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Steve Avery, Paws, fireworks are part of Saturday night's World Series opening ceremonies

TAYLOR, MICHIGAN -- Steve Avery, who went from the sandlots of Taylor to pitch in the Major Leagues, will throw out the ceremonial first pitch Saturday night during opening ceremonies of the Junior League Baseball World Series at Heritage Park.

Also on hand will be Paws, the official mascot of the Detroit Tigers professional baseball team.

Ceremonies start at 8 p.m. The public is invited to attend at no charge.

The festivities will welcome all 10 teams to the World Series for the best teams of 13- and 14-year-old ballplayers from around the globe. Five teams are regional champions from the United States. The other five are from international locations: Aruba, Canada, Chinese Taipei, Italy and Mexico.

The event includes a colorful Parade of Champions, the playing of national anthems and patriotic songs, speeches by dignitaries, the introduction of umpires and the special ceremonial first pitch involving Avery and players from all of the teams.

The evening ends with fireworks, which are sponsored by Taylor Ford.

"I think our ceremonies will be very professional," said World Series Director Greg Bzura. "I like to call it a mini, mini Olympics. The teams carry their flags. We present the national anthems for the teams from other countries and patriotic songs for the teams from the United States."

Bzura's son, Dan, is in charge of opening ceremonies and will emcee the evening's festivities.

Steve Avery was an all-state pitcher during his days at John F. Kennedy High School in Taylor. After graduating in 1988, he was drafted by the Atlanta Braves of the National League. His best year was 1991 when – at age 21 – he was 18-8 and had a 3.38 earned run average while helping the Braves win the league title. Most significant, he shut out Pittsburgh in two games of post-season play and was named most valuable player of the National League Championship Series.

In 1993, Avery was named to the NL all-star team. Two years later, he and the Braves won the World Series. He later played for Boston and Cincinnati before finishing his career with the Detroit Tigers.

The baseball field at Kennedy High School is named for Avery. These days, he assists with the baseball program at St. Frances Cabrini High School, running a popular summer camp at the school in nearby Allen Park.

Paws is one of the most recognizable mascots in all of Major League Baseball. The Tigers' official mascot since 1995, Paws entertains fans at home games and makes appearances at public and private events.

The United States National Anthem will be sung by Rosella LoDuca, the daughter and granddaughter of local home builders Nino and Ross LoDuca of MJC Lotus. At 17, Rosella is an accomplished singer and dancer. She has performed at such local venues as Joe Louis Arena, the Royal Oak Music Theater and The Magic Box.

Rosella was originally scheduled to perform The National Anthem last year before the opening ceremonies were rained out for the first time in World Series history.

This year, organizers are hoping for clear skies and dry land – especially with fireworks scheduled.

"I think we'll have a nice show and I invite everyone to come out and welcome our visiting ballplayers, teams and spectators," Bzura said. "We want to make the players and coaching staff feel like celebrities. I hope everyone comes out and cheers them on."

Heritage Park is located at 12111 Pardee Road in Taylor.

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