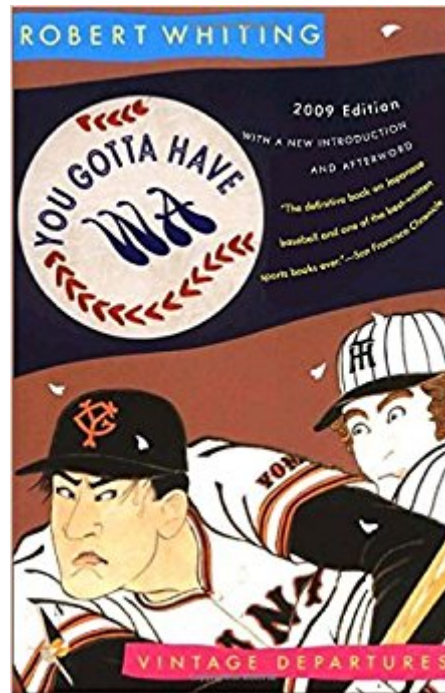




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You Gotta Have Wa



Synopsis

A hilarious, informative, and riveting account of Japanese baseball and the cultural clashes that ensued when Americans began playing there professionally. In Japan, baseball is a way of life. It is a philosophy. It is *wa*. Its most important element is *wa*—group harmony—embodied in the proverb "The nail that sticks up shall be hammered down." In this witty and incisive book, Robert Whiting gives us a close-up look at *wa*'s teams, obsessive ritualism, and history, as seen through the eyes of American players who found the Japanese approach—rigorous pregame practices, the tolerance for tie games, injured pitchers encouraged to "pitch through the pain"—completely baffling. With vivid accounts of East meeting West, involving Babe Ruth, Ichiro Suzuki, Bobby Valentine, Japanese home run king Sadaharu Oh, and many others, this lively and completely unique book is an utter gem and baseball classic.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The "wa" one must have is the group harmony that is the essence of Japanese baseball. According to PW, "this interesting comparative study of the sport as it is played on both sides of the Pacific concentrates on the American stars who have gone to play in Japan." Photos. Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Wa," Japanese for "team spirit," is the creed of Japanese baseball, played since the 1850s and professionally since 1935. Whiting, a long-time Japan resident, concentrates on the two pro

leagues. The Japanese leagues, he reports, believe their severely coached game to be superior to the U.S. game. They discourage Japanese from entering U.S. leagues. A few Americans, usually older ones, have been accepted on Japanese teams, but they meet with resentment, criticism, and discrimination. The book updates Whiting's earlier *The Chrysanthemum and the Bat* (LJ 10/1/76) and contrasts with Sadaharu Oh and David Falkner's *Sadaharu Oh* (LJ 6/1/84; o.p.). A revealing and disturbing account that is heartily recommended for adult and YA collections.- Morey Berger, Monmouth Cty. Lib., Manalapan, N.J. Copyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This was an interesting read, not as funny as people make it out to be--though it is amusing at times--but well worth it as an intro to Japanese baseball. I read it for one of my own books, part of the *Essays on the Classics!* series, which is a collection of essays on baseball, first from the management side of things and then in terms of its on the field manifestations. What I wanted to look at was how value systems shape sports--rather than the other way around--and so I looked at both this and *Only the Ball Was White*, about the old Negro Leagues. I have to admit that while I intended to focus on the on-the-field aspects of value system shaping sport, I found more about how value systems shape the outlook of ownership and management, which is then reflected on the field. I would say that given what I was looking for, I was definitely satisfied with what I read. I came away with a lot to say. I took Japanese in high school and have looked at a few other books about Japan, and it fit in with those. And then I watched *Mr. Baseball*, which was largely taken from this. Now THAT is laugh-out-loud funny!

Even casual American baseball fans are aware that they play what we call "our national pastime" in Japan. We see players such as Ichiro, Dice-K, Godzilla (Hideki Matsui) and Kosuke Fukudome join the rosters of some of the best-known MLB teams and, especially in the case of Ichiro, do well. Casual fans also know of the great Japanese home run king, Sadaharu Oh, who hit more home runs than Babe Ruth (but they are aware of the differences in the level of play and the dimensions of the ballparks). White Sox fans will never forget the contributions made by second baseman Tadahito Iguchi to the White Sox's 2005 World Series championship. And most casual fans are also aware that occasionally middle-of-the-road American ballplayers, or older players on the downside of their careers, decide to play in Japan for whatever reason. This creates curiosity about the state of baseball in Japan: what is the game like there? How does it compare to the American game? What is it like to play baseball in Japan? "You Gotta Have Wa" does an admirable job of answering

these questions and more. As portrayed in "You Gotta Have Wa", there are some very significant differences in baseball as played in the United States and Japan. Japanese baseball apparently draws upon the martial arts and samurai warrior tradition in Japan. The culture and work ethic of a Japanese baseball team, whether at the high school, college or professional level, is a product of the hard-working, self-sacrificing, master/pupil culture of the Japanese people. The most interesting aspect of "You Gotta Have Wa" is how it uses Japanese baseball to illustrate aspects of Japanese culture. "You Gotta Have Wa" should appeal to more than just baseball fans - it also should appeal to readers interested in modern-day Japanese culture. My only complaint about "You Gotta Have Wa" is that I was hoping the book would be a bit more in-depth and slightly less sensational. The chapters read like a series of magazine articles, and I have a hard time believing that the Japanese fans are quite as fanatical as portrayed in the book, or the coaches as demanding. I suspect Robert Whiting exaggerated a bit for maximum effect. The book also could have benefited from an index, as the chapters are organized by topic, and many players and story lines appear in multiple chapters - hence an index would have helped the reader chase down everything about a particular player or incident. Those minor flaws aside, "You Gotta Have Wa" is definitely worth reading if you at all interested in Japanese baseball or Japanese culture.

This book is about Japanese Baseball and WA. But it is mostly about WA. The book examines the conflict between "American individualism" and Japanese WA in the crucible of Japanese baseball. As a non traveling Western, Southern actually, I doubt I will experience WA. As a Japanophile, WA is of keen interest to me. WA defies single word or concept translation. The author has example after example of different adaptations or non-adaptations of MBL players with the WA in Japanese baseball. I am not a baseball fan. But I found this book was engrossing, educational, entertaining, and at times funny. It helped me get a little more understanding of Japanese culture. This book was a great read. I will be looking for more of his books in English and in Japanese.

On the surface, this is a treatise about baseball in Japan. Only slightly underneath, it's a fascinating work on the difference between Japanese and American culture. The title word Wa comes from the Japanese word for team unity, as opposed to the American interest in individuality. The book goes through both a history of baseball in Japan, as well as challenges American's deal with over there. It covers the trials and tribulations of Americans like Bob Horner, who thrive on the diamond, but struggle off the field. It covers the adversarial relationship between Japanese coaches and their foreign (Gai-jin) charges. Any American going to work in Japan is well advised to pay attention! How

is Japan changing over time? Compare how the approval of "different" antics of foreigners changes over time. Learn how some Japanese players follow the model, but as the exception and not the rule. Is the Japanese culture changing, or a surface appearance of change part of the Japanese character? Read the book to find out. Again, it's only about baseball on the surface. How does training differ? The American model suggests individuals can improve, but only to the limit of their ability. The Japanese model in both the field and the office is that there is no limit - strength and success is limited only by effort. This drive leads to a 10-11 month season counting training camp, as well as several hours of strenuous exercises every day before practice. This is essential to developing the fighting spirit. Again, someone travelling to Japan for business is well advised to understand this. The book is a must for baseball lovers as well as people interested in learning more about Japan. The book is a fascinating work that hides great learning behind Japan under the story of America's pastime.

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