

All lights point to World Series Field at Taylor's Heritage Park

Faced with the choice of installing expensive new lights for the 2008 Junior League World Series in Taylor or waiting until next year, Director Greg Bzura said it came down to one factor: the safety of the players.

In the span of a week, one of the most expensive investments in World Series history happened well ahead of schedule. There are new lights at World Series Field in Heritage Park.

Musco Sports Lighting, working with G & B Electrical Contractors, removed the eight antiquated wooden light poles and replaced them with six energy-efficient galvanized steel poles that are expected to provide better light on the field at half the electricity cost.

The lights were turned on for the first time the evening of July 29. They will be on during the August 9 opening ceremonies and night games of the Junior League World Series, scheduled for August 10-16.

Matt Ruhlig, Musco field sales representative for Michigan, said the new lights are "much brighter – probably twice as bright" as the former system.

"What the viewing spectators will notice is a much more even distribution of lights," Ruhlig said. "There will be no black spots. Each fixture will work in harmony with each other. Each fixture is helping each other out, so there's no wasted light; no wasted energy."

The old light poles were 23 years old, came with costly electric bills and, worse, could shift with a stiff wind and play havoc with a fielder's view of the play. This was a concern not only for World Series players but also local children who play on the field throughout the year.

The wood poles are not approved by Little League International, but were used at the World Series in Taylor, which was "grandfathered" by the rule because the rule came into place after the series was in place.

"There's no question we were facing the inevitable time when some kid could get injured seriously because of blind spots for lack of proper lighting," Bzura said. "The biggest benefit here is just knowing that will not be the case any more."

World Series organizers and officials from the Taylor South Little League, who takes care of World Series Field for the city of Taylor, decided it would be better to install new lighting this year and continue raising funds to make payments on the \$120,000 investment.

"We made the call that we have to get it regardless of the cost," Bzura said. "We believe the cost is as competitive as it can be because it is a Little League-approved product. We believe the amount is worth it knowing we're providing safety for those 13- and 14-year-olds – and that includes Taylor kids."

Nearly \$40,000 has been raised to date – half of that coming from a \$20,000 "challenge grant" from the Detroit Tigers Foundation, which agreed that the "Light Up the Series" campaign was a bright idea.

Bzura said the series had saved more than \$12,000 in its capital fund and added another \$2,500 during last year's international tournament.

Since then, the Taylor Lions Club and the Taylor Northeast Little League contributed \$1,000 each. Bzura said the Lions' donation falls right in line with their campaign to helping people see better. He said Taylor Northeast officials were motivated by the fact that their league uses the junior field as a home field for the 13- and 14-year-old division.

As series organizers continue to seek grants, corporate sponsorships and donations from anyone, they've raised about \$2,000 so far by selling collectible coins for \$20 each. The coins, which are each individually numbered, commemorate the Light Up the Series campaign. They will be available during the World Series.

Besides the improved lighting and energy savings, the new light poles eliminate obstructed views of the field. The new poles also give organizers the option of selling advertising to help defray the costs.

"We planned on campaigning for lights for next year," Bzura said. "Obviously, we have to run this year's tournament first. Anyone who knows somebody that is interested in sponsoring a pole, give us a call."

Crews performed the work at Heritage Park in steps. Bzura said they installed concrete bases 14 feet into the ground and six to seven feet above ground. They assembled the new poles on site, then they went around the field, alternating between removing a wooden pole and installing a steel pole until the work was done. Workers trenched the site and ran wires from the old poles to the new poles, Bzura said.

Crews used chain saws to cut the wooden poles into smaller pieces and removed them from the park, leaving only a few remnants sticking out of the ground.

The old light bulbs and apparatus were donated to the city "for everything they do for us" for use elsewhere in the city, Bzura said.

Musco, a lighting company that is approved by Little League International, has installed lights at Comerica Park and Ford Field, on NASCAR tracks, at college and pro football fields and at the Little League World Series field in Williamsport.

The new lights come with a 25-year warranty. Technology allows the lights to be "focused" on the field using computers and a cell phone. "Musco said this is their latest product," Bzura said. "And therefore, it's more advanced than any lighting installed in previous years."

Musco's Ruhlig compared the new fixtures to have a "large mag light up on the pole."

"We can control the light with our fixture instead of wasting light that goes into the sky," he said. "We can direct it back to the field. That's how we're able to do it with less fixtures."

