

1915: Lai Tin's almost-tryout with the Chicago White Sox

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David Marasco, a baseball historian, has made an astonishing discovery. In 1914 the New York Times reported that Jimmy Callahan, the manager of the Chicago White Sox (an old and famous professional baseball team), had offered a Chinese baseball player the chance to try out for the White Sox in the following spring. The player, Lai Tin or Lai Tan or Honolulu, seems to have been a truly talented athlete who held the Hawaiian records for the 100-yard dash and the broad jump. However, there is no record that he ever received his tryout. Callahan lost his job at the end of 1914 and Tin was forgotten. No Chinese American was to succeed in Major League baseball for another ninety years. (2)

Marasco reports that Tin did play in Chicago, however. In 1912 a touring team of Chinese amateur players from Hawaii played two games in the White Sox's stadium, Comiskey Park, against a local semipro team that called itself the Uncle Sams. "L. Tin" was a member of the Hawaiian team. The Chicago Tribune reported that he performed creditably in both games.

Tin played in Chicago again in 1915, when the University of Chicago Maroons faced a visiting team from the Chinese University of Hawaii. The visitors lost, and "Loi" Tin, although he showed himself to be a competent fielder, did not exactly cover himself with glory in terms of hits and runs. He got none.

We have no idea how the local Chinese-American community reacted to these visits by Hawaiian Chinese teams. If you know anything about them, please let us know.

(1) David Marasco, Lai Tin, The Diamond Angle, 2004 (<http://the-diamondangle.com/marasco/peo/laitin.html>)

(2) Chien-Ming Wang (王建民), a star pitcher for Taiwan in the 2004 Olympics, joined the New York Yankees in 2005. As of late September, he had a won-lost record of 8-4. Chin-Feng Chen, a Taiwanese outfielder, came up to the Majors in 2005 and has played a number of games for the Los Angeles Dodgers. Bruce Chen, a Panamanian pitcher who may be of Chinese ancestry, has pitched for several major league teams since 2002. Chin-hui Tsao (蔡金輝), yet another Taiwanese, has pitched for the Colorado Rockies since 2003.