

DIAMOND JACKS ALUM MIKE FORD CALLED UP TO NEW YORK YANKEES

By Bob Behre

On his first call-up to the major leagues, brand new New York Yankee Mike Ford was still accessible, while being a bit swamped, to his friends at Diamond Nation.

He answers were understandably short and clipped, as if he was alighting from an Uber in front of Yankees Stadium. "Thank you. Call me tomorrow. Yeah, madness," were Ford's responses to three questions.

"Mike has earned the opportunity to play in the big leagues," said Ford's college mentor, Princeton coach Scott Bradley. "We are all very excited to see him in a Yankee uniform. Bradley's first major league stop was with the Yankees.

Being elevated from the Scranton-Wilkes Barre Railriders to Yankees Stadium can be a bit like Dorothy Gale's flight from Kansas to Oz, but if anyone is capable of a handling that drastic change of environment, it is the unflappable Ford. The Princeton and Hun School grad from Belle Mead in Somerset County has certainly not been the anointed one during his rise through the Yankees minor league system.

Indeed, Ford qualifies as the relentless grinder, head down, eyes focused on his goals. The latest injury to Yankees first baseman Greg Bird finally opened the door to 'The Show' for the former Diamond Jack.

Ford followed a strong 2018 season with the Railriders with a fast start to 2019. The lefty-hitting first baseman went 16-for-39 (.410) with five HRs and 14 RBI in the Railriders' first 10 games. He boasts a 1.364 OPS. The lefty-hitting Bird has shared first base and the DH role with righty-hitting teammate Luke Voit. Both are batting below .200 thus far for the injury-depleted 6-9 Yankees.

Voit is in the lineup tonight, playing first base and batting third and Clint Frazier has been inserted at DH. It would have been quite a challenging entry into the big leagues had Ford gotten the start, considering lefthander Chris Sale is on the mound for the Red Sox. Don't be surprised to see Ford get a look tonight if the Sox go to a righty in the pen.

Ford batted .252 last season for the Railriders, hitting 15 HRs and driving in 52 runs. He had been selected by Seattle in the Rule 5 Draft during the winter of 2018 but the Mariners returned Ford to the Yankees. The Princeton alum has batted .271 in six full minor league seasons, hitting 71 HRs and driving home 325 runs.

Ford was not drafted after a junior campaign at Princeton in 2013 in which he remarkably earned both the Ivy League's Player of the Year and Pitcher of the Year awards. No other player had done so in Ivy League history.

But Ford was still being watched carefully by scouts that summer in the Cape Cod League where his play drew the interest of the Yankees, who would offer him a free agent contract.

He began his four years of play with Diamond Jacks program at Diamond Nation in Flemington, N.J. at the tender age of 14.

"Mike is a top shelf human being," said Diamond Nation's catching and hitting instructor Travis Anderson. "He plays hard and is a true professional. Mike always has a smile on his face and has a fire that burns like no other. I will always remember him being very thankful to the people who have coached him and that is a great trait to have."

Before he left for his freshman year at Princeton, the classy Ford thanked those coaches and the Diamond Jacks program that helped to hone his skills.

"The Diamond Jacks program has helped me tremendously in pursuit of my dreams to play Division 1 baseball and hopefully make it to the major leagues," he said. Well, welcome to the big time, Mike.



TWO-DAY EASTER EXTRAVAGANZA FEATURES 11U, 13U, 14U TITLE QUESTS

It's difficult to believe, but the two-day Easter Extravaganza this weekend already marks the sixth tournament of the spring at Diamond Nation in Flemington, N.J.

The pre-Easter event begins early Friday and runs through early Saturday evening.

The 13U Easter Extravaganza kicks off at 10 a.m. Friday as the NY Gotham's 13U Red tangle with the Wyckoff Raiders and the Diamond Jacks Gold 13U squad squares off with NJ Axemen West.

The 13U tournament playoffs begin with the semifinals at 3:15 p.m. on Saturday. The 1 vs. 4 seeds play on Field 1 and the 2 vs. 3 seeds meet on Field 3. The 13U Easter Extravaganza championship game will be played at 5:30 p.m. on Field 1.

Some of the other highly competitive squads in the 13U tournament include Baseball U. NY, RCBC Nationals, the Diamond Jacks Super 13U and NJ Glory-Stars.

The 14U Easter Extravaganza begins play at 12 p.m. on Friday when Jersey Boyz Baseball collides with Warstic Citius Red and Five Star NY faces the SV Railers.



(continued to back page)

EASTER EXTRAVAGANZA (continued from front page)

The 14U tournament playoffs are set for a 3:15 p.m. start on Saturday when the 2 vs. 3 seeds play on Field 4 for a berth in the final. The championship game follows at 5:30 p.m. with the No. 1 seed taking on the winner on Field 4.

The Bronx Bombers 14U, PA Shockers and Canes Mid Atlantic help form a formidable 14U field.

A small but sturdy 11U Easter Extravaganza tournament field begins play at 4 p.m. on Friday as Mid Atlantic Show plays the Poughkeepsie Lightning.

The 11U tournament playoffs begin with a first round game at 10 a.m. on Saturday. That winner will advance to the championship game opposite the No. 1 seed on Field 2.

The RCBC Nationals are sure to be a major factor in the 11U Easter Extravaganza.

Next weekend, a huge softball crowd will pour into Diamond Nation as the annual Jennie Finch Spring Invitational takes center stage. The 10U, 12U and 14U age brackets will compete for championship hardware in the April 27-28 event.



NJ GLORY EDGES RISING STARS, 10-8, IN 13U APRIL BLAST FINAL



By Bob Behre

NJ Glory Stars exploded for eight runs in the first inning then fended off a relentless Rising Stars Gold club on the way to a 10-8 victory in the 13U April Blast championship game last night at Diamond Nation in Flemington, N.J.

Righthander Kyle Rogers earned the victory in the final for NJ Glory and was named the April Blast Most Valuable Player.

"Kyle had a bunch of extra-base hits for us in the tournament, too, and came up big on the mound in the final," said NJ Glory coach Steve Teel.

It was the Rising Stars who struck first, scoring three runs in the top of the first inning on Cole Serfass' one-out two-run triple and an RBI fielder's choice grounder by Dylan Carfara. Zack Wendell and Sean Grady had ignited the rally with back-to-back one-out singles.

The Rising Stars, however, would find themselves on their heels in short order.

NJ Glory turned three hits, four walks and a pair of Rising Stars errors into an eight-run outburst in the bottom of the first. Payne Teel, who would later close out the victory for Rogers, drew a bases-loaded walk to bring home his team's first run. Aiden Almeyda followed with a two-run single left field to tie the game at 3-3.

Aiden Choi then brought a run home on a grounder to the left side as Teel beat the throw to the plate. Mike Carcich hit a grounder to the right side that the Rising Stars pitcher fielded and raced to get the out himself at an unoccupied first base. Not only did Almeyda score from third on the play but Choi alertly raced home from second as well to boost the NJ Glory lead to 7-0.

Danny McClonnan's single to left brought home the eighth run in the rally.

"We played well as a team," said coach Teel. "Our guys picked each other up throughout the tournament."

NJ Glory tacked on a run in the second inning on Justin Hernandez's two-out single to left field. Gabe Kushner had triggered the rally with a leadoff single over third base. He moved to second on a passed ball. That run would actually prove decisive as the Rising Stars rallied in the fourth inning.

Chris Olah led off and reached on an infield error that seemed to open the gates to the big inning for the Stars. Jacoby Sauer then singled through the left side before Ray Schiavo reached on a pop fly to shallow right-center field that somehow fell.

"We had a bad inning there," said coach Teel.

The Rising Stars would pounce on NJ Glory's miscues. Evan Kovalcik brought the first run home on a fielder's choice grounder, then Logan Higgins followed with a two-run single to center field. Serfass (2-for-4, 4 RBI) capped the uprising with a two-run single through the left side, drawing the Rising Stars within a run at 9-8.

"That team hit the ball very well," said coach Teel.

But Payne Teel, who had entered the game after Higgins' big hit, gained control from there. The righty would allow just one run on three hits over the final 2.2 innings,

striking out one and walking one. He retired the last four batters, the top four hitters in the Rising Stars lineup, in order.

NJ Glory tacked on an important insurance run in the bottom of the fourth on three singles, the last by Robbie Carcich drove home Mike Carcich from third for a 10-8 lead. Mike Carcich and Aiden Heyward kicked off the rally with singles to center field.

"Payne came in and threw strikes," said coach Teel. "He had those two lockdown innings and closed it with three straight pop ups." NJ Glory received some big tournament at bats from Robbie Carcich and steady, strong defense from its short-stop, Hernandez.

NJ Glory Stars (4-0) outscored its tournament opponents 37-11 while Rising Stars Gold (3-2) held a 33-21 runs advantage on its opponents.



10U

Baserats Baseball 13, Diamond Jacks 10U 6

Baserats Baseball defeated the Diamond Jacks 10U, 13-6, in the 10U April Blast championship game. Vincent Petruzzelli of the Baserats was named the 10U tournament's Most Valuable Player. The Baserats (4-0) outscored their opponents 43-16 while the Diamond Jacks (3-1) held a 35-21 runs advantage on their opponents.



11U

Hit Brigade 5, Delmarva Aces 11U East 2

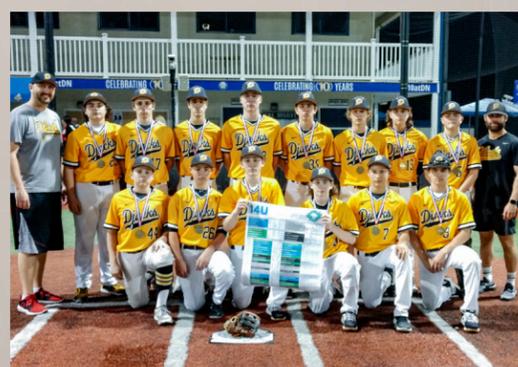
Hit Brigade defeated Delmarva Aces 11U East, 5-2, in the 11U April Blast championship game. Cameron Rice of Hit Brigade was named the 11U tournament's Most Valuable Player. Hit Brigade (4-0) outscored its opponents 30-8. Delmarva Aces (4-1) held a 37-25 runs advantage on its opponents.



12U

DJacks Super 12U 6, Morris County Cubs 3

Diamond Jacks Super 12U edged the Morris County Cubs, 6-3, in the 12U April Blast championship game. Dylan Wayne and Brevin Bezick of Super 12U shared the 12U tournament's Most Valuable Player award. The Diamond Jacks (4-0) outscored their opponents 43-6. The Cubs (4-1) held a 41-21 runs advantage on their opponents.



14U

DJacks Super 14U 5, AD Titans Select 2

The Diamond Jacks Super 14U defeated AD Titans Select, 5-2, in the April Blast championship game. Jimmy Mulvaney and Mark Gialluisi of the Diamond Jacks were named the co-MVPs of the 14U tournament. The Diamond Jacks (5-0) outscored their opponents 43-7. AD Titans Select (4-1) held a 43-10 runs advantage on its opponents.