

Photos by Lance Tupper



Story on page 13
of The Westfield Leader



McCAFFREY 4-FOR-4, 3B, 2B; KNIGHT 3-FOR-4, 2B, RBI; RAVETIER RAPS 2 SINGLES, 3 RBI

Cougars Topple Knights, 14-4, for Section Baseball Crown

By LANCE TUPPER

Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Competing for championships is the rule, rather than the exception, for the Cranford High School baseball program, and understanding what it takes to win big games is ingrained in the minds of the players.

Shrugging off some early adversity, the top-seeded Cougars captured their third consecutive North Jersey, Section 2, Group 3 title with a 14-4 six-inning victory over the fourth-seeded West

Essex Knights at Memorial Field in Cranford on May 30.

The 17-6 Cougars mounted a surgical, 17-hit attack and south-paw pitcher Patrick Knight, who took the hill in the third inning, delivered three and two-third innings of clutch relief to earn the win.

Combining patient at-bats with daring base running, Cranford kept the pressure on three different West Essex pitchers and the defense for the entire game. Jack McCaffery went 4-for-4, including booming a triple and a

double. Knight went 3-for-4 with a double and RBI.

Aware that he was a homerun short of hitting for the cycle, McCaffery said he was focused on looking for good pitches to hit. "I was looking fastball and it worked out for me. I wasn't worried about the cycle at all. I was just trying to get a hit, and down two strikes my fourth at-bat, and I was just...trying to see a ball over the plate and hit it hard. I wasn't really too worried about anything like that (the cycle). I was just thankful that I saw some good pitches," McCaffery said.

He also joked that he may not be the most patient Cougar hitter. "I don't have too many walks or hit-by-pitches, and by far I

have the most (official) at-bats on the team. Pretty much if the first pitch is a strike, I'm swinging. And that's pretty much the mentality I've gone with the whole season," McCaffery said.

Matt Ravetier rapped two singles and added three RBI; Tommy Trotter singled in a run, walked, scored and swiped a base; Albert Gargiulo had two hits and two RBI; Sam Scher was 2-for-3; Mike Smith singled, walked twice and scored twice; John Oblachinski singled, doubled, had two RBI and scored twice; Liam Duffy walked twice and scored twice.

The Cougars drew first blood in the bottom of the first inning. With one out, McCaffery doubled off pitcher James Panzarino and came around to score later on Knight's

two-out single. Knight, who had advanced to second, was gunned down trying to steal third by catcher Mike Cesare to end the inning.

West Essex knotted the score in the second. Anthony Tornatore (2-for-3) drilled a leadoff double to left-center and later scored on Joey Gonnella's RBI groundout.

In the third, West Essex, with one out, strung together three straight hits, including an RBI double by Kevin Fox. Ravetier walked Panzarino to load the bases. Tornatore then scorched a liner off the left shin of Ravetier, who scrambled for the ball and flipped it underhanded to catcher Scher, but the runner was ruled safe, and the Knights led 3-1.

In obvious pain, Ravetier rolled to the ground, clutching his leg.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

BALLYHOO

See & Subscribe at
goleader.com/ballyhoo

Submit commentary and items for publishing.
Email to ballyhoo@goleader.com

Google l'ennemi du journaliste