

# Cougar Nine 'Squeezes' 6-5 Win Over Raiders

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third. Wilkinson walked then Jonny Ramos (3-for-4, 2 runs) laid down a bunt single that also caused a throwing error, allowing Wilkinson's pinch runner Ricky Lopez to score. Dean Kirian walked then both runners advanced on another wild pitch, setting up Willy Gale's RBI sac fly to center. Cucurullo relieved in the third inning and tossed four straight hitless innings although he did walk six and hit a batter during that span. In the meantime at shortstop, Ramos initiated a key inning-ending double play involving second baseman Pat Dembiec in the sixth.

"It was hard hit and I was lucky that Dembiec made a good play on it. It was a good double play for us," Ramos said. "He did a good job. That was one of those plays where he flipped to second. I was saying No! No! Then he got the guy and Patrick turned it really quick. That was great double play in a tight spot," Raider Head Coach Joe Higgins expressed.

Ramos' two-out double to leftfield the inning before set up a three-run inning that gave the Raiders the 5-4 lead. Kirian followed with a walk then Gale beat out an infield RBI single and later stole second base. Mike Dieu stepped up and punched a two-run single to left.

"I was just trying to get on base and

have people move me over. I wanted to get us going when we struggled a little bit at the beginning," Ramos explained.

"Jonny had a nice day with some good at-bats. He's a leader. He the kind of kid, who has the same look on his face whether he's making errors and striking out or getting hits and making plays. Today he got hits and made plays. He set the tone," Coach Higgins said.

On his clutch two-run single, Dieu described, "He got me the first two at-bats with two strike pitches. The next two at-bats I had to make an adjustment, widen my feet a little bit. I just had to put the ball in play. That was all I was thinking. I was trying to put my team in a good position."

"Michael has been doing a pretty good job with two strikes lately. You can tell he's really working on cutting down his strikeouts and changing his approach with two strikes," Coach Higgins said.

The Raiders had a chance to score again in the seventh. Ramos lined a one-out single to center and Kirian grounded out to first. After Gale was intentionally walked, Kevin Donovan relieved Vam Dam. Dieu rapped a bouncer past short as Ramos attempted to score but Johnson in leftfield rifled him out at the plate.

"I thought he was blocking the plate. I couldn't really get to the plate without hitting him. Whatever happens we got to keep playing," Ramos recalled.

The Cougars' heroics in the seventh did not tarnish Cucurullo's performance. "He's a bulldog. He just competes. I was telling him he just has to throw strikes and we will be there for him. He did his job," Dieu said.

"He's got good stuff. You know he beat them here last year. He's a competitor. We are looking forward to seeing him pitch a lot," Coach Higgins commented.

As to the weather's bite, Plick answered, "When you are playing in Cranford baseball, it's always breezy. You got to come out here and get ready to play. Control all you can."

"We tried to stay in the game, keep the bats going and play really good defense, not let any runs up. We had Donovan come in and pitch a great last inning. He got the job done," Johnson added.

"We worked for months for this moment. We practice thousands of bunts. When the opportunity arises, it's not like you are not prepared. I feel good about the first win. Hopefully we can keep it going," Meola expressed.

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David B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader and The Times  
KEEPING CLOSE TABS...Blue Devil senior midfielder Matt Leone, No. 38, keeps close tabs on Bulldog attacker Chris Bockelmann, No. 3, in the game against Rumson-Fair Haven on "Senior Day" at Kehler Stadium in Westfield on April 4.

# Blue Devils Muzzle Rumson-Fair Haven, 12-7

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up only two goals," Dardia said.

Dardia came up with two more key saves then Aslanian intercepted a pass, sprinted downfield and passed off to McLane. As the Dawgs' defense shifted, McLane shuffled back to Aslanian, who put the Blue Devils back on top, 8-7, with 1:38 on the clock. Dardia added another key save with 1:00 remaining.

"We were a man down on this end. I was playing on top of the key. I was able to pick off a pass. I came down. I saw Devon at the point. No one picked me up as I flowed to the crease. Devon saw me inside and I got off a shot as quickly as I could and it went bottom corner," Aslanian described.

The fourth quarter would belong to Westfield but not until Dardia made another huge save after two minutes of possession by the Dawgs. McLane scored his fourth goal then Engelke scored, making the score 10-7. Freer and Prybylski added takeaways. With 3:59 remaining, McLane assisted Engelke on his second goal. Then after Aslanian scooped a ground ball on a face-off and Dardia made his final big save, McLane broke the WHS record with his fifth goal.

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Westfield 2 4 2 4 12

we could get a good win," Prybylski described.

The second quarter began with another fine Dardia stop but three minutes later, Will Sullivan tied the score 2-2. McLane then got into the act with a jump-shot score less than a minute later.

"I drove up on the right side and my guy kind of over committed to my backhand and I jumped over him. I think that comes from just playing a lot of basketball with Griff [Aslanian]. He taught me to get my body over him and get my shot off. It really helped my lacrosse game."

Then two minutes later on an assist from Engelke, McLane gave Westfield a 4-2 lead with a pump fake and stuff goal.

"Yesterday because we've been having all these games back-to-back. We just tried to hone in on our skills with fundamentals because that's what the game comes down to. Just fundamentals! We got tons of reps finishing and I think it showed on the field today," McLane said.

Within a brief span of 23 seconds, the Dawgs won the face-off and Rowan Goldin scored. With 4:40 left in the half, McLane scored his third goal with a slick 180 degree spin-

and-in shot.

"That's the classic question mark move that Griffin's older brother [Chris] taught me and it worked really well," McLane answered.

The Dawgs tied the score 5-5 with respective goals from Bockelmann and Goldin but with two seconds on the clock, Martini, on a quick shuffle from Duffy, scored to give Westfield a 6-5 lead at the half.

The pivotal third quarter turned out to be an Aslanian and Dardia show. The Dawgs would win four of the five face-offs but Aslanian's takeaway led to a 7-5 lead when Alfano scored with 10:42 left in the quarter. Aslanian added another takeaway but so did the Dawgs leading to Bockelmann's wraparound goal. After Dardia made another crucial save, Bockelmann scored again on the same style of wraparound to knot the score 7-7.

Just when the Dawgs thought they found a chink in the armor, the Blue Devils adjusted and shut them out the rest of the way.

"The communication was much better after the first half. The first half, we were kind of doing our own things on defense. In the second half, we played more as a unit. It definitely showed on the scoreboard, us giving



David B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader and The Times  
SCORING THE RAIDERS' THIRD RUN...Raider Jonny Ramos slides home in the fifth inning as Cougar catcher Joe Meola prepares to catch the ball. Ramos had a big day at the plate with a double, two singles and two runs scored.

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