

Asians in American sports • Asian Americans in world sports

Depleted squads from Japan & South Korea fall short at WBC

By Mike Street

Special to The Asian Reporter

For Asian athletes, the World Baseball Classic (WBC) has fallen victim to its own success. The Japanese and South Korean players who rose to international prominence at the tournament are now too focused on their success in the U.S., which drained talent from their national teams. As a result, South Korea was eliminated early from this year's tournament while Japan lost a squeaker in the semifinal against Team USA, the eventual champion.

Since its inception in 2006, the tournament has provided international exposure for players in other professional leagues, most notably the Korean Baseball Organization (KBO) and Japan's Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB). As those stars signed contracts with Major League Baseball (MLB) teams, however, the demands of the MLB season have taken them out of the WBC tournament.

MLB players Shin Soo Choo, Hyun Soo Kim, and Jung Ho Kang had anchored South Korea's team in the past. However, Kim opted out this year to focus on improving from a shaky rookie season, while the Texas Rangers held Choo out of the WBC due to his injury history. Unable to secure a U.S. work visa due to his DUI conviction in South Korea, Kang has bigger things than baseball on his mind.

For its part, Japan was without the aging Ichiro Suzuki, whose best years are behind him, with journeyman Norichika Aoki as their sole MLB representative. And the pitching staff was missing all its MLB talent, as Masahiro Tanaka, Kenta Maeda, and Yu Darvish all opted out.

Because of an ankle injury, the team was also without the NPB's top talent, 2016 Pacific League MVP Shohei Ohtani. In four seasons, the 22-year-old Ohtani has amassed a 39-13 record with a 2.49 ERA on the mound, logging more than a strikeout per inning. On the days he's not pitching, Ohtani plays as a designated hitter, where he averaged .322 last season with 22 home runs.

Despite these talent deficits, both teams had plenty of other native talent to draw



WORLD-CLASS BASEBALL. Tetsuto Yamada (top photo) of Japan bunts during the eighth inning of a semifinal game against the United States held as part of the World Baseball Classic, in Los Angeles. In the bottom photo, Norichika Aoki bats during the first inning of the same semifinal match. (AP Photos/Chris Carlson)

For its second straight tournament, South Korea did not escape the first round.

Japan fared much better in its early games on home turf in Tokyo. They crushed Cuba, 11-6, in their opening match, came back against Australia to win 4-1, then jumped on China early before winning 7-1.

Japan faced its toughest second-round challenge against the Netherlands. Each team scored one run in the second inning, followed by four runs in the third, three of Japan's coming from a homer by first baseman Sho Nakata. Japan took a one-run lead in the fifth, but the Netherlands tied the score in the bottom of the ninth. In the 11th, Nakata came through again, driving home two runs on a line-drive single for the win.

Next, Japan faced Cuba, a rematch of their opening game with a similar result. This time, the teams traded leads throughout the game until Japan scored three in the bottom of the eighth and went on to an 8-5 win.

Facing surprising powerhouse Israel next, Japan seemed to have met their match, as the game remained scoreless through five innings. But then Japan broke open the game with five runs in the sixth and three more in the eighth, so the three runs Israel scored in the top of the ninth didn't matter.

Japan headed to the WBC semifinal to face a U.S. team that had experienced some early-round problems. Although they advanced from both brackets, the U.S. dropped a game in each, losing 5-7 to the Dominican Republic and 5-6 to Puerto Rico.

But Japan's vaunted defense fell flat at precisely the wrong time in the semifinal game. In the fourth inning, second baseman Ryosuke Kikuchi bobbled a hard ground ball, allowing Christian Yelich to reach second. Yelich would later score on

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on, resulting in mixed outcomes at the 2017 WBC.

South Korea finished the inaugural WBC tournament in third place, lost to Japan in the 2009 finals, then failed to advance out of the first round in 2013. In 2017, South Korea hosted Pool A, giving them a leg up in a tough group.

Facing Israel in the first game, South

Korea battled to a 1-1 tie after nine innings before surrendering the winning run on an infield grounder in the 10th inning. Against the Netherlands, South Korea fell behind early as the Dutch scored three runs in the first two innings, eventually winning 5-0. Even lowly Chinese Taipei proved a hard matchup, as South Korea needed 10 innings to secure its only win.

Foreign adoptions to U.S. families continue long decline

By David Crary
AP National Writer

NEW YORK — The number of foreign children adopted by U.S. parents dropped almost five percent last year, continuing a steady decline that's now extended for 12 years, according to new State Department figures.

However, department officials say they have been working closely with numerous countries to strengthen international adoption procedures, and they suggested the numbers could rise if the U.S. adoption community helped to address some of the concerns of the countries about ethics and oversight.

The department's report for the 2016 fiscal year shows 5,372 adoptions from abroad, down from 5,648 in 2015 and more than 76 percent below the high of 22,884 in 2004. The number has fallen every year since then.

China, as is customary, accounted for the most children adopted in the U.S. Its total of 2,231 was down slightly from 2015 and far below a peak of 7,903 in 2005.

Congo was second on the list with 359 adoptions. Many of those were adoptions that had been delayed for several years during a suspension — now lifted — that the Congo govern-

ment imposed out of concerns over adoption fraud.

Ukraine was third on the list with 303 adoptions, followed by South Korea, Bulgaria, India, Uganda, Ethiopia, Haiti, and the Philippines.

As adoptions from various countries have declined in recent years, adoption advocates — and the State Department — have cited Africa as an area where adoptions may increase. However, Susan Jacobs, the department's special adviser for children's issues, said this can present unique challenges because some African birth parents may incorrectly believe that adopted children would return home to care for them after living abroad temporarily to get a good education.

For a second straight year, there were no adoptions from Russia, which once accounted for hundreds of U.S. adoptions each year, but imposed a ban that fully took effect in 2014. The ban served as retaliation for a U.S. law targeting alleged Russian human-rights violators.

The last time there were fewer foreign adoptions to the U.S. overall was in 1981, when, according to U.S. immigration figures, there were 4,868 adoptions from abroad.

The State Department, in its new report, said it had identified three

concerns that were causing some foreign countries to be wary of international adoption:

- ♦ Illegal or unethical practices by some U.S. adoption agencies or adoption facilitators operating abroad. One Ohio-based agency was recently barred by the State Department from engaging in international adoption for three years because of extensive improprieties.

- ♦ Lack of comprehensive, nationwide laws that prevent adoptive parents from transferring custody of adopted children to another family without official authorization. This practice, known as re-homing, has often involved children adopted from abroad who prove more challenging to raise than the adoptive family had anticipated.

- ♦ The failure of some U.S. families to complete required post-adoption reports. Trish Maskew, chief of the State Department's adoption division, said Kazakhstan and Guatemala were potentially interested in resuming long-suspended international adoptions to the U.S., but only if several hundred overdue reports were completed by parents who adopted children from those countries in past years.

Chuck Johnson, CEO of the National Council of Adoption and a

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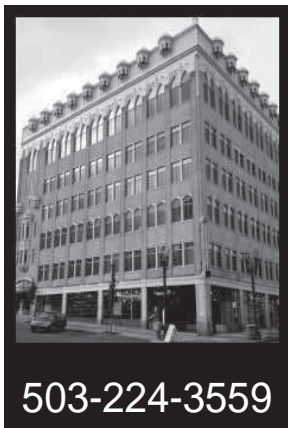
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