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A Combat Flag From Africa Finds Its Place at CCSU

by Nicolina Coronis
Assistant Lifestyle Editor

Balancing the responsibilities of military service while pursuing a college degree is no small task. For one CCSU student and active service member, the journey has been shaped not only by discipline and dedication but also by the support of the university's Veterans Affairs Department.

In recognition of that support, the student recently presented the department with a flag that was flown over a combat zone in Africa, highlighting the vital role

campus resources play in helping student veterans succeed both academically and personally.

Max Chiarillo is a junior in the nursing program and an aircraft mechanic for C-130 cargo planes in the Air National Guard. This kind of lifestyle requires much support, which has been provided by CCSU's Veterans Affairs Department. "Last semester there were some opportunities to request a flag to be flown on our planes over a combat zone, and then they see *VA* on page 2



Max Chiarillo (middle) dedicated the flag that he flew over the Horn of Africa to CCSU's VA office, Nicolina Coronis/The Recorder



The Black Foodie Expo Bangs!

by Lorenzo Gagliotta
Staff Writer

An event aimed at raising awareness of minority-owned restaurants in the local community was hosted in the Assembly Room in downtown New Britain by the Black Foodie Expo After-Work Social on Friday, March 27.

The atmosphere featured live music, food and drinks as people from the New Britain community came together to

recognize local food businesses. Organizers of the event, Yusuf Hasaan and Jasmine Sampson, spoke about some of the goals they have set for hosting Black Foodie Expo events.

"Our goal is to bring people together, eat good food and also generate revenue for small businesses," Yusuf said. "The event's growing and it's all about collaborating. We still have a long way to go. There are a lot of great restaurants that do not

have exposure. Our goal is to bring more awareness to them."

The aim is to help connect the Connecticut food scene with its diverse culture through the Black Foodie Expo.

"We've known each other for over 10 years, and we are always kind of connected to food," Jasmine said. The pair hosted their first event last year in New Haven, with

see *FOODIE* on page 3

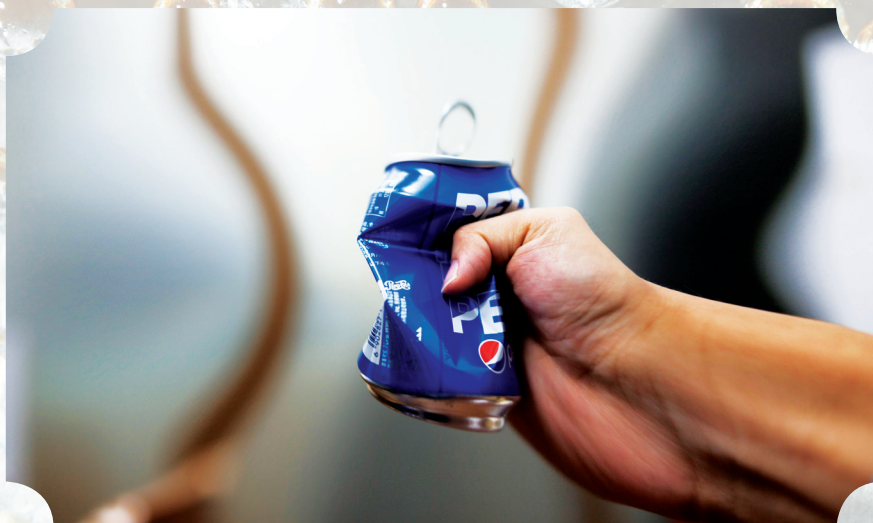
A Soda Tax...

by Liam McCusker
Staff Writer

The recent proposal by Connecticut lawmakers to impose a 2-cent-per-ounce tax on soda to pay for universal school meals has sparked considerable debate.

Less sugary drinks, as noted by the American Heart Association, would improve students' health and allow them to learn better in the classroom, and roughly 500,000 students and their families would no longer have to worry about having enough money to buy meals.

...Does That Sound Sweet?



A soda tax may put a squeeze on Connecticut consumers, pexels.com

A poll conducted by the American Heart Association found that about 80% of Connecticut residents favor a tax on sugary drinks to support universal school meals.

The goal of making meals free and accessible to students is commendable, as no student should go through the school day hungry, but burdening taxpayers and restaurants in the process is not the right approach.

This tax would raise the cost of a 2-liter bottle of soda from \$1.99 to \$3.35.

see *SODA* on page 4

ABOUT

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DESIGN / LAYOUT EDITOR

RON MARQ

SPORTS EDITOR

MARCUS SAUNDERS

SOCIAL MEDIA EDITOR

EARY BANUSHI

ASSISTANT LIFESTYLE EDITOR

NICOLINA CORONIS

STAFF WRITERS

- NOAH GAVIN
- LORENZO GAGLIOTTA
- RONAN HINCKLEY
- LIAM McCUSKER
- ANDREW O'SULLIVAN
- KYLE ZARNOCH

CONTRIBUTORS

JAYDEN KLAUS

CO-EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

MARCUS SAUNDERS
ELIJAH HERNANDEZ

MEETINGS

MONDAYS AT 3:00 PM AT

THE RECORDER OFFICE

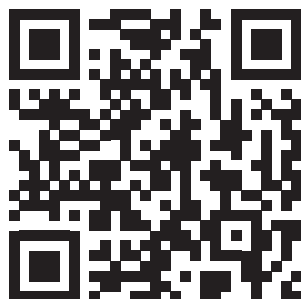
CCSU STUDENT CENTER
R107
1615 STANLEY STREET
NEW BRITAIN, CT 06050

860 • 832 • 3744

theccsurecorder@gmail.com
centralrecorder.org

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SCAN HERE FOR OUR LINKS



VA continued from front

print off a certificate and dedicate it to someone," said Chiarillo. "I just thought it would be nice to dedicate it to the department because they've been really helpful with me. It's the least I could do."

Serving while being a student is ordinary for students like Chiarillo.

"It's not very hard. I mean, the commitment in the military — at least in the National Guard — isn't too strenuous, one weekend a month typically. Deployments are normally some of the things that get in the way, but it was a good opportunity to get out there, and I've never been out of the country, so I thought that was fun," said Chiarillo.

The VA department on campus works with many student service members and assists them in obtaining their degrees. "We help students transition in and out because they are not only going for deployment; sometimes it's annual training," said Veteran Affairs Retention Assistant Melina Lopez. "Making sure there's no obstacles for the students when they do return. Making for an easier transition for them to be able to go do what they have to do in the military and then be able to come back and continue their program," said Lopez.

The flag that was presented to the department was flown around the Horn of Africa during a combat mission. The certificate reads, "This flag represents the will and resolve of the American people to stand strong and defeat all who attempt to do us harm."

"Even when I was overseas, I just didn't realize how much they [VA Department] really did or how much goes on, because I'm trying to focus on deployment, and it helps to give them a call and be like, 'Hey, I'm not really sure what I'm supposed to be doing. I have a lot going on,'" said Chiarillo.

#KIZERSAYS

THERE ARE NO TRAFFIC JAMS ON THE EXTRA MILE.

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Have a story that needs to be told?
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FOODIE continued from front



*Culture and cuisine collide in New Britain, Lorenzo Gagliotta/
The Recorder*

Hartford influencer Jimmy Robinson, known as JimmyOfficial, in attendance.

“It was just a way to kind of bring people together, kind of expose new businesses and caterers and just have a good time,” Sampson said.

“So that’s our goal with every event that we do. We want to bring people to the food, we want to celebrate community, celebrate culture, just have a good time.”

In attendance at this year’s event were Connecticut-based food influencers the 2 Hungry Jenns.

“Food is celebratory,” Jenn said. “This event allowed different Black businesses to showcase what they had. We totally want to support all of them.”

The duo, both mothers, aim to share their foodie experiences around Connecticut through their engaging culinary content.

“It’s something to celebrate. So we get excited, and it’s just kind of like a way that we’ve continued to connect and share what that experience should be like,” Jenn said. “It was nice to come in and see everybody already here engaging at the event.”



The After Work Social presented by the Black Foodie Expo was held on March 27, Lorenzo Gagliotta/The Recorder



SODA continued from front

Local stores and restaurants would likely have to raise their prices to cover the expense of the tax. Business representatives say this added cost could hurt small businesses and potentially even cause consumers to shop in neighboring states, which is especially concerning given that inflation in the state and across the country is high.

Without intending to, this tax could also place a new burden on low-income students and their families, raising questions about the fairness of the proposal.

Instead of relying on a new tax to pay for universal school meals, Connecticut’s leaders could add this cost directly to the state budget. Feeding students is an investment in their education and in the future of the country.

Another option is to use money from the state’s rainy-day fund. This fund is designed to cover expenses during emergencies, and ensuring all students have access to meals during the school day could qualify as such a circumstance. While this would not be a permanent solution, it could temporarily cover the expense while lawmakers explore alternative funding plans.

This is not to say that the proposal for free school meals is wrong. It certainly isn’t. It is one of the best ways to improve students’ academic performance and well-being. However, theoretical ideas do not always work well in practice.

If lawmakers want to address this issue the right way, they need to find a more equitable solution. A soda tax might seem like a simple solution, but it is not the right one. Students deserve to be supported, but not at the expense of others in their community.

THIS WEEK'S CAMPUS EVENTS

First Year Experience

Devil’s Den @ 10 PM: FYE Pajama Paint Night
Thursday, April 2, at 10 PM EST
Semesters Cafe, CCSU Student Center

Student Government Association [SGA]

SGA Campus Scavenger Hunt
Monday, April 6, at 12 PM EST
Student Center Circle, CCSU Student Center

Albanian Student Union

Balkan Bites with ASU
Wednesday, April 8, at 4:30 PM EST
Student Center - 1849 Room 220

The Finance Association

Stock Pitch Panel
Wednesday, April 8, at 4 PM EST
Robert C. Vance Academic Center Room 204

BTS is BACK with ARIRANG (아리랑)

by Ron Marq
Design and Layout Editor

Bangtan Sonyeondan, Bangtan Boys, BTS; whatever you may call them, they're known and back. After a six-year musical hiatus brought on by mandatory service in the South Korean army, all seven members: RM, Jin, SUGA, j-hope, Jimin, V, and Jung Kook, come back with an illustrious 14-track album named after the most famous Korean folk song, ARIRANG.

The album's genres jump from hip-hop tinged dance tracks to pop ballads with soulful vocals. The first track 'Body to Body' samples the album's namesake. The following tracks, 'Hooligans', 'Aliens', 'Fya' and '2.0' fall into a very similar uncanny valley of brash boy band braggadocio. A single gong sounds during the track 'No. 29' as a sort of break leading into the more emotional and tender side of the album.



ARIRANG album cover art, bts-official.us

The next track 'Swim' was their most radio-friendly hit off the album, moving between hip-hop and R&B elements. Their ability to blend Korean and English is impressive. The latter tracks 'Merry Go Round', 'Normal', 'Like Animals', 'they don't know 'bout us', 'One More Night', 'Please' and 'Into The Sun' show off a more grown and sophisticated side that one wouldn't expect from from a boy band. Their talent and harmonies shine through the latter half. While the album has many songs that could be considered generic boy band pop, ARIRANG serves as a decent comeback album hearkening to their South Korean roots with production by top producers like Mike WiLL Made-It, JPEGMafia, Diplo of Major Lazer, Flume, Kevin Parker of Tame Impala, and Ryan Tedder of OneRepublic. 감사합니다, BTS. Well, done.

7/10

Artist Showcase Offers Local Artists a Platform to Connect With the Community

by Elijah Hernandez
Co-Editor-in-Chief

Creativity in all its forms was present during the third annual Artist Showcase hosted by 107.7 WFCS The Edge in Alumni Hall at the Student Center on March 26.

Taking place as a Devil's Den event and co-hosted by the Fashion and Design Club, the showcase was an opportunity for all forms of art to find their community.

From numerous clothing brands such as Ripped Jeans, CCXVI, Royal Lifestyle and S3R3N3TY offering unique and fresh pieces available for purchase, to artists like Zajah Divine giving a peek at her one-of-a-kind designs, Kitoko Blooms showing that crochet creations have no limitations, Tommykinz transcending skin



Leading members of the Fashion and Design Club, D&J Productions.

by translating tattoos into traditional prints, and Chris and Webster drawing caricatures for anyone in attendance, there were no barriers to participation other than creativity.

The general manager of WFCS, Hilberto Depena, said the event was a chance for the culmination of artists to be celebrated.

“We try to aim for as much diversity as possible ... we know for a fact that people around here are interested in obviously doing music and being creative, but then also again try and give them a space to be able to promote themselves when it’s hard to do so in a small state compared to others,” said Depena.



Student and local artist Zajah Paul, D&J Productions.

With the event premiering with a comedian, Taylor Doyle, the Artist Showcase grew from having musical talent at the forefront but has expanded to include all aspects of the arts.

“This year, when we included a previous staff member and graduate, Taylor, her being the first comedian that we’ve had for the event, it was another way of diversifying even further because now it’s beyond music, it goes more into the arts itself,” Depena said. “The phrase ‘celebration of the arts’ is definitely what this year’s showcase was meant to be.

Every year I would always describe it as the celebration of arts in its different mediums, whether it be music, art, that’s why we had vendors, that’s why we have people doing their thing dancing, comedy, music, having people sell things whether that be clothes, whether it be their own personal art pieces, anything you can possibly think of, we wanted to try to incorporate them in the showcase.”

The night began with Doyle giving a witty and relatable performance, easing the audience into a night filled with rhythm and bass.

The duo Paaaron kicked off the music portion with a synchronized number, leaving the audience guessing whose voice was whose. The harmony of the act transitioned to a solo performance by Ron Marq, who embodied the “entertain” in entertainer with his high notes accompanying theatrical dance moves.



The CCSU Pep Squad, D&J Productions.

Javor slowed the pace of the night with smooth and very real bars, offering the audience storytelling from the soul. The melodic performance had listeners feeling the weight of his words as they reverberated through the venue.

With the introduction of CCSU’s Pep Squad, the mood immediately shifted as the tempo of their choreography not only raised the BPM of the music but also the heart rates of everyone in the vicinity. With each move emulating the essence of hip-hop, the methodical and cohesive performance had the audience hyped.

Continuing the momentum of the Pep Squad, 2/14, a rock band from the tri-state area, filled the hall with boisterous chords that felt as if they were going 120 mph. From the energy of the band, a mosh pit formed in front of the stage, with the space filling in an instant. Audience members shook the ground beneath

them in response to the aura emanating from the stage. Earplugs were supplied to every table as a pre-emptive measure by event organizers.

Artemis transformed that energy to empower the women of the crowd with her 2000s-reminiscent sound. With a track list that sounded like it could come from a Beyoncé discography, her confidence on stage had the crowd waving their hands side to side and singing along after hearing her lyrics for the first time.

A fitting end to a talent-filled night, Keon Riveur offered a sobering performance that showed nuanced understanding and a comforting compassion for the words that left his lips. In collaboration with his DJ, Antonio, the two allowed space between the music and the audience's ears to appreciate and blossom.

Aside from the musical performances or traditional forms of art, McCray Footwear Service was offering shoe cleanings and the option to



JaVør, D&J Productions.

purchase customized sneakers, Victoria from Chi Upsilon Sigma National Latin Sorority Inc. hosted a bake sale with proceeds going to Girls Inc., and the JSB Gallery showcased expressive experiences through visual and wearable art.

Being the third installation in the series, Depena said he's optimistic about the future of the event.

"This year, particularly, was the best yet," he said. "I've heard so far that there have been plenty of people who were impressed with the event and the scale of it. I want to keep it going and improve even further. While there are always going to be hiccups, overall, that's fine, as long as we get as many heads as possible coming in, looking around and thinking, 'Oh, this is what the radio station on campus is doing for the local scene and for the community.'"



Artemis, D&J Productions.



Trust in the Journey: Richie Kerstetter Believes in the Team Around Him to Repeat Their Success



Richie Kerstetter is a junior pitcher for the Blue Devils,

Steve McLaughlin

by **Elijah Hernandez**
Co-Editor-in-Chief

An athlete's journey can span decades, or it can last a year. Richie Kerstetter has an intimate relationship with his journey because he's experienced the elation of raising a trophy over his head, but also the mortifying nature of hearing a doctor tell him he might not be able to play again.

In high school, Kerstetter found major success, being part of the All-New England team as a senior, but it came with its costs.

"I was very fortunate to obviously be able to be in a spot in high school where I was athletically advanced, to where I'm being able to show off my skills in front of all these Division I coaches, and I felt like St. Joseph's offered a spot where I was far enough away from home, but able to, you know, if I wanted to, take a train ride home," Kerstetter said. "But the thing that helped me, I think, with that transition to college was even before that, I had left my local private high school in Fairfield, Notre Dame, and I had left and went to prep school at Canterbury up in New Milford."

Kerstetter said his time at Canterbury not only helped with the college lifestyle but with his performance on the field as well.

"I left [Notre Dame] and repeated my junior year due to COVID, and I had been injured during that stretch of time, too," he said. "So it kind of worked

out for me to do that fifth year in a sense of high school and get my feet wet with living away from home as well. I think that really helped me and shaped me to be able to go into college feeling confident and feeling like I was ready to, you know, perform, not only on the field but control the academic side of it and being able to keep up with my schoolwork."

When reflecting on his time at St. Joe's, Kerstetter said a change was necessary to regain the confidence that he once had.

"After two years, obviously, it didn't quite feel like home, and I ultimately made the decision to enter the transfer portal," he said. "I had known Coach Hall prior to going to St. Joe's, and thankfully, he reached back out. It was probably the best decision that I could have made to come back closer to home, trust his word, trust Coach Hickey's word. Seeing how they develop and how they succeed and constantly win, that's the environment that I want to be around. I got put in a great spot last year, where we succeeded and ended up winning a championship."

Kerstetter found himself needing to place his trust in the people around him as a way to not only make progress with his game but as a necessity to grow as a person.

"I think a lot of it goes into trust," Kerstetter said. "You have to trust, especially in baseball, you have to trust your coaches, you have to trust your teammates, you have to trust all of that work that you put in to be able to be at that level. So I think the ability to just let others help and let others be a part of that journey as well is a part of the process. Especially in baseball, like it's not a one-man game, it's nine people competing against nine other people."

He continued by mentioning his process of allowing people in and allowing himself to be helped.

"A big thing for me is the ability to let outside aspects in while also controlling it, so I'm not letting it negatively affect me to where it's hurting more than helping. In that sense, just the trust of those teammates, like

those encouragements, like you're going to show up," he said.

"And it's those long days that feel like they drag on to where you may feel like you don't have your A game, but it's those teammates and those coaches that pick you up and help you strive to that finish line. Strive you through those late innings or get you through those tough games. It's rewarding at the end of the season when we all hold the trophy together."

One of the personal issues he faced was not having his support system around when he was going through some of the hardest times of his collegiate career.

"It's a luxury that you don't know that you have until you don't have it. For me especially, I really struggled when I was down in Philadelphia my redshirt freshman year because I had surgery on my elbow my freshman year," he said. "So I went in there and immediately redshirted because I had Tommy John. Going to those away games and, like I said, maybe not having your best stuff there, and then you go out and the game's done. And my parents and my family aren't there. So I feel like not having that was a little tough."

Now that Kerstetter is closer to home, he feels the support, and his gameplay and outlook on the game have improved.

"Looking at that side of it, where now I can come out of the game and it's like, oh, I'm instantly seeing my parents, I'm seeing my friends, I'm seeing all that family aspect where I guess I didn't see it before, I think that really helps it because it's that extra pickup when you need it, because baseball especially is a game of failing," Kerstetter said. "You have to push through that constant failing to ultimately succeed."

The injury process for any athlete is one that is tumultuous, but Kerstetter recognizes an aspect that he said some overlook.

"The biggest thing that stuck out to me throughout that whole process was not the physical side of it, getting my arm back in shape and trying to come back

in X amount of months to be able to perform. It was definitely the mental side of it," he said. "Being able to get over that and gain that confidence back to know, like, go out and trust all the physical therapy that you put in, all the time and all that work that you put in. Trusting it and being able to go out and realize that you're not hurt anymore, you're back and you're fully healthy and just go, let it show. I think the mental side is a huge thing that gets overlooked, especially coming back from injury."

Kerstetter said his journey has been anything but seamless.

"Last spring, halfway through the year, which not many people had really known about, I had torn my ACL, MCL and meniscus halfway through our season last year, so we didn't really know what exactly it was until I had continued to play on it for a little while," he said. "So I had gone out and pitched on it and then finally gone to the trainers. They had said meniscus originally, so we had made a decision where I felt comfortable pitching, so I finished the rest of the season on it."

The price to pay was one with no concrete answer, and he would have to go through adversity once more just to play again.

"I actually had surgery this past summer in June on my knee. So that was like, outside of seeing the whole Tommy John process, I think that shaped this past recovery to be like, OK, now you know what you're doing," he said. "You got to just replicate that again. Now you know what the mental side of it is and how difficult that is. So I really locked in on the mental side of things, took that to another

level, and that ultimately helped me get back a little bit sooner than expected and possibly in the best shape of my life, to be able to be there for my teammates and compete at that level this year."

When Kerstetter found out about his recent injuries, his response was a sobering one.

"I would just say shocked. The biggest thing that helped me get through that and realize I'm good enough, like I'm still OK to pitch, was those families, those friends, those teammates that were around me, that were constantly there for me and still able to be around and give me encouraging words to support me in that time," Kerstetter said. "It sucked going through the rest of that season being hurt, but I wouldn't have wanted it any other way because obviously how it ended. I think the way it shaped that whole thing just makes it a little bit more of a cooler story, right?"

Kerstetter attributes not only his success but the team's success to the rigorous training the coaching staff puts them through.

"Our coaches are great at putting us in a spot where our mental aspect of the game is really tested through practice, so now it's almost like the game is very rewarding when we go out and we compete and face that adversity that we always do in baseball," he said. "Coach Hickey and Coach Hall and the rest of the coaching staff do a very good job of putting us through tests through the offseason, so when we get ready for the season, it's just go out and perform. Once we get in that spot, it's fun when we're winning and gelling as a team."



Standing for the national anthem, the baseball team hopes to replicate the same success they had last year, this year,

Four Seam Images LLC

Kerstetter credits his team for a lot, but the work didn't happen overnight. The bonds he's formed and the relationships he's created have all been part of getting him back on the field.

"I would just say a huge shoutout to everybody at Central — all the coaching staff, all my teammates who this year and last year went on a great road trip last year winning NEC," he said. "Obviously, it's a different team, new environment, new guys, and I think the best thing is these guys just want to go out there and play loose and show what everybody's got. They're a very good group of guys that's young but ready to go. We have a lot of anxious guys that just can't wait to go out there and show what they have to prove."

As for his journey, Kerstetter described it in a unique way.

"I'd say a roller coaster, just because when it started off I went in on the high horse going into college. I'm thinking the sky's the limit for myself," Kerstetter said. "But initially getting hit right in the face with that injury created a huge mental steep path that I had to overcome and get myself in that spot. Then I felt like when I was there, the mental side of things killed it, and it kind of stayed there for a while. Then once I felt reignited here when I transferred in last year, I felt like I was back up on that high note, and then the injury came back and brought it down. I feel like I just want to stay at the top of that roller coaster now and continue to cruise and see what happens."



Zach Worzel loading up a pitch against Sacred Heart on 3/31,

Andrew Johnson

Blue Devils Baseball Defeats In-State Rival to Get Back on Track

by Andrew O' Sullivan
Staff Writer

CCSU ended their first full month of play with a win against the visiting Sacred Heart Pioneers in a high-scoring 12-8 matchup on March 31.

It was Central's 18th game of the regular season, and the team improved its record to 7-11 with the victory.

The Blue Devils began the game defensively as Zach Worzel started on the mound, with the team giving up a run to Sacred Heart in the top of the first before the offense exploded in the bottom of the inning as Central scored six runs almost all consecutively as the Pioneers cycled through three different pitchers. SHU starter Jake Friel was pulled after 0.2 innings, where he gave up four runs.

The following couple of innings saw comparatively less action, as Worzel and CCSU prevented scoring. The second went completely scoreless, as did the third, highlighted by a play from third baseman Louis Jordan where he threw an out at first from the other side of the diamond.

In the top of the fourth, the Pioneers clawed a run back with a homer off Worzel's first pitch in the inning but were thwarted in their quest for more as Worzel prevented any runs with the bases loaded. Central then piled on the pressure in the bottom of the inning with six more runs

scored, with Gianni Merlonghi and Brandon O'Neill getting big hits to bring their teammates home.

As Sacred Heart went to its sixth pitcher of the game at only the bottom of the fifth, Central made a change as well, as Worzel was relieved after his good start for Nico Christon. Christon prevented any runs in the fifth, but after a consecutive strikeout triple from Central in the sixth, he gave up a home run to SHU for its third run of the day.

Christon was replaced by Brandon Candelora for the seventh inning, who almost immediately gave up a two-run home run and the Pioneer runs kept coming throughout the eighth and ninth innings, as the score tightened from 12-3 to 12-8, although the Blue Devils were able to outlast them with expert plays in the outfield to prevent any more scoring.

Merlonghi led the way statistically for Central, recording the most hits on the day with three, while also driving in two runs, a mark shared by teammates Matt Graziose and Gabe Pitts.

Despite the victory, head coach Charlie Hickey mentioned that the team didn't fully play to his liking, and that there was a lot to go over.

"We're fortunate. When you play Tuesday baseball, there's a lot of uncertainty which starts on the mound," Hickey said.

He later added that the six runs the team got off no hits doesn't and shouldn't happen. Hickey bluntly stated that the game played out ugly.

"In all honesty we're very sloppy and we're not a very good team. [...] If we get that last out on an 0-2 pitch we go home and have dinner at a regular hour," he said. "But we kept opening the door and they started playing without anything to worry about. It's part of why we've been struggling, we just happened to win today."

He commended the pitching effort of Worzel and made clear the value of strikeouts in a game such as this.

"It was a good day to hit but you can't walk people. That's what we've been doing on the weekends and that's why we've been struggling, because we don't throw enough strikes."

He added that the team still has a long way to go before they consider themselves a good team.

Central will return to the diamond as they host Northeast Conference rivals Wagner in a three-game series starting on Thursday, April 2.

CCSU'S ATHLETIC SCHEDULE

Men's & Women's Track

April 4 @ UConn Invitational

Softball

April 3 @ Wagner at 1 PM
April 3 @ Wagner at 3 PM
April 4 @ Wagner at 12 PM
April 7 @ Stonehill at 1 PM
April 7 @ Stonehill at 3 PM
April 8 @ Stonehill at 12 PM



Baseball

April 2 vs. Wagner at 3 PM
April 2 vs. Wagner at 3 PM
April 3 vs. Wagner at 1 PM
April 4 vs. Wagner at 1 PM
April 7 vs. St. John's (NY) at 3 PM

Women's Lacrosse

April 4 vs. Howard at 1 PM
April 8 vs. LIU at 3 PM