

## Post 218 Baseball Outlasts Mitchell Davis But Still Struggling to Develop Confidence

After losing seven of its first nine games this summer, the Princeton Post 218 American Legion baseball team was ready to break out for a big win.

Hosting last-place Mitchell Davis Post 82 last Wednesday, Post 218 took a 3-0 lead in the first inning and appeared to be on the way to an easy day at the office.

By the top of the seventh inning, Post 218 was up 7-1 and three outs from finally enjoying a laugh.

But with ace pitcher Jim Fuhrman tiring after six strong innings and Mitchell Davis coming up with some clutch hits, the Post 218

smiles turned to frowns as the visitors tied the game up at 7-7.

Post 218 failed to score in the bottom of the seventh and the game went into extra innings. Princeton reliever Anthony Freda brought the heat and Mitchell Davis went down meekly in the top of the eighth.

With night falling at Smoyer Park and the umpires considering suspending the game, Post 218 knew that it had to act fast to pull out the win.

Sparked by a key hit from Danny Jeong, Post 218 loaded the bases. The hardy crowd on hand rippled with

excitement as Princeton's top hitter, Danny Etherton, strolled to the plate.

Etherton, a former Princeton High standout who hit .403 this spring at Chestnut Hill College (Pa.), kept his cool even as the count went to 1-2.

"My thought was that if I got out someone else was going to do it," said Etherton. "Everyone wanted to hit in that last position."

The lanky centerfielder made sure that nobody else had to hit as he lashed a single to right field to end the marathon and give Princeton the win.

"He got the curve ball up

and I just went the other way with it," said Etherton, reflecting on his game-winning hit.

Post 218 may not have even gotten to extra innings if Etherton hadn't made a game-saving throw in the seventh inning to cut down a Mitchell Davis runner at home plate with two out.

"I thought I floated it a little bit; I put everything I had into it," recalled Etherton.

"I was just trying to win; everyone wants to win. We just wanted to stop it there; we didn't want to go into the 7th down a run."

While Etherton was glad that Post 218 got the win, he isn't looking for that kind of drama on a daily basis.

"I hope we can build on this because we want to win," asserted Etherton.

"We want to bury teams as much as possible and not have to worry about that bottom of the 8th inning."

Etherton's hot bat has helped Post 218 stay with most teams as he has built on the confidence he gained from his superb college debut season.

"I'm relieved that I'm hitting with the metal bat; that hit [in the 8th inning] would have probably broken my bat," said Etherton, who was hitting .514 in games through June 29.

"I'm just working on some new things, working on what my coach told me to do. I changed my stance in the spring; it's been working ever since."

Post 218 manager Tommy Parker acknowledged that his team had to work hard to get the win.

"Nothing comes easy; you absolutely have to work," said Parker.

"That was a demonstration of what the coaches have been saying all year — the fundamentals have to be sharp; you have to be thinking all the time. You cannot rule your opponent out until the umpire has called the last

out." Parker was hoping that star pitcher Fuhrman would be around to get the last out in the 7th inning.

"Jimmy deserved a better fate than that; I was totally impressed for him for six innings," said Parker. "I don't want him feeling bad; he pitched his heart out. It was misplays that hurt us; not being in the right position."

Post 218 was in a good position having Etherton at the plate in the 8th inning.

"Danny has been on fire, I was happy to see him up," added Parker, whose team couldn't catch fire last weekend, falling 10-7 to Ewing Post 314 on Friday and 14-4 to North Trenton 458 on Saturday and then losing to Bordentown Post 26 14-4 last Monday.

"I was also glad to see Dan Jeong get a hit; that broke him out of a skid. He has tremendous potential; I know that's an overused word but he really does."

Jeong, for his part, believes Post 218 is on the verge of reaching its potential as a team.

"We just know we are a

better team; we just need to get the little details out," asserted Jeong. "Pretty soon we will be able to win and have confidence."

The ever-optimistic Parker has confidence in his players. "I think to get over the hump; we just need to keep thinking and stay in every game," said Parker, whose club will look to get on the winning track when it hosts WW-P on July 2 and Lawrence Post 414 on July 7 before playing at Hightstown Post 148.

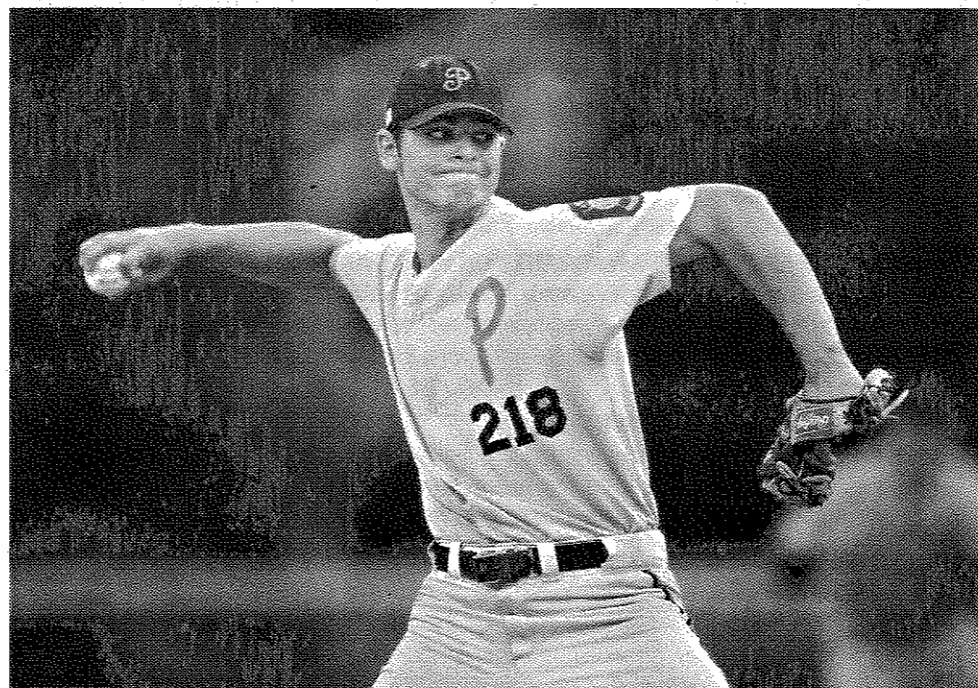
"Everybody in Mercer County can play; all these guys are ballplayers. The thing is to not get down and give up. We need to keep our focus on the fundamentals."

Etherton concurs with Parker's analysis. "We need to make the easy plays," said Etherton.

"The errors that we made build on each other. It seems like every time we have an error, it comes back to haunt us."

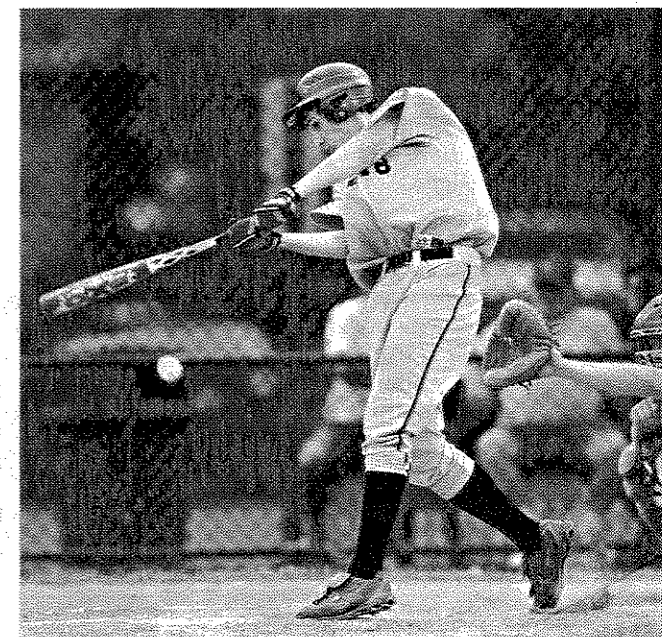
For one game anyway, Post 218 was able to come back and leave its foe with that haunted feeling.

—Bill Alden



**BREAKING POINT:** Princeton Post 218 pitcher Mark Madden uncorks a breaking ball in recent action. Madden and his teammates have had a tough summer, getting off to a 3-10 start. In upcoming action, Post 218 hosts WW-P on July 2 and Lawrence Post 414 on July 7 before playing at Hightstown Post 148 on July 8.

(Photo by Bill Allen/NJ SportAction)



**HOT BAT:** Danny Etherton takes a cut in recent action for the Princeton Post 218 American Legion baseball team. Etherton, a former Princeton High standout who was an all-conference performer this past spring at Chestnut Hill College (Pa.), has been a major bright spot this summer for Post 218. The centerfielder was hitting a team-high .514 through the games of June 29, and was second best in the Mercer County American Legion League.

(Photo by Bill Allen/NJ SportAction)

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