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Asian MLB pitchers rise and fall with injuries

By Mike Street

Special to The Asian Reporter

At the start of the 2015 Major League Baseball (MLB) season, injuries continue to tell the story of Asian starting pitchers imported from Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB). Whether due to the advanced age of the players or the difference in pitching schedules or workout regimens, many NPB imports succumb to arm and shoulder ailments. Two imported relievers, however, have shown how well they have recovered from past injuries.

Three notable Asian starting pitchers have been bitten by the injury bug; the youngest of them will be gone until 2016. Hyun-Jin Ryu of the Los Angeles Dodgers became the first starting pitcher to jump from the Korean Baseball Organization (KBO) to MLB in 2013. Because of the low regard in which many hold the KBO, little was expected from the young lefty, despite his impressive KBO credentials.

Ryu responded with a combined 28-15 record over the past two seasons, with a strong 3.17 Earned Run Average (ERA) and an excellent 1.20 Walks & Hits per Innings Pitched (WHIP). Ryu placed fourth in Rookie of the Year balloting in 2013 and was poised this season to build on his strong start. But the shoulder injury that put him on the disabled list twice in 2014 turned out to be a labrum tear. Incredibly, he pitched through the tear for the past two years, but last month's shoulder surgery knocked him off the mound until next season.

Expectations ran much higher for Masahiro Tanaka, who pitched for seven seasons with the NPB Tohoku Rakuten Golden Eagles. There, he amassed a combined 99-35 record, with a 2.30 ERA and 1.11 WHIP, setting an NPB record with 26 consecutive decisions and leading his team to a Japan Series win in 2013.

Tanaka signed a seven-year, \$155-million contract with the New York Yankees before last season, then pitched impressively in his MLB debut. He racked up a 13-5 record with an excellent 2.77 ERA and tiny 1.06 WHIP. But he missed two months to a partially torn elbow ligament and faced the prospect of offseason surgery that would have kept him out all of 2015.

He chose against surgery and managed to make four starts this season before hitting the disabled list again. This time, it was for a forearm strain and wrist tendinitis, which Tanaka claims are unrelated to his elbow problems. But it's also easy to see how these might have happened if he was favoring his damaged elbow. He is expected to return to the Yankee lineup soon after this column goes to press, but it's hard to believe his torn elbow ligament won't continue to bother him.

A lesser injury felled Tanaka's former Rakuten teammate, Hisashi Iwakuma of the Seattle Mariners. Seattle signed Iwakuma to a one-year, \$1.5-million contract in 2012, a year after Oakland failed to land the NPB star.

Prying parents: Phone monitoring apps flourish in South Korea

Continued from page 5

each other and try to build consensus. He is only in [the] sixth grade, but he wants to have his privacy," Lee said. "I told him: 'We are installing this and father will know which app you use,'" he said. "I see it as positive in helping nurture his habit of self-control."

Legal experts, however, say South Korea's telecom regulator has taken the sweeping step of legalizing the broad collection of personal, sensitive data that belongs to teenagers without any public consultation or consideration of the possible consequences.

"South Korea underestimated the chilling effect," said Kang Jeong-Soo, director at Institute for the Digital Society.

Cybersecurity experts also warn that the apps could be misused and installed on phones without the owner's knowledge.

"It could be an official spying app," said Ryu Jong-myeong, CEO of SoTIS, a cybersecurity company.

To get around the regulations, some students say they will wait until they turn 19 to get a new phone.

"I'd rather not buy a phone," said Paik Hyunsuk, 17. "It's [a] violation of students' privacy and oppressing

freedom."

Cho Jaehyun, a senior year high school student, had to install a parental control app when he was in middle school. But he said he was lucky that his parents agreed to uninstall the app when he entered high school.

"We don't always use the smartphone for something bad," said Cho, 17. "Because I could use my phone freely without control, I got interested in developing iPhone games."

Not all parents are on board, either.

Park Choel-hee, father of a 10-year-old daughter, said South

Korea resorts too much to regulation and makes "senseless" choices about what content is offensive.

"A few officials arbitrarily determine which websites are harmful and unilaterally shut them off. They rob the rights of internet users. It is no different from the Great Fire Wall of China."

Park, who gave his daughter his second phone so she didn't have to release her personal information to mobile carriers, said he feels "uncomfortable" that his child is growing up in a society of prying eyes.

"Children will not have an ability to think for themselves," he said.

Mariota adapting to huddle, complex plays with Titans

By Teresa M. Walker
AP Pro Football Writer

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Marcus Mariota never had to worry about huddling up to call plays at Oregon — he and the Ducks simply glanced to the sideline for what to run next.

Now with the Tennessee Titans, it's up to Mariota to huddle up his teammates and call a play only he has received from the sideline. The play can be as short as three words or as

long as 11.

So the Heisman Trophy winner says he's practicing those calls every night on his own to make sure he's ready to rattle off whatever coach Ken Whisenhunt wants.

Mariota showed his command of the huddle last month as the Titans took the field for their first organized workout this offseason. Whisenhunt says that hasn't been an issue since Mariota arrived as the No. 2 pick overall.



AP Photo/Ben Margot

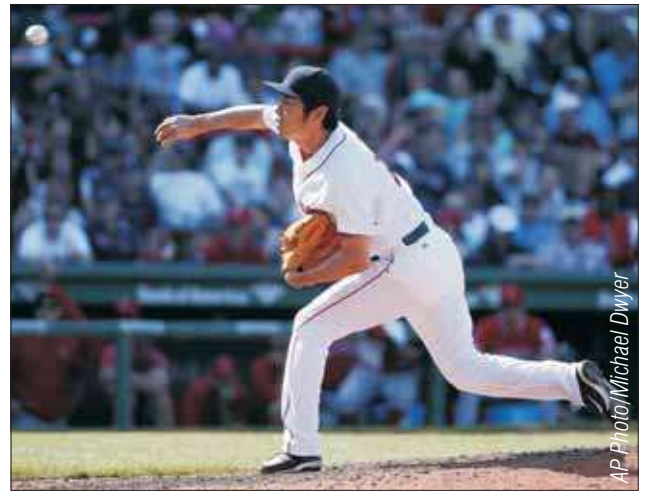
INJURIES & EXPECTATIONS. At the start of the 2015 Major League Baseball season, injuries continue to tell the story of starting pitchers imported from Asia. One pitcher, Hyun-Jin Ryu (bottom right photo) of the Los Angeles Dodgers, underwent surgery for a torn labrum last month, an injury that will keep him from playing for the rest of the season. A pair of Asian relievers — Junichi Tazawa (left photo) and Koji Uehara (top right photo) of the Boston Red Sox — however, have overcome injuries to become a devastating 1-2 punch for Boston's bullpen.

Iwakuma paid huge dividends on that investment, working his way from the bullpen into the rotation in his first season in Seattle and finishing with an overall record of 9-5 with a 3.16 ERA and 1.28 WHIP.

Seattle signed Iwakuma to a three-year, \$20-million deal before the 2013 season, and he has only gotten better since then. Over the past two years, his record was 29-15, supported by a 3.6 ERA and 1.03 WHIP; he became an all-star for the first time in 2013. After a sluggish start this season, Iwakuma was placed on the disabled list with a strain to a shoulder muscle. Seattle expects him to be back this month and return to his winning ways.

If these starters need a roadmap to recovery, they can look to a pair of Asian relievers, Koji Uehara and Junichi Tazawa, who have overcome their injuries to become a devastating 1-2 punch at the back end of Boston's bullpen.

Tazawa was best known for dodging the NPB draft to play in MLB, and he quickly rocketed through the Red Sox minor-league system before Tommy John surgery knocked him out for 2010 and part of 2011. In the three seasons since, however, Tazawa has notched a 2.48 ERA



AP Photo/Michael Dwyer



AP Photo/Lenny Ignelz

and 1.11 WHIP with 47 holds, the best measure of a relief pitcher who isn't a closer.

He might have pitched in the closing role if it weren't for Uehara, signed from the Texas Rangers before the 2013 season. Uehara initially came from NPB to the Baltimore Orioles as a starter, but a series of hamstring injuries pushed him to the bullpen, where he did well, but nothing like he has in Boston.

Uehara's first season with the Red Sox was one for the record books, as he set the all-time MLB record for ERA (1.09) and WHIP (0.57) for any pitcher who threw more than 50 innings. The following season, he also posted excellent numbers, with a 2.52 ERA and a 0.92 WHIP; he combined for 47 saves over those two seasons, blowing just eight saves in 55 opportunities.

If only the rest of the club could be as strong: Boston won the World Series in Uehara's first season, then plummeted to last place in their division the following season. Perhaps, like their prized relievers, Boston can emerge from its recent challenges to excel once again. Whether or not the Red Sox can, other injured NPB imports can take heart from the successes of Uehara and Tazawa and realize that there is life after injury, no matter how severe.

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