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Bandits to replace Cat at tourneys

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World Baseball Village LLC announced a new partnership Friday for this summer's youth softball tournaments at Hall of Fame Fields.

The softball village will bring players from the Chicago Bandits professional softball team to headline its stay-and-play tournaments at the complex, which is a public-private partnership between WBV and the City of Bellevue.

Tim Law, director of the complex, said he's had positive feedback about the announcement. He said the Chicago Bandits Champions Village tournaments will replace the Cat Osterman Experience tournaments that initially anchored the Hall of Fame Fields complex.

The Bandits are the defending National Pro Fastpitch World Champions. The team includes big-name players like Monica Abbott, the most valuable player in the 2011 NPF championship.

Bandits General Manager Aaron Moore said in a press release that his organization was impressed with the Hall of Fame Fields complex while playing there against the Akron Racers in 2010.

"Teams from across the USA and the world will play in these events," Moore said. "We feel it is a unique opportunity to give back and foster the upcoming champions of the future, as well as grow the Chicago Bandits brand at the grass roots level."

At least two members of the Bandits will attend the first two days of each scheduled weekly tournament, Moore said in the release. The players will sign autographs, pose for photos and participate in opening ceremonies and skills competitions.

Law said the Bandits will host small instructional clinics, allowing players at the tournaments to learn new skills that they can then practice during that week's competition.

This year's tournaments are scheduled for 16 and under players on July 2-7, 14 and under on July 9-14 and 12 and under on July 16-21. Included with each stay-and-play tournament are seven sanctioned softball games, five nights of lodging, 13 meals and nightly activities.

Hall of Fame Fields will also host three Omaha Champions Village baseball tournaments, which will coincide with the College World Series in Omaha. Those are scheduled for 11 and under and 10 and under on June 11-16, 12 and under on June 17-22 and again on June 23-28.

Law said signups for the summer tournaments have started to improve, and he said WBV will launch a marketing campaign soon. The complex hopes to sign up 160 teams between the six weeks of games.

The complex is also planning to launch a girls' fastpitch softball league in conjunction with Great Plains Sports Productions LLC this spring. The seven-week leagues will run April 16 through June 1, with the final week featuring a league championship tournament.

"We'll have teams down there at the complex Monday through Thursday," Law said. "We're still going to run our weekend tournaments down there, too."

Teams will participate in 13 to 16 games, depending on how they do in the championship. The league will offer three levels of competition, as well as a high school division, with different leagues for ages 10 and under, 12 and under, 14 and under, 16 and under and 18 and under.

More information on the spring league can be found at www.usssane.com. More information on the summer tournaments can be found at www.hofffields.com or www.omahaball.com.