

Baseball by Masaoka Shiki

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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

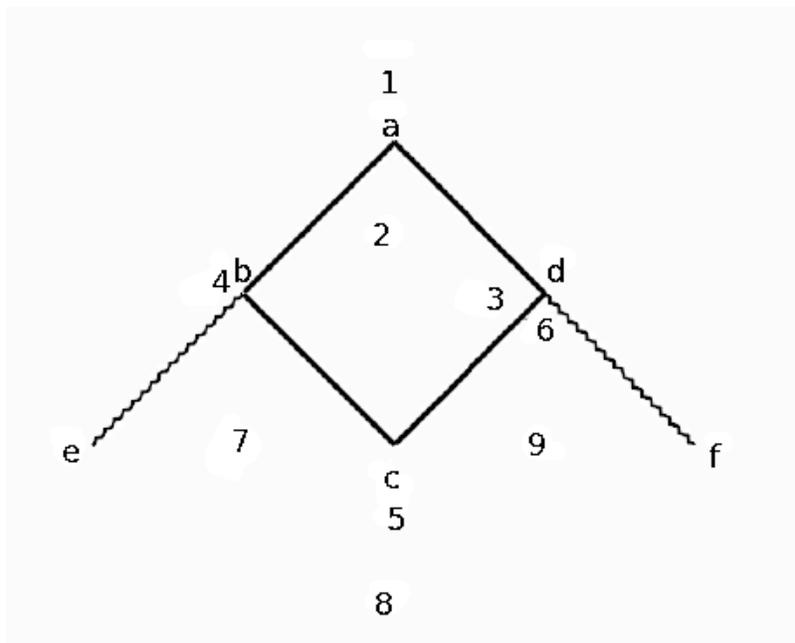
wear a mask and a mitt (like the mask and gloves worn in kendo (fencing)) and catch a direct ball. The pitcher will learn how to throw a pitch, and a ball-nine pitcher will improve to ball-four (or ball-six). In the next installment, I will describe a few playing techniques.

(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)