

Aug. 2 Babe Ruth Mid-Atlantic Regional: Hamilton 15s win with leather



Hamilton second baseman Joe Paragone turns a second-inning double play as he throws over a sliding Troy Cavell during tonight's Mid-Atlantic Region game at Switlik Park. It was one of five double plays pulled off by the Switlik Gang (Photos by John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing jbsportsphoto@aol.com).

Hamilton 15s could have died by the glove, but lived by it instead

By Rich Fisher
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Aug. 2: The Hamilton Babe Ruth 15-year-old All Stars look of their defense, but ended up winning thanks to – what else? – their defense.

That's baseball folks.

Hamilton got two fifth-inning runs; strong pitching efforts from Johnny Mastrangelo and Nick LaBelle; and huge defensive plays from Kevin Smiegocki, Joe Paragone and Dan Garcia to salvage a 3-2 victory over Frederick, Md. in tonight's pool play opener in the Mid-Atlantic Regional Tournament at Switlik Park.

"It was very important to win this game," Mastrangelo said.

"It sets the tone," added Garcia. "That team is a tough team, they came out to play just like we did. They battled, we battled back."

Frederick entered the game having already beaten Bear, Del. earlier in the day at Veterans Park.

Starter Connor Cool pitched the final two innings against Bear but was stellar against Hamilton for four innings before being removed in the fifth. Mastrangelo was just as effective during his five innings of work.

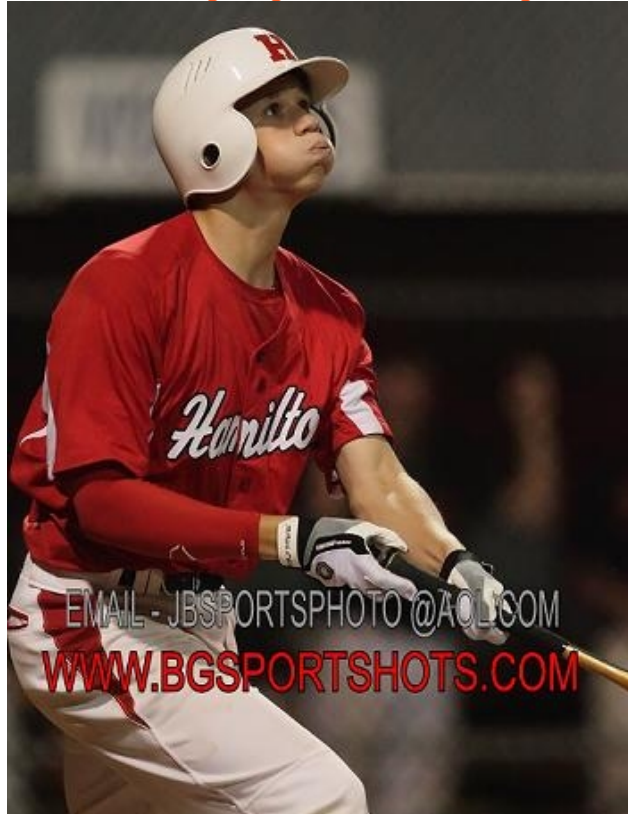


Hamilton Mayor John Bencivengo throws out the first pitch at Switlik Park to officially kick off the Mid-Atlantic Regional Tournament (Photo by John Blaine)

Neither team had a hit in the first two innings as Hamilton turned twin killings in each of the first two frames. They would end up with five, the last three kind of unconventional.

"They really helped," said Mastrangelo, who relied on his fastball before finding his curve later in the game. "We work on them in practice all the time."

Frederick got consecutive one-out singles in the third and had runners on second and third before Mastrangelo got a strikeout and ground out to escape unscathed.



Johnny Mastrangelo watches his home run head over the right field fence during the fourth inning of tonight's game (Photo by John Blaine)

In the fourth, two leadoff walks and a double steal led to a throwing error that allowed lead runner Ryan Howard to score while Troy Cavell got to third with no outs. Bailey McAuliffe then hit a fly ball to medium left field that Smiegocki gloved and gunned homer to catcher Luke Westerberg to nail Cavell.

"That made me feel great," Mastrangelo said. "It was a big lift."

Garcia agreed, saying "That picks us up and takes it right out of them. It was a big momentum change."

Mastrangelo led off in the bottom of the inning and promptly tied it with a blast over the right field fence.

"I knew it was gone off the bat," said Mastrangelo, who took a second to watch it go.

Frederick came right back in the top of the fifth when Dave Stauffer walked and Cool was hit by a pitch. They pulled a double steal, and Cool scored on an error. Mark Smith hit into a fielder's choice at second to put runners on first and third with one out.

Mastrangelo then got a big out on a pop to first, and Howard followed by hitting a hard smash up the middle that Paragone made an excellent back-hand play on before throwing to first for the

out.

Hamilton went to work again in the bottom of the fifth. Paragone led off with a single and Brandon Leaver hit a grounder to third that was booted, and another error ensued on the play as Paragone came all the way around to score while Leaver ended up on third.

After a ground-out to short, Garcia executed a perfect squeeze bunt that ended up being a hit. Hamilton had its first lead and made it stand up.

"You gotta pick up the runs when you can," Garcia said. "We just took advantage of some things they gave us."

In the sixth, Frederick put runners on second and third with one out when Mastrangelo was removed by his dad, manager Ralph Mastrangelo, in favor of LaBelle, who started in house ball but has been a reliever for all-stars.

"My arm was a little tired at that point," said Mastrangelo, who allowed four hits and five walks with three strikeouts. "It was probably good to come out."

LaBelle said there was no doubt he was ready to roll.

"Whenever I get to pitch I make the most of my opportunity," LaBelle said. "Coach Mastrangelo and coach (Dave) Lauer asked me if I was OK to relieve and I said 'Of course, give me the ball.'"

LaBelle walked his first batter to load the bases. But on a strikeout of Cool, Stauffer inexplicably broke from first. Westberg threw to Smiegocki (who had moved to first) to get Stauffer

in a rundown, and Smiegocki then threw home to nail Cavell trying to score for DP No. 4.

In the top of the seventh, Frederick looked like it might be in business when Gabe Maymon reached on an error by Mastrangelo – who had moved to shortstop -- to lead off the inning. Mark Smith then smoked a line drive that Garcia made an incredible diving catch on, then threw to first to double off Maymon.

“They call it the hot corner,” Garcia said. “It was all reaction. Just my instincts.”

“That was great,” Mastrangelo said. “As soon as he made that play I went over and said ‘Thanks for piking me up.’”

Garcia felt that was the least he could do.

“Johnny pitched a heck of a game,” he said. “He was picking us up all game, so it was our chance to pick him up. And Nick saved us and got us out of a jam.”

LaBelle said it was easy with guys he had behind him.

“I know if I make a good pitch my defense behind me would make the play and that's exactly what happened,” LaBelle said. “Dan made a great play and I knew after that play the game was ours.”

Hamilton returns to action at 8 p.m. Wednesday when it meets Evans Youth of Western New York.

Rest assured they'll bring their gloves along with them.