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Champions arrive Friday for 2011 Junior League Baseball World Series in Taylor

For the first time in the 31-year history of the event, a team from Rhode Island will play in the Junior League Baseball World Series at Taylor's Heritage Park.

Johnston, Rhode Island, won twice on Thursday over Perkasio, Pennsylvania, to win the USA East regional tournament and earn a spot in the World Series for the best teams of 13- and 14-year-old players.

The Whalley Little League from Surrey, British Columbia, won the Canadian national championship on Thursday to round out the 10-team field of the World Series.

Teams will arrive in Taylor on Friday and get their uniforms, on Saturday morning and afternoon.

Opening ceremonies are set for 8 p.m. Saturday. Games get under way at noon Sunday and continue through the world championship game at 11 a.m. Saturday, August 20. Heritage Park is located at 12111 Pardee Road.

Admission is free to opening ceremonies and just \$5 per carload per day on game days – or \$10 per carload for the entire week. Both fees include parking.

Rhode Island is one of five teams to win regional championships across the United States. Other teams in the USA Pool are North Canton, Ohio; Tampa, Florida; Rosenberg, Texas; and Tucson, Arizona.

Team Canada is one of five teams in the International Pool. The others are Asia-Pacific champion Taoyuan, Chinese Taipei; Emilia, Italy the champion of Europe, the Middle East and Africa; Latin America champion Maracaibo, Venezuela; and the Puerto Rican national champions from Yabucoa.

A team from Taipei City, Chinese Taipei, won the world championship in 2010. Teams from Tampa, Tucson and Yabucoa are past Junior League World Series champions.

The Junior League World Series in Taylor is the older brother of the Little League World Series, a tournament for 12-year-olds held annually in South Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Both are sanctioned by Little League International.

Saturday night's opening ceremonies include a parade of champions, speeches by dignitaries, a special first-pitch ceremony and fireworks.

Starting Sunday, teams compete in round-robin games in either the USA Pool or the International Pool. On Sunday, games are scheduled for noon, 2:45 p.m., 5:30 p.m. and 8:15 p.m. Games start a bit earlier August 15-18: 11 a.m., 2 p.m. 5 p.m. and 8 p.m.

The top two teams in the International Pool standings play at 5 p.m. Friday, August 19. The top two teams in the USA Pool play at 8 o'clock the same night. The International champion plays the USA champion for the world title at 11 a.m. Saturday, August 20.

A number of current or past professional baseball players – Gary Sheffield, Eric Bedard, Brett Myers, Jose and Javier Valentin, Erubiel Durazo, Chad Hermansen, Derek Bell, Delino DeShields, Shannon Withem and Adam Loewen – played for teams in the Junior League World Series years before making it as stars in the big leagues. Sheffield and Bell were teammates on the Belmont Heights team from Tampa, Florida, that won the Junior League world championship in 1982. Some future major leaguers may be on the rosters in 2011.

Matt Cassel, who played in the World Series for Northridge, California, in 1995, is starting quarterback for the Kansas City Chiefs. Mark "Bo" Pelini, a member of the 1981 champions from Boardman, Ohio, went on to play safety for Ohio State University's football team and is now head football coach at the University of Nebraska. Chris Dingman and Steve Reinprecht, Junior League teammates in 1989 with Edmonton, Alberta, went on to play in the National Hockey League.

For more information, visit the website www.cityoftaylor.com/worldseries. To sponsor the World Series, call Director Greg Bzura at (734) 306-3113.

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