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Ten-team field nearly set in Junior League World Series in Taylor

The 10 best teams of 13- and 14-year-old baseball players from around the world will converge on Taylor's Heritage Park starting this weekend for the 31st annual Junior League World Series.

Five United States teams and five international teams will compete to become 2011 world champion during the weeklong spectacular.

The public is invited at no charge to attend colorful opening ceremonies – including fireworks – beginning at 8 p.m. Saturday. Games get under way at noon Sunday and continue through the World Series title game on Saturday, August 20.

Four games will be played daily, Sunday through Thursday. The International and United States championship games take place Friday. The August 20 world championship game – which has a morning starting time for the first time in series history, 11 a.m. – will be broadcast live on ESPN2.

Admission on game days is just \$5 per carload per day or \$10 for the entire series. Both fees include parking. Heritage Park is located at 12111 Pardee Road.

"We have an incredibly talented field of teams again; they all arrive in Taylor as champions," said Greg Bzura, founder and director of the World Series, which has been held in Taylor since its inception.

"Every team will have won a regional championship or a national title. They beat a number of great teams just to get here. The teams from the United States are state champions, too. And now they'll all play to be called the best team in the world."

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.

At this writing, eight of the 10 teams have qualified to make the trip to Taylor with the last two scheduled to earn their way on Thursday.

The four qualifying international teams to date are from Chinese Taipei, Italy, Venezuela and Puerto Rico. The four U.S. teams are from Ohio, Florida, Texas and Arizona.

The Canadian national champions and the USA East regional champs will join them.

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.

The 2011 Teams

Asia-Pacific Region: The boys from Taoyuan, Chinese Taipei, will attempt to win a second straight world championship for their native land. A team from Taipei City won the title for the first time last year, defeating USA champion Tyler, Texas, 9-1, in the finals.

The Shing-Ming Junior Little League from Taoyuan qualified for the 2011 World Series by winning the Asia-Pacific region championship in Solo City, Indonesia. Taoyuan outscored rivals from the Philippines, Hong Kong and Indonesia by a combined 96-2 over four games.

EMEA Region: Italy also will make its second appearance in the Junior League World Series after a team from Emilia won the eight-nation Europe/Middle East/Africa (EMEA) region played in Kutno, Poland.

Italy defeated the national champions of The Netherlands, 9-2, in the EMEA title game. Team Italy also beat Netherlands and South Africa in pool play and Lithuania and South Africa, again, in the semifinals. Its only loss was to an American military base team in Ramstein, Germany. The national champs from the Czech Republic, Great Britain and Poland were also in the tournament.

In 2009, Friuli Venezia Giulia gave Italy its debut in Taylor, going 1-3 in the World Series.

Latin America Region: For the third time, a team from Maracaibo, Venezuela, won the Latin American championship to qualify for the Junior League World Series. This year, Venezuela won a 10-team regional tournament in Abaco, Bahamas, defeating Chitre, Panama, for the title, 5-4. The win avenged a 6-2 loss to Panama on the opening day of the tournament. Chitre played in the 2010 Little League World Series.

In the Bahamas, Venezuela also defeated national champions from Nassau, Aruba, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Curacao. Also playing in the Latin America regions were champions from Freeport, Bahamas, St. Maarten, Mexico and Ecuador.

Venezuela has done well in Taylor. Maracaibo all-stars went 4-1 in both 2001 and 2006. A team from Punto Fijo, Venezuela, went 5-1 in 2004. In both 2001 and 2004, the Venezuela teams lost in the World Series championship game.

Puerto Rican National Champion: In odd-numbered years of the Junior League World Series, the national champion of Puerto Rico receives an automatic berth. In even-numbered years, the national champion of Mexico qualifies automatically. Little League baseball is very popular in both nations.

This year, the Juan A. Bibiloni Little League of Yabucoa, Puerto Rico, will play in Taylor. The same league has been represented in the Junior League series seven previous years – most recently in 2009. Yabucoa won the World Series in 1990. This will be the 22nd year that a team from Puerto Rico will play in the JLWS.

Canadian National Champion: Provincial champions of Canada have been competing for the Canadian national championship in Lethbridge, Alberta. The championship game on Thursday pits the Whalley Little League from Surrey, British Columbia, vs. the Medicine Hat Little League from Alberta.

British Columbia is a baseball hotbed and its champions have played in Taylor 14 years since Canada entered the JLWS in 1988. Surrey teams have played in Taylor six times. Medicine Hat would be just the second provincial champion from Alberta to play in Taylor. Edmonton qualified in 1989.

USA Central Region: North Canton, Ohio, defeated a team from Taylor, Michigan, 8-6, on August 10 to win the USA Central region. Nine state champions and a host team competed for the title in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

North Canton will attempt to be the first team from Ohio to win the World Series since a team from Boardman won the title in the very first year of the tournament, 1981. This will be the sixth team from Ohio to play in Taylor.

The all-stars from Taylor South/North Central fell one game short – the farthest any Taylor team has gone in a Junior League regional tournament. Taylor South is the host league for the World Series at Heritage Park.

USA Southwest Region: The Texas East state champions from the Rosenberg National Little League emerged from the six-team USA Southwest region to earn a spot in the World Series, defeating Blanchard, Louisiana, for the title, 12-3, on August 9.

Rosenberg went 4-0 in the regional played in Midland, Texas. Teams from Texas have played 13 times in the Junior League World Series and have won three world championships – the last time by El Campo in 2006.

The 2010 Southwest champ from Tyler, Texas, lost in the world championship game to Chinese Taipei. This will be the first appearance for Rosenberg.

USA West Region: The Sunnyside Little League from Tucson, Arizona, won the USA West region with a 10-0 victory over Nampa, Idaho, on August 9. The teams emerged from a field of 12 teams – 11 state champions and the host team – during the tournament in Irvine, California.

The city of Tucson is familiar with Taylor, Michigan, when a team from Arizona's second-largest city won the world championship in 1992. At the time, the tournament was limited to 13-year-olds. It expanded to include 14-year-olds in 1999.

Arizona is 2-for-2 when competing in the Junior League World Series. The only other team from the state to compete in Taylor was Scottsdale – and that team won the world championship as well, in 2009.

USA Southeast Region: The all-stars from the Palma Ceia/Bayshore Little League in Tampa, Florida, earned the USA Southeast championship by defeating Elkton, Virginia, 5-4, at the end of a 10-team tournament in Greenville, South Carolina.

Palma Ceia already has its name on in the Row of Champions at Taylor's Heritage Park as a record-breaking team from the Palma Ceia/Bayshore league won the world title in 2004 – the year of Hurricane Charley.

This will be the fourth time a team from Tampa plays in the JLWS. A team from the Belmont Heights Little League – featuring future major leaguers Gary Sheffield and Derek Bell – won the world title in 1982. A team from the Tampa Bay league won it in 1985. In all, teams from Florida have represented the Southeast region in Taylor seven times, winning three world titles.

USA East Region: At this writing, a team from the Penridge Little League in Perkasio, Pennsylvania, needed one more victory to wrap up the USA East championship. Challenging the Pennsylvania state champions on Thursday in Freehold, New Jersey, will be Johnston, Rhode Island, which defeated Wilmington, Delaware, on Wednesday night. The Rhode Island state champs came out of the losers bracket and must win twice to earn the regional crown. Nine state champions and a host team competed for the East title.

Teams from Pennsylvania have played in Taylor three times, the last coming in 2002. Rhode Island is seeking its first World Series berth.

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