

# Yakyuu

Who is Sadahara Oh, and why is he so famous in the world of baseball?

<sup>1</sup> What could be more American than baseball? It was one of the earliest sports played in America, created during the mid-1800s. But the Japanese have been playing for nearly as long. In fact, baseball's popularity in Japan rivals its popularity here in the United States.

<sup>2</sup> In the early 1870s, Horace Wilson, an American professor living in Tokyo, introduced baseball to his students. They loved it, calling the game *Yakyuu*, which means *field ball*. It quickly caught on with students all over the country. Japanese leaders also embraced baseball because they thought that it contained elements that were already part of Japanese culture. For instance, baseball's focus on the mental competition between pitcher and hitter was similar to the one-on-one competitions of martial arts.

<sup>3</sup> By the early 1900s, amateur baseball leagues had been established in secondary schools and colleges throughout Japan. To this day, the enthusiasm for college baseball in Japan is equivalent to the excitement people have for college football or college basketball's March Madness in the United States.

<sup>4</sup> To make baseball even more popular, American teams regularly toured Japan in the early 1900s and played exhibition games against the local amateurs. Top American baseball stars like Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig came to Japan in the 1930s and played against the top Japanese college teams. The Americans won all 17 games they played, but baseball fever swept the whole country. A professional Japanese baseball league was formed in 1936. The Great Tokyo baseball club—known today as the Yomiuri Giants—was the first team, but it was soon joined by six others.

<sup>5</sup> Like so many other things around the world, World War II interrupted Japanese baseball when almost all of the players became soldiers. Because baseball had become an important part of Japanese culture, professional teams reformed after the war. By 1955, with the help of television, professional baseball in Japan became bigger than ever.

<sup>6</sup> The Yomiuri Giants are not just the oldest pro team in Japan; they may also be the greatest. From 1965 through 1973, the Giants won nine consecutive national championships, partly because of the legendary player Sadahara Oh. The surname *Oh* means *king*, and he certainly was the king of baseball in Japan. Among his many incredible statistics, Oh holds the world record for career home runs—868! That is more than Hank Aaron, Babe Ruth, Mark McGuire, Barry Bonds, and Sammy Sosa.

<sup>7</sup> Japanese professional players have also come to the United States and played in Major League Baseball, setting records here as well. Current players include the New York Yankees' Ichiro Suzuki. In 2004, Suzuki broke a baseball record for hitting that had stood for more than 80 years! Kazuhiro Sasaki, who played for the Seattle Mariners, was named the American League Rookie of the Year in 2000, and Hideo Nomo of the Los Angeles Dodgers was MLB's 1995 Rookie of the Year.



1. Check the sentence that best states the main idea of the passage.

Although baseball is thought of as an American sport, there are many fans and talented players of Japanese baseball, or *yakyuu*.

American teams toured Japan in the early 1900s and played exhibition games against the local amateurs.

Horace Wilson brought baseball to Japan in the 1870s.

2. Number the events below to show the order in which they happened.

Horace Wilson introduced baseball to his students.

World War II interrupted Japanese baseball.

The Giants won nine consecutive national championships.

Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig played baseball in Japan.

3. Check the phrase that best describes the author's purpose.

to inform

to entertain

to persuade

4. Why is Sadahara Oh's last name so appropriate?

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5. Why did Japan's leaders like baseball?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. What is the literal meaning of *yakyuu* in Japanese?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. During World War II, many of the players became \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_