

# Baseball by Masaoka Shiki

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First Printing: 2014

ISBN 9781311532886

Published by Shelley Marshall at Smashwords

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## BASEBALL BY MASAOKA SHIKI

FEW PEOPLE HAVE experienced baseball, and the range of people with knowledge of baseball is very narrow. Since the recent game played between the First Higher School of Tokyo and Americans living in Yokohama, the word baseball has unexpectedly entered the ears of the general public. Yet, not one of these people understands what baseball truly is. Baseball should be called the national sport of the United States. The enjoyment of this game by ordinary citizens is akin to the enjoyment of sumo here in Japan or bullfighting in Spain. (Our loss to the Americans was regrettable, but the challenges of the rematches should hardly be thought of as a national disgrace.)

The history of the transfer of these skills to us is not fully known, but began when Hiraoka Hiroshi, originally, an engineer at the Shimbashi office of the Japan National Railway, returned from the United States and taught baseball to his co-workers. (This happened around 1881 and 1882.) Then, these skills were passed on to the former Preparatory School of the University of Tokyo. Around the same time, they spread to both The Imperial College of Engineering and the Komaba Agricultural School. The Preparatory School of the University of Tokyo later became the First High School and Middle School and then the First Higher School of Tokyo. According to records dating from 1885 and 1886, the preparatory school or the high and middle school sometimes played matches with the College of Engineering and the Komaba Agricultural School. Games were also played between the Shimbashi team and the College of Engineering. Later, the Anglo-Japanese College of Aoyama also appeared in matches although the dates have been forgotten. Nevertheless, today, the high school has 14 to 15 years of experience in baseball. (For the most part, there has been a continuous turnover of students.) Preparation seems to have ended around 1890 or 1891.

Until now, the play has been truly amateurish. From now on, however, serious techniques as well as progress and organization will emerge. Organization is beginning to develop at least in form. That is, the catcher will

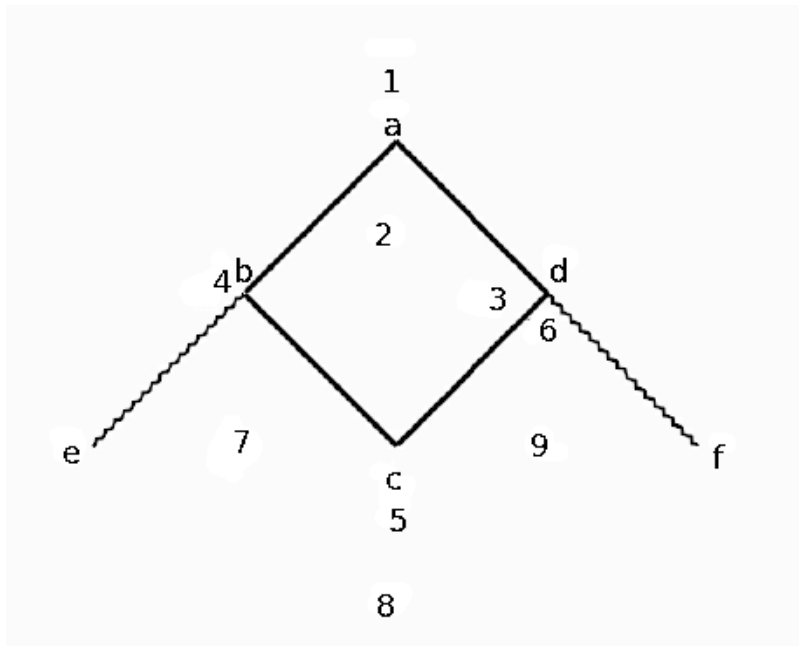
wear a mask and a mitt (like the mask and gloves worn in kendo (fencing)) and catch a direct ball. The pitcher will learn how to throw a pitch, and a ball-nine pitcher will improve to ball-four (or ball-six). In the next installment, I will describe a few playing techniques.

(July 19)

## THE BASEBALL FIELD

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR baseball are a flat lot measuring approximately 1000 *tsubo* (0.8 acres) (a grassy field is good); a ball wrapped in hide (the ball is finished with rubber and string to a diameter of just 2 *sun* (2.4 inches)); a wooden bat for hitting the ball thrown by the pitcher (a bat with a somewhat thicker tip and a narrower part to be held by the hands and having a length of just 4 *shaku* (about 4 feet)); one each of objects similar to iron plates to be placed at the positions of the pitcher, the home base, and the three bases made to resemble a sackcloth *zabuton* (flat floor cushion) measuring one square *shaku* (1 square foot); a net (6-*shaku* (6-feet) high by 12- to 18-*shaku* (12- to 18-feet) wide) for stopping balls that pass the catcher; and 18 players (9 players on each side); one umpire; and one manager (to record the game).

I will use this drawing to describe the playing field.



(a) Home base

(b) First base (base placed here)

(c) Second base (base placed here)

- (d) Third base (base placed here)
- (1) Position of catcher (net extended behind the catcher)
- (2) Position of the pitcher
- (3) Position of the shortstop
- (4) Position of the first baseman
- (5) Position of the second baseman
- (6) Position of the third baseman
- (7) Position of the right fielder
- (8) Position of the center fielder
- (9) Position of the left fielder

Lines a-e and a-f extend to infinity (in reality, there are no lines or light gray lines are drawn) . An infinitely large playing field is formed in the right angle e-a-f. In reality, however, the playing field is limited to the places reached by the balls hit by batters at home base. The square defined by a-b-c-d becomes a 15 *ken* square (90 square feet). A contest is the accumulation of nine smaller contests, innings, completed by the players. One inning is divided into two half innings, in one, team A (9 players) stands on the defended ground, and in the other, team B (namely, the opponent of team A) stands on the defended ground. While standing on the defended ground, the positions of first, second, third, etc. are taken by each of the nine players based on their duties. However, these positions fluctuate somewhat during the contest. When team A stands on the playing field, team B waits in the back except for one or two players, but no more than four players, who will hit the ball.

## THE BASEBALL GAME

**E**ACH ATTACKER (enemy of the defenders) strives to run from home base (a), past each base (b, c, d), and return to home base to score a home run. A baseball game ends after nine innings. The home runs of each team are tallied and compared, and the team with the most home runs wins. For example, a *win of 23 to 8* means that team A won with 23 home runs compared to the 8 home runs of team B. The duty of the players is to increase the number of home runs when standing on the ground of the attackers, and keep the number of home runs low when standing on the ground of the defenders. A home run is a circuit around the square with the checkpoints of first base, second base, and third base along the path. A guard at each checkpoint makes it difficult to easily run past (first base is staunchly guarded by the first baseman, the second and third basemen do the same). The loss of the right to run the bases by the runner (player running the bases) is called an out. (This is usually called a kill.) If the umpire calls an out, the runner (or the batter) should immediately leave the field and retreat to the bench. When three players are out, that half inning ends. Thus, the attackers try to produce many home runs before three players are out, and the defenders try to get three players out without any home runs. When three players are out, the defenders switch and become the attackers, and the attackers become the defenders. And when three players are out again, the first inning ends. Each side attacks and defends nine times, and the game ends after the ninth attack.

## THE BASEBALL

THE BASEBALL IS simply a ball. This ball is always in the hands of the defenders. The player with this ball becomes the heart of the play, and the place where the ball goes becomes the heart of the play. The ball always moves, so the heart of the play always moves. The eyes of the nine defenders must not leave the ball for an instant. The batter and the runners must also watch the ball. If the spectators also watch the ball, they've captured the gist of the game.

Ordinarily, the ball is in the hands of the pitcher and is usually thrown towards home base. One batter (one of the attackers) stands at home base holding the bat. The batter must hit the ball while thinking about the ball arriving at a proper position (that is, when the ball passes above home base, no higher than the shoulders and no lower than the knees). If the bat and the ball make contact, and the ball drops inside the square (called a fair ball), the batter drops the bat and runs in a straight line towards first base. At this moment, the batter becomes a runner. When the batter becomes a runner, another batter immediately stands beside home base. However, if the batter does not hit the ball, the batter stands as before.

The catcher, who is behind the batter at position 1, stops the ball and throws it back to the pitcher. The pitcher should throw towards home base many times. As mentioned above, one batter gets three tries to hit the ball. If a direct ball (ball that has left the pitcher's hand and does not touch the ground) for the third hit does not touch the bat and is skillfully caught by the catcher, the batter is out. If the catcher misses the catch, the batter gains the right to become a runner. When the batter gets a hit and the ball flies through the air, if the ball is caught (by anyone) before touching the ground (regardless of the distance), the batter is out.

(To be continued)

(July 23)



## THE BASEBALL (CONTINUED)

**W**HEN THERE IS one runner on the field, the role of the ball becomes crucial. If two or three players are runners at the same time, the role of the ball becomes decisive. Unrelated to the more complex playing techniques used when there are many runners, in the end, only the ball matters.

Now, I will explain the relationship between the runner and the ball. The runner resembles a man passing alone into enemy lines. The ball resembles a bullet of the enemy. The runner goes around the four sides of the square (see the drawing above) and is not allowed even one step outside of the line. However, if the player touches the ball of the enemy even once while on this line, he dies on the battlefield (is out) where he stands. Here, touching the ball occurs when the defender holding the ball in his hand touches a part of the runner's body, but the ball is never thrown at the enemy. If a thrown ball hits the runner, this is called a dead ball. The enemy is not killed, instead, the defender suffers a loss. A runner in this situation has thrown himself into danger, and the solitary bulwarks become the first, second, and third bases. If a part of runner's body touches a base (object resembling a *zabuton*), he is never out even if the enemy's ball touches his body. (In this case, a base resembles home in a game of tag.) The runner should run at full speed while staying as far away as possible from the ball.

For example, a runner is on first base and waits for the instant when the pitcher takes the ball and throws it towards home base (batter) to run, and when he sees the ball leave the pitcher's hand, he runs to second base. At this moment, the catcher should immediately grab the ball and throw it directly to second base. The second baseman should grab the ball and try to tag out the runner. The runner must immediately advance while always watching the motion of the ball during the rush, brave the dangers, decide whether he can reach second base or should retreat and return to first base, and act on that decision. He continues to persevere when moving from second base to third base, and again when moving from third base to home base. However, third

base is closer to the catcher than second base, and home base is closer to the catcher than third base. Consequently, the danger gradually increases during the run.

If there are two runners, first, the defenders take the usual steps to defeat the runner in front. The presence of three runners is called bases full. (No more than one runner is allowed at one base. The maximum number of runners is three.) If the batter becomes a runner when the bases are full, the earlier runners must advance one base. This situation is the most dangerous as well as the most enjoyable. A hit by the batter is actually related to winning or losing and will produce home runs by two players if the batter hits a good pitch. If the pitch is bad, the three players remain standing (or are stalled). If there are many runners, the players run to the right and to the left, and the ball flies forward and backward. The situation changes abruptly. This is essential to the spectators. People watching baseball should watch the ball.

## THE DEFENDERS IN BASEBALL

I WILL NOW explain the roles of the players on the defended ground, that is, the players standing in the playing field. The catcher always stands behind the batter and works to stop the ball thrown by the pitcher. The catcher expends most of his strength catching the direct ball pitched to the batter on the third hit when the runner is running to second base and throwing the ball to the third baseman, and emerging from home base to stop a runner running toward home base. The usual duty of the pitcher is to throw the ball toward the batter. The variety of pitches include the outer curve, the inner curve, the drop, etc. Perhaps, the batter's eyes will be tricked and he will swing at a bad ball. At other times, the pitcher always watches the runner and throws the ball towards the base if the runner moves too far away from that base. Both the pitcher and the catcher occupy the most important ground on the field and have the roles demanding the most skill.

The shortstop stands between the pitcher and third base and strives to stop the ball hit by the batter and immediately throw it to first base. This position is

on the route taken by many balls hit by the batters. The player placed in this role is responsible for stopping, which is a critical action.

First base is the most suitable ground to occupy in order to take out the runner. For instance, if the ball thrown by the shortstop is caught and the first baseman steps a foot on first base (or a part of the body touches first base) faster than the runner, then the runner is out. If the runner runs toward first base from home base, advances to a position from which he cannot retreat, and is touched by the ball, he is out.

The role of the second and third basemen is to catch the ball thrown by the catcher or another player and try to touch the runner's body with the ball. Interesting phenomena like attacks on both flanks develop between these two players. The right fielder, center fielder, and left fielder all have the role of catching fly balls hit by the batter (in this case, the batter is out) or stopping the ball and throwing it to first base.

A ball game is not lifeless, and the defenders have the sole objective of sending out the enemy. Therefore, it is essential for each player to alter his actions with the circumstances. All defenders must always be ready for the ball dropping in front of them. The basemen must always be ready for the ball being thrown to them.

## THE ATTACKERS IN BASEBALL

THERE ARE ONLY two types of attackers, the batters and the runners. The aim of the batter is to strongly hit the ball. If the hit is strong, the ball passes the defenders and is not stopped. It is easy to grasp the outward beauty of the ball flying high. The runners nimbly start running and must pass under the hands of the enemy to reach the base. When in danger, the player must drop his body forward and slide to reach the base. The rules for other special cases should be listed one by one. Perhaps, listing each one would be pointless and only add confusion.

## THE FEATURES OF BASEBALL

IN ROWING, HORSE, and foot races, the techniques are very simple, and the outcome is limited to just being slow or fast. This holds little interest for the spectators. Complex techniques and many changes make a baseball game interesting to the spectators. A feature of this game is the liveliness of vigorous action, and spectators often cheer without realizing it. During play, however, some risk to the players and to the spectators cannot be avoided. It is best for the spectators to be situated to the left or right or behind the catcher.

There are still no words in Japanese related to baseball. The Japanese words presented here are linked to our originality. We will know if the translations are suitable; however, there is no reason to make hasty revisions.

Gentlemen, may good fortune be bestowed on you.

Noboru

(July 27)

## CREDITS

The original Japanese version was published in *Japan*, Nippon Shimbun-sha, 1896 (Meiji 29), July 19 to 27 editions.

[Original Japanese text](#) of ベースボール at [Aozora Bunko](#), an Internet library.