



## The Star-Ledger

### Livingston's Little League dream comes to a sad ending

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**BY BRENT JOHNSON**  
Star-Ledger Staff

BRISTOL, Conn. – Nick Ebert, probably the most lively member of the Livingston American Little League team, stood in the shadows of the snack bar at Breen Field, nervously twisting his hands around the top of his Gatorade bottle.

He had just watched his team's blistering run through the postseason end harshly on a walk-off homer. He saw his chance to play in the Little League World Series slip away.

"I thought we were going to go," said Ebert, his face solemn after Livingston – the New Jersey Little League champion – lost to Staten Island in the Mid-Atlantic Division final, 2-1, last night. "All we needed was one more win."

It appeared to be headed that way when Ebert's home run in the fourth inning put Livingston in front. And even when it seemed Staten Island – the New York champ – had taken the lead two innings later, a clumsy runner kept Livingston's chances alive.

But it all ended suddenly in the bottom of the sixth, when right fielder Frank Smith belted a line drive over the fence in left-center field, ending Livingston's dream of becoming the first team from the Garden State to play in the World Series since 1999 and the ninth team ever from the state.

"It's tough to lose here," said first baseman John Sorrentino, who helped Livingston go undefeated in the tournament before last night. "They're a great team to lose to, though. It was a close game. They just came out (on top) in the end."

Livingston was handed a second life in the bottom of the fifth. The Essex County team led 1-0 when an error and a walk put Staten Island runners on first and second with one out. The runners advance to second and third on a wild pitch and then Joe Calabrese singled to center, apparently scoring two runs – the second when center fielder Clint Callahan overthrew the ball to home.

But a minute later, pitcher Zach Gray threw the ball to third on an appeal play, and the umpire called the second runner to score, Adam Skjeie, out for missing the bag. The score was tied, 1-1.

Jacob Emert singled up the middle in the sixth, but Livingston failed to capitalize.

"I thought if we scored in that inning, we might have won," Sorrentino said. "But we didn't end up scoring, so..."

Smith was the first batter in the bottom of the inning for Staten Island, and smashed his homer on a 2-2 count to win the game.

"I was really nervous," Smith said. "That team was really good."

Livingston had entered the game having won all but one of its postseason games this summer. But Staten

Island threatened its dominance Wednesday, the first time the two teams met, pushing their first-round matchup into extra innings before Livingston won it, 8-6, in the top of the seventh.

Last night's matchup was just as tight, as Calabrese held Livingston to just two hits through three innings – both to Jon Pena.

But as he'd done throughout the summer, Livingston's Gray countered with another strong outing, striking out five and surrendering two hits through the first three innings.

Then Ebert came up with one out in the fourth and belted a towering drive over the right-field fence, giving Livingston a one-run advantage.

Gray followed by striking out the side in the bottom of the inning. He finished with nine strikeouts while giving up four hits and two runs, one earned.

In the end, however, Livingston had to settle for being the best only in the Garden State.

"It feels great to even win the states," Sorrentino said. "Our goal was to win states. Making it to regions, making it to the regional finals – it was a great run for us."

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