

Aug. 6 Babe Ruth Mid-Atlantic Regionals: Hole too deep for Hamilton to escape



Dan Garcia makes a nice catch of a foul ball against the fence during today's game at Switlik (Photo by John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing jbsportsphoto@aol.com).

Hamilton comeback falls short as 'Squan wins semifinal battle

By Rich Fisher; Fish4Scores.com

Aug. 6: As the Babe Ruth 15-year-old Mid-Atlantic Regional settled into its Final Four, one thing was very apparent.

The teams from the Southern New Jersey State Tournament were truly the class of the region, as all three SNJ teams reached the semifinals along with Tri-Township, Pa.

And that spelled bad news for Hamilton today, as old nemesis Manasquan jumped to a big early lead and held on for 10-8 semifinal victory over the gritty Switlik Gang at Switlik Park. If there is one trait SNJ teams Hamilton, Ewing and the 'Squan all have, it's toughness and a never-say-die attitude.

Manasquan also beat Hamilton 4-3 in the states.

"That team is tough," said third baseman Dan Garcia, who had a streak of reaching base 11 straight plate appearances snapped in the last inning. "We saw them in states and wanted to get back at them but it wasn't today. We knew what they had, but they're just tough."

Manasquan, which was playing its fourth game in two days and had a pitching staff running on fumes, won an 8-7 game over Frederick, Md. earlier today by staging a late rally.

The Shore Boys took advantage of several un-Hamilton like misplays to go from a 3-0 deficit to a 10-3 lead after 2-1/2 innings.

'Squan starting pitcher Korey Moore belted a second-inning grand slam and a third-inning two-run single off Hamilton ace John Mastrangelo for most of the damage.

Moore struggled on the mound, however, despite getting a big break.

In the third, Mastrangelo drew a leadoff walk. On an attempted steal, Luke Westerberg tried to get out of the way of the pitch but it hit off his bat and popped into foul territory. The Manasquan catcher made an outstanding diving catch and threw to first to double off Mostrangelo.

Hamilton followed with four straight singles but got just one run out of it as the double play proved big.

The Yardville Boys kept plugging and got two each in the fourth and fifth to close it to 10-8. Hamilton had all the momentum, as Manasquan reliever Justin Moore was allowing runs and escaping jams, as Hamilton left the bases loaded in both the third and fifth.

"We were going to live and die with him, but if they tied it (in the seventh) he was out of innings anyway," said Manasquan manager Matt O'Conner, who knows about Hamilton baseball from going to Rider University. "Playing two games really taxed our arms."

After gutting through three innings, Moore suddenly seemed to find his stride. In the sixth he allowed a leadoff walk but escaped the inning on a line drive double play to first. In the seventh, he posted the game's only 1-2-3 inning for either side by getting a fly out and two strikeouts.

It seemed as if Moore began throwing harder and with better control the deeper he went.

"In the last inning he came at me with fastballs," Garcia said. "He was 1-2 and he froze me with a curveball. He started to pick it up a little bit at the end."

For Manasquan, it was business as usual.

"That's our team," O'Conner said. "We jump out on people and never put them away. They like to torment me. That's the way it goes."

But this is torment he can take. Kind of like last year's San Francisco Giants and their "Torture" mantra.

"It's torture but I always know at the end they're gonna fight through it," O'Conner said.

Hamilton can say the same thing.

"We know we can come back," Garcia said. "We keep on fighting. We were fired up the whole game. It's just that today wasn't our day."

There were some bright spots for Hamilton.

Garcia was 1-for-2 with two walks, an RBI and two runs, Westerberg had a single, double and three RBIs, Gerry Gomez had two hits and scored twice, Kevin Smiegocki had two hits and an RBI and Steve Powell pitched 2-2/3 innings of outstanding relief to allow Hamilton the chance to come back. One concern came when Powell had to leave after hurting his arm.

Ray Mazzella and Nick LaBelle also threw well in relief, and Mastrangelo made an incredible diving catch on a pop-up to save at least one run. But Hamilton just couldn't get over the hump after making the long climb upward.

It marked the third straight year Hamilton has lost in the regional semis and the second time in those three years it was the Pool champion before losing in the semis.

And with the way Hamilton seemed to be putting it together, hopes were truly high this year.

"In our heads," Garcia said, "We thought we were gonna go to Jamestown."

In their heads, they should still be proud of a job well done, all the way through to the end.