

# Is Baseball a Global Sport? America's 'National Pastime' as Global Field and International Sport

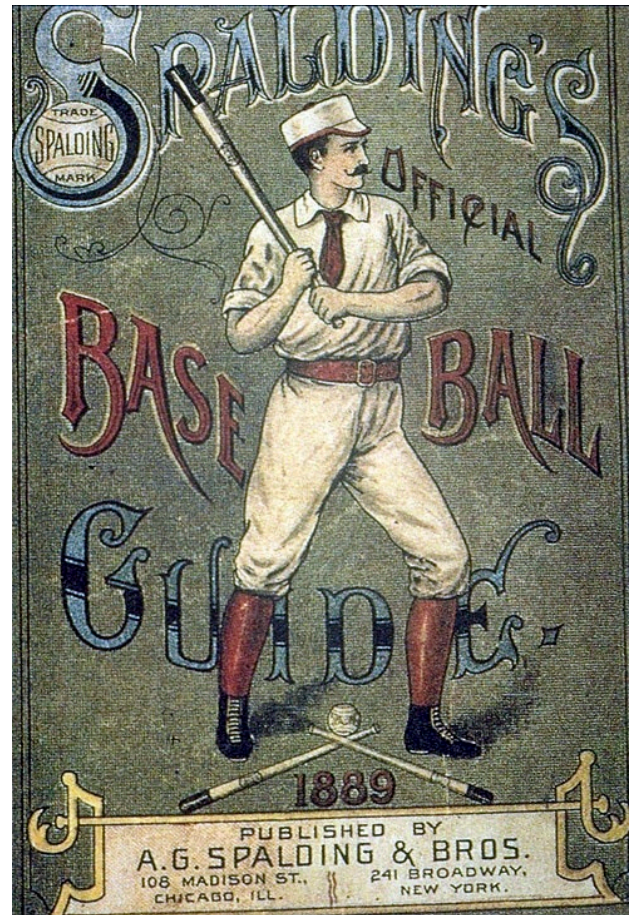
William W. Kelly

## Is Baseball a Global Sport? America's "National Pastime" as Global Field and International Sport

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*I claim that Base Ball owes its prestige as our National Game to the fact that as no other form of sport it is the exponent of American Courage, Confidence, Combateness; American Dash, Discipline, Determination; American Energy, Eagerness, Enthusiasm; American Pluck, Persistency, Performance; American Spirit, Sagacity, Success; American Vim, Vigor, Virility.*

*Base Ball is the American Game par excellence because its playing demands Brain and Brawn, and American manhood supplies these ingredients in quantity sufficient to spread over the entire continent. (Albert Spalding 1911:12)*



Front cover of Spalding's Official Base Ball Guide (1889)

Sports have long been a powerful connective tissue of modern life on imperial, international, and global scales. Soccer, cricket, and baseball were at the core of a myriad of organized sports and physical leisure activities that were formalized in the nineteenth century and spread quickly from the West to the Rest. From the second half of that century, they traveled the colonial, military, and mercantile circuits of the world as organizational complexes of skills,

rules, equipment, and players, creating a global sportscape of local followings, national pastimes, and international rivalries. What happened when they arrived in locations around the world has produced a fascinating, rich literature about the dynamics of domestication that often these days goes under the catch-all notion of "glocalization." The term captures the sense that local appropriation is seldom simply assimilating and imitating. Rather it is generally a process of indigenization—of appropriating the foreign objects and practices by re-contextualizing them into local matrices of meaning and value.

However, the differences in the world histories of the three sports are as significant as their commonalities, and in this article I begin from some of the distinctive features of baseball's development in the U.S. and its move through the Caribbean and the western Pacific regions, with special reference to Japan.



**Japanese boys and girls playing baseball in the early 1950's. Source: National Geographic [date unknown]**

Unlike soccer and cricket (and American football), baseball in the U.S. developed wholly outside of elite schools, and perhaps for that reason was fully commercialized and professionalized much earlier than soccer and cricket. The professional game was never antagonistic to amateur or school forms of the sport, no doubt because baseball as sport never had very strong ideological associations with a personal "character" ethic. And at least by the 1860s, baseball was already explicitly "nationalized" as the American pastime, and in that image it was emulated and resisted in the locations in which it took root. There has been a transnational world of baseball for almost a century and a half, from the 1860s, and over time this has linked several circuits of the game



within the U.S. (including Major League Baseball or MLB, the Negro Leagues, and various minor league systems), across the Caribbean and Central America (especially the Cuban, Dominican Republic, and Mexican leagues), and through East Asia (especially Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea).



**Dominican boy playing baseball. Source: National Geographic [date unknown]**

Because of these and other related factors, baseball, however, has never developed the global character of soccer. Despite Albert Spalding's tireless proselytizing, it is not even the equal of cricket, which became a fully Commonwealth sport with an international competitive balance that disrupted (and de-classed) early English dominance. In the sportscape of world baseball, the U.S. professional association (MLB) has always remained the dominant center, and this has significantly determined (and distorted) the

sport's local histories, its regional forms, and its cross-national linkages. Baseball is, as my subtitle suggests, a sport regarded as the national pastime of several countries in the Americas and Asia that are linked internationally and transnationally, but whose domestic games are far more important than international competition.

The year 2006 illustrated the contrast between soccer and baseball quite instructively. The 18th FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) World Cup final pool and championship rounds in Germany, after two years of qualifying by its 207 member national federations, demonstrated once again that soccer is the only truly global team sport (just as track and field, under the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), is our only really global individual sport). This is true in several senses. There was extensive participation and spectatorship across the North-South divide. FIFA itself exercises powerful supra-national governance in establishing standards and adjudicating disputes. This was a genuinely open world championship competition. There are now in professional soccer generally only limited controls on transnational player movements. And there was relatively open competitive bidding for media rights and extensive coverage.

Of course, one may point out that traditional powerhouse teams from Europe and South America dominated the championship rounds, that FIFA is a crony-ridden headquarters pursuing narrow self-interest, that financial clout has replaced legal restrictions in controlling soccer labor movement, and that only a few powerful multinational corporations are able to secure primary commercial sponsorship and media rights. Nonetheless, for at least half century since the 1950 tournament, the FIFA World Cup has been one of the few titles deserving of its name, and FIFA itself can rightly claim to be in the

vanguard of supranational sports governance.

The global scale and transnational nature of soccer stood out starkly against the events of three months earlier, in March of 2006. For 17 days, the first “World Baseball Classic” was held in several venues among 16 national teams, grouped into 4 first-round pools. But it was less the scale of participation than the U.S. hegemony of organizational power that revealed world baseball’s skewed landscape. Four of the 7 tournament venues were on the U.S. mainland, and 2 were in Puerto Rico; only the Asian first round pool was played beyond the American flag in Tokyo. The WBC was organized by U.S. Major League Baseball (MLB) and the MLB Players’ Association, which reserved for themselves a major share of the proceeds. The Classic had been delayed a year over objections by the Commissioner’s Office of Japanese professional baseball (NPB for Nippon Professional Baseball) precisely because NPB felt that the scheduling, logistics, rules, and finances of the event had been established by and for MLB. And the Classic was threatened with cancellation in the winter of 2005 over the U.S. government’s unwillingness to grant visas to members of the Cuban national team.

Of course, in this case too, there are factors that some feel mitigate a simple conclusion that U.S. domination has kept baseball as a parochial sport. It was not lost on many who followed the tournament that Japan and Cuba, the two teams that met in the single-game championship, are the two nations with the most vibrant and autonomous baseball cultures. The U.S. national team advanced to Round 2 but after winning a close game with Japan that was decided by a controversial call by an American umpire, it was routed by Korea and closed out by Mexico and was relegated to spectatorship (and sponsorship!).

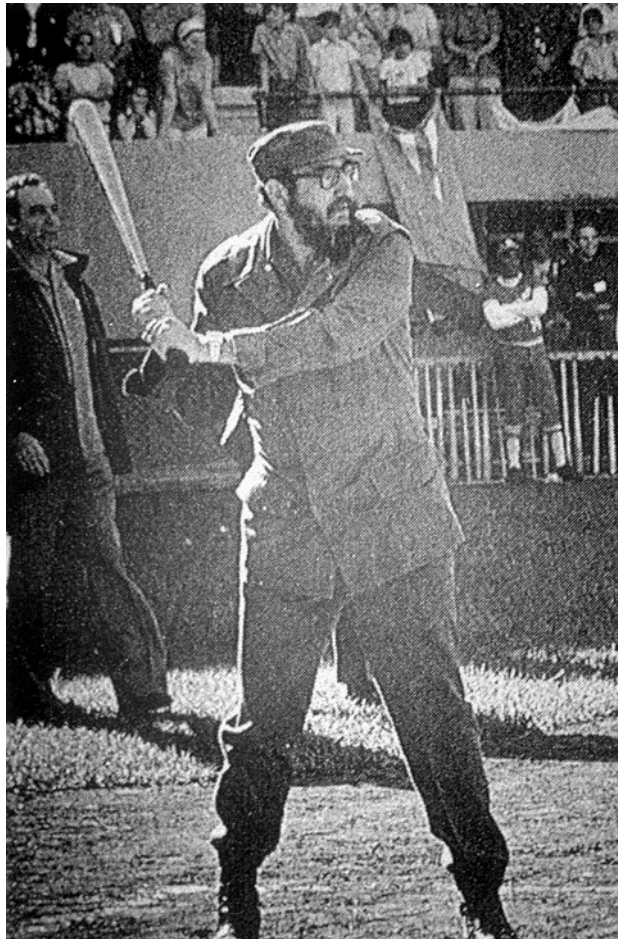


**OH Sadaharu, manager of the Japan national team, being tossed by his players upon winning the championship game of the World Baseball Classic, March, 2006**

And we may also note that this World Baseball Classic was not the beginning of broad international competition but more precisely an effort by MLB to graft itself on to longstanding and multi-level international baseball organizations and competitions. Though little known, there has been a Baseball World Cup since 1938—the first was held in England with only two teams, from Great Britain and the U.S., and was a five-game series won by Britain (thus, England participated in and won a baseball World Cup before joining the soccer World Cup!). The organization that has evolved into the International Baseball Federation (IBAF) was formed that year to promote these competitions. With 112 national member units, it now administers several levels of world championship tournaments, including youth, junior, university, and “intercontinental”; a Women’s Baseball World Cup has been held



twice from 2004. The Baseball World Cup itself has been held 35 times since 1938, with Cuba winning the last nine titles (and 25 of 36 overall, despite not participating several times for political reasons).



### **Cuban president Fidel Castro at bat during the 1960s**

Baseball has an Olympic history as well, being played as an exhibition sport first in 1912 and again in 1936 in Berlin before 125,000 spectators at the Olympic Stadium, still the largest crowd ever to watch a baseball game. It was a demonstration sport in the 1984 and 1988 Games before gaining official designation in 1992. To associate itself even more directly with the Olympic movement, the IBAF moved its headquarters to Lausanne in 1993.

But a litany of amateur and professional international competitions and a growing

global audience for MLB satellite broadcasts do not make a global sport. Most important baseball scholars talk about baseball “globalization,” but hesitate to label it a global sport. Peter Bjarkman’s valuable *Diamonds Around the Globe: The Encyclopedia of World Baseball* (2005) profiles the distinct but intertwined histories of the sport in a dozen or so countries that together characterize what he most frequently terms “international baseball.” Alan Klein’s new book (2006) details “the globalization of major league baseball,” by which he means international sources of players and an aggressive marketing of MLB games and products to foreign markets. And at the end of his new edited collection, *Baseball Without Borders: The International Pastime* (2006), George Gmelch asks “is baseball really global?” and while he tries hard to answer the question affirmatively, he too concludes by emphasizing the diversification of US professional baseball.

Their caution is appropriate. Baseball is a significant international sport, with rich and well-documented autonomous histories in several countries. It is also a transnational sport because, among these national spheres, organizational templates, players, techniques and strategies, and spectatorships have continuously circulated. But it is not a global sport as measured by what sociologists Richard Giulianotti and Roland Robertson have astutely identified as globalization’s core process: that it “relativizes all particularisms” (2004: 547). There is a single center to the baseball world, and it is in New York at the MLB Commissioner’s Office, not in Lausanne. Baseball has many local vernaculars of a single dominant language, and that is the dominant language of U.S. baseball. Throughout its history, US professional baseball has successfully subordinated all challenges to its popularity and profitability (at least from within the sport itself). This happened early on, when Albert Spalding and the National League engineered the collapse of a rival Player’s

League in 1889; then when the National League absorbed a second rival American Association several years later and finally forced a *détente* with the American League to form Major League Baseball in the early 20th century; and through the mid-20th century when it turned back a renegade Mexican league (Klein 1997), undermined the Negro Leagues with its own integration, embraced Caribbean players, made a labor peace with its own players' union, and forced an agreement with the Japanese professional leagues that has created a posting system to facilitate the MLB signing of Japanese stars.

Even at the amateur level, the IBAF remains a minor world federation whose championships have been overshadowed and undermined for fifty years by the binational politics (which is to say, the continuing Baseball Cold War) between Cuba and the U.S. The world's highest profile amateur competition is actually the Little League World Series, carefully managed by "Little League International," the decidedly American organization that also puts on seven other similar "world series" championships of youth baseball and softball. The current format of dividing teams into the United States Bracket and the International Bracket insures that an American team will reach the finals and is symptomatic of uneven terrain of power in the baseball world, which at all levels tilts towards the United States.

In all of this, precisely what has not happened has been a relativizing of the particular shaping force of MLB baseball, to recall Giulianotti and Robertson's standard. Their measure, applied to sport, does not to reduce globality to relative strength (does the MLB always win?) or geographical dispersion (in how many countries are MLB broadcasts popular?). It draws attention, more significantly, to patterns of governance, vectors of player movement, and flows of media attention and sports capital. In baseball, the center still holds.

## Baseball, besuboru, and beisbol

Why is this so? Baseball's emergence as an organized sport and its diffusion beyond the U.S. began even earlier than the English sports of soccer and rugby (cricket's spread predated all three). Even as baseball was spreading across the U.S. from its New England and Mid-Atlantic beginnings in the 1860s, during and after the Civil War, it was simultaneously moving abroad—to Cuba in 1860 and elsewhere in the Caribbean and Central America soon after, to China in 1863, and to Japan and Korea in the early 1870s. Given this, we might have expected it to have assumed a more global, rather than international form, in the ensuing century. Albert Spalding certainly did, as he expressed triumphantly in the magazine piece he wrote on his return from leading an exhibition tour of baseball stars around the world from December, 1888 to March 1889 (Spalding 1889, see also Lamster 2006). Instead, baseball's further advance was much slower and in fact depended more on Japan, which promoted baseball in its empire in Korea, Taiwan (Morris 2004), Southeast Asia, and then Oceania (e.g., Murdock 1948) as it moved across the Pacific. [One must recognize also the contributions of Japanese immigrants to Brazil and Hawaii, who promoted the game there in the early 20th century.]



### Baseball in the Pacific. Cover of Saturday Evening Post, April 21, 1945

Soccer's diffusion was slightly later, but it sustained a momentum of promotion and appropriation. Certainly European continental interest and British imperial circuits gave the sport a far wider zone of contact than baseball. Much is made, too, of the "simplicity" of soccer as responsible for its global reach—its minimal rules, basic equipment, and fundamental skills necessary to play and to watch knowledgeably. What is more immediately approachable than a round ball propelled gracefully about an open flat rectangle by a balanced number of players? Baseball, in contrast, seems so idiosyncratically complicated: the oddly configured field with a diamond infield and non-converging foul lines and base paths and pitcher's mound, the arbitrary dimensions, the positionality of skills, the gloves and masks and bats and bases that must accompany the ball, the arcane statistics, the intervals on interruption that entice coaches and managers and umpires to interject authority and expertise. Too quirky and arcane to appeal popularly.

Perhaps the features of the two sports do account for some of their differential reach, as Appadurai (1995) and others argue, but other sport cases suggest this is at best incomplete. Basketball, for example, matches soccer in its pace and elegant simplicity (it is but soccer on a smaller scale, by hand rather than by foot and head), but basketball was vastly slower to spread since its invention in 1891, and while it has gained great popularity in a number of countries, its reach does not compare with that of soccer. Considering basketball leads other analysts to find cause in an American parochial disinterest in promoting its own sports abroad. Not only baseball and basketball but also American football and lacrosse—none of America's four indigenous modern sports gained any world standing like soccer and athletics.

This too runs against the historical experience. In fact, I would argue there were three features of baseball's early international history that shaped and ultimately limited its spread. The first was its precocious professionalization in the U.S. in a league format that created powerful commercial interests and incentives for team ownership, stadium and transport, and baseball goods. Having ownership of a team allowed owners to commercialize all goods from picking the right bat to [choosing baseball cleats](#). Of course much sporting activity in the nineteenth century was professionalized (in terms of performing for pay, event admissions, gambling revenues)—pedestrianism, cycling, bare-knuckle fighting and a host of other "blood sports," etc.—but baseball was different than most as a team sport that was played as broadly as it was watched and that rapid stabilization into regular seasons, stadium fixtures, continuing player contracts, and monopolistic associations of owner-operators. That is, more than other of the early professional sports, it systematized and stabilized its business foundations as a small monopoly of individual owners.



At the same time, and as a way of consolidating and expanding its business potential, baseball was promoted in highly nationalistic terms, as embodying American values and as inculcating an American character. Much of this national pastime discourse was exhortative and aimed at domestic conditions through decades of massive waves of foreign immigration and internal population movements, the playable spectator sport was a powerful solvent, even as the game itself perpetuated racial, ethnic, and gender exclusions. But the same coding of baseball practices as culturally American was the idiom by which the sport was so fervently promoted abroad as a surrogate for more direct political control. Most notably this was through the tireless efforts of Spalding himself, and his 1911 proclamation of “America’s national game” has been a central text in several explications of national sports diplomacy waged through baseball (especially Brown 1990, 1991, Crepeau 1982, and Dyreson 2003, 2005). “It has followed the flag to the Hawaiian islands,” Spalding boasted, “and at once supplanted every other form of athletics in popularity. It has followed the flag to the Philippines, to Porto Rico and to Cuba, and wherever a ship flying the Stars and Stripes finds anchorage today, somewhere on nearby shore the American National Game is in Progress” (Spalding 1911:14; see Elfers 2003 for the 1913-14 world tour).

Strong claims, but misleading history. It was Cuban students returning from the U.S. who brought the game to the island, and while baseball’s origins in Hawai’i have mainland roots, its popularity and strength was borne much more by Japanese immigrant labor (Nakagawa 2001). American sailors on shore playing the game in ports of call had important demonstration effects on local populations, but it was actually several resounding defeats of such a team in the late 1890s by Japanese schoolboys that boosted the popularity of the sport and shaped it in a direction quite different from Spalding’s American style. That

is, a third feature of baseball’s early international history is that the countries in which it was most enthusiastically adopted fell within the political and economic orbit of the U.S. but were not under its direct colonial rule. Missionaries, educators, YMCA instructors, merchants, and others were teachers and models of the American game (Bjarkman 1994, Reaves 2002, Gems 2006), but local players and promoters could and did respond with considerable creativity and even irreverence.

In short, the consequence of the specific political conditions of baseball’s spread was that the distinctiveness of the various national baseball cultures was framed in dialectic with the sport’s central power, the U.S. The form of this dialectic is what I turn to now.

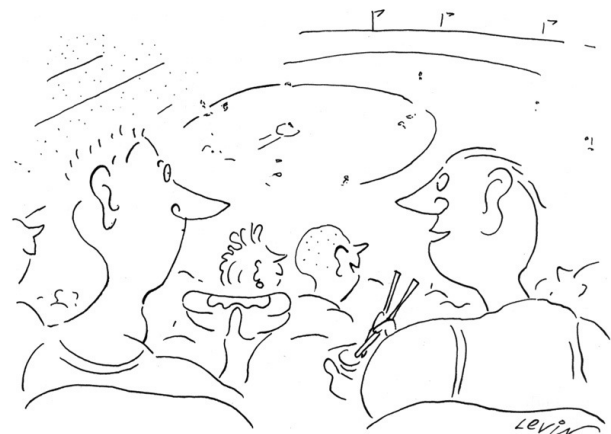
### **Uncanny mimicry: The ideological dynamic of world baseball**

Sports of course are among a vast array of institutional complexes and commercial products that form the political economy of globalization (political constitutions, movie industries, scientific technologies, fast food franchises, etc.). What sets sports apart is that they are by definition contests, and this has made them inevitable and compelling frameworks for organizing social solidarities and rivalries, emotional attachments, and ideological polarities at intra-societal and inter-societal levels. One cultural idiom for expressing relations of affinity and opposition is that of sporting “style,” which is generally taken to be a distinctive albeit elusive configuration of coaching philosophy, game strategy, player attitudes, and team social relations. Individual players and coaches have styles, teams have styles, but the notion is used most broadly (and most problematically) as national styles of sports. Participants, spectators, and commentators invest much in defining and defending or deriding the style of Brazilian soccer, Indian cricket, Pakistani field hockey, Rumanian gymnastics, Soviet ice



hockey, and so forth. Sports styling is, in effect, a core grammatical construction of sports glocalization.

Styling, though, assumes a different syntax in the world of soccer—an ever-shifting polyglot of continental, national, and club styles—than in baseball’s circuits, where for much of its century and a half, styling becomes a response to American claims of authenticity and authority. Under these conditions, what has most frequently developed is appropriation in the form of an “uncanny mimicry”—a condition, to put it tongue in cheek, in which Sigmund Freud meets Homi Bhabha. By uncanny, I mean Freud’s original sense of the unnerving sensation of encountering something both familiar and foreign at the same time. As I argued above, since the 1860s, Americans have exuberantly exported the game, all the while worrying constantly if it can and should be played properly by those beyond the smell of hot dogs and the strains of our national anthem. Two of the most enthusiastic promoters of American baseball, Albert G. Spalding and Henry Chadwick, both wrote with messianic zeal about spreading the “American game” (and its American values) to what Spalding once labeled the “little brown skin peoples.” It was “gratifying,” he observed, to see them playing the American national pastime, but disappointingly inevitable that they could never quite “get it”—and “extremely unsettling” whenever they beat us! From Albert Spalding to the latest high-priced and underperforming American star for the Japanese professional teams, the effect of seeing “our” and “not our” baseball at the same time is just that sensation captured by Freud’s uncanny.



*“There’s nothing like ballpark sushi.”*

**“There’s nothing like ballpark sushi” New Yorker, October 7, 2002, page 89. Drawing by Levin**

And what does baseball glocalization look like from the other side? Baseball was taken in to Japan and elsewhere in a spirit of enthusiastic mimicry, at least as Homi Bhabha (1984) used the term for how colonial and neocolonial subjects appropriated their master’s practices with equal measure of anxiety and anger. “Mimicry” is both the pale copy destined to fall short of an original and an aggressive appropriation that imaginatively exceeds the model. It is playful disruption and intentional distortion.

What I am suggesting is that the dynamics of uncanny mimicry have been one significant form of sports glocalization, especially in the case of baseball, a sportscape of plural manifestations across a global playing field but with a single center that continues to claim the aura and authority of authenticity. I turn to the fate of baseball in Japan to illustrate these dynamics, although I believe we can find equal demonstration in all corners of the baseball world (see especially for Taiwan, Morris 2004; for the Dominican Republic, see Klein 1991; for Mexico, see Klein 1997; for Cuba, see Eastman 2006).

**Samurai sporting style in an international**

## sportscape

Japan is a strategic case of uncanny mimicry because it is the nation beyond the U.S. with the longest history of the sport, the largest spectatorship, the most extensive media coverage, and the most elaborated administrative organizations at the amateur and professional levels. Baseball has been regarded as the national pastime sport at least since the mid-twentieth century. Even during the 70 years prior, it had no rival in popularity.

The many forms of baseball in Japan, from children's sandlot through national high school tournaments, university and industrial leagues, and the professional leagues themselves are nonetheless most often reduced to (or essentialized as) a single dominant image: Japanese baseball is samurai baseball.



**2005 team logo of the Samurai Bears, a team of Japanese players who played in an independent professional baseball league in southern California and Arizona**

To commentators, both foreign and domestic, it looks just like US baseball but it is really completely different. The same field dimensions and rule book seems to have spawned radically divergent cultures of performance. Free-spirited, hard-hitting, fun-loving, independent-minded American baseball players are pitted symbolically against team-spirited, cautious, self-sacrificing, deeply deferential, intensely loyal samurai with bats. As *The Economist*

opined several years ago:

*To Americans, baseball is all about enjoyment and sudden surprises; of spectacular hits, dexterous fielding and cheeky running between the bases. Not so in Japan. When introduced in the late 19th century, baseball was widely interpreted by the former samurai elite to be a kind of spiritual training - a discipline for shaping young minds and bodies. To the Japanese, yakyū (field ball) is seen to this day as a martial art to be practised remorselessly to perfection and then grimly executed with the sole purpose of crushing the opposition.*  
[1996]

Such portraits as this form a thick file of media stories stretching over many decades, by visitors and local alike. An American reporter, for instance, captured his own discomfort at the uncanniness of Japanese baseball in the following report:





**"Japanese Baseball: A Whole New Ballgame," The News & Observer, August 31, 1997**

*"Japanese Baseball: A Whole New Ballgame"*

*The News & Observer, Sunday, Sept. 28, 1997*

*By Gary A. Warner, Staff reporter for Orange County (CA) Register*

*Oh, take me out to the besuboru game*

*Take me out to the dome*

*Buy me some dried squid and yakitori on a stick*

*The orange-colored rabbit mascot is really a kick*

*For it's bang the taiko drum for the home team*

*But if they tie the other team, it'd be great.*

*One, two, three "sanshin," bow to the ump, and you're out*

*At the old besuboru game.*

They don't sing that song above during the seventh-inning stretch at Japanese baseball games. In fact, they don't sing anything at all. Oh, the insanely loud home-team rooters in the right-field seats screeching on their whistles and pounding on a big taiko drum will occasionally break into a toe-tapper such as "To the Sky with Fighting Soul, Ah Giants." But that can happen any time. Or rather all the time. From an hour before the game until the final out.

Still, it's baseball all the same. Nine players. Nine innings. Three outs. A full count is still 3-and-2.

No wait, it's 2-and-3. In Japan, the strikes are called first. But otherwise, it's just like a night at Seattle's Kingdome or at Dodger Stadium.

Except for players bowing to the umpire instead of kicking dirt on him. And the cheerleaders dancing on the field between innings. The young women with pony kegs of beer strapped to their backs serving draft from a spigot. The vendors hawking cigarettes or the couples sharing a "bento box" of deep-fried asparagus and raw fish on rice wrapped with seaweed. The players throwing stuffed animals to the crowd after a home run.

Same pastime. Different nations. Baseball in Japan is a game familiar, yet exotic. Unchanged, yet with more twists than a Fernando Valenzuela screwball.

*"There's fewer fastballs. More full counts. Strategy is what it's about - bunting, hit and run, moving the man over. Giving yourself up for the good of the team," said John De Bellis, an American expatriate who covers baseball for the Asahi Evening News, a major Tokyo-based newspaper. "It's baseball, but not the same baseball Americans know."*

*Or, as a somewhat less charitable Reggie Smith, the former Dodger slugger, put it after his first year with the Yomiuri Giants in 1983: "This isn't baseball - it only looks like it."*

Indeed, the dominant image of Japanese baseball is that of a society that has actively and forcefully reshaped baseball's original forms and spirit to fit a set of purposes that turn play into pedagogy, that subordinate the excitement of contest for the demands of character building. Americans gleefully play baseball; Japanese grimly work baseball—and they are the worse for it.

Warrior players giving their all for the team has been potent imagery, especially in the international world of baseball, because it is a vividly oppositional metaphor (setting the Japanese East against the US West) that simplifies the often confusing task of sorting out what is common and what is different. That is, as a singular image and a universal label for baseball in Japan, it allows us to ignore important and intriguing differences across teams, across levels of play, and across history (precisely, the differences and changes that Japanese fans often find most absorbing about the sport in their own society). It is also conveniently all-purpose. In one simple opposition (group work versus individual play), it purports to describe Japanese baseball (this

is how they play it over there), to explain it (they play it that way because they're samurai), and to judge it (usually negatively, because although Americans idealize cowboys, we are far more dubious of samurai!). This is sport reduced to eternal, essential national verities.

However, this is only half of the dynamic of uncanny mimicry. The re-positioning of the sport in Japan—its glocalization—may be viewed in deprecating terms by American players and commentators, but local appropriation of American forms has a very different and decidedly positive valence for many Japanese. The most crucial inversion in the introduction of American baseball into Japan in the late 19th century was its positioning within the elite boys' schools of the time. This happened in the 1880s and 1890s, when it became one of a number of Western sports (sharing popularity with cricket, rowing, and rugby) that were encouraged as student-run club activities at the so-called higher schools, the narrow conduits to the single national university in Tokyo. In this regard, it was less like baseball in the US and more like American football or like cricket and rugby in Great Britain. All of these school-based sports generated an ethic that games-playing inspired virtue, formed character, and developed manliness.

Although these sports quickly found enthusiasts among the elite students, who developed organized clubs and spirited inter-scholastic competitions, the associations of school sports with personal character-training and a samurai identity were not inevitable. In fact, baseball was highly unusual, and its emergence as school sport par excellence depended on the fortuitous circumstances of a series of challenge games that the baseball club of First Higher School played against Americans resident in the treaty port of Yokohama augmented by fleet sailors.



BASEBALL.												
A baseball team of the Y.A. & A.C. were badly beaten on Saturday by a nine from the Tokyo Higher School, being out-manceuvred at all points of the game as a glance at the score will show. Mr. Geo. Rice was scorer.												
TOKYO HIGHER SCHOOL.						Y.C. & A.C.						
Pos.	Runs.	Outs.				Pos.	Runs.	Outs.				
Ihara ...	S.S.	4	2			Smith ...	3 B.	0	5			
Murata ...	3 B.	3	3			Ginn ...	R.F.	1	4			
Miyaguchi ...	1 B.	2	4			Ellis ...	C.	1	2			
Tominaga ...	L.F.	5	1			Abel ...	S.S.	1	2			
Aoi ...	P.	0	5			Tilden ...	1 B.	1	1			
Fujino ...	C.	1	5			Schweyer ...	P.	0	4			
Inouye ...	2 B.	4	2			Crawford ...	L.F.	0	2			
Kamimura ...	R.F.	6	0			Hunt ...	C.F.	0	3			
Moriwaki ...	C.F.	4	2			Lyons ...	2 B.	0	4			
Total ...		29	34			Total ...		4	27			
INNINGS.												
Tokyo Higher School ...	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9			
Y.C. & A.C. ...	2	4	7	2	5	1	0	2	0	29		
	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4		

横浜カントリー & アスレチッククラブと一高の試合スコア (横浜開港資料館)。

### Box score of the first game played between "Tokyo Higher School" (Ichikō) and a team of Americans representing the Yokohama Country and Athletic Club on May 23, 1896

These games have been recounted frequently in the literature (e.g., in English, see Roden 1980, Guthrie-Shimizu 2004, Guttmann and Thompson 2001, Kelly 2000); from 1896 to 1904, First Higher played 13 games against the Yokohama Americans, winning eleven and losing only twice. The repeated victories reinforced the prominence of the baseball club among other sports clubs at the school, the status of Ichikō in the world of elite education, and the spread of baseball as a popular sport upwards to the universities and downwards into the national secondary school system.

The particular styling of baseball as embodying a samurai "fighting spirit" owed much to the way this baseball club conducted itself, reveling in punishing practices and proclaiming a rhetoric of self-sacrifice. It no doubt saw its ethic vindicated by the considerable success it enjoyed on the field, although this was also a decade when elite youth fell under the critical gaze of a populace suspicious of their moral and physical fitness for the prestigious positions soon to be theirs. The ostentatious

exertions of the First Higher School Baseball Club and its articulation of "fighting spirit" were in part an effort to answer these suspicions.

Then, in the late 1910s and 1920s, "fighting spirit" found another influential ideologue—and a slightly different formulation—in the Waseda University player, coach, manager, and later newspaper commentator, Tobita Suishō. Like the First Higher club, Tobita stressed a spiritualized and self-sacrificing playing commitment explicitly likened to a warrior code. However, baseball clubs had now come under adult supervision, both at the university and high school levels, and not surprisingly, Tobita insisted on the unquestioned authority of the manager and his coaches in controlling the team. The lines of discipline and hierarchy were redrawn.

Although there were other coaching styles and philosophies, Tobita's proved compelling at a time, in the second and third decades of the century, when newspapers and transport companies rushed to sponsor sports events and to fan sports fever for corporate profit. Tobita's stern amateurism was used to temper this emerging commercialized popularity, especially of middle-school and Tokyo-area college baseball. Tobita's spiritualization of sport performance also dovetailed the Japanese state's efforts in mobilizing athletics to counter what it targeted as "subversive" elements among educators and university students in the 1920s and 1930s. Thus, in the mid-1930s, when a professional league was organized, it adopted some of this amateur fighting spirit into its own image in order to make itself palatable and profitable with a public warmed to sports as character building. Famous managers, star players, leading teams, all have appealed to reputed samurai qualities to explain themselves, to exhort others, and to distinguish themselves from foreigners who fall outside this noble heritage.

To be sure, the genealogy of “samurai baseball” is much more complicated than this (as I and others have elsewhere tried to delineate), and this ideologically-charged imagery cannot itself account for the fuller history of the sport in Japan and its multiple attractions to sponsors and spectatorships (Kelly 1998). The symbol itself of the samurai was deployed to baseball as much to associate the sport as a vehicle for training and displaying certain codes of citizen-worker conduct within Japan as it was to establish a contrast with its American counterpart, and the baseball player as samurai warrior was but one of many extensions of the image to define and discipline social roles in twentieth-century Japan (especially soldiers, students, and workers). And the virtues of samurai baseball themselves have transformed from the early days of solidarity with the autonomous student team to deference to the single adult manager to the more impersonal loyalty demanded of contemporary players to the large organization that are the professional clubs (each with rosters of 70 players, coaching staffs of 20 or more, and front offices of 50-70).

Finally, it is essential to note that part of the lasting fascination in Japanese baseball with the samurai imagery is the sheer difficulties of actually coaching and performing “samurai” baseball, especially at the professional level. For every legendary example of 1000-fungo drills, of pitchers’ overextending their innings, of absolute obedience to managerial whims, there are undercurrents and counter-examples of petulance, irreverence, and outright resistance to these practices and demands. As is often the case with moral injunctions, the frequency with which they are demanded is a clue to the difficulties of eliciting their acceptance. Japanese players and fans alike have always been able to distinguish the practices of a sport from its ideology. Much of the continuing fascination of Japanese baseball has been in savoring this gap between saying and playing (W Kelly 2006).

## Future prospects

Among the dominant American professional sports, both the National Football League and MLB have watched enviously through the 1980s and 1990s as the National Basketball Association succeeded in a highly profitable international campaign to showcase its games and its stars and sell its products in markets around the world (LaFeber 2002). Both the NFL and MLB sought to emulate this expansion, but there are few analysts who share Spalding’s conviction in the destiny of any of the three to attain global standing. In the case of baseball there are several factors that severely limit such a prospect.

First, the organization of the sport itself obstructs sustained multinational league competition. Baseball has the longest season of major sports; an American professional ball team plays 162 regular-season games per year (Japanese teams play a 140-game schedule) plus preseason exhibitions and post-season playoffs. Moreover, post-season tournament play in baseball at the university and professional levels are multi-game series of several play-off rounds towards the championship. The logistics of international travel would require substantial truncation of its format, which is highly unlikely. Cricket’s compression of multi-day test matches to single-day competitions had its analog at the 2006 World Baseball Classic in a single-game championship—which was widely criticized as one of its worst features.

Even more importantly, as with the NBA and the NFL, MLB financial interests lie much more with marketing its “product” to the rest of the world rather than promoting autonomous zones of baseball and ceding some jurisdictional powers to other national federations and an international body like the International Baseball Federation. In fact, MLB has joined with USA Baseball, the national federation that administers U.S. participation in world



championships at all levels, in part to protect its control (for an extended discussion, see John Kelly's brief but pungent 2006 account).

Its extension to other parts of the world is also intended to develop foreign sources of new player talent, and in this MLB has been strikingly successful. The MLB team baseball academies in the Dominican Republic have become critical channels for recruiting young and inexpensive prospects, the machinations to entice Cuban players to defect and sign with MLB clubs, and the extensive scouting efforts in Japan and other East Asian countries have resulted in the increasingly multi-ethnic composition of MLB teams. The effect is to draw the best players to the U.S. rather than to nurture elite level competition elsewhere. The consequences of such asset stripping were long ago evident in the Dominican Republic, where only an abbreviated Winter League remains of what had been robust year-round league play that rivaled MLB and attracted some of its players during their off-season (Klein 1991). The costs of the accelerating flight of Japanese stars for the long-term prospects of the professional leagues in Japan is uncertain, but attendance and television market share of NPB are in decline and JPB has been unable to negotiate an equitable binational agreement with MLB over player movements.



**Cover of the March 26-April 2, 2008 issue of the Weekly Dig, a free local weekly magazine, featuring with mock-seriousness the Red Sox "Nine Samurai" as they enter Japan!**

Ironically, then, baseball's continuing internationalization, in the form of current MLB initiatives, will only undermine its prospects of ever becoming a global sport. Anti-American politics within the International Olympic Committee unrelated to baseball are thought by many to have precipitated the dropping of the sport (and softball) from the official Olympic roster. Whatever the cause, its absence from the only meaningful supranational multi-sports organization will further consolidate the present configuration of the baseball world as a dominant center of economic clout, jurisdictional authority, and ideological aura constraining though never wholly dominating a penumbra of baseball nations which have fashioned some space for autonomous development through the dynamics of uncanny mimicry. Indeed, the American reporter in the Japanese stadium was not watching "a whole new ballgame," but he had come upon a sibling form of the sport that

had been raised in significantly different historical conditions and whose mimicry of its older sibling was so uncannily discomfiting to him.

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