

THE SAMURAI WAY OF BASEBALL AND THE NATIONAL CHARACTER DEBATE

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The success of players like Ichiro Suzuki and Hideki Matsui in the United States, has once again demonstrated the power of sport in crossing national borders. With their stirring performances on America's baseball diamonds, these imported players have helped to create vast new markets for major league baseball back home in Japan, while teaching Americans that there is a new and very different way to approach their own national pastime. More important, the accomplishments of these athletes have also served to influence the way many Americans and Japanese look at each other and have raised anew questions about the role of culture in sport.

Not so very long ago, there were executives in the highest echelons of the game who were still talking privately, in not very nice terms, about keeping Japanese in their place. Remarks of this nature were first heard in the midst of lengthy, heated meetings between U.S. Major League Baseball (MLB) and the MLB Players Association (MLBPA) officials regarding Hideki Irabu's contract during the winter of 1995-96. San Diego had claimed the right to Irabu's services via a trade with Irabu's former team the Chiba Lotte Marines at the end of the 1995 season. Irabu claimed the trade was illegal because it amounted to "slave trade." He hotly refused to sign, saying he would only play for the New York Yankees. Irabu's comments, which had been well reported in the media, angered some officials and prompted an outburst from one of the MLB executives involved, who told Gene Orza, attorney for the MLBPA, "we have to keep baseball safe for people who look like you and me."¹ Irabu's request to be released from the Padres claim on him was initially denied by the MLB Executive Council, but was approved some weeks later during an appeal after Irabu's attorneys had threatened litigation. Orza is quoted in *The Meaning of Ichiro* as saying, "If Irabu had had the name of John Smith, with blond hair and blue eyes, I do believe that all this would have never happened."² Moreover, in October 2003, a Japanese employee of Major League Baseball's business arm in New York City, sued her bosses for fostering an environment, during her 18 month stint there, in which anti-Asian hostility thrived. In the suit, which was later settled out of court, the plaintiff, Juri Morioka, claimed that "F---ing Japs" and "Nips" was part of the everyday office lexicon of her immediate supervisors.

But this attitude has seemingly changed in the wake of the impressive achievements of recent imports. Seattle Mariner Ichiro Suzuki has put together an

¹These remarks were conveyed to me and other individuals by Gene Orza, who was taken aback but, in the interest of maintaining a smooth relationship between the union and management, asked me not to name names.

²Robert Whiting, *The Meaning of Ichiro* (New York: Warner Books, 2004), 134.

unprecedented string of 200 hit seasons, and has also broken George Sisler's 84 year-old single-season hits record while spurring an influx of tourists from Japan that has brought millions of dollars into the economy of the Pacific Northwest. Hideki Matsui has become a popular, reliable fixture in the New York Yankees outfield, while Tadahito Iiguchi played such an important role on the 2005 World Champion Chicago White Sox squad that manager Ozzie Guillen called him the team's real MVP. The subsequent emergence of an enormous new market for Mariner, Yankee, and White Sox telecasts in Japan has also helped. At the end of the 2003 season, the MLB signed a record \$275 million TV contract with the giant Japanese advertising firm Dentsu and then sent the Yankees and the Tampa Devil Rays to play an opening day game in Tokyo in 2004. Moreover, the MLB and the MLBPA enthusiastically promoted the establishment of the World Baseball Classic (WBC), a quadrennial tournament featuring national teams from 16 countries, debuting in March 2006, with American organizers going to extraordinary lengths to coax an initially reluctant Japan to join in. All in all, this is a transformation.

The *Asahi Shimbun* summed up the impact of these events in Japan by editorializing, "Japanese were once seen in the U.S. as a 'faceless' people obsessed with exporting cars and consumer electronics. The excellent play of the Japanese baseball players and their positive personalities have changed the world American image of the Japanese."³ Japan's team WBC certainly helped solidify that new image.

Finally, it might be said that the Ichiro experience, has helped to usher in a new era of acceptance of Americans in Japan. I cannot count the number of times that people – from ordinary fans to members of the journalistic profession – expressed their surprise to me that during Ichiro's ultimately successful quest to break Sisler's single season hits record, the Japanese star received almost uniformly positive treatment by American fans and media. This was puzzling to them because it was in marked contrast to what American sluggers have experienced when chasing titles or attempting to break Japanese records.

For example, in 1965, Daryl Spencer was walked eight times in a row – once with his bat held upside down – when he threatened to become the first American to win a home-run title in postwar Japan. Said pitcher Masaaki Koyama, who himself had walked Spencer four times on sixteen consecutive pitches, including the one at-bat in which Spencer held his bat upside down, "Why should we let a foreigner take the title?"⁴ Randy Bass, a big, bearded, popular Oklahoman, threatened ex-Giant star Sadaharu Oh's single season record of 54 home runs going into the last day of the season. But facing the Giants, then managed by Oh, at Tokyo's Korakuen Stadium, he too was walked intentionally four out of five plate appearances, reaching base only when he stuck his bat out at an outside pitch for a fluke single to the outfield. Tuffy Rhodes received similar treatment in 2001. Playing for the Kintetsu Buffaloes, he was walked repeatedly in a late-season game against the Hawks of Fukuoka, also managed by Oh. Said Hawks battery coach Yoshiaru Wakana "It would be distasteful to see a foreign player break Oh's

³*Asahi Shimbun*, October 2, 2004

⁴Robert Whiting, *The Chrysanthemum and the Bat* (New York: Dodd-Mead, 1977), 199-201.

record.”⁵ These incidents indicate a strain of anti-Americanism present in Japan in the postwar era. It has been one of the defining characteristics of the Japanese game since the early 1960s, when former major league players began arriving on the scene in sizable numbers with hefty salaries and equally hefty egos.

American managers in Japan have also generated ambivalence as well. Wally Yonamine, Joe Lutz, and Don Blasingame, among a handful of others, managed in Japan, but they were eyed with a certain amount of skepticism, because, among other things, their American-style philosophies regarding training and discipline were too moderate for most Japanese, accustomed as they were to a strict “blood-and-guts” approach to baseball. Blasingame’s departure in mid-season of 1980, after a policy dispute with the front office, prompted his Japanese replacement Futoshi Nakanishi to comment that Blasingame simply could not understand the Japanese way of thinking, while the Central League commissioner remarked “Foreign managers are simply not suitable for Japan.”⁶

By the end of 2005, with Japan basking in the glow of international good will inspired by America’s love of Ichiro, there were suddenly no less than three American managers in the Nippon Pro Baseball (NPB) league, an unprecedented embarrassment of *gaijin* influence. They were led by Valentine, who became the first American to win a Japan Championship when his Chiba Lotte Marines swept the Hanshin Tigers in four straight games after defeating the Softbank Fukuoka Hawks in a five-game playoff. He did it with a modified American style approach and it came, incidentally, a decade after he was fired by the same team after only a year on the job because of the “philosophical differences” noted above and despite a strong second place finish.

Valentine emphasized proper rest and short, snappy practices focusing on individual instruction as opposed to the traditional group-based, rote-learning approach that characterized practices in Japan. He also eschewed the kind of negativity seen on many Japanese clubs where praise is rare, harassment common, physical abuse not unheard of, and where post-game *hansei-kai* (self-reflection conferences) were a daily occurrence. In addition, special morning practices, along with banishment to the bench or the farm team, were frequent results of bad play.

At the end of the year, Valentine’s methods were enthusiastically applauded in some circles. He was the only foreigner listed in survey results conducted by Macro Mill research company concerning the “ideal boss.” A newspaper editorial by the president of Nippon Metal called on Japanese firms to curb their tradition of harsh management and overwork and begin treating employees “the same way Bobby does.”⁷

Valentine’s ways did not win him any friends among Japanese traditionalists. In the summer of 2005, the *Shukan Asahi* published an article accusing Lotte players of drug use. There was no hard evidence, but a former Lotte executive, Tatsuro Hirooka, the man who had once fired Valentine, was quoted in the piece as saying, “The players on Lotte are no good. They don’t practice hard. So the reason they are winning must be drugs.”⁸

⁵“Oh disgraces the Japanese game,” *Asahi Shimbun*, October 3, 2001. Said Wakana to the *Deiri Supotsu*, “Oh would probably say ‘we shouldn’t walk Rhodes.’ But I think we should walk him because I doubt Oh wants to see Rhodes break the record in front of him.” *Deiri Supotsu*, October 1, 2001.

⁶*Deiri Supotsu*, May 15, 1980; Robert Whiting, *You Gotta Have Wa*, (New York: MacMillan, 1989), 158.

⁷Anthony Faiola, *Washington Post*, November 28, 2006.

⁸*Shukan Asahi*, August 19, 2005. Both the accusation and the Hirooka quote appeared in this article.

When spring training started in 2006, the foreign-managed teams practiced from 10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., as MLB teams are wont to do, after which the players were left to their own devices, which often meant hanging around for individual instruction or simply going home. By contrast, those teams run by Japanese managers practiced as a group until 3 or 4 p.m. or longer, as NPB teams traditionally do, focusing on the finer points of team play: relay drills, sign plays, the push bunt, and so forth. The venerable Katsuya Nomura, aged seventy, new manager of the Rakuten Golden Eagles, made his charges swing the bat a tiring one thousand times a day in practice and forced his pitchers to throw as many as an arm-numbing three hundred pitches in one go. Legendary slugger Sadaharu Oh, manager of the Softbank Hawks, was just as tough and his veteran stars went even farther on their own. His slugging first baseman Nobuhiko Matsunaka started his day lifting weights at 9 a.m. and finished up at 6 p.m. after a solid hour of swinging the bat. Moreover, during the season, most Japanese-managed teams practiced more, and held lengthier pre-game workouts and pre-game meetings. They also practiced on travel days – something not done in the MLB. Meanwhile, across the sea, hard-working Ichiro Suzuki, famous for his lengthy training camp and pre-game workouts, had taken his Seattle teammates to task for their overall lack of preparation and commitment, and was trying to get his manager to adopt more Japanese-style methods.

Indeed, the smooth, much praised performance of Team Japan in '06 WBC, an event that was highly watched in Japan, caused many Japanese baseball experts to conclude that after all, their way was best. The manager of Team Japan, it should not escape notice, was the aforementioned Oh, a man whose name was synonymous with backbreaking workouts during a storied career in which he hit 868 home runs.

Samurai Baseball

The system in Japan dates back to the 19th century and has been called “*samurai besuboru*” by many participants. Some critics object to this appellation as too simplistic and scoff that players of today bear as much resemblance to the warriors of the past as the Marlboro man does to the original cowboy. But that is a false comparison for it ignores the very real similarities and the grounding that the game has in “*budo*” or “*bugei*,” the martial arts of old, and its relationship to *bushido* with its lessons about dedication, self-perfection, submergence of ego, and development of inner strength. They are lessons that also apply to life as well as sports and have been passed down from generation to generation by fathers, teachers, coaches and, in adult hood, corporate bosses, right to the present day.

Baseball was introduced in early Meiji Era by American professors and became popular when the First Higher School of Tokyo, an elite prep school for students aged 18-22, defeated a team of Americans from the Yokohama Country and Athletic Club in a series of games in 1896 that received wide press coverage and turned their players into nationwide heroes. Ichiko, as the team was known, was managed by a 26 year-old named Kanae Chuman, a former player who believed that his team should ignore the American way of playing and devise a system that suited Japanese. This involved a year-round, often blood-stained, training regimen, and two to three months of practice before a team

played its first game.⁹ It centered around the martial arts idea that training, as demonstrated by famed judo teacher Jigoro Kano years earlier, should be an ordeal the player must endure to strengthen him mentally as well as physically. According to historical accounts Kano had resurrected the ancient and, at the time, largely forgotten art of *ju-jitsu* in the 1870s primarily because he was tired of being beaten up by larger classmates in school. The fighting form he ultimately developed, judo, became a popular sensation in the 1880s after Kano's judo club met and defeated a *jujitsu* squad belonging to the Tokyo Metropolitan Police – a squad which included much taller and heavier combatants. This historic encounter, which later inspired Akira Kurosawa's film "*Sugata Sanshiro*," popularized the idea that a man could defeat a much larger opponent with hard training, fighting spirit, and brainpower. The appeal of this concept to the players on the First Higher School of Baseball squad, of which Kano was an avid fan, who were trying to beat physically larger American teams, should be obvious. Kano, interestingly, was principal of Ichiko in 1893.¹⁰

Kanae's star player, Jitsuzo Aoi, was known for his thousand-swing drill at night in the team dormitory. It evoked associations with, among others, famed 17th century swordsman Musashi Miyamoto, who, in his classic work, *The Book of the Five Rings*, preached the Way of the Martial Art, which Kanae exhorted his devotees to "put into practice morning and evening, day in and day out." "Surpass today what you were yesterday," he wrote, and his phrase "See to it that you temper yourself with one thousand days of practice and refine yourself with ten thousand days of training" was also evocative of the Itto and Yagyū schools of swordsmanship dating back more than four hundred years.

A commemorative work published by the Alumni Association of Ichiko in 1903 carried an introduction by an Ichiko alumnus, which clearly stated what they were doing: "Sports came from the West. In Ichiko baseball, we were playing sports, but we were also putting the spirit of Japan into it. . . . *Yakyū* (i.e. baseball, literally "field ball") is a way to express the samurai spirit. To play baseball is to develop this spirit. Thus our members were just like the warriors of old with their samurai spirit."¹¹

In the early part of the 20th century, Waseda's Suishu Tobita, the most influential college baseball manager in the history of Japan, copied the Ichiko system, which he called "*bushido* baseball," and which he declared was "the only true form of the game." He invoked concepts of loyalty, courage and honor and exhorted his players to "Practice until you die," or at least until they had "collapsed on the ground and froth was coming

⁹ The Ichiko practice routine described in *Tobita Suishu Senshu, Yakyū Kisha Jidai, Besuboru Magajin.*, 1960 (pp. 30-31). Also see *Koryōshi*, pp. 799-810, *Dai-Ichi Koto Gakko Kishukuryō*, September 10, 1930 for summaries of Ichiko-YCAC games. Accounts of Ichiko stars appear in *Yakyū Nenpo*, published by Mimatsu Shoten Nai Yakyū Nenpo Henshu-bu, 1912, pp. 309-317 and *Undokai*. 47, April 1912. Kanae Chuman came up with the term "*yakyū*" (field ball) for baseball and wrote the first book about it, entitled *Yakyū* and published by Maekawa Buneido Shuppan in 1897.

¹⁰ See Kano Sensei Denki Hensankai, ed. *Kano Jigoro* (Tokyo: Kodokan, 1964); Brian N. Watson, *The Father of Judo* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2000); Nihei Kato, *Kano Jigoro: sekai taiiku shijo ni kagayaku*, (Tokyo: Shōyō Shoin, 1964).

¹¹ From "*Yakyū Bushi*," an article appearing in a commemorative work published by the Alumni Association of the first Higher School of Tokyo, February 28, 1903.

out of their mouths.”¹² Waseda graduate and Tobita acolyte Sadayoshi Fujimoto, who became manager of the Tokyo Giants when professional baseball was established in 1936, led his team through a camp solely designed to hone the players’ fighting spirit, not their baseball skills. It was so hard that it was nicknamed “Vomit Camp.” It made what the New York Yankees went through seem like a spring vacation. Wrote one Giant historian, “It was from the mud and sweat of this training that the soul of Giants was born.” Practice at the Hanshin Tigers camp in Osaka was similarly intense, and featured participants walking barefoot on the upturned edge of a samurai long sword, in an exhibition of mental control.¹³

With some exceptions, subsequent managers, in the professional as well as the amateur ranks, have followed this system, or variations thereof, as they attempted to catch and surpass the standard of play set by U.S. major league baseball. Tetsuharu Kawakami, the most famous postwar manager in the pros, and one of the strictest, played for the aforementioned Fujimoto. Like Tobita and many others, he thought the study of Zen an important tool for training his players. Kawakami’s star players, Tatsuro Hirooka, Shigeo Nagashima and Sadharu Oh, all went on to become successful managers. They were famous for their own “hell camps” and their respect for *bushido*. Hirooka and Oh, for their part, practiced Zen, while Nagashima favored spiritual retreats to the mountains to hone mental strength.

This history is the reason today that pre-season pro camps in Japan are twice as long and twice as tough as their major league counterparts. Moreover, it is also why some Japanese pro teams hold intense “autumn camps,” something major leaguers do not do. These harsh camps, like the *kangeiko* in judo, are a character-building ordeal to be endured, with thousand-swing and thousand-fungo drills, marathon runs, and other sadomasochistic methods of honing spirit and mental strength. The Yomiuri Giants farm team started off the first day of autumn camp in October 2005 with ten hours of practice.

There have, of course, been exceptions to the rule, like the free-wheeling, night life-loving Nishitetsu Lions of the early 60s, who managed to win while having fun. But the Ichiko-Tobita system, and variations thereof, remained the most popular because it was the most successful and the most in-tune, ostensibly, with Japanese sensibilities. In 2004, a team of Fuji-Sankei reporters conducted an informal analysis of all pro managers since 1936 (there were 105 at the time) and came to the conclusion that some 90% of them were believers in, or followers of, *seishin yakyu* or “spirit baseball,” as the system was also called.¹⁴ Managers and coaches, they concluded, were simply continuing the demanding routines they had been subjected to from high school on up.

¹²The Tobita Philosophy can be found in the six-volume collected works of the famous coach, entitled *Tobita Senshu*. See Tobita Suishu, *Tobita Suishu senshu*, Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Besuboru magajin-sha, 1960), 25-28. “Froth coming out of their mouths” appears in *Gakusei Yakyu Ron*, Vol. 2, 260.

¹³*Tokyo Yomiuri Kyojin Gun 50-nen*, published by the Yomiuri Group in 1985. See pp. 191-195. The Morinji camp is described in even greater detail in Kyushi Yamato, “Nihon Yakyu-shi, Showa-hen Sono Ni,” *Besuboru Magajin* (1977): 261-270. It was also described in Osamu Mihara, *Kyojin gun to tomo ni* (Sakuhinsha, 1949), 23-30.

¹⁴The Fuji-Sankei reporters were Kozo Abe, Shuji Tsunoyama, and Osamu Nagatani, who had a combined total of over 100 years covering professional baseball in Japan.

There are other reasons critics dislike the samurai/martial arts metaphor applied to baseball. They point to the fact that the professional leagues allow tie games instead of battling to the end and note that players who change teams lack the samurai-like loyalty one would expect. They charge that the artificiality of conjured-up images of bat-swinging samurais will jeopardize our understanding of Japan – a complex, densely populated country with a long history. Further, they perpetuate the stereotype of fascist, collectivist baseball characterized by group-think and cause a “flattening of heterogeneity” in favor of “neat and unequivocal contrasts and Benedictian oppositional dyads,” to use some of the academic lingo that seems to be in vogue. But these arguments seem to me to be nitpicky and beside the point. Ball players in Japan don’t wear kimonos or top knots, either. They don’t carry swords. They don’t commit *hara-kiri* (although more than a few young players have been driven to mental hospitals by the demands of their coaches and some have even died from the shock of the experience). And unlike the warriors of old, they don’t sleep with children in their free time – or at least I don’t think they do. Not openly.

The metaphor may not be perfect, but metaphor means resemblance, and so we must consider the ways in which it does fit – in the concepts of constant training, perfectionism, and development of spirit to overcome physical limitations. To this writer, these characteristics represent the primary virtues of the samurai and the reasons why Japanese players are better conditioned than their American (North, Central, and South) counterparts and are better at the fundamentals of the game. They are seen in a year-round training system that shows no signs of abatement. It is not too much to say that baseball practice of 2006 in Japan is fundamentally similar to baseball practice of 1896 in tone and even content. It has been part of the secondary school curriculum for that long (and in the pros since 1936). By and large the system has endured because it works. Setting aside exceptional teams, such as those managed by Bobby Valentine (discussed below), generally speaking, the team that bleeds most, wins. Indeed, players today may take as many as a thousand swings a day in camp and require two to three months to get ready for the season, just like their ancestors did a century ago – ancestors who cited samurai influence.

Moreover, demonstrations of loyalty, another samurai virtue, and the importance put on human relations *are* seen repeatedly, not only in high school and college but in the pros, as well. Recently deceased Motoshi Fujita, who played and managed for the Yomiuri Giants in a long career, first joined the team in the 1950s solely because his college *senpai* Shigeru Mizuhara assumed the managerial helm and “ordered” him to sign up with the club. Fujita pitched so often and with so little rest that he not infrequently collapsed in his *genkan* entryway from exhaustion. But he never complained, even though a subsequent sore arm forced him into early retirement.¹⁵ Of course, star pitcher Hideo Nomo rebelled against the ‘pitch-until-your-arm-falls-off’ philosophy of his Japanese manager Keiichi Suzuki, and defected to the U.S. (incurring lasting enmity in the process), but Ichiro Suzuki, who could have followed the same path, delayed his departure to the major leagues out of loyalty to his manager Akira Ogi of the Orix Blue Wave. Certainly the actions of those pitchers who refused to throw strikes to Bass, Rhodes, and Cabrera reflected a certain kind of fealty to the boss.

¹⁵October 31, 2003 interview with Motoshi Fujita, http://www.mita.keio.ac.jp/alumni/01_2.html.

Further evidence of the difference between the U.S. and Japan in the area of player relations lies in the fact that the NPB players union is far more compliant than its aggressive U.S. counterpart and the movement of free agents from one team to another, though gradually increasing, is a fraction of what it is in the U.S.. Unlike its American counterpart, the MLBPA, the NPBPA refused to strike for many years because it would be “unfair to the fans and the owners,” as union head Kiyoshi Nakahata put it back in 1986. Only strong public opposition to a merger of two teams in 2004 finally convinced the union to stage a first ever walkout in September of that year – “in support of the fans” as NPBPA press releases put it. Even then, it lasted but two days and was accompanied by tearful public apologies, free autograph sessions and complimentary baseball clinics for kids over that historic weekend by way of compensation. American MLB representatives who observed the scene could only smile in bemusement and, perhaps, envy.

Whether players see themselves as “samurai” is beside the point (although some players like Norihiro Nakamura of Orix have the ideograph for samurai proudly written on their gloves); the historical connection is clearly there and the term is an appropriate shorthand for a way of approaching the game that is significantly different from way its American counterpart is played and practiced.

National Character

If *bushido* is a metaphor for baseball, however imperfect, then baseball is similarly a metaphor for Japanese society. Look hard at Japanese baseball and you can see the corporate characteristics of “unpaid overtime,” “*karoshi*,” or death from overwork, and group *wa* or harmony achieved through daily meetings. As Carol Gluck has pointed out, the code of *bushido* was seen in some quarters as the ethical model for rural 19th century Japan, where hard work, cooperation, and obedience to the village headman were paramount.¹⁶ Donald Roden has written that baseball in 1896 “nourished the traditional virtues of loyalty, honor, and courage symbolized in the ‘new *bushido*’ spirit of the age” and further “nourished those values celebrated in rural Japan and the “civic rituals of state: order, harmony, perseverance and restraint.”¹⁷ Such values were reflected in the Imperial Rescripts on Education and, after that, in the big corporations and small businesses of modern Japan, as well as in the government bureaucracies and even the *yakuza* underworld. Moreover, Eiko Ikegami, in her seminal books *Taming of the Samurai* and *The Bonds of Civility*, contributed significantly to our understanding about the lingering influence of the samurai ethos in modern Japan, which, incidentally, has been seen as recently as March 2006, when Kozo Watanabe, chairman of the Democratic Party of Japan’s Diet Affairs committee, called on his subordinate Hisayasu Nagata, who was embroiled in controversy over falsely accusing the Secretary-General of the LDP of accepting a bribe, to “act like a samurai and resign.” Watanabe recalled the

¹⁶Carol Gluck, *Japan’s Modern Myths* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1985), 180, 185.

¹⁷Donald Roden, “Baseball and the Quest for National Dignity in Meiji Japan,” *The American Historical Review* 85:3, (June 1980): 511-534.

story of the “*Byakko-tai*” (White Tiger Squad). After losing a battle against the government in 1868, this band of samurai, loyal to their feudal lord, killed themselves.¹⁸

If there is one thing that baseball players, businessmen, bureaucrats, bartenders, beauticians, and gangsters of the modern age have in common, it is that they come from a primary and secondary school system that emphasizes uniformity, submergence of self-interest to that of the group, and ‘*gambaru seishin*’ (all-out spirit, making the great effort, gutting it out). The thought processes behind “Study until your eyes bleed,” “Work until you drop,” “Practice until you die,” and “The nail that sticks up gets hammered down,” all come from the same source.

I remember the great surprise my Japanese brother-in-law, a chemical engineer assigned to his firm’s Washington D.C. branch, experienced when he attended the first day of school with his children in a Virginia primary school and they were required to stand up, along with every other student in class, and describe what made them different from others. “In Japan it would never happen,” he said, “kids are all taught to be the same as everyone else.”¹⁹ Indeed, students in most schools in Japan are trained to listen quietly, to not disturb the teacher with questions, and to not express their opinions. They live in a culture of rules and of superior-subordinate status relationships, which prepares them for entry into adult society with all its strictures and behavioral codes – some of which harken back to the Tokugawa era. Students are also immersed in a method of learning that emphasizes repetition and perfection of minutiae. They learn to write ideographs in a certain way, to arrange flowers, and to swing a *kendō* stick or a baseball bat in similarly prescribed forms. This *modus operandi* naturally carries over into their adult work environment.

I’m familiar with the arguments of the anti-culturalists. I admit the concept of “national character” is often used by racists or as a stereotype that doesn’t go very far in explaining the actions of a country’s citizens very deeply. But to suggest that there is nothing different about the way that a typical Japanese and a typical American sees the world and the way they articulate and act out values in a given situation, is to deny reality and throw the baby out with the bathwater. I’ve never argued that a society of 125 million and a sports history of 125 years can be summed up by the notion that they are “latter day samurai playing with bats instead of swords,” as William Kelly of Yale implies I do. I’ve never argued that Japanese behavior is instinctive, timeless, unchanging, unique or without internal contradictions. However, There is something more going on with the one thousand-swing fungo drill than “personal competition among individual players caused by the small scale of Japanese pro ball and the corporate ownership,” as some have written. What label you want to give it can be debated, and maybe ‘national character’ is a passé term, but something else is going on and it’s not ‘ideological decisions made in particular circumstances.’²⁰

Of course, things change. Jet travel, satellite TV, and the internet have all served to lessen Japan’s relative isolation and blur the differences and distinctions between the two countries. Players have become more Americanized. The departure of superstars to the MLB, something once unthinkable, has brought about great change. As Jeff Kingston

¹⁸*Asahi Shimbun*, March 11, 2006.

¹⁹Fusakazu Hayano, Ph.D., personal conversation, January 2, 1995.

²⁰William Kelly, “Same Sport, Different Structure,” *LOOK Japan* 44:510 (September, 1998).

shows in his modern classic, *Japan's Quiet Transformation*, change is seen in other developments that are taking place in society in Japan – a more laid-back school system, serious political reform, a slightly higher rate of acceptance of foreigners compared to fifteen years ago, and an incremental unraveling of the values and verities that have long been taken for granted. But at the same time, you can still bet that 99% of the players will show up for voluntary spring training in January and puke their guts out during the dawn-to-dusk training camps. And there is a reason for that, just as there is a reason that most Japanese will put in unpaid overtime or hang around the office after quitting time just to avoid being the first one to go home. These gestures matter.

Since the samurai approach is still pervasive (indeed one will often hear that once Valentine and the other *gaijin* managers depart Japan, Japanese baseball will return to the older “Japanese way” of doing things), it seems a useful metaphor for understanding society and the way people view the world and act in it. People may attribute different characteristics to samurai based on contemporary mores – witness the *Shinsengumi*'s metrosexual samurai – but there is a general sense of what those attributes are or should be and a sense that they are virtuous and worth emulating.²¹ Naturally, there is a gap between ideal construct and everyday practice, but there are clearly broad influences. I do think that the gut-it-out approach to life, school and work is still quite common in Japan, and that such gestures are still expected and offered because they matter as an ideal, albeit one increasingly observed in the breach.

Setting the Record Straight

Finally, in this context, I would like to say something about the voluminous writings of Professor Kelly, the highly regarded Yale anthropologist and frequent critic of my work. I respect Professor Kelly's scholarship and I admire his effort to put together an academic history of Japanese baseball. At the same time, I must say that I find some of *his* interpretations of the game in Japan uninformed and believe that they undermine Americans' understanding of it. Professor Kelly's account of fan behavior and his *gattsu* genealogy are two examples that I discussed in the *The Meaning of Ichiro*.²² In “Sense and Sensibility at the Ballpark: What Fans Make of Professional Baseball in Modern Japan,” an article about the noisy outfield *oendan* cheering sections so popular in Japan, which originally appeared as “An Anthropologist in the Bleachers,” Kelly declares that, in Japan, in general, the “more numerous infield audience . . . by and large behaves rather like crowds at American ballparks.”²³ This account goes against everything I have encountered in 40 years of watching baseball in Japan, where the contrast between organized cheering groups in the bleachers and the more sedate fans sitting in the infield is clear and is quite different from that found in American parks. To quote one of the many longtime observers who sees the same thing I do, Ichiro Suzuki, a baseball player who spent nine years in Japan and five in the U.S., “I think Japanese fans, like the

²¹ The *Shinsengumi* were a band of samurai who supported the Tokugawa regime and battled against imperial loyalist forces in the 1860s at the end of the Tokugawa era.

²² See Whiting, *The Meaning of Ichiro*, 284-288 for the former and for the latter, Chapter 3, 280.

²³ William Kelly, “An Anthropologist in the Bleachers: Cheering a Japanese Baseball Team,” *Japan Quarterly* 44:4 (October-December, 1997): 78.

Japanese players, suppress their emotions too. They are very *otonashii* (quiet). You have the cheerleaders blowing trumpets and all. But when they're not doing anything, the stadium is really quiet. American fans, by contrast, do their own thing – people stand up and dance. The fans get up and express themselves, they show their own individuality, just like the players. You get the feeling they are really enjoying themselves.” Asked why the Japanese fan is so quiet – was it courtesy or shyness? – he responded, “I think it's shyness. When I'm sitting in the stands in Japan as a fan, I can really understand that feeling.” In “The Blood and Guts of Japanese Professional Baseball” by Professor Kelly, the professor argues that, among other things, that “guts” did not become ideologically central in pro baseball until the V-9 era of Kawakami and the Yomiuri Giants, 1965-1973.²⁴ This would also be news to the men who participated in the Morinji “Vomit” Camp as well as pitchers Motoshi Fujita, who pitched 359 innings for Mizuhara and his Giants in 1959, Tadashi Sugiura who pitched all four games of the 1959 series against the Giants for the Nankai Hawks, coming off a season in which he won 38 games while pitching 371 innings, and another contemporary, Hiroshi Gondo, a pitcher who threw 429 innings in 1961. These individuals uncomplainingly pitched their arms out for their managers, relying on guts when the inevitable pain from so much wear and tear manifested itself in their elbows and shoulders. Their careers ended early, but as Gondo put it, “The code of *Bushido* was strong. Many times my fingers and arms hurt, but I could not refuse my manager's request.”

Kelly's remarks on the autocratic Tetsuharu Kawakami represent another of his interpretations that undermines Americans' understanding of the Japanese game. In an essay on Sadaharu Oh, “Learning to Swing in Japanese Baseball,” for example, he writes:

Japanese organization's suppression of individual initiative and selfless commitment to group objectives have always been stereotypic pieties mouthed by corporate flacks and accepted at face value by outside commentators and critics. In fact, however, postwar large organizations have always been defined by the continual tensions between the variable talents and motivations of individual members and multiple (even inconsistent) aims of the hierarchically structured group. Group harmony, hierarchical authority and individual motivation have always coexisted uneasily in Japanese organizations, like organizations everywhere.

This was certainly the case with the Yomiuri Giants, despite their carefully polished image of “managed baseball.” Indeed, it was well known that despite that phrase, manager Kawakami actually stressed individual effort to the players. . . . (As Sadaharu Oh said,) “Kawakami baseball” was generally thought of as team-oriented rather than individual-oriented. . . . Play with greed for victory, he taught, and this he most particularly emphasized as an individual thing. One strove for its highest individual goals possible and did so relentlessly. We had an

²⁴Linhart, Sepp and Sabine Frühstück, eds., *The Culture of Japan As Seen Through Its Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

obligation to the team, but his obligation was best fulfilled by learning to use ourselves individually to the limit.²⁵

Self-sacrifice, one might say, is a rather more complex disposition than that of a “cardboard samurai” – and rather more like definitions of effort familiar to athletes in the United States and elsewhere.²⁶

To imply that the Machiavellian Kawakami stressed individual achievement is to stand the term on its head. Kawakami was famous for saying that individualism would destroy a team, that lone wolves were a cancer in any organization, and he demanded that his players all train the same way with the same intensity. Furthermore, he regularly condoned the use of physical force by his coaches on the Giants’ younger players to keep them in line. His dictatorial, harsh ways caused, in one infamous case, the nervous breakdown of a 20-year old pitcher, Toshiko Yuguchi, who entered a mental hospital in December 1972, after two years under Kawakami’s iron hand. Tsuguchi was the number one draft choice of the Giants, but found himself psychologically unable to cope with Kawakami’s strict regimen as well as memorize the dozens of complicated defensive formations that manager made his players remember. After being severely rebuked by Kawakami for giving up two home runs in a meaningless intra-squad game played on Fan Appreciation Day in November 1973, during which the Giants celebrated their 9th straight Japan Championship, Yuguchi went into a downward emotional spiral and sought medical treatment. After stays in two different mental hospitals, he died of heart failure in March 1973. Kawakami’s response to the news of Yuguchi’s death was quoted in the above-mentioned Oda book as follows: “The Giants are the ones who suffered. We invested a lot of money, time and emotion in this player.”²⁷ While I am on the subject of Kawakami I would like to point out that I’ve never written that Kawakami *kanri yakyu* (controlled or managed baseball) is in the majority, as Kelly says I have.²⁸

Kawakami was among the league leaders in sacrifice bunts, despite having the most powerful one-two punch in Japanese baseball history in Oh and legendary third baseman Shigeo Nagashima. This strategy of sacrifice bunting at the earliest opportunity all too often left first base open when Oh came to bat, resulting in an inevitable walk, and literally taking the bat out of his star slugger’s hands. This practice, not uncommon in Japan but generally considered counterproductive in MLB by both managers and players, may well have prevented the great Oh from reaching the lofty 1,000 career home run mark.

Veteran observers recall the time, early in the 1973 season, when Kawakami removed his ace pitcher Tsuneo Horiuchi, in the fifth inning of a game with two out,

²⁵William Kelly, “Learning to Swing: Oh Sadaharu and the Pedagogy and Practice of Japanese Professional Baseball,” in *Learning in Likely Places*, ed. John Singleton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 422-458.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷See Tetsuharu Kawakami, *Aku no kanrigaku* (Tokyo: Kobunsha, 1980); Tetsuharu Kawakami, *President Magazine*, “Za Man” series, October 15, 1987; Juntaro Oda, *Kyojingu ni homurareta otokotachi*, (Tokyo: Shinchosha. 2003).

²⁸Alan Guttman and Lee Thompson, *Japanese Sports: A History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001): 175.

nobody on and a ten-run lead, thereby depriving him of credit for the official win. It was something no MLB manager would do, but Kawakami acted thusly, it was believed, to demonstrate his power and teach Horiuchi – known for his surliness – a lesson in humility. Horiuchi was surprised, but he did not protest. At the same time, Kawakami also overworked his star, using him as a starter and in relief, in a way that won pennants, but damaged Horiuchi's arm and put an early end to his career. Horiuchi may have had individual goals, but he was resigned to the fact that he would have little say in how he was used. All in all, Kawakami's regime was not quite like organizations everywhere.

Next, consider Professor Kelly's recent essay "Baseball in Japan: The National Pastime Beyond National Character," in which he slammed the *New York Times* for its headline on the aforementioned Randy Bass incident, which read, "The Japanese Protect Oh's record." He writes:

It was not the Japanese who walked Bass, but rather the Giants pitchers, and I think they had more reasons for doing so than the simple fact that they were Japanese.

The first reason he cites goes as follows:

. . . the Giants wanted to win that final game very much, because they could salvage some pride by clinching the season series against their bitter, long-standing rivals, the Tigers. One can not exaggerate the intensity of what was for decades not only a rivalry of teams, but also the pitting of second-city Osaka pride against the national-capital dominance. That year, the Giants had been preseason favorites to win the league title but slipped disappointingly and embarrassingly, while the Tigers were celebrating a rare success. With the Giants desperate for a victory, it was obvious strategy for them to pitch around the Tigers' most potent hitter, who nevertheless became the second foreigner to win the Triple Crown.²⁹

While one might object mildly to the generalization evident in the *Times* headline, it is inaccurate to say that "pitching around Bass" was an "obvious strategy." The 1985 Hanshin Tigers had perhaps the most potent batting lineup in the history of the Japanese game. Bass hit in the third slot in the order. Batting fourth behind Bass was third baseman Masayuki Kakefu, who hit 40 home runs, had 108 RBIs and a batting average of .300. Hitting fifth after Kakefu was second baseman Akinobu Okada with 35 home runs, 101 RBIs and a .342 average. (Hitting leadoff was right fielder Akinobu Mayumi had 34 homers, 84 RBIs and a batting average of .322.) Putting Bass on base with such dangerous hitters coming up was tantamount to throwing the game, which was perhaps why the Giants lost 10-2. The argument looks even more dubious when one considers the details of each at-bat. In the first inning of the then scoreless game, Bass came up with one out and a runner on base, only to be walked on four straight pitches, a violation of the canonical baseball rule, which says "Never put the lead run in scoring position." Next, Bass led off the fourth inning, with the Tigers trailing 1-0, and was walked intentionally again, this time in violation of the canonical rule that says "Do not put the tying run on

²⁹William Kelly, "Baseball in Japan: The National Game Beyond National Character," in *Baseball as America*, ed. National Geographic Society (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, in conjunction with the National Baseball Hall of Fame, 2002), 47-52.

base.” In the sixth inning of that game, Bass came up to bat again with a runner on first, none out, and the Tigers still trailing 1-0. Incredibly, Giant starter Masaaki Saito, a young phenom who was leading the team in wins, tried to walk him for a third consecutive time. Bass threw his bat at a pitch well out of the strike zone and hit a fluke single to left. Kaekefu then singled and the Tigers went on to score seven runs. Bass came up for his second at bat of the inning with another runner on first base, and was walked intentionally yet again. In the eighth inning, he was given a fourth intentional pass – in this instance with runners on first and second base and the Tigers leading 7-2. Kakefu singled and the Tigers extended the lead to 10-2.³⁰

To call that “obvious strategy” for a team “desperate” to win the final game is the sort of disinformation one frequently gets from Giants’ front office executives on loan from the *Yomiuri Shimbun* head office and who are not particularly well versed in the game. Such an explanation falls in the same category as the inflated and blatantly false attendance figures the Giants have regularly reported over the years, which veteran sportswriters greet with laughter. It was also characteristic of the sort of propaganda that Foreign Ministry officials have offered foreign journalists to explain away the closed *kisha* (reporters) club system in Japan, which effectively denies non-Japanese correspondents access to important press conferences.

Professor Kelly goes on to discuss other factors:

Furthermore, the record the Giants’ pitchers were protecting belongs to their manager, who was standing in the dugout watching them. Manager Oh was perhaps remembering another controversial game against the Tigers from his own playing days, when Oh himself was thrown at twice by the Tigers’ pitching ace, Gene Bacque, known as the “Ragin’ Cajun.” The second time Bacque threw at Oh produced a bench-clearing brawl, during which Oh’s batting coach, Arakawa Hiroshi, stormed the mound and was punched out by Bacque. Perhaps, too, Oh and his pitchers were recalling the belittlement of Oh’s career home run record by the American baseball world.

Most baseball fans, Japanese and American, felt it was unfortunate that the Giants pitchers avoided pitching to Bass. But the incident was much more revealing about the Giants, the Tigers, and that season than it was about the Japanese as a people. Personal histories, bitter team rivalries, city pride, and our nations’ past interactions were all part of what happened that evening. A simplistic interpretation solely in the context of a broad-brushed national character is not an explanation. A love of the game and its pleasures should encourage us to appreciate the subtleties of baseball in Japan with the same knowledge and passion that we bring to the sport here at home.³¹

I agree with this, but it is in its subtleties that I find Kelly’s analysis lacking, for here again, there are distortions. For example, anyone who knows Oh knows that he and Bacque were friends and that they often visited each other’s houses, both before and after the incident. The one who flew into a rage was not Oh, who simply strode out toward the mound to tell his friend to stop throwing inside, but Oh’s mentor Arakawa.

³⁰From the official Central League box score of the game, played on October 24, 1985, 1 p.m. at Korakuen Stadium.

³¹Kelly, 2002, 51.

As for the argument that walking Bass was payback for Oh's record of 868 homers being belittled in the American baseball world, that too is hard to swallow. In fact, Oh's achievements won him the cover of *Sports Illustrated*, a front page story in the *Washington Post*, a special display in the Hall of Fame at Cooperstown, and kudos from every major leaguer who had seen him play, including Ted Williams, Hank Aaron and Cleve Boyer. Oh himself has repeatedly said that his achievement should not be compared with those of MLB record holders because the two games are so significantly different that it is difficult to make any conclusive comparisons. One glaring example of the differences between the two games can be found in the compressed bats that Oh used, which were banned in the U.S. pro game because it was believed they gave the batter an unfair advantage.

In addition, anyone who knows the ever fair-minded Oh would know that he would never issue such a walk order to his pitchers. When Oh said that he had given no such orders to his staff to protect his record by intentionally walking Bass, he was widely believed. But also, anyone who knows Oh would also know that he would never countermand such an order from the front office. That would be disrespectful. Nor would he ever prevent his players from doing so on their own, out of respect for the tribute they would be paying him.

That the Giants wanted to protect their team record is certain. Indeed, walking the opposition to protect a team record has been a common, if unsavory practice in Japanese baseball and if Oh's challenger had been Kakefu or Okada, those hitters would have been walked as well. American Keith Comstock, who pitched for the Giants that year, says he was told by a team coach that there would be a fine of a thousand dollars for every strike thrown to Bass and most close observers believed those orders came from the front office.³² But when a foreign player is involved, there is usually more at work than mere team loyalty, or at least there was then.

How "most [Japanese] baseball" fans felt about Bass's treatment is not entirely clear despite Professor Kelly's claim that most of them thought it "unfortunate" that the Giants pitchers avoided pitching to Bass.³³ However, having been on the ground and in the trenches covering Japanese baseball during that era, I can make an educated guess about the "national mood" at that time. Government surveys annually showed that roughly two-thirds of Japanese did not want to associate with foreigners, and only about one-fourth of the public was favorably disposed toward the idea of marriage with a non-Japanese. Moreover, the 1980s were a time of intense anti-American feeling, because of trade friction with the U.S., among other factors, and there also had been much criticism of American ballplayers after a series of high profile walkouts by noted ex-big-leaguers who were dissatisfied with their playing conditions. The Commissioner of Baseball at the time of the Bass affair, Takezo Shimoda, a former ambassador to the U.S., was openly hostile to American players. He was famous for saying that foreign players didn't belong in the game in Japan, a remarkable statement for an ex-diplomat of such standing. "The *gaijin* are overpaid, underproductive, and generally annoying," he had said, this despite the presence of many well-mannered players from North America who more than earned

³²Author Interview with Keith Comstock, Oct 25, 1985. "...those orders came from the front office" was the conclusion of a study done by the editors of Takarajima Magajin-sha. in a special edition entitled *Kyojin gun Tabu Jiken Shi*, 1288, December 1, 2005.

³³See quote, p. 117

their salary, including the easy-going Bass.³⁴ In 1983, Shimoda had even made the rounds of spring training camps, urging Japanese players to stop depending on their foreign teammates. “After all,” he said, getting down to the heart of the matter, “it is only natural that Japanese baseball be played by Japanese alone, as the gap between the respective levels of the Japan and American games narrows. Japanese baseball will never be considered first rate as long as there are former major leaguers no longer wanted in their own countries in key spots in the Japanese lineup.”³⁵ Shimoda probably did not find it the least bit “unfortunate” that Japanese teams avoided pitching to Randy Bass, a former MLB bench-warmer. Nor did the folks over at the rightwing-leaning *Sankei Supotsu*, who had previously published a baseball series entitled “Time of Peril” that called for a total ban on foreign players. In one article, a *Sankei* reporter had written, “What the Japanese fans really want to see is a big home run by a Japanese star, not a *gaijin*.”³⁶

The smaller-than-usual afternoon crowd of 30,000, cheated out of an epic confrontation between Bass and Giants ace Masaaki Saito, certainly protested the walks to Bass, but most of those fans were there to support the Hanshin contingent and Bass, and the booing did not begin until the fourth walk. Moreover, retired Hanshin slugger Koichi Tabuchi, nicknamed “Mr. Tiger” for his prodigious home run output with that team and a man who, as a Tiger alumnus, should have been rooting for Bass, instead sympathized with the opposing faction. “It was us against them,” he said later. “I played in the same era as Oh and we felt very strongly about his record. At the time, I would confess that people did not want anyone other than a Japanese to break the record.”³⁷

Further evidence of this attitude was seen in the contemporary coverage of the Bass incident. Although a column in a late evening edition of the *Asahi Shimbun*, Yomiuri’s arch rival, criticized the behavior of the Giants pitchers, sports papers the next morning were curiously devoid of outraged editorials or indignant quotes about the matter from fans and prominent NPB personages including, of course, the commissioner.

Rules existing at the time already limited foreign participation in the regular season to two players per team and in All-Star games as well, a restriction that often kept league leaders from appearing. (The NPB now permits four foreign players per team.) Although such rules did not exist in the MLB, where there has long been a substantial Latin American contingent, few in Japan objected to their existence in the NPB.

In September 1986, the *Asahi Shimbun* conducted a survey that asked the question, “Are foreigners necessary?” 56% of the fans said yes. But only 10% of the players, four of the team owners and none of the managers said yes. The main complaint was not that foreigners cost too much money or deprived younger players of a spot on a team or even that they caused too much trouble. It was simply a Delphic, “Japanese-only teams are ideal.” In 1987, new NPB commissioner Juhei Takeuchi declared flatly, “pure-

³⁴ Shimoda made his remarks at, among other venues, a meeting of Japan’s professional baseball executive committee, November 14, 1984. They were widely reported at the time by the Japanese media.

³⁵ From author interviews with Reggie Smith and Ichiro Tanuma of the Yomiuri Giants, who were among those who listened to Shimoda’s plea, February 12, 1983. Also, this author interviewed Takezo Shimoda, May 10, 1983. Shimoda’s remarks were also widely disseminated in Japanese press.

³⁶ *Sankei Supotsu*, December 5-15, 1980.

³⁷ *The NY Times*, September 15, 2001.

blooded baseball is ideal, We have to have a World Series between the Japanese and the Americans. We can't do that with foreign players here.”³⁸ *Yomiuri Shimbun* chairman Risaku Mutai made similar statements throughout the 1980s.³⁹ And in 1999, Giants manager Shigeo Nagashima, Japan's national idol, declared to a group of supporters that his “ideal” for many years had been to field a purely made-in-Japan lineup.⁴⁰ A manager in U.S. MLB making such borderline racist remarks would no doubt be censured or perhaps fired. Predictably, no one in the Japanese press or the NPB raised any objection to the remarks.

As mentioned earlier, when Ichiro moved to the MLB, the situation appeared to have changed. The aforementioned Tabuchi sensed this as well. He said, “Back then, the game seemed like the Japanese versus the U.S.. But now, with Ichiro and Sasaki, people are watching a lot of American ball and have gained a real appreciation for it. There's no prejudice anymore.”⁴¹ In fact, Randy Bass had even written a letter to Tuffy Rhodes during the 2001 season when Rhodes was threatening Oh's record, saying essentially the same thing and telling him his chances for success were much better than in Bass's time.

As we have seen, this turned out not to be the case. Rhodes was also denied the chance to break Oh's record. But at least the NPB commissioner on watch at the time, Hiromori Kawashima, was willing to denounce the un-sportsmanlike behavior that prevented Rhodes from succeeding in his quest for the record. He issued a statement that said, “The decision of the Hawks to walk Rhodes was completely divorced from the essence of baseball, which values the supremacy of fair play.”⁴² This was in sharp contrast to the statements of his predecessor and appeared to be widely supported by the fans. However, Rhodes left Japan convinced that there was a “Code Red” that kicked into action whenever a foreign player did too well.⁴³

In conclusion, it is perhaps ironic that although anthropologists are trained to see through the surface appearances of society, in this case, Professor Kelly, normally a highly sophisticated observer of the scene in Japan, seems, however understandably, to have been taken in by Japanese society while missing the fundamental realities. If we are going to talk about U.S.-Japan relations, then we should address the dark side, for it certainly exists. Xenophobia may be slowly dying out, but it has not yet disappeared. Nor has Japan's “national character.” Baseball is still a good window for looking at both of Japanese culture.

³⁸ Author Interview. November 25, 1987. Takeuchi's remarks were widely publicized.

³⁹ Author interview, Warren Cromartie, who attended the annual pre-season team dinners at which Mutai made his comments. March 15, 1990.

⁴⁰ Nagashima's videotaped remarks were made on March 3, 1999 at a meeting of the “San-san kai” (Thirty-Three Association) in Tokyo.

⁴¹ *The NY Times*, September 15, 2001.

⁴² *Nikkan Supotsu*, October 2, 2001; *Asahi Shimbun*, October 2, 2001.

⁴³ Author interview, October 8, 2002.

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The samurai, members of a powerful military caste in feudal Japan, began as provincial warriors before rising to power in the 12th century with the beginning. As servants of the daimyos, or great lords, the samurai backed up the authority of the shogun and gave him power over the mikado (emperor). The samurai would dominate Japanese government and society until the Meiji Restoration of 1868 led to the abolition of the feudal system. Despite being deprived of their traditional privileges, many of the samurai would enter the elite ranks of politics and industry in modern Japan. More importantly, the traditional samurai code of honor, discipline and morality known as bushido—or “the way of the warrior”—was revived and made the basic code of conduct for Samurai were a class of honorary soldiers in Japan who served from the early 600s to the late 1800s. Between 1467 and 1573, various daimyos led their clans in a fight for national dominance, and nearly all of the provinces were engulfed in the fighting. The Warring States Period drew to a close in 1568 when the warlord Oda Nobunaga defeated three powerful daimyos, marched into Kyoto, and had his preferred leader, Yoshiaki, installed as shogun. The culture of the samurai was grounded in the concept of bushido, or the way of the warrior, whose central tenets are honor and freedom from fear of death. A samurai was legally entitled to cut down any commoner who failed to honor him—or her—properly. The warrior was believed to be imbued with bushido spirit. way to express ong>theong> samurai spirit. To play baseball is to develop this spirit. Thus our. What label you want to give it can be debated, ong>andong> maybe “national character”™ is a pass© term, but something else is going on ong>andong> it™s not “ideological decisions made in. particular circumstances.” How does this national character debate relate to that concerning invented traditions? How do traditions, invented or selected, shape and permeate the modern? Since the samurai approach is still pervasive (indeed, one will often hear that once Valentine and the other gaijin managers depart Japan, Japanese baseball will return completely to the old ways), it seems a useful metaphor for understanding society and the way people view the world and act in it. People may attribute different characteristics to samurai based on contemporary mores—witness the Shinsengumi™s metrosexual samurai—but there is a general sense of what those attributes are or should be and a sense that they are virtuous and worth emulating.