

Berkeley Carroll wins first NYSAISAA baseball title

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It looked like Poly Prep was finally getting to Phillip Seay.

The Berkeley Carroll right-hander had walked E.J. Martinez to start the seventh inning and, two batters later, J.J. Franco ripped a hard-hit single. The Blue Devils were threatening, down three runs in their final at bat.

Joe Calabrese followed Franco with a long drive to the warning track in center field that was reeled in by Giancarlo Hirsch. Then, with two outs, Rich Carbone lined what looked to be a sure hit into short, right-center field. Had it fell in, it could have scored two runs. But, out of nowhere, senior right fielder Theo Guest dove to his right and stabbed it just before it touched the ground, making a highlight reel catch.

“Honestly, I blacked out,” he said. “I don’t remember what happened. ... I stood out there, like I really don’t know what to do right now.”

What happened next was a mob scene.

The Berkeley Carroll fielders tossed their gloves in the air and mobbed Guest in short right field. The second-seeded Lions had just done the improbable – beating heavy favorite and No. 1 Poly Prep, 4-1, to win their first-ever NYSAISAA baseball championship Wednesday afternoon at Columbia University.

“I always shy away from diving on the ground,” Guest said. “I’ve never been big on diving ever.”

Added coach Wally Paller: “I’ve never seen him dive in four years.”

He picked the best possible time. Guest’s play made Seay’s incredible outing stand up. He allowed just one run on six hits and struck out seven in seven innings on just two days rest.

On Sunday, Seay pitched Berkeley Carroll (19-2) into the final by giving up just two runs on five hits and striking out seven in seven innings against No. 6 Collegiate. He threw 98 pitches in that game just a day after getting a five-out save in the quarterfinals against No. 7 St. Ann’s.

“Paint an ‘S’ on his chest the last week,” Paller said.

Seay got some breathing room in the sixth inning. Poly Prep (22-3) was ahead, 1-0, backed by a strong performance from Carbone, a junior left-hander. But Seay ripped a one-out double against him in the sixth and Robbie Paller, the coach’s son, followed with a game-tying RBI.

Blue Devils coach Matt Roventini pulled Carbone and went to ace J.J. Franco, son of New York Mets legend John Franco. But Franco hit Hirsch with a pitch and junior catcher Walker Harrison doubled in Paller to make it 2-1. Dan Schwartz struck out, but a high chopping infield single by senior leftfielder Max Rainey scored Hirsch and, due to heads up base running, Harrison came all the way in from second to make it 4-1.

"I was really tired at the beginning of the game," Seay said. "But after that big inning, I got a rest." Ironically, had everything gone the way it was supposed to be, Seay wouldn't have been in that spot. BC's ace all season was James McDonough, but due to a clerical error leaving him off the team's NYSAISAA tournament roster, he was declared ineligible to play.

"I'm sure the person who made a mistake doesn't feel as bad now," Guest said.

Berkeley Carroll had not made the NYSAISAA championship game since 2001 when Adam Ottavino, an eventual first-round pick of the St. Louis Cardinals, was a sophomore. The Lions won the ACIS, but always wanted more. Seay said it was like leaving a legacy at the small Park Slope school.

"This is for all the little guys," said Paller, who has coached BC for 23 years. "This tournament has been dominated by the Ivy League."

In 2001, Paller thought his squad would be right back in the championship game the next few years. It didn't happen that way. He's hoping history does not repeat itself.

"Hopefully, it's a beginning," Paller said, "not just a culmination."