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THE WEEK IN SPORTS

Sports Section
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WILKINSON, CUCCURULLO RULED MOUND, GALE B.A.

Raiders Seized UCT Crown; Finish Baseball Season 18-9

By DAVID B. CORBIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Very close games have become the norm for the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School baseball team this season. Despite losing several of those close games early in the season, the senior-heavy Raiders turned things around in a big way as the season progressed, won the Union County Tournament (UCT) championship and finished with an 18-9 record.

By season's end, the Raiders had 12 games that were decided by one run and four games that were decided by two runs. Although they lost their first four games that were decided by one run, the Raiders would go on to win six of the remaining eight one-run games. The Raiders finished 2-2 in the games decided by two runs.

Of those close games, some of the most interesting were a 5-4 win and a 5-4 loss in the regular season then

finally a 3-1 setback to the Westfield Blue Devils in the North Jersey, Section 2, Group 4 semifinals. The Raiders lost 6-5 to Governor Livingston, edged the Cranford Cougars, 7-6, then lost to them, 6-5. In the UCT, the sixth-seeded Raiders edged Oratory, 2-1, nipped third-seeded Union, 1-0, beat second-seeded Governor Livingston, 6-2 then claimed the program's fifth UCT title with a 4-0 victory over the AL Johnson Crusaders.

"I cannot say enough about this team's resilience and competitiveness. They bounced back from a tough start and beat some good teams in some very close games. The leadership of this senior class will benefit us for years to come as our younger guys follow their example," Raider Head Coach Joe Higgins said.

The performances of the pitching staff played a key role in the Raiders'

success, finishing with a 2.09 team ERA. Four-year veteran and Villanova bound Danny Wilkinson in 50 innings, allowed 21 hits, walked or hit (W-HP) 21 and five batters, respectively, struck out 77 batters and recorded a 4-1 record with one save for a 1.82 ERA. Senior Patrick Cuccurullo vastly improved since his junior season. In 40.2 innings, he recorded 38 strikeouts, allowed 33 hits and 23-5 (W-HP) to finish with a 6-3 record with two saves and a 1.72 ERA.

Senior Nick Merkel in 31 innings, finished 4-1 with a save and a 1.13 ERA, allowing 14 hits and 23-5 (W-HP), while striking out 25. Junior Mike Urbano in 20.1 innings, allowed 24 hits and 6-3 (W-HP), while striking out 14 to finish 1-2 with two saves. Senior Charles Widder pitched 16.2 innings, allowing 12 hits and 12 walks, while striking out four and

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David B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader and The Times
SECOND STRAIGHT SECTION TITLE...The Blue Devils celebrate after defeating the Ridge Red Devils, 4-2, at Ridge High School for their second straight North Jersey, Section 2, Group 4 title. The Blue Devils defeated Millburn last year.

CATANZARO, CARLONE LED PITCHING, McINTYRE 'O'

Baseball Blue Devils Revved Up at Right Time; Won Section

By DAVID B. CORBIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

No one, or at least, very few would have believed that the Westfield High School baseball team would repeat as North Jersey, Section 2, Group 4 champions after such an atrocious beginning of the season. Ah! But timing was everything. Barely qualifying for the sectional tournament as the eighth seed and with a 7-11 record,

the Blue Devils disjuncted Union and ace pitchers Andrew Sanborn and Zach Fernandez, 4-2, bounced top-seeded Bayonne from glory, 3-2, burned fourth-seeded Scotch Plains-Fanwood (SPF), 3-1, then stunned the second-seeded Ridge Red Devils, 4-2, to claim their second sectional title in a row. Their season ended with a 6-1 loss to Ridgewood in the Group 4 semifinal.

The bumps were truly ratty and very deep at the beginning of the season for the Blue Devils and their wheels were spinning with big-margin losses to the Union Farmers and the Governor Livingston (GL) Highlanders, an 8-4 loss to Somerville and a 9-5 loss to the Cranford Cougars. The Blue Devils regained some faith with a 5-4 win over the SPF Raiders

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MUCCIGROSSO HR, BENDERT HR; FALK 2B, 1B, 2 RUNS

Cranford Bumps Summit, 7-2, For Ripken 10U District Title

By DAVID B. CORBIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Something had to give! Two unbeaten teams from the same pool faced off for the Cal Ripken 10U District Touma-

ment title at Booth Field in Scotch Plains on June 24. On the strength of their pitchers, along with some impressive offensive clout, the Cranford Cougar Gold rolled past the Summit

Hilltoppers, 7-2, to claim the crown. Both teams, however, would advance to the state tournament to be held in Bridgewater this coming weekend.

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David B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader and The Times
UNION COUNTY TOURNAMENT CHAMPS...The Raiders celebrate after defeating the AL Johnson Crusaders, 4-0, for the Union County Tournament Championship at Kean University in Union.

MONAHAN, OLEAR, CARRACINO 3 RBI; BARATTA 4 RUNS

Cougar 13Us Whip Westfield In Babe Ruth District Pool Play

By DAVID B. CORBIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Fifteen run rule cut a Babe Ruth District 13U Tournament Pool play game short in the bottom of the fourth inning when Ryan Carracino slammed a double to centerfield, scoring Owen Baratta with the 16th run to give the Cranford Cougars a 16*-1 victory over Westfield on the turf at Memorial Field in Cranford on June 21. *Ben Monahan actually scored a 17th run on Carracino's double but the 15-run spread was all that was needed.

Since the majority of this group of Cougars have been together from 8U, winning has been the norm. Under the previous head coach Jim Grady, this group of Cougars have played in five

Cal Ripken District 12 Tournaments and have won four of them. Last year they trounced Millburn, 13-4, to win the 12U title at Gumbert Field in Westfield to receive the First Annual Kevin Ford (longtime coach of Millburn) Award and in 2016, the Cougars won the 10U title at Booth Field in Scotch Plains after humbling the same Millburn Miller team, 11-1. All those games have been played on fields with the 60-foot base paths.

In this Pool play game, the Cougars definitely adjusted more quickly to the 90-foot distances between bases and the vast expanse of the outfield. The participants for the Cougars were Nick Kelly, Baratta, Monahan, Dennis McCaffery, Carracino, Will

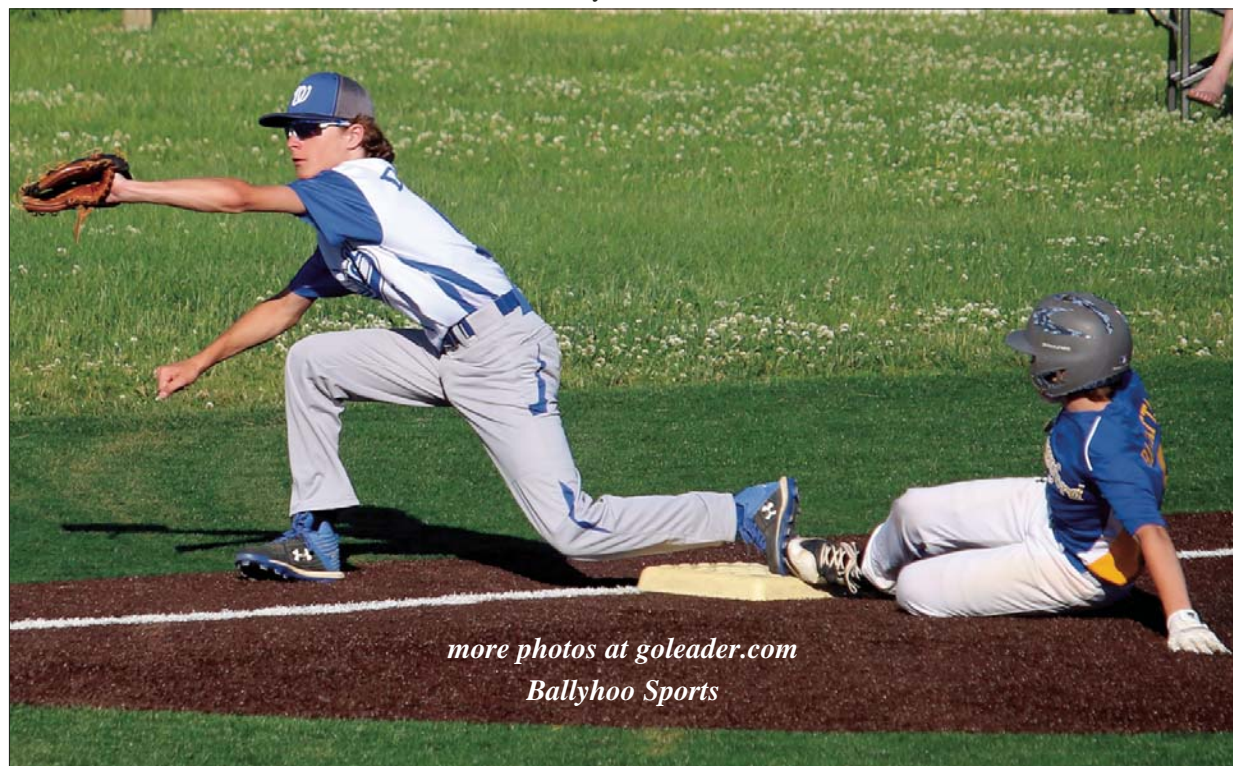
Kahney, Sean Riley, Ed Toy, Chris Santorelli, Matt Chapman, Dan Olear, Chase Teel, Tom Buckman and Jack Zambito with coaches Dave Kahney, Dan Olear and Mike Zambito. The participants for Westfield were Ethan Delforte, Mike Lynch, Randy Davis, Owen Durham, Jack Paris, Phil Langhart, Tommy Hyland, Brendan Schepher, Evan Durham, Justin Bergerman, Zach Korr and Paul Shyposh with coaches Jay Cook, Steve Lynch and Matt Catanzaro.

Buckman started on the mound for the Cougars and was relieved by Riley with one out in the top of the first inning after he hit a batter and walked the next two. Riley went on to retire

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David B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader and The Times
TAKING SECOND BASE...Cranford's Charlie Springer slides into second base as Summit shortstop Gavin Schnall gets the ball in the first inning of the Cal Ripken District 12 10U Championship game at Booth Field in Scotch Plains on June 24.



David B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader and The Times
STEALING THIRD BASE...Cranford Cougar Owen Baratta swipes third base in the first inning as Blue Devil third baseman Randy Davis awaits the throw during the Babe Ruth 13U Tournament at Memorial Field in Cranford on June 21.

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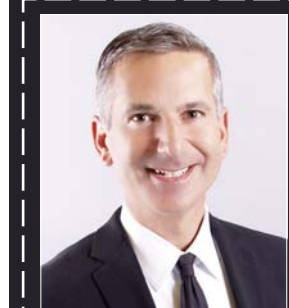
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