



A BALL GAME IN THE ANTIPODES

Baseball in China

Loyal Fans on the Other Side of the World

By Maurice Allen

THE time worn old Empire of China has been associated for ages with all that is antique and unprogressive. Its musty civilization, fettered with the mildewed customs of a hundred generations as in an iron framework, seems to be the least pliable and elastic of any the mind can picture. She has been called the Sleeping Goddess of the East, or rather the Demon brooding in the steadfast calm of her great prototype Buddha over the destinies of her swarming slant-eyed children.

With all her reverence for past tradition and her apathy toward the genius of modern invention, however, the Chinese nation has shown a tremendous capacity for imitating the customs of her newer sisters in the West and incorporating their systems among her own. It is not so strange in view of the enormous strides which her cousin across the Straits of Korea has made in the march of civilization that even China should

have the inherent power somewhere in the strange makeup of the Oriental mind to be carried away with the same enthusiasm as the occidental by the bustling sports of the Western Hemisphere. Baseball is the national game of Japan and some day it may be of China also, who knows? But that is a different story and a little too far cry into the future.

But for all that, here in the very shadow of the fabled dragon with the warm wind of the China Sea fragrant with the smell of the rice fields and the tea gardens and under the warm light of the Oriental sun, the athletic spirit of the West finds an occasional and not at all uncongenial setting for the display of its healthy enthusiasm.

On the fourth of July of last season when the major leagues were lighting with their full strength in the larger cities and baseball of some kind was being played on almost every available diamond in the Union, few of the mil-



GLIMPSE OF A BALL PARK IN THE CELESTIAL EMPIRE

lion or more fans who flocked to the bleachers or the grandstands on this occasion would have believed for a moment that the same game was being played within the same twenty-four hours away on the other side of the earth beneath their feet. Yet, strange as it may seem, such was the case, and while the crowds were not so large as those at the polo grounds, they were just as enthusiastic.

Shanghai, the imperial port of China, is the outer door of that forbidden and likewise forbidding kingdom. It has been called the Paris of the East and it well deserves the name. Situated on the Woosung River, eleven miles from the mouth, it is in every respect a cosmopolitan city. The principal nations of Europe and the United States as well, have wrested from the feeble hands of the Chinese government, various tracts of territory which are known as concessions and in which each of the countries in question maintain the quarters of their embassies and a colony of their own countrymen. The foreign town which has sprung up in this way and which is some distance from the great native city fosters all the luxury and pleasures of the East and West, so it was not so odd after all in this hybrid mixture to find a good degree of enthusiasm for our own national game.

The teams which contested on this sunny afternoon in the antipodes were composed of Uncle Sam's jackies from warships which rode at anchor in the river.

There were two games played on the local cricket games of the foreign settlement. The crowd turned out in gala attire for the mixed population of this pleasure loving city are ready enough at all times to welcome a holiday, and the fourth of July is just as enthusiastically observed by the British residents as it is by the American. The warships of all nations in the channel were arrayed in their best clothes, so to speak, with a gorgeous profusion of flags and bunting. All American soldiers were allowed shore leave and they quickly took possession of the town, riding about in native rickshaws decorated with little American flags which could be bought on every street corner from the native vendors.

Bubbling Well Road is the fashionable drive of Shanghai, and this was filled with the gay throngs on their way to the game. The crowd was hardly the ordinary one of our own ball parks but it was far more picturesque. The sailors all wore their summer suits, white duck with blue facings, and the other spectators were generally clothed in much the same

way with either white duck or alpaca. There were a great many native Chinese present and representatives of almost every other nation on the face of the earth, so it made up in variety what it may have lacked in numbers. A large tent was erected specially for the ladies and these turned out to witness the novel scene in goodly numbers. I am sure no grandstand in the United States on that date could boast of so spectacular a scene where Oriental and occidental costumes blended in a strange mixture of color.

A feature of the contest, which would doubtless add to the already great popularity of our favorite sport if introduced on this side of the Pacific, was the fact that refreshments were furnished the spectators free while there was plenty of beer for the sailors,

The teams in the opening contest were picked from the crews of the U. S. S. Cruiser Raleigh and the U. S. S. Elcano, which was originally a Spanish gunboat captured at Manila. The associations of

defeat must have clustered around the old craft for her representatives were downed on the diamond after a game struggle. The second contest was fought out between picked teams from the U. S. S. Cruiser New Orleans and the U. S. S. Monitor Monadnock. This also was a closely fought contest but the representatives of New Hampshire finally went down to defeat after a prolonged battle with the Southern boys by a close score of 5 to 4.

I do not suppose that there were any pitching stunts pulled off on that day which would quite equal Mathewson in his prime, and I imagine Ty Cobb might have beat out some of the bunts which our boys slipped up on. But I am sure there was no more enthusiasm in any of the home bleachers or grandstands on that same July afternoon than was shown by the interested and very interesting crowd assembled from all quarters of the globe in the suburbs of historic old Shanghai.

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