

SUMMER BASH, 17/18U COLLEGE ELITE SHOWCASE NEXT UP AT 'THE NATION'

By Bob Behre

Diamond Nation swings into the last couple weeks of its summer schedule with this weekend's Summer Bash and the 17/18U College Elite Showcase Wood Bat tournament scheduled for Monday-through-Wednesday.

The Summer Bash opens on Saturday and boasts the 10U, 14U and 16U age groups and each playoff championship games is set for 6:30 p.m. on Monday. The College Elite Showcase steps in on Monday morning and the three-day event closes with its championship game at 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday.

The **10U Summer Bash** begins play at 8 a.m. on Saturday with an attractive matchup pitting Berks Stars and RCBC Nationals on Field 2. ASBA Downingtown, Bonnie Braves, Dodgers Nation and the Green Dogs 10U Green are some of the featured teams in the 10U field.

The 10U Summer Bash winds down to the championship game at 6:30 p.m. on Monday on Field 2.

The **14U Summer Bash** is a 20-team event and opens with five games at 8 a.m. on Saturday. Fans may consider taking a peek at an intriguing tournament-opening contest on Field 4 that has Tri-State Arsenal NY 14U Pride squaring off with Fergie Jenkins 14U East All-Stars.

The 14U playoffs begin with a pair of semifinals at 2:15 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. on Monday. That will set the championship pairing for the 6:30 p.m. championship game on Field 3.

Adrenaline, Fivestar NY, Rochester Cougars Elite, International Baseball Academy, the Bronx Bombers and ASBA Cherry Hill are some of the featured programs in the 14U Summer Bash.

The **16U Summer Bash** begins play a bit later, but comes in strong with five openers set for 4:30 p.m. on Saturday. An opener pitting Avengers 16U and State Island Orioles Black on Field 5 gets the tournament off to an impressive start.

The 16U playoffs begin with the semifinals at 2:15 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. on Monday and the championship game follows at 6:30 p.m. on Field 1.

BBA Expos, the Staten Island Orioles' Gray and Black teams, Hudson Valley Rebels, Dutchess Elite, DBA Sandhogs and East Brunswick Rebels are some of the talented teams featured in the 16U Summer Bash.

The **17/18U College Elite Showcase Wood Bat** begins play at 10 a.m. on Monday and one of the four openers that catches one's eye is a game between Team BC Baseball and the Staten Island Orioles 1. Highly competitive Team BC is from British Columbia, Canada and is a frequent August visitor to Diamond Nation.

Two days of pool play are followed on Wednesday by the playoffs, which begins with the semifinals at 12:15 p.m. and 2:15 p.m. The 17/18U College Elite Showcase Wood Bat tournament championship game follows at 4:30 p.m. on Field 1.

The NY Nighthawks Show, Team Steel 2020 Gold, RCBC Nationals, Massapequa R Baseball 2020 and the Manalapan Braves bolster a strong 17/18U tournament field.



DJACKS OF ELMORA LITTLE LEAGUE BEGIN WORLD SERIES QUEST

By Bob Behre

Jairo Labrador realized his talented group of Elmora (Elizabeth) Little Leaguers were going to have to take their training up a notch if they were to meet their goal of playing in the Little League World Series.

"We won the Mid-Atlantic championship in 2016 and that is as far as it goes for 10 year-olds," said Labrador. "After that run we saw what it would take to go further and we knew we had to get better. We had to take it to the next level."

Labrador noticed an advertisement online for Diamond Nation's Winter Patriot League and made it a Christmas gift to his sons Jason and Justin, who were 10 and eight at the time. Assistant coach Sal Garcia brought his son, Sal, along too.

"We felt, for us to compete at a high level, we needed to get better," said Labrador. "Adding off-season training was one of the ways to make that happen." It wouldn't be long before Diamond Nation's Patriot League instructors saw the group from Elizabeth was ready for a higher level of ball.

"Shane (Solimani) pulled me aside and told me our kids needed to come to practice with the Diamond Jacks teams," said Labrador. "Buck (10U-13U Diamond Jacks Coordinator Mike Buckelew) got involved and soon our kids became Diamond Jacks."

Labrador, pleased at what he saw unfolding at Diamond Nation, began to spread the word back home. "I told Buck, if you like these kids, we have more," he said.

Labrador, whose coaching pedigree includes a few years as an assistant on the Elizabeth High School football staff, quickly fell in love with the Diamond Jacks program and began bringing more talented youngsters on the 50-minute trip from Elizabeth, south to the Flemington facility.

Elmora Little League's players continued to enlist in the Diamond Jacks program until it's numbers grew to 10 players, all of which are playing on Friday for the 13-man Elmora Youth Little League representing the Mid-Atlantic region in Williamsport, Pa. Elmora begins its quest for Little League immortality at 8 p.m. on Friday when it opposes Salem, Oregon, representing the Northwest region, in its Little League World Series opener.

"Win or lose, they are going to be celebrities for the next couple months," says Buckelew, who was present for Elmora's state championship victory in Sayreville. "That atmosphere was insane. My whole 12U team was there and most of the 11U team was there, too. They've all latched onto this team. I've even seen our older kids, our 16Us, posting stuff on Instagram about Elmora."

Elmora's nickname is the Troopers, named out of respect for N.J. State Trooper Thomas Hanratty,



Mid-Atlantic Region

Team Representative: Elmora Youth LL

Team Location: Elizabeth, New Jersey

Regional Record: 4-1

a former Elmora Little Leaguer. Hanratty made a routine traffic stop on April 2, 1992 when he was struck by a passing vehicle and tragically killed at the age of 24. Elmora's field is named in Hanratty's honor. His badge number, 4971, remains on the team's sleeve.

"Because we have so many Diamond Jacks on the team, we've been calling ourselves the Trooper Jacks," said Labrador. But it's Hanratty's memory that is of utmost importance to Elmora. "4971 is one of our chants. It's ingrained in their system," Labrador told the New York Post.

There's been plenty of evidence at Diamond Nation since early spring that this group of Elmora Little Leaguers were headed for something special. The Diamond Jacks Super 12U squad, which boasts Elmora's Sal Garcia, Jayden Capindica, Joel Sanchez, Yadi Mateo and J.R. Rosado on its deep roster, went 51-5 in the spring and summer to earn a No. 27 national ranking by Perfect Game.

"I'm super thankful for the Diamond Jacks program," said Labrador. "It's a big part of the reason we are here in Williamsport. We've been treated so well and the coaches, including Buck, Shayne, Walt (Cleary), among others, have been unbelievable."

From Cleary's end, he's thankful for the experience of coaching a fine group of youngsters.

The Diamond Jacks Super 11U squad has been bolstered by Elmora's Justin Labrador and Josiah Sharpe on its way to registering a 36-13 mark through the spring and summer. L.J. Aponte played for the Diamond Jacks Gold 11U team. Two other Troopers taking hacks in Williamsport this weekend, Derek Escobar and Yamil Soto, played with the Diamond Jacks at one point, too.

"It's been fun watching them go this far," said Buckelew, who is making the trip to Williamsport for Friday night's game. "I knew if they played the way they are capable they'd give themselves a chance. It's amazing. They came here just to play winter baseball. The biggest thing I've enjoyed seeing is that all of them are such a closely knit group. Reaching the state final showed what kind of kids we have in our program. They've been with each other the entire spring and summer and it shows."

(continued on back page)

LITTLE LEAGUE (continued from front page)



#1
Justin
Labrador

Positions: 2B/IF/OF
Bats: R | Throws: R
4'9" | 82



#2
Yamil
Soto

Positions: 2B/SS
Bats: R | Throws: R
4'11" | 92



#3
Jaime
Tamayo

Positions: OF
Bats: R | Throws: R
4'11" | 87



#4
Josiah
Sharpe

Positions: OF
Bats: R | Throws: R
4'5" | 84



#5
Emmanuel
Nuñez

Positions: OF
Bats: R | Throws: R
5'0" | 99



#6
Sal
Garcia

Positions: R/2B/SS
Bats: R | Throws: R
5'5" | 102



#9
J.R.
Rosado

Positions: P/C/SS
Bats: R | Throws: R
5'3" | 125



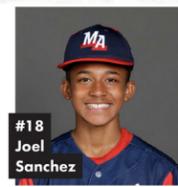
#14
Santi
Alvarez

Positions: OF
Bats: R | Throws: R
5'2" | 112



#16
L.J.
Aponte

Positions: P/C/OF
Bats: L | Throws: R
5'3" | 114



#18
Joel
Sanchez

Positions: P/C
Bats: R | Throws: R
5'7" | 126



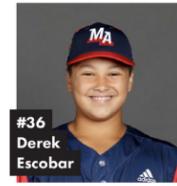
#21
Jayden
Capindica

Positions: P/1B/CF
Bats: L | Throws: L
5'9" | 124



#35
Yadi
Mateo

Positions: P/1B/3B
Bats: R | Throws: R
5'11" | 231



#36
Derek
Escobar

Positions: P/3B
Bats: R | Throws: R
5'5" | 195



Louis
Aponte

Positions: Coach
Bats: | Throws: |



Sal
Garcia

Positions: Coach
Bats: | Throws: |



Jairo
Labrador

Positions: Manager
Bats: | Throws: |

Once Labrador and Garcia had enticed this tightly bonded group of young ball players to elevate their training at Diamond Nation, a logistical problem emerged; how to get eight or nine boys to Flemington in time for twice-a-week practices, batting practice, winter training and games. "Sal bought a Suburban so we could easily drive all the kids to Diamond Nation," said Labrador.

A lot of problem solving goes into formulating a successful team and Garcia wasted no time putting the travel issue behind his Elmora boys.

"It takes a lot of special things to happen for a team to achieve what we've achieved," said Labrador. "Our parents and whole community bought in. They know we have the best interest of their kids at heart. It's a dream to get here."

Labrador has been a school teacher in Elizabeth the past 13 years and currently teaches health and physical education at the elementary school level. "I know this age group very well," he said. "And I've known these particular kids since they were six or seven years-old."

One of Labrador's former fellow coaches at Elizabeth, Casey Ransone, has been wrapped up, too, in Elmora's entertaining run to Williamsport, frequently tweeting out his excitement for the team's success.

"There is a difference between a successful coach and a great coach," said Ransone, in his third year as the Hunterdon Central head football coach. "Jairo is what I consider to be a great coach. He relates to all ages and backgrounds. Most importantly, he teaches kids to be good people and how to do the next right thing."

That tightly knit group of Elmora ball players has also shown an affinity for resilience.

Capindica surrendered a walk-off home run in an 8-7 loss to Washington, D.C. in the second game of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Tournament. Elmora didn't budge, allowing just a single run over its next three games, all victories, including Capindica's 5-0 shutout over Washington, D.C. in the semifinals. Elmora would then roll past New York, 19-4, in the championship game.

"Capindica gave up that walk-off to D.C. then came back and shut them out," said Buckelew. "In the spotlight, Jayden's a calm kid. He's a kid who is unfazed in a high pressure situation. That was a high pressure situation against a team that had beaten him. He also closed out the championship game in the State tournament."

"I can't say enough about the great type of kids they are. Yadi, J.R., Justin, Sal, all of them. I believe that's why they are where they are. They stick together. You can see how well they get along and how well they play the game together. We just want them to play the game the right way and embrace this amazing experience."

NIAGARA'S GOYETTE FOUR-HITS ZOOM BASEBALL IN 17/18U SUMMER FINALE



By Bob Behre

Righthander Chris Goyette tossed a four-hitter and Niagara Thunderwolves struck late on the way to a 3-0 victory over Zoom Baseball Academy in the 17/18U Summer Finale Gold Bracket championship game.

Goyette struck out 10, walked one and hit a batter and the bottom of the Niagara batting order triggered a three-run top of the sixth inning that proved the difference in a tidy, cleanly played championship game.

"Chris showed a lot of competitiveness today," said Niagara Thunderwolves coach Jeff Ziemecki. "He commanded all of his pitches. His breaking balls set up his fastball. He throws around 81-83 but his fastball looks much harder because of his breaking balls."

Goyette had to outduel Zoom Baseball's lefty Ryan Albin, who shut out Niagara on one hit through five innings. But the narrative changed in the top of the sixth when Nick Castellana, Niagara's No. 7 hitter, led off with a single to right field. Liam Ward then dropped a sac bunt down the third base side and was safe at first as the throw pulled the first baseman off the bag. Castellana alertly raced all the way to third on the bunt when he noticed the base uncovered.

Gavyn Boyle, the No. 10 hitter, stepped in and squared to bunt on the first pitch. But Albin's pitch was in the dirt and got away for a wild pitch that allowed Castellana to score the game's first run and Ward to take second. The count would run to 1-2 on the lefty-hitting Boyle after he missed at two bunt attempts. He quickly rectified that failure by hitting an opposite field laser into left-center field for an RBI triple.

"Gavyn is just a 2022 and is an exceptional talent," said Ziemecki. "He's a fun kid to watch."

Andrew Stillinger, Niagara's leadoff hitter, capped the rally with a quality at bat, hitting a bouncer to the right side that scored Boyle with the third run of the inning.

Goyette, who was named the Gold Bracket Most Valuable Player, retired Zoom Baseball in order in the sixth and got through the seventh for he complete game despite Jesse Jaconski's two-out double.

"My slider felt real good and my curveball had good movement," said Goyette. "I started to get a feel for my changeup around the third or fourth inning and went to that for strikes a lot."

Goyette did have to survive Zoom Baseball's biggest threat when the game was still scoreless in the bottom of the fifth.

Albin, batting fifth in the Zoom order, started the rally with a leadoff bunt single down the third base side. Jaconski bunted him to second before Shaun Levan drew a walk on a 3-2 pitch from Goyette. Nick Micciche dropped another bunt down the third base side that went for a single and loaded the bases with one out.

Goyette, however, struck out the next batter before inducing the No. 10 hitter to hit a bouncer to the shortstop Ward, who forced Micciche at second to end the threat. Ward, however, nearly lost the handle on the grounder but managed to roll it to second baseman Stillinger who grabbed it just before Micciche got to the bag.

Goyette, in the end, was extremely efficient in taming the Zoom Baseball lineup.

"My philosophy is to hit spots," Goyette said. "I pride myself on hitting my spots and using the movement of my pitches to keep hitters off balance. I think I had good control of my slider after about 50 pitches. I got a backdoor slider on the outside corner to get one of their lefty hitters."

Albin permitted three runs, two of which were earned, over five-plus innings on three hits. He struck out five and walked two. He also picked off a runner at first base and got a 1-3-6 caught-stealing when he threw behind another runner as he broke for second base.

Incredibly, the Thunderwolves won three games and tied two despite scored just 15 runs in their five games. That good fortune arrived courtesy of outstanding pitching that permitted just five runs. Mitch Pascarella, in fact, pitched a seven inning perfect game in the semifinals when Niagara defeated Freedom baseball, 1-0. Pascarella struck out eight in the perfect.

"Chris' and Mitch's pitching performances were two of the best we've seen all season," said Ziemecki. Niagara scored a single run in two other games but strong pitching enabled it to come away with a pair of 1-1 ties against Pacoy Dragons Showcase and Pro Tech.

Niagara had competed in the 17/18U Blue Chip Prospects last week, registering a 3-1 record and winning its pool before losing in the first round of the playoffs.

"We've been here since last Sunday," said Ziemecki. "The Blue Chips was a great tournament and it just worked out for us that these two tournaments were back-to-back. We love coming here."

Zoom Baseball Academy (4-1) held a 22-7 runs advantage on its opponents.

TOURNAMENT RECAPS

17/18U BLUE CHIP PROSPECTS

Black Bracket
Baltimore Redbirds 5, Syracuse Sports Zone Braves 0
The Baltimore Redbirds defeated the Syracuse Sports Zone Braves, 5-0, in the 17/18U Blue Chip Prospects Black Bracket championship game. The Redbirds' Noah Rodriguez was named the Black Bracket Most Valuable Player. The Redbirds (5-0) outscored their opponents 27-5 while Syracuse Sports Zone (4-1-1) held a 24-12 runs advantage on its opponents.

Red Bracket

Northeast Pride Scout 7, 9ers Baseball Club 18U 1
Northeast Pride Scout defeated 9ers Baseball Club 18U, 7-1, in the 17/18U Blue Chip Prospects Red Bracket championship game. Bryce Reimer of Northeast Pride was named the Red Bracket Most Valuable Player. Northeast Pride (5-0) outscored its opponents 22-3. 9ers Baseball Club (5-1-1) held a 36-12 runs advantage on its opponents.

Green Bracket

Diamond Jacks Super 17U 9, Next Level Titans 6
Diamond Jacks Super 17U defeated the Next Level Titans, 9-6, in the 17/18U Blue Chip Prospects Green Bracket championship game. Matt Gluck of Super 17 was named the Green Bracket Most Valuable Player. The Diamond Jacks (5-0-1) outscored their opponents 32-15. The Titans (5-1) held a 52-25 runs advantage on their opponents.

Gold Bracket

East Coast Sandhogs 8, Baseball U. Prospects 2
The East Coast Sandhogs defeated Baseball U. Prospects, 8-2, in the 17/18U Blue Chip Prospects Gold Bracket championship game. The Sandhogs' awarded the MVP to their entire team. The Sandhogs (6-0) outscored their opponents 29-9. Baseball U. Prospects (4-2) held a 21-16 runs advantage on their opponents.

Blue Bracket

Baseball U. North Jersey 5, Long Island Body Armor Titans 16U 2
Baseball U. North Jersey defeated the Long Island Body Armor Titans, 5-2, in the 17/18U Blue Chip Prospects Blue Bracket championship game. Baseball U's Andy Serretti was named the Blue Bracket Most Valuable Player. Baseball U. North Jersey (5-0) outscored its opponents 22-7. The Titans (5-1) held a 34-8 runs advantage on their opponents.

AUGUST SHOWDOWN

11U

Redblacks Baseball 2, NY Bluebirds 11U Blue 1
Redblacks Baseball defeated the NY Bluebirds 11u Blue, 2-1, in the 11U August Showdown championship game. James Sorrentino of Redblacks Baseball was named the 11U Most Valuable Player. Redblacks Baseball (3-2) outscored its opponents 32-17. The NY Bluebirds (3-1) held a 25-8 runs advantage on its opponents.

13U Silver Bracket

RCBC Nationals 14, New Jersey Bulls 0
The RCBC Nationals defeated the New Jersey Bulls, 14-0, in the August Showdown 13U Silver Bracket championship game. Coach Ron of the Nationals was named the 13U Silver Bracket Most Valuable Player. RCBC (3-1) outscored its opponents 40-5. The New Jersey Bulls (3-2) were outscored, 27-22, by their opponents.

13U Gold Bracket

CrossBridge Raiders 6, Diamond Jacks Super 13U 3
The CrossBridge Raiders defeated the Diamond Jacks Super 13U, 6-3, in the August Showdown 13U Gold Bracket championship game. CrossBridge's Bryce Meccage was named the Gold Bracket Most Valuable Player. The Raiders (5-0) outscored their opponents 29-8. The Super 13U (3-1) held a 27-10 runs advantage on its opponents.

17/18U SUMMER FINALE WOOD BAT

Silver Bracket

Mid-Atlantic Show 10, Lehigh Valley Revolution 1
Mid-Atlantic Show defeated the Lehigh Valley Revolution, 10-1, in the 17/18U Summer Finale Wood Bat Silver Bracket championship game. Sam Portnoy of Mid-Atlantic Show was named the Silver Bracket Most Valuable Player. Mid-Atlantic Show (5-0) outscored its opponents 33-10. The Lehigh Valley Revolution (3-1) was outscored, 13-9, by its opponents.