

Problems that Japan Professional Baseball Players Association faces

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In this paper, comparative studies on the industrial relations in professional sports in Japan and Australia will be made. In the first half, however, cases in Japan will be mentioned.

Japan Professional Baseball Players' Association is the only labour union for players of all the professional baseball teams in Japan.

If we are allowed to jump into the conclusion at this stage, the following can be said: it would be epoch making to the Japanese professional sports and even revolutionary to the Japanese Society if sumo wrestlers, who are still suffering the feudalistic system and the shackles of convention, organised their own trade union.

By the way, the most serious problem that JPBPA suffers now is the difficulty in establishing the 'agent' system concerned with the contract renewal of players.

The negotiations for the contract conditions between the management and players had long been quite unfair to the players until the situation slightly changed for better a few years ago. The players were summoned individually to the office and forced to sign the contract agreement the management had prepared. That meant, needless to say, that the players had to compromise with the management over their own annual salary. Players who did not immediately sign the agreement were first accused of demanding too much contract money, threatened with the trading list and release. To make the matter worse, the whole mass media, especially newspapers, battered those players.

Under such circumstances wherein the players had suffered for many years, the JPBPA finally succeeded in the recognition and introduction of the 'Agent System' in 2000 after negotiations with the owners of baseball teams and the Office of the Commissioner of Japanese Professional Baseball. For the players who are not good at dealing with issues other than playing baseball, let alone with any sort of negotiation, it was necessary to establish the "Agent System" generally accepted as a

foregone conclusion in U. S. A.

The circumstances can be described as following.

The 'Agent System' was discussed for the first time in December 1999, when the mass media reported the case of Kudo, a pitcher of Daiei Hawks (Yomiuri Giants at present), who came to the negotiation table for exercising his bargaining power as a 'free agent (independent player)' accompanied by his own "lawyer".

Coincidentally, the JPBPA had held a symposium titled 'The First Session by The Committee for the Future of Japanese Professional Baseball' on December 2, 1999, inviting some liberal journalists, such as Mr. Tetsuya Chikushi, as the panelists. This appealed to the public opinion and convinced people of the importance of the 'Agent System.'

As a result, on December 4 in 2000, Shimoyanagi, a pitcher of Nippon Ham Fighters (Hanshin Tigers at present), exercised his bargaining power against his team in the presence of his 'gent'. This was the first case in the history of the Japanese Professional Baseball.

The 'Agent System', however, is still a nominal system. For example, some players of Hanshin Tigers, who tried to use the 'Agent System' as a part of their bargaining right, have been badly criticized by all the sports newspapers of the past few days, who are in favour of Hanshin Tigers.

As shown in this case, the Japanese society has been thus unaware of the importance of the 'Agent System' as the right of the players. In other words, the JPBPA is required to move beyond the status quo. And this is the biggest problem the organization faces now.

Furthermore, this problem indicates the true nature of the Japanese society that does not allow its members to exercise their own rights. We cannot even begin the reform of the structures without realizing the bargaining right of workers. And we can easily understand how superficial and suspicious is so-called reform of the structures that the Japanese Government and Prime Minister advocate.

Finally, there is indicated the English version of articles originally written in Japanese which are titled 'What is JPBPA?' and 'What is JPBPA striving for?'

What is JPBPA?

JPBPA is an organisation constituting of all the Japanese professional

baseball players (including a part of foreign ones) of all the 12 teams.

As you know, professional baseball players have only a very short period as an active player, and they are not rewarded with enough social welfare.

In view of the above-mentioned problems, and for the improvement of players' social position, JPBPA was organised.

After obtaining the corporate right in 1980, it was certified as a labour union by Tokyo District Labour Committee.

At present there co-exist two organisations to form the JPBPA together, that is, Public Corporate of Japan Professional Baseball Players Association and Labour Union of Japan Professional Baseball Players Association. The both organisation have been collaborating with each other and making tremendous efforts for solving general problems associated with the players' status quo and improving their social position.

The activities of JPBPA are not limited to these, but cover various activities for public interests, such as nationwide charity baseball classes and lectures for the youth.

What is JPBPA striving for?

The goal of JPBPA is basically the improvement of the social position of professional baseball players as its members. At the same time, it makes a stress upon the following issues:

- 1) Future visions for Japanese Baseball.
- 2) What should be done to make Professional Baseball more attractive not only for baseball fans but also for people associated with the trade?
- 3) How JPBPA can contribute to making the youth, candidates for baseball players in the future, have a dream of becoming professional baseball players?