This Sporting Life
Sports and Body Culture in Modern Japan

Edited by
William W. KELLY

With
SUGIMOTO Atsuo
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Contributors to the Volume 281
Men at Work or Boys of Summer?
Professional Baseball as Workplace in Contemporary Japan

William W. Kelly

To Americans, baseball is all about enjoyment and sudden surprises; of spectacular hits, dexterous fielding and cheeky running between the bases... To the Japanese, yakyū (field ball) is seen to this day as a martial art to be practised remorselessly to perfection and then grimly executed with the sole purpose of crushing one’s opponent. (The Economist 1996).

One of the sillier contrasts of professional baseball in the US and in Japan is the claim that the Japanese athletes are grim “men at work” whereas we Americans are the spirited “boys of summer.” The Economist of London is hardly alone in disparaging the Japanese “workaholic” sportsmen, whose relentless effort, self-sacrifice, and exacting discipline turns even play into work, while imaging that American professional athletes, fun-loving “playboys,” retain a truly ludic sporting spirit.

Even in the U.S., of course, many baseball analysts and fans readily recognize the sport is a business, a big business. The “boys of summer” was Roger Kahn’s famous characterization of the Brooklyn Dodgers (1972), but “men at work” was the title of George Will’s equally compelling 1991 book of baseball essays. The umpire may shout “play ball!” but the owners and players are always thinking “pay ball.” In truth, one must be deeply lost in the “field of dreams” to misrecognize that most sports—in Japan, in America, throughout the modern world—have been commercialized in one form or another for a long time, that many modern sports have also been thoroughly commodified and packaged for and by mass media, and most of the major “spectator sports” have been professionalized. These three trends are all related, though distinguishable, transformations—or deformations—of sporting practices, and they are certainly true for baseball wherever it is played.

In truth, Japanese and American ballplayers are both ball-workers, but I would insist nonetheless that there is a subtle difference in how baseball tends to be regarded as a business in the two countries. When academics and journalists (and fans) analyze the business of baseball in the U.S., they usually look at the economics of the sport: such matters as team ownership, television broadcast
contracts, stadium finance deals, free agency, salary caps, and contract clauses. However, I do think that they are less inclined than Japanese spectators and commentators to consider baseball teams as workplaces and baseball clubs as work organizations. Our propensity for euphemisms like “home team” and “ball club” masks this workplace reality.

The premise of this chapter is that Japanese understandings of baseball as a professional sport are built around a clearer recognition that baseball teams are workplaces, that they are constructed socially of work relations and ideologically of work authority claims. Japanese ballplayers are literally “men at work” and not just working men. My argument that follows from this premise is organized around four main questions, which I will develop in the following sections:

- First, if baseball is a place of work in Japan, just what kind of a workplace is it? My claim here is that an effort is made to construct it as a corporate workplace.
- When and why did this happen? There isn’t an inbred Japanese propensity to organize the sport this way, despite the common claims of such a national character. Rather, I argue, at a particular historical moment, the mid- to late 1960s, there was a conjunction of developments in the Japanese political economy and in the fortunes of a particular team, the Yomiuri Giants, within the baseball world that brought this organizational image to the fore.
- Thirdly, I want to consider how successful the powers-that-be have been in packaging baseball in this corporate way—and my argument will be that they are not very successful, for a number of reasons that I will try to enumerate, including some particular to baseball in Japan and others generic to the sport.
- And finally, I want to consider what audiences created by this sport make of this thoroughly compromised organizational form. What I will suggest is that they often read against the grain. One of the fascinations of baseball fans is in savoring the gaps between the corporate image mongering and a more complex, occasionally sordid reality of team life and player careers. In this sense, I conclude, baseball is a kind of living “salaryman comic,” although the medium for this counter-reading is not the comics themselves but the national daily sports newspapers.
If baseball is a place of work in Japan, what kind of a workplace is it?

The twelve teams in the two leagues that have made up professional baseball in Japan since the early 1950s are structured within and by the corporate world. Eleven of the twelve are wholly owned by major corporations, particularly media, retail, and rail transportation companies. They are almost all named for their corporate owners, not for the cities in which they play—thus, the Hanshin Tigers and not the Osaka Tigers, the Orix BlueWave and not the Kobe BlueWave, the Nippon Ham Fighters and not the Tokyo Fighters, and so on.

And the teams themselves are large organizations. Consider, for example, the Hanshin Tigers. In 1999, the team roster carried 69 players, divided into the first squad (of 28) and a second, or “farm,” squad of 41. Each squad had a manager, ten coaches, three trainers, and several batting practice pitchers and catchers. Thus, there were about 100 persons among the field players and personnel. In addition, the Hanshin “front office,” the club’s management and support staff, had about 65 employees, whose duties ranged from administration to accounting, marketing, player development, and press relations. This front office was organized in a familiar corporate hierarchy of several divisions (bu), which were subdivided into departments (ka), which often further divided into small sections (kakari). In effect, then, to get nine players on the field to start each game, the Tigers baseball club has become a large organization of over 160 employees.

Moreover, the Hanshin Tigers club is itself embedded in an even larger corporate structure. In Japanese business shorthand, the club is a “child company” (kogaisha), or wholly-owned subsidiary, of a “parent company,” the Hanshin Electric Railroad Corporation. The parent company name recalls its original business, operating a commuter railroad between Osaka and Kobe, but it now controls a family of businesses, including department store retailing, travel agencies, air transport, land development, taxi companies, and leisure park operations in addition to the railroad. Even baseball-related operations are distributed among a set of subsidiaries—the Tigers ball team of course, but also a stadium management company, a horticulture and grounds keeping company, a security company, and a goods and concessions company—all under the control of the parent corporation.

In a monograph in preparation, I describe some of the day-to-day operations of the club—on the practice field, in the front office, and in relations with the parent company. Here, I will merely assert that these work routines would seem quite familiar to any observer of Japanese corporate life. They include such matters as:
the chain of command and its expressions (for example, the first team manager receives daily phone reports from the farm team manager and oral reports from the first team head coach; the first team manager meets with the club president, who in turn reports each Monday to the parent company CEO, who serves as team “owner”)

• the structure and tenor of meetings (meetings are frequent, written-agenda driven, exhaustive discussions to flush out and cool out opposition or reservations and broaden responsibility)

• budget and accounting practices (which are adopted from and are linked to main office)

In these and other ways, then, Hanshin and professional baseball more generally has been “corporatized” as a workplace. By this I mean that not just corporate ownership and marketing but also organizational templates and ideologies of competence, status, and authority have come to inflect the social relations of the ballparks and the ball clubs.

When did the professional baseball workplace become corporatized?

However, work relations in Japanese professional baseball haven’t always been so corporatized. This is my second point. What we see today is not yet another manifestation of a collectivist instinct that some people think is the dominant chromosome in the national gene pool. Of course, professional baseball, by definition, has always been work. “Occupational baseball” (shokugyō yakyū) was the original term for the league when it was formed in 1936, and the organizational initiative came from major companies in Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya. From the start, teams were owned and operated under corporate aegis.

But it wasn’t until the particular conditions of the late 1960s and early 1970s that corporate-style baseball became the dominant form. This was when the game and the business of the game were fundamentally reshaped by one team, the Yomiuri Giants, and its parent company, Yomiuri, during the team’s unprecedented reign as national champion for nine consecutive years, from 1965 to 1973. The so-called “V-9” Giants were led by two of the greatest players ever, Oh Sadaharu and Nagashima Shigeo, and their popularity was assured by the backing of the Yomiuri companies, the most powerful news and entertainment organization in the country. The V-9 Giants were managed by Kawakami Tetsuharu, who had been known during his player years as the
“god of hitting.” As manager, Kawakami quickly became famous for a style of authoritarian leadership called “managed baseball” (kanri yakyū). He demanded (or at least, appeared to demand) iron discipline, arduous practices, stolid teamwork, a conservative playing strategy.

The V-9 Giants totally dominated the league and thoroughly reshaped the image of professional baseball. Even that was not enough, however. By coincidence, the Giants’ preeminence precisely mapped the postwar economy’s double-digit growth years that catapulted the country to the first rank of industrial powers. In the aftermath of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, during the boom years of the government’s “double-your-income” policies, through the national crises of the Nixon Shocks and the first Oil Crisis of 1974, the Giants were a lightning rod for national prestige and patriotic pride.

Yomiuri went to great effort to package and present the team as supremely talented, tautly disciplined, and relentlessly efficient. The Giants’ success was celebrated as a powerful synecdoche for the confident, industrious society and competitive, resurgent economy that Japan saw itself becoming. And indeed, seemingly directed by a marshal-general-like manager and a full complement of staff-officer coaches, the Giants projected a player image and a playing style that was coordinated, committed, and collective.

The point is that this image was deliberately portrayed to resonate powerfully with and to serve as testimony to a larger business image, which came to called “Japan-style management.” That is, this same moment, the mid- to late 1960s, was precisely the period when business people and commentators began to revise the image of “the Japanese company system,” not as an inefficient, tradition-bound anachronism but as a Japanese accomplishment and an effective positive alternative to Western corporate forms and distinctive. What Japanese and foreign commentators alike had disparaged as inefficient primordial rigidities were now being spun into a potent and prescient “Confucian corporatism” that would be a new standard for late-capitalist organization. The key features of this form of economic organization were touted as building strength through solidarity:

- full-career employment (creating a sense of mutual fate)
- bottom-up entry by school leavers (not lateral mid-career shifts)
- hiring by general educational credentials (not specific skills)
- pay and promotion by seniority (these were age-grade societies)
- career development management, extensive in-service training, and provision of a panoply of social services by the company
The Giants epitomized how tempting a venue was professional baseball for performing such corporate-style authority and exacting exemplary discipline. And many other clubs and their parent companies were led to introduce similar changes in club organization, with more or less enthusiasm and with more or less success. This was corporate-style authority and corporate prestige explicitly invested in and demonstrated through the subsidiary ball clubs.

The difficulties of performing corporate-style baseball

And yet, over time it has proven very difficult to perform corporate-style baseball despite the institutional and ideological commitment to securing such demonstration effects. The reason, I believe, is that baseball has a number of features, some particular to Japan and some more generic to the professional sport, which put great strain on corporate-style authority claims. I will briefly enumerate some of these features to suggest just how difficult it is in fact to control the “demonstration effects” of baseball.

Factors specific to Japanese baseball

One might first point to the personnel structure of Japanese clubs, which we might expect to value features showcased as Japanese-style corporate employment, such as seniority, long service, career development, pyramidal authority structures, and educational credentials. A closer look reveals conditions quite different from conventional corporate employment and harmony. What I have learned from observing a baseball organization like Hanshin is that it is an often contentious combination of “suits” and “uniforms,” the 65-member business-suited front office and the 100-member uniformed team. Salary negotiations, scouting, trade and draft strategies, practice schedules, travel arrangements, foreign player recruitment, media relations policy, marketing—in countless issues, a fault line opens over who should have greater authority to decide and what is the proper basis for decisions: those in uniforms with baseball credentials or those in business suits with educational seniority? Physical ability and baseball smarts are seldom congruent with educational credentials, and such issues seldom yield a simple division of responsibility and expertise between field and front.

This rift is aggravated by inversions of salary and public recognition. The players, who would be the ordinaries (hira shain) in an office hierarchy, and the manager are accorded, obviously, far more public attention and paid far more in
salary than their “superiors” in the front office (and even parent company). All of
this produces endless, mutual recriminations and derogatory back-and-forth.

As if that doesn’t set in motion sufficient office politics, the front office and
the team are not united against the other. Rather, each is further subdivided
against itself by conditions of employment. The front office in fact includes four
different types of employees:

- permanent employees of the parent company who are sent down on
  assignment for 2-5 years (often in budget and financial supervisory
  positions)
- permanent employees of the ball club subsidiary (some of whom are
  ex-players and others are have no player experience)
- yearly employees of the ball club (including some clericals, equipment
  managers, and junior trainers)
- seasonal employees of ball club (for fan service and other in-
  season jobs)

The effect of these multiple statuses is to produce (or rather reproduce) within
the front office the broader antagonisms between parent company and subsid-
iary and between authority claims to business sense and to baseball smarts.

In contrast, the team itself has a common feature: everyone is on an annual
contract. [Unusually, in 1997-1998, the manager and two star players did have
two-year contracts, but the other 98 players and coaches were on eleven-month
contracts.] By law, Japanese pro players and coaches are independent contrac-
tors, and as such every year they must negotiate salaries with the club. And
as independent contractors, they have no pension or other company benefits.4
Loyalty and commitment must be revalidated each year in November and De-
cember, and players are not legally members of their team in December and
January. [Importantly, through a reserve clause, the baseball teams have exclu-
sive rights to their players for nine years, which is an effective hold over most
players for their entire professional career.]

A second deviation from the large-corporate norm is in personnel recruit-
ment. It is true that like many major workplaces, baseball players almost always
enter the team from the bottom up, as rookies, but several factors conspire to
complicate the evaluation and testing of talent.5 First, there is a rigid barrier
between amateur and pro baseball in Japan, and there are no minor leagues to
weed out and to train potential talent out of the limelight of the major clubs.
There is a very small pool of professional-level players anyway, and each club
only signs four to eight rookies each year out of high school, college, and in-
dustrial leagues (compare this to the average US professional club, which drafts 45-50 players a year!). Fierce competition has led to a salary structure that pays exorbitant signing bonuses of $1 – $1.5 million to untried teenagers.

Thirdly, under such workplace conditions, even baseball team managers can find it difficult to carry off their supposedly unchallenged authority, belying our common image of the Japanese manager as a “warlord” figure of absolute authority and reverence. Clubs find it desirable, of course, to have a manager with demonstrated organizational and motivational skills and a keen strategic sense, but there are few testing grounds to identify such talents (there no minor leagues, and pro teams cannot hire from the amateur ranks). And clubs also have a strong incentive to hire a high-profile famous ex-player (to encode seniority in a large coaching staff, to insure the respect of players, and to gain name recognition for the parent company). The problem is that playing prowess rarely translates directly into managerial leadership, and managers actually vary widely in effectiveness as team leaders. Moreover, their warlord image is further undermined by the presence of a front office and parent company. In larger organizational terms, the manager is really just a high-level department or division head.

Factors generic to baseball

The institutional context that has characterized Japanese baseball since the mid-1970s is exacerbated by factors that at least some readers will readily anticipate as generic to baseball as a sport and even to the problematics of professionalizing—let alone corporatizing—any sport. Still other factors are generic to baseball, but work particularly on undermining the distinctive patterns of authority in the Japanese context.

(1) Hierarchies in sports organization are frequently undermined by the non-congruence of talent and seniority. The 69 Hanshin players on the 1999 team ranged in age from 19 to 36, in years of pro experience from 0 to 14 years, in salary from $40,000 to $1.5 million a year, and in performance by a similarly enormous variance. But age, experience, pay, and performance record do not correlate positively. In fact, they often vary quite independently of one another; the older players are not always the higher-paid, the higher-paid players do not always perform better, etc.

(2) The job performance of a player is publicly visible and precisely measured. Professional baseball raises workplace surveillance to a level that other corporate executives can scarcely imagine! There are no other company employees
who work every day in front of 55,000 spectators intent on following their every move and about whose performance some twenty separate statistical indicators are calibrated and recorded—and published daily in newspapers with circulations in the millions and followed and debated endlessly by the spectators.

(3) **Baseball is a “profession,” but it is often a short and insecure career.** Baseball players may have longer careers than female clerical-technical staff (OLs) of Japanese companies, but few last beyond their early 30’s. In 1998, the average age of the 69 Tiger players was 27, and there were only four of them who were 35 years old or older. The contemporary situation matches the long-term historical trends, as Figure 1 demonstrates. Nearly 50% of all Hanshin pitchers from 1936-1999 (93 of 188) were registered on the first team for only one or two years, and nearly 40% of non-pitcher Hanshin players (162 of 412) failed to last more than two years during the same period. Moreover, there is less player movement among Japanese teams than in the American Major Leagues, but it is still more than one might think. In 1998, 11 of the 69 players were traded or otherwise signed from other Japanese teams, and with new foreign players and rookies, fully 21 of the 69 were on the roster for the first time.

![Figure 1. Career longevity of Hanshin Tigers players, 1936-1999.](image-url)
Even pay controverts the Japanese corporate model of steady upward increments. Given the careful measurement of performance, salaries are adjusted annually at contract time. Of the 55 salaries for returning players in 1998, less than half (25 players) were given raises, ranging from 5% to 250%. Eighteen players were forced to accept salary reductions (of 5% to 40%) and another twelve were signed at the same amount as the previous year. [And for the Tigers, the December salary negotiations themselves are reported daily in many of their often messy details.]

Furthermore, the risk of injury creates unpredictability for the organization’s human resource planning. In 1998 the Tigers’ pitching staff was decimated by unexpected injuries in the early season that left it floundering in the cellar and several of the pitchers with career-ending conditions.

Where does one go at the end of such a short career and in a labor market in which prestige jobs are in “real” corporate sites that permit little lateral, mid-career entry? Some are kept on (a big name player might move into the coaching ranks and a few others of average performance but who had conveyed the proper attitude are kept as bullpen pitchers, scouts, clubhouse secretaries, etc. Most, however, are simply let go to make their way in a labor market rather indifferent to their experience. In this regard, I suppose, the clubs are not much different than their parent companies, which may offer plush second-career sinecures to a few top executives and arrange less attractive positions for some at lower ranks, but which end their “lifetime” commitment to most employees with a severance retirement package.

(4) The persistence of failure undermines authority. Another challenge to authority in such sporting complexes is what we may identify as “the problem of failure”—at least the failure to win. The odds against winning consistently in a team sport like baseball are high. In every contest, obviously, half the players are losers. In every season, only one team will emerge as champion, and all others end in defeat. Now coping with consistent failure is a much more complicated issue than I can discuss here, but suffice it to remark the obvious—that the specter of losing in such frequent, highly visible, and easily quantifiable fashion puts considerable strain on authority claims. There are ways of deflecting attention, but it is one more reminder of how hard the powerful must work to remain dominant.

(5) The artisanal nature of baseball skills works against corporate authority. Finally, let me point out yet another quality of the sport that renders authority vulnerable and limits regimentation—the artisanal nature of baseball work. Unlike the Japanese corporate preference hiring a generalist workforce, base-
Pro Baseball as Workplace

ball is rigidly positional. It favors bundles of specialty skills—pitchers, for instance, but among that category, right-handers and left-handers; starters, long relievers, sport relievers, and closers; power pitchers and finesse pitchers. All skills must be honed through constant repetition, and certain fundamentals are liable to collective practice and supervision. However, excellence, which is generally the prerequisite for long-term survival in a short-term profession, demands that an individual player constantly test conventional styles. Players are engaged in a highly competitive search for an edge in and with these skills, rivalries that can seriously disrupt team play and collective interests.

And those in formal control, the managers and coaches, are often ill-equipped to teach such specialty skills; a younger pitcher, for instance, is usually better off seeking to learn a new pitch from an older pitcher who himself has used it. This can create tense dynamics characteristic of artisanal-apprentice settings, including the reluctance to fully share specialist knowledge and the need to “steal” the master’s secrets. It certainly disrupts the normal lines of pedagogical authority in a corporate-style organization.

Counter-hegemonic viewing:
Baseball as sarariiman manga

What I am suggesting here is that there are very good reasons why professional baseball practices and structures should have been harnessed to corporate needs and desires in contemporary Japan. Such corporate features have given a particular shape to many teams, but I have become equally impressed by the “deformations” of corporate organization that teams like Hanshin represent. Hanshin would like very much for the Tigers to be a model subsidiary, successful in results and exemplary in form, but the real Tigers continually frustrate these efforts, for the reasons I have enumerated.

Putting these countervailing tendencies together, it seems to me, is one way of appreciating baseball’s abiding fascination to a great many Japanese over the contemporary decades. Put simply, professional baseball, for many viewers, listeners, and readers, has been savored as a long-running corporate drama. What it is seen to demonstrate are not the ideal forms of legitimate authority and smooth workplace relations but the more common reality of rivalries and office politics, of unpredictable and sometimes undeserved success and adversity—conditions of work familiar to the sport’s followers in their own lives.

Indeed, professional baseball is viewed as a real-life “office comics” or “sarariiman manga.” What do I mean by this? Despite a common impression about the Japanese comic book publishing industry—the largest in the world, we must
remember—it is not dominated by pornographic violence, although that is a regrettable segment of a much more varied palette of genres. In fact, a far more popular and longstanding staple form is a type favored by the millions of harried and frustrated and brow-beaten workers as they ride the cramped trains and subways to and from the factories and offices in which they spend so much of their adult lives.

These are the “office comics” or more precisely, “white-collar worker comics.” With titles like “Tanaka-kun,” “Section Chief Shima Kōsaku,” and “The Old Osaka Way of Finance,” they are serial stories in weekly comic books, variety magazines, and some newspapers, sometimes running for a decade or more, periodically collected and issued in multi-volume anthologies. They are humorous, sardonic, cynical narrative pictorials of office rivalries, business dealings, shop floor pressures, water cooler romances, stock market shenanigans, botched promotions, etc. They give pointed, bittersweet expression to life under pretentious, unreasonable, uncaring bosses and the demanding drudgery of day-to-day work.

Baseball, both school and professional varieties, has itself been a popular locale for such manga comics, and elsewhere I will consider their creation of an animated sports world. Here though I want to draw attention to the key role in shaping and circulating baseball narratives that has come to be played by the national sports dailies. Other countries have daily sports newspapers, but I’m not sure if there is any country in which these papers have so dominated sports reporting.

There are five national sports dailies, four of which date from the late 1940s, although the big jump in circulation and notoriety happened in the 1960s. Their circulations are in the millions, and they depend almost entirely on spot sales at street and station news kiosks and in convenience stores, not through subscriptions. Professional baseball overwhelmingly dominates the papers’ daily front pages, total coverage, and staff assignments.

What is the connection? Sports dailies are not comics but they have drawn key inspiration from elements of comic design and layout and from comic narrative strategies. For instance, the front page reporting an exciting Tigers victory by a late-inning home run might have a full-page photo of the hit, taken from behind the batter, with a dotted line tracing the ball’s flight back three-dimensionally into the page into the outfield stands, with several side close-up photos of the Tigers bench and the fans. This photo spread is often the background for overlays of several sizes of headlines, a couple of brief statistical tables, and several columns of text, trumpeting the blow, analyzing the sequence of pitches that led to the hit, and quoting the player and manager. It is a multi-perspectival view of the drama of the moment.
Equally frequent are the front page treatments over several days and even weeks of continuing narratives like team slumps, star player woes, managerial difficulties and replacements. Here too, the straightforward rectangular geometry of the conventional news page is ignored for a multi-colored pastiche of short stories and sidebars in square and circular and even more irregular frames, announced by huge headlines, decorated with overlays and underlays of graphics and photos. The reader is drawn to the entire page, which portrays and conveys the incident as a riveting picture-story.

In closing

My argument here, then, is that in trying to force baseball structures into a more explicit large-corporate frame, those who control the sport have opened it to cross-readings and counter-ideological viewing by fans and audiences, who are already adept and disposed to such skepticism through parallel experiences—as readers and viewers of workplace comics and as workers themselves.

By no means am I claiming that this exhausts what fans make of and take from baseball and I’ve written elsewhere about other uses and attractions of Hanshin baseball (including its place in the political-economic rivalries of Osaka and Tokyo). But the corporate forms intended for and by Japanese professional baseball are one particular pathway that commercialization and professionalization of the sport can take—one of the manifold indigenizations of modernity, in other words—that has proven quite attractive to corporate managers of the game in Japan.

But like the game of baseball itself, whose form they can dictate but whose outcome is always in doubt, they have fashioned a sport that offers many fans partially an escape from their own workday routines but, equally, a mirror—albeit a funhouse mirror—of their own workplace frustrations and foibles.
Endnotes

1 American observers and fans tend towards euphemisms like “home team” and “ball club” that mask the workplace reality. There are exceptions of course. An excellent book that does in fact focus on U.S. baseball as a workplace is In the Ballpark (1998) by the anthropologist George Gmelch and J.J. Weiner. Nick Trujillo’s 1991 article is also informative.

2 After several brief false starts in the 1920s, a professional baseball league was permanently established in 1936 with eight teams. In 1950, a two-league format were established, with the season champions of the two Central and Pacific Leagues meeting in October in the Japan Series. After some early shifts, league membership stabilized at six teams each.

3 I have been engaged in fieldwork and archival research on professional baseball in Japan since the late 1990s, focusing on the metropolitan Kansai region, home of three pro teams, and among them, particularly on the Hanshin Tigers. For fifty years, the Tigers have been the overwhelming sentimental favorites of Japan’s second city, Osaka. In some respects, Hanshin is not representative of professional baseball organizations, but it does share most of the structural features analyzed here with the other eleven teams.

4 The club does provide medical treatment and insurance for job-related injuries.

5 There are many fewer trades among clubs in the Japanese major league; rather, the constant hiring and firing of foreign players is the more frequent lateral movement.

6 One catalogue lists at least 379 different comics in the period 1948-1996, most of them in weekly comic magazines (Nishii 1996:104-107). The first hit series of the postwar was “Aka gurobbu to aoi batto” [Red Glove and Blue Bat], which burst into sudden popularity when it appeared in the 1948 inaugural issue of Manga shōnen [Boys Comics]. The era of their greatest proliferation and popularity was 1958-1978, when series like “Supōtsuman Kintarō” (1959-1963), “Kyojin no hoshi” (1966-1971), “Dogaben” (1972-1981), and “Asutoro kyūdan” (1972) captured readerships in the millions. This is a contrast to the United States, where baseball fiction much more frequently takes the form of cinema and prose (novels and short stories). Baseball comics form such a wide range of graphic styles and story themes that I must postpone a detailed consideration to a later study. Briefly,
though, they have a different emphasis than the sports papers themselves, showcasing individual players in mock heroic plots, often more glamorous than gritty. I think they too are read against the corporate grain, although not in the same way as the sports papers present the “real” sport.

7 The United States and Canada are notable exceptions, for reasons that include the expansion of sports news desks within the regular urban and now metropolitan and national papers, the early development of television sports journalism, and the near-disappearance of public transport for commuting to work. Sports dailies in Japan are designed to be read on the rail and bus commute to work and on breaks at work.

8 The five national sports dailies are *Hōchi shimbun* (1946), *Nikkan supōtsu* (1946), *Deirii supōtsu* (1948), *Supōtsu Nippon* (1949), and *Sankei supōtsu* (1963). Each publishes regional editions. In addition, Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya each have local sports dailies.
References


