Remembering Japanese Baseball

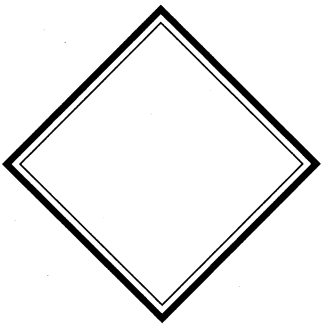
An Oral History of the Game

Robert K. Fitts

Foreword by Robert Whiting

Remembering Japanese Baseball

AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE GAME



Robert K. Fitts
With a Foreword by Robert Whiting

Southern Illinois University Press ◆ Carbondale

Printed in the United States of America
08 07 06 05 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Fitts, Robert K., 1965–
Remembering Japanese baseball : an oral history of the game / Robert K. Fitts ; with a foreword by Robert Whiting.
p. cm. — (Writing baseball)
Includes index.
1. Baseball—Japan. 2. Baseball players—Japan—Biography. 3. Baseball players—United States—Biography. I. Title. II. Series.
GV863.77.A1F58 2005
796.357'0952—dc22
ISBN 0-8093-2629-9 (cloth : alk. paper)
ISBN 0-8093-2630-2 (pbk. : alk. paper) 2004023651

Printed on recycled paper.

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

Writing Baseball Series Editor: Richard Peterson

For Sarah,
whose enthusiasm and support made this project possible,
and for my little buddies Ben and Simon

Contents

Foreword

Robert Whiting

I HAVE BEEN WAITING for a long, long time for a book like this to come along. While the professional game in Japan has a history that dates back to the 1930s as well as an amateur track record that dates back even longer and while thousands of Japanese have played baseball there alongside more than seven hundred transplanted Americans and other foreigners, there has never been, to date, an extensive oral history told by the participants (this despite an ever-growing list of work that deals in English with the subject and in the Japanese language a treasure trove of material).

Of course, one reason for this is that such a project is so difficult to put together. Players retire and scatter to distant places. It takes a lot of time and effort to track them down, and once they are found, it often takes even more energy to persuade players to open up and talk, to make them jog their memories and from that produce a coherent narrative that piques a reader's interest. Then, on top of that, because memories fade, and eyewitness accounts are often erroneous, it requires even more research to make sure that what the players are telling you is actually true and accurate. The language barrier further complicates the matter.

However, now, finally, we have *Remembering Japanese Baseball,* and for that, we must thank Robert Fitts, who spent considerable time and effort hunting down and interviewing former players and coaches, starting with "Cappy" Harada, a contemporary of the legendary pitcher Eiji Sawamura, who humbled the mighty Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, and Jimmy Foxx in a memorable 1934 exhibition game in Japan, and ending with Eric Hillman, who had the rare distinction of pitching for Bobby Valentine's Chiba Lotte Orions and then later *puro-yakyu* (pro-baseball) legend Shigeo Nagashima's Yomiuri Giants in his brief but memorable career.

I first met Rob Fitts at a baseball seminar at Union College in upper state New York in the spring of 2004. He struck me as an earnest, intelli-

gent young man, and when he told me about the project he was in the final stages of completing, I must admit I felt a twinge of envy, for his book was something that I'd always fantasized about one day doing myself if I could ever find the time. But when I eventually read the manuscript sent by his publisher, I could not help but thoroughly admire the final product. In the tens of thousands of words this book comprises, Rob has managed to deftly present a comprehensive slice of Nippon Professional Baseball history, using the words of men who actually lived it, in a most compelling manner.

Here we see the slow but steady growth of the game, from a time when balls were so rare that they had to be stitched back together after being overused to the present day of NPB with its expensive, new, domed stadiums and high-tech digital/electronic scoreboards that match anything in the world.

In *Remembering Japanese Baseball,* which recalls the work of the great Studs Terkel, we read accounts from characters like Hirofumi Naito, who played at a time when pro ball was in its infancy and considered impure because its participants played for money; Wally Yonamine, who broke the Yomiuri Giants postwar *gaijin* barrier and introduced new ideas about hustle; Gene Bacque, whose brushback pitch to national hero Sadaharu Oh ignited one of the most famous brawls in NPB history (and ended Bacque's Central League career); Masanori Murakami, the only man to sign simultaneous contracts with Major League Baseball and NPB clubs; Daryl Spencer, so frustrated at being walked during a home-run race that he held his bat upside down at the plate (and still received a free pass!); Clyde Wright and his numerous temper explosions (including the time he and fellow American Charlie Manuel took on the East German hockey team at a Tokyo disco); Leron Lee and the famous *gaijin* expanding strike zone; and famed manager Masaaki Mori, who elevated the use of the sacrifice bunt to all-time record highs.

Through it all, with only a few exceptions, we see the dedication, the endless eleven-months-a-year training and the self-sacrifice that have come to give Japanese baseball its distinctive mark. We also witness the frequent conflicts with the American way of doing things that also distinguish the game.

Interviewing these players and coaches in retirement, as Rob has done, I might also add, was a wise and necessary thing to do—something I can attest to from my own experience. Unlike their American counterparts, Japa-

nese team officials can be particularly obstructionist. The front-office executives of the Tokyo Yomiuri Giants, for example, insist on controlling all press interviews with their players and coaches. The executives ask to see questions in advance and demand editing rights afterward—something no United States news organization would agree to. On top of that, they'd demand a substantial interview fee. In the early 1990s, about the time Rob first came to Japan, an NBC-TV crew flew to Tokyo to interview the Giants' American player, Phil Bradley. NBC was required to submit a list of questions to be approved. Of the half-dozen proffered, half of them were rejected. Among those whose answers might be deemed too dangerous for public consumption were such questions as "How do you like playing for the Yomiuri Giants?"

Journalists who printed the unvarnished truth were subject to banishment from the field. Those belonging to that particular category included, incidentally, yours truly. The first of my sins was in 1986 when interviewing Warren Cromartie at the end of the season for a Japanese magazine, a time when Cromartie was supposedly free of his contractual obligations to the team. He offered the opinion that Giants executives were "racist" because they treated pure-blood former manager Shigeo Nagashima with more respect than Cromartie's manager at the time on the Giants, the half-Chinese Sadaharu Oh. Cromartie also revealed the tendency of certain Giants' farm-team coaches to slap, kick, and punch their younger charges—as part of their training. For printing this Q&A, I was banned from the Giants stadium for two years, along with two Japanese journalists who had committed similar indiscretions—actually printing a player's real opinion instead of sanitized PR pabulum. (I suffered a similar fate in 1990 when I discovered and printed that the actual capacity of the Giants home stadium, the Tokyo Dome, which the Giants invariably filled, was ten thousand less that what the team announced daily.) From this, one can see the benefit of Robert Fitts researching and interviewing only retired players.

Anyway, happy reading. Sit back and enjoy. I'm sure you'll enjoy this engrossing book every bit as much as I did. This most fascinating volume deserves a special place in every baseball lover's personal library and, Rob, I eagerly await volume 2.

Preface

I SAW MY FIRST Japanese baseball game in 1993, only three hours after arriving in Japan. Having just survived a thirteen-hour flight and a two-hour bus ride into Tokyo, I arrived at the Hotel Okura. My wife, who had arrived two weeks before me, said, "Get ready. We're going out!" and took me to a subway so crowded that the pressure from the surrounding commuters lifted me off the ground. We arrived at Meiji Jingu Stadium, a small, old-fashioned ballpark in the heart of Tokyo, bought some grilled octopus and a couple of beers, and settled into our seats to watch the Yakult Swallows take on the Hanshin Tigers. I was unprepared for what happened next.

Forty-thousand fans began beating noisemakers in unison and chanting fight songs. A brass band began to play. Fans in the bleachers waived giant flags bearing team insignia and pounded drums in hypnotic rhythm. The noise was deafening and shook the old stadium. I found myself clapping in rhythm with the crowd. After a Swallows player homered, the hometown fans raised thousands of green umbrellas and sang their fight song as the umbrellas bobbed up and down. I fell in love with Japanese baseball that night.

Over the ensuing years, I've tried to absorb all I could about the Japanese game and its rich heritage. I scoured flea markets and used-book stores in the back alleys of Tokyo for old magazines and baseball cards known as *menko*. I read everything I could find. But no matter how much I read, the legendary players who stared at me from those old *menko* remained just names and statistics. They lacked the stories, so common in the United States, that bring former stars alive.

My quest to learn about these players brought me to a second-floor pearl shop in the Roppongi section of Tokyo to talk to Japanese Hall of Famer Wally Yonamine. For two hours, I sat transfixed as he told me about the hardships and joys of Japanese baseball in the 1950s as well as tales of his teammates and the stars he had played against. These were the stories that

I was wanting. A few months later, I started asking other former players about their experiences. As I spoke to these men, the idea for this book emerged.

Japan has created its own brand of baseball called *yakyu*. Although the games' rules are basically identical, the approach is distinctly Japanese. I wanted true insight into the Japanese game and its history, not just complaints about a different style of baseball, so over the next six months, I contacted about forty former players and one executive involved in Japanese baseball. I chose the interviewees with care and sought out men who had had successful careers in Japan. I conducted interviews with *gaijin* or foreign players, but I also traveled to Tokyo twice and interviewed Japanese players with the help of simultaneous interpreter Ami Shimizu. These interviews were crucial because Japanese players understand the nuances of their game far better than the visiting Americans. Their explanations for Japanese practices often differed widely from the Americans' explanations.

During the interviews, I asked the men a series of prepared questions but encouraged them to digress and tell the stories that were important to them. I edited the interview transcripts into stories by removing my questions, combining discussions of the same topics, and reordering the topics. Factual errors, such as dates and baseball statistics, were corrected, but the players' stories remain as they told them to me. The players then had the opportunity to read their chapters, correct mistakes, and add details omitted in the initial interviews. Throughout this book, Japanese players are rarely referred to by their first names. In Japan, people are usually called by their last name along with the suffix *-san* or their job title. In their stories, many of the players use the honorific *san* or Mr. when referring to managers and other players.

The chapters are arranged in chronological order by when the men entered Japanese professional baseball with one exception. Masaaki Mori's chapter is ordered by his first year as a manager rather than as a player. This temporal approach shows how the game has changed over time and allows readers to immerse themselves in a particular era. The players discuss many aspects of Japanese baseball, but common themes emerge. Nearly all mention the differences between Japanese and American baseball and tell us about Japan's star players. Americans talk about the difficulties adapting to Japanese culture and also compare the quality of Japanese and Major

League baseball. Many players also discuss the uncertain future of Japanese baseball now that its best players are leaving Japan for the Major Leagues.

As most readers lack a strong background in Japanese baseball, I have provided a brief introduction to the Japanese game. Readers can also refer to the timeline located after this introduction for an outline of the history of Japanese baseball.

Since I started this project, many people have offered their support, help, and invaluable advice. I thank you all. Yet, I would like to single out the following people who helped make this book possible.

Without Paul Yonamine, I would not have been able to start this project. Paul introduced me to his father, Wally Yonamine, and helped schedule interviews with his father's former teammates. I greatly appreciate the help he has provided. This book would also not have been possible without the help of Wally Yonamine and Takashi Iwamoto. Both men offered priceless advice and introduced me to other former players.

I interviewed thirty-four former players for this book. For a variety of reasons, not all of the interviews were included in the final draft, but I would like to thank all of the men who consented to be interviewed. They are: Gene Bacque, Don Blasingame, Jack Bloomfield, Ralph Bryant, Orestes Destrade, Paul Foytack, Carlton Hanta, Tsuneo "Cappy" Harada, Eric Hillman, Satoshi "Fibber" Hirayama, Jyun Hirota and his wife, Ruth, Jack Howell, Takashi Iwamoto, Dick Kashiwaeda, Takeshi Koba, Rick Lancellotti, Leron Lee, Jim Lefebvre, Brad "Animal" Lesley, Gene Martin, Glenn Mickens, Andy Miyamoto, Masaaki Mori, Masanori Murakami, Hirofumi Naito, Futoshi Nakanishi, Alonzo Powell, Daryl Spencer, John Sipin, Greg "Boomer" Wells, Gordy Windhorn, Clyde Wright, Wally Yonamine, and Howard Zenimura. Talking to all of these former players made this project a pure joy. I would especially like to thank Orestes Destrade, not only for his interview but for introducing me to his teammates on the Tokyo Dreams of the Professional Baseball Masters League.

I would like to thank Marty Kuehnert, Kerry Nakagawa, Yoichi Nagata, and Ralph Pearce for helping me contact former players and Mel Bailey and Wayne Graczyk for providing photographs. The staff at the Japanese Baseball Hall of Fame provided superb assistance as always. Special thanks go out to Philip Block, Gary Engel, Ray Franco, Jeff Kusumoto, and Bob

Lapides for discussing the project with me and offering many helpful ideas. Gary Engel, Beverly Fitts, Donald Fitts, and Myrna Watkins proofread and commented on sections of the manuscript. Thank you for your wonderful suggestions.

I would like to thank Evelyn Bagley and Ann Fabian for introducing me to the world of publishing and especially Louis Masur for suggesting that I contact the Southern Illinois University Press. The staff at SIU Press has been extremely helpful and friendly. I would like to thank Richard "Pete" Peterson, Editor of the Writing Baseball Series, for his guidance, Karl Kageff, Editor-in-Chief, for making the process run smoothly, and others at the press, including Carol Burns, Jonathan Haupt, and Barbara Martin, and Mary Lou Kowaleski, professional freelance copyeditor, for their hard work.

A very special thank-you goes out to Ami Shimizu. A superb simultaneous interpreter, Ami interpreted during all of the interviews conducted in Japanese, helped set up appointments, answered players' post-interview questions, and ensured that the interviews in Tokyo went smoothly. The interviews with native Japanese players could not have been included in this book without her expertise.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, Sarah, Ben, and Simon, for being supportive and listening to me talk endlessly about this book for a year and a half.

Introduction: The Japanese Game

HORACE WILSON supposedly introduced baseball to Japan in 1872 or 1873. Wilson, a mathematics teacher at Kaisei Gakko (which evolved into Tokyo University), created a student baseball club and set up a practice field on school grounds. In 1873, Albert Bates probably organized the first formal game on Japanese soil, but the earliest recorded game was played in the summer of 1876 between students from the Imperial College at Tokio and a group of amateur Americans who included Wilson. The Americans won 34 to 11 but the *New York Clipper* (December 12, 1876) reported that the Japanese "take a great deal of interest in the game, and, as they are very quick and generally good throwers, they will make fair players with some instruction." In the same decade, Hiroshi Hiraoka, an engineer for the national railways, returned from studying in America and introduced the sport to his co-workers. They formed Japan's first organized team, the Shimbashi Athletic Club, in 1878.

Baseball quickly became popular among the elite high schools and by the turn of the century had spread to major universities such as Keio and Waseda. Japanese school teams approached baseball with a martial arts mentality. They emphasized practice to the point of exhaustion to build character and achieve perfect form. In the most famous example, Ichiko pitcher Tsunetaro Moriyama supposedly bore a hole in the clubhouse's brick wall by repeated practicing his fastball against it. Aspects of this approach still survive in Japanese professional baseball.

In 1905, the Waseda University team became the first of many Japanese teams to travel to the United States to sharpen their skills. Not to be outdone, Waseda's rival Keio University traveled to America in 1911. American teams also traveled across the Pacific Ocean to play their Japanese counterparts. Before World War II, teams from the University of Wisconsin, University of Chicago, University of Washington, and Harvard University,

and the Philadelphia Royal Giants of the Negro Leagues toured Japan. Major League teams also came to Japan to promote professional baseball. Touring teams included the Reach All-Americans (1908), the New York Giants and Chicago White Sox (1913), the Herb Hunter All-Americans (1920 and 1922), and Major League All-Stars (1931 and 1934). As Japanese baseball was primarily an amateur endeavor until the mid-1930s, the touring Americans played lopsided games against university and amateur teams. From 1908 to 1934, American professional teams won 87 of the 88 contests in Japan. Japan's only victory came on November 23, 1922, when the amateur Mita club, led by star pitcher Michimaro Ono, beat Herb Hunter's Major League All-Stars 9 to 3. Hunter's team included Luke Sewell, Wait Hoyt (who lost the game), and George Kelly.

Baseball remained a scholastic and amateur sport until 1920 when the first professional team, Nihon Undo Kyokai (the Japan Athletic Association), was organized in Tokyo. The team played its first professional game in 1922, but the following year the Great Kanto Earthquake devastated Tokyo and forced the team to move to the Osaka area. The team changed its name to the Takarazuka Kyokai and played for six more years before disbanding. Once again, Japanese baseball became solely an amateur sport.

The 1934 Major League All-Star tour changed Japanese baseball forever. The Major Leaguers formed one of the strongest teams in the history of baseball. Led by Connie Mack, the roster included Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Jimmie Foxx, Charlie Gehringer, Earl Averill, Lefty Gomez, Lefty O'Doul, and Moe Berg. To challenge this formidable opponent, *Yomiuri Shimbun* owner Matsutaro Shoriki bought together Japan's most talented players. Although the team contained eleven future Japanese Hall of Famers, they lost all eighteen contests by a combined score of 189 to 39. The highlight of the tour came on November 20 when seventeen-year-old Eiji Sawamura pitched seven shutout innings before surrendering a home run to Gehrig. Sawamura lost the game 1-0 but struck out nine, including consecutive strikeouts of Gehringer, Ruth, Gehrig, and Foxx.

Unlike previous Japanese all-star teams, which played just a few games against touring opponents before disbanding, Shoriki decided to keep the team together as professionals. The team traveled to North America the following year (1935). Known as the Dai Nippon Tokyo Yakyu Club, they played against college, amateur, and minor league teams across the United

States and Canada. At Lefty O'Doul's recommendation, Shoriki changed the team's name later that year to the Tokyo Yomiuri Giants. The Giants have remained "Japan's team." They are by far Japan's most popular and successful franchise. From 1937 to 1945, the Giants won eight out of ten championships and have won thirty pennants and twenty championships since 1946, including an unprecedented nine straight between 1965 and 1973. The Giants have also produced many of the best players in Japanese history including Eiji Sawamura; Tetsuharu "the God of Batting" Kawakami; the world home-run king, Sadaharu Oh; Japan's greatest player, Shigeo Nagashima; and Hideki Matsui.

Following in the Giants' footsteps, other Japanese professional teams quickly formed. In 1936, seven teams formed the Japan Professional Baseball League and played a series of tournaments. In 1937, an eighth team joined, and the league played its first full season of pro ball. The widely popular league continued until play was suspended in 1944 because of Allied air raids.

After World War II, Japan lay in ruins. As part of a grand scheme to boost Japanese morale, the Allied occupational forces restarted professional baseball in 1946. The league was a success but, facing incredible economic and social disruption, Japanese morale remained low. In 1949, the occupational forces once again turned to baseball to boost morale and invited Lefty O'Doul and his San Francisco Seals to Japan. The Seals played seven games against the Giants and all-star teams and won all seven. But the tour was a resounding success. Over four hundred thousand people attended the seven games, and morale increased everywhere the Seals played. Since the Seals' tour, Major League teams have come to Japan nearly every two years. Overall, the Major Leaguers have won 210 of the 311 contests since 1950, but every decade the American winning percentage has shrunk.

In 1950, Japanese professional baseball reorganized and adopted a two-league system. Seven more teams were added to form the Central League and the Pacific League with the winners of each league meeting in the Japan Series for the championship. The leagues contracted during the 1950s, and since 1958, each league has comprised six teams. Japanese teams are usually owned by parent corporations, which use the teams to promote the parent companies. As a result, teams are usually known by corporate rather than municipal names. The current franchises in the Central League are

the Yomiuri Giants, the Hanshin Tigers, the Chunichi Dragons, the Hiroshima Carp, the Yakult Swallows (formerly the Kokutetsu Swallows, Sankei Swallows/Atoms, and Yakult Atoms), and the Yokohama Bay Stars (formerly the Shochiku Robins and Taiyo Whales). The Pacific League consists of the Seibu Lions (formerly Nishitetsu Lions, Taiheiyo Club Lions, and Crown Lighter Lions), the Nippon Ham Fighters (formerly Tokyu Flyers and Toei Flyers), Orix Blue Wave (formerly Hankyu Braves and Orix Braves), Kintetsu Buffaloes (formerly Kintetsu Pearls), Fukuoka Daiei Hawks (formerly Nankai Hawks), and Chiba Lotte Marines (formerly Mainichi Orions, Daimai Orions, Tokyo Orions, and Lotte Orions). The number of games per season has fluctuated through time, but most seasons consisted of 130 to 140 games. At the end of each season, the Japanese select winners for Most Valuable Player, Rookie of the Year, and Sawamura (best pitcher) Awards. In each league, the best player at each position is selected to be on the "Best Nine" team.

In 1951, the Yomiuri Giants made a bold move and signed an American player. With resentment towards the United States still high, they carefully chose Wally Yonamine, a Japanese-American, to become "the Jackie Robinson of Japan." Yonamine's congeniality and exciting style of play won over Japanese players and fans alike. Over the next four years, the Giants signed five more Japanese-American players, known as *nisei*, and other teams began recruiting foreign players. In 1952, eleven foreigners, known in Japan as *gaijin*, joined the leagues and thirteen came over the following year. Most of these early foreign players were Japanese-Americans; however, the Hankyu Braves recruited four former Negro League players. In 1953, Leo Kiely became the first Major Leaguer to join the league. The foreign players had an instant impact on Japanese baseball, and in 1954, Larry Raines, a former Negro League player and future Major Leaguer, and Yonamine won the two batting crowns. The league quickly limited the number of foreign players per team to three.

During the 1960s, Japan started importing players from AAA franchises and former Major Leaguers. As the caliber of the imported players rose, the league reduced the permitted number of foreign players per team to two in the mid 1960s. Currently, each Japanese team is allowed three foreigners on the field at one time. Many Americans have starred in Japan, but many, such as Gene Bacque, Joe Stanka, Jack Bloomfield, Leon Lee, Leron

Lee, Greg "Boomer" Wells, Randy Bass, and Tuffy Rhodes, are unknown to most American baseball fans. Their success is often cited as evidence for the low quality of play in Japan, but it takes a special type of person to succeed in Japanese baseball. Numerous Major Leaguers have failed where these men triumphed. For example, Larry Doby, Johnny Logan, Joe Pepitone, Mike Lum, Bump Wills, Don Money, Doug DeCinces, Bill Madlock, Jesse Barfield, Brook Jacoby, Rob Deer, Dion James, Mike Pagliarulo, Pete Incaviglia, Kevin Maas, and Mariano Duncan did not do well in Japan.

Japan's greats are enshrined in two halls of fame. The professional players have created an organization known as the Meikyukai or Golden Players Club. To gain entrance, a player must have two thousand career hits, two hundred career wins, or two hundred fifty career saves and be elected by the current members. The Meikyukai members play charity games and act as ambassadors for pro baseball. Most Japanese fans consider Meikyukai membership to be as prestigious as membership in the official Japanese hall of fame.

The official Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum is located in the impressive Tokyo Dome complex. Membership is determined by a panel of experts, who are writers and former players. An individual must be out of uniform for at least five years to be eligible for induction. Many managers, officials, amateurs, and players not eligible for the Meikyukai are enshrined in the Baseball Hall of Fame. The museum is filled with memorabilia and plaques of Japan's greatest: Eiji Sawamura, Tetsuharu Kawakami, Shigeru Chiba, Masaichi Kaneda, Shigeru Sugishita, Kazuhisa Inao, Katsuya Nomura, Shigeo Nagashima, Sadaharu Oh, Isao Harimoto, and others. These players are almost unknown in the States but their baseball skills dazzled millions across the Pacific. For me, these great Japanese stars came to life through the recollections of the former players I interviewed. I hope that the interviews contained in this book will also introduce American fans to these stars and Japan's rich baseball history.

Japanese Baseball Timeline

1872 or 1873 Horace Wilson introduces baseball to Japan.
1873 Albert Bates organizes the first known formal baseball game.
1876 First documented game between Japanese and Americans.
1878 Hiroshi Hiraoka organizes the Shimbashi Athletic Club.
1886 Ichiko (First High School) forms a baseball team.
1896 Ichiko defeats an American team from the Yokohama Country Club.
1905 Waseda University tours the United States.
1906 Waseda University vs. Keio University games suspended for twenty years after a riot.
1907 The Hawaiian St. Louis team of Hawaii becomes the first foreign team to tour Japan.
1908 Reach All-Americans become the first professionals to tour Japan.
1913 New York Giants and Chicago White Sox tour Japan.
1914 Tokyo-area university league established.
1915 Inter-Middle School Baseball Championship Tournament established.
1920 First professional team, Nihon Undo Kyokai, is formed.
Herb Hunter All-Americans tour Japan.
1922 Herb Hunter All-Americans tour Japan.
1923 Nihon Undo Kyokai renamed Takarazuka Kyokai.
1924 Koshien Stadium opens.
1925 Tokyo Big Six University League established.
Waseda vs. Keio games resume.
1926 Meiji Jingu Stadium opens.
1927 Philadelphia Royal Giants, a Negro League All-Star team, tours Japan.
1929 Takarazuka Kyokai disbands.
1931 Major League All-Stars with Lou Gehrig and Lefty O'Doul tour Japan.
1932 Philadelphia Royal Giants tour Japan.
1934 Major League All-Stars with Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig tour Japan.
Eiji Sawamura loses 1-0 to Major League All-Stars on November 20.

All-Japan team remains together as a professional team named Dai Nippon Tokyo Yakyu Club.

1935 Dai Nippon Tokyo Yakyu Club tours United States and becomes Tokyo Yomiuri Giants.

1935 Osaka Tigers (later Hanshin Tigers) formed.

1936 Japanese Professional Baseball League established.

Eiji Sawamura pitches the first professional no-hit game on September 25. He will pitch two more before being killed in World War II.

1937 First full season of Japanese pro baseball.

Eiji Sawamura wins the Spring Season MVP Award.

Harris McGalliard wins the Fall Season MVP Award.

1938 Haruyasu Nakajima (Tokyo Yomiuri Giants) wins the first triple crown.

Tetsuharu Kawakami's rookie season.

1939 Russian-born Victor Starffin sets the record for the most games won in a single season with forty-two and wins the MVP Award.

1940 Victor Starffin wins his second MVP Award.

1943 Hideo Fujimoto sets the record for the lowest single-season ERA with 0.73.

1944 Professional league suspended due to Allied air raids.

1946 Professional league resumes play.

Kazuto Tsuruoka starts his managerial career by winning the league championship.

Hiroshi Oshita's rookie season.

1947 National Baseball League established with four teams but disbands in same year.

1948 First professional night game held on August 17 at Yokohama Stadium.

1949 Hiroshi Oshita gets seven hits on November 11 to set the single-game record.

San Francisco Seals tour Japan.

Shigeru Sugishita's rookie season.

1950 Central and Pacific Leagues established.

Mainichi Orions defeat the Shochiku Robins in the first Japan Series.

Makoto Kozuru sets single-season records with 161 RBIs and 143 runs scored.

Hideo Fujimoto (Yomiuri Giants) pitches the first professional perfect game.

Shigeru Mizuhara becomes the Yomiuri Giants manager.
Masaichi Kaneda's rookie season.
Lefty O'Doul and Joe DiMaggio visit Japan.

1951 Wally Yonamine becomes the first American player in post-War Japan.
First Central vs. Pacific League All-Star Game.
Yomiuri Giants win first of three straight Japan Series titles.
Yoshiyuki Iwamoto becomes the first player to hit four home runs in a game.
Masaichi Kaneda pitches first of his two no-hitters.
Joe DiMaggio and Major League All-Stars tour Japan.

1952 Eleven foreigners join leagues including Jyun Hirota, John Brittian, and Jimmy Newberry.
Futoshi Nakanishi wins Rookie of the Year.
Wally Yonamine selected for first of his seven straight Best Nine teams.

1953 Futoshi Nakanishi misses the triple crown after finishing second in the batting race by .005 percent. Nakanishi also selected for the first of his seven Best Nine teams.
Yomiuri Giants hold spring training in Santa Maria, California.
Eddie Lopat All-Stars tour Japan.
New York Giants tour Japan.

1954 Chunichi Dragons win Central League pennant with Michio Nishizawa and Shigeru Sugishita.
Wally Yonamine and Larry Raines win batting titles.
Yomiuri Giants tour South America in the spring and Australia in the fall.

1955 Yomiuri Giants win first of five straight pennants.
Futoshi Nakanishi misses the triple crown by one RBI.
New York Yankees tour Japan.

1956 Nishitetsu Lions win the first of three straight Japan Series over the Yomiuri Giants.
Wally Yonamine wins the Central League batting title.
Hawaiian Andy Miyamoto wins the Central League RBI title.
Futoshi Nakanishi misses the triple crown again by finishing second in the batting race by .0005 percent but wins the MVP Award.
Masaichi Kaneda wins the first of his three straight Sawamura Awards.
Kazuhisa Inao's rookie season.
Brooklyn Dodgers tour Japan.

1957 Wally Yonamine becomes the first foreigner since World War II to win an MVP Award as he wins batting title and leads the Yomiuri Giants to pennant.

1958 Kazuhisa Inao pitches in six of seven Japan Series games, wins four, and posts a 1.53 ERA in forty-seven innings.

Shigeo Nagashima and Tadashi Sugiura win Rookie of the Year Awards.

Tetsuharu Kawakami, Fumio Fujimura, Makoto Kozuru, and Michio Nishizawa retire.

St. Louis Cardinals tour Japan.

1959 Shigeo Nagashima hits a *sayonara* home run in first baseball game attended by the Japanese Emperor.

Tadashi Sugiura goes 38-4 with a 1.40 ERA and 336 strikeouts in 371 1/3 innings pitched.

Tadashi Sugiura wins four straight Japan Series games as the Nankai Hawks sweep the Yomiuri Giants. Sugiura pitches thirty-two innings in the series with twenty strikeouts and a 1.41 ERA.

Sadaharu Oh, Isao Harimoto, and Minoru Murayama's rookie seasons.

Japanese Baseball Hall of Fame founded.

1960 Taiyo Whales, managed by Osamu Mihara, go from last to first and sweep Daimai Orions in the Japan Series in a major upset.

Tetsuharu Kawakami becomes Yomiuri Giants manager and begins creating an all-Japanese championship team.

San Francisco Giants tour Japan.

1961 Shigeo Nagashima wins first of his five Central League MVP Awards.

Kazuhisa Inao wins forty-two to tie the most games won in a single season.

Masaaki (then using the first name Masahiko) Mori selected for the first of eight straight Best Nine teams.

Isao Harimoto wins first of his seven batting titles.

1962 Hanshin Tigers win their first pennant.

Sadaharu Oh wins his first of thirteen straight Central League home run crowns and the first of his thirteen RBI titles.

Katsuya Nomura wins his first of seven straight Pacific League home-run crowns.

Jack Bloomfield wins the first of two consecutive batting titles.

Larry Doby and Don Newcombe play for Chunichi Dragons.

Detroit Tigers tour Japan.

1963 Takeshi Koba of the Hiroshima Carp is hit in the head with a pitch during a tight batting race with Shigeo Nagashima. Koba recovers and eventually becomes a Hall of Fame manager.

1964 Hanshin Tigers win their second pennant as Gene Bacque becomes the first and only American to win the Sawamura Award.
Joe Stanka wins the Pacific League and Japan Series MVP awards.
Daryl Spencer selected to the first of two straight Best Nine teams.
Masanori Murakami becomes the first Japanese to play in the Major Leagues.
Sadaharu Oh sets the single season home run record of fifty-five.

1965 Yomiuri Giants win their first of nine straight championships.
Masaichi Kaneda signs with the Yomiuri Giants.
Katsuya Nomura wins the first post-War triple crown.
Katsuya Nomura vs. Daryl Spencer home-run race.
Amateur draft established.

1966 Los Angeles Dodgers tour Japan.

1967 Hankyu Braves win their first of three consecutive Pacific League pennants.
Isao Harimoto wins the first of three straight batting titles.
Don Blasingame selected for his first of two straight Best Nine teams.
Masaaki (then using the first name Masahiko) Mori wins the Japan Series MVP Award.

1968 Yutaka Enatsu strikes out 401 batters to set the single-season record.
St. Louis Cardinals tour Japan.

1969 Masaichi Kaneda wins four-hundredth game.

1970 Minoru Murayama sets the post-World War II, single-season record with a 0.98 ERA.
San Francisco Giants tour Japan.
Isao Harimoto's .383 batting average breaks the single-season batting record. The record has since been topped twice.

1971 Hankyu Braves win their first of two straight Pacific League pennants.
Baltimore Orioles tour Japan.

1972 Yutaka Fukumoto sets the single-season stolen-base record of 106.

1973 Last of the Yomiuri Giants' nine straight Japan Series titles.
Sadaharu Oh wins the triple crown.

1974 Chunichi Dragons win the Central League pennant.
Sadaharu Oh wins his second triple crown.
Shigeo Nagashima retires.
Tetsuharu Kawakami resigns as the Yomiuri Giants' manager.
New York Mets tour Japan.
Sadaharu Oh vs. Hank Aaron home-run derby.

1975 Pacific League adopts the designated hitter.

Hiroshima Carp sign Joe Lutz as the first non-Asian manager, but Lutz is replaced after one month. Under the direction of Takeshi Koba, the Carp go on to win their first pennant.

Hankyu Braves win their first of three straight Japan Series titles.

Koichi Tabuchi wins the Central League home-run crown, ending Sadaharu Oh's streak at thirteen consecutive titles.

Shigeo Nagashima becomes the Yomiuri Giants' manager, but the team finishes in last place for first time in its history.

Dave Johnson becomes the first foreigner on Yomiuri Giants since 1962.

1976 Yomiuri Giants sign Isao Harimoto and Clyde Wright and rebound to win the pennant.

Hisashi Yamada wins the first of his three consecutive MVP Awards.

1977 Sadaharu Oh breaks Hank Aaron's career home-run record on September 3.

Yomiuri Giants win the pennant but lose again in the Japan Series to the Hankyu Braves.

Leron Lee wins the Pacific League home-run and RBI titles.

1978 Yakult Swallows win their first pennant and the Japan Series.

Koji Yamamoto wins the first of his four home-run crowns.

The Suguru Egawa controversy forces the Japanese baseball commissioner to resign.

Cincinnati Reds tour Japan.

1979 Kintetsu Buffaloes win their first pennant.

Charlie Manuel wins the Pacific League home-run crown and MVP Award.

Hiroshima Carp win the first of two consecutive Japan Series championships.

Don Blasingame takes over as the manager of the Hanshin Tigers.

Major League All-Stars tour Japan.

1980 Kintetsu Buffaloes win their second pennant.

Leron Lee wins the Pacific League batting title, and his brother Leon Lee finishes second.

Charlie Manuel wins the Pacific League home-run and RBI titles.

1981 Yomiuri Giants capture the Japan Series as Suguru Egawa wins the Central League MVP and Tatsunori Hara wins the Rookie of the Year.

Kansas City Royals tour Japan.

1982 Hiromitsu Ochiai wins his first triple crown.

Seibu Lions win their first of three pennants in four years under manager Tatsuro Hirooka.

Chunichi Dragons beat out the Yomiuri Giants for pennant by half a game.

1983 Yutaka Fukumoto breaks Lou Brock's career stolen-base record.

1984 Hiroshima Carp beat the Hankyu Braves in a seven-game Japan Series.
Greg "Boomer" Wells wins the triple crown and MVP Award.
Baltimore Orioles tour Japan.

1985 Hanshin Tigers win the Japan Series for the first time.
Randy Bass wins his first triple crown.
Hiromitsu Ochiai wins his second triple crown.

1986 Randy Bass wins his second triple crown.
Hiromitsu Ochiai wins his third triple crown.
Randy Bass sets the single-season batting record with a .389 average.
Masaaki Mori takes over as the Seibu Lions' manager.
Seibu Lions win eight pennants in the next nine seasons.
Seibu Lions slugger Kazuhiro Kiyohara named Rookie of the Year.
Koji Akiyama selected for the first of eight straight Best Nine teams.
Major League All-Stars tour Japan.

1987 Sachio Kinugasa breaks Lou Gehrig's consecutive-games-played record.
Rick Lancellotti wins the Central League home-run crown.
Greg "Boomer" Wells wins the Pacific League RBI title.

1988 Seibu Lions win pennant over the Kintetsu Buffaloes by .002 percentage points.
Major League All-Stars tour Japan.

1989 Kintetsu Buffaloes win the Pacific League pennant by .001 percent over Orix Braves and .002 over Seibu Lions.
Ralph Bryant leads the Pacific League with forty-nine home runs and wins the MVP Award.
Greg "Boomer" Wells wins the Pacific League batting and RBI titles.
Warren Cromartie wins the Central League batting crown and MVP Award.

1990 Hideo Nomo win the Rookie of the Year, MVP, and Sawamura Awards as he leads the Pacific League in wins, ERA, and strikeouts.
Orestes Destrade leads the Pacific League in home runs and RBI.
Major League All-Stars tour Japan.
Seibu Lions sweep the Yomiuri Giants in the Japan Series as Orestes Destrade wins the series MVP.

1991 Atsuya Furuta becomes the first catcher to win the Central League batting title since World War II.
Orestes Destrade wins the Pacific League home-run and RBI titles.

Seibu Lions beat the Hiroshima Carp in an exciting seven-game Japan Series.

1992 Seibu Lions beat the Yakult Swallows 4-3 in one of the most exciting Japan Series ever.

Jack Howell wins the Central League batting and home-run crowns and MVP.

Orestes Destrade wins the Pacific League home-run crown.

Greg "Boomer" Wells wins the Pacific League RBI title.

Major League All-Stars tour Japan.

1993 Ralph Bryant wins the Pacific League home-run and RBI titles.

Yakult Swallows beat the Seibu Lions 4-3 in the Japan Series.

Hideki Matsui and Ichiro Suzuki's rookie seasons.

Free agency established.

1994 Ichiro Suzuki sets the record for the most hits in a single season.

Ichiro Suzuki wins the first of his seven straight batting titles and first of his three consecutive MVP Awards.

Alonzo Powell wins first of his three straight batting titles.

Yomiuri Giants win pennant over the Chunichi Dragons in the last game of the season.

1995 Hideo Nomo joins the Los Angeles Dodgers and wins the National League Rookie of the Year Award.

Tom O'Malley wins the Central League MVP Award.

Hideki Irabu wins the Pacific League ERA and strikeout titles.

Koji Noda strikes out nineteen on April 21 to set record for most strikeouts in a game.

Bobby Valentine manages the Chiba Lotte Marines.

1996 Hideki Matsui wins his first MVP Award as the Yomiuri Giants capture pennant.

Orix Blue Wave beat the Yomiuri Giants in the Japan Series 4-1.

Hideki Irabu wins his second ERA title.

Eric Hillman selected for the Best Nine team.

Major League All-Stars tour Japan.

1997 Atsuya Furuta wins his second MVP Award as the Yakult Swallows win their fourth pennant in six years.

Hideki Irabu joins the New York Yankees.

1998 Yokohama Bay Stars win the Japan Series.

Kazuhiro Sasaki wins the MVP with forty-five saves and a 0.64 ERA.

Kazuo Matsui wins the Pacific League MVP Award.

Hideki Matsui leads the Central League in home runs and RBIs.

Major League All-Stars tour Japan.

1999 Fukuoka Daiei Hawks beat the Chunichi Dragons in the Japan Series.

2000 Yomiuri Giants, managed by Shigeo Nagashima, beat the Fukuoka Daiei Hawks, managed by Sadaharu Oh, in so-called "ON" Japan Series.

Hideki Matsui leads the Central League in home runs and RBIs and wins second MVP Award.

Kazuhiro Sasaki joins the Seattle Mariners and wins the Rookie of the Year Award.

New York Mets and Chicago Cubs open the Major League Baseball season in Tokyo.

Major League All-Stars tour Japan.

2001 Ichiro Suzuki joins the Seattle Mariners and wins the American League Rookie of the Year and MVP Awards.

Tuffy Rhodes hits fifty-five home runs to tie Sadaharu Oh's single-season record.

Yakult Swallows top the Kintetsu Buffaloes in the Japan Series.

2002 Alex Cabrera hits fifty-five home runs, tying the single-season home-run record.

Hideki Matsui leads the Central League in home runs and RBIs and wins his third MVP Award.

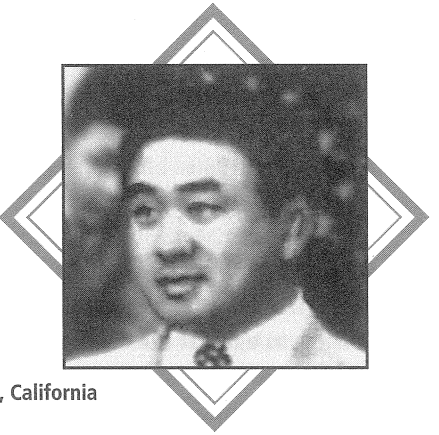
Major League All-Stars tour Japan.

2003 Hanshin Tigers win their first pennant since 1985 but lose to the Fukuoka Daiei Hawks in an exciting Japan Series.

Hideki Matsui joins the New York Yankees.

2004 New York Yankees and Tampa Bay Devil Rays open the Major League Baseball season in Tokyo. Hideki Matsui homers in his first at bat against the Yomiuri Giants.

Remembering Japanese Baseball



1 Tsuneo "Cappy" Harada

Born: October 16, 1921, in Santa Maria, California
Baseball executive

Tsuneo "Cappy" Harada has spent his life promoting ties between American and Japanese baseball. As a U.S. Army officer and member of the occupation force, Harada was in charge of reestablishing Japanese athletics. He focused on baseball and quickly restarted the National High School Baseball Tournament at Koshien and the professional league. To help boost morale, Harada arranged for the San Francisco Seals to tour Japan in 1949. The tour was so successful that Harada helped arrange Major League teams to visit Japan in 1951 and 1953. He also worked closely with Japanese baseball officials to create the current two-league format and establish the Japan Series. In the early 1950s, Harada became a special adviser to the Tokyo Yomiuri Giants. In that position, he helped recruit *nisei* players and arrange the Giants' foreign tours. After leaving the Yomiuri Giants, Harada became an adviser and scout for the New York/San Francisco Giants. In 1966, while serving as the general manager of the Lodi Crushers of the California League, he was named Executive of the Year by the *Sporting News* and the National Association of Professional Baseball. Since the 1970s, Harada has been an adviser for Major League Baseball and the United States Olympic Committee. He currently lives in southern California.

BEFORE THE WAR [World War II], a couple of American All-Star teams visited Japan and were very popular. That's the reason professional baseball was started in Japan back in 1936. Lefty O'Doul, who was very fond of the Japanese people, was on the 1931 and 1934 All-Star teams. Lefty became very friendly with Matsutaro Shoriki, the father of professional baseball in

Japan. They ended up starting the Tokyo Giants, the first professional baseball team in Japan, and Lefty arranged for them to barnstorm in the States in 1935 and 1936.

When I was a young fellow, I played against the Tokyo Giants in my hometown of Santa Maria, California, during the tour they made in 1936. They had a doubleheader scheduled. They played the local Japanese-American team first, and the Japanese-American team won that game. The second game was against the Santa Maria merchants, who didn't have anybody who could speak Japanese. I was just a young punk but they asked me if I would get in uniform, play a couple of innings, and be an interpreter. I was a pretty good hitter. I had a lifetime .323 average in high school. But unfortunately, I didn't get up to bat. Although I was only fifteen years old, I made a lot of friends because I could speak Japanese. It was a lot of fun and a good experience. I became well-acquainted with all of them but especially with Sotaro Suzuki. He had lived in New York for awhile and had become a real baseball nut. He was very instrumental in getting professional baseball started in Japan.

The Tokyo Giants had a great team. They had two great pitchers, Eiji Sawamura and Victor Starffin. Both could have made the Major Leagues at its present standard very easily. Sawamura threw a fastball that hopped all over the place. I would compare him to Roger Clemens. Sawamura was a very smart ballplayer who knew how to pitch. It was unfortunate that he was killed during the War. Had he come to the States, he really would have made a good impression. Starffin was a fellow who could pitch every day. He could pitch five or six days in a row! One time, the story goes, he pitched forty innings right in a row! He was a good pitcher and a great competitor.

They also had a shortstop named Hisanori Karita, who was a wonderful fielder and a good clutch hitter. His keystone partner was Takeo Tabe. He was also a great fielder and a good hit-and-run man. He had speed just like Ichiro Suzuki and would've been a sensation here. Their third baseman was Shigeru Mizuhara. He was just like Stan Hack; when a line drive came at him, he let his body stop it. In right field, they had Haruyasu Nakajima, the first triple-crown winner in Japan. He could hit anything. All of these players are in the Japanese Hall of Fame.

When I got older, I played semipro baseball and was scouted by the St. Louis Cardinals. But then the War broke out, and that was the end of my

career. During the War, I was with military intelligence and worked with the Navajo Ghost Takers in Australia and New Guinea. I was wounded twice. The Ghost Takers were invaluable, because they would send messages in Navajo, and the Japanese couldn't decode them. They were great soldiers.

I went to Japan at the start of the occupation in 1946 and was appointed aide-de-camp to Gen. William Marquat, who also was crazy about baseball. Well, I was very fortunate that I had a great boss named Gen. [Douglas] MacArthur. I was assigned to rehabilitate sports in Japan. Although I revived the Olympic committee and other things like that, since baseball was my favorite, I worked on it first.

At the end of the War, Japan had some really good ballplayers, but Japanese baseball as an organization was in shambles. The stadiums were being used by the occupation forces as motor pools. I went right to work and got the stadiums returned to the ball clubs. I had to tell the commanders that General MacArthur needed the stadiums to get sports started again. It was very easy since I was using the general's name. At first, the baseball was about class C level. But even back then, a few of the ballplayers could've played in the Majors.

One of my tasks was to negotiate the return of prisoners of war from the Soviet Union. Mr. Sataro Suzuki asked me look up a prisoner named Shigeru Mizuhara. "Hey, I know him!" I said. "Well, he's a prisoner over there. Try to get him back." I was fortunate enough to get him back and brought him to a relocation camp. The Giants wanted to get him back as soon as possible, so I got him a special privilege to leave the camp and go to Tokyo. When he came back, he made a speech in front of forty-five thousand people. That was a very emotional moment.

In the late 1940s, the morale of the Japanese was really low. During a staff meeting, General MacArthur asked, "What can we do to get the morale of the Japanese people back?"

I was only a first lieutenant, but I just popped up and said, "I think baseball would be a wonderful thing."

"Why do you think baseball's important?" he responded.

"Well, the Japanese people love baseball, and I think if we brought an American baseball team here, the Japanese people would love that, and it would really help bring the morale up."

"So what are you waiting for?" he said.

I thought of Lefty O'Doul first because he was so popular in Japan. So I went to San Francisco, where Lefty was managing the Seals of the Pacific Coast League. Lefty thought it was a fine idea, and Paul Fagen, the Seal's owner, agreed. We set up a joint committee made up of Japanese and Americans to handle the tour. I was the head of the American portion of the committee, and the Japanese had Sotaro Suzuki and two others.

The tour was built around Lefty O'Doul. When he arrived in Tokyo, we had a parade through Ginza. It was amazing! There were so many people! The driver didn't even have to push on the gas. The people were just pushing the cars. I was in the same open car as Lefty. He yelled, "*Banzai! Banzai!*", but nothing happened. He commented, "Usually before the War, when you yelled *banzai*, they would yell *banzai* back. How come they don't yell *banzai*?" And I said, "That's the reason you're here, Lefty. To build up the morale so that they will yell *banzai* again." He understood. By the time he left, people were yelling *banzai* again.

The Seals drew full-capacity crowds every place they went. One of the highlights was at the opening ceremonies when I had General MacArthur's permission to raise the Japanese flag and play the anthem at the same time. It was the first time after the War that the Japanese flag had been raised together with the Stars and Stripes, so it was a very historical moment. The Japanese people were very surprised, and a lot of them were moved to tears. That was very emotional. Being in the military, I automatically saluted the flag. Of course, that drew a lot of criticism. One of the senior aides to General MacArthur thought that I had gone too far, but the General said that he gave me permission to do it. In each city we went during that tour, the occupational commander would send a lieutenant to ask, "Is Harada going to salute the Japanese flag this time?" And I said, yes, I would. So in all the cities on the tour, the commanders also saluted the flag except in Osaka where the commander refused. In the 1970s, Ryuji Suzuki, the president of the Central League, threw a party to celebrate a book they wrote about me called *A Bridge Across the Pacific.* At the party, he mentioned that the most significant thing that I contributed to the Japanese morale was arranging to have the Japanese flag raised and anthem played at the same time. And that I saluted it.

After the Seals tour, Lefty O'Doul was really appreciative of what I did for him, so he invited me to Hawaii. At one of the cocktail parties, Dr. Kat-

sumi Kometani said to me, "Cappy, there's a wonderful young man and a really good ballplayer who would like to get a chance to play professionally in the States. Would you do something for him?" I said, "Well, I'll talk to Lefty." So Lefty invited him to spring training, and in 1950, Wally Yonamine was invited to the Seals camp. He made a great impression, but he didn't make the Seals at that time. Instead, he played for the farm club in Utah, where he did well. At the same time, Mr. Shoriki told me that he would like to bring a foreign ballplayer to the Tokyo Giants. I told him that we should try to get a good *nisei* ballplayer. Well, the first fellow who came to my mind was Wally Yonamine. So I went immediately to Lefty O'Doul and asked his permission to sign Wally. Lefty, of course, being very cooperative, gave permission. Wally was such a cooperative, wonderful person and was very ready. His hustling revolutionized Japanese baseball.

Like Jackie Robinson, who broke the color line here, Wally is the one who started everything in Japan for foreign players. Because of Wally, Mr. Shoriki asked me if I could get some other foreign ballplayers. I said maybe it would be better to get some more *nisei* players. So I went to the owner of the Hawaii Asahi, Angel Maehara, and signed their catcher Jyun Hirota. Right away, he made a big contribution and became the first-string catcher. Then, a fellow named Dick Kashiwaeda came, followed by Bill Nishita, the pitcher. Of course, the guy who became really popular was Andy Miyamoto because he hit a home run his first time up. Andy is a real nice person. He married Hirofumi Naito's, the second baseman's, sister. Those five *nisei* ballplayers helped define the post-war Tokyo Giants. They were very popular, and they were all good.

In the late 1940s, Mr. Shoriki asked me, "How come our baseball isn't getting stronger like the Major Leagues?" I said, "Mr. Shoriki, there's a simple answer. You have to form two leagues and have a Japanese World Series. Then, everybody will be fighting for something, and that will foster competition. Then, Japanese baseball will get stronger." Mr. Shoriki said, "Let's have a meeting on it." The meeting took place at a restaurant in Osaka. At the meeting were Mr. Shoriki, Ryuji Suzuki [the president of the league], Mr. Nagata [the movie magnate], and Prince [Naruhiko] Higashikuni. We discussed it and decided that it was a good idea. I hate to take credit for it but I think I was responsible for creating the two leagues. In 1950, the first year of the new leagues, they invited Lefty O'Doul and Joe DiMaggio for open-

ing day. At the opening ceremony, Lefty threw out the first pitch, General Marquat, my immediate boss, was the catcher, and Joe was the hitter.

In 1951, I became an adviser to the Tokyo Giants. I was also the team's general manager during our overseas tours of Australia, South America, and the United States. That same year, Mr. Shoriki wanted to bring a Major League team to Japan not only to boost morale but also to sell subscriptions to his newspaper. So I negotiated with Lefty O'Doul to bring an All-Star team. I told Lefty, "Bring guys like Joe and Dominic DiMaggio." He said, "Well, I'll try." And he came up with a heck of the team: the DiMaggio brothers, Eddie Lopat, Billy Martin, Bobby Shantz, Ferris Fain, and Mel Parnell. It was a wonderful tour. They made a lot of friends and won all the games. We saw DiMaggio hit the last home run of his career during the tour. I gave a film of the home run to Joe to keep, but I don't know if his family still has it.

One of my highlights was escorting Joe DiMaggio and Marilyn Monroe on their honeymoon to Japan in 1954. I have a funny story about that. After Joe got married, he and Marilyn were driving through Santa Maria. He knew that I was from Santa Maria, and he thought that I might be there. Well, as all the other ballplayers knew, Joe rarely had a penny in his pocket. So he called me collect in Santa Maria and got a hold of my sister, who told him that I was in Japan. So he called me in Japan—collect! He said, "I got married, and I'd like to take my wife to Japan for a honeymoon."

"Who did you get married to?"

"You know her—she's a blond."

"Well, if it's Marilyn Monroe, you can bring her now without getting a sponsor."

But I asked the *Yomiuri Shimbun* anyway if they would sponsor them, and they were very happy to do it because she was a sensation. She was so popular, we had trouble getting her off the airplane! People would come to the hotel and wouldn't go home until she went out to say hello to them. It was a wonderful honeymoon trip for them. But they had some disagreements. Down in Hiroshima, we were staying in a Japanese hotel, and early in the morning I looked out in the garden, and I saw a shadow. I looked again and saw that it was a lady. So I went out there and found Marilyn, and she was sobbing. They must have had a disagreement. Joe was very possessive and very jealous. I remember at the time telling one of my friends at Yomiuri that the marriage will be just like a baseball game—nine innings.

Sure enough, nine months later, they were split up. Joe and I remained very good friends until the day he passed away. He was a real gentleman. He had his faults, but he had his good points, too.

In 1952, Mr. Shoriki came to me and said, "I want to get our ballplayers to play at the same level as they do in the States. How can we do that?" I suggested, "The best thing to do is to send them to spring training in the United States. We should open up a spring camp for the Tokyo Giants, and I'll arrange with Lefty O'Doul to play games against Pacific Coast League teams and perhaps even a Major League team." I figured that the best thing was to bring them to my hometown of Santa Maria, California, where there were a lot of bilingual Japanese Americans and also a ball park. We went over in 1953.

Right after the War when I returned to Santa Maria, I was still wearing my uniform. I hadn't seen my father for several years so I figured I would send him a picture of me in uniform. So I went to a photography studio and asked to have my picture taken. The fellow refused me. He said, "I don't take any pictures of Japs!" Well, when I brought the Giants to Santa Maria, I was the first to get off the bus. And there was *that* photographer trying to take my picture, so I gave him my finger! Fortunately, the *Santa Maria Times* didn't print it!

The camp was really successful. Horace Stoneham, who was the owner of the New York Giants, really helped us. He and I became very good friends. When I told him that I was bringing the Tokyo Giants to spring training in my hometown, he said, "Well, why don't we bring the Giants and have an exhibition game?" Boy, I thought that was just wonderful! Leo Durocher was the manager, and they had some great ballplayers on that team, including Willie Mays and Monte Irvin. Their shortstop, Daryl Spencer, ended up having some great years in Japan. After that, Mr. Shoriki said he would like to invite the New York Giants to Japan for an exhibition tour that fall.

In Tokyo, the New York Giants stayed at the Imperial Hotel. At that time, Durocher was married to Laraine Day. One morning, he called me up and said, "Cappy, let's have breakfast together, and let's meet in the lobby." I went to the lobby, and he was there with Laraine. Then all of a sudden, he saw Dusty Rhodes coming into the hotel, and he said, "Cappy, do me a favor? Take Laraine in there, get a nice table, and I'll be right with you." He went up to Dusty and said, "Are you coming in, or are you going out?"

"I can't lie to you, Skip. I'm coming in."

"What were you doing out there like that?"

"Well, I was visiting my cousin."

Leo just burst out laughing and said, "I've never run into a person that has so many cousins all over the world!"

So he played Dusty all nine innings that day. But Dusty got even with him. He hit three home runs! But Leo was still mad at him. He said, "Cappy, come with me. We're going to get rid of that guy." So we went up to Mr. Stoneham's suite and knocked on the door. And guess who should open the door but Dusty Rhodes with a drink in his hand!

After that tour, I started working for the New York Giants and stayed for twenty-three years.

During the tour, the Tokyo Giants pitcher Takumi Otomo was very impressive, and the New York Giants wanted to get him. So I talked with Mr. Yasuda, the [Tokyo] Giants president, and he said, "I will give you Otomo for ten thousand dollars plus we want to get two or three good ballplayers from the States." In those days, ten thousand dollars was a lot of money. But Mr. Stoneham said that was too much. So Otomo's dream of playing in the Major Leagues ended there. He was an underhanded pitcher, and I'm sure he could've done very well here.

After the 1954 season, the Tokyo Giants made a goodwill tour of Australia, and I went along as the general manager. We landed in the northern part of Australia, and there were a lot of anti-Japanese demonstrations. Since I was the leader of the tour, I told everybody, "We had a lot of trouble getting here, so you guys stay in the airplane, and I'll go down and meet with the people."

One of the leaders of the veterans association came up to me and said, "You have a lot of nerve bringing Japanese ballplayers here after what they did to us!" He knew that I was an American. I guess he was already briefed.

"Wait a minute," I said. "We have five American citizens on our team."

"What do you mean by American citizens? They're all Japanese."

I said, "No. They're Japanese-American." And I gave him the names: Wally, Dick, Jyun Hirota, Doug Matsuoka, and Bill Nishida. "They are all from Hawaii and were born in the United States but are officially members of the Tokyo Giants. So what's wrong with that?"

I slowly convinced him. But they did everything possible during the tour to make it difficult. For example, at Sydney, before the game, the veterans association started a movement to stop all the streetcars so people couldn't come to the ball park.

Next we went to Canberra, where Prime Minister Robert Menzies threw a reception for us, and the Japanese ambassador attended. The tour ended in Brisbane. Brisbane brought back a lot of fond memories because that's where MacArthur's headquarters was before we moved up to New Guinea. We were supposed to go to Adelaide, but that never happened because the people of Adelaide didn't want us to come there, and the promoter ran out of money.

On the way home, we stopped in Manila. There was still a lot of anti-Japanese feelings there as well. At that time, the future dictator [Ferdinand] Marcos was a policeman. He might have been the chief of police but I'm not sure. Well, he arranged for all of our players to have an escort. We played two games there, and the stadium was packed full.

After I left the Tokyo Giants, I stayed in Japan as a representative of the San Francisco Giants. In 1963, I scouted Masanori Murakami before he joined the Nankai Hawks. He was a good left-handed pitcher, and I figured that he might one day be a good pitcher for the States. He joined the Hawks but didn't make the big club in Japan. I still thought that he had the potential to pitch in the States. So I asked the Hawks' permission to bring him and a couple of other guys to spring training with the San Francisco Giants. At camp, Murakami was a big hit. Charlie Fox, who was a catcher and also a coach, caught for Murakami during batting practice. After a few warm-up pitches, he came up to me and said, "You tell the boss that this guy can pitch in the States. We'd better sign him!" Right away, we signed him and sent him to Fresno, the class C team. He did really well, so after September 1st, we brought him up to the Big Leagues where he was a great sensation. He was a great relief pitcher, and he was well-liked by everybody in the Giants organization.

Murakami became very friendly with Jack Hiatt, who is now head of player development for the Giants. Hiatt taught Murakami a few English phrases. So one day, Murakami was called in to pitch in relief. He walked up to the mound, and Herman Franks, who was the manager at that time,

started talking, and Murakami didn't understand anything he was saying. So Murakami said, "What do you want, strikes?" "Yeah," Franks responded, "I want strikes!" And Murakami said, "Well, take a hike!"

In 1964, I had a cancer operation, and I wasn't feeling too well. So I decided to go back to the States for treatment. That's when I decided to pull out of Japan. I was still with the San Francisco Giants as a scout. So I went back and helped Mr. Stoneham with the Giants for one year, and then he told me that the Chicago Cubs were looking for a general manager for their minor league team in Lodi, California. So I went over there in 1966. That year, baseball gave me the honor of giving me the Executive of the Year Award.

There has been some talk about being elected to the Japanese Hall of Fame, but that's not my dream. My dream was to bring Japanese baseball to the level of American baseball. So I'm very happy that Japanese ballplayers are finally over here playing in the States.

2 Hirofumi Naito

Born: January 20, 1931, in Kofu, Japan
1949–58: Tokyo Yomiuri Giants infielder
1959–61: Kintetsu Buffaloes infielder
1964: Kokutetsu Swallows coach
1982: Yakult Swallows farm team manager

Hirofumi Naito served as the utility infielder for the Yomiuri Giants from 1949 to 1955. In 1956 and 1957, he became the Giants' starting second baseman. Known for his sure fielding, Naito led all Central League second basemen with a .986 fielding percentage in 1956. After the 1958 season, Naito was traded to the Kintetsu Buffaloes where he played second base for three years. In his thirteen-year career, Naito hit .232 but was a member of eight pennant-winning teams. After retiring, he coached the Swallows in 1964 and managed their farm team in 1982. He now lives in Tokyo.

I DIDN'T WANT to be a baseball player. I wanted to be the captain of a ship.

In those days, the Giants accepted people based on a test. First of all, I had no intention of taking the test. I was originally from Yamanashi Prefecture, which is inland and surrounded by mountains. So I dreamt of going out into the ocean and thought about going to maritime school after graduating from high school. However, one of my friends came over and said, "Hey, there's going to be a test for the Giants. Go over, take the test, see the faces of the big stars, hear them talk, and then tell me about it."

This was in the old days [1948], so it took four hours by train to get to Tokyo. I didn't wear Western shoes. All I had was *geta* [traditional Japanese wooden sandals], and I had only one bat on my shoulder. Well, I went to Nakano to stay with my uncle and take the test. At that time, I still didn't have any interest of actually joining the Giants but I went to take the test anyway. There were over two hundred people who took the test that day.

We had to run sixty meters, throw the ball, and swing the bat. I think those were the only things they tested us on.

The Giants players were standing all around watching us. My friend had asked me to look at each face and see how they talked and their expressions and everything. So going through the test just once wasn't enough to catch all of that, so I took the test over and over again to get a good look at each of them.

I was planning to go back home at the end of the day, but then they announced the people who passed the first day of tests, and my name was called. I ended up staying with my uncle another day. The next day, we came out and did some actual fielding and batting.

So I went home and reported to my friends about all the players that I met, and I forgot all about it. Then, suddenly, I got an acceptance notice from the Giants. I thought, "Oh my God, what should I do?" I hadn't even I told my parents that I took the test. So I told my parents, and the one word they said was "*No*!" At that time, the public had a very low image of baseball players. Their names were pretty well known, and they had money, but everybody thought that all they did was fool around. They were treated as something like *yakuza* [gangsters].

I had another goal in those days—to win the national high school championship at the Koshien summer tournament. My high school team went to the Koshien tournament but we didn't win. After it was over, the Giants kept on saying, "Come on over and sign the contract." This was in 1948, and although I wanted to become a ship's captain, we were being occupied by the United States, and all the ships were under American control. So I thought, "OK, there is not too much of a chance there." So I made my decision to join the Giants, and I told my parents that that was my decision. I came to Tokyo with my father. We had no knowledge about contracts and professional baseball, so we signed whatever the Giants gave us.

In those days, we didn't have sufficient equipment to play baseball, and there wasn't enough food to eat. My original position in the Giants was outfielder, but during batting practice and whenever the pitchers practiced in the bullpen, I became a catcher. After practice, I gathered the equipment and took care of it. Balls were very valuable in those days. So at the beginning of practice, the business manager would give me the balls and count them. At the end of practice, he would count the balls again to see if there

were any missing. Then, he would make me search every single stand and corner until I had them all. We also didn't have enough food, so when we went to Nagoya or Osaka, each player had to bring his own rice. That shortage lasted for about a year. I thought, "Wow, I thought professional baseball would be something different. My God, what a world I've entered!"

Many regular members of the team were people who had fought in the War. They were old-fashioned and stubborn. In those days, at the end of each game, we'd all take a bath. But, of course, there was a seniority system so the seniors [*sempai*] would wash up and jump into the tub before me. While they were taking the bath, I would be in the locker room polishing their shoes and polishing their equipment. By the time they were all finished and it was my turn to take a bath, the bathroom would be completely dirty and grimy, and the tub would be full of dirty water. So I would only take a shower. Well, one day the visiting team didn't take a bath but went straight back to their hotel, so the bathtub in the visitors' side was completely clean and unused. One of the janitors called me over and said, "Hey, come on over. This is your chance to take a nice bath." So I went and actually took a nice hot bath in a clean bathtub. But the regulars of my team found out, and Noboru Aota smacked me on the head and said to me, "Were you out in the game today?"

"No, I wasn't."

He asked me, "How many of the people who came to see the game came to see you?"

"Probably nobody."

"So all of the fans came to see the regular members of the Giants, and it's the regulars who sweated out and work hard to earn your monthly pay. To take a bath before the regulars, who were working hard for you, is not the correct thing for a human being to do."

In those days, Japan had just lost the War, and we were now free to do whatever we wanted. But after this event, I thought, "Hey, maybe the people in the Giants have a very good sense of morals and values here."

When we went to away games in those days, each player had to do his own laundry—all his underwear, socks, everything. Nowadays, they just stuff their dirty laundry in a bag, and by the next morning it's clean. But in the old days, we would line up in the bathroom, washing our laundry and going over the previous game's plays. When we made too much noise, the

older players would come, stop the water, and say, "Is this how you use water in your homes?" You see, if we used water too lavishly, there would be a huge water bill, and the hotel employees would have to work that much harder to make up for it.

Sometimes when we went to the station and were waiting for the train to arrive, we'd start singing. But again the seniors would come and tell us to stop singing because, as I said before, the image of a baseball player was not good in those days. So to gain the respect of the general public, we had to be role models and be very gallant and serious.

These were things that I wouldn't have learned in school or if I had entered a company. I thought, "Wow, this is something unique to being a professional baseball player and especially the Giants." So I started liking being a professional baseball player from then on. The Giants are the most popular team in Japan, and you ask "Why?" Well, such values are handed down from generation to generation, that's why.

In my second year, I started appearing in games. My position was shortstop, and at second base was Shigeru Chiba, the premier second baseman in Japan. One day, we were playing the Taiyo Whales at Korakuen Stadium. There was one out and a runner on first base, and the batter hit a ground ball to short so I thought, "Ah, double play." So I threw to second base, but the ball went a little to the right of Chiba. Chiba just ignored the ball and didn't even try to catch it! The ball rolled over toward the right-field foul pole, and the runner went to third base, and the batter ran all the way to second.

I was still the youngest player on the team, and after the game, I had to collect all the balls and the equipment. I was almost crying at that point, and I walked with all the equipment toward the lockers. Well, right at the corner of the locker room, Chiba was talking to a reporter. The newspaper reporter was telling Chiba-san, "You shouldn't be so hard on such a young player. He's just the kid on the team."

Chiba answered, "I'm not bullying the young boy. I'm not being mean to him on purpose. I'm teaching him what it is to be a professional player. Teaching him to be a real Giants player. You have to throw the ball to smack in the center where it's easy to catch. To do such a play as he did today is inconsiderate to the people who came to see the game. If Naito understands from such a lesson what it really is to be a Giants player, then it's even worth losing one or two games."

When I heard that I thought, "God, what a good choice I made. I made the right choice to enter the Giants." That spirit was handed down in the Giants team, and I think that such spirit showed in the play on the field and attracted the fans to watch our games.

When I first entered the Giants, I was an errand boy to Tetsuharu Kawakami, Shigeru Chiba, and Noboru Aota. On road trips, they would be out drinking every night and wouldn't return to the hotel until morning. When they would come back to the hotel, I would have to be waiting with a big bowl of ice water and a towel. They would lie on their beds, and I would take the towel and dip it in the cold water and put it on their eyes. Before they'd fall asleep, they'd ask, "Who's the opposing pitcher today?" And I'd tell them. They would respond, "I thought so, too. I guess I can get two hits off him. No, I think I can get one hit off him" and then fall asleep.

Kawakami was a true professional. I had trouble hitting the Swallows' ace pitcher Masaichi Kaneda, so I asked Kawakami-san, "How can I hit Kaneda?" He answered, "Why do I have to help raise your salary? I might lose my salary instead." I learned that a professional player figures out his own answers and then does it.

Chiba was a nice guy. The young players really liked him. But when he played, there were no concessions. He never gave in to anything. He was a right-handed batter but he always hit into right field. So every time he was at bat, all the outfielders would go toward right field. One game, Chiba was hitting second, and Aota hit third. Aota-san said to Chiba, "Every now and then why don't you try hitting to left field?" So Chiba went into the batter's box grumbling and smacked a double into left field.

On the bench, we were all betting five hundred yen on what would happen. Aota bet five hundred yen against Chiba, but when Chiba got the hit, he was very happy and shouted, "Good! Good!!" The reason was because he was competing with Chiba for the RBI title. Aota then got a hit, scoring Chiba, and picked up another RBI. Chiba came back to the bench and exclaimed, "That's why he wanted me to hit to left." Aota laughed, "I may have lost five hundred yen, but another RBI will increase my salary. So five hundred yen is nothing."

All baseball players hate to lose, but Takehiko Bessho, our ace, was the sorest loser! Once he was pitching a no-hit, no-run game. It was the ninth-inning, and I was playing second base. With one out, the batter hit a fly, and

the right fielder and I went after it, but neither of us caught it. We shut them out, but until his dying day, every time Bessho saw my face, he would say, "No-hit, no-run! No-hit, no-run!" He blamed me for it! Pitchers as a whole are very proud people but especially Bessho.

Bessho and Aota both went to the same high school, and both were heavy drinkers. You would never know when the drinking would end once they got started. Even if they didn't sleep one or two nights, they were tough once they got out on the field. These were men who had gone and fought in the War, so they were tough. One day Bessho and Aota were drinking in a movie producer's home. They got in a fight over something, and they really messed up the house. The house was a complete disaster! They were too drunk to realize what they had done. So afterwards, when they were told, they blamed each other. But somebody had to pay for the damage, so they did rock-paper-scissors, best out of five. I think Aota lost and ended up paying for the damage.

The AAA San Francisco Seals, managed by Lefty O'Doul, was the first American team to come over after the War. The day before the game, we practiced at Korakuen, and after our turn, the Seals practiced, and we stayed to watch. During batting practice, their coach pitched very slow balls, and none of the batters were hitting them into the stands. We were all watching and saying, "They're nothing. This is boring. Let's go home." We had a pitcher named Tokuji Kawasaki, who threw a fantastic *shuto* [similar to a sinker]. So the next day, we started the game thinking that it was going to be an easy win. Then Kawasaki started to pitch, and *Bang*! *Bang*! They were hitting it all over the field! Next game, Bessho pitched. He had a pretty good fastball, and his curve ball would drop quite a lot, too. And then *Bang*! *Bang*! He was hit all over the place. And we said, "Hey, are these the same guys we saw practicing?" If an AAA team was this strong, what could we do against a Major League team? That changed the way we viewed American baseball.

When there wasn't a game, the team enjoyed being together. We'd be all sweaty from practicing, so we'd take a shower and feel all refreshed, and then the lights from the bars would invite us, "All you stupid fools, come on over, and have a drink." Every night, we would all pitch in three thousand yen. We'd start in Kanda and go drinking and go on to Ginza and then to Shibuya and then the last stop would be Shinjuku. Since I couldn't drink,

I would be the treasurer and would collect all the money and pay. The managers all knew us because it was our normal route, so they gave us discounts. We would go in, and other customers would join in and celebrate winning the game. Then afterwards we'd go on to the next place. We gave the managers free tickets, so many wouldn't charge us. By the end of the barhopping, the players would be pretty drunk, so I'd give some of the money left over to each player as taxi fare to get back home.

In those days, there wasn't much exchange between the United States and Japan concerning baseball techniques. We had a uniquely Japanese way. It was rather an easy way of going about the sport. There wasn't much fighting spirit. Then, Wally Yonamine came over from Hawaii. By that time, I had learned to love the Giants. I had learned to love being a professional baseball player. But this man made me love everything even more. He changed the way we batted, the way we fielded, the base running, the way we practiced, everything.

In the 1951 Japan Series when we played the Hawks, Wally was running from second to third and kicked the ball out of the third baseman's glove and was safe. The third baseman was Kazuo Kageyama out of Waseda University and one of the finest third basemen in the league. This was the first time we'd seen such baserunning. It was an eye-opener for the fans. It was also very impressive to the people in uniform and playing professional baseball. From then on, we started practicing sliding seriously.

If we had a game in Osaka, in those days we would take the overnight train and arrive in Tokyo in the morning. Wally would get off the train and say, "Hey, let's go!" And where did he invite me to? Well, he'd invite me to the Tamagawa grounds where the farm team played, and we'd go practice. He'd ask me to pitch to him, and he'd bat to his heart's content! He'd think it over, muttering, "No, that isn't the right way," and he'd swing as much as he wanted. When he was finally satisfied, we would switch roles, and he'd pitch to me. Afterwards, he'd invite me over to his house, and we'd have a meal together. Nowadays it's taken for granted that somebody in a slump would have special batting practice or special fielding practice, but this way of practicing was something that Wally brought over to Japan.

When Kawakami was a player, he would compete with Wally for leading hitter and MVP. Whenever they were really, really competing, Kawakami was more severe and had a harsher expression on his face. I've watched

Kawakami-san for a long time, and he only had such a strong rivalry against Yonamine. He was an old-fashioned guy, so he especially didn't want to lose to Wally because he felt that such titles should be won by Japanese players. Neither of them showed this rivalry in their expressions or in their words, but inside it was all there.

Every day, Wally would write a letter to his wife in English. One day, a young maid came into the hotel room and saw him writing in English, and she was amazed. "Wow, he's writing in English." I told her, "He's not Japanese. He came over from America. He doesn't understand any Japanese. Watch." So I said *baka* [idiot] and other bad words to him. At first, the maid said, "You shouldn't say such bad things to him." "Oh, he doesn't understand," I responded. "You try it." The maid shyly said, "*Baka.*" Yonamine didn't react at all because he didn't understand. So she started getting bolder and shouted all these bad words at him. Finally, Wally turned around and yelled in Japanese, "What are you saying?" And she ran away barefooted out of the hotel and never came back!

Wally was also a real prankster. When we traveled, the players would all lie back and fall asleep. While they were asleep, Wally would go around and tie knots in all their socks and put them back in their shoes. But he wouldn't wake them up until we would get to our destination. When we arrived at the station, Wally would yell, "Get up! Get up! We're at the station!" So we had to rush out of the train, but we couldn't put our feet in our shoes because Wally had stuffed our socks in them. So the Giants would emerge barefoot with their bags on their backs.

Wally used to have this false tooth. When we would sit down to eat, and Wally would see a dish that he liked, he would take out his tooth and throw it into the bowl! The rest of us would yell out, "That's disgusting!" and Wally would smile and eat this dish by himself. Well, that worked a few times, and then we decided that we wanted the dish as well. So we just picked out the tooth and ate the food anyway.

In 1953, we had spring training in Santa Maria, California. The Americans would do anything to thwart a double play. I was playing as though we were in Japan, and they would come sliding full power into the base. I still have scars from their spikes on my hands. Well, it now is prohibited to slide into a player with your spikes out, but I think from the fans' perspective, it's exciting to watch a player slide with his spikes high.

Unofficially, I was once invited to join the Dodgers. It was during spring training, and the manager of the Dodgers was Walter Alston. Jim Gilliam came sliding into second base, and I jumped to avoid his slide but tagged him out. I also got several hits during these games. One of the newspaper reporters came to me and asked if I had any thoughts about the coming over to the States to play. I thought he had to be kidding! The reporter said that the Dodgers' dugout felt the same and that they would love to have players like me come over to the States. But I knew that they were such big guys and so much more powerful that I wouldn't be able to do it over there. So I said no.

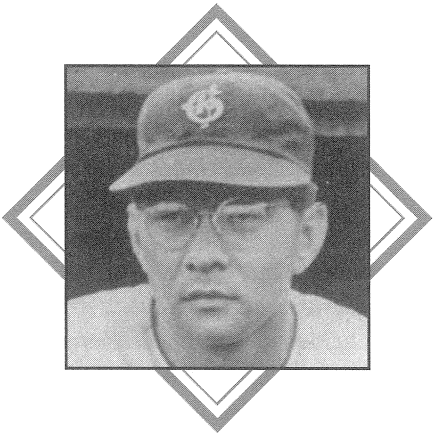
Obviously, one of the differences between the Major Leagues and Japan is the difference in power, but spiritually, in America, the first word that comes to a player's mind is " Go! Go!" but in Japan it's "Wait. Wait." The American game is much more aggressive. In America, the batters try to hit the first ball pitched to them. Traditionally, the Japanese way of playing the game is to make the pitcher throw as many balls as possible to tire him out. So you don't swing at the first ball. In the Japanese game, you are always just waiting and waiting.

In the old days, when it rained and it was announced that there would be no game, we young players would be joyous! But the old players wouldn't go home! If the seniors were still in the locker room, the younger players couldn't leave. So we would be sitting in the corner glancing over, trying to see when they were going to leave the stadium. They would ask, "Did all the fans go home?" Then, the veteran players would take off their uniforms and in just their underwear and shirts, start running laps on the field. I'd say to Wally, "You run every day, you don't have to do this now." But you know, Yonamine, Chiba, Kawakami, and the veterans would go out there and run. From that I learned that even when the game is canceled, if we felt that we needed to build our stamina, we'd go out and run. There was a sense of professionalism, very strict professionalism, in the Giants.

I think that Sadaharu Oh and Shigeo Nagashima saw this type of spirit and realized that you have to practice when nobody's watching you. I remember that Nagashima would run very early morning or late at night along the Tamagawa River. The only ones who knew about it were the old men who fished by the river. When Nagashima built his house, he built a room just for practicing his swings. I think that Nagashima and Oh saw

players like Yonamine, Kawakami, and Chiba and did what had to be done to become good players. I think if they had joined another team, they would never have become such big stars.

What was my most memorable moment as a player? All of it. Every moment.



3 Wally Yonamine

Born: June 24, 1925, in Maui, Hawaii
1951–60: Yomiuri Giants outfielder
1961–62: Chunichi Dragons outfielder
1963–66: Chunichi Dragons coach
1967–69: Lotte Orions coach
1970–71: Chunichi Dragons coach
1972–77: Chunichi Dragons manager
1978–80: Yomiuri Giants coach
1981–82: Nankai Hawks coach
1983–84: Seibu Lions coach
1985–88: Nippon Ham Fighters coach

Known as the Jackie Robinson of Japan, Wally Yonamine was the first American player to go to Japan after World War II. Prior to that, Yonamine played professional football for the San Francisco 49ers. Wally, as he is universally known, initially shocked the Japanese with his aggressive play, but soon his style helped transform how baseball was played in Japan. His hustling style led to three batting titles, seven straight selections to the Best Nine team, a .311 lifetime batting average, and the 1957 MVP Award. After retiring in 1962, Yonamine coached six different clubs and managed the Chunichi Dragons—winning the Central League pennant in 1974. In 1994, he was elected to the Japan Baseball Hall of Fame. Wally Yonamine now splits his time among Hawaii, Los Angeles, and Tokyo as he helps with the family business, Wally Yonamine Pearls.

WHEN I CAME TO JAPAN, I wanted to do three things: to manage a championship team, get into the Hall of Fame, and to shake hands with the emperor. I won the Central League championship in 1974, and I made the Japan Hall of Fame in 1994. I thought that meeting the emperor would be impossible, but when I was a scout with the Giants, my wife and I met the emperor and empress in Los Angeles. The audience was in a small room

with eight others. When we were introduced, I automatically stuck my hand out because we were in Los Angeles. And he shook my hand! The empress talked to my wife for over five minutes. As they were walking out of the room, the empress looked at me and took a practice swing! There she was, the *empress* of Japan in a nice kimono and all that, giving me this batting stance! Those are the three things that I'll always remember.

I was born in Maui. When I was a little boy, I used to listen to the Honolulu high school football games and the Hawaii League baseball games on the radio. My dream was to play at Honolulu Stadium. So in my junior year of high school, I left my family in Maui and went to Honolulu. I played football my senior year for Farrington High School. I was so happy to be finally playing at the Honolulu Stadium. We used to draw twenty-five thousand every game—a packed house every game—and we won every game. I did so well that I was named the MVP and an All Star. I graduated high school on a Sunday night in 1945, and Monday morning I was drafted.

In two months, the War was over, but I was stationed at Schofield Barracks for a year and a half. During that time, I played football, baseball, and basketball. When I was playing football for the army team, we barnstormed to Portland, Oregon, and played against the University of Oregon. We beat Oregon 64 to 13, and I practically scored all of the points. I didn't know it but a scout from the San Francisco 49ers came to watch the quarterback for Oregon, but when he gave his report, it only talked about me. After I got discharged from the army, I had a scholarship to go to Ohio State for football. But the 49ers offered me a two-year contract for fourteen thousand dollars. In 1947, fourteen thousand dollars was a lot of money, so instead of going to college, I signed right away.

I played one year with the 49ers. After that first year, I went back to Hawaii in the off-season and played baseball. Unfortunately, I broke my wrist sliding into second base. When I reported to camp, I still had a cast on. As my contract said that I had to be physically fit, the 49ers kicked me out after ten days, and I didn't receive the other seven thousand dollars. I was really disappointed, because football is a sport that I really love. In the off-season, I used to just fool around with baseball. After I was let go by the 49ers, I came back to Honolulu and played for a team called the Hawaiian Warriors.

In the meantime, I met Lefty O'Doul. I signed with the San Francisco Seals, and they shipped me out to Salt Lake City in 1950. I had a good year,

hit .335. Lefty was going to bring me up to the Seals, but instead he told me, "Wally, I think that you should go to Japan. The Japanese are going to love your style." I decided to go because I had hurt my shoulder playing football. If I stayed in the States, the best I could do was AAA ball because of my shoulder. So if I stayed, I just would have been wasting my time.

The Tokyo Giants offered me a two-year, guaranteed contract, so I came to Japan in 1951. My first game was at Korakuen Stadium. In the eighth inning, runners were on first and second, and the pitcher was Shigeru Sugishita. Our manager, Shigeru Mizuhara, looked at the dugout and asked if anybody had enough guts to bunt. So all the guys said, "Why don't you let Yonamine bunt?" Now, I hadn't seen a ball for a month, but I figured that I could bunt. So I said, "Well, I'll try." I started to swing the bat, and I didn't feel anything. But when I got into the batter's box, my knees started shaking! Shaking like a leaf because it was the first time that I ever played in front of twenty thousand people. In football, I played at Yankee Stadium in front of seventy thousand; Los Angeles Coliseum in front of ninety thousand; but in baseball, the most I had played in front of was maybe six thousand. The first pitch I bunted the ball down the first-base line but foul, and when I started to run, I was shaking so much that I fell down. Mizuhara came to me and told me to bunt down the third-base line. The next pitch I bunted down the third-base line, and I beat the throw. The next day, I started in left field.

When I first came to Japan, it was a really slow game. They didn't know about aggressive baseball. When they hit a ground ball to the infield, they just jogged and sometimes even walked to first base. They didn't break up double plays. Everything was so slow. So, I was debating whether to be aggressive or not, but Mr. Mizuhara said, "What you did in the States, what you learned there, you do that in Japan." When he told me that, I thought, "OK! He's backed me up now," and I started to break up double plays and things like that. In those days, when they were turning a double play, the second basemen would stand right on the base and throw to first. So I'd knock them down. Naturally, they were very surprised. The fans for other teams thought that I was a dirty player and would yell, "Go back to Hawaii!" But that was my style of baseball. Even in Hawaii, I used to break double plays like that. After I started to do that, the opposing fans would throw rocks at me when I was in the outfield. I remember one time in Osaka, I

was playing left field, and the lights went out. Since I was close to the fans, I thought that I had better start walking in. When the lights came on, I went back to my position, and there was a big rock. Somebody must have thrown the rock, trying to hit me.

I've been called the Jackie Robinson of Japan, but although I had it rough, he had it much rougher than I did. You see, my skin is yellow just like the Japanese. They hated me because I was with the Tokyo Giants. We were so strong in those years that the fans everywhere would pick on the Giants. Sometimes, in Hiroshima, we couldn't go home. The fans would lie down in front of the bus. They would shower the bus with rocks. Oh, I'm telling you! You couldn't believe what we went through. We had to get down and hold our faces just like shrapnel was coming at us. Some of the fans with knives even punched the tires!

One time in Nagoya, we went to the hotel, and there were about one thousand angry Dragons fans waiting for us. We were supposed to catch the train to Osaka, but we couldn't leave, because the fans wanted to beat us up! They had to call the cops. You know the police wagons? They brought a wagon right in front of the hotel, and we climbed in it and went to the train station. The fans were terrible in Hiroshima and Nagoya. They were terrible!

When I played, I was always aggressive. Something that I learned is that when you are in a slump, a lot of players get into the batter's box and think, "Oh, I can't do it." They don't have a positive attitude. That's also how I felt when I was in a slump, but I told myself that I can't do that. So when I started to slump, I told myself, "Anybody who's in my way, I'm going to knock down." Because I played football and I was 180 pounds, I never gave anybody a chance. I told myself to be aggressive, so that when I got into the batter's box, I would be aggressive when I hit. People would say to my wife, "Your husband, he looks so calm." And she would answer, "Yeah, he looks so calm but when his uniform is on, I don't know what happens to him. He goes crazy!"

I used to be really aggressive on the base paths. I remember one time, there was a ground ball to the second baseman, he caught it and threw it to the Chunichi shortstop, Shigeru Makino [who later became a Giants coach]. I was coming into second base, and Makino saw me and knew that I was going to hit him. Before he could catch the ball, he shied away, and the ball ended up in left field.

In the old days, the *sempai-kohai* [senior-junior] relationship was worse than today. The *kohai* could not eat with the *sempai*, and could not bathe with the *sempai*. I think I helped change that. By my second game, I was already a regular. For one week, I stayed with the younger players while the veterans got the first bath. The regulars would get all the soap in the water, and the water would get cold so the younger guys wouldn't get a clean bath. After one week, I said to myself, "I'm going to go in with the old-timers." So one day in Osaka, all the old-timers were in there, and I walked in. I put my head down and walked in. I could see the guys poking each other, and I knew they were thinking, "What is this rookie doing in here?" So I just got in, and they didn't say anything to me. After all, I played every day, and I was a foreigner, so the rules sometimes didn't apply to me. From then on, the Giants team slowly started to change. Like when we used to go eat, the old-timers would eat first, and the rookies would eat after them. But I changed all that by starting to go with the regulars.

I came to Japan in 1951 only six years after the War, and some of my teammates had fought against the United States. So I was really worried about how they were going to accept me as an American and a *nisei*. But I didn't have any problems whatsoever. The players didn't talk about the War, just baseball.

The hard thing about playing in Japan was the traveling, the hotels, and the food. The trains had wooden seats. Twenty-five hours on the train and boy, your back hurt! A lot of times you had to sleep on the floor of the trains—and they were dirty! I would even go up onto the luggage rack to sleep sometimes. In the hotels, we didn't have air conditioning, didn't have heat. The rooms were often much colder than outside, so I would wear my overcoat in the room. The food was really bad in those days, too. It was often so bad that I couldn't eat it. But I didn't want to leave the food on the table, because I didn't want my teammates to think that I thought I was too good for them. So I would sit close to the window, and when nobody was watching, I'd take the food and throw it out the window! These were things that I had to do. That first year I lost a lot of weight.

The first year I came, we won the championship, and Shigeru Chiba took the young guys to a nightclub. Chiba-san called me to the side and said, "As a rule, we don't like *nisei*. But you're one good *nisei*. You did everything we did. You slept with us, you ate the food, and you didn't grumble. You go

back to Hawaii, get married, bring your wife, and I'll back you up one hundred percent." I was so happy because my first year with the Giants was the toughest year of being in Japan, but I didn't grumble because I wanted the players to like me. I felt that if I did my job, other American players would have a chance to come to Japan.

When I first came to Japan, I wasn't good at hitting curve balls, so I would go to Tamagawa, where the farm team practices, and just hit for one hour—curve ball, curve ball, curve ball. I used to do everything like that. I used to practice so much. My wife used to take care of the home front, and the only thing that I would do is practice, practice. I had to feed my family, and I wanted my three kids to go to college because I didn't. So, I had to do well at baseball. During some years, I wouldn't take a day off from February to October. I would practice every day. Sometimes, if I played at night and went 0 for 4, I would get up early the next morning and practice. Then I would go home, take an hour nap, and go to the stadium. Some nights, I would swing the bat four hundred times and even ask my wife to be the pitcher.

I have so many good memories from Japanese baseball. One time, I went forty at bats with no hits. I was going crazy—forty times at bat with no hits! But once Mizuhara had confidence in you, he wasn't going to use anybody else. Finally, we had a doubleheader in Sendai. Before the first game, I went to see the head coach, Daisuke Miyake, and asked him, "Mr. Miyake, I was at bat forty times, and I didn't get a hit. Can I rest one game?"

"Well, let's go see Mr. Mizuhara," he responded.

So we went to see Mizuhara, but he just gave me a good scolding, "What you talking about? You're getting paid by the Giants, you play!"

I got so mad. I didn't say anything to him because I respected him, but inside I was thinking, "Mizuhara, you *yaroo* [rascal]! I'm going to show you now! I'll show you!" I was just so mad. Well, in that doubleheader, I went eight for eight. Then after the game, Miyake came to me. He was so mad at me. "Yonamine, you think that I'm a damn fool or what!" And he gave me a good scolding. "Eight for eight and you wanted to sit down!" But that's what I needed, somebody to kick me in my pants.

The Giants of the early 1950s were the best teams that I played on. We had good pitching; the team batting average was about .285; and we were a good defensive team, too. Shigeru Mizuhara, our manager, was very disci-

plined and the reason I did so well in Japan. He was a good man, so I really respected him. But, Mizuhara was the type of manager who never praised you. I gave so much for the team, like breaking up double plays and doing sliding catches, but he never praised me. But there was one time. We went from Tokyo to Shimonoseki, and it took seventeen to twenty hours and those days you couldn't sleep well on the train. We got to Shimonoseki, and he called a meeting. I was really tired. I sat down on the tatami mat and was leaning my head against my bat, when Mizuhara told the other players, "Look at Yonamine. He loves his bat so much that he sleeps with it. That's why he is a good hitter."

But he never babied you. When my wife was pregnant, I had to take her to the hospital. So I called Mizuhara's house and told him, "I have to go to the hospital. Can I catch the next train? I'll be to the game on time." But he said, "Yonamine, you get to the train with the players! You get on that train to Hiroshima!" I couldn't believe it! Mizuhara wouldn't let me take her to the hospital! She had to get a friend to take her. During that game, she gave birth to my son, Paul, and I hit a home run to straight center field.

At first base was Tetsuharu Kawakami. Kawakami and I were rivals, like Ruth and Gehrig or Oh and Nagashima. When I got here, I thought, "How can I become a good ballplayer in Japan? Well, if I beat Kawakami, who is the best hitter on the team, then I have a good chance of winning the batting title, and if I don't, I'll probably become number two or number three, just behind him." So my goal was to beat him every year, but I didn't tell this to anybody.

For the eight years we played together, he always used to needle me. If I didn't get a hit, he would come up to me and say, "Oh, Yonamine, you didn't get a hit" and "Oh, you looked terrible." That would really get me mad, but that's the mistake he made. I would think to myself, "Okay, I'm going to show you." So the next day, maybe I'd get two or three hits. He and I were always like this. He won the batting title two times, and I won it two times.

Shigeru Chiba played second. Chiba was a good defensive player and a very good hitter, too. The majority of his hits were toward center and right. He hardly pulled. Mizuhara was the type of manager that would always bunt to get one run. I guess if you have good pitchers, like he did, you just try to get ahead. If I got on base, instead of letting Chiba do a hit-and-run

or letting him hit to the opposite field, he would make Chiba bunt. Chiba used to get all mad at Mizuhara and complain to me, "Bunt! Bunt! Why? Why? I could hit behind you!"

After the first year, Chiba-san was one of my best friends. He used to call me all the time and take me out to dinner and stuff like that. I hit leadoff, and he was the number-two batter. When I was stealing, if he thought that I would get caught, Chiba-san would foul it off. Once he did it seven times in a row, and I yelled to him, "Hey, I'm tired, you know!" After the game, I asked him, "Chiba-san, are you doing that on purpose?" He said, "Yeah." So I asked him to teach me how to hit foul balls. The next year at camp, I started to practice hitting foul balls during intersquad and exhibition games. I would take two strikes purposely and then just practice hitting foul balls. Mizuhara was at Vero Beach with the Dodgers so Kawakami, the assistant manager, took over. In the first ten games, I didn't get a hit, so Kawakami was kind of worried. He called Mizuhara at Vero Beach and said, "Yonamine doesn't have a single hit." Mizuhara said, "Oh, don't worry it's just exhibition games." But I didn't tell anybody what I had in mind. I knew that in an exhibition game I could get a hit if I wanted, but I wanted to learn how to hit foul balls. I played in twenty games, and I didn't get a single hit.

On opening day, Masaichi Kaneda was the pitcher, and Mizuhara didn't use me since I didn't get a hit in the exhibition games. In the eighth inning with a runner on second base, he had no pinch hitters left so he told me to pinch hit. I got a hit to center field that scored the run, and we won the game. That year, I hit .361. Chiba-san and I became so good at hitting fouls that in some games we would make the pitcher throw about twenty-five pitches to us in just the first inning! The most that I fouled at one at bat was sixteen. I would just foul off the hard pitches and wait for one that I'd want.

We had some really good pitchers—Takehiko Bessho, Hideo Fujimoto, Hiroshi Nakao, and Takumi Otomo. Bessho was one hell of a pitcher. Just like an American pitcher—good fastball, good curve, threw for strikes, and challenged the hitters. He won thirty-three games in 1952, but if he were pitching today, now that they use closers, he would have won more. He used to do a lot of relief pitching, too. He could have made the Major Leagues.

Later [in 1958], Shigeo Nagashima joined the Giants. Nagashima was such a natural athlete. The thing that I respect about Nagashima was that he could field, could hit, and he always told people that I taught him how

to slide! He was a showman. He threw the ball on the ground and stuff like that. When you really needed one, he'd come through for you. Like when the emperor of Japan came to see the game. I remember that the stadium was jammed packed. When the emperor first entered the stadium, naturally, everybody stood up. They were amazed because it was the first time that he had ever gone to a ball park. We were really happy that he came, and it was really an honor for us to play in front of him. Every two minutes, the fans were going crazy. Instead of watching the ball game, I think that they were all looking at the emperor and empress.

The game was tied in the bottom of the ninth inning, and Nagashima led off. He hit a fly to left field, but he didn't know if it was going to be foul or fair, so he just stood there by home plate and watched the ball. Once he figured that the ball would be fair, he started running around the bases. As far as I'm concerned, Nagashima was the best clutch hitter in Japanese history. It was a real treat for me to play in that game.

When Sadaharu Oh first came to the Giants, he was playing first base, and I was playing outfield. Oh used to strike out a lot, so when Mizuhara took him out, I'd play first base. When we took the train, the old-timers would take their time, and the young guys had to run and get all the bags. Oh was with my group, and sometimes he used to carry my bag. I never thought that one day, he was going to be such a superstar!

Oh was really disciplined and worked hard. He must have swung that bat over a thousand times a day. He'd just swing, swing, swing. Of course, he became a really good hitter. One time, when I was managing Chunichi, the bases were loaded with two outs in the ninth. We were three runs ahead, and Oh came up to bat. So I walked him purposely and gave them one run. Oh couldn't believe it. But I felt that Oh, in a situation like that, was going to hit a home run or something. So I walked him.

Under Mizuhara we won eight pennants, but the first year we didn't win [1960], he was fired. It was my tenth year, and I thought, "Oh man, Kawakami's going to be the next manager, and he's going to fire me." So I went to the front office, and sure enough I was let go. I came out of the meeting, and Kawakami said, "How was the meeting?" I didn't even talk to him. I just walked away. I knew that he was the guy who really wanted to let me go.

As soon as I got fired, Chunichi picked me up, and I got back at the Giants. The first game against the Giants was at Korakuen Stadium. It was in

the eighth inning, I think, and I came up to bat. It was either 0-0 or 1-0, and Minoru Nakamura was pitching. I hit a home run, and we won. But the thing that made me really happy was that the Giants fans, who saw me play for ten years, all stopped and clapped for me. That was one of the best feelings in my life.

In 1972, I was hired to manage the Dragons. We had a party, and the directors and president said, "*Kotoshi koso*!" which means "This year is the year we will win the championship." And I said, "*No way*! I know because I'm the manager." I told them, "Give me three years. I'm going to teach these guys fundamentals, and I'll make a couple of trades."

My third year, we won the championship by beating the Giants. The Giants were going for their tenth championship, and Kawakami was still the manager. After that season, Kawakami resigned or got fired, and Nagashima retired. Once we clinched, we had two more games with the Giants at Korakuen Stadium, but I couldn't go because we were going to have a parade in Nagoya. So I called Nagashima, because that was his last game, to apologize. He said, "Oh no, don't worry about it. Don't worry about my game. Your parade is more important." The day he retired, he made that famous speech and was crying all over. Every time that they show Nagashima making that speech, I remember winning the championship and beating the Giants!

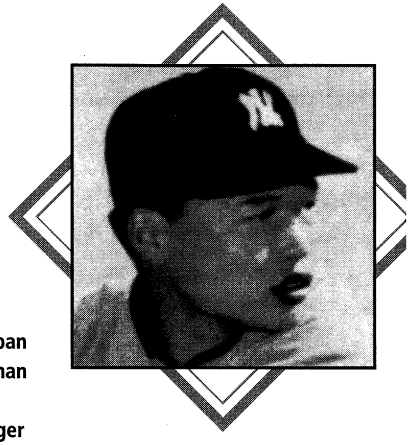
I was in Japanese baseball for thirty-eight years. After I retired, I became a scout, and five years later, my name went on the Hall of Fame ballot. I was worried that the young writers didn't know who I was. You have to get 75% of the votes from the media to get elected, and my first year I only had 68%. So I thought, "Oh boy, I'm going to have a hard time." The second year, Sadaharu Oh was eligible. I thought that, naturally, Oh was going to get in, no problem. And he did, and I also got in. So, Oh and I were inducted into the Hall of Fame at the same time.

A lot of the players today don't know what it is to be hungry. You know, I come from a poor family. When I was twelve and thirteen years old, during the summer I used to get up at 4 A.M. and help my father work in the cane fields. I would have to work for three months, trying to make a dollar here, a dollar there, but we used to get paid only twenty-five cents a day. I used to hate that—going to cut grass, but that was the only job that we could get.

So when I came to Japan and played for the Tokyo Giants, I never forgot that. You never forget things like that.

Every year when I went back to Hawaii, I'd land in Honolulu and take the next flight out to Maui to see that cane field and the old house where I used to live. I thought how fortunate I was to be in baseball and making a living. So when I went back to Japan, I would try harder. I did that for ten years. I told myself that I'd better not forget what I went through to get here. Even today, I feel how fortunate I am that I came to Japan, because I feel that Japanese baseball did so much for me and my family.

The old-timers here in Japan say that I changed Japanese baseball. If that's true, then I'm very happy, because it's really an honor for me to do something like that.



4 Futoshi Nakanishi

Born: April 11, 1933, in Takamatsu, Japan
1952–69: Nishitetsu Lions third baseman
1962–69: Nishitetsu Lions manager
1974–75: Nippon Ham Fighters manager
1980–81: Hanshin Tigers manager
1985–90: Kintetsu Buffaloes coach
1992: Yomiuri Giants coach
1994: Chiba Lotte Marines coach
1995: Orix Blue Wave coach

During the 1950s, Futoshi Nakanishi was the most feared slugger in Japan's Pacific League. The 5'8", 205-pound Nakanishi could generate incredible power. He began his career by capturing the Pacific League Rookie of the Year Award in 1952. Over the next six seasons, he led the league in home runs five times, RBIs three times, and batting twice. He nearly captured the triple crown in four seasons—missing it by one RBI twice and a single hit once. He won the Pacific League MVP Award in 1956 and was named to seven Best Nine teams. A debilitating wrist injury limited his playing time and transformed Nakanishi into a playing manager for most of the 1960s. After stepping down as manager, he spent nearly thirty years as a hitting instructor. Nakanishi was elected to the Japan Baseball Hall of Fame in 1999. Today he lives in Tokyo.

WORLD WAR II ended when I was in the sixth grade. We had a lot of air raids, so there was nothing left to do but sports. You name it, I was number one. I was number one at fighting, sumo, running, everything. Had times been different, I would've been recruited as a soldier. Fortunately, the War was over, so one of my teachers invited me to start playing ball. I officially started playing baseball in 1946 when I entered junior high school. I lived in Shikoku in place called Takamatsu, where the great Shigeru Mizu-

hara and Osamu Mihara came from. So there was a strong tradition of baseball in the area.

At that time, we had no equipment. We had no balls. We had nothing. So we had to play mentally. Because we had no equipment, we had the basics in our heads and our bodies. So we didn't have a lot of injuries. I think the players nowadays don't have that basic knowledge instilled in them.

Everything was burned away by the air raids, so there were no baseball fields left except for the ground at our junior high school. This was during the occupation so the U.S. soldiers would come over and play there. They would hit the balls all over the place. We would hide them and tuck them in our shirts so we could use them to practice with. The *sempai/kohai* [senior/junior] system was very much in place, and the seniors were very strict. If we lost a ball, everybody would have to take responsibility. So the seniors would come and hit all of us on the side of the head. I've lost my hearing on one side from being hit so many times.

At practice, we did the one-thousand-ground-ball drill, and we'd play catch but it was a really concentrated catch. The pitchers would be about twenty meters away in a circle, and they would throw the ball toward you. It was really cold, and our gloves were all worn and were like mittens. So if you didn't catch it right in the middle, you would break your fingers! Naturally, we learned to catch it in the middle of our palms. Every time it rained, we would study the rule books, have meetings, practice swinging the bat, or train our wrists and the lower halves of our bodies. We used to swing the bat by candlelight and run the bases after dark. We did so much running that there was a path, a trench, dug by our footsteps from home plate to first base. That was our generation's baseball.

Sometimes, I would listen to the radio while swinging the bat. I'd listen to the pro and the Big Six University games. It was the same radio we had used to get the bombing raid alarms, so it didn't work very well, and we had to bang on it to make it work. I knew some of the famous players. My favorites were Kazuto Yamamoto of the Hawks [who was later known as Tsuruoka], Kaoru Betto, and especially Fumio Fujimura of the Tigers. He was a really good batter, and I became a third baseman like him.

In high school, I played at Koshien three times. Koshien has a very long history, and playing in the tournament is the ultimate goal of all Japanese high school players. The seniors told us about the experience and its im-

portance. When we went to Koshien immediately after World War II, we had to take rice with us from home because they had so little decent food to eat in Osaka! Now everybody takes a little bag of sand from the field home with them, but back then we weren't allowed to do that. To become a pro, you had to go to Koshien. It was the first step. Afterwards, you had two choices, to go to the Waseda or Keio University teams or go directly to the pros.

I had wanted to go to Waseda University, but my parents negotiated a contract with the Nishitetsu Lions. I got thirty-five thousand yen a month, and just to sign I got seven hundred thousand yen. But nobody told me these things. It was all done through my parents. It was like they sold their kid! That was how I felt. When you got your monthly salary of thirty-five thousand—you bought your equipment, you sent something for your parents, and then nothing was left. But if you became a public servant you only got about six thousand or seven thousand yen a month, so thirty-five thousand in those days was quite an amount!

When I entered the Lions, the manager was Mr. Mihara. Mr. Mihara was an old-timer, but he was able to look ahead and had foresight. For example, he was against the brutal hazing of rookies. He said once you were on the field, age doesn't matter as long as you have ability. This helped produce great players such as Kazuhisa Inao and Yasumitsu Toyoda. I don't think they would have become such great players if they had gone directly to a team like the Giants.

Since we only had one coach and one manager in those days, we rookies would pitch batting practice and carry the equipment. Remember, I grew up during World War II, so obeying orders was embedded in me. I had to carry three people's bags, but I didn't mind. Back then it took between ten and twenty hours to get to Osaka and twenty-some-odd hours to go to Tokyo, and we rode in the lowest-class cars. Often, we'd be together with kids from elementary or junior high schools going on field trips. I was pretty smart and clever, and the bags in those days weren't quite as big as they are today, so I'd line the three of them up in the train corridor, make it into a bed, and sleep on it.

In the United States to be eighteen years old and suddenly play in the Majors would be unbelievable, but that was what happened to me here. I was really scared to become a pro because I might have failed, but in my

first game, I was the seventh hitter, and I hit a double. So they gave me the nickname: Young One with Power. I ended up hitting twelve home runs and being the rookie of the year.

My second year, I changed my batting form from a contact hitter's style to the slugger's style. Mr. Sabuo Hirai, the Giants shortstop, was a friend of the manager of my high school in Kyushu. We would go over to the high school and practice together. He would also give me a lot of advice. I would think about the advice and change my form by myself. I have a small body, and I thought, "How could I hit it far despite my small body?" So I figured out how to use the sharp twist and torque of my spin to hit with power and to balance my body. Bat control and balance are everything. So I practiced in camp and changed my form.

The hard work really paid off. That year, I hit .314 with thirty-six home runs and eighty-six RBIs. In the old days, the balls didn't carry as far, so if you hit more than twenty-five home runs, you became a home-run king. I was able to hit so many home runs because I could hit it anywhere—center, right, or left.

That season in July, we were facing Giichi Hayashi of the Daiei Stars at home. He was a good pitcher, an underhander with good control. He wasn't very fast, but he was able to hit the corners. He threw me an outside slider that just missed, and I hit it. I was young, so I just started running and didn't look at the ball. Everybody was screaming, and I still didn't look. Well, it went over the center-field scoreboard—over five hundred feet away.

When I joined the Lions, we were a weak team from Kyushu. We had an inferiority complex, and we thought that we could never win against the Nankai Hawks. Nankai was very strong, but they were growing old. We were a young team, but we had recruited a lot of young and powerful players, and they matured in a good way. We also had Hiroshi Oshita, who was an established veteran. Oshita was one of the first players to have a lot of home runs plus a good average. He really was a technician of Japanese baseball. He had a very strong sense of not wanting to lose, and that kept him going. He saw us young ones hitting home runs, and he would come in earlier to practice and try to compete with us. Mr. Mihara was smart and arranged it so that we would feel a rivalry and be stimulated by each other. We learned from Mr. Oshita, and he was pushed by us. At spring training,

he would climb the mountain near camp before any of us got up. I respected him very much and learned from him that you have to work hard to get results.

It was really Mr. Mihara who took a team of country bumpkins and turned us into winners. Mr. Mihara had a real head for baseball. In those days, there was Mizuhara and Tsuruoka and other famous managers, but Mr. Mihara was fifteen years ahead of any of his contemporaries. He was a strict manager but very broad-minded and full of ideas. His philosophy was called *inch baseball.* It was a very detailed way of looking at the game. He thought about everything. He also liked mah jong and enjoyed its strategy. He watched how his players played mah jong and tried to figure out how they thought from their moves and learned about his players that way.

To make us stronger, he actually paid soldiers from the U.S. occupation force to practice with us. There was an air force base in Kyushu, and Mr. Mihara would hire a soldier to be a pitcher for one day. Some of those soldiers who came to practice with us became Major League players. I don't know how he got the information about them. He had an amazing network of information.

A lot of managers in Japan, at both the high school and professional level, were very emotional, but Mr. Mihara wasn't like that. He was all theory. He said, "Never lose your temper, and don't try to intimidate your players." Of course, if you broke a promise to him, then he would scold you. He really looked after the athletes. If somebody was in a slump, he would take them to another baseball field for extra practice.

Mr. Oshita would take out the older players drinking, but he'd never take us out. We were just kids, and Mr. Mihara always watched over us. While he kept an eye on us, we couldn't do anything. For example, it was popular in those days to form a circle and pour for each other to see who could drink the most, but Mr. Mihara would never allow such contests among his players. Besides, we really had to practice hard to be able to compete against the strong Nankai Hawks and the strong Giants, so we had no time for such things. Mr. Mihara was always very sensitive about how the mass media covered the Lions. For example, if reporters wanted to photograph him during an interview, and there was a beer bottle on the table, he would say, "Stop. Get rid of the beer bottle first. Never get that in the picture." If we were too rowdy the night before, and we weren't in good shape for the game the next day, Mr. Mihara wouldn't use us in the game, so we had to behave.

We actually didn't do much socially as a team. The regular players didn't go out together. We'd go our separate ways because we were rivals. Japanese always talk about team unity. The idea is that teammates should all get along and in a friendly atmosphere compete against each other, and that power will lead a team to victory. But that's an ideal. In reality, you're an individual out there, and you're playing for yourself. In the end, your efforts are intermingled with everybody else's efforts, and you win. It is really a battle out there between the players, and if such a battle didn't exist, it would be the end of the team. Some managers don't understand that.

We had a really balanced team with good hitting and good defense, so we began to rise, and then we got Kazuhisa Inao in 1956. That's when it all came together. Mr. Inao was very balanced. He was a great pitcher and also very good at defense as well as hitting. The highlight of my career was 1956. I got the MVP Award that year, I married Mr. Mihara's daughter, and we beat the Giants for the first time. The following year, we also played the Giants in the series. That was a real tough one. We won four straight games with one tie, and all of them had a one-run difference!

The 1958 Japan Series was the famous one where Inao won four and lost two in the seven-game series. We had gained confidence from the previous year, and we had a very balanced team. The Giants were saying, "We can't lose this series. We've got to win!" The Giants won the first three games, and they were just saying, "We've got to win this next one!" But we were out there saying, "Let's just play a normal game, and do it." And we had the god, Mr. Inao. It was his third year, and he was at his peak. There's a saying, "A cherry blossom comes out for only a short time. Let it blossom, and show its stuff." Well, it was the moment of his career, and we let him show his stuff. He won four straight games and hit the game-winning homer in the fifth game!

Our baseball facility was run by the local government, but every time we won the series, Mr. Mihara would get something added to it. For example, one year, we got lighting for night games, and another year we got practice facilities.

I spoke to Hideki Matsui before he went over to the U.S. He came over to me and said, "Mr. Nakanishi, it was you and I who always missed the triple crown." I had forgotten all about it, but he made me remember it! I just missed getting the triple crown in four different seasons [1953, 1955, 1956, and 1958]. Twice I missed it by one RBI and once by one hit. But it

was just bad luck, so we didn't make a big deal about it. For example, in 1955, we were playing the Orions at the end of the season, and Mamoru Otsu was pitching for us. Otsu was intentionally throwing balls to Kazuhiro Yamauchi, my rival for the RBI title. But Yamauchi swung at an outside pitch and lightly hit it for a base hit and an RBI. So he won the title. It was luck.

In 1956, my teammate Mr. Toyoda won the batting title with a .3251 average. I had a .3246 average. After we clinched the pennant, I didn't play in the next two games. A lot of people in the mass media keep saying that I let Toyoda take the title, that I gave it to him, but no, that's not true. The championship was what mattered. Individual titles were secondary.

I had been swinging this really heavy bat, thirty-five inches, for all that time. I practiced so much with this heavy bat that in 1960 I got tendonitis—that's what they said in the old days. Nowadays if a doctor looked at the injury, they probably would find a splintered bone or something of that nature. Maybe with modern-day medicine, they could've fixed my injury. I think if I had rested it, I could have gone on, but I didn't. I had been spiked in the leg the year before, and I was recovering from that injury. When I don't play, I become fat. So to lose that weight, I used to run up mountains and things like that. It was also the year that Mr. Mihara had quit, so I needed to work extra hard for the new manager. Now, I can do normal daily activities, but if I hold a bat, pain still runs through my hand. Because of that experience, I tell the younger players to use a lighter bat and avoid the same injury.

When I played against the Major League teams that came to Japan, the players came up to me and said, "Hey, you're small, but you're fast, and you're a good all-around player, the only problem is that you have weak arms." Americans hit with their powerful arms whereas we Japanese have to hit with timing and technique. They said to me, "Nakanishi, you don't have a strong arm transfer." After hearing that comment, I started training my arms again despite my injury.

But I never considered playing in the Majors. There was no way that I could match their power. Everything we saw just amazed us and awed us, especially their speed and the strength of their shoulders. Today's Big Leaguers can hit, but a lot of players are lacking in technique. Their defense isn't as good, and they can't throw the ball as well as they did back then.

They are not the wonderful players as they used to be in the old days. The second baseman, the shortstop, the outfielders, they were all amazing. In those days, they had these great pitchers where we would be still swinging when the ball was already in the catcher's mitt! I remember Don Larsen. He was this giant, and we were just midgets against him.

Because of my injury at such a young age, the team felt sorry for me and made me a playing manager. So in 1962, I became the manager and a pinch hitter. I was twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old and I thought, "I can't be an effective manager," so it was a learning experience. But my head coach, a veteran pitching coach named Tadashi "Bozo" Wakabayashi, helped me. He was a wonderful person from Hawaii and had been a very successful pitcher in Japan.

As a manager, I let younger players play ahead of me. I think that I also had a very good relationship with my foreign players, Jim Baumer, Tony Roig, and George Washington Wilson, so we were able to win the championship in 1963. The foreign players are like the joker card. They are the almighty cards. If you can't use them well, you can't win. It's still true today. As a manager, you have to open yourself up and communicate with them. They are the ones who are in the inconvenient situation. They have a hard time even reading a map! I decided that I couldn't inconvenience them any more. My English wasn't very good, but we didn't use an interpreter. When I wanted to tell them something, I looked into their eyes and communicated what I wanted to say. If you really look at a person, you're able to communicate with him. It's important to be friendly and communicate with them the same way as you do with the Japanese players. You have to tell them what needs to be said to their faces, because if you just complement them and then complain to the mass media, it's not going to work. But you also have to introduce them to Japanese baseball without forcing them to change.

For example, when Roberto Petagine first came here, he wouldn't talk and was really gloomy. I was an assistant coach, and I helped him out. I taught him what Japanese baseball is and the Japanese way of practicing. But I said, "Hey, you're from America, and you have your own way of doing things, but if you think that this way is good, then incorporate it into your style." I didn't tell him that he had to do it my way—that was the key. I'm proud that during my career, I was able to use the *gaijin* players very well.

After managing, I became a hitting coach. I've managed or coached almost every Japanese club. I think that the accomplishment I'm most proud of was being able to coach so many different teams and help so many different players with their batting. I had planned to go to the United States to work with the Arizona Diamondbacks when Buck Showalter was their manager. Unfortunately, I got cancer so I never went.

I still have the desire to go to the States and learn more. You always have to be imaginative and creative in baseball. I want to learn the good points from American baseball and teach the Americans the good points about Japanese baseball. Our bodies in Japan are getting larger but we can never catch up to the power of the Americans. If you do not have power, you have to use technique as your weapon. Here in Japan, we have technique. We have the proper way of hitting the ball and using our bodies. If you could mix that with the power of the Americans, I'd like to see what could be accomplished!

5 Takashi Iwamoto

Born: April 20, 1930, in Tanabe City, Wakayama Prefecture, Japan
1953–58: Yomiuri Giants outfielder
1959–61: Taiyo Whales outfielder
1971–73: Kintetsu Buffaloes manager
1977–80: Yomiuri Giants farm team manager

After starring at Waseda University, Takashi Iwamoto joined the Yomiuri Giants in 1953. As a rookie, Iwamoto moved into the Giants starting lineup at left field. He retained that position until being traded to the Taiyo Whales in 1959. During his nine-year career, he played on six pennant winners. After retiring as an active player, Iwamoto managed the Kintetsu Buffaloes from 1971 to 1973 and the Giants farm club from 1977 to 1980. He subsequently joined the Giants' front office and was also in charge of overseas scouting. Today, he lives in Tokyo.

WHEN I GRADUATED from college, I had a difficult decision to make: to join the Yomiuri Giants or the Nankai Hawks. I think that I made the right choice by going with the Giants. Tatsuro Hirooka, the Hall of Fame shortstop, was one year my junior at Waseda University, and he also had the same decision to make—the Giants or the Hawks. The Giants' front office told me, go over and convince him to become a Giant, and I did. Until his dying moment, Kazuto Tsuruoka, the Hawks manager, said to me, "If you had come to Nankai, then Hirooka would have come to Nankai, and Nagashima would also have probably come to Nankai, and the landscape of Japanese baseball would have been changed forever. You are the culprit! Because you went to the Giants, everyone else went there, too!"

When I was at Waseda University, Mr. Shigeo Mori was the head coach. He had a room in the dormitory where the baseball team lived, and he

would give us a lot of advice on our private lives. His motto and principal was "A baseball player does not seek his own private road." This meant that we must be team players both on the field and in life. For example, when we use the toilet in Japan, we have to change into special slippers to go into the water closet. One time, after I came out of the water closet, I just kicked off the slippers, and he said, "Wait a second, the way you left the slippers for the toilet is wrong. You shouldn't think only about yourself. Leave the slippers so that the next person who uses the toilet can easily slip his feet into them." So he taught us such minute points about daily life and how we should live.

We played in the Big Six University League, which was made up of the six Tokyo universities: Waseda, Keio, Meiji, Rikkio, Hosei, and Tokyo. In my first season, Mori made me the fourth batter in the lineup even though I was so young. We were always fighting for the championship, but Mori-san would say, "You should not aim for the championship of the league—that's not what your goal should be. You are just playing against one school at a time, and when you play you should have your mind on how to beat that team." Whenever we played Keio, sixty thousand people would come to the game. We were told that that it was one of the three biggest games in the world. The other two were the Cambridge versus Oxford rowing match and the Army-Navy football game.

As a manager, Mr. Mori didn't say a lot about strategy. The only time he gave us signs was when we had to bunt or do a squeeze play. He let us do things freely. For example, stealing a base or attempting a hit-and-run was left up to the players. I really understood from him that baseball is played by the players—that I was in control of making decisions. If we did a hit-and-run, and it didn't go well, we would ask ourselves what did I do wrong? How can I improve? It made us think. So I wasn't taught. I studied it myself—that's how I learned baseball.

When I entered Waseda, Kazuo Kageyama, who later signed with the Nankai Hawks, was the captain of the baseball team. The year before I graduated, Mr. Tsuruoka of the Hawks enthusiastically invited me to join them. Ninety percent of my mind was made up to go with the Hawks. But earlier, when I had graduated from high school, I had been invited to join the Giants. My father, however, said to the Giants, "Please let my son go to

Waseda University, and I promise that when he graduates, he will join the Giants." So my senior year of college, I was chased by newspaper reporters asking whether I was going to go to the Giants or the Hawks. I had to hide from them! Well, my father was in construction and was an old-fashioned guy, and he said, "You're going to destroy my reputation!" He threatened me, so I had no choice but to go with the Giants!

I got married just before I joined the Giants. My wife was an only child, and her father was deceased, so we decided to get married early. That year, 1953, we had spring training in Santa Maria, California. Would it be okay in America to leave a newly wedded wife back home and go to spring training in a foreign country? Well, that's what I had to do. So I was already married when I joined the Giants. This was very unusual, so I was treated a little differently from the other rookies, though the older players still treated me like a kid. "Well, just do your best, kid," they would say. The outfielder, Fukashi Minamimura was my senior [*sempai*] at Waseda, so he took care of me very well.

I think joining the Giants was more difficult for my wife than for me, because there were cliques among the players' wives. Each clique wanted the new wife to join their group, so I told my wife not to join any clique. These cliques didn't affect the players on the field or in the clubhouse.

On the Giants, there were so many great players surrounding me. Tetsuharu Kawakami, Shigeru Chiba, Wally Yonamine, Hideo Fujimoto, Takehiko Bessho, and Hiroshi Nakao are all in the Hall of Fame now. We didn't use nicknames back then. But sometimes we shortened the last names and called players by only the first syllable. For example, Iwamoto would become Iwa and Kawakami would become Kawa.

The only people who were called by the first names were the *nisei*, such as Wally or Dick [Kashiwaeda]. In the mid-1950s, the Giants had six *nisei* players from Hawaii: Wally Yonamine, Jyun Hirota, Bill Nishita, Dick Kashiwaeda, Doug Matsuoka, and Andy Miyamoto. There was no tension between the *nisei* and the Japanese players. In fact, many of the Japanese were friendlier with the nisei than they were with each other. Everybody valued them very much, because they were motivated and had a lot of ability. And they didn't do anything other than baseball! We played mah jong, pachinko, we'd go out with girls, but they didn't do anything! They only did baseball.

They had a strong sense of responsibility for what they needed to do. We Japanese didn't have the same sense of professionalism, so we respected them a lot. I thought they were even tougher than the old guys! For example, Jyun Hirota ripped his hand between two of his fingers, and even with such an injury he wouldn't take a day off. I was shocked when I saw that.

Wally, of course, had a lot of talent and changed baseball in Japan forever. What I was impressed with most was his sliding. Nobody in Japan had that technique in those days. The sliding system that the Giants use now is based on what Wally brought over. He was also the first person to use the drag bunt in Japan. There was nobody else who could do such a thing in those days, so everybody was very impressed.

We didn't practice that much in the old days. You see, many of the players used to be in the military, so they already had lots of basic stamina. For example, they said that Noboru Aota could throw a grenade seventy meters! That's how strong he was. Also in the old days, we were poor in Japan. Once you stepped out of the major cities, there was no running water. So we would have to go to a well, which might be two kilometers away, and balance two buckets of water on our shoulders and carry them back home. So that was training. Nowadays, young people don't train their bodies like that in their daily lives. When I was fifteen years old, we used to train by taking a bale of rice that weighed sixty kilograms and run a hundred meters with that on our shoulders. If any of the young people nowadays did such a thing, they would crumble! They would break a hip!

At training camp, the older players would slowly jog around the field—just taking their time. Then they would start batting—Mr. Kawakami, Mr. Aota, Mr. Chiba, and Wally, too. They would hit, and then they wouldn't do anything at all! We used to train in cold places in those days. We would get a campfire going, and the older players would give us directions while they stayed in front of the fire. They would hit about ten ground balls for us to catch, and then we were finished. We didn't run that much, and Mr. Kawakami didn't run at all—not at all.

But then, five of our stars, Shigeru Sugishita of the Dragons, Fumio Fujimura of the Tigers, Makoto Kozuru of the Carp, Kawakami, and Bessho went to spring training in the United States, and they were all shocked! When they came home, Mr. Kawakami started running!

I said, "What? What has happened?" But he kept on running—by himself.

"What happened?" I said to him.

"This is the American way!" he answered.

And that's how it all began. From then on, in the winter, we started to run. Now, Japanese baseball teams have the reputation of training much harder than Major League teams.

When I joined the Giants, our manager, Shigeru Mizuhara, introduced the platoon system, so if there was a right-handed pitcher, he brought out a lefty batter and vice versa. I was basically used to face left-handed pitchers. But all the left-handed pitchers were really good in those days—like Masaichi Kaneda! I thought, "Oh no! What have I gotten myself into?" So I asked our left-handed pitchers, Mr. Nakao and Mr. Matsuda, to throw me pitches during practice. I asked them to look at my stance and throw the ball where they thought I couldn't hit it, because the pitchers of our rival teams would be thinking that way. So that's how I practiced, and I learned how to hit lefties.

Today, many people teach young players, but in the old days, nobody taught you, because if you taught another player, and they became better than you, you might lose your job. So you had to learn by yourself. You watched other players and stole their technique. One of the players who did help me was Tetsuharu Kawakami. But I could never understand Mr. Kawakami's batting instructions. He told me to keep my elbows in tight and close to my body and to hit the ball here close to the body, but I couldn't hit the ball when I did exactly as he told me, because it was too close. Nowadays they say that you have to hit the ball more in front.

On road trips, there were no such things as single rooms, so we had to share rooms. They put a senior player [*sempai*] and younger player [*kohai*] in each room. The younger player would have to take care of the older player and run errands for him as if he was the emperor. I used to share a room with Kawakami-san. Sometimes at night, there would be this noise, and I'd wake up, and there was Kawakami swinging his bat right over my head! As soon as he got up in the morning, he grabbed his bat and just held it. Then, he got into his batting stance. After he changed into his uniform for the game, he would stand there again and swing about ten times. Well after the game, we would all come back to the hotel, and everyone else

would go take a bath, but he would leave his uniform on and start swinging again! As his junior, I would have to wait for him to finish before I could take my bath. That's the type of era we played in!

I was lucky enough to play on eleven championship teams. During the four years I was at Waseda, we played eight seasons and were champions five times. In the six years I was with the Giants, we were champions five times, and in the two years I was with the Taiyo Whales, we won the championship once. I always had very good teammates! The first time that I won as a professional player, I was very happy, and when we won in the Japan Series, that was really, really special. In those days, however, everybody took it for granted that the Giants would win. For example, when we would play the weaker teams, sometimes the regular players wouldn't even go on the road trips. So the substitutes, who normally didn't play, would go, and we would still win. So it wasn't that impressive to win as a Giant.

The Giants are the most popular team in Japan now, but this is because they invested a lot of money in the early days. We were like salesmen for the Yomiuri newspaper. By doing well and attracting fans, we helped sell the newspaper. We would barnstorm into the rural areas of Japan, such as Hokkaido. On these trips, we traveled in the third-class train cars. There were no beds, just benches facing each other, so we would put very thin, straw mats on the floor and sleep there. Sometimes we would take boards with us and put them between the seats. The senior players would sleep on the boards while the younger players would sleep below them on the floor. Masaaki Hirai, our shortstop, had a mosquito net. There were lots of mosquitoes in those days. He would sleep up on the luggage rack with the net over him.

So we gained many fans and helped sell newspapers, but to become a stronger team, we had to learn from the United States. Mr. Mizuhara told us that the Giants needed to catch up with the Major Leagues and eventually surpass them. So in 1953, we had a training camp in Santa Maria, California, for two months. We mostly played against Pacific Coast League teams. They were very strong—stronger than Major League teams are today. We even played twice against the New York Giants. They treated us like kids, but we learned a lot by playing against such teams. The next year, we went for spring training in Latin America for two months. We started in Mexico and went to Columbia and even Cuba. It took a lot of money to

go on these two-months' tours, and there was no other Japanese team that would spend that kind of money.

The best player I played against? Well, somebody who just hits well does not qualify as the best player. He has to hit, run, and field. That limits the people because in the old days as long as you could hit and run, that was enough to qualify you as a good player. Nagashima was really great. I only played with him for one year. He was a natural player. Nobody taught him when he entered the pros. His batting never changed. It was the same from beginning to end, so maybe Nagashima was the best.

There were some really good pitchers: Sugishita, Kaneda, Inao, Otomo, Hasegawa. They were quite wonderful pitchers. I'm still very friendly with Shigeru Sugishita. He was from Meiji University. I'm a right-handed batter, and he would throw these slow curves. You would think, "Oh, I can hit a home run!" I'd swing, and it would go close to the wall and then go foul. I'd get two strikes like that. He was just baiting us, you know. Then he'd throw a high fastball or a forkball that weaved as it came over and then finally dropped. I thought, *Wow*! Even Kawakami-san couldn't hit that one! Sugishita had such good control, and he was relaxed when he threw. We would just try to hit him before he threw the forkball. He was quite a pitcher.

When Masaichi Kaneda was young, he threw about 150 kilometers [93 miles per hour], and he had very good control. When he threw, the ball would come falling from about shoulder height. It went up once and then came down—and was very fast, so I had a very difficult time with him.

Kazuhisa Inao, of course, he was something! He'd throw a slider right on the black, and we'd foul it off. Next, he would throw it out of the strike zone—just off the outside corner by half a ball. If I hit this, it would be another foul ball. The third ball would be just outside the plate, so he was slowly pulling us toward the outside part of the plate. Then, just when our minds were concentrating on the outside, he'd throw one on the inside! And it would all be over in an instant!

When he was about to throw a curve, Takumi Otomo of the Giants could tell when the batter's timing was perfect for the pitch, and at the last second, change the pitch from going into the strike zone to becoming a ball. So the catcher would be expecting the curve to come in here, but suddenly it would go off to the side. Otomo was quite a guy. His pitches would make a noise when they came over. In 1953, he won against the New York Gi-

ants at Korakuen 2-1. Leo Durocher said that the Japanese had no chance against the Americans, because [the Japanese] always pitched low balls. They pitched low because they didn't want home runs, but Major Leaguers can hit low pitches for home runs. So Durocher said, "Pitch higher. Throw high." Otomo did that, and we shut them down!

Ryohei Hasegawa was another great pitcher in those days. He threw like he was dancing! He threw underhand and had such good control. In the old days, the pitchers really could maneuver and put the ball where they wanted it to go. That's the big difference between the pitchers now and then. Pitchers today have very bad control. In the old days, they were real pitchers, but now they are just throwers.

In 1959, I was traded to the Taiyo Whales. Mr. Mori became my manager again for one year before Osamu Mihara took over. The difference in the level of play between the Giants and Whales was really big. The level was very low at the Taiyo Whales at that time. A number of players had come straight out of the universities and had only been playing professionally one or two years, but Mr. Mihara used the athletes very well. And in 1960, we won the pennant! I learned a lot about baseball then and realized that with good managing even such a team could win the championship. We played the Daimai Orions in the Japan Series. They were really strong. We thought that we didn't have a chance, and so did everyone else around us. But we won four games to nothing! The way Mr. Mihara used the players was outstanding. He was a professor and a psychologist. He'd gather all this data, put in his head, and then go into the game. He would do unpredictable things, but his strategy was based on all his data. They called it "Mihara magic." For example, if a batter got a hit in each of his first three at bats, his fourth time up Mr. Mihara would pinch-hit for him. Why? You see, if he's already gone three for three, the chances are against him getting another hit. That was Mr. Mihara!

Mr. Mihara wanted to make me a manager. He taught me a lot of things, but I had no intention of becoming a manager. Eventually, however, I did manage the Kintetsu Buffaloes for three years [1971–73]. The first year I managed, we finished in third place. The second year, we finished in second place—and the members of our team weren't that great either—so can you can guess what the front office said to me my third year? That I must

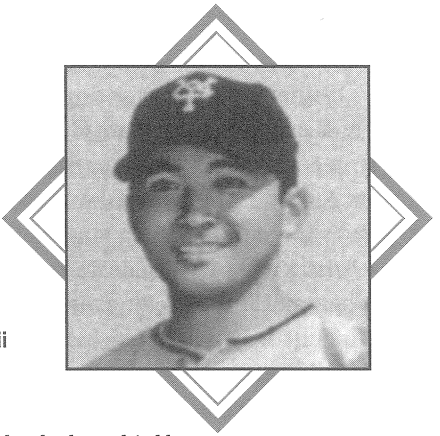
win, of course! I said, "Impossible! To win the championship we need better players." But the front office just said, "You have to win the championship."

So I told my team that this was going to be my last year, and I wasn't going to manage again, so we were going to do a lot of unexpected things. I told some of the younger players, "I'm going to use you this year, but it's going to be at the tail end of the season. When I do use you, I'm going to be fired, but I'm going to use you anyway. Years from now, if you become good players, I'm not going to regret what I'm doing now. I'll be happy." So I started using Masataka Nashida and also Kyosuke Sasaki as well as some others, and they became good players. The Kintetsu organization, however, was very cold to me, and I was fired. A few years later, the team won their first championship. Now those players tell me it was because I used them that they won in 1979.

After the Buffaloes, I managed the Giants' farm team for four years [1977–80] and then moved into the front office. I stayed there for ten years [1981–90]. While I was in the front office, I devised a contract system that based compensation on a player's performance. I was in also charge of bringing foreign players to the Giants, so I would go to the States and Venezuela by myself for three months, even though I couldn't speak English. I'd watch a lot of games and try to get good players. When I first went over to America to search for players, they said, "You play professional baseball in Japan?" They thought that we were on the edge of the earth. It's only in the past ten or fifteen years that Americans have really started to understand Japanese baseball. When we were searching for American players to come to Japan, we wanted to get the most famous—the ones in their prime—and bring them to Japan and show such players to the Japanese fans. At that time, we could only get two foreign players per year. I ended up signing Warren Cromartie and Bill Gullikson.

We still want to catch up and even surpass Major League Baseball. This will probably always be a dream, but we all share that feeling inside our hearts. Many Japanese players now dream of becoming Major League players. I want them to realize their dreams, but as our good athletes keep going over to the States, it becomes a concern. The falling attendance at Japanese stadiums is a real problem. Until recently, people in Japan didn't watch Major League games, but now they want to see how Matsui, Ichiro, and

Nomo are doing, so many people don't follow the Japanese teams as much anymore. The Major Leagues have been building a global strategy for forty years now. They want to be an umbrella over all the other baseball leagues. But we don't want to become a minor league for the American Major Leagues, so we don't want too many of our players to be scouted and go over to the States. But for the ballplayers, that's the dream. That's their goal—their objective. So, my feelings about the topic are divided. It's a very difficult, difficult situation. But Japanese baseball [*yakyu*] is very different from American baseball. *Yakyu* matches the Japanese personality—the psyche of the Japanese, so I think no matter what happens *yakyu* will always be vibrant.



6 Dick Kashiwaeda

Born: August 20, 1924, in Kauai, Hawaii
1953–56: Tokyo Giants third baseman

Dick Kashiwaeda is considered by many to be the best third baseman in the history of the Hawaii League. In 1953, he joined the Yomiuri Giants. For three seasons, he filled in at third base and was the team's primary pinch hitter before being injured in the spring of 1956. In 1953, he hit .341 with nine home runs in only 220 at bats. He also hit .336 in 214 at bats in 1955. Kashiwaeda currently lives in Hawaii, where at the age of eighty, he was still playing competitive softball three times a week.

I'M THIRD GENERATION—called *sansei*. I was brought up on a plantation on the island of Kauai and was the youngest of seven kids. My two older brothers played ball, and I was their mascot until I was old enough to play. When I became twelve years old, I started playing in the junior league. I went on to play at the St. Louis High School in Honolulu and in the local American Japanese League [AJA]. Later, I played in the Hawaii Baseball League, a non-pro league that was the best league in the islands. Before the War, the teams were based on ethnic groups. We had Filipino, Chinese, Portuguese, Hawaiian, Japanese, and Navy [sub-base] Caucasian teams. I played with the Asahi Japanese team. I was proud to wear the Asahi uniform because you were considered among the best of the Japanese players. Asahi was a goal for all young ballplayers. This is where I first played ball with Wally Yonamine, Jyun Hirota, and Bill Nishida.

In 1953, Yomiuri was interested in Shin Yogi, who later played with the Hanshin Tigers. He was a *nisei* boy, about four or five years younger than I was. But Shin got drafted into the service. Since I had played ball with Wally Yonamine and Jyun Hirota, they encouraged the owners to take a look at me. I was twenty-eight when Yomiuri signed me.

I joined the team at spring training in February of 1953 in Santa Maria, California. I traveled from Hawaii to California with Wally Yonamine and Jyun Hirota, and they gave me the rundown on each of the Giants' players. So when I met them, I was comfortable because I knew what I should and should not do. In Japan, that's the most important thing. You cannot tell them what you can do; instead you have to watch and try to fit into their program. I kept on telling myself, "I have to adjust, I have to adjust." It was difficult for an amateur to just jump into professional baseball. Even if the Japanese teams were not able to compete with the top Major League clubs, they would have done pretty well against the lesser Major League teams. We practiced for four or five hours every day, and I had never done that before. It all came down to how well I could hit. During spring training, I had no problem because nobody was throwing junk, everything was fast, and that was no problem for me.

Before our first breakfast at the Santa Maria Inn, all the ballplayers were standing outside because the manager hadn't come down and been seated yet. In Japan, the manager has to go in first and sit down before anybody else can go in. The maitre d' came over and said, "Hey, this is going to foul us up if the manager comes in late every morning!" So he asked us to talk to the owners' representative to make sure that whoever came down first would go in the restaurant first. This was one way the Giants' ballplayers became more Americanized. It was the same thing with the bus. The manager and the starting players would go in first and then the rookies, but the rookies had to sit in the back. In those days, everybody carried his own equipment bag and bats, so once the front was filled up, getting to the back was difficult. The bus driver put a stop to that.

I think the Giants utilized us [the *nisei* and *sansei*] very well. Back then, each team was only allowed three foreigners. Wally Yonamine was grandfathered because the rule was made after he joined the team. So we had Jyun Hirota, Bill Nishita, Andy Miyamoto, and me—the four of us. In 1954, Bill Nishita had to go back to Hawaii because he got drafted into the service. When Bill was out, it was no problem. Once Bill came back, if we needed pitching, Bill would be on the team, and Andy would stay with the farm club. When the pitching got strong, Bill would go down, and then Andy would come up again.

Even though we were foreigners, our problems were not that severe or critical. Baseball is an international thing—you have to hit, you have to

catch, and you have to throw—so that portion wasn't difficult. We just had to adjust to the Japanese style of living. For example, there weren't many hotels in those days so we stayed in Japanese inns, and the food was a little different. I was fortunate that Mr. Yonamine and Mr. Hirota were predecessors of mine, so they clued me in. As for sleeping and eating, I tried to adjust to whatever situation came up. Mr. Yonamine told me that they have a set menu at the inns, but you can deviate from it if you pay the difference. So, we all did that. If we had a doubleheader, the Japanese players would take a box of sushi for between the games, but we'd order sandwiches. And we'd pay for the sandwich since they were more expensive than sushi. If we wanted steaks, we would order steaks and pay the difference. So it wasn't that bad. The Yomiuri Giants were very generous in that the management felt that the players should be well cared for, so we always traveled special second class, where you would get a reclining seat, or in sleepers if there was a game that day. The other teams usually traveled third class. Mr. Chiba, our second baseman and a well-respected ballplayer, said, "Look, Yomiuri will give us everything first-class, but at the same token you have to respect that and don't take advantage of it."

I roomed with Wally Yonamine, Jyun Hirota, and Hirofumi Naito. If it wasn't for Mr. Naito, we would have all been lost. His sister is married to Andy Miyamoto. Mr. Naito was so nice. He always took care of us. When we traveled on the train, although it was an express, it would stop at certain stations. At each station, Mr. Naito would run out and pick up the city's specialty foods, *shumai* [Chinese shrimp dumplings] at Yokohama, *unagi* [eel] at Hamamatsu, and *kamabuko* [fish cakes] at another station and bring it up to us. After about eight months, he said [in broken English], "Eh, you four can talk. You go on your own if you like to eat." So we had to go out for ourselves. The managers would cringe, "Oh no, you're going to get the runs!" But we knew that we had that Japanese stomach medicine, *wakamatsu*. We would take half of the bottle, and it really worked!

Bobby Brown from the Yankees was a captain in the air force. I remember in the early part of the season that I joined Yomiuri, he used to come up to Korakuen Stadium and watch our games. Because we spoke English, the four of us—Yonamine, Hirota, Nishita, and I—would talk to him, and we'd ask him all kinds of questions. He always gave us straight answers. One time, I asked him, "Captain, you know I play third base. My manager keeps on pushing me back and back and back. So I keep on moving

back and back, but when I turn to my left, I'm at the same distance as the shortstop. What should I do?" He asked me, "Who pays your salary?" Then he said, "Look, if they're paying your salary, and they tell you to go out to left field, you go out to left field. You don't argue." That struck home, and everything became clear to me. I was fortunate that this was in the early part of my career.

The regular third baseman was one of Yomiuri's star players, Mitsuo Uno. He was thirty-one years old, a very good third baseman, and hitting well at that time. So when I first joined the team, I was the pinch hitter. I had an advantage over the rest of the players because when you go in as a pinch hitter, if you get a hit, you look great. If you don't hit, it's one of those situations, right? I used to read the *Sporting News*. There were a lot of articles about pinch hitters and about the good hitters and their philosophies. I picked up a few of them.

In Japan, rookies don't talk to the old-timers. But I felt differently because in Hawaii, you talk to the old-timers, and it doesn't matter. I thought the only way I can find out things was by asking. So I wasn't afraid to talk to Mr. Kawakami, Mr. Chiba, and all the old-time ballplayers. They were glad to talk if you approached them. They wouldn't come to you, but you could go to them. Tetsuharu Kawakami was at that time Mr. Baseball for Japan—everybody called him the Lou Gehrig of Japan. The younger ballplayers were afraid of him, but he was such a nice guy that if I had problems I would go to talk to him.

I asked, "How come, Kawakami-san, every year you consistently hit well?"

"Every ballplayer has to have a philosophy on what they are going to do."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "Every time I just go in there and swing away."

He said, "No, no, no. You see when you are in the batter's box, that's the best time to concentrate on what you're going to do."

"Oh, on a given situation."

"Let's put it this way, if you come to bat and there are two outs, what do you have to do as a ballplayer?"

"Get on base," I said.

"Yeah, you get on base, but if the next person after you gets a hit, you'll probably end up on third base. But as a ballplayer who is playing for Yomiuri and who wants to be part of a team that's going to excel, you have to

try to get on second base. You have to look for the extra-base situation. Now to do that, you have to be a zone hitter. You either pick a high ball or low ball. If the pitcher throws the ball, he's either going to throw you a high or low ball. Everybody stands over there, and their concentration is fifty percent because they don't know if they are going to get a high ball or a low ball. If you change your philosophy and think, "OK, I'm going to wait for the high ball," and you concentrate on that high pitch. What have you done? All of a sudden you have one hundred percent concentration on that one pitch. A double or triple or even a home run should come automatically."

That was his philosophy. I thought, "Wow, if only I had talked to him earlier in the season!" So from then on that's what I concentrated on. Even in batting practice, that was the only thing that I concentrated on. Knowing that I would be only a pinch hitter for six to eight months or until Mr. Uno decided he didn't want to play, it was a good thing that I opened my mouth.

In Japan, you always respected your elders. In one particular game during my first year, we were playing our rivals the Hanshin Tigers. Any good plays you made against Hanshin felt much better than if you made them against the Hiroshima Carp or Kokutetsu Swallows. There were men on first and second, and the batter hit the ball toward the third-base bag. So I took a couple of steps, picked up the ball, touched third base, and I whipped it across to first base for the double play. I felt happy because it was against the Hanshin Tigers, and I got a double play. So anyhow, I'm going back to the dugout, and the manager, Mr. Mizuhara, was walking toward third base. He stopped me and asked me in broken English, "Dick, why you no play easy double play?" I said, "Oh, my weight shifted to the right, toward the bag, so it was easier for me just to touch the base and throw across." But he just repeated, "Why you no play easy double play?" So, I repeated my answer. He didn't say anything. He just walked straight to the third-base coaching box.

Wally Yonamine was running in from the outfield and by then was almost behind me. So when we went to the dugout, he asked, "So what did the Old Man tell you?" So I said, "He asked why I didn't take the easy double play by throwing to second." And Wally asked, "So what did you tell him?" So I told him how I explained that my weight had shifted to the third-base line so it was easier for me to step on third base. He said, "You stupid! Don't you remember what I've been telling you! When the Old Man tells you

anything, you say, 'Oh, I'm sorry. Next time I'll do it.' I'm quite sure that you're going to sit out two or three games." Sure enough, I didn't play for three games! Mr. Mizuhara was a very proud man. He was a good athlete himself, and he contributed a lot to the Yomiuri Giants.

When we went to Santa Maria in 1953, the Giants saw how Major Leaguers executed the hit-and-run for the first time. Nobody did that in Japan. So we adopted it because our lineup started with Wally Yonamine and up to the sixth or seventh batter, everybody could run well. I think we did it better than some of the Major League teams, because we had guys who could hit behind the runners, and the Major Leaguers had lots of guys just going for the fences.

In 1953, we finished sixteen games ahead of the second place team, and it was all on the basis of the hit-and-run. With the hit-and-run, as long as it's hit down the first-base side, the runner has a chance to go to second or even third, so we were making the opposing teams crazy with that. We didn't have to steal. We had only a few players who could steal although the opposing catchers weren't all that good. A typical Japanese catcher used to receive the ball from the pitcher, take two steps forward, then crank his arm, and throw. Sometimes on that pump, Wally Yonamine would steal second base, because the catcher's mind was only on the pitcher. You would see Wally sliding into second base, and the pitcher was just getting the ball! When Mr. Hirota started to throw like American catchers, then a lot of the Japanese changed.

So we were very unusual for a Japanese team. I used to enjoy the hit-and-run because I used to drag my bunt toward first base. That way I knew that I was going to put the ball behind the runner. But we didn't continue it because Mizuhara's new philosophy was that the Giants needed to hit to win.

When we went to Australia in 1953, Australians were just starting to play baseball so they were really raw. They all played cricket, so they could run, they could throw, and they could hit. The only thing is they weren't polished. They played hard because they had their cricket legs. Oh, they could run! If these boys had only been taught how to steal, field, and understand strategy, then they could have been great players. It was just a barnstorming tour. We were to play about six or seven games, but because the game was so new to them, there weren't many spectators, and the promoter had to call off some of the games.

Before we went, Mr. Yasuda, Yomiuri's president, told me, "Dick, next year is your second season. We're going to South American for spring training. You have to go to Australia, and if you do well, I'll give you a raise." I said, "Oh, OK, Mr. Yasuda." He said, "Don't worry, you just play hard as you can, and enjoy yourself, and you'll play well." So we went to Australia, and fortunately, all they had were cricket fields, which were real oblong. So they made baseball fields out of them. The right fields were short, and the left fields were forever. I'm left-handed so I think that I hit about four or five home runs! All I had to do was pop the ball, and it went into the stands. The Australian baseball was about a skin thicker than the Japanese ball, so a curve wasn't going to be as sharp. We used our ball when we were on defense, and they used their ball when they were on defense. It was the end of the season, so the ball looked like a balloon, so I did really well and got a raise.

Actually, I enjoyed the trip. I met three Australian guys, and we became good friends. We corresponded for years. As late as five or ten years ago, one of them went to New York on business and on his way back stopped in Hawaii. We had dinner and talked about the old times. All three of them have now passed away.

The next year, 1955, the Yankees came to Japan. We were playing at Hiroshima, and Whitey Ford was the pitcher, and Yogi Berra was the catcher. When I was at bat, I got a couple of balls, and then Whitey Ford threw me an outside pitch that I hit real well, but it went about six inches off the third base bag—foul ball. So Yogi Berra looked up at me, and said, "Hey, sonny boy, you hit that ball good but you watch this one!" But I didn't see anything because it came down like a bullet. It was a slider. I thought to myself, "No wonder this guy gets paid the big money!" But at least I hit a foul ball off Whitey Ford.

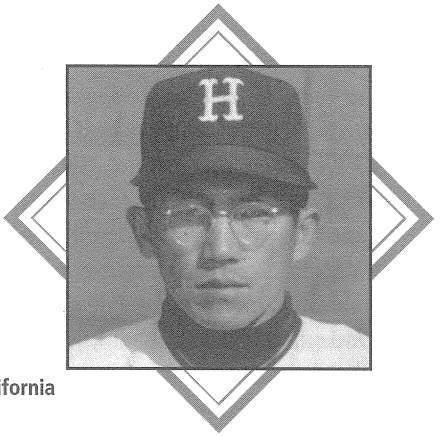
The Japanese were very surprised how far the Yankees could hit the ball. When the big guys hit their home runs, they almost went out of the park. In just about every game, somebody hit a home run, so it was nice for the fans. Mr. Kawakami said, "We cannot duplicate what they're doing because they're too big and strong, so we have to play our way."

My last year, 1956, I hurt my arm during spring training. We were practicing right outside of Osaka. That place was cold. We had big five-gallon cans filled with charcoal for warming up our hands and even our bats! They would hit ground balls to me for maybe a half an hour. By then, the

infield would get all messed up, and they would start taking bad bounces and hit me in the stomach. I wore glasses, so I also had to protect my face.

Mr. Mizuhara wanted me to take over at third base because I did well the year before, so I just thought I could show it to him. So, I overthrew a lot of my balls, and I overdid it. I was thirty-two, so I should've been smart enough to try to get around those things, but I overdid my capabilities. I realize I shouldn't have done it. Sometimes, pride comes too strong. It took me about a year to recuperate, and I wasn't even on the roster that season. At the end of the season, I returned to Hawaii. I became an insurance agent and was with Equitable for about twenty-five years.

I'll be eighty come this August, and I still play softball three times a week. I played yesterday. It's a slow-pitch league for players over fifty-five years old. My team has been playing together for about twenty years. If we win, we're lucky. It's more about fellowship than anything else. In life, you've got to be lucky. I've made a lot of good friends playing ball both here and in Japan.



7 Satoshi "Fibber" Hirayama

Born: February 17, 1930, in Exeter, California
1955–64: Hiroshima Carp outfielder

After playing baseball for Fresno State College and the Stockton Ports of the California League, Fibber Hirayama joined the Hiroshima Carp in 1955. Hirayama moved into the starting lineup and stayed there for seven years. Known for his hustle and great arm, he soon became a fan favorite. During his ten-year career, he hit .229 but stole 160 bases. After returning to the States, Hirayama became an overseas scout for the Carp in 1975. He is still active in the Carp organization, serving as a scout and a staff member at the Carps' Dominican Baseball Academy.

I WAS BORN AND RAISED in a little town called Exeter, California, about sixty miles from Fresno. In 1942, I was relocated to a camp in Poston, Arizona, for about three years. I played a lot of baseball there. Not in a league itself because I was still too young, but I did play a lot. I came back to Exeter as a junior in high school and then went to Fresno State on a football scholarship in 1948. At that point in time, I feared no one, and they had a tough time tackling me because I was so small. I loved football. The only reason that I went out for baseball was that I didn't like spring football. Once I got involved, I learned to love baseball. I played three years of varsity football and three years of baseball.

Right after college, I signed with the St. Louis Browns and was assigned to Stockton in the California League. It was a class C league at that time. After playing for the summer, I went in the service in January of 1953. While I was in the service, Mr. Kenichi Zenimura, who ran a *nisei* baseball club in Fresno, contacted me about going to Japan. His son had played in Japan

the year before. I talked to my wife-to-be. We had never been to Japan, so we thought that it might be a good thing to do. I contacted the Browns, and they were good enough to give me my release. When I got out of the service in 1954, I got married in February, and a few weeks later, we went to Japan.

When we arrived, they paraded us through downtown Hiroshima. Apparently, there were about one hundred thousand people there. It was just tremendous. I didn't speak any Japanese so they told me what to say. But I made a mistake and I said, "*Watashi no namae wa Hirayama Satoshi-san* [My name is Mr. Satoshi Hirayama]." I used the word *san* [Mr.]. That's a no-no! So everybody laughed. I was so dumbfounded by the reception, I just couldn't believe it.

Mr. Zenimura's son had been living in Japan for a long number of years, so we lived in the upstairs part of his home. A nice situation, except we slept on the floor, and we had nonflushing toilets, so we had to get used to it. It took a couple of years, but I learned Japanese. For quite awhile, even though I understood a little bit, I told people when they asked questions that I didn't speak Japanese. After about the third year, I became very fluent. The toughest part was the writing. I couldn't understand the letters at all. I never learned them.

When I first went to training camp, we didn't pick up a baseball for about a week. All we did was exercise and run. They had this little hill that we ran up. I about died! I never spent a more miserable time in my life. It was really tough. I couldn't believe it. My new teammates were all so friendly and so nice to me. I can't remember anyone being unfriendly. I think that was one of the reasons that I enjoyed baseball in Japan so much—everybody was so nice to me.

My first game in Japan was an exhibition game near Hiroshima. There was a big crowd there. I had a pretty good arm and was playing right field. In one of the early innings, I fielded a base hit and threw it home. I didn't mean to, but I threw it home on the fly, and people were so astounded by that. I went 1 for 4 or something like that, and I was amazed at the control of the Japanese pitchers.

When I first got there, we played at this stadium out near the airport. It was a very primitive ball park. It had no lights. There were no seats in the outfield, everybody sat on the lawn. And the dugouts—that's what they

were—old-fashioned dugouts. There was no exit in the back to go to the restroom. You had to go outside the dugout to go to the restroom. There was also no clubhouse in the stadium. We changed for the games at the dormitory where the unmarried players stayed and took a bus to the ball park.

The Carp were a city-owned ball club. Consequently, they had a number of barrels at the entrance where people would toss in money, and that was part of the way that the club was run. They also had a number of fan clubs, and the ballplayers would have to go to these fan clubs and put in appearances. In most cases, they would ask you to sing, and *that* was one of the things I hated to do! I can sing like nothing. We used to go to these fan clubs just to make an appearance and to get money from them to help support the club.

Hiroshima was such a very poor club that when I first got there, we traveled third class. There were no reservations in third class, so the rookies would go in through the windows of the train and grab seats for everybody. The seats were hardback. There were no cushions at all, so the traveling was very, very difficult. But it's a funny thing, I slept pretty darn well. I think I was tired all the time!

In old Japan, the rookies had to do all the menial things, because they have the peer structure—the *sempai-kohai* [senior-junior] structure. When I first went over there, I was amazed. The veterans would eat first, and then the younger players would be served. The same thing held true for the bath. The youngsters always took their baths after the veterans, so they always bathed in lukewarm water. I fit in with the veterans because I was a *nisei*, but I always used to bathe with the rookies because I couldn't stand the hot water. The *sempai-kohai* thing was very, very forceful at that time in everything. The younger players just accepted it. That's what they understood life to be.

I played a year and a half at the old ball park, and in the middle of 1955, they built the new stadium. It was like night and day—a beautiful stadium. Of course, it had lights so we didn't have to play day games anymore in the summer time, and they had a clubhouse.

The new ball park was built right across from the Peace Memorial Park. I had a funny feeling, especially in the first part of August, when so many people would go there. It took me awhile to get used to it, because I had a

very, very awkward feeling about the atomic bombing. There was a person on the ball club who had lived in Hiroshima as a child. That day, he was playing with a ball, and it went under the house so he went after it just when the atomic bomb exploded. His parents both passed away, and he was saved because he happened to be under the house. I can remember when I first got there, people would show me places where a person had been killed, and you could still see the outline on the sidewalk. It was scary and something I'll never forget.

The Hiroshima fans were crazy. They were die-hards. They used to have a trumpeter. He would be blowing his trumpet, and they would be waving banners. If you did something wrong or if they felt you did something wrong, they blasted you. They were much louder than the other teams' fans, no question about it. They would get carried away and just hoot up a storm. One time, the Giants beat us in a very close game. I think they scored a couple runs in the final inning to beat us. Well, after the Giants boarded their bus, the Hiroshima fans started throwing rocks and everything at it! It was something else, I couldn't believe it!

Another time, when we were playing Hanshin at home, there was an argument, and our manager, Mr. Shiraishi, got thrown out of the game. The fans became very, very excited and started coming down out of the stands. It was a funny feeling being in the outfield and seeing fans run by you. They were steaming. They tore up everything in the dugouts, and they went into the radio booth and tore the radio equipment out. The umpires had to call the game, and we couldn't play at home for a couple days. I wasn't worried about my own safety because I had become accustomed to Hiroshima fans. They were terrible, and they would get on you, but they really took care of the home team.

The Hiroshima fans really liked my style because I would run out to my position and run back into the dugout. The other Carp players just walked out of their positions, so I was really a novelty, and the fans really enjoyed that. It was just something I learned in college and I've always done. Normally, I was back in the dugout before any of the other players. Well, my teammates didn't like that at first, but they sort of got used to it.

I was also a hard slider. I think Wally and I were the two people who introduced breaking up the double play in Japan. Even though Wally had been doing it for years, the Japanese runners still wouldn't slide hard into

second. They would just sort of go out of the baseline standing up. The first time I did it, did I get dirty looks from the second baseman! Some of the second baseman really got wise to me, and if they got the ball early enough, they would throw it right at my head and make me slide!

Although we often finished in the second division, we had three future Hall of Famers on the Carp. Katsumi Shiraishi was our manager and shortstop. He was a good, solid player—very orthodox and very no-nonsense. The same thing held true as a manager. Very orthodox and played for one run all the time. That was the biggest difference between Japanese and American baseball. They played for one run early in the ball game. Even in the first inning, they would bunt the runner a base ahead. I never saw that in the States. After the sixth or seventh innings, then you might play for one run, but until then, you never saw that.

Shiraishi was very much of a disciplinarian. We had curfews, but off the field as long as you met the curfew, there wasn't much said. Nonetheless, the Carp were a serious-minded team. Once in awhile, you would go out and party a little bit, but we learned that you never did that in Hiroshima. Because if you did and you happened to have a bad day on the field the next day, the fans would get all over you! They'd think, "The reason you're not doing well is because you were out drinking last night!" They really got on you. We learned not to do anything in Hiroshima.

My first year in Japan, we were playing this game at Hanshin's Koshien Stadium, and my teammates were trying to teach me a little bit of Japanese. They told me that if the manager says something to you, you answer—and this was in Hiroshima dialect—*Kabachi tarena*. That means "Oh, shut up!" but I didn't know that! I was playing right field, and when I came in between innings, Mr. Shiraishi told me that I should play a little deeper. I told him, "*Kabachi tarena*!" He looked at me, and I thought that he was going to tear me apart! I looked at the bench, and they were just rolling! All the players were on their backs and just laughing like crazy! I thought, "Aw, oh!" After awhile, even Mr. Shiraishi started laughing. Thank heavens! That was my most memorable experience in Japan.

Mokoto Kozuru played center field. He was an outstanding ballplayer and a nice, quiet person. He had the most unique batting stance and stroke of anyone I ever saw. He'd hold the bat on his shoulder, and he would just sort of rotate his hips a little bit inward on his stride. I think that he swung

more with his hips than he did with his hands. Very, very odd to watch. It wasn't a swing that you could imitate. He was a good hitter. Before he came to the Carp, he had a tremendous year with the Shochiku Robins. He was the Most Valuable Player, led the league with 51 home runs, 161 RBIs, and hit .355. But I don't think he could have played in the Majors. I don't think he could have handled a really good fastball. He didn't hit for too much power at Hiroshima.

Our ace, Ryohei Hasegawa, was an outstanding pitcher. He was a little guy who threw from the side with a very odd delivery. Naturally, throwing from the side, he could throw that slider in, or he could throw the sinker away. He was outstanding at changing speeds. He would always have those hitters out in front, but if they were looking for the change, he'd bust the ball in on them. It seemed like he could pitch every day. Sometimes, Hasegawa would start, pitch a complete game, and the following day, they might call him in for relief! I could not believe it! That was one of the biggest things that I could not understand about Japanese baseball. Our ball club didn't have a rotation! None. Whoever looked good in practice, pitched. They threw every day. I couldn't believe it.

I was very fortunate to be part of the Japanese club that toured with the New York Yankees in 1955. I was able to travel, meet, and play cards with Billy Martin, Mickey Mantle, Whitey Ford, Yogi Berra, and all those folks. I really enjoyed that. The Yankees really enjoyed Japan—especially Billy Martin and Mickey Mantle. They were up most of the night and day. I can remember that in Hiroshima, they asked me to translate an interview with Casey Stengel. I was never so confused in my life! I didn't know how the hell to translate that stuff! But I really enjoyed it because he was such a nice person.

One of the highlights of any visit to another ball club was seeing the other foreign players. You looked forward to just visiting with them. The first year I was in Hiroshima, Harvey Zenimura was there, so I could speak English. After he left, there was no one to speak English to, and I could only speak and hear Japanese, so I really looked forward to seeing the other foreign players. The Giants had Wally, Dick Kashiwaeda, Jyun Hirota, and Andy Miyamoto, so I really looked forward to that.

Actually, I really enjoyed playing against the Giants. During the time I was there, they had a strong ball club almost every year. Playing against

them was always an adventure. When you played the Giants, there was a full stadium, and that really pumped me up. Of course, we didn't win that often. The Giants' first baseman, Tetsuharu Kawakami, was probably one of the best hitters ever in Japan. He was very much like a robot. At first base, he had the range of maybe three steps, so he wasn't a good first baseman at all, but hitting-wise, he knew his zone and would swing the same way at every pitch. He was a master who had studied his swing. I've never seen anyone quite similar to Kawakami.

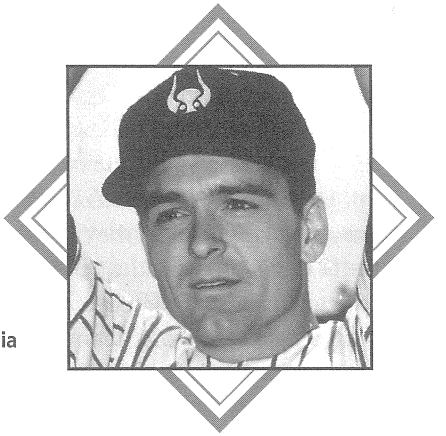
In 1958, a fellow named Mark Harris, who was living in Hiroshima at the time, wanted to do an article about me and my experience in Japan. He was a writer and wrote *Bang the Drum Slowly* and other popular baseball books here in the States. We talked for awhile. I think it took several days. The article was published in *Sports Illustrated* [August 4, 1958]. I was very, very thrilled. I couldn't believe that was happening to me. Here I am a nobody and to have some sort of article like that. Well, I still have a copy. People can't believe it.

I retired in 1964 because my wife and I wanted the kids to grow up in America. The oldest was going into the second grade, and the middle one was going to start first grade, so we wanted them to go to school in America. I left under good conditions with the ball club. When I returned to the States, I became a teacher near Fresno, then a vice-principal and principal, and finally I went into the district office as the head of personnel. I did that for a long number of years before I finally retired.

During that time, I also scouted for the Hiroshima Carp. When Mr. Takeshi Koba became the manager in 1975, he asked me to find some *gaijin* ballplayers for him. That's how it started, and I've been doing it ever since. One of the first players I sent over there was Adrian Garrett. I went down to Venezuela to watch him play. That was the first time that I went out of the country as a scout.

Mr. Kohei Matsuda, the former owner of the Carp, was a very farsighted person. He wanted to strike out in different directions and possibly tap the Dominican market for ballplayers. He decided to build a baseball academy down there. One of our graduates is Alfonso Soriano. He played a few games with the Carp in 1996. He did not have any power whatsoever at the time, but you could tell that he really had sense batting-wise. I knew it was just a matter of time because he had such good baseball sense. I never

thought he'd make it is a second baseman, I thought he'd windup as a third baseman. I hated to see us lose him, but he is such a nice kid that I really hope that he has a great career. I'm mostly involved with baseball operations and the coaching staff. I still go down about six or seven times a year, normally for three weeks at a time.



8 Glenn Mickens

Born: July 26, 1930, in Wilmar, California
1953: Brooklyn Dodgers pitcher
1959–63: Kintetsu Buffaloes pitcher

After graduating from the University of California–Los Angeles, Glenn Mickens spent eight years in the Brooklyn Dodgers organization and pitched in four games for the 1953 Dodgers before coming to Japan in 1959. Mickens immediately became the ace of Kintetsu's staff. He was selected for the Pacific League All-Star team in both 1960 and 1961 and won the Third All-Star Game in 1960. After leaving Japan, Mickens spent the next twenty-five years coaching at UCLA. He is currently retired and lives in Hawaii but occasionally returns to Japan as a guest coach for Keio University.

I WENT OVER TO JAPAN with Ron Bottler in 1959. It was a big jump because we were among the first Americans to go over. I played there for five years and made a couple of All-Star teams. I thought it was a real honor to have pitched and been credited with a win in the All-Star games. They treated me really, really well in Japan. The people over there were really good to me, and I had some great experiences.

When I signed, they told me that I would get five hundred dollars per win for every game I won over fifteen. I thought that was great because some guys were winning thirty, but I had no idea that Kintetsu was the perennial cellar dweller! We had the worst defense and worst offense in the league. I didn't know that before I went over there. But, regardless, I would've went anyway. Well, the most I ever won was thirteen. I was thirteen and ten in 1960, but I always had a really good ERA. I won ten games my first year. The team only won thirty-nine games, so obviously they were extremely happy with me winning ten.

When Ron Bottler and I got invited over there, Japanese baseball was an outlaw league. After I had been there about a month, they called me into the office and wanted to know what the reserve clause was and the whole bunch of other things. I said, "Well, I don't know all those things, but why are you asking?" Then, they showed me a letter from the vice president of the Dodgers that said the Dodgers were highly regretful that the Buffaloes had taken one of their players and signed him to a Japanese contract. And that it might cause international dissension. Of course, that shook the Japanese up. From then on, the Japanese had to get permission from the United States before they signed any American players.

Our manager was Shigeru Chiba. Ohhh, he was funny. They told me that he used to be a heck of a hitter and a really good second baseman for the Giants. But, it always looked like he was sleeping. He would keep his head cocked off to one side like it would never straighten out. They told me that he used to do the same thing when he hit.

One night in 1959, my first year, we were playing in Osaka. Osaka in the summertime is about as hot and humid a place as there ever was. It was the eighth inning, we were winning, and I was out of gas. I was sitting there on the bench between innings, and Chiba looked over and saw that I was really tired. Now, we didn't win too many games, so he was thinking of something to say to make me mad enough to finish the ball game. So he looked at me and said with a thick Japanese accent, "Remember Pearl Harbor!" And I almost fell off the bench! Here's a Japanese guy telling me to remember Pearl Harbor so that I get mad enough to go out there and beat the other team. It didn't matter that I was on a Japanese team!

Before I went to Japan, people told me that the Japanese were little ping hitters, and they could all fly. Well, that wasn't true. The average club in the States, I don't care what level—A, AA, or AAA—could generally outrun most of the clubs over there. They didn't have that many guys who could run. The one guy who could was the Hawks' shortstop, Yoshinori Hirose. He could fly! They called him *Choro, choro, choro*—something about the wiggling of a mouse. Boy, he could run.

When I was over there, people used to ask me to compare Japanese ball to the big leagues. I would say, "Well, they have a few guys over there who would do well in the Major Leagues, but over all it's probably class AA." The way they played the game was different. They didn't play to win, so that lowered the caliber of baseball. Probably one of my biggest disappoint-

ments with Japanese ball was that they were just not very aggressive. There was no hustle.

They had their own way of playing the game, and their game was strictly offense. If you could hit, that was fine. You didn't have to hustle. You didn't have to do anything else. You know how every day on ESPN you see the catch of the day and these guys making the greatest plays? That didn't happen in Japan. They didn't worry about defense. They very seldom had anybody in the outfield who could throw. Nobody had any arm strength.

For example, Isao Harimoto had big league material. He was a pretty good-sized kid. He was unbelievably talented. He could fly. And he could hit with anybody. Could hit in the big leagues over here but he was a real hot dog. He'd walk up, and it would take him five minutes to get into the batter's box! And he'd have his bat on his shoulder. So every time he came up, I'd knock him down. As the hitter, I had tremendous respect for him, but he was brutal in the outfield—just terrible. Balls would go out there that he should've caught in his jockstrap, and they were going up against the fence and bouncing in front of him. Again that wasn't part of their game. You didn't have to be a great defensive ballplayer to be a superstar.

The most frustrating thing was when I'd watch those guys go into second base without sliding. If you had runners on first and third with one out, and a ground ball was hit in the hole, you would obviously expect the runner on first to slide and take the second baseman out since that would score run for you. But no! The Japanese would run out of the base paths and let him complete the double play. That was the Japanese-style. That used to just frost me! If the runner took somebody out on the double play or did some things that they were supposed to do by hustling, we would have a better chance to win. But no matter how much I would scream and yell, it was ingrained into the ball club. That's the way they played the game.

Jackie Robinson was my idol. I got to play with him for a very short time when I was on the '53 Dodgers. Whether it was an exhibition game, a spring training game, or what, he played one way, and that was to win. He was a fierce competitor. I loved to be on the mound anytime I had guys who played like that behind me. So it just got very frustrating in Japan to see these guys with this lackadaisical attitude.

They would also do strange things. Here is a typical Japanese baseball strategy that I could never get over. When a team was down by ten runs, and the batter from the losing team was up with a 3-0 count, he would

swing away! Once I asked my interpreter, "What the heck is he doing?" The answer was, "He's a home-run hitter. We have to get one run." But when you're down that far, you want to get a rally going. You want to get guys on base. A home run is going to do you no good whatsoever.

I never saw them use the hit-and-run or any of the other things that Americans use to try to win ball games. I don't remember them squeezing or stuff like that. They paid their guys to swing the bat, and that was all. They didn't pay them to hustle or slide. That was back then. I think that Japanese baseball has changed considerably today. I see Hideki Matsui and Ichiro Suzuki come over to the States and bust their rear ends.

The Japanese also used to overtrain guys. It just went on and on and on, eleven months out of the year. Even in the winter months, when it was very cold, they had to train indoors under the stadiums. It was like they were boxers—they'd train and train. I think by the time they reached the main event, they were half burnt-out. But they psychologically talked their guys into being good. If you can psyche a guy up, you can get more out of him than the ability he has.

For example, once they got an ace pitcher, that guy would just throw and throw and throw. The other guys on the staff were just fillers. You've heard about Tadashi Sugiura, who played for the Nankai Hawks? In '59, the guy won thirty-eight and lost four with a 1.40 ERA, struck out 336 guys in 371 innings, and won all four games in the Japan Series! He was just unbelievable! Every time he went out there, Ron Bottler and I would say, "He has got to be tired! He has got to be tired!" He would pitch nine innings, and the next day if they had a small lead, he was back there again. He would come out of the bullpen. You would just be sitting there in awe. If it was my arm, it would be hanging on the ground! Yet, he would go out there and keep on doing it. I saw him at an All-Star game one time, and I said to him, "You've got to be tired. Your arm has to be hurting." He said, "No. *Daijobo, daijobo* [I'm OK, I'm OK]." As the ace of the pitching staff, he was never going to say that he wouldn't pitch. It was an honor to be the ace. Most of the Japanese aces got sore arms prematurely because they overused them.

For me, Sugiura was the best pitcher in the league. I didn't see anyone better. He threw three quarters underhand, so he wasn't a complete submarine pitcher. He could turn the ball over and make it sink from the letters down to your knees. The ball would just explode! Then he could turn

his wrist and make the ball explode up because he was coming from down underneath. He wore glasses, must have weighed 155 pounds at most, and stood only 5'8", but he was the most dominating pitcher I've seen.

Kazuhisa Inao was right there with Sugiura. Inao threw over the top. He was different from the others because at that time, the majority of Japanese pitchers threw from three-quarters to the side. They called him the "ironman." He was a *mainichi* pitcher—every day, every day, every day.

In 1962, Kaoru Betto became our manager. He had sat on the Dodgers bench for a year, so when he took over, I thought, "Oh, this is going to be a breath of fresh air. Now they're going to see how baseball is played in the United States." I thought that we would go to three starters and one or two relievers. But no, it was the same situation. He would leave the same guy out there all the time. I usually pitched every four days. After I had pitched the day before or two days before, Betto would ask, "Today, can you go maybe one or two innings?" I would say, "Oh, just one or two innings." I would go out there and after three or four innings, I would say, "Betto-san, *domo arigato*, but I can't do this—my arm will fall off!" So the headlines in the paper became, "Mickens very selfish—won't play for ball club." One time, I saw my picture in the paper, and I said, "Boy, these guys must really like me—page one of the Japanese paper!" So I got the interpreter and said, "Read this for me. What good things are they saying about me?"

"They're talking about how egocentric you are. How you just want to play for yourself and not for the team and that you don't want to pitch when the manager tells you to."

"Wow! I guess they don't like me that much!"

My most memorable moment was being chosen for the All-Star team in 1960 and 1961. I didn't think that would ever happen. I didn't think they would pick a *gaijin*. Tsuruoka was a manager of the Pacific League, and I think he picked me personally each time. There were three All-Star games in 1960 and two in '61.

We played before about thirty thousand people. The stadiums were full. The Japanese are extremely quiet. You can have fifty thousand people sitting there, and there won't be a noise. And then the cheerleaders will get them going, and they start beating the drums, yelling, and waving those flags. But outside of that, they are unbelievably quiet. At the All-Star games, there were no cheerleaders, so it was extremely quiet, I couldn't believe it.

In 1960, I got to start the third game at Korakuen Stadium. I pitched three innings there, and that's when I got the win. After the game, they gave Tsuruoka a whole mess of presents, and he gave them all to me. I never forgot that. Actually, somebody gave him some beautiful dogs, and he didn't give me the dogs! In my time playing over there, I had some great experiences, but I think that was probably the highlight.

The next year, I got to pitch the three middle innings in the first game. The second game was in a different stadium, the hot and steamy Tigers stadium [Koshien], and I got to pitch three innings there and finish it. I think I pitched a total of nine innings, and I didn't give up a run. It was against the Central League, and those guys hadn't seen me before.

I got to face Sadaharu Oh. You know how he cocked up that front leg and just sat on the back leg? Well, I thought how the heck is he going to hit a change-up? If I could get him to commit that front foot and get him way out in front, I figured that I'd have luck with him. Well, I threw him a change-up, and he still hit the ball well. But I got him out. I think he hit the ball to left center field. I know I got him leaning a little bit. He had tremendous balance. When he put down that front foot, his weight didn't shift from the back to the front.

Shigeo Nagashima with the Giants was the best all-around ballplayer I saw over there. Oh was undoubtedly one of the greatest hitters they ever had, but for running, throwing, hustling, Nagashima was the best. He was kind of a novelty because the Japanese just didn't hustle. There's no doubt about it, Nagashima and Oh could have made the Majors. Oh never would have hit more home runs than Hank Aaron, but he still would have been good. Sugiura and Inao, they could have pitched in the big leagues in the United States.

Katsuya Nomura, the catcher for the Nankai Hawks, was one of best hitters in the Pacific League. You had to make a perfect pitch to get him out. If you got the ball a little bit up or a little bit out, he would hit it, and he could hit the ball as well to right center as he could pull the ball. He would hit thirty, forty home runs year after year. He was amazing. He'd be back there catching a whole round of batting practice and then go out and catch a whole game or even a doubleheader!

One day he comes up, and he'd been hitting the ball really well off me. So I knocked his rear down, and his helmet went flying. He got up and hit the next ball off the center-field fence! Well, two days later, it was the All

Star game. I'm out in the outfield as part of the All-Star squad, and he comes up running out like a madman. I thought he was about to kill me! And he yells at me, "You! Pean ball! Pean ball!" And I said, "It's not pean ball! Its bean ball! Babe—I called him Babe, short for Babe Ruth—I wouldn't throw at you." Of course, the Japanese never threw up and in to anybody. When I go over now to advise Keio University, I tell them that my old roommate Don Drysdale used to say that he owned the inside part of that plate. That it was his territory—so, you better hang loose! But, the Japanese just don't believe in that.

I hit Kazuhiro Yamauchi, the leading home run hitter, in the head once. But, that event gave me a reputation as a headhunter that I thought was unfair, and I really didn't want. I learned to jam hitters and keep them honest, but I never wanted the reputation of being a "bean ball" pitcher. Yamauchi was a fine ballplayer. He didn't run that well, but he could go get the ball in the outfield. He would just get his knocks and hit thirty-some home runs every year. For me, he was the toughest hitter in the Pacific League. That night, Yamauchi was 2 for 2 against me, and he was 3 for 3 the previous time he faced me, so I told my catcher that we had to knock him off the plate to keep him "honest." Our catcher—I called him "Bulldog" because he was a scrapper—was ecstatic as he evidentially liked to do what had never been done before! I think we got a strike on Yamauchi, and then I came up and in with a fastball. If he had simply moved his head back, the pitch wouldn't have been close to him. But, he was just used to stepping into everything, so he just moved right into the ball and got drilled. When I went to visit him in the hospital, he said that he lost the ball, and it wasn't my fault. To this day, he is still a good friend. He says, "You did plastic surgery on my face!"

After I hit Yamauchi, I was standing on the mound with my back to the plate, when I looked over my shoulder and saw five of their players coming toward the mound. Their ace pitcher grabbed for my shirt, so I started swinging at anything that moved—I don't think I actually hit anyone! A riot broke out, and fans from both sides came running onto the field, and the police had to restore order. During the riot, one of our fans ran up to me, took the little towel that they all keep in their pockets, wiped the sweat from my face, and said, "Nice Mickenzu!" Amazing!

After order was restored, I was getting ready to pitch when I felt a rock whiz by my ear. I walked to the dugout and told Chiba, "I no more pitchy tonight!" He said, "*Hayaku* [hurry], go on home!" I got in a cab and went

back to my apartment. The police stood guard all night, but there was no more trouble. The next day, I met with our general manager, and he told me if I hit anyone again, to just tip my cap, bow, and say *gomenasai* and everything would be okay. Since I went to Japan to pitch and not be a troublemaker, I said okay, I will do it their way.

The Orions' outfielder, Kenjiro Tamiya, remained really upset that I didn't tip my hat after I hit Yamauchi. Tamiya couldn't do anything but hit. He couldn't run, he couldn't field, and he wouldn't hustle. He was the laziest player I ever saw, but he could flat-out swing the bat. When he came up later, I drilled him and tipped my hat! He knew that I was throwing at him. But what was he going to do about it? I did exactly what they told me to do. I said, "*Gomenasai*" and tipped my cap!

They got back at me. I was batting one night, and their ace pitcher, Masayuki Dobashi, pitched inside. I tried to get out of the way, but my right hand got hit. I went out the next inning and tried to throw, but I couldn't. I had a hairline fracture in my wrist. Well, they put this little cast on me, but they put it on wrong. Two weeks later when they took it off, I had a dislocated bone. They said that they were going to have to operate, but I said, "Oh no, you're not!" I went back to the mainland and had a plate put in. I had to work my rear off to get back in shape, but I did it and pitched another two or three years.

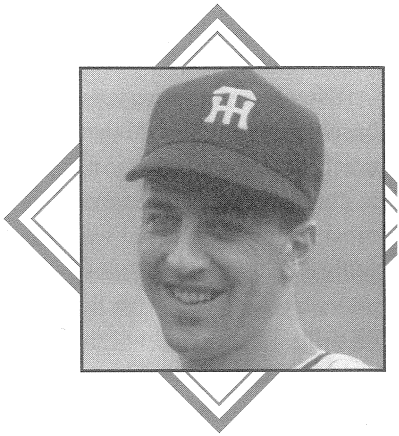
After they saw me in the All-Star games, where I came in for three-inning stints and even got a win, the Buffaloes decided that I would make a good closer. That may have been true, because I did a lot of relieving in the United States. Betto tried to keep me as a relief pitcher, as a closer. Well, we never got a lead, so I would sit there for two weeks and never get to pitch! So that strategy didn't work.

When I was over there, there weren't that many other foreigners. You had to be a special breed to get along there. For example, as a *gaijin*, you might hit a home run one day but the next day be on the bench. And you're left wondering, "What the heck is going on? Why did they bring me over here?" I helped a friend of mine Bob Jenkins get a job over there. I played with him in the Pacific Coast League, and he was a good hitter. But they had him on the bench and going back and forth between the big club and the farm team. I just couldn't figure it out. They would pay you five thousand dollars or ten thousand dollars to go over there, and then they wouldn't use you. It didn't make any sense to me, but they had their own ways.

What kept me going was the hope that somehow I could improve their baseball. Kintetsu had been in the cellar for ten years, so I figured we had nowhere to go but up. So I just picked out little things and tried to get them to change. For example, one time, I went out to coach first base. They almost died because that wasn't my job, but I went out there and started yelling, "Let's get a hit!" and things like that. I was just trying to stimulate them, trying to get a little life into the ball club. Jack Bloomfield and I kept on yelling so much that I think we at least stimulated the guys to hustle a little bit. One time, when Lefty O'Doul was visiting Japan, he said to me, "Kid, I haven't changed these guys in thirty years, you're not going to do it one year!" I kept on thinking what Lefty said, and after I had been there awhile, I thought, "He's exactly right."

After I returned from Japan, I coached at UCLA for twenty-five years. We had an exchange program with Keio University, so I've been back three or four times. In fact, I just went over there a few weeks ago. I got to see Kintetsu play the Chiba Marines. The way they play the game has improved greatly from back when I played. I saw guys sliding and running hard. Back when I played, all you had to do was hit. But this time, I saw a few all-around ballplayers who really impressed me—guys with five tools, who could run, hit, throw, hit with power, and field. It was nice to see that things have changed.

I played professional baseball all over the United States, Cuba, Mexico, South America, Canada, and Japan, and our national pastime was exceptionally good to me. What I saw and what I loved the most was that baseball had no partiality toward color or race—it was truly color-blind. Whether you were big, fat, small, or skinny, all you had to do was be able to compete. In my early days with the Dodgers, that couldn't be said, but we have come a long ways. When I see players in the big leagues from all parts of the world, it proves that sports can be the equalizer to making this world a better place for all of us.



9 Gene Bacque

Born: August 12, 1937, in New Iberia, Louisiana
1962–68: Hanshin Tigers pitcher
1969: Kintetsu Buffaloes pitcher

Gene Bacque is the most successful American pitcher in the history of Japanese baseball. With one hundred career wins, Bacque is tied with Joe Stanka for the most wins by an American in Japan. Bacque finished his eight-year career with a 2.34 ERA and is the only American recipient of the coveted Sawamura Award. After leaving Japan, he became a teacher and now runs a ranch with about seventy head of cattle in Louisiana.

I STARTED LIKE ALL KIDS in the United States by playing Little League ball. Afterwards, I played in high school and then for the University of Louisiana, Lafayette. After my second year of college ball, I signed my first professional contract with the Detroit Tigers. I played six years in the Detroit minor league system, going from class D ball to AAA. When I was optioned out to Hawaii, I really started hearing a lot about baseball in Japan. Bill Nishita, one of my teammates, had played in Japan, and he started talking to me about possibly going over there. He became a good friend and introduced me to a wonderful man by the name of Angel Maehara, who had connections in Japan.

While in Hawaii, I got released from Detroit. To keep in shape, I played in a semi-pro league. In the meantime, word got to Japan that I was available, and some scouts came and saw me pitch. The first thing you know, Angel Maehara got me a tryout with the Hanshin Tigers in Japan for a couple of weeks in July 1962.

I had just gotten married, and my wife stayed in Hawaii while I went to Japan for two weeks. They treated me well and had an interpreter for me. I

ended up trying out for the minor league team. I even hit a couple of balls out of the ball park, and they said, "Are you sure that you're not a hitter?" I said, "No, I want to pitch." After two weeks of working out with them and playing intersquad games, they decided to sign me. So I went back to Hawaii to get my wife and a commercial visa.

It was August before I was able to get back to Japan. As a matter of fact, I joined the club in Tokyo, and right off the bat, they threw me against the Giants. I did pretty well that night. The first thing you know, we won the pennant. I really didn't help them out too much. I think I ended up losing three games and not winning any. I did help them out a little bit in the Series against the Flyers. They put me in relief in game three, and I held them for four innings until the curfew. The game ended in a 2-2 tie after fourteen innings. Right away I was sort of a celebrity. When you win a pennant over there, the people just go crazy. They root for you and stay in the ball park two or three hours after the game is over—they don't go home! It's a wonderful experience to see people really enjoying the game.

Once I joined the team, a lot of guys took me under their wing and would take me out in the evenings or to eat after ball games. One of the Japanese who really helped me out was our star pitcher Masaaki Koyama. He was a good guy and taught me the bad Japanese words! Koyama-san had amazing control. He could pinpoint a ball. As a matter of fact, I enjoyed watching him and tried to imitate him to get more control. He also threw pretty hard—up in the high eighties—and had a good slider. He won a lot of games and probably could have pitched in the Majors. Then, of course, Yoshida-san, our little shortstop, was a lot of fun to be around. I really had quite a few friends on the team.

Of course, my American teammate Mike Solomko was instrumental in getting me around. He had married a Japanese girl and spoke Japanese fluently. As a matter of fact, he still lives in Japan. He interpreted for me all the time. I was probably a bother to him sometimes because I asked so many questions. On road trips, he was staying with the Japanese, and I didn't mind staying there. It was an adventure for me. I didn't have any trouble in the Japanese hotels with the sleeping. I just couldn't get that rice and gravy like I was used to here! But once I learned about the food and could call out what I wanted, I didn't mind at all. I think the rest of the *gaijin* stayed at Western-style hotels. By staying in the Japanese inns, I was able

to learn a few more words and their culture a lot quicker. I also learned things that I probably would never have learned if I stayed in the Western hotels, so it helped me get to know my teammates.

After the games, the players were pretty low-key. There wasn't much boozing it up. They weren't those kind of guys. After a game, we might go out and have a beer, have dinner, but we were always in by 12:30–1:00 A.M. On the road, most of the players would stay right in the hotel. After games, I'd go to their rooms, and they'd be watching TV, playing mah jong or Go, or reading a book.

The Japanese approach to the game took a little getting used to. One of the things that I thought was a bit strange was if you were warming up on the mound, and you didn't look good, they might change you before the game even started. I don't know if it was their culture that makes them do that or if they could foresee how you were going to do in a game. I really don't know. Also, if they didn't think that they were going to get too many runs off a particular pitcher, they would start bunting right away in the first inning. Things of that nature were a little bit weird. Otherwise, the game was pretty much the same as it was here. There were just a few little quirks and a few little things that I didn't understand much at the time, but after I knew their culture a little more, I more or less understood what was going on.

Something else that I didn't understand was when the Japanese would strike out, they would smile and nonchalantly put the bat away. I couldn't understand how they never showed any emotion. I'm not proud of it, but I would get p.o.'d when I'd get knocked out of a game. If they had a fan in the dugout, I'd throw that fan around and raise hell. I was just mad at myself. I remember one time when I got knocked out of a game, it was cold, and they had hibachis in the dugout. Well, I kicked over a hibachi, and hot coals went flying everywhere. There were guys jumping all over the dugout trying to get away from the hot coals. They were screaming, "Bacque, no, no! Bacque, no!" They couldn't understand why I just couldn't control that anger. Although it took a long time, I learned how to deal with it. That was when I became more of a control pitcher and more relaxed. That helped me think better out there and helped me become more successful.

I came back to Japan in 1963 and did fairly well. I pitched in a few games and won eight. Then in 1964, they traded Koyama-san and made me one

of the top three starters. That gave me an incentive to do better, and I just started out with a bang. I won ten or eleven straight, and from then on I'd lose one and then win another four or five, then lose another and win five or six more. It was just one of those years that no matter what you did, you knew you were going to win. It was also sort of mind-boggling, because I pitched 353 innings, and I didn't have a place on my body that hurt. I ended up winning twenty-nine and losing nine with a 1.89 ERA. It was just one of those fantastic years that you dream about.

We won the pennant with a ball club that didn't have much hitting. Pitching was more or less what carried us over. Minoru Murayama ended up winning twenty-two, so between us we won fifty-one of our team's eighty victories. He also had a fantastic ERA. Of course, he had to have a good ERA, because we didn't hit! Murayama-san was one of the hardest-working guys I've ever seen. He gave his all in every game and on every pitch that he threw. We were rivals but for the betterment of the team. When he'd win a game, I wanted to do the same and do as well as he did. When I won one, he wanted to do the same and do as well as I did. I think that's why in '64, we both had such great years. We each tried to out do the other and ended up winning the pennant. Murayama-san could have probably pitched in the big leagues. He would have had to learn a little bit about pitching inside. Over there, they didn't pitch inside much. They mostly pitched outside. But if he could have learned to come in a little more and get the hitter off the plate, he could have played Major League ball.

When my friend Koyama-san got traded to the Orions, we got Kazuhiro Yamauchi in return. He was a good hitter and helped us to the pennant by hitting thirty-one home runs. He was the only one on our club that had the power to get the ball out of the ball park. He also became my hunting buddy. He loved to hunt, and I enjoyed hunting, so I stayed in Japan after the season, and we went hunting in Himeji and had a wonderful time. He was a fun guy to be around, and he loved to talk baseball. Yamauchi-san was also a natural teacher, and he loved to teach the younger kids about hitting and about baseball.

Another key to our success that year was our shortstop Yoshio Yoshida. He was as good a double-play guy as you'd want. He had good power for a little guy and was quick. Yoshida-san was a good baseball player, but I think that his size kept him from being a great baseball player. I'd still take him as the shortstop on my team any day.

Our home ball park, Koshien Stadium, is really a historical place—it's like Yankee Stadium. Every summer, they have the big high-school tournament there. So, clinching the pennant there just made us feel great. It was just a wonderful year for me and for the Osaka fans. Of course, I'll cherish that.

At the end of the season, they chose me to be the recipient of the Sawamura Award. Then they told me about Eiji Sawamura, and I said that this is probably the greatest honor that I'll ever have. I think that I'm the only American who has ever won that award. It was just a great year, and like I said, you just dream of these years and hope that you can have one.

Our biggest rivals were the Yomiuri Giants. At each position, they were all good defensive ballplayers. They could hit the ball, and they had good pitching. They had Kunio Jonouchi and Tsuneo Horiuchi and guys like that who threw the ball over the plate hard. They were just real strong at each position. And they weren't just one deep, they might have been two deep. They always had two or three good catchers. They always had five or six pitchers that were around the plate and threw hard all the time. They had good players at second base and shortstop, good power in Sadaharu Oh and Shigeo Nagashima. You never knew when Sadaharu Oh would hit one out. He could hit to the opposite field. If you pitched him outside, he'd go with you and hit a home run out to left field. I respected Nagashima-san quite a bit, but I normally could get him out. He got a home run or two off of me, but I normally had an easier time with him than I did with left-handers. Oh-san and Shibata-san were the guys that gave me a little trouble. Isao Shibata was a little, pesky, aggravating son-of-a-gun. He would just get on base, and he was quick, so you know he'd run. He didn't have to hit the ball that far or that hard, but he would just get on base so many times. Even Masaaki Mori, the catcher, could hit it out, you know. They were the prima donna team of that era—just a good ball club. It was very difficult to beat them. They all had good baseball sense. And, of course, the manager, Tetsuharu Kawakami, was a big name in Japan, and those guys really respected him.

Well, I always tried to make fun of the opposing batters, and especially Oh-san and Nagashima-san, to get them mad and get their minds off of the game. I tried to intimidate them enough to where they'd get mad, so mad that they couldn't hit! But they're both nice guys. It was just that during those games, I wanted to win. I didn't care how I won as long as I won. I'd

have tried anything. A matter of fact, one day, the umpires weren't watching the pitcher's mound too closely, and over there, the grounds are all skin, you know, no grass. So every inning, I'd just cover the pitcher's mound and cover the rubber until I had it all covered up. Then I started creeping up on the mound until I was about four or five feet in front of the rubber! In fact, one of the guys on the Giants said, "Gosh, Bacque is throwing fast tonight." Even our catcher didn't know that I was cheating about six feet, so he says, "Yeah, he's got good stuff tonight!"

The highlight of my career in Japan was pitching a no-hit, no-run game against the Giants at Koshien Stadium in 1965. I can remember it as plain as day. Normally in Japan, the TV coverage cuts off around 9:30 but that particular night, they left it on. I think that it was the only game shown from the first inning to the ninth inning throughout its entirety while I was in Japan. During the game, my teammates would not say anything in the dugout. Of course, I knew that I had a no-hitter going, but they wouldn't say anything. They didn't want to say, "OK, Bacque, one more inning." They didn't want to talk to me! So it was sort of funny at the time, you know. They just didn't want to jinx me, I guess. In the ninth inning, the second-to-last out was Sadaharu Oh, but he popped up to Kingo Motoyashiki playing second base. It was the thrill of my life, pitching a no-hit, no-run game. It was fun for me but also for the Japanese fans. I think that my teammates enjoyed it even more than me, because they were all happy and jumping up and down.

I'm a good-natured fellow, but I'd try to intimidate them a little bit, you know. I was a fairly big guy, and I liked to pitch high and inside, and once in awhile, I'd hit somebody. They wouldn't really know if I was actually throwing at them or if I was just trying to brush them back. Well, that led to that little altercation I had with Sadaharu Oh and the Giants in 1968.

The tying or winning run was on third, Oh-san was up, and I had a base open and two outs. So the situation called for me to walk him. I told myself that I wasn't going to give him anything good to hit. I wasn't going to let him beat me that day. I got ahead of him and then threw the second pitch inside. I was 1-1, and I thought that I'd come back inside, because it was okay if I walked him or even hit him. So I came back inside again. By doing it a second time, I guess he thought I was throwing at him, and he got a little riled up. He never swung at me or anything, he just talked. I

couldn't understand what he was saying, but I figured that it wasn't something nice. But when he started talking to me, his dugout started coming on to the field, and one of the coaches started doing all that karate stuff and knocked me down! I thought, "Man, they're going to stomp all over me!" So I got up and started defending myself. I hit the guy who had given me that karate chop and broke my thumb. Then, everything went haywire. After they separated everybody, they brought Masatoshi Gondo in to relieve me, and he bopped Oh-san in the head, and it started all over again!

It was just one of those altercations that happens in a game. To me, it wasn't a big deal. But to the Japanese, it was quite an incident. We ended up going in front of a judge and paying a fine of about 320 bucks. In 1969, I got traded to the Buffaloes, and I've always felt that the reason I got traded was because of that altercation with Oh-san the year before.

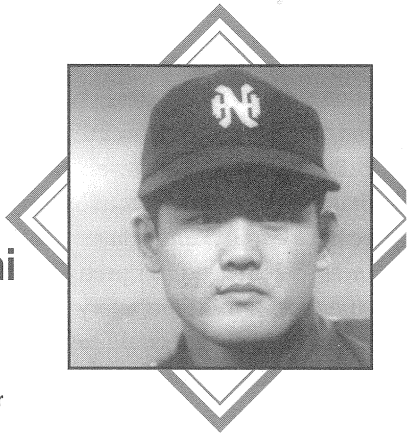
The manager I had my last year [1969], Osamu Mihara, would pull some stunts! He was liable to pull you out with a ten-run lead or do some of the strangest things like bunt when you are behind or steal when you're behind four runs and things of that nature. If you went three for three, and you came up in a key situation, Mihara-san would take you out, because he figured you had your three hits, and you were not going to get another one! Well, he took me out of one game when I was ahead 5-1. I wasn't pitching that good, but hell I was ahead 5 to 1. I had just finished the fourth inning and was thinking that if I could get another inning in here, I'd get a win. So I got ready to go pitch the fifth inning, and he pulled me back, and he said, "Bacque, we're going to change you and let the other guy go in." I said "What!? No, you got to be crazy!" He said, "No. We're going to let the other guy pitch." Then I understood why none of the players—Japanese or American—liked the guy. He was just a funny type of character, and that's the way he was.

I only played for him a few months, because that year, I ruptured a disc. I was told that I shouldn't go back to baseball, because it could happen again. I promised that if after the operation, I could walk out of hospital, then I'd just give up the game. That was probably the most difficult thing that I ever had to do. We really were enjoying life in Japan. It was like home for us. My first eight years of my married life were in Japan, and my children were born there. My wife loved it over there. I don't know who was more disappointed, my wife or me. I think that's why when it was time to

leave, I didn't really tell anybody. I got my ticket and just took off, hoping that I would get back over there someday but not expecting to.

But I get to go back every few years for the old-timer games. They're a lot of fun, and they treat us like royalty. We stay in some of the best hotels; we have fantastic breakfasts; the last time, we had a couple of banquets—it was major league. It's pretty great to be back. Japan was just a wonderful experience for me. So, every time I go back, I just cherish the moments.

The only thing I could say is, I wish I was twenty-four years old again and back in Japan!



10 Masanori Murakami

Born: May 6, 1944, in Otsuki, Yamanashi Prefecture, Japan
1964–65: San Francisco Giants pitcher
1963, 1966–74: Nankai Hawks pitcher
1975: Hanshin Tigers pitcher
1976–82: Nippon Ham Fighters pitcher

As a young Nankai Hawks pitcher, Masanori Murakami went to the San Francisco Giants organization for seasoning in 1964. His surprising success led to a call-up with the big league club in September and a contract dispute between the Giants and the Hawks. Murakami elected to play another season with the Giants before returning to Japan. He went on to pitch for seventeen seasons in Japan Pro Baseball racking up 103 career wins. In 1968, Murakami was 18-4 with a 2.38 ERA. After retiring as an active player, he became a baseball commentator. He currently lives in Tokyo.

WITH HIDEO NOMO going over to the Major Leagues in 1995, people started to wonder who, if anyone, had done it before. The generation under forty years old didn't know about me and were surprised to know about my career. Nomo knew what I had accomplished in the States, and it gave him confidence to think that he could do it, too. I became famous as a result of Nomo going to the majors, and I have great respect for his achievement.

During World War II, my father was in Manchuria and China, and then he spent five years in the Soviet Union, so I didn't really have him around. After the War, he was very strict and I was scared of him. He actually didn't like baseball very much, so when I wanted to play, he said "No." But, one day I said to him, "I'd like to play baseball in elementary school," and he said OK. I played three years, but when I went to middle school, he said that I couldn't play anymore. He wanted me to become a doctor. So, I did Judo

for three months, but I didn't like it. In September of my second year, I started secretly playing baseball. One day, he found out, and he went to the school and spoke with the manager. That night, I was scared to go back home. He said, "Sit down over here." And then he said, "Playing baseball is okay as long as you continue studying hard." I played one year in middle school; then I played in high school.

When baseball first came over to Japan in the Meiji Era, it was influenced by *bushido*—the samurai spirit. There was a military approach to training that would be unimaginable in the United States. This was probably true both before and after World War II. By the way, you know that during World War II, we were prohibited from using any English words so we couldn't say, "strike out" or things like that.

I went to Hosei Second High School, which is attached to Hosei University. When I entered there were 850 students in my year, and on the first-day of practice for the baseball team, two hundred came out. A few days later at the end of practice, we did something called the derby. The third-year students would get into teams and take turns running around the baseball field. But, all of the first-year and second-year students would have to run with each team. So, we didn't get to rest. By the end of the first day of doing this practice, fifty had dropped out. This was repeated day after day, until only forty or so people remained.

In my day, to practice you had to have guts. They wouldn't even let us drink water during practice. So we would think of devious ways to get a drink of water. For example, I was a pitcher, so every now and then, I would need to change my undershirt. Whenever I went to change, I would make sure that nobody was looking and take a sip from a faucet. The outfielders had it even tougher. When a ball would be hit beyond the field and go into somebody's yard, they would chase the ball, apologize to the owner of the house for having intruded on their property, and then ask for a sip of water. There used to be rice patties around the baseball field, so some outfielders would drink from there.

This was just twelve or thirteen years after World War II, so there wasn't a lot of money, there wasn't a lot of goods, there wasn't a lot of anything really. Balls were very valuable, and they would slowly deteriorate as we practiced, and the strings would come apart. When that happened, a first- or second-year player had to take it home, stitch it back up, and bring it

back by the next day. If the stitching was wrong, then he would have to take it back and do it all over.

Third-year students had real power over the first-year and second-year students, and there was a very rigid chain of command. It was almost like the military. It's still true today. If a first-year player made a mistake, all the first-year players would be punished. Often, first-years would have to stand at attention and listen to the third-years lecture about the mistake, but sometimes we had to squat with our heels up for a thirty-minute lecture. If anybody lost his balance, we would have to squat with a bat sandwiched behind our knees. So even today, I am still close to my old teammates. We get together at the beginning of every year.

I played for a strong team, and we won the National High School Tournament at Koshien in 1960 and 1961. I was the second pitcher, but I only pitched once. To win Koshien is every high school player's dream. During three years of high school, the players have a hard, tough time, and they put everything into winning. So to actually step on the ground of Koshien Stadium is like a dream come true. Of course, many schools never make it to Koshien. For three years of hardship, they work toward this big goal, and eventually they are probably going to lose and end up crying. The three years of hardship, their misgivings, regrets, and joys are all symbolized by the tears they cry after losing that game. But I didn't cry.

The summer after my third year, Mr. Tsuruoka [then manager of the professional team Nankai Hawks] came to my home several times to talk with my father. Scouts from other teams also came to visit. They all talked about how much money I would make if I signed a contract with them. But Mr. Tsuruoka said, "If you sign up with the Nankai Hawks, we will seriously consider letting you go study abroad in America." I said, "Really? You would really be willing to let me go?" But after I signed, somebody else was allowed to go to spring training in America for two weeks, so I thought, "Oh, he's the one who got to go, and since the promise was only verbal, I guess they are never going to let me go."

We immediately went into spring training and played exhibition games. One day, it was snowing really hard, and I had to pitch during practice for forty minutes. My fastballs and curve balls were pretty good at that time, but the pitching coach said, "Hey, raise your arm a little higher when you throw the ball." I followed in his directions, but it was really cold, and it was snowing hard. Suddenly when I pitched, I heard this sound—a "snap"

from my elbow. Even though I had injured my elbow, they used me throughout the games in March. When the season finally opened, they sent me to the minors.

In my second year, around February 20th, they said suddenly, "Hey, you are going to America!" So I had to get together the various documents, take a photo, go to the U.S. consulate in Kobe, and in March, I and two other rookies were able to go. This was, of course, my first-time going abroad, so I was really happy and excited.

We flew over to the United States on Pan-American. When I looked at San Francisco from the airplane window, I thought, "Wow, this is like fantasyland!" After landing, I went to Candlestick Park to greet the front-office people. I was in my suit, but I went out onto the mound and pretended to pitch. I still have a photograph of that moment. It was like a school trip. We saw the Golden Gate Bridge, Fishermen's Wharf, Chinatown, Disneyland, Hollywood, and Universal Studios. I ate good food and ate good crab. Up to that point, it was really fun. And then, they took us to Arizona.

Casa Grande is in the middle of the desert, with only one road running through it. There's nothing there, and we were left all alone with the team, and somehow we had to communicate in English or Spanish. We would hitchhike to the nearest town, which took about twenty to thirty minutes by car, to do our shopping. Everything seemed new and interesting to us. In Japanese baseball, they pay us every month from January through December. So I had expected that they would pay our salary at the end of March, but we waited and waited, and it never came. Eventually, our supply of money started to dwindle, and we didn't know whom to ask for help. But then, we left for Fresno in April.

At Fresno, somebody was supposed to put us up in their home. We spent three days in the hotel waiting for them to show up, but they didn't. By then, we had no money left. Fortunately, there was a branch of the Bank of Tokyo in Fresno. We ran into the bank and said, "We're here from Japan, we don't have any money, and we need to find an apartment!" The bank employees took us around to look for an apartment. At one location, we met Mr. Saeki, a young Japanese man, who introduced us to his mother, and she put us up. Finally, at the end of April, they paid us.

At last, the season was about to begin. When we went to the ball park, the manager came out with four cardboard boxes and told us to find a uniform that fit. But we couldn't understand him. We were just standing

there, not understanding anything. Meanwhile, our teammates were going through the boxes looking for uniforms. Well, we were the last ones. I finally found a uniform at the very bottom of the box. It was the only one left, and fortunately, it fit me. For home games, I found number six. But in the road uniform box, only number eight was left, so the manager said, that it was okay to have different numbers for home and away games.

There was always a group of pranksters on the team. They taught us useful English phrases, but when we returned to our home-stay parents and used these phrases, they would scold us for using bad words! My favorite place to sit on the bus was at the very front by the door. I wanted to sleep on the bus trips, but the pranksters in the back would throw these crumpled pieces of paper at me. Finally, I yelled, "Stop it!" but they wouldn't. So I got really angry and grabbed a big wrench at the foot of the driver's seat. I knew pretty much who was throwing the paper at me, but I went to each of my twenty teammates and said, "Is it you? Is it you?" And they all said no. But after that, nobody bothered me again.

The manager basically decided to use me as a closer. I would pitch for three innings from the seventh through the ninth innings. I was in good condition, and I did okay. The local paper wrote that whenever Mashi Murakami pitched, the Fresno Giants would win.

At the end of August, I went to the clubhouse, and a few guys were talking in a group so I went and joined them. They said to me, "You, too!" And I said, "What?" Then, they explained that in September, the Major League teams were going to allow forty people on the bench, and from our team I was going.

On the 30th, the owner came and gave me my airplane ticket and told me the name of the hotel in New York where I was to go. I took a propeller airplane to San Francisco. I thought that somebody would be there to welcome me but no, nobody. At John F. Kennedy Airport, I thought that somebody would meet me, but again nobody was there, so I had to find my way to the limousine bus and the hotel. Once I arrived in the hotel, I tried to check in, but my name wasn't on the list. I was at a loss. I just sat in the corner of the lobby for about twenty minutes, and finally the travel secretary walked by and said, "Hey, are you the Japanese pitcher?" and I said, "Yeah." So I finally got to my room.

The next day, we went to Shea Stadium. We changed into our uniforms, and I wore the dark navy blue undershirt that we used in the minor leagues. We went out onto the field, and the traveling secretary came up to me and said, "Hey, what you wearing? The Giants wear black, not navy blue." Since I didn't have the correct undershirt, I cut the sleeves and hid it underneath my uniform and returned to practice. But before we finished, the general manager called me to the clubhouse and gave me a contract. He said, "Sign here." And I said, "No."

Why didn't I sign when he told me to sign? Well, I had already signed a contract before leaving Japan, and I was used to the Japanese way, where you only sign a contract once a year. Also, my parents back home had told me to be very careful about contracts, and it was in English so I couldn't understand what it said.

They kept on trying to explain why I needed to sign, but I couldn't understand their explanation. They went out into the stands and found a Japanese person who came down and explained to me that when you move from the minors to the majors, you have to sign a new contract to be able to play. This was fifteen or twenty minutes before game time, and the roster had already been officially submitted before I finally understood and signed the contract. Immediately the GM telephoned the commissioner and told him that Masanori Murakami had signed the contract and could now play in the Major Leagues.

I was in the left-field bullpen, and we were losing 4-0. Then we got a call saying if we didn't score in the eighth-inning, I was up. I started warming up, and we didn't score. Finally, it was my turn to come in.

I heard the stadium announcer say, "Now pitching, Number 10, Masanori Murakami." And the door opened from the bullpen out onto the field. There were lights all-around—and forty thousand fans! To stay calm, I started humming the *Sukiyaki* song. Everybody in the stands was looking at me, so I hummed the song, and I walked out. I didn't run, because I had to stay calm. Once I got to the pitcher's mound, several of my teammates came over and watched me throw some practice pitches. Then the catcher and I confirmed the signs. I had decided that my first pitch was going to be a fastball to the outside corner. Tom Haller, the catcher, signaled me to go with it. And I threw it—my first big league pitch.

I remember still, I struck out the first batter, Charlie Smith. The second batter got a base hit to center, but I struck out the third batter. Finally, the fourth grounded out to shortstop. In the top of the ninth inning, we scored two runs. There was still a runner on base, and I was hoping for a home run so that I could pitch in the bottom of the ninth, but unfortunately, it didn't happen, and the game ended there.

During the game, I was really calm, and after the game was over, I felt a sense of satisfaction. However, the next day, when I saw myself in the newspaper, I really became overwhelmed. I thought, "Wow, I've really done something here!" That night, I phoned home.

Well, the season ended, and the Giants said I could play the following season. So, I signed a contract with them. After the season, I decided to play winter ball in Arizona. I asked my father to have the Nankai Hawks get in touch with me, because I wanted to know what was happening. When the Hawks' representative called, I could tell that he was calling from a bar or restaurant because of the background noise, and all he said was, "Come home." So I went back to Japan. But I didn't understand what had happened.

When I returned, people told me that there wasn't an official trade between the Hawks and the Giants. The Giants claimed that they had paid ten thousand dollars to get me, but the Hawks just said, "You are a Nankai player." I think that the Nankai Hawks probably made a mistake somewhere along the way, but their understanding was that they were going to let me go to the United States, and when they wanted me back, I was going to come back. After listening to the Hawks' side of the story, I started thinking that maybe they were right. They had given me the opportunity to study baseball in America, and after investing so much in me, they wouldn't give me up. So, I also signed with the Nankai Hawks. At that point, I didn't know whom to trust.

The commissioner of Major League Baseball, Ford Frick, became very, very angry and said, "We are not going to allow Murakami to play any games in Japan whether it's major or minor league. He can only practice in Japan." I was in limbo.

Finally, a decision was made in the beginning of May, and I went back to the United States. My teammates welcomed me back very warmly. I had been away from the game, so it took me a while to get a hang of the game again, but gradually, my condition improved. There are a lot of happy memories from that season. We were in first place in August, but in September,

the Dodgers overtook us, and we lost by only two games. I pitched really well against the Dodgers, and I think that if I had joined the team on time, the Giants would have won the pennant. That really irks me.

The biggest difference between the Major Leagues and Japan was the power. Overall, I think that Japanese pitchers had better control, but although there were some Japanese who could throw hard, the American pitchers had the power to throw really fast. In those days, there were twenty teams in the majors, so the level of the athletes was very high. The Japanese teams had been working hard to reach that level, but there was still a difference.

Another difference was in how they used pitchers. In Japan, there were starters and relievers, but the starters were the really good pitchers, and when it looked like you could win, then a reliever might come in to finish up the game. A pitcher would start one day, then the next few days, maybe he would be used in relief and then start all over again. This was the style that was used in the United States in maybe 1910 or 1920, and it really tired out the pitchers. In the United States, there was a rotation, and using a setup man and closer had already started to be established in the 1960s. For example, Juan Marichal only relieved maybe twice a season, and that was always at the end of the season when we couldn't afford to lose.

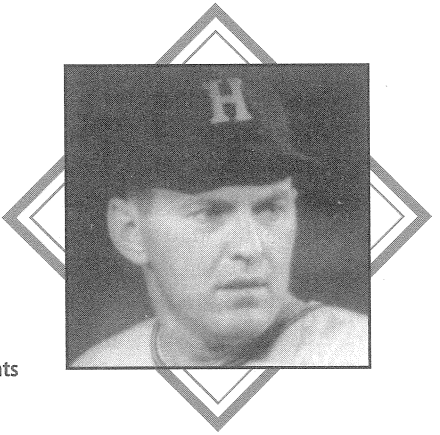
At the end of the season, they offered me another contract. I had been paid fifteen thousand dollars for 1965, but they ended up offering me thirty thousand dollars for the next year, plus they would bring my parents over to the States for one month. But I didn't sign. I heard their best offer, went back to Japan, and signed with the Nankai Hawks. Why did I do that? Because I had promised Mr. Tsuruoka. He had told me that I was going to study in America, and to me study abroad meant that I would come back. So I opted for keeping my promise with Mr. Tsuruoka rather than staying in the Major Leagues.

At that time, the Nankai Hawks had fantastic pitching and were considered the top team in the Pacific League. Since I had been used as a relief pitcher in the United States, that was how the Hawks planned to use me at first. By playing in the majors, I had become famous, so Nankai was expecting that a lot of people would come out to the ball park to watch me. But soon after I returned, a commentator looked at my form and said that my arm was lower than it used to be. After hearing that, I started raising my arm a little higher, and that put me off-balance. So my first year back,

I didn't do very well. Then the fans started yelling, "Go back to America! Go back to America!" It took me about two years to get back into my original form.

The year I returned, I had dinner with the president of a big Yokohama company. Afterwards, we went to a bar. As we sat at the counter, I started singing a song about San Francisco, and I was crying. The president of the Yokohama company said to me, "I can talk to Mr. Tsuruoka and convince him to let you go back to the United States next year. But you would have to come back to Japan the following year." But I said to him, "No, no. That's okay."

But, looking back on my life, there is a lot of regret. It was really a difficult situation. If I had returned to the Major Leagues, I would have realized my dream, but I would have betrayed Mr. Tsuruoka. Yet, because I kept my promise to Mr. Tsuruoka, I forever carry this sense of regret.



11 Daryl Spencer

Born: July 13, 1928, in Wichita, Kansas
1952–59: New York/San Francisco Giants infielder
1960–61: St. Louis Cardinals infielder
1961–63: Los Angeles Dodgers infielder
1963: Cincinnati Reds infielder
1964–68: Hankyu Braves infielder
1971–72: Hankyu Braves infielder and coach

After a very successful Major League career, Daryl Spencer joined the Hankyu Braves in 1964. Spencer was an immediate success, finishing second in the league in home runs, third in RBIs, seventh in batting, and making the Best Nine team. In 1965, he was involved in a controversial race with Katsuya Nomura for the home-run and batting crowns when a traffic accident ended his season. Nonetheless, he still finished second in home runs and batting average and once again made the Best Nine team. After a brief retirement, Spencer returned to Japan in 1971 and 1972 as a player coach. He now lives in Wichita and returns to Japan for old-timers games.

I GOT RELEASED from Cincinnati on my birthday, July 13, 1963. As soon as I was released, I was contacted about going to Japan. But I was so pissed off about being released from Cincinnati that I didn't want to mess with baseball anymore. So I just went back to Wichita and played in the summer pro tournament here. In '64, Joe Stanka called me on behalf of the Nankai Hawks, and the Hankyu Braves contacted me. A good friend of mine was going to Hankyu, so I decided that even for less money to go with the Hankyu Braves. Two weeks before I was supposed to go, he backed out.

Once I got to Japan, I found out what a terrible mistake I had made. The Nankai Hawks' ball park was like a bandbox, so there would have been no telling how many home runs I would have hit. Plus, they already had the

great home-run hitter Katsuya Nomura. I'm sure that the Nomura and Spencer combination would have been famous. But I was with Hankyu. They were a last-place team for years and years. I don't think that they had ever won anything in their thirty-year history.

I arrived in Japan around February 28th. I had played in the big leagues, so they welcomed me with open arms. They gave me an interpreter, and right away, I had a lot of interviews. Ordinarily, they started their season in the first week of April, but in '64, they had the Olympics in Japan, so they started a month earlier. I had only one week of spring training, which was great for me, because I hated spring training! When I played in the big leagues, I had learned how to read certain pitches, and it was even easier for me in Japan. I could pick up their pitches, and I knew what they were throwing me, so I had a lot of confidence. I had a great first year, but we finished second to the Nankai Hawks by 2 1/2 games.

In the Major Leagues, you play percentage baseball, but the Japanese knew nothing about percentage baseball. It was so frustrating. Four times during the season, we had runners on second and third with the eighth-place hitter up, and instead of walking him and facing the pitcher, we pitched to him. Three of the four times, he beat us. So there were the 2 1/2 games that we lost! They knew nothing about pitching around certain hitters. Most of the teams had only one or two really good hitters that could beat you. Yet, we would consistently let those guys beat us and then say, "Oh, nice batting. Nice batting." If I'd been the manager, there would have been no hesitation. I would have walked those tough hitters to get to the others. They knew nothing about percentage baseball.

Another thing, when there were runners on first and second, the first baseman would hold the runner on at first base. I tried to get them to play behind the runner, but they wouldn't do it. After a couple years, I switched from second base to first base, and I started playing behind the runner. Soon, all the other teams started copying me. Well, that's just a simple thing that you learn in the minor leagues over here. I think what happened is that one time with runners on first and second, they held a guy on and picked him off first, so they thought, "Well, that's a great play." But, it's certainly not a good percentage play.

They would also bunt in the first inning, but when you needed a bunt in the late innings, they would do something else, like try a hit-and-run that

would backfire. It was so frustrating. I'd hit a home run and get us ahead, and then we'd make a bunch of errors. I went through too many at bats thinking, "How much can I do?"

The whole league was just that way. The standard pitchout in the States is the catcher gives a sign, steps outside, and throws the guy out. Well, I picked up all their signs right away, and I'd relay them to the catcher. But instead of calling for a pitchout, they'd call for a high inside pitch, and the guy would steal. I tried really hard to get through to them for a couple weeks, and then I thought, "The hell with it. It's no use. There's no hope." Finally, about two-thirds of the way through the season, I talked to my interpreter, and I said, "Tell the catcher Okamura that if I give him a sign, to call a pitchout, step outside, and get the runner." Well, by golly, it happened. Then they said, "Oh, that's a good play!" Well, it took me three months to get through to them!

I was known as a hard slider in the States. During the course of the year, I noticed that on double plays, the runner on first would get about two-thirds of the way to second base and just turn out to right field, and the second baseman would just stand there and make the double play. So one time, we were playing the Orions and Koyama, one of the best pitchers in Japan, was pitching. He had very good control and could throw nine out of ten pitches for strikes. It was 0-0 in the eighth inning. Gordy Windhorn was on second base, and I was the batter. They walked me to face the next batter, because he was an easy double-play man, as he hit a lot of ground balls. So I yelled down to Windhorn, "If he hits a ground ball, don't stop at third. Just keep going, 'cause I'm going to knock out the second baseman!" I had no more got that out of my mouth when the guy hit a ground ball to short. When he threw it to second, I knocked the second baseman down, he dropped the ball, and Windhorn scored. Then, they had a thirty-minute argument on the field. They were saying, "Oh, Spencer-san, that's not a legal play. You can't do that." Even the owner of the visiting team came out on to the field to argue. Finally, the umpires got together said that there was no rule that said I couldn't do that.

So we won the game, 1-0. The next day, the papers were all talking about Spencer's hard sliding. Well, that day, one of our players goes in and breaks up a double play. A couple of nights later, I slid into home and knocked the ball away from the catcher. Now all of a sudden, we were sliding hard into

bases, and all the other teams were starting to do it as well. It changed the whole style of baserunning in Japanese baseball.

That first year was just unbelievable. I ended up with thirty-six home runs and ninety-four RBIs, and I was eleventh in the league in batting. I think I failed only once all year to drive in a run that was in scoring position. I hit third, and what made the ninety-four RBIs even more remarkable was that the two players in front of me hit .244 and .238. I also made the All-Star team and hit a home run in the All-Star game. I ended up signing a two-year contract. I came back home for a couple of months and then went back to Japan for my second year.

In 1965, the Nankai Hawks just ran away with the league. There was no doubt about who was going to win, it was just by how many games. Nomura was having a fantastic season. I had made up my mind that I was just going to concentrate at each at bat, because too many times the year before, I went up thinking the hell with it because even a home run wasn't going to help. So the game before the All-Star break, I hit for the cycle. I had never hit for the cycle before in my life. I was hitting .345 and had twenty-five home runs at the break on July 16.

A month after the All-Star break, we had a series with the Nankai Hawks. About twenty minutes before one of the games, I had a meeting with my interpreter and the batting coach. Nobody had ever won the triple crown, and Nomura was hitting .343, had a whole bunch of RBIs, and had twenty-seven home runs to my thirty-three. The batting coach said, "Spencer, you must concentrate on keeping Nomura from winning the triple crown." They didn't think Nomura was worthy of the triple crown after all the other great players who had failed to do it. I said, "Well, don't worry. I'm going to win the home-run title." Then he said, "No, no, no. That has already been decided. You will not win the home-run title." I about dropped out of my seat. I said, "What are you talking about?! I've got six more than he does, and I'm in a groove." But he said, "Forget about that. You must concentrate on winning the batting title, because Nomura has a history of slumping at the end of the season, and his batting average will come down." I left the meeting, and the Hawks walked me three times that game. But I didn't think that much about it.

We went to Tokyo to play the Orions and Koyama—who can throw strikes blindfolded. They promptly walked me eight straight times! The

ninth time, I threw my bat at the ball and grounded to second, or it would have been nine straight walks. Koyama walked me four straight, the last time with the bases loaded. I was getting the message. Koyama was quoted in the papers as saying, "Why should we let an American win the title?" Nomura was also a personal friend of his. That really irritated me, so I quit playing. I thought what the hell. I sat out seven or eight games and hit only one home run in a span of thirty-five games. During that time, Nomura tied me at thirty-four home runs. Like I said, I just kind of quit playing, so my average was down to .310 or something, and I had lost my desire to compete.

Although the Nankai Hawks and Tokyo Orions wouldn't pitch to me, three teams would if the situation called for it. We were down in Fukuoka, and I went out there in batting practice one day and just kind of turned the switch on, which I could do in Japan. I just decided that I was going to start hitting again and see what happened. Nomura had forty home runs and I was stuck at thirty-four. I hit a home run that night and added a couple more in a home series to give me three in five games and a total of thirty-seven.

We were scheduled to play the Hawks in a doubleheader at our ball park, and Nomura was in a heck of a slump. The interpreter came in and said, "The manager wants you to play today, and you can bat leadoff." I said, "I'm not going to play! They're just going to walk me!" They said, "We'll pitch to Nomura, but if they don't pitch to you, we won't pitch to Nomura anymore." But Nomura didn't even play in the first game. I went out there, and the first time up, they walked me in four straight pitches. The next time up, I went up with my bat upside down, and they still walked me! Well, I went to first base, and I just turned, walked to the dugout, and said, "I ain't playing! This is ridiculous!"

When it was time for the second game, they came in again and said, "You must play this game, because we are on national television. Nomura is going to play, and like I said before, we will pitch to him the first time he comes up." Well, he was in a heck of a slump, and he couldn't hit anything, so I played. Joe Stanka was pitching for Nankai. He didn't want me to hit a home run, because then his players would think that he gave it to me. But, Joe would challenge me, and he pitched hard against me. So, the first time up, Nomura struck out and looked terrible. At my first time up, I hit a line drive to the shortstop, but at least he pitched to me. Nomura popped out the second time, and I homered off Stanka. It was my thirty-eighth home

run. Nomura only had forty, and we had eleven games left. So when I came to home plate, I said, "I'm going to get you, Moose!—that was Nomura's nickname—I'm going to get you! Only two more!" He understood enough English to know what I said. The third time up, I batted against a Japanese pitcher, and he walked me on four pitches, so I went to first base and left the game.

After the doubleheader, we got a day off before a team that would pitch to me came to town. At dinner time, about three o'clock in the afternoon, I told my wife, "You better come to the ball park tonight. I know that I'm going to hit one home run, and I'll probably hit two." That was just the way I felt, because I knew they would pitch to me. I couldn't say that in the big leagues, of course, but in Japan, I just felt superior and had a lot of confidence. I got on my little Honda motorbike that I used to ride for about a mile to the train station. About a block and a half away from my house, I was going down this little street, and I saw this little delivery truck start to pull out of a side street. I tried to swerve, but he just ran right into me! I got knocked down. I tried to get up and said, "Oh my God, my legs hurt!" My wife was only a block and a half away, so she came running down there. They took me to the hospital, and I had a broken leg! I had made up my mind that I was going to beat Nomura for the home-run title, but I'll never know. He ended up hitting .320 with forty-two home runs and winning the triple crown. I finished up at .311 and thirty-eight home runs.

The next season, I went back to Japan, but I had already made up my mind that I would play out my contract and then go home. In spring training, they said, "Oh, you'll get the home-run title this year," but I had made up my mind that I was hardly going to put out. I would just go about the business of playing baseball. But crazy things happen. During the off-season, we got a new shortstop named Toshizo Sakamoto. This kid was batting second, getting on base all the time, and making all the plays in the infield. I just got enthused. I thought, "Now, we have a chance to do something!" So I went back for two more years.

Sakamoto just changed the whole team and especially my attitude about us winning. We also got a rookie left fielder named Tokuji Nagaike. I taught him how to read some of the pitchers, and in '67 he hit twenty-seven home runs. In fact, he got so good that he would come up to me and say, "I've got this guy's pitches. Can you see them?" He was probably about

twenty-three, and I was thirty-nine at the time, so his eyes must have been better than mine. I said, "I can't see them." He ended up teaching me how to read some of the other pitchers. We just started having a better team, and we ended up winning two championships [1967 and 1968]. After our first championship, the team was really high, because they had never won anything for thirty-two years. So they gave us a free trip to Hong Kong, Bangkok, Singapore, all expenses paid!

We got beat by the Giants in the Japan Series. I did real good and hit three home runs, but we just couldn't beat the Giants. Oh and Nagashima were just too much. Of course, we kept letting Oh beat us all the time. But, they just were better than we were.

I pulled off some crazy things over there. I'd get behind a runner and go up and grab his pants. The fans would all yell and cheer. I'll never forget this one time in Tokyo. There was already one out, and I made the second out on a ground ball. When I got to first, for some dumb reason, I just kept on running out to the visitors' bullpen bench in foul territory past first base. I figured the next guy up was just going to make a quick third out, and I'd go to my second-base position from the bullpen bench. Well, I sat down on the bench with the pitchers. The fans were just going goofy, because no one had ever done that before. I don't even know why I did it. Well, I'll be damned the batter went 2 and 2, and then the umpire called time and said, "Spencer get back to the dugout." So I jogged back to the dugout, and the fans were yelling and cheering. The fans really liked goofy stuff like that, since they never got it from their own players. My teammates loved it, too, but the manager was very upset.

Most Japanese teams had three or four players who were guaranteed starters, but the other starters were chosen based on how they did in pregame practice. The manager and batting coach would watch batting practice to see how a hitter did. If he did well, he would be in the starting lineup. Well, one time we were playing the Nankai Hawks, and a pretty good sidearm pitcher named Mutsuo Minagawa was starting. He was tough to hit. I didn't hit that well in batting practice, but I didn't pay that much attention to it. After infield practice, I went up to our locker room. It was kind of an odd deal. You had to walk behind our dugout, down a hallway, and up stairs to get to the locker room. I was changing into my game jersey and game shoes when the interpreter came up and said, "The manager says you take

rest today, your condition not so good." That really irritated me. I had beaten Minagawa in a game not too long before. I said, "OK. Well, I'll just get in my car and go home." I was in shorts and a T-shirt, so I put on my little sandals and walked down the stairs.

They were playing the national anthem, and Don Blasingame, who was coaching the Nankai Hawks, was standing in the hallway. He said, "Where you going?" I said, "Well, my condition's no good. I've got to leave." I was still in the original lineup on the scoreboard. It had Spencer hitting third and playing first base. I told Don, "Watch this!" I went to our dugout, and instead of getting my bats and leaving, I got my bat and took my place in the on-deck circle as the next batter, because the lead-off hitter had made an out, and the second-place hitter was in the batter's box. See, I was still in the game, because they hadn't made an announcement yet. So I was out there swinging my bat in the on-deck circle in my shorts, T-shirt, and bathroom sandals. The players were going crazy. The fans were going nuts. And my interpreter was yelling, "D., get back here! Get back here! Get back here!" But I said, "No, I'm still in the lineup." Finally, I walked back, and the fans were still going crazy. I think I got fined fifty-thousand yen for that. I just did things on the spur of the moment. And would you believe it, a week later we played this team again, and I went three for four off Minagawa!

I just finally had enough. We had won two championships but lost in the Japan Series. I was forty years old, and I had made a little bit of money, so I went back to Wichita and opened a restaurant franchise. I did that for two years, when I got a call from the Hankyu Braves. They wanted me to come back as a coach. I said, "OK, I'll come back. I like Japan." I went back for spring training, and I must have weighed 260 pounds. They had a hard time finding a uniform that fit me. They put me in charge of hitting ground balls to all the infielders. In America, an infielder may take fifteen to twenty ground balls a day, but I was hitting about seventy-five to each of twelve infielders every day. I started to lose weight and get into pretty good shape. One day, I asked if I could hit batting practice, and I hit three or four out of the ball park. A few days later, they called me in and asked me to be a player-coach. I ended up playing in fifty-four games, and we won the championship again.

In the Japan Series, we were playing the Giants again. I was a coach, and we had this young kid named Hisashi Yamada out there pitching in game

three. It was the bottom of the ninth inning, we were ahead 1-0, and they had runners on second and third with Sadaharu Oh up. The catcher looked in the dugout, and Yamada looked in the dugout, asking what should we do? I'm yelling, "Four balls! Four balls!" They don't call it base-on-balls, they call it four balls. The manager went back and got a drink, because he didn't want to make a decision! We pitched to Oh, and he hit a home run to beat us. The next day, the same situation came up in the third inning in a 0-0 game. So, this time, the manager said, "Put him on." But the hog was already out of the barn! They just didn't understand percentage baseball until years later. I guess the thing that summed up Japanese baseball was frustration. There were only one or two players on each team that could hurt you anyhow, and we just let them beat us.

I've probably been back seven times since '72. In 1993, they started old-timers games, and they invited back the Americans that played well. We went back in '93, '95, '97, and were supposed to go back in '99, but then the economy just dropped off, and we couldn't find a sponsor. Finally, last year, they started it up again, and I was asked to manage the U.S.A. old-timers in a two-game series. It's kind of fun to see everybody again, and I hope they keep inviting me back. I enjoyed my years over there. It was an experience I'll never forget.

12 Gordy Windhorn

Born: December 19, 1933, in Watseka, Illinois
1959: New York Yankees outfielder
1961: Los Angeles Dodgers outfielder
1962: Kansas City A's outfielder
1962: Los Angeles Angels outfielder
1964–69: Hankyu Braves outfielder

After a brief Major League career, Gordy Windhorn joined the Hankyu Braves along with Daryl Spencer in 1964. Batting primarily leadoff, Windhorn helped the Braves to three consecutive Pacific League pennants (1967–69). His best season came in 1967 when he hit .285 with twenty-five home runs and fifteen stolen bases and led the league in runs scored. Windhorn did particularly well in the Japan Series, hitting .314 with two home runs in fifty-one at bats. After leaving Japan, he scouted for the Angels for two years before managing and owning a beer-and-wine distributorship. He resides in Danville, Virginia.

DARYL SPENCER AND I were together with the Dodgers in 1961. The next year, I was traded to the Angels, but we still lived in the same apartment complex even though he was with the Dodgers and I was with the Angels. Then I bounced around. I was property of the Cincinnati Reds when I went to Hawaii, and I played in San Diego for a year. Daryl contacted me because the Hankyu Braves were looking for another player. At that time, each team was allowed three foreign players, *gaijin* as we were called. That changed while I was over there to two players. In fact, we had Lee Walls with us in 1965, but then when they dropped the limit down to two, he was not retained. When Daryl called me and wanted to know whether I'd be interested in going, I said, "Yeah, that sounds great to me." I was about ready to hang things up over here anyway. But, of course, I was still property of the

Reds. The Reds said that they would let me go if I bought out my own contract. Which was kind of ridiculous. But we negotiated and I paid them something like fifteen hundred dollars and got a release so I could negotiate with Hankyu. That all transpired in the winter of 1963, and we went over there in '64.

Our reception was fantastic! It was like the greatest players in the world were coming over there. Up to that time, Hankyu had never done too well in the league. I don't think they ever finished higher than third or fourth. The players accepted us just great. Some of them, like our catcher Koji Okamura, would try to speak English. Of course, they loved to hear us try to talk Japanese. It was really amazing. There was a complete language barrier, but we all seemed to get along well together. You think about the War years, but, of course, most of these kids weren't even born at that time. The president of our club, who was instrumental in getting us over there, was a prisoner of war during World War II, and the Americans evidently treated him very well. He always seemed happy that we were there representing his organization.

Of course, we weren't accustomed to their spring-training procedures and things like that. That was a little change. They trained big-time! We went down to an island, Shikoku maybe, I can't recall for sure. There were no Americans down there at all, and it was kind of a backward area. I remember, they told Spencer to get me on his back and run up a hill! Daryl said, "Good golly!" For the first two or three weeks, we hardly played baseball. There was a lot of calisthenics and vigorous training, like running up mountains and running around the ball park numerous times. It was tough! They probably trained the same way they did during the War. It was a change from what we were accustomed to here. Spring training here would last two or three hours. Over there, there was always a morning workout and then lunch break and then an afternoon workout. It was a full day. But we did the best we could. It was a new experience. There's no question about that.

I think the pitchers threw a whole lot more than they should have, but I guess they were thinking more short-term and the more you threw, the better your control got. They didn't seem to care what happened two or three years down the road. Well, what stood out in my mind probably more than anything is the way they thought about the loss of face. A whole lot

of times, once they got their ace pitcher in there, the mangers would hang with them a long time, thinking that they could lose with them and not lose face. If they brought some rookie in there and he lost the ball game, that would make them look bad. That was a big difference between the States and Japan.

When I went over there, they told me that one of our ace pitchers, Takao Kajimoto, once had a record of twenty-one and eighteen. I thought to myself, how in the world does one get a record like that! Well, he would start one game, and the next night, if we were ahead and we needed him to come in and save the game, he might come in pitch five or six innings! One night, he struck out eight or nine in a row, but the next night, he couldn't get anybody out. The poor guy probably couldn't lift his arm! The Japanese pitchers didn't throw in the nineties, like they do here, but their control was absolutely unreal because they threw every day. I used to say, "Man, those guys' arms are going to be gone."

None of them really had a great curve ball. They had what they call a *shuto*. Have you ever heard that? A *shuto* ain't nothing but a sinker. Well, it would be the opposite of a cut fastball. It's just something that they would turn over. They would work the inside, and then they would work the outside on you. When the plate got wide, and the umpire helped them out little bit, it was tough to protect both the inside and outside. Their main thing was location. They would never come right over the middle plate. They would work you right down to three-two and still try to get you on the outside the plate. I'm sure this has changed since we were there in the '60s, but most pitchers were done by the time they were thirty years old, because they threw all the time. But while they were healthy, their control was fantastic.

Our home park was in Nishinomiya, which is halfway between Osaka and Kobe. It was an old, old stadium—probably one of the oldest in Japan. It was very large and, of course, it had a skinned infield. By skinned, I mean all dirt. But it was well-manicured and just as smooth as a pool table. Of course, the clubhouse had Japanese-style baths. They didn't have showers like they have here. But that was no problem. Once we learned that one first bathed outside the tub before you got in, we enjoyed it. They had two dressing rooms. The older, establish players stayed in one locker room, and then the younger players stayed in another. Daryl and I were with the older players.

The Braves had a dormitory right outside the stadium where the rookies and younger players stayed. That was the farm team. They would jockey

players back and forth from the big team to the farm team. The younger players were not really accepted until they had established themselves. They had to spend time on the farm team to merit the chance to get in with the older players. There was definitely a division there, I can recall that.

The American players always had nice facilities. We got to stay in American-style hotels, except in the very few instances when we traveled to areas that didn't have them. Then, of course, we stayed in Japanese inns. They were very comfortable, and the food was extremely good. Very seldom would we travel with the rest of the team. The American players had our own travel arrangements, just like our living quarters on the road were always separate. We flew almost all the time. I didn't think that it was always fair to give us privileges that the other players didn't have. But they were accustomed to their Japanese inns, and I didn't see any animosity toward us because we were treated differently.

My family went over with me, and we lived just outside of Kobe in an extremely nice area. We had a Western-style house with a live-in maid, and it was great. The area had a lot of foreigners, not only Americans but a lot of nationalities lived in the Kobe area. We just had a great time. My son was four when he came over, and my daughter had just been born. We put our son into a Japanese kindergarten, and in a very short time he was fluent in Japanese. He was a little blond kid, but he could really speak Japanese. He was just four years old, but to go to school, he would get on a train and then on a bus all by himself. When we went shopping, he would be our interpreter. We had a neighbor, from Sweden or Austria, who couldn't speak English, and my son couldn't speak his language so they played in Japanese. That was quite interesting.

The Hankyu Braves had never done well before, but once Daryl and I went over, the team seemed to really come around. We finished second the first year we were there, and after a couple of seasons, we won the pennant, which Hankyu had never done before, in 1967. The fact that we were improving every year was a big, big thing. I ended up hitting about one hundred home runs over there.

Our team's strength was really the pitching staff. We had three aces. Tetsuya Yoneda was one of the older, more-established players. He was a big boy with a good assortment of different pitches. He kept the ball in and had good location. Yoneda was probably one of the smarter pitchers over there. Takao Kajimoto was in also Yoneda's class as far as being an estab-

lished star pitcher. He was a big left-hander—probably six-foot-one or six-foot-two. Americans thought that all the players over there were small, but they weren't. After the War, those kids had different diets, and they got to be good-size boys. Kajimoto was one of the guys who made us feel welcome. Mitsuhiro Adachi was also great and was a good competitor. He threw underhand. He probably could have pitched in the Majors when he was in his prime. He had arm problems the second or third year that I was there, but he came back strong.

The last three years that I was there, 1967, '68, and '69, we played in the Japan Series against the Yomiuri Giants. They were the Yankees of Japan. They had the big stars: Shigeo Nagashima at third base and Sadaharu Oh, the all-time home-run hitter, at first base. The big ace with the Giants was Masaichi Kaneda. I'm sure he's in their Hall of Fame. Of course, we were over there at the end of his career, but I can remember facing him in the series, and he was still pretty tough. He probably had one of the best curve balls in Japan. They were expected to win. They were a class team, and they beat us every year. But, we gave them a good run the last year. I hit two home runs in the fifth game, but they beat us in six games. They were just a good all-around ball club. I think other teams were a little intimidated by them and probably expected not to win.

Baseball was serious over there, but the Japanese thought that they knew the game as well as, if not better than, we did. They were proud, so they wouldn't let you think that you knew more than they. They would observe things that we did, and then a couple of weeks later, they would have a meeting and tell their players what they saw us do. But they never gave us any credit for helping out with fundamentals or other aspects of the game. Another big thing over there was whether we were in condition to play. They'd watch batting practice, and sometimes if you didn't have good swings in batting practice, you wouldn't play!

For the *gaijin* who went over there to play, it was a different game. It's an adjustment, that's what it was, and some guys could never adjust to Japan. It really bugged some guys, like Jim Gentile. He just could never adjust to it. Nor could Johnny Logan. Remember Johnny Logan? He was a National League All-Star for the Braves for several years. He played for the Hawks and had an awful season. One time, he was so down, and he said that he was 0 for 27 or something like that. I said, "Well, shoot, that ain't too

bad." Then he said, "That's twenty-seven games!" They would just throw that *shuto* in on his fists, and that plate would get about twenty inches wide. Once your mind started playing games with you, it would bug you to death, and, of course, the managers didn't help out the situation. The umpiring was also a little bit bad as far as Americans were concerned. But, we couldn't say a whole lot to them, because they couldn't understand us. I had to call the interpreter out there a couple of times to express my opinion.

I was just glad to be there, so I just went along with their program. I figured when in Rome, do as the Romans. I got along with them really well that way. It was just a different world, but it was a good experience. Of course, Daryl Spencer didn't go along with their methods quite as much as I did! He was a big star over here, and he didn't quite agree with the way they operated. He didn't take a lot of junk and did things the way that he wanted to do them. But, of course, he produced, and it was just like in the States. If you were Mickey Mantle, you could do anything you wanted to.

I don't know whether we should talk about stealing signs? You might get me in trouble, but it's water over the dam. Of course, for American players, any edge that gives you an advantage, whether you call it cheating or whether you called it smart baseball, you take it. Players have been stealing signals as long as they played the game. That's why the catcher runs out to talk to the pitcher when you get a man on second base—to switch the signs. Daryl was extremely good at it, and that gave us an advantage a lot of times. We got them different ways. A lot of guys can pick them up from the catcher. Coaches can pick up signs if the catcher doesn't keep his legs together. But it's easier to get them from second base once you learn how to read them. Even runners on first base can read them if they get a good enough lead. You can transmit them to the hitter in different ways by either crossing your legs or clinching a fist or holding your hands straight down your pants. There're just a lot of ways to do it. But the Japanese, I think, didn't believe in it. They thought we were doing something wrong. But there again, you do what you've got to do.

My most memorable moment? Nothing really stands out. I did hit a couple home runs in the Japan Series in 1969. I tried to be a team player and do things that would help the team win. I hit at the top of the lineup most of the time, so my main interest was to get on base and hope to score. Every game, the Braves would give an award for the outstanding player

of the game. I still have those metals. They were big on trophies! They loved to give trophies. In fact, when I left, I had to leave a lot of stuff there. I brought back some of the things that really meant a lot to me. A lot of pictures, of course, they were big on pictures. There were photographers all over the place.

I never did much in the States. I always seemed to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, but I had six good years over in Japan. I got a chance to play every day and feel like I could help the ball club. The fans were great, and I always felt like I was appreciated. My family loved it over there, and we just fit in. It really worked out well, and we were sorry we had to leave. I went back one time in around 1971 for a trip, and it was great. I would love to go back again someday, but I don't suppose I will.

13 Don Blasingame

Born: March 16, 1932, in Corinth, Mississippi
1955–59: St. Louis Cardinals
second baseman
1960–61: San Francisco Giants second baseman
1961–63: Cincinnati Reds second baseman
1963–66: Washington Senators second baseman
1966: Kansas City A's second baseman
1967–69: Nankai Hawks second baseman
1970–77: Nankai Hawks coach
1978: Hiroshima Carp coach
1979–80: Hanshin Tigers manager
1981–82: Nankai Hawks manager

Nicknamed "Blazer," Don Blasingame had a twelve-year Major League career. Known for his speed and hustle, he was named to the National League All-Star team in 1958. He also participated in the 1958 and 1960 Major League tours of Japan. In 1967, Blasingame left for Japan to join the Nankai Hawks and ended up staying for sixteen years as a player, coach, and manager. As a player, Blasingame was named to two Best Nine teams. After acting as a coach for nine seasons, he became the manager of the Hanshin Tigers in 1979 and the Nankai Hawks in 1982. He currently lives in Scottsdale, Arizona.

WHEN I WAS PLAYING with the St. Louis Cardinals in 1958, we went on a tour of Japan after the season. I liked Japan, and we were treated very well. At that time, there wasn't much publicity about Japanese baseball over here, so we really didn't know too much about the Japanese players at first. But, during the tour, we got to know them and realized that some of them had good ability. We went out with them socially, and we got to know some of them pretty well. Shigeo Nagashima stuck out in my mind as being an outstanding player. I think he had just come off his rookie year. He had

all the tools—he could run, field, hit, everything. I also remember Futoshi Nakanishi. He was a big, stocky home-run hitter and a real funny guy. He laughed a lot, which was kind of unusual for the Japanese. Later, he was my head coach at Hanshin, and he took over as manager after I left. I went over again with the San Francisco Giants' tour in 1960. I enjoyed the tours very much, but, at that time, the thought of playing over there professionally didn't enter my mind.

In 1966, Kansas City released me. I probably could have signed on with another team here, but I spoke to Daryl Spencer, who was playing over in Japan. He told me that the Nankai Hawks had just released their second baseman, and the manager, Tsuruoka-san, was looking for an American. I had liked the tours over there, so I was willing to go back and play. I got in touch with them and eventually signed with the Nankai Hawks for the 1967 season.

On the way over, one of our kids came down with chicken pox on the plane. At that time, health inspectors came on the planes, so it was kind of embarrassing because we held up the whole plane. When I finally got off the plane, there were so many writers and photographers that I was looking for some celebrity behind me! Cameras were clicking away, and they wanted interviews right there. Pretty much every time I went back, it was almost that big. And after I became a coach and manager, they gave me a royal reception when I got off the plane. Anyway, my wife ended up quarantined in a hotel room with the kids for about a week. I went to spring training, but I'm sure that first week for her wasn't very pleasant!

During the first week of spring training, all we did was conditioning. I don't think we picked up a bat for about a week. We started out in the morning running around this track. I didn't know how long we were going to run, so each time I would think, "This has got to be the last lap!" But we just kept going and going. After that, it was like boot camp—really! We chopped wood, jumped over ropes, and climbed under stuff. At the end of the day, we ran up a small mountain. The conditioning was quite strenuous. They told me that they knew I wasn't used to it, so if I wanted to drop out, I could. But being hard-headed and not wanting to drop out, I never did it.

My teammates were all friendly. I didn't have any problems with any of them. If you give the Japanese a chance, don't go over there with a chip on

your shoulder, and show that you want to do the work and be one of them, most Americans won't have any problems at all.

Kazuto Tsuruoka, my manager, treated me great and became a real good friend of mine. I couldn't have had a better manager. Somebody told me before I went over, I think it was Spencer, that Tsuruoka liked American players, so I had a good relationship with him. He was a class act. He played old-style baseball, but that was the way they all played back then. At that time, I wasn't sure what they were saying all the time, but he was the Man. There was no doubt about that! He controlled the game.

As I've told many people, even way back then, they definitely had pitchers and position players who could have played in the big leagues. There were a lot of pitchers. For example, my teammate Mutsuo Minagawa could have pitched over here. He was a side-armer and just a good pitcher. A fellow named Yoshinori Hirose could have played over here for certain. He could run. He was quick as a cat on that first step. He didn't steal bases just to run up his numbers. He did it only when he could help the team. I think that he could have stolen even more bases than he did. Of course, Sadaharu Oh could have played over here for sure. He was a good defensive player and good offensive player. And so could Isao Harimoto and Shigeo Nagashima. Nagashima could do it all. He had defense, speed, and could hit.

Katsuya Nomura was also a great hitter. He was as good at hitting the high, inside pitch as anybody I've ever seen because he had a short stroke, and he drove the bat through the zone. He would have been a hitting star in the Majors. He wasn't as good defensively as some of the American catchers, but he could hit anywhere. His arm wasn't real strong, but he was a smart catcher. He would call pitchouts, and it was uncanny how often he was right. I asked him, "Moose, how did you know to call a pitchout? What are you picking up?" He just said, "Well, I watch the runner do certain things." He just knew when runners were going. I was also amazed at his stamina. He didn't want to come out of a game. He'd even catch doubleheaders. He just loved baseball. But there was no chance of him actually going to the Majors. At that time, they just weren't doing that. There wasn't any free agency, so the only way they could have done it was a trade or with money. So even back then, they had some good players. They weren't as strong as they are now.

When I first got to Japan, some funny things happened with the interpreters. They were still learning, and some things were lost in interpretation. Sometimes, they were too literal. I remember one time, I was talking about a shortstop going into the hole, which is the space between third and short, so I used the word *hole*. The interpreter started looking at the field. I said, "What are you looking for?" And he said, "The hole!"

I was very fortunate to be allowed to coach over there. That came about because the front office wanted Nomura to become the manager after Tsuruoka retired. Now, Nomura was still playing—he had some years left—actually he played for ten more seasons—and I don't think that he really wanted to manage. But they talked him into being a player/manager. He asked if he became the manager, could he get me as his head coach. Obviously, they agreed. Nomura let me have an awful lot of say, because he was busy catching, which is a full-time job by itself. He pretty much let me plan spring training along with some of the other coaches. He also let me have free reign on many things including the practices. I introduced the delayed steal. I don't think they had done it before, and it was very successful.

I coached third base, and in the exhibition games, Nomura said, "Why don't you just go on and decide what we do offensively? I won't give any signs—you just do it." I said, "OK." So we played the exhibition games that way. He must have liked what I did because he continued to let me coach third and make the offensive decisions during the regular season. He made all the lineup changes and things like that, but as far as hit-and-runs and bunts, I called those unless he specifically said, "This inning I'd like you to do so and so." As I said, I was very fortunate to be able to do this. It turned out successfully and convinced everybody that I could coach. In my third-year coaching, we won the pennant. That was quite a thrill. I don't think anybody expected us to do that. Perhaps that's my fondest memory from Japan.

Nomura left the Hawks after the 1977 season. And when he left, I left. I went down to Hiroshima and coached for one year, but I quit because it was tough on my family. They still lived in Kobe, because the kids went to school there. So we returned home to St. Louis. That winter [1978–79], the Hanshin Tigers called me and wanted to know if I would be interested in managing. I was kind of coy about it. I said, "Ah well, maybe, I don't know." I turned to my wife and said, "You know that I'm going to do this." We didn't talk

about money or any details. By the time we got off the phone, we had just agreed to have further conversations, but I knew that I was going to do it.

When I got the job, Hanshin asked me about my coaching staff. I said, "I don't know the ones that you already have, but there is one that I want to bring with me." They asked, "Who?" and I said, "Minoru Ichihara." He had been my interpreter with the Hawks. They asked, "Why do you want to bring him?" Because by that time, I was speaking some Japanese, and I used to listen to interpreters and correct them. But he had been with me for seven or eight years, and he knew exactly what I thought, the way I felt, and how to interpret what I said. When I was made a coach with the Hawks, he was a minor-league player, and they told him, "You're going to be the interpreter." He didn't speak a lot of English, but he was an intelligent kid so he learned. I used him a lot, and he would interpret for the American players. So Hanshin agreed to it. He ended up staying on there, and he's still in baseball. He works with the Kintetsu Buffaloes now. He's been in baseball a long time.

That first year with the Hanshin Tigers, we had a tremendous year. They had a miserable year before I got there. But they made a few trades. We got a new catcher named Yoshiharu Wakana, an outfielder named Masashi Takenouchi, and the shortstop Akinobu Mayumi. We also got a really good pitcher from the Giants, a little right-handed side-armer named Shigeru Kobayashi. Those trades made the team better for me. We had a very interesting team, and if we just had a little something here or there, we would have won the pennant. But we had a successful year. We drew fans and set an attendance record. We also beat the Giants nineteen out of twenty-five times. That made everybody happy!

I was the first ex–Major Leaguer to manage a Japanese team for an entire season, so obviously culture spilled over into the game. After I was over there for awhile, and I understood their culture and the people a little better, I understood some of the things that they did on the field. I've been told by Japanese that they spend long hours at work to show that their dedication to their jobs and their respect and appreciation to their employers. That has spilled over into baseball, so they spend long hours practicing.

At one point in time, I had wanted to cut the length of practice a little bit. At the beginning of each day, the trainer would line up the whole team

by twos, blow his whistle, and the guys would go through their calisthenics, running, and whatever. I told him, "You know, you can cut the time in half by running four at a time instead of two." But that didn't go over well. So I just let it alone. Especially after I became a manager, I decided that I wasn't going to step on their culture. Things that didn't particularly pertain to winning or losing, I kind of left alone. Obviously, we had some practices that I ran the way I wanted to, but there were certain things that they wanted to do, and I just said, "That's fine." But once the game started, I played the game my way. Whether I was right or wrong, I did what I thought was right.

The Japanese style of managing was also a little different. Japanese managers did a lot of things because of their *kimochi*—gut feeling—whereas Americans are more likely to play percentages. So they did some surprising things that to an American would be not very logical. For example, when I was managing against the Chunichi Dragons, their catcher, Tatsuhiko Kimata, just wore us out. He was their third-place hitter, and we couldn't get him out! Well, in one game, in the first inning, they got their first two men on base, and then they had Kimata bunting! Of course, an American manager wouldn't do that. He fouled the first pitch off, and I was thinking, "Jeez, get the bunt down! Get the bunt down!" because I didn't want him to swing the bat. Sure enough, he didn't get it down, so he had to swing away. And he hit a double! The media asked me after the game, "Were you surprised by that play? Do you think it was a good play?" And I said, "Yeah, I was surprised." I didn't elaborate on it. I didn't want to say that we wouldn't have done it. I just said that I was surprised.

A lot of Japanese managers bunted in the early innings, but some managers in the States did that as well. You have to tailor your strategy according to your team. For example, the Dodgers did a lot of that when they had Sandy Koufax, Don Drysdale, and Maury Wills leading off. They figured their pitching was good enough to hold a small lead, so when they got Maury on base, he would either steal second, or they would bunt him over. They played for one run in the early innings quite a bit.

During the time I was in Japan, some of their managers—I don't really want to say became Americanized—but they got away from some of the old traditions. They started doing things less with their *kimochi* and began playing a little more logical baseball. Of course, that's an opinion of an American.

After that first year, Hanshin drafted a little college superstar named Akinobu Okada. He was a third baseman in college, but we already had a superstar third baseman named Masayuki Kakefu. Well, I wasn't going to dislodge Kakefu. I had also brought Dave Hilton over from the Swallows to play second base. Dave had been successful with the Swallows. He was a good offensive player, but his defense was a little shaky. I thought that I could help him defensively and that he would really help our ball club.

I liked Okada, but I just didn't know where to play him. I got a lot of bad ink. The fans got on me pretty good, and they were all over Hilton. Well, you don't just switch a young guy like that from third base to second and start playing. I was trying to find a place to play him, because I wanted to play him. A lot of people didn't believe that, but I really did. After I didn't play him for awhile, it got pretty messy. One night, we were coming out of a game in Tokyo, and the fans started shaking our taxi. They were angry that I was playing Hilton instead of Okada. Like I said, I just didn't know where to play him. You can't just run somebody out and tell him, "Hey, you're a second baseman!" I can understand the fans' viewpoint. Everybody loved him, because he was like a Heisman trophy winner is over here. They wanted to see him play, and I don't blame them. I was just trying to pick the spots—the best times to bring him in, and they didn't understand that.

Finally, we went into the front office, and I told them that I didn't think Dave could play under those conditions and that we should just send him home. And I explained that to Dave. Then, the front office went out and brought in an American outfielder. It was a done deal before I even knew. In my opinion, we didn't need an American outfielder. We had a few meetings about that, and then we just agreed to disagree. And I left the Tigers. I wasn't particularly pleased, but I also wasn't particularly mad at anybody. They had been really good to me. So that was the Hanshin experience.

After Hanshin, I went over to the Hawks and managed for a couple of years. I'm sure that Mr. Tsuruoka had a lot to do with that. In fact, I know he did. We did alright, but we just didn't have the talent. I tried to suggest trades, but in Japan, it's not as easy to trade as it is in the States. So, I wasn't as successful as I had been at Hanshin. Finally, I came home after the 1982 season. Certainly, there were some things that I wasn't pleased with, and there were things that I did that they weren't pleased with, but all in all it was a great experience.

I thought it was also a great experience for the whole family, and we really enjoyed it. Kobe was a great community and a great place to bring the kids up. All of our kids speak some degree of Japanese. One of my sons is fluent and is now the foreign scout for the Colorado Rockies. He spends a lot of time in Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan, and Australia.

I was involved in Japanese baseball for over twenty years—first as a member of touring Major League clubs, then as a player, a coach, and finally a manager. Now that I look at it, maybe I was a little bit unique, but I just feel fortunate that I was in the position to do that. It wasn't anything I planned on. It just happened. And I enjoyed all of it.

14 Gene Martin

Born: January 12, 1947, in Americus, Georgia
1968: Washington Senators outfielder
1974–78: Chunichi Dragons outfielder
1979: Taiyo Whales outfielder

After a brief Major League career, Gene Martin joined the Chunichi Dragons in 1974. His thirty-five home runs (third best in the Central League) and eighty-seven RBIs (also third best) helped the Dragons capture the pennant and end Yomiuri's streak of nine straight championships. For his achievements, Martin was selected for the Best Nine that season. Martin stayed in Japan for five more seasons and was always among the Central League leaders in home runs. Overall, he hit 189 homers with 498 RBIs in six years. He currently lives in Leesburg, Georgia.

I HAD BEEN PLAYING winter ball in Venezuela, and I got home on my birthday, January 12, 1974. I didn't have a contract or any place to go. I had played in Hawaii the year before, but it seemed like nobody wanted me for the upcoming season. At the end of February, I got a phone call from Wally Yonamine, who wanted to know if I would be willing to play in Japan. I didn't hesitate, I said, "Sure, as quick as I can get there." He asked me if I had enough money to fly there, and I told him that I could get over. I went back to Hawaii to get the visa, and I flew from Honolulu to Tokyo. I didn't know what to look forward to. I had no idea. I didn't even know what the weather would be like, so I didn't take a jacket. When I got to Tokyo, it was cold, and I nearly froze to death! The team had already broken camp and were in Nagoya, so that's where I started my spring training. Luckily, I was already in shape, because I had been playing winter ball.

I took my own bats with me. They were Louisville Sluggers, thirty-five inches long and black in color. But the league wouldn't let me use black bats, so I had to take the lacquer off. We took sandpaper and sanded all the dark color off the bats. And then they sure picked up water. I found out right quick that American-style bats in Japan are not the way to go. They just flew all to pieces. I don't know if it was the weather or the baseballs or what. So I switched to a Japanese-made bat. The Japanese bats are extremely hard. When they get wet, they get real heavy, so you have to protect them and keep them in a bag or something.

Wally gave the *gaijin* the option of staying in a Western-style hotel or staying with the team in a Japanese inn. In Tokyo, I stayed in the Western-style hotels, but in a lot of places, like Osaka, I stayed with the team. That didn't necessarily make me closer to my teammates. I don't know if you ever got close to your teammates in Japan. *Gaijin* were there for a purpose, and you had it drilled into you that if you don't produce, you wouldn't get to stay. So, you either concentrated on doing your job, or you were out of there! Some of the boys on the team became real good friends, but others were sort of standoffish. If you hit a home run, everybody lined up to shake your hand, but after the game, everybody went their separate ways.

Instead, I socialized with the other *gaijin* players. We got together almost every day. If *gaijin* from another team were in town, we might go out for dinner, or they might come over to our house. If we were in their towns, we were often at their houses for dinner. In Tokyo, a couple of the guys had apartments, so we would go over after the games and just talk and discuss Japanese baseball—how to hit or what to do in certain situations. When we would all get together and pool our knowledge, you could really learn a lot.

Clete Boyer was my favorite ballplayer. He showed everybody the ropes. He was probably forty at that time and was playing with the Taiyo Whales with John Sipin. We were playing them one night, and I was on first, and Kyohei Taniki was on second. The third-base coach gave Taniki the steal sign, but he didn't give me a sign at all. Taniki took off, and I figured that I could make it, too, even though I got a late start. Well, the catcher threw to third, and Taniki beat the throw, but Boyer caught me going to second. It was embarrassing, really embarrassing. But I still had dinner with him afterwards!

I played with some great guys—Clete, Gail Hopkins, Jim Lyttle, Roger Repoz, Clyde Wright, Charlie Manuel, Jimmy Williams, Ron Woods, Harold Breeden, and Willie Davis. I haven't seen any of them except for Harold since I left. Harold lives in the same town as I do. He's the sheriff.

In Japan, the games always took a long time. It was more of a waiting game. Here in the States, we played in about 2 1/2 hours, but over there it was 3 1/2 to 4 hours a game. It's stressful when it takes that long to play a game. One of the differences in strategy was that the Japanese managers made a lot of moves. For example, when a pitcher was being lit up, they might change the catcher—I guess, because he was calling a bad game, putting down bad signs! I once saw a pitcher being hit hard, and the shortstop make an error, so they took the shortstop out and put in a new shortstop.

You also didn't know who was pitching until about ten minutes before a game started. And they would use pitchers who had pitched the night before. In a doubleheader, if a guy pitched the first game, there was a good chance that you might see him in the second game as well. That happened against the Giants the first year I was there. Tsuneo Horiuchi pitched the first game against us and beat us two to one. We couldn't guess who was pitching the second game. We were going, "Maybe this guy, maybe that guy." Well, I'll be darned if Horiuchi didn't come out and start the second game as well! I kid you not. He never pitched well after that. I mean, never again.

The Japanese players also didn't have that aggressive nature like Americans do. They were more courteous. They didn't take out guys at second base, and they didn't run over the catcher at home plate. The Dragons were a little more aggressive than the other teams because of Wally, but we still played Japanese-style baseball.

I tried not to overdo it in practice, because I knew that if I practiced the way they did, I wouldn't last. They practiced so hard. Sometimes, I believe the Japanese put more emphasis on practice than actually playing the game. I think it was ninety percent practice and ten percent playing the game. We did a lot of practicing. They believed that if you couldn't practice, you couldn't play. The home team was responsible for canceling games because of conditions. If it rained a couple drops, and the team wasn't practicing well, they would call the game off. They would wait for another day when everybody was *genki* [fit and ready to play].

When your game was rained out, you had to go practice in a barn. Every team had a barn. It was a building with a dirt floor, a couple of pitching mounds, and nets all over the place. They ran practices with everything but fly balls in them. You took batting practice and all that stuff. We had one in Tokyo. It was a pretty good-sized barn, but it was a long way from the hotel. You had to get dressed in the hotel, go over there and practice, and then take a cab to the hotel. It was pretty frustrating on those rainy days. And it rained a lot! They have the whole month of September open for makeup games. There are no games scheduled, just makeup days!

Did you see *Mr. Baseball* with Tom Selleck? Well, that was a half-truth. It wasn't like that. You had some clowns on the team but not many. It was a very serious thing to be playing the game. They weren't all that aggressive, but they came to play. They didn't believe in individual accomplishments; they believed in team accomplishments. We also cheered for our teammates. Wally made us cheer. He ran the team, and he ran a tight ship. Wally liked to see you get mad, so he'd get on your butt! But I believe that everybody respected him. They knew he was an American, but he had paid his dues. He had gone through it and turned out to be a good manager.

One of our best players was Morimichi Takagi. I first met Takagi back in 1965 when I was with the Washington Senators. I was playing winter ball in Tampa, Florida, during October and November, and some of the Dragons including Morimichi Takagi and the catcher Tatsuhiko Kimata were there. We were young then. Morimichi was as slick a second baseman as I've ever seen. At the time, he was like Felix Millan defensively, and he could hit. Oh boy, he could hit! He was a true samurai. In his earlier days, I believe he could have played in the Majors. When he got old, I think he hurt his arm or something, but it didn't stop him from hitting, and he could run!

My first year over there we won the pennant. That was a memorable year, because we had to fight for the pennant all season. It was a tough race, and we only won it by [one] one-hundredth of a point. You have ties over there, and the Giants had one more win than us, but we had two more ties, so that's how we won it. That was a close, close race.

The Japan Series didn't last very long. We played Lotte, and Jim Lefebvre played second base for the Orions. They beat us in four straight. We had played all those games, and that was it. The Dragons told us that they were going to give us sixty thousand dollars if we won the pennant. That was a

lot of money, but we had to split it among about forty ballplayers. I think my share ended up being about thousand dollars.

The next year, they built us a new clubhouse. That was a nice facility. The old clubhouse had about two inches of dirt on the floor. You had to walk about fifty yards to the shower and bath. And they had no heat in there, so it was cold! When you got out of the tub and came back to your locker, there was steam coming off you! And when you came out of that hot tub and you met that cold air, damn! But in the summertime, the clubhouse was so hot, you couldn't stand it. The humidity was unbelievable!

In 1976, Ron Woods was on the Dragons. He is a good guy—a real class man. Ron had a lot of ability, but he wasn't doing very well. The general manager of the Dragons called us into his office one day before a game. At the time, I was on a tear. I was hitting well over .300, and I must have had fifteen or twenty home runs. Well, he called us both in the office and said if we didn't start doing better, he was going to release us. After he said that, the meeting ended. That was the whole meeting! Ron and I were walking back downstairs, and Ron just started cracking up. He said, "Now that just doesn't make any sense! It seems like they're trying to make you have a bad year!" Right after that, Ron said, "I'm ready to get out of here. I'm ready to go home," and he really became frustrated. Eventually, they just paid off his salary, and he went home.

Now, Willie Davis was something. His antics were unbelievable! Willie was a real thorn in Wally's side, but Wally doesn't say anything bad about anybody. Sometimes, Willie would come to the ball park, say, "I don't feel like playing," and go home! Other times, he would show up at the ball park five minutes before game time, put on his uniform, and walk out onto the field with his shoes off. I've even seen him walk off the field in the middle of a game!

We were in the middle of the game, and all of a sudden, the umpire held up his hands and called time. Willie walked on by me at first base and said, "I ain't playing. I ain't putting up with this shit!" And he walked off the field! The umpire Tamaguchi met him before he reached the dugout and asked Willie what was wrong. Tamaguchi spoke English really well, and he was also one of the better umpires in Japan. Willie said, "They're throwing trash on the field out there. And I don't like that." Tamaguchi said, "If I get security out there to stop them from throwing trash, would you go back out

there?" And Willie said, "If you make the announcement, I'll go back." Tamaguchi went over, got the microphone, and made the announcement. Willie walked by me, winked, and then ran back out there, and we finished the game.

Willie was the fastest man I've ever seen get out of his clothes. We had a seven-hundred-gallon, stainless steel bathtub in the clubhouse. And he just dove right in! He didn't wash off or anything. He just dove right in and started soaping up! Boy, the Japanese went nuts! The players went crazy. They came to me and said, "Gene, you tell him!" But I said, "I ain't telling him nothing! You tell him!" Things really livened up when Willie was there. But, he wasn't good for the team. They didn't care for him at all. They thought he was just a typical American, but he wasn't! He was just crazy!

Willie was a practicing Buddhist, and he would keep you up all night with this chanting from the room next to you. "*Namu Myoho renge-kyo, namu Myoho renge-kyo, namu Myoho renge-kyo* . . . " You would hear that doggone chanting all night long! He was dedicated to it, I'll say that. One night, we are playing in Hiroshima, and Willie hit third, and I hit fourth. Before he went up to hit, I heard him chanting, "*Namu Myoho renge-kyo, namu Myoho renge-kyo, namu Myoho renge-kyo.*" By golly, if he didn't hit the first pitch into the right-field stands. So I started chanting, too!

Willie would give you the shirt off his back. He helped me out. One day in Tokyo, we were playing the Giants. Clyde Wright was pitching, so Wally put a right-hander in for me. Clyde is a very smart person, and he was a hell of a pitcher. He was a battler, a real battler. I came back into the clubhouse after warming up and said to Willie,

"Dang, I sure did want to play today!"

Willie looked at me and said, "You really want to play, man?"

"Yeah, I want to play."

"Okay, wait right here." And he walked into Wally's office. I don't know what he said to Wally. I have no idea, but he came back out and said to me, "You're playing." I said, "All right! I'm in there!" You know, I hit a home run that night off Clyde. I made Willie look like a genius. We ended up beating Clyde 2-1. That was a good game. Clyde pitched a heck of a game but he hung me a curve ball, and I hit it over the backstop up on the scoreboard. It was probably the only base hit I ever got off him, but it was a good one!

Remember I was telling you that there were a few clowns on the team? Well, we had this left-handed pitcher named Yukitsura Matsumoto, who was one of them. He didn't care if the sun didn't shine in the morning—he was that kind of guy. I think he's a color commentator over there now. Well, in 1978, Fred Kuhaulua and he were in the dugout making fun of me while I was hitting. I went to my interpreter and asked him for advice, and he said that I should talk to our ace pitcher, Senichi Hoshino. I asked Hoshino, "Why would your own teammates make cracks about you while you're in the middle of a game and doing everything you can to win?" He said, "Sometimes, people relieve stress and pressure on themselves by directing it toward other people." Well, that kind of made me mad, because I was hoping he would say something to Matsumoto, but I guess Hoshino did say something to Toshio Naka, who was the manager that year. I think that Naka decided that I wasn't going to be good for the team.

That year, I had one of my best seasons. I had thirty-three home runs, ninety-five RBIs and hit .289. Well, I came home, and in December, Hal Breeden and I went to the winter baseball meetings down in Orlando, Florida. Hal wanted to get back with a Major League team. In Florida, I ran into Naka and my interpreter. We spoke for awhile, and they didn't say anything about not coming back in 1979. But on January 12, my birthday, they called me and told me that I was released.

Right after they called me, the Taiyo Whales called me.

"Gene, we heard that you've been released."

"Well, you heard right."

"How would you like to play for the Whales?"

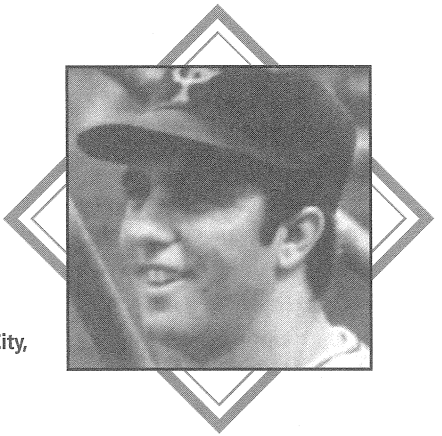
"Oh man, I'd love to! I'd love to get back over there and play against the Dragons!"

I lost all respect for Naka. I had just had a super year for him, and then he pulled that stunt. He had told me, "See you in Japan next year." Well, he was right. He saw me—but with somebody else! I think I made him kick the water cooler more than once! The first time we played them we beat them.

I did pretty well with the Whales. My batting average wasn't up there [.254], but I hit quite a few home runs—twenty-eight. About a week before the season was over, the interpreter came to me and told me that I wouldn't be coming back. I just had this empty feeling and thought, "What do I have

to do to play baseball?" I wasn't angry. In a way, I was glad it was over. I had already been there about six years, and I thought that if it was time for it to be over, it was time for it to be over.

When I look back at Japanese baseball, I think of their dedication, their enthusiasm, and the way they went at it. At the time, I thought it was just overkill, but now I realize that it was just their way. I'm pretty sure that they still approach baseball like that today and that they had been doing it that way since they started playing the game. They have their regimentation, and they go at it. I don't think I ever was frustrated with it, because I really did try to play their style of baseball. The main thing was to go over with an open mind. You're not there to change them. You're in their country. It's their ways, their customs, and you adapt. That's basically it. You don't try to go against the flow, you go with the flow.



15 Clyde Wright

Born: February 20, 1941, in Jefferson City, Tennessee
1966–73: California Angels pitcher
1974: Milwaukee Brewers pitcher
1975: Texas Rangers pitcher
1976–78: Yomiuri Giants pitcher

Before joining the Yomiuri Giants in 1976, Clyde Wright was one of the California Angels' top left-handed pitchers. His Major League career began with a four-hitter against the Minnesota Twins on June 15, 1966. After going 1-8 in 1969, he mastered the screwball in winter ball and came back to go 22-12 with a 2.83 ERA in 1970. That year, Wright also no-hit the Oakland A's, pitched in the All-Star game and was named the American League Comeback Player of the Year. Wright had several more good years with the Angels before being traded to the Brewers in 1974 and losing twenty games. Known for his intensity on the field, Wright pitched three seasons for the Yomiuri Giants and helped them win two Central League championships. Today, he runs the Clyde Wright Pitching School in Anaheim, California, and keeps in close contact with his many friends from Japan.

MY NAME IN JAPAN was "Crazy Righto!" Nagashima was the one who stuck that on me because of the things I would do. He would just say, "You're crazy!" So I guess it just stemmed from there. Then the newspapers picked it up, and it just hung with me. When my son Jaret came over to visit, they made him a uniform with "Crazy 1/2" on the back of it. I have some good pictures of him in that uniform. "Crazy 1/2" on the back!

One time, we were playing the Yakult Swallows, and their pitcher drilled me. The umpire started to throw him out of the game, but I grabbed the

umpire and said, "*Daijobu, daijobu* [It's okay, it's okay]". So I walked on down to first base and I started hollering at Tatsuro Hirooka, who was the manager for Yakult. I yelled that when the pitcher came to bat, I was going to hit him right between the eyes, and I pointed to my head! So they took him out in the second inning and wouldn't let him bat! Charlie Manuel was sitting on the Swallows' bench laughing silly and yelling, "Crazy! Crazy! Righto Crazy!"

Everybody on the Giants always thought that Charlie was crazy. We were playing Yakult one night, and Charlie came to bat. We had this young catcher, and he stood up right behind Charlie and yelled something to his infielders. So Charlie got in the box, bent over, looked down, got right in the catcher's face, and started screaming at him! Then, he calmly got right back in the box to hit.

In 1976, Texas released me during spring training, a week before the season started. I had some friends with the Dodgers, and they got me in touch with the Tokyo Giants. I signed with the Giants that spring, so I missed Japanese spring training my first year, thank God! I went over there for fifty thousand dollars, but by the time you bought a cantaloupe for fifty dollars and a steak for one hundred dollars, well, look out! You had no money left! But I'm going to tell you, it was a neat experience for me.

I didn't go straight to the team. Instead, I went down to their minor league team at Tamagawa and practiced for about two weeks. God, I hope I never see that place again! I left a lot of running shoes down there in Tamagawa. Well, it was interesting. I practiced every day down there, and finally, I went up to the big club. I don't even remember where I pitched or who it was against.

I'll tell you, their training is like going through boot camp! I thought that I was in pretty good shape when I went to Japan to play baseball, but I came back in twice as good condition. And I still couldn't do all the running and all the throwing that the Japanese players did. I went to Miyazaki one year with them for spring training. They would strap this halter on you and have you drag tires and stuff! On any given day, you would have to throw three hundred pitches. I couldn't roll it out there three hundred times, but they could. I watched them take ground balls at shortstop. They would hit one hundred ground balls to the left and then one hundred ground balls to the

right. Those kids would just be dead at the end of practice. But the next day, they went right back out there and did it again! They did so much running over there that they could outrun Tom Hanks in that movie *Forrest Gump*! Hell, they would've passed him up five times!

The Giants were the last team to bring Americans over there. Davey Johnson and I were the first *gaijin* to play with them. They weren't planning to do it, but I just happened to be at the right place at the right time. They needed a left-handed pitcher just when I got released. We realized that when we went over there, we took some Japanese kids' places. And we heard about it. Some of the players said that they didn't want us there. I learned how Japanese culture worked—if you're not a member, you don't get in the club. We didn't fit in, and we knew that we didn't fit in. But I also know that back then, we would not have liked it if two of them came over here and took two American places. But it's changed now. It's accepted. We take their players over here, and we get along a lot better over there. Time heals a lot of old wounds.

Now, don't get me wrong! I have a lot of good friends from when I played over there. I had some super, super guys as teammates. Well, you know that Sadaharu Oh was the first baseman, and Isao Harimoto was our left fielder. We got along fine, and they're both still good friends of mine. Shigeo Nagashima was the manager. I had the utmost respect for Nagashima. They have certain ways they do stuff, and I knew that if he didn't manage by that set of rules, he was going to have to take a vacation. That's what the managers have to do when the front office gets mad at them—they have to take a *long* vacation! You know the story about when Nagashima took me out of a game, and I tore my uniform up in the clubhouse? A lot of people thought that I was pissed off at Nagashima, but that wasn't it. I wasn't mad at Nagashima. I was mad at Japanese baseball, because they took me out in the fifth inning with two outs, and I had a chance to get another win. I had a bonus clause in my contract that if I got so many wins, I would get more money. But it seemed like they were always taking me out in the fourth or fifth inning, and I couldn't get the win. It just got frustrating as hell. But, Nagashima and I were never at each other's throats. I want to set that straight. We got along super. We really did. And Nagashima and I are still good friends. Those three guys are as close to me even though they were

Japanese—actually Harimoto is Korean—as any American player I've ever played with. The other guy that I really respected was Masaichi Kaneda. Those four guys stood for what Japanese baseball was all about.

Our locker room at Korakuen Stadium was very small. and you had to dress in shifts. The big stars had plenty of space, but the rookies had their own little room. To take a bath, first, you had to sit on a stool and pour water over you. Then you jumped in the bath. Oh, that was outstanding! I loved that to death. Japanese toilets are these little slits in the ground. When I went in there, I would get the floor wet in front. I finally asked Harimoto, "How you do this? I'm always peeing on the floor!" And he said, "Well, turn around, you stupid!" I had been using them backward! We used to have a lot of laughs over that.

We had fun! I used to take batting practice in between Harimoto and Oh. One day, I slipped in an aluminum bat, and I started hitting balls over the back wall. Harimoto wanted to use the bat, but I said, "Oh no, no! This is a pitcher's bat! Good hitters don't need this." We did everything over there. We would tie guys' shoestrings in knots so that they couldn't get them undone, cut the toes out of one shoe, and nail their shoes to the floor . . . just crazy things. Some of the jokes went over well, some of them didn't. Harimoto was the worst prankster. He would do anything!

I guess I was so popular with the fans because I took care of them and would play around with the kids and give them stuff. I love to be around kids. At that time, fans weren't allowed to keep foul balls. They could keep home-run balls, but they had to throw the foul balls back on the field. But when fans would holler at me that they wanted something, I would just throw it up in the stands. Every time I would warm up, they would give me three balls before I went down to the bullpen. I would always throw them in the stands to some kids. When I would get down to the pen, I'd say, "Hey, no balls." So, they would have to run back and get three more so that I could warm up. We used to keep baseballs in these big old garbage cans. Well, one day, we had a bunch of kids at the stadium, so I took a can full of balls to the top of the stadium and poured them out. You should have seen the bunch of kids! They were as happy as ever! They all got new baseballs.

When I was over there, all the Japanese media wanted to do was find something bad to put in the papers. When I went out at night, they would follow me! I would see them hiding in the corners with their cameras! They

were just waiting for me to do something. Everybody thought I loved the night life, that I was a hell-raiser. You see, when I first went over there, I was by myself. When the other teams were on the road, I'd come home to this empty apartment, so I'd go to Roppongi. I would go to the Playboy Club, because I couldn't get in trouble there.

One night, we did get into trouble in Roppongi at a bar called Byblos. There were some guys who were giving a Japanese girl a hard time, and we'd been drinking. Roger Repoz, Charlie Manuel, and I went over and told them to shut up and leave her alone. Not too long after that, we were getting jacked around the bar! Glasses were broken all over the place! There were ten or fifteen of them and only three of us. We found out that the suckers were East German hockey players! If I had known that, we never would've started it! Hockey players are pretty tough! So, we got our butts kicked around pretty good. They had the slap sticks, and we were the pucks!

I didn't like to lose. I didn't put in all that preparation, all that running, all that sweat to go out there and lose. I always gave one hundred percent and tried to help the team win. I didn't care what it took—if I had to cheat, if I had hit somebody or run over somebody to win a game, I would. That never bothered me. There was always one thing on my mind when I played, and that was to win. I never wanted to get that feeling where you would get beat and just say, "Well, I got beat, and that's it." I couldn't accept losing.

One time, when we were playing the Hanshin Tigers, Mike Rhinebeck ran over our other *gaijin*, Jack Lind. I told him, "Don't do that!" But he said, "I'll do anything I want to!" So I said, "No, you won't, because I protect my players!" He had gone out of his way to hit our guy. So, the next time he came up, I hit him. But he kept on and on. So, his next time up, I hit him again and broke his arm. It didn't matter to me whether he was an American or not, I protected my players.

The rivalry between the Giants and the Tigers was very intense. They just didn't like each other. You could tell it from the fans, too. The Hanshin Tigers fans didn't like the Giants, and the Giants fans didn't like the Tigers. You could just feel the tension in the stadium when we got together. Sure, we got in fights with the Hanshin Tigers. Death threats? Yeah, I got a few, but that was just stupid stuff. Some of the fans didn't like me, but what the hell are they going to do? Kill me in Japan? I don't think so. I didn't take it very seriously.

In 1976, we played against the Hankyu Braves in the Japan Series. We lost the first three games. After we lost the first three, Davey Johnson and I packed up all of our stuff, because we had been over in Japan a long time, and we just wanted to get home. We took all our stuff to Osaka, so that we could fly directly back to the States. Well, we won the fourth game, and then it was my turn to pitch the fifth game.

Davey came to me and said, "We have all our stuff packed, so if you screw this up tonight, I'm really going to be pissed! We've got to get out of here and get home." Well, I screwed up. I pitched well, hit a home run, and we won the game. So, we had to take all our stuff back to Tokyo. Davey hasn't forgiven me yet!

I started the seventh game of the series. At one point, we were leading, and I was dead tired. I told my interpreter, "Tell the pitching coach, that I'm tired. I'm dead tired. Take me out, and put somebody fresh in." I don't know whether he told Nagashima or not, because they sent me back out there, and I gave up two home runs the next inning, and we ended up getting beat. I was dead tired. I was gone. Well, that was typical Japanese managing. If you were pitching well, you stayed in. I don't know if a Japanese pitcher would've told him that or not. Maybe that's against the code of conduct. Or maybe, you wouldn't tell a manager or pitching coach that you're tired, because he'd make you go to Tamagawa and run!

After we played in the Japan Series, the Giants invited all of us to Hawaii to play golf. Harimoto was absolutely terrible, so I bought him a dozen orange golf balls so he wouldn't lose them. They didn't last four or five holes. He lost all of them! When the manager and the owner play golf, they have another guy play with them, so if the owner's ball goes out of bounds, there is somebody to go get it and set it back in play. I said, "There's no way that I'm ever going to play with the owner. I'm not going to go chase his ball. I have a hard enough time trying to find mine!" I've played golf with Nagashima and Oh, and they're just outstanding. We were playing in Hawaii one time, and Nagashima was out in the middle of the green building up this mound to put the ball on—like hitting it off a tee. I said, "Hey, boss"—I called him boss all the time—"boss, you can't do that. That's a penalty." And he said, "Oh no. For you it's a penalty, for the manager no penalty!"

My most memorable baseball experience over there was probably Sadaharu Oh breaking Hank Aaron's record. There were so many cameras in the

stadium that night it was unbelievable. After he hit the home run, everybody gave him an ovation, and we stopped the game. Then all the dignitaries came down, and everybody gave him flowers and stuff. It was quite experience to be there when it actually happened.

But you've got to understand that the baseball stadiums in Japan are a little bit shorter, the balls are a little bit better, and the bats are a little bit better. And the pitching was a little bit better in the States. So, the only way you can compare what Oh and Aaron did is just by the numbers. That's all. Oh hit 868, and Aaron hit 755. That's all you can say about it. If Oh had to play here, there's no way he could've broken Aaron's record. But, if Aaron would've played over there, there's no way he would've broken Oh's record, because they wouldn't have let him! They would've walked him with the bases loaded or even walked him with two outs. So, there's no way they would've broken each other's records if they had played in each other's country.

Sadaharu Oh's strike zone? Oh Lord! Well, the plate is supposed to be seventeen inches, right? Oh's strike zone was maybe three inches! Now, that was Harimoto's joke. Harimoto used to kid about it all the time when Oh was at bat. They used to throw on the inside corner, ball one; throw one on the outside corner, ball two; throw one down the middle, and *sayonara*, he would hit it out of the park! That was Oh's strike zone. You know, it's the same way over here. A lot of the big hitters get preferential treatment.

Everybody thinks that Japanese baseball is a lot lower than the big leagues. Oh no, baby! They can play! Don't let anybody kid you. They can hit, they can run, they can field! So, don't tell me there's that much difference between the two. The only big difference is the power. The Americans are stronger, but now the Japanese are getting a lot bigger and stronger. When I was over there, each club only had about four really good players. Now, they have a lot more than four. They've got six, seven, or eight players on each club who can play here.

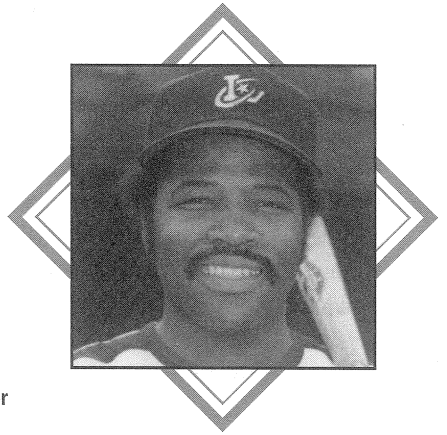
Back when I was there, there were quite a few Japanese players who could have played and been successful in the big leagues. Oh would've done very well here. He would have hit a few home runs, but he wouldn't have hit eight hundred. The guy that I think would have hit for a high average over here was Harimoto. He was some kind of hitter. Other guys that would have been successful were Koichi Tabuchi, the catcher for the Han-

shin Tigers; Takenori Emoto, their big pitcher; Chunichi's big right fielder Kenichi Yazawa; and the Taiyo Whales' first baseman Makoto Matsubara. We had a shortstop by the name of Kazumasa Kono, who I thought could've played over here. Kono would just make the plays day in and day out. So, there wasn't only one or two. There were quite a few who could've played in the Major Leagues then and been successful.

And now, they're finally starting to come over here. I don't mind them coming over, but you can't let a guy who's played ten years in Japan be the Rookie of the Year. He's not really a rookie. After ten or twelve years in Japan, everybody knows he can play! And everybody knows that he's a better player than ninety-nine out of a hundred rookies in the big leagues. I don't think they deserve to get the award, because they're much older, and they've played a lot more years of professional baseball than the true rookies.

I didn't leave Japan with a good taste in my mouth. When I left Japan, the Giants still owed me ten thousand or twelve thousand dollars, but I didn't care. I had had enough of it. I was just going to get out of there. I had no trouble with the players and no trouble with the fans. The only trouble I had was with the Giants' front office. It was different playing over there, but I had a good time. There are a lot of good memories, and it's something I'll cherish for a long time. Now, I have my own pitching school here in Anaheim. I've been doing that for twenty-three years. I also still work for the Anaheim Angels. I've worked for them ever since I came back from Japan. I do a lot of their community relations. I go talk to Little Leagues and business groups. I keep very busy.

I think the players and the fans in Japan recognized how hard I played. They understood that I had a big heart, and I didn't want to lose. When they started having old-timers' games, I was one of the first ones they called. It's quite a thrill and an honor for me after all the trouble I had over there. And I just love to do it. I thoroughly enjoy going back over there for a week and seeing Oh, Nagashima, Harimoto, all the old guys. Now is just friendly competition to have a good time. I can't wait to get back over there to see those guys again. I want to do it every year!



16 Leron Lee

Born: March 4, 1948, in Bakersfield, California
1969–71: St. Louis Cardinals outfielder
1972–73: San Diego Padres outfielder
1974–75: Cleveland Indians outfielder
1975–76: Los Angeles Dodgers outfielder
1977–87: Lotte Orions outfielder

Leron Lee was one of the most successful foreigners to ever play in Japan. His .320 lifetime batting average is the highest career average in Japanese history. During his eleven-year career, Lee hit over .300 ten times and led the Pacific League in batting average once, home runs once, and RBIs once. He was selected for the Best Nine team four times. Lee also leads all foreigners in Japan in career home runs, RBIs, and hits. Before coming to Japan, Lee played eight seasons in the Major Leagues. He currently lives in southern California and often returns to Japan for business and celebrity appearances.

I PLAYED IN JAPAN for eleven years and was pretty successful. I still get Japanese fan mail—have three in front of me right now. I enjoyed playing in Japan. I enjoyed every single minute of it. A lot of foreign players who go to Japan and fail complain that the Japanese are prejudiced and dislike Americans. Well, I don't care where you're living, some people are going to fail and blame it on the system. I always tried to remember that I went there to play baseball in their country, so I played by their rules. PBS came over there one year to figure out why foreign people have a hard time in Japan. They came to my house and tried to make me say something negative about Japanese baseball. But I had nothing negative to say. Every negative question they asked me, I turned into a positive. That's how I succeeded in Japan. I was able to take negative things and make them work for me. Guys who didn't do that didn't stay too long.

I landed in Tokyo on January 28, 1977, spent one day in Tokyo and then went down to Kagoshima for spring training. It was very, very cold. It was about forty degrees, and the wind was blowing for the first three weeks. For a couple of days, the field was covered with snow, and we still took batting practice! So, the first three or four weeks were really tough. The next year, I bought thermal underwear, ski gloves, earmuffs, and a total-face ski mask, so when I went to spring training in the beginning of February, I did *not* get cold. I couldn't even throw the ball with those gloves on. I'd be taking infield, and the ball would be going sideways. The coaches were hollering at me, but I had my earmuffs on, so I'd yell back, "I can't hear you!" Finally, they gave up. But I did not freeze that year! After the second year, I got used to the cold. I realized that if everybody else could do it, I could do it.

When I think about that first spring training, my mouth still hangs open! Our manager, Mr. Masaichi Kaneda, was known as the running manager. We would start with a walk at 7 A.M. It didn't matter what the weather was. Sometimes, I had to run to keep up with the Japanese players who were power-walking. That would last for an hour. Then we would have breakfast, and practice would start around 9:30. We would warm up for about an hour, and then we would change clothes and do special hitting or special training for another hour and then have lunch. Batting practice would start about 1:30, and fielding practice would also be in the afternoon. So, the whole morning for the first four weeks was just warming up. Most of the foreign players just went berserk. "This cannot be happening! This is not right! This is totally backwards!" And basically, they were right. It was totally opposite of what we would do in America.

At batting practice, they would set up five hitting stations, and we would bat until our hands were going to fall off! I did a lot of B.P. when I was in the States—a couple of hundred balls a day. But in Japan, we were hitting five hundred to seven hundred balls a day. I got these huge blisters and calluses on my hands because nobody had any batting gloves that would fit me. Over the years, all the practice turned out to be a blessing. It made me a more consistent hitter, because my swing was fixed. As the years went by, I realized that that kind of spring training was exactly what I should have been doing here in the States.

When I first arrived in Japan, Clarence Jones was in his ninth and last season with the Kintetsu Buffaloes. In spring training, we played the Buf-

faloes first, and Jones and I met in the hotel. He started telling me about the pitchers and about Japanese baseball. He told me that a brushback pitch in the States is a strike on *gaijin* in Japan. And then he told me how to hit it! He gave me the lowdown on all the pitchers and the umpires. It was great. It was unbelievable information. I took it all in.

We went out for the first exhibition game, and Jones was playing first. The pitcher Yutaka Yanigida threw me a curve ball that broke about a foot outside—strike one! I couldn't have reached it with six-foot bat! Then came the next pitch, a fastball up and in. I leaned back, and the ball went right by the letters. The umpire said, "Strike two!" I walked out of the batter's box and looked down at Jones, and he had his glove over his face, and he was laughing! On the next pitch, he brushed me back again, so I stepped open and pulled my hands down, and I hit the ball just like Jones told me. I barely took a step out of the batter's box, because I thought it was going to hook foul. But the ball went straight as an arrow, past the right field pole for a home run. When the game was over, I grabbed Jones and said, "Tell me the rest!" Every time I saw him that year, I got him to tell me about Japanese baseball.

To show their fighting spirit, the Japanese would focus on how hard they could practice and how long they could practice. Some of the drills would put players in the hospital for two or three days because of dehydration. They would leave most of their stuff in practice. When they would get into the ball game, they couldn't really perform up to their abilities. Three-quarters of the guys playing Japanese baseball back in those days were burnt out by August and tired every day by the fifth inning. Nowadays, almost every Japanese team takes one day off a week, and they don't practice three hours every day. They've really become more Westernized in their training.

One of the tricks that Jones taught me was to go to the ball park early and watch the other team's pitchers. See who was throwing in the bullpen, and count how many pitches they threw. Then just wait for them to pitch in the game, because they're not going to have a good fastball or a good breaking ball. I went out there, and I brought a little book with me and wrote down who was throwing and for how long. Some pitchers would throw two hundred balls the day before they pitched and then come out and throw seven or eight innings!

The first complaint I had was that the games were too long. Every day, we played at least a three-hour game. Mainly, it was because of pick-off plays

and trick plays. I'd be out in right field yelling, "Throw the ball," and they be doing these pick-off plays. Pretty soon, they sent the interpreter out and asked me to be patient. I had to realize where I was standing and where I was playing.

In Japanese baseball, they have signs for everything. I had my interpreter ask our catcher, Hidetoshi Hakamada, "How many signs do you have?" We started counting. On any given play, he had fifty-two different signs that he could possibly give. Fifty-two! It was unbelievable. I asked my interpreter, "Can he remember all those signs?" He responded, "He has to." My teammate Hiroyuki Yamazaki showed me how to steal signs. Every single player on the bench had to know every sign that was given during a game. When the third base coach gave a sign, you would see all the reserves on the bench start talking to see if they got the sign right. Based on the situation, you could guess what play was on. If the coach gave a set of signs, and nobody talked on the bench, it meant that no play was on.

My first real game was in Sendai, Japan. The night before opening day, we had a meeting to go over our opponents, the Kintetsu Buffaloes. The starting pitcher was a left-hander, Keishi Suzuki. The scout went up in front of the room and went on and on for about fifteen minutes about Suzuki. I turned to Jim Lefebvre and said, "If this guy pitches like the scout says, we're not going to get any hits tomorrow!" And sure enough, on opening day, Suzuki pitched a one-hitter! That guy was the best left-handed pitcher I ever faced in my life. I faced Steve Carlton and several pretty good pitchers in the big leagues, but this guy was unbelievable. He had a running fastball, an outstanding slider, and he would throw it right behind your ear when he wanted to. There were several guys in those days that hit people as part of their ball game. He was an absolutely fabulous pitcher who could have pitched in the Major Leagues very easily.

The ace of our staff, Choji Murata, was also fabulous. He was the best pitcher I've ever seen in my life except Bob Gibson. In 1979, he pitched against the American All-Stars, and Ted Simmons was on the team. After the tour, Ted told me that Choji Murata was the best pitcher he ever faced in his life, bar none. That's how good Murata was. He could throw ninety to ninety-six miles an hour consistently, had a great fork ball, and he had this really funky windup with a high kick. I saw him throw an inside pitch that hit the bat below the label, broke it in half, and the ball had so much power that it went through the bat, hit the batter on his back leg, and rolled

out into fair territory along with the head of the bat. Everybody in the stadium stopped for two or three seconds and looked. It was unbelievable for a ball to go through a bat and still have enough momentum to hit the batter in the leg and roll forward.

In 1982, Murata hurt his arm—the ligament came off his elbow. After two years, he went to Los Angeles, and Dr. [Frank] Jobe put him back together. He ended up pitching another five years and still threw the ball hard! Actually, we had two exhibition games last year between the retired American players and the retired Japanese Meikyukai players. Murata came in to pitch, and he was still throwing eighty miles an hour! He struck out everybody for two innings. He's in perfect shape today, and he must be about fifty-three years old.

My first year in Japan, I was in line to win the triple crown. The guy who beat me in batting average was my teammate Michiyo Arito. Arito was the star player before I got there, and I think he took it hard—we were more rivals than teammates. During the second half of the season, I saw him get about thirty hits that shouldn't have been scored hits, and his average went up from .299 to .329. At the same time, mine went from .329 to .317.

During that season, I met an interesting guy at the Royal Hotel bar in Osaka who was in business in Kobe. We talked and talked, and he said, "I want to give you some advice. I'm not a baseball player but I've been in business over here for twenty years. And I know how things work. I think you should concentrate on two of the titles and let the other one go." I didn't say anything for a minute. I had only been there for five months, and he'd been there for twenty years, and he was telling me something that he knew worked in his business. I said, "You know, you're right." He said, "If you mess around with it, you might not end up winning any of them, so capture two, and don't worry about the other one." So I did that. It turned out that I got the RBI and home-run titles, and Arito won the batting title. But that was fine. Not winning the triple crown wasn't frustrating—I won two of the three, and that was great. I had a great first season. I didn't go there to win titles. I went over there to help the team win a pennant, make money, and play baseball, because I loved and respected baseball. There were much bigger things than just me winning a title.

One of the papers that year carried a story saying that it would be a disgrace to Japanese baseball if a foreigner won the triple crown. They were not going to allow me to win it. In later years, when the Japanese developed

a higher self-esteem about their baseball, things changed. But even in those days, there were a number of players who could have been Major Leaguers: Sadaharu Oh, Koji Yamamoto, and Sachio Kinugasa from Hiroshima and Masayuki Kakefu. Akinobu Mayumi of the Tigers was a good player with a quick bat, and the Chunichi Dragons had a left-handed batter named Kenichi Yazawa, who was a great hitter. A guy who just turns and pulls the ball cannot hit in the Major Leagues. He has to have power to the gaps. You know who was a good player? Toshio Shinozuka of the Giants. He could have played in the big leagues. He was a Joe Morgan–type guy but maybe not as strong. Koji Akiyama of the Seibu Lions was another guy who could have played in the Majors. He was a very fast runner, played great defense, hit the ball to all fields with power, and the fans would have loved him. Of course, Keishi Suzuki, Hisashi Yamada, Osamu Higashio, and Choji Murata all could have pitched in the big leagues.

Except for his defense, probably the best player I saw was Hiromitsu Ochiai. He had a very unorthodox swing. You couldn't pitch him in, and he also could hit the ball away. Ochiai joined the Orions in the spring of 1979. He came from the Industrial Leagues, and he was already twenty-five or twenty-six years old. He was pretty confident—not arrogant—but not scared. But he had a problem in the beginning with his swing. It looked like he couldn't get out of the way of an inside pitch. He'd just let the ball hit him. It irritated people. They thought that he was awkward, but when he hit the ball, it really jumped off his bat. He had good power. From what I understood, they weren't going to keep him that first year, but I thought that he had great potential and said so. The guy turned out to be one of the best hitters ever in Japan.

Ochiai was young, strong as a bull, and aggressive. I think most of his problems came with the press because he told people exactly what he thought, and Japanese aren't supposed to do that. You're supposed to say this or that, but he came out and said, "I'm going to win this title, and I'm not going to let foreign players win these titles anymore." He was mainly talking about me, my brother Leon, and Boomer [Greg Wells]. But that was fine. We were friendly, and I wasn't there to win Japanese titles. I was there to take some money home.

In 1977, my brother Leon was with the Cardinals triple-A team at Tulsa. The rumor was that the Cardinals were going to take him up to the big

leagues. Instead, they brought up Keith Hernandez and sent my brother to AA. I tried to get him to Japan that year, but the Cardinals wanted too much money for his contract. I kept on talking to Mr. Kaneda about him, and that winter, Mr. Kaneda came to L.A. to meet Leon. He looked at him once and said he was going to sign him, even though he had never seen him pick up a ball or a bat! So, my second year, Leon joined me. For the five years we played together, it could not have been better. In 1980, I led the league in batting every day of the season except for one day. And that day, Leon was ahead of me by one point. I went ahead and finished up at .358, and he finished in second place at .340. We led the league in almost everything that year. That was an unbelievable season. We hit back-to-back home runs twelve times!

Our success helped change Japanese baseball. It helped the Japanese hierarchy realize that they could get younger players and have better production for a longer time. When I went over, most of the *gaijin* were over thirty years old and at the end of their careers. But if you look at the rosters after that season, you'll see more younger, stronger, healthier *gaijin* players.

You would never believe some of the weird things that happened. One time, we were playing the Nankai Hawks, and we had bases loaded with one away. There was a full count on the batter, and our manager Yamauchi put on the squeeze play—with a full count and one out! I was on third base, and I saw the squeeze sign so I was thinking, "Should I break, or should I wait?" If the next pitch was ball four, then I could walk home, but if he bunted it, and it wasn't a good bunt, I'd be out. I decided to break off the base. The pitcher went into a stretch, and I got my lead. As he threw, I broke toward home plate. Well, their catcher stood up, and the Nankai Hawks have called a pitchout! It's a full count, right. A pitchout is ball four! But our catcher, Hiroshi Takahashi, who was a thirty-eight-year-old veteran, followed Japanese directions to the max and tried to bunt it! So it became strike three, and they tagged me out to complete the double play! I just stood on the third baseline, and Leon brought my glove out. I said, "Leon, did you see that? What you think just happened?" He said, "I don't know." I said, "Well, I'll tell you. Their manager outdumbed our manager!"

Here was the most unusual play of all. It was also against the Nankai Hawks. Shinichi Yamauchi threw me a change-up, and I hit a ground ball foul to the first baseman who was left-handed. He ran over to the first-base

coaching box and picked up the ball. I'd trotted about three steps down the line, and he was getting ready to toss it back to the pitcher when the first-base umpire called the ball fair! I stopped. The first baseman stopped in his tracks, he couldn't believe it. He held the ball, walked over, touched the bag, looked around, and the umpire called me out. I was standing about halfway between home plate and first base looking around, and the pitcher Yamauchi, who spoke a little English, looked at me half laughing and said, "Lee-san, *gomenasai* [I'm sorry]." That was probably the most unusual call that I had in the whole eleven years.

A lot of strange things happened like that. I hit a ball that struck second base and bounced over the shortstop's head, and the shortstop got an error because the scorekeeper thought that he should have jumped up and got it.

The *gaijin* players had their own special strike zone. Actually, I wouldn't even call it a strike zone. It was whatever the umpire decided to call. Bobby Marcano, who played with the Hankyu Braves, told me right away not to argue if it's a ball or a strike. If it comes within range, swing at it, and try to hit it far! If it was close enough for the umpire to call it a strike, it was close enough to hit. That became my motto. One day, a right-hander threw me a curve that broke right over my chest and hit me in my back leg. And the umpire called it a strike! I started laughing, "What's going on here?" He looked around and looked at the other umpires, and they didn't know what to do. I said, "Don't worry about it. It's a strike," and I got back in there.

It would have been nice to have things all even, but I always went back to the point that I went to play baseball in their country. I was living in their country and their culture. It was the same when you played here. If you were in Little Rock, you played the way they did in Little Rock; if you were in Santo Domingo playing winter ball, you played baseball the way they played in Santo Domingo. I was in Japan, so I was playing Japanese baseball. That was always my bottom line.

Because Clarence Jones and other people had helped me when I first got to Japan, I felt obligated to tell guys the same things. Warren Cromartie started calling me "the godfather to *gaijin*," because I was helping all the guys. We used to go to Roppongi and meet at Nicola's pizza parlor. There were three teams from Tokyo, so there were usually four to six players who would come over. We'd have a few beers and talk about the game.

Most of the foreign players had the same complaints when they got to Japan. "They run us into the ground. They turn us around. They spin us up and down. They trip us. They trick us. They do everything they can to upset us." But they were trying to see what we were made of. Japanese players had been through all that stuff since they were in Little League. We were basically getting initiated. I don't know about today, but if you went to Japan twenty years ago, you would have gotten initiated to see if you were tough enough or loyal enough to work in Japan. That was part of the system. Everybody I met in Japan had to go through something similar, whether they were an airline pilot, a photographer, or a restaurant owner. We all went through the same situation to live and work in Japan. That's how the Japanese lived, and that's how they made their system work—how they got everybody to move together and not step on each other's toes.

I would always tell the other *gaijin* that there were only two of us on each team, so we really had to take care of each other. And the first thing you do to take care of your teammate is to stop complaining. Leon and I had a rule that we spread to the other guys. When Leon would complain to me about something, I had the authority to stop him from talking after about five minutes. There was no reason to talk about it for ten minutes or twenty minutes. It was just a waste of time. When I would say, "That's enough of that one," he would stop, and we would talk about something else. We started doing that at Nick's.

I always told them to protect your partner's back. The first thing they would try to do in Japan was to see who was the weaker of the two *gaijin*. If one guy stabbed his partner in the back, that would be the end for him, because he wasn't a good teammate. I would tell them you really have to work hard, not complain, and set goals. After all, we were there to play baseball, and it was good baseball.

Probably the all-around best team was the Seibu Lions of the mid-1980s. They had an unbelievable pitching staff and very good defense. Terry Whitfield and Steve Ontiveros were their foreign players. They played every day, didn't complain much, and got the job done. Their manager, Tatsuro Hirooka, was tough. He had those guys drinking goat milk and soymilk. He controlled their diets and everything they did. They had three starters who could throw in the nineties and a reliever by the name of Tamotsu Nagai, who struck me out and made me look bad for eleven years! When they used

to bring him in, the guys would start laughing, "Here comes Nagai!" They knew that I wasn't going to get a hit. Everybody in the country knew it!

Over time, you try to use some sort of psychology on different pitchers—especially a guy who gets you out. So, one time, I gave Nagai a present. Their team was warming up on the field, and I got a bag of candy, and I walked out to where the Lions pitchers were stretching. I said, "Nagai-san, Nagai-san." He looked up, and he had this funny look on his face. He had probably never seen me close-up, never closer than sixty feet, before. I said, "*Presento, presento,*" and I gave him the present. What I was trying to do was get him to change the way he thought about me—to alter his thought process, because he was getting me out regularly. I gave him this present, and I thought, "This is going to work. This is going to work." But it didn't.

Well, after he had appeared in five hundred games, they had a celebration party for him, and he invited me and my wife to the party. I thought that was pretty strange, because he was supposed to be the enemy. They were making speeches and giving him trophies, and they called me up to the stage. I was standing there onstage with my wife, who was interpreting for me, and Nagai said, "I invited Leron here today, because out of my 500 appearances, I had 220 of them against him! Thank you very much!" And then he gave me my present back! I just started laughing. I thought that was probably the greatest thing that ever happened to me in Japan. It just really, really blew me away.

During my first year, Clarence Jones said that it was his last year, and I said, "We're in spring training, how do you know it's your last year?" He said, "I just know it's my last year. And when it's your last year, you're going to know it, too. And you won't be able to stop it. It's just the way it is here."

In 1987, Arito became the new manager. He played old-school, Japanese-style baseball. He traded Ochiai, because he didn't like the way Ochiai played baseball. He also thought that I didn't practice or run enough, so I didn't deserve to be playing. It didn't matter that I was the league-leading hitter and averaged almost twenty-nine home runs year. He wanted a traditional Japanese team, and he couldn't do that with Ochiai or Leron Lee. They wouldn't trade me, so it was up to Arito to get me out of there. I was thirty-nine years old, and Arito was giving me the steal sign every time I got on base. I was stealing my fifth base in spring training, and I didn't steal five bases usually all season, when I sprained my back or something. I knew

that I couldn't come out of the lineup, because I'd be playing right into his hands, so I tried to play through the pain. By the end of May, I could hardly walk. I went to all kinds of doctors, but I finally had to go on the disabled list. I was out for six weeks, and every day, I went someplace different, trying to get my back fixed, because I had to get back in the lineup. As a veteran player I knew that I needed to get back into the lineup by a certain time to hit .300. I had been told several years before, that the first time I didn't hit .300, they were going to let me go.

Well, I finally got off the disabled list, but Arito still didn't play me. I sat there just waiting and counting the missed at bats. One day, he put me out to pinch-hit when there was a right-handed pitcher out there, and then he called me back. He did that just to show me up. He pinch-hit for the pinch hitter before I even got up. He was trying to make me lose face. I sat on the bench and pinch-hit for another two weeks. Finally, he put me in, and I started hitting. I got my average up from .235 to .272, but then the season ended. That was when I knew that I was out of there. There was no way that I would come back and play for Arito, anyway. The day the season ended, the press writers had already calculated that if I had played in thirteen more games that I probably would've hit .300. But as it turned out, I couldn't have played anymore anyway, because my back never completely recovered. To this day, I still have back pains.

A lot of people asked me, "Would you rather be playing now?" And I say no. I played in the Majors for seven years, and I got to play against Hank Aaron, Willie Mays, and Willie McCovey. I got to play with Lou Brock and Bob Gibson. I met some really great players, the real superstars of Major League baseball. And then I went to Japan, and there was Sadaharu Oh, Shigeo Nagashima, Koji Yamamoto, and Hiromitsu Ochiai. The superstars of Japan and I was right there with them. I would actually say that my professional career was in Japan and not in America. It was a great career, and it was just a fabulous time.

17 Masaaki Mori

Born: January 9, 1937, in Gifu, Japan
1955–74: Yomiuri Giants catcher
1978–79: Yakult Swallows coach
1982–84: Seibu Lions coach
1986–95: Seibu Lions manager
2000–01: Yokohama Baystars manager

Masaaki Mori has won more championships than any other man in the history of Japanese professional baseball. As a player, Mori caught for the Yomiuri Giants for twenty years and helped them to sixteen championships. He was a member of twelve All-Star teams and was selected for the Best Nine eight times. He was also named the Most Valuable Player of the 1967 Japan Series. After retiring as an active player, Mori coached for the Yakult Swallows and Seibu Lions, picking up three more championship rings in five years. In 1986, he took over as the manager for the Seibu Lions. During his nine years at the helm, Mori led the Lions to the championship eight times and won the Japan Series six times. He has won the Shoriki Award (given annually for contributions to the development of Japanese baseball) twice (1986 and 1990). Overall, Mori has been on twenty-seven pennant-winning teams and has won the Japan Series twenty times. As a manager, he won 673 games, lost 438, and tied 59.

I WAS A BASEBALL PLAYER for twenty years for the Yomiuri Giants before I became a coach and a manager. I managed the Seibu Lions for nine years and the Yokohama Bay Stars for two years. I enjoyed managing more than playing. When you're a player, you only have the responsibilities of your own position, but as a manager, you control the game. Also, you may win

a championship, but the next year you have to start again and sometimes even build the team from scratch. And that's really fun.

When I first joined the Giants in 1955, the rookies all lived together in a dormitory, and there was a farmer's field nearby where we used to practice. Our manager, Shigeru Mizuhara, carried on the old traditions and old style of baseball. He was a wonderful person, and he reflected the age that we were playing in. He used to come to the field about thirty minutes before the games and never came to watch us practice. Under Mizuhara-san, there was really no coaching staff. Goro Taniguchi was the pitching coach, but there was no batting coach, no fielding coach. In our days, if we didn't do well, we were fired, so we went to the Tamagawa practice field on our own to practice. But at that time, the Tamagawa facility was really just some open space by the banks of the river. During the rainy season, if it rained for a week or so, we couldn't practice at all.

My rookie year, the Yankees came to Japan, and I played against Yogi Berra. We were both catchers, and we both threw right-handed but hit left-handed. So there were a lot of similarities between us. I really admired him, but I was only a rookie, so I didn't get many opportunities to talk to him. I was more influenced by Roy Campanella. When the Giants went to Vero Beach training camp in 1961, Mr. Campanella coached us.

I became a regular player in my third-year. Mizuhara-san and Tetsuharu Kawakami were completely different types of managers. Under Kawakami-san, everything became more organized. He made Shigeru Makino a coach, and he created practice facilities, and we started practicing longer. Many people credit Makino-san for bringing the Dodgers' strategy to the Giants, but that's not true. It was actually when we were at Vero Beach that we began incorporating those strategies. Kawakami-san then gave everybody a copy of the book on the Dodgers' strategy, and he incorporated bunting into the team's plays.

Of course, I was the catcher for the famous V-9 Giants when we won nine consecutive championships. People often say how strong we were, but I think that we were really strong only during the first five years [1965–69]. At that time, our main rivals, Hanshin and Chunichi, were also very strong, and they really pushed us. But everybody took it for granted that we would win, so when we won a game, we'd feel relieved, not happy. If

we lost, everybody would complain! It was terrible! So rather than happy moments, I remember feeling more the very severe conditions and pressures that we were put under and the relief we felt from being released from that pressure.

Of all the teams in Japan, the Giants had the strongest sense of professionalism, because the older players set good examples. For instance, Mr. Kawakami practiced all the time in his room by swinging his bat. Before he entered professional baseball, Shigeo Nagashima was already a superstar in the Tokyo Big Six University league, and despite his popularity, he practiced more than other people. If he had a poor game, he would continue to swing his bat in his room before taking his shower or taking a meal. He did what needed to be done even in his private time to get good results on the field. I think he realized that he was the central player for the team, so he had a strong sense of responsibility and pride. When the young players saw that even a player of his caliber practiced so hard, it motivated them to work hard.

When Sadaharu Oh came up in 1959, he wasn't much of a hitter. For the first three years, he didn't hit very well. Then he realized that he needed to change. He wanted to figure out how to adjust his timing. Mr. [Hiroshi] Arakawa, the batting coach at that time, and he developed that one-legged stance, and as a result he became a home-run hitter. But it took time, and he practiced quite a lot to get to that point. So, I think it was important that the senior players established a sense of professionalism. Of all the teams in Japan, the Giants have the longest tradition of this.

In those days, the team functioned as a typical Japanese organization—everybody did the same thing together. There was not much of a difference among the players, including the stars, except for Masaichi Kaneda. He was different. If he felt that he wasn't in a very good condition, he would just practice in the morning and go home. That was very unusual in those days. But when he did practice, he practiced hard. When he entered the Giants in 1965, the young players were astonished at how hard he worked. A lot of the other pitchers on the Giants said they couldn't keep up with his practice.

Of course, training is very different now. There were no machines in those days, and there was nobody to teach us. We were told not to swim and not to do weights. There was a difference in diet, too. But, I think that it's not necessarily true that players today are bigger and stronger. I think

players in the old days actually had tougher bodies. We didn't get injured as often as the players do today. Look at the pitchers. In those days, they had big hips. You didn't see these slender pitchers that you have now. Physically, I think the core of their bodies were stronger, and they were able to withstand the punishment better. They also played despite injuries, because they might lose their position—their livelihood—if they didn't play, and in the long run, that made them stronger players.

To be honest, there was really no point in my career when I thought that I wanted to be a manager. After I retired, I became a coach for the Yakult Swallows for three years and then a coach for the Seibu Lions for three years. After the 1985 season, Tatsuro Hirooka was dismissed as the manager of the Lions. I had quit my position as coach the year before, but they called on me to become the next manager. I ended up managing the Lions for nine years and winning the league champion for eight years and the Japan Series six times.

My basic philosophy was defense oriented, centered around pitching. I built a strong defense and then added in the offensive components. I thought that each player had to fulfill his own role and contribute toward a win. I tried to have them understand that winning is not caused by one player's performance but that everybody contributes to a win. I especially made sure that the younger players understood this philosophy. The manager before me, Mr. Hirooka, was very strict. I think that many of the younger players felt distant from him and were little scared of baseball as a result of his very strict philosophy. I valued each player's feelings. I really respected each individual and also respected his pride as a player. I told the *gaijin* players that they could talk to me about anything. I realized that they were coming into a different culture, and their lifestyles would change completely. They had to adjust not only in baseball but in everyday life, and it would take time for them to really understand Japanese culture.

In the games, a manager uses whatever strategy is appropriate for his team. It depends on the team's makeup. Look at the Giants. They had so many home-run hitters that they didn't need to bunt much. But if there are no big hitters in your lineup, then the priority is to get runners to the next base. The media just doesn't understand that. They may say that a lot of bunting makes the game less interesting, but it's all a matter of percentages. When you are facing a really good pitcher, you have only a few opportuni-

ties from the first to ninth inning to score, so to let an opportunity pass by just because it appears early on is really stupid. That first run really gets the game moving and starts everything. Once you get a runner on base, if you move him to second, that puts more pressure on the opposing team. And if you get him to third base, that's even more pressure. That's how we mentally attack the pitcher.

Using the bunt really depends on the rival pitcher and also the personalities of the players that you have on your team. For example, I had a player named Hiromichi Ishige, who was very famous, but when there was a man on first and no outs, he would hit into a double play seventy percent of the time. So, it was better to tell him to bunt the ball at that time. This is just percentage baseball.

Another player on the Lions, Hatsuhiko Tsuji, seemed very agile but actually couldn't execute a drag bunt, so a straight sacrifice was the best strategy to use with him. Players who seem very good from the outside are not necessarily so once you know them really well. For example, somebody might have a batting average of .300 against bad pitchers and only .100 against good pitchers. There may also be somebody who is not that great a batter overall but is really strong in a clutch situation. Those are the guys that you can really rely on. You have to take all of those numbers into consideration.

Many Americans comment that we Japanese practice too much, but they don't fully understand the situation. Americans have a complete organizational system where young players enter the minor leagues and are taught baseball. By the time they climb to the Major Leagues, all they have to do is concentrate on their performance in the games. We don't have such a system for youths in Japan. We get young rookies who have just entered the game in our clubs, so we have to educate them, and we have no choice but do that. Therefore, to win games, we have to do a lot of practice. Of course, in Japan, we have major teams and farm teams, but the difference is much clearer in the United States.

One of my fondest memories as a manager was when we played the Yakult Swallows in 1992 for the Japan Series. Katsuya Nomura was managing the Swallows at that time. It was a battle of managers and how we used our heads by reading the opponent's moves and trying to guess what each would do next. I would bring out one player, anticipating that if we brought him out, Nomura would bring out another player. But Nomura

wouldn't do it that way. I'd ask myself, "Why isn't he bringing out that player?" We were constantly trying to read each other's moves and minds.

What was the funniest thing I ever saw on a baseball field while managing? Well, that question is very unusual from a Japanese point of view. There were moments where in my mind I was laughing, but I don't remember openly laughing at anything. Most of the time, I was concentrating on the game or thinking about what the next move should be, so I didn't have time to smile or laugh.

The role between the front offices and the men on the field was pretty bad. I feel that the people in the front offices don't really understand the game very well. They don't have a clear vision of what direction a team should go. And the roles haven't been clearly set in Japan between the front offices and those in the field, so managers have to get involved. For example, when we want to trade a player, the front office should handle it, but in Japan, the manager has to get involved. As a person who has been on the field for a long time, I felt very frustrated.

As a manager, my job was to get results. My attitude was if you are not satisfied, go ahead, and fire me. It was up to the owner and front office to decide my fate. As long as I had done what I thought was right, even if they fired me, that was okay. Surprisingly, the more you win in Japan, the less they appreciate each win. Even if you win more and more, the number of fans in the stands don't necessarily increase. Instead, people take it for granted that you're going to win again. And they keep one wondering what's next? Well, in Japan, what's next is they want a manager who is popular with the mass media—a showman. I think that in the United States, that would be unthinkable. The more you win, the more respect you gain from the fans, owners, and media. But in Japan, the more you win, the larger the sense of jealousy toward the manager. That was very difficult to deal with.

I've visited America and attended the World Series and All-Star games, and I am envious of what I saw. I think American baseball fans are wonderful, and I envy that there are so many fans who value the history of the game. When you walk into any team's stadium, you can see its history through the photos lining the walls. Go into any front office, and again you see memorabilia of their history—you don't see that in Japan.

The spirit of respecting the history of baseball that causes people go to Cooperstown in the United States does not exist in Japan, nor does the desire to leave stories for the next generation. I think it's very sad that Japa-

nese youths don't know about most former players. But the fact that most current professional baseball players in Japan don't know about the people who created the history of baseball I think is a tragedy. People today don't know who Mr. Mizuhara was or who Mr. Mihara was. Most of the players themselves don't know who Mr. Tsuruoka was. I had a twenty-year career with the Giants, but if I went back to the Giants, most of the players wouldn't know that I had played for the team.

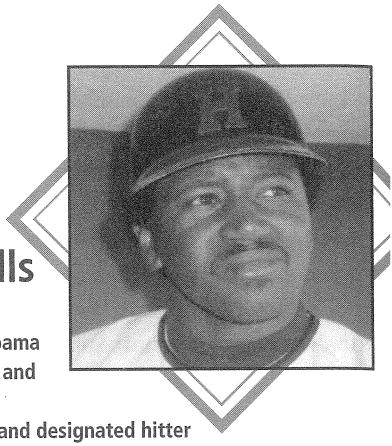
Why is this knowledge about the past lacking in Japan? I think the problem is in the overall Japanese baseball system. One of the problems here in Japan is that the organization—the commissioner and the associations in the Central League and the Pacific League—is bureaucratic. The people who run baseball in Japan today, do they understand the game? Do they love the game? Unfortunately, the answer is no.

For example, in the All-Star Game and the Japan Series, the first pitch is usually thrown out by a celebrity, who has no understanding of baseball at all. That's really, really sad. Nobody thinks about inviting the former players to these events. They are almost forgotten.

I've had the chance to meet the commissioners from both Korean and Taiwanese baseball, and I felt an enthusiasm that is lacking in the Japanese organization. Although organized baseball in these countries has a very short history, they are incorporating new ideas and are enthusiastic about learning from Major League Baseball. They're always asking themselves what can they do to develop the sport further.

Another problem is the Japanese media. There's a big difference in the sports media between Japan and the United States. In the United States, journalists who cover baseball really love the game and have a real deep understanding of it whereas in Japan, the mass media who cover the game often don't even understand the rules. For example, the Japanese media don't concentrate on how baseball is played but on just one player. When Nomo went to the Majors, all the media concentrated on him. Then, Ichiro went over, and Nomo was forgotten. And then, Matsui went over, and everyone else was forgotten. I think that exemplifies the situation. They don't understand the game as a whole. Some baseball players have gotten so fed up with answering stupid questions that they have stopped giving interviews. I think that every team in Japan still forbids the mass media from coming into the locker rooms.

I think Japanese baseball is really standing at a precipice right now. The commissioner is not doing his job, and the future of Japanese baseball is really unsure. The reforms that need to be made haven't been made. Everybody is thinking only of himself and not how to develop the game. I think that we are all feeling very anxious. A good example is how the Central League and Pacific League have their backs to each other, with no relationship whatsoever. In the United States, they are doing everything they can to increase the number of fans. That's why they now have interleague games, but in Japan, that hasn't been realized. The Pacific League teams would like to have games with the Central League, but for the other teams in the Central League, that would mean fewer games against the Giants. These teams are thinking only of themselves. Nobody is taking into consideration what would be best for the fans. Are the commissioner and the baseball associations thinking about the future of the game? No. We need to change all aspects of the game here in Japan, because if we don't, baseball will be left behind the other sports. I probably sound I like I'm criticizing Japanese baseball, but it's because I only want Japanese baseball to improve.



18 Greg "Boomer" Wells

Born: April 25, 1954, in McIntosh, Alabama
1981: Toronto Blue Jays first baseman and designated hitter
1982: Minnesota Twins first baseman and designated hitter
1983–91: Hankyu Braves/Orix Blue Wave first baseman
1992: Fukuoka Daiei Hawks first baseman

After a brief Major League career, Greg "Boomer" Wells became one of the top hitters in the history of Japanese baseball. During his ten-year career, Wells collected 1,413 hits, 277 home runs, and 901 RBIs and posted a .317 lifetime batting average. In 1984, Wells became the first foreigner to win the triple crown in Japan, as his 37 homers, 130 RBIs, and .355 batting average helped the Braves capture the pennant. Wells went on to win the RBI crowns in 1987 and 1989 and the batting title in 1989. He was selected to four Best Nine teams. He currently lives in Atlanta, Georgia, and returns to Japan for old-timers' games.

WHY DID I GO to Japan? Because I was sold like a slave!

I was with the Twins, playing ball in Puerto Rico when my agent called and said, "You've just been sold to Japan." I was like, "Wait a minute—they can do that without my permission?" I had heard that guys who went to Japan were old and were just going for a last paycheck before they retired. At the time I was twenty-seven, so I said, "No way! I'm not going over there! Tell them that I don't want to go." But the Twins told my agent that they had already sold me and that I didn't have a choice. Still, I said I wasn't going. Finally, Calvin Griffith, the Twins' owner, called me directly and said, "Look, we've already sold your contract, and you're going." I told him that I wasn't. He told me, "If you don't go to Japan, there's no telling where I'll send you next year!" I thought, "Oh my goodness, that could mean Mexico or something. Twenty-some-hour bus trips and stuff like that."

I sat down with my wife and said, "What are we going to do? If I don't go, there's a good chance that I'll get blackballed and be out of the game. So should I try to go to Japan and make a little money?" She said, "Do whatever you want to do." So I said, "Let's see what the Japanese are talking about," and we started talking about a contract. They were offering me good money—I could make in a month what the big-league minimum was for the season. I told them, "That's pretty good, but I've heard about all this money over there, and if you want to get me over to Japan, I want a bunch of that money!" I was basically trying to blow the deal so that I wouldn't have to go. But Calvin Griffith called me and said, "I hear you're having trouble signing. Don't blow this deal! If you blow this deal, you'll be sorry!" I got the message and agreed to a two-year contract.

I just loved playing baseball. I would have played baseball in the Major Leagues for free. Since I was a little boy, I dreamt about being a Major League ballplayer, and when I finally got the opportunity to do it, they sold me to the other side of the world. And I didn't have a choice about it. It was unreal, and it bothered me. Then, I thought about it, and I decided what the hell. I had played baseball in Venezuela and Puerto Rico and always had fun. They were going to pay me to be a kid so I'd be a kid in Japan.

For spring training, we went to an island that they said was like Florida. But when we got there, it was snowing! We were on the field by 9 A.M., off at 5 P.M., and we never stopped moving except for thirty or forty minutes to eat a sandwich and a bowl of noodles. They had the weirdest sandwiches—tangerine and banana sandwiches, cucumber sandwiches, and stuff like that. I told them, "I don't eat that! Put some meat between the bread!" We showed up on February first, and the first month was like boot camp for the Marines! Then, in March, we started playing games.

In my first spring-training game, we played against Seibu, and I hit three home runs. Three monster shots off Kimiyasu Kudo. His manager ran him to death after that! We became good friends. If he struck me out, as I was going to play defense, he would say, "Ahhh, that ball was too high." And if I hit a home run off him or something, I would go, "Ahhh, that curve ball was only so-so. It was too slow." Or I'd say, "You have to get those down." We just talked and laughed like that ever since.

I had the best manager of all time to play for: Toshiharu Ueda. He was the perfect manager for a foreigner—he left me alone. I used to tell my for-

eign teammates as they came over, and I broke in quite a few, "As long as you work hard and play hard, Ueda will not bother you." He was also a good manager, and I enjoyed playing for him. We got really close, and he became like family to me.

We didn't play base-to-base baseball. We played long ball. Ueda-san used to love to watch the home-run ball. When we took batting practice, if we weren't hitting balls in the stands, he would ask, "Boomer, is the ball carrying?" "Not really," I would say. And he would just stop batting practice and make our equipment manager bring in all new balls. He used to like just to sit back and watch us hit balls into the stands.

One time against the Hawks, we had runners on second and third, and they were going to purposely walk me. The catcher was squatting, but they were throwing balls outside the strike zone. I had three balls, and the next one was outside, but I acted like I was swinging and couldn't hold up. I looked in the dugout, and Ueda-san started laughing. The guy threw another pitch out there, so I just swung. Ueda-san was still laughing. So now I had a full count, and I was thinking, watch this guy try to sneak one on the inside of the plate. And sure enough he did, and I hit a home run. When I came into the dugout, Ueda was tapping on his head saying, "Nice thinking."

There were just all kinds of crazy stuff going on. Stuff that most people never knew. The first time we played the Hawks, a coach got up on the benches and was feeling around the edges of the top of the dugout and around the lights. "What are they doing?" I asked. My interpreter said, "They're looking for bugs." I said, "Roaches? What's that about?" "No," he said, "they have listening devices hidden in dugout to hear what we're saying during our meetings and to find out what our game plan is going to be." I was like, "Oh God! This is baseball! It's not a war game! It's not that tough!"

We went to our home park at Nishinomiya, and my teammates said, "Boomer, we know the pitches!" I said, "I don't want to know." They said, "You don't want to know what the pitches are?" "No, because I can't hit like that." I had no problem hitting by just seeing the ball and watching the spin. "I don't want to know what the pitches are, I'd rather do it my way." I turned to my interpreter and said, "Chico, just out of curiosity, how do they know the pitches?" He said, "Look out into center field. See that guy with the gray uniform?" And there was a guy sitting in the center-field bleachers with a gray usher's uniform on, with high-power binoculars stealing the

signs from the catcher. If he leaned right, it was a curve ball, if he leaned left, it was a fastball. "What are you all doing?" I wondered. "This is baseball! It's not that tough!"

They used to steal signs so much that they had what I called the Ouija board. The catcher and pitcher used to have a piece of cardboard glued to the backs of their gloves with a grid containing the types of pitches. The catcher would put down signs like one, two, and three, and the pitcher would look at the Ouija board on the back of his glove and go over one, down two, over three, and whatever was in that box was the pitch the catcher wanted. Sometimes the pitcher would shake him off—so the games took forever! It would be three hours, and we'd only be in the fifth inning. I would say, "Take that crap off your gloves, and just throw the ball!" The only people that didn't use them were the star pitchers. Hisashi Yamada, Choji Murata, and Osamu Higashio didn't use them because they didn't care if you knew what was coming.

I didn't know this until almost the end of my career, but Choji Murata's catcher never gave him a sign. Murata just threw whatever he wanted, and the catcher had to just see the ball and catch it. No wonder he had so many passed balls! This man was throwing the ball ninety-five, ninety-seven miles per hour with an awesome forkball and a devastating slider, and his catcher didn't know what was coming! He used to get beat up. I didn't know, I thought he just couldn't catch! I had wondered why Murata would pitch so quickly. He would just get the ball and throw, get the ball and throw, get the ball and throw.

The first year is always the toughest over there, but I did alright—hit .304 with seventeen home runs and sixty-two RBIs. Everybody was telling me, "You had a good year." I said, "What? That's not a good year for me. I'm a much better player than that. You wait. Next year, I'll show you."

During my second year, the year we won the pennant, and I won the triple crown, this is what a February day was like. We would start practicing at 9:00. We would start off jogging, then we would stretch, do some exercises, and start sprinting. Then we would go to another field and take infield practice. We would take ground balls, practice cutoffs and relays, and all of that. Then we would break up into groups. One group would take batting practice on the field, another would be inside at the cages, and another group would be in the weight room where one of the oldest

coaches would make us do crunches and sit-ups and all kinds of stuff. Then we would rotate. We would keep moving like that the whole time. No stopping to rest or anything. Then we would have lunch for about thirty to forty minutes. After that, we started up again. We would start by taking regular infield. Then, the coaches would line up across the infield and hit forty minutes of ground balls to each player at each position! They would hit twenty minutes worth of ground balls to your left and then twenty minutes to your right. When we got through with that, we would move to the next base. The third basemen would move around to first base, and we would do it again at each position! Afterwards we did some stretching and ran ten pole-to-poles. Then we turned around and ran sixty-meter dashes and then ten, thirty-meter dashes! After we did that, we would stretch again and go indoors for about an hour's worth of nonstop aerobics!

When we were through, and I got back to the room, I was covered with dirt from my head to my toes. I'd walk in the room, close the door behind me, lay down right there on the floor behind the door, and sleep for about an hour. Then I would get up, take off my uniform, lay it outside the door in a pile like we were supposed to do, and take a shower. After I got out of the shower, I would lie on the bed and go to sleep for an hour or two. Then I would get up and go eat dinner, come back and go to bed. I'd wake up the next day and do the same thing over again!

When we started the 1984 season, we were just in great shape. We started off winning, and I started off hitting the ball really well. And I just kept going. Over the season, I got a little bit tired, because basically I was carrying the team. Believe it or not, your shoulder gets real heavy if you have to carry a team for the whole year. But we were in just so much better shape than everybody else that we had ten- and twelve-game winning streaks.

I was leading the league in everything and going for the triple crown. No foreigner had ever won the triple crown before. Hiromitsu Ochiai just came out and said that it wasn't right. I was winning everything too easily and that he should challenge me. And, man, Ochiai could hit! He had this attitude, because he knew he could hit. So, all of a sudden, I stopped getting pitches to hit. The strike zone was already horrible, but it got even bigger. And pitchers all over the league started feeding him mediocre fastballs. Even some pitchers on my team grooved pitches for him. Yutaro Imai was one of them. At the time, I was ticked off, but I understood how tough it was for them. It was their game, and they had these foreigners coming in

and just destroying the league. He won twenty-one games that year, and some of the press told me that if I hadn't won the triple crown, Imai would have won the MVP award. So he had the MVP hanging over his head, which was more money and everything. I sort of understood it. The next year, we ended up becoming good friends.

The only thing that Ochiai had a chance to catch me in was home runs. The press asked me if you don't win the triple crown, which category do you want to win? It was as if they had already written me off. So, I told them the home-run title. And I concentrated even more and started trying to hit home runs. As my concentration got stronger, my average and RBIs also went up.

The 1984 Japan Series against the Hiroshima Carp went seven games and was very exciting. Well, the reason it was so exciting was because I wasn't hitting! I didn't hit at all. Oh, I was miserable! We had clinched the pennant early, and we didn't have many rain-outs, so there was almost a two-week gap between our last game and the start of the series. There's nothing like live pitching and playing in real games. I had just come off a triple-crown season and had hit all year long, but my timing was gone. I was struggling, and I was upset, but Ueda-san sat me down and said, "Don't worry about it. You carried us all season-long. Let somebody else do it now." I said, "But I'm supposed to hit. I'm the leader." He said, "I know, but you can't hit all the time. We leaned on you all year, now you lean on us." Well, I played as hard as I could, but I just couldn't hit. It was like somebody came down and stole my timing. I wasn't myself, it was an out-of-body experience. We ended up losing. My interpreter told me that there were all kinds of rumors—some people even said that the *yakuza* [Japanese mafia] paid me off. I wish it was that simple!

But the year I won the triple crown wasn't my best season. 1986 was my best season. I had 42 home runs, .350 average, and 103 RBIs, and I finished second in everything, as Ochiai won the triple crown. My daughter was supposed to be born in February, so I told the Braves that I was going to stay home until she was born. I was still going to get in a lot of spring training, but she didn't come until March 18. When I got to Japan, we had only a week left of spring training. The press had already decided that there was no way I was going to hit, because I had missed spring training. I told them that just missing two months of spring training wasn't going to stop me from hitting, because I was in shape. I don't think my average got under .340 that year, but I didn't win the Player of the Week once, and I didn't get any

interviews that year. It was like I had the plague. They stayed away, because I broke the rules by not going through all that rigorous training.

That same year, "Animal" [Brad Lesley] joined the team. Animal was fun. There was never a dull moment. The catcher would usually go to the mound to congratulate a pitcher at the end of a game. The first time Animal got a save, the catcher took off his mask, and Animal head butted him and almost knocked him to his knees! After that, whenever he went to congratulate him, he kept his mask on! After a save, players wouldn't high-five him, because he might kill them! The players would sort of run by and give him a pat. Oh, it was funny. Those were good times! He's a sick man—a very sick man!

My most memorable moment was something that they don't even talk about in Japan. They don't even show the tape. We were playing the Kintetsu Buffaloes, and this one pitcher, I can't remember his name, always used to throw at me and knock me down. My first time up, he knocked me down—I mean he put me in the dirt! I was screaming at him as Todd Brown walked up to the plate, and [Todd] just got drilled right in the ribs. Now I was really screaming at the guy. When I got really mad at a pitcher, I used to come back to the dugout and pace behind the bench. My teammates used to watch me as I would just pace and pace. I would get madder and madder, and that made my concentration just awesome. Then I would say, "Downtown! I'm going downtown!" And my teammates would say, "Boomer said 'Downtown'! He's going to hit a home run!" I never missed the call, because I would get so mad that I could hit a BB at that time.

Well, the next time up, the guy knocked me down again, and then he hit Brown again, so I started pacing hard. I was mad. I was fuming. The next inning, I was going to get a chance to hit. I had my helmet on and my bat in my hand, and I was pacing. And I said, "Downtown!" And my teammates said, "Downtown?" I said, "Yep, I'm going downtown. And I'm going to point!"

"Point?"

"Yeah, I'm going to do like Babe Ruth and point!"

"Naw, stop joking."

"No, I'm not joking. I'm going to point!"

They just started laughing, "No way."

I walked up to the plate, dug in, and pointed out toward the left-field stands. The umpire said, "Boomer-san, Boomer-san, *Dame*! *Dame*! [Don't do that! Don't do that!] Stop! Stop! *Dame*!"

I stepped in the box. First pitch—way inside. I stepped back out of the box and pointed again.

"Boomer-san, *dame*!"

I stepped back in the box, and this nut tried to sneak a fastball by me on the inside part of the plate, and I hit it off the back of the stadium! I hit a bullet—just a line drive right out of the park. It was funny, because Ralph Bryant was in the Buffaloes' dugout just shaking his head. He told me, "Man, I was back in the dugout, and they told me, 'Bryant, Bryant, look at Boomer! He's doing the Major Leagues—Babe Ruth!' 'What?' 'He's pointing!'" So he came out and watched me hit this bomb. He told me, "If I'd have been pitching, I would have hit you so hard. I cannot believe that he tried to sneak a pitch on you. Man, that was crazy!"

They never showed that moment. Never talked about it.

Hiromitsu Kadota was one of the strongest men I've ever known. He was a left-handed hitter, and when he came up, I would go back on the grass at first base. He would look down and shorten up like he was going to bunt, and I would yell, "*Dozo* [Please go ahead]!" and then he would hit a bullet somewhere. If he didn't hit the ball right at you, you couldn't catch it, because you didn't have time to react! If I was holding a guy on first, and he was at the plate, I was scared. With that all dirt infield, oh my goodness! I used to get off the base and hold my glove in front me to protect myself because this man was awesome! When he came to play with us, he became a good friend.

The Braves usually brought their draft choices over to the field and let them take batting practice so everybody could see them. I was running in the outfield when this kid walked into the cage and started hitting. I just stopped and stood there watching him hit. Our vice president was on the field, so I called him over, "Who's this kid right here?"

"That's Ichiro Suzuki."

I said, "That's your next superstar! Is he your Number One?"

"No, we drafted him in the fifth round."

I said, "You're lucky! This man can hit! He can hit right now in this league. Look how he's throwing his hands at the ball. That's your next superstar right there!"

He was like, "You think so?"

"I know so!" I don't believe in using the label *can't miss*, but he couldn't miss. After he got through hitting, he was out shagging fly balls, and you

could see that he had a little cockiness and that great arm. I was like, "This boy is awesome!"

He wasted three years in the minor leagues over there. In my last year, when I was with the Hawks, we were getting ready to play Orix, and I looked around and asked my old teammates, "Where's Ichiro?"

"He's on the farm team."

"Why?

"We have too many outfielders."

"So trade them," I said. "Put them all in a sack, and trade them for some pitchers! Why is he on the farm team? He shouldn't have been on the farm team last year. Last year, he should have been up with us—this year for sure, he should be starting. Too many outfielders, man, you're all crazy!"

When Ueda retired, and Shozo Doi came in 1991, I went through what a lot of other foreigners had gone through. Doi didn't respect me, and he didn't respect what I had done. He moved me from hitting third to hitting fifth, with the guy hitting behind me batting .190. The other teams just walked me. I would tell him, "Doi-san, you've got to hit me higher. I've always hit third." But he just refused. He didn't want a foreigner leading the team. I told him, "I'm the leader. If I don't hit, we don't win. It's always been like that." I told him that I play the game hard all the time and I've done too much for him not to respect me. But he did whatever he could to try to break me. He would make little comments on the bench, and he could speak just enough English to make me mad.

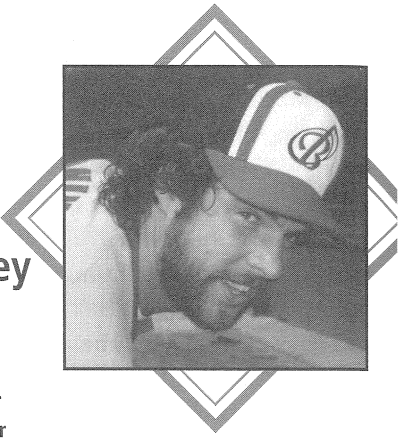
I've always had fun playing baseball. I thought I had the greatest job in the world. They paid me to be a kid. I loved it. I laughed, talked, and joked, no matter how hot it was, no matter what the score was. I had fun. It's a game, but Doi made it not fun. He made it where I didn't want to go to the ball park. My wife was saying, "You know, I've never seen you like this. You're not having fun. It's a chore for you to go to the games. It's not worth staying if you're going to be miserable." And she was right! So I took a serious cut in pay, a *serious* cut in pay, to move to the Hawks.

During my last season with the Braves, Shigetoshi Hasegawa was a rookie. Hasegawa could throw a slider over a dime! He had pinpoint on that slider. But he never threw his fastball. I used to tease him all the time. He was always telling me, "Boomer, I'm going to the Major Leagues. I'm going to play in the Major Leagues." I would say, "Get out of here! You'll never play

in the Major Leagues." He said, "Why?" "Because you don't pitch inside. You throw that little slider, and that's going to get hit if you don't pitch inside. You have to throw your fastball inside to make that slider that much better." But he never pitched inside until I became a free agent and went to the Hawks. Then, I walked up to the plate, and his first pitch knocked me off the plate! I tried to intimidate him by screaming, but he just stood on the mound and smiled! He's probably one of the smartest Japanese players I've known—actually he's probably the smartest player I know, period.

I wanted to be the first foreigner to hit three hundred home runs, and I wanted a thousand RBIs. If I hadn't broken my leg one year and messed up my knee another, I probably would have done it. Midway through 1992, I was leading the league in everything. It looked like another triple crown, but during the second half of the season, I hit a brick wall. I just ran out of gas. I was sitting in the dugout one day, and I just said, "Damn, that's what it is!" Kadota and the manager, Koichi Tabuchi, were with me. They went, "What?" I said, "I know what's wrong. In my mind, I can still do what I used to be able to do, but my body can't do it. I've gotten too old to do all the stuff I used to do. That's why I've run into this brick wall." They just started laughing! I said, "What's funny?" They said, "Every player realizes that one year. Once you realize that, the following year, you may have an awesome season."

But later that year, the Hawks changed managers, and Tabuchi was gone. The new manager came and said, "Boomer, you've gotten old, and we think you should retire. We need to make a change." I said, "What?!" I had led all of Japan in RBIs, and I finished in the top ten in home runs, but they weren't used to me hitting under .300, and I hit .271. I felt that I still had a good year and that I made everybody else play better because I played hard and pushed everybody and also keep them loose. But they forced me into retirement. It was time to leave, I guess. I was only going to play for one more year, anyway. I wanted to get my three hundred home runs and thousand RBIs, and then I was going to be through.



19 Brad "Animal" Lesley

Born: September 11, 1958, in Turlock, California
1982–84: Cincinnati Reds relief pitcher
1985: Milwaukee Brewers relief pitcher
1986–87: Hankyu Braves relief pitcher

Known as the "Animal" in the United States and "Animal-san" in Japan, Brad Lesley was the first foreign closer in Japan. Lesley had a promising rookie year with four saves, a 2.58 ERA, and a National League Player of the Week award with the Cincinnati Reds in 1982. However, a subsequent injury shortened his Major League career despite winning the 1985 Pacific Coast League Most Valuable Pitcher Award. In 1986, he joined the Hankyu Braves where he racked up nineteen saves, posted a 2.63 ERA, and was the winning pitcher in the second All-Star game. His on-the-field enthusiasm and antics made him an instant celebrity. After two years of Japanese baseball, Lesley retired and stayed in Japan for seven years to pursue an acting career. He currently lives in California, where he is part-owner of the Seattle Mariners Fantasy Camp, runs the Web site www.animalsan.com, and continues to act.

I WAS THE FIRST CLOSER ever brought to Japan. They had always preferred hitters, so Japan had never incorporated a closer into their system. When I went over there, I was a little apprehensive. I didn't speak the language. I didn't eat the food. It was going to be an eye-opener. I thought to myself, "Thank God, baseball is baseball." After about two months, I realized that the food was great, the people were wonderful, and it was easy to live there, but the baseball was ass-backwards!

Because closers were new, they didn't know quite how to use me. I remember there were nights when we had a two-run lead in the ninth, and the starter was laboring. I was up and ready, but they left him out there, and

he would give up three. Then, when we were down 6-5, they would bring me in. A starter loses face if he comes out of a game, so it was quite frustrating for a closer. Toward the end, they started using me properly, but in the beginning, it was a little tough.

There were a lot of things about Japanese baseball that I wasn't used to. One of the things I struggled with was that in the big leagues, it's all about winning—everything is about winning—but in Japan, practice was just as important as winning. One night, a guy got four hits including the game-winner in the ninth inning, but he had a bad practice the next day, so they benched him. There was also no killer instinct. In the big leagues, you wanted to kick the opponent's ass. You played for a five- or six-run inning, and you didn't bunt when you're ahead. In Japan, if you get your first guy on, the next guy will bunt. You try to get that first run. It's just the way they play. Also, outfielders would take balls in the gaps on the hop rather than risk looking ridiculous if the ball got by them when they were trying to make a great play.

A lot of the old, great players become managers in Japan. Like in the States, just because you were a great player doesn't mean you're going to have success as a manager, and that ran pretty rampant in Japan. But our manager, Toshiharu Ueda, had spent only a limited time in their big leagues as a catcher. He was a pretty gutsy manager. He didn't like losing. Before I got there, they had lost in seven games to the Hiroshima Carp in the Japan Series. A foul ball called fair for a home run beat them. Ueda lost it and beat the shit out of an umpire.

Ueda-san was, however, a very good skipper. He created a good atmosphere and had that killer instinct. That's why I enjoyed playing for him. He had a tough time handling me at first, because he had never had a closer before. So, we butted heads quite a bit, but there was mutual respect. He respected my ability, and I loved the fact that he loved to win.

I had a very good first year. There was many a night where I came out with my good stuff and got three strikeouts and the save. I ended up five and three with nineteen saves and a 2.63 ERA. The league hit .180 against me, and I only gave up one home run in two years. And that was a little thing that squeaked out in a very short ball park. We were playing the Buffaloes, and I came in with two guys on and a one-run lead. I hit the first guy and then had their catcher, Masataka Nashida, one and two. I threw a slider

over the plate, and he just got his bat on the ball. It looked like a short foul ball to right field, but it snuck in right over the corner of a little fence near the foul pole.

Later that season, when I was selected for the All-Star team, Nashida was my catcher for the second All-Star game, and I got the win. I went three innings that night. It was hot and humid, and the umpire kept on throwing balls out there that weren't rubbed up, and I would throw them back. It became comical. I'd throw them on the ground and rub them up with my sweat, and they kept on fouling them off.

Most of the Japanese players were great, great guys. That's one of the things I really liked about Japanese baseball. In the big leagues, after a game, everybody goes their own way, and you see them the next day at the ball park. In Japan, when you're on the road, everybody goes back to the same hotel, and more times than not, you eat together as a group. There were also no drug problems. In the States, every team has a selfish player—there is none of that stuff in Japan. It was a good group of guys and good team-oriented baseball.

During my first year, the Braves' attendance doubled. A large part of that was because of me. I was on the news every night, I think. I would yell and scream and celebrate strikeouts. When I was in the game, the heat was boiling! The oven was cooking! When you're a closer, it's a one-run game or tie game, and there's pressure with every pitch. I would definitely get caught up in the moment. I hated the hitters, and I attacked them in that manner.

One night, I was in Tokyo drinking with the *yokozuna* [champion sumo wrestler] Yasushi Onokuni, who was a dear friend of mine. It was five in the morning, and I asked him, "Ono, what's that thing you do at the end of the match after you get the prize money, that little hand gyration?"

"It's a special movement called a *kokoro*, which means *heart*. It means from my heart I accept this," he said.

"That is so cool! Next time I strike somebody out, I'm going to give him a little bit of that love!"

"*No, Animal*! Don't do that!"

"I'm going to do it," I said. He bet me one hundred thousand yen that I wouldn't do it. Seibu was in town, and the next day I struck out their star, Kazuhiro Kiyohara. I came flying off the mound and did a *kokoro*! It was on every news channel that night! They were all talking about that crazy *gaijin*.

The Braves marketed the shit out of me. Every night was, "the Animal this" or "the Animal that." They had the Animal yelling contest. Another time, they let fans who put on long hair and a beard in for free. I made a record and endorsed numerous products. The Braves made a lot of money on me. I was definitely a cash cow for those people. But that was okay. It's show business. The fans dug it, and I've always been about the fans. The Japanese fans were absolutely fantastic to me. I still have a love affair with those people.

My nickname? Johnny Bench gave it to me. Toward the end of his career, they played J. B. a lot at first base. Well, one day when J. B. was at first, they hit a weak ground ball to the right of Bench, and I went to cover first base. I was a very excitable player, and as I was coming to first base, I screamed, "Give me the fucking ball, J. B.!" His eyes popped out of his head, the ball kicked off of his glove, and he booted the play! When the reporters asked him about it after the game, he said, "The kid looked like a crazed animal coming at me!" So, the name was born. Whether you like it or not, when a Hall of Famer gives you a nickname, it sticks. It's a good name for a closer, and I think it exemplified the way I played, so I took it as a compliment.

Yeah, I did some crazy things, but the hitters respected my ability, and the fans dug me. I just butted heads with management. Like in 1987, we had five games left in the season, and we were a game and a half behind Seibu. We had a three-game series with them, and we won the first game to cut it to a half game. They were going to play Lotte, a weak team, after us, so we needed to sweep them. Their pitcher for the second game was Hisanobu Watanabe. He was their ace and a very good pitcher, who in his prime could have done very well here in the big leagues. Before the game, Ueda was on the bus saying how this guy has shoved it up our ass all year long. He was like 4-0 with a 1.80 ERA against us. He gave us this speech about samurai fighting spirit.

Every day after he gave his speech on the bus, he would put in a tape of that day's starting pitcher so we could study his trends and tendencies. There are six teams in the league, so you play the other five teams twenty-six times each. You know what time these guys go to bed! I mean, there's no mystery about what's going on. Ueda-san finished by saying, "Show me your samurai spirit. Reach deep inside yourselves because we have to win today." And he turns on the tape of Watanabe. The guys were so incredibly

nervous. They were just petrified! So, I had decided to loosen up the atmosphere and had done a little tape change. When he pushed in the tape, it came on to show this porno flick! The players laughed for maybe a full two seconds. Then there was dead silence, and the hands were all on their knees, and their heads were bowed to their laps. Ueda got up, and as he was trying to pull the tape out, he was screaming my name, "*Animal*!" But he couldn't get the tape out. I was having the time of my life! I had played in the big leagues. I know what it takes to win. You have to be relaxed and go out and kick your opponent's ass. That's what it's all about. These guys were so nervous, I thought I would lighten up the atmosphere. Trust me, I didn't!

But you know what? We beat Watanabe that night! But we lost the next night, and Seibu ended up winning the pennant and then beating the Giants in the Japan Series. The team fined me a couple of thousand dollars for that one, but I was just trying to get everybody to relax.

My first year over there, we were at home against Lotte, and we were tied in the tenth inning. I had pitched the top of the tenth, and we didn't score in the bottom half. I went back out to pitch the top of the eleventh, and the groundskeeper was on the field. I didn't speak Japanese yet, but I said, "Hey, you got to get off the field! It's 4-4!" He kept pointing to his watch, "Time over! Time over!" and I kept yelling at him to get off the field. Then, I looked around, and I was the only one on the field! My teammates were packing up their bags. I thought, "I know we didn't score, and they didn't get one off me. What the hell is going on?" And that's how I found out about the time limit. They have a curfew so everybody can catch the train back home. When they were shooting the movie *Mr. Baseball*, I ran that by Tom Selleck, and he fell out laughing, and it ended up in the movie. Selleck reacted in the movie to the grounds crew guy just like I did. So I ended up helping to put the script together.

At first, the movie was called *Tokyo Diamond*, and they pretty much wanted to laugh at Japanese baseball and make a mockery of it. The project didn't get off the ground. Then Universal came in and hired Fred Schepisi to direct it. Schepisi is a great director, who had just finished *The Russia House* starring Sean Connery and also did *Roxanne* starring Steve Martin and Darryl Hannah. But he's an Australian and knew nothing about baseball! And here came Tom Selleck, who is a big baseball fan and wanted

everything to look legitimate on film. Watching these two butt heads was classic. But the project came off, and I like the movie. I worked on that movie set for about three months. I had a good time, and it was good for me, because that opened the door to the Hollywood thing. This is my twelfth year now in the Screen Actors Guild.

The Braves wanted me to renew my contract for the 1988 season at the same amount, but I didn't want to do it. About that time, representatives for Kitano "Beat" Takeshi, a popular comedian, came down and said, "We read in the papers that you like Japan and are having contract trouble. If you want to come to Tokyo and learn Japanese, formally study it, we will match your baseball salary for two years, and you can start acting on *Takeshi's Castle* [a popular TV show]. As your Japanese increases, your role will increase." I said, "Yeah! I'll take a couple years off from baseball—no big deal." So I went from the ninth inning to a comedy show. I stepped on some toes. I won't lie to you. There were very mixed opinions about me in the baseball community. To save face, the papers reported that I was released. But, it was a contract issue.

Well, after two years, I couldn't afford to get back into baseball. I was doing acting, commentating, and I was teaching weight training at Hosei University. It was a good time to be over there, and it was a lot of fun. The show *Takeshi's Castle* ran for four years in prime time over there, and it just started running here. It's called *The Most Extreme Elimination Challenge* here. And it's going through the roof! There's a web site and everything else, and I'm all over this thing. It's fun to rekindle those old memories, since I was one of the original guys on the show.

Many foreign players who went over there couldn't wait to get home. I'm one of the few who stayed for years after my career was over. I learned the language. I married a Japanese girl and lived there for seven years. Japan was good to me. I still go back a couple times a year—usually, once for baseball and once for acting. I'm still very active in the movie business. Dave Henderson, a business guy, and I also own the Seattle Mariners Fantasy Camp. We do those twice a year. I also go to the Reds Fantasy Camp.

I think in the last twenty years the game has changed a lot. The typical Japanese isn't five-foot-two and 140 pounds anymore. There are some big kids playing now. They have reluctantly adopted more and more Western

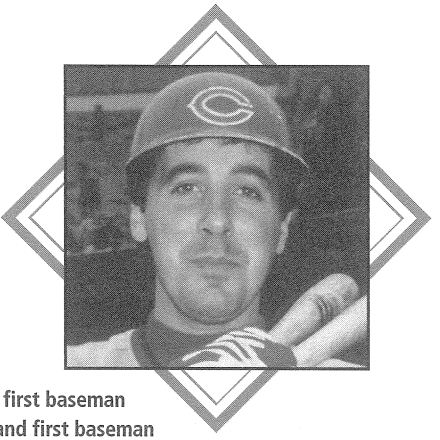
culture into their game. I think they've gotten a little bit more aggressive. They use the hit-and-run more. There's a little bit more stealing, and they are little bit more gutsy in the outfield.

I personally would love to see Japanese baseball flourish. The Japanese fans are knowledgeable and intelligent. My God, they stand for hours and hours supporting their clubs. They do a lot of things right. I love the way the teams travel to play league games in parts of Japan that don't usually have a chance to see pro ball. I would love to see Japanese baseball make a few changes to keep their heroes at home and supply a product that is lucrative for the owners, lucrative for the players, and complete entertainment for the fans. All three of them deserve it. and there's enough in that pot to go around.

I think Hideo Nomo and the other guys who have had success here have opened the Japanese eyes. and they're going to have to change some things. They are going to have to start taking care of their ballplayers. There's been a little bit of collusion by the owners over there. Ten years before you can become a free agent is ludicrous. In the States, if you have eight years in the big leagues and go 8-16, you're going to get a raise. In Japan, you can have an average year, but if your team doesn't do well, they might take back twelve percent of your salary! It's tough over there. To keep their players, the owners are going to have to sweeten the pot. It's business. And in our business you can't throw ninety-fives miles per hour when you're forty years old. There's a very small window of time when we can make big money.

Japanese baseball needs interleague play. Twenty-six games against each of five teams in one season is ridiculous. It's monotonous and a slap in the face to the fans. I'm not crazy about interleague play in the States, but in Japan, it is needed. It is absolutely needed. I would love to see the hierarchy make the needed changes to keep their stars there and have a legitimate World Series. I'd love to see a South American club and Asian club and American club played for the World Series. We're the only people in the world who would have a World Series and don't invite any other countries! That's a little backwards!

I think the future of Japanese baseball is okay. I really do.



20 Rick Lancellotti

Born: July 5, 1956, in Providence, Rhode Island
1982: San Diego Padres outfielder and first baseman
1986: San Francisco Giants outfielder and first baseman
1987–88: Hiroshima Carp outfielder
1990: Boston Red Sox outfielder and first baseman

Rick Lancellotti is often called the real-life Crash Davis, as he is the all-time, minor-league, home-run leader with 276. During his seventeen-year professional career, Lancellotti played for twelve minor-league clubs and three Major League clubs as well as a number of winter ball and foreign teams. In 1987, his first year with the Hiroshima Carp, he led the Central League with thirty-nine home runs. He currently lives in Rochester, New York, and runs Rick Lancellotti's Buffalo School of Baseball.

I NEVER PLAYED FOR MONEY. It always cracked me up when I went to the bank to cash a check for playing ball. I always thought, "I'd play for nothing." I slummed around every God-forsaken place on Earth, all because I just loved playing so much. I played in Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Italy, Japan, and all over North America. It was kind of a rocky road. I didn't choose the highway. I went by the back roads. I played for seventeen years and only got about ninety days in the big leagues. But you learn a lot by doing it that way.

I signed professionally in 1977 with the Pittsburgh Pirates, and spent nine years bouncing mostly around the minors. I played in the Pirates, Padres, Expos, Rangers, Mets, and Giants organizations. In June 1986, I got called up to the Giants. I was there for about ten days before they sent me back to Phoenix. But they called me back up in September. During that summer, Japanese clubs were coming around looking for players. They

ended up scouting Randy Johnson, who was our third baseman, and me. The Japanese scouts were there all the time videotaping me. Jimmy Lefebvre, our manager, had played in Japan, so he told me a lot about it. The more he told me, the less I wanted to go. He didn't paint a negative picture, he just painted an honest one. They say that whatever you know about American ball, leave it on the plane. Because once you get off the plane, you're in their world, and you have to play by their rules.

In the fall of '86, I was really torn. I was finally in the big leagues. Roger Craig was San Francisco's manager, and I went into see him. I said, "Look, Roger, I have a real problem. I do not want to go to Japan. I did not practice this hard to become a Japanese ballplayer. I need your opinion. What do you think I should do?" He said, "Well, I think you can play here. Maybe you should talk to Al Rosen [the general manager]." I went up to Rosen's office and asked the same questions, but he said something that sent a flag up. He said, "I think you can play here. But, I can't guarantee you anything. The money they are offering is a good deal." And the way that he said that, I thought, "Oh shit!" At that point, I was twenty-nine or thirty years old. I had already put in nine years in the minor leagues. I was thinking, "If I get sent back to the minor leagues again, I'm going to shoot myself!"

I put my wife, Debbie, through hell with this decision. Not even she could help me. It was one of those life decisions that you have to do on your own. She was so supportive in whatever I decided. Even though I had played ball for all those years, Debbie and I had no money and nothing to show for it. My son Joe was also born that year, so I kept thinking, "I should do the smart thing. The smart thing is to go to Japan, make the money, and be done with it." But the other side of me said, "What are you—nuts! You can play. You can make the Major League club and worry about the money later." I was really having a hard time deciding, but eventually, I took the deal.

I went over there with Randy Johnson. We were just in sweatshirts and jeans, and when we got off the plane, the media was everywhere. There must have been fifty people with cameras. We were instant celebrities. They put us in the back of a bus with a table, and the media rode in the front of the bus. They had TV cameras on us and were asking us questions like, "How do you like Japan?" We had been there only an hour! When we got to the hotel, there were another twenty or thirty reporters there. They asked us every question under the sun! Including "What do you think about the

War?" We were like, "What!? We're just here to play ball." It was a wild first day. Our heads were just spinning.

We stayed in Hiroshima for a few days and then went to Okinawa for spring training. Oh my God! You know, I've been to spring trainings where they work you, but I never knew how insane their spring trainings were. If you were tired, that meant run more. I'd say, "No, I'm tired because I'm running too much." And they would say, "No, you're tired because you're not running enough!"

We started out the first day running around the track. There was a huge clock up on the scoreboard, and it said nine o'clock. They said, "Okay, start running!" We went to 9:45, and then they said to turn around and go the other way. So we ran in the other direction for another forty-five minutes. An hour and a half of running, and then they said, "It's time for sprints!" So we did sprints for about forty-five minutes. Then, we had to do this drill where you piggybacked a guy and ran. By that time, I was dead tired, and I couldn't even lift Randy on my back. We started laughing. We kept falling down, because we were laughing so hard! We were rolling around on the ground, and they were all yelling at us to get up. Finally, we just lay there playing dead. But that was what they wanted. They wanted to see us wave the flag and say, "I give up." And then we were done. I remember Jim Lefebvre telling me, "Never say no. Just drop and say I can't do anymore. But don't say no."

They had the thousand-ball drill. That was always interesting. They pulled out shopping carts overflowing with baseballs, and they'd hit every one of those balls to you. I was an outfielder, so they told me to go into center field, and they started hitting fly balls. I was catching them and thinking, "I can do this all day." Then they started hitting them to the right-field line, and then to the left-field line, and then back to center, and back to left, and back to right. Before I knew it, I was ready to puke! I couldn't breathe. And there were still two hundred balls left! I just kept running and running and running, and I can still remember hearing Jimmy's voice in the back of my head saying, "Don't say no. Just drop." So I just dropped, and they started yelling, "Get up!" But I couldn't. I just couldn't do it, so then I was done. I thought, "I should have done that an hour ago!"

The Japanese players always completed their drills. They were good. And the players were good guys. I wasn't sure what to expect, but the play-

ers were a lot of fun. Over there, baseball is work. You don't invite friends and family to work. If I would ask, "Where's your wife?" the answer would be, "She's at home, of course." "Doesn't she come to the games?" "No." And that's exactly how they approached the game—as work. They did their jobs and went home and came back and did it again the next day.

Hiroshima fans were into their baseball. You talk about fanatics! You can't compare playing Japanese baseball to anything other than perhaps being a rock star. Fans just couldn't contain themselves. We were coming from AAA ball in America, where you could wear your jersey with your name on it, walk down Main Street, and people would say, "Who are you?" Over there, we wore old clothes with a hat pulled down, and people would still stop us, and before you knew it, there would be ten or fifteen people around you.

At first, that was kind of fun, but after awhile, it got really annoying. I wasn't used to it. I'd rather just do my thing and be left alone. But we just couldn't hide—even when we went to other towns. I'd be in Tokyo, walking down the street, and a car would come flying up alongside me, slam on its brakes, and a guy would jump out and stick an autograph board in front of me. They have these eight-by-ten-inch autograph cards there, and people would come flying up to us with a marker and these boards, and I couldn't help wondering, "Where did they get these from? Do they just have these on them at all times?" Sometimes, they would hand you their baby to hold! "Touch my kid!" I was like, "Oh my God! I'm just a guy—a dumbass ballplayer. Leave me alone!"

Every time we walked out of our stadium, we were staring at the Peace Park. It's a hundred feet away across the street. The Peace Park is surrounded by a fence, and inside is a shell of a building—all that remained after the bomb. It was the only thing left standing. It just sends shivers up your spine. It's kind of an eerie thing. I think a lot of the older people in Hiroshima gave us that resentful look. The younger kids didn't really seem to care that much, but the older ones never seemed to take to us too kindly. Our manager's father was killed in the War, and he didn't seem fond of us either. Pretty much all he said was "hi" to us when we got there and "bye" to us when we left two years later. But, we were just there to play ball.

In 1987, Bob Horner came over and joined the Swallows. At the beginning the year, before he came over, I had about nine home runs and was

leading the league. Then in one week, he hit seven. When we went to Tokyo, the foreign players in town would get together at this place called Nick's Pizza. We would all go there, Randy Bass, Matt Keough, Bob Horner, Randy Johnson, Leon and Leron Lee, and Boomer Wells. We saw Horner at Nick's, and he was saying, "Oh, this is great. I love it. Man, they're treating me like gold!" Randy and I were like "Ah-hum." He said, "What?" And we said, "Just wait." Well, we saw him a month later, and he still had seven home runs. He was bitching like hell, "They haven't thrown me a strike in a month! They won't let me hit a home run!" We were laughing, because that's exactly how it is. They will not let you beat their records. Pure and simple, they just won't let it happen. Their records are sacred over there. So don't even think about it. At the end of the year, Horner finished with thirty-five home runs and was offered a three-year deal, and he told them to stick it. He said, "Are you kidding!? There's not enough money on the face of this Earth to make me stay!"

That year, I won the home-run title with thirty-nine. Their record is fifty-five, so I was no threat to it. But a year or two before me, Randy Bass had fifty-four homers when he came into a three-game series against Tokyo. Sadaharu Oh, who holds the record, was the manager of Tokyo. We heard that if anybody threw Bass a strike, it was going to be a thousand-dollar fine. They threw him three straight games of nothing but balls. It got to be such a joke that Randy flipped the bat around and held the barrel.

Oh also had a record of hitting home runs on seven consecutive days. In August of 1987, I hit homers on six consecutive days. On the seventh day, I had media all over me. But that day, I was walked five times! I did get one strike, and I missed it! That's the way it works—they won't let you touch their records.

That same year [1987] my teammate Sachio Kinugasa beat Lou Gehrig's record for consecutive games played. That was huge. Kinugasa was a great guy—very professional and very humble. I never heard anything negative about him. He played hard and did all the drills that the younger kids did. The last week, we were all just hoping that he wouldn't get hurt. It was stressful even on us. Whenever anything happened to him, we would run over and say, "Are you okay? Are you okay?" He would dive for a ball, and everybody would run over, "Are you okay? Are you okay?" It got to be kind of funny.

When the date came, they had a big ceremony at home plate. They had about two hundred people out on the field and a band and girls handing out flowers and stuffed animals. Fifty-five thousand people were throwing confetti. It was like when somebody wins the World Series. It was that kind of atmosphere. I was so happy for him. I think he played in almost a hundred games after that. He also hit his five-hundredth home run when I was there.

Our manager's name was Junro Anan. In late 1988, word came out that Koji Yamamoto was going to get the job the following year. I think that Anan just decided to that he was going to lose. I swear he started losing on purpose. He wouldn't pinch-hit. For instance, I was in the slump, so they benched me. The score was tied in the bottom of the ninth, and bases were loaded with two outs, and the pitcher was due up. All the players were looking at me and asking, "Are you ready? Are you ready?" But Anan didn't even look at me. He let the pitcher hit! Well, he struck out, and the game was over. Even the Japanese players were all shaking their heads. I think his strategy was if you're going to get rid of me, I'll show you!

So, we started losing games. Then, he stopped playing me. Granted, I was in a slump, but they were paying me to do a job, so I wanted to get back on my feet again. We went from two games out of first place to eight games out, and it didn't seem to bother him a bit. I was going out of my mind! The media was asking what was going on, and I started to say that it was pretty obvious that he was trying to lose. Holy cow! You should have heard that comment come down. My interpreter said, "You can't say stuff like that!" Keeping pitchers in too long, playing rookies, benching me, it was pretty obvious that he was trying to lose, because he knew he was losing his job. Finally, I said something that I knew would get printed, but I didn't care at that point. The next day, I said that I wanted a meeting.

All the brass were at the meeting, and they announced that they were going to send me to the farm team. I said, "Bullshit! I'm not going to the minors! I'm not going to be your scapegoat. I'm going out there, and I'm telling the media exactly what's going on here. I'm not going to minors, but if you want me to go home, I'll go home." They had a half hour powwow in another room. When they came back, they said, "Okay fine, we will pay you what we owe you, and you leave, but you can't say a word to the media." But I said, "Sorry, fellows, people should know." So they said, "Well then,

we're not going to pay you." Well, now they had me. They had this three-page agreement typed up that basically said that I would go home and keep my mouth shut, and they would pay me my three-months' salary. It was a lot of money, so I signed it.

I walked out, and there must have been about twenty reporters waiting. They said, "What happened in there?" I said, "I'm going to tell you exactly what happened," but my interpreter said, "Hey! Wait! Wait! You promised!" So I said to the reporters, "It was all just a big misunderstanding." And that was it. I never spoke about it again until now. Three days later, I was on a flight back home.

After I got home in the fall of '88, I didn't know what to do. I had been playing my whole life. In March of '89, I ended up going to spring training with the Yankees, and I probably had the best spring training of my life. I hit about .400, but on the last day of the camp, I was released. I couldn't believe it. I was crushed. Later that season, in the end of May, I signed with the Pawtucket Red Sox. They were 5-25, so I figured they could use some help. I ended up second in the league in home runs and winning the team MVP. I'll always be grateful to our manager, Ed Nottle, for signing me that year.

Yes, I am the all-time, minor-league, home-run leader. It's one of those honors you'd rather not have. So can we move on to something else?

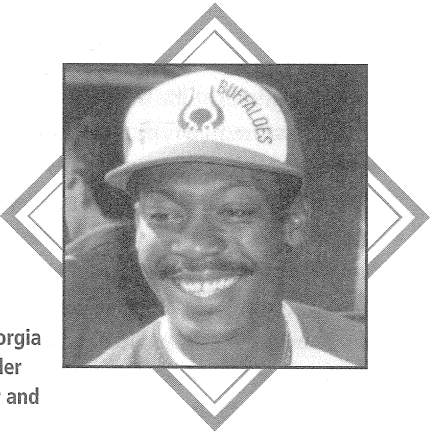
Actually, the more I think about it, at least I did something right. When I broke the record, the movie *Bull Durham* had just come out. Bob Ryan from the *Boston Globe* got ahold of it and wrote a story. You would have thought that I had beaten Babe Ruth's record! The media started coming around and saying, "You know you just beat Crash Davis's record of 255 home runs?" I said, "Oh shit! It's just a movie!" But they said, "No, it's a real number. It's a fake name, but it's a real number." I said, "Well, whatever." But the next thing you know, I'm on the *Today Show*! I was sitting in the studio next to Bryant Gumbel on the *Today Show,* thinking, "This is unbelievable! This isn't really happening!" They wanted to know all about this home-run record that I didn't even know existed a few days before! Then *Sports Illustrated,* CNN, and *USA Today* were all over me. So, it was kind of fun. I never did quite understand it all, but they made me feel good about it.

In 1992, I finished out my career in Italy. It was a nice way to go out. They only played twice a week, practiced for about an hour on three days, and gave us the other two days off. The games drew about a thousand people.

The league is doing much better these days, but back then, it was pretty close to starting. The fans would sometimes cheer for the other team when they scored. I'd be like, "What are you doing? You're the hometown fans. You're supposed to boo the other team." But they didn't get the concept. The Italian guys were a blast, and the food was unbelievable. I had fun over there.

When I finally retired, I thought, "What am I going to do? Baseball is all I know." So I started a baseball school, because I love teaching kids, and it kept me involved in the game. Ten years later, I'm still doing it.

Do I regret going to Japan? You know what? I still fight with it. I think sometimes, "What if I had stayed? What if I did get my shot at the big leagues?" But, who knows? I don't like to think about it too much. My whole life had been driven toward making the Major Leagues, and when I finally got there, I felt that I sold myself out for a few bucks. I wasn't ready to go. I sold myself out, and I couldn't get past that. No matter what I did—home-run titles, game-winning hits, whatever—it just wouldn't take that pain away. I couldn't get over it, so it was really hard for me to go over there with a smile on my face. If I had gone under different circumstances, it would've been different. But, maybe it was a blessing. When you go through a lot of hardship, you learn and hope you get something out of it.



21 Ralph Bryant

Born: May 20, 1961, in Fort Gaines, Georgia
1985–87: Los Angeles Dodgers outfielder
1988–95: Kintetsu Buffaloes outfielder and designated hitter

Ralph Bryant was one of the most successful foreign power hitters in the history of Japanese baseball. During his eight seasons in Japan, he racked up 259 home runs and 641 RBIs. He led the Pacific League in home runs in 1989, 1993, and 1994 and in RBIs in 1989. His 49 homers and 121 RBIs also led the Kintetsu Buffaloes to the 1989 pennant and brought him the Pacific League MVP Award. Bryant was named to the Best Nine team three times (1989, 1993, and 1994). He is also famous for hitting a home run off the speakers on the ceiling of the Tokyo Dome. Had it not struck the speakers, the ball would have traveled 558 feet. He currently lives in Atlanta, Georgia.

I WAS SIGNED in 1981 by the Los Angeles Dodgers and played with their organization for seven years. In 1988, when the Dodgers signed Kirk Gibson and Mike Davis, who were both left-handed-hitting outfielders, I knew my chances were very slim of making the club. So I decided to ask them to let me go somewhere else or trade me. I told them that I would like to go to Japan, but they said that it was not easy, because each team was only allowed two foreigners. The Chunichi Dragons came to the States for spring training that year, and when we played them, I hit a home run and a double. A couple of days later, I signed a contract with them.

When I got to Chunichi, I was the third foreigner, so I had to go to the minor league team. Our day games started at eleven o'clock in the morning, so I had to get up at 6:30 A.M. for the traditional Japanese workout. I lived in the team dormitory, so after I got up, we all went downstairs, put

on our little slippers, walked for about five minutes to a common area, and then we stretched. Then we came back and had breakfast. After breakfast, we went back our rooms for twenty or thirty minutes and then went back downstairs, dressed, and went to practice. We practiced for about three hours and then played the game at eleven o'clock.

At first, I had some trouble with the food, because I wasn't used to eating raw food. The first time I saw that I said, "No way!" But they had chicken, they had steak, they had seafood. Certain things I knew I couldn't eat, but *yakitori, sukiyaki*—that's some great stuff. It became fun for me, and it all tasted good. I stayed on the minor league team for about a month until I got traded to the Kintetsu Buffaloes.

I joined the Buffaloes in late June, 1988. When I first came to Kintetsu, we were about five games out. I remember the first time we played Seibu. We were playing them in Nagoya, and we were facing Taigen Kaku, who was already 10-0 with an amazing ERA. I remember my teammates said, "We're playing the Seibu Lions," and I was like, "Who?" I had never heard of the Seibu Lions before. They had a team! They had Koji Akiyama in center field, who could have played in the Major Leagues—no doubt about it! He could run like a gazelle, had a great arm, could hit for power, could hit for average. He was just a great player. They also had Kazuhiro Kiyohara at first and that pitching staff. Man, those guys were loaded! But we went out and won two out of three games. That really turned our team around, because we saw that we could play at the same level as those guys. All of a sudden, everything started coming together, and the race got a little tighter. We ended up winning one more game than the Lions, but we lost the pennant on percentage points. The Lions had one less loss and two more ties than we did. It was very disappointing because coming from the States, I never understood why there should be a tied baseball game. It was just weird.

My initial reactions to Japanese baseball? I thought it was crazy! They did the unexpected. They'd get behind, so you're looking for a fastball, but you might get a forkball or a curve ball. You could never look for one pitch in a sequence in Japan. They would just always make it up, so I had to learn to adjust. Also, there was never an easy pitch to hit. It was always going to be something in tight or something away. I was a free swinger. Anything close, I was swinging at it. That was my biggest downfall. I guess one of my most frustrating experiences was the strike zone. The umpires made more

bad calls than you could imagine. I really thought that the foreign players had a larger strike zone than the Japanese, because there were times when I knew the ball was way inside, and they called it a strike. A guy threw a slider one day that hit me on the back leg and the umpire called it a strike! I was like, "How can that be a strike?" Then the Japanese guys would step in and get a ball right down the middle, about thigh high, and it would be called a ball. But when I first got there, Benji Oglivie was on the Buffaloes, and he taught me to keep my head up. He said, "Just don't worry about some things you're going to see. Don't worry about them—just keep playing." So I never really worried about the different strike zones.

I did get frustrated when I struck out. One time, I was just so mad after striking out that without even thinking about it, I just snapped the bat in two over my knee. The crowd went crazy! I'll let you in on a secret. It was a thin-handled bat. The handle wasn't big, so I knew that I could do it. If you put enough pressure on it, it would snap like a twig. I saw Bo Jackson do it, too. The fans loved it so much that I thought, "OK, I'll do that again!" I did it a number of times. Actually, I did it so much that they eventually asked me to stop!

The strategy in Japan is a little different than in the States. In Japan, they don't want to give up any runs, where in the States, they'll give up a run or two. For example, in Japan, if the first guy gets on third base, they'll bring in the infield regardless of whether it's in the first inning or the ninth inning. So you don't get a lot of ground-ball RBIs over there. But over here, if the guy gets on third base early in the game, they'll put the infield back and concede the run. Also, in the States, if a guy hits a double, we'll try to hit the ball to the right side and get him over. In Japan, if the first guy gets on, they bunt him over to second base, and if they get a lead-off double, they're going to bunt him to third. You have a lot of guys who can hit the ball out of the park in the States, but in Japan, there aren't as many, so they just play fundamental baseball. Get him on, bunt him over, and get a hit to bring him in.

Overall, I adapted to the Japanese style pretty well. We did a lot of working out. We would work out for maybe an hour and a half before practicing. We did exercises, calisthenics, and a lot of running. A lot of American players couldn't deal with the way they ran things, but I figured that I was living in Japan, so I should give it a shot. I tried to do what they did, at least

as much as I could. They had been doing workouts like these since they were little kids, and it was something new to me, so I just tried to adapt and make the best of the situation. I ended up having a pretty good half season, and they kept me over there.

At the end of my first season, they told me that I had to be back on January 20th. I said, "For what?"

"Spring training."

"There's no spring training that starts in January!" I said.

"It does in Japan!"

We went to Saipan, and the heat was just unbelievable. It felt like 110 to 120 degrees. Boy, it was hot over there! It was absolutely scorching! In the States, we have spring training for about a month and a half, and then we're done. For the first week, we begin to get in shape, and then the next week, we're playing baseball games. But over there, it lasts about two months. It was hell on earth! By the time the season started, most of the guys were probably burnt-out from the work we did in spring training! But I must say that in the long run, it helped. We were in good shape when the season started, and there were no excuses that we weren't in good enough shape to play.

After coming so close to winning the pennant in '88, we thought the next year could be our year. We didn't start off too well, but in the middle of the season, everything started to click, and it became a great pennant race. We had some great battles. There were three teams fighting it out: the Lions, Braves, and us. We had a lot of comebacks that season. Before, if we were down by four or five runs, we never could win it—it would be all over, but that year, even if we got down by five runs, it didn't matter. We would come back.

One of my most memorable days in baseball came at the end of that season. It was in October. It was crunch time, and we were going for the pennant. We had a doubleheader against Seibu, and we had to win those games to contend for the pennant. If we had lost either one, we would've been down by a game and a half with two games to go. Hisanobu Watanabe was pitching. He used to just eat me alive. But that day was just like a fairy tale. We were down something like 5-0 in the first inning. In my first at bat, I hit a solo home run, so it was 5-1. That was my first home run ever off Watanabe. In my second at bat, I hit a grand slam and tied the score. In my

third at bat, I hit a solo shot that won the game. So we won the first one 6-5. In the second game, I hit another home run in my first at bat. Four in a row! It was like a dream come true. Everything I hit was just going over the fence! I was like, *wow*! I love this! That was an unbelievable feeling that day.

Our team stuck together, and we hung in there and ended up winning the pennant by 0.001 percentage points. It was a long season, but it was a lot of fun. I worked really hard and everything just clicked. I was fortunate to hit forty-nine home runs that year and win the MVP Award. It was great a personal achievement, but the best thing was winning the pennant and going on to play in the Nippon Series. The victory celebration was wild. We almost didn't get back to the clubhouse. It was total chaos! It was like a riot—there were so many people pushing and screaming and grabbing us. It was just absolutely unbelievable. The fans and the city were all excited, because it had been so long since we had won it.

We felt pretty confident going into the series. We got up three games to none, and everything was going well. Then all of a sudden, everything shut down. It was like everybody just forgot what we were supposed to be doing. It was as if we woke up and said, "Damn, we're playing the Giants!" And we ended up losing four games in a row! That was something I couldn't understand. With a great pitching staff like ours and up three games to none, we should have just let it all hang out. But I guess we just lost concentration and forgot about what we were supposed to be doing. The Giants were the heart of Japan baseball. They have all those titles, so when you play those guys, it's never over until you've beaten them in four games. Losing those four games in a row was the worst feeling I ever had while playing professional sports.

The following year [1990] Hideo Nomo joined us. When he came into the league, he was just phenomenal. I've never seen anything like it. The guy had fantastic stuff. He threw about ninety-five miles an hour, and he had a slider and two different forkballs. Those forkballs were unbelievable. I would just sit there watching him pitch, thinking, "You've got to be kidding me!" People were very enthusiastic and really started coming out to the games. But the Buffaloes' management just wore him out! They rode him until he just had enough and needed to get out of there. I didn't like the way the managers treated the pitchers. We had some pitchers before who had great arms. They would have a great season, and then the next

year they couldn't do anything. Their arms were already shot. I guess the Buffaloes never really understood that the heart of your team is the pitching staff. If you have no pitching, you have no team. It doesn't matter if you can put up ten runs; if you give up eleven, you're still going to lose.

While we played together, Nomo told me that he wanted to play in the Major Leagues. I told him that I thought he had a great chance, because a lot of Major League pitchers didn't have his kind of stuff, and he had some stuff that they had never seen before in the States. I thought he could be very successful, but he had to make up his mind whether to go or stay in Japan. At the end of the 1994 season, he wanted a two-year contract, and the Buffaloes said no. He decided to try his luck in the States. And great for him! When he came over, it was Nomo-mania! All the press he got was great for the Japanese people and for Japanese baseball.

Despite getting Nomo, we didn't win the pennant in 1990. They brought in a new manager, Keishi Suzuki. Japanese managers don't sit down one-on-one and talk to the guys. Whatever the manager says, that's what goes. That's it. Don't ask any questions. A lot of the players didn't get along with Suzuki, and they were unhappy. You could see it on their faces. They always talked about it, but it was Japanese baseball, so they never complained to him. They would say things to me, but hey, what could I do? I'm just a foreigner. I was just doing the best I could to survive.

Playing in Japan was a chance of a lifetime, and I'll have all those memories for the rest of my life. One time, in June of 1990, I hit the speaker on the ceiling of the Tokyo Dome. That was a fluke. A left-handed pitcher threw me a slider, and it was sliding when I hit it. I thought it was a routine pop-up going deep to center field, but it just kept going and going. Then it hit the speaker on the ceiling! Nobody could believe it. I couldn't even believe it. It turned out to be a home run. People said, "Could you hit it again?" But, no, I could never hit that speaker again. If I shot at it, I might, but with a baseball, never.

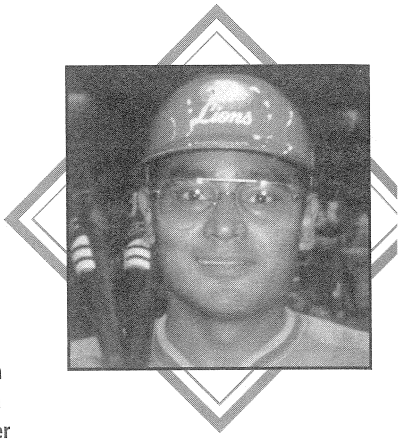
One of the funniest things I saw in Japanese baseball was when a foreign player would charge the mound, and the pitcher would just run away! The first time I saw it happen, I was watching on television at home. Mike Diaz charged the mound, and the pitcher just took off and started running. I was like, where are you going? I had never seen that before. At home when somebody charges the mound, there's a fight. One game, a guy hit me, and

I charged the mound, and sure enough he took off and started running! I got to about shortstop, and I couldn't catch him so I had to start laughing. I was like, "Man, this is crazy! I'll never catch him, so why am I even chasing him?!" And then, they threw me out of the game! I said "For what?" They said, "Well, you chased him." "But I didn't catch him!" It was crazy!

I always remember the Japanese fans—they had those flags and drums going all the time—and cheerleaders. It was like being at a football game with all that excitement. The first time I heard that I was like, "Be quiet! I'm trying to concentrate!" But after awhile, you get used to it. If you hit a home run, they absolutely go bananas out there! It was great! Everywhere I went in Japan, even if we went out to the countryside in the middle of the boondocks, there was always a cheering section for us. Somebody was rooting for your team all the time. That was a great thing for me, knowing that no matter how well or how poorly we did, we always had somebody cheering for us. In the States, you just don't see that. You root for your home team, and you boo the away team.

I was really disappointed with the way my career ended over there. After leading the league in home runs in 1994, the next year I got hurt, and they just released me. It was like all those years with them didn't even exist. I knew that I was just a foreigner over there, but they could have come back and said let's try one more year. I was only thirty-four years old, so I felt like I could still help out, and I really wanted to stay there a little longer. That left a bitter taste in my mouth. It took me awhile to get over that. When I returned home, I just stayed away from baseball.

I've been back to Japan a number of times now. I play in old-timers' games, and I've been back for a couple promotional games. In 2002 and 2003, I played in the Suntory Malts games. We have a team made up of old-time *gaijin* players called World Powers, and we play the Japanese Suntory Malts team. The first year we did it, fifty thousand people showed up to the game! We won, so we did it one more time. They called it the *Revenge: Suntory Malts 2 versus World Powers 2*, and we won again, of course! They told us that we're not welcome back! It was fun. Forty-five thousand showed up to see some old-time players. Over the winter of 2003–04, I played in the Masters League. They still played hard. The atmosphere was about the same, but the guys were just older. Going back and seeing some of the old guys and some of the players that I played with and against was a lot of fun.



22 Orestes Destrade

Born: May 8, 1962, in Santiago, Cuba
1987: New York Yankees first baseman
1988: Pittsburgh Pirates first baseman
1989–92: Seibu Lions designated hitter
1993–94: Florida Marlins first baseman
1995: Seibu Lions designated hitter

After eight years in the minor leagues and brief appearances with the New York Yankees and Pittsburgh Pirates, Orestes Destrade joined the Seibu Lions in June of 1989. He became an instant success, hitting a home run in his first game and going on to hit thirty-two in just eighty-three games. Destrade led the Pacific League in home runs each year from 1990 to 1992 and in RBIs in 1990 and 1991. From 1990 to 1992, he was named to three consecutive Best Nine teams and helped the Lions to three straight Japan Series championships. During the three Japanese Series, Destrade hit seven home runs with fifteen RBIs and won the 1990 series MVP Award. In 1993, Destrade left Japan to play for his hometown Florida Marlins, but he returned to Seibu in 1995 for half a season before retiring. He has since worked for the Tampa Bay Devil Rays and is a baseball commentator and writer.

MY CAREER STARTED in 1981 with the New York Yankees. At that point, the Yankees were just collecting talented young players. They had signed a number of power-hitting first basemen including Don Mattingly, Fred McGriff, Willie Upshaw, Steve Balboni, and me, so I was stuck in a difficult position. I had some really good years in the minor leagues, but I was still stuck behind Don Mattingly at first base and Dave Winfield in the outfield. In the spring of 1988, I asked manager Lou Pinella to facilitate a trade, which he did. I went to Pittsburgh and spent the 1988 season with them. It was nice to finally be in the big leagues, but I was still backing up Barry

Bonds in the outfield and Sid Bream at first. At this point, the Chunichi Dragons and the Seibu Lions started noticing me and contacted my agent. After my first true season in the big leagues, I was looking toward the future and was excited about my prospects, so I turned down the Japanese offers in the winter of '88. In 1989, I had a really good spring training but didn't make the Pirates team out of camp. I was twenty-seven years old, so I told my agent to find out who was still interested in me. Seibu had just won three consecutive titles yet were still looking for a new *gaijin*. Six weeks into the season, they were in second-to-last place and twelve games back, which was unfamiliar territory for them. So we were able to work out a deal for the remainder of the '89 season.

At that time, Japanese teams were starting to change their preference for the type of foreign player they wanted. Before they had sought veteran players, like Reggie Smith or Bob Horner, but these players cost a lot and would only stay for a year or two. Instead, they started to focus on AAA and unheralded Major Leaguers, because they were younger and hungrier. And I was extremely hungry.

I went with the goal of being the best run-producer in Japan. Prior to leaving for Japan, I asked them to send me as much footage of opposing pitchers as possible. It took a week and a half before I actually left because of the visa and other arrangements, so during that time, I studied the heck out of that footage. In Japan, there are only six teams in each league, so that's only five other teams to worry about. If you concentrate on the four or five key starters for each team, there are only twenty to twenty-five pitchers to learn. I still have that footage to this day.

I got there in June, and my wife and two-and-a-half-year-old daughter moved there with me. After adjusting to the jet lag and playing in a couple of games with the farm team, they brought me up to the big team. My first game was against the Orix Braves on the road at Nishinomiya Stadium, and Guy Hoffman was pitching. I'll never forget it. In my first or second at bat, I was batting right-handed, and I hit a change-up for a home run. You know how dramatic the Japanese are about first impressions, so it was a big deal. I thought it was nice, but they thought it was super.

When I arrived, Seibu was 11 1/2 games back, sitting in the middle of the pack. I was on fire and hit thirty-two home runs in eighty-three games and helped to revitalize the team. I don't want to take full credit, because we

had this incredible team with stars at every position, but it seemed like they were just out of sync. I was a young and hungry, power-hitting *gaijin*, and after I came, we just took off. We ended up losing the pennant to the Buffaloes during the last series of the year by only a half game. The Lion's management was very excited about how things turned around and how I affected the team.

I was lucky enough to be part of one of the great dynasties in the history of Japanese baseball. From 1982 to 1994, the Seibu Lions won eleven pennants and eight Japan Series titles. When you do something special like that, there has to be real synergy. I thought about it many times, and I think their success came from a combination of things. Obviously, first and foremost was talent. Just about every starter was among the best players in the league at his position. Second, it was a young, exciting, and vibrant team. We had this new persona when compared to the old guard of the Giants. Our owner, Tsutsumi-san, focused on attracting young fans. Our stadium was in the suburbs, and he built a big Busch Gardens–type theme park right next to the stadium. Finally, we had a phenomenal front office. Nemoto-san, the general manager and president of Seibu, put together the team. He was not against having influential *gaijin* players on his team at a time when some other teams had trouble with that. And there was Manager [Masaaki] Mori. Mori knew how to motivate his players. His coaches Kuroe-san and Ihara-san knew how to teach. Even the foreign-relations guy, Shin Kuzutani, was the best in his field of dealing with foreigners and their problems.

The players all seemed to get along and respect each other, which I think was another positive thing. The key players were all about my age, and I fit in perfectly with them. Because of my background—I came from Cuba when I was six years old—I adapted to Japan a lot easier than some of the American guys did. A lot of Americans go over there and struggle with a completely different culture. I think you'll notice that recently a lot of Latino players are doing very well in Japan. That's because they've already made one big crossover into another culture when they went to the United States, so going to Japan isn't as big of an adjustment for them.

My locker was in between the yin and yang of the team. I had Hiromichi Ishige on my left and Koji Akiyama on my right. Ishige was the captain and third baseman and also the most veteran starter on the team. He was a solid player but not a superstar—he always hit close to .300, hit ten to

fifteen home runs, and drove in key runs. He was a real timely player, a phenomenal defensive player. He was the guy who got us motivated if we were dragging in practice or a game. His favorite phrase was, "*Ike*! *Ike*!" which means "Let's go!"

Koji Akiyama was the opposite of Ishige. He was, and still is, a quiet person, kind of shy, and reserved. From the late 1980s to mid-1990s, every foreigner who came through said that [Akiyama] the best player in Japan. He was just unbelievably talented. He was a five-tool player; he could hit for average, hit thirty home runs, steal thirty bases, and played Andruw Jones defense or better. I know Andruw's phenomenal, but I saw Aki do things that were just unbelievable! Aki was very quiet. It was difficult to get him excited, whether he hit three home runs in a game or struck out four times. I've never seen anybody like that. I think the organization was trying to get him to become more aggressive and more excitable to eventually take over the leadership role, but that just didn't happen. He ended up being traded in 1994 to the Daiei Hawks and going back to his hometown in Kyushu.

All-Star first baseman Kazuhiro Kiyohara is one of the most controversial players of the last fifteen years. After winning the high school championship in 1985, he really wanted the Giants to draft him, but they picked his teammate Masumi Kuwata instead. He cried when that happened, and a rivalry between Kiyohara and Kuwata developed. Kiyo finally joined the Giants as a free agent in 1997. Kiyohara was good looking, six-foot-three, and 210 pounds—big for a Japanese kid. He was a cult figure and was treated like a rock star. We'd go on a train or an airplane and people would be yelling, "Kiyohara! Kiyohara!" and girls would be crying like it was the Beatles. That got to his head.

Initially, I struggled with Kiyo. At twenty-three years old, he was a young, brash, cocky kid, and in '89 and '90, I felt this animosity. After I started learning Japanese, I could hear comments under his breath. It became a driving force for me. You see, "A. K. D."—our nickname, which stood for Akiyama, Kiyohara, and Destrade—was the greatest three-four-five punch in the history of Japanese baseball. His attitude became a challenge, and it drove me to outdo him. We had some close races down to the wire for the home-run title, but Kiyohara never won the title. It's his dark cloud, and it humbled him. Into 1991, Kiyo started softening up some, and I also started

reaching out and opening up to him. We ended up having a really good friendship and still do to this day.

Our catcher was Tsutomu Itoh. He became the starting catcher in 1984 and retired in 2003. He was just named the manager for 2004. He wasn't a .300 hitter, but he got a lot of clutch hits and was really good at handling the pitching staff. The pitching staff was just loaded. We really had three aces: Watanabe, Kaku, and Kudo. When all three were on, it was hard to take a series from us. Hisanobu Watanabe, who was on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* in 1994, threw in the low nineties with four quality pitches. Taigen Kaku, who is from Taiwan, had the best stuff of anybody on our staff. He was just nasty. Kimiyasu Kudo was this little roly-poly jolly dude who was also an extreme competitor.

Tetsuya Shiozaki was our closer. Not a very big guy, but he threw in the nineties and had a sneaky change-up. I remember when he first came up in 1990. I thought he was sixteen years old. I was like, "Who is this little kid?" But when he started dealing, I was like, "Ohhh, OK!" He had actually pitched for a couple years in the industrial leagues, so he was about twenty-one years old when he showed up. I used to call him *kohai* [junior], and I was the *sempai* [senior]. Japan is very hierarchical, and the younger guys, no matter how good they were, had to show respect for the older players. That's one thing you don't have in the Major Leagues. But over there, even Kiyohara had to show respect towards the older players. It didn't matter if he went out there and hit two home runs with six RBIs, the next day he had better not be cocky to the veterans.

Our pitching staff could rival Major League staffs—even size-wise. Other than Kudo, most of them were six-feet or over. I remember Americans would say, "You're playing in Japan? You must just tower over those guys." I would answer, "I do when I walk the streets of Tokyo, but on my team I'm not even the tallest guy." We had a pitcher who was six-five, but he barely pitched. We were definitely not the prototypical Japanese team from earlier times. To be honest with you, I haven't seen another team like ours in Japan during the last ten years. Our combination of hitting and pitching was just phenomenal.

I can't say enough about manager Mori. My experiences with him were wonderful. I found him to be a good leader. When there was a crucial time in the season or in the Japan Series, he could motivate the team. That was

his forte. He wasn't really a hands-on manager. He had good coaches, and he delegated the teaching to them.

Some of the Japanese players struggled with him at times, because they thought he was a little harsh. For example, we had three platoon outfielders. If one of these poor guys went 0 for 2 by the third inning, he was done for the night. Mori would bring in one of the other guys. Except for the top three guys, Mori did the same thing with the starting pitchers. If they didn't do well, they were sent to the minors as punishment. There was pitcher named Tomio Watanabe, who always went up and down. I'd come into the clubhouse and say, "Where's Tomio Watanabe?" They'd answer, "He got sent down again." And I'd say, "You've got to be kidding me!" Then, he would be back up a week later. So there was a lot of pressure on some players. I used to think that this was an impossible way to play the game—the game is just too hard, and a lot of guys bitched and complained about it. But the bottom line is that Mori has more championships under his belt as a player, manager, and coach than anybody else in the entire world. He was on twenty-one championship teams and another six pennant winners. If you're a common denominator in all those championships, it's not luck.

The first week or so of the 1990 season, we were playing in Nishinomiya, and I hit a home run in extra innings. I was really pumped up. I was a very excitable and very intense player. In fact, the first year I was there, people thought I was really scary. After all, here was this big six-foot four, 240-pound, dark-skinned *gaijin*, and although I didn't have a mean face, I looked scary when I concentrated. Later, people told me that they were afraid to approach me when they saw me around town. Actually, I'm one of the most personable people you'll ever meet. Anyway, after I hit that home run, I stopped halfway up the line and pumped my arm in the air, like Kirk Gibson in the 1988 World Series, and yelled, "*Boom*!"

After the game, people asked, "What was that guts pose?"

"What's a guts pose?" I went.

"You know, that pose that you did."

"Well, I was just excited," I said.

Then it dawned on me, that would be my marketing scheme! I would start doing this thing every time I hit a home run. In Japan, you can do that. You don't do that in the Major Leagues. You would get knocked down! Well, I went out and hit forty-two home runs and did the guts pose each time.

By the end of the season, little kids in my neighborhood and all over Japan would see me and yell, "Destrade-san!" and do a guts pose. To this day, when I do interviews on TV, nine times out of ten, they ask, "Do the guts pose for us?" In fact, it's on the cover of my Japanese autobiography, which came out in 1995.

We had a great year and won the pennant. The 1990 Japan Series was one of my most exciting memories of Japanese baseball. We played the Giants—the most successful team ever in the history of Japanese baseball. They had an unbelievable team, predominantly because of their pitching, not their hitting. We were a much better hitting team. They had five or six Major League–caliber pitchers. Their aces, Hiromi Makihara, Masaki Saito, and Masumi Kuwata, all had Major League stuff. Masao Kida came over to the Majors, and he wasn't even one of the Giants' top starters! We went into the series as severe underdogs.

My goal was to be MVP of that Series. I was and still am a very goal-minded human being. In the first game, I hit this dramatic home run that's still talked about today. It was in the first inning with runners on first and second and two outs. The count was 3-0—0-3 over there. Makihara grooved me a fastball. I got a green light and boom! I turned to the Giants' dugout, and I did my guts pose right at their dugout. I could see their hearts sink. At that point in time, I knew we were going to win that Series. We went on to sweep the unbeatable Giants in four games! I didn't even know the importance of the sweep at the time. It was unheard of. I had a good series, hit .375 with two home runs and eight RBIs, and won the MVP Award.

The 1991 Japan Series was a very dramatic one as well. It was all tied after six games, and we came back home and took the seventh game. Akiyama had an unbelievable Series with four homers and eight RBIs, but Hiroshima was just not as high caliber a team as the Giants, so it wasn't as exciting as the 1990 series.

My third Japan Series against Yakult and legendary player and manager Katsuya Nomura in 1992 was a big one because of the two famous catcher managers. The Series was almost more about them than the players. Yakult had a great team. Their star shortstop, Takahiro Ikeyama, and catcher Atsuya Furuta could have definitely played in the Major Leagues, and Kaz Ishii is now pitching for the Dodgers. I was probably, no kidding, five feet from being the MVP of that Series as well. I homered twice in the first game, but

we lost. When I homered in my first at bat of that game, I set a record that I'm personally very proud of. I'm the only player in the history of Japanese baseball to homer in three consecutive first-plate appearances in the Japan Series. I homered in my first at bat in the 1990, '91, and '92 Japan Series.

We went out and won the second game at Jingu Stadium and also the next two games at home, so we were up three games to one. In the fifth game, I homered early in the game to help us tie it. In the bottom of the ninth, I just missed a change-up and the center fielder caught it right against the wall! It would have ended the game and the Series. In the tenth inning, Ikeyama, their star shortstop, hit a dramatic home run, and they won. In the sixth game, they won again in extra innings. This time, Shinji Hata won it with a homer off Shiozaki in the tenth.

Now the Series came back home for game seven. We pitched Takehiro Ishii, a late bloomer who won the Sawamura and the Pacific League MVP Awards that year. He shut them down, giving up only one run in ten innings. I ended up scoring the game-winning run on a sacrifice fly in the tenth. Ishii was named the series MVP. I was happy for Take, because he had struggled for a couple of years as a middle reliever. He had great stuff but just couldn't seem to put it together. Nineteen ninety-two was his one and only huge season, but it was a memorable one. It was just a very back and forth, dramatic series, and I know that manager Mori savored the victory over his rival, manager Nomura.

Every year from 1989 through 1991, I was approached by three or four Major League teams, but I was happy in Japan, and they couldn't come close to what Seibu was paying me. I had become a superstar in Japan and was just happy with being the big fish in a small pond. But in 1992, after I led all of Japan in home runs for the third straight year, the Marlins came looking. I was really happy with Seibu, so deciding to leave was a very, very tough decision for me. Not only would I be back in the Major Leagues, but I'd also be playing for my hometown team in front of my parents and family. It would bring my kids back home and give my wife a break from living in Japan. It also had a lot to do with my father. He was so important to my career and upbringing that I wanted to come back home for him. In hindsight, even my father probably wishes I hadn't returned. I had what I thought was a real strong first-year back in the majors, leading the team in home runs and RBIs, but all in all, it wasn't that great of an experience.

I don't like to second-guess myself, but I'll be honest with you. If I could do it over, I would have stayed in Japan.

I went back in 1994 to do some guest commentary for the Japan Series. During the game, my guide came to me and said that Mr. Tsutsumi, the Lions' owner, would like me and my wife to come up to his box. He's kind of this mystical person in Japan, and I had never met him before. I went up there to finally meet the man. He was very nice, and he asked me to consider coming back to Seibu. I was like, *wow*! My wife and I talked about it on the trip back home. We were having some marital problems at that time, but she said, "OK. Let's do it." I went back to Japan in 1995 with one of the largest contracts up to that time. But the marital problems really never ceased. In fact, they actually intensified when we got back to Japan, and she went home in the middle of the season. At the time, my daughter was seven, and my son was three. Being separated from them really upset me, and my production started going down.

I asked Seibu for a leave of absence, which was unheard of because they're so business-like about baseball. Over there, you can be going through divorce or have a death in the family, but the team always comes first—everything else is secondary. I went home for a week, talked to my wife, and she said that she wanted me to retire. So I went back to Seibu for about another month and subsequently told them that I was leaving. It was a very difficult time. The team didn't understand my decision, and it caused some real problems between the organization and me. They felt that I had betrayed them, but I felt that I needed to do this, for my children more than anything. And that was it. I never played professional baseball again.

After that, I took a year off and spent a lot of time with my kids, but subsequently, my wife and I got divorced. It was important to spend that transitional period with my children. The Devil Rays called towards the end of 1996 and asked me to come aboard as their ambassador to the community. I worked for them for three years.

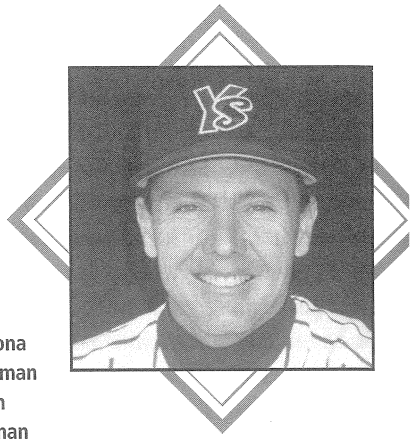
There's no doubt that Japanese baseball in the last ten or fifteen years has come a long way. Everything they do is about ten years behind what is done in the Majors—that goes for front-office decision making as well as actual player application. Now there's a new generation of bigger, taller players who've been weight training; players are trying to establish a stronger union and fight for free agency; it's more accepted for a Japanese player to

have an agent, which was unheard of ten years ago; and even their front office mentality and their marketing are slowly changing.

The Japanese love their baseball. They still root for their hometown teams, but now they are being drawn to Major League baseball. I believe that every team has two to four Major League–caliber players, but there are twenty-five or twenty-six guys on the team. The other players are AA or AAA caliber. There's not great depth on the Japanese teams. It's more fascinating for fans to follow what Ichiro and Matsui are doing in the States—that's just natural growth. Japanese players are going to continue migrating to the United States for quite awhile, so what will be done to create a greater interest in Japanese baseball?

I love the Japanese people, and Japanese baseball was very good to me. I care about it, but I think there will have to be major changes in Japanese baseball in the next five to ten years. It's going to take a few years. Why? The old guard that runs Japanese baseball and the commissioner's office needs to retire. I think that they have to be more creative marketing-wise to make fans want to come out to the ball parks. They need to give more back to the fans, like giveaways, and make coming to a ball park a lot more fun.

I still go back to Japan very frequently—probably four to six times a year to do endorsements and appearances. Most recently, I was endorsing Hit-Away, a hitting product for amateur players. I also write some articles for a Japanese Web site and for some magazines over there. The past two winters, I've played in the Masters League over there. The league is made up of retired professional players. We have five teams, and we each play sixteen games. I play for the Tokyo Dreams, and my teammates include Isao Harimoto, Choji Murata, Yutaka Entasu, and Masanori Murakami. It's a lot of fun. Thankfully, I'm still well-remembered. I can't say enough about how good Japan has been to me. It was a special time and special place for me.



23 Jack Howell

Born: August 18, 1961, in Tucson, Arizona
1985–91: California Angels third baseman
1991: San Diego Padres third baseman
1992–94: Yakult Swallows third baseman
1995: Yomiuri Giants third baseman
1996–97: California Angels third baseman
1998–99: Houston Astros first and third baseman

Jack Howell had seven big-league seasons under his belt before coming to Japan in 1992. In his first Japanese season, he led the Swallows to the pennant by leading the league in batting and home runs and won the Central League MVP Award. The following season, Howell set a record for the most *sayonara* (game-ending) home runs in a season, and he again led the Swallows to the pennant and the Japan Series. At the end of the 1994 season, he joined the Yomiuri Giants but retired from Japanese baseball at mid-season. He played four more seasons in the Major Leagues before retiring as an active player in 1999. Since then, he has coached and managed in the Arizona Diamondbacks' organization. Howell currently lives in Tucson, Arizona.

I HAD BEEN A starting third baseman for the California Angels for about five years, but right before the trade deadline in 1991, I was traded to San Diego. After that season, I became a free agent. The Padres were planning to sign me, Mike Pagliarulo, and a couple of other third basemen, take us to spring training, and let us fight it out. To make a long story short, Doug DeCinces, who had played for the Angels and the Yakult Swallows, called me and asked me to play for the Swallows in Japan.

That year, the Swallows had spring training in Yuma, Arizona. I lived in Tucson, so on the first of February, I loaded up my truck and drove to Yuma for spring training. I had to learn a whole different style of baseball, but

being able to do that without leaving the country, or even my home state was a real advantage. Bob Horner, who had obviously been a big name for the Swallows, was a spring-training instructor that year. He didn't really talk about the difficulties of playing in Japan but he did talk about what to expect and how to handle things. Of course, Doug DeCinces had already told me a lot about Japanese ball and how to act and that sort of stuff.

My interpreters were indispensable. There were two interpreters on the Swallows. Luigi Nakajima, who handled the discussions with the front office, and Masahiko Yota, who was the everyday interpreter. Later, when I went to the Giants, Toru Kuramata was my interpreter. These guys are often forgotten, but they have a huge role. On the field and off the field, they have the responsibility for trying to keep us happy and trying to keep the Japanese team happy with us. They not only help us communicate with our manager and teammates, but away from the game, they help us with traveling, checking into hotels, ordering food, getting our clothes washed, trying to find a place to see a movie, all sorts of things. They also have the important job of trying to interpret Japanese baseball for us. They'll tell you, "This is the way Japanese baseball has been for years, and you don't want to mess with this" or "This is an area where you have some flexibility" or "You can bring your own views and ideas here." There's a lot of pressure on them. They got pressure from me because I wanted them to tell the owner, manager, and players what I think, and I'm sure there's pressure on them from the manager and owners.

I thought my new manager, Katsuya Nomura, was a great manager. My first few years in the big leagues, my manager was Gene Mauch, who knew baseball inside and out. He didn't need to use a lot of words. You could tell by his actions and his facial expressions whether he was pleased with you or not. As I grew to know Nomura, he reminded me a lot of Mauch. He really knew baseball, and he had a passion to succeed and be number one. When he was pleased with you, and things were going well, he had a little smile on his face. You also knew when he was displeased with your performance.

My first game in Japan was a very intense moment for me. I had been a starting third baseman for five or six years in the Major Leagues, so you'd think that I'd been through so much that something like that wouldn't affect me. But I remember the cheering and the chanting and being really

nervous. I knew that a lot of things were going to hinge on me, and a lot of eyes would be on me. I also realized that the media would hold me responsible. They often phrased their questions like, "That was an important play, and you didn't get the job done. Do you feel that the team lost because of you?" I wasn't going to point out that there were several other times when the bases were loaded and other players didn't come through. I just had to bite the bullet and say, "Yes, I didn't get the job done. And I need to do better." I was being paid a lot of money, a lot more money than I was ever paid in the States, to go over there and try to help that team turn around. Therefore, if I didn't get the job done, I was responsible. I never defended myself. One of the reasons I was successful in Japan was that I tried it their way. I didn't fight the system.

Japanese baseball reminded me a lot of National League baseball. There was more bunting, and they had the pitcher hitting down at the bottom of the order. Basically, you tried to get your lead-off guys on, in your three, four, and five spots you waited for the big blow, and then down at the bottom of the order, it was small ball until you got back to the top again. There was more strategy and little ball. They also had a lot of charts on how to play and pitch to guys, and we spent a lot of time in meetings learning the opposing pitchers. That was the big thing about Japanese baseball. There were a lot of strategies, a lot of notetaking, and a much more sophisticated game plan on how to defend against your opponent.

We had a pretty good lineup. In 1992, we had three guys with thirty home runs and a fourth with twenty-five. Atsuya Furuta was our star catcher. What impressed me the most about him was that not only did he have a great season at the plate with thirty home runs but he also caught almost every day. Our manager, Nomura, was the best catcher that ever played in Japan, and he was tough on Furuta. Furuta had a lot of pressure on him, but I think if you asked Furuta, he would probably say that it was the best thing that happened to him. He became one of Japan's best catchers. Furuta was also the fan favorite. He was a G.Q.–type guy. He wore designer clothes and glasses, and the girls really liked him. When we would come off the bus or go into a hotel, the fans would be yelling and screaming, "Furuta!" and going nuts. He would wave to them or sign for them, and they would go whacko!

Takahiro Ikeyama at shortstop hit thirty home runs that year. He always had a smile on his face and would joke around a lot with me. For a fairly

small guy, he had some pop and an absolute cannon from short and incredible range. He was a big-league shortstop. Katsumi Hirosawa was another big popper in our lineup. He hit twenty-five homers in '92. He was a good first baseman and a hard worker. At the top of our lineup, we had Tetsuya Iida. He was a small guy in stature, but he played with a big heart. He could run the ball down like crazy and would make leaping catches against the walls and bring balls back. He was a very aggressive center fielder and had a real good arm. And you could just tell that he loved playing baseball.

Early in the 1992 season, I tore my hamstring. I had always had hamstring problems, but I never needed surgery or missed a whole lot of time. I would just miss a week or two to rehab the leg, and then, boom, I was back. It would normally happen once a year. The Japanese trainers said that it was just pulled, but I tried to tell them that I knew about leg problems, and that this was worse than any I had before. I took ten days off and tried to play with it taped, but I could barely run. It got worse, so I told them that I would need another week or so off. I think that led them to believe that I didn't want to play. At the same time, my wife, Kelly, was pregnant with twins. I tried to be very honest with the Swallows. I told them, "My wife is very close to giving birth to twins. Let me go home and spend some time with her, and I will see my doctor and have my leg checked out. Then when I come back, I'll be one-hundred percent." I'm speculating here, but I think they thought I was trying to use the injury to go back to see my wife. I can understand how they could think that. Well, right up to the All-Star break, they kept saying, "Let us give you treatment, and you can try to play next week." I tried to do it their way, but it just got worse. I knew that if I could just get healthy, I could be much more productive.

They eventually let me go back to the States for a week or so. Kelly was having complications, and she wasn't ready to deliver, so I didn't get to see the birth, but I did get to see a doctor. He injected the hamstring with a saline solution, and within two or three days, it started feeling better, and I came back to Japan healthy. After the twins were born, my wife, Kelly, packed everybody up and came to Japan. She got all set up but then realized that with me traveling and playing baseball all the time and with the subways and double strollers and everything, that it was just too much. She decided to go back home. Since it was the summer, I said, "Look, why don't we leave the oldest here, and he can hang out with me, and that will give you a little break at home?" She returned with the twin girls, Haley and

Hunter, and my five-year-old son, Dallas. Josh, who was about eight or nine at the time, stayed with me.

I don't know how I pulled it off, but he traveled with me the whole second half of that incredible season. He was with me on all the bullet trains. During batting practice, he would shag flies for us. He loved baseball so much. He kept score of every game. In Koshien Stadium, they have these little press boxes right on the field level next to the dugouts. Josh would sit in there keeping score, and I remember late in a couple of games looking over and seeing him asleep on his score pad. When he was traveling with us, the team got hot, so Nomura started calling him "lucky boy." Soon, everybody was calling him that. Now that I was healthy, I really got hot and put up some serious numbers in a short amount of time. I don't know them off the top of my head, but if you look at my numbers up to the All-Star break, you'll see that I won the MVP, the home-run title, and the batting title in the second half of the season. Sharing that experience with my son Josh was one of my favorite memories of Japan.

Winning the pennant was just incredible. I had heard about how important it was, but I was surprised at all the fans, reporters, and television crews that came to our practices the week before the series. It was almost like the city shut down for these games.

The 1992 Japan Series against the Lions was a very intense series. That was an experience that I'll probably always remember. They were a good team, and they had some guys in their lineup with pop. Although they did play little ball at times, they seemed to be waiting for blows by their big guns, so they were a lot like an American League team. Every game was filled with a lot of strategy, and every game was close, often going back and forth. It was an incredible series from both a baseball strategy point of view and for the fans. For me, it wasn't a pleasant experience, because I tied the strikeout record for the Japan Series. I had really adjusted well to the off-speed pitching in Japan, and I was healthy and had been putting up some pretty big numbers. For half a season, I barely saw a fastball. Then we played the Lions in the series. They had a really good pitching staff with two or three starters and a reliever that were really impressive. I was shocked, because these guys had decent fastballs. They didn't give me any off-speed pitches but came at me hard, high, and tight. I wasn't ready for that, and in the seven-game series, I struck out sixteen times in thirty at bats. So even

though I had a great '92 season, it ended on a sour note by my not doing so well in the series and the team being defeated in the seventh game.

When I came back for the 1993 season, there was a lot of pressure on me to produce. I didn't put up big MVP–type numbers that season, but I was more of an MVP to the team because I either tied or broke the *sayonara* home-run record. Even though I put up modest numbers, when the team needed a big blow at the end of the game, I came through. You would have thought that they would have pitched around me in those situations, but they didn't. I guess it's because it wasn't like I was 4 for 4 in those games. Often, I was hitless until that final at bat, so they might have thought, "He's not swinging the bat well. Let's go after him." Winning MVPs and leading the leagues in different categories is nice, but helping the club win when they're down and out is a great feeling.

A lot of the credit for the team's and my success should go to my teammate, Rex Hudler. Rex has a passion for the game of baseball, and he gave a thousand percent every day. He recognized the pressure on me to come back and repeat that MVP season, so when I would struggle, he always kept me upbeat. If I hit a *sayonara* home run, while I was doing the interviews, he would carry my bags to the bus and have everything ready for me. When I came on the bus, he would clap and cheer and hug me! He made me feel like I was the greatest thing in the world.

Rex was an important part of the team, and he helped loosen things up. One day, they knew it was going to rain, so they called the game early. But the rain wasn't too intense so we decided to work out. The heat and rain on the Astroturf had brought some bugs and things out onto the field. I remember as we were running seeing a lot of worms out on the wet, warm Astroturf. While we were stretching in right field, somebody made a joke about a worm. I had once heard a story about Rex eating a bug, so I grouped everybody together and picked up one of the worms. In my broken Japanese, I explained to everybody that if they put in ten thousand yen apiece [about a hundred dollars] that I could get Rex to eat this big, nasty-looking worm. They were all impressed by the idea. I think almost everyone agreed to pay. I tilted Rex's head back, and he stuck his tongue out. I dropped it on there, and he munched on that worm! Obviously, Rex made some pretty good money doing that. It loosened up the team, and we had a fun time, but who knew that it would be in the newspapers the next day! A few weeks

later, while we were perusing a Japanese sports magazine, we found a cartoon of this crazy American eating a worm!

One of my fondest memories of that season came on July 4th. It was Josh's birthday, and he was visiting. We were playing the Giants at Jingu Stadium, and I hit a *sayonara* home run. He came on the field with me, I put him up on my shoulders, and we waved at the crowd. I mentioned during an interview that the home run was for my son. The next day in the paper, there was a picture of him on my shoulders, and it said something about it being his birthday.

The 1993 Japan Series was basically a repeat of the '92 series. It was also a back and forth, very well played, intense series. The difference was that we won game seven instead of losing it. Personally, I did a lot better. I adjusted to the pitching a bit better, and I didn't have as many strikeouts. I don't think I had great numbers, but I remember feeling pleased with my performance. The experience from the year before helped out a lot.

After we won, everybody went nuts! I remember driving back to Tokyo on the bus, screaming and waving to people outside and everybody beeping horns and waving at us. They paraded us to the New Otani Hotel where there were tons of people waiting as we came off the bus. They were all jumping and cheering. We did some sort of presentation out by the pool, and then they started throwing everybody into the pool. We were all swimming in the pool in our uniforms, and everybody was going nuts! It was just an incredible experience. The party went on forever. I was very excited and wanted to celebrate, but I had a ticket to go home the next day. Once the party started to break up, I went back to my room, packed up, and got ready to catch an early cab to the airport.

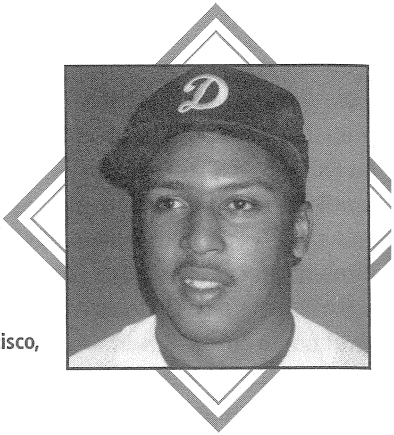
After my third year with the Swallows, they chose not to pick up my option. When it was announced that I was leaving the Swallows, my neighbor Mr. Ichikawa called me and said, "You need to go to the Giants. They need a third baseman." Somehow, he got me in contact with the Giants and let them know that I still wanted to play in Japan and that I would love play for the Giants. The next thing I knew, their representatives called, and they signed me.

When I was signing with the Giants, I remembered from when I played in the American League, the mystique surrounding the Yankees. The Yomiuri Giants have that same type of mystique. That no matter how they

were doing, they were always on TV or in the headlines, so I was a little apprehensive when I first played for them. The manager, Shigeo Nagashima, had his own presence and mystique. Everywhere he went, there were thousands of people around him. Nagashima always had a smile on his face. You could just tell that he loved baseball. He was easy to play for, and I thought he was a great manager.

Unfortunately, that season became a disaster. I had a lot of stuff going on at home family-wise. My wife was really sick, and my mind was focused on her and back home. The team wasn't playing well, so there was a lot of pressure to win, and finally after 3 1/2 years, the pressure was starting to wear on me. I wasn't doing poorly, but I wasn't doing well, either. I just felt that physically I couldn't take it anymore and that it was important for me to be back home. I also didn't want my attitude to disrupt the team's harmony. I came home at the All-Star break, and that was the end of the season for me. I not only quit the Giants and Japanese baseball but I also quit baseball altogether and focused on family. Eventually, things got better at home, and I made some phone calls to the Angels, and I played two seasons with the Angels and two with the Astros before I retired at the end of the 1999 season.

My time in Japan was a huge turning point in my career. I came to Japan as a free agent when my future in the Major Leagues was in doubt. Because of my success over there, I was able to come back and play in the big leagues for another four years. I also matured as a person over there. As a foreign player, especially an ex–big leaguer, you're paid a lot of money, and you're expected to be their savior. That puts a lot of pressure on you, and it humbles you. Dealing with the criticism when you fail makes you tougher and builds character. Also, learning how to be humble when you succeed makes you a better person. I'm so thankful for my Christian faith, because it helped me meet these challenges. I not only experienced another culture, but my time in Japan helped me grow up. Overall, it was a wonderful experience. I hope someday to return and see my old teammates and maybe even coach over there.



24 Alonzo Powell

Born: December 12, 1964, in San Francisco, California
1987: Montreal Expos outfielder
1991: Seattle Mariners outfielder
1992–97: Chunichi Dragons outfielder
1998: Hanshin Tigers outfielder

After a strong AAA career and appearances with the Expos and Mariners, Alonzo Powell became a Chunichi Dragon in 1992. Powell had a good first year but didn't hit his stride until the second season when he hit .317 with twenty-seven homers. In 1994, he won his first of three consecutive batting titles, joining Shigeo Nagashima as the only Central League players to accomplish the feat. In seven years in Japan, Powell hit over .300 five times and retired with a .313 lifetime batting average. He was selected to four consecutive Best Nine teams. After returning to the States, Powell became a coach in the Cincinnati Reds organization and is now managing the Dayton Dragons of the Midwest League.

KEN MACHA, A FORMER PLAYER with Chunichi Dragons, was my bullpen coach when I played for the Montreal Expos. Later, I was traded to Seattle, and Ken ended up with the Angels. In 1992, we played the Angels during spring training, and I was in right field, and Macha was in the bullpen. Macha and I were yelling back and forth at each other between innings. At one point, he yelled, "Alonzo, have you ever thought about trying to go to Japan?" I yelled back, "I thought about it, but nothing has really come up." He shouted back, "A player just got injured over there, and I could recommend your name. Is that okay?" I said, "That's fine." I had another good spring with Seattle and once again was the last person to get cut. It was my fourth or fifth year in Triple-A, so I made a deal with the manager that I wouldn't have to play on long travel days.

We were traveling from Calgary to Tucson, and we were in the Tucson airport getting our bags when this Japanese guy approached me and said, "Excuse me, sir. Are you with the baseball team?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "What time is batting practice?"

"Well, today is optional hitting because it's a long travel day, and optional hitting is at 5:30."

Then he said, "By the way, do you know Alonzo Powell?"

I was like, "Yes. Yes, I do."

He said that his name was Mr. Ashiki from the Chunichi Dragons, and he was there to watch me play. Immediately, what went into my head was that I had just told the manager that I had wanted the day off! I begged the manager to put me back in the lineup. I ended up getting in the game and playing really well. I went over to Japan that May.

Mr. Ashiki said that I could travel comfortably on the flight over, but that they wanted me to wear a suit when we arrived in Japan. I said okay because maybe that was the team policy. I wore a sweat suit, and about an hour before we landed, I changed into a suit. When I got off the plane, there were about fifteen TV cameras and about twenty reporters. I started looking around, because I thought maybe Michael Jackson or Michael Jordan was on the airplane as well. I said, "Who's on this flight?" And Mr. Ashiki said, "Everybody's here for you." I was like, "What?!" I had a press conference at the airport, and they asked me millions of questions about Japanese baseball. At that minute, I realized, "This is a lot more serious than I had thought. This is big-time here." I was overwhelmed.

I was supposed to play in three minor league games, then join the big team. In my first minor league game, I did so-so, but in the next game, I hit two home runs, so the expectations were phenomenal. My first official game was against the Giants, and I think I went 0 for 4. I started off really slowly as I adjusted to the different style of Japanese baseball. In America, I knew the pitchers, catchers, and players, but in Japan, it was like starting baseball all over again. I didn't know any of their players, so I didn't know their tendencies.

Since I started off really slow, the manager called a big meeting and suggested that I go down to the farm team to get accustomed to Japanese baseball. I was thinking, "Oh no, here we go again. The same thing that

happened to me in the States is happening to me again in Japan!" Luckily, I had in my contract that they couldn't send me to the farm team without my permission. I knew that if I went to the farm team and did poorly, I was finished. I felt that if they gave me the opportunity to play, I would show them that I could play well. I stayed with the big club but was put on the bench and relegated to pinch-hitting and playing late-inning defense.

Every day when I was struggling, I had an early hitting session with a couple different coaches. One day, they put a towel under my left arm, and I had to swing without dropping the towel. I thought, "Well, I'm not doing well, and my goal is to try to keep everybody happy." From what I had been told about Japanese baseball, they didn't like confrontation. My goal from the beginning was to play three years, so I tried to keep everybody happy, and I went through all the drills.

Hiromitsu Ochiai was very helpful. One day he pulled me aside and said, "Alonzo, you have a really, really good swing. One thing you have to remember, don't change. Remember what got you here. You're a strong batter. You hit the ball to all fields. Don't change. Do the same things here that you did in America." Here was one of the all-time best hitters in Japan giving me some pretty good, logical advice. I did what I had to do in practice, but during the games, I hit my way. Either I was going to succeed hitting my way or go home hitting my way.

I don't remember the exact game, but I think we were playing the Yakult Swallows, and our manager, Morimichi Takagi, got mad at one of our outfielders. He put me in during the seventh inning when we were down by eight runs. I ended up batting in the ninth and hitting a home run, so I played the next day. I went 3 for 4 with another home run. I went three days in a row going 3 for 4 with a home run! I ended up hitting home runs four days in a row. I went on a sixteen- or seventeen-game hitting streak and was named the player of the month for July. I proved to the team that I could play. I ended up having a good first year [.308 with thirteen home runs] and stayed for six more years, but I had been a few bad games away from being out of Japan before the end of my first season!

I met Wally Yonamine during my first year there. He was doing some commentary on TV. He came down during batting practice and told me that the most important thing for survival in Japan is being patient. He was exactly right. The biggest thing was being patient and trying not to be hot-

headed. It was easy to say and hard to do. But I learned to keep my mouth shut and let my actions on the field describe how I felt.

Before I went to Japan, I had played winter ball. In winter ball, you have to adapt to being in a different land, not knowing the language, and not understanding the customs. I felt that as a visitor in someone else's country, it was my job to learn and understand their ways the best I could. I looked at Japan the same way. I wanted to be a good baseball player, but also I really wanted to adapt and fit in with my teammates. I didn't want them to think that I was just a money-hungry American. I thought, "I'm in a foreign country, and my job is to learn the language." The more I learned, the more I felt appreciated by the players. I could basically understand everything, but I was really shy about speaking, because I didn't want to make a mistake. I also wanted to experience some of the culture of Japan and to understand some of the different customs. When I went to different cities, during the day, I would go out sightseeing whenever possible.

A lot of the American players who come over don't know the history of Japanese baseball, because it's not that prominent in America. I had a really good interpreter named Toyo Kunimitsu, who helped me a lot. He was the Lee brothers' interpreter, so he told me the things the Lee brothers went through, and he gave me a really good overview of Japanese baseball—how it was played and its history. He knew all the American players who had been there before me, so he pointed out what the successful guys did. The common denominator was being patient and trying not to get frustrated.

I had great teammates. Yasuaki Taihoh was one of my best friends on the team. His locker was next to mine, and because he was from Taiwan, he saw himself as a foreign player even though he had Japanese-player status. We had a bond because we both saw ourselves as outsiders. He hit in the lineup behind Ochiai and me and was very instrumental in us doing well. Kazuyoshi Tatsunami was another of my good friends and an outstanding player. He was a good fielder and good hitter. I think there's no doubt that he could play in the Major Leagues.

Ochiai was basically an American in a Japanese body. He did everything American-style. If he didn't want to take batting practice one day, Ochiai didn't take batting practice. If Ochiai didn't want to take infield, Ochiai didn't take infield. That was totally opposite of everybody else in Japan. He even had his own style during batting practice. He had the pitchers throw

the balls in a sort of arc around thirty, forty miles an hour, almost like a softball pitch, and he would just relax and hit the ball. Everybody told him that he couldn't succeed that way, but he was the type of guy that was out to prove that they were wrong. With his numbers, you obviously couldn't argue—he was one of the best players to ever play in Japan.

On the bench, he would tell me about the pitchers. For example, he might say that with two strikes, Masumi Kuwata of the Giants likes to throw a *shuto* inside for a ball to set up a split finger. And the next time up, he would get two strikes, and then here came a *shuto*, and then came a split finger! I would usually hit in front of or behind him, so I would watch how they pitched to Ochiai, because they would pitch me very similarly. It was a great advantage to have him on my side.

After the 1993 season, Ochiai became a free agent and chose to go to the Giants. Being from America, I was used to people changing teams, but it was kind of shocking in Japan. We felt that Taihoh could step in at first base and approach the numbers that Ochiai had consistently put up. We also got Mel Hall that year. We solidified our offense, because Taihoh and Mel Hall were two outstanding left-handed bats. The thing that we missed about Ochiai was his experience and his knowledge. That was irreplaceable.

We had some tough pitchers on our team. Masahiro Yamamoto, Genji Kaku, and Shinji Imanaka were very good. I was very impressed with the pitching in Japan. I nicknamed Yamamoto, our left-handed starter, "Amemoto"—*ame* means rain. It seemed like every time he pitched, it would rain. One time, we were supposed to play the Giants in Nagoya, and the day before, we were in Osaka and they were in Tokyo. That morning, there was a train accident in Tokyo, and the trains were shut down so neither one of us could get to Nagoya. So, we were "trained out." Of course, Yamamoto was supposed to be pitching! In 1997, we were playing in the Nagoya Dome, and there was a typhoon—so the game got rained out in a dome! And, obviously, Yamamoto was supposed to pitch!

The 1994 Central League pennant race was incredible. We were in first for most of the year, and we were battling with Hiroshima. Then, all of a sudden, the Giants got hot and got into the race at the end. The ball park was filled every day, and every game was do or die. It was fun!

I went through about half of that season with a broken toe. A lot of people didn't realize that. We were at Meiji Jingu Stadium, and I was try-

ing to make a play at the wall. I jumped to get the ball, and my toe kicked into the cement base of the wall. I ended up breaking the big toe on my right foot. I went back to the States, and the doctors said that I could have surgery and miss the rest of the year or be fitted with an orthotic, play with some pain, and have the operation at the end of the year. I chose the latter. I missed about three weeks for that injury.

We battled all the way down to the end. Going into the last game of the season, we were tied. It all came down to a final game against the Giants. And that was unbelievable! I was told that it was the top-rated TV program in Japanese history. The '94 Giants were probably the best team I saw over there, because they did everything well. They had great pitching, great hitting, and a great bullpen. And they just did everything at the right time. I was very impressed with the pitchers. Masaki Saito was very tough and was my nemesis for years. At that time, Masumi Kuwata was one of the best pitchers, but he ended up getting hurt a few years later. The Giants also had Ochiai and Hideki Matsui.

Their manager was Shigeo Nagashima. He was a living legend. I'd put him up there with your Hank Aarons, Willie Mayses, and Babe Ruths of baseball. I read a lot about Japanese baseball history, so I found out about Nagashima as a player. His name always comes up as one of the top-five players in Japanese history, and many think he was the best. Having him in the clubhouse took a lot of pressure off his players. He used to always joke with me. He would say that I was one of the better hitters in Japan, and what was my secret? And I would say, "There is no secret. I just close my eyes and swing hard!" And he would laugh.

Imanaka started that final game for us. He was probably our best pitcher. I think he was a little bit tired, but you have to go with your best. Ochiai had just come back from an injury, and he hit a big home run early in that game to put them ahead. We battled and got back into the game, and then Henry Cotto hit a home run, and they won the game. They pitched a good game that day. They actually threw their three best pitchers at us. Hiromi Makihara started the game, then Saito came in, and then Kuwata came in to finish it. It's a game that I'll never forget. I ended up winning the batting title in that game, but I would have rather lost the batting title and won the game.

That first batting title was the hardest one to win. I had a great spring training in 1994. I hit close to .500 with six or seven home runs. Everything

was going right. Then the season started, and in the first month, I hit about .190. Nothing went right. I finally started taking extra batting practice, and I found my swing. I had a couple of good games in a row, and one day on the bus to Koshien Stadium, I told my interpreter, "You know what? I'm going to tell you something funny. I'm going to win the batting title this year." He looked at me and said, "You're hitting about .200 right now. You have a long way to go." I said, "Usually when I get hot, it's not for a week—it's for about two or three months." I started climbing the ladder, and I got over .300. Soon I was fighting for the batting title. It all came down to that last game of the year against the Giants.

If I remember correctly, I went into that game trailing Akira Eto from Hiroshima by two points. Our game started at 6:00, and the Carp game started at 6:20. I found out later that they were going to watch me because I was two points behind. Eto started the game on the bench, because if I went 1 for 4, he would win. In my first at bat, I got a base hit, which put me ahead of Eto. They waited to see what happened in my second at bat, because they knew that I had to play. I got another hit in my second at bat so that put me two or three points ahead of Eto. Then. they put Eto into their game and he went 0 for 2. I ended up beating him by about four points. Actually, he ended up being third, as his teammate Tomonori Maeda also passed him in that game.

I felt that sitting out was a bad mistake on his part. They tried to be smart and watch me to see what happened, and he ended up losing. I always felt when it comes to a batting championship, either you win it yourself, or you lose it yourself. But that was the custom there. We did the same thing with Hideki Matsui one year. Taihoh was going for the home run title and was leading by one. We played the Giants in the last game of the year, and they led off Matsui, and we walked him five times on twenty pitches!

Winning the batting title was bittersweet. Of course, I loved winning it, but I would rather have gone 0 for 4 and won that game against the Giants.

When I won that first batting title, it was the same year that Ichiro won his first batting title in the Pacific League. We would talk with each other in spring training, and when we saw each other the next spring, we said let's do it again! And we both did. The second year, I had to fight it out with Bobby Rose. I pulled a quad muscle and went on the disabled list for about three weeks. When I came back, the press was making a big deal out of me

and Bobby fighting for the batting title. Bobby and I went out to dinner one night, and we agreed that since one of us was going to win, we would just go out there and play our best. If I didn't win the title, it would have been an honor to finish second to Bobby. He was a class player. In the third year, Ichiro and I had a friendly bet to see who would hit the highest. I had a real comfortable lead pretty much the whole year. I was only one or two hits away from the Chunichi record for most hits in a year and had a good chance to beat Ichiro, but I ended up going 0 for 12 to end the season! So during the next spring training, I took him out to dinner in Okinawa.

Of course, my name is Alonzo, so everybody here in the States called me "Zo." I found out from my interpreter that Zo meant elephant in Japanese. All my teammates called me Zo-san, and it became a real popular nickname. When I won the batting title, I learned from Genji Kaku, who won the ERA title, that I should give out presents. I came up with T-shirts with an elephant swinging a bat. The guys on the team really liked them. The two following years, I made them a little better, and all the guys would wear them in the workout room and around the hotels.

When they come to Japan, a lot of American players see the shorter fences and get away from their game and start trying to hit more home runs. I stayed with the same game plan that I had in the States. I felt that if I was hitting for average, then my home runs and RBIs would come along. I think the biggest reason for my success in Japan is that I had a natural swing for hitting the ball to right field. That was something that I've always had since Little League. That really helped me out, because it opened up the whole field for me. If they pitched me away, I could take what they gave me and get a base hit to right field, but if they came over the plate or inside, then I could take advantage of my power.

One of the most fun experiences was a benefit game for the earthquake victims of Kobe. It was the American players versus the Japanese players. That was pretty fun, because we had all the American players together and Bobby Valentine as our manager. We played the game in Fukuoka, and on the bus, we were laughing and joking about all the things that happened to us during the season. We took batting practice and right before the game, Valentine got everybody together and said, "Well, the game's getting ready to start. Obviously, I don't want anybody to get hurt. Play hard. But the biggest thing is to get out of this game healthy and go back to your teams. But,

I want you guys to know that we have everything to lose and nothing to gain." We all look at each other and realized that he was exactly right. If we lost, it would be on the front page of the newspapers, but if we won, it wouldn't be a big deal.

In the second inning, we had a runner on second base, and I was hitting behind Julio Franco. Julio said, "We're going to play American baseball here. I'm going to hit a ground ball to second base to move that runner over, and you get a base hit to bring him in." On the first pitch, he hit a ground ball to second base. He came back and said, "I did my job. Now, you do yours!" I got a base hit. We ended up winning the game. It was fun to be with all the American guys and show the Japanese players the American way of playing baseball. There was no pressure. It was just about going out there and having fun for a good cause.

I think that during the six years that I played with Chunichi, I did as well on and off the field as any other American player they've ever had. I played hard and played with major injuries. But the first time that I had a bad year, they let me go. They did it by calling me on the telephone after a game and telling me that they were going to release me. I thought that was classless. Being released is part of baseball, and I don't have a problem with that, but I thought they could have let me finish out the season and talked to me face-to-face like professionals. That left a bad taste in my mouth.

I ended up coming back the next year and playing for Hanshin. I had a slow start, but the very night I got my average back up to .300, I went 0 for 4. The next day, I went to the ball park, and the manager told my interpreter that he wanted me to be a pinch-hitter. That meant that I would only get one chance to hit per game, and most likely it would be against the closer. That's not a good way to do well. I was pinch-hitting and not getting a chance to play. In August, they wanted to send me to the farm team. I told them that maybe it was time for me go back to America and see what I wanted to do for the rest of my career.

I came home and played one year in the Yankee organization. I had a really good year but didn't get called up to the Major Leagues. That led me to decide that it was time to do something else, so I took a year off and spent time with my family. I've been coaching the last two years with the Cincinnati Reds organization, and I just was named the manager for Dayton's minor league team.

I still miss the fans in Japan. I played a lot of center field and right field near the cheering section. It's unbelievable how loud and loyal the fans were. Whether you were 0 for 4 or 4 for 4, those fans cheered their hearts out from the first pitch to the last pitch of the game. Just this year, I got a really nice letter from a kid in Japan who said he really liked the way I played, and he wanted to know what I was doing now. He sent along some cards for me to sign, and I thought that was really nice.

Japan forever changed my life as an individual and as a player. The opportunity that I had in Japan was probably the best opportunity that I might ever have in life. They took a chance on a so-called triple-A player, and they gave me the opportunity to set my family up for the rest of their lives. That's something that I'll never forget. I had some opportunities once I was in Japan to come back and play in the Major Leagues, but I turned them down to stay in Japan. Why? Well, Japan took a chance on me when nobody in the States was willing to take chance. I felt a sense of loyalty to Japan. And I was going to get a much better deal in Japan than I would in America. There is no question that it was the right decision. I have no second thoughts about it. I had already established myself in Japan as a pretty good player, so why not try to stay as long as I could? It was a wonderful experience.

25 Eric Hillman

Born: April 27, 1966, in Gary, Indiana
1992–94: New York Mets pitcher
1995–96: Chiba Lotte Marines pitcher
1997: Yomiuri Giants pitcher

After pitching for the Mets for parts of three seasons, Eric Hillman followed his AAA manager Bobby Valentine to the Chiba Lotte Marines in 1995. Hillman teamed up with future Major Leaguers Hideki Irabu and Satoru Komiyama to form a strong rotation that helped propel the Marines from fifth to second place. In his second year, Hillman went 14 and 9 with a 2.40 ERA and a league-leading 213.1 innings pitched. He was also selected as the Pacific League's Best Nine pitcher. After the 1996 season, he signed with the Yomiuri Giants, but an injury limited his season to just six innings and ended his career. He now lives in Denver, Colorado.

YOU KNOW THAT MOVIE with Tom Selleck, *Mr. Baseball*? That's actually an accurate depiction of baseball in Japan.

I played for the New York Mets off and on for two years from 1992 to 1994. In 1994, I made the team as a starter, but right before the strike, I got sent down to AAA Norfolk to play for Bobby Valentine. I was going to quit baseball, but Valentine kept me from quitting. I played really well for him and went 10 and 1 in a shortened season. Either you love Bobby Valentine or you hate him. There's no middle ground. I'll tell you what—I'd take a bullet for that guy. He did everything for me in my career.

Valentine's the reason that I went to Japan. He told me that these Japanese guys were courting him to manage in Japan. He didn't know if he wanted to go or not, so he asked my opinion. I said, "Bobby, you already managed eight years in Texas. It's not like you're a young minor-league manager on the rise, going to get his first taste of the big leagues. If they're

throwing all kinds of money at you, go!" I don't know if I helped him make a decision. I only offered my opinion. Later, Bobby asked me, "Would you be interested in going? Would you want to go to Japan with me?" And I said, "Oh yeah, I'd love to go!" So, I went to the Lotte Chiba Marines in 1995 with Bobby. We had a great time over there.

Bobby V. convinced the Japanese that they should have spring training in Peoria, Arizona. So in 1995 and 1996, we had about three weeks in the Mariners' and Padres' complex from February 1st until about February 24th or so. We did a kind of American-style spring training. Bobby butted heads with the front office nonstop. He would say, "It's the first couple days of spring training, let's get them out of here by one o'clock," but the Japanese wanted to run these guys into the ground until six o'clock at night. It was like a Catch-22. They wanted an American manager, but they didn't want any of his ideas.

Japanese baseball was like a chess match. They played for one run every inning. It didn't matter if it was the first inning or the ninth inning. It didn't matter if you were up by six runs or down by six runs, if that lead-off guy got on base, they bunted him over. They almost never tried to hit behind runners. That was such a relief for a pitcher, because unless some guy hits a double and you walk the next guy, you rarely have to face first and second with nobody out. And if you ever did, you knew that they were going to bunt then!

It was station-to-station baseball. They never went first to third! It was amazing. Even Ichiro [Suzuki], who flies, wouldn't go first to third on a single. He'd be on first base, a ground ball would go between the first and second, and he'd stop at second even though it's a long throw for the right fielder. And Ichiro's speed can rival anybody's. It all came down to losing face. If that third base coach waved him on, and he got thrown out, it would be the third-base coach's fault. The funny thing about Japanese baseball was that everybody wanted to save face.

There was way too much over-coaching in Japanese baseball. The pitchers all threw the same thing: forkball, a four-seamed straight fastball, and a slider. It's like you can just open up a can of pitchers over there, and they all threw the same. They liked to warm up all their pitchers every game in the bullpen even if they weren't going into the game. If a pitcher didn't get in the game but had a good bullpen session, he would get a little asterisk

that would go towards his next year's contract. So, the relievers were throwing every day. Even if I had a shutout going into the seventh inning, and we were up 5-0, or 3-0—you know how low-scoring those games are in Japan—and I had a low pitch count, the relievers would all throw. It was cover-your-own-ass coaching. They would make these guys throw in the bullpen, and if a guy got in a game and got his ass handed to him [because he had left everything in the bullpen], the coaches would say, "He was fine when he was with me."

Bobby V. would hit-and-run. He went to Japan and showed them things that they just didn't do because he took risks—risks that we take for granted everyday in the United States. He applied them to Japanese baseball and had a lot of success. He was a great manager. Bobby had a two-year deal over there. After he managed I think it was one hundred games or so, his next year's salary was automatically guaranteed. He never really rocked the boat during those first hundred games. He did things his own way, but I really think he accommodated the Japanese as much as he could. He did everything. He went the extra mile to learn the language, attended all their functions, and was more than gracious. Bobby V. loved Japan. He wanted to experience everything Japan had to offer. We went to a sumo match and did everything we could.

After the first hundred games, he started doing things his own way, like not scheduling practices on off-days and letting pitchers in the bullpen rest. Bobby turned that team around. One game, Bobby had Yasuyuki Kawamoto and Toshihide Narimoto, our stoppers basically, sitting in the dugout with us. These guys had the funniest looks on their faces. They looked like, "Oh shit, what are we doing here?" because they were usually in the bullpen throwing all game. Bobby kept saying, "No, you're staying here. You're staying here!" Finally, Bobby turned out the lights in the bullpen. Kawamoto went out that night and threw 156 kilometers—which is about ninety-six miles per hour. Bobby tried to change things mentally and physically over there, but his ideas weren't well received.

The general manager, Tatsuro Hirooka, and Bobby V. both had strong personalities, and they clashed from the start. He was always on the field, working with guys in the bullpen, working with guys in the outfield. He was like baby shit—he was everywhere. He was just a mean-ass guy. He had this guy Hiroshi Tsuno throw four hundred balls in the bullpen. I mean this guy couldn't even wipe his ass, his arm was so sore. Hirooka just thought of him-

self as omnipotent as far as baseball went. He was just going to teach everybody everything, from getting up in the morning to going to bed at night.

My first start in Japan, I gave up two runs in the first inning when Kevin Mitchell hit a double, but I threw seven scoreless after that, and we ended up losing 2-1. The next game, I went six and two-thirds innings, and we were leading 2-1 when I got taken out. Well, Narimoto came in and gave it up, and I got a no-decision.

Valentine had built some awesome incentives into my contract. If I reached ten wins, I would get fifty thousand dollars, but if I got twelve wins, just two more wins, I got an additional hundred thousand dollars. In the first two games, I pitched my ass off and pitched well. After those two starts, Hirooka came up to me and, via my translator, told me that I had great fighting spirit and pitched really well in the first two games and that he would give me a one-victory credit towards my incentives. I said, "Oh great! Thank you very much!" Later that year, when I was 11 and 9 with three starts left, I thought that I would test the guy's character. I grab my translator and ask Hirooka, "Remember back in April when you gave me a one-win credit towards my incentives? I'm 11 and 9 right now but in Lotte's eyes and as far as the checkbook is concerned, I'm 12 and 9, right?"

Hirooka-san said, "No, I don't remember that."

I said to my translator, "You remember? You're the one who translated it."

"Ah, Eric-san, I don't know."

But I still had three starts left, so I said, "Don't worry. I'll get my twelfth win." And I did. I ended up 12 and 9.

The front office treated the team like a car. They knew that the team had some problems, so they flew in this mechanic from the United States [Valentine] to fix it. We had a great year in 1995 and finished in second place. We were eleven games over .500, which was great for this team. We finished way better than they had finished for eleven years, so they thought the team was fixed, which was just crazy because managing is constant maintenance. They got rid of Bobby, and everything just went back to the way it was.

I honestly think that Bobby V. was supposed to fail from the start. He was being sabotaged from the day he stepped off the plane. This team was the Milwaukee Brewers of the Japanese league. Bobby had no way of winning. If the team did well, they would take credit, which they did. If the team did badly, he shouldered all the blame as do most managers. It was an unfortunate situation.

After Valentine left, it just got back to this very sterile, very predictable environment. A couple of our great players wrote letters to Bobby V. saying, "Bobby, please come back to Japan." They loved him. For the ballplayers, it was chance to live free. It really was. Otherwise, these guys were like clones. Nobody would ever say anything. They all sat there and did whatever the team said, because win or lose, they are probably going to end up with jobs with the parent company.

In 1996, we had spring training in Arizona again. It was a lot more Japanese style. I told them that I had been using my own training system my whole life, but I did all the conditioning stuff as long as I didn't think it would drain me or hurt me. A lot of things that you do in spring training and in the first months of the season affect how you're going to play in August. I would do everything that I needed to do. I didn't throw nearly as much as they wanted. I told them, "As long as I am getting what I need in a game, then I don't need to throw in the bullpen." If I threw 110 to 120 pitches in a game, then I would only throw thirty pitches between starts. That freaked those guys out because the Japanese throw twice between starts. They would literally throw a hundred pitches between starts. Come game day, they just didn't have the strength and velocity that they should have.

We would also sit in endless meetings going over the hitters. They would be like, "Get two strikes, then pitch him low and away." We had to go over every hitter for this? I ended up saying that I wasn't going to any more of these meetings. All hitters like the ball over the middle of the plate and rely on pitchers' mistakes, so I went with my strengths instead of pitching against their weaknesses. If he's a good fastball-hitter, and I'm a sinkerball pitcher, well, here's my best pitch, and if you hit it, well, hats off to you.

I stopped going on road trips with the team if I wasn't playing. Even when I was scheduled to pitch, I'd take the bullet train down to the city the night before. After the game was over, sometimes I'd take the bullet train that night back to Tokyo. It made sense because I couldn't dress for the other games. They have a crazy rule: Twenty-eight guys on a team but only twenty-five can be active at one time, so Irabu, Komiyama, and I never dressed out unless we were playing. I never had the comradery of being able to sit on the bench and relax with the guys. Every time that I was on the bench, I had to have my game face on.

I had great teammates and made a lot of friends on Lotte. Never had I felt so at home. Nineteen ninety-five was the first year that I had ever started

and finished with the same team. The main guy that I always went out with was Hideki Irabu. He and I became really good friends. He spoke pretty decent English, and I had a crash course in Japanese, so we didn't need a translator to talk. He was very unhappy in Japan, so he talked a lot about getting over to the States. Irabu was a great pitcher. He would throw a nice slow curve ball along with some real heat. I don't know what happened when he was with the Yankees. I know that they totally changed his mechanics. I always thought, if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Another one of my teammates, Satoru Komiyama, also pitched in New York for the Mets. Komiyama was a student of the game. He was very intelligent guy, one of the smartest guys that I've run into either here or in Japan. He went to Waseda University and speaks really good English. We also had two great relievers, Yasuyuki Kawamoto, who was a left-hander, and Toshihide Narimoto. I called them the Moto brothers. They always called me Hillman-san, and I would always say, "No, man, don't call me by my last name. Just Eric. Call me Eric."

"OK, Eric-san."

"*No*, man, just Eric!"

"OK, Eric-san."

Kawamoto, this guy could deal! Kawamoto made it look like the ball was rising, only because it wasn't sinking as fast. He was just fricking nasty. He could have easily played in the majors. And he was a super guy. He took my wife and me out for sushi even though he didn't speak a lick of English except a couple of words and phrases. I didn't speak a lick of Japanese, but we just had the best time.

You know that all the Japanese baseball players smoke. I had never smoked, but I'd go back in the smoking rooms with these guys. I smoked a cigarette one day, and I couldn't walk. They laughed their asses off. But you know what? I think they really appreciated it. Yeah, smoking a cigarette is one of the dumbest things you can ever do, but going to the lounge, trying to learn mah jong and Japanese card games, and having a schmag really helped.

I never took myself too seriously. I used to goof around and have a lot of fun. I was always the team comedian. In 1996, I was on the All-Star team, and we played in the Tokyo Dome. During the fifth inning the grounds crew would go out there, rake the field, and change the bases. I pitched the first three innings, and afterwards, I scoured the Tokyo Dome to find the grounds-

crew area. Finally, I got a uniform and a hat. The pants were too short and the shirt too small. I grabbed a rake, and I told them, "I'm going out." So, I went out during the fifth inning of the All-Star game and raked the pitcher's mound. I still have a great picture of me running off the mound with a rake. Nagashima was standing in the tunnel, and he said incredulously, "Hillman-san?!" And I'm like, "Hey, Nagashima-san, how goes it, man?"

Another time in the middle of a game, Ichiro hit a ball to the right of the first baseman, and I had to cover the base. It wasn't a bang-bang play, Ichiro was safe by a good amount. I walked back, and I yell, "Nice speed! Nice speed, Ichiro!" I put my arm around him, and I faced him toward the camera pit, and I said, "Come on—smile! *Shashin*! *Shashin, o nagaishimasu* [Photo, please]!" There we were standing on first base in the middle of the game, and they're taking pictures. It was fun. I just had a good time.

I think a lot of Japanese players are envious, because the foreign players come over, and we're just ourselves. We're not robots. I feel sorry for the Japanese, because they're slaves for their organizations. The organization tells them to jump, and they say how high, without questioning whether it's right or wrong or beneficial to their career or not. They don't like to rock the boat, because they want to have jobs with the corporation after they're done playing.

I did pretty well in 1995 and '96. I was 12 and 9 the first year with a 2.87 ERA. In 1996, I was 14 and 9 with a 2.40 ERA, and I was named to the Best Nine. I didn't even know what it was until I won it. They just told me that I won Best Nine, and I was like, "Best nine what?" I didn't realize that it was best pitcher in the Pacific League. I did pitch very well in '96, but I also did everything that I possibly could. Bobby said, "The worst thing to do is to go over there and be an ugly American. You know, going over there and acting like you're God's gift to baseball." Bobby knew that I'd be fine, because that's not the kind of person I am, anyway. I was gracious to all the sportswriters over there. If they wanted an interview, I was more than happy to give one. I never said, "I have ten minutes, and that's all you get." It's a business. You're in sales. You're in the business of selling yourself. I was obviously very honored to win the award. They fitted me for a ring and everything.

I didn't have much trouble with the big power-hitters like Kazuhiro Kiyohara. My philosophy was "The bigger they are, the slower I'll throw." You

know the guys who always gave me the most trouble? The seven, eight, nine guys. The pesky guys that wouldn't go away, like the mosquito that keeps buzzing your ear. But, I didn't have any trouble with Ichiro. After seventy-five or seventy-six at bats against me in two years, he hit .206, I think. My buddies were razzing me, because before he came to Seattle, there was a little blurb in *ESPN Magazine* that after getting drilled in his first at bat against ex–New York Met pitcher Eric Hillman, he went on to hit three home runs in that game. I was like, "What the heck! Where did they get that from?" He never did that.

Ichiro is the Michael Jordan of Japan. He's a great guy, and when he left Japan, it was as if Michael Jordan left the Bulls in his prime to go play in Europe. I think that it was pretty devastating to Japanese baseball, especially followed up by Hideki Matsui leaving. Ichiro was a class act everywhere he went. Matsui was wonderful. Irabu was wonderful. These guys just had smiles on every day and came out and did their best. The main reason, I think, that Ichiro grew facial hair when he came to Seattle was that he couldn't do it for nine years. They would not allow it in Japan. They said you couldn't grow facial hair, so I grew a goatee for the first time in my life in 1995 in Chiba. But nobody ever said, "Oh, you have to shave that," because I was an American.

At the end of the '96 season, I was a free agent. I wanted to stay with Chiba so badly, but I think the team knew that I wasn't going to come back even though I had a great year in 1996. When I left, I was in that clubhouse saying goodbye to guys, hugging guys, and I was crying. I was crying my eyes off, because these guys had been my family, and there were zero egos. Actually, nobody in Japan, even Matsui and Ichiro, had an attitude or big ego. I had to provide for my family, so I went with the Giants. I think I was the second-highest-paid player in 1997 right behind Kiyohara.

The Yomiuri Giants are supposed to be something special. Yomiuri owns the largest newspapers and TV station in Japan, so for the last fifty years, they've been hyping their team constantly. I'd say that 85% of the fans in Japan are Giants fans. I think their greatness is partly a mirage, because their media always portrays them as being great.

Shigeo Nagashima managed the Giants. Nobody in America knows this guy. One of the best ways to describe his magnitude in Japan that he is a cross between Sean Connery and Mickey Mantle. He's one of the best-look-

ing guys in Japan, and he has notoriety that is just beyond belief. Shane Mack used to tell me that Nagashima loves his gaijin players, and he treats them well. But I didn't get to play much with the Giants. I got injured right away at spring training in Miyazaki. Miyazaki was beautiful. We stayed in this little hotel that if it was in New York, would have been condemned. But the Giants had been staying there for fifty years. We stayed at this hotel where we slept on tatami mats and beanbag pillows. And sure enough, there was a brand new Sheraton or Royal Prince Hotel right next to us. I was like, "Goddamn, can't we stay over there?!" "Oh no, tradition!"

Anyway, it was still snowing down there! But we went out there and threw in the bullpen. After the bullpen, we did batting and bunting and then took some P.F.P. [pitcher fielding practice]. My shoulder was aching, and I wanted to ice it, but I was also trying to impress. We were just doing some P.F.P., little bunts off the mound where you come up and fire the ball to second base, when I felt like my arm wasn't right.

I threw one inning against the Hiroshima Carp, and I could see the arc on the ball—that's how much it was killing me. I was grinding my teeth, but I went out in the bottom of the first and got them one-two-three. When we came up to bat, I couldn't even lift my arm. I told them, "I'm done. I'm out. Get somebody else in there." There was going to be a new pitcher for the second inning, but they still made me hit! We had twenty-eight guys on the team—we had guys that couldn't even sniff at an at bat—but they still let me go up and hit. I thought, "This is a ship without a rudder."

I had a thickness tear of my rotator cuff. It was torn all the way through. I took two shots a week of cortisone, one in the front of the shoulder and one on the back. I wanted to try everything I possibly could to honor that contract with the Giants, so I stayed over there and ran and worked out. I got in really good shape, because I couldn't throw. The Yomiuri media was there all the time asking, "Will you be throwing today?" I'd say, "No, I won't." "When will you throw?" These were the same questions that I had every day. Photographers and reporters were coming to my apartment and everything, wondering when I was going to do something. I told them, "Listen, I can't do anything," but they couldn't understand that. It was the worst feeling to have people question my integrity, because all I ever tried to do was bust my ass over there. Luckily, I couldn't read the Japanese papers. They were accusing me of faking an injury, but I needed to go home

and get surgery. I'd love to go back and play in the old-timers' games, but I don't think that will ever happen because my name is a four-letter word over there.

I think that American ballplayers going to Japan have to realize what they're getting into. You're going to an Asian country. If you can adapt to the culture, that's the main thing. Is the culture right, or is it wrong? Well, you know, it's not my culture. It's not for me to judge. Just go over there with an open mind, and have a good time. If you do that, I guarantee that you will. If you go over there closed-minded as an angry American, you'll be miserable. I had an absolute blast in Japan. I loved it, and I wanted to end my career there, which I basically did. I went to spring training with the Astros in 2000, but my shoulder was pretty trashed.

I honestly feel that I made some good friends in Japan. When I was with the Giants, there were some guys who had been traded to Central League teams, and they came running up to me and were happy to see me. When I left Lotte, I had tears in my eyes, because I knew that I had finally found a team that I really liked. The part that bothers me the most is knowing that more than likely, I'll never see these guys again for the rest of my life.

Illustration Credits

Chapter 1: Tsuneo "Cappy" Harada, 1950. Courtesy of Cappy Harada.
Chapter 2: Hirofumi Naito, 1950. RobsJapaneseCards.com, LLC.
Chapter 3: Wally Yonamine, 1951. RobsJapaneseCards.com, LLC.
Chapter 4: Futoshi Nakanishi, 1958. RobsJapaneseCards.com, LLC.
Chapter 5: Takashi Iwamoto, ca. 1954. RobsJapaneseCards.com, LLC.
Chapter 6: Dick Kashiwaeda, 1954. Courtesy of Dick Kashiwaeda.
Chapter 7: Satoshi "Fibber" Hirayama, ca. 1955. Wayne Graczyk Photo.
Chapter 8: Glenn Mickens, ca. 1960. Courtesy of Glenn Mickens.
Chapter 9: Gene Bacque, 1967. Photo by Mel Bailey.
Chapter 10: Masanori Murakami, 1967. Photo by Mel Bailey.
Chapter 11: Daryl Spencer, 1967. Photo by Mel Bailey.
Chapter 12: Gordy Windhorn, 1967. Photo by Mel Bailey.
Chapter 13: Don Blasingame, 1967. Photo by Mel Bailey.
Chapter 14: Gene Martin, ca. 1975. Wayne Graczyk Photo.
Chapter 15: Clyde Wright, 1976. Wayne Graczyk Photo.
Chapter 16: Leron Lee, ca. 1980. Wayne Graczyk Photo.
Chapter 17: Masaaki Mori, 1967. Photo by Mel Bailey.
Chapter 18: Greg "Boomer" Wells, ca. 1985. Wayne Graczyk Photo.
Chapter 19: Brad "Animal" Lesley, 1986. Wayne Graczyk Photo.
Chapter 20: Rick Lancellotti, 1987. Wayne Graczyk Photo.
Chapter 21: Ralph Bryant, ca. 1990. Wayne Graczyk Photo.
Chapter 22: Orestes Destrade, ca. 1990. Wayne Graczyk Photo.
Chapter 23: Jack Howell, ca. 1992. Wayne Graczyk Photo.
Chapter 24: Alonzo Powell, ca. 1993. Wayne Graczyk Photo.
Chapter 25: Eric Hillman, ca. 1995. Wayne Graczyk Photo.

Index

ROBERT K. FITTS is the creator of RobsJapaneseCards.com, LLC, the world's largest web site dedicated to Japanese baseball cards and memorabilia. He has published numerous articles on Japanese baseball and memorabilia and is currently working on a biography of Wally Yonamine, the first American to play baseball in Japan after World War II.

Other Books in the Writing Baseball Series

Breaking into Baseball: Women and the National Pastime
JEAN HASTINGS ARDELL
Foreword by Ila Borders

Man on Spikes
ELIOT ASINOF
Foreword by Marvin Miller

Off-Season
ELIOT ASINOF

The American Game: Baseball and Ethnicity
EDITED BY LAWRENCE BALDASSARO AND RICHARD A. JOHNSON
Foreword by Allan H. (Bud) Selig

The Chicago Cubs
WARREN BROWN
Foreword by Jerome Holtzman

Willie's Time: Baseball's Golden Age
CHARLES EINSTEIN

My Baseball Diary
JAMES T. FARRELL
Foreword by Joseph Durso

The Brooklyn Dodgers: An Informal History
FRANK GRAHAM
Foreword by Jack Lang

The New York Giants: An Informal History of a Great Baseball Club
Frank Graham
Foreword by Ray Robinson

The New York Yankees: An Informal History
FRANK GRAHAM
Foreword by Leonard Koppett

The Best Seat in Baseball, But You Have to Stand! The Game as Umpires See It
LEE GUTKIND
Foreword by Eric Rolfe Greenberg

Line Drives: 100 Contemporary Baseball Poems
EDITED BY BROOKE HORVATH and Tim Wiles
Foreword by Elinor Nauen

Full Count: Inside Cuban Baseball
MILTON H. JAMAIL
Foreword by Larry Dierker

Owning a Piece of the Minors
JERRY KLINKOWITZ
Foreword by Mike Veeck

The Baltimore Orioles: The History of a Colorful Team in Baltimore and St. Louis
FREDERICK G. LIEB
Foreword by Bob Broeg

The Boston Red Sox
FREDERICK G. LIEB
Foreword by Al Silverman

The Pittsburgh Pirates
FREDERICK G. LIEB
Foreword by Richard "Pete" Peterson

The St. Louis Cardinals: The Story of a Great Baseball Club
FREDERICK G. LIEB
Foreword by Bob Broeg

Bottom of the Ninth: Great Contemporary Baseball Short Stories
EDITED BY JOHN MCNALLY
Foreword by Richard Russo

The National Game
ALFRED H. SPINK
Foreword by Steven P. Gietschier

Dead Balls and Double Curves: An Anthology of Early Baseball Fiction
EDITED BY TREY STRECKER
Foreword by Arnold Hano

Baseball's Natural: The Story of Eddie Waitkus
JOHN THEODORE
Foreword by Ira Berkowtype