

of sport and baseball in particular, as a unifying, nationalistic impetus in the quest for regional and international leadership.

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## **Professional Baseball in Korea, 1981-1989**

This paper examines the first decade of professional baseball in Korea, from 1980 to 1989 by analyzing the factors leading to its emergence, corporate sponsorships, league structure, the location of teams, and its overwhelming public reception. The paper explores these themes against the backdrop of Korea's overall sporting policies and the political context of its changing economy. Korean professional baseball has been blossoming since the early 1980's, and this development can only be understood in a modern geopolitical context. Modern history of South Korea was that of a military dictatorship politically, foreign military dominance by the United States, and the dire drive for export-dependent economic growth based on the forced sacrifice of the working class. Modern Korean culture was propounded, shaped and unalterably molded on such political and economic terrain. The dictatorship used culture as a very effective means to control people. After the massive slaughter of civilians in the city of Kwangju in 1980, the coup-based military regime had to find a way to nullify and de-legitimize Korean peoples' growing anger against the government. In this regard, national cultural events such as Kukp'ung 81, a Korean song festival, were organized, and professional sports such as baseball were introduced. Thus the government expanded sport from its long-term policy goals directed to achieve a significant propaganda effect and to spread prestige abroad. Korean dictators promoted sport to mollify, to pacify an anger-driven public from seeking legitimate human rights demands.

The narrative and analysis is drawn on a wide variety of primary and secondary sources. However, direct evidence is scanty given the governments desire to protect records from full disclosure. Cited are historical works on Korea; historical, political and sociological works on sport in Korea, western countries and Japan; five daily Korean newspapers; a wide variety of Korean magazines on sport and popular culture; government documents on sport and physical education; documents of sporting

organizations, such as Korean Baseball Organization; and, interviews with individuals involved in making sporting policy during the period under investigation.

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## **Assimilation or Isolation? Nisei Baseball and the American Mainstream**

During the 1930s Japanese American community leaders actively encouraged their second generation-Nisei-to excel as Americans. To that end, they sought an identity, which heavily portrayed himself or herself within the fabric of the larger mainstream. In doing so, acceptance by the mainstream, they hoped, might temper the discriminatory attitudes aimed at their community. Baseball seemed to fit well into this plan. By engaging in America's national pastime, the Nisei hoped to advance their identity as Americans, but in constructing exclusively Nisei leagues, they also isolated themselves from the very cause for which they sought.

Nisei baseball operated as a duplicitous factor in the quest for acceptance and possible assimilation. For the Japanese in America, the game served a dual purpose: it had an established tradition among the Nisei forefathers as the game's genesis lay in the land of their birth. In many respects, the game was a bridge between two generations. Furthermore, it was a sanctuary that the competitive Japanese could turn to during a period where many social doors remained closed to those of their kind. Their community papers aggressively touted the baseball achievements of their players, and American patriotism was not an uncommon theme during the several tournaments held throughout the west.

By the mid-1930s however, the games and leagues were exclusively Nisei, and mainstream newspapers, even in small towns, rarely, if ever, posted the scores of those games. Like their communities, Nisei baseball remained an isolated institution that did not reach the eyes of the larger population. Hence, by 1941, notwithstanding a so-called "golden age" of baseball, the Nisei players, like their community, were no closer to finding acceptance in the mainstream than had been the case a decade earlier. As such, anti-Japanese proponents found the Nikkei – all Japanese