

## July 23 Babe Ruth SNJ 15s: Hamilton wins a thrill ride in opener



Hamilton second baseman Joe Paragone awaits the throw from catcher Luke Westerberg as he gets ready to nail Northern Burlington's Cole Clauser attempting to steal second in tonight's game at Veterans Park (Photo by Ken Weingartner).

### What Hamilton's win lacked in beauty, it made up for in thrills

By Ken Weingartner

Fish4scores.com

**July 23:** It might not have been pretty, but it sure was exciting.

Hamilton's 15-year-old Babe Ruth all-stars overcame six errors and an early two-run deficit to beat Northern Burlington, 4-3, on Johnny Mastrangelo's walk-off base hit in the Southern New Jersey State Tournament at Veterans Park today.

Mastrangelo, who also was the winning pitcher, singled to left-center field to drive home Dan Garcia with the winning run in the bottom of the seventh inning after Northern Burlington tied the score at 3-3 with an unearned run in the top of the sixth.

The game was Hamilton's opener in the SNJ tourney and the Babe Ruth Tournament in general. Hamilton returns to action at 3 p.m. Sunday against Mount Laurel at Veterans Park.

Mastrangelo received advice about pitch location from third base coach Dave Lauer prior to his at-bat in the seventh.

“My coach told me they were going to try to put it on the outside corner, and that’s what they did,” the left-handed-hitting Mastrangelo said. “I just went with it and took the ball the other way. It feels great.”

Garcia got the rally started when his sleeve was grazed by a pitch as he led off the inning.

“At that point, you just want to get on base any way you can,” Garcia said.

Gerry Gomez sacrificed Garcia to second and Mastrangelo followed with his single.

Hamilton, which did not play in the District One Tournament, got off to a tough start. Northern Burlington, which was the District Five runner-up and beat Nottingham, 12-1, in its SNJ opener, saw its first two batters reach base on errors, leading to an unearned run and a 1-0 lead in the first inning.

The damage could have been worse, but Hamilton turned a double play to end the inning.

In the second, Northern Burlington saw its half of the inning end when Clarke Laba lined into a double play. In the third, an NB threat was thwarted when Hamilton catcher Luke Westerberg threw out a runner trying to steal second, stranding another runner at third.

At the plate, Hamilton batters hit several line drives in the first two innings, but had nothing to show for it. In the third, Nick LaBelle started a rally with a leadoff walk. LaBelle was erased at second when Brandon Leaver reached on a fielder’s choice, and Leaver moved to second on a passed ball. Garrett Bezak’s single put runners on the corners and Garcia followed with a double to drive home Leaver.

Gomez then smashed a base hit to right, scoring Bezak and Garcia to give Hamilton a 3-2 lead.

The score was unchanged until the sixth when NB scratched out another unearned run against Mastrangelo.

Hamilton manager Ralph Mastrangelo was going to remove the pitcher after the sixth inning, but the hurler talked his way into returning to the mound for the seventh. He retired NB in order, thanks in part to a fine catch against the fence in foul territory by third baseman Steve Powell, who had just entered the game.

For the game, Mastrangelo allowed six hits – most of them infield singles – one walk and struck out six in getting the victory.

“I just wanted to keep throwing strikes and trying to get outs,” Mastrangelo said. “My curveball was working real good and I was hitting my spots.”

Manager Mastrangelo was surprised by his team’s defensive lapses.

“We’re a fundamentally sound team; we don’t usually make mistakes,” he said. “I think maybe we were a little rusty, and it was the first game in states so we might have been a little nervous at the start.”

Garcia agreed.

“It looks like all the nerves got out today,” he said.

And it sure was exciting.