

Local youths to go on a baseball mission to Cuba this summer

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Youth Futures International will partner with Boston nonprofit The Base to create “Building Bridges through Baseball,” an international program that will send a baseball team to Cuba this summer with the hope of fostering leadership and diplomacy.

Youth Futures International announced the joint partnership Tuesday, and the inaugural Building Bridges through Baseball will begin Aug. 20, when youngsters will spend 10 days in Cuba completing a variety of leadership and baseball activities. YFI founder and executive director David Butler hopes to create a lasting partnership between the two nonprofits.

“The future is about having long-term relationships,” said Butler. “Long-term is always the goal because of the impact we know can make [rather] than just doing a one-time program.

“I feel real synergy with Robert Lewis Jr. [president of The Base] as we hope we can partner more throughout the year in volunteering in different levels.”

The joint partnership was spearheaded by former Red Sox and Phillies relief pitcher Wayne Gomes, who was coached by Butler in 1982 when he was a

military dependent on an Air Force base in Germany. Gomes and Butler reunited last summer with the goal of creating an international baseball program.

“Putting two organizations that are so like-minded can only benefit the kids in masses,” said Gomes. “Both programs have grown and I have no doubt they will continue to grow together and the effect will be changing lives in the community.”

Gomes is one of seven former major leaguers who will be coaching with the organizations this summer.

“The major league baseball players provide not only experience from [a] baseball standpoint and instruction they can’t get anywhere else, but they also provide the opportunity to share life lessons,” said Gomes. I [wanted] our coaching staff to be diverse, familiar with working with kids, and having the ability to teach the game like I know it can be taught.”

YFI has created partnerships with England and Ghana, but the partnership with Cuba poses some difficulty because of the United States’ less-than-cordial relationship with the island nation over the years.

“Through sports, our program hopes to generate a positive response with our youth coming together with youth from other nations, whether we’ve had great relations with other countries or not,” said Butler. “Students want to be a part of making a difference positively, and we have safe conduits like baseball and soccer that help create a ripple effect.

“We want them to know they can make a difference now versus just waiting for the problem to be solved.

“Each and every youth, no matter where they come from, can bring relevance, credibility, and value to our global story.”

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