

**By Mike Furatani**

"America's pastime" has always been a staple of Japanese American culture for a long time.

"The earliest known mainland Japanese American baseball team is the San Francisco Fujii club, a team of Issei players which formed in 1903, the first year of the modern World Series. Other cities across the US with large Japanese American populations also developed Issei teams around this time. Seattle, Los Angeles and Honolulu, for instance, all had teams by 1905 and organized leagues by 1910.

These first teams were primarily organized for the enjoyment of the players wishing for some much needed recreation. But there were other motives as well. Many Issei were aware that baseball could provide a common bond between the Japanese immigrant community and the dominant white society. Through a shared love of baseball, it was hoped communication and perhaps even respect could be established. However, except in isolated instances, these diplomatic goals were not always achieved through baseball. Despite playing baseball with All-American fervor and ability, Japanese immigrants continued to face hostility from the general public that could not readily be overcome." (from the National Japanese American Historical Society website <https://www.njahs.org/japanese-american-baseball-history-project/>)

When the Japanese and Japanese Americans were imprisoned in internment camps during World War 2, baseball survived behind the barbed wire and became a vital part of the internees' ability to endure the harsh environment and situation they found themselves in.

"In every camp, internees attempted to counter the boredom and harsh conditions of internment life by developing thriving sports activities. Baseball, in particular, provided a much needed diversion for players and fans alike. Internees at Gila River, for instance, developed a year round baseball league with 32 teams and championship games drawing crowds into the thousands. As George Omachi recalls, "It was demeaning and humiliating to be incarcerated in your own country. Without baseball, camp life would have been miserable." (from the National Japanese American Historical Society website <https://www.njahs.org/japanese-american-baseball-history-project/>)

After the camps were closed and the Japanese Americans returned to their former lives, baseball again helped them assimilate back into American society to a certain extent.

"Japanese American baseball did manage to continue through the difficult resettlement period after the conclusion of World War II. In fact, some areas saw a resurgence of Nisei baseball in the 1950s that continued through the 1960s into the 1980s." (from the National Japanese American Historical Society website <https://www.njahs.org/japanese-american-baseball-history-project/>)

Monterey has had a rich history with Japanese American baseball.

"During the 1920s and '30s, most communities in the Monterey Bay Area — Monterey, Watsonville, Santa Cruz, Salinas, Hollister and Gilroy — hosted talented Japanese-American baseball teams that played in highly competitive leagues against each other, with games scheduled on Sundays.

Sports activities in the Japanese-American community focused around the Japanese American Citizens League, or JAACL, and the Minato Athletic Club. The first Minato baseball team organized in the 1920s and fielded strong teams for the next two decades." (From the Monterey Herald article "Japanese American baseball teams thrived in local area before World War II", dated May 2010.)

Now, with all the other activities available to youths, baseball as a whole faces stiff competition for players and fans. The Northern California Japanese Baseball League which boasted as many as 20 local area teams from Sacramento to Fresno, from Watsonville to Reedley, now consists of 4 teams: San Francisco, Florin (Sacramento), Lodi and now, with the demise of the team from Fresno, the return of Monterey.

**The new formed Monterey Maguro (Amberjacks – a type of tuna fish), in honor of the Monterey Minato baseball club, will be representing the Monterey Bay Area in the Northern California Japanese American Baseball League. League play starts on June 10 and culminates in the Annual All-State California AA Tournament against the teams from Southern California on Labor Day Weekend. This year's tournament will be held in Lodi, CA.**

The unique aspect of the JA baseball leagues, besides being created for players of Japanese descent – although now, all backgrounds are welcome to participate – is that we have players from 12 years old (with parental approval) all the way to 60 years old (usually with spousal approval) – this way, the older players can mentor the younger players and pass along the love of the game – their experiences, their advice, their skill and their humor.

Maguro home games, two 7-inning will be played on Saturdays at Monterey Peninsula College (MPC). First game starts at 11 AM and second game at 2 PM. (Full schedule below.)

I've been playing in JA baseball since I was very young and able to throw a ball with my father – I am now in my 50<sup>th</sup> year of playing baseball – most of it in JA baseball – I've been able to experience winning the state championship in the league with Lodi back in 2015, the first AA title in Lodi's 100+ year history – I know my time playing the game I love cannot last forever, but my hope is that the league does so we can pass on the legacy of those who came before us.

If anyone is interested in joining the Maguro, please contact me, Mike Furutani [mfurutani@yahoo.com](mailto:mfurutani@yahoo.com) or 415-515-3597.

We would be honored if the Monterey JACL would join us in re-igniting and continuing the tradition and legacy of Japanese American baseball on the Central Coast and California.

### **2023 Northern California Japanese American Baseball League Schedule**

Sat, June 10 SF @ Florin

Sun, June 11 Monterey @ Lodi (noon start)

Sat, June 17 Monterey @ Florin

Sun, June 18 SF @ Lodi (noon start)

Sat, June 24 Lodi @ Florin

Sun, June 25 Monterey @ SF

Sat, July 1 BYE

Sun, July 2 BYE

Sat, July 8 Monterey @ Lodi (4:00 pm)

Sun, July 9 Florin @ SF

Sat, July 15 Monterey @ Florin

Sat, July 15 SF @ Lodi (4:00 pm)

Sat, July 22 SF @ Monterey

Sat, July 22 Lodi @ Florin

Sat, July 29 Lodi @ Monterey

Sun, July 30 Florin @ SF

Sat, Aug 5 Florin @ Monterey

Sun, Aug 6 Lodi @ SF

Sat, Aug 12 SF @ Monterey

Sat, Aug 19 Florin @ Lodi (4:00 pm)

Sat, Aug 26 BYE

Sun, Aug 27 BYE

Sept 2-4 State Tourney in Lodi

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