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Junior League World Series starts Sunday; opening ceremonies, fireworks are Saturday

TAYLOR, MICHIGAN – The games of the 33rd annual Junior League Baseball World Series begin at noon Sunday at Taylor's Heritage Park.

Ten teams from around the globe are traveling to Taylor to compete in the 2013 world tournament for 13- and 14-year-old ballplayers. Opening ceremonies, including fireworks, are set for 8 p.m. Saturday.

A week's worth of games at World Series Field culminates in the world championship game at 2 p.m. next Saturday, August 17.

"We invite everyone to Taylor to witness history in the making," said Greg Bzura, founder and director of the World Series since its inception in 1981. "These are the best teams of players in their age group. They have already won regional and national championships. Now they have a chance to win a world championship. We can't wait to see how the week unfolds."

The Junior League World Series is the "older brother" of the more famous Little League World Series for 12-year-olds played in South Williamsport, Pennsylvania. When players turn 13 and 14, they can compete in Taylor.

The 10 teams are divided into two pools of five teams for round-robin play: the International Pool and the USA Pool. Four games are played each day, Sunday through Thursday. The International championship game is set for 4 p.m. Friday, August 16, followed by the USA title game at 7 p.m.

The pool champions play for the world title Saturday afternoon, August 17. The World Series finale will be broadcast live by ESPN on its website www.ESPN3.com. The game will be replayed on television on ESPN2 at 2 p.m. Wednesday, August 21.

Six teams qualified for the World Series this past week in regional tournaments across the United States and in the Canadian national tournament in Alberta. Four international teams had qualified previously in tournaments in Aruba, the Philippines, Poland and Puerto Rico.

The USA Pool includes teams from Bedford, Indiana, champion of the USA Central Regional Tournament; Massapequa Park, New York (East); Goodlettsville, Tennessee (Southeast); Lafayette, Louisiana (Southwest); and Rio Rico, Arizona (West).

All of the USA qualifiers were state champions before winning regional titles. Last year, the Goodlettsville all-stars were runners-up in the Little League World Series.

Teams in the International Pool are national champions from Calgary, Alberta, Canada, and Manati, Puerto Rico; the Asia-Pacific regional champions from Taoyuan, Chinese Taipei; the Europe and Africa regional champions from Brno, Czech Republic; and the Latin America regional champions from Willemstad, Curacao.

Sunday's schedule features Arizona vs. Tennessee at noon, Curacao vs. Puerto Rico at 2:45, Louisiana vs. Indiana at 5:30 and Canada vs. the Czech Republic at 8:15.

Games on Monday through Thursday begin earlier. Monday's schedule features New York vs. Louisiana at 11 a.m.; Czech Republic vs. Chinese Taipei, 2 p.m.; Canada vs. Puerto Rico, 5 p.m.; and Tennessee vs. Indiana, 8 p.m.

Admission is \$5 per day per carload – or \$10 for a weeklong pass. Both prices include parking. Heritage Park is located at 12111 Pardee Road in Taylor.

To date, World Series teams have come from 29 states and 24 international locations. The 2012 Junior League world champion was Rockledge, Florida. Midland, the 2013 state champion from Michigan, competed in the Central Region tournament, making it to the final four.

Current or past Major Leaguers who played in Taylor as teen-agers include former Detroit Tiger Gary Sheffield, Eric Bedard, Brett Myers, brothers Jose and Javier Valentin, Erubiel Durazo, Chad Hermansen, Derek Bell, Delino DeShields, Shannon Withem, Adam Loewen and Chris Brock.

Past Junior League standout Matt Cassel plays quarterback in the National Football League. Mark "Bo" Pelini played in Taylor with Boardman, Ohio – the first World Series champion – and is now head football coach at the University of Nebraska. Former Team Canada mates Chris Dingman and Steve Reinprecht went on to play in the National Hockey League.

Umpires of the Junior League World Series have come from 33 states and 17 international locations. The umpires selected to call balls and strikes have met challenging qualifications. They are all volunteers who travel at their own expense.

Series Director Bzura said the World Series operates with sponsorships, donations and the participation of about 200 volunteers. He said all contributions are appreciated.

For more information on the Junior League World Series, visit the website www.cityoftaylor.com/worldseries. To sponsor the World Series, call Director Greg Bzura at (734) 306-3113. Also, follow the World Series all year long on Facebook at www.facebook.com/juniorleagueworldseries.

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