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## World Series Memories: 1982 player returns to Taylor

If you think baseball is just a game, you haven't met Chad Eddy, who played for Libertyville, Illinois, in the second Junior League World Series in Taylor way back in 1982.

Eddy, who returned to Taylor last week for the first time since his World Series, says the international baseball tournament in which he played 27 years ago helped shape the rest of his life.

"My experience that summer has defined who I am today and how I approach everything I do in my life," said Eddy, now a 40-year-old sales executive for Nationwide Insurance in Columbus, Ohio.

At the time, the World Series in Taylor was just for 13-year-olds – it's expanded to include 14-year-olds since – and was known, appropriately, as the 13-Year-Old World Series.

Eddy's team from Libertyville, Illinois, was the USA Central Regional champion and one of only five teams in the World Series that year. The tournament has expanded to 10 teams since the inclusion of 14-year-olds.

In 1982, there were four teams from the United States: Illinois, Delaware, Florida and California. It also was the first year the Puerto Rico national champion played in the series.

The 1982 series rosters featured some of the most famous 13-year-olds to play in Taylor. Gary Sheffield, perhaps the best known of all JLWS players, was a teammate with another future Major Leaguer, Derek Bell, on the Belmont Heights Little League team from Tampa, Florida. And Delino DeShields, who would go on to a 13-year career with five different teams in the Majors, was a member of the team from Seaford, Delaware.

Eddy, who played centerfield, knew the Libertyville team had its hands full when the players watched DeShields and his Delaware teammates warming up for the opening game.

"During warm-ups, we looked over to the bullpen to get a glance at their starting pitcher," he said. "We assumed that the guy loosening up in the bullpen was a coach. 'It must be a coach. That guy is too big and throws too hard for a 13-year-old,' we all rationalized.

"That same guy took the mound in the first inning. It was Delino DeShields. He struck out the side in the first three innings and then was pulled when he couldn't find the plate – much to our relief. He was clearly one of the most talented players there."

DeShields wound up walking the bases loaded and giving up a grand slam to Illinois' Matt Wamser. It was one of two Wamser grand slams in the series.

Illinois defeated Delaware, 9-2, but wasn't as fortunate in its second game, a 10-6 defeat at the hands of Sheffield, Bell and their Tampa teammates.

"We all knew they were the team that had lost the year before to Taiwan in the championship game of the Little League World Series in Williamsport (Pennsylvania)," Eddy said. "We wanted to beat them badly. We were up, 6-0, going into the fifth, only to lose 10-6."

In 1982, the series featured a two-game elimination format, which meant the loss moved Libertyville to the losers' bracket. They couldn't lose another game and had to keep winning to keep playing.

Vega Baja, Puerto Rico, knocked out the USA Western Regional champs from Robinwood, California, 4-3. But Eddy's team stunned the Puerto Rico national champs, 16-5, to earn a spot in the World Series championship game.

To win the title, the Illinois state champs would have to defeat unbeaten Tampa twice. Alas, it was not to be as the USA South's best team defeated Eddy and Co., 6-1.

"Sheffield pitched a one-hitter against us," Eddy said. "He and Derek Bell both hit home runs to account for their runs."

Eddy, who injured his thumb in the Puerto Rico game and was playing on an injured hamstring, remembers having to use a lighter pink-colored bat and bunting each time he came up to the plate in the final game. He reached base safely when Sheffield slipped and fell while fielding one of the bunts. Instead of an Eddy hit, the official scorer, the late Andy Gerick, called it a fielding error.

Bell would have had a second home run in the game, but Eddy caught one before it went over the fence. In fact, Eddy had one hand on the fence when he reached up and caught the ball.

"I remember the day we lost – we were all pretty upset," Eddy said. "I remember us all feeling like we just wanted to keep playing baseball. When we lost, it was like a double whammy: summer was over."

Eddy and Sheffield shared the series stolen base record, five. These days, the record is 10.

"Like Delino DeShields, Sheffield and Bell were clearly in a league of their own and it was no surprise to anyone to see them playing in the Major Leagues," Eddy said.

Despite the loss, Eddy has nothing but fond memories and has never forgotten the summer of 1982.

"Because we were playing baseball all summer long, I didn't see friends back home for six weeks," Eddy said. "When I ran into a buddy and told him we finished second, he said, 'Oh, that sucks.' I remember thinking, no it doesn't. We were second in the world.

"On paper, perhaps we did not have the best individual talent, but we were the best 'team.' To the credit of our coaching staff, they taught us the three key ingredients to success: preparation, teamwork and attitude. Every time we stepped on the field, we were the most prepared team and always believed that regardless of who we played and what the circumstances were, when we played as a team we could win.

"And as a leader of teams in the corporate world, I make it clear that these qualities hold true in the office as much as they do in sports."

He said the same group of players stayed together four years and won the Colt League world championship in 1986.

Eddy played ball through his sophomore year at the College of Lake County in Chicago. At that point, his parents retired to South Carolina. Eddy said he "realized baseball wasn't in my future," so he transferred to Clemson in South Carolina and earned a degree in accounting.

He eventually moved to Atlanta, Georgia, where he worked for Turner Broadcasting, the Atlanta Braves and their farm clubs. He met his future wife in Atlanta and, after they married in 1997, they relocated to her hometown in Columbus, Ohio.

Eddy worked at Ernst and Young from 1998 to 2000 and has been at Nationwide since. He is director of sales operations for customer choice distribution.

Recently, Eddy started a group on the social networking Web site Facebook to reconnect with his former teammates.

"We had a great run," he said. "It makes you all really close. Even though you lose touch over the years, the minute we connected on Facebook, we said, 'What a summer.'"

This year, Eddy decided to return to Taylor to give his children, 5-year-old Nicholas and 8-year-old Meredith, a firsthand look at the Junior League World Series and the field he played on 27 years earlier. His wife Amy stayed behind in Columbus.

Besides watching the Friday and Saturday games, Eddy reconnected with World Series Director Greg Bzura, who founded the series in 1981. His children sat for awhile in the press box, enjoyed snacks and proudly wore World Series T-shirts.

"Man, it was incredible," Eddy said of their visit. "For me, personally, all sorts of memories started flying through my head. It reaffirmed for me what an amazing experience that was. I wanted my kids to see the whole atmosphere. I wanted my kids to see what I experienced.

"They haven't stopped talking about it. They were treated like rock stars."

Eddy posted some photos of their experiences on the Facebook site and his former teammates are now talking about returning to Taylor for their 30th reunion in 2012.

Eddy was so impressed that he inquired about how he could give back to the World Series that had given him so much. He learned that last year series organizers installed new lighting at World Series Field – an expensive venture for an all-volunteer group. Eddy has set up a fund-raising venture on Facebook called "Light Up the Series."

Years after playing in the series, Eddy realized what a sacrifice his parents made just to get him to Taylor.

"As kids, you think that's just what parents do," he said. "The reality is the parents are the unsung heroes. My mom sold jewelry to pay for our trip. We had to go from Illinois to Iowa for the Midwest regional, then we had to fly to Detroit. I hope to have the opportunity to do that same kind of thing with my kids."

Eddy said there were many noticeable differences from the 1982 series and the 2009 series, which was won by Scottsdale, Arizona. Besides doubling in size from five to 10 teams, he was impressed by the five international teams that visit Taylor annually, by the lively crowds and that the finals were televised by the ESPN network.

"The field looked phenomenal," he added. "The surroundings looked great, too. We didn't have the hills when I played. In a lot of ways, the atmosphere was the same. In a lot of ways, the atmosphere was better."

The return visit, he said, was almost as memorable as the summer of 1982.

"I can't tell you how much I appreciate it," he said. "We had a great time. You can definitely count on us coming back."

-- Dave Gorgon



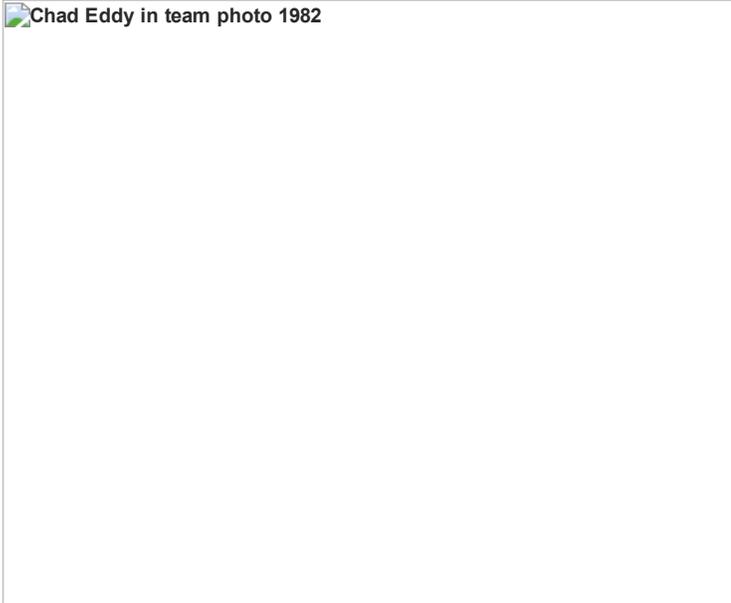
**Chad Eddy plays on World Series Field in Taylor in 1982. Note the wooden bat.**

 Chad Eddy plays centerfield



**Chad Eddy plays centerfield against Seaford, Delaware, in 1982.**

 Chad Eddy in team photo 1982



**Chad Eddy poses with his team from Libertyville, Illinois – the runners-up in the 1982 Junior League World Series.**



**Chad Eddy, son Nicholas and daughter Meredith check out World Series Field in Taylor, Michigan's Heritage Park. Eddy played on the field 27 years earlier as a 13-year-old.**

*Have a Junior League World Series memory? E-mail them to Dave Gorgon at [TaylorNews@aol.com](mailto:TaylorNews@aol.com).*

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