

## P-C 15s end with Babe Ruth heartbreaker

Montgomery, WW-P ousted earlier

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EWING — The last two summers of Babe Ruth baseball have ended with heartbreak for the Princeton-Cranbury 15-year-old all-stars.

Last summer, it was the heartbreak of seeing their chances in the District One 14-year-old tournament dashed by a pair of last-inning one-run losses.

"We were close in both of them last year," recalled P-C manager Matt Cordonnier. "But we lost them both in the seventh inning by one run. They were heartbreakers."

Princeton-Cranbury's 6-0 loss to Ewing on Wednesday in a District One 15s tournament elimination game brought a new sort of heartbreak with the realization that Babe Ruth baseball is over for the 15-year-olds on the team, as well as their coach.

"It's a sad moment," Cordonnier said. "I love coaching. I'll coach somewhere else and do something. There are a lot of kids playing Legion ball now and Junior Legion. I'll help with that. It's fun."

Cordonnier has guided the core of the P-C team since they were 7-year-old all-stars.

"They've grown up," he said. "They're a lot better players than they used to be. Now some of them are playing high school. Some of them have to make their way through high school and Legion baseball now. It's serious for them."

"Five of these kids are playing Legion baseball now. That helped a lot. They had about 12 Legion games before Babe Ruth started. That helped. It helped them get ready to go. They got to practice the whole time and Legion ball is more competitive than this."

P-C gained some measure of satisfaction in surviving one elimination game. Their 9-3 win over West Windsor-Plainsboro knocked out the program that had won the 15s age group last year.

"That was good," Cordonnier said. "We played our best Babe Ruth game."

Everything we did worked. We squeezed, we bunted, we did hit and run, all at the right time and it worked. That was fun. We hadn't won a Babe Ruth game. We lost last year, two games by one run, so it was nice to get a win."

The win was delayed two days by rain, but P-C didn't seem to mind the wait. It gave them some time to plan a strategy and when play resumed Tuesday with Matt Hoffman at third base, P-C wasted no time in squeezing him home with Josh Berger. The run helped P-C build a 4-0 lead by three innings.

"We didn't hit the ball tremendously against West Windsor," Cordonnier said. "We just nicked and dined it. We bunted to move runners, which is not normally what we do well. It was fun to be able to do that."

"We were able to squeeze when we came back," he added. "That was fun. I thought about it for three days. We needed a run. We don't hit well. So any time we have a guy on third, we have to score him."

WW-P had more difficulty mustering offense for its side until it made it interesting at 4-3 going into P-C's five-run seventh inning. WW-P bowed out of the District One tournament without a win this year, but they undoubtedly have the youngest team in the district with eight 14-year-olds. While many of them will look forward to going farther next summer, Etienne Aduya, who had two hits and drove in two runs, and Ryan Billek were selected for the District One All-Tournament team that will play a team of Mercer Senior Babe Ruth 16-year-old all-stars Aug. 2. Joining them from P-C will be Luke Cordonnier and Chris Harwood. Harwood pitched against WW-P and had two hits and three runs scored. Cordonnier got the save against WW-P and got one of P-C's two hits against Ewing while also pitching an effective six innings.

Nick Covello and Adam Verducci will represent Montgomery, which was eliminated late Tuesday with a 12-4 loss to Lawrence. Covello had three hits while Verducci threw a solid five innings that included six strikeouts in relief in the loss. Base runners and base hits were ultimately too scarce for P-C to advance beyond Wednesday. In its loss to Ewing, Ewing hurler Eric Kondor allowed just two hits and struck out 14, 11 swinging.

"We couldn't hit him. . . obviously," Cordonnier said. "We never faced this pitcher before. His curve ball got us."

P-C was only down, 2-0, after three innings and it played strong defense throughout the game. The defense was a welcome sight for a team that struggled early in the tournament in the field as errors led to five unearned first-inning runs against Hightstown.

"Our first game," Cordonnier said, "we didn't play good defense. Today, we played better. We actually made some good plays behind Luke. Our centerfielder and rightfielder both made good plays. Both of those balls could have broken the game open. We played a good defensive game."

P-C would have liked the hitting to come around a little quicker, but the team showed improvement in each facet each game in District One tournament play. In the process, they picked up a Babe Ruth win before they finally were sent packing with a new sort of heartbreak.