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Father played in Little League World Series 25 years; now it's son's turn in Taylor

When Armando Verdugo Sr. told his son what to expect at the 2010 Junior League World Series in Taylor, he was speaking from experience.

Armando Verdugo Jr. is a member of the El Monte, California, team that is playing this week at Heritage Park.

When Verdugo Sr. was 12 years old, he played in the 1985 Little League World Series in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. He was a second baseman with the Mexicali, Mexico, which played as the champion of the USA West region.

That August, there were eight teams in the Little League series – half the number that will play this year. Mexicali beat teams from Staten Island, New York, and Morristown, Tennessee, to qualify for the championship game. Seoul, South Korea, won the title, 7-1.

Two years later, Verdugo said, his family moved to California for a better life. His goal was to keep playing baseball and he played throughout high school and a season in college.

Today, he is married and works in production for the local Safeway milk plant. He also coaches Armando Jr. in youth baseball.

Twenty-five years after Verdugo Sr. played in the Little League series, his son's El Monte team is playing in Taylor as the champion of the West region – the same region Mexicali won.

"My goal was to be there in the World Series," said Verdugo Sr., now 37 years old. "When I started coaching with these guys, I said they had a good chance to be there. My goal was to be in the World Series with my son."

Verdugo Jr., who is 13, is a utility player who also pitches. He said making it to the World Series "was hard" but "feels great."

"We put in a lot of hard work and had to practice a lot," said the eighth-grader at Royal Middle School. "We played a lot of good teams to get here."

The youngster said his dad reminisces about his baseball days and inspires him with advice. Each has been the smallest player on his respective team.

"He said that you have to work hard to get over here," Verdugo Jr. said. "There are really good teams over here. You can never quit. If you're losing by five runs and it's the last inning, never quit. You've got to keep going."

California teams have played in Taylor in 15 of the 30 years of the Junior League World Series, but it's the first time for El Monte. Verdugo Sr. said the current team can take a step further than he did in a World Series.

"In El Monte, a lot of people know about this team," Verdugo Sr. said. "People will be waiting for us when we come back with the World Series championship."

"I'm excited to have this team, to come over here. Not a lot of people come a second time. This is special for me because my son is on the team."

Verdugo Sr. said he'll be on hand when the Mexicali team has a 25-year reunion. Several of his friends played pro ball in Mexico. One friend, David Cardenas, is retired after a Major League career with the Atlanta Braves, Cleveland Indians and Colorado Rockies.

