

By JOSEPH G. LARIOS

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Philippine Softball Players' Comeback Bid Fades

CHICAGO (*jGLi*) – Every year, for the last two decades, the Philippines sends her boys and girls to compete in one or two of the eight amateur baseball and softball World Series championships in the United States

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They are the Little League Baseball (children aged 11 to 13); Junior League Baseball (13-14); Senior League Baseball (14-16); Big League Baseball (16-18); Girls Little League Softball (9-12); Girls Junior League Softball (ages 13-14); Girls Senior League Softball (13-16); and Girls Big League Softball (14-18).

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This year is no exception.

But before the Filipino team can go to the United States, its members have to slug it out with regional teams. Between July 10 and 15 this year, the ILLAM Central-Makati City Little League dominated the Pool B of the Asia-Pacific Regional Tournament in Surabaya

,
Indonesia
, participated in by
Hanoi
,
Vietnam
;
Singapore
;
New Zealand
and
Hong Kong
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The Pool A dominated by powerhouse Fu-Hsing, Kaohsiung, Chinese Taipei is consists of host Indonesia
; Northern LL, Dededo,
Guam
; Sanuk,
Chiang Mai
,
Thailand
, and
Seoul
,
South Korea

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During the Asia-Pacific Championship last Aug. 4th, Chinese Taipei blanked the Philippines, 10-0, advancing to the Little League Baseball World Series in South Williamsport

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Pennsylvania
to be held from Aug. 20 to 29 this year.

The best showing for the Philippines for this event was in 1992 when it took the title that it later forfeited in favor of Long Beach, California after Zamboanga City was found playing with ineligible players (out of area and out of age).

This year, the Philippines represented the Asian Pacific Region in the boys Big League Baseball World Series held in Easley, South Carolina from July 28 to Aug. 4. But they performed poorly, winning only one out of four games, in the tournament captured by Puerto Rico.

In the case of the girls, the Philippine team represented by the City of Manila was this year's representatives for the Asian Pacific at the Big League Softball World Series in

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Kalamazoo

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Michigan
from Aug. 5 to 11.

After losing its first two games, the lasses from Manila roared back, winning six games in row, qualifying for the championship round with the U.S. Central champions, represented by District 9 of Grand Rapids, Michigan, which lost only one game during the nine-team, one-round robin tournament.

OVERCOMING JETLAG & FATIGUE

When they lost their first two games, the Philippines' excuse was jetlag and fatigue of the flight. But when it bounced back and won all its six successive games, it was believed its players were able to recover beautifully as the days and the games went on, becoming the highest scoring team during the tournament.

But during the championship game televised live on ESPN3.com, the suddenly highly regarded Philippine team appeared to lose its bearings when its ace pitcher, Julie Muyco, winner of five in row, gave up six runs, prompting Philippine coach Randy Daizer to replace her with right fielder Veronica Belleza in the first inning.

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The Filipino players actually forgot their defense and the fundamentals of running and catching the ball and for Muyco not rushing to the home plate as back up when the catcher was away from the base.

Despite the deficit, Daizer assured the ESPN3 TV play-by-play announcer that his girls can still rally. "We will comeback. They have adjusted. We can do it," Daizer said. It was nearly a self-fulfilling prophesy when third base man Elvie Entrina of the Philippine team, one out away from elimination, singled, driving two runs, including designated hitter Erica Escanuela, keeping the Philippines in the game. Then, left fielder Melanie Macatangay singled home short stop Marlyn Francisco, who scored from the first base, to stage a mini-comeback by putting the Philippines on the board with four runs at the end of the fifth inning and trailing 4-10.

MERCY RULE AT WORK

But in the sixth inning, Central piled up four more runs, capped by a two-run walk-off homerun by catcher Liz Hamming, 14-4, as the hosts celebrated their victory. The umpire stopped the game based on the 10-run mercy rule that if a team scores 10 or more runs after the fifth inning, the game ends.

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It was the second time that a Philippine team missed the title. In 2008, the Philippine contingent was leading by 1-0, in the extra ninth inning, when the same Central team scored a walk-off homerun with a man on base, tallying 2-1 and snatching the title from the Filipinos.

Under the rules of the Big League Softball World Series, the nine teams go on a round-robin in a seven-inning game and the ages of the players for this year should range from 14-19 (cannot turn 19 before Jan. 1, 2010) and the conventional field size is 200 feet all around.

During their self-introductions, most Filipino players chose Seattle Mariner right fielder Ichiro Suzuki as their role model. DH Erica Escanuela, however, wants to meet in person during the trip – a non-sports personality – Oprah Winfrey.

Aside from coming to America and meeting new friends and winning college scholarships, the only other motivation for the player to join this summer fest is to bring honor to their country. # #
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