

Ichiro Suzuki, the leadoff man of the Seattle Mariners in Major League Baseball, is perhaps one of the best known Japanese in America. Recently, I watched a Japanese TV documentary program which chronicled 70 days of his private life. The program was very interesting because it shed new light on the personality of Ichiro, who is known to be mass media-phobic and seldom talks to journalists. I was relieved to hear him say he is “susceptible to pressure,” showing that even a man looking like a superman is no different from anybody else.

Ichiro collected more than 200 hits in the 2007 season, achieving the feat for the seventh consecutive year, an MLB record. But he said that in every season up to 2006, he was placed under pressure from around the time he collected 170 or so hits. This is not surprising because all baseball players are under pressure. But Ichiro is different from ordinary players in that he constantly strives to evolve.

In 2007, Ichiro said, he dared to face up to the pressure, probably because he felt he had gained enough confidence in his batting technique to overcome pressure.

On the program, an interviewer asked, “What do you regard as a

named after Ichiro, was available at a booth of Safeco Field, but attendants said the Ichi-Roll was outsold by the “Daimajin Roll,” named in honor of then Mariners closer Kazuhiro Sasaki, nicknamed Daimajin (Great Demon), who won the Rookie of the Year Award in 2000. In that game, Ichiro hit a double off veteran Yankee hurler Roger Clemens and I had a hunch that Ichiro would do a great job in his new surroundings. In fact, he has proved his worth as one of the top-ranked Major Leaguers.

On the TV program, Ichiro made another remark that startled me. He said he could hit a home run if he wanted to. “I hit many home runs when they counted, and that is for a sort of pleasure,” he said. His remark that he grasped a new feeling in 2007 has raised high hopes on his play in the 2008 season.

I have learned many things from what Ichiro said on the TV program. Firstly, it was brought home to me that a genius can become a superstar if he strives, but that an ordinary man only fails unless he strives. For the second thing, he heaped praise on his wife as “more professional than I in that she knows what she has to do.” I must bear his remarks in mind in my daily life, though it is hard to do what Ichiro does.

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What Is a Professional?

By *Shinichi OGATA*

professional?” His answer was quite impressive. “Spectators come to the ballpark at the cost of something in their daily life. Since they pay a sacrifice to see us play, we naturally have to sacrifice something.”

He isn’t flamboyant and always plays in earnest. His thought about “being a pro” is straightforward, like a straight ball, with his style in the spirit of the saying, “Easier said than done.” To foreigners, he may seem to be a pure-minded *samurai*. To my mind, however, his view of professionalism reflects his unique rationalism. He may be thoroughly implementing his contract with the Mariners in a business-like, give-and-take manner.

I went to Safeco Field in Seattle in May 2001, the year Ichiro made his MLB debut, and watched him from an infield stand seat on the first-base side. As the game against the New York Yankees opened, he dashed out of the bench like an elementary schoolboy who has just started baseball, and ran to the right field at a full speed to take his position.

Incidentally, the “Ichi-Roll,” rolled *sushi*



Photo: PANA

Ichiro hits a homer to the right-field stand of Yankee Stadium for his 200th hit of the season in the third inning of a game against the New York Yankees on Sept. 3, 2007.

Shinichi Ogata is chief editor, the Cultural News Section, Kyodo News.