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For Immediate release

Some of Australia's best female softball players will have the opportunity of a lifetime when they join the Chicago Bandits to play professionally in the USA this year.

Softball Australia today announced one of the most pivotal agreements in women's softball history, signing a Memorandum of Understanding with National Pro Fastpitch (NPF) in the USA for the 2017 season and beyond.

After months of negotiation between Softball Australia CEO Chet Gray and NPF Commissioner Cheri Kempf, today's announcement is another step forward for Australia's future success in international competition and the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games.

The agreement will allow for eight Australian athletes to experience the daily training environment and play for the Bandits in one of the best softball competitions in the world.

The Chicago Bandits play home games at the impressive Ballpark at Rosemont, the only stadium in the USA built for a women's professional sports team. They have been NPF champions four times, including the past two seasons.

"This partnership between Softball Australia and National Pro Fastpitch is critical step forward for our women's high-performance program looking towards the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games," Gray said.

"Our program needs to focus firstly on improving our performance from the 2016 World Championship and then on qualifying for the Olympic Games.

"This agreement with the Chicago Bandits and NPF will ensure that many of our identified athletes have a chance to participate as a team together in one of the best competitions in the world."

In 2016, Aussie Spirit players Vanessa Stokes, Stacey Porter, Chelsea Forkin and Taylah Tsitsikronis played in the NPF. The experience proved invaluable to those players in the lead-up to the Softball World Championship.





With at least eight total players to join the league this year, it means most of the Aussie Spirit squad will be getting high-level professional competition and daily training under the guidance of expert coaches in the lead-up to the 2018 World Championship and any subsequent Olympic qualifying events.

NPF Commissioner Cheri Kempf said the league wanted to include more international players to ensure it could showcase the best available softball talent, and to help develop the game globally.

“It is a conscious strategy of the league to integrate more international players and continue to have a positive effect on the global development of the game of softball,” Kempf said.

“Being able to include Australian players on a much larger scale in the NPF in 2017 is a win for our sport.”

Chicago Bandits General Manager Toni Calmeyn said: “The Village of Rosemont and the Chicago Bandits are thrilled to have an opportunity to work with Softball Australia in an effort to continue to elevate the sport of women’s softball. We are looking forward to a great season!”

National Pro Fastpitch is a five-team league that takes place June through August in the United States. The league features the very best talent including all active US former Olympians, NCAA National Champions and Women’s College World Series’ MVPs, and NCAA Softball’s most decorated athletes both nationally and through individual conference affiliations.

Since 2005, the Chicago Bandits have been members of the NPF league. The Bandits provide an opportunity for female fastpitch players to further their careers at a professional level, and the roster has included such names as Jennie Finch, Stacy May-Johnson, Monica Abbott and Tammy Williams. The 2017 season will be the Bandits 13th season in the NPF.

About National Pro Fastpitch

National Pro Fastpitch (NPF), an Official Development Partner of Major League Baseball since 2002, provides elite female athletes with an opportunity to pursue a professional career in diamond sports beyond their collegiate success.





In 2017 NPF regular season action, 120 games are scheduled leading up the Championship Series, held in mid-August.

The NPF's five affiliate teams include the Akron Racers, Chicago Bandits, Scrap Yard Dawgs, Texas Charge and USSSA Florida Pride for the 2017 season.

National Pro Fastpitch players hail from the US, Australia, Canada, Japan, the Netherlands and New Zealand, representing the most accomplished and talented athletes in the sport of women's softball.

The season will kick off June 1 when the Akron Racers and Chicago Bandits match-up for a three-game series at The Ballpark at Rosemont. Regular season action will conclude August 13, with the top four finishers moving onto the Championship Series.

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