

The Recent Development of Women's International Baseball Competitions

By Jim Glennie - American Women's Baseball Federation

Modern competitive international women's baseball play began when Japanese organizers sent a nationally selected elite squad, Team Energen, to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, to participate in the American Women's Baseball Federation's (AWBF) 1999 South Florida Diamond Classic tournament. The AWBF and the Japanese team had established contact through the AWBF web site.

The Japanese organizers, later to be known as the Women's Baseball Association of Japan (WBAJ), and the AWBF had agreed that Japan would put together an all-star team to participate in a spring women's baseball tournament in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. The Japanese all-star team would be called Team Energen. The Team Energen name devolved from a sport drink named Energen that was marketed by a sponsoring pharmaceutical company, Otsuka Pharmaceutical.

At the 1999 South Florida Diamond Classic Team Energen showed they could play at the top level of women's baseball and vowed to return home to develop an even stronger team. At a meeting between the WBAJ and AWBF officials following the tournament plans were initiated for a contest between a national women's baseball team from the United States and Team Energen in Tokyo.

In May of 2000, a United States national women's baseball team (selected by the AWBF) flew to Tokyo and played the first competitive international women's baseball game on May 1 in the Seibu Dome against a nationally selected Team Energen squad. The Japanese team defeated the United States team in front of 3,000 enthusiastic fans. The American and Japanese organizers developed a plan to continue this international competition with a Women's World Series to be held in the United States or Canada in the summer of 2001. After discussions over the summer with women's baseball program organizers within the AWBF, Baseball Ontario, the Victorian Baseball Federation (Australia) and the WBAJ plans were developed for the 2001 Women's World Series in Toronto.

Representatives from the AWBF and Baseball Ontario flew to Tokyo in April of 2001 for discussions with the WBAJ. After several rounds of discussions the formation of the Women's International Baseball Association (WIBA) was memorialized in an agreement between representatives from Canada and the United States and Japan. Although Australia was unable to send a representative for discussions its representative had indicated their willingness to play in international competitions. A press conference was held in Tokyo on April 10 to announce the formation of the WIBA and Japan's participation in the 2001 World Series in Toronto on July 4-8, 2001.

The cornerstone for attracting the Australian and Japanese teams to North America was the 2001 Women's World Series. This first of its kind international competition involving national women's baseball teams from four countries provided an attractive platform for

seeding the long overdue development of international women's baseball play. The Toronto Blue Jays agreed that several games including the championship game of the 2001 Women's World Series would be played in the Toronto SkyDome between July 4th-8th. This proved to be an irresistible venue for attracting Japanese and Australian teams to North America.

Japan committed to play in the 2001 Women's World Series and sent their national team, Team Energen. The WBAJ selected their team from national tryouts held in Tokyo during the first week of December of 2000. The tryouts attracted several hundred players from across their country. Team Energen came as an experienced international entrant. They had played in the 1999 South Florida Diamond Classic and hosted a United States national team in Tokyo in May of 2000.

Australia selected their national women's team from a tryout process woven into their women's first national baseball championship. The Australian Baseball Federation selected and trained the team which entered the 2001 Women's World Series.

Baseball Canada also selected and trained a women's national team in 2001. Canada had an ongoing youth female baseball program and it was an easy extension to field a women's team. Many of the eligible Canadian players had already had been playing with women's baseball teams in the United States and welcomed the new awareness in Canada. Canada dropped out of international competitions after a disappointing fourth place finish and did not resume play until the 2004 Women's World Series in Uozu City, Japan.

The American Women's Baseball Federation (AWBF) with the help of the Roy Hobbs Baseball organization selected and organized the 2001 United States team through tryouts held in several areas of the country. A team ranging in ages from 15-41 represented the United States well eventually winning the inaugural 2001 Women's World Series.

The 2002 Women's World Series was played in St. Petersburg Florida with Japan, Australia and the United States entering teams. In the Gold Medal game played at Tropicana Field following a MLB game Australia defeated Japan 7-4.

The 2003 Women's World Series was awarded to Australia and was played August 25-30 on the Gold Coast in Queensland at the Australian Baseball Federation national training site, Palm Meadows Baseball Complex. Originally Japan was to host the 2003 event but the SARS virus foreclosed that venue in June of 2003. The Australian Baseball Federation graciously agreed to host the event and invitations were reissued to Australia, Canada, the United States (AWBF) and the China Taipei Baseball Association. Teams from the United States, Australia and Japan accepted. Japan won the 2003 Women's World Series defeating Australia 4-2.

Following the 2003 Women's World Series representatives from the Australian Baseball Federation, the American Women's Baseball Federation and Team Japan met to discuss whether the 2004 Women's World Series planned in Uozu City, Japan would be

cancelled or rescheduled because of the newly sanctioned IBAF 2004 Women's World Cup of Baseball. The three country representatives and the IBAF agreed to reschedule the event for July 16-23, 2004. This would honor previous commitments and serve as a good preparation tool for the Women's World Cup of Baseball.

Eight teams played in the 2004 Women's World Series. This enormously successful event witnessed new teams from Korea, India, Hong Kong and Chinese Taipei. Japan defeated the USA 14-4 before a crowd of almost 10,000 spectators for the Gold Medal. Canada defeated Australia for the Bronze.

The Women's World Series created a network in which countries and other baseball organizations nurtured and developed strong women's baseball programs. Already the International Baseball Federation (IBAF) had taken notice and scheduled the first Women's World Cup of Baseball. This event was awarded to Baseball Canada who asked the Edmonton International Baseball Foundation to organize the event for July 30-August 8, 2004. The United States won the Gold Medal by defeating Japan 2-0.

The IBAF made two important announcements recently. The 2006 Women's World Cup of Baseball would be played in Taipei from July 31 – August 6. The Women's World Cup probably will be renamed the Women's World Championship and has been sanctioned for play in 2008, 2010 and 2012.

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revised April 2, 2006©