

KIPPY

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KIPPY. Except that then, all of a sudden, we started losing ... bad. Apparently, our pitching staff held a secret meeting at which they voted to slump in unison. Take our Ace for example: Takeshi Kawabata-san. (*Kawabata appears, pitching.*) Acquired in the off. season from the Fukuoka Daieh Hawks, Kawabata came with a dazzling arsenal of pitches, a breathtaking contract, and a truly stupendous lack of English language skills, which, at times, seemed willful. For the first half of the season, he pitched brilliantly. He was *still* pitching brilliantly - for about six innings a start.

Then the seventh would come, where he would break down completely, and leave the game ... (*Kawabata breaks down, leaves the game.*) ... ashamed, disgraced, and basically inconsolable because, speaking no English, he never spoke at all, and was alone in his defeat. (*Kawabata's gone.*) Then we'd go to our bullpen guys who'd all begun to grip the ball like it was some chunk of alien matter that had fallen from the sky, and alluva sudden we're in first place by only half-a-game. But we're the Empires - we fix these situations.

Word came back from Double A Utica about a guy who was burning up the place - with an E.R.A. under *one* over nineteen games. And He Came Unto Us. (*Shane Mungitt appears. He throws a series of pitches. But he throws like a dybbuk. And he keeps throwing.*) And we were winners again.

Which was how things we.re supposed to be. But he spoke less English than the Japanese guy. And there was something worse than that: He didn't seem to like the game.

Now, over the course of a hundred-sixty-two games, guys are gonna be angry, smelly, turbulent, fractious, but just drop a key word or two and most of them are all of a sudden going to remember being four - and dad and the Wiffle ball and it's *too much emotion*. Which is appropriate.

Almost everybody picks up on that almost right away.