

VICTUS BAT CO. AND DIAMOND NATION HIT A HOMERUN PARTNERSHIP

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By Bob Behre

When Bryce Harper, Mookie Betts and George Springer are using your bats, it's fairly safe to say, your product has turned some heads.

Victus Sports co-founders Ryan Engroff and Jared Smith believed the wood bat market was "stale" and felt they could make a difference in a sport they loved. So, working out of a shop in a garage in tiny Blackwood, N.J., they went to work.

"It was very humble beginnings," said Smith, Victus Sports' Sales and Operations Manager. "We were technically living at the shop and showering at the gym for a period of time after we got started in 2012."

Harper, Betts, Springer and many other major leaguers are now hitting home runs and ripping lined drives all over MLB stadiums with their Victus bats.

"We really had nothing more than a big attitude and a bigger love for the game," said Smith. "We've grown into one of the most elite wood bat manufacturers at every level of the sport."

That's right, Victus bats are not just for major leaguers. The bats are designed for use for players at every level. Victus uses design driven craftsmanship and an unprecedented commitment to adaptable performance-based quality.

"We embrace the evolution of the game," says Smith, "and salute the next generation of players who are changing it. Victus believed we would be able to bring in new technology and style to set ourselves apart from the competition."

As Victus Sports grew from that garage in Blackwood, just 15 miles from Philadelphia, its team began collecting victories.

"We had a few major highlights the past few years, including the MLB Home Run Derby champ (Harper), the AL MVP (Betts) and a World Series star (Springer) using our bats," said Smith.

"But first and foremost, we love that we are able to deliver the highest quality bat in baseball to both our amateur and professional players," says Smith. "We've been able to make all of this happen by coming into the shop every day with the goal of making the best products."

This makes the partnership between Victus Sports and Diamond Nation a natural as each organization demands high quality performance in their day-to-day operation. The four-year deal between the two baseball titans will showcase Victus with plenty of signage around the Diamond Nation facility, provide access to Diamond Nation players and fans and present the first Victus Wood Bat Tournament series -- 10 in all -- at the Flemington site this summer.



Left to right, Jared Smith (Victus), Bob DeChiaro (Diamond Nation), and Paschal Petrongolo (Victus)

"We are excited to announce the partnership with Victus and help the company further expand into the amateur market," said Diamond Nation General Manager Nick Massari. "The thing that struck us most about Victus is not only its appreciation for putting the best product on the field, but also its creative and forward-thinking nature. It's a perfect marriage and we cannot wait to offer the best wood in baseball to some of the best young ball players in the country."

Victus Sports certainly enters the partnership with a head of steam in the industry.

"Diamond Nation is a high class organization run by some of the best guys in the baseball industry," said Smith. "Their facilities are second to none and they have a reputation for deftly coordinating tournaments and teams with densely talented player pools. Victus makes high performance products specifically for players looking to take their game to the next level. We want to be around players, coaches and people who live for the game. Diamond Nation offers exactly that."

Visit Victus Sports' website (<https://victussports.com>) and shop for Pro Reserve, Axe Bat, Grit Matte, Custom and Training bats. The company also provides batting accessories and baseball apparel.

"We are looking to expand our product line," says Smith, "while maintaining our focus on quality, performance and design."

JERSEY'S COLLEGE BOYS OFF TO FAST START ON OPENING WEEKEND



Erikson Nichols

By Bob Behre

The start of the 2018 college baseball season last Friday was certainly a breath of fresh air in the cold northeast.

As high school players continue their count-down to March 1 and the first day of practices around the state, Diamond Nation.com will keep an eye on our Jersey boys getting it done on the collegiate level.

Here's a few fine performances we noticed during the first weekend of the college baseball season.

Christian Brothers grad

Brandon Martorano, a junior and starting catcher for North Carolina, opened the season with a 6-for-9 performance during a three-game sweep of Xavier. Martorano, an All-State selection at CBA, ripped a pair of doubles, hit a home run, drove in three runs and scored six runs for the Tar Heels. All that while batting ninth in the North Carolina order.

Martorano's UNC and high school teammate, big righthander Gianluca Dalatri got the nod at the very front of the Tar Heels' rotation, starting Friday's season opener. Dalatri, a consistent strike-thrower, had some uncustomary trouble with his command. He allowed three runs on three hits, struck out three, walked two and hit two batters before being pulled after 2.1 innings in Carolina's 12-3 victory.

Former Diamond Jack Mike Maguire picked up where he left off from a productive sophomore season at Lehigh University. Maguire, who leads off and plays center field for the Hawks went 4-for-12 while his team was being swept by Duke. Maguire's teammate and fellow Diamond Jack sophomore righthander **Peter Woltersdorf**, pitched 3.2 innings of two-hit shutout relief in Lehigh's game three loss to Duke. Woltersdorf struck out three and walked one. A third Diamond Jack alum saw action for Lehigh as **Tom Schumacher** started games one and three in the series at first base, but did not get a hit. Schumacher is a North Hunterdon grad.

Across the diamond was another Diamond Jacks alum, Duke third baseman **Erikson Nichols**, who performed brilliantly in the sweep for the Blue Devils. Nichols went 5-for-9, drove in four runs and scored twice. Duke, by the way, has six players from New Jersey on its roster and more on the way, including current Diamond Jacks **Alex Stone ('20)**, **Luke Storm ('20)** and **Adam Boucher ('20)**.

Monroe grad Robbie Peto of Stetson had a nice performance while absorbing a hard luck 4-3 loss to Sam Houston State on Saturday. Peto, a 6-4, 215-pound redshirt sophomore, permitted two runs, one of which was earned, on six hits over 5.1 innings. He struck out three and walked three. Fellow Garden Stater **Jon Meola**, a Toms River North grad, delivered a double in the game.

Diamond Jacks alum Brandon Hylton, a talented freshman first baseman, was a noticeable absence from the Stetson lineup. Hylton was expected to bat in the middle of the Stetson lineup but suffered a torn meniscus sliding into third base prior to the season. He is expected to be out for the season and redshirt.

Manhattan catcher Matt Padre, yet another Diamond Jacks alum, batted either third or fourth in the batting order when his team went 1-2 in a three-game set at Stetson that included Sam Houston State and Virginia Tech. Padre had a single in Manhattan's 5-2 victory over Stetson on Sunday.

Seton Hall first baseman Matt Toke began his junior season in style, cracking a two-run home run in a season opening 4-3 loss to Ohio State.



Ryan Morash

Seton Hall suffered a three-game sweep at the hands of the Buckeyes.

David Yanni is batting fourth and playing third base for Pittsburgh, which opened the season with a victory over Villanova before dropping three straight to Iowa, Marshall and Milwaukee. Yanni, a junior and former NJ Super 17 player, singled and scored a run in the opening day win against Villanova.

A pair of freshmen from the Diamond Jacks program, righthander **Mike Murray** and infielder **Ryan Morash**, saw action during their very first weekend of college ball for Hofstra. Murray pitched a scoreless and hitless inning of relief in Hofstra's game four loss to the University of Incarnate Word. Morash started both the third and fourth games of the weekend series at second base, going 3-for-7 with a double and a run scored. He batted leadoff in his first college start on Saturday and went 2-for-5 from the leadoff spot.

Two teams loaded with NJ players, Rutgers and St. John's, were swept in their respective opening weekends against Miami and UCLA. Rutgers freshman catcher **Peter Serruto** of Millburn delivered a pinch-hit single in his first career at bat during the Scarlet Knights' game one loss. Serruto struck out in a pinch hitting opportunity in the second game before getting the start behind the plate for game three. Serruto cashed in on that opportunity, going 2-for-4 with an RBI from the No. 8 spot in the Rutgers batting order.

Serruto's teammate, sophomore center fielder Mike Nyzstor went 3-for-5 and scored a run in Rutgers game three loss to the Hurricanes. Nyzstor is a Toms River North grad.

Ocean City's Sean Mooney, Gloucester Cath-



David Yanni

olic's Ian Murphy and Colts Neck's Mike Antico had fine starts to the 2019 season for St. John's, which was swept in its three games in Los Angeles against UCLA. Mooney limited UCLA to one run on three hits over 5.2 innings in a tough luck 3-2 loss in the opener. The righthander struck out eight and walked four. Murphy pitched 1.1 innings of scoreless relief in game two, striking out two and walking two. The junior Antico, batting leadoff and playing left field, had his first hit of the season in the second game. Talented freshman catcher **Colin Wetterau**, a Shawnee High School grad, saw some early action, going 0-for-1 as a pinch-hitter in game two before getting the start at first base in game three. He was 0-for-3 and scored a run in the 9-3 loss to Miami.

Another talented pitcher who played many a game at Diamond Nation during his high school years, is sophomore righthander **Dan Klepchick** of Monmouth University. Klepchick, coming off a MAAC Conference Rookie Pitcher of the Year performance in 2018, put forth a terrific effort in the Hawk's 1-0 loss to Penn State on Friday. Klepchick shut out the Nittany Lions on three hits over 6.2 innings, striking out six and walking one.

Mike Salvatore, a senior second baseman and leadoff hitter at Florida State, had a huge opening weekend in the team's 4-0 sweep of Maine. Ewing's Salvatore, who was selected in the 19th round of the 2015 MLB Draft by Cincinnati, went 7-for-16 with seven RBI in the series against Maine. Watch for Salvatore's name in MLB's 2019 Draft.

North Hunterdon grad Shayne Fontana is off to another outstanding start to a season at Division 2 Lynn University in Florida. Fontana is batting .389 with four HR, 13 RBI, 15 runs-scored and four stolen bases for the 7-2 Fighting Knights.