



‘PRAIRIE’ REBOOT

IT’S A STORY WITH COVERED WAGONS, BUT SHOWRUNNER REBECCA SONNENSHINE SAYS THE “LITTLE HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE” REMAKE STILL SPEAKS TO TODAY’S AMERICAN DREAM. **12**

BASEBALL

Star catcher committed to Rutgers in 8th grade. Now MLB Draft looms.



Mickey Gilligan could land anywhere in the first three rounds of this weekend’s MLB Draft. Photos by Scott Faytok, for NJ.com

Mickey Gilligan faces a huge decision after years of being followed by pro scouts.

PJ Potter NJ.com

Scouts jostled for position behind the backstop of a high school baseball field in New Jersey. They clenched stopwatches in anticipation. The focus? The catcher set up behind home plate.

One scout stumbled through the gravel behind the chain-link fence, arriving a moment too late. Mickey Gilligan was already transferring the ball to his right hand before firing it down to second. The ball was a blur before it reached the base.

Fifteen stopwatches clicked in unison, thumbs pressing down with the hope of accurately capturing Gilligan’s pop time — the time between the start of the transfer from the catcher’s mitt and when the ball hit the shortstop’s glove. The scouts turned their heads down the line to compare numbers.

1.74 seconds.

That consensus was faster than the 1.86-second average of then-San Francisco Giants catcher Patrick Bailey, the best in Major League Baseball at the time. One of the stopwatches clocked Mickey at 1.72.

“Our jobs would be easy if every kid could throw like that,” one scout said.



Gilligan had a .639 batting average in 2026.

Gilligan, a 6-foot, 190-pound senior, already had scouts sold on his arm before Passaic Tech’s season-opener against DePaul in March. But he wasn’t done. Gilligan made a graceful play in the third inning to swipe a runner out at home plate. He ripped his mask off, with his fluffy brown hair swirling in the wind, and took two steps in front of the base to field a one-hop throw backhanded.

Gilligan then rocked his glove back in time to get the runner.

“That’s the kind of play an athletic shortstop makes,” Passaic Tech coach Robert Nutile said. “Mickey did exactly that, but with catcher’s equipment on.”

Pro scouts have followed Gilligan since he committed to Rutgers University in eighth grade, starting with two years of trips to Lakeland High and then tracking his ascent after he transferred to Passaic Tech before his junior year.

As if his defensive display wasn’t enough to win over the scouts on this rainy, windy March afternoon, Gilligan took it a step further: he crushed a game-tying two-run home run over the right-center-field fence in the sixth inning.

“Imagine if I had a f----- rocket of an arm like that? And that kind of power?” one scout said. “You’d never hear the end of it from me.”

Expectations are high for Gilligan in this weekend’s MLB Draft. He’s projected to land anywhere in the first three rounds — a rarity for high school catchers in the Northeast. While exciting, the situation puts this highly touted prospect in the ultimate conundrum: stick with his pledge to Rutgers that he made as a young teenager or cash in now on years of preparation and chase a family dream?

THE FAMILY BUSINESS

The baseball looked beaten, as if it’d been dragged through the mud. Even the red seams were faded. But Mickey wanted it. He needed it.

His first home run ball. He was 9 years old. He remembers the moment as if it were yesterday: the thundering whack it

SEE BASEBALL, A2

STATEWIDE

Heat deaths labeled ‘mass casualty event’ by advocates

The state reported 29 people died over five days. N.J. saw 6 such fatalities last summer.

Lilo H. Stainton New Jersey Monitor

Heat-related deaths in New Jersey appear to have shot up roughly five-fold over last summer following a holiday weekend with record-high temperatures, prompting advocates to urge the state to do more to protect vulnerable residents.

New Jersey reported 29 heat-related deaths between July 2 — when state data shows temperatures in New Jersey peaked at 108 degrees — and July 6, according to state health officials, up from six such fatalities last summer.

Roughly a dozen of the deaths involved people who were unhoused or living in their cars, said Connie Mercer, CEO of the NJ Coalition to End Homelessness.

“Really we had a mass casualty event,” Mercer said.

Mercer and others want the state to expand its network of emergency cooling centers and take other steps to better protect those who are living or working outside from the impact of extreme temperatures.

State health officials did not provide specifics on the recent heat-related deaths, which must still be confirmed by autopsies, but they said most occurred in north and central New Jersey and involved people of all ages, not just elderly residents. Some were found in homes without air conditioning, while others died on the street or in parked cars, they said.

The heat also led emergency rooms to diagnose 132 people with heat-related illnesses on July 3, the highest single-day total in several years. Between July 2 and July 6, more than 350 people sought emergency care for heat issues, state data shows.

“This is not a typical summer heat wave and it’s really important that we all take it seriously because it can become life-threatening very quickly,” state health commissioner Raynard Washington said at a July 4 press conference on storm damage and heat impacts.

New Jersey has reported heat-related fatalities in the single-digits for most years since 2000, when there were just two such deaths, according to health department data. Deaths peaked at 11 in 2002 and reached 10 in 2011 but fell to three in 2024.

The recent high death toll underscores the need to do more to protect those who work outdoors, according to state Sen. Joe Cryan, D-Union, who has championed a bill to create a state program to reduce occupational heat stress.

The bill, which has yet to get a hearing, calls for farms, amusement parks and

SEE STATEWIDE, A4

EAST RUTHERFORD

FIFA selling nearly 1,200 more seats for World Cup final at \$7,380

Associated Press

World Cup ticket resale prices dropped for quarterfinal matches following the elimination of co-hosts United States and Mexico, and FIFA has nearly 1,200 seats on sale for the final at \$7,380.

The site TickPick listed the lowest price for the Spain-Belgium game on Friday at Inglewood, California, at \$1,381, down from \$3,261 before the U.S. lost to Belgium in the round of 16.

The lowest price for the England-Norway match at Miami Gardens, Florida, on Saturday was \$2,049, down from \$3,866 before England defeated Mexico to reach the quarterfinals. It listed the lowest price for the Argentina-Switzerland game at Kansas City, Missouri, at \$1,142, down from \$2,381

before the round of 16.

Standing outside SoFi Stadium on Friday, Jake van Baarsel said he bought tickets two days earlier. The 65-year-old from Riverside, California, said he hadn’t previously planned on attending because he knew ticket prices were so high. But when his son called to tell him he obtained seats at a lower price, he decided to pay for two at \$1,000 each to share the moment with his 13-year-old grandson.

“It’s one of those things — it’s a memory maker for my grandson and me,” he said. “So how much money do you put on a memory?”

“So yeah, it’s steep for a game, but we enjoy.”

Others who bought tickets well ahead of Friday’s quarterfinal match paid far more.

Lisandro Pineda, 70, of East Los Angeles, said he paid about \$2,200 a month ago.

“The price was too high, I think, but it’s a resale, remember,” he said. “I didn’t want to be left out. I’ve never been to a World Cup. I didn’t go to the one we had before. So I figured, I have the money, I have the time, what the heck, buy the ticket, so here we are.”

Kourosh Modarress, 68, of Los Angeles, said his family bought hospitality tickets at \$7,000 each after they failed to obtain other tickets in one of FIFA’s sales rounds.

“I think it’s highway robbery,” he said.

FIFA had nearly 1,200 category two tickets priced at \$7,380 on sale Friday for the World Cup final on July 19 at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford.

The governing body’s last-minute tickets sales site, which at times had listed the

game as sold out, had 1,178 seats available across five sections of the top deck along the sidelines: 282 in section 344, 299 in section 343, 139 in section 335, 443 in section 334 and 15 in section 333.

FIFA also was selling 68 front category one tickets in the lower deck at prices ranging from \$19,995 to \$32,970 and had remaining hospitality tickets in its Trophy Lounge and Trophy Lounge+ sections priced at \$34,500 and \$32,500, including food and drinks.

Soccer’s governing body did not immediately respond to a request for comment on why the additional tickets had become available.

Resale tickets for the final were available on FIFA’s marketplace at prices from \$7,440.50 to \$11,499,998.85.