

Princeton Post 218 Showing Promise; Looking to Surprise Foes This Summer

Playing in mid-90 degree temperatures that made Smoyer Park feel like a blast furnace, the Princeton Post 218 American Legion baseball team faced a trial by fire last Sunday as it opened the season.

Post 218 was hosting a North Trenton Post 459 squad that featured a core of players that led Nottingham High to an 18-6 record this spring.

In the early stages, it

looked like Post 218 was going to wilt in the oppressive heat as it fell behind 5-2.

But Post 218 rallied for three runs in the bottom of the third to tie the game at 5-5. After falling behind 6-5, Post 218 newcomer Trevor Barsamian blasted a homer over the fence in right center to knot the game at 6-6.

With relief pitcher Ryan

Gordy cooling off Post 459, the game turned into a nailbiter. Post 218 threatened in the bottom of the sixth, but couldn't push across any more runs as it ultimately lost 9-6.

Longtime Post 218 manager Tommy Parker was proud of the way his players hung in there.

"We battled back and forth," said Parker. "I think that overall, I wasn't truly disappointed in terms of how we played. There were a couple of mental mistakes. It's the first game, get it over with and learn. It's kind of like a Lite beer commercial; I feel strongly both ways. It's frustrating to lose but you see the bright spots. We truly held our own. If we make a couple of plays and don't run out of a couple of innings, maybe they are looking up at us in the last inning."

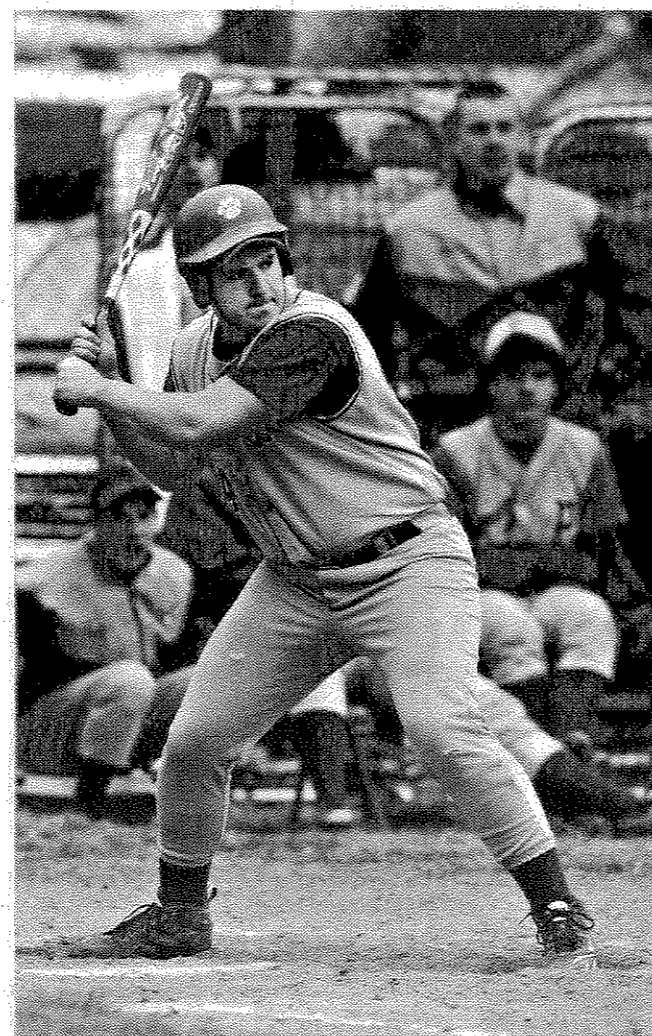
A night later, Post 218 made the plays as it cruised to a 9-1 win over Mitchell Davis Post 182 with Danny Etherton and David Petrucci each pounding out three hits and Will Mooney going 2-for-4 with two RBIs. Anthony Freda went the distance on the mound, striking out eight and giving up just five hits.

Parker is looking to veteran stars Etherton and Clint O'Brien to come up with a lot of hits and leadership this summer.

"Their skill, ability, and experience is a plus," asserted Parker, whose team is coming off a disappointing 5-17 season in 2007.

"These guys are kind of natural leaders; they will bring these young guys along. With Etherton captaining the outfield and Clint leading the infield, it's like having coaches on the field."

In Parker's view, Post 218 has some young guys who should make big contributions.



SUDDEN IMPACT: Trevor Barsamian prepares to take a cut this spring in action for the Princeton High baseball team. Last Sunday, Barsamian sparkled in his debut for the Princeton Post 218 American Legion baseball team, going 2-for-4 with a homer and an RBI as Princeton fell 9-6 to North Trenton Post 459. Post 218, which improved to 1-1 with a 9-1 win over Mitchell Davis Post 182 last Monday, plays at Hamilton Post 31 on June 12 before hosting Hightstown Post 148 on June 14. (Photo by Bill Allen/NJ SportAction)

"These young guys are going to rise to the occasion," said Parker.

"The real beauty of this whole thing is that they are young; we lose three guys in Clint, Danny, and Ryan Gordy. Everyone else is eligible to play."

One of Post 218's brightest young stars could turn out to be the powerful Barsamian, who starred for the PHS football and baseball teams this past year as a sophomore.

"That was a helluva debut," said a grinning Parker. "I've watched him all high school season and he is a kid that is not intimidated by the situation. I told him, you hit a home run; now don't go for homer the next time up. Let your at-bat come to you and play. He had a good at-bat; he worked the pitcher. You want someone who is confident and comfortable. In that situation, more times than not he is going to put a bat on the ball."

Post 218 has plenty of others who should put their bats on the ball this summer besides Barsamian, Etherton, and O'Brien. "We can mix and match," said Parker.

"Mark Madden is going to be able to help, as is Richie von der Schmidt. Benny Siegel played a helluva game today; he's one of our captains along with Sam Baxendale. Benny is a story you point to; he bided his time. Last year he got a chance to play and we weren't able to take him out of the lineup. He has a great attitude."

Parker thinks his mound

corps has a chance to hold down most lineups. "I think we have decent pitching as long as we play a great mental game and don't make mistakes," added Parker.

"We can't run ourselves out of innings and we need to play solid defense. Our pitching is good enough to keep us in a game like this. We have Madden who had a great season out at PDS. Freda didn't do a bad job at Hun. Jimmy Fuhrman is a very smart pitcher. The guy comes out of the game and he said, 'Coach, can I put my shorts on and run?' That's going to rub off on the guys. We have 1-2 out guys who are needed in today's brand of baseball. Clint can come in and get you an out or two. Dan-

ny can get you an out or two."

With Post 218 looking to be a contender for a playoff spot in the Mercer County American Legion League (MCALL), Parker believes his team will be a tough out.

"I think we are going to surprise some folks," maintained Parker, whose team plays at Hamilton Post 31 on June 12 before hosting Hightstown Post 148 on June 14.

"In terms of their chemistry, this team is already coming together a lot faster than some of the other teams. For some of the Princeton teams in the past, you have to get into the season and then they start jelling."

—Bill Alden

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