

IOC: Flexible rules could allow baseball's return

INCHEON, South Korea (AP) — The adoption of a more flexible approach to the Olympic program could allow for the return of baseball and other sports that have been dropped from the games, according to International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach.

Asked on the sidelines of meetings at the Asian Games, Bach declined to comment specifically on baseball's suitability for the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo. The sport is hugely popular in Japan, as well as in Taiwan and South Korea, adding momentum to the drive to have it reinstated.

However, Bach said that an IOC vote in December on rules for including new sports could open the way for further talks on the subject. He advocates changing the rules to make it easier to drop and add sports in order to increase the variety and appeal of the Olympics.

"We have to discuss about the



FLEXIBLE RULES. South Korea celebrates by throwing their manager, Kim Kyung-moon, in the air (left photo) after beating Cuba 3-2 in the gold-medal baseball game at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing on August 23, 2008. Pictured at right, Japan's Yu Darvish pitches against Team USA during the Beijing 2008 bronze-medal baseball game. Team USA won the game, 8-4. The adoption of a more flexible approach to the Olympic program could allow for the return of baseball and other sports that have been dropped from the games, according to the International Olympic Committee.

procedures first, how we can make the composition of the program more flexible, and afterward we can discuss about individual sports and disciplines. But first we have to win the votes

in December," Bach said.

Baseball and softball appeared in the Olympics from 1992 to 2008, but IOC members voted in 2005 to drop them from the program — the first sports to be



excluded since polo in 1936. That decision affected about 300 athletes, half of them women.

The sports were eventually replaced by golf and rugby sevens, both of which will join the program at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.

Critics of the inclusion of

baseball and softball point to their lack of appeal in Europe, Africa, and the rest of Asia, as well as a lack of competitiveness because of the unwillingness of Major League Baseball teams to release players for national duty at the height of the baseball season in North America.

NFL says Abdullah should not have been penalized

By Dave Skretta
The Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The National Football League (NFL) says Kansas City Chiefs safety Husain Abdullah should not have been penalized for unsportsmanlike conduct when he dropped to his knees in prayer after an interception.

The league's rule book prohibits players from celebrating while on the ground, but spokesman Michael Signora wrote in an e-mail that the "officialing mechanic in this situation is not to flag a player who goes to the ground as part of religious expression, and as a result, there should have been no penalty on the play."

The flag thrown in the fourth quarter of Kansas City's 41-14 victory over the New England Patriots on Monday Night Football led to criticism on social media, with many wondering how it was different from players such as former NFL quarterback Tim Tebow dropping to one knee in Christian prayer.

Abdullah is a devout Muslim who took a year off from football to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. He said after the game that he knew before he even reached the end zone he



would drop to his knees in thankful prayer after intercepting a pass attempt by Tom Brady.

After he slid to the grass in Arrowhead Stadium, yellow flags came flying from the officials.

SLIDING FEE. Kansas City Chiefs free safety Husain Abdullah (#39) bows his head in prayer after intercepting a pass from New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady (#12), seated on the field at left, and returning it for a touchdown during the fourth quarter of a National Football League game in Kansas City, Missouri. Abdullah was penalized on the play. (AP Photo/The Boston Globe, Barry Chin)

"I don't think it was because of the actual prostration that I got the penalty," Abdullah told The Associated Press afterward. "I think it was because of the slide."

And that's precisely the explanation Chiefs coach Andy Reid said he received from the game officials. They had no issue with the prayer, Reid said, only the celebratory slide.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a civil liberties and advocacy organization, issued a statement asking that the NFL take steps in response to the penalty.

"To prevent the appearance of a double standard, we urge league officials to clarify the policy on prayer and recognize that the official made a mistake in this case," CAIR spokesman Ibrahim Hooper said.

Reid didn't agree with the penalty, but he also didn't

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