

# Baseball is back! — in South Korea

**By Kim Tong-Hyung**  
The Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — The new baseball season began in South Korea on Tuesday with the crack of the bat and the sound of the ball smacking into the catcher's mitt echoing around empty stadiums.

After a weeks-long delay because of the coronavirus pandemic, umpires wore protective masks and cheerleaders danced beneath rows of unoccupied seats as professional baseball got back on the field.

There were many faces in the stands in at least one stadium, but they were pictures instead of real people because fans aren't allowed into the venues — at least for now.

Instead, it was easy to hear players cheering and shouting from the dugouts. And it was a relief to fans watching from home in a country that is now attempting to slowly return to pre-COVID-19 normalcy.

The country's professional soccer leagues will kick off Friday, also without spectators.

As one of the world's first major professional sports competitions to return to action amid the pandemic, the Korea Baseball Organization has employed various measures aimed at creating safe playing environments.

Players and coaches will go through fever screenings before entering

stadiums, while umpires and first- and third-base coaches must wear masks during games. Players are prohibited from signing autographs or high-fiving teammates with bare hands.

Also, chewing tobacco was banned to prevent spitting, while masks and latex gloves will be required at training facilities.

Fans will be barred from games until the KBO is convinced the risk of infection has been minimized. If any member of a team tests positive for the coronavirus at any point of the season, the league will be shut down for at least three weeks.

"I feel great," said Cho Ki-hyun, a 65-year-old SK Wyverns fan who shared a mattress with three other fans outside the walls of the team's stadium in Incheon, watching the game against the Daegu-based Hanwha Eagles with a tablet computer. "I am delighted just to hear the sounds of a baseball game from outside."

The teams tried to create a festive atmosphere in the empty stadiums.

In a game in the capital, LG Twins defeated cross-town rival and defending champion Doosan Bears 8-2 at Jamsil Stadium, where the outfield seats were decked with huge banners of the Twins' cheering slogans.

Twins outfielder Kim Hyun-soo, who spent some time with the Baltimore Orioles, hit the league's

first home run of the season in the third inning, a two-run shot off Bears starter Raul Alcantara. As he rounded the bases, Kim extended a hand toward third-base coach Kim Jea-gul, who raised his arm but stayed out of contact.

"The players just really wanted to play baseball, and we are delighted to do just that," Kim Hyun-soo said.

The Wyverns imitated a home crowd in Incheon by covering their outfield seats with rows of horizontal banners showing faces of fans wearing the team's hats and masks. They still lost 3-0 to the Eagles, who won their first season opener in 11 years with former Detroit Tigers pitcher Warwick Saupold hurling a two-hit, complete game shutout.

In Daegu, the city worst hit by the virus, the Samsung Lions used their huge scoreboard to play video messages from players, celebrities and fans thanking doctors and medical staff fighting the outbreak, which overwhelmed the city's hospitals in late February and March before slowing in recent weeks. The Lions fell to the Changwon-based NC Dinos 4-0 in a game that was broadcast on ESPN.

"It would have been better if they could be with us, but I am glad that we delivered something good to fans watching TV," said Dinos outfielder Na Sung-bum.

# LOANS

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Recipients of the loans included The Landing Hotel, owned by Karin Tsiatsos and her husband Gust, which received a \$10,000 loan.

Karin Tsiatsos said the loan will help her business be in a position to continue making a strong recovery once it can fully reopen. Without the loan, Tsiatsos said, The Landing faced the prospect of financial hardship. Tsiatsos said the loan will cover insurance expenses, the city's lodging tax, mortgage payments, utilities and employee wages.

"It will fill in many gaps," she said.

Tsiatsos said her business went five to six weeks with little income after Gov. Kate Brown's stay home order in mid-March. The Landing's hotel has been able to operate because lodging has been deemed an essential service. However, its restaurant, like all those in Oregon, had to shut down its main dining area. Still, The Landing has been able to provide room service meals and take out meals.

Tsiatsos said business at her hotel has picked up significantly in recent weeks because people are traveling more.

"We have been quite busy," she said.

Buggy Bath Car Wash, owned by Mat and Toni Miles received a \$5,000 loan from the city.

"We were thrilled when

we got the call. It was a breath of fresh air," Mat Miles said.

He said without the loan his business would be in jeopardy of closing. Miles noted in March revenue was down 50% of what it normally is that time of the year. This added to an already challenging financial situation.

"We always lose money in the winter, it is tough to survive," said Miles, who said the car wash is open in the winter to help people clean salt off their vehicles.

Mat and Toni Miles will use their loan to pay for the car wash's operating expenses, which include water, electricity for pumps and heating.

The Mountain Works Bicycles received a loan of \$10,000. Mavis Hartz, co-owner of The Mountain Works Bicycles with her husband Whit, said the loan will provide her store with an important buffer.

"If we get sick we have

to shut down and we cannot pay our bills. This will allow us to operate with a little cushion," Mavis Hartz said.

Hartz is grateful the city of La Grande stepped forward to help businesses via the loan program.

"They didn't have to do this," she said.

Each business was able to apply for a loan of up to \$10,000, but Strobe said some requested less.

In most cases, the city granted the loans for the full amount the businesses applied for. There have been two or three exceptions and each involved businesses that indicated they would spend a portion of the loan money on expenses they will encounter after reopening rather than immediate costs.

In one case a restaurant indicated it would use \$8,500 of the money it was requesting to pay utilities, rent and wages and \$1,500 would go toward inventory.

# LEVY

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Chris Law, manager of the Union County Vector Control District, said passage of the levy would help his department upgrade the services it provides.

"We are looking at expanding our services by using new technology," Law said.

He explained this would allow his district to make greater use of safer organic products and do aerial applications with drones. Law said with unmanned aircraft his staff would be able to treat large areas in much less time, thus creating the potential to treat

more acres.

Law said a drone could treat a 180-acre area in 30-40 minutes, a task that would take several people working on the ground two to three hours to do.

"We would be able to treat areas more effectively and get more treatments done," Law said.

Law said passage of the levy would put Union County in a better position to prevent the spread of the sometimes deadly West Nile Virus and also possibly the Zika virus, which has gotten as far north as Mexico and may someday make it to Oregon. The Zika virus can cause serious neurological complications.

Should the Union County Vector Control District not be approved, Law said he would still pursue making technology upgrades. He said it would take one to two years longer to get them in place though without passage of the levy.

The proposed levy would raise about \$304,000 in 2020-21, \$314,000 in 2021-22, \$325,000 in 2022-23 and \$336,000 in 2023-24, according to the election ballot. These estimates are based on information from the Union County Assessor's Office.

Ballots for the May election were sent out late last week by the Union County Clerk's Office. They must be returned by May 19.

# BAKER

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including its efforts to get approval from Oregon Gov. Kate Brown to begin the county's three-phase plan to reopen its economy.

"Our Health Department, county and community partners have been preparing for this day since we learned of this virus spreading its way across the world," said Nancy Staten, Baker County Health Department director. "Now that it is here, we need to not panic, but pull together as a community. Just because we have a confirmed case of COVID-19 in Baker County doesn't change the everyday precautions that are already in place. Please understand this is a serious illness and take the appropriate measures to keep ourselves, our families and our community safe."

Residents are urged to take precautions to prevent the spread of coronavirus to those most vulnerable to complications from COVID-19. The high-risk populations include adults age 60 and over, those suffering from a serious health condition including lung/heart issues, diabetes, and kidney disease, or anyone with a suppressed immune system. Those vulnerable to complications are advised to follow the recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to stay home as much as possible and avoid gatherings.

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