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## Russians leave Fort Myers happy

### Two-week visit hosted by FMA Little League

*By Tim Ritter*

*tritter@news-press.com*

From a distance, it might have seemed like any other Saturday at the Sam Fleishman Regional Sports Complex.

Players sat in their colorful jerseys, well-worn baseball caps and grass-stained pants after a game, chowing down on hamburgers and hot dogs.

It was only on closer inspection that the most striking difference appeared: Everyone was speaking in Russian.

"Big houses, beautiful trees, monuments," said Nikita Balashiha, 12, in broken English, then shook his head. "Very hot."

This weekend brought to a close a hectic two weeks packed to the brim with theme park trips, special events and, of course, baseball, as Fort Myers American Little League welcomed back the Russian national youth team for the first time in eight years.

"Busch Gardens was probably the most significant thing," said Donny Overholser, the president of Fort Myers American who for the third time helped coordinate a Russian visit to Fort Myers. "They don't have anything like that."

"You'd be sitting on the bench, and a group of them would run by at 90 miles per hour to the next ride, just having the time of their life."

While days were spent visiting theme parks, scuba diving and touring pirate ships, the nights were spent at the ballpark battling Fort Myers American and other local teams.

The results? About 50/50, by most players' estimates.

"They were pretty good," said Zachary Chappell, a 14-year-old pitcher and shortstop for Fort Myers American. "A lot better than what I thought they'd be."

Saturday, after the last game ended, players on both sides traded everything - jerseys, hats, equipment, key chains and more.

"Their faces lit up when they got all the stuff we gave them," said FMA pitcher Jonathan White, 14.

Then goodbyes were said, but the break won't be long. Already in the works are a visit from the Russian youth softball team in January and a few basketball teams in the spring.

And then, in August, Fort Myers American will make its trip to Moscow to resume the budding cross-Atlantic baseball rivalry.

"I think it'll be crazy," Zachary said. "I hope it's during school."

