

The History of Seibu in Photos (Part 2)

III Business Expansion and Renewal Period (1950–2003)

Seibu Lions Established

A new leader in baseball emerges in Tokorozawa. Pro baseball team management is reformed

1978

From birth to a golden age

With the reorganization of professional baseball in 1949, the Japanese Baseball League was split into two—the Central and the Pacific leagues. With that split, the Nishitetsu Clippers joined the Pacific League, marking the beginning of the Lions' history that continues today. The team, which was based in Fukuoka, changed its name to the Nishitetsu Lions in 1951. Under famed manager Osamu Mihara, players such as Futoshi Nakanishi, Yasumitsu Toyoda and Kazuhisa Inao brought the team new vitality, particularly from 1954, when the team was known for its overwhelming strength, winning four pennants in five seasons and placing second once.

In the latter half of the 1960s, however, many of the team's leading players—the so-called “baseball samurai”—left the team, and for a time, team performance sank. With subsequent management difficulties, the team went through a bewildering number of changes in ownership and sponsors, from Nishitetsu to Taiheiyo Club, then to Crown Gas Lighter, and yet still the team's record and its management failed to perform. Apprehensive about the situation, the chairman of the Pacific League at the time requested that the Seibu Group take on a rebuilding of the Lions, after seeing how passionate the Group had been over the years in its involvement in industrial baseball, including the Prince Hotel baseball club. In response, Yoshiaki Tsutsumi decided to

have Kokudo Kikaku (now Prince Hotels) acquire the team, and in October 1978, the Seibu Lions team, based in Tokorozawa, Saitama Prefecture, was born.

At the end of that year, the new home stadium—which was already under construction—was named the Seibu Lions Stadium, and the team's logo and colors chosen. The decision to use Leo, a lion character appearing in *Kimba the White Lion*—an animated series based on a *manga* by the famed comic artist Osamu Tezuka—was instrumental in telling not only baseball fans, but the public at large, that a new and different baseball club had emerged.

Although the team's performance in the three years following its first season in 1979 found them stuck with a B-class record, from their first year in operation they topped the Pacific League in attendance numbers thanks to the ideal location of their ballpark and the popularity of the animated film *Ganbare!! Tabuchi-kun!!*, modeled on real-life Seibu Lions player Koichi Tabuchi.

In 1982, management of the team was handed over to Tatsuro Hirooka, and that year the Seibu Lions won their first league pennant, going on to take the Japan Series championship. This striking achievement, coming in just the fourth year since the team's establishment, was major news at the time. In subsequent years through 1985, the Seibu Lions were league champions three times, and came to be recognized as the new leader in Japanese professional baseball, both in name and in reality.

Becoming an Image Leader

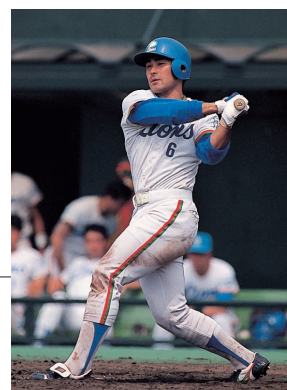
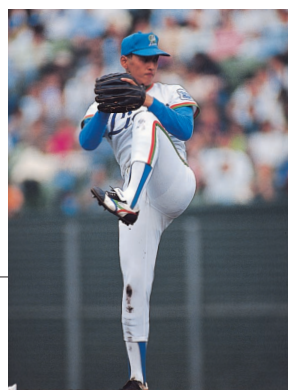
The Seibu Lions' brand strategy contributed to expanding professional baseball's fan base. This was in part thanks to the spread of family attendance at games, a new style of recreation that grew out of the proximity of Seibu Lions Stadium (currently Seibu Prince Dome) to the Seibuen Amusement Park.

Hisanobu Watanabe (left) and Norio Tanabe, two players who sustained the Seibu Lions in their Golden Age



In 1982, the team won its first league pennant and its first Japan Series championship, marking the start of Seibu's first Golden Age.

The “Lions News” displayed in trains to inform passengers of the team's league championship



The Seibu Lions: Five Major Topics



Masaaki Mori, Manager

TOPIC 1 Famous managers who built an era

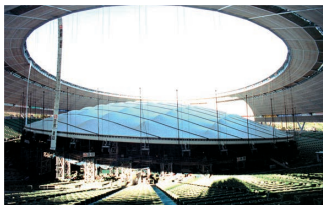
The Seibu Lions, who came to lead professional baseball and build a golden age, also produced many famous managers, starting with Tatsuro Hirooka, who led the team to its first Japan Series championship. Masaaki Mori, who commanded the Seibu Lions for nine years, left behind a record that included six Japan Series championships and eight league wins. Looking at the data, in the years between 1978 and 2007, only one of the team's six managers during that time had a total winning percentage below 50%. What is notable is that four of the six left winning records in their first year as manager.



Press conference in December 1978 announcing the signing of Koichi Tabuchi. Manager Rikuo Nemoto is at far left. (Photo: The Manichi Newspapers)

TOPIC 2 The memorable opening of a new ballpark

The game marking the opening of the Seibu Lions Stadium was held against the Nippon Ham Fighters on April 14, 1979. Fans who had managed to purchase tickets—selected by lottery from among about 200,000 entries—got a close up look at the players as they trooped onto the field via the stadium's "Victory Road," before sending them off to their first match. Incidentally, the Seibu Lions lost this first game, 1-to-7, failing to commemorate their new ballpark with a win.



Seibu Dome during the second phase of construction (Photo: The Yomiuri Shimbun/Aflo)

TOPIC 3 From Seibu Lions Stadium to Seibu Dome

The Seibu Lions Stadium was completed just prior to the start of the 1979 season. Even today, the stadium is known as a visitor-friendly facility, and even has a so-called "Victory Road" where visitors can exchange high-fives with the passing players after a successful win—something regular fans are familiar with. In 1997, construction was started to convert the stadium to a dome. In 1998, work was completed on the first phase, which put a roof over the spectator seats, and the stadium's name was changed to the Seibu Dome. The second phase of construction, a roof to cover the field, was completed in 1999.



The Saitama Seibu Lions team logo

TOPIC 4 From the Seibu Lions to the Saitama Seibu Lions

In 2008, the team name was changed to the Saitama Seibu Lions, with the goal of bringing them even closer to the local community. While the Lions were always managed with the goal of becoming a beloved local team, this name change provided the opportunity to clarify the team's presence in Saitama Prefecture, and to plant even firmer roots for its activities in the community. In June of the year the name was changed, the team held its first game at Omiya Stadium, owned by the prefecture, and the team continues to move forward as a professional baseball team that is close to its fans and its community.

TOPIC 5 Promoting baseball, supporting children

In recent years, the Seibu Lions have also been proactively involved in contributing to the development of baseball as a whole. The team is particularly active in promoting baseball, donating equipment to emerging baseball-playing countries, and has also started working to develop the next generation of star players through its Lions Academy and Lions Baseball School, targeting elementary and middle school students. The team will continue to promote baseball and to make proactive efforts to contribute to society.



Lions Baseball School

The team also maximized its advantage in being part of a group that owned a railway company. On days when an all-star game or the Japan Series was being played at Seibu Lions Stadium, Seibu would run extra trains before and after the game, ensuring smooth access to the stadium. In 1998, they also began mutual through service with the subway's Yurakucho Line, making it even easier to reach the stadium from anywhere in the Tokyo metropolitan region. The trains were also used to offer information to fans—the day after a

Lions win, "Lions News" posters would go up in Seibu Railway train cars—and to further expand the fan base.

When Rikuo Nemoto, the team's first manager, also served as administrative manager and played a pivotal role, he was essentially the general manager, a management approach that garnered much attention. These and other unprecedented initiatives by the Lions also had the effect of improving the Seibu Group's overall image. Today, the Seibu Lions continue to take on the role of image leader for the entire group.