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Curacao is a first-time qualifier for the Junior League World Series

The Latin America region of the world will have a first-time participant in the Junior League World Series in Taylor.

Curacao, which has played in the last seven Little League World Series in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, has finally qualified to play in its first world tournament for 13- and 14-year-old baseball players.

Willemstad, Curacao, is located in the Netherland Antilles in the Southern Caribbean 35 miles north of Venezuela. The Curacan all-stars from the Pabao Little League defeated Yauco, Puerto Rico, 11-2, in the Latin American regional championship game July 12 in Yauco.

Curacao lost only once during the region, going 4-1 in round-robin play. Victories came over the national champions of Bonaire (12-1), the U.S. Virgin Islands (16-0), the Dominican Republic (13-7) and Venezuela (10-0). The only loss came to the hosts from Puerto Rico.

In the semi-final round, Curacao eliminated Panama, 9-1, while Puerto Rico ousted Aruba, 6-5, setting up the lopsided rematch for the title.

This year is the 28th that the Junior League World Series will be played in Taylor. Teams from Latin America countries have been visiting since the second year of the series, 1982.

In that time, five teams from Puerto Rico, one team from Mexico and one team from Panama have won the world championship, the most recent coming from Panama City in 2005. A team from St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Island played in Taylor last year, going 2-2 in the International Pool.

Curacao could provide a formidable team for the opposition. In 2004, a team from Willemstad won the Little League World Series, which is the tournament for 12-year-olds. In 2005, Curacao was runner-up. Last year – its seventh straight appearance in Williamsport – the Curacao national champions lost in the finals of the International Division.

The Junior League World Series is scheduled for August 10-16 at Heritage Park, with opening ceremonies the evening of August 9. The series includes 10 teams from across the world: five regional champions from the United States, plus the champions of Latin America, the Asia-Pacific region, a region known as EMEA (Europe/Middle East/Africa), Canada and Mexico.

The teams are divided into USA and International pools for round-robin play. The top two teams play for the pool championship and a shot at the world championship. This year's World Series title game will be at 5 p.m. August 16. Again, it will be taped for future broadcast by ESPN.

Curacao is the second team to qualify. The first was the International Little League Association of Manila, Philippines. That nation finished runner-up to Pearl City, Hawaii, in last year's JLWS and repeated as Asia-Pacific champions this year.

Play will wrap up this weekend in the EMEA region in Kutno, Poland. The national champions of Mexico will be announced soon. The other regional tournaments will be played later in July or in August.

About Curacao: Generally pronounced "kurr-uh-sou" the Caribbean island of Curacao is one of five island areas of the Netherlands Antilles. Willemstad is the capital.

Curacao has a land area of 171 square miles and, in 2001, had a population of 130,627.

A number of Major League baseball players are natives of Curacao, including former Detroit Tigers Jair Jurrjens and Randall Simon. Others are Andruw Jones and Wladimir Balentien.

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