

BASEBALL IN THE OLYMPICS

by Pete Cava
©1991

This summer in Barcelona, baseball makes its official debut as an Olympic sport, four years short of a century since Baron Pierre de Coubertin revived the Games in Athens in 1896. Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear: As the good Baron pondered the possibilities of an Olympics with no cable television revenue, across the waves the National League was preparing for its 21st season as America's top baseball circuit.

While some 311 athletes from 13 nations convened for the Games, Ned Hanlon and the Baltimore Orioles were embarking on a third straight drive to the pennant. That year, Greece's Spiridon Loues raced to the Olympic marathon title and Cleveland's Jess Burkett took the N. L. batting crown. Baseball and the Olympics were as far apart as Tippecanoe and Timbuktu.

For the next four score and seven seasons, that, for the most part, remained the status quo. Baseball was added as a demonstration sport at the Los Angeles games in 1984 and again at Seoul four years later. This was a prelude to baseball's current status as a medal sport. Between Athens and Los Angeles, however, baseball has provided some of the more fascinating and underexplored corridors of Olympic history.

Some historians include baseball as an exhibition or demonstration sport in the St. Louis Olympics of 1904. The Games were part of that year's Louisiana Purchase Exposition, and virtually every amateur sporting contest in St. Louis from May to November was packaged as part of the fair or the Olympics. *Spalding's Official Athletic Almanac for 1905* includes a report from Olympic director James E. Sullivan that boasts: "This is the largest entry that has ever been received by any one organization or corporation that ever held an athletic meeting." Yet only twelve nations sent athletes, and in many events only Americans competed.

Sullivan's list of "Olympic" events includes the Interscholastic Meet for the State of Missouri on 14 May; and amateur baseball tournament in June and the Athletic Games in Honor of Cardinal Satolli on 1 July. Thrilling events, no doubt, but none can seriously be considered part of the Olympics.

YANK TRACKMEN TRIM SWEDES IN BASEBALL'S OLYMPIC DÉBUT

In 1912, as America's major league clubs were gearing up for a new baseball season, the Swedish capital of Stockholm was preparing for the Games of the Fifth Olympiad. Two years earlier Sweden's first baseball club, Vesteras, had begun play. At about the same time the U.S. professional teams were heading north from spring training, Sweden's Olympic Committee contacted Vesteras officials about the possibility of a baseball exhibition during the Games with some of the American Olympians.

Vesteras players must have turned cartwheels at the thought of displaying their talents during the Olympics. Some of the club's best players, however, had recently moved away --- a harbinger, perhaps, of the era of free agency? --- and club officials fretted over whether or not they could field a competitive team. Determined to do their best, the Swedish baseballists soon began to prepare for their Olympic moment with thrice-weekly workouts.

Meanwhile, according to the organizing committee's report on the Stockholm Games, U.S. Olympic team members were making plans of their own for the exhibition. The American baseball squad, made up of volunteers from the track & field team, would bring their own baseball uniforms to Sweden along with special handouts. The flyers they had printed were intended to explain to Swedish spectators the intricacies of the bunt, the hit and run, and, possibly, the wave and the Tomahawk Chop.

Original plans called for playing the game on the evening of July 10, during the track & field competition. The American Olympic Committee, however, forbade the U.S. players from taking part in any exhibition until they had finished competing in their primary events. The game date then shifted to Monday, 15 July. The Ostermalm Athletic Grounds (site of the equestrian events) would be the site.

The game started at 10 in the morning. To even the sides, the visiting Americans provided a battery for the home team. The Swedes immediately inserted their new recruits --- catcher Wesley Oler, a high jumper from Yale, and pitcher Ben Adams, who had won a bronze medal a week earlier in the standing long jump --- at the top of their batting order. The game was to be a six-inning affair.

The Americans got to Adams early, scoring four runs in the first. One of the big guns was Abel Kiviat, who played short and batted third in the order. Kiviat stole a base and had a pair of hits in four at bats, including a triple. Kiviat, Jim Thorpe's shipboard roommate en route to the Games, was a great athlete in his own right. Born in Manhattan's Lower East Side to an immigrant peddler, the five-foot, three-inch Kiviat had been the silver medalist in the 1,500 metre event. In 1909, the bowlegged "Kivvy" was an all-city baseball player for Staten Island's Curtis High School. Kiviat, who for many years served as a press steward for track meets at Madison Square Garden, lived a long and merry life. At the time of his death in August, 1991, at the age of 99, Kiviat was America's oldest Olympic track and field medalist. The last surviving member of the America's 1912 Olympic team, he was inducted into the National Track and Field Hall of Fame in 1985.

All told, eight Olympic medalists took part in the game. First baseman George Bonhag, who went oh-for-two in the game, had won a gold medal running the anchor leg in the since-discontinued 3,000 metre team race. Fred Kelly, the centerfielder, had led a U.S. sweep in the 100 metre hurdles. Kelly had a single in three trips and made one of two U.S. errors afield.

Silver medalists included Kiviat and starting pitcher Richard Byrd (discus), who notched three strikeouts and started the first double play in Olympic history. Ira Davenport, who caught the entire game and went two-for-three, was the 800 metre bronze medalist. High jump third-placer George Horine played half a game in left while Lawrence Whitney, the shot put bronze winner, took over in right field halfway through the game.

One of the batting stars was a non-medalist. Sprinter Ira Courtney failed to make the finals in the 100 and 200 metre events and was a part of the sprint relay team that was disqualified in the qualifying heats. Courtney vented his frustration on the baseball field, going two-for-three. His double and Kiviat's triple were the only U.S. extra-base hits.

The Americans scored again in their half of the second to go up by 5-0. The Swedes got on the scoreboard with a pair of runs in the fourth. The Yanks put the game out of reach with an eight-run fifth inning. The Vesteras club managed a final tally in the sixth, aided by the fact that they were allowed six outs in the frame. The U.S. won by a 13-3 score.

Swedish officials praised the local boys who, according to the Official Report, "did not at all make such a bad figure in the field." The Swedes made five errors plus a few other mistakes, notes the report, "excusable on account of nervousness, etc."

Legend has it that Olympic great Jim Thorpe, a future major leaguer, played in the game. Thorpe's name does not appear in the boxscore and with good reason. The USA-

Sweden match took place on the last day of the decathlon competition. Competing in both events simultaneously would have been an incredible feat, even for Thorpe.

The game received little press coverage in the states. The 17 July edition of *The New York Times*, however, describes a game held the day after the USA-Sweden game. In this contest, two teams of American players squared off with the East squad topping the West, 6-3. "Platt Adams, New York Athletic Club, and C. E. Brickley, Harvard University, composed the battery for the East," notes the *Times*, "while Walter McClure, Olympic [Club], San Francisco; R. L. Byrd, Adrian College, and Edward F. Lindberg, Chicago Athletic Association, were in the points for the West." Platt Adams was the brother of Ben, who had been loaned to the Swedish team the day before, while Byrd and McClure had pitched for the U.S. team.

"The game was novelty to the Swedes, and a large crowd was present," according to the *Times*. Ironically, the Official Report says the previous day's USA-Sweden match had "no great crowd of spectators, and those that were present were mostly Americans or Swedish Americans."

Thorpe did manage to get into the second game, playing right field and ripping a double in two official trips to the plate.

All but forgotten in the USA-Sweden game was the umpire: George Wright. In the Official Report, his name is listed unobtrusively at the bottom of the boxscore. Wright had been baseball's first superstar with the Cincinnati Red Stockings. He had become a wealthy sporting goods entrepreneur after his playing days had ended. In 1912 he was a spry 65 years of age. Although no evidence had turned up that history's first Olympic ump was the George Wright, all indications are that it was. Frederick Ivor-Campbell of the Society for American Baseball Research [SABR] (whose brief account of Wright's life appears in *The Biographical Dictionary of American Sport*) asks rhetorically, "Who else would it be? An Englishman? Hardly. Some other George Wright with enough interest in and knowledge of baseball that he would officiate at a ball game in Sweden? Maybe, but I'll bet not." George Wright would live another 25 years, long enough for baseball's next Olympic appearance.

KAATSEN, CURVEBALLS, AND HITLER'S MAIN SQUEEZE

Baseball sometimes gets a mention in reports of the 1928 Games in Amsterdam. No reputable sources concur. Bill Henry, sports editor of *The Los Angeles Times*, was an eyewitness to the Amsterdam Games. As sports technical director for the next Olympics, Henry was in town to give a report on Los Angeles' progress. His definitive history, *An*

¹ Confirmation of George Wright as the umpire in the first 1912 Olympic contest came shortly after this piece was completed. The confirmation came from two very disparate sources. Darryl Brock, author of *If I Never Get Back* and one of the foremost authorities on the Cincinnati Red Stockings, called to report a conversation with one of Wright's descendants. Wright's relative confirmed for Darryl that his ancestor was indeed the arbiter in Stockholm. Ironically, a day before Brock's call, I discovered a poster that had appeared in Stockholm during the Olympics. The poster hawked a game between the "Amerikanst Baseball-lag" and the "Vasteras' Baseballklubb," and mentions Georg [sic] Wright of the "Champion Baseball Team of the World."

Approved History of the Olympic Games (first published in 1948), does not include baseball as a sport in Amsterdam. Neither does the American Olympic Committee report for the Seventh Olympiad, nor do any of the works of Erich Kamper, the noted Austrian Olympics expert and honorary president of ISOH.

A possible explanation for the confusion: one of the demonstration sports on the docket in Amsterdam was *kaatsen*. Perhaps it was this sport --- a Dutch version of cricket --- that some mistook for baseball at the Games of 1928.

Four years after the Olympic baseball contest in Stockholm, the Games were cancelled due to the First World War. After the next Olympic baseball game in 1936, the Games would take a 12-year hiatus, due once more to global conflict. There is evidence that, but for the Second World War, baseball might have become an official medal sport in the Olympics much sooner than 1992.

M. E. Travaglini's fascinating account ("Olympic Baseball 1936: Was es Das?," *The National Pastime*, Winter 1985) cites Leslie Mann's efforts in bringing baseball to Berlin in 1936. Mann had hoped to make baseball an exhibition sport in 1932 (Los Angeles organizers went instead with football and lacrosse). A 16-year big-league outfielder, Mann dreamed of baseball as an Olympic sport. He had a prominent role in his own dream. An ambitious soul who brought along a publicist to Berlin (*Miami Herald* sports editor Dinty Dennis), Mann, says Travaglini, "liked being at the center of attention." Longtime U.S. Olympic Committee member Bob Paul described Mann to Travaglini as "a hot dog. With the mustard." In Mann's report to the Olympic Committee on the baseball team, the old flyhawk mentions himself (in the third person) no less than nine times.

Mann's breakthrough came in 1934 when Berlin organizers invited the Americans to engage in a challenge match with Japan. The "challenge" --- engineered by Mann, Travaglini believes --- never materialized. The game in Berlin would turn out to be an All-American affair.

"Trials" for the Olympic baseball team took place in Baltimore in early July. Years later, one player told Loel Schrader of the Long Beach *Independent Press-Telegram* that "they wouldn't send you (to Berlin) unless you could come up with \$500 for expenses." Stanford University's Harry Wolter would coach the 21-member squad. Mann took the title of manager, with Dinty Dennis as assistant manager.

"Man blaspheme what they do not know," opined 17th century French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal. Pascal obviously wasn't one of the more than 90,000 spectators at Berlin's Olympic Stadium on 12 August. Mann (who Pascal probably would have blasphemed) reported the attendance at 125,000. No matter. The German fans, seeing baseball for the first time, loved it --- but for the wrong reasons. "Here's somebody running down to first base and the crowd's cheering --- and it's a pop-up," one surviving player told Travaglini, "But belt one out beyond second base and go for extra bases and there was no reaction at all."

The game was played at night on a makeshift diamond with no mound and bad lighting ("I think they had one 20-watt bulb in centerfield," quipped Gordon Mallatrat, one of four Stanford players in Berlin). Through a loudspeaker system, an announcer kept the crowd informed of the game's nuances. The players had been divided into two teams, the "World Champions" and the "U.S. Olympics." An inside-the-park homer by former Bowdoin College player Bill Shaw gave the Olympics a 2-0 lead in the first. After the homer, said Dick Hanna, another Stanford alum, "there was a big pause. Then there was an announcement in German that . . . hitting a home run was a big deal. So, everybody cheered."

The novelty was beginning to wane by the seventh inning, which, the announcer told the fans to great applause, would be the final frame. The U.S. Olympics managed a run in the top of the seventh to knot the score at 5-5. Les McNeese of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, settled

matters in the last of the 7th with a homer to give the world champions a 6-5 win. Relying on his curve, Carson Thompson of the Penn A.C. hurled four shutout innings in relief of start Bill Sayles of the University of Oregon.

A four-letter man from Temple University, Thompson's most vivid memory from Berlin had come a few days earlier. He had been selected to explain the game to one of the narrators of an Olympic documentary film. Thompson told Phil Elderkin of the *Christian Science Monitor* that the narrator turned out to be "a charming woman," with whom he spent an entire afternoon. The narrator was Eva Braun, the mistress of Adolf Hitler.

The game received mixed reviews. Most reporters panned it ("There is reason to believe that Germany has been made immune to baseball," wrote Joe Williams of *The New York Times*). The 1912 contest in Stockholm had at least been an international affair.

Mann remained undaunted. His report mentions Japan's plans to include baseball as part of the 1940 Games, which were originally scheduled for Tokyo. Mann's agenda included a series between the U.S. and Japan in 1937 and 1939. The 1940 "World's Tournament" in Tokyo would involve nine other teams: China, The Philippines, Hawaii (a U.S. Territory at the time), England, Germany, Mexico, and Cuba.

World events over the next nine years would snuff out Mann's dreams, not to mention some 55 million lives, as the U.S. and Japan played a different sort of "series." Bill Shaw, interviewed by Travaglini, was certain of the game's purpose, "Without the events that interfered with the 1940 Olympics," Shaw told Travaglini, "baseball would now be as much a part of the regular Olympic program as soccer is."

PESAPALLO AND THE GAME DOWNUNDER

In ancient times, wars were postponed so that the Olympics could take place. In this century, it's been the opposite. In 1948, after the world had pulled itself together again, the Olympic Games resumed. By now, basketball, another American sport, was thriving in the Olympics. Baseball was still feeling its way. Left out entirely at the 1948 Games in London, baseball took a backseat in Helsinki in 1952.

That year the Finns unveiled their own brand of baseball, called *pesapallo*. Developed in the twenties by a Finnish professor named Lauri Pihkala, *pesapallo* resembles baseball about as much as baseball resembles cricket. The Finnish pastime has a pitcher stationed to the right of home plate; a catcher who stands in front of home plate and a first baseman located halfway between third and home. Second base in *pesapallo* is where first base would be in American baseball. There are a pair of positions called "left shortstop" and "right shortstop." The entire field is shaped like an overgrown home plate. The pitcher, standing not far away and to the right of the batter, tosses the ball in an upward spiral. As the ball descends, the batter takes his cut and the pitcher ducks out of the way. The result looks like a two-man fungo operation, with spaghetti-bowl baselines that go from home to first (which is halfway down the third base side) and from there diagonally across the field to second. To get to third, a runner cuts straight across the field, and there to home, crossing first base in the process.

Erich Kamper's *Encyclopædia of the Olympic Games* cites a *pesapallo* contest on 31 July in which the Workers' Athletic Federation topped the Finnish League, 8-4. The rosters include immortals like Eero Vuorlu and Osmo Juntto. Not included in Kamper's tome are a pair of good old-fashioned baseball games played by an American pickup team.

According to Phil Elderkin, the Helsinki organizing committee invited the Americans to play the champions of Finnish baseball. This time the U.S. soccer team would furnish the

personnel. Walter Giesler, the soccer manager, was pressed into service to organize the baseball squad. The Yanks scrimmaged a team from Venezuela to prep for the game with the Finns. The American win streak remained intact as the U.S. players whipped the Venezuelans, 14-4.

The game with Finland was a rout. Played in the Helsinki Football Stadium before some 4,000 fans --- well below expectations --- the Americans scored seven runs in the first inning en route to a 19-1 triumph. U.S. Olympic Soccer Committee Chairman W. T. Hobson, Jr., reported that the highlight of the game was Charlie Colombo's homer. Colombo, a soccer standout from St. Louis, knocked the ball "over the top of the grandstand," noted Hobson.

Summer comes late in the year to the Antipodes. When the Australian city of Melbourne hosted the Olympics in 1956, the events took place 22 November through 8 December. By '56 W. R. "Bill" Schroeder had been director of the Helms Athletic Foundation for almost a decade. Schroeder was a west coast sportsman who, in the forties, had been one of the founders of the California League. The Helms Athletic Foundation (the forerunner of today's Amateur Athletic Foundation in Los Angeles) was an altruistic organization funded by a wealthy Los Angeles bakery. Through the foundation, Schroeder had strong ties with the Amateur Athletic Union and the U.S. Olympic Committee. When Melbourne organizers asked for an American team to put on a few clinics and play in a demonstration game, Olympic officials contacted Schroeder.

Schroeder scarcely had a budget. But he came up with a brilliantly simple idea. The armed forces played an important role in America's Olympic Movement. Schroeder would put together a team made up of servicemen from the U.S. Far East Command. Military transports would bring the players to Australia from around the Pacific. The all-service team played a series of exhibition games with local teams around the countryside prior to the Games.

The big game was scheduled for the morning of 1 December in the main stadium. Track & field events --- always the Olympic centerpiece --- were scheduled for later that day. Most newspaper accounts of the day's activities make no mention of the baseball game. "Poorly advertised and poorly timed, only a few thousand fans saw the first few innings of U.S. vs. Australia," wrote Phil Elderkin.

As the game progressed, track & field fans began arriving in droves. By late in the game there were an estimated 114,000 fans in the stands --- believed to be the largest ever for any baseball game.

The Americans beat the Aussies, 11-5. The big blow was a bases-loaded home run by a sergeant named Vance Sutton. The U.S. Olympic baseball win skein, which spanned five decades, now stood at 4-0.

DEDEAUX'S '64 SQUAD: BEST OF OLYMPIC BASEBALL'S OLD ERA

By 1964, Rod Dedeaux, the legendary University of Southern California (USC) coach, was well known in Japanese baseball circles. Dedeaux's 1955 USC squad had barnstormed through Asia. The affable Dedeaux's Trojans had taken on all comers, including U.S. military teams and native ballclubs in Okinawa, Korea, and Japan.

The 1964 Games were the first in Asia. The Japanese take their baseball seriously, and Tokyo's Olympic organizers invited Dedeaux to bring an amateur team for an exhibition. The team would be the best to date to play baseball in the Olympics. After Tokyo, ironically, there would be no more Olympic baseball for two decades. By then the old era of Olympic baseball, when the sport was buffeted about like a red-headed stepchild, would be over.

Dedeaux's 1964 team boasted a better roster than several expansion teams of the sixties. His collection of collegiate all-stars included eight future major leaguers. Among the

U.S. pitchers were left hander Alan Closter of Iowa State (who later played for the Senators, Yankees and Braves); Dick Joyce of Holy Cross (Athletics); and Chuck Dopson (who won 74 games, mostly for the A's, between 1966 and 1975).

The position players included Jim Hibbs, an All-American catcher from Stanford (Angels); rifle-armed Florida state receiver Ken Suarez (A's, Indians, Rangers); slugging University of California first baseman Mike Epstein (who pounded out 130 homers for five teams over a 9-year career); outfielder Shaun Fitzmaurice of Notre Dame (Mets); and one of Dedeaux's USC stars, second sacker Gary Sutherland (a capable utilityman for seven teams from 1966-74).

The contingent wasn't considered part of the official U.S. Olympic team. Instead of quarters in the Olympic village, the baseball players found themselves staying in an antiquated YMCA. Eventually the team moved to more suitable lodgings in a Tokyo hotel. They soon became the envy of the other American athletes. Unlike their brethren in the Olympic village, the baseball players weren't subject to curfew. One team member recalls attending a party with sprinter Bob Hayes and Walt Hazzard of the basketball team. When Hayes and Hazzard had to leave early to make curfew, the baseball player continued to boogie to his heart's content.

More than 50,000 fans turned out of the game with a Japanese amateur all-star team on 11 October. Dedeaux positioned himself in the third base coaching box, wondering how his team would fare. "Shaun Fitzmaurice was the leadoff hitter," Dedeaux told Loel Schrader. "He hit the first pitch of the game for a home run over the left-centerfield fence." The U.S. was en route to yet another Olympic victory, this one a 6-2 triumph.

72 YEARS LATER; STILL A DEMO SPORT, BUT WITH A FUTURE

Why did it take so long for baseball to win full status as an Olympic sport? While baseball started, sputtered, and stopped in the Games, basketball had flourished. One stumbling block was Avery Brundage, the venerable head of the IOC. Brundage, Olympism's answer to Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, ruled the Games for years with an iron fist. To Brundage, the Olympics were for individual athletes. To him team sports --- and the Winter Olympic, for that matter --- were anathema.

Another problem was baseball's near-total lack of popularity outside of North and South America. While Americans played baseball and measured in feet and inches, the rest of the world used the metric system and played football [soccer]. Curiously as soccer began to boom in the U.S., the rest of the world began to discover baseball.

The final stumbling block was the lack of a visible international organization. Each Olympic sport has its own governing body. Going back to Les Mann in the thirties, several organizations had tried this role and failed. It wasn't until the mid-seventies, with the founding of the International Association of Amateur Baseball (eventually renamed the International Baseball Association) that the sport would enjoy worldwide organization and unity.

AINBA officials almost immediately began lobbying for baseball in the Olympics. Avery Brundage had stepped down as the IOC head after the 1972 Olympics. Slowly, the complexion of the Olympics began to change. In 1981, the IOC executive board approved baseball as a demonstration sport for the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles. A six-team format was adopted at an IOC session in New Delhi in March 1983. Five months later the six teams were selected. They would come from Korea, Italy, Cuba, Nicaragua, Chinese Taipei, and the United States.

CUBA, NO! JAPAN, SI!

Some 385,000 fans would watch the baseball games of the Los Angeles Olympics. Only track & field and soccer would attract more. The contests were played at Dodger Stadium, quite an improvement over the makeshift diamonds of the past.

Rod Dedeaux, again the American team coach, knew Cuba would be tough to beat. "They've got pitching, power, and defense" he said. Forbidden to sign with major league teams since the early days of the Castro regime, several Cuban players could have easily commanded megabucks on the free agent market in major league baseball.

Cuba, however, joined the Soviet-led boycott, and the Dominican Republic replaced them in the Olympics. The tournament had been expanded to include two more teams, Japan and Canada. With the Cubans gone, Dedeaux figured the Asian teams --- especially Korea --- would be the toughest competition.

The American squad included future major leaguers like Will Clark, Mark McGwire, Cory Snyder, Barry Larkin, Shane Mack, Bobby Witt, Scott Bankhead, and Billy Swift. After a close 2-1 win over Chinese Taipei, they beat Italy, 16-1, and the Dominican Republic, 12-0 in the preliminary round.

Japan had gone 2-1 in the prelim round, losing to Canada. The Japanese won their semifinal game with Chinese Taipei in the lo-inning, 2-1 contest. The U.S.'s Oddibe "Young Again" McDowell's homer sparked a 5-2 win over Korea in the other semi.

Dedeaux's ace, John Hoover of Fresno State, started the championship game while Japanese coach Reiichi Matsunaga's choice was Atsunori Ito. Matsunaga also inserted Katsumi Hirosawa at first base, where the incumbent was in a 3-for-15 slump.

The Americans scored first, but Japan nicked Hoover for two in the 4th and another in the 5th. It stayed that way until the 8th when Hirosawa lit up Hoover for a three-run homer. In the 9th the U.S. scored twice, but it wasn't enough. Japan won 6-3. Ito, with relief help, got the victory. A streak that dated back to the Stockholm Games of 1912 was over.

POPCORN, SMOKED SQUID, AND SEAWEED RICE BALLS

While most of the American players went on to the pro ranks, the Cubans kept on winning at the amateur level. Cuba took the Intercontinental Cup at Edmonton in 1985. At Amsterdam in 1986 they claimed the world title. At the following year's Pan American Games in Indianapolis, the Cubans survived a 58-minute rain delay and wiped out a 3-run U.S. lead in the gold medal game. Two months later they captured another Intercontinental Cup title.

Cuba joined the North Korean boycott of the Seoul Olympics, however, much to the dismay of U.S. coach Mark Marquess and his players, including nine veterans of the 1987 Pan Am Games. Stung by the 13-9 loss to Cuba in the championship game, the Americans wanted a rematch. Australia replaced Cuba, joining the U.S., Japan, Korea, Chinese Taipei, Canada, Puerto Rico, and the Netherlands in the Olympic tournament.

Marquess (a Stanford coach, like 1936 mentor, Harry Wolter) had a starting rotation of Ben McDonald, Andy Benes, and Jim Abbott, but was wary of Japan. "No matter who you pitch, they have good balance," said Marquess.

The concession stands at Chamshil offered smoked squid and seaweed rice balls as well as popcorn, candy, and Coke. There was music and dancing in the stands during the Games

("It gets a little irritating," griped Ben McDonald). Somehow Olympic organizers --- who had spent \$3 billion U.S. dollars preparing for the Games --- forgot to purchase a tarp for the baseball diamond. An early game between Canada and Australia, following a rainstorm, was played on a soaked field. Aside from these aberrations, it was baseball as usual in the Land of the Morning Calm.

The Americans went 2-1 in preliminary play, good enough to advance to the semi-finals. They beat a tough Korean squad, 5-3, and pasted the Aussies, 12-1, before losing, 8-7, to future big league hurler Rheel Cormier of Canada. In the semifinal, Ben McDonald, the 6'7" (2.00 metre) Louisiana State pitcher, handcuffed Puerto Rico, 7-2. Japan's 3-1 win over Korea set up a rematch of the 1984 championship game.

Lefty Jim Abbott of the University of Michigan, born with only a partial right hand, was a favorite of the Asian press in Seoul. Abbott had ended Cuba's win skein at home one year earlier. Coach Marquess handed Abbott the ball for the title match.

Ex-University of Tampa first baseman Tino Martinez gave Abbott all the support he needed with a pair of homers and 4 RBI's, and the U.S. had a 5-3 win. Abbott pitched the whole way, allowing 7 hits. "I didn't come in here thinking home run," Martinez told *Baseball America's* Danny Knobler. "They just happened."

The absence of Cuba didn't dampen the American victory celebration. "They're not here," said U.S. third baseman Robin Ventura. "That's their own problem. They know we can beat them."

BASEBALL IN BARCELONA CUBA'S TURN AT LAST, OR THEIR LAST AT BAT?

Cuba will finally make it to the Olympics again in 1992. The Cubans went undefeated in the 1991 Pan Am Games in Havana ("Cuba," says '92 Olympic coach Ron Fraser of the University of Miami, "is better than the Cleveland Indians.") Ironically, Barcelona would be the Cuban's last chance for Olympic glory. Without Soviet aid, how long will Castro's regime last? Without Castro, will Cuban players be permitted once more to sign with big league teams (and, if they are, will the Washington Senators mount a comeback)? How badly would the drain of talent affect Cuba's national team?

Even if Cuba maintains the status quo, the cracks are showing. A Cuban team at the 1991 World Junior Championships in Brandon, Manitoba, finished fifth. ESPN's Peter Gammons reports that the scouts were "shocked at the low quality" of the Cuban squad.

The field is set for baseball's first true Olympic medal tournament. Japan, Chinese Taipei, Puerto Rico, Italy, Spain, and the Dominican Republic are entered, along with Cuba and the United States. Baseball's international popularity is at an all-time high and the game is played in more nations than ever before.

If Cuba wanes as an international power, will the U.S. fill the vacuum? Or Japan? What about Chinese Taipei, whose youth teams always dominate Little League play? Or Australia, the team that handed the Japanese their only loss at this year's Asian tournament? Has anyone noticed that three Aussie natives --- Craig Shipley of the Padres, David Nilsson of the Brewers, and the Yankees' Mark Hutton --- played in the majors or high minors in 1991?

Stay tuned!