

You Gotta Have Wa

By Robert Whiting

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Robert Whiting broke into the big leagues with his book *The Chrysanthemum and the Bat*, written more than 10 years ago, and he has kept current by writing extensively on Japanese baseball ever since. He is a longtime student of Japanese baseball, and his background expertise and many in-depth studies combine to make his new offering, *You Gotta Have Wa*, an excellent book.

Whiting weaves this book from the various experiences of American professional baseball players who have played or are now playing in Japan, and he uses these and other anecdotes to define the friction between the Japanese and American styles of baseball. Yet his insights are not limited to baseball but touch on significant aspects of Japanese and American culture. The central theme is that Japanese baseball emphasizes "determination" and "harmony" while American baseball values "individualism" and "rationalism."

"Determination" in Japanese baseball means training. American players are puzzled as to why the Japanese train so hard, not only in spring camp but even in mid-season. The typical American player contends that each player is accountable for his own performance, that all that matters is what happens on the field, and that it is up to each player to train when and as he feels necessary. The American philosophy is that no one knows better than the individual himself what kind of training is best for him.

In contrast, Japanese players are expected to be in tip-top shape not only physically but also as gentlemen. Japanese locker rooms sport such slogans as: Without Self-Sacrifice There Can Be No Real Team; Cry in Practice, Laugh in the Game; and Self-Reflection Is the Bread of Progress. Baseball might be just another job to American players, but it is a way of life to the Japanese. This is why the

most respected players, managers and coaches in Japan are the ones who see baseball in spiritual terms. Not even a natural batter such as Hiroshi Oshita or the pitching ace Kazuhisa Inao could neglect this, and both failed as managers because they sought to introduce a "laissez-faire" philosophy.

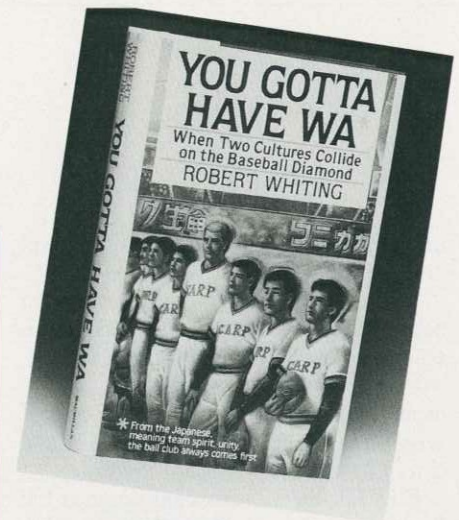
Efforts by the only two Caucasian managers in Japanese baseball history, Joe Lutz (with the Hiroshima Carps) and Don Blasingame (nicknamed Blazer, with the Hanshin Tigers) to introduce American-style rationalism also ended in failure. Blasingame's philosophy of keeping practices short and efficient so as to avoid exhausting his players was criticized as being too lax and condemned for departing from the tough training and detailed coaching taken for granted in Japan.

Likewise, Japanese baseball places great value on "harmony," meaning team work and cooperation. "Harmony," as is well known, is a vital part of Japanese society, not only the sports world. While the contemporary mottoes of American society are "Live and Let Live" and "Do Your Own Thing," Japanese society preaches that "The Nail That Sticks Up Shall Be Hammered Down."

Much of the philosophy behind the Japanese style of baseball originated with Suishu Tobita (born in 1886) who managed Waseda University's team from 1919 to 1925. Tobita saw baseball as embodying the same spirit as *bushido* and believed that being a great athlete required living a morally correct life. To Tobita, the purpose of practice was to discipline the soul. Whiting explains that this philosophy is most apparent today in high school baseball but still exists in professional baseball as well.

Known as the "god of baseball" in Japan, Tetsuharu Kawakami, who piloted the Yomiuri Giants to nine consecutive Japan Series titles, followed in Tobita's footsteps in advocating controlled baseball. Some of the tenets of this approach are: "Most players are lazy, and it's a manager's responsibility to teach the players manners," and "Lone wolves are the cancer of a team."

Tatsuro Hirooka, an avid practitioner of Kawakami's controlled baseball theories,



earned himself the title "Iron Shogun" during his years of managing the Seibu Lions. His methods included enforcing a natural-food diet for the players, setting lights-out times, and advising players on their family lives and even their sex lives. He also confined players to their quarters when they played poorly on road trips.

When he was manager of the Yakult Swallows, he often lambasted Charlie Manuel for not polishing his spikes, for taking too much time stepping into the batter's box, and for eating too many hamburgers, steaks and pizzas. Hirooka and the carefree, party-loving Manuel clearly did not see eye to eye. Injury-plagued in 1976, his first year with the Swallows, Manuel went on in his second and third years to be a top home-run hitter and have a batting average of over .300, contributing in his third year to the Swallows' victory in the Japan Series. Despite this, he was traded to the Kintetsu Buffaloes the next year.

Clyde Wright, a former Texas Rangers pitcher, joined the Giants in 1976 with great fanfare. When he was pulled off the mound in the sixth inning of a 1-1 game, however, he responded by throwing the ball against the dugout wall, yelling, and ripping apart his uniform. After that, he was nicknamed "Crazy Wright" by the mass media and the Giants composed a 10-rule code of behavior that the foreign players dubbed the "Ten Commandments." In 1983, Reggie Smith came to the Giants, but he was too individualistic and quickly earned a reputation as a troublemaker. From the start, Smith's Afro hairdo and mustache ran against the grain of a 50-year tradition of refinement in which no player had ever worn facial hair.

Whiting presents many such real expe-

riences and paints a very convincing picture of the "individualism" and "rationalism" of the American players. A poignant example is the case of Randy Bass, a top hitter and home-run king for the Hanshin Tigers, who took leave to accompany his son to the U.S. for treatment for a brain tumor but was released when he postponed his return to Japan. The consensus in the world of Japanese baseball was that a Japanese player would not desert his team just because his son was sick.

In the eyes of many Japanese, the American players are overpaid, are selfish, are pampered, are not team players, and are over the hill. This friction shows no signs of abating in the 1990 season. Indeed, it is unlikely the situation will change so long as the Japanese baseball world thinks of American players as mere short-term help. Nor will it abate until the American players themselves make more of an effort to adjust to the Japanese style of baseball.

Banning foreign players because of

these problems is not the answer. Rather, I feel that the present limit of two foreign players per team should be raised to three. What is wrong with some friction? Is it too much to hope that this friction will fuse the best of the American style and the best of the Japanese style to create a new brand of baseball that is even more interesting?

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Outing

Niigata: Hub of Japan Sea Rim Economic Sphere

The Sea of Japan coast area was once called *uranihon*, the back of Japan, with the beginning of political and economic centralization in Tokyo in modern times. As the name suggests, it has spent years in obscurity. But today the area and its de-

facto capital of Niigata are claiming their rightful place as one of the nation's doorways to the world.

Since ancient times, the Sea of Japan has been both buffer, protecting the bow-shaped Japanese archipelago from the powerful countries of continental Asia, and sea-lane, carrying the culture and material wealth of the continent to Japan's shores. The coming of the Meiji Restoration (1868) and Japan's opening to the West plunged the region into relative obscurity, isolated from the metropolitan area as it was by difficult terrain and underdeveloped transportation networks. Its traditional ties to Asia were all but ignored as the economy turned to Europe and North America.

This exciting rebirth of the Sea of Japan area in part reflects government measures to spur regional development. But even more than that, it has been a spontaneous result of the shifting map of world politics. The end of the Cold War and the improvement of U.S.-Soviet relations has been felt in new, *perestroika*-driven economic policies in the Soviet Far East. Today's visionaries speak of a "Sea of Japan Rim Economic Sphere" tapping the great latent synergy of ties among Japan, the Soviet Union, the Koreans and China. It is Niigata City, the biggest port city on the Sea of Japan coast, that stands to benefit most from the rebirth.

Niigata, capital of Niigata Prefecture, and with a population of 480,000, can be reached from downtown Tokyo in only two hours via the Joetsu Shinkansen su-

perexpress train. The city sprawls over a giant delta formed by the egress of the Shinano and Agano Rivers. Originally growing up along both sides of the mouth of the Shinano, the longest river in Japan, the city of Niigata has now spread east and west along the coast.

Walk 15 minutes from the bustling city center, and you come to the shore of the Sea of Japan. The clear and calm dark blue waters of the sea glistening under the summer sky are in dynamic contrast to the raging leaden gray sea of winter. Visitors accustomed to the dirty and pale blue waters of Tokyo Bay and its environs on the Pacific coast marvel at the Sea of Japan in summer. The silhouette of Sado Island lying off the coast some 30 kilometers west of the city is breathtakingly beautiful, backlit by the setting summer sun. The long, gently curving coastline of Niigata is spotted with numerous attractive bathing beaches, crowded in the summer with young people and families.

Spectacular display

The biggest event of Niigata's summer is the Niigata Annual Festival, lasting from August 7 through August 9. Long lines of dancers course through the streets of the city on the first two spectacular nights. The Bandai Bridge spanning the Shinano River is packed with more than 30,000 dancers and spectators, surging back and forth like giant waves. The spectacular fireworks display on the night of the 9th is a grande finale in the old tradition, with

