A study of The Crisis of Professional Baseball in Taiwan: Game Fixing

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I. Introduction

Baseball is called the sport of country in Taiwan. Chinese Professional Baseball League has been tenable for twenty years today. Today, not only Chin-Feng Chen(陳金鋒), the first Taiwanese striker who went up Major League Baseball at present worked in the team, LaNew Bear, in Chinese Professional Baseball League, but also the former MLB pitcher, Chin-hui, Tsao, joins the most popular baseball team which named Elephant Brothers. Recently CPBL became prosperous and the championship series proceed with much notice by baseball fans in Taiwan, and most of Taiwanese takes this as the revival of CPBL from its former game fixing scandal. As we planned to make a research to reflect upon the game fixing history in CPBL, much to our sorrow, another fixed game scandal burst out unexpectedly. It however becomes a trigger for us to know why game fixing seems an unavoidable crisis for professional baseball game in Taiwan. In fact, game fixing in baseball game is not a peculiar case which only happens in Taiwan. Such scandal has its history also in Japan and U.S.A, the two most powerful country in the field of baseball. Thus, before probing this game fixing issue in Taiwan, it is of value for us to reflect upon how America and Japan went through this problem as they move on to today’s success.

II. Thesis

1. The Case in America: Black Sox Scandal

The Black Sox Scandal refers to an incident that took place around and during the play of the 1919 World Series. The name "Black Sox" also refers to the Chicago White Sox team from that era. The case originates from players’s complaint toward
the team own’s exploitation. The team owner, Charles Comiskey is notorious for paying the players low salary and bench the player who almost meet the criteria of winning the bonus. Comiskey didn’t want to pay Cicotte's contract that would have paid Cicotte an additional 10,000 bonus for winning 30 games. According to Eliot Asinof’s account of the events, Eight Men Out, Cicotte was not allowed to play for the following two weeks after reaching his 29th win, presumably to deny him the bonus. However, the record is perhaps more complex. Cicotte won his 29th game on September 19, had an terrible game on September 24. As the result, eight members of the major league franchise were banned for life from baseball for cheating in games, and giving the series to the Cincinnati Reds. The conspiracy was the brought up by White Sox first baseman Arnold "Chick" Gandil, who had known many bad guys. He persuaded Joseph Sullivan, a friend and professional gambler, that the fix could be worthwhile. New York gangster Arnold Rothstein supplied the money through his lieutenant Abe Attell, a former eatherweight boxing champion. To save American Professional baseball, Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis (1866-1944) was named the first Commissioner of Baseball in MLB. As major league baseball's first commissioner, he cleaned up a sport that had been almost fatally corrupted by ties to organized gambling. Ruling with an autocratic hand, Landis saved baseball from owners and players and saved American's undisputed national pastime during the era.

2. The Case in Japan: Black Fog Scandal

The Black Fog Scandal occurs in 1969 in which many of players are involved in the game fixing. It is a series of game fixing scandals in the Japan professional leagues between 1969 and 1971. The fallout from these scandals resulted in several star
players is suspended for very long time, salary cuts, or being banned from professional play entirely. the result abandonment of baseball by many fans in Japan also led to the sale of teams as the Nishitetsu Lions and Toei Flyers (now the Seibu Lions and Hokkaido Nippon Ham Fighters). To save Japanese baseball, the strict law is set and a high moral spirit is reaffirmed in the field of baseball in Japan; yet, it still takes decades for Japan to recover the confidence for baseball.

3. The Case in Taiwan: Black Eagle Scandal

The rumors came true in January 1997, just before the season started. With solid evidences, prosecutors arrested several CPBL players for fixing game. During the judicial process, more players, mostly from the China Times Eagles, were found involved in game-fixing and were promptly expelled by CPBL. In June 1997, only two Taiwanese players on the roster of China Times Eagles remained clean, and the other six teams had to lend their players to the Eagles for the team to finish the season. China Times Eagles were disbanded the the next year as a result, and CPBL's average attendance declined sharply, from the peak 6,000 in 1994 to merely 1,500 in 1998. However, the ordeal does not stop. In August 1997, several Mercuries Tigers players were threatened under similar circumstance as the August 3 Incident. In April 1999, Wei Chuan Dragons' then manager Hsu Sheng-ming (徐生明) was attacked near his Taipei residence. Mercuries Tigers and Wei Chuan Dragons also did not survive the financial loss brought about and closed down after the 1999 season. The whole event was later nicknamed as "The Black Eagles Incident" due to the fact that the China Times Eagles was most seriously involved.

4. The Case in Taiwan: 2005 Scandal
In July 2005, another gambling-related scandal surfaced when local Next Magazine published a story with photographs of Chinatrust Whales' Australian pitcher Brad Purcell at a Taipei lounge bar along with several local gang members. This article further points out several suspicious games in May and June 2005, and listed nearly ten players involved, mostly foreign players. Local prosecutor Hsu Wei-Yueh (徐維嶽) took up the case and imprisoned La New Bears catcher Chen Chao-Ying (陳昭穎) and Macoto Cobras coach Tsai Sheng-Fong (蔡生豐) on July 27, both of whom were immediately expelled. However, on August 22 Hsu released the two, stating that "they had made full confessions". Bradley Purcell himself had been released earlier by Chinatrust Whales and left Taiwan in advance before the judicial action started. Hsu later summoned a total of near fifteen players, including Sinon Bulls American pitcher Jeff Andra, La New Bears Puerto Rican infielder Victor Rodriguez and Chinatrust Whales Dominican pitcher Emiliano Giron, and claimed they were implicated. None of them admitted to be involved but Hsu still ruled that most of them needed bail of NT$ 100,000 to be released. CPBL immediately expelled those players who needed to post bail. Only Brother Elephants and Uni-President Lions remain unaffected by this scandal. The circumstance remains unclear, with the lack of investigative progress and indictments, and the fact that Hsu Wei-Yueh himself was later arrested for his involvement in a bribery scandals, which led to his trial and sentence in 2005.

5. The Case in Taiwan: The dmedia Incident

On October 8, 2008, Banciao district attorney's office called the owner of dmedia T-REX Shih Chien-hsin, the team's GM, spokesperson, one coach, and three players to the office for alleged game-fixing scandal. The three players, Chen Yuen-chia (陳元甲), Chen Ke-fan (陳克帆), and Cory Bailey, were later released after posting their
bails. In accordance with CPBL policy, the three were immediately expelled and they were banned from playing professionally in the league. Due to the involvement of management/operation personnel in the scandal, the team was expelled from CPBL on October 23, 2008. Chinatrust Whales also announced its disbandment on November 11, after their twelve years history in CPBL. The league now has only four teams.

III. Conclusion

What kind of problem are we encountering now in Taiwan’s Professional baseball? As we reflect upon both the foreign and local cases, we found several resemblance in game fixing scandal. They are the player’s welfare, the gangster, and the morality. At first, we notice that even in America players used to cheat for money because they are greedy and in lack of welfare security both in wage and labor right. In Taiwan, some baseball players are only paid 33,000NT dollars per month, let alone they don’t have multiple-year contracts to ensure their job in the following season. It seems very difficult for players to refuse to fix game which can even earn 1,050,000NT dollars per each fixed game. What’s more, gangster might threat them by hurt them or their family. As mentioned earlier, in April 1999, Wei Chuan Dragons’ then manager Hsu Sheng-ming (徐生明) was attacked near his Taipei residence. What would you do, if you were the players? Lastly, it is also about the issue of morality. Still, not every players are willing to fix game for benefits or safety. We need to raise players’ spirit of honesty and honor like Japan. To sum up, it is a systematic problem which causes the game fixing. It will not be effective if we couldn’t strengthen the effectiveness of the public investigators and a more equal labor-right for players in Taiwan.
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