

NJ Nationals Drop Season Opener

Jeff Lombardi Jr.

MAHWAH, N.J.-The opening game of the 2018 Metropolitan Collegiate Baseball League season featured a rematch of last season's title game between the New Jersey Nationals and the North Jersey Horned Frogs.

After taking home the title last season, their inaugural season as a member of the MCBL, the Nationals faltered in their first game of the 2018 season Monday night, dropping a 6-5 decision.

The Nationals opened the scoring in the top of the first inning on an errant pickoff throw by Horned Frogs starting pitcher, junior, [Ryan Vasel](#) (River Vale, N.J./Ramapo College) allowing Nationals shortstop, sophomore, [Dan Abate](#) (Wayne, N.J./William Paterson University) to score following his double earlier in the frame.

The Horned Frogs scored all six of their runs over the first four frames, capitalizing on three Nationals errors.

After singling to leadoff the fourth inning, freshman second baseman, [Francis Prior](#) (North Caldwell, N.J./NYU) came around to score on a base hit up the middle by junior catcher, [Steve Lazicki](#) (Jackson, N.J./Moravian College) to cut the Horned Frogs lead to four.

In the sixth inning, a groundout by freshman catcher [Kevin Rodriguez](#) (West Orange, N.J./Bloomfield College) plated classmate, third baseman, [Dan McLaughlin](#) (Clifton, N.J./NJCU). In the ensuing frame, a double into the left-center gap by freshman right fielder, [Dan Carter](#) (Bloomfield, N.J./William Paterson University) drove in classmate, center fielder, [Mike McLaughlin](#) (Clifton, N.J./NJCU) who lead off the inning with a walk and Abate who followed with a single to cut the deficit to one.

Carter was later hit by pitch to lead off the ninth inning, providing hope for late game heroics, however he was stranded on third as the game's final out was recorded.

On the mound for the Nationals, freshman starting pitcher, [Jason Rivera](#) (Clifton, N.J./NJCU) worked the first two innings, surrendering three runs; two earned, on two hits and a pair of walks. Junior [Jeff Lombardi Jr.](#) (Kendall Park, N.J./William Paterson University) entered the game in the third inning and was removed from the game after recording the first out of the eighth, allowing three runs; two earned, while scattering four hits and one walk while striking out three over 5 ⅓ innings pitched. Classmate, [Mike Elia](#) (Kendall Park, N.J./Stevenson University) recorded the final two outs of the home half of the eighth.

Vasel picked up the win after tossing six innings, allowing three earned runs--five total, on eight hits and a pair of walks while fanning 11. Sophomore, [Sean Keleman](#) (West Millford, N.J./Sussex Community College) worked the final three scoreless frames, en route to earning the save.

The Nationals will take on the Randolph Chiefs on Wednesday, May 23 at Wardlaw-Hatridge School at 5:30 p.m.