
Pearl Harbor: A Failure for Baseball?

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Claiming to be the national pastime, baseball had established a link with democracy as part of that claim. And if the Americans saw their mission in the world as that of spreading democracy, then surely the game of democracy would play a role in that American mission. Americans had also assumed for themselves a special role in Asia, and when American missionaries took Christianity and Democracy to the Orient they took baseball with them.

Baseball writers of the 1920s and 1930s were acutely aware of this role for the diamond sport, and were greatly heartened when baseball took hold in Japan. Japanese university teams made tours of the U.S. campuses. In return U.S. players from the big leagues as well as U.S. college teams made tours of the Orient. The climactic tour coming in 1934 when Babe Ruth led a group of major leaguers through the Far East. The Japanese had been trying for years to get Ruth and when he finally arrived he received a welcome of tremendous proportions.

Such tours were ended after 1934 by a decision of the baseball hierarchy at its 1934 winter meetings, much to the dismay of those who were baseball missionaries. Not much appears in the American press concerning baseball in Japan until 1940 when ominous reports from Japan suggested that baseball was being downgraded there, and being purged of its American appearances and terminology. In late summer 1941 worse news arrived. Baseball had been abolished in Japan, proving according to some that baseball and dictatorship were incompatible.
