

Styles of the World

My whole life has consisted of baseball. I've reached a point where I finally realized that my pitching career has most likely come to an end. But baseball has meant so much more to me than just a game. It was my way of life. I wasn't ready to let that part of my life go just. I wanted to dig deeper than just looking at the wins and losses. This project has given me insight into a sport I thought I knew so well. Looking at the game from a different perspective was really an eye opening experience. I've always strictly looked at the game from a physiological aspect. For the past few months, I've seen it from a social and cultural aspect - Areas in which I've never really explored in depth up until this year. I wanted to keep baseball a part of my life for as long as possible.

In class, we watched a video about the Trobriand tribe and their love of cricket. It showed us a sport of their culture in which they play more uniquely than any other country. I was shocked that a tribe that seemed so different than the rest of the world picked up a game played by the British. I became curious about other sports and how they were changed throughout the world. It inspired me to do dive into the realm of baseball, seeing it from this point of view. It was a research topic in which I was glad I chose.

My research was pretty simple: learn how other cultures have affected baseball and its players. Looking at the sport from a completely new point of view has expanded my knowledge of the game that much more. The research consisted of mostly talking with current and ex baseball players here at the

university. The general consensus was this; other countries and cultures may have affected them, but not to the point where it was affecting the game or playing style permanently. I can say from my own personal experience that for me, culture affected my high school team.

A teammate of mine who goes to this university began chatting with me about the beginning of our high school season. We started off the season winning every game by 6 or more runs. With these victories came swagger. The kind that wasn't helpful to the team, and our coaches noticed it. They sat us down and began to tell us that there is a fine line between having confidence and being cocky. They began preaching about the Japanese. It happened to be the time when the World Baseball Classic was going on, which all the countries are competing against each other. The focus of the speech was that they wanted us to be more humble, which is what the Japanese are known for. If you ever get the chance to watch the Japanese play, you will definitely notice a distinct difference in not only playing style, but mannerisms as well. The Japanese lifestyle in general is a quiet, docile one. These values translate to baseball as well. On the field, they keep to themselves. They do their jobs and don't try to do it flashy. The Japanese often play the game like the men of science they are. Is there any skill they haven't studied and perfected with machine-like precision? These players become so regimented, so pre-programmed; they aren't as inventive as other players. Trash talking is non-existent in Japan. This is one of the many different cultural barriers Japan has with America. Trash talking has almost become synonymous with every sport in America, especially for young

men playing sports in college.

Another student who I spoke with here I played against for many years. I met him early this year so I asked for his help on my research. We had a very interesting conversation, which ended up being the opposite of the Japanese story my ex teammate and I spoke of. He recalled of a tournament his team went to in Georgia in 2006. There were teams from all over the world, such as Japan, Hawaii, South America, and Cuba. One team caught everyone's eyes and ears. The Puerto Ricans.

You could always tell when the team was at the stadium. You could hear them for what seemed like a mile. Between the numbers of fans they brought along and the noise they made, you would think you were at a major league game. They even brought instruments to make noise. Never had he seen so much enthusiasm coming from one team. The players carried the same swagger and enthusiasm as the fans did. They talked to each other on the field as if what they were doing was child's play. Their boisterous style appeared to be so unorthodox and even annoying. But it worked for them. The student I interviewed had to play them in the championship game of the tournament. He said it was almost overwhelming playing them because he had never seen anything like it before. Apparently it was too much and the Puerto Ricans ended up winning the game and the tournament. The Puerto Ricans play baseball with emotion oozing out of their caps. Fists pumping, hands clapping, flags waving, mouths moving. If something in a ball game was worth doing, it was worth celebrating. He said after that game, his whole team saw how unified not only the players were, but the

coaches and fans as well. From that game forward he said, he would do his best to motivate his team and be the spark plug that would keep them going when they were down.

I spoke with a current member of the Illinois baseball team. He went to my high school and played on the team with me. I asked him straight forward if any culture had affected any part of his game. He's a quiet kid and didn't have much to say, but he did give me an honest no. He said he sticks to what he's been doing his whole life because it has always worked for him. I know from playing with him that despite his tremendous skill, he stays humble yet is a team leader who motivates by example.

My research of baseball has been gratifying. Looking at a sport from a different direction has shown me how different parts of the world are. It amazes me how one unifying game can be played so uniquely. The countries that play baseball have very little in common besides the ball they both throw around. In fact, it's possible there is no element of everyday life that bonds these countries more than their love of baseball. So these countries are showing us, through the prism of baseball, exactly how much the world is shrinking. Just as we all borrow from each other now – in food, in music, and in life – we borrow from each other in baseball, too.