

# Inside The Nation

Baseball/Softball News at Diamond Nation

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FLEMINGTON, NEW JERSEY

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## FIRECRACKER, FINCH'S ACES FIRE UP 'THE NATION' AS 4TH APPROACHES

By Bob Behre

Firecracker Classic baseball and Finch's Aces softball share the stage this weekend as Diamond Nation takes its swings heading into Fourth of July week.

The Flemington, N.J. baseball and softball facility will be host to 76 teams in all this weekend. The Firecracker Classic begins Friday and concludes on Monday while the Finch's Aces Stars & Stripes tournament begins Friday and winds down on Sunday.

A **20-team 14U Firecracker Classic** field has the honor of opening things as Full Count Futures plays the Whiz Kid Futures on Field one in one of three 14U openers in that time slot. The four-day 14U tournament is capped on Monday when the playoffs get underway. The top four seeds square off in a pair of semifinal round contests for the right to play in the championship game at 4:30 p.m. on Field 5.

The deep 14U field boasts such strong programs as Team Crush Baseball 2023, DHAA Knights, 14U, L.I. Dodger Nation, South Jersey Warriors and the Lehigh Valley Pates.

**Next up on Friday is the 15U Firecracker Classic** opener pitting Bluerocks Baseball and the Diamond Jacks Gold 15U in a 12:15 p.m. battle. That talented field winds down to the top five seeds for what is sure to be a hotly contested playoff on Monday. The Nos. 2 and 3 seeds and Nos. 4 and 5 seeds face off at 4:30 p.m. before the top seed plays the 4-5 winner at 6:30 p.m. The survives play for the 15U championship at 8:30 p.m. on Field 1.

Wladyka Continental, New Jersey Rising Rebels 2022, Teel Ravens, Diamond Studs Baseball, GC Outlaws and Baseball Warehouse are a few highly competitive entities in the 25-team 15U Firecracker Classic.

The **13U Firecracker Classic** breaks out in style with four openers at 4:30 p.m. on Friday as the NY Gothams 13U Red square off with the Locked In Expos Blue on Field 1. That deep field begins its playoff on Monday at 4:30 p.m. when the Nos. 2 vs. 3 seed meet in the first round with the winner taking on the top seed for the championship at 6:30 p.m. on Field 3.



It's a healthy mix of talent in the 15-team 13U field that boasts such programs at the Canes Mid-Atlantic, Jersey Boyz Baseball, NJ Tribe, NJ Jays and the Millburn Millers.

### Finch's Aces Stars & Stripes

The softballers open play at 5:30 p.m. on Friday with an attractive pair of games pitting NJ Venom and Jersey Girls '06 and the Black Diamonds and NJ Gator MSV. The **16-team 12U Stars & Stripes** begins its 16-team playoff with first round games at 9:30 a.m., 11 a.m. and 12:40 p.m. on Sunday. Second round play in the Stars & Stripes is set for 2:10 p.m. and 3:40 p.m. The playoffs move along to the quarter-finals at 5:30 p.m., the semifinals at 7 p.m. and conclude with the championship game at 8:30 p.m. on Field 2.

The deeply talented 12U Stars & Stripes field also features the Montgomery Twisters, Northern Columbia Chaos, Finch's Aces 12U, Team Long Island 2025 and Miss Shen Thunder.



## ALL-STATERS HUNT, DECHIARO LEAD ALL-STAR DIAMOND JACK HONOREES

By Bob Behre

NJ Super 17 players K.C. Hunt and Joey DeChiaro were named to the NJ.com All-State team, leading a large contingent of players in the Diamond Jacks program out of Diamond Nation who received statewide recognition by the state's largest publication.

Hunt, a senior at Ramapo High School, was named First Team All-State after the 6-3, 180-pound shortstop/pitcher batted .468 with five HRs and 27 RBI. Hunt (pictured above) concluded his senior season as Ramapo's career hits leader. The righthander went 4-2 with a 2.14 ERA and struck out 50 in 30 innings. His next stop is Mississippi State.

DeChiaro, a 6-2, 195-pound lefthander from Hunterdon Central in Flemington, went 5-2 with a 1.04 ERA to earn Third Team All-State recognition a year after being selected to the First Team. DeChiaro, a senior, leaves Hunterdon Central for Old Dominion having set his high school's career wins record at 26.

DeChiaro was also named the Skyland Conference Player of the Year for the second straight season.

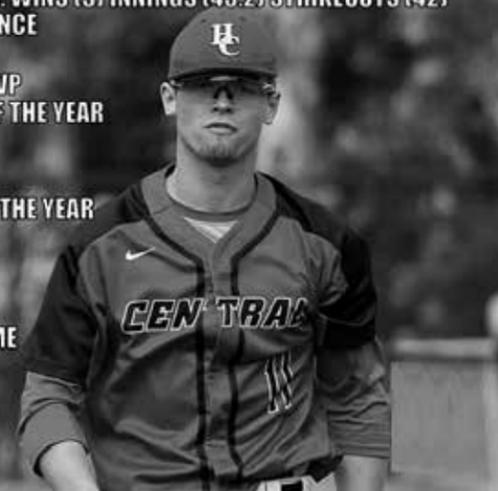
The All-State committee also awards honors by NJSIAA group size as Hunt was a First Team All-Group 3 selection. Earning Third Team All-Group 3 honors were Diamond Jacks Devin Hack (.329, 14 SBs) of Somerville and Zach Sylvester (.390) of Montville. Hack, a talented center fielder and speedy leadoff hitter, will play for Seton Hall University in the fall. Sylvester, who just completed his junior season, was named as a utility player for his ability to play multiple positions.

**Diamond Jacks Alex Stone of Newton** and Kyle Adorno (.440, 40 hits) of Johnson of Clark were named to Second Team All-Group 2. Stone is a hard-hitting junior catcher already committed to Duke and Adorno is an outstanding sophomore outfielder.

**Five more Diamond Jacks earned** All-Non-Public recognition. Jack Eichler (.392, 21 RBI), a senior second baseman at Seton Hall Prep, Felix Diaz (.337, 5 HRs), a senior third baseman at Immaculata and Adam Boucher (6-3, 2.44 ERA, 72K, 43 IP), a junior righthander also committed to Duke, were each named to All-Non-Public Second Team. Boucher



**Varsity Freshman School Records: Wins (15) Innings (43.2) Strikeouts (42)**  
 2016, 17, 18, 19 ALL-SKYLAND CONFERENCE  
 2017, 18, 19 ALL-COUNTY SELECTION  
 2018 H/W/S COUNTY TOURNAMENT MVP  
 2018 & 2019 SKYLAND CONF PLAYER OF THE YEAR  
 2018 NJ.COM FIRST TEAM ALL-STATE  
 2019 NJ.COM THIRD TEAM ALL-STATE  
 2019 HUNTERDON COUNTY PLAYER OF THE YEAR  
 ALL-TIME SCHOOL RECORD - 26 WINS  
 13-3 IN COUNTY/STATE PLAYOFFS  
 196.1 INNINGS - 107 HITS - 1.36 ERA  
 210 CAREER STRIKEOUTS - 2<sup>ND</sup> ALL-TIME  
 2018 H/W/S COUNTY CHAMPION  
 3 TIME CONFERENCE CHAMPION  
 3 TIME GROUP 4 SECTION CHAMPION  
 2 TIME GROUP 4 STATE CHAMPION



plays for St. Joseph of Metuchen. Earning Third Team All-Non-Public are a pair of talented sophomores, Donovan Zsak (5-2, 44K, 26.1 IP) of St. Joseph of Metuchen and Ryan Rumsey (4-1) of Paul VI of Haddonfield.

Zsak, a freshman lefthander, has already committed to Virginia. Rumsey is a sophomore righty also used as a corner infielder.

**The Diamond Jacks also had a trio of** talented players earn honors competing in the Prep School ranks for The Hun School in Princeton. Jack Erbeck, a gifted two-way player, went 6-0 with a 0.32 ERA while batting .393 and hitting six HRs against stiff competition. Teammates McGwire Tuffy (.500, 24 RBI), who is headed to Quinnipiac in Connecticut, and Erbeck's younger brother, Ricky Erbeck, a sophomore righthander and infielder, were also honored on All-Prep. Hun won its conference, the Mid-Atlantic Prep League, and the state Prep A championship this spring.

**Former Diamond Jack Anthony Volpe**, who was selected 30th overall in the First-Year Players Draft by the New York Yankees, was named the State Player of the Year. Volpe, a remarkably gifted shortstop who spent his formative years with the Diamond Jacks program, batted .477, scored 42 runs and drove home 36 runs while ripping seven triples and hitting eight HRs. He hit critical home runs for his team in one-run victories in the Morris County Tournament final and the Non-Public A state championship game.

# SCRAPPY FULL COUNT SCORES SUPER 16 WORLD SERIES TITLE

By Bob Behre

Righthander Chris Serrano pitched 4.1 shutout innings and Andrew Fernandez keyed a four-run third inning as the Full Count Prospects defeated Baseball Performance Center, 4-0, in the Super 16 World Series Red Bracket championship game on Sunday night at Diamond Nation.

Serrano, a rising junior at Kearny High School, kept the strong Baseball Performance lineup at bay with a clever mix of his fastball and curveball as he limited the Atlantic County club to one hit while striking out six and walking three.

"My fastball was feeling good out of my hand," said Serrano. "We didn't come this far to lose." Serrano did an excellent job working the outside corner against the Baseball Performance Center bats.

Serrano and Josh Kuroda-Grauer, a rising junior at Franklin, were named the Red Bracket co-Most Valuable Players.

Jayden Shertel, the starting pitcher and No. 3 hitter for Performance Baseball would get the team's only hits, a single in the first inning and an infield single in the seventh off reliever Ishaan Patel (Edison).

Shertel was sharp for five innings except for the third inning when a pair of walks contributed to Full Count's four-run rally. The righthander and rising junior from St. Joseph of Hammonton surrendered four hits, all coming in the third, struck out eight and walked four.

The bottom of the Full Count order ignited the rally in the third. Nick Della Salla (South Plainfield) lashed a leadoff single to left-center field, the first hit allowed by Shertel. Matt Orlando (St. Joseph of Metuchen) then ripped a double down the right field line to put two runners in scoring position. Patel, the No. 11 hitter, delivered Della Salla with the game's first run on a long sac fly to center field.

Shertel struck out Serrano, Full Count's leadoff hitter, for the second out, but he would not get out of the jam yet. Raiden Yost (Middlesex) drew a walk and Kuroda-Grauer followed with a single to left that scored Orlando with the second run. Shertel then walked Matt Carey (Delbarton) before Fernandez (Seton Hall Prep) drove an outside pitch into center field for a two-run single and a 4-0 lead.

"We played a clean game and our pitchers threw strikes," said Full Count coach Kristian Cortizo. "And we got timely hitting when we needed it. This is a scrappy bunch."

Shertel would restore order by retiring Full Count in order in the fourth and fifth innings but Serrano and Patel weren't giving much ground either. Serrano did walk the first two batters in the fourth before getting out of trouble unscathed, catching the clean-up hitter looking at a third strike curveball for the third out.

Serrano, who had won a game in relief on Saturday, had to convince Cortizo to allow him to come out for the fifth. "Coach was trying to take me out, but I wasn't done," said Serrano. But Cortizo did come and get Serrano after he issued a one-out walk to Jackson Vanesko. Patel fell behind 3-0 to the first batter he faced, Mark Elliot, but induces a grounder to the right side that second baseman Brandon Shine (South Plainfield) deftly turned into a 4-6-3 inning-ending double play. Patel would work around a walk to Louie Levari (Buena) in the sixth and Shertel's infield single in the seventh to locked down the championship for Full Count.

"This team has character," said Cortizo. "That's what we instill in them. They never quit." Full Count was trailing, 7-0, in its tournament opener against the RCBC Nationals and rallied to an 8-7 victory that propelled the Middlesex County-based squad to a 6-0 tournament run.

Jonathan Rosado (Elizabeth) had the only other hit for Full Count, a two-out infield single in the top of the seventh. The only error in the game came on an errant pickoff attempt in the top of the seventh after Fernandez drew a leadoff walk. Otherwise, both teams played sterling defensively.

Baseball Performance Center's Clay Sands (Mainland) made a remarkable lunging catch near the right field wall on a drive by Carey to end the sixth. High school teammate Chase Petty, a rising junior, showcased a powerful arm at shortstop on a number of throws. He very nearly threw out Rosado at first base in the seventh despite going deep in the hole and firing off his back foot. Kuroda-Grauer likewise made a couple of strong throws from shortstop for Full Count.

"We're a scrappy team," said Serrano. "We hit the ball and make plays in the field. Our pitchers trust out defense. That method is working for us."

Full Count (6-0) outscored its tournament opponents 42-18 while Baseball Performance Center (4-1) held a 32-10 runs advantage of its opponents.

**TOURNAMENT NOTES:** The Long Island-based East Coast Lumberjacks, a familiar face at Diamond Nation tournaments, entered its 2022 squad which consists of rising high school sophomores and even a pair of rising freshman. The baby Lumberjacks did themselves proud, going 3-2 in tournament play before falling in the Blue Bracket semifinals to the eventual champion East Coast Royals. ... Baseball Performance Center coach Ed Charlton is a St. Augustine Prep and NJIT grad. He played professionally for two years in the Cincinnati Reds chain and with the CanAm League Rockland (NY) Boulders.



## SUPER 16 WORLD SERIES RECAPS



### **WHITE BRACKET** RCBC New Jersey 7, Hit & Run Outlaws 3

RCBC New Jersey defeated the Hit & Run Outlaws, 7-3, in the Super 16 World Series White Bracket championship game. Hunter Rivera and Chris Corchado of RCBC were named the tournament's co-Most Valuable Players. RCBC New Jersey (5-0-1) outscored its opponents 44-20. The Outlaws (4-1) held a 50-27 runs advantage on their opponents.



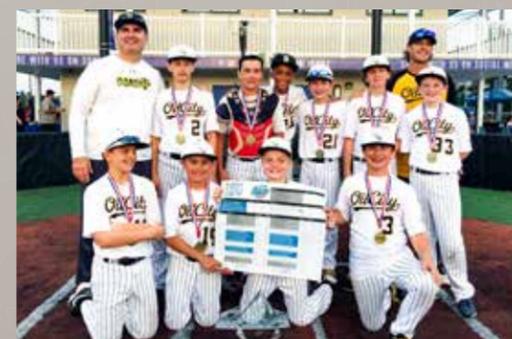
### **BLUE BRACKET** East Coast Royals 11, Jersey Boyz Baseball 3

The East Coast Royals defeated Jersey Boyz Baseball, 11-3, in the Super 16 World Series Blue Bracket championship game. Cole Reynolds of the Royals was named the tournament's Most Valuable Player. The East Coast Royals (5-0) outscored their opponents 52-10 while Jersey Boyz Baseball (4-1-1) held a 38-22 runs advantage on its opponents.



### **SUPER 9U INVITATIONAL RECAP** Grit 9U 10, Mt. Laurel Indians 6

Grit 9U defeated the Mt. Laurel Indians, 10-6, in the Super 9U Invitational championship game. Luke Fazulak and Trevor Greenbush of Grit 9U were named the tournament's co-Most Valuable Players. Grit 9U (3-1) outscored its opponents 37-29. The Mt. Laurel Indians (2-1) held a 34-13 runs advantage on their opponents.



### **SUPER 12U INVITATIONAL RECAP** Oil City Bandits 6, Baseball U. NY 4

The Oil City Bandits nipped Baseball U. NY, 6-4, in the Super 12U Invitational championship game. Aiden Shaughnessy of the Bandits was named the tournament's Most Valuable Player. The Bandits (4-1) outscored their opponents 50-31. Baseball U. NY (2-1-1) held a 28-18 runs advantage on its opponents.