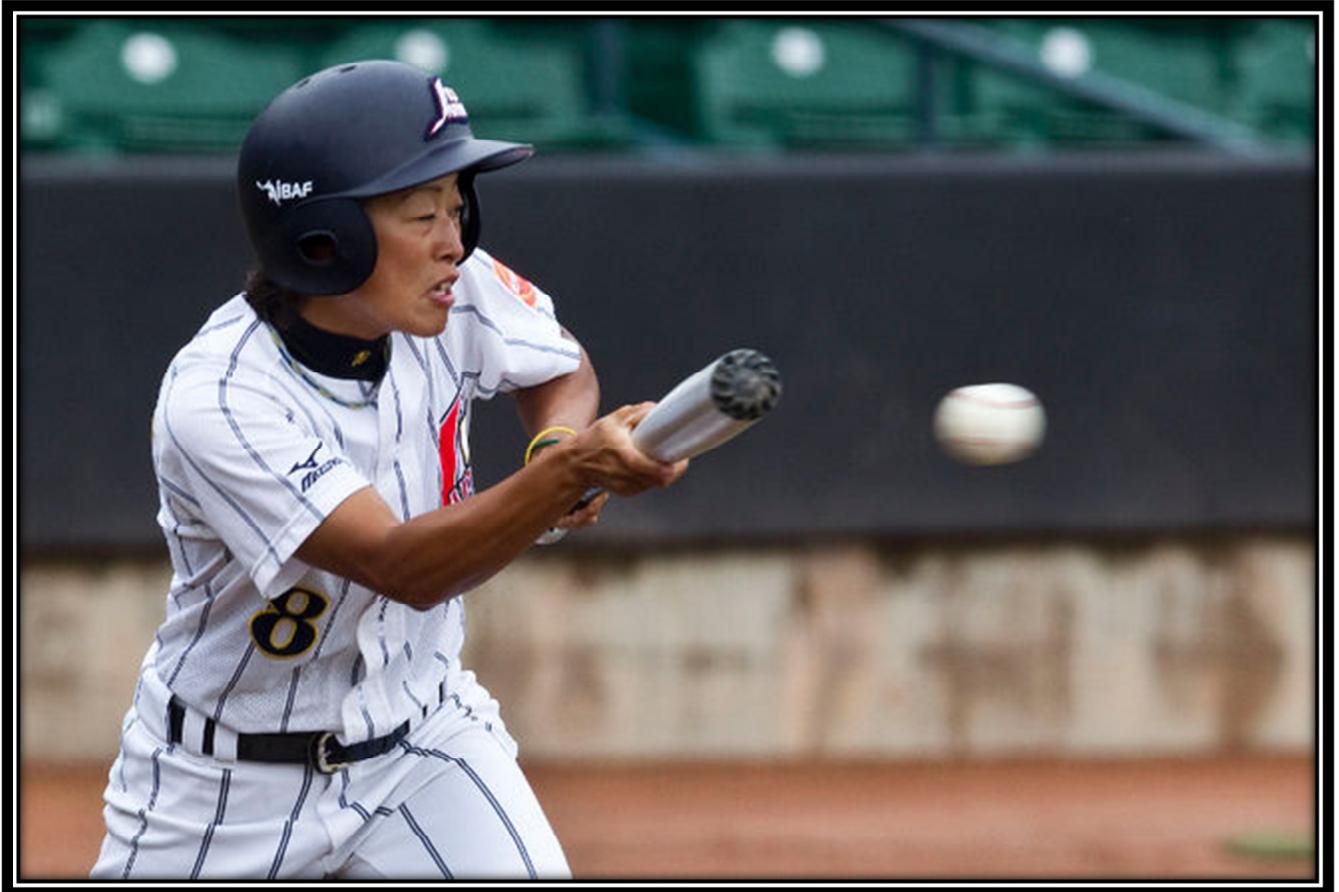


Japan advances to WWC final

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JAPAN'S AKIKO SHIMURA LAYS DOWN A BUNT DURING THEIR GAME AGAINST CHINESE TAIPEI'S AT THE WOMEN'S WORLD CUP BASEBALL GAME AT TELUS FIELD ON TUESDAY. CODIE MCLACHLAN, EDMONTON SUN

EDMONTON - Having set the bar with an appearance in the final of the last Women's World Cup of Baseball, Australia came into this year's tournament with high expectations.

Unfortunately for the girls from Down Under, they ran into the defending champions in the semifinal and had their tournament come to a premature end on Saturday.

Japan earned a spot into today's final with a 5-1 win over Australia at Telus Field.

"I'm quite proud of what the girls did today, they fought quite hard," said Australian head coach John Gaynor.

"Japan smacked our butts 10-0 two days ago and we were lost. But we were able to turn it around, and I thought we played pretty well.

"We had a couple of bad innings and it cost us. We got the same amount of hits as they did; we just didn't capitalize on our chances."

A three-run inning in the third and another two runs in the fifth accounted for Japan's scoring. Australia responded with a run in the third, then stranded a pair of runners.

"We were able to get one hit here, one there, but we weren't able to get them grouped up," said Gaynor.

"They had two innings where they had chances to score and they made the most of it. That's why they're the best in the world."

Two years ago in Venezuela, Australia made it to the final before losing out to Japan.

This time around, by virtue of finishing fourth after the round-robin, Australia was forced to face Japan in the semifinal.

"I think we played poorly throughout the tournament," said Gaynor.

"I think besides the Netherlands, we probably made the most errors of any team. That's what's disappointing.

"We put in the hard work, but for whatever reason, some days we'd turn up and we'd be really hot and the next day, it was like there were a bunch of kids playing out there."

Regardless, there were plenty of bright spots for the Australians to build on throughout the tournament.

Christina Kreppold was one of the top players in the tournament, going into the semifinal batting .600.

"Yeah, but it's a team sport," Kreppold said.

"As much as you might be doing alright, I'd rather not play that well and have the team do better. It's just one of those things."

Despite falling short of their goal, having a team at the World Cup will help the development of the game in Australia.

"I think all the senior players on this team have been helping grow the sport a fair bit," Kreppold said.

"We've been out there trying to get young girls to join our local clubs and training them up to be the next superstars of Australia."

The performance of the Australian team throughout the tournament has shown they can compete with traditional powerhouses like Japan, Canada and the U.S.

"Usually we're quite a strong hitting team and we're able to get back-to-back hits and back each other up," Kreppold said.

"But we just struggled to get it to all gel at the right time. Hopefully we can get all that together (Sunday) and bring home a bronze medal."

Australia will play either Canada or the U.S. for bronze, starting at 1 p.m. at Telus Field.

Last night's game between Canada and the U.S. to determine who faces Japan for gold was still in progress at press time.

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