

Kia ora koutou,

Going into today the JWS were in the top 12 after 2 rounds of championship play. This means that of the original 24 teams, 8 did not advance and went to a consolation round, and 16 advanced to the championship round. Of the 16, after round one of championship play a further 4 were retired leaving the top 12. At this time the JWS were in this category. The first round today was sudden death, with a further 4 teams to be ousted, leaving the top 8.

The first game was against the Washington Devils at 8am. They were a tidy team with some good hitters, but we were better. We got on top of their pitchers out hitting them and defensively took some amazing outs and looked like a champion team. The final score was a victory 4 to 1. This retired the Devils and they looked defeated whilst we were elated and our championship hopes were alive. We rushed back to the hotel to get some lunch into the players, re-group then get back to the park for the next sudden death game.

The game was vs. the Arkansas Phenix at 1pm. I said to their coach at the coin toss that I had never met anyone from Arkansas before and he replied that he had never met anyone from NZ before. What I really wanted to ask him was whether their uniform suppliers had made an error and not put in the "o" as in Phoenix, but I thought that might be considered rude, and I did not want to cause an international incident after all. So it looks like I will never know if there is such a thing as a Phenix??

The Phenix were a well drilled well disciplined all blonde team (that looked like cheerleaders with sparkly hairbands) from middle America. They swung the bat like their lives depended on it and as a result hit the ball really hard. Our field got a hammering, and despite some solid fielding, a couple of errors crept in. Our hitting however let us down and their field supported the pitcher as there were very few strike outs with almost all out's being pop fly's or ground outs. We kept fighting until the final inning but lost 0 to 4.

With that, the JWS finish 7th or 8th (final standings have not yet been released), and bow out of the competition. It is always a solemn occasion when this happens. Its a time when players (and coaches) run through the "what if's" and there is some soul searching. The gloss has gone off the tour and a bout of homesickness hits. Watching the Junior Black Sox beat Argentina to secure a place in the final was a pleasant distraction tonight. And as they have been on a rather strict meal plan for the entire time, I brought pizza at around 9pm as a treat. The players are tired, but ok and are now looking forward to going home.

Tomorrow we will do a bit of shopping, will watch the championship final, then go out for a final dinner together. Then its Monday and its packing for the journey home.

In summary we played 13 games ( 4 exhibition, 5 pool play and 4 championship games), won 7, lost 6, scored 67 runs and gave up 50 runs. We tested 15 players against some of the best U18 Gold softball teams in North America and as a team competed well, finishing in the top 8. The players came together as a team and came to grips with our haka performing it with pride.

One final word regarding what an amazing tournament this is. The hosts were incredible supplying transportation for us in large SUVs driven by a bunch of passionate retired drivers who love to chat. Everyone was so very friendly and our host family / liaison person Di is incredible. I am looking forward to coming back to Vancouver sometime somehow.

Time to sign off for the last time, thanks for all your messages and support from home.

Mihinui kia koutou,

Aroha Metcalf

Team Manager

NZ Junior White Sox at the Future Gold, Canada Fastpitch Championship (the Canada Cup).