

Goldenstein's USA team is runner-up at Latin American Classic

Written by Chris Lee

HHS sophomore Jaydin Goldenstein became a big part of the USA 15 and under baseball team and helped them capture runner-up honors at the Latin American Baseball Classic.

“It was fun, I liked it,” Goldenstein said. He spent Aug. 2-9 in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic playing baseball and getting a close look at how other kids in the world live.

Goldenstein’s 15 and under team went 4-2 throughout the tournament and finished in second place after a 1-7 loss against La Javilla. Goldenstein played all but two innings throughout the six games. The 15 and under team finished higher than the other three USA teams.

One of the big things Jaydin, his dad Clint and HHS baseball coach Kyle Bules, brought back from the trip is a sense of knowing how much better off they have it here.

Kids of all ages bombarded members of the USA teams asking for gloves, bats, shirts, jerseys, shoes and anything else relating to baseball. Jaydin said he ended up giving one of his shirts away on the last day.

“I felt bad for most of the kids there because they’re so poor,” he said. “Most kids here get a glove when they turn 5. Kids there are begging and working for gloves. It made me feel pretty lucky.”

Goldenstein said the little kids knew how to say, “My friend, my friend, bat please.”

Goldenstein said he met one kid whose family is so poor they could only afford baseball gear for one kid. So his parents picked him to play ball and his siblings were forced to work for the family.

Goldenstein said the kids also really enjoyed the candy they gave them. Clint said while on an ATV ride, Bules’ wife Tanisha, bought a bag of candy and handed it out to people.

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Clint mentioned Bules took a leather repair kit with him and noticed a kid on an opposing team with some glove trouble. Bules gave him the necessary pieces to fix his glove and Clint said it made the kid's day. "It was like he gave him a new glove."

Goldenstein also met some kids who knew Ubaldo Jiménez of the Colorado Rockies before he came to the United States. Jiménez is from the Dominican Republic.

He said he met numerous kids who have already signed with major league teams as well. Goldenstein also said some of the 16 and older teams lost kids days before the tournament because they had signed with teams and were unable to play in the tournament.

The tournament was held at major league fields where kids go to school and play baseball. Kids get drafted to attend these schools where they study and play. They study English and math in the morning and then play baseball the rest of the day. Clint said they learn math so if they do get signed by a team they will have some idea of what to do with their money.

A big difference in the type of ball played there was the overall atmosphere. Jaydin said they aren't quite as technical there. He even mentioned the umpires got confused on the count a couple of times.

Clint said on the final day, the championship was played at a different field. It was a little complex where there were multiple fields and there were two games going on before the championship game began. Clint said kids as young as 8 were playing and turning double plays during these games.

The big difference was that there weren't any umpires. Kids organize their own games and choose an umpire from within the teams who stands by the pitcher's mound and acts as an umpire. "There was no arguing or parents yelling," Clint said.

Jaydin was the only player from Colorado on the team. Most, if not all, of the players were from Washington and Alaska, according to Clint. Jaydin got the opportunity to play after attending a tryout in Washington in February.

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HHS baseball coach Kyle Bules has a nephew who played on the same team and when he heard of an opening he thought of Jaydin.

Jaydin had a tryout with Jim Parque who was a major league pitcher for the Chicago White Sox among other teams.

Between the four age groups, over 80 games were played throughout the four days, according to Jaydin. In addition to the 15 and under team, there were 12, 14 and 16 and under teams.

Teams played seven innings in each of the games except the championship where they only played five. Jaydin said everyone was pretty tired and the heat got to be a factor come the final day. Jaydin said he was dumping water over his head and everyone was drinking large amounts of water.

There was one point where his teammates were dunking rags and towels into the water to cool themselves off. Jaydin said the water got to be pretty dirty but they were still drinking it anyway.

At the end of the tournament, Goldenstein was recognized as the most improved player on his team. Clint said at the time of his tryout in February, Jaydin had come off an injury and hadn't even really picked up a glove or bat. With all of the ball he played earlier in the school year and this summer, his skills came back to him and he really shined.

One of the statistics Clint pointed out was that Jaydin didn't have any errors throughout the entire tournament. This was one of Jaydin's goals heading into the tournament. He played four different positions including second and third base, catcher and pitcher.

The first game of the tournament was called due to "torrential rain," Clint said. Jaydin started at second base.

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He began the next game at second base against Natera Thursday, Aug. 5. USA had a dominating 19-2 victory. Jaydin got the scoring started in the top of the third inning when he got on with a base on balls. He advanced to second on a walk and then stole third and home to score the first run of the game.

He would go on to score two more runs for the team after being walked once and hit by a pitch twice. He finished the game with an .800 on base percentage, a stat both he and his dad were proud of.

The next game put USA up against Idlewid, the team they were playing when rain forced the game to be called a day earlier. USA took another commanding win, 11-1.

Goldenstein started at third base and batted in the eighth position. He struck out twice and had a single to right field.

USA came away with a slim 8-6 victory over Wolverines Friday, Aug. 6. Goldenstein started at second base and played there until the final inning when he was called upon to pitch.

He faced three batters and pitched for a pop up, strike out and grounder on 15 pitches to seal the win.

The team's first loss came against the same team they would face in the championship, La Javilla. They fell 13-15. Jaydin started behind the plate as catcher. He was then moved to pitcher in the fifth inning and came out of the game in the sixth.

In the semifinal game Goldenstein's team played the Wolverines again and beat them 11-2.

Jaydin started the championship game as the pitcher. He pitched his way through the first three innings without giving up a run. He even had the bases loaded in the third before getting out of the jam.

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He gave up two earned runs in the fourth inning before moving to third base in the fifth.

USA lost 1-7 as Jaydin finished with two earned runs and five strikeouts. "He did a good job," Bules said. "Nobody on the USA team produced very well that day on offense."

With a nephew also playing on Jaydin's team, Bules had the chance to watch two players he knew play in a completely different setting.

Jaydin said after some of the games, kids from the team they had just beaten, came over and hung out behind their dugout. "They just wanted to be with us," he added. "It was pretty cool. They all wished they were with the USA."

Infrastructure is different

Trash was everywhere according to both Jaydin and Clint. They also said dogs were walking around everywhere. "There were some areas where it was littered with broken down cars and mounds of trash," Clint said.

Clint also noticed those not in the upper class drove motorcycles or used public transportation. He noticed a lot of chop/part shops where engine parts were hanging from the ceilings. These "hole-in-the-wall" stores were a frequent thing throughout the city.

Another aspect of transportation included the roads. Numerous potholes caused many flat tires and Clint said you would see multiple vehicles pulled over to the side of the road fixing tires. Jaydin also said he saw a manhole without a cover and someone had stuck a tree limb in it to mark the hole.

Sightseeing opportunities

Clint and Jaydin said they got to see where Christopher Columbus is buried at the cathedral in Santo Domingo.

Another cool thing was the underground caves at Cueva de los Tres Ojos which translates into Three Eyes Cave. This was a spectacular place, according to both Clint and Jaydin.

Clint also went on an ATV ride with Kyle and Tanisha Bules through a small community and sugar cane fields. "That was amazing to go through that and see the little kids out in sugar cane fields," Bules said. He noted kids were everywhere trying to sell them different things.

Towards the end of the trip Clint went with one of the physicians that traveled with the team to help him donate the rest of his medical supplies to a Red Cross chapter in a town about 30 miles from Santo Domingo.

Clint said there was one ambulance at this place and it hadn't worked for six months. They then went to the fire department where there was only one fire truck and 16 fire fighters.

There was a problem however. The fire truck wasn't there because the chassis had broken in half and had been sent off to get welded. To keep the pump safe, they took it off the truck and hung it at the station.

He also noted there were only four sets of bunker gear and much of it was mismatched stuff. This was an eye-opening experience, according to Clint.

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Although it was an amazing experience, Jaydin isn't 100 percent sure if he would go back. He has an opportunity to go and play next year but said the price of the trip may hold him back.

He did mention he would take more things to give away to the kids if he went back. He does plan to send some baseball gear to some of the kids he met.

Goldenstein wants to thank all of the people who made his trip possible. If not for those people he said the once-in-a-lifetime trip wouldn't have been possible.

Some of the kids added Jaydin as a friend on Facebook when he got back home, he said. He plans to keep in touch with both his teammates and some of those he met while at the tournament.