

July 27 Babe Ruth SNJ 13s

Nottingham can't scale Mount Laurel as early deficit finally proves costly

By Ken Weingartner

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July 27: There would be no rally tonight for the Nottingham 13-year-old Babe Ruth all-stars.

A day after digging out of a 4-0 hole to defeat Hightstown-East Windsor and stay alive in the losers' bracket, Nottingham saw its Southern New Jersey Tournament run come to an end with an 8-2 loss to Mount Laurel at East Windsor PAL.

Mount Laurel scored twice in the top of the first inning and added five runs in the fourth to build a 7-0 advantage.

"We didn't play well," Nottingham manager Jim Maher said. "We didn't pitch well, we didn't field well, we didn't run the bases well, we didn't hit well. We got what we deserved.

"You want to build off the momentum you had last night. I'm disappointed because we did things a typical Nottingham team doesn't do. We threw the ball around, we didn't know what we were doing on bunt coverages; we work on those things probably more than anybody in this tournament."

Nottingham scored its runs in the fifth. Ken Zahn's sacrifice fly drove home Konner Blackwell, who doubled, and Shane Keledy's sacrifice fly plated Frank Lucchesi, who walked.

Blackwell finished with two hits for Nottingham. Steve Moticha had a double.

Nottingham entered the SNJ tourney off a District One championship two weeks ago.

"A lot of these kids never won before," Maher said. "Did they become satisfied with just winning a district title? Sometimes you've got to set the bar a little bit higher. I think we looked like we won the district and whatever happens in the states happens.

"I thought we were a team that would contend for a state title. Even though we finished fifth, I don't feel like we contended for a state title."

Maher and his coaches will meet with the players next week to discuss ways to improve.

"It's hard to say, they're only 13, but I think we've got to get a little tougher, a little thicker skin," he said. "We have to have a little bit more awareness of the game. I think we have talent. We have kids, like a Blackwell, like a [Michael] Nguyen, like a [Riley] Schmitt, that if they ever figure it out, they have unbelievable tools. Hopefully, they learn. The more you play, the better you get."