

Matsuzaka's Major League Revolution

日本人が知らない松坂メジャー革命

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Prologue

In the autumn of 2006, the Boston Red Sox committed the scarcely imaginable sum of over \$100 million to secure the services of a single remarkable athlete. Remarkable, yes, but remarkably untested in the competitive environment of the major leagues.

How do we explain this extraordinary commitment to bring Daisuke Matsuzaka to Boston? Although Japanese stars have been recruited to other teams in recent years, this offer dwarfed that of the Yankees to Hideki Matsui or the Mariners to Ichiro Suzuki. The Red Sox team owners, headed by John Henry, a fabulously successful trader in commodity futures, are savvy businessmen. And this was surely in some measure a business decision. But to say that simply begs a further question. Who are the customers so demanding they made the investment in an untested Japanese pitcher seem necessary? What sort of fans are devoted enough to pay the ticket prices, buy the goods, and watch the cable broadcasts that might allow the investment to pay off?

Probably they are people a bit crazy like me.

Like many children growing up in New England, even in those years when the team was mediocre at best, my relationship to the Red Sox was imprinted in my consciousness as if from a pre-natal link. Almost exactly ten years before I was born, the story goes, my father (age 17) and his kid brother (13) spent a fall afternoon in 1942 fly fishing with their grandfather at a club on a private pond about 25 miles west of Boston. Who should they meet but the “splendid splinter” himself, Ted Williams, the greatest

hitter who ever lived, out for an afternoon of fly fishing, something he loved almost as much as sending a fastball soaring over the wall. Williams was at the peak of his baseball prowess. He had batted an astonishing—and yet-to-be-equaled—.406 in 1941, and he had lead the league again in 1942 at .356, a full 25 points above his closest competitor. But he had also that summer, after some criticism that he took that long, announced his intent enlist in the Naval Aviator Corps at the end of the season. This was more than a half-year since Pearl Harbor. Japan's empire stood at its apex, and Red Sox fans were pleased at Williams' service but anxious for the team and its star. Indeed, he would not return to the lineup for three years.

The great hitter was famous for his disdain for the press and aversion to the public spotlight, but on this private occasion he was happy enough to make small talk with two star-struck youths. Talk turned to his impending military service. My father asked “so, afterwards will you still be with the Red Sox?” “Sure,” Williams told them, “I’ll play for the Red Sox when I come back.” His kid brother wisecracked “you mean, IF you come back.” Mortified, the elder brother berated the young kid, and launched a sharp elbow to the ribs. Williams burst into laughter, and intervened kindly, “its ok kids, don’t worry, I’m coming back.”

You don’t have to be a professional historian to wonder if this story checks out in every detail, but it *felt* true in the family re-telling. It played its part in confirming to grandchildren of immigrants that they were Americans who shared heroes with neighbors and strangers. My great-grandfather, Ellis, who took his grandchildren on this fishing excursion, was born to a Jewish family in Russia. He came to the United States in 1885, aged 13. He followed a charmed path of successful assimilation. He began by selling

newspapers and eventually founded a business manufacturing shoe soles in the heart of Boston's "leather district." As chance would have it, he and his wife lived their final years in a residential hotel in Kenmore Square a few blocks from Fenway Park, where some of the ball players also stayed, where I once caught a glimpse of some of the baseball demigods in the elevator.

This family story is one small part of a 20th century history in which the game of baseball—not without tension—played its part turning immigrants into Americans. Each ethnic group had its heroes, perhaps most famously Joe Dimaggio of the Yankees, the favorite son of Italians throughout the country. In the 1950s and 1960s baseball played a role in America's ongoing efforts to resolve its shameful heritage of racism and discrimination, as African-Americans beginning with Jackie Robinson were grudgingly allowed to perform on the major league stage. Since the 1970s, players from Latin America and the Caribbean, often struggling in the face of considerable cultural and language barriers, have achieved extraordinary success. More recently of course, and facing much less race-based resistance, players from Japan, Taiwan, and Korea have excited the hopes of fans—and some measure of anxiety—on both sides of the Pacific Ocean.

Unlike Ellis Gordon, Daisuke Matsuzaka won't have to hawk newspapers on the streetcorner to make a living. He is most unlikely to assimilate to the point of citizenship. But his story will definitely sell papers. It will become part of the great ongoing narrative of the American "national pastime" and its expanding global reach.

* * *

In these pages I will tell the story of Matsuzaka's first season as a (hoped-for) hero of Red Sox nation. I will try to write with a measure of detachment appropriate to my day job as a professional historian, without sacrificing the passion of the fan. After all, telling the Ted Williams story not only confirmed earlier generations of my family as members of the American nation. It also inaugurated me, a mediocre little league second baseman, into lifelong fandom of a star-crossed team. The Red Sox were mediocre at best when I was a child. My uncle Mark, the wise-guy kid brother in 1942, never lost his sarcastic wit. He constantly berated the "Smell Sox" for their rotten play. Still, my occasional childhood visits to the ballpark were magical.

An early memory is a game my grandmother took me to, against Baltimore. She remembered that I fell asleep in the middle innings. I remembered that Ted Williams hit two home runs. Over the years, as my own study taught me how dubious the recollections collected by oral historians can be, I came to doubt this recollection. But to my happy surprise, the memory checks out with the record book. During Williams' last season (1960), he indeed hit two homers on August 20 in an 8-6 victory over the Orioles. This must have been the game I went to, aged eight. It was a moment of individual glory for Williams, who also hit a still-remembered home run in his very last at bat a month later. But despite William's heroics, the team was nothing to celebrate. It finished one notch from the bottom of the eight-team American League, with a record of 65 wins, 89 losses, 32 games behind the "damn Yankees," pennant winners once again. How we hated, and feared, the Yankees!

These childhood years of supporting a perennial loser felt like forever, but they came to an end with surprising speed in 1967. That was the year of the "impossible dream," a

team led by Carl Yastrzemski, Williams' successor as a slugging left-fielder. That May, in a moment when hope happily triumphed over experience, my uncle bought eight bleacher seats for the final game of the season. This allowed the two brothers to take their families to what turned out to be a stunning celebration of a win that clinched a tie for the pennant. In a miracle of mail order lottery, we secured tickets as well to the World Series games that followed.

Even though the Red Sox lost the World Series, these were thrilling moments for a 15 year old, as well as an episode marking the birth of a new cycle of “near misses” by pretty good teams, an experience even more frustrating than the perennial failures of the awful ones. At roughly ten-year intervals starting in 1967, the Red Sox made their way to the World Series. The battle with Cincinnati and their superstar Pete Rose in 1975 produced one of the greatest games in World Series history, a 12 inning classic ended by Carlton Fisk with his walk-off home run to tie the series at 3 games each. All who watched were certain that Fisk kept the ball fair only by his desperate body language, waving and willing the ball to the inside of the foul pole.

By then I was in graduate school, studying the history of Japanese society in the 20th century. I still remember Pete Rose's insulting joke, emblematic of a certain attitude toward Japan among his generation, reported in the local paper during that World Series. Talking of his upbringing to reporters after the Cincinnati team won the deciding seventh game the next day, he said, “I was so poor. I had a sister that was made in Japan.”¹

Traumatic defeat to the Yankees in 1978 was followed by the mother of all “near misses” in 1986. By now I was an assistant professor of Japanese history, at Duke University in North Carolina (about 800 miles from Boston). But even at this distance,

¹ *The Boston Globe*, Thursday, October 23, 1975.

and without benefit yet of cable TV or the internet, the march to the World Series against the New York Mets that year grabbed my imagination. As fate would have it, my three living grandparents, aged 86, 82 and 80, along with my parents, had flown to North Carolina the weekend of the ill-fated sixth game of the World Series between the Mets and the Red Sox. The day of that game was our daughter's seventh birthday, and my wife (unlike Pete Rose's sister, she actually *was* made in Japan) had organized a slightly Americanized version of the 7-5-3 ceremony. The party over, children asleep, grandparents back in the hotel, one out from victory in the bottom of the ninth inning, my father and I broke out some scotch to toast what was sure to be a glorious win.

That this was about to be the first Red Sox World Series since 1918 flashed (prematurely) on the screen. I realized that my grandfather, 18 years old at the time, probably remembered that occasion. I made a note to ask him the next day. When a ground ball eluded the first baseman, and the Red Sox had impossibly managed to lose, I decided that certainly my grandfather—and probably all of us—would not live to see another championship. And when I found myself unable to sleep that entire night, replaying the ground ball over and over in a tortured version of counting sheep, I finally realized that my pre-natal link to Red Sox fandom had bequeathed an affliction, not a happy passion.

* * *

This burden of history means that for long suffering fans of Red Sox “nation” their baseball team bears a special kinship to Japan. Like the Red Sox, Japan has the image of a place that celebrates the “nobility of failure” in its tragic heroes, from Taira no

Kiyomori to Saigo Takamori.² This sort of easy generalization about a culture—it is important to realize—can be profoundly misleading. Indeed, one goal of this book will be to undermine simple-minded cultural generalizations about baseball and national character. After all, many Red Sox failures were hardly noble, and the team occasionally did come out victorious. In 2004 they finally and improbably vanquished the hated Yankees in a glorious comeback from an impossible deficit. And people in Japan, at least as I’ve observed them over the years, are often obsessed with success, much happier basking in the glow of victory than bathing in the tears of noble defeat. Otherwise, how does one account for the fact that the Yomiuri Giants were the most popular team in the land during their record string of nine consecutive national championship titles? But the interesting point is that sports, and sports heroes, as much as literature and literary heroes, play their part in the process of making and remaking local or national stereotypes, and sometimes turning these on their head.

Matsuzaka Daisuke will no doubt take his historic turn as a maker and transformer of stereotypes. Fortunately, with the Red Sox World Series victory in 2004, a bit of the pressure has been lifted. Fans in New England hope Matsuzaka will anchor a team that can for prevail for the second time in four years, but this is a far less desperate state of mind than wishing and praying for the first such triumph in 86 years. Still, it is important to understand that Matsuzaka will be pitching on behalf of a “nation” of people for whom baseball anchors community, and carries the burden of linking generations past and present. As Dan Shaughnessy, one of the finest local sportswriters, put it during the 2004 World Series, “The Red Sox are a team that connects generations...They remind

² The late Ivan Morris wrote a well-known book on this topic, *The Nobility of Failure*.

you of your father and mother, maybe your grandfather, too.” Indeed, when the Red Sox finally won the World Series in 2004, I right away called my aunt, whose husband, he of the wise-guy comment to Ted Williams 62 years earlier, had died two summers before. And cemeteries all over New England were bejeweled with Sox paraphernalia, as children and grandchildren visited graves of loved ones who did not live to see the day.

* * *

In following the course of Daisuke Matsuzaka’s first season in the major leagues, I will write about the ballgames, of course. But accounts of the balls and strikes will also be points of departure to ponder some larger questions. I do not expect to find in baseball, the Red Sox, and Matsuzaka clear windows into some essential American or Japanese characteristics. The sport, the team, and the star will function more as prism or mirror—perhaps a distorted fun-house mirror—reflecting myriad images back at ourselves. Try as they might, Americans will not discover in Matsuzaka some essential “Japanese” quality. They will rather transform him, through an unpredictable alchemy, into an emblem of their own American dreams. And Japanese fans, likewise, will create and recreate their understandings of America in their obsessive watch over their exported star in his foreign adventure.

That is to say, the chemistry that turns sport into emblems of national character is complex. Think, for example, about the most common cultural trait attributed to the Japanese people by Japanese and foreigners alike. They are said to be a people who elevate group over individual. And think of the typical American, understood to do precisely the reverse.

Yet, the most popular “traditional” spectator sport in Japan today is certainly sumo, and the most popular modern or Western sport in Japan is certainly baseball. How can we square these facts with stereotypical views of Japanese national character? Both sports spotlight man-on-man, individual play: the behemoths in the sumo ring; the pitcher confronting the solitary hitter. The two sports share something profound in the fact that play commences not with a clock or a whistle, but at an instinctively felt moment when both contestants are dug in and ready to go. The pitcher starts his windup and the batter readies to swing, just as the two *rikishi* touch ground and spring forward. These moments both celebrate individual more than group achievement.

And in America, even though the national pastime is said to be baseball, an objective observer would have to give pride of place to football, the sport where 10 men, faces hidden from view by helmets, throw themselves down on the ground in sacrifice so that one hero can move forward. Is this not the sport of the quintessentially group-oriented society, the sport where anonymous organization and collective effort enable victory? Put simply, the favorite sports in Japan have “American” values at their core, and the most beloved sport in America is in some sense “typically Japanese.” It is futile to think one can peer through a sport and see clearly the soul of a nation.

My one prior experience observing Japanese and American baseball close-up might serve to illustrate this point, and leave us ready to head for spring training. In June of 1996 I had the great fortune to help moderate and interpret at a dialogue (*taidan*) of the two great iron men of Japanese and American baseball. The occasion was the moment when the all-time record for consecutive games, held since his retirement in 1987 by the great Kinugasa Sachiyo of the Hiroshima Carps, was to be eclipsed by Cal Ripken. The

Asahi Shinbun arranged to have the two men spend a few hours together, iron man to iron man, exchanging thoughts on their achievement. It was a memorable event.

The two men shared remarkably similar attitudes to the sport and their place in it. Each denied that perseverance was his most important quality or the source of his pride. The streak meant not that they were tough or determined, but that they had played well and continued to make contributions that justified their staying in the lineup. Not all observers would agree with this. But they themselves drew pride from the streak as a sign of their talent and enduring skill.

They also took pleasure in each other's company, as two men sharing something unique. Ripken stressed how much he enjoyed the *taidan*, and noted how gratifying it was to meet Kinugasa. This record was in some ways, he said, more special than surpassing Gehrig, because he could actually talk to the man whose record he broke. He was astonished at how much they shared in common. Kinugasa also spoke of sharing of something precious, something that no one else had achieved. He too felt lonely when he had broken Gehrig's record nine years earlier, but—as he repeated several times over the course of the day—he was gratified now to have someone who can understand what he's done.

The immediate connection of the two “iron men” to me suggested something of the problem in carelessly linking the character of sport and of nation. One typically associates Japanese culture with values such as nintai, gaman, doryoku (endurance, perseverance, effort); this makes it easy to see why there would be such admiration for Kinugasa in Japan. In contrast the United States is said to be the land of individuals, of self-promotion, and the search today for glory in a flashy spotlight. To that extent, one is

hard pressed to explain the power of Gehrig's record or Ripken's achievement. Yet, the emotional outpouring when Ripken broke Gehrig's record makes clear the depth of other values in American culture. I pointed this out to Ripken, and he replied that "I've been seen as an old-school type, and in terms of my attitude toward family and baseball, I am. I'm proud of that. I see value in being there for the long haul. As for a comparison to Japan or anywhere else, I don't have any basis to comment, but I think there is a tendency for Americans to seek something big in the short-term—the whole thing about 15 minutes of fame. But clearly there's also an appreciation for perseverance here. In my case, what I did seemed to resonate with people who made a comparison to what they did by going to work or school everyday."

Later that night, after the game when Ripken tied Kinugasa's record, over steak and beer at a Kansas City restaurant, he reiterated his pride in his "old school" attitude. There is too much individual glory-seeking, he lamented. "There should be some code, some sense of honor in how you play the game." If that had been Kinugasa speaking to an American reporter, you can just imagine the storyline he'd have constructed, full of codes of honor, of bushido in baseball. But far from the unique "way" of a single culture, these attitudes are shared across cultures.

* * *

The decision to write this book came from a fortuitous convergence of events.

In mid-November, just after the Red Sox posted their astonishing bid for Matsuzaka and began to negotiate with his agent, Scott Boras, I received a phone call from my friend Peter Grilli, the president of the Japan Society of Boston. Peter grew up in Japan, and

knows the language and culture as intimately as any American. The Red Sox were preparing a short “recruitment DVD” to give to Matsuzaka, hoping to sell Boston with image and sound as a great city and the Red Sox as a great team. They asked Peter to stand in front of the “Ginza” Japanese restaurant near Fenway Park and offer a “welcome” speech. He suggested to the producers that I be invited to join the recruitment effort, by telling Daisuke how all of us at Harvard were hoping he would come to Boston.

One day later, I recorded my one minute speech on camera in front of the statue of John Harvard. Shortly thereafter, the 10 minute DVD production somehow made its way to Daisuke in Japan.

Thus, when he signed his contract, I was certain that far more than the temptation of 50+ million dollars, or his own long held dream to play in the major leagues, it must have been my speech in the video that had convinced him to come!

At the time, participants were asked to keep the existence of the DVD a secret, so I jokingly told my friend and editor at Asahi Shinsho, Ishikawa Masahiko, that I had played a hidden role in recruiting Matsuzaka to Boston. Someday, I would tell him the whole story. He replied quite seriously: “well, why don’t you write a book on his first year in Boston, combining the perspectives of an academic and a fan.

It did not take long for me to realize that this was a wonderful idea. I would be able to watch baseball games, and call it “work”!

The result is the book you are reading.

* *

How then, will Matsuzaka make his mark here in Boston, and what sorts of stories of sports and nation, of noble failure or gritty success, will we be able to tell? Spring is around the corner. We will soon find out.

Expectations

The six week spring training camp is a modern American tradition of renewal and hope, where anything seems possible. It is all about expectation.

The Red Sox make their camp in Fort Myers, a coastal city in Southwest Florida, and a more appropriate place than Boston for a month full of hope (and illusion). Indeed, it is hard to imagine two regions of the United States more different than New England and Florida, or two cities less alike than Boston and Fort Myers. The former was colonized in the time of Tokugawa Iemitsu by sternly righteous religious refugees from England. The latter was colonized a full century earlier, during Japan's Warring States era, by Spanish explorers in search of the ultimate symbol of illusory dreams, a mythical "fountain of youth." The former emerged as a center of learning and culture, and commerce from the early days of United States history; the latter only developed as a major population center in the 20th century, when air conditioners and civil engineers allowed people to reclaim swampland for farming and resorts.

Florida also stands in relation to Boston like Okinawa to Sapporo, offering sandy beaches and warm sunny winters. Especially in the decades since World War II, it has drawn a huge population of northern retirees as permanent residents, and a seasonal migration of the so-called "snowbirds," elderly northerners seeking to escape for a few months from the dreary grey winter skies, snowstorms, and bitter cold of their home towns. Every winter, from mid-February through March, Florida also draws about 2/3 of the major league baseball teams to ball parks and practice fields scattered throughout the state.³ Young players dream of making the big league team. Veterans imagine a stunning comeback from injury or slump. Weak teams hope they have finally pulled

³ The rest, mainly west coast teams, go to Arizona.

together a winning combination, while the traditional powerhouses look ahead to a season of dominating all rivals.

In the winter of 2007, along with the snowbirds on the scene in Fort Myers, everyone from owners, to fans back in Boston and in Japan, to media from both sides of the Pacific Ocean, were linked as never before in a frenzy of expectation called “Daisuke-mania,” centered on a single Japanese pitcher. What manner of madness was this?

The Red Sox owners surely expect a return on a major investment in multiple ways. Immediate financial benefits include ballpark advertising revenues reported to total \$3 million per year, led by the tidy sum of \$900,000 a year from Funai corporation for placing its name on the backdrop for Matsuzaka’s news conferences. Over the six years of Matsuzaka’s contract, these additional revenues could approach one-fifth of the total expenditure by the Red Sox. One can add to that the facts that the \$51m posting fee paid to Seibu for permission to recruit Matsuzaka does not count toward calculating the “luxury tax” levied against major leagues teams with payrolls over a certain threshold, and that compared to the salaries earned by other top pitchers, Matsuzaka’s annual pay is hardly excessive. The real cost of bring Matsuzaka to Boston is less outrageous than at first glance.

But beyond financial considerations, Red Sox ownership and management clearly have been hoping that the advent of Daisuke could rekindle the passions of Red Sox nation. Toward the disappointing end of the 2006 season, these passions began to diminish for the first time in several years. Principal owner John Henry noted as much in an email message to a reporter, published in the *Boston Globe* on April 1 as spring

training ended: “I consider the year a failure if we don’t make the playoffs. Last year was a failure on our part. We didn’t have enough depth and we had too many injuries. I’ve never seen a first-place team collapse like that.” By bringing Matsuzaka to Boston, Henry was bringing the promise of winning, and the certainty of a resurgent enthusiasm among citizens of Red Sox nation. Before a single official game had been played, the ownership’s expectations had been more than realized. As Henry wrote, “the most surprising aspect has been how much the signing of this one man has seemed to uplift our entire region. It is a remarkable and a great thing. He [Matsuzaka] seems to be comfortable with all of the expectations.”⁴

The expectations of fans and of media are quite different on the two sides of the Pacific Ocean. For Boston fans, it is fair to say, the fact that Daisuke is from Japan adds interest and flavor to the recipe for a happy season, but it is not the main point. As the season begins, Red Sox nation is prepared to embrace Matsuzaka because his presence offers promise of beating the Yankees, and winning the pennant and World Series. If he excels, but the team fares poorly, expectations will be dashed. If Matsuzaka pitches well, but the team falters because of a weak bullpen, one could even imagine fans blaming team management for spending too much money on one starter, and not enough on relievers.

For the media, in Boston and nationally, at least on the surface, expectations of winning are beside the point. Most media pundits expect him to succeed, although their standard of success is far more modest than the fans. A season of 13 or 14 wins will be considered a major achievement by most writers. I suspect that most sportswriters are in fact fans at heart, and they actually hope he exceeds expectations. But they are too proud

⁴ *Boston Globe*, April 1, 2007, pages A1, C11

to admit this; most cling to the idea that they are supposed to be objective observers, not rooting for any particular result.

But win or lose, the American mass media hopes Matsuzaka will offer source material for interesting stories. For the more thoughtful and adventurous sports journalists, Matsuzaka's arrival offers a chance to explore the ongoing process of the globalization of baseball, as well as the possibility to examine the history of racial and ethnic exclusion and inclusion in baseball and American society more generally.

In mid-February, Globe reporter Gordon Edes offered a fascinating and quite moving story of the Stanford political scientist Daniel Okimoto, a Japanese-American scholar who is close friends with Red Sox owner Larry Lucchino. Okimoto played a key role in advising the Red Sox as they recruited Matsuzaka. He was born in 1942 in a stable on the grounds of a racetrack; his family was in custody of the US government, about to be sent to a "relocation camp" in Arizona. By means of this story, Edes offered a valuable brief history lesson to thousands of baseball fans, certainly including many only dimly aware, if at all, of the shameful episode of the wartime internment of Japanese Americans.

The weekend before opening day, both the New York Times and the Boston Globe ran lengthy features on the internationalization of major league baseball, and on the history of Japan's own professional leagues. On March 30, the Globe told the poignant tale—hardly known to the vast majority of American fans—of Murakami Masanori, the first Japanese player to pitch in the major leagues over 40 years ago, who was forced to return to Japan by contractual constraints despite his early success in the major leagues.

As part of its longterm strategy for global marketing of their sport, Major League Baseball is hoping to transfer the loyalty of Japanese fans from their players—especially Matsui and Matsuzaka—to the teams—especially the Yankees and Red Sox. It is hard for me to imagine this will happen. At present, it is clear that for Japanese fans, the fate of the Red Sox as a team—at least in these early days of the season—is hardly a matter of great concern. The expectations are all about Daisuke. If Matsuzaka pitches brilliantly and wins 17 or 18 games, but the team does poorly, Japanese fans will be delighted. If he does poorly, but the Red Sox win nevertheless, there will be no joy in Tokyo.

For this situation to change, the Japanese media would have to build interest in the team as well as the star from their homeland, but the media, both print and TV, take a similar approach to that of fans. Their job is defined as covering the Japanese players, not the American team. They are hard-pressed to respect the implicit taboo against writers behaving like fans. I experienced the power of this taboo first hand in 1996 when I watched Cal Ripken play his “world iron man” record breaking game from the press box in Kansas City. When Ripken snatched up a sharply hit grounder, I inadvertently murmured “nice play.” The writer sitting next to me shot over a scornful glance as if to say “you amateur imposter! How dare you!” The Japanese media are also clearly (if quietly) are rooting for Matsuzaka to succeed.

These media hopes were crystal clear on the first day that I watched a spring training game from the press box. Matsuzaka was pitching against the Cincinnati Reds, March 26, in his final start of the Florida season. The small press room was jammed with about 20 reporters. All but three or four were Japanese. Matsuzaka struggled with his

control, walking 5 batters in 5 innings. With each base on balls, the reporters audibly sighed in disappointment or frustration.

This almost desperate hope that Matsuzaka succeed in the “big leagues” on the part of Japanese fans, and especially the media, is the anxious legacy of a quasi-colonial relationship. In a world order dominated by the American behemoth, where Japan’s geopolitically subordinate status is hard to deny, the success of a pitcher like Matsuzaka—striking out big brawny American hitters—offers a degree of solace. At the same time—and this is the dilemma of a “post-colonial condition—it also raises fears that in a free market for players, the major leagues will skim off the cream of the Japanese crop, recreating a colonized order in which Japanese baseball serves as a minor league feeder to the American major leagues.

Consider the editorial in the *Asahi* on November 17, 2006. Written just three days after the Red Sox posted their extraordinary bid for Matsuzaka, it began with a fervent hope for his success: “Matsuzaka, spread your wings on the big stage.” It ended with the anxious worry that “we might become content with the status of simply sending our best players [to America].

Examples of this sort of nervous hope for recognition are omnipresent, found even in tiny sidebar stories. To take just one example, as spring training ended, the official website of the major leagues placed the Red Sox signing of Matsuzaka as the biggest story of the year so far, ahead even of Barry Bonds’ pursuit of the all time major league home run record. The *Suponichi* tabloid felt moved to publish the strange boast: “Matsuzaka boldly overtakes Bonds for first place.”

If these are the expectations and anxieties of fans and media, then what of Matsuzaka Daisuke's expectations for himself? These are harder to gauge, in part because he has been reluctant to offer specific goals in interviews. His numbers in spring training were impressive. In four games against major league batters in Florida, over 17 2/3 innings, he gave up just nine hits, posting a 2.04 ERA with 19 strikeouts. His outing on March 21 versus the Pirates was most impressive; he allowed just 1 hit with 7 strikeouts in 5 2/3 innings. After giving up a single in the first inning, he retired the next 11 batters in a row, and struck out the final three batters he faced. If this is the "real" Matsuzaka, we are all in for an exciting ride this spring and summer. But remarkably enough, Matsuzaka said in his post-game press conference that he had "struggled" during that start.

But his next start, a sunny Florida afternoon against Cincinnati on March 26, at which he was expected to pitch up to 7 innings, offered an even stronger sense of how extraordinarily high Matsuzaka's own expectations are. He gave up no hits (!) over five innings. Counting from the end of the first inning of his previous start, Matsuzaka had pitched more than nine consecutive innings of no hit baseball. Even in spring training, this is an impressive result.

To be sure, the Cincinnati game was a ragged outing. Matsuzaka needed 103 pitches to complete 5 innings. Although he struck out 6 batters, he walked 5. As manager Terry Francona said afterward, "he didn't command his pitches." At the same time, only one ball was hit hard all day, that one a sharp grounder running just foul over the third base bag. He did get outs when he needed to.

After he left the game, I made my way with the Japanese reporters to the designated press conference area behind the Reds administration building. We stood around expectantly for about 30 minutes, joined by a few American reporters, when the feisty press liaison, Sekiguchi Sachiyo, suddenly arrived to announce in both English and Japanese that the plan had changed. Matsuzaka would not be speaking to the press. Instead, he issued a statement: “At this point in the season, the substance is more important than the results of my pitching. And today, the substance was too bad. Too many walks, poor control, and as a result, it was hard on the defense and our hitters could not find a rhythm.

Even after listening to the English translation twice, the American reporters were baffled. Was he hurt? Why wouldn't he come out to explain his view on his pitching in person? One Boston reporter emerged from the clubhouse to report that “Matsuzaka was just sitting alone, looking down at the floor in front of him. He was talking to no one. It was like lasers were coming out of his eyes, he was so angry.” Manager Francona, surrounded by a horde of anxious Japanese and Boston reporters, was blunt: “His expectations of himself are of perfection, and we need to get used to it.”

Predictably Boston press reports the next day sought to make a mountain out of this post-game molehill. Did his refusal to talk mean that Matsuzaka is an immature prima donna, a second coming of the brilliant but mercurial Pedro Martinez? Or was he simply a fierce competitor and perfectionist?

No one can be sure how these expectations will all play out, but one certainty is that they will be realized, or betrayed, in the bright glare of public scrutiny. The long weeks of spring training have offered a series of relatively insignificant “first” events,

each attended by 100s of writers, photographers, and camera crews from two nations: the first warm-up throws in camp, the first bullpen session, the first live batting practice, the first game action (against a college team), the first game action against a major league team, first runs allowed, the first excellent start, the first disappointing one, the first sign of Daisuke's extraordinary expectations of himself.

The important "first" events begin in April.

Beginnings

To note that the start of the baseball season coincides nicely with springtime is a convenient cliché. This year, at least, it captures only part of the story. Even as daffodils struggled in the chill rain of New England spring, and as fans and players looked with excitement to Daisuke Matsuzaka's first games on the big league stage, what made the season special was not just the promise of a new beginning in the present, but the way it was linked to the past. For fans, owners, players, and writers alike, in the United States and in Japan, what was special was the way a sense of a new beginning was linked to intense awareness of historic continuities and transformations, connecting a long ago past to the present, bridging childhood memories to adulthood, and this spring, connecting Japan to America.

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Kansas City, Missouri was the site for Matsuzaka's first regular season start in the major leagues on April 5, a frigid Thursday in the American heartland. This once-proud franchise had fallen on hard times, and in 2006 had the second worst record in the major leagues, a pitiful 62 wins and 100 losses. But the team had reason to hope for something better this year. It boasted a new ace, Gil Meche, signed at considerable cost, and he did in fact best Curt Schilling on Opening Day, to the delight of a large crowd. The excitement continued on the third day of the young season, when the contingent of media jammed in to the Royals ballpark—including 125 from Japan—was as large as the group covering the team's last appearance in the World Series, back in 1985.

Together with fans back in Boston, and those bleary-eyed devotees watching at 3 am in Japan, these Matsuzaka-watchers saw an artist at work.

Matsuzaka started a bit shakily, as a single and walk put men on 1st and 2nd with one out in the first inning. But he nicely started a double play on a weak ball back to the mound, and quickly found his rhythm. As television cameras sent back to Boston unaccustomed shots of fans wearing hachimaki adorned with 必勝 (Certain Victory) and 一番 (Number One), Matsuzaka retired the next nine men in a row, including a most impressive 4th inning where he struck out the side. As the announcers love to say—and this time it was surely true—he was “painting the corners” of the plate, and the batters were much overmatched.

In the 5th inning, with two outs but two men on base, Daisuke helped his own cause with some nice fielding of a tricky grounder in front of the plate. The Royals did manage a small rally in the 6th, as David DeJesus lined a home run over the wall to start the inning. Two more hits followed, but little damaged, Matsuzaka finished the inning with his 8th strikeout. He struck out the first two batters in the 7th as well. Both men looking more than a little bewildered in the face of Daisuke’s nasty breaking pitches.

Matsuzaka finished his day after 7 innings, having scattered 6 hits, struck out 10, and walked just one. He left the game ahead just 2-1, but the Red Sox added two runs in the top of the 8th. Jonathan Papelbon—ace closer—set the tone for his own dominating first month of the year by striking out two batters in an easy 9th inning.

After the game, Dennis Eckersley, a Hall of Fame pitcher for the Red Sox and Oakland, and a Red Sox post-game announcer, waxed eloquent for the fans back home: “I was absolutely impressed. It was dominant. I don’t know what to say. He had 7

pitches, and knew what he was doing with all of them. . . . Every fastball he throws, there's a meaning behind it." Catcher Jason Varitek, who carried a sheet with some key Japanese phrases on it to the mound for his occasional conferences with the pitcher, was also enthused at "a phenomenal first outing." But Daisuke told the NESN reporter that "I wasn't that sharp, but I paid attention to control and location."

If this was not a "sharp" performance, the opposing teams would be in real trouble. For me, the pleasure of watching Matsuzaka pitch this day rivaled that of the games thrown in his prime with the Red Sox by Pedro Martinez, another artist of the diamond with an extraordinary ability to keep hitters off balance with his variety of pitches and pinpoint control.

The two Boston papers the next day echoed these views, in a rare moment of unanimity. These papers, the Globe and the Herald, are different in style. They compete, but they speak to different audiences. The Globe is more liberal in politics; it aims at the middle-classes and the suburbs. The Herald is a tabloid, flashier and quite a bit to the right. It headlines a sports story on the back cover and a news feature, or gruesome crime, on the front, with a populist but nationalist tone. Think Asahi Shinbun versus Nikkan Gendai.

But on this day, both papers (one imagines to the chagrin of the editors) ran identical headlines: "DICE-KKKKKKKKKK." The new hero's nickname was perfect. Dice-K is easy to pronounce in English, and it very nicely echoes the proper pronunciation in Japanese. And the "K", of course, is the baseball scorer's universal symbol for the "strikeout," the pitcher's equivalent of the home run ball for a slugger.

But the Globe went the Herald one better with its headline atop the sports page. Perhaps for the first time in history, an American daily newspaper ran a Japanese language headline (with a small-font English “subtitle”):

怪物デビュー (monster debut).

The headline was a marvelous emblem of the local enthusiasm for the team and its new starting pitcher. And the small-font English “translation” offered a clever play on words. “Monster debut” conveyed the meaning (as it does in Japanese) of “debut of Matsuzaka, the monster,” where “monster” is a noun. But unlike the Japanese version, it also could be read with “monster” as an adjective, in the sense of a “fantastic debut.”

This local celebration of the embrace of Japan by Red Sox nation was impressive and perhaps excessive. At a post-game press conference two weeks later, a Herald reporter griped in what seemed to be good-natured fashion, while waiting for Matsuzaka to appear, that “my paper is obsessed with Matsuzaka.” Of course, excessive expectation can pave the way to sharp disappointment; this was just one win against a fairly weak team. But it was a tempting start, nonetheless. And for the Boston public, the excitement at this start can be read as a sense of pride going beyond the simple results on the baseball field. Red Sox nation was celebrating its new global reach and recognition.

* * *

Six days later, on April 11, Matsuzaka pitched his first game in Boston. The Seattle Mariners were the opponent, and their star from Japan, one of the greatest athletes

in the game, would be his first opposing batter. Matsuzaka versus Ichiro: this was a script that could have been written in Hollywood.

Outside the park, I strolled down Yawkey Way—a street running along the first base side of the park, named for Tom Yawkey, the wealthy southern gentleman who owned the team from 1933 to 1976. Before and during each home game, the street is turned into a sort of pedestrian festival ground, an extension of the ballpark open only to ticketholders. An astonishing array of Japanese language signs had sprung up, as if overnight, for food, for souvenirs, or simply stating “welcome to Boston” on behalf of the mayor. Not all the translations were fluent, but the effort was clear.

Inside the ballpark as the players took batting practice, dozens of fans waved Japanese language signs, including one in Okinawan dialect noting “Ganbare Matsuzaka.” All told, a veritable US-Japan baseball festival. Even Kato Ryojo, the Japanese Ambassador to the United States in Washington DC, joined the party from a distance, invoking his sense of the past with a diplomatic eloquence: “I’m deeply moved that Japanese baseball has come this far. In 1955, the New York Yankees came to Japan and played the Japanese team. The Yankees won 15, tied won. Today, we’ve come to this point where the Matsuzaka-Ichiro confrontation attracts such interest. Extraordinary are the changes wrought by time.”

In the dugout before the game, I spoke briefly to Red Sox general manager Theo Epstein. He sounded mildly intrigued at the idea of a book of Matsuzaka-ology, and rather more interested that Masa Hoshino, Matsuzaka’s interpreter, had studied Japanese history with me at Harvard. “Do you have any dirt on Masa? We have to pull him down a notch after that ovation he got last night.” Indeed, as all the players and key staff were

introduced to the crowd two days earlier, at the home opener, Masa received among the strongest ovations, more than many of the players. It was a puzzling if happy moment, perhaps a thank you to the interpreter for helping Matsuzaka communicate to his new “countrymen”? In a jovial mood, Epstein ended the conversation: “good luck with your book, but next year you might need to do one on their guy [the Mariner’s pitcher], Hernandez. There aren’t going to be a lot of runs scored tonight.” Prophetic words.

As Matsuzaka prepared by running some laps in the outfield, the team’s President and co-owner, Larry Lucchino, was hosting in the owner’s suite a more exclusive, but no less exuberant, Japan festival than the street fair on Yawkey Way. My wife and I were fortunate to be invited, together with assorted guests from the Boston Japan Society and the business community who played some role in supporting the Red Sox as they prepared to recruit and welcome Matsuzaka to Boston.

Lucchino’s close friend, Dan Okimoto, who had been urging the team to go after Matsuzaka for several years, flew in from California with his wife to take part in the happy event. Principal owner John Henry, and Tom Werner, chairman and co-owner joined the group, greeting Okimoto with real pleasure. Craig Shipley, vice president for international scouting and architect of the team’s Japan strategy, stopped by as well. We briefly discussed how the advent of players from Japan promised to change major league baseball. He told me “lets talk again—but I can’t tell you the whole story (of how we recruited Matsuzaka)!”

About 40 minutes before game time, the Japanese Consul General for Boston and New England, Yoichi Suzuki, arrived. Lucchino greeting him with a surprise request to “please throw out the first ball.” Suzuki had no idea this treat was in store for him, but 30

minutes later, after a few warm-up tosses, he stood on the mound in front of 37,000 cheering fans, and marked the ceremonial start of the game with a toss to the catcher. Within an hour, he was proud possessor of a baseball inscribed for the occasion. Perhaps this will end up in the Foreign Ministry archives.

On this night in April, the Red Sox “Japan strategy” was deployed in full force, from the streets, to the field, to the owner’s suite. The thorough care of this effort is worth noting. It is an attempt both to field a winning team, and to continue a move—already underway—to leave behind a far-from-proud history of racial discrimination. Tom Yawkey was a benevolent owner who treated his players well, but he carried the prejudices of his era. It was not until 1959 that his team became the last in all of major league baseball to add an African-American player to the team. One manager in particular, Mike Higgins, was well known as a racist.

Japanese sportswriters assigned to cover the Red Sox this past winter knew something of this past, if only by reputation. One of them told me, “it’s the kind of thing one shouldn’t say, but Boston has the image of a mainly white town that maybe wouldn’t be so welcoming of the Japanese press. But in fact it has been really impressive how welcoming the Red Sox are to the Japanese reporters, expanding the press area, even giving Japanese reporters credentials when not all the American press is accommodated. I’m quite moved.”

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Matsuzaka took the mound to an impassioned ovation. Even before the first pitch, the stands were completely packed. On an ordinary evening, fans make their way

gradually from work or home, and the seats are never filled until the 2nd or 3rd inning. This night was different. People had come to witness something they felt to be historic. Was the sense of history generated merely by the pitcher's staggering price tag of \$100 million? Or was there some greater desire as well, a hope to be able to say years later, "I was there, at Matsuzaka's first game?"

Ichiro finished his stretching, and stepped into the batter's box. As he readied for the first pitch, suddenly the flashes of all the digital cameras throughout the ballpark started popping, reaching an extraordinary crescendo, like white *hanabi* on a summer night along the Sumida River. Matsuzaka later admitted he had trouble concentrating during that pitch. He was just glad he got it over the plate. Third baseman Mike Lowell said he was simply hoping the ball didn't come his way: "I'd have been knocked over by a line drive." First pitch strike, and the crowd roars "Daisuke, Daisuke."

If one thinks about it, taking a snapshot with an ordinary digital camera from high in the stands is a symbolic gesture, not a serious act of photography. The players will be tiny pinpoints; that the photo was of this particular game, with Ichiro and Matsuzaka facing each other, will hardly be evident. For a pictorial record in full detail, far better to buy the next day's newspaper, or a magazine like *Sports Illustrated*. Yet, everyone it seems, was intent on taking a snapshot, to mark in a personal record book that "I was there (even if you can't really tell) on that special day."

I watched this scene from seats in front of the owner's suite behind home plate. John Henry and Tom Werner had moved with some colleagues to a more private, glassed-in box just to our right. As Matsuzaka got two quick strikes on Ichiro, and then ran the count to 3-2, the owners stood behind their chairs nervously tapping the back of

their seats as they surveyed the scene. Their huge investment was being tested at home for the first time. Their sense of anxious anticipation mixed with huge satisfaction was palpable as they surveyed the scene, 37,000 fans shouting on an April evening in their ballpark, focusing all attention on the man on the mound and the solitary hitter. For all that we flatter ourselves for living in modern times at the cutting edge of the new, did the ancient Roman emperors not look out in similar fashion at the sporting spectacles in their colosseum nearly 2000 years ago?

The game turned into a fast-paced pitcher's duel. Matsuzaka was sharp. He scattered 8 hits in 7 innings, striking out 4, walking just one. He kept Ichiro—who was still searching for his accustomed hitting stroke—off balance all evening, hitless in his four at-bats against Matsuzaka, including one strike out. He did give up a run in the second on a single, a double, and a sacrifice fly, and the Mariners added two runs on three hits, aided by a Red Sox error, in the fifth. But on most nights this performance would have qualified as a solid win, and indeed by present day major league statistical standards, this was a so-called “quality start” (at least 7 innings, 3 runs or less).

But as Theo Epstein had suggested, Felix Hernandez, the Mariners' 22 year-old prize pitcher, was nearly untouchable, setting down the Red Sox with ease. Midway through the contest, I walked round to the center field bleachers, where a group of Harvard faculty, staff, students, and visiting scholars from Japan had secured a block of seats for the occasion. Bundled against the cold (gametime temperature was only 46 degrees), they watched with growing concern as Hernandez carried a no hitter toward the final innings.

One senior staff member in Harvard's program of international studies, Steve Bloomfield, recounted his own sense of the history of the day. On September 1, 1964, age 9 years, he was among the full house of 50,000 fans in Shea Stadium, New York, to watch the first game pitched by Murakami Masanori of the San Francisco Giants. To this day, he remembers the occasion clearly, and recalls a sense that Murakami's presence was a big deal. Forty-three years later, he may well have been the only person in Fenway Park to have witnessed that game.

Back in the owner's suite, Larry Lucchino paced anxiously as Hernandez carried his no hitter through the seventh. Another Red Sox player hit a feeble grounder. Lucchino lamented, "Oh my god. What an irony this would be. The wrong team's guy throws a no hitter." In the bottom of the eighth inning, right fielder J.D. Drew managed a clean single to right center field, ruling out the chance for this ignominious and ironic result. But Hernandez managed a stellar complete game one-hitter, and Matsuzaka has experienced another first: his first loss.

At the post-game press conference, pitching coach John Farrell spoke of a tough brush-back pitch that knocked Ichiro down, before Matsuzaka retired him on an easy fly. The fans in the bleachers had certainly noticed—with gusto and appreciation—this willingness to challenge a top-flight hitter. Farrell noted, "He is a tremendous competitor, and we saw that in the at-bat against Ichiro, where he used his fastball up and in. For him to throw that pitch was crucial, as it allowed him to open up that outer part of the plate, prevented Ichiro from dominating the outside. This speaks volumes about his intensity....To see both these pitchers—that was pretty special." Indeed, it was.

Matsuzaka's third start was his first at a comfortable temperature, under the dome in Toronto, also his first start against one of Boston's toughest divisional opponents. In 2006, the Blue Jays actually finished ahead of the Red Sox in the standings, and they won the season series 12 games to 7. So for Daisuke to dominate the Blue Jays is an important goal for the 2007 campaign.

As in the previous start, Matsuzaka could have emerged victorious with just moderate run support. He breezed through 3 innings, retiring the first 8 batters and giving up just one single. Entering the 4th he was ahead 1-0 thanks to a monster home run by Wily Mo Pena.

Then came a minor meltdown. He struck out the first batter with a fastball touching 94 mph. But after a tough pitch to Vernon Wells, which he thought was a third strike, but the umpire judged to be just off the inside corner, Matsuzaka seemed annoyed, all the more so when Wells beats out an infield hit on the next pitch. He walked Frank Thomas on four pitches. A sharp ground single—that might have been caught for a double play on slower natural turf, scored the first run—and then two surprising walks in succession forced in a second.

Matsuzaka recovered nicely in the 5th and 6th innings, and the relief corps did its job, holding Toronto scoreless the rest of the way. But the Red Sox failed to score another run, and lost the game 2-1.

* *

It was hard to fault Matsuzaka for losing two games in which his team had scored a total of ONE run. The fans and the media showed no sign of disappointment. All eyes

were instead looking forward to Matsuzaka's final two starts of the month, what most in Red Sox nation would call the two most important "firsts" of all: the first start against the Yankees, at Fenway, set for the finale of a three game series on Sunday April 22. And the first Yankees game in New York, slated for the following Friday, this time with Matsui Hideki back in the lineup, recovered from an early season injury.

But a funny thing happened on the way to this dream confrontation of the Monster versus Godzilla in the legendary "house that Ruth built." On Friday April 20, the first warm evening of the season at Fenway park, the first encounter in the season's first Yankee series, a different Japanese hero stepped out from the shadows.

Even before Hideki Okajima took his first turn on center stage, some unusual performances marked this game. Curt Schilling pitched weakly, surrendering 5 runs on 8 hits over 7 innings. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that Alex Rodriguez was simply superhuman. With two home runs, he drove in 4 of the 5 Yankee runs, upping his total to 12 in 15 games. At this rate, he would end the season with 130 home runs! And Mariano Rivera blew his second save in a row, in truly remarkable fashion.

Manager Joe Torre brought Rivera into the game with a 6-3 lead, one out in the eighth. He had previously stated that the Yankees would not ask Rivera to close games from the eighth inning this year, to protect his most valuable pitcher, one of the greatest closers of all time, over the long season. Admittedly the starting pitchers were injured, and the bullpen worn out, but this seemed to be an early season sign of some desperation. The Red Sox had already scored a run in the inning, and had runners on second and third when he entered the game. But Rivera was the man who lost the lead. He gave up three

straight hits, including a bases clearing triple to the number nine hitter, Coco Crisp. Before jubilant fans, the Red Sox took a 7-6 lead into the 9th inning.

Then, to the astonishment of almost everyone in the ballpark, manager Francona turned to Hideki Okajima to try to close the game. Romero and Snyder had not been particularly effective the previous inning, giving up a run. Papelbon was not available; by the perhaps over-protective customs of the major leagues these days, he had thrown too many pitches the two previous games. In the eyes of most fans, absent the ace closer, Donnelly or Timlin were the logical choices. The Japanese reporters were as surprised as the fans to see Okajima entered the game. My colleague from Asahi, Murakami Naofumi, called his appearance “stunning.”

Francona’s intuition had some grounding in past performance. After surrendering a home run *on his very first pitch in the major leagues* (just the third pitcher to do this in a century of Red Sox history), Okajima had retired 14 batters in a row, in 5 appearances. This night, he retired Jeter on an easy grounder to second. He put Abreu in a 1-2 hole, then walked him. Red Sox fans cringed. Here comes Rodriguez, two home runs already, with chance to put the Yankees back ahead. Okajima gets a strike, then three straight balls. Fatalistic citizens of Red Sox nation see what must be coming. A fat pitch to get a strike, that A-Rod will blast over the fence. But such pessimism proved premature. Okajima throws a second strike. Then, jammed with a fastball, A-Rod lines softly to 2nd base. Okajima strikes out Thompson (who had run for Giambi the previous inning) to end the game. Roll out the clichés: the crowd goes wild. A star is born.

Six weeks earlier, after his second appearance of the spring (March 5), an American reporter had asked Okajima to comment on the great fuss over Matsuzaka. His

reply offered a wonderfully modest, and it now seemed a prescient, perspective on his role: "If Daisuke is top-class, then I'm a hero in the shadow. If I can achieve that, it's fine with me. If Daisuke can fight for us then I'm happy if I can be a source of strength in the shadows."

This modesty was refreshing, and it was honest. Few if any observers had expected Okajima to emerge as an anchor of the Red Sox bullpen. But at least through the month of April, his stellar performance would continue. The implications of Okajima's success—especially of course if it were to continue—are worth pondering. It would be one thing if only 2 or 3 exceptional players from Japan—Ichiro, Matsui, Matsuzaka—were truly able to excel in the major leagues at any one time. Unlike the automobile industry, Japan's export trade in baseball talent would be limited. The trade surplus would favor the United States, as it shipped past-the-prime sluggers to Japan and took few in return.

But if a veteran like Okajima, with a strong but not outstanding career in the Japanese leagues (34 wins, 32 losses, 41 saves in 12 years) can step with success onto a major league mound, the terms of trade between the U.S. and Japan, and the relative assessment of baseball quality, will surely change.

In fact, the balance is already changing. In 1995, Nomo Hideo was the only Japanese player in the major leagues. The numbers have since fluctuated, but by the early 2000s, US teams fielded roughly a dozen Japanese players in any given year. As the 2007 season began, no less than 13 Japanese athletes, 6 pitchers and 7 position players, were on major league rosters. In April, almost half of these men either played for Red Sox or faced them as opponents. Matsuzaka, Okajima and their teammates faced

Ichiro and Jojima of the Mariners. The Red Sox hit with mixed results against Tomokazu Ohka, formerly their own player and now with Toronto. And in the only game they would lose to the Yankees in six encounters, it was Kei Igawa who shut them down.

The success of Japanese players in the major leagues evokes a complex mix of anxiety and pride in Japan. It stimulates an equally interesting mix of pride and introspection on this side of the ocean. The pride comes in two forms—affirming the United States as the destination of choice for the best players in the world, and affirming more generally an American self-image (sometimes truer than others) as a land of open opportunity for people from all over the world. The introspection is the other side of the coin: if Japanese teams can produce such outstanding competitors, then in addition to hiring their best players is there something to be learned from a very different systems of training their baseball talent?

This is a question to ponder as the season progresses. The fact that Okajima pitched splendidly the next night as well (another Red Sox come from behind victory), and ended the month of April with the extraordinary record of just one run and 5 hits surrendered in 12 and 2/3 innings, striking out 17 of the 38 batters retired, suggests the answer is yes.

Matsuzaka's own Yankee starts, one in Boston on April 22, and one the next Friday in New York, were far from artistic success. He took formal credit for "wins" in both games, but he pitched better in his two losses against Seattle and Toronto.

Daisuke's outing in front of a national television audience in the US (and of course in Japan) was his weakest of the month. In 7 innings, he managed 7 strikeouts, but he allowed six runs on eight hits, one walk and two hit batsmen. As if to compensate

for the total lack of run support in his previous starts, the Red Sox hitters offered a truly historic offensive barrage on his behalf. The Sox were down 3-0 in the 3rd inning, when four consecutive batters—Ramirez, Drew, Lowell, and Varitek—hit homeruns. Each ball was crushed; no cheap flies curling round the foul pole. This was one of those moments when fans go home thrilled at a memory that merits the word “historic”—only the second time in over a century of major league baseball that a team hit four consecutive home runs against a single pitcher. One statistician calculated the odds of this happening at roughly 1.2 million to one. Even Red Sox fans might have felt sorry for poor pitcher Chase Wright, a minor-league call-up thrown into this game due to the many injuries to Yankee regulars.

Yet Daisuke gave back the lead, allowing single runs in the 5th and 6th innings. Only Mike Lowell’s second home run of the game, a line shot over the Green Monster with two men aboard in the 7th inning, allowed Matsuzaka to exit the game with a lead, and record a win thanks some stellar fielding in the 8th, and another dominating closeout by Papelbon.

Even so, the crowd was generous (it is easy to be generous when your team is winning!). He received a remarkably strong ovation on leaving the game in the top of the 8th, after allowing the tying run aboard (A-Rod again) with a no out single. Daisuke hardly felt he deserved the applause. He told the Japanese reporters after that game that “I thought [the ovation] was for Okajima” (who was entering to relieve Matsuzaka).

Matsuzaka’s last start of April came the following Friday night at Yankee Stadium. It was a more important game for the Yankees than the Red Sox. Having lost six consecutive games, the “evil empire” from the Bronx found itself in a most

unaccustomed place in the standings—dead last. Its pitching staff, injury plagued to be sure, had given up 6 or more runs in 7 consecutive games.

Matsuzaka breezed through the first three innings, giving up just two soft hits and striking out four. In the second inning, his first match-up in the major leagues with Hideki Matsui ended in the Monster's favor, an easy fly out on an 0-2 pitch. But with a 2-0 lead thanks to a Kevin Youkilis home run, Matsuzaka once more experienced a fourth inning meltdown. It was even more damaging than at Toronto two weeks before.

With no outs, Matsuzaka walked the bases loaded, giving free passes to A-Rod, Giambi, and Matsui. With the crowd in an uproar, the NESN announcer noted "Welcome to Yankee Stadium." Matsuzaka was clearly flustered. He turned to shortstop Julio Lugo, pointing to second for a possible force or double play. But in this circumstance, the proper choice was a force at home. Lugo shook his head and pointed to home, correcting Matsuzaka.

After giving up a soft bloop single to Posada, nicely trapped by Ramirez to allow just one run to score, Matsuzaka got two quick outs on a strikeout and pop to third. He had a chance to emerge relatively unharmed from a mess of his own making, but consecutive singles by Damon and Jeter led to three more runs. To be sure, not one of the three hits was for extra bases, or even hit sharply, but still, Matsuzaka was off his game. He seemed to be thinking too much, pitching too cautiously.

Fortunately for the Red Sox, the Yankee pitcher, veteran Andy Petite, was no better. In the next inning, he too walked the bases loaded and immediately allowed the Red Sox to retake the lead. And Matsuzaka did impressively recollect himself, again much like the game in Toronto, retiring 6 in a row in the 5th and 6th innings, striking out

two. Overall, he gave up just 5 hits, and few were hard hit. Okajima contributed another strong effort in relief, ending the 8th inning by striking out Posada. Over 9.2 innings, he had struck out 12. A few days later, his April heroics in the dark would win him the league's "Rookie of the Month Award."

But what of Daisuke? Are his two episodes of mid-game struggle a worrisome portent? Or—and this is the hope of a Red Sox fan—has his first month in the major leagues been a story of a great performer at work, figuring out by trial and occasional error how to reach the top of his game in a new, more demanding setting.

My long time friend Takano Naoto is a thoughtful gentleman in most respects, although he is foolish enough to root for the Yankees. From Tokyo by email at the end of April, he offered a different perspective and prediction. "Seibu fans in Japan are saying things like 'just like always, his bad habit of suddenly falling apart hasn't changed,' or 'just like in Japan, he's sometimes good, sometimes bad.' I think he'll be like that all season."

There is an interesting symmetry to the respective debuts of Godzilla and the Monster. Both of them did better in their very first game than at any point in the rest of their first weeks as major league "rookies." After Matsui's extraordinary first game, he struggled so much over the following weeks that he was dubbed "the ground ball king." Yet by the end of the season, Matsui was firmly established as a valuable member of the Yankees. The coming months will tell us if Matsuzaka achieves similar status in Boston.

Takano, who at the time held an executive position at a major Japanese bank in New York, was at Yankee Stadium entertaining a client the night of Matsui's home debut, on a frigid and rainy early April evening in 2003. A few inches of snow had fallen the

previous day, and 300 grounds staff had been mobilized to clear the field and seats.

Matsui looked tense. He grounded weakly to second in his first at bat. But in the 4th inning a fine play in the field, winning a tremendous ovation from the crowd, seems to have calmed his nerves.

In an e-letter to friends sent the next day, Takano described Matsui's next at bat: "When the pitcher started to pitch around the previous batter, Bernie Williams, my guest—the chairman of a company doing business with our bank—grumbled, "The nerve of pitching around anyone to get to Japan's best clean-up hitter....Matsui will show him. I'm sure he'll hit a home run." And sure enough, a grand slam home run, just as predicted! Exchanging high fives with Yankee fans all around him—total strangers all--the chairman shouted for joy over the bedlam, "See! Didn't I tell you! That's Japan's clean up hitter!" Tears started to well up in his eyes. Overcome by joy, he said "This is the second time I've ever wept at a sports event. The first time was Mohammed Ali's comeback championship fight. And now this. I'm glad I've lived to see it. This is history!"

The chairman's tears speak to a remarkably cosmopolitan patriotism. After all, the other time he wept at a sporting event neither combatant was Japanese, and the event did not take place in Japan. The reactions to Daisuke's debut have similarly shown the power of sports to both reinforce and to transcend ethnic allegiance.

Adjustments

The month of May began with the Red Sox in first place and their fans in high spirits. As Matsuzaka readied for his first start of the month, a home game against the Mariners on May 3, the team's record stood at 18 wins, 9 losses, an impressive 5.5 games ahead of their two nearest rivals. To most everyone's surprise, those rivals were Tampa Bay and Toronto, not the Yankees. The evil empire was floundering in 4th place, two games under .500.

As the month progressed, the Sox only extended their lead. By the end of May, they had the best record not only in their division, but in all of the major leagues. Experienced Boston fans cautioned themselves against over-exuberance or premature celebration. It was "only May." The season was "a marathon not a sprint."

Even so, the team was the talk of the town. Just as Osaka folk are said to greet each other by asking "are you making money?", Bostonians started their day with "how about those Sox?" As always, but perhaps even more so, the team served as a metaphor for all manner of argumentation, from small talk to serious debate. One afternoon in the middle of May, I joined a meeting of my Harvard colleagues in the stiffly solemn faculty room, where portraits of past University presidents stared down at the assembled professors. At issue was a new set of requirements for undergraduates. A highlight of the meeting came when one former Dean used the universal language of a Red Sox fan to express his strong opposition to adding new requirements: "If we don't understand what we are voting, we may wind up in worse shape than the Yankees—just adding [new players/new requirements], no matter what the cost."

The high spirits of the fans, and the high performance of the team, offered a breathing space to the new star from Japan, as he struggled to adjust and to find his “true” game in his new home.

* * *

The game against the Mariners on May 3 was the first “ordinary” game of the season for Matsuzaka. With a month of first encounters behind him, Daisuke was facing the Mariners and Ichiro for the second time. The Japanese media contingent had shrunk by more than half from its April peak. At game time the park was barely two-thirds full. There was no hint of the electric atmosphere of the memorable first match-up of April 11.

Eventually, all the fans showed up, and for whatever reason this game saw the largest attendance at Fenway Park since the end of World War II, a total of 37,216 paid ticket holders. But the late arrivals were fortunate; they missed an abysmal performance.

Matsuzaka had no command at all. He walked the first three batters. After a ground out (that scored a run), he hit a batter to reload the bases, and gave up two more runs on a hard-hit double. Two errors by Julio Lugo hardly helped matters, but Matsuzaka had only himself to blame for an inning in which the Mariners scored 5 runs on just one hit. As pitching coach Farrell noted, in a couple of previous outings Matsuzaka temporarily “lost his release point.” In this game, he never found it. From the start, he was searching for a pitch he could throw with confidence.

For the next three innings, Matsuzaka settled down some, and as if to make up for their poor run support in earlier games, his teammates rallied to tie the score with five runs in the second inning. The Red Sox forged ahead, 7-5, in the fourth inning when

Manny Ramirez lofted a home run over the wall in left with a man on base. But Matsuzaka promptly surrendered the advantage, giving up two runs in the next inning. He was replaced with the score tied at 7. His totals were dismal: just five innings, giving up seven runs on five hits and five walks, with only one strikeout.

* * *

The Red Sox eventually won the game, thanks to Ramirez's second home run of the night, and excellent help from the bullpen. But clearly something was not right with the \$100 million man. Matsuzaka appeared at a loss to explain the problem. In the postgame conference with the American reporters, the first question was short and pointed: "What happened in the first inning?" After a long, frowning silence, looking tense as could be, Matsuzaka replied simply "I don't understand it myself." The questions continued.

Q: "What do you have to do to get out of this rut?"

A: I've been thinking about it since I left the mound. I need to change something that I'm doing.

Q: "What?"

A: "I'm not sure."

Matsuzaka received no shortage of unsolicited advice on what the most important adjustment issues might be. The print media, the television commentators (including former players and coaches), the online bloggers, and that unique American institution of sports talk radio, where obsessed fans called in with their sometimes outrageous comments, together offered a dizzying array of suggestions. The list of differences

between American and Japanese baseball, said to be confounding Matsuzaka and impeding his transition, included at least the following.

- Off the field, away from the game: perhaps there were problems settling into a new cultural environment with his family—different food, different language, different city.
- Between games, and before each game: perhaps the American style of preparation was not working for Daisuke; maybe he was not doing enough hard pitching (*nagekomi*), or enough hard running (*hashirikomi*). Perhaps the five day rotation, as opposed to his familiar seven day routine, was uncomfortable.
- Umpires: maybe the tighter strike zone said to be called by American umpires was a source of frustration (indeed, Matsuzaka seemed unhappy with a number of calls, but what pitcher is not?).
- Opposing hitters, and pitching strategy: perhaps major league hitters are more patient at the plate, and don't chase his slightly off-the-plate pitches as much as batters in Japan. Maybe Daisuke needed to shift to the reportedly American pattern of using his dominating fastball to set up his breaking pitches, rather than—as in Japan—using his remarkable array of breaking balls to set up the fastball. Or maybe he had already made that shift and he needed to shift back.
- Or perhaps there were some basic material differences between the Japanese and American versions of the game: the mound was said to be firmer; the cleats said to be different; the resin drier. The ball was a bit

larger, the seams had a different feel to them, and whereas Japanese pitchers used sand to roughen the feel of the balls, and improve the grip, the Americans rubbed the game balls in mud.

Which of these mattered at all? Which of them mattered the most? And if Okajima was taking to the big leagues like a fish to water, was any of this really a Japanese-American adjustment, as opposed to a particular dilemma for a single athlete?

After the disastrous Mariner's game, Matsuzaka suggested that the problem might be found in his preparation.

"It's not a matter of changing the pitches themselves, as doing something so I can throw good pitches..." He did note the need to adjust to the umpires: "While I'm pitching, I need to figure out that umpire's particular habits." But in the next breath he denied that the problem lay in the particulars of the American environment: "It's not an external problem; it's a problem of my own technique. I had this much trouble at times in Japan as well. How did I cope then? I have my notes from those times, so I need to look at them.

Matsuzaka elaborated further in talking to reporters the next day: "It's not a matter of changing my pitching... Well, it's a question of changing how I prepare."

* * *

Over the next several days, Matsuzaka certainly began to figure out *something*, whether from his notes or some other form of introspection. His next three performances were by far the most effective of the season. He was credited with three wins, against good hitting teams: Toronto, Detroit, and Atlanta. He gave up only 5 runs in 24 innings,

for an ERA of just 1.88 (lowering his season ERA from 5.45 to 4.06 in the process). He struck out 19. And in the games against Detroit and Atlanta, he walked no one.

The game at Toronto (May 9) featured the rare spectacle—just the fourth time ever—of two Japanese starting pitchers going head to head in the major leagues. The opponent, Ohka Tomokazu, was clearly proud to have made most of his career in the major leagues, with none of the special attention and treatment accorded the big Japanese stars who came to the US after winning fame and fortune at home. He generated a small media buzz by complaining to the American press before the game about the far greater attention devoted by the Japanese media to Matsuzaka. One can understand his frustration, but given his performance, he should have kept quiet. He walked 5, hit a batter, and threw a wild pitch. He was fortunate to have only surrendered 3 runs before he was replaced after just 4 2/3 innings.

Matsuzaka, by contrast, pitched his best game since early April. His fastball was consistently in the mid-90s, and his breaking pitches were sharp. His varied offerings kept hitters off balance. He gave up just five hits and one run, striking out eight, walking just three. His teammates, led by Ortiz with four hits, provided more than enough support. After seven innings, he left the game with a lead of 8-1. As manager Francona mentioned after the game, this night he “was a real complete pitcher.”

The good times continued five days later back home at Fenway Park against the Detroit Tigers, one of the best—perhaps the very best—teams in the league. They entered the game at 23-13, atop their division and with the second best record in the American League, after the Red Sox. But against Matsuzaka on this night, they could manage just 6 hits and one run. Daisuke struck out two in the first inning, but after that

settled into a groove with pinpoint control of the lower corners, using his fastball to set up his offspeed pitches, inducing grounders one after the other. All told, he retired 16 of 27 batters on ground outs, striking out five others.

He needed to be sharp, because the game was close until nearly the end. Detroit scored its only run on a solo homer in the third, but the Red Sox quickly tied the game at 1-1 on two hits in the bottom of the inning, adding single runs in the next two innings. Not until the bottom of the eighth, did the Red Sox break the game open with four more runs. Through eight innings, Matsuzaka had thrown 109 pitches. For most pitchers, the night would be done. With a 7-1 lead, a back-up reliever would be sent in for the 9th to finish the game.

But Daisuke had not gone to a three ball count since the 4th inning. He had retired the side in the 8th on just 9 pitches, not more than one ball to any batter. He was in complete control, and Francona—to the slight surprise of the press box and the great delight of the crowd—sent him out for the final inning. He ended up pitching his first complete game in the major leagues, the first of the season for the Red Sox, as well. It was a magnificent show.

Post-game, both manager and pitcher were cool, although their satisfaction was evident. Asked “Was that [finally] the guy you had heard about?”, Francona replied simply “That was a solid outing. We’d seen it before,” and went on to note “he got locked into a groove, stayed in it, really located well.”

Daisuke, for his part, played down the achievement. The first question was the obvious one: “How thrilling was it to pitch a complete game at Fenway Park, with the crowd behind you?”

“The complete game was not that thrilling, but to do my first really good job pitching at Fenway, that was exciting to me.” And, in answer to a question at the separate post-game conference with the Japanese reporters, Matsuzaka described his perfectionist ambition with an impressive confidence: “I’m gradually improving but I’m not satisfied. It was the same in Japan, but I’ll never be satisfied, no matter how I throw.”

His next start, at home against Atlanta on a cloudy Saturday with the threat of rain looming, saw Matsuzaka flirt with the sort of obscure statistical history that baseball buffs love to unearth. He nearly became the first Red Sox pitcher in 11 years to throw back-to-back complete games.

The game itself was completely one-sided. By the fifth inning, the Red Sox were ahead 7-0. Matsuzaka was once more in a groove, walking no one, keeping the Atlanta hitters off balance, painting the corners with his fastball. After four innings, he had thrown just 44 pitches. The only remaining suspense was whether he would throw another complete game. In the press box, the reporters and the team’s media liaison competed to be the first to find out who was the last to throw back to back complete games for the Red Sox, and when. It turned out to be none other than Roger Clemens. He accomplished the feat in August of 1996, near the end of his final season with the team. So Matsuzaka was perhaps going to enter the record book in the company of the greatest pitcher of his era, perhaps of all time, and the man who had just ten days earlier stunned the Red Sox faithful by signing up for few months as a New York Yankee, for one (last?) time.

As it turned out, a poor fielding play by Wily Mo Pena, misjudging a fly ball to left, extended the 7th inning, stretched out Daisuke’s pitch count, and cut short this

historic achievement. With the game safely in hand after 8 innings (Red Sox ahead 13-3), even though he had thrown just 103 pitches, Francona patted Matsuzaka on the back to signal an end to his labors. Matsuzaka made it clear afterward that he had hoped and expected to finish the game, but he did not seem greatly upset.

* * *

How do we explain the sharp turnaround since the horrendous outing on May 3? Although academic types love complex answers, in this case it is a simple one: returning to a more familiar routine of preparation made a big difference.

In his mid-week bullpen session before the Toronto start, Matsuzaka threw 109 pitches, closer to his typical routine in Japan. He also did more vigorous running.

To what extent should we understand these adjustments as matters of a Japanese versus an American way of playing (and practicing) baseball?

Matsuzaka, for one, certainly analyzed his decisions through a US-Japan comparison. Asked by a Japanese reporter if the key change he made was more intense running, Matsuzaka replied “Of course, while I’ve been incorporating American practices, after all I’m Japanese. I think there are practices that fit a Japanese body, and I guess I decided to increase what I’ve been doing so far and try doing things again the way I did in Japan.”

The Red Sox pitching coach, John Farrell, spoke to me several weeks later about Matsuzaka’s May adjustments. His perspective was similar. Farrell, himself a former major league pitcher, is in his first year as on the job with the Red Sox, after working for five years as Director of Player Development with the Cleveland Indians. The strong

performance of almost all the Red Sox pitchers, starters and bullpen, newcomers and veterans, suggested that he is skilled and effective.

Farrell quickly identified what he saw as the most significant issues in Matsuzaka's adjustment to the major leagues: the shift from a seven to a five day rotation, and the related question of how much throwing and other training to do between starts. He noted that finding a comfortable training routine was crucial: "because he draws confidence, any player does, from the work he puts in." At the same time, "we play a longer season, more games, we have less off days."

So the crucial trick is to find the right balance. After the May 3 loss to Seattle, "we went on the road, and he had a 109 pitch bullpen session, which is probably double the normal amount. But, there were reasons for that." Farrell felt it was at this point important for Matsuzaka to do more work, to "allow for more confidence, and relaxation....So, we took the limits off, let him go work to find a peace of mind and a relaxation that would allow his abilities to come out."

Farrell credits Matsuzaka with working flexibly and thoughtfully in searching for the right balance: a regimen that would not wear him down in the longer season with less time between starts, and would yet give him confidence that he was sufficiently prepared. "He [at first] made a very conscious effort to make changes or to adjust into the American way, from a pitcher's perspective, from a work perspective. [Then,] he went back more to his traditional training techniques, with more running, more cross training, and reducing the amount of upper body weight lifting." One should also credit Farrell for working flexibly and thoughtfully with his pitcher.

Farrell noted some other differences between the two professional leagues that were of some significance. Both Matsuzaka and Okajima complained that the smoother surface of the mud-rubbed ball made it harder to get the proper grip on their sliders. The tighter strike zone has been an issue at times, “when Daisuke has thrown pitches that he felt are strikes, and that has carried over into his subsequent pitches.”

But Farrell also expressed faith in the ability of his new pitcher to figure out the most effective way to attack hitters in the major leagues, while keeping his pitch count under control. “The one thing we really didn’t want to do when he first came here was to change his approach to attacking hitters. If there was a change, it would be because he initiated it. Here’s a guy who because he is such a rare combination of power and finesse, you know his pitch distribution is perhaps 52 to 55% fastballs, which is lower than the norm. But because of his feel for secondary pitches, we weren’t going to change that.” That said, Farrell recognized that using all his pitches made his pitch counts go higher in Japan. “He pitched to the full count. He used all the pitches.” But in a context where pitch counts are closely monitored, getting quick outs with fastballs and cutters becomes more important. “I think he is naturally making that change himself.”

* * *

Clearly, there are significant differences in baseball on two sides of the Pacific Ocean. With guidance from the manager, the pitching coach, and the catcher, Matsuzaka is using his talent and baseball intelligence to navigate his way in his new setting. That much is clear.

But, how much sense does it make to understand these differences as grounded deeply in a broader culture?

The Red Sox manager, Terry Francona, has been consistently reluctant to turn to cultural or ethnic differences in discussing his new pitcher. After the Atlanta game, when Francona removed Matsuzaka after the 8th inning, to the disappointment of the pitcher, one of the veteran local reporters asked “is it a point of pride for him to go deep into a game? Something from the baseball culture over there?”

Francona’s replied clearly that “I don’t think it is cultural. Schilling is like that. Good pitchers feel that way. He didn’t want to come out of the game.” For this manager, a “good pitcher” is universally recognizable, transcending culture: he is determined; he wants to pitch to the end whenever he can. Farrell echoed this point in our conversation, using a time honored American idiom: “baseball is such a melting pot. Regardless of where you are from, body mechanics are body mechanics, deliveries are deliveries, competitors are competitors.” And both he and Francona saw Matsuzaka as fiercely competitive, with a tremendous sense of responsibility to the team.

After Matsuzaka’s next outing in Texas, Francona echoed this view of Matsuzaka as an individual pitcher, not a representative of Japanese culture. An upset stomach had forced Matsuzaka to leave the game after just five innings, having given up five runs. Matsuzaka later apologized to his teammates, through the media, for having “inconvenienced” them. Francona responded, "He could have said, 'Get somebody else out there' in the second inning and we all would have understood. That's not the culture, that's the person. He seems to get it, on a lot of levels."

None of this is to deny that there are different modes of playing baseball in different places. After all, American League baseball is quite different from the game as played in the National League, so much so that for pitchers to switch from one league to another is a major adjustment. One persuasive explanation of the difference rests in the impact of the designated hitter rule. Whether a pitcher must bat, or whether a designated hitter does so, has all sorts of impact on strategy, and on the challenges facing the opposing pitcher.

It is tempting to suggest that this single rule produces a contrast in baseball as played in two US leagues nearly as great as the difference that exists between nations. After all, when the current Red Sox ace Josh Beckett joined the team in 2006 from the National League, he struggled for his entire first season. He is only regaining his true form in his second full year. Several local sports announcers and writers have described the difficulty of this adjustment as comparable to that experienced by Matsuzaka. In fact, it is possible that Daisuke might well make his adjustment as quickly as Beckett, or faster.

* * *

Just as the players, coaches, manager, and media, have various understandings of cultural contrasts and adjustments, so do scholars and other expert commentators.

The heavyweight contestants in the debate about whether, and in what ways, one should attribute essential cultural characteristics to a Japanese (or an American) “way” of baseball are William Kelly and Robert Whiting. Kelly is a leading anthropologist at Yale University who has been studying Japanese baseball for more than a decade. Whiting is a well-known baseball commentator based in Japan, who has written a number of

fascinating books. The titles of Whiting's books make his perspective crystal clear: *You Gotta have Wa* and *The Samurai Way of Baseball*. One can identify, he believes, an essentially "Japanese" way of playing the game, deeply rooted in durable traditions going back far in time.

Kelly takes a different approach, one I find much more convincing. His perspective, and mine, is not to deny that there are differences between cultures and nations in perception—how baseball is understood and how it is discussed. Nor do we deny differences in the way the game is actually played—whether practice routines or game strategies.

But these differences are fluid and shifting. One finds great variation within a culture. One finds profound commonalities across cultures. And of greatest importance, cultures interact, changing dynamically over time. This is the case whether one looks at sports, at family, or at the workplace. Cultures are shaped by history and by global interactions.

Kelly, for instance, observes that the organized rooting in Japanese professional baseball, which is so often described as a quintessential product of Japanese cultural traditions of group solidarity, was in fact imported from the United States. Japanese college baseball teams who traveled to the US in the early 20th century observed American college *football* cheerleading squads. They were impressed, and they brought the institution of the organized rooting squad home with them. It later spread to Japan's professional leagues.⁵

⁵ William Kelly, "Japan: The Hanshin Tigers and Japanese Professional Baseball," in George Gmelch, ed., *Baseball without Borders: The International Pastime* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006) p. 35.

Consider, as well, the matter of the intense practice regimen, often noted in the media. This matter of practice was at the heart of the adjustments undertaken by Matsuzaka and his coach. Certainly players in Japan today engage in practices of throwing and running (*nagekomi, hashirkomi*), which are not typical in the United States, and are indeed not easy to translate into a compact English phrase. But to understand them as essentially or traditionally Japanese, rooted in some cultural essence, is deeply misleading. Looking back, one finds evidence that these practices, like organized cheering, were imported from America.

An American observer of baseball in Japan named Robert Fitts several years ago interviewed Iwamoto Takashi, whose professional career began with the Yomiuri Giants in 1953. Iwamoto recalls, “We didn’t practice that much in the old days. You see, many of the players used to be in the military, so they already had lots of basic stamina.” As Iwamoto tells the story, at training camp in the 1950s, there were none of the fierce practices, such as “1,000 fungo drills” later said to be essential features of Japanese baseball culture.

“The older players would slowly jog around the field—just taking their time. Then they would start batting....They would hit about ten ground balls for us to catch, and then we were finished. We didn’t run that much.

“But then, five of our stars went to spring training in the United States, and they were all shocked! When they came home, Mr. Kawakami [Tetsuharu] started running!

“I said, ‘What? What has happened?’

“‘This is the American way,’ he answered.

“And that’s how it all began. From then on, in the winter, we started to run. Now, Japanese baseball teams have the reputation of training much harder than the Major League teams.”⁶

The lesson of this baseball story of long ago is that cultures are not like billiard balls, hard and fixed entities that bounce off each other. They are more like scoops of ice cream, which melt together in a dish, and then perhaps refreeze in new flavors, only to melt again.

I have discovered similar patterns in the history of labor and management in Japan and the United States. Just a few years before Iwamoto Takashi and his teammates were learning new ways of practicing from Japanese-American players like Wally Yonamine, Japanese business managers were learning new systems of Quality Control from American managers and engineers. And just as Japanese players took American practices of throwing and running and changed them to so-called Japanese styles, so did Japanese managers and workplace foreman improvise new modes of production, which they called “Total Quality Control.”

Eventually, these practices were re-exported back to the United States. Will Japanese baseball improvisations also find their way back into American baseball culture? Of course, they have already started to do this, via players like Matsuzaka. It remains to be seen what further changes will come.

Certainly, American players are willing to try new things, just as the Japanese players did in the 1950s. When Matsuzaka Daisuke and Okajima Hideki showed up in camp with Japanese-made socks, with individual toes (like gloves for the foot), their

⁶ Robert K. Fitts, *Remembering Japanese Baseball: An Oral History of the Game* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005) pp. 44-45.

teammates were curious. Matsuzaka and Okajima explained that these socks gave them a better grip on the ground, and improved their stability as they pitched. As the New York Times and the NESN cable network both reported, a number of the Red Sox players started to use these socks, ordered in bulk from Japan. This is a small example, to be sure, but perhaps a harbinger of adaptations to come. [Perhaps omit this paragraph if not enough space?]

* * *

The transformative impact of Japanese players will depend, of course, on how well they perform. After three splendid games, Matsuzaka ended the month of May on a downward trend. His rough start in Texas on the 25th (five earned runs, including two home runs, surrendered in five innings) was almost certainly due to his stomach bug. The offense was solid, however, scoring ten runs and giving Daisuke a “win” that he clearly felt embarrassed to add to his total, although his teammates admired his toughness in lasting as long as he did. But in a difficult bookend to a down-up-down month, the start of May 30th against the powerful Cleveland Indians was almost as weak as the disastrous outing on May 3.

His command was poor, and the Indians battered him for 6 earned runs in 5 2/3 innings, ending Matsuzaka’s personal winning streak at four, and dropping his record to 7-3. While nothing to be embarrassed about, Matsuzaka’s performance over the first third of the season made it clear that even for this gifted pitcher, adjusting to a new league was a complicated matter, a work in progress.

The following night, the team's co-owner, Tom Werner, spoke at the gala annual dinner of the Japan Society of Boston. In jest, to be sure, he started his keynote speech:

"There was a pitcher in Japan who we knew had the talent to pitch major league baseball, the mental makeup to deal with the pressure in Boston, and the savvy to come into Fenway Park and immediately make an impact on our club.

"And that is why we signed . . . Hideki Okajima."

With Okajima and his wife in attendance, the crowd of about 350 Japanophiles and baseball fans roared with laughter, masking perhaps a shade of anxiety. They could only hope that by the end of the season, Matsuzaka's impact would indeed rank as highly as that of his colleague from the Giants.

Global Reach, Local Reactions

The traditional mark of mid-season rest and reflection for America's national pastime comes the week after the July 4 Independence Day holiday, during the three-day break for the All-Star game. After a disappointing three game sweep at the hands of the Detroit Tigers, ending on July 8 with Daisuke Matsuzaka's only weak start in seven outings since the beginning of June, six Red Sox players headed for the annual inter-league showdown, this year in San Francisco. The rest of the team headed home for a brief mid-summer vacation. Given the team's strong first-half record, the large size of Boston's All Star delegation was no surprise. That the sixth man in the group was Hideki Okajima was, for many observers, not only in Boston or Japan, the single most surprising and delightful story of the season.

The team's record stood at 19 games over .500 (53-34). The Red Sox ranked first in their division by a full 10 games thanks to the surprisingly mediocre play of their expected rivals. Barely ahead of the formidable Tigers (52-34), the Red Sox also held the best record in either league. What mid-season conclusions might one reach about this team, about Daisuke and his increasingly famous countryman, and about their global and local impact?

* * *

With the team so far ahead of its rivals in the division, it might seem strange to read that fans and the media were pessimistic about the second-half prospect. But Boston fans have enough painful memories of fast starts followed by late season collapses to know how to find the cloud in every silver lining. No true citizen of Red Sox nation is unaware that in 1978, the team was a full 14 games ahead of the Yankees as late as July

(the 18th, to be exact), and still managed no better than a tie at season's end, followed by a traumatic defeat in a one game playoff.

And in the summer of 2007, it was hard to deny that a few clouds had gathered. At 36-15, the team had reached 21 games over .500 on May 29. But from this point, through the break, they lost more games than they won (17-19). There were some good reasons to be worried.

Curt Schilling gave what might have been the final brilliant performance of his career on June 7, a 1-0 complete game masterpiece in which he carried a no-hit game until two outs in the 9th inning. But then, after two disastrous starts in which he surrendered a total of 11 earned runs in 9.1 innings (10.6 ERA), he went on the injured list with shoulder tendinitis. His prospects for any sort of a return, not to mention a return to top form, were far from certain. With an untested rookie (Kason Gabbard) in his place, the back end of the starting rotation was definitely shaky.

The bullpen had two undeniable all-stars, closer Papelbon and the “shadow hero” from Japan, but two men could not be expected to shoulder the entire late inning load. The Red Sox needed a reliable right-handed set up man to complement Okajima, but the main candidates (Donnelly, Timlin) were struggling to come back from injuries, and another alternative, Manny Delcarmen, was a second-year player still learning to pitch on the big stage.

Of greater concern than these pitching questions, though, was the power failure in the batting order. The twin engines that drove the Red Sox scoring machine in the previous four seasons—David Ortiz and Manny Ramirez—were sputtering. Both were getting their base hits, with averages of .314 and .284 respectively at the break. But for

sluggers at the heart of the order, too many of the hits were singles, with hardly a home run to be seen. From June 1 through July 8, Ortiz hit 5 and Ramirez just 3, well under half their typical number.

Elsewhere in the lineup, the newly acquired—and expensive—right fielder, J.D. Drew, had mediocre first half numbers: a .263 average, just 6 home runs and 33 RBI. And the highly touted new lead-off man, Julio Lugo, was slumping in historic fashion. Over a stretch of 13 games from June 15 to July 2, Lugo went 0 for 33. He ended the first half with a glimmer of hope, three hits including a home run in the final game against the Tigers, but this slender player's .197 batting average was barely more than his weight.

* * *

Set against the concern for these weaknesses, the brightest stars in Boston's June sky were the two rookie pitchers from Japan. Okajima Hideki continued his sterling relief work. In 15 games from June 1 to the break, he pitched 17 2/3 innings, and gave up only one run! The Red Sox website posted an on-line poll in early July, offering fans a chance to vote for the "first half team MVP." Okajima (17%) placed third, after Kevin Youkilis (21%) and pitcher Josh Beckett (48%), among 50,000 online voters. In the eyes of a number of local writers, his performance during the first half of the season made him the single most valuable player on the team.

And after his disappointing final two outings in May, it appeared that Daisuke Matsuzaka had made enough adjustments to establish himself as the high-impact star the Red Sox had hoped for. His ERA of 1.59 for the month of June easily led all the team's

starters. Local scribes began to speculate on his chances to win the Cy Young award if this performance continued.

Matsuzaka first two June outings were strong efforts. In most circumstances they would have sufficed for two wins. But the offense—which had given Daisuke unusually good run support overall—fell short.

At Oakland on June 5, Matsuzaka held his opponent to 2 runs in 7 innings. He used a strong fastball to set up his breaking pitches. But the Red Sox—despite the gift of seven walks and two bases loaded opportunities—could manage just 3 base hits and not a single run.

Next on this arduous road trip (about 7,000 miles of travel over the span of a week) came the sort of match-up Matsuzaka was looking forward to when he decided to move to the major leagues. He faced Randy Johnson, now with the Arizona Diamondbacks, still a formidable and fierce competitor, boasting 284 career wins and a certain path to the Hall of Fame. Interest was intense: no less than 46,000 fans crowded into the ballpark. The Diamondbacks ordinarily drew half that number. A week earlier, even a game with the San Francisco Giants and Barry Bonds—notorious for his alleged steroid use and famous as the man soon to surpass Hank Aaron as the greatest home run hitter of all time—had attracted only 26,000 fans.

The game unfolded as hoped-for over the first six innings: a tight duel between two ace pitchers. The Red Sox scored only one run against Johnson in six innings, and they scored none at all against three relief pitchers. Over two entire games, their hitters had offered a starvation diet to Daisuke—just one run of support.

Without much offense, Matsuzaka had to be nearly perfect to win, but he hurt himself with walks. Both of the two runs he surrendered came from batters who had walked. Pitching coach Farrell suggested, postgame, that “he has in some cases been too fine with his pitches.”

But this was nonetheless a powerful performance: nine strikeouts in six innings, just four hits (2 singles, 2 doubles). An effective mix of fastballs and breaking pitches had the Arizona batters off balance—his strikeouts came on fastballs, sliders, curves, and cut fastballs. Despite recording two losses, Matsuzaka’s May adjustments, especially the return to a more familiar practice routine, seemed to be bearing fruit in June.

The harvest came in the next four outings. In match-ups with San Francisco, San Diego, Seattle, and Tampa Bay from June 16 through July 3, Matsuzaka allowed just 2 runs in 29 innings. His hits surrendered in each game (3, 5, 3, 4) would have satisfied lesser pitchers as *run* totals.

The game against the San Francisco Giants on a sunny Boston Sunday, June 16, set Daisuke Matsuzaka and Hideki Okajima head-to-head with the great and notorious Barry Bonds. It was surely the team’s most exciting game of the season thus far, and I will return to it to close this chapter.

This shut-out performance was followed by two one-run outings, once more on the west coast. The Red Sox griped about their travel schedule, and with good reason. Added to the ordinary need to make west coast trips against American League rivals, this season’s interleague match-ups set the Red Sox against National League teams from the Western Division, making three trips necessary over the summer.

After a week on the west coast in early June (Oakland, Arizona), the Boston players spent just one week back home before taking an even larger circular route, Boston-Atlanta-San-Diego-Seattle-Boston over 11 days. Local broadcasters felt the need to offer even American viewers a geography lesson, projecting maps on the screen tracing this 10,000 mile journey, down and up, back and forth, across the continent. The team's tired bats could be explained in part, at least, by jet lag.

But Matsuzaka's arm, far from tired, was finding a comfortable slot.

This didn't seem the case for the first inning of the game at San Diego. This was the second start of the month against a pitcher certain to enter the Hall of Fame. The rival was Greg Maddux, still pitching effectively at 41 years old, with a career total of 340 wins. Matsuzaka, as in one earlier game against Seattle, walked the first three men to load the bases with none out in the first inning. He had no command of any of his pitches. But unlike that night, he found his groove quickly. He did allow one run, on a single, but retired the side with a pop out, strikeout, and fly out and no further damage.

The Red Sox once more offered only modest, but on this night sufficient, run support: a total of two runs on four singles in the 4th inning. Daisuke relied this night more than in most previous games on a very strong fastball, effectively mixed with the occasional curve and slider. This shift to a more typically American-style of attacking the hitters was effective. With his pitch count high, due to his walk-plagued first inning (32 pitches), Matsuzaka's night ended after the 6th with some gritty pitching in a jam. With men on first and third, Daisuke recorded his 9th strikeout against the final man he faced, Marcus Giles, on a flurry of fastballs.

In a pattern that was becoming familiar to Red Sox fans, Okajima and Papelbon closed out the game with impressive confidence in the 8th and 9th innings. Okajima struck out two of the three men he faced; Papelbon retired the side in order. The only tricky moment came in the 7th inning, a somewhat shaky bridge between the starter and the two ace finishers. As announcer Remy put it, the Red Sox strategy was to somehow “piece together the 7th inning to get to Okajima.”

This road game, more than any to this point in the season, made good on one promise to Matsuzaka in the November recruitment DVD—that Red Sox fans constituted a “nation” of support at ballparks everywhere. In the final innings, as the Red Sox clung to their slim lead, the cheers of support for Okajima and Papelbon were extraordinarily loud. The San Diego ballpark—3000 miles from Boston—had been converted for one night into Fenway Park West. Matsuzaka’s interpreter Masa Hoshino told me that as many as one-third of the fans were citizens of Red Sox nation.

Matsuzaka’s final June start, in Seattle, was also the last game of what felt to the players like an endless road trip, nine games in ten days in three cities. Red Sox fans were almost as tired as the players—these west coast games began at 10 pm in the eastern time zone, ending most nights after 1 am in Boston. For fans who needed their sleep, NESN relieved the late-night burden by broadcasting one hour condensed “coffee time” replays the morning after each west coast game, from 8 to 9 am.

After losses in the first two games of the Mariners series (and seven consecutive losses in the Seattle ballpark reaching back to the 2006 season), bleary-eyed fans were hoping that Matsuzaka would send the team home on a winning note. Daisuke did his

part. He struck out Ichiro on three pitches to open the game. No first inning floundering this time, as he set down the next two as well, striking out Jose Vidro.

Daisuke went on to pitch 8 innings, keeping ahead in the count, giving up just three hits and one run, striking out 8 men. He mixed his pitches effectively, using his full range of breaking balls as well as a lively fastball. His final strikeout, with a man on second in the bottom of the 8th inning, came on three straight fastballs of 91-93 mph.

After setting down the first 8 batters, the backup catcher, Burke (giving Johjima a rest) doubled sharply to left field. Ichiro followed with his first hit ever off Matsuzaka, a soft bloop to center, accounting for the only run he would allow. He retired the next 10 batters in order, and faced no significant threat until the bottom of the eighth inning.

But the Red Sox offense, once again, failed to produce. The team scored only a single run in the 7th inning, made possible in fact by a Mariners' fielding error. The inning ended in frustration, with Ortiz and Ramirez failing to advance runners who had reached first and second with just one out.

Okajima pitched the bottom of the ninth and uncharacteristically got into a jam. He let men reach 1st and 3rd with just one out, and Papelbon rescued him with a pop and a strikeout. But in the bottom of the 11th inning, the first string relievers had been used. One of the few inconsistent relievers on the team, Joel Piniero, walked Ichiro. He scored the game-ending run on a double by Jose Lopez.

One of the key stories of the game, and the whole series, was the central role of the four Japanese players on the two teams. That the position breakdown set two Red Sox pitchers against two Mariners hitters made for a three day series of direct one-on-one match-ups, a sort of Japan vs. Japan game within the game. It would hardly be

exaggeration to say Ichiro above all, but Johjima as well (with one home run and four RBIs in the first two games), made the two greatest contributions to the Seattle sweep. Certainly, Ichiro was the batting hero of game three, knocking in the first Seattle run, and scoring the second and winning run.

And Matsuzaka had pitched brilliantly, despite the loss. For the month of June, his record was a deceptive 2 wins, 2 losses, and one no-decision. In these five games, the Red Sox scored a total of just 5 runs. That Matsuzaka managed to walk off the mound with even 2 wins was testimony to his superb pitching under pressure.

As if to say—“even if we only score one run, I can win if I throw a shutout,” Daisuke’s next outing, back home on July 3, a lovely summer evening before the Independence Day holiday, was stronger than the previous game. Eight innings, four hits, no runs, eight strikeouts. He had command of all his pitches, but especially a baffling slider. The young Tampa Bay players were entirely overmatched. And this night, for the first time in quite a while, the batters helped out. Julio Lugo ended his 0-33 slump with a two run single in the third inning, and Matsuzaka coasted to an easy 4-0 victory, his tenth win of the season.

Postgame, the buzz from both the Japanese and American press was only positive. One reporter asked “was this prime time Matsuzaka?” For the first time all season, interpreter Hoshino seemed at a loss to convey the literal sense of the idiom, but he did get the point across: “are we now seeing the true Matsuzaka?” The answer was predictably cautious: “Well, its not perfect, but I’m gradually getting back to a good place.”

The papers the next day were less restrained. One Boston writer called his effort, with its dizzying variety of breaking pitches “textbook Matsuzaka.” And one opposing player, Carlos Pena, a local favorite who grew up just north of Boston, offered an amused and admiring account of the confusion produced by Matsuzaka’s varied arsenal: “He’s got, like, 25 pitches...I don’t know how many signs you [the catcher] can have with one hand. He pitches backwards. The count is 0-2 and he throws his fastball finally. Usually you get ahead with the fastballs. He’s unpredictable. What’s his out pitch? All of them.”

* * *

Through a month of brilliant pitching, Matsuzaka Daisuke and his shadow hero, Okajima Hideki, established secure places for themselves in the hearts and minds of the Red Sox faithful. Okajima rode this local support all the way to San Francisco. Announced as a candidate for the final “fan internet vote” spot on the American League All Star team, Okajima found himself the focus of a Red Sox marketing campaign for votes both in his new home and his old one. An advertising sign behind the mound, in Japanese as well as English, appeared on the TV screen with almost every pitch of each game during the week of balloting: “vote for Okajima Hideki on MLB.com.”

This trans-pacific election campaign was one small example of the new global reach of the Red Sox. And the globalization of this one team was part of a larger continuing transformation of America’s “national pastime.” This transformation was most evident in the extraordinary proportion of foreign players in the 2007 All Star game. The American League was particularly diverse. About 20 percent of all major league

players in 2007 were from outside the United States, but over half of the full roster of 32 American League All-Stars was foreign born (17 players, 53%). Nearly three-fourths of the position players (14 of 20) were non-American.

And by the count on the official website of MLB.com, Derek Jeter was the *only one* of the eight starting position players from the United States.⁷ MLB's measuring stick for "foreign" or "United States" origin was strangely arbitrary. Among the starters, Alex Rodriguez was born in New York City. His parents were natives of the Dominican Republic, and they did move back to their homeland for four years of Rodriguez's childhood, but he lived in Miami from the age of nine. Pudge Rodriguez was born and raised in Puerto Rico, not one of the 50 states but nonetheless an American territory. Both players are US citizens. But even if one adjusts the numbers to reflect these facts, the globalization of American baseball, mainly to the Caribbean, Latin America, and Asia, is undeniable, and it was on full display as players headed to the All-Star Game.

Perhaps more than any other sport, baseball is a game of statistics. Fans and the media not only keep track of balls, strikes, hits and runs and all manner of game-related, official statistics. Since the early days of the game, they also have maintained unofficial counts of the race and ethnicity of players.

For many decades, this counting game was filled with tension. Nativist defenders of America as a white, mainly Anglo-Saxon nation, viewed the influx of immigrants and immigrant ball players, from eastern or southern Europe, not to mention African Americans, with considerable anxiety and resistance. Even in the early 1970s, as Hank Aaron pursued Babe Ruth's all-time home run record, he was subject to some virulent

⁷ The birthplaces of the other 2007 AL All-Star game position players are: Dominican Republic (Ortiz, Polanco, Guerrero), Japan (Ichiro), Venezuela (Ordonez).

racist criticism from fans. These tensions are not entirely gone today. In July 2007, former Yankee, Gary Sheffield, now with the Detroit Tigers, stated that Yankee manager Joe Torre treated the white players better than the black ones.

While tensions thus remain, over the decades of the 20th century, the idea of America as a melting pot, where people from all over the globe realize their dreams, became a defining positive characteristic of American identity. In baseball, anxiety and resistance over the influx of new groups for the most part gave way to celebration of the game's increasingly global points of origin. The MLB.com report on "AL All-Stars going international" was positive to the extent of exaggerating the numbers for dramatic effect.

Anxiety in 2007 was rather expressed that in one important area, diversity was *decreasing*. During the springtime celebration of the 60 year anniversary of Jackie Robinson's joining the Dodgers, in 1947, as the first African-American player in the major leagues, numerous commentators, white and black, lamented the decline in the numbers of African American players in the major leagues.

The immigrant communities themselves—and the African-American community—viewed the success of their favorite sons with extraordinary pride.

The May/June edition of *American Jewish Life Magazine* published an essay titled "Why Every American Jew Should Love the Boston Red Sox and Hate the New York Yankees." The gist of this account was that the Red Sox have fielded a larger number of Jewish players, by far, than the Yankees: "the Yankees have had the luxury for decades of sitting in the heart of America's largest Jewish population...In spite of this, there have been a relatively small number of Jewish players in pinstripes."

The Red Sox, by contrast, on August 8, 2005, put 3 Jewish players on the field at once, reportedly the first time in MLB history that a single team has done this (there was a game in the 1940s with four Jewish players, but two on each team). Also, the Red Sox are the only team to have had four Jewish players on their 25 man roster at one time (also in 2005).

This story was written with irony, in places quite hilarious, as if to say—“I know this is not the most important thing about baseball or Judaism.” But behind the humor, the author does not hide a genuine admiration for the Jewish Red Sox, who “make Jews proud to be Americans, to be budding young ballplayers, to be Jewish.”

One found similar pride in summer of 2007 in accounts of a brilliant rookie outfielder, Jacoby Ellsbury, in the mainstream media, in blogs, and among the Native American community itself. This young man is a member of the Navajo tribe of Native Americans. There have been a number of Native American players over the years in the major leagues, but he is the first ever from the Navajo tribe. When regular center fielder Coco Crisp was briefly injured in late June, Ellsbury made his Red Sox debut in very impressive fashion. He compiled a .375 batting average in six games. He electrified fans with his running, in home game scoring in an amazing burst of speed from second on a wild pitch.

If the Yankees trail the Red Sox in their welcome to Jewish players, among teams on the East Coast they have been ahead—at least until this year—in bringing Japanese talent to the big stage. The first half of 2007 saw the first occasion in major league history when four Japanese players competed in a single game, two on each team. This happened in the May 4 game pitting the Mariners against the Yankees: Igawa and Matsui

for New York versus Ichiro and Johjima for Seattle. Although, as a Red Sox partisan I would argue that the three game Boston-Seattle series had an even more interesting and significant density of Japanese player contribution.

The veteran NHK announcer Kudo Saburo told me in late June that “nowadays, it doesn’t much surprise fans or announcers when two or three Japanese players appear in one game.” In a telephone interview from Tokyo, he explained that as a broadcaster, he is trying to shift focus from particular Japanese players toward the teams they play for, and suggested that fans are doing the same. Kudo noted that this change was significantly accelerated with the advent of a pitcher like Matsuzaka, because a pitcher, more than any other single player, has a major impact on whether a team wins or loses that game.

Of course, one shouldn’t exaggerate this shift. Japanese newspapers still print a daily list of the results of every Japanese player, a sort of “Japan team box score,” in as much or more detail than the actual team results. And even if it was not top headline news, nonetheless, Kudo and other Japanese reporters I spoke to very quickly identified the Seattle-Yankees series as the first time four players from Japan took part in one game.

Given that virtually every community—whether defined by nationality, ethnicity, race, or religion—roots for its players this way, it would be exceedingly odd for Japan to be different. Japanese fans are certainly no *more* obsessed with “their” players than other communities. And they seem less single-minded in tracking the unofficial “MLB Japan team” than a few years earlier. National perceptions of sports are dynamic and shifting.

Indeed, the *Boston* fans appear to have made a greater emotional investment in the success of *their* Japanese players than the fans in Japan. In a discussion on the eve of the

All Star break, team owner and CEO Larry Lucchino told me that “We did anticipate a huge Japanese reaction. Matsuzaka is well known [there], and well regarded. But we underestimated the American reaction, how large it has been and how positive. Partly because of the drama of the negotiation, the money involved. Last night at Comerica [Park, in Detroit], I saw so many children and families with Matsuzaka shirts.”

Indeed, these shirts, whether in English, or even better with Japanese emblazoned on front or back, were one of the hottest fashion items in Boston in 2007. Even among five year-olds. One history department colleague told me, “You should hear the kids at my son's kindergarten talk about Daisuke and the Red Sox-- you'd think they were all destined for careers as sports-writers.” The Japanese child who showed up one day to her son's class wearing a Matsuzaka T-shirt was instantly the proudest and most popular boy in the class.

The Red Sox cable network, NESN also made proud use of the team's new Japanese connection in its local advertising. As the network's programming director explained to me, “Matsuzaka, and Okajima, added a whole new dimension to the idea of the ‘Red Sox nation,’ and we wanted to highlight that.” Throughout the first half of the season, NESN used a literally “global” ad to promote upcoming game broadcasts. This eye-catching commercial begins with scenes of the opening pitch and flashbulb fireworks of Matsuzaka's April 11 debut. With the first pitch, the television announcer shouts out: “The Daisuke Matsuzaka era has officially begun.” Stirring music and a series of action shots of Daisuke and his teammates follow. The final frame begins with an aerial view of Fenway Park, zooms out to a satellite view of Boston, then New England, then finally the entire globe from Japan to the United States. The announcer says, in English, “Red Sox

Nation, Gone Global, on NESN.” A phrase in Japanese is briefly superimposed on the screen: 「一つの王国一つのネットワーク」, literally “One Kingdom, One Network.” The characters fade and shift into English, “One Nation, One Network.” The globe transforms itself into a baseball.

The use of the Japanese word for “kingdom” brought to mind a similar moment at Daisuke’s debut on April 11. The huge center field scoreboard introduced Consul General Suzuki in English, as he threw out the first pitch, as the representative of “the kingdom of Japan” (to the Consul General’s considerable surprise).

A political scientist might ask, isn’t Red Sox nation better translated as a democracy than a kingdom? The NESN producers, of course, did not convene an academic conference to prepare this ad; I spoke to them later in the summer, and learned they were not aware that of the anachronistic understanding of Japanese political culture it conveyed. And it would be silly to dwell too much on these political implications aside. This 30 second spot nicely captured and conveyed the local pride and excitement at the place of Red Sox at the hub of an increasingly global baseball.

This excitement turned to frustration of an interesting kind when the American press began to report that the reaction to Matsuzaka in Japan had cooled off considerably over the first half of the season, in part due to disappointment at his performance. Murakami Naofumi, the Asahi reporter covering Matsuzaka from spring training through April, wrote from Tokyo just before the All Star game that “In Japan, it seems that the feverish Matsuzaka reporting has cooled down. With it now common for Japanese players to do well in the major leagues, fan attention heats up easily and cools down fast.”

A report in the newspaper, *USA Today*, on June 26 announced “Matsuzaka mania subsides in Japan,” and provoked a strange form of pro-Matsuzaka “Japan-bashing.”

Radio talk show hosts and their callers were furious:

“What’s wrong with people over there?”

“Don’t they understand how hard it is to adjust to a new league?”

“Can’t they see what a fantastic job he is doing? What do they expect, that every game is a no hitter?”

In a remarkable combination of insularity and internationalism wrapped up together, the citizens of Red Sox nation seemed to be saying “we appreciate Japanese ballplayers more than the Japanese people themselves.”

* * *

The story in *USA Today* on the cooling of Daisuke fever made its point by noting that “Matsuzaka’s first meeting with Barry Bonds (June 16) wasn’t the top story in any of Japan’s five major daily sports papers.” Indeed, this seems odd. For me at least, this was the best game of the season so far, a match-up of two teams that had never played in the regular season. The two teams had not met for an official game since 1912, the year Fenway Park opened. The Giants were then in New York, and they faced the Red Sox in the World Series. The final game, at Fenway Park, set two of the greatest pitchers of the era against each other. Smoky Joe Wood of the Red Sox, a 34 game winner in the regular season, came on in relief to beat Christy Mathewson in a ten inning thriller, 3-2.

The centennial anniversary of that season will come in 2012, Matsuzaka’s final year of his Red Sox contract. Perhaps he will make a similarly memorable appearance.

Already, in this first year of the Matsuzaka era, the Giants-Red Sox matchup set baseball's best home runner hitter against both of Boston's new pitchers from Japan.

Matsuzaka allowed only three hits in seven innings of shutout ball, claiming 8 strikeouts with just three walks (one intentional). His control was sharp. One local writer called his precision "surgical," as his varied pitches caught the corners (and he won a few generous calls). Staked by a Ramirez homerun in the fourth inning to what he called a "precious" one-run lead, he managed to protect it, passing the ball over to Okajima in the 8th inning.

Matsuzaka faced only two serious threats. One came in the first inning. David Roberts, a Red Sox hero in the 2004 miracle comeback against the Yankees, now with San Francisco, started the game with a walk, took second on a ground out, and was still there when Barry Bonds strode to the plate with two out. Francona signaled for an intentional walk. Matsuzaka scowled, clearly irritated. He snapped at the ball each time Varitek threw it back. As he told the Japanese reporters after the game, reminded by one that his last intentional walk was in the year 2003: I dislike intentional walks the most of any tactic.....In Japan, I refused (to do it)." Matsuzaka might have been annoyed, but the strategy worked. He retired the next batter, Molina, on an easy ground ball.

Daisuke sailed through the next four innings, allowing just one double and one single, retiring Bonds n the 4th on a deep fly to center.

His second pinch came in the 6th inning. A walk to Winn and a single to Ray Durham put Barry Bonds at the plate with no outs. This time, there was no question of tactics—Daisuke was delighted to challenge Bonds directly. He noted postgame, in a

somewhat defensive reference to the first inning free pass: “This time, I could not avoid challenging him, and I had no thought of that at all.”

Bonds fell behind 1-2, then hit a hard grounder to the third baseman, Lowell, for the first out. If the infielders had not been shifted to cover the right side, it would have been an easy double play. With runners now in scoring position, Matsuzaka got the final two outs on an infield line drive and a strikeout.

The day’s final moment of high drama came in the eighth inning, as Okajima struggled to protect the slim lead. He almost failed. In an eerily precise replay of Matsuzaka’s troubles two innings earlier, he too gave up a walk to Winn, a single to Durham, and faced Barry Bonds with two on, none out. He threw two balls to Bonds. Okajima had lost his rhythm. Postgame he admitted that “I got too excited.” But a mound visit from Farrell, who according to Okajima simply asked, in Japanese, “Are you ok?” (*Daijobu*), and followed, in English, “Just challenge him,” seems to have calmed him down. To the delight (and perhaps surprise) of 37,000 fans, Okajima struck Bonds out on three pitches. He then escaped the inning with a shallow fly, and a grounder to short. Papelbon retired three in a row in the ninth. Game over. A 1-0 shutout for Matsuzaka and his two bullpen friends.

Matsuzaka and Okajima left the ballpark that day as happy as the fans. Matsuzaka’s Seibu coach, Higashio, had been visiting for the week. Daisuke noted after the game: “It was my best result of the season; I think he can be at ease going home to Japan). And Okajima joked to the Japanese reporters: “If I get hit, I’m thinking, I can’t go back to Japan.”

As far as Red Sox nation was concerned, the unappreciative fans “back home” would have to wait a while for his return.

Extending the Japanese Connection

A few days before the July 10 All-Star game in San Francisco, NHK announcer Kudo Saburo commented to me by email that “it feels almost lonely for only two Japanese players to be there.” From the perspective of Japanese fans and media, it was now only natural that players from Japan took part each year in this showcase event.

The results on the All-Star playing field surely erased such lonely feelings, while offering dramatic proof of the global sources of baseball excellence. Ichiro was the hero of the evening, a perfect three hits in three at bats.

After singles in his first two appearances, Ichiro came to the plate with a man on first in the fifth inning, and the AL team trailing 1-0. He drove a long fly to the base of the center field wall. As it caromed sharply away from the fielders, he managed to come round the bases to score an inside-the-park home run, the first ever in all-star game history. He was named the game MVP, winning a new car that night, and a few days later a generous new multi-year contract with the Mariners. The “Ichiro era” was now certain to continue in Seattle for quite some time, probably to the end of his remarkable career.

* * *

The unexpected Red Sox All-Star, Okajima Hideki, did not get a chance to play in the game. But he returned from his All Star sojourn to pick up where he had left off—as a strong anchor to what had become the strongest bullpen in the league. In eight appearances through the remainder of July, he gave up just one run in 12 and 2/3 innings, striking out nearly one in three of the batters he faced.

Okajima's stellar performance was a national as well as a local story. Earlier in the season many observers, and to be honest I was one, doubted that he could sustain his early success. Wouldn't the batters eventually figure him out? With each additional no-run outing, the certainty grew that the Red Sox had made a brilliant move to bring him to Boston, as did the attention of observers near and afar.

At the end of July, Okajima was the featured player in [a](#) long article in *The Wall Street Journal*, the premier financial newspaper in the US. The article sought to answer a two-part question I had posed earlier in the season to Craig Shipley, the head of international scouting for the Red Sox: when you are scouting baseball talent in Japan, trying to decide who will succeed in the major leagues, what are the most important characteristics to look for, and how does one judge them?

Like all scouts, Shipley is stingy with information. He told me "there are [only] certain things I am willing to discuss." This question was certainly not one of them. He responded with silence.

The *Journal* reporter—I was jealously happy to notice—had only a bit more success getting other scouts to offer useful replies to this question. His article began by noting that the "wild variation" in the performance of players from Japan is a mystery and "a source of anxiety for team owners, who have committed \$160 million in the past year to acquire Japanese talent."⁸ (Of course, [nearly](#) 2/3 of that sum went to just one man, Daisuke Matsuzaka). Some players did extremely well; others failed completely. What was the difference?

The factor identified by anonymous "coaches, team executives, and scouts" as most crucial to success in the major leagues was neither prior success in Japan, nor the

⁸ Jon Weinbach, "From Japan, With Mixed Results, *Wall Street Journal*, July 27, 2007.

ability to avoid homesickness. It was “the ability to make small adjustments” to the differences in how the game is played in the major leagues. That makes sense. It is well known that Okajima, for instance, developed a new change-up during the off season. He worked with pitching coach Farrell in April to slightly change his wrist motion as he released the ball. The new pitch—more real than the gyroball—has been affectionately dubbed the “Oki-Dokie” by local broadcasters and writers (in English, this phrase is a variant of “OK”, which of course also is a play on his name).

But the most important question remains: how on earth can one know in advance which players will be able to make these adjustments? The *Wall Street Journal* offered no answer, and neither can I. It remains a mystery, or at least a corporate secret. If Craig Shipley has figured it out, he is not telling anyone.

* *

Despite his spectacular string of success in June and the first outing in July, it was clear through the rest of the month that Daisuke Matsuzaka was continuing to struggle with his own small adjustments.

During the Red Sox’ 11 game home stand just after the All Star game, he pitched twice. He was credited with a win in the first outing, July 14, against the Toronto Blue Jays, although his performance was far from stellar.

The Red Sox bats awakened from their recent slumber, staking Matsuzaka to leads of 3-0 and then 4-1 through the first 5 innings. But Toronto batters made solid contact with a number of balls. In the 6th inning, the Blue Jays strung together a double, single and a 3-run homer to tie the game at 4-4.

In the bottom of the same inning, a huge home run by Varitek, followed by some timely hitting and small ball (including a rare double steal), produced 5 Boston runs and rescued the game for Matsuzaka, giving him win number 11. But his line was a modest 6 innings, 9 hits, 4 earned runs, 2 walks and just two strikeouts. Over two games Matsuzaka had surrendered five home runs and 10 earned runs. Something was not quite right.

* * *

Matsuzaka's second start of the homestand came on July 19 against the Chicago White Sox. The game was delayed for two hours by rain that sent many fans home early. I viewed it as the first start for Matsuzaka that had important implications for the team's success in the pennant race. For personal reasons as well, it was Matsuzaka's most important game of the month.

Since early May, the Red Sox had been so far ahead in the division that each game was far more of a personal challenge for Daisuke than a critical "must win" for the team. Even this game, many would argue, could not truly be called a life or death contest. The Red Sox still led the division by 6.5 games.

But one should probably say "only led" by 6.5, rather than "still led." The Yankees were on the move. They had won 8 of their last 10 games while the Red Sox lost 7 of 10, including the two previous games. The footsteps of the evil empire's troops were audible, and the fans were nervous.

As the Red Sox players went through their pregame routine, the Yankees were playing an afternoon game against Toronto. In a corner of the Red Sox clubhouse, the

television showed New York trailing by a run in the bottom of the ninth inning. About 50 media members, rather than talking to players, were intently watching the broadcast. Not a single player was watching. Almost an hour later, Boston closer Jonathan Papelbon walked through the clubhouse and asked who had won the game. When told it was the Blue Jays, he turned and said sarcastically to the wall of media members, “Can we all breathe now?” He followed his question with an expletive.

The Red Sox players were certainly aware that fans and media were fixed on the Yankees in the rear view mirror. Perhaps Papelbon’s anger meant that he and his teammates were not only frustrated at this scoreboard watching, but shared these worries,

For Matsuzaka, this game presented a personal challenge in at least two ways. First, could he begin to establish a record as a “stopper,” the man expected to halt a slide in team fortunes every time he takes the mound, and perhaps the most important quality of a true ace pitcher? This game would be the 4th time in the season that he took the mound after the Red Sox had lost 2 consecutive games.⁹ In the three previous such outings, Matsuzaka was credited with two losses and a no-decision (June 27 at Seattle, a game the Red Sox eventually lost), leading to the team’s only three-game losing streaks of the season. To be fair, however, in two of the games Matsuzaka pitched well enough to win, had the team scored even 3 runs.

Daisuke was certainly aware of this context, noting to a reporter before the game that “When the team really needs a win, pitching to somehow give them a chance to win, that is really important.

Matsuzaka’s second challenge, after two weak starts, was to re-establish some consistency in his performance. In the days before this game, the discussion of May

⁹ June 5 vs. Oakland; June 27 vs. Seattle; July 8 vs Detroit.

about pitch counts and practice routines reignited. John Farrell from the inside, and agent Scott Boras from the outside, expressed concern at Matsuzaka's durability over the course of the longer MLB season. Farrell's opinion mattered more. The day before the game it was widely reported in the Japanese media--but not at all in the Boston papers—that Matsuzaka had been asked to curtail his hard throwing and running on the days before the start. How would this push back toward a more “American” style of preparation affect him?

A single game was not enough to offer a certain judgment.

Matsuzaka certainly did better than the previous two starts. He surrendered just one hit in 5 innings, an RBI single by Pierzynski in a rocky first inning, which followed two walks. He did not allow a hit over the next four innings, and the Red Sox scratched out a pair of runs on four consecutive singles in the second inning. Matsuzaka carried a slim 2-1 lead into the 6th inning.

But his control throughout was shaky, and things fell apart in the 6th—a repeat of his now familiar “one bad inning” syndrome. Matsuzaka walked the bases loaded to start the inning, then gave up another single to Pierzynski, this one for two runs giving Chicago the lead. He left the game with still no outs in the inning. Okajima, for his part, gave up a home run in the 8th inning, his first blast surrendered since the first pitch of the season. The Red Sox could score no runs the rest of the game. Matsuzaka took the loss.

It was an odd game. The long rain delay left the crowd depleted in numbers and spirit. As the clock reached 11:30 pm by the 7th inning, the stands were half empty, although the score was still tight. Matsuzaka showed a frustrating combination of tough survival skills and poor control. No player other than Pierzynski made solid contact with

either his fastball or breaking pitches, but he gave up a season high six walks. As Daisuke noted in the post-game conference, the combination of only two hits and all these walks was hardly different from giving up 8 singles.

Matsuzaka was annoyed by several close calls on pitches that could have been third strikes. Especially, one pitch to Pierzynski in the 6th inning looked to all in the press box to be strike three. It would have retired his nemesis and might have squelched the game winning Chicago rally entirely. But a top pitcher has to recover from the occasional poor call.

In the clubhouse after the game, Matsuzaka sat for a long time staring unhappily into his locker stall, although he grudgingly acknowledged some benefit from the altered preparation routine: “In this cool-down interval, I’ve adjusted by strictly limiting my throwing. Maybe this helped? In any case, my pitches were lively. But my poor control was a reason we lost.”

The adjustments were clearly continuing.

And for Matsuzaka, despite his gloomy face in the locker room, adjusting was part of the fun and the challenge of coming to Boston in the first place. While admitting that he has “probably worried too much at times,” he also told a Nikkan Sports reporter during the All Star break, in one of his first (and it would turn out, only) lengthy interviews of the season, “I’ve gone to a new environment in America, and I need to somehow adjust. Trying various things out, this is something I like and enjoy.”

* * *

Matsuzaka's next outing, July 24, showed the fruits of this mid-season round of adjustments, in possibly his finest outing of the season thus far. Like the June matchups with Johnson and Maddux, this was a classic pitcher's duel.

The opponent was C.C. Sabathia, a hard throwing ace on the Cleveland Indians with a 13-4 record and a 3.81 ERA. The Indians were among the top four teams in the league; if the playoffs had started on this day, the Red Sox as league leaders would have been facing the Indians as the wild-card entrant.

The Red Sox were riding a four-game win streak, supported by a sudden surge of hitting. Manny Ramirez seemed to have regained his power stroke, and the team overall had scored 35 runs in four games. The Yankees were still surging, but so long as Boston kept winning, they were not gaining ground.

Matsuzaka once again started out shakily, loading the bases in the first inning on a single, walk, and hit batter. But he escaped without giving up a run, helped in part by a Cleveland base-running blunder. By the third inning he had found his groove, effectively mixing his fastball, at times up to 94 mph, with an assortment of sharp breaking pitches. The Red Sox managed to score one run in the fourth inning on three singles, helped by some poor Cleveland fielding. Mike Lowell hit a soft fly to shallow left field, which would have been caught if the fielder had not taken a confused step backward before running toward the ball. It fell for an RBI single, what turned out to be the game's only run.

The game neatly followed the pattern of the San Francisco game in June: seven shutout innings from Daisuke (4 hits, 3 walks, 5 strikeouts), and two scoreless, hitless innings of relief from Okajima and Papelbon. Matsuzaka once again was pitching in the

face of the constant pressure that comes with meager run support. This was the 9th time in his 11 previous games in which the Red Sox scored 2 or less runs while he was pitching. But as Matsuzaka noted after the game, “In a tight duel with a good pitcher, we challenge each other, and I think it brings out my best.”

It is hard to imagine that a pitcher would not in fact prefer at least a slight margin for error. Many hurlers will readily acknowledge that when they are ahead by 3 or 4 runs, it is easier to pitch, simply throwing strikes and letting the fielders take care of most balls hit into play. But Matsuzaka, who certainly had many “opportunities” to learn to cope with poor run support when he was with the Seibu Lions, seems to genuinely enjoy the pressure of tight games, even if he does not always prevail.

* * *

Matsuzaka ended his month with another strong—although not entirely comfortable—performance. This time he came out on the losing side of a duel with the opponent’s ace pitcher. The Red Sox entered the contest against the cellar-dwelling Tampa Bay Devil Rays having won 8 of 9 games (and 11 of 17 since the All Star break). They stood at a season high 24 games over .500, and they had rebuilt their lead over the Yankees to a full 9 games.

The Tampa Bay pitcher, Scott Kazmir, was a young lefty who had thwarted the Red Sox on numerous occasions in recent years. He had struck out 21 batters in his previous three starts, with a 2.2 ERA. On this night, neither pitcher was in brilliant form, but each was more than adequate in a pinch. Through six innings, the game was scoreless. Boston had some chances, stranding two runners in the first inning, and failing

to score after Wily Mo Pena reached third with out in the 5th. Kazmir struck out the next two batters.

Matsuzaka allowed at least one base runner in each of the first 5 innings, including a lead off double in the 5th inning. His fastball location was inconsistent, but breaking balls were sharp, and he got men out when he had too. He appeared stronger as the game progressed, throwing his first 1,2,3 inning in the 6th.

Kazmir left the game after just six innings. Remarkably, the Devil Rays' bullpen, with the worst record in the league, kept the Red Sox in check. Matsuzaka was not so fortunate. With one out in the bottom of the 7th inning, having thrown 101 pitches but retired the previous 6 batters, he left a fastball up over the plate. The Devil Rays number 8 hitter, Dioner Navarro, hardly a noted slugger (2 prior home runs for the season), lined a home run just over the right field fence.

Down only 1-0, Matsuzaka gave up a single to the next batter, and he was relieved by Manny Delcarmen, who promptly allowed another baserunner and a three run homer, effectively losing the game. For one of the very few times all year, the bullpen had failed to protect a strong effort by a starter.

One might note in defense of Daisuke that he had now received 2 runs of support or less (while he was in the game) in 10 of 12 previous outings. Prior to the Navarro home run, he had thrown 13 1/3 shutout innings in a row.

Matsuzaka's post-game self-assessment included an expected tone of contrition and an unusual moment of reflection at the overall shape of his experience since coming to the Red Sox. The contrition had the feel of the model answer one is expected to give:

“when the batters aren’t scoring, my job is to keep the opponents at zero, and its too bad I failed to do so.”

The reflection was more interesting. Asked by a Japanese reporter at the joint post-game conference to talk about his feeling for the ball over his final two years with Seibu to his current performance, he replied, “If my pitching for Seibu was a 10, then I’m at about 6 or 7 now. But even so, if I pitch properly when the game is on the line, that is not a problem.”

For a man who on the eve of the All Star break repeatedly refused to offer any overarching reflections on his performance or experience since coming to Boston, this was a revealing comment. Matsuzaka had already established himself as an anchor on the staff, capable of brilliant work in the clutch, but he was still groping his way toward his accustomed level of excellence.

Would he ever reach “ten” again?

With at least 5 ½ seasons of Daisuke mania still before them, and judging from his trajectory thus far, Red Sox nation had good reason to believe he would. The owners had good reason to believe their mega-investment would turn out to have been a good one.

* * *

The team’s front-office was clearly taking a long view of their strategy for Japan, in both baseball and business operations.

The clearest public indication of this long-term approach ironically came on America’s Independence Day, July 4, when the team with much fanfare announced what

it called a “strategic alliance” with the Chiba Lotte Marines in simultaneous press conferences in Chiba and Boston, to extend for at least three years through 2010.

President and CEO Lucchino called this “an historic day” for the team, part of the effort to “expand its influence from both a baseball and business perspective into Japan and the Pacific Rim.”

The particulars of the alliance included the sharing of scouting information and statistical analysis that would help the Red Sox evaluate players in Japan, and help Lotte evaluate players in the major leagues. More intriguing was what the team called an “on-field” element that would involve the baseball staff from each organization attending each other’s spring training and fall programs and perhaps conducting joint training sessions elsewhere in Asia.

A number of MLB teams in recent years have concluded similar alliances with NPB counterparts. Lucchino told me he did not know exactly how many, perhaps 6 to 8, but he suggested that few of them are as active or ambitious as the Red Sox effort will be.¹⁰

This view may simply be home team bluster. But there are some signs that the Boston-Chiba connection will be more active and significant than most such alliances.

The two organizations already have a number of close personal ties from top to bottom. Lucchino has known the Chiba owner, Akio Shigemitsu, since 1996. Not only Lucchino, but also Shipley and his Pacific Rim deputy Jon Deeble, know Bobby Valentine well. And Valentine’s assistant, Shun Kakazu, who graduated from Harvard

¹⁰ Other current alliances reportedly include: New York Yankees-Yomiuri Giants, Tampa Bay Devil Rays-Bay Stars, Arizona Diamondbacks-Nippon Ham Fighters, Washington Nationals-Nippon Ham Fighters-Cleveland Indians-Yakult Swallows, Atlanta-Braves-Hanshin Tigers, Detroit Tigers-Hanshin Tigers, LA Dodgers-Kintetsu Buffaloes, Orix Blue Wave-Seattle Mariners. However, many of these relationships are relatively inactive, or complete moribund.

College in 2004, is well connected to the agent Scott Boras, to the Red Sox, and to Boston.

Even before the alliance was announced, these links had produced some noteworthy results. According to Shipley, “Chiba was very helpful with us last year in how we evaluated Daisuke and Hideki.” And after the Matsuzaka signing, the hiring of Masa Hoshino as Matsuzaka’s interpreter was mediated via these connections. Hoshino’s great skill as interpreter and his terrific personal rapport with Daisuke have certainly been important, if quiet, elements in supporting Matsuzaka’s continuing adjustments to the major leagues.

Of course, a relationship that simply feeds Japanese talent to the Red Sox will ring “neo-colonial” alarm bells in Japan. To what degree will the alliance be one of mutual learning and exchange? In the press conference that announced the alliance, it was noteworthy that after stressing that the Red Sox and Marines would be learning from each other, Craig Shipley felt the need to make a pre-emptive defensive statement that the alliance is “not something we’re doing to come over here to raid Japanese baseball.”

Lucchino, too, is aware of the undercurrent of concern or criticism in Japan at the possibility that NPB might become a subordinate feeder league. He told me that the long waiting period (nine years) before Japanese players become free agents would likely prevent a harmful imbalance in the flow of talent, and ensure that NPB gets significant benefit from most Japanese players: “We are hoping for a dynamic process of mutual learning, whether pitching techniques or preparation. It is a two way street. We will learn as much as we impart if it plays out right.”

One indeed catches glimpses of the possibility and desire for hybrid and dynamic interactions, which might deepen over time. Before his superb July 24 start against Cleveland, 7 innings of shutout pitching, Matsuzaka went through his regular pregame routine of intensive running. Unlike his inter-game running and pitching, which have been subjects of debate and adjustment, his game-day routine has been consistent all season. On this day manager Francona recalled how pitcher Bronson Arroyo (with the Red Sox from 2003-05) often slept until 30 minutes before games. Commenting to reporters about Matsuzaka's sweat-inducing routine, so different from the typical major league pitcher, he concluded "That's something I wish would rub off on our culture."

| * * *

Certainly there will be an element of trial and error as the Red Sox, and MLB more generally, develop more extensive and intimate, and to some extent reciprocal, connections to Japanese baseball. This is as true of the business side as of the baseball side, or perhaps even more so.

Indeed, as the Red Sox vice-president for sales and marketing, Sam Kennedy, made clear in a lengthy interview in early August, the team has essentially been figuring out "on the fly" its strategy to profit in a financial sense from the new (and definitely in Matsuzaka's case, long-term) presence of Japanese stars on the team. The decision to recruit Matsuzaka, he said, was dictated by a baseball logic more than a business logic. Or at least, the team started to figure out the business logic only *after* the ink had dried on the contract.

Of course, Larry Lucchino in particular held a longstanding interest in building links to baseball in Asia. He is on the "internationalization committee" of MLB owners.

As Kennedy noted, “there were times over the years when he would ask, ‘what would be the [business] impact of bringing on board a front line player?’ from Japan.”

But prior to the signing, team management had not discussed the specific financial value of recruiting Matsuzaka, and certainly had not prepared a detailed analysis of anticipated revenues in relation to cost.

In fact, generating direct revenues from the heightened Japanese interest in the Red Sox is no simple matter. Few fans understood this at the time of his signing, but it has since been widely and correctly reported that the great majority of revenues from Japan, including sales of team goods, broadcast rights for Red Sox games, revenues from any special television programs about Matsuzaka or Okajima, corporate sponsorships or advertising generated in Japan, ticket sales from any future exhibitions or regular season games played in Japan, all go directly to Major League baseball. All such income is shared equally by all 30 teams.

The Red Sox derive direct revenue only from local television rights (defined as broadcasts in the six New England states), ticket sales and related ballpark revenues such as luxury corporate boxes, and local corporate sponsorships (including all signs in Fenway Park, even if then broadcast back to Japan). Since the Red Sox own the NESN cable network that broadcasts the games, the owners can profit as well from the large advertising revenues from these broadcasts.

These local revenues are quite substantial. Annual gross ticket sales alone surely exceed the entire team payroll. And the team has 40 luxury suite holders and 95 local or in-park corporate sponsors, including Bank of America, State Street Bank, and Budweiser

Beer. But there is a limit to how much additional direct income of this sort can be derived from the new popularity of the team in Japan.

Even this limited amount is significant, to be sure. At the start of the season, club sources anticipated about \$3 million additional revenue, anchored by the \$900,000 commitment from Funai for placing its logo in the background of all of Matsuzaka's Japanese-language postgame TV conferences. Funai had previously been a sponsor of the Yankees, but had been quite dissatisfied with that relationship; Kennedy happily claimed that the Red Sox "turned this around." Other key Japanese corporate sponsors are Sharp and Nikon. Over the life of Matsuzaka's contract, these sources alone might recoup one-fifth of the total outlay for the posting fee and salary.

But Kennedy calls the interest in sponsoring Red Sox from Japanese firms in the US "disappointing." One problem is that a starting pitcher appears in only 20% of the games, so a Japanese company placing its signs in Fenway Park would find far more Red Sox games broadcast if the team had a star daily player. Companies, he said, have been taking a "wait and see" attitude, and "it has been a slow key year one in terms of marketing" directly to Japanese corporations.

Given these constraints, and in a sense making a virtue of necessity, the Red Sox fundamental business strategy to profit from their two Japanese stars, developed over the course of the season, focuses not on direct revenues but on indirect profits. These are less tangible, hard to measure, but undeniably important.

This was not necessarily what team management expected at the start of the season. In our August interview, Kennedy noted that "from seeing the fan reactions, I'd say there is lots of interest in these two guys, but less interest in that they come from

Japan than that they help us win. I find this really interesting. When we recruited them, I thought there would be a big interest in the Japan connection. There has been some of that. There was a spike in ticket sales when they signed.”

But Kennedy went on to make an impassioned and generally persuasive case that the Red Sox make the greatest economic gains simply because Matsuzaka and Okajima are talented players who enhance the overall success and appeal of the team. “All our marketing activities locally are impacted by the competitive nature of the team. So, for instance, what price do you put on having a 20 game winner? What price do you put on having added a relief pitcher who was the team MVP in the first half of the season—that, anyway, is how I’d assess Okajima’s contribution.

“Excitement about these players sustains the sellout streak, it keeps the corporate sponsors interested, and allows NESN to charge more for advertisements; this is all the result of fielding a competitive team. When we market the Red Sox to Bank of America, Mastercard, Coca Cola, it is less significant that Matsuzaka and Okajima are from Japan. It is more significant that they help us win and make the team popular.”

These benefits also carry forward for the long run. Television commercial fees charged by NESN reflect a baseline of the previous season’s ratings, so if Matsuzaka and Okajima play a role in elevating ratings this year, it has a future positive impact on revenue. And corporate sponsorships are typically three to five year deals, the fees are locked in based on current assessments of interest in the team, as well as future promise.

* * *

What does Daisuke think of these business dimensions to the game of baseball? Certainly he is aware of them. He has several major sponsorships in Japan, including Asahi Beer (no relation to the publisher of this book!). His wife, Shibata Tomoyo, is the poster model for the magazine Saita, with an image-promoting company actively managing her own efforts to prosper from her husband's fame in America and Japan.

The Red Sox marketing division assists such efforts by an individual player (and in this case, quite unusually, his wife) to add to his already huge salary, working together with a player's agent to build goodwill for the future. After all, if Matsuzaka fulfills his early promise, the Red Sox will surely want to re-sign him in 6 years time, when he will only be 31 years old, and could conceivably play another decade or more in the major leagues.

But Matsuzaka this summer did something that many players would not do. He turned down a proposal from Dunkin Donuts, a major Red Sox corporate sponsor, to appear in a commercial campaign that Kennedy said would have earned him over one million dollars. Even for Daisuke, this is considerable money, an addition of about 12 percent to his annual salary. To his credit, Matsuzaka, who has granted remarkably few interviews during the season and won a reputation among the Japanese press corps for being "selfish," places media relations and commercial activities on a lower priority than the game on the field.

The commercials would have returned to a theme in a clever commercial spot featuring Curt Schilling when he joined the team in 2004. This showed him sitting in the locker room, trying to learn to speak with a Boston accent: instead of "parked my car", he struggled to say, in true Bostonian English, "pahked my cah."

Red Sox fans will not have the opportunity to watch similar donut commercials where Daisuke learns the local dialect. They will have to be content to watch him learn to pitch with success in the major leagues.

August: The Rivalry

As in the previous three months, the statistical profile of the Red Sox was upbeat as August began. The team boasted the best record in the major leagues (65-42) and a seven game lead in their division. Since April 14 they had occupied first place for 108 consecutive days. Their record since the All-Star break stood at a respectable 12-8.

But numbers sometimes lie. The Fenway faithful were far from united in their feelings about the team's prospect.

The optimist party noted that, for all the worry of July, the team had recently gained back some ground on the second place Yankees. They had also traded just before the deadline for Eric Gagne, one of the best relief pitchers in all of baseball in 2002-04.¹¹ After injury setbacks in 2005 and '06, he was now back in good health and seemed close to his best form.

With this move, the Red Sox had decided to add strength to strength, following the maxim, "one can never have enough pitching." Their bullpen, already the best in the league, now promised to be invincible. The team's logic reflected the dominant MLB philosophy of the past two decades, a view quite at odds with the standard baseball wisdom in Japan: pitchers needed rest and protection from overwork. Gagne was expected to offer such protection to Jonathan Papelbon, who had injured his shoulder the previous August, and to Hideki Okajima, who was on a pace to pitch more games as a

¹¹ From 2002-04, Gagne saved 152 games for the Los Angeles Dodgers and set a major league record of 84 consecutive successful saves.

reliever than ever in his career.¹² And with such a strong bullpen, the starters—Matsuzaka included, whether he felt he needed it or not—were protected as well. They could safely hand a game over to the relievers after just six innings.

The pessimist party had several doubts. Why didn't the Red Sox address their hitting weakness and trade at the deadline for a strong batter? Was Gagne really going to be as strong as three years ago? Hadn't the Yankees cut the Red Sox All-Star break lead of 9.5 games to 7, pulled together a solid pitching rotation to match their unparalleled hitting, gone 15-6 since the break? Bitter experience told the pessimists, who surely commanded a voting majority among citizens of Red Sox nation, to expect unhappy answers to these queries. No doubt, by the time the teams met for six crucial games in late August and mid-September, the Yankees would be in striking distance.

Whoever proved correct, the season was headed for a late summer showdown of the two arch-rivals.

* *

Matsuzaka had been initiated into the rivalry in his two April starts. He commented at the time on what “at treat” it was to pitch against the Yankees, and duly noted how intense the excitement was. But for Daisuke the most significant team rivalry thus far had been with the Mariners, and the most significant individual nemesis was Ichiro. The two seemed linked by a special karma.

In their first confrontation in the Japanese pro leagues, in Matuzaka's first season with Seibu (1999), he memorably struck out Ichiro three times in a row. When they

¹² Projecting forward from August 1, by the season's end Okajima would have appeared in 72 games and pitched 79 innings. His heaviest workloads as a reliever in Japan came with the Giants in 2000 and 2001 when he was in his early 20s: 72 innings (56 games) in 2000, 58 games (62 innings) in 2001.

faced each other in Daisuke's equally memorable first appearance at Fenway Park in April 2007, once again Matsuzaka prevailed. He retired Ichiro four straight times including one strikeout.

On the eve of Matsuzaka's first start of August, against the Mariners in Seattle on the 4th, Ichiro had managed only one hit, a single, in nine at bats against his nemesis. This game marked the fourth time Matsuzaka would face the Mariners this season. Since the teams—in different divisions—only faced each other nine times in all, the likelihood that one pitcher's number would come up four times was extremely low, enabled only by a rainout that pushed one game out of cycle. Was this not a sign from the baseball gods that their rivalry was special? Matsuzaka noted after this fourth confrontation: "I never imagined I'd face him so many times, but he's the one I psych myself up most to face, and I definitely didn't want him to get a hit off me"

Daisuke's performance on this night was his strongest of the season to date. It was a win the team needed. Earlier in the evening, the Yankees had clobbered the hapless Kansas City Royals, to move within 6.5 games. Entering the contest, not only had Matsuzaka failed to record a win against the Mariners (one loss, two no-decisions), but the Mariners had beaten the Red Sox nine consecutive times in Seattle, a Boston losing streak dating back to the start of the 2006 season.

Bolstered by some modest run support for a change, Matsuzaka was in top form. One Japanese sports tabloid exulted, "The Monster finally showed his true self." Through 7 innings Matsuzaka gave up just two runs on six hits and two walks, with 10 strikeouts (his first double digit string of K's since April). He left the game with a 4-2

lead, and although Gagne struggled some (a portent of further woes) giving up a run in the 8th, Papelbon closed out a 4-3 victory.

Daisuke's fastball was sharp all night: "Today was the best fastball I had all season; it was lively from start to finish." His final (113th) pitch was a wicked 94 mph heater, a called strike on the outside corner to Jose Guillen.

The highlight of the evening, ranking with his confrontation with Barry Bonds in June, was Ichiro's 10 pitch at bat in the third inning.¹³ Matsuzaka fell behind 2-0 on two outside fastballs, followed by a swinging strike on a breaking ball inside. Then, working the outside edge of the plate with mostly fastballs, the "monster" bested the All-Star MVP. Ichiro took a called second strike, a waist-high fastball on the outside corner, and then fouled off four straight pitches before grounding weakly to short on yet another fastball. At 96 mph this was Matsuzaka's fastest pitch of the night, placed just off the plate, where Ichiro could not afford to let it pass. Later Daisuke coolly remarked: "with several of those pitches, I was able to overpower his bat."

* *

Red Sox fans took note of these memorable confrontations, as well as the individual rivalry between Matsuzaka and Tampa Bay's Iwamura which developed over several games in July and August. But for almost all of them—probably for every one of them—it was the Yankees rivalry that really mattered. The bitter past of battles with the Bronx Bombers is ever present in the collective consciousness of the Red Sox nation.

I have tried to show in this book that baseball in America since its early days has been a way for citizens and immigrants, religions, races, ethnic groups and nations, to

¹³ On this night in August, we should note for the record, Barry Bonds tied Hank Aaron's MLB home run record of 755, and Alex Rodriguez hit his 500th homer as well.

measure and define selves. In addition, baseball has been a way for local and regional communities to create identity and a sense of solidarity that cuts across generations and hierarchies, whether of ethnicity, education, occupation, or social class. The community of fans joins together people who otherwise share little beyond their place of residence. This is true of all sports in media-saturated mass societies of modern times. It is certainly true of Bostonians and New Yorkers and their beloved (and mutually hated) baseball teams.

A skeptic might note—some indeed have—that the baseball competition between the Red Sox and Yankees hardly merits the label rivalry. If that word implies a contest between two parties, each of which has some chance of winning, then indeed the times of true rivalry over the past century-plus have been surprisingly few.

The Red Sox were the dominant team during the first two decades of major league history in the 20th century. At the time named the Boston Americans, in 1903 they won the first World Series ever played (of course, to name the contest a “World” series exemplifies the insularity and grandiose pride of Americans at the time, and since). Renamed the Red Sox in 1907, the team soon won four more World Series (1912, 1915, 1916, 1918). Boston was bolstered by the arrival of the young Babe Ruth in 1914. His stellar pitching and increasingly powerful hitting in the regular season led the Red Sox to three American League championships over four years, and he was the pitching hero of the 1916 World Series.

The New York team by contrast (initially called the “Highlanders,” renamed the Yankees in 1913) did not win a single *league* championship in this span, not to mention a World Series. More often than not, they finished near the bottom of the league.

But the tables quickly turned. It is a story all too well-known that from 1919 through the end of the 20th century, the Red Sox failed to win a single World Series championship. The Yankees, led by Babe Ruth after his infamous sale to the Red Sox in 1920, won their first World Series in 1923. The men in their elegant pinstripe uniforms closed out the century with World Series championship number 26 in the year 2000.

How can one use the word rivalry to describe a relationship as lopsided as 26-0? It would be like describing the Japan Socialist Party as a serious rival to the Liberal Democrats between 1955 and 1990. Japan specialists called this a “1.5 party system” Perhaps we should call the Yankees-Red Sox competition a “1.5 team rivalry.”

Of course, even as a permanent minority party, the Japan Socialists did act as a restraining force to the LDP. Some of their policy innovations, especially at the local level, were later adopted by the conservative rulers. And from time to time—in particular in three eras of relative parity over the course of their 86 year championship drought, the Red Sox did mount a serious challenge to Yankee supremacy.

The first came in the 1940s. Each team had a great star, possessed of an oversized self-image. Williams on the Red Sox coveted and many say still deserves the label “the greatest hitter that ever lived.” Dimaggio of the Yankees in later years would not make a public appearance unless he was introduced as “the greatest living baseball player.” The Red Sox won the pennant in 1946 with the best record in team history, falling to St. Louis in a seven game World Series. They tied Cleveland for first place in 1948, losing a one game playoff to decide the pennant winner.

The final two days of the 1949 season then cemented for posterity the idea that the Yankees-Red Sox rivalry was special, one predestined for Boston fans to begin with

high hopes but end sadly. The Sox headed for the final two games of the season with a one game lead in the standings. One victory, and the pennant was theirs. In both games the Red Sox took the lead. In both games, they lost.

The 1949 season ended this first era of true rivalry, as the Yankees began a string of five consecutive World Series championships. In a period of unparalleled domination, from 1949 through 1964 they won 14 league pennants and nine World Series. From 1950 through 1964, the Red Sox never finished higher than third in the league, and usually floundered near the bottom. And when the Red Sox fortunes revived with their improbable pennant in 1967, it was the Yankees who had entered a rare time of decline, placing 9th in the ten-team American League.

The rivalry's second era of intensity and relative parity came in the 1970s, reaching a peak in 1977 and 1978. Both seasons ended with New York in first place, Boston in second. In 1978 of course (a fact repeatedly with annoying frequency in 2007 whenever the Red Sox lead began to slip), the Yankees overcame a 14 game deficit to end the regular season in a tie. With an improbable late inning comeback homerun by the light hitting Bucky Dent, they won the first-ever Red Sox-Yankees postgame contest, a one-day playoff to decide the pennant. Yankee partisans renewed their confident (one might say arrogant) certainty that the team would always prevail. Red Sox nation reaffirmed the bleak conviction that however valiant the struggle, a painful defeat awaited at the end of the day.

The third era of remarkable parity is the present. The Red Sox-Yankees competition thus far in the 21st century can justify the bombastic claim to be the "greatest rivalry in all of American sports." And with the signing of Matsuzaka in 2007, the

golden age of the rivalry now features “Godzilla versus Monster.” The Red Sox have given fans in Japan, who root for MLB teams by supporting a favorite player from home, a choice of their own.

Thanks to Matsui’s presence and NHK’s broadcasts, Japanese baseball fans were able to watch in “real time” the two greatest clashes at the heart of the present day rivalry. So there is little need to repeat the painful or inspiring details. First, the Yankee comeback in game seven of the American League championship series in 2003: sparked by Derek Jeter against a tiring Pedro Martinez in the 8th inning, and capped by the unsung Aaron Boone’s 11th inning walk homerun. Then, the stunning Red Sox return from the edge of extinction in 2004: the first-ever playoff victory by a team that had lost the first three games of a series exorcised Babe Ruth’s “curse,” shattering as it did so the twin myths of Yankee invulnerability and predestined Red Sox failure.

The passion people bring to this rivalry is not limited to fans. The brash Red Sox co-owner, Larry Lucchino, and the strong-willed Yankee owner, George Steinbrenner, genuinely detest one another. Lucchino is the man who dubbed New York the “evil empire” after the Yankees bested the Red Sox in a bidding war for a free agent pitcher in 2001. Steinbrenner responded that Lucchino was “baseball’s foremost chameleon.” Commissioner Bud Selig intervened to order a verbal ceasefire.

Even in the era of free agency and frequent circulation from team to team, the players bring more personal animosity to Red Sox-Yankee contests than to others. Bench-clearing brawls have marred numerous games over the years, most famously in the 1970s. In a 1976 fight, Yankee players (on purpose?) inflicted serious injury on the pitching arm of one Red Sox hurler. More than one quarter-century later, in 2003, Pedro

Martinez threw the 72 year-old Yankee coach Don Zimmer (the Red Sox manager in 1978!) to the ground during a free-for-all sparked by an exchange of beanballs. Pedro's nasty move made sumo grand champion Asashoryu look like a well-mannered gentleman.

Baseball allegiances transcend (or predate) rational thinking. My colleague Mark Kishlansky, a fan since growing up outside New York city on the Yankee stronghold of Long Island, frowned as I explained my plans for this book: "I just hate the Red Sox."

I found this emotion puzzling. It is easy to understand why Red Sox fans loathe the Yankees. But shouldn't a rational Yankee fan in fact love the Red Sox? Are they not the necessary and perfect foil, the opponent which obligingly loses in crucial games, and thus confirms the proud superiority of the New Yorkers and their team?

I put the question to Kishlansky, a renowned historian of the English Revolution, who studies box scores with the same care that he devotes to 17th century English political archives. A Yankee fan's attitude toward the Red Sox, he replied, "is different when you live in New York. There, unless you really go searching for it, there isn't much Red Sox news....But, living in Boston and having to put up with the insufferable Schilling...."

Enough said. This I can understand. Living in enemy territory can be tough. Perhaps that is the subconscious reason I turned down a job offer from Columbia University (in New York) 25 years ago! And my poor sister has to hide her Red Sox allegiance every day at her job in the New York Federal Reserve bank, or else suffer the ridicule of colleagues.

Observers in Japan often seek to understand this rivalry through analogy. Boston is to New York as Osaka is to Tokyo. The Red Sox are the Hanshin Tigers of America,

and the Yankees of course are the Yomiuri Giants. The comparison has some value, especially in conveying a sense of the centrality of New York in the United States and of the Yankees in the baseball world, and a sense of the shared futility of the Red Sox and Tigers. In the modern times of their respective leagues, each boasts a handful of pennants but just one outright championship.

But the comparison fails to capture the profound asymmetry of the Yankee-Red Sox relationship. Osaka is a much more significant city relative to Tokyo than Boston is to New York, and the Giants have not been as consistently dominant as the Yankees.

A better analogy—for understanding the mental world of the fans—is the relationship of the United States to Japan. The asymmetry of global power in this era of American hegemony is not unlike the asymmetry of baseball power relations. Just as Japanese people spend far more time thinking about the United States than Americans do thinking about Japan, fans of the Red Sox are far more obsessed with the Yankees than the reverse.

The Boston fans are always aware of the Yankees, but most Yankee fans (at least until their traumatic loss in 2004) view all their opponents with a haughty, Olympian detachment. They hotly deny a particular concern with the Red Sox. My brother's former girlfriend (a passionate Yankee fan—perhaps that is why she is in the category of “former”) denied that she cared particularly about beating the Red Sox with such furious conviction that my brother suspected she cared very deeply indeed!

A similar parallel can be found in economic power. Japan boasts the world's second largest GNP, although Japanese people don't feel comfortably rich. The Red Sox,

measured in present day payroll dollars, stand second only to the Yankees, but their fans hardly feel as rich as the numbers suggest.

Given this comparison, one might expect Japanese baseball fans to embrace the Red Sox. But at least until this year, it has been more common for fans to cross the Pacific on the bridge connecting Tokyo to New York, the Giants to the Yankees. The addition of Matsui Hideki to the Yankees in 2003, and the feverish media coverage of his endeavors, contributed greatly to this rooting kinship.

Watching the NHK broadcasts of the Red Sox-Yankees games when I visited Japan this June, it was clear that the announcers were telling the story from the New York perspective. Mussina pitches to Ortiz in a crucial spot. The announcer tells viewers that “Mussina really needs to throw a strike here,” not that “Ortiz really needs a big hit here.” I might as well have been watching the broadcasts on the Yankees cable network.

I mentioned this to Kudo Saburo. He agreed that in the past, NHK broadcasters definitely pulled for the Yankees, but he maintained that recently, and this year in particular with the advent of Matsuzaka, the announcers have been shifting to a more neutral perspective. But he admitted, as any Japanese speaking Red Sox fan would agree, the shift was far from complete.

As Kudo looks to the future, he expects the balance of Japanese allegiance to shift. Fans, he believes, feel greater intimacy with Matsuzaka than with the other top stars from Japan: “He has been the focus of fans for a decade, ever since his amazing performances at Koshien. Fans really like him. It is almost as if a member of their family has gone to the United States.” If Kudo is right, the Red Sox have a leg up over the Yankees in

winning new fans in Japan. Of course, for this to happen, Matsuzaka needs to write some of his own glorious chapters in the history of the rivalry.

* *

Few would have predicted that Matsuzaka's brilliant victory effort versus the Mariners at the start of August, his 13th victory of the season, would be his only winning start of the month. But the baseball gods are fickle, and Daisuke was plagued by poor run support as he continued to grope toward a formula for consistent major league success. In his next three starts he sandwiched two excellent games around one weak effort against a weak team.

Through 7 innings at Baltimore on August 10, a duel took place of two brilliant strikeout artists. Eric Bedard held the Red Sox scoreless. Matsuzaka struggled some with his command, but he allowed just four hits and one run. Each man struck out seven. The Red Sox then reached Bedard and his reliever for five runs in the 7th. Eric Gagne entered to pitch the 8th with a 5-1 lead, and the game seemed certain to end as Matsuzaka's 14th victory of the season. But Gagne pitched miserably. He retired just one batter, and he gave up four runs in what seemed like four minutes. Hideki Okajima, in a rare stumble, gave up the winning run in the bottom of the ninth inning. This was probably the most frustrating night of the year for Matsuzaka and his teammates.

Five days later, Matsuzaka threw one of his weaker games of the season against the cellar-dwelling Devil Rays. He gave up 6 runs in 6 innings, including a four-run third inning. Tampa Bay's third baseman Iwamura Akinori seemed to have Daisuke's number. He scored two runs, with one walk and two hits in four at-bats. The Devil Rays pitcher, Andy Sonnastine, entered the game with a record of 1-8, and an ERA over 6.00, but the

Red Sox batters did not score until the seventh inning. Their last minute rally fell short, for a 6-5 loss.

Exactly a week later, on 6 days rest for the first time all season, Matsuzaka returned to form.¹⁴ He struck out Iwamura all three times he faced him, and he allowed only one hit and no runs through five innings. His team had managed just one run, but against a Tampa Bay bullpen renowned for its weakness, fans expected the Red Sox eventually to extend their 1-0 lead. But the Tampa Bay bullpen, remarkably, held strong. And in the 6th inning, Matsuzaka left a fastball left waist-high, over the plate, and B. J. Upton stroked a home run (with a man on base by a walk). Daisuke suffered another hard-luck 2-1 loss, bringing his season total to 13 wins, 10 losses.

To this point in the season, the Red Sox had played the Devil Rays 12 times, with nine victories. Amazingly, Matsuzaka was the pitcher of record in all three losses. One could argue that he hardly deserved two of the losses, games in which he surrendered a total of 4 runs in 14 innings (2.57 ERA) while his team scored only two runs. But he surely expected to be able to win against one of the weakest hitting teams in the major leagues.

As Matsuzaka struggled to consistently pitch to his full potential, observers began to notice the sharp difference between his performance in games following four days rest (the case in a five man rotation when the team plays every day) compared to his starts after five days' rest. As of August 15, Matsuzaka's ERA in 12 starts on four days rest stood at 4.56 (with 5 wins, 6 losses, and one no-decision). In 13 games thrown after five or more days rest, he boasted a 3.07 ERA (and an 8-3 record, two no-decisions).

¹⁴ The six days were due to an off day, plus the insertion of Julian Tavarez for a spot start to rework the rotation by pushing all regular starters back one day.

As the season began, Matsuzaka's endurance had been a point of pride among Japanese fans and commentators. Daisuke himself claimed at one post-game press conference in May that he could effectively throw 150 pitches in a game. MLB pitchers, it was said, are too pampered, while Japanese pitchers, thanks to their demanding practice regimes, are made of tougher stuff.

The comparative ERA data, based on less than a full season, is suggestive more than conclusive. But at the very least, it suggests that the longer MLB season, and the shorter interval between games, indeed presented challenges that Matsuzaka had yet to fully resolve.

* *

When the August 15 game at Tampa Bay ended, the rotation projected forward such that Matsuzaka would not pitch in the Yankees series at the end of the month. He would not play a direct role in deciding whether the 2007 season would add to the long-running rivalry drama yet another dreary chapter of late-season Boston defeat.

But manager Francona reworked the rotation after this game, inserting Tavaréz as a sixth starter for one game. As one result, Matsuzaka would pitch the first game of the crucial Yankees series. In addition, he would now be pitching on 5 days rest in most of his remaining starts. The manager explained his decision as designed to give extra rest to *all* the pitchers. But this statistically savvy manager was surely aware of the possible benefit of the longer intervals between starts for Daisuke.

Happily for Red Sox fans, though a bit disappointing for those hoping to see Matsuzaka stand at the center of a high-stakes rivalry showdown, in the week running up to the Yankee series, the Red Sox bats came to life while the pitchers continued their

strong work. They won 2 of 3 against Tampa Bay and then demolished the White Sox in a 4 game sweep at Chicago, scoring at least 10 runs in all four games.

The Yankees, meanwhile, proved unable to sustain their torrid pace once the schedule set them against some of the top teams in the league. Just before the Red Sox series, they lost three of four at Detroit. As the Red Sox headed to New York, their division lead stood at 8 games, the largest margin since August 2.

Even so, the stakes were fairly high on a gorgeous late summer afternoon, August 28, as Daisuke went through his accustomed pregame routine, hard running in the outfield, then long tossing, heading back to the dugout in full sweat, wrapped in the world of music on his ipod. If the Red Sox could win just one game in this series, they were assured of leaving New York ahead 7 games, with just 28 games to go, putting the Yankees into a very deep hole. If a Matsuzaka victory led to a 2-1 split or a sweep, the magic number countdown for the first Red Sox divisional championship could begin in earnest.

Matsuzaka welcomed this showdown, noting before the contest, “at this point in the season, a direct confrontation (of first and second place) is important. I want to challenge myself with this pressure.” The celebrities of New York were also excited. Spotted in the stands on the first or second night of the series were Tiger Woods, Carmen Diaz, and Paul McCartney.

For six innings, the game unfolded as a tight pitcher’s duel. New York sent to the mound Andy Pettitte, a certified Red Sox killer and one of only two Yankee pitchers who had been consistently effective all season. He held the second highest winning percentage against Boston of any MLB pitcher since the 1960s.

Pettitte threw effectively for a full seven innings, surrendering just six hits. The Red Sox scored three runs: solo homers to Ramirez in the 2nd and Varitek in the 7th, the latter just clearing by inches the leap of Johnny Damon at the fence in left, and a triple by Julio Lugo, who scored on a deep sacrifice fly by Ortiz.

Matsuzaka matched Pettitte through six innings, also allowing just three runs, on four hits. But he gave up the game-winning two-run homer with the score tied at 3-3 in the 7th to Damon, the former Red Sox hero, now turn-coat nemesis.¹⁵

This outing neatly displayed both the critical shortcomings and noteworthy achievements of Matsuzaka's first MLB season as it entered the home stretch: on one hand, the one bad inning, so often the first; the soft pitch at a key moment leading to a damaging home run; the damaging walk or hit batsman. But on the other hand, the ability to minimize damage in a jam, the quick recovery of command, the ability to keep opposing batters off balance with an effective mix of pitches, the willingness or desire to shift strategies as situations demand. All told, a tantalizing display of talent and promise not yet fully realized.

Once again, by my count the 6th time of the season, Matsuzaka threw a shaky first inning¹⁶. Relying mainly on his fastball, he gave up a single by Damon on a fat pitch over the middle of the plate. With one out, a walk to Abreu and a pitch that caught A-Rod squarely in the back loaded the bases. A weak ground out by Matsui knocked in the first Yankee run. And a sharp line drive double by Posada scored the second, sending Matsui to third.

¹⁵ Damon seemed genuinely upset at the harshness of the booing that greeted him on his first game back to Boston after his defection.

¹⁶ Previous wobbly first innings: April 22 vs. New York (hit batter, walk, double, 2 runs); May 3 vs. Seattle (walks load bases, 5 runs); June 22 @ San Diego (walks load bases, although just one run scores); July 8 @ Detroit (first inning home run); August 15, Tampa Bay (2 singles, one run).

One might lament Matsuzaka's bad luck—if Matsui's grounder had been hit sharply, a double play results, and no runs are scored. But one might just as easily call Daisuke fortunate to escape with just a two-run deficit—a faster runner than Matsui might have scored on Posada's hit, and Coco Crisp prevented another two runs with a fine running catch on Cano's dangerously deep center fly to end the inning.

However one spins it, this was the typical “one bad inning,” sometimes coming at the start of the game, sometimes midway, which had plagued Matsuzaka all season long.¹⁷

On the other hand, as he has also done all season, Matsuzaka steadied himself and settled into an effective groove. From the second through the fourth innings, he retired nine of ten batters: he set down five in a row, walked A-Rod, and retired the next four. He ended the fourth inning with his first strikeout of the night, catching Andy Phillips looking at a cut fastball that just caught the inside corner. The Red Sox, meanwhile, had battled back to tie the score at 2.

But then, and this too has been an unfortunate recurring theme, Matsuzaka twice failed to preserve a tie after his team-mates made a comeback.

As a stunning orange full moon (following an eclipse earlier in the day) lit up a cloudless NY sky in the bottom of the 5th, Derek Jeter launched a soft curve, waist high near the middle of the plate, on a laser-like course to the opposite field, landing several rows deep over the right center fence. This was no cheap home run. And two innings later, after Varitek had re-tied the game with his homer, Johnny Damon just barely

¹⁷ Besides these first inning troubles, Matsuzaka had “one bad inning” in the following games (runs allowed in parentheses): April 17, 4th inning @ Toronto (2); April 27, 4th inning @ New York (4); May 25, 4th inning @ Texas (5); May 30, 6th inning vs. Cleveland (4); July 8, 3rd inning @ Detroit (4); July 14, 6th inning vs. Toronto (3); July 19, 6th inning vs. Chicago (2); August 15, 3rd inning vs. Tampa Bay (4).

cleared the fence at the shortest point in the stadium. This was a fly out in many ballparks, but still, the pitch was a fastball over the heart of the plate. As Matsuzaka noted postgame, the responsibility for this defeat was his.

The interview was subdued as one might expect, with mostly stock answers to predictable questions. The one point of interest reflected another noteworthy Matsuzaka trait, one that he surely needs for long-run success in a new baseball environment. That is the willingness to make adjustments, try various strategies, approach different games differently.

One Japanese reporter noted that, after the first inning, Matsuzaka had kept his pitch count down, and he asked if this was his intention. Daisuke replied “I abandoned the strikeout, and tried to keep my pitch count down to go deep into the game.” He seems to have rethought his approach since his previous start, when he commented after the game that he had not made it a particular goal to keep his pitch count down.

* *

While this game was disappointing for Matsuzaka, the context in which it was played brought into sharp relief just how valuable both Matsuzaka and Okajima have been to the Red Sox this season.

Through August at least, the difference maker for the Red Sox, comparing the 2007 team to the previous year, has without doubt been the pitching. The team’s batting numbers are down, but the team’s bullpen ERA leads the league. Okajima Hideki has been the most important addition to the relief corps, providing the most steady setup work of any pitcher in the major leagues. His versatility allowed Papelbon to match his

prior year without being overworked, and it allowed Timlin the time to recover from injury without pressure to rush back too soon.

The starting pitching rotation has been essentially the same as the previous year, with the one exception of Matsuzaka. Of course he is not the only star, nor the brightest one. In year two, Josh Beckett has made his AL adjustments, emerging as the staff ace. Tim Wakefield has put together one of the steadiest and strongest seasons of his long career. But Matsuzaka's record is misleading. He has provided a critical element of stability and consistency to the rotation, pitching at least 6 innings in 22 of 27 starts.

And as the NY Times sports columnist, Murray Chass, lamented in the next morning's paper, signing Matsuzaka was just the sort of bold move the Yankees used make, leaving the Red Sox fans and owners "to gnash their teeth and bang their heads against the wall." If the Yankees had secured "the monster," and the Red Sox had settled for the disappointing Kei Igawa, or the free agent lefty Barry Zito, who has also had a weak season (and an even higher price tag), the fortunes of both teams would have been vastly different.

Of course, as the month of August ended, each team had nearly 30 games left to play. The Yankees won the next two games, sweeping the series to pull to within five games. They still had three games with the Red Sox in mid-September. Expectations of some fireworks when the teams next met were raised in the ninth inning of the third game of the series. The Yankees flame-throwing rookie reliever, Joba Chamberlain, threw two consecutive pitches over the head of Kevin Youkilis. He was ejected from the game (and later suspended for two games for his actions). Matsuzaka, who had hit Alex Rodriguez

in the back with a pitch two games earlier, was in line to pitch the first game of the final Red Sox-Yankee series. The rivalry would continue.

September: A Major League Revolution?

The 2007 baseball season marked the 40th anniversary of the modern rebirth of the Boston Red Sox. The “Impossible Dream” team of the summer of 1967 re-ignited the passion of fans whose enthusiasm had dimmed during nearly 20 years of mediocrity.

From 1950 through 1966, the Red Sox never finished higher than third place in the American League. From 1959 through 1966 they did not have a single winning season.

But suddenly in the summer of 1967, the Red Sox stars came into alignment. Powered by Carl Yastrzemski’s triple crown batting performance, the team ran off a ten game win streak in July to move into pennant contention. The “Fenway faithful” (as they were called; the concept of Red Sox nation had yet to be invented) started flocking to the ballpark. For the first time in memory, some games sold out. By the end of the season, the Red Sox boasted the highest attendance in the league. They won the pennant on the last day of the season, and held their own against the St. Louis Cardinals until losing in the seventh game of the World Series.

In celebration of this anniversary, the Red Sox in 2007 issued a commemorative DVD set, including a remarkable copy of the second to last game of that season against the first place Minnesota Twins. This and the next day’s contest were must-win games, as the Red Sox stood one game behind the Twins. This is said to be the oldest surviving complete recording of a regular season color telecast of an MLB game. Viewing it 40 years later makes clear how dramatically the technology of baseball telecasting has changed: no replays, just a handful of camera angles, wide shots with no close-ups. Watching that broadcast is much closer to the experience of watching in the park than it is to the experience of viewing a present day telecast.

Even more dramatic than the change over 40 years in the techniques of televising baseball is a revolution in the origins of the players. One aspect was well underway by 1967: the racial integration of the major leagues. Even the Red Sox, slow to take part in this effort, included four black players: one Cuban and three African Americans among the 39 players who were part of the team at some time in the season.¹⁸

But just two players were born outside the 50 United States, and *only one* was not born an American citizen.¹⁹

The contrast with 2007 is extraordinary. Over the course of this season, 40 players spent some time on the Red Sox active roster and appeared in at least one game. Of these, more than one-third (14) were born outside the 50 United States, and 9 were not American citizens by birth.²⁰ One unfortunate trend throughout the major leagues is that the diversity of baseball's roots *within* the United States has been declining: only two players were African American. On the other hand, ten of the players appear to trace some part of their ancestry to the continent of Africa.

The global roots of America's "national pastime" have thus been spreading for several decades. The advent of Matsuzaka Daisuke and Okajima Hideki, and the presence in 2007 of a record number of Japanese players on MLB rosters, is a new chapter in an ongoing story.

The point is not that baseball is new to Asia. Far from it. Its roots in Asia reach back to the 19th century, well before the founding of the modern major leagues around

¹⁸ MLB active rosters are limited to 25 players, but with injuries and demotions/promotions to and from the minor leagues, a larger number take part at some point in the season.

¹⁹ Ace pitcher Jose Santiago was born in the American territory of Puerto Rico. Jose Tartabull was from Cuba.

²⁰ Five were from Puerto Rico, five from the Dominican Republic, two from Japan, and one each from Nicaragua and Canada.

1900. What is new in the past decade, and to significantly greater extent in the past several years, is the intimacy of the links across the Pacific, in both the movement of professional players and the interest of fans, and in the possibility of a two-way traffic in thinking about and playing the game.

* *

Beyond the demographic profile of the players, other major changes certainly have taken place in how the game is organized and played. Baseball faced no steroid problem in 1967. Free agency still lay in the future. The designated hitter rule had not been adopted. And, of greatest importance in considering Matsuzaka's potential impact, the practice of major league pitching was far different.

Since that time, a rigid division of labor among starters, set-up men, and closers has taken root. Teams have shifted from four to five man rotations. And with the advent of a regime ruled by pitch counts, the complete game has become an endangered species.

Pitchers on the 1967 Red Sox threw 42 complete games over the course of a 162 game season. Jim Lonborg, the team's ace and Cy Young award winner, threw 15 complete games en route to a 22 win season. He pitched a total of 273 innings over the course of the season. In the year 2007, the team's starters pitched the full nine innings only four times!²¹

This remarkable change is by no means limited to the Red Sox. Over many decades a gradual decline in complete games took place in MLB in general. In the early 20th century, the major league leader in complete games typically went the distance on 30 or more occasions. These totals dipped some in the following decades, but the NL and

²¹ One each for Beckett, Matsuzaka, Schilling, Buchholz.

AL leaders still recorded anywhere from 15 to 25 full-game outings per season until the late 1980s.

The truly dramatic decline has come only in the past 20 years. The year 1991 was the first time that the complete game leader in one of the leagues recorded a total only in the single digits. The year 2000 was the first time in MLB history that no pitcher in either league reached a two digit complete game total.²² The leaders in 2006 in each league threw only 6 complete games.

Two words explain this change: pitch counts. In major league baseball since the mid-1980s, it has become standard wisdom to impose strict limits on starting pitchers, usually in the range of 100 to 115 pitches per game. But for many decades, the number of pitches thrown by one team in an average game has been relatively constant, around 145. Only an extremely efficient pitcher, and even then only on occasion, can finish a game with fewer than 120 pitches.

The reason for adopting pitch counts was two fold. First, an in-game tactical reason: pitchers were said to be less effective after throwing many pitches in a game. Second, over the long run, it was thought that pitch counts would prevent injuries and prolong careers. With salaries soaring under free agency, players found the promise of pitching a few more lucrative years to be attractive enough to accept the logic of pitch counts.

For all the talk that there exists in Japan a very different “way” of baseball, a similar change has taken place. For most of the postwar era, complete games in Japanese pro ball, as in the United States, were common. Totals varied from year to year,

²² In 1991, Tom Glavine of Atlanta and Dennis Martinez of Montreal tied for the NL lead with 9 complete games each. In 2000, David Wells led the AL with 9. Randy Johnson and Curt Schilling tied for the NL lead with 8.

but a complete game was thrown in roughly 25 to 30 percent of all games in Japan from the 1950s through the early 1990s. Then, beginning in the 1990s, complete games declined in number: from 28 % of all games in 1990, to 18% in 1995, to barely more than 10% in 2005. Clearly, the concern with pitch counts had crossed the Pacific.

In this matter of pitch counts and complete games, I would argue, historical change in both American and Japanese baseball outweighs the difference between the way the game is played in these two countries. On both sides of the Pacific, the complete game pitcher was dominant for many decades. With a slight time lag, the pitch count has recently come to dominate pro baseball in both countries.

Will this trend continue in both Japan and the US? Stabilize? Reverse?

Although supporters note the unprecedented numbers of pitchers performing with success into their early 40s as evidence in favor of the new regime, the iron rule of the pitch count has critics in the United States as well as in Japan. No less a figure than Bill James, the famous guru of “sabremetrics”—the application of complex statistical analysis to baseball strategy—is among those arguing forcefully that the reliance on pitch counts in MLB has gone overboard and is counterproductive. He is not alone.²³

* * *

This season the astonishing discussions that took place between manager Francona and GM Epstein on a memorable late summer evening make it clear how entrenched the pitch count regime has become.

Clay Buchholz, a highly regarded rookie, age 23, was the Boston starting pitcher in this September 1st game, versus the Orioles.. He had been called up from the minor

²³ A very interesting summary of the case against pitch counts, by Steve Tredor, can be found at the website www.hardballtimes.com, titled “What Pitch Counts Hath Wrought.”

leagues for a spot start due to Tim Wakefield's injury, only his second start ever. Not even the most optimistic fan was prepared for what unfolded. Against a team with some very fine hitters, Buchholz became just the 3rd person in the entire history of major league baseball to throw a no hitter in his first or second start.

The Red Sox jumped in front 4-0 in the 4th inning. Fans could relax and enjoy what promised to be a victory when Boston added four more runs in the 6th inning. But as Buchholz continued to retire batter after batter, a new sort of tension mounted. No hits so far? Could this possibly continue? By the 8th inning, the crowd was locked onto every pitch, as were the many viewers at home. The excitement in the stands was even greater than at the World Series games that Boston easily won in 2004.

But for many observers, almost outweighing the thrill of this achievement was the shocking fact that during the game, manager Terry Francona had several telephone conversations with general manager Theo Epstein. For a manager and a GM to confer during a game is extremely rare. Larry Lucchino can recall only one other instance in his 27 year career as a baseball executive when this happened. What was the reason on this September night? Of course, pitch counts.

Entering the game, out of concern to protect his young arm and bright future, the team has set a 120 pitch limit on Buchholz. The manager and GM were discussing what they would do if Buchholz reached that limit with his no hit game intact.

Is it conceivable he would have been lifted?

Terry Francona later joked that he would have sent out his bench coach to make that move, for fear the fans might have staged a riot. As it turned out, Buchholz struck out the final batter on his 115th pitch of the night. We will never know what might have

happened. I very much doubt he would have been lifted until he gave up a hit. But the very fact that such a conversation was necessary speaks volumes about the tyranny of the pitch count in major league baseball today.

On the other hand, at least measured by some of the local press coverage and by calls to the local talk radio shows, it is clear that many people were astonished and unhappy that such a step was even considered. Sentiment does exist opposed to this tyranny.

* *

As fans in Japan well know, Daisuke Matsuzaka stood his ground against the retreating tide of complete games in Japanese pro baseball. In 8 years with Seibu, he threw 72 complete games (35% of his starts). And he was improving with age and experience. Matsuzaka led NPB in complete games in each of his final three (2004-06) seasons. In his final two years with Seibu, as the overall complete game rate in Japan dropped to just over 10 percent, Matsuzaka boasted a truly remarkable 53 percent rate (28 complete games out of 53 starts).

No wonder that as Daisuke prepared last winter for his first season with the Red Sox, advocates of the view that more work is not a bad thing, and that present day pitchers are pampered, looked to Daisuke to force American baseball to rethink its ways.

At least in his first year, these hopes have not been fulfilled.

Back in May, a different scenario momentarily seemed to be unfolding. Matsuzaka threw his first complete game on the 15th against Detroit, and he easily could have completed his next outing against Atlanta. But he was removed after 8 innings with

a 13-3 lead, having thrown just 104 pitches. In Japan, no doubt, he would have finished the game, but manager Francona followed today's common wisdom turned to the bullpen.

That was the closest Matsuzaka came to a second complete game in his first year. As the long season drew to a close, common wisdom among American observers was that if anything, Daisuke needed more rest and protection from excessive pitching.

Matsuzaka's first September start came on the Labor Day holiday night (September 3), at home against Toronto. As against the Yankees the week before, he started unsteadily, allowing a run in the first inning. He then pitched four strong scoreless innings, showing more life on his fastball than the past couple outings, while the Red Sox batters offered some precious run support. They clobbered Toronto's pitching to build a 10-1 lead by the start of the 6th inning. And then, once again, came the "one bad inning." As Takano had put it in April, Matsuzaka returned to his "bad habit of suddenly collapsing." He surrendered 7 runs in that one inning. The Red Sox held on to win, 13-10, but Matsuzaka hardly deserved much credit.

His next start (September 8) was even worse. An Ortiz homer with a man on base gave him a two run cushion in the top of the first inning, but he gave one back immediately: a homer by Tiki Redman on a fastball over the middle of the plate. The Red Sox scored two more runs in the second inning, handing Matsuzaka a 4-1 lead.

But disaster struck in the third. The first six batters to face Matsuzaka reached base: two singles, one double, three walks. Matsuzaka was missing badly on location, especially with his fastballs; they were either well outside, or right over the plate. He could not find the corners. After three runs had scored to tie the game at 4, he did manage to get two outs. But then Scott Moore shot another poorly placed fastball over the

fence for a grand slam, ending Matsuzaka's evening and essentially winning the game for Baltimore. Eight runs surrendered in 2 and 2/3 innings. Over his past five starts, 28 runs surrendered in 26 2/3 innings, an ERA of 9.57.

What on earth was happening? The cliché among fans and the media was that Matsuzaka had "hit a wall." Indeed.

But which wall, or which combination of obstacles: Fatigue? Familiarity? Loss of confidence? Teams in the Eastern Division were seeing him for the 3rd, 4th, or even 5th time. Had they figured him out? Could he make further adjustments?

The Boston press for the first time all season showed signs of impatience. After the Toronto game, Buckley of the *Herald* was blunt, "There's no way other way to put this: Matsuzaka has been lousy in three of his past four outings." After the Baltimore collapse, the critical voices only grew louder, as did the hard questions, in print, radio, TV and on the streets.

My brother called me up in a rage: "Tell your new friend Farrell to let Daisuke skip a start, so he's ready for the playoffs!" Others questioned whether he should even appear in the playoffs. The Red Sox would only be using 4 starters because of the increased number of days off. Perhaps after Beckett, the next three starters in a playoff series should be Wakefield, Schilling, and either the impressive rookie, Lester or the phenomenal Buchholz?

Matsuzaka, in comments to the media, denied that fatigue was the problem. Pitching coach Farrell was also cautious in his public comments, talking not of the work load but of particular strategies and their execution (or lack of proper execution).

After the Baltimore game, Farrell told reporters that "When he's in a big inning, he has a tendency to rely on his fastball and generate as much power as possible and, with that, he's sacrificing location...He's somewhat gone away from his offspeed pitch and hitters have had a chance to look in hard [look for fastballs] and not have to guard too much against anything soft." Farrell noted that Matsuzaka even at the end of a 40 pitch inning, maintained his velocity, with 94 mph fastballs. The problem was that "by relying solely on velocity, he's sacrificing some feel [for his] pitches and overall [ability to] change speeds."

But it was hard to overlook fatigue as one factor. Matsuzaka's total starts and total innings as of early September were approaching his career highs. The only season in which he threw significantly more (2001) was followed by an injury and a season of only 14 starts. Most recently, in the 2006 season with Seibu, Matsuzaka threw 2,770 pitches. As he looked to reverse his month-long slump against the Yankees on September 14, Matsuzaka had already thrown 3,125 pitches.

Daisuke was not the only Boston pitcher from Japan to have stumbled in recent weeks. Hideki Okajima gave up at least one hit in each of 5 consecutive appearances from August 24 through September 5, for a total of 8 hits and 5 runs in 4.2 innings. This downturn seemed to stem from a combination of fatigue and the effects of a slight hip injury. The team began to use him more sparingly. An efficient 1,2,3 inning against Baltimore on the 9th (after three days rest), and a crucial strikeout in the 8th inning of the game against Tampa Bay on the 12th, suggested Okajima had found his groove once more. Whatever the manager and pitching coach might say publicly, in their eyes, the wear and tear of a long season was part of the problem for both men.

John Farrell made this clear in a conversation with me in the Red Sox dugout on September 11. He stressed the “special challenges” of making the transition from Japanese to American major league play: “The different time zones. Japan is only one time zone. The travel. Until one goes through it, you really don’t know the difficulty. The intensity of the opposition, the capabilities of the opposing batters. This is a step above what he’s used to.”

In this context, he said, Matsuzaka’s problem “is both a mental and a physical fatigue. He is in uncharted waters. When a pitcher gets into some trouble, and this is true with Daisuke recently, there is a tendency to become more aggressive, to revert to pure stuff, not changing speeds as much.” Relying too much on power pitching meant that Matsuzaka was not making use of his full range of pitches, something Farrell acknowledged as well.

To this explanation centered on “physical and mental fatigue” I would add a (temporary) loss of confidence. Matsuzaka seemed to have lost some of his swagger of earlier in the season. He had retreated from use of several pitches, including the change up. He decided before the late August game against the Yankees to “abandon the strikeout.” Instead, he worked to minimize his pitch count, a significant change in his formula for success to this point, perhaps a sign of uncertainty. One Japanese reporter covering the Baltimore game on September 8 wrote to me that “when Matsuzaka gave up the grand slam, he stood by the mound, looking down, with his hands on his knees. This was a pose he would never take in Japan, and it was pretty shocking. Perhaps, he has lost confidence.”

In the short run, it was clear to Farrell what had to be done: “executing pitches, maintaining delivery, not abandoning different speeds. It is easy to talk about it, but with [a pitcher’s in-game] adrenalin and all, it’s harder to do. But he is a competitor, has a good attitude, and necessary adjustments will be made.”

* * *

Against the Yankees three days later, Matsuzaka was clearly following this advice, and he proved Farrell’s prediction more or less correct. In the opening game of a high-stakes three game series that would do much to decide the pennant, his performance was some distance from “prime time Matsuzaka.” But, it was a creditable outing, far closer to the “real” Matsuzaka than the previous several starts.

Matsuzaka expanded the range of his pitches, using the change-up as well as curve or splitter in some key situations. At the same time, he was unafraid to challenge batters with his fastball, for 6 of his 7 strikeouts. He threw 5.2 innings, allowing just 2 runs and 4 hits, with 5 walks and 7 strikeouts. His command could have been better: of 120 pitches, only 64 were strikes. But he showed toughness and skill in pitching out of several jams.

The two most impressive escapes both involved Matsui Hideki. Facing yet another first-inning bases loaded jam, Matsuzaka battled back from a 3-0 count to Matsui, with two outside corner fastballs at 94 mph. At 3-2, with Matsui likely looking fastball once more, he threw a sharp slider on the outside edge for an easy ground out.

The 4th inning began poorly for Matsuzaka, seeking to protect a 2-0 lead. Posada doubled sharply into the left-center gap. Godzilla then lofted a triple (nearly over the fence) to deep right field. One run was in, and the tying run on third with no outs. But

after a walk to Giambi, the Monster came to life, striking out Cano on a steady stream of fastballs, and leading Cabrera to ground into a double play with a pitch just over the outside corner.

Over the first five innings, the only hard hit balls were these fourth inning drives by Posada and Matsui. Matsuzaka pitched himself into a two out, bases loaded jam in the 6th inning as well, ending his night earlier than he wished, but Mike Timlin retired the side allowing just one of the runners to score, on an infield hit. The score was 5-2, and thanks to some sloppy Yankee fielding, the Red Sox added two more runs in the bottom of the 5th. Three innings to go, a five run lead. Given the bullpen's record all season, Daisuke's 15th win seemed assured. More importantly, the Red Sox would start the series with a win, virtually extinguishing New York's pennant hopes.

As it turned out, however, Matsuzaka's strong showing—pitching “with a lot of heart” in the words of Francona—was not at all the main story of this game. In stunning fashion, things fell apart in the 8th inning. In his worst outing of the year, Hideki Okajima allowed two solo home runs (Giambi, Cano), followed by a walk, and a double by Damon. His pitches were either well off the plate, or right over the middle. Francona turned to the nearly perfect closer, Papelbon. He had not allowed a run in 16.2 innings, and allowed just two hits in facing 52 batters since the end of July. But for the first time all season, he gave up three straight hits. Just five pitches, to Jeter, Abreu, and A-Rod, and the Yankees had taken the lead 8-7.

The last time the Red Sox had surrendered a lead of this size to the Yankees in a home game was in May 1955. But a September match up of first and second place teams made this a far more dramatic turnaround. The New York Post the next morning sought

to thrill Yankee readers as they sipped their Saturday morning coffee: “They will remember this inning: the Yankees, the Red Sox, New York City, New England. They will remember what happened in the top of the eighth at Fenway Park this morning, next week, next month. If things happen the way it looks like they may well happen from here on in, they will remember this inning 50 years from now. Every detail. Every minute. Every second.”

In fact, this overwrought prose proved far from prophetic. Things hardly “happen[ed] the way it looks like they may.” This year’s Red Sox team proved resilient enough to rebound, crushing the Yankees 10-1 the next day behind a terrific outing from Josh Beckett. They ended their season series with the Yankees with a 4-3 loss the in the final game of the series. Fans of either team would agree this was a fabulous game, a tight pitchers duel setting Roger Clemens, age 45, against Curt Schilling, age 41, with important contributions as well from rookies on both teams, a clutch three run homer from Derek Jeter, probably the Yankee most feared and respected by Boston fans, and a final failed chance by David Ortiz to win the game, with bases loaded and two outs in the 9th inning. Even with this loss, Boston ended the series still 4 ½ games ahead of New York, with only 12 left to play, in a strong position to win the division, and certain to reach the playoffs.

*

After the Yankee series, the Red Sox headed to Toronto for a three game set. With three starting players out of the lineup with injuries (Ramirez, Youkilis, Crisp), they lost all three games. For many fans, myself included, as troubling as these losses (which let the surging Yankees climb to within 1.5 games) was that the manager was putting

more emphasis on positioning the team for the post-season playoff tournament than on winning the division. Francona treated these contests a bit like exhibition games, juggling the lineup to rest his pitchers. He gave what was essentially a “tryout” to the struggling reliever, Eric Gagne, to give him a chance to return to top form for the playoffs. Leaving Gagne in even as he struggled led directly to one of the Red Sox losses.

If one accepts that winning the World Series is the most important goal of the long season, it is hard to argue with the team’s logic. By the end of the Toronto series (September 19), even as they lost three games, the magic number for the Red Sox to clinch a wild card slot was down to 3. General Manager Epstein was blunt in a radio interview that day: “Our main goal now is not to win the division but to make the playoffs.” What good would it be to win the division by expending all resources, if the result was to arrive battered and exhausted at the playoffs and lose in the first round?

But for fans obsessed with the goal of finishing ahead of the hated Yankees for the first time in over a decade, this strategy, however cold and clear its logic, left a sour taste.

Matsuzaka’s second to last start of the season came on the September 22 in Tampa Bay. A Detroit loss and Boston win would clinch at the very least a wild-card playoff spot. Matsuzaka pitched a strong game. He mixed pitches well, striking out batters on curves and sliders as well as fastballs, seven in all. The Red Sox offered some run support for a change. Matsuzaka walked the last two batters he faced, a sign he had tired and lost some command, but he left the game with two outs in the 6th inning, with a 5-3 lead.

For the second time in a row, the bullpen failed to hold the lead. Reliever Lopez gave up a three run homer to the very next batter. Matsuzaka would not record his 15th win of the season.

But he and his teammates left the ballpark in happy. They rallied in the top of the 9th inning for three runs, on home runs by Varitek and Lugo. Detroit indeed had lost its game shortly before this, and the Red Sox held a relatively quiet celebration of their advance to the playoffs. They were saving the champagne for future occasions.

Six days later, September 28, Matsuzaka made his final start of the regular season. The Red Sox had split the intervening four games. The Yankees had also lost two games over their previous five. They too had clinched at least a wild card slot and stood 2 games behind the Red Sox with three games left for each team. Both teams were in the uncomfortable position of trying both to rest and get ready for the playoffs, while also seeking to win the division. But the Red Sox had the advantage. If they won two of the season's final three games, at home against Minnesota, they would clinch the division. Matsuzaka could take them half the way there with a victory on this evening. And if the Yankees lost their game, he could be the pitcher of record on the night they clinched the division.

Matsuzaka did his part, in his strongest outing since early August. Working quickly and confidently, mixing slider, cut fastball and fastball, and with excellent control, he breezed through the first six innings, giving up just 4 hits, and no runs, striking out six batters, walking none. Led by David Ortiz, who in the third inning reached base for the 11th consecutive times over three games, the Red Sox scored two runs in the first, one more in the third and sixth, for a 4-0 lead. Daisuke stumbled in the

seventh, giving up two runs, but he finished the inning without further damage. At 105 pitches, Matsuzaka's night appeared to be over, but to the surprise of most in the park and all in the press box, Francona sent him out for one more inning. Matsuzaka was clearly energized. He struck out Bartlett on three straight fastballs, 94, 95, then 96 mph. After a walk to Kubel, he ended his night by getting Torii Hunter to hit into a nicely turned double play. Just 2 runs on 6 hits over 8 innings, 8 strikeouts and no walks: the Monster was back in top form heading into the post-season:

Papelbon, back in form himself, retired the side in order on 5 pitches in the ninth.

In the postgame press room, Terry Francona extolled Matsuzaka, displaying no small amount of relief at the prospect going forward to the postseason: "he had a good look in his eyes, confident, and it was awesome,"

But even as Francona spoke, a truly strange spectacle unfolded in a half-darkened Fenway Park. Soon after the Red Sox game ended, the Yankees built a 9-6 lead over Baltimore in the top of the 8th inning. An Oriole comeback was most unlikely. The Red Sox, it seemed, would have to win the division pennant themselves on the next day. But just in case, the ballpark management projected the Yankee game broadcast on the big scoreboard in centerfield. Incredibly, at least 2000 fans—by some estimates 5000--stayed behind in the faint hope that Baltimore would rally, allowing the Red Sox clinch on the spot.

Well over an hour after the Boston game had ended, Mariano Rivera allowed a bases loaded triple, coughing up a 3 run lead in the ninth. And in the bottom of the 10th, as delirious fans watched the big screen half in disbelief, the Orioles pushed across the winning run on a two out squeeze bunt. A stunning way in which to win the pennant.

The players watching in the clubhouses broke out the champagne as one might expect. But then, not so expected, one after another they ran out onto the field, Daisuke among them, spraying themselves and fans alike in an impromptu celebration, an early fall festival for the diehards of Red Sox nation. Those who stayed for the party can be called the “true believers” among the Fenway faithful.

* *

For the first time since they won the division in 1995, the Red Sox finished ahead of the New York Yankees. They ended the season with 96 wins, 66 losses, tied with the Cleveland Indians for the best record in all of major league baseball.

The specter that once more, Boston fans would see hopes raised, and dashed, in story as predictable as Charlie Brown’s futile dash to kick Lucy’s football, or as inevitable as the annual turn of the New England fall foliage, was this year banished. As students started back to classes, as the days grew longer and the evenings cooler, the team was headed for the playoffs in confident spirits.

The contributions of two pitchers from Japan, one greeted with unprecedented hoopla and acclaim, the other coming to town almost unnoticed, were extremely important to bring about this happy result. Indeed, despite Okajima’s late season stumbles and Matsuzaka’s deeper late summer downturn, one must recognize these two men among the greatest difference-makers in a memorable season.

Okajima threw in 66 contests (the most in his career as a reliever). He gave up only 17 runs, for a 2.22 ERA. For most of the season, he was the lynchpin who brought stability and flexibility to the strongest bullpen in either league.

Matsuzaka ended the season with a record of 15 wins, 12 losses. He pitched 204.2 innings, with an ERA of 4.40 and 201 strikeouts. He started 32 games, the most on the team, and was the only pitcher in the rotation not to miss a single start. For fully half the season, in 18 starts from May 9 to August 10, he maintained a 3.00 ERA, the 6th best among American League starters. And for much of this time, 13 starts from July 5 through August 10, he was the top performing pitcher in the American league. During this span, with an ERA of 2.53, he surrendered 2 runs or less in 10 of his starts.

While he was not the staff ace, by never missing a start, and by going deep into most games, he provided a foundation for one of the league's strongest starting pitching rotations. Without his consistent presence, the season would have been far less successful for the team as a whole.

* *

On the field before Matsuzaka's final start of the regular season, I mentioned the title of this book to Red Sox GM Theo Epstein. "Revolution?" He smiled. "Maybe its evolution." Like Epstein, readers of this book can be forgiven for questioning its title. Especially given Daisuke's August-September slump, what has been the "major revolution"? Indeed, I have asked been asking myself this question.

The answer goes something like this. Revolutions come in various types. Some, such as those in Europe in 1848, are thwarted. Some, and this has commonly been said of the Meiji revolution (although I disagree), are distorted versions of a truer model of revolution.

But even profound revolutions do not, in fact, take place over night. Sentiments for change, and new ideas about what is possible or desirable, spread gradually at first. If Daisuke Matsuzaka is part of a major league revolution with roots in Japan, we currently stand, in Japanese terms, in the late years of Keio. Meiji has not yet arrived.

Of course, well before the Tokugawa regime collapsed, changes were underway in Japan. And some things have changed in the present day baseball world as well.

Most important has been a change in the American understanding of Japanese baseball. On many teams, front office personnel, managers, and coaches seem willing, indeed interested, to consider different modes of playing the game or preparing to play it. Developments like the Chiba-Red Sox alliance hold promise of more two-way traffic in baseball thinking and practice.

At the level of fans, here in Boston, there has been a dramatic change in how the fan base—the entity called Red Sox nation—understands its reach and membership. The enthusiastic welcome extended to Daisuke Matsuzaka and Hideki Okajima has been remarkable, even to the point of surprising the team’s owners and executives. Matsuzaka’s late season slump threw some cold water on this passion, but it has already revived as he and Okajima put on strong displays for the Fenway faithful in the last regular season games.

That said, basic changes in sports, as in other realms, are rarely the achievement of a single individual. Although contemporary culture (and past cultures too) love to focus attention on individual heroes, it is a naïve to expect one man to lead a revolution.

Looking ahead, the extent to which so-called “Japanese” elements will be further incorporated into major league baseball is far from certain. Matsuzaka’s late season

slump meant that in 2007 he was not going to lead a charge against dominant ideas about pitch counts. Even so, his body of work over the entire year suggests that in a context of ongoing debate about pitchers and pitching, with contestants on both sides of the battlefield, Matsuzaka in future seasons, along with others, might play an important role in rethinking some of MLB's common wisdom.

As it had been all season long, this will be a process of negotiation between different views of the practice of pitching. Epstein, in our pregame conversation on the 28th, summed up Matsuzaka's and Okajima's first season as a process of "mutual learning and adjusting....If we had forced them to adapt our way of doing things, that would have been a failure. And if they had rigidly insisted on doing things as in Japan, that too would have failed." Overall, he judged Matsuzaka's first season a real success, offering a "strong platform" to build on in "his coming prime years as a pitcher."

I asked Farrell if he believed Matsuzaka in the future could pitch at his extraordinary June-July level consistently for a full season. "Sure he could be that pitcher. What he showed was not a fluke. Looking to next year, he'll [have more experience to] be able to manage his routine, including the volume of throwing. And we'll need to think also—do we use him differently next year? Given him a mid-season sabbatical?...We'll convene at the end of the season to see where adjustments are needed, discuss things. Will he embrace them, or will we adjust some? We want to adjust to where he's comfortable. This is yet to be determined."

* *

I have in these pages followed Daisuke Matsuzaka on his first year's sojourn to Boston. What will the future bring? How will his game develop? How will baseball

more generally continue to change, here and in Japan? And how will all who read about, listen to, watch or play the games understand this? It is too soon to answer these questions.

But this much is certain. Fixed ideas of culture, of region, of nation, will continue to collide with the messy reality of exchange and transformation, and might occasionally change in the process. And all who watch will continue to take pleasure in watching and talking about the games, their heroes, their goats, and their unpredictable outcomes.

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Mid-way through the summer, my older daughter was married to a wonderful young man on a glorious day. Fortunately, it was a Saturday evening when Matsuzaka was not pitching, so I was spared a difficult choice of which to attend. I am indeed grateful to Jennifer, her husband Luke, and my wife Yoshie for putting up with my occasional distraction from wedding plans over the course of the season.