R. Park baseball captures North 2, Group 1 crown

Sought win Tuesday to reach Toms River

By JR Parachini
Sports Editor

ROSELLE PARK – It is written that Hoboken is the birthplace of baseball and Frank Sinatra.

With that said, last Friday at approximately 6:15 p.m., Roselle Park sophomore Richie Johns did it to the Hoboken Red Wings – His Way!

With runners on second and third and one out and the game tied in the bottom of the seventh, Johns - who was previously 0-for-3 in his first three at-bats against Hoboken junior lefty Abe Groomes including swinging strikeouts his first two times up - came through with the biggest hit of his young career.

Johns - on the first pitch of his fourth at-bat and the 125th thrown by Groomes including third ball in the third and shortstop hole and into left field to score senior Nick Longo from third base and lift the fourth-seeded Panthers past 11th-seeded Hoboken 5-4 in Friday's North 2, Group 1 championship game.

Pandemonium in town.

His game-winning hit put Roselle Park in the Group 1 semifinals for the first time in 12 years.

“This is the best thing that's ever happened to me,” said a joyous Johns. “I was just trying to make contact and do the job for the team.”

Longo gave Roselle Park a 2-0 lead with a long triple to right in the first inning. He led off the bottom of the seventh with a four-pitch walk, was bunted to second and moved to third on a passed ball.

Longo is a four-year varsity player in wrestling and baseball. He helped the Panther wrestling team win four sectional titles.

“This one (sectional title) is the most special,” Longo said. “It is because baseball is the sport that’s my true love and because we really had to work hard to achieve this.”

Roselle Park last won a baseball sectional title on May 28, 1999 when as the third seed defeated fourth-seeded Madison 9-2 in the North 2, Group 1 final played at Linden's Memorial Field. That Panther squad was led on the mound by winning pitcher Nate Mooney and run-providing sluggers Adam Lovas, Gary Talaba and Kevin Kolbeck.

Roselle Park was then defeated by North 1 champion Glen Rock 13-2 at William Paterson in Wayne in a Group 1 semifinal.

Before Friday, the last time Roselle Park was in a sectional was on May 31, 2001 when the fourth-seeded Panthers were blanked by second-seeded Whippany Park 8-0 at Morris Hills in Rockaway. In those years, sectional finals were played at neutral sites.

Roselle Park, which also captured the Union County Conference's Valley Division championship this season with an 11-1 division mark, won its sixth straight to improve to 18-6 overall.

“Richie was struggling all day at the plate and he made a heck of an adjustment,” said Roselle Park ninth-year head coach Nick Agoglia, this for him as the Panther mentor a first sectional title. “He came through with a big hit and we live for another day.”

Roselle Park won its first sectional title since 2003.

Tuesday's other semifinal was to pit Central champ Florence vs. South champion Audubon. Top-seeded Florence defeated seventh-seeded South River 12-2 in Friday's Cl, G1 final, while second-seeded Audubon edged fifth-seeded Pennsville 9-8 in Friday's South Jersey, Group 1 title game.

The Group 1 final is scheduled to be played Saturday at one of the three Toms River high schools.

Since the state went to group finals in 1971, Roselle Park captured the Group 1 state championship game in 1972 and 1987 and lost in the title contest in 1986.

Roselle Park was one win away from reaching its first Group 1 final in 24 years.

“If I hope this is the first of many to come,” said winning pitcher Luis Amaro.

The freshman rightly hung in there after giving up four runs and the lead in the top of the fourth to blank Hoboken 6-2 and move to the Group 1 championship game.

Roselle Park's third run in the bottom of the fifth came as the result of an infield error - with Longo scoring the first of his two runs - and was unearned.

Longo was 1-for-2, with two RBI, two runs and a hit batter.

“Amy walked the first two batters he faced in the fifth, with opposition pitcher Abe Groomes receiving the first base on balls after being behind 1-2 in the count. During that at-bat, Agoglia was ejected from the game by the home plate umpire for arguing balls and strikes.

Hoboken scored its first run when Danny Grossi walked with the bases loaded - which was the third walk Amaro yielded in the inning. A perfectly placed suicide squeeze sacrifice bunt brought home the second run.

Dave McCourt, who went 3-for-4 and reached base all three times up including on the only Roselle Park error in the sixth, produced an opposite field two-run single to right field to give the Red Wings a 4-3 lead.

Roselle Park’s fourth run was also unearned.

With two outs in the bottom of the fifth, Johns hit a ground ball to the shortstop, with the fielder’s throw bouncing to first base and not being held by the first baseman. Matt Talbot came around to score from third base to tie the game at 4-4. One of six Roselle Park seniors, Talbot doubled to center with one out and moved to third on a balk.

After Longo walked to lead off the bottom of the seventh, cleanup batter Onofre Cabezas put down an efficient sacrifice bunt and was also safe at first when the first baseman’s throw – according to the infielmpulled the second baseman off the first base bag.

Zach Hrubie was almost able to bunt both runners over before he was retired on strikes. Hrubie singled and stole second when Roselle Park scored its first three runs in the first inning.

Then on the next pitch Johns ended the game in the most dramatic fashion – with a walkoff game-winning hit.

For senior first baseman and four-year varsity starter Jeremy Montanez, who is in line to get the start on the mound Tuesday, this victory was very sweet.

See PANTHERS, Page 26

Roselle Park senior first baseman and four-year varsity starter Jeremy Montanez was in line to pitch Tuesday's Group 1 semifinal vs. Waldwick.

Roselle Park, GL, Summit title teams needed to win big contests this week to reach championship games Saturday

Sectional baseball championship teams Roselle Park and Governor Livingston repeat boys' lacrosse state champ Summit needed to win big games this week in order to play for another title on Saturday.

The Roselle Park baseball team - which captured North 2, Group 1 last Friday for the first time since 1999 - was scheduled to play Waldwick Tuesday at Demarest in a Group 2 semifinal.

The GL baseball team - which captured Central Jersey, Group 2 last Friday for the first time since 2006 - was scheduled to play West Deptford Tuesday at Monmouth University in a Group 2 semifinal.

The group finals are scheduled to be played Saturday at the three Toms River high schools.


The Summit boys' lacrosse team - which captured the Group 2 state championship last Thursday for the first time since 2009 - was scheduled to play Delbarton in last night's second Tournament of Champions semifinal at Kean University in Union. Summit won Group 1 last year.

If Summit won - which would have extended its state-record winning streak to 68 games - the Hilltoppers will be playing in a third straightTOC final Saturday at 3 p.m. at Rutgers University's Yurcak Field in Piscataway. Summit won the TOC for the first time in 2009 and for the second year last year.