

A Slightly Askew Glossary of Japanese Baseball Terms

Most of the entries in this glossary comprise either katakana words that have been adopted into Japanese from other languages (predominantly from English, although there is one rather notorious example from the French) or native Japanese words that have acquired a specialized meaning in baseball, such as おさえ or つまる. I have tried to include most of the hard-to-understand terms that are likely to be heard on TV and radio broadcasts, and avoid terms that are self-explanatory or too esoteric to be used by anyone other than baseball insiders.

The expression “slightly askew” appears in the title of this glossary because some of the explanations contained herein might occasionally have a less than objective slant to them. That doesn’t mean that I have allowed my personal prejudices to compromise the integrity of this work; it is simply a reflection of the fact that when it comes to baseball, it’s a lot more interesting to hear things from someone who’ll give you the straight story than from someone whose professional ethics require them to maintain a semblance of disinterest. And if there is one thing about baseball I ain’t, it’s disinterested.

Go Red Sox!
Go Dragons!

And may the N.Y. Yankees and Tokyo Giants end up where they belong: *in the cellar!*

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A word about pitching terminology:

When I first began compiling this glossary, pitching terms gave me a lot of trouble. This is not surprising, especially since the Japanese approach to baseball exhibits an almost puerile fascination with pitching, and 80% of what gets said during a typical broadcast will revolve around how the pitcher should pitch either in the current situation in general or to the current batter in particular. When I first began paying attention to these mysterious flights of fancy, I thought that there must be some discrepancy in meaning between certain Japanese katakana words and the English terms from which they originated, but after a little research and a fair amount of thought, I realized that they more or less correspond correctly with the single exception of terminology related to the screwball, where Japanese makes a distinction that is not ordinarily made in English; to wit, in English, a screwball is a screwball, whereas in Japanese, a screwball that breaks away from the batter is a スクリューボール but one that breaks in on the batter is a シュート. I think that this distinction might be made on occasion in English, but in Japanese, it is observed religiously.

References:

I generally keep a pencil and a pad of paper at my side when watching or listening to play-by-play broadcasts, and write down the more intriguing expressions I hear, but in addition to such hands-on fieldwork, I also have found the following to be valuable references:

On the Web:

<http://www.geocities.co.jp/HeartLand-Sumire/8209/yakyuyogo.htm>

<http://yokohama.cool.ne.jp/niwaka/yougo/a.htm>

On CD-ROM:

Microsoft/Shogakukan Bookshelf Basic

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to Tom Gally and the jeKai Project (<http://www.jekai.org>) for giving this glossary a home.

A Glossary of Japanese Baseball Terms

DH (でいー・えいち)	That abomination to all of baseball, the designated hitter.
FA (えふ・えい)	Another abomination, the free agent. Note the tendency to refer to abominations only by their initials.
アーチ	Synonymous with homerun.
アウトコース	A pitch on the outside part of home plate. See also インコース.
アベックホームラン	Back-to-back homeruns. To the best of my understanding, this term can refer either to consecutive homeruns hit by two different batters or to homeruns hit by the same batter in consecutive at-bats.
あまい	Not a baseball term per se, but often used to indicate that something is not as rigorous as it should be. 守備が甘い The defense is not as tight as it should be. あまいボール A pitch right down the middle of the plate or in an otherwise easy-to-clobber area.
雨中 (あめちゅう)	Nowadays this might even be taken to mean teenage girls passing hard candy from mouth-to-mouth, but in baseball it is an abbreviation for 野球試合が雨天中止--game called because of rain.
荒れ球 (あれだま)	This is what happens with pitchers who have poor control; their pitches go all over the place.
イージーフライ	A routine fly ball.
一発 (いっぱつ)	A shot; specifically, a homerun.
インコース	A pitch on the inside part of home plate. See also アウトコース.
インストラ	This is an abbreviated form of “inside slider”: a slider thrown on the inside part of home plate.
ウイニングショット	A pitcher’s best pitch, the one he goes to when he has to get an out.
ウエーティングサークル	The on-deck circle.
打ち方 (うちかた)	A player’s swing or batting form. Used when speaking of the mechanics of hitting.

裏 (うら)	The bottom of an inning.
エース	A team's best pitcher. One of the few terms that means exactly the same thing in both English and Japanese.
Aクラス (えーくらす)	A term used to refer to the top three teams in either of Japan's two six-team leagues. For obvious reasons, there is no exact equivalent in American English, but depending upon the context can be rendered as "upper division teams." See also Bクラス.
エンタイトルツースベース	This refers to a ground-rule double, in which the batter and any runners are "entitled to take two bases." See, the Japanese language isn't as obtuse as you first thought.
MVP (えむびいびー)	Most Valuable Player. . . Ah, excuse me, that's <i>valuable</i> .
遠征 (えんせい)	The literal meaning of this expression is "to conquer a far away place," which means that we are referring here to a road trip, an "away series"; often heard when one of the half dozen teams located in the Kanto area heads out to one of the less civilized areas of Japan.
エンドラン	No, this was not misappropriated from the American football term, it's an abbreviated form of "hit and run."
追い込む (おいこむ)	Used to describe a situation where the pitcher is ahead on the count, especially an 0-2 or 1-2 count. When watching a Central league game, this is usually a good time to go get a beer because the next two pitches are almost guaranteed to be wasted outside.
抑え (おさえ)	A closer; a relief pitcher who comes into the game during the 8th or 9th inning and shuts down the opposing team to preserve a lead. There are some good ones in Japanese baseball, but those of us old enough to remember Dick Radatz and Sparky Lyle just aren't impressed.
オープン戦	The exhibition season, or an exhibition game.
オーバー	A ball hit over the head of an outfielder. Obviously, there are three flavors: ライトオーバー, センターオーバー and レフトオーバー (not to be confused with 有り合わせ).
オーバースロー	A pitcher who throws over-handed (as opposed to a three-quarters or side-armed pitcher).
押し出し (おしだし)	To walk the batter with the bases loaded, to walk in a run.

表 (おもて)	The top of an inning.
カーブ	A curve ball.
ガッツポーズ	Literally, a “guts pose,” used in reference to that annoying habit held by so many contemporary professional athletes of raising and shaking in triumph their fist every time they do something right. These athletes are exceeded in obnoxiousness only by Japanese play-by-play announcers who insist on screaming out this phrase at the top of their lungs every time they see a professional athlete do it. Speculation over the origin of this phrase has resulted in at least one urban legend.
ガッツナイター	If you are aware that “nighter” means “night game,” then it is easy to see that this expression literally means “guts nighter.” No, we’re not talking about a typical Saturday evening at the Roman Coliseum, but rather the title of Tokai Radio’s play-by-play broadcasts of Chunichi Dragons night games. It wouldn’t surprise me to learn that a number of other radio stations also use this same moniker, but I have yet to confirm any.
壁役 (かべやく)	Literally means “to play the role of a “wall,” and is used to refer to catchers who warm up pitchers in the bullpen. Apparently a term of mild derision.
空振り (からぶり)	To swing and miss. A swinging strike, especially in 空振り三振 (からぶりさんしん), to strike out swinging.
完投 (かんとう)	A complete game.
完封 (かんぷう)	A shutout.
逆転 (ぎゃくてん)	This is an ordinary Japanese word that means “to rotate in the opposite direction” or “to turn something “topsy-turvy.” Thus, in the world of baseball it means to come from behind. Often used in combined with other words to form expressions like 逆転ホームラン, or a homerun that takes the lead away from the opposing team. Interestingly enough, in addition to the term 逆転勝ち, or “come-from-behind victory,” there is also the term 逆転負け. “Come-from-behind loss” is oxymoronic in English, but I’m sure you get the point.
球威 (きゅうい)	There are probably a number of different ways to render this term into English, but I think that “heat” is probably at the top of my list. It refers to a pitch that isn’t just fast, but that sneaks up on the batter.
キャンバス	A base, a “bag,” a reference to what bases are made of.

<p>均衡 (きんこう)</p>	<p>Used in the expression 均衡を破る (きんこうをやぶる) or “to destroy the balance,” and it refers to scoring the first run in a game that has remained scoreless over the first five innings or so.</p>
<p>クイックモーション</p>	<p>The motion referred to here is that of the pitcher when throwing to first base. I suspect that most American baseball fans would call this “sneaky” rather than quick.</p>
<p>クッションボール</p>	<p>A carom off the outfield wall by a batted ball: a reference to the fact that most walls are covered with protective cushions.</p>
<p>クリーンアップ クリーンアップ トリオ</p>	<p>In Japanese, even “clean up” by itself refers not just to the No. 4 hitter as it would in American baseball, but collectively to the Nos. 3, 4 & 5 hitters, or “clean-up trio.” Although I have never heard the term “clean up” used that way in America, I have heard the yet-to-be-substantiated rumor that NY Yankees announcers used to refer to Mantle, Maris, and whoever the Yankees’ No. 5 hitter was in this manner. Anybody know for sure?</p>
<p>ゲーム差 (ゲーむさ)</p>	<p>The distance in the standings between two teams expressed as the difference in number of games won or lost. This is self-explanatory to most baseball fans, but if the Dragons have won 10 and lost 5 and the Giants have won 8 and lost 7, then the Dragons have a two-game lead over the Giants, and all is right with the world.</p>
<p>月間MVP (げっかんえむぶいびー)</p>	<p>“Player of the Month” is one way to render this, though I don’t know if there is an equivalent award in the US right now. This refers to a PR program run by both leagues wherein at the end of each month of the baseball season, the outstanding players in several different categories receive awards.</p>
<p>ゲットツー</p>	<p>A double play.</p>
<p>酷使 (こくし)</p>	<p>I wish I knew a good way to refer to this in English. This literally means “to overuse,” and it usually gets used in reference to the pitcher that a manager always calls on in a pinch. You know, the guy who gets asked to pitch 1000 innings over the course of three or four years, and then gets traded away because he doesn’t throw as hard as he used to.</p>
<p>攻撃的なディフェンス (こうげきてきなでいふえんす)</p>	<p>Literally, an “offensive” defense, this phrase is apparently the bastard child of the old expression “the best defense is a good offense.” I suppose that the best way to render this into English would be an “aggressive defense,” but after years of watching Japanese baseball, all I can tell you is that if I had to pick a single word to describe the defensive play of Japanese baseball teams, it would be “offensive.”</p>

<p>好プレー (こうぶれい)</p>	<p>A good play, an example of excellence on the playing field. Often used in the expression 珍プレー好プレー (ちんぶれいこうぶれい), which is the title of a TV program reviewing the best and worst of the year in baseball. See also 珍プレー.</p>
<p>好ゲーム (こうげいむ)</p>	<p>This is most often used in reference to an excellent effort in a losing cause, such as coming out on the short side of a 1-0 pitching duel.</p>
<p>ゴロ</p>	<p>A ground ball.</p>
<p>コントロール</p>	<p>A pitcher's control.</p>
<p>差込む (さしこむ)</p>	<p>To jam a batter with an inside pitch.</p>
<p>さよなら</p>	<p>Sayonara refers to the home team winning a game in the bottom half of the final inning of a game, and shows up in combination with other words like さよならホームラン, which in the US has recently been called a "walk-off homerun" (because the home team walks off the field with a victory). Also commonly heard are the terms さよなら勝ち and its antonym, さよなら負け.</p>
<p>四球 (しきゅう)</p>	<p>Four balls, a walk. Easily confused with its homonym shown below.</p>
<p>死球 (しきゅう)</p>	<p>Synonymous with デッドボール.</p>
<p>借金 (しゃっきん)</p>	<p>Literally, a loan or a deficit, this term refers to the number of games a team is beneath the .500 mark. Often used in expressions such as 借金生活からの大脱出 (Out of the red at last!) See also 貯金.</p>
<p>ジャストミート</p>	<p>How many times did you hear your Little League coach tell you to "just meet the ball?" This is also called "contact hitting," but more often than not, people will just say "get good wood on the ball."</p>
<p>首位攻防戦 (しゅいこうぼうせん)</p>	<p>A game or series of games between the first and second place teams, especially if the teams are close enough in the standings for them to be tied or change places should the second place team win the series. See also 天王山.</p>
<p>シュート</p>	<p>A pitch which "shoots" across the plate toward the inside corner, especially a screwball thrown by a right-handed pitcher to a right-handed batter (or by a left-handed pitcher to a left-handed batter). Wiffle ball players know this as an in-shoot.</p>

守備固め (しゅびがため)	Refers to making replacements for defensive purposes in the late inning of a game in which you are leading or maybe within a run or two.
ショートライナー	No, this isn't a commuter train between New York and Newark; it's a line drive to the shortstop. By analogy you can also get ファストライナー (not a "fast," but rather a "first" liner), or a liner to any other defensive position.
シングルハンデッド キャッチ	Those of us old enough to remember the days when baseball gloves really were the size of gloves, not of vegetable baskets, and when good fielding was a prerequisite skill not an "added dimension," tend to get a little disgusted by players who use their right hand only after the ball has bounced off their glove. I know that baseball is a team sport, but how the hell else are you going to catch a baseball except "single-handedly?" The correct term, for those who still don't get it, is "one-handed catch."
シーズンオフ	The off season.
スイッチヒッター	A switch hitter.
スクリーボール	A screwball, but more specifically a screwball that breaks away from the batter. A screwball that breaks in on the batter is called a シュート.
ストレート	This is not really a pitch per se, but a category of pitches, as opposed to 変化球 (へんかきゅう), pitches that curve, drop, or otherwise change direction.
スライダー	A slider.
スピードボール	A fastball, heat.
セーフティーバント	A safety bunt, a bunt to get on base; in Japanese baseball, sometimes synonymous with drag bunt.
制する (せいする)	To take control of, to take the lead, to win. 試合を制する, to take control of the game.
制球 (せいきゅう)	The pitcher's control.
セットポジション	The set position, the stretch. See also ワインドアップ
セ・リーグ	Abbreviation of セントラル・リーグ, Japanese baseball's Central League. Suffers from over-popularity because the Tokyo Giants are in this league. Major saving grace is that it does not permit use of the designated hitter. See also パ・リーグ.

選球 (せんきゅう)	Refers to a batter's ability to judge whether a pitch will be called a ball or a strike, and swing or not swing accordingly.
選球眼 (せんきゅうがん)	A "batting eye": the ability to judge whether a pitch is a ball or a strike.
先制(せんせい) 先制点(せんせいてん)	Refers to the first lead of the game.
タイムリ タイムリヒット	An RBI hit. Although the expression "timely hitting" in English does not necessarily imply that a run scored, in Japanese it explicitly means so.
タイムリエラー	Although an oxymoron in English, this expression refers to an error which directly allows a run to score.
打撃 (だげき)	Batting.
打数 (だすう)	Number of times at bat. 5 打数の3 安打: To go 3 for 5.
打席 (だせき)	A turn at bat. 打席に立つ to enter the batter's box, to stand in at the plate.
立ち上がり (たちあがり)	In baseball, this refers specifically to how well a pitcher pitches at the start of the game.
駄目押し (だめおし)	Insurance runs, runs added to an already substantial lead.
チェンジ	A change up.
珍プレー (ちんぷれい)	An unusual play. Most often albeit not exclusively a blooper or other example of mediocrity on the playing field. Often used in the expression 珍プレー好プレー(ちんぷれいこうぷれい), which is a generic title for any TV program reviewing the best and worst baseball during a specific period. See also 好プレー.
貯金 (ちょきん)	Refers to the number of games a team is above the .500 mark. See also 借金.
長打 (ちょうだ)	An extra-base hit, power hitting.
長打コース (ちょうだこうす)	A ball hit toward the gap between outfielders that appears to be an extra-base hit.

<p>二死から四球病 (つーあうとからふぁわぼーるびょう)</p>	<p>One of baseball's great mysteries: the tendency, sometimes shown by even experienced pitchers, to start walking batters after there are two outs.</p>
<p>つまる (つまる)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To hit the ball near the handle of the bat, thus failing to get good wood on the ball. According to the definition given at http://yokohama.cool.ne.jp/niwaka/yougo/a.htm, this is the opposite of ひっかける, for which つまる is often incorrectly substituted. 2. Therefore, in its broadest sense, to get only a piece of the ball, to fail to get good wood on the ball.
<p>ツーベース</p>	<p>A double.</p>
<p>デッドボール</p>	<p>In Japanese baseball, the term デッドボール is used only to refer to a batter being hit by a pitch. See also 死球. (Note that in American baseball, the ball is “dead” after a foul ball, after a batted ball hits a runner, after a pitch hits the batter, after an umpire calls time, or after any other event that results in the legal suspension of play.)</p>
<p>天王山 (てんのうざん)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The name of a mountain to the southwest of Kyoto, where in 1582 forces led by Toyotomi Hideyoshi defeated Akechi Mitsuhide's army to avenge the death of Oda Nobunaga. As a result of this victory, Hideyoshi was able to consolidate his position as the most powerful of Nobunaga's successors. 2. Being an analogy to the above, a game between the first and second place teams where the winner claims possession of first place, especially if one of the teams is the Tokyo Giants. To get a real feel for this expression, try imagining what it would be like if every time the Red Sox faced the Yankees with first place in the AL East on the line, the sports media called it “the Battle of Gettysburg.” See also 首位攻防戦.
<p>得点圏 (とくてんけん)</p>	<p>Scoring position, runners on second and/or third base.</p>
<p>トンネル</p>	<p>A common phenomenon in Japanese baseball, where a batted ball goes through the fielder's legs. See also 攻撃的なディフェンス.</p>
<p>内安打 (ないあんだ)</p>	<p>An infield hit. Play-by-play announcers who like to dramatize their broadcasts tend to scream this word at the top of their lungs, and for the first two years I was in Japan, I thought that they were saying (守備側が) 悩んだ! なやんだ!</p>
<p>ナイター</p>	<p>A night game. See also ガッツナイター.</p>
<p>ノーコン</p>	<p>Literally, “no control.” Poor control by the pitcher.</p>

ノック	For some reason, a fungo” is called a “knock” in Japanese. Actually, I suppose I shouldn’t be sarcastic here since no one knows why “fungo” means what it does in American baseball, either.
中継ぎ (なかつぎ)	Middle relief pitching. The pitchers who come in when it’s still too early to bring in your closer.
流し打ち (ながしうち)	To hit to the opposite field. See also 引っ張る.
ナックル	A knuckle ball.
パスボール	A passed ball.
バックスクリーン	This refers specifically to the hitter’s background in center field, an area where there are ordinarily no bleacher seats, and is often used to describe a homerun hit to dead center because it enters this area.
バッティングピッチャー	A batting practice pitcher.
バスター	To show the bunt and then swing away.
パ・リーグ	Abbreviation of パシフィック・リーグ. Japanese baseball’s Pacific League. Suffers from a dearth of popularity because the Tokyo Giants are not in this league, compounded by the fact that it permits the use of the designated hitter. See also セ・リーグ.
ファインプレー	Synonymous with 好プレー.
ファストカンパス	First base. The bag at first.
フォアボール	A walk.
引っ張る	To pull the ball. Pull hitting.
Bクラス (ビークラス)	The 4th, 5th and 6th place teams in either of Japan’s two leagues. Lower division teams. Non-contenders . See also Aクラス.
フォーク	A fork ball.
ベースカバー	To cover a base.

変化球 (へんかきゅう)	This term is used in contradistinction to 直球 (ちよつきゅう) or ストレート, and refers to any pitch that curves, drops, slides or otherwise changes course as it heads toward the plate. Do not confuse this term with the English term “change-up,” which refers to a pitch that comes towards the batter at a slower speed than expected, irrespective of whether it curves or not.
フルカウント病 (ふるかうんとびょう)	The tendency of a pitcher to go to a full count with every batter irrespective of the situation. Although the term is sarcastic in tone, the tendency itself has been elevated to the status of an art in the Central League.
ピッチャーマウンド	The mound. The pitcher’s mound.
引っかける (ひっかける)	To hit the ball off the end of the bat, thus failing to get good wood on the ball. See also つまる.
ボ - ル	One of my <i>favorite</i> terms, it can refer to either to a pitch that has missed the strike zone, or to the pitch itself, leading to the following often-heard exchange from the broadcast booth: 実況：ストライクスリー、アウト！！見逃しの三振！！ 解説：いいボールでした、ね。
ボールカウント	The count of balls and strikes. One important point to remember here is that the order is reversed so that a three-and-two count is called ツー・スリー in Japanese. This is not a big problem when the count is full or even, but it can sure drive you crazy when it’s oh-and-one or one-and-two.
本格派 (ほんかくは)	In a baseball context, this refers to a “classic” style pitcher with a good fastball and strong curve.
凡退 (ぼんたい)	To go down in order. To send just three batters to the plate in an inning. Most often heard in the phrase 三者凡退 (さんしゃぼんたい), three up, three down.
ホームイン	Refers to a runner coming home to score.
満塁 (まんるい)	The bases are loaded.
満塁ホームラン	A grand-slam.
見送る (みおくる)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To take a pitch, to let a pitch go by. 2. To watch a batted ball go into the stands, especially a home run.
見送りの三振 (みおくりのさんしん)	To take a called third strike, to go down looking.

見逃す (みのがす)	1. To take a pitch. 2. To waste a chance.
見逃しの三振 (みのがしのさんしん)	To take a called third strike, to go down looking.
ランニングホームラン	Inside-the-park homerun.
リリーフ	A relief pitcher, the bullpen.
両バッテリー (りょうぱってりい)	The battery: the pitcher and the catcher.
連係プレー (れんけいぶれー)	Teamwork. A pick-off play, a relay from the outfield to the infield, and even a 6-4-3 double play are all good examples.
遊撃 (ゆうげき)	Short, the shortstop.
ワインドアップ	The windup position. See also セットポジション.

Last revised on Jan 1, 2002.
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