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On the side

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NC graduate in Taiwan to coach Olympic team

Indianapolis-based SoftballOne Inc. and ASA Team Indiana founder Cara Johnson-Hirsch, a North Central High School graduate, has been hired by the Chinese Taipei Olympic softball team as a batting specialist.

Johnson-Hirsch will be in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, until March 11 to train Olympic players in offensive strategies and techniques.

The 2008 Olympics may be the last year that softball is played unless the International Olympic Committee overturns its 2005 ruling to drop baseball and softball from the Summer Games after the Beijing Games. Among its reasons, the IOC cited baseball's failure to submit to the World Anti-Doping Agency's code and drug-testing procedures.

Politics also poses a complication for the Taiwanese team. The team must call itself the Chinese Taipei team instead of the Taiwan Olympic team because of a dispute with China. Taiwan broke away from China after World War II, and China is still trying to get the island back under its rule. If Taiwan beats China in softball, the win could cause political turmoil.

In addition, Johnson-Hirsch will be in Taiwan during a time of political uncertainty. Presidential elections are set for March 22, and incumbent President Chen Shui-bian cannot seek re-election because of term limits. Johnson-Hirsch will be blogging and taking photos of her time training the Olympic team in Taiwan. Her blog can be found at www.softballone.com/blog

Submitted by Leslie Wiser of SoftballOne Inc.