

July 26 Babe Ruth SNJ 15s: Nottingham ousted by top-notch hurler



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Shane Plunkett watches as his single goes into right field for Nottingham's first hit of the game in the fourth inning against GVAA ace Steve Priolo (Photo by John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing jbsportsphoto@aol.com).

Nothing goes right for Nottingham in elimination game with GVAA

By Rich Fisher; Fish4Scores.com

July 26: The Nottingham 15-year-old Babe Ruth All-Stars began the SNJ State Tournament against wicked curveballer and ended it against a blinding fastballer.

It made for a quick stay in the states for Nottingham, which dropped a 10-0 elimination game to Gibbsboro-Voorhees Athletic Association at Veterans Park tonight. The game ended after five innings due to the 10-run mercy rule, with Nottingham getting just two hits and striking out seven times against flame thrower Steve Priolo.

The loss eliminated Nottingham from state play after it won the District One Tournament for the third straight year.

“It’s disappointing for all the players, it’s disappointing for the coach, for the league,” manager Jeff Plunkett said. “But it certainly wasn’t due to lack of effort.

“We ran into probably the best pitcher we’ve faced in the 21 games we played. He was really dominant from the first pitch of the game.”

Priolo, who went 6-1 for the Cherry Hill East varsity this spring, struck out the side in the first inning and fanned two more in the second. He retired the first 10 hitters he faced before Shane Plunkett’s one-out single in the fourth.

What compounded Priolo’s talents was the fact that Gibbsboro got eight runs in the bottom of the first to doom Nottingham early. GVAA collected three hits in the frame, drew three walks, was hit by a pitch and benefited from two Nottingham errors.

“Craig (Buczynski) struggled with his control, we put some baserunners on and we didn’t make some plays to prevent the big inning,” Plunkett said. “When you give up an eight spot right off the get-go against a pitcher like that you’re really gonna have your hands full.”

Nottingham actually looked to be timing Priolo better in the later innings. But with the game shortened by two frames the hosts did not get the chance to play it out. After Plunkett stopped the no-hitter, Franco Esposito got one in the fifth to put runners on first second.

But the game ended on an 8-6-3 double play on a ball run down in the left-centerfield gap by Devin Smeltzer.

“If you look at it, Shane gets a base hit in the fourth, we get a couple decent swings in the fifth,” Plunkett said. “If we could have kept it 2-0, 3-0, then you got a chance in the sixth or seventh inning. We didn’t do that and you’re looking for that one just to keep the game alive.

“We had better swings later in the game against this guy but I still felt he’s the best player we faced. I’m kind of flabbergasted they lost 10-0 to Manasquan. I don’t know what that’s all about. Tip your hat to them, they beat us two years in a row handily, they’re a better ball club than us.”

In the tournament opener, Zack Gakeler baffled Nottingham with a tantalizing curveball, as the Vets Park gang’s only win came in between.

“We ran into probably the two best pitchers in the tournament,” Plunkett said. “When that happens you gotta keep the game close and we didn’t do that. They get on a roll and you really don’t have much of a chance at that point and time.”

As the season and his Babe Ruth association with this team ends, Plunkett can look back on some good memories and some not-so-good. But the good always outweigh the bad at this level.

“We will miss them,” Plunkett said. “You commit for every day around May 15 to now and it comes to a screeching halt.

“We’re gonna miss them a lot and miss the effort they put in for you and miss the effort they put in for the league and all the people that support them. That’s’ what you’ll miss, that’s for sure.”