

Blue Devils Edge Panthers in Boys Lax, 9-8

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WARDING OFF AN ASSAULT...Blue Devil goalkeeper Theo Dardia and defender Colin Freer, No. 11, work to prevent Bridgewater-Raritan attacker Ethan Fought, No. 50, from scoring during the North Jersey, Group 4 quarterfinal at ALJ High School in Clark on May 18. CJ Duffy, on an assist from Devon McLane, flicked in a key behind the neck goal with seconds left in the second quarter. The Blue Devils nipped the Panthers, 9-8. McLane had three goals and five assists.

Cougar Laxers Nip Raiders in Section, 12-11

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TRYING TO SCORE...Raider Noah Costanza, blue, tries to get past Cougar defenders Adam Kutzer, No. 22, Liam Loughlin, No. 5, and goalkeeper Phil Marotta during the thrilling North Jersey, Group 3 quarterfinal game in Cranford on May 18. The Cougars won 12-11.

The 17-2 Cougars led 8-6 at the half but the 10-8 Raiders came roaring back and with 17.7 left in the third quarter, Anthony Porter passed to Noah Costanza, who knotted the score 10-10 entering the final quarter. The Raiders then took the lead with 6:29 remaining when Aidan Guma flicked in an underhanded shot. Three minutes later, the Cougars won a scramble and Cole Blazek scored to tie the score. Possession kept shifting until Dante Cassaro, assisted by Ryan Echavarria, made the score 12-11. The Raiders did not quit and with :28 on the clock, Porter intercepted and made one last attempt but the Cougars saved his shot to claim victory.



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STEALING SECOND BASE...Cougar Mike Murphy steals second base in the second inning against the St. John Vianney Lancers on May 17. The Cougars showed the Lancers just what kind of thieves they were by swiping 10 bases..

Cougars Swipe 10 Bases; Rock Lancer Nine, 9-2

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bottom of the first. Szczech chopped a leadoff single past third, stole second base, sped to third on a wild pitch and scored on Plick's sacrifice fly to leftfield.

After the Lancers got their run in the second, the Cougars answered with three runs on four hits. Joe Meola doubled to left-center and was replaced by courtesy runner Jake Chapman, who was awarded third on a balk call. Murphy (3-for-4, 3 RBI, 2 runs, 2 stolen bases) added an RBI single, stole second then tagged up and dashed to third on Mike Meola's fly out to right. Next Will Gallagher (2-for-3, 2 RBI) pulled off a perfect suicide squeeze bunt single as Murphy galloped home. Gallagher then scored all the way from first on Jamie Shriner's RBI double to center.

On the squeeze play, Murphy explained, "We practice it every day and the timing on the squeeze, so we were ready for that."

As to his three hits, Murphy added, "A couple of balls were like bloop hits but they got the job done, got some runs in."

The Cougars burst the game wide open with five runs, on three hits, three errors and five more stolen bases in the fifth inning to take a 9-1 lead. DeClerico tapped a leadoff single and

stole second Joe Meola walked. Chapman came in as a courtesy runner then a double steal followed. Murphy drilled a two-run single to left, took second on a throwing error then swiped third. Gallagher slapped an RBI single past first. Szczech reached first on a force out, stole second then scored on Shriner's long shot that deflected off the leftfielder's glove. Shriner scored the fifth run of the inning when Plick's fly ball to right was dropped.

"Yes it's great, stealing a lot of bags. Getting extra bases makes it hard for the defense and puts the pressure on them. Our hitters did a great job of bringing us in when we were in scoring position," DeClerico said.

"I was just trying to get a good jumps and stealing bags to get into good scoring position, help put up nine runs on the board, help win ball games," Murphy added.

Shriner was also the lead man on a double steal in the fourth inning. "It makes it a different game when you get to second and third. It gives you a bigger opportunity to get the two runs home. It was good to get extra hits later in the game," Shriner said.

The Lancers scored their final run in the sixth. Jake Ramirez looped a one-out single over short, stole second then

scored on Ryan Sekman's single to left. In the seventh, Van Dam yielded a one-out double to Margulis but scooped a grounder back to the mound for the second out then ended the game when he fanned Luciano Fabrizzi.

After a regular-season game with Roselle Park on May 18, the third-seeded Cougars were to host 14th-seeded Iselin Kennedy in the first round of the North Jersey, Section 2, Group 3 Tournament on May 20.

"We got a game [Roselle Park] on Saturday. That's what we are focusing on first then practice Sunday. You just got to take it one day at a time in a state tournament. You can't look ahead because then you can get burnt. We got to focus on JFK on Monday first," Donovan said.

"We got to keep working hard. We have been on a tear lately and that's really good. State tournament is coming up. Like Kevin said, you got to take it day by day," DeClerico added.

"Day by day! Keep grinding and focus on the moment," Murphy expressed.

"It's another year. Day to day! You got to focus on the round that day. You never know who's out there," Shriner cautioned.

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