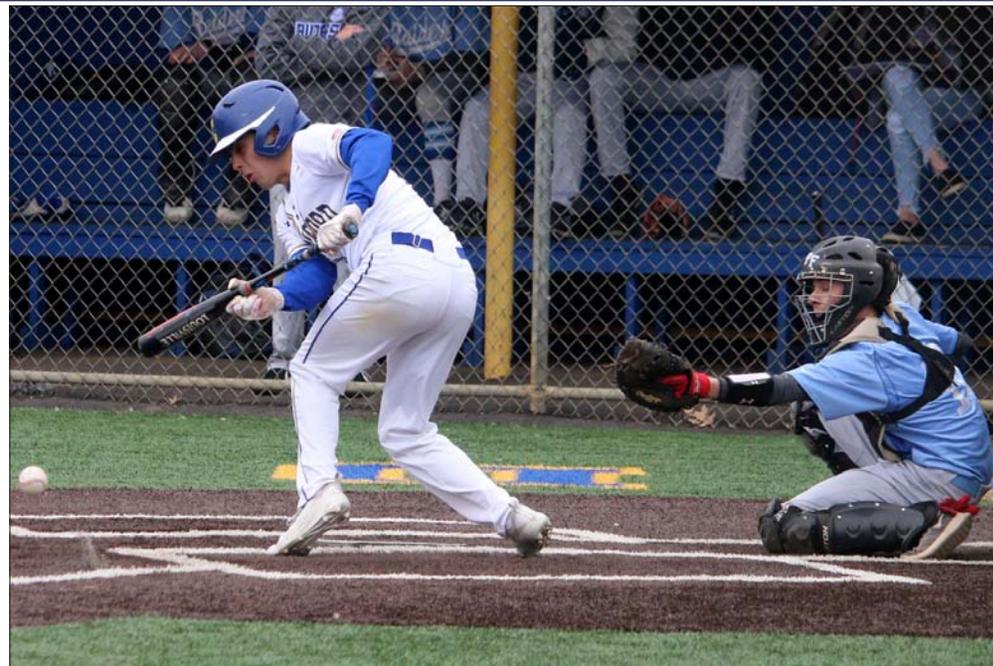


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Story on page 9  
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***J. MEOLA'S BUNT BRINGS PLICK HOME WITH WINNER IN 7TH; RAMOS GOES 3-FOR-4, 2 RUNS***

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

By **DAVID B. CORBIN**

*Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times*

"Small Ball" paid huge dividends in the bottom of the seventh inning for the hosting Cranford High School baseball team in its season-opening showdown with the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Raiders

at Memorial Field on an extremely chilly April 2.

Trailing 5-4 Tyler Szczech plopped a leadoff single over first base and Aiden Plick drew a walk on Raider pitcher Pat Cucurullo. Marcus Johnson's fake bunt set up a successful double steal.

Johnson then lofted an RBI sacrifice fly to centerfield as Szczech scored and Plick tagged up and sped to third. Joe Meola stepped to the plate and pulled off a perfect squeeze bunt as Plick came zooming home to earn the Cougars a 6-5 victory.

"I saw that Marcus tied the game bottom of seven, so I was looking to score the run no matter what. When he gave me a fastball on the first pitch, I tried

to put it in the stands but I couldn't do that. I was expecting a squeeze earlier. When I saw coach, he gave me the squeeze, I wasn't surprised because we practice it so much in practice. I just had to get it down. I started celebrating before I got to first then Coach Mac [Dennis McCaffery] screamed at me to touch first base, so I made sure that I got there," Meola, who finished 2-for-3 with a run scored, explained.

On his assignment, Plick answered, "You just got to trust

your guys when the call is on that they are going to get it down. I had all the faith in the world that he was going to get it done."

On his important role, Johnson explained, "I went up there to try to get a bunt then he gave me a fake bunt steal, so he threw it outside, let it go. Then I was down two strikes just looking to get the pitch I wanted and attack one to get it deep out of the infield, so he could tag up, get a run. Anything so I could score that third-base runner."

*CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE*

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