

Junior White Sox ready for Oklahoma

The New Zealand Junior White Sox will depart Auckland tonight, beginning their U19 World Championship campaign.

The team will fly to Los Angeles where they will play 10 build up games over five days in preparation for the world championships in Oklahoma City.

Head coach, Kevin Gettins, feels as though the team has prepared well. "We have worked with regional coaching setups with people in Christchurch, Wellington, Hawkes Bay, Waikato and Auckland. We have been very fortunate to have people in these locations willing to help", says Gettins.

"In addition to this we have had Kevin Henderson working with the pitchers and have also placed a strong focus on fitness building up for the tournament. The weather will be very hot in Oklahoma City so fitness will be important for us to compete."

As for the build up games in California, Gettins stresses that results are not the focus but rather preparing the players for tougher competition. "The warm up games are very much about getting everybody game time, working on combinations, understanding game plans, learning signals and working on all the basic elements of softball."

The Junior White Sox have had much success in recent years, they placed 6th in 2011 and 4th at the 2013 tournament behind Japan, USA and Australia. Gettins states that the current team are younger and less experienced. "The players coming through now, taking age into account, are not as game savvy as previous teams. This is an observation, not a criticism."

"I put this down to the fact that there is a small player base in New Zealand, meaning that players get elevated through the system quickly and without spending the time to learn and understand the game to a level that is required to compete higher up", says Gettins.

There is no doubt it is a young side, with seven athletes eligible for the 2017 world championships. Gettins feels as though each Junior White Sox team is slightly different, which makes them difficult to compare but that every team has the same goal.

"Our first goal is always making it through to the top 8 but we must finish top 2 in our pool to do so. Once you get through pool play the tournament effectively starts again."

It will not be an easy ride for the team, as they find themselves in a challenging pool alongside Canada, Chinese Taipei and Venezuela. "If we want to succeed our team dynamics need to be focused on aggressive play, urgency and playing the game with intensity", says Gettins.

"As New Zealanders we are a little laid back at times and this hurts us when we compete against the higher ranked teams who play with all those attributes all of the time."

The 2015 U19 World Championship will be held 9 August – 15 August. New Zealand will face Canada in their opening game.