



Photos by Lance Tupper

Cougars Topple West Essex Knights, 14-4, for North Jersey, Section 2, Group 3 Crown

Cougar Head Coach Dennis McCaffery and his staff came out to check on their injured pitcher and summoned Knight in from right field to take over the pitching duties. Refusing to be removed from the game, however, Ravetier hobbled out to play right field.

Inspired by Ravetier's determination, Knight coolly punched out the next two batters, extinguishing the Knights' threat. For the rest of the game, changing speeds and location, Knight retired the first nine batters he faced, allowed two hits, one run, struck out three and did not yield a walk.

"When I came in from the outfield I saw my teammate on the ground like that, I got a little fired up. When I was throwing in the outfield before the game my arm felt very good. And I was warming up back there (before taking the mound) I was throwing with some good velocity, a good fastball, came in here and I

was confident that I could retire (the batters in the 3rd inning) without any harm," Knight said.

Knight said despite having thrown four plus innings in the Cougars' win over Summit, essentially pitching on two days of rest, his arm felt strong. "I felt pretty good. Fastball felt good, curveball was all right. But can't ask for anything more than that," he said.

West Essex Head Coach Scott Illiano, who was baffled how the tide turned against his squad, said, "I thought Patrick Knight was exceptional in relief. He didn't appear to be fatigued or tired in any way. And I thought what appeared to be us having a momentum shift and on the brink of maybe busting the game open, was actually a turning point for them. Where he came in and he closed the door, he struck out two in a row. And then the game just got away from us a little bit

in a lot of ways."

Cranford manufactured a run in the third to narrow the West Essex lead. But the game was blown wide open when seven Cougars scratched the plate with the help of six hits.

The Cougars scored five more times over the last two innings, taking advantage of several defensive lapses. Cranford plated the game-clinching run from third base, when a pitched ball eluded the catcher.

Coach Illiano said his team had not surrendered that many hits in a game all season and praised the Cranford hitting approach. He said it, "seems like their hitters really stay within themselves, they don't try to do too much. They'll use the whole field. They'll go the other way. They'll put it on the ground, they don't pop up."

Ravetier said leaving the game was never an option. "When I got

hit, I was still trying to make the play, there was no way that I was going to let it go just like that. After he (the runner) was called safe the pain kind of hit me a little bit and it hurt really bad, but there was no way I was going to come out of this game. There was no way I was going to let my boys down," Ravetier said.

Responding to how it feels to repeat as sectional champs, Ravetier said, "It's fantastic, it's great to be back here and just winning again. We're going for another North Jersey championship; try to get back to another state championship."

The Cougar players happily congratulated each other afterwards, but the celebration was somewhat muted. The players, collectively, took the win in stride.

Coach McCaffery said he believes the players feel a responsibility to continue the program's winning tradition. "That's a credit

to all the kids that played before in this program. There had to be 20 to 25 players, former players that were here. We know that they were talking, texting, a number of them came to practice the last couple of days and talked to them to kind of let them know that there's a certain level of expectations when you play here at Cranford," Coach McCaffery said.

"It's one game at a time and this is a six-round fight. That's the way they look at it in the state tournament. You've got to win one round at a time and you have to take it one game at a time, and now we have to get ready for Tuesday," he said.

The Cougars would face 22-6 Mount Olive, who nipped Mahwah 3-2 for the Section 1 championship June 3, at Belleville High School.