

By JOSEPH G. LARIOS

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C HICAGO (*jGLi*) – Right hander Rizza Bernardino pitched a dominating five-inning complete game and willed her Asia-Pacific team to win the first ever Big League Softball World Series title for girls for the Philippines last Wednesday (Aug. 8) at Vandenberg Park, Kalamazoo, Michigan, in a nationally-televised game on ESPN3.

Bernardino gave up two earned runs on five hits as her team routed the West Chester, California, 14-2, in a shocking comeback.

The game was supposed to be played for seven innings but under the rules, if one team is ahead by 10 runs at the end of the fifth inning, the mercy rule is applied.

Third baseman Michelle Lentija put the Philippine team on the board with a run-batted-in (RBI) double, 1-0, followed by shortstop Queeny Sabobo's two-run single to end the top of the first inning, 3-0. It was the score all the Filipinos needed to beat the champions of the West, who could only scrap for two runs at the bottom of the fifth inning.

Second baseman Krisna Paguican's single in the middle drove in a pair of runs at the top of the second inning to make it 5-0.

Rizza Bernardino's two-run homer, a blooper, chased California's ace left handed starter Christina Washington, who took the loss.

Washington was replaced by Karen Mao, who was making her first appearance on the mound.

Asia Pacific right fielder Kristine Joy Lacupa put the game out of reach with an RBI double at the top of the third inning, 8-0.

“CHEMISTRY, STRONG WORK ETHIC”

At the end of the third inning, Bernardino retired eight batters in row.

Lentija scored on a wild pitch on the fourth, followed by left fielder

Mary Joy Floranza's two-run homer on the fifth to make it 11-0. Lentija added a two-run single to make it 14-0 in a five-run fifth inning scored on two outs.

Ana Santiago, manager of the Philippine team, credited the win to the "chemistry and strong work ethic" of the team, who refused to quit.

When the Philippine team left the Philippines on July 27, they had a nine-hour layover in Japan and another 11-hour layover in Honolulu, Hawaii en route to Seattle, Washington, and Minneapolis, Minnesota, before arriving in Chicago, Illinois, on July 29 and taking a 149-mile, 2.30-hour bus ride to Kalamazoo.

As a result of their travel fatigue, the Philippine team dropped their first two initial games, one of them to the unbeaten California team that swept its seven elimination assignments, blanking Southwest (Texas), 13-0, Monday.

But the Philippine team did not give up after they rested and battled their jet lag, winning all subsequent seven games in a row in a nine-team Pool Play for girls aged 14-19 (They cannot have turned 19 before January 1, 2012), in a seven-inning game, playing in a 60-foot diamond, 43-foot pitching distance and a 12-inch ball.

Manila, representing the Asia-Pacific Region, had lost in the Big League World Series finals in 2008, 2010 and 2011.

The Team Manila advanced to the finals by beating East (Pennsylvania) 11-6.

Santiago, the manager of Team Manila, was quoted by third baseman Michelle Lentija as saying that during the tournament there is “no cell phones, no Internet, no shopping – only softball.”

The Philippines squad built a 14-0 lead before the West Region representing the Los Angeles area scored three hits to drive in a run.

Ten of the 13 players from Manila would be too old to join the team next summer.

For now, it will be “party,” “party” for these players, who will be bringing home to the Philippines a World Series trophy for the first time.

The members of the team include Ana Santiago, Manager, Sandy Barredo and Rafael Borromeo, Coaches; Gene Joy Parilla, Centerfielder; Mary Joy Floranza, Left Fielder; Krisna Paguican, Second Base; Michelle Lentija, Third Base; Queeny Sabobo, Shortstop; Kristine Joy Lacupa, Right Fielder; Glesyl

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Opier, First Base; Charmain Joy Oria, Catcher; Andrea Mae Gonzales, Mary Jane Pabellar, Maria Luna Amparo and Baby Jane Raro, Reserves. # # #

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