

THE JAPANESE CULTURE AND THE BASEBALL IN BRAZIL

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Abstract

The present article shows the baseball in Brazil and its relations with the Japanese traditions. In the introductory discussion we present the perspective of the organization and the practising of the sportive modalities as a reflex of social organization. Based on this point of view, analyse and understand the practise of the Brazilian baseball is at the same time, a way to comprehend how the Japanese descendants, who came and settled in Brazil, adapted their characteristic life style to a physical and cultural space completely different from the one they left in the East. The conclusions indicate that despite the initial association with the Japanese culture, baseball is today a "mestizo" modality since there are more and more Japanese descendants practising it as the days pass by.

Key words: Sportive practice; culture; baseball; immigrant.

Introduction

Considered a multiracial cauldron and, therefore, a multicultural one, Brazil is different from other nations of the planet not because of its economic power, neither because of its "democracy", its "capitalism", not even because of its Industrial Revolution. DaMatta (1990) is developing studies to better understand the reasons that make Brazil a capitalized Brazil, and complimenting the differences and the alterity of the country he points: "*different from the United States, we never say 'equals, but separated', instead we say 'different, but together', this is the golden rule in a hierarchical universe like ours. (p. 16)*"

Those differences, even if mixed together, are socially maintained and organized, preserving the culture of the people like those who immigrated to Brazil during the last and the current century.

The understanding I have of culture is as descriptive (*a group of practical and social behaviour invented and transmitted to a group: the language, the rituals and cults, the mythological tradition, as well as the clothing, the 'habitat' and the handicraft that constitute the essential elements of it*, Favrod, 1977:70) as semiotic (*believing that the man is an animal attached to webs full of meanings wove by himself, I assume the culture as being his webs and its analyses*, Geertz, 1978:15), and I consider that both the construction of a meaning and the transmission of practices and behaviours includes the diachrony in its body.

Even though the migratory movement aimed exclusively at economic development with the opening of new markets and the accommodation of inactive and/or unproductive population (Sakurai, 1995) one could not separate or erase the cultural characteristics brought by several immigrant groups from their origin places.

As a result several cultural manifestations as the religious representations, the music, the dance and also the sportive practicing were imported and adapted to the place where those social groups settled in.

Even though studies over the last decade explore the sport as a product and cultural producer and the sociologists point out the sports as sub culture of sub groups (Andrews & Loy, 1993; Hughson, 1998), I will make use of the expression culture for sport through the perspective of Crosset & Beal (1997) which propose the observation and registration of the interaction between groups, considering all social facts associated with them.

The major and most expressive example that we have along the XX Century is, without any doubt, the soccer, originally a British modality that DaMatta (1982:21) presents as *a vehicle for a series of dramatisations of the Brazilian society*. And not uniquely in Brazilian, but also in Irish and Swedish societies as demonstrated in Giulianotti's work. (1995; 1996)

Although soccer has its history linked to the Englishmen's free time practising, especially those men who were hired to work at the weaving industry, at the railway or

other British companies, the modality was being adapted and shaped to the Brazilian practitioners, who until that date were not aware of the existence of such sportive and cultural practice. At first the 'foreigner' Brazilian was necessary because the teams needed a certain number of players so they could get organised. Later on, after the appropriation of the game characteristics, the 'native' Brazilian became the 'ball' s owner', making possible the construction of a very own 'soccer' identity, extrapolating this identity to the nation, turning Brazil 'the country of the soccer' .

Being, however, as a shaped mask of a face from where are extract physiognomy details, according to DaMatta (1982:21), the '*football' practised, lived, discussed and theorised in Brazil would have its specific characteristics, among them the Brazilian way of speaking, presenting, revealing its society, letting others to find things out about ourselves.*

If on one hand soccer can be considered the screen where Brazil is projected on, there are cases where the story is the same and the actors have changed. From now on, our story will focus on the baseball and our characters will be the components of the Japanese colony which means nikkeis (Japaneses), nisseis (first generation) and sanseis (second generation), where we find some 'dramatisations' of the Japanese society that has settled here, preserved traces and developed their own identity, constituting themselves one of the ingredients that would compose the Brazilian cultural cauldron.

The Japanese culture in Brazil.

One fact that differentiates the Japanese identity formation is the seeking for harmony between contemplation and fight, not existing any opposition or contradiction in this relation, representing therefore, the same sense of integration in the person himself as well as with the reality outside. The reflex of this conduct is a gesture in the daily life that can be called active patience or the capacity of persistence whether in proved victory or imminent failure situations.

It is not accidental the fact that education is considered one of the fundamental points of the Japanese national character. Characteristically, in the past and in the present, the Japanese pedagogy is based on the exemplification and endless repetition. The master does; the pupils imitate.

The essential principle *zen*, that remains on the bottom of all Japanese pedagogy, according to Barros (1988) consists in the repetition until all learned would be forgotten, turning to a second nature, becoming an integrating (and unconscious) part of the person' s behaviour and spirit.

From the cultural and historical point of view, Yamashiro (1986) points out that the Japaneses present two important characteristics: the preservation of autochton values through the time, in a continuity rarely observed in the history of other people; also the capacity of introducing, incorporating and assimilating foreign cultures, harmonising several factors sometimes even the conflicting ones.

From there, may be, the capacity of adaptation and surviving in distant places experienced by several immigrant groups along this century, and the 'nationalisation' of western sports, like baseball in the end of the last century as well as soccer in the last decade.

The capacity of introducing, incorporating and assimilating foreign values does not imply only the flexibility of a possible acceptance of the new, but is based on the accuracy related to the own culture. This represents the conscious contact with the contamination risk, without fearing the imminence of death.

This link with the ancestry makes it possible to the japaneses who immigrated to have perpetual contact with their origins. That is the reason why Kikuchi (1995:103) says that *even though they go on identifying themselves as Japanese, their experience in Brazil made them Japanese from Brazil and not from Japan.*

And this is the way baseball has been practiced in Brazil.

In this article I will try to present an ethnographic study of the structure and organisation of baseball in Brazil, considering the following aspects:

- a. The relations between institutional organisation of the teams and the familiar constitution of the Japanese descendants.
- b. The role performed by the men as managers and team coaches and the paternal function performed at home.
- c. The female submission in relation to the men and the exercise of indirect power enjoyed by women.

This study was realised after a year and a half living, as a psychologist, with a group of about 120 athletes, divided in 8 categories, men' s and women' s. From this experience with the athletes and their families emerged the possibility of acting with a perspective that Augras (1995) nominate psychology of the culture where we try to describe the modalities in which one builds and express himself inside determined

culture and, from this observation, we try to comprehend fundamental aspects of the human reality.

Family, club, social organisation and expectations

The baseball arrived in Brazil with the first group of Japanese immigrants in 1908. With its origins connected to the practise of British games such as *rounder* and *cricket*, the baseball reached big development in USA (Batista Jr., 1998) but it was because of the japaneses that it started to be practised in Brazil, it was developed in the regions where the immigrant colonies settled to work in the coffee camps like in Sao Paulo Northeast, sorocabana region and North of Paraná.

Since the beginning, baseball obeys its own dynamic, both about the rules and tactical questions and principally about team and club managing. It is practised by the japaneses and descendants, having as basic principle the obedience to the hierarchy and the discipline. The players' education was the main objective of those who spread out this modality (Batista Jr., 1998). With the passing years and the inexorable approximation with the Brazilian population, as well as the cultural syncretism that the colony started living, some practises became more flexible, allowing, for example the entering of gaijins (foreigners, westerners) in the teams, maintaining, however, the spinal cord of the sport that was based in the clubs' organisation.

This organisation starts by the division of the clubs' responsibilities with the families, understanding by responsibilities not only the payment of the monthly fares, but also accompanying the teams when training or playing, taking care of the fields, and participating in several activities that take place in the competition days - even though it is not the same category their son belongs - participating in the refereeing and noting of games, among many other activities. That type of association is not related only to leisure activity, since by the time the family assumes the responsibility of doing certain task, they are obliged to assume the compromise every weekend, and sometimes longer than that.

The familiar contribution occurs also in other levels. The athletes are known by they surnames, in other words by the history of the family, that many times had had well succeeded athletes in past generations.

To develop his/her own name and identity is a difficult task to the youth who wants to trail a private path. There are cases of brothers who compete in the same category and carry on the uniforms the same surname, the only difference is a initial which refers to his first name, that is used only in restrict circles, in other words, a nickname or the first name are not used in public.

This means that in a wider grade and without losing sight of the Japanese culture characteristics, that person who carries the family surname in his back is responsible for the image that is not only his own, but belongs to his ancestral, that in the process of immigration suffered with the constitution of 'artificial' families. According to Kikuchi (1994) those constitutions took place because of a legal requirement that determined that only would be able of staying in the country the groups of families who had at least three "arms" (meaning by that the number of persons who were capable to work in the agriculture). This way, many couples, accompanied by young children or elderly, were obliged to make groups with people they frequently did not know. There are reports of many groups that were only adventurers and many times ended solving and maculating the name of families they arrived in the country with.

The acquaintance between the families who form the club community gets as intense as the responsibility of their children as athletes grows, and the parents who get involved with the club structure. This kind of organisation makes the children face a structured web of social interactions that impels them to the practise of baseball, even if the modality is not their most preferred (Rubio & Angelo, 1998). The teenagers get so involved with the team routine with practices and games every weekend and in some cases even during the evenings in week days - they do not have other choice but stay in group, once the sportive team also ends being social reference, acquaintance nucleus, and then, once again, the parental influence can be decisive.

To the parents the sportive practice can determinate behaviours that will interfere in the familiar and scholar dynamics, it can work as a regulator to the teenager's social life offering knowledge about the limits - failure and success - and it can still offer the possibility of free time fulfilling and consequently promote the removal from laziness which is considered by the elderly as a dangerous state. To the athletes the participation in practices and games demands sacrifice and dedication that exceeds their own desire and effort, and the family involvement in the club do not promote a health break up of that structure.

Based in these expectations the parents believe that the sport discipline theirs athlete-children, consider it as being a school for life - specially when referring to

the learning of conquering - and they see the sportive practice as a leisure activity, even if their behaviour in game situation indicates a excessive valorisation of the success. The athletes, on the other hand, facing the obligation and responsibility with the training and competition, recognise the effort as a extra sacrifice to satisfy the parents' desires and not theirs, feeling pressed by their past, and yet desiring more freedom instead of weekly obligation of training and competitions, they do not believe that their professional future is related to sportive activity.

Parents, ex-athletes, coach and managers

The baseball played in most of the Brazilian teams nowadays follows a pattern that has everything to do with heritage whose dynamic is marked by the experience of the elders, who become coaches by the time their carrier as athletes is over, carrying with them, applying and perpetuating training and physical preparation methods they had learned and practised. Part of this dynamic was broken by some teams that have established relations of interchange with Cuba, one of the largest schools of baseball nowadays, receiving coaches and suffering the influence of that school.

The hereditary condition that we are talking about has to do many times, or better, most of the time, in a very little reflexive practise that creates, nowadays, confront with many athletes. It happens once the inquiring attitude of these young athletes is not seen as a 'bad behaviour' anymore but it has become a desired attitude deserving support, mainly provided by those who suffered with the unquestionable authority of a Japanese father. This worry is expressed in the speech of a mother:

*I do not want my son to simply low down his head and obey the commands.
It was very bad to me and my generation. This submission ends up reflected
at work, at home, at school. Today, I prefer to have a son who answers
and fights, than to have a good boy who sometimes can be made a fool by the
others. If the coach is wrong my son has to reply.*

Even if this relation is not immediately made, the coach figure is a projection, and in some cases a reproduction, of a fatherly model whose knowledge and authority are added, resulting in an almost unlimited power over the athletes. And even facing the evolution of the pedagogy of human movement and sport, we still can observe training sections that besides being obsolete, put in danger the development of the child and her/his body, whether because of the endless repetition of movements or the heavy effort.

If on his side the coach believes he is doing the right and best, the athlete, the one who lives the practise, does not have scientific knowledge but understands that something must be wrong or even overcoming his/hers limits.

*Aunt. Is it right? We have been training from 8 o' clock till now (5 p.m.)
Is it right to make us run thirty minutes more?*

Asking about the training plan that included this conditioning at the end, the coach answered that he has always done it, that he once was one of the best players of Brazil and that it worked just fine, and that was the reason he kept doing things the same way he himself had learnt. This answer was not given in an aggressive way. It was expressed with the same tranquillity that we taste a delicious dish or we remind of a family scene.

This attitude confirms what Barros (1988) calls of 'hierarchic formalism' in the relations between japaneses. In other words, on one hand the rite of politeness in the inter-personal relations, and on the other the absolute intimate nature 'that is the pre condition and universal characteristic of any personal relation among (or with) japaneses' (p.164)

Women, mothers, generators and maintainer

Another very particular question in the baseball universe is the role performed by the women. It is a rigid and patriarchal structure, the teams and clubs are managed by men who make groups or subdivide themselves into the several functions needed for the club to work. Nevertheless, almost all clubs are amateurs, being maintained, some of them through decades, without any financial help from outside. It has represented, along the years, the elaboration of creative strategies for the surveying and continuity of the teams.

The most helpful of the strategies is on the hands of those who have been excluded of the decisions: the women, almost all of them mothers of the athletes or wives of the directors.

Organisers and the ones who realise the *baiten* - a meal made and served in the club - they transform the kitchen income on the financial support that maintains the club working. It is important to point out that in the kitchen there are several 'teams' of wives-mothers who work in turns during the weekends to make the meals. This volunteer activity, besides of giving the income of money to the institution club is also an indicator of its organisation.

If from the beginning we have been affirming that the management of the club follows a familiar structure, and if the kitchen is a generator of resources, we have in here a denunciator of the effort devoted by the parents. The speech of a coach who has been living from baseball for more than 50 years offers to us the possibility for comprehending the importance of this department in the club.

*The S. was one of the most important clubs that has existed in Brazil. It had great players and everybody was afraid of playing against them. Their field was one of the most beautiful and organised of all. Do you know why it is over now? Because the **baiten** fell apart. The women did not want to cook no more, the boys did not want to play... the team was over.*

If we pay attention to the symbolism of the female function, the women do more than take care of the kitchen, they assume the role of caterer for the people, the mother who takes care, who supports, who feeds - and the team - the maintenance of the function maintains the institution. Even if socially considered inferior, the woman has her role recognised and valorised at home as well as in the sportive institution.

If, in one side, the Japanese father is a synonym of unquestionable authority by the reason, and sometimes by the force, the woman is a synonym of unquestionable authority as well, passing through the excessive care and super protection in an education system that reaches its objectives by the persistence and repetition.

The apotheosis scene of the recognition of the women function in the club is given by the attitude of visiting team at the end of the game or the competition; before going back to their homes, the athletes queue in front of the kitchen and, with their caps on hands, make a large reverence, thank in Japanese to the women who are responsible for the meals, and the women behind the bar reattributed the compliment clapping their hands. More than a disoblged attitude this behaviour is one more among many rites performed by the nisseis, sanseis and gaijins that, today, belong to several Brazilian baseball teams.

An important detail about the gratefulness is that several gaijins participating in the ceremony without knowing the meaning of words that are being said.

Concluding comments

It is common to hear among the Japanese immigrants that Brazil has been like a mother, a big and welcomer country, and Japan is the father who brought them to the world and was a reference to their lives. Facing this metaphor it is possible to realise the effort that the majority of the Japanese who immigrated to Brazil had to make to adapt to the land and its people with costumes and habits so different from theirs.

The baseball, as a sportive practice and a reflex of this context, is being a denunciator movement presenting to all what has been occurring in these social groups as well as in the sport itself. In the sport we observed the desire for expansion, but also the fear of losing control of the structure that is organised and administrated by those who live the sport for more than half a century. In the social group, there is a transformation of the hierarchic formalism with the incorporation of western values that confront those preserved by the eastern ancestries. An ethnical obligation of doing yourself as better as possible changes to doing yourself only what is possible.

Even without competitive tradition the Infantile Brazilian Team (11-12 years) and Juniors (14-15 years) conquered world championship titles, creating the interest of American and Japanese teams for those athletes and also for the managing of Brazilian clubs. Even though living the modernity, referring in this point to the consume goods and the liberalism in market practising, the descendent of the Japanese immigrant still feels difficulty in treating his native sport with such liberty.

After overcoming the discrimination, based on the control, power and hierarchy (DeSensi, 1995) and surrender itself to the race mixture, the baseball in Brazil passes by a silent revolution, preserving, however, the most important traces of its structure, based on a familiar system, not to say feudal, in a world full of electronics score boards and aluminium sticks.

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