



As I see it

By KEN HOFFMAN

One of the more disturbing pieces of news came over the sports wires last week with the announcement that foreign teams would no longer be permitted to participate in the Little League World Series. The official reason offered for this decision was the cost factor involved with arranging for the foreign teams' accommodations.

The real reason? These foreign teams, Taiwan in particular, were barred for the simple reason that they are just too good for our American boys. The Taiwanese are bigger, stronger, and better coached than the Americans. The boys from the Far East had won five out of the last six championships and the over-protective mentality of too many Americans would not allow the U.S. boys to continually suffer at the hands of a foreign entity. This decision by the Little League Inc. has to be a dangerous one.

The world has grown just a little farther apart now. I had always thought that sports provided an avenue to world understanding. Through inter-

national competition, athletes and spectators were interacting in a diplomacy unblemished by the often times corrupt nature of government. But sports has grown to be popular, too popular for governments to stay out of the act. Like so many other arenas that our political leaders infiltrate, the end result is less than satisfactory.

SO NOW our young boys won't be beaten by the Taiwan team. At Williamsport next year a new world's champion team will be crowned, and it will be an American team, and American mothers and fathers will sleep well that night knowing the United States is once again the best.

The fact that the winner of next year's event will not be the best doesn't appear to disturb the League's officials. Even though Joe Frazier was technically the heavyweight boxing champ after Muhammad Ali was stripped of his title illegally, he wasn't recognized as being the best until Ali fell victim to his left hook.

Frazier became the true champion that night. He won the title in the ring, not in the courtroom or in a commissioner's office. Next year's Little League championship has already been decided, the only element miss-

ing is which group of young American faces will be so honored.

The entire issue revolves around the myth of American superiority. I don't understand what is so radically upsetting that our teams take a good beating once a year in Little League competition. I do know that each year I watch the championship game on ABC's Wide World of Sports, and it sure isn't because of the American teams! Compared to the Taiwan squads, our Little League program is in an infantile state.

I wonder if anyone ever bothered to ask the kids how they felt concerning the inclusion of foreign teams in the world series. It would seem to me that its more an experience to compete against the world's finest than to stay in our own backyard. And if our boys continually lose to Taiwan, so what? Our country learned a good lesson last year: ours isn't the best country in the universe. Now where do we get the audacity to exclude the Taiwanese?

WHO ARE THESE boys from Taiwan, and what does their success mean to the country? Taiwan has not been enjoying one of the brighter periods in its history. In 1971 our country abandoned support of Taiwan's position in the United Nations after a

promise of allegiance. Many political observers saw this as an opportunistic play by the man who recently vacated the presidency of the U.S.

Excluded from the world community to a great measure, the people of Taiwan really do not have much to cling to with pride. The Little League teams the country produces have provided a rallying point, however.

The games involving the Taiwanese teams have been televised live via satellite, sometimes four in the morning. The shows are the highest rated programs of the year over there. In our country, people went to bed the night of man's first walk on the moon.

Three years ago, the Little League team from Birmingham had its sights set on the world series. That particular title eluded our boys and went home with the Taiwanese. This fact didn't take anything away from the Birmingham boys, they lost out to a better team. The only way a team will ever improve is to compete against superior teams. You're only as good as what surrounds you.

What the decision to bar the foreign teams has left us is not unlike winning the U.S. Olympic trials, but not competing in the Olympics. A world series by its very definition dictates

that all teams should be admitted. One more time we've destroyed something good.

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Girl sports goods boom

By RON HINGST

Sports equipment stores and manufacturers are meeting the influx of female athletes with a variety of sports goods aimed at the ladies.

Golf and tennis are no strangers to female participants, but as the women gain interest in previously "male-dominated" activities such as hockey, track, snowmobiling, basketball and long-distance running.

"Basically, today we are getting a

proliferation of tennis equipment such as lighter rackets," said Chuck Spindler, S&G Sports Goods Wholesale, Pontiac.

FEMALE TENNIS, golf and bowling equipment has been in the marketplace for years, but the variety of such goods has broadened considerably.

"For example," Spindler said, "bowling equipment manufacturers are making every possible color available in bowling balls in order to appeal to the women."

Spindler and other local sources noted an increase in business in other areas of female athletic endeavors.

"It's an increasing phenomenon," he said, "nothing of epidemic proportions, but women are just as eager to get into sports as the men."

THE S&G SPOKESMAN cited snowmobiling, hockey and hiking as particular areas that have caught the ladies' eye. Elsewhere, John Spindler of Schneider's Sports, Troy, said "our biggest thing for women is in track equipment."

"We can order most women's equipment from most of the better manufacturers," Spindler said. "But our largest increase in female equipment is in track. It seems more and more ladies are getting into long distance running and jogging."

Women have often been stereotyped more style conscious than men, but that doesn't always hold true in all sports products.

Spindler noted a ladies line of basketball shoes that were designed for the fashion-conscious woman. However, he indicated many female customers look for quality rather than a colorful appearance.

PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT for women, such as in hockey, has been made lighter.

Generally, protective or functional equipment for women has been patterned after the men's, but some styling flair has been added to such things as uniforms.

"I sell as many ladies' snowmobile suits as men," Spindler said. "Of

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