Kenichi Zenimura,
Japanese American Baseball Pioneer

Bill STAPLES, Jr.

INTRODUCTION

(After showing the opening sequence of the NHK Documentary on Zenimura)

Hello, my name is Bill Staples. I am a baseball historian and author of the book, *Kenichi Zenimura, Japanese American Baseball Pioneer.* It is an honor to be here today to discuss the life and legacy of Zenimura-san.

Before I start, I would like to thank the representatives from Ritsumeikan University for inviting me to Japan. Specifically, I want to thank Kyoko Yoshida, a fellow baseball historian who I have collaborated with on baseball research projects since 2006. Amazingly, this is our first time to meet in person.

I would also like to thank the distinguished faculty of the International Institute of Language and Culture Studies and its staff members: Prof. Takahashi, Mr. Yasukawa, Ms. Shiga, and Mr. Shimizu.

I would also like to thank the three panelists joining us today at our symposium: Mr. Ishihara, Mr. Takano, and Mr. Masaki.

For me to tell you the story of Zenimura I first have to tell you a little about myself, as I feel our life stories are now intertwined. I fell in love with the game of baseball at age 10. I lived in Houston, Texas, at the time and the Astros were my favorite team. If you would have told me then that the Astros would win the World Series in 2017, and that I would travel to Japan to talk about baseball history several months later, I would not have believed you.

My interest in Japanese culture began 30 years ago. At age 18 I loved to play football and baseball, but I also loved to paint, draw and write. I was an athlete-artist. As a freshman in college I was first introduced to the beauty of Japan through the works of American poet Gary Snyder. In the 1950's, Snyder studied Buddhism in the monasteries in Kyoto at the renowned Zen temples of Daitokuji and Shokokuji.

From there my interest in Buddhism drew me to the fascinating book, *A Zen Way of Baseball*, the life story of global home run king, Sadaharu Oh. Oh-san is one of my favorite players, and his biography is one of my favorite books. In fact, when I met Major League Baseball's all-time hit king in 2002, Pete Rose, I asked him to sign a picture of him with Oh in my copy of *A Zen Way of Baseball.*

I also want to introduce my lovely wife of 23 years, Kyra, who has joined me on this journey. She too has a personal connection to Japan, one that occurred long before she and I met at age 20. In the early 1960's her family moved to Japan. Her father served in the U.S. Air Force and was based in Tachikawa. She is the youngest of three children, and her middle brother was born in Japan in 1965. He was a dual citizen of both Japan and the U.S. Her family returned to the U.S. before she was born, but she was raised hearing countless stories about her family's wonderful memories of life in Japan. Sadly, none of her family are still with us today, so in a way this trip is an opportunity for us to reconnect with, and celebrate, their spirits.

In addition, Kyra's great uncle was a professional baseball player who competed in the Negro Leagues of Texas. His name was Robert Bailey and he was teammates with many great ball players from Texas in the 1920's, some who are now honored in the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. Although her uncle did not travel to Japan, many of his peers did – their names are: Biz Mackey, Andy Cooper, O'Neal Pullen and William Ross. And I will discuss their importance today, as they too were positively influenced by Zenimura and are connected to the larger legacy of Japanese American baseball.

JAPANESE STARS IN ARIZONA

I have travelled 5,983 miles (9629 kilometers) from Arizona to be here today. As we speak, half of the teams in Major League Baseball are conducting their spring training in Arizona and preparing for the 2018 season. There are many great players from Japan playing baseball just miles from my home right now. Their names might be familiar to you: Shohei Ohtani of the Angels, Kenta Maeda of the Dodgers, Yu Darvish of the Cubs, Yoshi Hirano of the Diamondbacks, Kazuhisa Makita of the Padres, and Hisashi Iwakuma and Ichiro Suzuki of the Mariners. (I must confess that it warms my heart that Ichiro is returning for another season.)

So, how did they get to America? Hard work? Talent? An airplane? All of that is true, but those who know the history of Japanese American baseball understand that the Japanese stars playing in the majors today are there because they crossed baseball's symbolic "Bridge to the Pacific" that connects the U.S. and Japan. This important and influential bridge was built, in part, through the efforts of many people, especially Japanese Americans. I believe, and evidence supports the fact,

that Zenimura is one of the most important architects and builders of baseball's "Bridge to the Pacific."

HOMEPLATE

Every great journey in baseball starts at home plate, so that is where my story about Zenimura begins. In 2003 our family moved to Chandler, Arizona, a city of 200,000 people located just north of the Gila River Indian Community. The residents of Gila River are Native American, members of the Pima Indian tribe that have resided in Arizona for centuries.

I am also a youth baseball coach, so when we moved to Chandler I explored coaching baseball at Gila River. With this in mind, I went to Google and searched for "Gila River" and "baseball". The search results did not return anything about youth baseball. Instead, I saw the following:

> Baseball as America
> The Exhibition
>
> Handmade wooden home plate from Zenimura Field, designed by Kenichi Zenimura, Gila River Relocation Center, Arizona, 1943.

Prior to this discovery I had researched a lot about baseball, and thought I knew all there was to know about the game in America. But the truth be told, I did not know anything about Zenimura or Japanese American baseball. I knew a little about the internment of Japanese Americans during WWII, but that was it.

Keep in mind, the year was 2003. It was two years after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and America was at war with Iraq. Sadly, many Americans were caught up in the war-time hysteria and there were talks of sending Arab Americans to prison camps, just as our country did with Japanese Americans during WWII.

After Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in December 1941, U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which gave the government permission to incarcerate all people of Japanese Ancestry. The result was that approximately 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry were removed from their homes on the west coast and sent to camps behind barbed wire in the American Southwest.

U.S. Congressman Daniel Inouye said, "The lessons learned must remain as a grave reminder of what we must not allow to happen again to any group." The way our country was responding after

9/11, I was concerned that we were at risk of repeating the past.

Therefore, my research and writing of the biography of Kenichi Zenimura was my emotional response to 9/11. It was my attempt to seek wisdom. On one level the book is the story of the Japanese American experience, but it is also about the timeless and shared human condition.

I also wanted to know the answer to this question: "How does one find happiness and freedom in a world that is less happy and free?"

I believe that after three years of researching Zenimura's life, and three years of writing his biography, and many years of discussing the book, I have found my answer to that question. I will share it with you at the end of this talk.

ZENIMURA LIFE TIMELINE

Kenichi Zenimura was born in Hiroshima, Japan, on January 25, 1900. He moved to Honolulu, Hawaii in 1907, where he developed a passion and skills for baseball. In 1920 he left Hawaii for the mainland with plans to attend college and play ball in Iowa. But he got sidetracked along the way – most likely he met a girl, his future wife Kiyoko. So Zenimura stayed in Fresno, where he settled down and started his family. He continued to play semi-professional baseball in the Japanese American leagues of California, many of which he organized.

Why did he not leave Fresno and try to play professionally in America? I will discuss the reasons why shortly.

In 1942 people of Japanese ancestry on the American West Coast were forcibly removed from their homes and sent to prison camps. Almost all residents of Fresno were sent to Arkansas, but because Kenichi's wife, Kiyoko, had asthma, the family was sent to the dry climate of Gila River, Arizona. Zenimura returned to Fresno after the war in 1945. He continued to play baseball, manage teams and serve as a goodwill baseball ambassador between the U.S. and Japan. He played in his last game at age 55 as a catcher. And sadly, he died after suffering fatal injuries when his work truck was hit by a drunk driver. He died on November 13, 1968.

ZENIMURA'S LEGACY

I would now like to explain how Zenimura earned the title of "The Father of Japanese American Baseball." To do so, I will reference the Preface to my book:

* * *

Much like Jackie Robinson and his peers in the Negro Leagues, Japanese Americans were forced to play in their own leagues from the 1900s to the 1940s because of bigotry and discrimination in white America. Today (early 21st century), virtually all baseball fans know Robinson's story and how he courageously crossed the color line in 1947 to become the first African American to play in the modern game. One need only attend a major-league game and see his retired uniform number 42 displayed in every ballpark as a reminder of his legacy.

Few baseball fans know the story of early 20th century Japanese American baseball—also known as the Nisei Leagues. Despite this lack of awareness, the impact of their leagues is still visible in today's game. It's subtle though, only visible to the well-informed. The legacy is not a retired uniform number, but the names on the back of the uniforms—Ichiro, Ohtani, Darvish, Kaneda, and Tanaka. *(This list was updated to reflect active players from the 2018 season)*.

[2018 Note: At the end of the 2017 season roughly 100 players from Asia played Major League Baseball. The count and countries of origin are: 14 from Taiwan, 23 from South Korea, and 63 from Japan – which includes the pride of Ritsumeikan University, Shigetoshi Hasegawa.]

The national pastime has unofficially become the ***international pastime***, and this is the enduring legacy of Japanese American baseball and pioneers like Kenichi Zenimura.

During his lifetime Zenimura was known for his great strategic sense of the game and a passion for exporting the American style of play to Japan, Korea and China. After watching Zeni compete on the diamond during the 1924 barnstorming tour, a *Japanese Times* reporter declared, "Zenimura is one of the smartest and most colorful players the writer had ever seen. He was the terror of the diamond, a man who played every position in baseball. He was tricky, shrewd and positive poison to every opponent."

His reputation grew over the years and during his 1937 barnstorming tour to Japan, Zenimura was prevented from playing because the games were for amateur players and, based on the skills displayed in previous tours, it was widely believed that he was a professional player back in the United States.

Between the years 1923 and 1931, no MLB goodwill tour barnstormed Japan. (Ty Cobb toured Japan by himself in '28, but not as part of an organized team.) The highest caliber of competition from the U.S. during this time came in the form of Nisei and Negro League teams like Zenimura's Fresno Athletic Club and Hall of Famer Biz Mackey's Philadelphia Royal Giants. During this eight-

year MLB void, Nisei and Negro Leaguers helped elevate the level of play in Japan and set the stage for the 1931 and 1934 MLB tour of stars like Lou Gehrig and Babe Ruth. The Nippon Professional Baseball League was officially founded in 1936.

In 1962, Zenimura was crowned the "Dean of Nisei Baseball" by veteran Fresno Bee sports reporter Tom Meehan. Shortly after Zeni's death in 1968, the same sentiment was echoed by Bee reporter Ed Orman. Approximately a quarter-century later, baseball historian Kerry Yo Nakagawa refined Meehan and Orman's tribute for a new audience and called Zenimura "The Father of Japanese American Baseball." Nakagawa argues that Zeni deserves this title for his unparalleled career as a player, manager and international and multicultural ambassador of the game.

There are some critics who say that Zenimura is not worthy of this accolade. Interestingly, much of the opposition comes from within the Japanese American community. For some Nikkei, they point out that Zeni was neither the first nor the best player in Japanese American baseball. Others with a limited knowledge of the game's history have sarcastically remarked that "the only thing Zenimura ever did was take a picture with Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig." Still others feel that a disproportionate amount of credit is given to Zenimura for organizing baseball behind barbed wire during the World War II internment. They say, "there was a 'Zeni' in every camp."

The parallels between the Japanese Americans and Jackie Robinson are helpful in responding to this criticism. In the Negro League baseball community—especially among former players and historians—there are grumblings that Jackie Robinson also receives a disproportionate amount of credit. American sports broadcaster Bob Costas says in response, "Jackie wasn't the first, there were others who came before him. He wasn't the best, there were others who put up better numbers. That said though, can you think of anyone more important?"

This sentiment applies to Zenimura, too. He is the most important figure in the story of Japanese American baseball. Yes, there were others who came before him. And yes, some players probably had better numbers (or might have; statistics for the Nisei Leagues are scarce). However, when you look at the defining characteristics and enduring legacy of Japanese American baseball, Zenimura has had the greatest impact.

The five defining characteristics of the Japanese American baseball legacy are:

1. Formal League and Team Development: Japanese Americans started their own teams as early as 1903; established their own league as early as 1910; and in West Coast cities like Seattle, San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose, Fresno, Los Angeles and smaller towns in between, the Nisei Leagues offered a highly competitive and financially successful form of ball and entertainment for

fans until World War II.

Zeni's impact: Between 1918 and 1955, he worked tirelessly to create, maintain and elevate formal Japanese American baseball teams, leagues, or both.

2. Games Against High-Caliber Competition: Zenimura believed that to be the best you had to compete against the best. For this reason, he and his Nisei peers scheduled games against talent from the Pacific Coast League, California Winter League, major leagues and Negro League barnstormers, and visiting teams from Japan. In games against each level, Nisei players not only proved they were worthy of being on the same field, on many occasions they were the victors. A study of Nisei Leagues box scores and games summaries between 1920 and 1940 reveals that the caliber of play closely reflects the common assessment of the Negro Leagues: not every player in the league was talented enough to play in the majors, but the stars of the league proved time and time again that, if given the opportunity, they could have competed with their white counterparts at the highest level.

Zeni's impact: No other Japanese American player or manager can claim as many games— or victories—against PCL, CWL, Negro Leagues and Japanese players or teams as Zenimura.

3. Pre-War Goodwill Ambassadors: For Issei and Nisei ballplayers, "putting on a baseball uniform was like putting on the American flag." Through their adoption of, and love for, the game of baseball, Japanese Americans believed they were demonstrating their loyalty to the United States. At the same time, they still maintained connections with their culture, family and friends in Japan. One way to stay connected was through a shared love of baseball. Baseball was introduced to Japan in 1872 and by the turn of the 20th century it had grown to become the country's most popular team sport. Nisei teams embarked on goodwill tours as early as 1914, and during the early 1920s to the late 1930s, they played a key role in exporting the great American game to Japan and welcoming dozens of visiting Japanese teams to the U.S. In both cases, the competitive interactions helped the Japanese improve their skill level, elevate the overall level of play, and eventually empower them to start their professional baseball league in 1936.

When Japanese Americans were not involved directly on the field, they were often involved off the field and behind the scenes. Because they knew the language and cultural customs of both countries, Japanese Americans often played a significant role in facilitating the outbound tours of Caucasian and African American teams, and U.S.–inbound tours of Japanese teams.

Zeni's impact: As a tireless ambassador, baseball entrepreneur, and diplomat, he led the first tour to Japan by a California-based Nisei team and participated in many subsequent tours to and from his

home country.

4. World War II Incarceration Camp Baseball: Perhaps one of the most unique, fascinating and tragic chapters in all of U.S. baseball history is World War II internment baseball. The national pastime behind barbed wire started shortly after President Franklin Roosevelt wrote his famous "Green Light Letter" to Judge Landis encouraging him to continue the 1942 baseball season. Weeks later Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 and set the stage for the removal and incarceration of more than 120,000 West Coast Issei and Nisei. Families were forced to sell their personal belongings and pack only what could fit in two suitcases. In each of the ten camps scattered across the American West and Arkansas, baseball was key to survival. It helped boost morale for everyone, players and spectators alike. Each camp had at least one baseball field and competitive league. In camps where the skill levels were more advanced, games were scheduled against top high school, college and semipro teams from surrounding cities. In the end, the outcome of these games mattered far less than the relationship mending that occurred between incarcerated Japanese Americans and the free Americans living beyond the barbed wire of the camps.

Zeni's impact: Within weeks of arriving in the camp he began to build a baseball field. Between 1943 and 1945, Zenimura arranged approximately 40 games with outside teams. He participated in each as either a player or manager. His team won more than 75 percent of these contests, including games against the top Caucasian and Negro semi pro clubs in Arizona.

5. Post-War Goodwill Ambassadors: Just as it was important to improve post-war relations on the local level with Caucasians, Japanese Americans knew it would be critical to do the same on the global level with Japan. Unfortunately, participation in the Nisei leagues after 1945 never returned to their pre-war levels. For those Nisei who still loved the game and wanted to compete at the highest levels, they had few options. American players like Fibber Hirayama, Kenshi Zenimura and Wally Yonamine were ready for the big leagues, but the big leagues weren't ready for them. So instead they went to Japan to play in the Nippon Professional Baseball League.

Zeni's impact: After the war Zenimura continued to work as a baseball ambassador between the U.S. and Japan. In addition to welcoming Japanese teams, players and officials visiting Fresno, he also served as a scout and facilitated the signing of several players from the U.S. mainland and Hawaii to central California colleges and professional teams in Japan.

The research behind my book and the works of other Nisei baseball historians has identified many important "founding fathers" of Japanese American baseball. Nonetheless, Zenimura still emerges as one of the top performers in the above considerations. He is not always the most accomplished in each category, but when the collective body of his work is considered, his career is by far the

most impressive. It is because of his remarkable legacy that I agree with Kerry Yo Nakagawa's position that Kenichi Zenimura is indeed the "Father of Japanese American Baseball."

* * *

Now I would like to talk about the social climate that people of Japanese ancestry faced when they arrived in America.

THE OTHER COLOR LINE

After embarking on a goodwill baseball tour of the world in 1913, New York Giants manager John McGraw confidently stated, "Mark my prediction. Some star ball players will come out of Japan within the next ten years."

He was off by about 50 years. If McGraw believed that Japanese players were talented enough to compete in the majors, why did it take so long? Why was Masanori Murakami the first player of Japanese ancestry to break into the big leagues in 1964?

The white players and owners of organized baseball entered into a "gentleman's agreement" and drew a color line against African Americans in the late 1800's. Was there similar prejudice against Japanese players?

There is evidence that people of Japanese ancestry faced racial discrimination in all other walks of life in the U.S. in the early 20th century. In fact, civil rights pioneer and founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), W.E.B. DuBois said in 1913, "The fight of the Japanese for equal rights is similar to the fight of the Negroes are making for their rights. Educated people of all races recognize that the color line is artificial."

Let's explore baseball's "other color line."

Players of Japanese ancestry began to make their mark on the national pastime at the end of the 19th century. In June 1897, Cleveland Spiders manager Patsy Tebeau attempted to sign a five-foot-three outfielder known only as "a relative of Sorakichi, the Japanese wrestler." Sorakichi Matsuda's brother was an amateur ball player in Chicago prior to catching Tebeau's interest. According to the *Sporting Life* magazine, Tebeau thought that the Japanese prospect would be "the marvel of the diamond and the greatest player of the century."

No reason was reported in the press as to why the Japanese outfielder never played with Cleveland.

Eight years later an incident would occur that offered one plausible explanation.

In 1905, the *New York Times* announced that a Japanese ballplayer would get a major league tryout with manager John McGraw's New York Giants baseball club. Shumza Sugimoto, 23-year-old outfielder was invited to join the team in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Sugimoto was described as a 118-pound "jiu jitsu expert" who successfully took down Giants' outfielder Mike Donlin, who weighed 175 pounds. McGraw said Sugimoto had "all the goods" as a player and described him as "extraordinarily alert, a splendid batter and base runner and unusually quick and accurate picking up flies and grounders." Impressive talent was not enough. Sugimoto was not signed by McGraw for the 1905 season, and it appears that race was indeed the reason. Organized baseball was not comfortable with the idea of a Japanese player crossing the color line. Towards the end of spring training this uneasiness was expressed in a debate in the press. "Should the color line be extended to include Japanese players?" According to the *Sporting News*, the general consensus was "yes." Sugimoto told the press that he "did not like the drawing of the color line in his case" and decided to instead join an integrated semipro team in New Orleans.

The cases of Sorakichi Matsuda's brother in 1897 and Sugimoto in 1905 demonstrate that there was a color line drawn in the major leagues that might have prevented Japanese Americans from receiving the opportunity to compete at the highest level.

In fact, 50 years after Sugimoto, another talented ballplayer of Japanese ancestry said that he did not feel welcomed in organize baseball. Satoshi "Fibber" Hirayama was two-sport athlete from Exeter, California who competed for Zenimura's Fresno Nisei ball club in the early 1950's. In 1954 Hirayama signed a contract to play professional baseball in the St. Louis Browns organization (now known as the Baltimore Orioles). In a 2012 interview, Hirayama confessed that even though he had signed a contract, he did not feel like he would be given a fair shot, and that his road to the majors would have been difficult to travel because of his ethnicity. "I felt that the big leagues were closed off to us (Japanese Americans) in those days (1955). That was part of the reason why I went to Japan to play. In a way, we faced the same thing that the black players went through."

Through the efforts of Zenimura, Hirayama signed a contract to play with the Carp, where he became an all-star outfielder and fan favorite. Hirayama would later say, "The reason I was able to go to Japan was because of Mr. Zenimura's faith in me."

Despite the evidence that I just shared, there are some baseball historians who do not believe that there was ever a color line drawn against Japanese players. They cite the fact that there were indeed Japanese players who signed professional contracts at various points in the early 1900's. Andy Yamashiro of Hawaii, signed to play in 1917 with the Gettysburg Ponies (Pennsylvania),

Jimmy Horio played one season for the Sioux Falls Canaries (South Dakota) in 1934, and in 1935 manager Connie Mack of the Philadelphia Athletics (Pennsylvania) wanted to sign Eiji Sawamura to a contract.

In response, I would encourage those historians to think about Jackie Robinson crossing the color line in 1947. Technically he didn't break the color line and make it disappear immediately when he crossed the color line and it slowly began to be erased across the league. In fact, the last major league team to welcome black players was the Boston Red Sox in 1959. Therefore, it took 12 years for the color line against African Americans to be completely erased in the majors. This is a perfect example of how some team owners in different geographic locations of the U.S. were willing to welcome players of color, while others were not. The levels of racial tolerance and acceptance varied depending on where you lived. Whereas a liberal state like Pennsylvania would welcome people of all races, religions and creeds, other states were not as welcoming. This was true for African Americans in baseball after 1947, and it was the case for Japanese Americans for the first part of the 20th century.

At that time, the racial animosity towards people of Japanese ancestry was equivalent to the Jim Crow laws of the southern U.S. that treated African Americans as second-class citizens.

In the early 1920's signs appeared in small towns declaring "Japanese Not Welcome." So what did Zenimura do? He schedule games in those towns because he knew that if his team arrived and played a "good brand of baseball," he could eventually connect with others and break down barriers. And that's exactly what happen. Eventually the signs disappeared and more games were scheduled.

However, Zenimura's efforts would not be as effective in 1924. A new semi-pro league in Central California called the San Joaquin Valley Baseball League was created. In the proposed six-team league, Zenimura's was the only Japanese ballclub. One team said that they would not join in the new league if the Japanese were allowed to participate. "We don't want the Japanese to play in Porterville," declared the community leaders. "We have kept them out in other lines and if we let them come in baseball, they will bring a following and this we don't want," they added. "This is a white man's town and we intend to keep it as such." Sadly, the league officials excluded Zenimura and his Japanese Americans ball club from the new league.

So the resilient Zenimura was forced to find high-caliber competition in others places, which he did.

In March 1924, Zenimura scheduled a series of three games with the Salt Lake City Bees—the Utah representative in the Pacific Coast League. The Bees held their spring training season in

Fresno. The Fresno Athletic Club defeated the Bees by a score of 6 to 4.

During the three-game series, the Bees signed a new pitcher/outfielder named Frank "Lefty" O'Doul from San Francisco. With the bats of O'Doul and future Yankee Hall of Famer Tony Lazzeri, the Bees won the next two games.

Zenimura's victory of the Pacific Coast League Bees was historic. But perhaps more important was O'Doul's presence in the lineup. The gregarious southpaw would later go on to lead several tours to Asia and serve as a major baseball ambassador between the U.S. and Japan after World War II. For his role as an international ambassador, O'Doul would later be elected into the Japanese Baseball Hall of Fame in 2002. With all of that in mind, it appears that the 1924 game between the Salt Lake Bees and the Fresno Athletic Club was O'Doul's earliest documented interaction with a team comprised of ballplayers of Japanese ancestry.

It is worth noting that in May 1924 Zenimura's club played a two game series with the Meiji University team—the college champions of Japan. While Meiji was in the United States touring, President Calvin Coolidge signed into law the Immigration Act of 1924 which severely restricted immigration from Asia to the U.S.

BASEBALL'S BRIDGE TO THE PACIFIC

Now I would like to share some statistics that I think will help you better appreciate the role Japanese Americans played in helping to build Baseball's Bridge to the Pacific.

According to research conducted by the Nisei Baseball Research Project, non-profit founded to preserve the history of Japanese American baseball, between 1905 and 1940 there were roughly 98 tours between the U.S., Japan and Hawaii. Of those tours, one out of three was Japanese American teams visiting Japan. (See Appendix A).

When we focus on just the tours conducted between 1923 and 1940, Zenimura's impressive impact becomes apparent.

There were 53 tours between 1923 and 1940. Zenimura was involved in some way with 17 (32%) of them. He led tours to Japan three times: 1924, 1927 and 1937. When he was not directly involved, he supported or influenced 14 different tours by other Japanese American teams, Negro League teams, and major league all-stars. (See Appendix B).

I don't have time to touch on all 14 tours, but will I discuss three of them and explain why they are

important:

- 1927 Philadelphia Royal Giants to Japan (led by manager Lon Goodwin)
- 1929 Meiji to U.S. (Led by Takizo Matsumoto)
- 1934 Major League All-Stars to Japan (Starring Babe Ruth)

But first let's discuss why the time period between 1923 and 1940 is important. U.S.-Japan baseball relations suffered a major setback in 1922. Let me explain how.

HERB HUNTER ALL-STARS 1922

In October 1922, Herb Hunter's all-stars sailed for Japan. Once they arrived, the big leaguers defeated every college, industrial, and amateur team the country had to offer—except one.

On November 23, Hunter's All-Stars lost 9 to 3 to the amateur Mita Club, led by future Japanese Baseball Hall of Fame pitcher Michimaro Ono. On the surface, one would think that the Mita Club and fans would be happy with the victory over the Americans, but they weren't. Reports out of Japan explained why. *Fresno Bee* reported on December 14, 1922:

> America's reputation for sportsmanship suffered a severe blow when the American baseballers threw away Sunday's game to the Mita local nine, which is strong nationally, but obviously no match for the American professionals.... The general opinion was frankly expressed that the Americans dropped the frame for advertising purposes, anticipating increased gate receipts later at Osaka and other parts.... The Tokio Asahi expressed the disappointment, "We welcomed the American team because we thought they were gentlemanly and sportsmanlike. They have now shown themselves to be full of the mean professional spirit. Japanese baseball followers are not foolish enough to believe they tried to beat Mita.... They disappointed our hopes and left an unpleasant impression upon us.

Losing pitcher Waite Hoyte would later explain that he and his teammates were just "clowning around" on the field and meant no disrespect to their Japanese hosts. Nonetheless, the damage was done. As a result of several factors—including the 1922 Herb Hunter All-Star thrown-game fiasco, the 1923 Great Kanto earthquake in Japan, and restrictive post-season play policies established by major league Commissioner Judge Landis—no major league team would tour Japan for another eight years. This major league void would proudly be filled by Zenimura and his West Coast Nisei and Negro League peers.

Ironically, just as Zenimura and his teammates were about to enter the role of goodwill baseball ambassadors to Japan for the U.S., on November 13, 1922, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Ozawa

v. U.S. to reaffirm the ban on Japanese immigrants becoming naturalized American citizens. First-generation Japanese Americans, or Issei, like Kenichi Zenimura, would have to wait another 30 years for the opportunity to call the United States of America their true home.

TAKIZO MATSUMOTO

Zenimura arrived in Fresno, California in 1920 and joined the newly formed Fresno Athletic Club (FAC). Once here, he not only bolstered the club's play on the field, he developed important relationships off the field as well. One of the most important relationships was with FAC co-founder Frank Narushima. He and Zeni had many things in common. Both were born in Hiroshima, Japan, both loved sports, and both possessed the charisma and drive to become winners in anything they did.

Narushima was born in Japan in 1901 with the birth name of Takizo Matsumoto. His name was changed when his family moved to Fresno when he was a toddler. Shortly after their arrival in the U.S., Matsumoto's father passed away. His widowed mother, Kiyo Matsumoto, remarried restaurant owner Hichiza Narushima, a man 14 years her senior. Afterwards, young Takizo took on both an American first name and his stepfather's surname and became known as Frank Narushima. Young Frank eventually became a star athlete at Fresno High School, excelling in football, baseball, and track between 1916 and 1919.

When Zenimura arrived in Honolulu in late 1907 with his aunt Hisa Hirokawa, she listed their closest relative in Japan as a sister with the last name Matsumoto who lived in the Takeya-cho section of Hiroshima. When the Zenimura family traveled to Japan during the late 1910s, they indicated that their closest relative in Japan was Sutosaburo Matsumoto, an uncle who also lived in Takeya-cho, Hiroshima. These facts point to the strong possibility that Kenichi's mother, Waka, had a sister who married into the Matsumoto family. This being the case, there is a strong possibility, although unconfirmed at this time, that Kenichi Zenimura and Takizo Matsumoto were in fact distant cousins.

Why is Takizo "Frank" Matsumoto important? Matsumoto returned to Japan in 1920, eventually became the team manager of the Meiji University baseball team, graduated from Harvard, held leadership roles for the Japan Olympic Committee in 1932, 1936 and 1940, and played a key role in U.S-Japan baseball relations before and after the war. And for his work as a goodwill baseball ambassador, he was inducted into the Japanese Baseball Hall of Fame in 2016.

In 2007 the Nisei Baseball Research Project (NBRP) submitted a proposal to the Japanese Baseball Hall of Fame nominating Kenichi Zenimura for enshrinement. In that proposal the NBRP not only

focused on Zenimura's accomplishments, it also highlighted the importance of Matsumoto. The recent addition of Matsumoto to the Japanese Baseball Hall of Fame is a great honor for this important and overlooked figure in U.S.-Japan baseball history. Matsumoto's enshrinement is a sign that his counterpart in the U.S., Kenichi Zenimura, who also served quietly behind the scenes as an ambassador between two baseball-loving nations, might someday receive the same honor.

On that note, there are roughly 20 of Zenimura's peers already honored in the Japanese Baseball Hall of Fame. Many as players, and a few as ambassadors. See Appendix C for the full list. I will name just a few:

Players: Tadashi "Bozo" Wakabayashi, Takeo Tabe, Shigeru Mizuhara and Shinji Hamazaki

Ambassadors: Nobuo Fujita, Lefty O'Doul, and of course, Takizo Matsumoto

GENTLE BLACK GIANTS

A Negro League All-Star team from California named the Philadelphia Royal Giants toured Asia three times: 1927, 1931-32 and 1932-33. They also met Japanese ball clubs at the half-way point in Hawaii during tours there in 1928, 1929 and 1931. Japanese baseball historian Kazuo Sayama states in his 1986 book Gentle Black Giants, that professional baseball in Japan is indebted to the Royal Giants. He believes that they arrived at the right time.

Sayama says, "There is no denying that the major leaguers' visits were the far bigger impact ... but if we had seen only the major leaguers, we might have been discouraged and disillusioned by our poor showing. What saved us was the tours of the Philadelphia Royal Giants, whose visits gave Japanese players confidence and hope."

He observed that the major league all-stars arrived in Japan with an attitude of, "we are experts, let us show you how to play," where as the attitude of the Negro League players was, "we are friends, let's play ball together."

The 1927 Philadelphia Royal Giants were led by manager Lon Goodwin, and his roster included future Hall of Famers in Biz Mackey and Andy Cooper, and Negro League all-star players like Rap Dixon and Frank Duncan.

How are the Royal Giants relevant to the story of Zenimura? Before they arrived in Japan, Goodwin's team was known as the Los Angeles White Sox, and they competed against Zenimura's Fresno Athletic Club three times.

The first game occurred in September 1925 when Zenimura's ball club defeated Goodwin's semi-pro White Sox, 5-4, in Los Angeles. In July of the following year, the teams scheduled a two-game series in Fresno. Zenimura's ball club swept those games as well.

More important than the score of the two-game series was the conversation that occurred between Zenimura and Goodwin. Historians believe that it was during this two game series that Zeni encouraged Goodwin to take his ball club to Japan. Zenimura already had his tour plans in motion by late 1926. Shortly afterwards, Goodwin announced a goodwill tour of his own. With the help of Japanese businessman George Irie, the Royal Giants' first tour of Asia was a success.

It's worth nothing that by going to Japan and recruiting high-caliber players like Mackey and Cooper to join his team, manager Lon Goodwin eventually got his revenge against Zenimura in a championship game played at Meiji Shrine Stadium in April 1927. Goodwin's team won 9-1 behind the powerful bat of Biz Mackey, who belted the first home run out of Meiji Shrine Stadium in the game.

If you have not yet read Kazuo Sayama's book Gentle Black Giants, I encourage you to do so. It is a fascinating story that details an important chapter in U.S-Japan baseball relations. In fact, I am pleased to share the news that an English version of Gentle Black Giants will soon be available to readers in the U.S. I collaborated with a team of Japanese speakers in Arizona who helped translate Sayama's classic. As the editor of the project I am pleased to announce that the book will be released in 2019.

I also brought with me today a replica baseball jersey of the Philadelphia Royal Giants. This throw-back jersey was worn during a game between the Kansas City Royals and San Francisco Giants in 2008. This specific uniform was worn by Keiichi Yabu, a right-handed pitcher with the Giants, and former member of the Hanshin Tigers.

BABE RUTH IN JAPAN

I have saved the best for last. Now I want to talk about Babe Ruth and the role that Zenimura played in the slugger's legendary visit to Japan in 1934.

In October 1927, fresh off of their World Series victory, New York Yankees' stars Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig barnstormed dozens of cities on the U.S. West Coast. Among those cities was Fresno, California, home of Zenimura's Fresno Athletic Club, the top Japanese American team in the west.

Zenimura and his teammates Johnny Nakagawa, Fred Yoshikawa and Harvey Iwata joined Gehrig's "Larrupin Lou's" squad, and they defeated Ruth's "Bustin' Babes" 13 to 3.

After the game the six ballplayers posed for the famous photograph. According to a 1962 article in the *Fresno Bee*, Zeni sent copies of the picture to his contacts in Japan. Zenimura said, "I got a call from Japan to see if I could get Ruth to go the island and play for a $40,000 guarantee ... I contacted Ruth and he said he would go for $60,000. It was too much but a few years later he went and made a big hit."

There are some historians who doubt the validity of Zenimura's claim regarding his role in helping to get Ruth to Japan. Some critics believe that Zeni, now age 62 in the interview, was just a senile old man embellishing his past to impress reporters.

Ninety years later (2017) the critics have been silenced. A copy of one of Zenimura's letters that he sent in 1927 has been discovered. The curator of the Hankyu Culture Foundation in Osaka, Masaki Yoshikatsu, located the letter (see page 47) in their archive.

I will say that the discovery of Zenimura's 1927 letters reflecting his efforts to negotiate a tour for Babe Ruth to Japan not only validate that he was telling the truth in his 1962 interview, it further solidifies his role as a historically significant ambassador of U.S.-Japanese baseball relations.

WAR ON THE HORIZON

1937 Kono Alameda All-Stars

In February 1937, a Japanese American businessman and baseball enthusiast from Alameda, California named Harry Kono secured plans to take a team to Japan. His ball club had already received financial guarantees from Tokyo managers and sailing was set for March. In fact, the prior year Kono served as a scout for the emerging professional league in Japan and negotiated the signing of pitcher James Bonner, the first African American to play in Japan (in 1936).

The Kono Alameda All-Star team set sail on the Chichibu Maru from San Francisco, bound for Honolulu. Kono served as manager, Zenimura was head coach, and alternated as catcher and second baseman.

When Zeni reached Japan he found that he was barred on the diamond on the pretense of being a professional and it was a month before Zeni could help out his ball club. As result, the team lost games until Zeni could participate, winning forty in sixty some played.

Wasting no time in Japan, Zeni was also engaged as a scout for professional teams in Tokyo and in Honolulu.

The 1937 tour also provided Zenimura an opportunity to reunite with his son Kenji, now age 12. Zeni had not seen his son since 1928 when he was sent to live with his grandmother. It is worthwhile to note that during WWII, Kenichi son's Kenji Zenimura served in the Japanese Air Force as a pilot.

After the 1937 tour, Zenimua made plans to return to Japan in 1938, and in 1940 for the Olympics. He reserved more than sixty rooms in a Tokyo hotel to accommodate the party that he intended to bring to the amateur baseball competition associated with the Olympic games.

1940 Tokyo Olympic Games

In the summer of 1938, Zenimura split his time between work as a car salesman, playing baseball, and arranging plans for his return to Japan for the 1940 Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo. On July 15, 1938, Japanese Welfare Minister Koichi Kido cancelled the 1940 Olympic Games, saying, "In a time when the whole nation is preparing for war," he said, "I think that it cannot host the [Olympics] and it cannot be helped." The news was a disappointment to Zeni and foreshadowed the coming of World War II.

Wartime Baseball

Zenimura would later use the game of baseball to help lift the spirits of those incarcerated in the camps. He was not the only one who saw value in continuing to play baseball during WWII.

On January 15, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt wrote a letter to baseball's Commissioner Judge Landis. In the historic memo, now referred to as "the Green Light Letter," the President declared, "I honestly feel that it would be best for the country to keep baseball going. There will be fewer people unemployed and everybody will work longer hours and harder than ever before. And that means that they ought to have a chance for recreation and for taking their minds off their work even more than before...that in my judgment is thoroughly worthwhile."

So major league baseball continued to play during the war, and Japanese Americans continue to play as well.

For Japanese Americans unjustly incarcerated during WWII, baseball was more than a game, it was their salvation. Future major league scout George Omachi said, "Without baseball, camp life would have been miserable ... it was humiliating, demeaning being incarcerated in your own country."

In the video you will meet Shoji Zenimura, the son of Kenji Zenimura's and Kenichi's grandson. He traveled to the U.S. to discover the grandfather he never met. Thanks to this wonderful documentary produced by NHK, you can join Zenimura's grandson on his journey to the U.S., and in doing so you will get a guided, virtual tour of the Japanese American incarceration camp at Gila River, Arizona. (Closing scenes of the NHK documentary)

HEADING HOME

Before Zenimura returned home in August 1945, he advocated for post-war peace and democracy through baseball with his exiting words from the camp. "Try to speed up the mutual feeling between the Americans and Japanese," he told *The Gila News Courier*. "It is much easier to make efforts of starting a better understanding between us in the field of sports than trying to talk your way through the rough spots."

The man who greeted Shoji Zenimura at the airport in the video mentioned above is named Tets Furukawa. He has a wonderful quote about Zenimura that I would like to share you in closing.

Furukawa said, "Coach Zeni ... indeed possessed a tremendous knowledge of baseball savvy, but above all, he wanted every player to become a better human being by realizing his responsibility and compassion for his fellow man."

I repeat – Become a better human being by realizing your responsibility and compassion for your fellow man.

Earlier in my talk I stated that Zenimura helped me discover the answer to the question: "How does one find happiness and freedom in a world that is less happy and free?" My interpretation of his life helped me find the answer.

Russian author Leo Tolstoy wrote a short story called "The Three Questions." It is a parable about an emperor who seeks the answers to three important questions that he believes will bring him happiness. His questions are:

1. When is the best time to do something?
2. Who is the most important person?
3. What is the most important thing to do?

The emperor goes on a journey, and through a series of events he eventually discovers the answers:

1. The present moment is the most important moment;
2. The person you are with in that moment is the most important person; and
3. Bringing joy into that person's life is the most important thing you can do.

I believe that Zenimura embodied this wisdom throughout his life, and especially during his time behind barbed wire.

1. Zenimura would have loved to have been anyplace else than the Arizona desert, but he made the best of the situation and was fully present;
2. His fellow Japanese American internees were the most important people to him at that time; and
3. The most important thing he could do was to bring joy to their lives by sharing his expertise and passion for the great game of baseball.

This is how Zenimura found happiness and freedom, and as a result happy and free. So not only do I think that Zeni was a Hall of Fame player, manager and international ambassador; I think that he was a Hall of Fame human being too.

With that in mind, I hope that in the near future I can return to Japan to be with you all once again as we celebrate the enshrinement of Kenichi Zenimura into the Japanese Baseball Hall of Fame. Maybe the year will be 2020, to coincide with the next Olympic games? That seems appropriate.

I thank you very much for your time, and now I would love to answer any questions you have about Zenimura or any other information I have shared with you today.

And if you have any information to share with me, please do. No matter how old I am I will forever be a student and open to learning new things.

And I will sign off like I sign my Zenimura book ...

Peace, Love and Baseball,
Bill Staples, Jr.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: U.S.-Japan Baseball Tours, 1905 to 1940 Total: 98 tours
1905 年から 1940 年にかけての日米訪問ツアー内訳（総計 98 ツアー）

28% — Nisei League teams visiting Japan	二世リーグチームの訪日
27% — Japanese teams visiting the U.S.	日本チームの訪米
25% — American University teams visiting Japan	米国大学チームの訪日
9% — Major league all-stars visiting Japan	大リーグチームの訪日
6% — American semi-pro teams visiting Japan	米セミプロチームの訪日
5% — Negro League teams visiting Japan and Hawaii	ニグロリーグチームの訪日と訪布

Appendix B: Zenimura-related U.S-Japanese Tours, 1923 to 1940
1923 年から 1940 年にかけて銭村が関わった日米ツアー

Year Team（Manager/Organizer）（カッコ内は監督もしくは主催者）

1924 — Fresno Athletic Club to Japan	フレズノ体育会訪日
1925 — San Jose Asahi to Japan	サンノゼ朝日訪日
1927 — Philadelphia Royal Giants to Japan (Lon Goodwin)	ロイヤル・ジャイアンツ訪日（ロン・グッドウィン）
1927 — Fresno Athletic Club to Japan*	フレズノ体育会訪日
1928 — Pullen's Los Angeles Giants to Hawaii	プレンの LA ジャイアンツ訪ハワイ
1929 — Los Angeles Giants to Hawaii	同上
1929 — Meiji to U.S.（Takizo Matsumoto）	明治大学訪米（松本瀧蔵）
1929 — Daimai（Osaka Mainichi）to Hawaii	大阪毎日新聞訪ハワイ
1931 — Los Angeles Giants to Hawaii	LA ジャイアンツ訪ハワイ
1931 — Kono Alameda All-Stars to Japan	コーノ・アラメダ・オールスターズ訪日
1931 — Hosei to U.S.（Nobuo Fujita）	法政大学訪米（藤田信男）
1932-33 — Philadelphia Royal Giants to Japan	ロイヤル・ジャイアンツ訪日
1933-34 — Philadelphia Royal Giants to Japan	同上
1934 — Ruth & Gehrig MLB All-Stars to Japan (Babe Ruth)	ルース、ゲーリッグ訪日（ベーブ・ルース）
1934 — Hosei to U.S.	法政大学訪米
1936 — Waseda to U.S.	早稲田大学訪米
1937 — Kono Alameda All-Stars to Japan	コーノ・アラメダ・オールスターズ訪日

Appendix C: Zenimura's Peers Honored in the Japanese Baseball Hall of Fame
銭村健一郎と同世代の日本野球殿堂入りした関係者

PLAYERS（17）	選手（17名）
1964 — Tadashi "Bozo" Wakabayashi	若林忠志
1965 — Saburo Miyatake	宮武三郎
1969 — Takeo Tabe	田部武雄
1970 — Shunichi Amachi	天知俊一
1970 — Nobuaki Nidegawa	二出川延明
1972 — Shuichi Ishimoto	石本秀一
1977 — Shigeru Mizuhara	水原茂
1978 — Shinji Hamazaki	浜崎真二
1979 — Goro Taniguchi	谷口五郎
1981 — Tatsuo Saeki	佐伯達夫
1985 — Katsumi Shiraishi	白石勝巳
1986 — Miyoshi Nakagawa	中河美芳
1987 — Minoru Yamashita	山下実
1988 — Saburo Yokozawa	横沢三郎
1989 — Masao Date	伊達正男
1998 — Shinjiro Iguchi	井口新次郎
2002 — Fujio Nakazawa	中澤不二雄
AMBASSADORS（3）	野球大使（3名）
1987 — Nobuo Fujita	藤田信男
2002 — Lefty O'Doul	フランク・オドール
2016 — Takizo Matsumoto	松本瀧蔵