

SABR Asian Baseball Committee Newsletter

Volume 3 Number 2 December 2005



Committee News

Merle Branner Takes Over Web Site.

Merle Branner is now in charge of the Asian Baseball research Committee web site. She has done a fabulous job redesigning the site to make in both look better and run more smoothly. Check it out at

<http://asianbb.sabr.org/asianbaseball.html>

If you have any comments or ideas for our web site, please contact Merle at merleab@mac.com

Mike Malloch Named Mainland Chinese Baseball Supervisor.

Mike is at the Asian Studies Center at Michigan State University. More His summary of the 2005 Chinese season is on page 10.

Committee Vice President Needed

We are looking for a vice president. Responsibilities include helping with the newsletter and website. The position is not very time consuming. Please email Rob Fitts if interested.

Korean Baseball Supervisor Needed

The committee needs a supervisor for Korea baseball. Duties include writing te season summary each December and answering questions about Korean baseball through email. Please contact Rob Fitts if you are interested.

Conference on Japanese to be Held in Michigan on April 1, 2006

The Asian Studies Department of Michigan State University will hold a one day conference on Japanese baseball in Troy, Michigan on April 1, 2006. Speakers will include Robert Whiting, Peter Bjarkman, Robert Fitts, William Kelly, Sayuri Shimizu and Robert Smaal. For more information please see the announcement on page 14 or email Michael Malloch at mmalloch@juno.com

1934 Major League Tour of Asia Project Looking for Writers

The 1934 Tour Project is currently in need of individuals interested in writing short (approximately 1,000 words) biographical sketches of both Japanese and American players and managers. These sketches will be posted on the 1934 Tour Project Website and be included in an upcoming SABR publication on the 1934 Tour.

Please e-mail Paul Hofmann at p_n_hofmann@hotmail.com if you are interested in writing one or more of these bios. Assignments will be made on a first come first serve basis. Team rosters are available on the 1934 Tour Website at: <http://www.robsjapanesecards.com/1934home1.htm>

Nine to Publish Article on Taiwanese Baseball

The Spring 2006 issue of Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture will publish Nationalism and the National Identity of Taiwanese Baseball by Chunwei Yu a assistant professor at Shu Te University in Taiwan.

Contact Information

Asian Committee Chair: Robert Fitts

Email: asianbaseball@mindspring.com

Telephone 212-828-6678

Committee web site: <http://asianbb.sabr.org/asianbaseball.html>

Japanese Baseball News



Nippon Profession Baseball 2005

By Michael Westbay
JapaneseBaseball.com

It's that time of year again, "*bounenkai* season" here in Japan. *Bounenkai* literally means "Forget the Year Party." But first, let's review what happened in 2005 that may or may not need to be forgotten.

A New Team

At the end of 2004, the players staged their first strike and forced the management, intent on reforming NPB with fewer teams, to add a new team in the wake of the merger between the Kobe-based Orix BlueWave and Osaka-based Kintetsu Buffaloes (resulting in the Orix Buffaloes). Rakuten Ichiba, an Internet shopping-mall like company, won the rights to join NPB and set about building a team in the northern city of Sendai, becoming the Tohoku Rakuten Golden Eagles. The team was made up of mostly the discarded remnants of Kintetsu and Orix, but a number of fine players like Hisashi Iwakuma (15 and 2 in 2004, who refused to join the merged team) and team captain Koichi Isobe (who was outspoken against the merger). Not part of the scandal of paying top collage prospect Yasuhiro Ichiba money under the table, the Golden Eagles where able to attain Ichiba's services as well.

On Opening Day, the Tohoku Rakuten Golden Eagles defeated the Chiba Lotte Marines by a store of 3-1 at Chiba Marine Stadium in a well played game by both sides. This was a very good start for the new ball club. Unfortunately, they lost 26-0 the following day, and things seemed to only get worse from there on out. Here's how the Eagles did month by month (Source: *Shukan Baseball*, Issue #57 for 2005):

Month	Games	W	L	T	W%	BA	HR	RS	RGU	ERA	
March	5	5	1	0	.200	.160	0	6	47	10.32	
April	24	5	19	0	.208	.237	12	87	142	5.48	
May	25	7	18	0	.280	.251	19	89	141	5.42	
June	22	8	14	0	.364	.247	19	89	120	4.92	
July	20	10	9	1	.526	.289	14	85	103	4.84	
August	24	3	21	0	.125	.251	12	72	164	6.37	
Sept.	16	4	12	0	.250	.283	12	76	95	6.10	
			=====	====	==	==	==	=====	==	====	=====
Total	136	38	97	1	.281	.255	88	504	812	5.67	

Despite finishing 59 games under .500, the move of a professional baseball team to the Tohoku region proved to be very good for Rakuten. Many were unsure if a small city the size of Sendai could support a professional team, and judging from attendance alone, Rakuten finished 11th overall.

Yet, thanks to marketing goods to the region (and available throughout the country from their Internet site), low priced players, and controlling all concessions at their home grounds (something most teams don't do, if any others do at all), Rakuten became the first Pacific League team in recent history to finish with a positive cash flow. This is significant because one of the major reasons for contraction was that the Pacific League teams continue to bleed red ink.

If they are to continue running in the black, though, Rakuten is going to have to field a better team next season. Their manager, Yasushi Tao, was released at the end of the 2005 season and veteran manager Katsuya Nomura was hired. Rakuten's owner, Hiroshi Mikitani, said that he should have hired a manager to build a new team, something that Nomura-kantoku has had experience at with Yakult, so the team's inability to win was not a true reflection on Tao-kantoku.

Japanese Baseball News



Team	Games	2005 Central League Attendance			Diff
		Attendance	Avg.	2004	
Hanshin	73	3,132,224	42,907	3,523,000	-11.1%
Giants	73	2,922,093	40,029	3,744,500	-22.0%
Chunichi	73	2,284,400	31,293	2,330,500	-2.0%
Yakult	73	1,307,731	17,914	1,686,000	-22.4%
Hiroshima	73	1,050,119	14,385	986,000	+ 6.5%
Yokohama	73	976,004	13,370	1,500,000	-34.9%
Totals:	438	11,672,571	26,650	13,770,000	-15.2%

Team	Games	2005 Pacific League Attendance			Diff
		Attendance	Avg.	2004	
Softbank	68	2,115,977	31,117	3,070,000	-31.1%
Nippon Ham	68	1,365,643	20,083	1,616,000	-15.5%
Orix	68	1,356,156	19,943	1,415,000	-4.2%
Lotte	68	1,334,014	19,618	1,596,000	-16.4%
Seibu	68	1,103,148	16,223	1,649,000	-33.1%
Rakuten	68	977,104	14,369	*	
Totals:	408	8,252,042	20,226	10,684,000	-22.8%

* Kintetsu had 1,338,000 reported for 2004.

Source: *Nikkan Sports*

Note: Up until the 2005 season, all attendances were estimated. Most people knew that 55,000 people would not fit into Tokyo Dome, but it wasn't until the 2005 season when teams started publishing actual gate attendance that such a fact could be confirmed. Considering that teams grossly over-estimated attendance in past years, little can actually be said about the reported drops this year. In fact, many of them may actually be increases.

Godfather Leaves and Returns

At the end of the 2004 season, three "owners" stepped aside from control over their respective teams due to the recruiting scandal of paying excessive amounts of money to collage prospect Yasuhiro Ichiba. Of them, the most public figure was Tsuneo Watanabe, the head of the Yomiuri Group, and who most consider to be more powerful than the NPB Commissioner himself. In fact, throughout the debates that marked the Kintetsu-Orix merger, the push for contraction by Watanabe and then Lions' owner, Yoshiaki Tsutsumi, the Commissioner parroted whatever Watanabe said or tried to stay out of the debates completely. Many saw the Ichiba Scandal as a way for Watanabe to get out of the hot seat he'd gotten himself into for pushing so hard for contraction against public opinion that was very much against him.

Takuo Takihana, president of Yomiuri Shimbun's Tokyo office, took over as new owner of the Giants. He was observed having frequent lunches with Watanabe, who would only give the press a cold "no comment" (when not telling them off for bothering him) before getting into a car and being driven away. Despite his "taking responsibility" for the scandal and retiring, it was obvious to all that Watanabe continued to control the Giants as puppet master instead of in front of the press.

However, not having Watanabe's boisterous, egocentric remarks about the Giants in the daily press seemed to give Japan's Team a back seat to other things going on in NPB. In fact, the Giants seemed to be totally void of direction the entire season, finishing in fifth place, their worst finish since 1979. Without Watanabe instilling fear into all those who work for the Yomiuri Group, Yomiuri TV affiliates in Hokkaido and the Tohoku regions got permission to **not** broadcast Giant games but to broadcast local (Hokkaido Nippon Ham Fighters and Tohoku Rakuten Golden Eagles) games instead. In fact, when the Hokkaido Nippon Ham Fighters went to Sendai to play the Golden Eagles, they sold more tickets to those games than when the Giants came to town, Giants having always been the premium tickets where ever they went. It was as though the entire Yomiuri Empire was crumbling without their long time godfather there to keep everything running smoothly, and everyone in line.

Japanese Baseball News



So before the season ended, a new position of team chairman was created and Watanabe took that seat. Watanabe started talking to the press again. Rather than talking through Takihana-owner, Watanabe-chairman was clearly in charge of selecting Tatsunori Hara as the new manager for the Giants next season. (Ironic, since it was an argument between Hara and Watanabe a few years ago that forced Hara to resign the post then.)

The Giants suffered greatly from lack of leadership in the media in 2005. But Watanabe still has a way to go to regain his pre-strike status of NPB Godfather. 2006 should see more of the man Pro Yakyu fans love to hate.

Inter-League Play

2005 saw the introduction of inter-league play between the Central and Pacific League teams. Even the most optimistic of fans didn't think that the Central League teams would allow two cards to be cut from their deck of Giants' matches during the regular season, as the national TV revenue for such games can pay several salaries. But they did agree, and for close to two month of the first half of the season, we got to see match-ups that only existed in a handful of post-season games or during the pre-season when teams were fine tuning their lineups.

Going into inter-league play, the Chunichi Dragons were way out ahead in the Central League, looking to repeat their 2004 league victory. But the Dragons couldn't seem to buy a victory against the Pacific League teams during the first month of inter-league play. In fact, against the Tohoku Rakuten Golden Eagles, who finished last in both the league and inter-league competitions, Chunichi went 2 and 4, the only team with a losing record against the new team (Yakult went 3 and 3 against them). At the end of inter-league play, the Dragons found themselves behind the Tigers and, despite playing better than .500 against the Central League teams the rest of the season, were unable to catch up.

The Chiba Lotte Marines were the victors of the first inter-league competition, beating out the Fukuoka Softbank Hawks by just a single game, and the Hanshin Tigers by 2.5 games.

Team	Games	W	Inter-League Final Standings				GB
			L	T	W%	GB	
Lotte	36	24	11	1	.686	-	
Softbank	36	23	12	1	.657	1.0	
Hanshin	36	21	13	2	.618	2.5	
Giants	36	18	14	4	.563	4.5	
Yakult	36	20	16	0	.556	4.5	
Yokohama	36	19	17	0	.528	5.5	
Orix	36	17	16	3	.515	6.0	
Seibu	36	18	18	0	.500	6.5	
Chunichi	36	15	21	0	.417	9.5	
Nippon Ham	36	12	22	2	.353	11.5	
Hiroshima	36	11	24	1	.314	13.0	
Rakuten	36	11	25	0	.306	13.5	

After years of playing against the same five teams over and over and over again, inter-league play brought a welcome relief to the monotony and introduced players in the Pacific League to the more populous Central League fans. Inter-league play will be continued in 2006.

JFK

In mid-summer of 2005, JFK made the headlines of the daily sports papers on almost a daily basis. No, not that JFK. This is Jeff (Williams), (Kyuji) Fujikawa, and (Tomoyuki) Kubota, the triple-stopper trio for the Hanshin Tigers.

Japanese Baseball News



The idea of a double-stopper started in the early 1990s by Yokohama manager Akira Ejiri. Ejiri-kantoku had Koki Morita come on in the 8th inning, then Kazuhiro Sasaki close out the 9th, effectively putting pressure on other teams to get their scoring done by the end of the 7th inning. This era marked the beginning of specialized relief pitchers.

While there may have been triple-closers before this season, there's no doubt that Hanshin's manager, Akinobu Okada, made it popular in 2005. Jeff appeared in 75 games this season, closing 7 of them, with a 3 and 3 record and 2.11 ERA. Fujikawa appeared in a record setting 80 games, closing 7 games while going 7 and 1 with 1 save and a 1.36 ERA. Then Kubota was the closer, finishing 63 of the 68 appearances he made, going 5 and 4 with 27 saves and a 2.12 ERA. This trio effectively cut down the opposition to just six at bats before being shut down. After all the criticism Okada-kantoku got from taking the 2003 champion Tigers to fourth place in 2004, this pitching move redeemed himself in the fanatical eyes of the /torakichi/.

Pacific League Playoffs

2004 saw the introduction of playoffs in the Pacific League. The First Stage is a best 2 out of 3 game series between the second and third place finishers. The Second Stage puts the winner of Stage One up against the teams that finishes the league play in first place in a best 3 out of 5 series. Depending on the number of games back by the challenger, an advantage of one game may be given to the regular season first place team.

Both in 2004 and 2005, the second place team in the regular season has advanced to the Second Stage. In both 2004 and 2005, the second place team won 3 out of 5 to advance to the Nippon Series, without any advantage given to the first place finisher. That is going to change for 2006 as the following changes are to be made to the playoff system:

1. The team who finishes in first place during the regular season gets a 1 game advantage in Stage Two regardless (it was only if they finished 5 games above the challenger).
2. The home field will for the Second Stage will be played at the team's stadium who finished higher in the standings for the first two games, at the team's stadium who finished lower in the standings for the second two games (if necessary) (it was all games at the upper team's stadium).
3. Even if two teams finish the season with the same winning percentage in first place, the First Stage will go on (Stage One would have been skipped up until now). However, the playoff winner does not change the mode by which the league victor is decided.

That last one is actually the biggest change that's being made. The Fukuoka Daiei Hawks in 2004 and the Fukuoka Softbank Hawks in 2005 finished the season in first place, but were not given the Pacific League Pennant. The third change will give them the Pennant even if they lose the playoffs for the right to go onto the Nippon Series. Of course, that extra game advantage (change #1) will help a great deal as they lost Stage Two in five games twice.

Nippon Series

The Chiba Lotte Marines took on the Hanshin Tigers in what was one of the most one-sided Series in recent history. Lotte swept the Hanshin Tigers in four games, out scoring them 33-4. Lotte won the first game 10-1 after being called due to fog in the 7th inning. The second game, also at Chiba Marine Stadium (without the fog) was won 10-0 by Lotte. Then to the Tigers' home ground of Koshien, but Lotte wasn't deterred, defeating the Tigers against a fan base of well over 90% by the score of 10-1. Then, the only game that Hanshin was really in, Lotte won the fourth game 3-2.

Japanese Baseball News



During the regular season, Hanshin's Makoto Imaoka and Tomoaki Kanemoto combined to drive in 272 runs, 37.2% of the team's 731 runs, the second most for a duo in NPB history. But during the Nippon Series, Kanemoto and Imaoka combined for a 0 for 6 record in Game One, 0 for 6 in Game Two, 1 for 8 record in Game Three, and a 2 for 7 record in Game Four, Imaoka driving in one of Hanshin's two runs that last game. Hanshin's JFK never had a chance to appear until Game Four, but it was too late by then.

Asia Series

Bobby Valentine, manager of the Chiba Lotte Marines, took his team to Tokyo Dome for the first ever Konami Cup Asia Series. Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Mainland China came had their respective league champions come together to compete against one another to claim the title of best Asian team. This is viewed by many as a precursor to a "True World Series."

The Chiba Lotte Marines, coming off of a month long set of winning the Pacific League playoffs and Nippon Series, had more momentum built up than any of the other participants. And they had a team that could even have challenged the North American champion White Sox. But the Sox didn't accept Valentine-kantoku's challenge, so we may never know that outcome.

In the Asia Series, the Marines took all three games against the KBO (Korean Baseball Organization) champions Samsun Lions, the CPBL (Chinese Professional Baseball League) Sinon Bulls, and the team made up of all stars from the CBL (China Baseball League). The Samsun Lions narrowly defeated the Sinon Bulls to earn a spot in the championship round to face the undefeated Marines.

In the final, the Samsun Lions managed to out-hit the Chiba Lotte Marines 13-6, but it was the Marines who made the most of their hits, outscoring the Lions by a score of 5-3. The Chiba Lotte Marines thus became the first Asian Champion.

Korean Baseball News

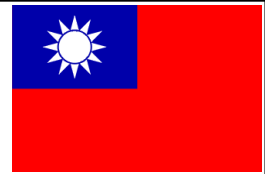


There is no summary of the 2005 Korean season because we do not have a volunteer to cover Korean baseball.

Would YOU like to help?

Country supervisors are asked to write the season summary each December and produce an article on any topic in April or May.

Taiwanese Baseball News



Taiwan 2005 CPBL Baseball Year-End Wrap-Up

A Year to Remember – For the Wrong Reasons

By Jason Pan Contributing Writer

For the 2005 baseball season in Taiwan, it was quite a year to remember, but for all the wrong reasons. For weeks on end, baseball news dominated the front-page headlines and stirred up media feeding-frenzy. Unfortunately, it was the off-field shenanigans, rather than on-field player performance, that had grabbed the whole country's attention.

The muddled affairs revealed much of the rotten state in Taiwan's pro baseball league (CPBL), and had undermined credibility of the league in the public eyes. These disturbing happenings led to the decline of fan support, and demonstrated the need for major reforms and new leadership.

Even before the 2005 season started, a bitter dispute broke out over TV broadcast rights and licensing fees. It pitted two rival camps (each formed by a partnership of two cable networks), with the champion Sinon Bulls siding with the upstart bid against the other five CPBL clubs supporting the existing broadcast deal.

At one point, the league was going to take legal action, and actually initiated actions to expel the Sinon Bulls franchise in going with a five-team format this season. In the end, the Sinon club backed down and stayed on with the existing deal worth NT\$ 62 million yearly per team in broadcasting fees.

Once the season got underway, unsettling news started to surface with tabloid journals reporting certain players having contact with gangsters and going to girlie bars for late-night entertainment. Then in mid-season, the public was shocked to learn of players' involvement in throwing games for big payoffs by underground gambling syndicates. The bombshell came when 10 individuals, including some baseballers associated with teams, were taken into police custody on July 26 for investigation into the game-betting scandal.

Subsequently, a few more players, coaches, and bookies were questioned by the police. New developments in this second baseball gambling scandal in 8 years became the hottest news in the country for some time. There were calls for the CPBL to suspend the games, but the league vowed to carry on, and announced new measures and tougher policies.

Weeks after the intense media coverage, a total of 16 individuals were charged, including 6 baseballers suspected of throwing games. The court decisions are still pending, but the players already received lifetime ban from the league.

In another startling news for this eventful year, Macoto Cobras' outfielder Mario Encarnacion (a former MLB player who had stints with Colorado Rockies and Chicago Cubs in 2001 and 2002) from the Dominican Republic was found dead in his team dormitory room on Oct.3. At first, the press speculated the cause of death was due to steroid use or other illegal substance. Official autopsy result was able to clear Encarnacion, revealing that he died of a congenital medical condition.

For on-field game results, the playoff series saw the Macoto Cobras took 3 wins against 1 loss to down the challenger President Lions for the championship series berth for taking on the Sinon Bulls, who finished the 2005 season in first place overall. In the Taiwan Series championship finals, the Sinon Bulls were successful in defending their 2004 crown by sweeping the Cobras in 4 games straight.

Taiwanese Baseball News

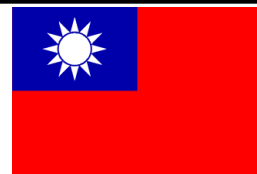


Table: CPBL 2005 Season Final Standing (Total 300 games, each team playing 100 contests)

	Win	Loss	Draw	Winning per-	Games behind
Sinon Bulls	53	41	6	0.564	--
Macoto Cobras	49	43	8	0.533	3
President Li-	48	49	3	0.495	6.5
Brother Ele-	47	49	4	0.490	7
Chinatrust	47	49	4	0.490	7
La New Bears	42	55	3	0.433	12.5

Addendum:

Local fans had high hopes for a good showing by the 2005 CPBL titlist Sinon Bulls as they headed for the Konami Cup tournament in Tokyo, the inaugural Asian baseball club championships series. It was seen that Taiwan's best ball club has a fighting chance against the champions of Japan and South Korea, with the key battle most likely for 2nd place up against the Koreans.

As expected, the Sinon Bulls did well against the China All-Stars with a 6-0 shutout for the first win. Then they crashed down to earth in Game Two, with a thorough beating by Japan's Chiba Lotte Marines 12-1. The game was called in the 7th inning, with the 10-run mercy rule in effect. For final contest, with 2nd place on the line, the Bulls lost a close one, edged 4-3 by the Korean champion Samsung Lions.

For Taiwanese fans, it was a huge letdown in not defeating the South Koreans to place second in the tournament. Rival team supporters called it an embarrassing showing by the Sinon Bulls, chiefly on account of the 12-1 drubbing at the hands of the formidable Chiba Lotte Marines, the eventual Konami Cup winner.

The perceived poor performance by the Sinon team against powerhouse teams from Japan and South Korea has led to changes by Taiwan's national team skipper Lin Hua-wei.

In preparing for the World Baseball Classic tournament in March, the national team selection has opted to go with a core line-up consisting of Taiwanese players who are based overseas. Those with MLB experience have been summoned to serve the country. Heading up the list are right-hander Wang Chien-ming of NY Yankees, lefty pitcher Kuo Hung-chih of the LA Dodgers, and outfielder Chen Chin-feng, who was just released by the Dodgers this past year.

Joining them on the pitching staff are a number of CPBL select stars, and several other overseas pitchers who are currently in the U.S. minor leagues, including left-handers Lo Ching-long (Rockies) and Cheng Chi-hung (Blue Jays), also right-handers Keng Po-hsuan (Blue Jays), and Huang Chia-an (Mariners).

Along with proven CPBL performers who have international experiences, the batting and fielding roster would be bolstered by highly touted minor league prospects Hu Ching-lung (Dodgers), Chen Yung-chi (Mariners), Lo Kuo-hui (Mariners), among others.

Chinese Baseball News



2005 China Professional Baseball League Round-Up

By Michael Mallock
Asian Studies Center
Michigan State University

There's an ancient Chinese curse: "May you live in interesting times." In polar opposition to the original intent of this "curse," which has generally been uttered in anger, expressing hope that one's adversary might be plagued by famine, flood, or Communist Party campaigns, the 2005 season was an "interesting time" for baseball in China – in the most positive sense.

The season began with a team of China Baseball League (CBL) all-stars taking its third-annual spring trip to Arizona. Since most baseball fields in China pale in comparison to many community college fields in the U.S., the trip allows China's best to compete in quality facilities against higher caliber opponents. Chinese National Team manager, Jim Lefebvre, and pitching coach, Bruce Hurst, both former MLBers, led twenty-three Chinese players through drills designed to improve baseball fundamentals. In addition, Dan O'Brien, 1996 U.S. Olympic gold medalist in the decathlon, worked with players to improve speed and agility. In 2006, a Chinese National Team will compete in the Arizona Fall League, hoping to improve prospects of a respectable performance at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games (as host nation, the Chinese National Team automatically qualifies for competition).

Given the impact of Japanese, Korean and Taiwanese players in the American big leagues, 2005 found MLB's Road Show hosting large events in several Chinese cities. There are relatively few baseball fans in China, but MLB tried to address the issue by giving fans and other curious folks a chance to take a few cuts in a batting cage, have their tosses clocked by a radar guns, and to learn more about baseball at an interactive media pavilion. While it will take time to develop the game in China, MLB, like other commercial enterprises, has staked much on the China market. In fact, provisions in Jim Lefebvre's and Bruce Hurst's coaching contracts include clearances allowing MLB to recruit and sign Chinese baseball prospects. The long-term hope is that, somewhere among China's population of 1.2 billion, MLB will discover a baseball equivalent of Yao Ming.

The 2005 CBL season began April 1, marking the inaugural contests of two new teams – the Sichuan Dragons, and Team Hope Stars. The new team in Sichuan, in western China, was an effort to expand baseball's geographical reach (akin to O'Malley's move of the Dodgers, without uprooting an existing team – "Da Bums"). The Dragons finished with an 8-22 record – symptomatic of new teams (check out the records of the first Mets, Expos, Blue Jays, or Devil Ray squads).

The Team Hope Stars also present an interesting story. The team consisted of 20 young, untested players – mere prospects in a league that that doesn't have a true developmental system. The Hope Stars played home games in the Beijing Tigers' home stadium (the Tigers are the "Bronx Bombers" of the CBL – having won three of four CBL "World Series"), but the rookie team's 2005 performance reflected their inexperience; the New Hope Stars wrapped-up the season with a 4-26 record. Despite the painful records of these fledgling franchises, the expansion of the CBL, from four teams, to six, was significant.

At the mid-season break, perennial powerhouses, the Beijing Tigers (12-3) and the Tianjin Lions (11-4) led the pack. The CBL hosted an all-star extravaganza in Guangzhou, from May 6-8, but the rest of the month was devoted to the Asian Baseball Championship (ABC). A Chinese team had never medaled in this annual competition, which is generally dominated by Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. In 2005, however, a CBL all-star team claimed the bronze medal, thus qualifying for the Baseball World Cup. Chinese lefty, Wang Nan (Beijing Dragons) took the hill in relief in the fourth inning of the bronze medal game against Korea, with China leading, 4-3. Pitching five

Chinese Baseball News



scoreless innings and allowing only one hit, Wang was named Most Valuable Pitcher of the ABC. CBL batting leader, Zhang Yu Feng (Shanghai Eagles), also propelled China's successful effort, batting .556, including a two-run homer in the bronze medal game.

Since the CBL's history dates back only four years, it's extreme to state that the pennant stretch was "business as usual" – the league will continue to develop and, as Chinese history shows, dynasties are born to fall. In any case, the 2005 final regular season standings held true to form; the Beijing Tigers (22-7) and Tianjin Lions (20-10) topped the league, qualifying for the best-of-five CBL Championship Series. Beijing won the three-game series in two straight games, marking the Tigers' third consecutive CBL Championship.

In September, a Chinese team participated in its first Baseball World Cup (BWC) in The Netherlands. Competing in "Pool A," the Chinese team didn't qualify for the BWC Championship Round. Despite this fact, the team's 3-5 record was respectable; the BWC appearance represented the first time a Chinese team had competed in an international tournament.

The 2006 baseball season promises even more exposure, international competition, and political intrigue for the Chinese National Team. In the Asia-Oceania bracket of the inaugural World Baseball Classic, China plays Taiwan in the first round. The Chinese government regularly threatens to invade Taiwan (to reclaim the "renegade province"); one can only imagine the interest, and fireworks, this diamond match-up might provide.

Baseball in China is a work in progress. Drawing one thousand spectators to a CBL game is a rare box office bonanza. But the game is evolving in the Middle Kingdom. Given time, and continued support from MLB, Chinese players will undoubtedly "crack the bigs" at some point. Since everyone loves a winner, Chinese fans will follow the yet-to-be prospected "golden arm" that finally takes the pill and the hill in an MLB game. "If you build it, they will come."

Final 2005 Standings

Team	Wins	Loses	Points
Beijing	22	7	44
Tiajin	20	10	40
Guangdong	19	11	38
Shanghai	16	13	32
Sichuan	8	22	16
Hopestars	4	26	8

Asian Studies Center Presents

**Baseball and Beesuboru:
Passion and Diplomacy between the Baselines**



Saturday, April 1, 2006
10:00 am—4:00 pm

MSU Management Education Center
811 West Square Lake Road
Troy, Michigan

The Asian Studies Center at Michigan State University will hold a one-day conference focusing on the importance of baseball in Japan, and on the growing influence of Japanese players in Major League Baseball in the United States. This conference will highlight the common love of baseball shared by Japanese and American fans alongside the different ways the game is played on and off the field. The aim is to give attendees a greater understanding of the globalization of our “national pastime” and to use baseball as a vehicle for understanding cultural similarities and differences.

Participants include:

Robert Whiting – Author of [You Gotta Have Wa](#), and [The Meaning of Ichiro](#)

Robert Fitts – Author of [Remembering Japanese Baseball: An Oral History of the Game](#), and a forthcoming biography on Wally Yonamine.

Robert Smaal – Producer and director of a forthcoming documentary on Wally Yonamine’s baseball career.

William Kelly – Author of [The Hanshin Tigers and the Practices of Professional Baseball in Japan](#).

Sayuri Shimizu – Author of several articles detailing the history of baseball in Japan.

Peter Bjarkman – Author of [Diamonds Around the Globe](#).