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**Master's Thesis of Global Sport Management**

**Exploring Adaptation factors on  
Re-signing of Foreign Players in  
Korea Baseball Organization (KBO)**

한국프로야구 (KBO) 외국인 선수들의  
재계약에 적응이 미치는 영향

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# **Exploring Adaptation factors on Re-signing of Foreign Players in Korea Baseball Organization (KBO)**

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# **Abstract**

## **Exploring Adaptation factors on Re-signing of Foreign Players in Korea Baseball Organization (KBO)**

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The purpose of this research is to explore the adaptation on foreign players in Korea Baseball Organization (KBO). The study will focus on the factors of adaptation, adaptation process, and the consequences of adaptation. Adaptation is defined as baseball culture and general culture experienced by foreign players both on and off the field.

Foreign players, who played in the past or currently playing, were interviewed in-depth under semi-structured format. The transcription of data is used to analyze the hierarchy format of categorizing the themes. Under higher order theme, ‘Best part of Korea (On-field: Internal)’ , ‘Best part of Korea (Off-field: External)’ , and ‘Challenges and Difficulties’ are categorized to identify the positive and negative factors affecting the adaptation process. Each categories have low order theme as listed factors such as Teammates, Team environment, Fans, Baseball culture, Equipment, Field condition, Balls, Foods, Living environment, General culture, Language, Family, Time difference, and Trust.

The most frequently cited themes by the participants, who played in KBO in the past, were Teammates, Foods, and Family and Language. The most repeatedly mentioned themes by the participants, who currently play in KBO, were Ball and Field condition, General culture, and Trust.

The result indicates different groups focused on different factors: Past KBO group emphasized external factors, whereas Current KBO group focused on internal factors.

By comparing the statistical data and the history of re-signing records, the participants who focused on internal adaptation factors, Current KBO group, tend to have better performance and have higher chance to re-sign. The participants who paid more attention to external factors, Past KBO group, tend to have poor performance and less chance to re-sign.

The chances of re-signing the following contracts depended on the performance level through adaptation factors, and adaptation on internal factors were significantly more important than the adaptation on external factors.

**Keywords:** adaptation, athletes, foreign player, Korea Baseball Organization, KBO, qualitative, interview, internal, external

**Student Number:** 2018-28968

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# **Chapter 1. Introduction**

## **1.1. Study Background**

Work environment has become global, and people started to work internationally. Under the global economy, workers with international knowledge and experience are the core resources of companies, and securing and maintaining them is a very important task in human resource management (Barney, 1991). In the global economic system, the concept of borders is disappearing not only in goods and capital, but also in labor (Ryu et al., 2012).

Globalization is emerging as an important theoretical, political, economic and cultural issue of our time (Albrow & King, 1990; Appadurai, 1996). Globalization is breaking down the barriers between the state, ethnicity and civilization not only in the macro view of political, respectful territory of the universalization of capitalist market economy, but also in everyday life. At present, the globalization process of the international economy results in massive movement of goods and capital. The formation of a capital economy and the international movement of the labor force continuously shares the track. Today, the internationalization of capital centered on multinational corporations simultaneously brings about the internationalization of the labor

market. However, unlike capital that 'freely' crosses over information, institutions, material and movement within the merging global economy, which has been uncontrolled and systematized into a single large market, regulations on labor of human movement are controlled and controlled by capital (Yang & Won, 2007).

As globalization intensifies, the number of foreigners residing in Korea has steadily increased from about 240,000 in 2000 to about 2.36 million in 2019 (the Ministry of Justice, 2019). Korea, which has long maintained the characteristics of a single-ethnic nation, is in the process of rapid change into a multicultural society that coexists with people of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds in accordance with such period changes (Kang, S. M., & Kang, J. H., 2015).

Sports are also undergoing changes through the globalization process. In the process of globalization of the international economy, capital is expanding in production and consumption in relation to sports activities, following Commodification, Corporatization and Internationalization (Wenner, 1996). The production, competition, spectating, televising, advertising, sponsorship, and consumption of sports marketing agencies are expanding around participation and viewing activities (Kang, 2017). Another evidence of the globalization of the sports sector is the rise of international sporting events, the rise of sports-related mass media programs, the growth of multinational

sporting goods producers and the international labor movement of foreign athletes.

In the detail of the international labor movement of foreign athletes, international contract caused labor movement is stated as 'migration'. The migration of sports players takes place at three levels: in-country migration, in-country migration between countries close to the same continent, and in regions on different continents, including changes and issues. In the consequences of the movement of talented athletes is that brings down the "supplied" country's sports to a lower grade and performance, and structure the lives of migrants.

Previous studies on the migration of players have been segmented into the background of players' migration, the influence of the sending countries, the expansion of the big leagues, cultural influence, issues around the adaptation of players, and identity issues.

Maguire (1990, 1993, 1996, 1999), which analyzed the inflow of American professional basketball players from England, the increase of North American ice hockey players, and the spread of American football as part of Elias' process<sup>①</sup>, interpreted it as Americanization of sports. Americanization

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<sup>①</sup> The Civilizing Process by Elias: The civilization process that Elias describes results in a profound change in human behavior. It leads to the construction of the modern state and

was interpreted as one of the numerous globalization processes that have continued not only in the past but also in the present. Researchers taking Elias' view of globalization as "a decrease in confrontation and an increase in diversity." McKay and Miller (1991) revealed that Australian nationalism has created an anti-U.S. influence on Australian sports in the revised Americanization, and that a non-U.S.-based multinational company has joined as a sponsor of Australian sports. Kidd (1991) reported that in Canada, a strong U.S. influence has affected the Canadian sports community and that the Canadian sports community is under great influence of U.S. capital. Wagner (1990), who studied sports in Africa and Asia, used the term "Mundialization" differently instead of the term "Globalization." Research by Chiba et al. (2001) and Chiba (2004) dealt with the globalization process of Japanese sports and the identity of Japanese-born and naturalized players in baseball. Bale and Sang (1996) addressed the problem of national identity associated with underdeveloped countries and subordinate developments. Many other studies have reported native talents from underdeveloped countries and issues under threat in national team performance (Maguire, 1996; Maguire & Falcous, 2001).

Starting with professional baseball in 1982 and professional soccer leagues the following year, South Korea has a mature viewing sports market.

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transition of man from the warrior of the Middle Ages to the civil man of the end of the 19th century.

The trend of globalization, which has been sweeping Korean society since the mid-1990s, marked a big turning point with the overseas expansion of sports stars in the Korean league. Fans disappointed of losing outstanding star players to big leagues overseas, and at the same time, fans felt ease by their performances in big league games through television and Internet broadcasting. Gradually, they experienced changes that made them familiar with foreign sports leagues and teams. In the midst of this change, the domestic professional league went beyond ethnic nobility and introduced foreign players to professional soccer in 1983, professional basketball in 1997, professional baseball in 1998, and professional volleyball in 2006. Fans cheered for the skills of foreign players they have not seen with domestic players, and the team and the league saw them as an important factor in the team's success. They are currently affecting the social, cultural, and ethnic identity of the Korean professional league in industrial and technological developments.

With the introduction of the foreign player system by the Korean Baseball Organization (KBO) league, foreign players have become heavily dependent on techniques and physical strength. Their performance has emerged as a big variable that determines the team's performance in a year, and teams are putting a lot of effort into recruiting good foreign players.

Foreign professional athletes as sports migrant laborer, the Korea

Baseball Organization (KBO) initiated its introduction of foreign players in 1998, with an original annual salary cap at US\$120,000. As the league grows to ten professional teams, KBO allowed carrying up to three foreigners on the active rosters, and the previous US\$300,000 limits of the salary cap was abolished in 2015. Two imported players were allowed to play in a game (International Baseball Federation, 2015). The rules regarding foreign players are still changing, and currently hold the position of having three players being able to play at the same time at one event. Regulations on foreign players vary from sport to league, but it has become very common to see foreign sports players in the K-League (Korea Professional Football League), the Korean Basketball Federation, the Women's Volleyball League, and the Korea Baseball Organization (KBO). Foreign professional sports players are becoming increasingly popular among Korean sports fans.

The integration efforts of governments and community organizations with multicultural family support centers are highly appreciated, but more efforts are needed for social integration from different perspectives. Through the basic immigration policy plan (2012), the government acknowledged that most people have yet to recognize or accept cultural diversity, raising concerns over the crisis of national identity (Ministry of Justice, 2019). In particular, there has been a disproportionate emphasis on cultural understanding on foreign migrants' understanding of Korean culture, not Koreans. As Korean language skills and Korean cultural knowledge are used

as indicators of immigration standards, it is difficult for foreigners to seek permanent settlement.

Migrant athletes with these sports talents have a major feature of the 'New Global Economy' (Appadurai, 1990). The inter-league human exchange moves with the flow of goods, clothing, equipment, media images, ideologies and capital, and these interactive flows represent the political and scriptural characteristics that characterize the global sports system and the power of civilization crossing (Maguire, 1999). It is worth noting the specificity of Korea's political and economic styles and socio-cultural conditions in the context of globalization passing through the process of compression. This is due to the impact of globalization and the reaction of cultures exposed to global culture are key aspects of discussing sports globalization (Houlihan, 1994). Foreign professional baseball players who have come to the Korean league are economic people in terms of moving by economic motives such as wage gaps, but at the same time social and cultural people who combine language, religion and ethnicity. Living in a country with a different life culture and organizational culture of Korea experiences serious cultural conflicts and adaptations in some cases (Yang & Won, 2007).

The most important parts for foreign players coming to the Korean professional baseball league (KBO) are financial rewards, sustainability and a stable environment. Financial rewards can be confirmed by various



evaluation structure and analyses conducted by each team, but the team believes that the adaptability of foreign players also affects the team. Since a player's ability to adapt does not appear with statistical figures, the team does not find it easy to assess a player's evaluation in areas other than statistical performance data each year. For the reason, this study will allow to find the impact of adaptation of foreign players in the Korean professional baseball league. In addition, how the adaptation affects their performance, and how the adaptation on performance relates with their re-signing process through in-depth interviews with players and team officials. The adaptation will influence the performance of the player, the team, and economic perspective.

## **1.2. Research Purpose**

Angel Sanchez of the SK Wyverns was recruited in 2018 and was foreshowed as the team's first starter. However, Sanchez failed to adapt Korean food culture by having difficulty eating spicy food, and lost about 10 kilograms that year. His failed adaptation process affected his performance, and his statistical number was not indicating the bright side of re-signing. Team changed his role as a reliever, and gave him another chance. He realized his miscarried adaptation process, and started to focus on his adaptation ability. Team was also supportive on the progress. In the second half of 2018,

Sanchez proved himself by decent performance when he only fetches out his ability he originally has with the efforts. This incident was well known to the public and became key topic in the baseball industry for few months, and at the end, led to a renewed contract in 2019. In 2019 season, Sanchez was full adaptation mode by controlling his diet with less spicy food, which not only helped the team to finish the season in second place, but also helped him to sign a new contract with the Japanese team on the following year.

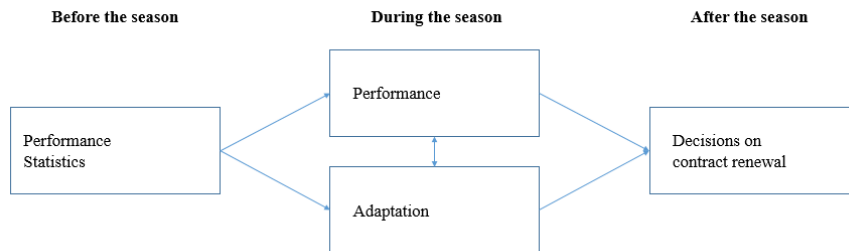
In Korean professional sports, each team is operated in terms of marketing tool with investment from their sponsoring mother companies. The purpose of marketing may vary from team to team and from sponsoring company to another company, but the common factor that is most important for all teams to achieve that goal is to perform well, and win the championship. The factors that affect the performance are classified in various ways, but the impact of foreign players on each team's performance is significant to all. From business perspective, especially on the sponsor's Return on Investment point of view, since the foreign players' weight of importance is heavier than the other factors, selecting quality foreign players is one of the key success factor. The selection of 'high-quality' foreign players through improvement of overseas scouting methods has been evaluated as one of the best output. In efficiency point of view, considering the amount of salary and effort the team invest into foreign players, selection from the vast amount of player lists has always been challenge from the teams. By considering the importance of

foreign players, improvement of overseas scouting is measured highly important.

Overseas scouting involves a number of factors. Direct or indirect effects and measures of a player's career, performance, personality, family, education and motivation will assist to predict a player's performance, and will affect the recruiting process. However, one unpredictable factor that teams always have been struggled to solve is the adaptation ability of players when they 'migrate' all the way around the world to Korea. There have been not many predictions or studies on how well the players who have been recruited through the best scouting process will be able to adapt to Korean professional sports and Korean way of life. The reality is that teams have no choice but to proceed with unanswered questions about the investment value of players who pay high salaries every time.

## Figure 1

### *The process of recruiting and evaluating foreign players*



Above Figure 1 implicates the process of recruiting foreign players, observing the performance and adaptation during the season, and evaluating the foreign players after the season.

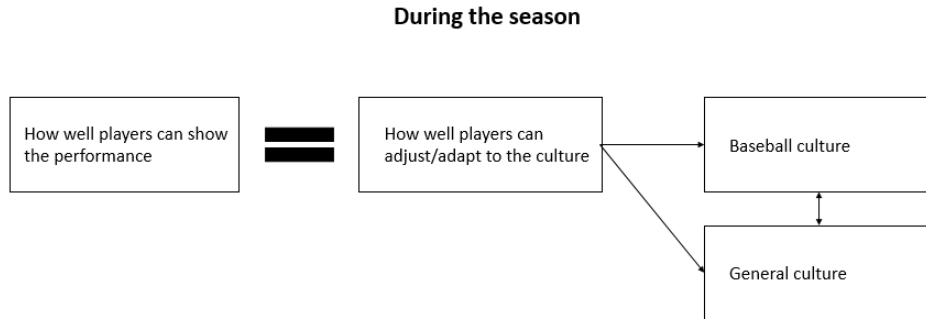
When a team scouts a foreign player for the upcoming season, team lists up the players with good statistical background for the season and past seasons. Then, teams send out scouts to see the target foreign players' games with bare eyes, and watch great amount of videos to analyze. With each team's priority statistic numbers such as batting average, home-run numbers, or pitching innings, teams line up the names by order, and start to filter out the players who the teams predict the success in Korea. Among the list of players, the tendency of likely to make the teams is that late 20s or early 30s in the age who does not have great opportunity to make Major League Baseball league in U.S. and looking for financial upside and opportunity, throws hard fastball, or hit for power. These are some factors that teams

categories and find suitable players for needs. One team may need a first baseman who can hit for power, and another team may need an outfielder who can run fast and have good defense ability. Since all teams re-organize the roster every year due to various reasons such as free agency recruit or newly drafted player, each team's needs of players with specific characteristics may vary every year. Foreign player signing is depicted as filling in the big gap and this process is certainly filling in the most important gap from the team's perspectives. Therefore, all major or minor factors affect the foreign player-recruiting lists and the filtering process.

After the recruiting process, during the season, it is time for the foreign players to perform and to demonstrate what they are capable of doing. This performance is often depicted as how well the foreign players adapt to inside and outside of the stadium of Korean culture. From general baseball fans' perspective, people notice or focus only on the statistic numbers shown. In fact, players who are recruited by KBO teams have similar or minor differences on the performance perspectives. Those players who are selected by the teams all had outstanding careers or eye-catching talents in the former organizations. What really matters is that how well they can show the exact same performance in Korea as they did back in former baseball teams or where they used to play. Regardless of how significant their performance is, a lot of factors related with how well they can adjust or adapt to the culture.

## Figure 2

*The relationship between adaptation and performance during the season*



### **Internal factors**

‘Internal’, ‘Inside of the stadium’ culture or ‘baseball culture’ is interpreted as baseball-related factors. Such as baseball, turf, mound, strike zone, teammates, coaches, manager, equipment, stadium surroundings, fans, helmets, dugouts, clubhouse, media response, stadium, etc. Each of all factors are sensitive to professional level baseball players. Minor difference could make huge impact on the result of the performance.

In 2016, LG Twins signed a right handed pitcher named Scott Copeland. Copeland was well-known for his sinkerball. LG Twins organization invested great amount of money into his anticipated performance, however, the player was a big failure by the team. According to Copeland, he could not adapt to Korean baseball balls. Compare to MLB or U.S. balls, Korean baseballs are softer and has more grip. The problem was that due to different type of

baseballs, Copeland could not throw sinker. His failure of adaptation directly linked with his performance, and ended up with releasing him after three months of the season.

In 2014 with LG Twins organization, and 2015 with Nexen Heroes organization, a player named Brad Snyder had completely opposite history. Snyder used to be a mid-range hitter who hit lot of two bases. When he first signed with LG Twins in 2014, he confessed to the researcher after the batting practice that Korean stadium sizes feel much smaller than where he used to play baseball, U.S. In fact, the sizes where he carried out his batting practice was as big as most of U.S. stadium sizes. After few months of the season, Snyder again confessed to researcher that he realized Korean manufactured bats and baseballs have much more repulsive force. Snyder ended up hitting many homeruns and enjoyed his baseball career in Korea.

### **External factors**

‘External’, ‘Outside of the stadium’ culture or ‘general culture’ is considered as the way of life, general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time. Food, living environment, family, communication with local people, local culture, climate, clothes, fashion, traffic, transportation, and more.

In 2011, Fernando Nieve played for Doosan Bears organization in Korea.

At the time, team and Nieve's chemistry was not in a good shape. Nieve complained about everything such as housing being dirty, weather gets too hot and humid, and no food was on his appetite. Nieve went to a restaurant, by not knowing the language and only by looking at the pictures on the menu, he was satisfied with himself ordering bacon. In fact, he ordered thin sliced beef, caused excessive amount of bill at the end. He was not able to adapt to general culture outside of the stadium, which made his life miserable in Korea, and affected his baseball life because he could not stay on his routine. He ended up of being released by the team after the season.

Above listed factors are examples of the matters that may affect players' adaptation process inside and outside of the stadium. This study will examine further detail of the factors that affect players' adaptation, and how the result of the adaptation leads or relates with re-signing of foreign players.

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of adaptation of foreign players in the Korea Baseball Organization (KBO). The study will focus on the relationship between the impact of adaptation on performance and the performance affected by the adaptation relates with team's decision on re-signing. Adaptation will be defined as the sports culture (baseball culture) and the general culture experienced by foreign players into both inside and outside the stadium.



### **1.3. Research Questions**

It is important to understand the internal and external factors that lead to foreign players' cultural adaptation, and the consequences of adaptation through the factors.

The focus of this study, therefore, was to investigate the internal and external influential factors that affect the adaptation process of foreign players, and how the foreign players adapt to the culture with aforementioned factors. As the result of adaptation, discovering the consequences of adaptation throughout the research was the goal to achieve.

- 1) What factors influence the adaptation of foreign players internally and externally?
- 2) How do foreign players adapt to the culture internally and externally?
- 3) What are the consequences of adaptation?

## **1.4. Significance of Study**

Throughout the study, in-depth interview data provide insightful direction of internal and external adaptation factors and process. The data, not only aid comprehensive understanding of situations with foreign players, but also help analyze the consequence of adaptation with cultural understanding.

By observing and analyzing the consequences of the study, the data will enable to predict foreign players' adaptation behavior for the purpose of future studies as well as what factors influence the adaptation process. With the defined factors, foreign players in various sports can be explored in the same manner to see how the foreign players adapt to the culture internally and externally, and the consequences of adaptation.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

Despite the importance of selecting foreign players, research in related fields is still in the early stages. Various studies have been conducted in the local sports sector to improve players' performance, as their adaptations and subsequent performance in professional sports are factors that greatly affect the team's performance.

Previous studies can be divided into two main research topics: the first is the evaluation of performance ability and strategy that measures athletes' performance more accurately and establishes effective strategies accordingly (Shin & Lee, 2011; Woo & Shin, 1998; Pyon et al., 2010; Mackovjak, 1999; Pyun et al., 2010), and the second is to identify various factors that affect athletes' performance and suggest ways to maximize their performance (Yang, 1996; Lee & Bae, 2005; Greenleaf et al., 2001). In the big picture, studies have been conducted on what factors ultimately maximize players' performance and how to improve their performance through these factors. However, previous studies have focused on internal factors on the ground that improving players' performance can be acquired through physical and psychological training. Indeed, several professional sports teams are working on ways to improve players' performance through repetitive physical and

psychological training, and some teams hire specialized coaching staff to conduct such training (Yoon, 2011; Jang, 2011).

However, there are certain factors that affect players' performance and performance that cannot be trained simply through training. Factors that affect players' performance are divided into internal and external factors (Hanton et al., 2005; Schinke et al., 2007; Yukelson, 1996), and most prior studies focus on internal factors. Although non-game situation factors are as important as those in the game-situation are, there is still no related research in Korea. Schinke et al. (2011) have two major non-game factors among the difficulties faced by professional athletes moving abroad in their study: New Community and New Culture.

When a player moves abroad, he or she will face the challenge of adapting to a new community and culture and, in most cases, adapting to a new culture that is completely different from that of his or her country (Schinke et al., 2011). Adapting to a new culture simply has difficulties in the process of adapting to it, but in many previous studies, athletes cited loneliness such as longing for family and friends, nostalgia for their hometowns as the biggest challenges (Schinke et al., 2011). It can be seen that these difficulties are factors that delay foreign players' adaptation, not only theoretically but also naturally.

Difficulties caused by cultural differences among foreign athletes directly lead to difficulties in adapting to the athletes, which affects their performance (Schinke et al., 2014).

Usually, when foreign players move to Korea, the team provides accommodation and vehicles to help the players adapt and provide convenience. However, it depends on player's own attitude to make action or take initiative in order to be absorbed by the culture.

## **2.1. International Labor Migration Theory**

The migration of athletes from country to country is not only the result of current economic situation or cultural aspects of sports in global, but also from connections among countries with deep social, historical, and cultural background. Taylor (2006) stated that sports migration is nothing new but has a long and complicated history evidenced in accordance with the professionalization of sports in Europe back in the early 1950s. Similar to other type of migration, athletic migration has been affected by economic and political manners such as economic crises, commercialization of sport, political issues, and restrictions set by governments and federations. All of these determinants formed the current sports market in sports, characterized

by a continuous flow of player migration with the aim of giving players higher value through trading agreements with other clubs in various sectors of the world. (Poli, 2010; Magee & Sugden, 2002).

There are many studies on the issue of athletic migration. However, due to complexity of the subject, various methodological perspectives exist. According to Maguire and Falcoux (2011), Bale and Maguire (1994) and Bale and Sang (1996), the issue of sports labor migration has been a multidisciplinary topic directly related to the globalization of the economy. From the development of international sport organizations, the growth of competition among teams, to the creation of world level tournaments and championships it all created a link between the interrelationships that shaped the movement of athletes. These migratory movements include economic factors, political, geographical, social and even cultural factors (Maguire & Falcoux, 2011; Poli, 2006). Maderer et al. (2014) claim that the employment of multinational teams (cultural diversity) can produce a variety of perspectives and experiences, which can contribute to greater creativity. Explicitly in sports, players with diverse cultural origins can contribute to better team performance due to variety of strengths and experiences. Related research on the area of athletic migration has mainly been focused on the motivations and experiences of migrant athletes (Elliott & Maguire, 2008), the migratory channels and the transnational trade circuits of professional and amateur players around the globe (Poli, 2010; Mixon et al., 2012) and also

the productivity (medals won) by migrant athletes (Horowitz & McDaniel, 2015).

Under this framework, Dobson and Goddard (2001) examined the economic dimension on the migration channels of European sports. It proves that the commercialization of sports has increased the club's perceived need to invest in players that are more “complete”. This demand could not be met in the local labor market, which led to an increase in migratory flows. In addition, Mason (1999) was documented that sports clubs were united to establish competitive wins as sports products with specific customers, such as companies, fans, communities, sponsors, and broadcasting stations that support sports clubs. Thus, the increased movement of the athletes to the European Sports is attributed to the club's main objective, namely the success on the field and the satisfaction of the aforementioned stakeholders. Gandelman (2008) has also verified this argument in the Uruguayan sports commenting that better performing teams attract better quality players. In addition, the recent study by Robinson and Simmons (2014) showed that this flow of migration has also been demonstrated in the English Football League, especially since 1983 when the gate-sharing clause was abolished.

Furthermore, the problem of athletes' movement was investigated from a geographical perspective as researchers tried to define the path and pattern of migratory flows between the host and donor countries. Darby (2000, 2007)

and Darby and Solberg (2010) stated that creating attractive leagues, providing contract security (reducing outside use of minors), providing healthy wages and high standards of living help maintain local talent and even attract more people from abroad. In contrast to the Ghana Sports League, which remains a donor country and experiences talent leaks, it is the case of the South African League, which maintains the country and talent. The same case is evident in the English Premier Academy League (Elliott & Weedon, 2010) which attracts foreign young talents mainly from Africa and South America. Thus, the formation of professional leagues has been the core of the movement of players and remains the most important driving force for foreign players.

In relation to the mentioned literature, Klein (2011) and Poli et al. (2015, 2016) tried to define the global value chains and production networks in sports that contribute to athletic migration. According to Poli et al. (2015), the commercialization of sports has led to a large outflow of players, mainly from Latin America (with Brazil and Argentina at the top), followed by Eastern Europe and Africa. According to the study, the income of athletes from Latin American countries follows the logic of geographical and cultural proximity to the host country. The leading European leagues are the host countries, and this trajectory is actually supported by the structure and development of the European sports market.



From the host countries perspective, Maguire (1999) concluded that the western European countries tend to hire foreign athletes to maintain or improve their current athletic performance, which in turn leads to increased demand for athletic migration. This claim was further demonstrated by Poli (2005), and Littlewood et al. (2011), who noted that foreign countries (outside Europe) and mainly Latin American and Eastern European countries invest in infrastructure to develop young talents, which could then be traded as economic developers (Bromberger, 1994; Cronin & Mayall, 1998; Lanfranchi & Taylor, 2001; Magee & Sugden, 2002; Taylor, 2006). However, this connection by stakeholders and the growing demand for foreign players have begun to cause problems for researchers and sports regulators, pointing to a decline in the quality and capabilities of domestic players and consequently the long-term competitiveness of the national championship.

Madichie (2009) acknowledged that a competitive competition improves the capabilities of the foreign players more than what they could have achieved if they had stayed in their home countries or would have gained financially if they had participated in a less competitive competition. Darby (2007) appears to agree with the abovementioned assertion but greater concerns were expressed for the host countries of foreign athletes. For instance, researchers agreed that the success of the Ukrainian national team is credited to the efforts of the local sports association to limit the number of foreign athletes on the local competition to leave enough room for the

development of native athletes and talents (Linnyk, 2007). In addition, Relvas et al. (2010) commented that several European leagues (Belgium, Finland, and Germany) have recognized the lack of homegrown players on professional clubs and the following outcome on the future success of the national team and the clubs. This issue has also been considered by the Qatar Q-league and limits on the transnational labor scouting to younger athletes have been seriously considered (Campbell, 2010).

On the contrast, Christoph (2003) argued that the participation of foreign players on the German Bundesliga not only reduced the appearance of native talents, but also helped the development of young native athletes since they gained significant experience after competing with well-esteemed foreign athletes. According to Niemann and Brand (2008), the success of maintaining and improving young talent at the German championships is attributed to restrictions set by the German Sports Association, which dictates that sports clubs must maintain athletic academies that compete with their amateur athletes. Additionally, Elliott and Weedon (2010) stated that the participation of foreign players in the British Youth Academy League has not only strengthened competition but also influenced the mentality of indigenous players who create more opportunities for them. Weedon (2011) also argues that in particular cases, sports challenged social stereotypes and contributed to the social cohesion and development of communities that promoted cooperation between natives and migrants.

Based on the discussion, it can be argued that there is no conclusive conclusion on whether the presence of foreign players will help sports clubs improve their performance. Previous studies have focused on migratory networks and tried to explain the determinants of overseas trade circuits, but according to Frick (2009), there is no direct test of the sports success of foreign athletes, which remains an open empirical question.

**Table 1**

*International Labor Migration Theory*

Author	Research Topic
Taylor, 2006	Athletic migration has been affected by economic and political process and restrictions by governments and federations
Maguire & Falcous, 2011	A multidisciplinary topic directly connected to the globalization of the economy
Dobson&Goddard, 2001	Commercialization of sports as a product increased the perceived need of teams to invest in more “finished” or complete players
Darby & Solberg, 2007, 2010	A healthy wage and a high standard of living helps to sustain local talents and even attract more from abroad
Maguire, 1999	Hire foreign athletes in order to sustain or improve their current athletic performance, leads to increased demand for athletic migration

## 2.2. Cross-cultural Adaptation Theory

According to Cross-cultural adaptation theory, Kim, Y. (2009), foreign players' process of learning culture can be defined as cross-cultural adaptation theory. Cross-cultural adaptation is that people from one culture moves to different culture learning the rules, customs (religion, food, arts), social norms (individuals' behavior in society), and language of different culture.

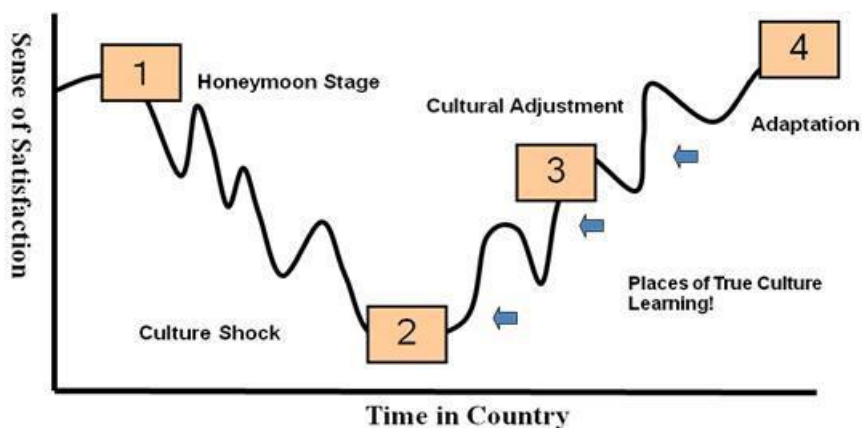
### Stress adaptation growth model

(Under Cross-cultural adaptation theory)

Rather than see culture shock as bad, it is necessary or even good. The 'stress' leads to change and personal growth.

**Figure 3**

*The stages of cross-cultural adaptation growth model*



1. The first stage of cultural adaptation is called the honeymoon stage.
2. The second stage tends to start three to four months after arrival. It is characterized by the feeling of culture shock.
3. Adjustment phase. This is where people learn to accept the culture and to change their negative attitude to a positive one.
4. Acceptance and Adaptation phase. This is where people will feel at home and become involved in activities and may enjoy some of the countries customs.

Rui and Wang (2015) defined cross-cultural adjustment as culture shock generated in the process of an individual adjusting to different culture in a foreign country. Collie et al. (2015) regarded cross-cultural adjustment as individual psychological stress relief, when encountering cross-culture shock in different environments, to reduce conflict and stress at work or not at work and receive psychological comfort and ease (Stilianos et al., 2017). Abdullah et al. (2015) revealed that, from certain cultures to other cultures, individuals had to re-adapt to cultural differences and change the lifestyle and thinking principles they had become accustomed to; from intercultural experiences, individuals were able to obtain distinct perceptions and physical and mental changes. It was called cross-cultural adjustment. Krishnan and Kirubamoorthy (2017) regarded cross-cultural adjustment as the interaction among people with distinct culture. Such interaction behaviors were communicated through languages (Cojocararu et al., 2012). Referring to Chen

et al. (2018), culture contains art, sports, cooking, music, dance, architecture, history, and family. The performance of culture is different in various countries that the success of expatriation enculturation includes four dimensions.

1. Self-adjustment: Self-adjustment reinforces the mental comfort of primarily respected and trusted expatriates. Foreigners with better adaptability can more easily deal with contradictions, emotional depression, and loneliness among people.
2. Other adjustment: It is an important factor in the development of lasting and stable friendships with local people and the joy of communicating with local people for a better culture.
3. Cognitive feeling: It refers to reducing uncertain interpersonal relationships, reducing people's suspicions, and avoiding misunderstandings caused by different cultures.
4. Cultural toughness: Each country has distinct cultural characteristics. Transnational corporate expatriates in some countries express different complaints about their performance, including job dissatisfaction, stress, health insurance, entertainment, food, and peer performance.

**Table 2***Cross-cultural Adaptation Theory*

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Author	Research Topic
Kim, Y., 2009	People from one culture moves to different culture Learning the rules, customs (religion, food, arts), social norms (individuals' behavior in society), and language
Rui & Wang, 2015	Culture shock generated in the process of an individual adjusting to different culture
Abdullah, Adebayo & Talib, 2015	Individual has to re-adjust to cultural differences and changes the accustomed lifestyles and thinking principles; Requires distinct perception changes and physical & mental changes
Krishnan & Kirubamoorthy, 2017	The interaction among people with distinct culture Such interaction behaviors were communicated through languages
Chen et al., 2018	Various cultural aspects need change and adjustment: art, sports, cooking, music, dance, architecture, history, and family

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### **2.3. Adaptation Theory**

Adaptation is important because in the event of maladjustment, it has a significant impact on the organization. It encounters the types of problems it faces in its own country and other problems, and life and communication problems arise. Inadequacy causes work disruptions and productivity declines due to substitute workers. Therefore, it is judged that the degree of adaptation will serve as an important variable to determine whether they will be successful in their lives in Korea (Jung & Lee, 2007; Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993).

Adaptation is a concept that represents the relationship between humans and the environment. Looking at the concept of adaptation, the emphasis is first divided into psychological adjustment and socio-cultural adjustment. The two adaptive concepts are also interrelated, but they are conceptually and empirically distinct.

Psychological adaptation means emotional state or subjectivity, such as mental repression, anxiety, tension, fatigue, etc. (Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993). Psychological adaptation is about the psychological and emotional aspects of adaptation, focusing on the attitude factors of the adaptation process based on a problem-oriented view. Therefore, psychological



adaptation is affected by the personality of an individual or social support (Jung & Lee, 2007).

Social and cultural adaptation, on the other hand, relates to the ability to fit into the interactive aspect of local culture and is measured by the amount of difficulty or difficulty in dealing with routine situations (Ward et al., 1998). Social and cultural adaptation is about the cognitive and behavioral aspects of adaptation, highlighting the social behavior underlying the attitude factors based on the cultural learning theory. Thus, sociocultural adaptation is influenced by cultural distance, the degree of contact with locals, and cultural knowledge (Ward & Kennedy, 1993).

Black (1988) defines adaptation as the degree of psychological comfort in various aspects of the country. The concept of adaptation is not a single dimension, but a multi-dimensional and consists of three dimensions: general adaptation, interaction adaptation, and work adaptation. First, general adaptation means adaptation to the general environment, such as climate or food in the local country, and culture, and interaction adaptation is divided into aspects of interaction, such as local culture and communication with locals. Finally, it was distinguished that the adaptation of the business unit meant different expectations or psychological peace of values and standards of work experienced by the foreign worker in the course of performing the work (Black & Stephen, 1989).

Meanwhile, Black (1991) and Shaffer (1999) are linear variables that affect the adaptation of foreign workers working abroad, suggesting personal factors, job factors, organizational factors, and non-working factors. Personal factors include language fluency that plays an important role in understanding dynamism in a new culture and forming interpersonal relationships (Aycan, 1997; Black et al., 1991; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985). Job-related factors include Hackman & Oldham (1975), and organization-related factors include support for local settlement (Black et al., 1991; Tung, 1998; Torbjorn, 1982), etc. Finally, it has a cultural distance (Hofstede, 1980) that means cultural differences with the home country felt by the dispatched overseas as an off-duty factor.

**Table 3***Adaptation Theory*

Author	Research Topic
Fiske, 2004	Physiological or psychological responses to significant events and unfamiliar stressors, where people must engage in an active effort to restore balance in their lives
Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993	The degree of adaptation will serve as an important variable to determine whether they will be successful on performing the duty
Black, 1998	The degree of psychological comfort in various aspects of the country. The concept of adaptation is consists of three dimensions: general adaptation, interaction adaptation, and work adaptation

With all the above theories, significance of adaptation will be studied throughout the work in various aspects. Foreign players' adaptation will be the focus of the study, and this adaptation will be viewed from two different perspectives: players' own perspective and teams' perspective. It is crucial to discover what other people's opinion is on foreign players' adaptation, especially the people around players and as employers due to the valuation work as product. Moreover, viewing from teams' perspective will enable to explore the direct connection between foreign players' adaptation,

performance, and teams' re-signing decision progress.

Depends on how well a foreign player adapts to the culture, his or her performance will be affected. That performance, addition to the other factors such as other adaptation factors and plus added value, will determine and will affect team's decision process of re-sign the player on the following year.

As mentioned above, performance measures are straightforward with statistical numbers. What teams always find difficult to measure is, and difficult to discover is, how the team can help foreign players to adapt and adjust to the culture harmoniously, and perform what he has shown before when the team scouted and recruited. Therefore, the key factor is depended on how well foreign players can adapt to the culture.

## **Chapter 3. Methodology**

### **3.1. Participants**

The subjects of this study were foreign players playing in Korean professional baseball league (KBO) and front office staffs of Korean baseball teams. The subjects were selected based on the ease of access and subjective intentions of researchers for observation and interview. The research was conducted on foreign players and players who had played or are currently playing in KBO league using criterion-sampling method. In the case of foreign players, players who have experienced domestic residence and adaptation processes were selected for the purpose of selecting them as follows.

The criteria for selecting detailed research targets were selected mainly for players who agreed to participate in the research based on the length of their residence in Korea, as there are differences in positions for foreign players to be judged by simple game records. For the front office staffs, criteria selection was based on minimum five years of experience in managing or recruiting foreign players. The researchers selected interviewers who met the criteria through a purposeful sampling and conducted the study

with the consent of the final study participants as foreign players and front office staffs with easy access by the researchers.

**Table 4**

*Target participants of the research*

	Name	Age	Years	Title
Foreign Player	Player A	33	4	Player
	Player B	31	2	Player
	Player C	37	1	Player
	Player D	30	4	Player
	Player E	29	1	Player
Front office Staff	Staff A	42	12	General Manager
	Staff B	47	15	International Director
	Staff C	40	5	International Director
Korean Player	Player A	35	20	Player
	Player B	31	20	Player

In connection with the researchers' work, foreign players were contacted who were easy to access, confirmed their intention to interview or survey for the study, and received positive responses. From the perspective of foreign players, the information related to the renewal and re-signing was their area of interest and was directly related to their livelihood. In addition, front office staffs showed interest in the results after the study was carried out and

expressed their willingness to participate actively, considering it was a plan that could be used by the team.

### **3.2. Data Collection**

The in-depth interview was carried out to the target interviewees listed above. Since in-depth interviews provide a diverse and in-depth explanation of any phenomenon or situation (Creswell, 2007), therefore, in-depth interview is the most appropriate method of data collection to achieve this research objective. Although, there have been many studies conducted on the difficulties faced by players moving to new countries in previous studies, the method of in-depth interview was chosen because there are differences in the characteristics of Korea, the nationality of players moving to the KBO league, and the sport of baseball.

Prior to the in-depth interview, basic data was be collected through prior research and newspaper articles, and based on the research, two separate in-depth interviews were conducted. The formation of a bond between participants and researchers, rapport process, is a very important factor in the in-depth interview (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, the first round of talks was conducted informally for the purpose of creating rapport with participants (to

hear a deeper and more honest story). Later, through the official second round of interviews, in-depth interviews were conducted on the difficulties of the new culture and environment experienced by participants, baseball-related adaptations and non-baseball adaptations, and their impact.

Interviews were conducted on a semi-structured format, but interview questions were prepared and were utilized in advance to minimize the issues (a phenomenon that deviates from the central context) that could arise from these methods and to consistently lead interviews with participants.

### **3.3. Data Analysis**

The data analysis was carried out through the transcription of data, data arrangement and implications extraction, and conclusion extraction process. After the transcription was completed, participants confirmed the interview contents to be accurate, and the translation of transcription materials (Korean to English) was executed. Subsequent analysis of enterprise data was conducted through the methods presented in the preceding study (Anfara et al., 2002; Burnard, 1994; Weston et al., 2001).

In this study, the verification methods presented by Anfa et al. (2002) is



applied to ensure the integrity and ethics of the study: triangulation, member checks by participants, and peer verification.

First, interview consent forms and recording permits were obtained from interview participants and the procedures and steps of the planned research were followed after. Next, the triangulation verification method observation at the factors of adaptation that participants thought, the relationship between adaptation and performance, and the process of systematically constructing, analyzing and interpreting the relationship between adaptation and re-signing from various aspects.

Verification by participants was confirmed the collected interview details with the participants again, and even after the analysis, the analysis results was checked with the participants again to confirm whether the researcher correctly analyzed the participants' intentions without distorting the information.

The peer verification was verified the research subjects and contents through interaction with graduate colleagues. In addition, opinions on analysis methods and systems were collected and reflected by colleagues, and the results were discussed after the analysis was completed.

In addition, the most suitable interviewee was selected through the

purposeful sampling to enhance the transferability of the study, and all interview contents were transcribed for the tick description technique.

## **Chapter 4. Results**

### **4.1. Data Interpretation**

Out of numerous targeted interviewees, front office staffs were neglected to provide their feedback and answers to the research questions. The reason is that some questions were directly linked with their strategies to help foreign players' adaptation process, and they did not want to reveal the tactics. Despite of anonymous interviews, due to very limited number of foreign player scouting or related field people, they can identify who provided what answers from which team. Therefore, the answers from the front office staffs and foreign players related field staffs had extremely limited information.

From Korean players' perspective, two interviews were conducted. Again, information was extremely limited due to their ignorant attitudes toward foreign players. Extremely obvious answers were provided such as language barrier and food difference as obstacles for foreign players, and no significant information was founded.

Therefore, the main interviewees were foreign players themselves. Main separation was the players who currently play in KBO league, and the players

who played in KBO league in the past.

## **4.2. Factors influence the adaptation (Internal & External)**

The results derived from the data analysis procedures represent the participants' collated responses. A total of 40 distinct adaptation factors emerged from interview transcripts. These were abstracted into three higher-order themes and subsequently categorized under one of the following: Best part of Korea (On-field: Internal), Best part of Korea (Off-field: External), and Challenge & Difficulties.

Best part of Korea (On-field: Internal) was associated primarily and directly with baseball related adaptation process and experience that foreign players went through. Best part of Korea (Off-field: External) was related with general cultural aspect of adaptation that foreign players went through. Lastly, challenges and difficulties were directly associated with cultural aspect and baseball related perspectives that foreign players experienced related with adaptation.

Based on the data analysis, adaptation process through living experience in Korea were separated by the foreign players who lived and experienced

Korea in the past and the foreign players who are currently living in Korea and playing for the baseball organization in Korea.

Among the interview participants, all had the similar factors such as teammates, foods, fans, Korea baseball, living environment, culture, and language. Although individuals may have various aspects and different perspectives from listed factors, foreign players tend to have common factors that they all get help for the adaptation progress: teammates, fans, Korea baseball, living environment, and food.

**Table 5***Factors mentioned by the Participants*

	Factors	Detail
	Teammates	Supportive and Family-like
	Team environment	Caring and Respectful
	Fans	Loud and Passionate
Internal	Baseball Culture	Tactical and Respectful
	Baseball Equipment	Player-oriented and Less regulated
	Field condition	Pitcher friendly
	Ball	Heavier and Thicker Seam
	Food	Healthy but Spicy
	Living environment	Advanced, Convenient, and Safe
	General culture	Respectful and Polite
External	Language	Challenging and Difficult
	Family	Homesick and Hard to communicate
	Time difference	Communication barrier
	Trust	Most difficult but most important

## **Supportive and Family-like ‘Teammates’**

‘Teammates’ factor was mentioned by most of the participants. Majority of the reaction was positive, and there were few negative feedbacks as well. Positive reaction was about teammates being supportive to the foreign players and tried to understand their situation for being away from home country and family. With cultural effects, teammates approached to the foreign players as family member. For instance, one participant stated that he was invited to the family parties and even travelled along with teammates’ families.

*One day, team captain Yang came to me and said, “Hey are you free this All-star break, or do you have any plan?” I told him, “No, I have nothing to do.” Then, he told me back, “You are coming to Yeosu with us.” During the All-star break, I came to the stadium to meet with Yang, and I was shocked. Oh my god. He had entire family members with him. Wife, son, parents, even grandparents. And it wasn’t just Yang. There were eight teammates with entire family members. I think it was like 50 people waiting for me to arrive. They made me feel like home, feel like part of the family. It almost made me cry.*

Beside of being supportive and friendly, there were a small number of negative comments about teammates. While interviewing through the challenges and difficulties, one participant stated that some teammates were not easy to get along, especially the veteran players.

*And the most difficult was... with few... not many, but only few teammates, well, I know, I love my teammates, I loved my teammates, everyone was very kind and friendly, they are great teammates. I still text them once in a while. But, there were few of them, just... not easy to approach... like I don't know, the veteran guys, the older guys, they have their own routine and I didn't want to interrupt their routine and, so I didn't, you know, tried to go and giggle around with them, but they were not easy to be around.*

### **Caring and Respectful, but Strict 'Team Environment'**

'Team Environment' factor was one of the positive factors mentioned by the participants. Most of them stated that team environments in KBO teams were caring for each other, respectful to senior and veteran players and coaches, but at the same time, the rules were strict. Within the boundaries of rules and regulations, teams were generally harmonious according to the participants. Front office staffs, coaching staffs, players, and families were all one team, aiming for the same goal of achieving championship trophy.

*I had really good relationship with coaching staffs and front office people. We made joke every day, had drinks after the games. It was like a family. We took care of each other. Even though there is a language barrier, but it didn't bother us getting together.*



*Sometimes, I had to be real quite in the locker room because the veteran players yell at younger guys, rookies. But I understand. That's how they learn. There are rules they need to know and follow. They will do the same when they become veteran. I know that scolding down action is not to harm someone or have negative feelings on them, it's just a way of teaching the younger guys and taking care of them.*

## **Loud and Passionate 'Fans'**

'Fans' factor was mentioned numerous times throughout the interviews. Mostly positive impact on foreign players' adaptation, but often there were negative influences by maniac level of fans' activities. Foreign players described 'Fans' as one of the biggest reason why they love KBO. They all came from overseas, experienced different leagues and baseball cultures. It is natural for them to compare each league and see factors' positive aspects and negative aspects. The reason why they consider KBO fans are the best is that KBO fans understand baseball, passionate about the sport, and get loud when they need to. Another finding about 'Fans' factor was that one participant stated KBO fans are patient. This particular player experienced MLB, MiLB (minor league system in U.S.), and Dominican Republic baseball. Where he played in the past, before KBO, fans asked for his autograph in the stadium or outside of the stadium when they faced the player. They did not wait for the players for hours. In Korea, when the games ended, fans waited outside of the stadium for hours to get autographs and to get pictures taken. This

player was not certain whether this is a cultural difference or the fans' attitude difference, but he was certain about KBO fans being the best in the world.

*Between Korea and Japan, the biggest difference is the fans. Korean fans, they sing and they go crazy with the players. But in Japan, they are quite, and they're very organized but then it's not as crazy as Korea so I like Korea better, to be honest.*

*And, Korean baseball is... intense! Well, American baseball is intense, too. But, it's different intense. Everyone in Korea is so pumped up every game, and they know how to have fun in the game. So I also had lot of fun in the game. And, if I have to point out the difference, there are definitely some major differences. Such as fans. Fans are the biggest difference. Uh... (thinking), yeah, I don't know. Um... there are quite different. Atmosphere and everything. But I can surely say that Korean baseball culture, especially the fans are the best.*

*And, also, people are very polite in Korea. In the states, when fans ask for the signature, autograph on the field, they just go for it. In Korea, fans ask for the same signature, they are very respectful and very polite, they try not to interfere player's routine and what they do, and they wait until the games end. It takes 4-5 hours, and they still wait until the game ends. When I come out of the stadium, they wait until the very end and they ask for the autograph like after all the games and routines. So, it was big culture shock. In the states, they just ask, come in, ask for what they need, and they just*

*leave. It's huge difference. And, for other cultural aspect... (thinking) what else, what else.*

*I mean those fans cheering, everybody has their own cheering songs, and all that stuffs, so and they play for the whole at bats, so I feel like that's the best experience in here.*

*It's not like oh, I'm Yankee fan, and my father was an Yankee fan and blah blah, whatever; they are the best team, fans actually know about the baseball, especially the girls, they know about the baseball and they know. It's great.*

*But... I mean the fans. Fans have been great. I feel like they treat us well here. They are great. They are out there all the time, cheer for us even we are struggling. I remember when I first got here. You know how we do Dominican Winter ball, if we struggle, they will tell you straight up. Get out of here. But, when I first got here, I was struggling, obviously, I wasn't adapted here yet. Stadium, pitchers, players, I struggled for a little bit, and I was waiting for it. They could say hey, go back home or whatever. And it was the opposite. They actually cheered for me. We know you are good, cheer up, fighting, but yeah, they are great here. Great fans. I feel like that has been great over here. I love the fans here.*

*But then, after I started to throw, all the fans they just blocked my way and asked for the photos and autograph and that was difficult but at the*

*same time I enjoyed it.*

## **Tactical and Respectful ‘Korea Baseball Culture’**

Foreign players from different culture and different baseball culture stated that they were astonished by ‘Korea Baseball Culture’. First, foreign players were not aware of Korea Baseball before they were recruited by the KBO teams. Whereas, they heard about NPB (Nippon Professional Baseball) from several different sources. Due to NPB having no limitation on signing number of foreign players, there are players who experienced NPB baseball. Those players talk to each other about Asian baseball they experienced or they have heard. In addition, media talks about financial upside for playing NPB on the players who do not make the major league level, which create dramatic illusion for the players who wish to make good money. However, KBO has limited three foreign player per teams, therefore, less chance to make the league and less chance to hear about the league. Nowadays, KBO’s reputation has been increased due to bigger upside on the financial terms, however, foreign players still consider NPB as their first consideration of Asian baseball. After foreign players arrived in KBO league, they were rather surprised by the Korea Baseball Culture. Since they consider Asian baseball league as lower grade or lower level of baseball to earn money, however, once they play for the league, most participants stated that Korea Baseball is relatively advanced. It is tactical in the ways of running the teams during the games, and respectful even to opponent teams. In terms of tactical baseball,

one participant indicated that Korea baseball has NPB ways of stealing base and bunting to sacrifice and score. At the same time, Korea baseball has MLB style of hitting deep when it is necessary. Lot of participants described Korea baseball style as in between of NPB and MLB. In terms of respectful baseball, the participant was shocked to watch a pitcher bowing to a hitter after throwing a hit-by-pitch ball. In MLB where this participant played before he came to Korea, self-esteem and pride are exceedingly important that they do not apologize or show respect. On the other hand, Korea baseball culture considers respect as the most important.

*When I say the system, in the big league or in the states, they go for the big ones. Like homeruns and all the hitters, they go with the big swings, but in Korea, they are very tactical. They like to bunt, run, steals bases, so more like small ball type but time-to-time, big swings too. I have to say Korean baseball is located in the middle of Japanese baseball and US baseball. US baseball is big ball when Japanese baseball is very small ball type tactic, you know like little hit, like base hit, and they run, steal the base, and they do the bunt and steal another base, you know all those stuff, but Korean baseball is in the middle. They like to hit with power like Byung-ho Park, he hit bombs, but you know like some players like to hit small hits, so it's kind of combination? I have to say? It's in the middle of it. US baseball and Japanese baseball.*

*Okay, um... (thinking) it's very respectful. The one word that I can*

*describe is respectful. People like to... well, I know that bowing is a simple gesture of respecting one another. When they are sorry, when they greet, and you know, when you see the senior person, players all bow to the senior guys. They even bow to the hitters when they throw on them. I was taught that it's a way to show respect to the senior veteran guys. And, the age matters in Korea. When you are an older person, you get bows from younger guys. I liked it. It's a respect. In the states, no one does that. Young guys, they are rude!!! We don't have bowing in the states, and I wish we have it. This is and it was big cultural difference.*

### **Player-oriented and Less Regulated 'Baseball Equipment'**

'Baseball Equipment' factor was surprising consideration that few participants mentioned. Especially, players from Latin America region were fascinated by Korean baseball equipment. According to the participants, the equipment is colorful, player-oriented, and easy to handle. One participant stated that the color used on the gloves and bats were bright, regulations on shoes were less strict compare to Dominican Republic baseball and U.S. baseball, and equipment materials were used to fit the players better than what they used to use before. In MLB, there are strict regulation about equipment regard to the colors used, materials, and weight. MLB put lot of weights on their history and try to preserve it, which ended up setting uncountable regulations on different aspects.

*When I played in MLB, I could only use black gloves, team color associated shoes, wooden bats, no necklace, even no facial hair. Too many rules. I hated it. Here in Korea, I can do whatever I want. I asked glove company to make blue gloves, and they made one for me. I asked for yellow cleats, and they made one for me. I can have my beard, necklace, everything. I love Korea baseball.*

*The gloves I use here is very soft. This company came to the stadium during the camp, and measured all my fingers. I never done that before. They customize the gloves. After few weeks, they sent me this glove. It fits perfect. And it's soft, too. I don't exactly know what skin this is, but I am definitely going to use this for my entire career.*

### **Pitcher-friendly 'Field condition'**

'Field condition' refers to ground condition including infield and outfield, grass, turf, stadium structure, and even moisture and temperature of the field. It varies to every stadiums and different regions. In general, comparison to the fields that foreign players experienced before they come to Korea, participants have said Korea baseball field condition is pitcher-friendly. Meaning that pitchers tend to have advantage of using the ground condition to have better performance and statistical data. A participant stated that one of the particular fields in Korea has longer turf and soft mound. Longer turf creates more advantage to the defensive team because it generates

resisting forces towards the ground balls. Soft mound reduces the kicking forces and decrease the speed of throwing force by pitchers.

*Anyway, back to baseball talk, I want to say Korean mound is much more soft. So whenever you step on, it goes down. It's like cushion. You know, it goes in deeper. That's big difference as a pitcher. The mound difference, let's say you are used to pitch from the hard mound and you step on the mound, it automatically pushes you to the front as you are jumping toward the plate in the states. But, In Korea, you cannot jump because it's too soft. You just go into deep downside, so it kind of stops you from jumping forward. So that's why US baseball has more velocity and more power pitchers, but Korea baseball, because the mound stops you, and break you, I think that's the reason why they use lot of breaking ball.*

*So I had to throw lots of breaking balls in Korea. Curve and slider. And Slider worked pretty well because I think that's because of the soft mound? I don't know. Maybe.*

## **Heavier and Thicker Seam 'Balls'**

'Ball' factor took a significant roll making distinction between where foreign players came from and in Korea. Especially, the pitchers stated that Korean baseballs have thicker seams. As a result, balls spin better and breaking balls fly more effectively with sharp angle. Another pitcher described that the balls are smaller than MLB baseballs, therefore, he could



have better grip and control better on the location. MLB or Dominican Republic baseballs were considered as slippery, thin seams, less grip, and slightly bigger baseballs. There were players who liked the differences of baseballs, and there were players who did not like it. There were players, who had to go through adaptation process on the different type of baseballs, and some were successful and some were not.

*In the baseball culture wise, um... (thinking) I don't know... (thinking) balls were different. You know. Korean baseball and U.S. baseball. The balls itself flew differently, and the seams are different. Thickness. Korean balls have thicker seams.*

*And it took time, but I liked Korean baseball because Korean baseball was smaller but it's got thick seams, and that was huge difference.*

*And the ball it flies um... little better. On the breaking wise. It breaks better. But the fastball, it doesn't fly well, so that's the influence of my baseball life.*

*I have big hands. With my hands on Korean baseballs, I could have better grip because the baseballs were much smaller than what I used to hold on to back in DR. And Korean baseballs are not slippery. DR balls are slippery, and it just slides out from the hands when I throw. I had to get used to Korean baseballs before the season. Took me a while.*

## Healthy but Spicy ‘Foods’

‘Foods’ factor had variety views from participants, but surprisingly, majority of participants showed positive responses toward Korean foods, even the ones who had never tried Korean foods before they came to Korea. Participants pointed out that Korean foods always have mixture of vegetable and meat, addition to soup selections. The foods are not only healthy with full nutrition, but also good for digestion.

Few negative feedbacks were, especially from the foreign players who came from Latin America background, the foods are too spicy. Koreans have Kimchi as a mandatory side dish, and they felt Kimchi was too spicy. What they did with foods was that in the beginning, they went out to find fast food such as hamburgers and pizza, and then they gradually tried easy and non-spicy Korean foods.

Since Food is crucial for the players to maintain the body shape, this factor affected adaptation process significantly overall.

*Because I like spicy food, and the first, people say Korean food is very spicy, and I was little worried because even though I like spicy food, Korean spicy is different level. And, at the first, Korean spicy was little too spicy for me, but I got... well, I think (laugh) I got adjusted I think. And then later, I*

*really enjoyed spicy food in Korea. When I was in Japan, I went to find Korean restaurants in Tokyo (laugh). That's how much I love Korean foods. Korean foods are the best. They have all different spicy foods, so many plates and bul-go-gi, and bi-bim-bab, I can name it all day. I can live forever with only Korean foods. If I have to eat just one country food, I will choose Korean food. It is definitely the best food in the world.*

*Um... (thinking) what factors... I have to say food is the big challenge but once you get used to it, you love it. I loved it.*

*Um... my outside of baseball... (thinking) I would say the foods, and the fans, and my living environment? That was big.*

*On the everyday life, the food routine is different, because we are so used to eat typical stuffs like cereal, hamburgers and stuffs. But in Korea, people eat rice every day, every single day, every meal. I think that's the healthy habit. And that healthy habit made me healthier body? And with my routine workout, it gave me better life. Body condition is much better than before, and I think that's because I still enjoy eating rice in the states. Good habit came along with me all the way from Korea (laugh).*

*Well, the easiest thing was food. It just naturally just came to me because it was tasty and you know, at first, it's hard for everyone, but it just naturally became your favorite, and it is the easiest.*

*For the learning outside of baseball, I told you, I eat Korean food every day. I even cook nowadays. Probably I will go to Korea for the trip, and eat Korean food, bunch of Korean food and come up. (laugh) it's that huge for me. I love Korean food.*

*I feel like that has been great over here. I love the fans here. But, off the field, obviously, Korean barbecue. (laugh) the food is good here. Yeah, I go Korean barbecue pretty much every night. I probably go to a barbecue place at least 3 times a week. But, people joke with me saying Koreans eat dogs and cats and stuff. I mean, I never seen anybody eating it. In the stadium cafeteria, players used to joke around with me, and say yo, go and get that food, that's dog. I'll be like what? No, but I never seen that meat before. And they all go like that's dog. Try, try. (laugh) they were just messing around.*

*I'm a big food guy so I like going trying new foods, so that's been cool here. I mean Korean food is kind of exploding all over the world right now, which is kind of cool, but so I like trying new foods and stuff so where that's kind of been hampered a little bit because I like going anywhere and everywhere and trying to find new places.*

### **Advanced / Safe / Convenient ‘Living Environment’**

‘Living Environment’ is one of the factor that most foreign players compared with where they came from. Few players who came from city

environment described that Korea is as advanced as the cities they were from, such as tall buildings, giant shopping malls, and advanced public transportation system. In addition, those who came from the cities in overseas also stated that Korea is extremely safe, compare to the cities they came from. Especially the ones who came from United States and Dominican Republic were astonished because they could not imagine walking around the street in the middle of the night. They were open to the dangerous environment with carrying guns and robberies. Then, they came to Korea and saw people walking around and socializing until late night.

Public transportation system was another surprising factor by foreign players. Due to regional characteristic being smaller than the countries where foreign players came from, Korea has advanced public transportation system. Subway is linked all around the cities, buses come by every 5 to 10 minutes, and taxis are everywhere with reasonable charge.

Foreign players mentioned convenience as an advantage of 'living environment' factor. Due to regional characteristic, Korea has easy access to all necessary goods. A participant stated that he has never been to any countries or cities where they have more stores or markets in walking distance.

However, there were minor negative feedbacks about 'living environment' factor. Negative opinions came from the participants who

resided in suburb area. Those participants felt there is a huge gap on the living environment between major cities and minor cities.

*When I woke up, it's different. When you looked out to the window, it's different. It's city! Seoul. And, out on the window, there were all the tall buildings, and lots of cars, people walking around, running around, and all.*

*Well, I liked Japan, but if I have to choose one, I liked Korea better because it was safe and... well, Japan is safe, too, but Korea was... everything was so advanced. The technology and everything is so convenient, you know. Um... the subway, and the fans are crazy, you know.*

*I wouldn't say most difficult, but that was just one of the difficult things I experienced. Other than that, oh! Subway system. Well, I liked subway in Korea, it's very easy and convenient. I enjoyed it all the time, but sometime it was difficult. I had to commute through subway, and I didn't want to bother other people.*

*Because team LG Twins was in Seoul area, it helped me a lot to adjust fast and enjoyed the surroundings. It helped me to like Korea a lot. But few other guys I talked to, they told me Korea is pretty challenging because the guys in Daegu, or Changwon Masan, or Gwangju, they told me when they go out, there is nothing, so they had to walk for long time or take taxi to the stadium for a while. Their houses not great, and there's nothing around, no subway or no eating places. I heard they had rough times.*

## Respectful, Polite, and Friendly ‘Culture’

‘Culture’ is a crucial factor on adaptation. All participants mentioned about cultural differences, whether they liked Korean culture, whether they were shocked by particular cultural behavior, or whether they disliked about some part of culture.

Respectful was the most frequently mentioned word to describe Korean culture. Foreign players stated that the people where they came from tend to have self-centered mind whereas based on their experiences in Korean, people are more friendly and have mind to help others. In addition, lot of participants were surprised to see that Korean people show respect to older and senior people. It is considered as a social norm, which they could not think of before they come to Korea.

*Okay, um... (thinking) it's very respectful. The one word that I can describe is respectful. People like to... well, I know that bowing is a simple gesture of respecting one another. When they are sorry, when they greet, and you know, when you see the senior person, players all bow to the senior guys. I was taught that it's a way to show respect to the senior veteran guys. And, the age matters in Korea. When you are an older person, you get bows from younger guys. I liked it. It's a respect. In the states, no one does that. Young guys, they are rude!!! We don't have bowing in the states, and I wish*

*we have it. This is and it was big cultural difference. And, also, people are very polite in Korea. In the states, when fans ask for the signature, autograph on the field, they just go for it. In Korea, fans ask for the same signature, they are very respectful and very polite, they try not to interfere player's routine and what they do, and they wait until the games end. It takes 4-5 hours, and they still wait until the game ends. When I come out of the stadium, they wait until the very end and they ask for the autograph like after all the games and routines. So, it was big culture shock. In the states, they just ask, come in, ask for what they need, and they just leave. It's huge difference. And, for other cultural aspect...*

*Naturally and unnaturally, I was adapting it and absorbed by the new culture every day.*

*Yeah, to be honest, we get annoyed sometimes, but we understand that the right way I mean they are saying... they are doing a great job. Especially when we had to do the 14 days quarantine, we were annoyed about it, because they told me if we get here by certain date, then you don't have to go through that 14 days. But, we got here, we got tested, and we still had to do it because that time the cases were striking out. I think that's because Korean culture takes care of each other, and try not to annoy someone else. Back in where I was from, they only think about themselves. Very selfish. Korea, it's the opposite. Very respectful to each other.*

*The Korean culture is very friendly and very welcoming. You know,*



*they're the Asian culture in general is a hierarchy of age and respectfulness and so that that takes some getting used to as an American, who you know we just speak our mind and me is nature I'm a more respectful person anyways.*

## **Challenging and Difficult ‘Language’**

‘Language’ factor acted mostly as negative factor in this case. Many foreign players stated that Korean language is hard to learn, and had difficulties with language barrier. Especially, during the communication with teammates, foreign players had to get help from a translator, which a participant described that translator’s help created bigger barrier between Korean players and foreign players.

Despite of the fact that young generation was able to communicate with foreign players with broken English and gestures, older Korean people had more difficulties communicating with them.

*Um... you said it. I think my thing was that I tried not to use my translator. As much. Even when I try to speak, teach or do something with the teammates, how to make adjustment, I try to explain the best way I can, of course, they have hard time to understand without a translator, but you know translator might put in nice words or like different words, and I want him to catch up from my own words. Because it's easier to communicate to*

*the players with your own words rather than using a translator, and I think it has been big for me, me earning that trust from my teammates. First, it's just simple great relationship, and then, I earn my trust, that helps the relationship better and helps me to explain to them and understand better, and trust. I feel like sometimes, they... I'm not saying this happened to our team or me, but just saying I feel like their culture here, if hitting coach says something to a hitter, it will be like hey, do this. Why? Just do it. It's going to help you. Right? Player will do it, but they don't really trust it. And if you are not going to trust it, you are not going to get better at it, or it's not going to work for you. So I feel like first, get into, player to trust you, it's very important and it's huge for that player to put that work in it. I don't know if that makes sense.*

*So it was a little easier for me than some people that are from different areas of the country or whatnot. But I'm a very outgoing person and I'm not gonna let the fact that we don't speak the same language and me having a relationship with you, so I am definitely out there, I used my translator a lot, I try to learn the language as much as possible. It is a very hard language to learn. So that's been challenging but you know I go out there I spend time I get to know these guys, I get to know their families, you know me and my wife have them over for dinner, we take them out you know on date nights with couples and try to get to know them. So I've really tried to plug myself into the culture and into my teammates.*

## **Homesick and Missing ‘Family’**

‘Family’ was a controversial factor. Foreign players, who were with their family in Korea, stated that Korea was best place to live with their family. As above mentioned, players especially from Latin America region felt safe being in Korea. Particularly the players with kids felt their home countries were not safe with countless crimes.

On the other hand, players who left their families behind at their home countries due to various reasons: wife work, wife pregnant, not knowing Korea’s living environment, and someone sick from family members, stated that they miss seeing their family. Being by themselves in Korea for the season could bring loneliness and homesick.

*Yeah, I really like Korea. I would love to go back because my time there it was great. Fans were great, and my family loved Korea, so Ethan and my wife really really want to go back to Korea and sometime in the future, I really hope to go back and I hope to spend time there.*

*You know. Like in the states, when your family try to come to away game, it’s 4-5 hours by car at minimum. For the longer ride, it takes 10 plus hours, so it’s pretty hard to invite your family to the games in the states, especially the away games. But then um... in Korea, it’s simple. You know. As a starting pitcher, you pitch according to the pitching schedule, and you*

*cannot always pitch in the home stadium. And, you want to invite you family to the games when you are pitching, which could be away games, right? So, that's the thing I like about in Korea.*

*Yeah, I miss my family and baby. It's definitely hard. Not having my family here. But same time, it's kind of like easy, I don't want say easy, but it's easier for me to adapt being here by myself. Because obviously I'm here from Dominican Republic and um... I pretty much being away from my family my whole life, well, not my whole life, but since I turned 18, I went to school in the states by myself, well, college, and then, I got drafted so pretty much been most of the time by myself. But, still it's pretty hard, I mean, specially after we had a baby. It's hard for being away from the baby for sure.*

*I was going to say missing family is the biggest challenge. um... we don't know yet. Obviously we want our family to come when it allows. But once they come, they have to 14 days quarantine. So, I don't want my family to do that. Because we have new baby, so it's hard. Maybe her grandma can come with, but sometime else, but they are not allowed to stay together because they are not my direct family. Only my wife and son can stay at apartment, my apartment. Then the rest of family has to stay at the Korean facility for the quarantine. That's not very fun.*

*So I'm trying to keep that to a minimum. We get a lot of delivery, but yeah, I mean it's almost same as the states. I mean, I get up you know when*

*my family's in country we kind of do stuff together and go do stuff with the kids when they're not I'm face timing them in the morning you know before they go to bed back home in Florida.*

## **Communication Barrier 'Time Difference'**

Some foreign players have never left their home countries before they signed with Korean baseball teams. Meaning that they have never experienced the time difference. 'Time difference' factor was something fresh and not welcoming subject to the participants and the biggest reason was that it limited the communication with the loved ones back at home countries.

*Right, right. I know, it's crazy how you said. I mean it's crazy also when I came to Korea for the first time. It was hard for me to get used to it at the beginning that time change. Especially, when I talk to my family and all that stuff.*

*Yeah I don't have that control but I mean I don't know I don't need to be on ESPN that bad just throw at 8 o'clock in the morning. It's hard enough to get over the jetlag and time difference I experienced. I am not going to favor ESPN for my routine.*

*When I first came to Korea, I called my parents at 3 o'clock in the morning at their time because I wasn't aware of the time difference. And then, they called me at five in the morning. That's when I really felt about*

*being away from home. Started to feel lonely.*

### **Most Difficult but Most Important ‘Trust’**

For the foreign players, after being away from their trusted people back in their home countries, they needed to find new trustful people in Korea. Number of participants brought up ‘Trust’ factor as the most challenging, but at the same time, the most important factor. Teams support foreign players and help them to perform and to adjust well. However, they are the ones who recruit, evaluate, and send back home. All foreign players stated that they do not entirely trust people from the teams.

Some participants mentioned agent and teammates. Agent is on players’ side. They act, speak, and negotiate the deal on behalf of the players and receive the fee. However, one participant commented that some agent do not work hard or do not stand entirely on players’ side when there is an issue between the team and the player.

Foreign players had respectable amount of trust on their teammates. Even though, they compete for the roster, they have one same goal of winning. Teammates are the ones who foreign players see every day and talk about their problems because they understand better for being in the same shoes. Teammates are easy to rely on. At the same time, foreign players try hard on their ends to earn trust from their teammates. One participants stated that he

approached to the teammates first, tried to be humble, talked a lot inside and outside of the baseball, and tried to understand them.

*Well... first of all, when I first came to Korea, I started to try to get close with the teammates because I needed, I needed to know like what's coming, you know, in the baseball wise, because that's my job. They are the ones I need to trust and rely on.*

*I honestly trust nobody in Korea. Especially anyone from front office. They approach to me, smile, and ask me whether I am okay. Very nicely. Then, they turn back and say bad things about me. They lost credits from me. I think trust is very important. Especially me being here alone, I have not many people I can trust. Probably few of my teammates, that's it. I speak to my agent, and that's about it.*

*I think my thing was that I tried not to use my translator. As much. Even when I try to speak, teach or do something with the teammates, how to make adjustment, I try to explain the best way I can, of course, they have hard time to understand without a translator, but you know translator might put in nice words or like different words, and I want him to catch up from my own words. Because it's easier to communicate to the players with your own words rather than using a translator, and I think it has been big for me, me earning that trust from my teammates. First, it's just simple great relationship, and then, I earn my trust, that helps the relationship better and*

*helps me to explain to them and understand better, and trust. I feel like sometimes, they... I'm not saying this happened to our team or me, but just saying I feel like their culture here, if hitting coach says something to a hitter, it will be like hey, do this. Why? Just do it. It's going to help you. Right? Player will do it, but they don't really trust it. And if you are not going to trust it, you are not going to get better at it, or it's not going to work for you. So I feel like first, get into, player to trust you, it's very important and it's huge for that player to put that work in it. I don't know if that makes sense.*

### **4.3. Adaptation Process (Internal & External)**

After analyzing the factors of internal adaptation and external adaptation, the coding process has been carried out in order to study the adaptation process. Most frequently and repeatedly cited factors were researched and went through the interviews to find out the weight within the interview content.



**Table 6***Most frequently mentioned Factors by the Groups*

	Past Korea/ KBO experience	Current Korea/ KBO experience
Internal	Teammates	Ball & Ground conditions
External	Foods	Culture in general
Challenges & Difficulties	Family & Language	Trust & Language

#### **4.3.1. Past Korea/KBO experienced players**

Among the factors mentioned throughout the research, the foreign players who lived in Korea in the past and played KBO in the past expressed that the adaptation process was mainly affected by ‘Supportive and Family-like Teammates’, ‘Healthy but Spicy Foods’, and ‘Challenging and Difficult Language, and Homesick and Missing Family’. Out of three main influential factors, the research interviews were heavily weighted on external factors, especially the ‘Healthy but Spicy Foods’.

Foreign players who lived in Korea in the past indicated that the adaptation process was mainly carried out and progressed through food and off-field actions. This participant emphasized on the food factor that has helped to adapt faster and to adjust effortlessly.

The most frequently cited theme within ‘Best part of Korea (On-field)’ was Teammates.

*Yeah, for sure. They are great people. Not just on the field and stuff, but also off the field. The relationship just keeps on, and they care about you, and I care them. They are great people. Um. I pretty much have great relationship with entire teammates. Because it's sometimes hard, because sometime on the interview, people ask me who is the best friend or teammates, and I don't know who to say because I have such great relationship with everyone in the team. (laugh) And, when that happens, I feel like I'm in the right spot.*

The most frequently cited theme within ‘Best part of Korea (Off-field)’ was Food.

*I feel like that has been great over here. I love the fans here. But, off the field, obviously, Korean barbecue. (laugh) the food is good here. Yeah, I go Korean barbecue pretty much every night. I probably go to a barbecue place at least 3 times a week.*

The most frequently cited theme within ‘Challenge & Difficulties’ was Family and Language.

*Um... we don't know yet. Obviously we want our family to come when it allows. But once they come, they have to 14 days quarantine. So, I don't want my family to do that. Because we have new baby, so it's hard. Maybe*

*her grandma can come with, but sometime else, but they are not allowed to stay together because they are not my direct family. Only my wife and son can stay at apartment, my apartment. Then the rest of family has to stay at the Korean facility for the quarantine. That's not very fun.*

*um... you said it. I think my thing was that I tried not to use my translator. As much. Even when I try to speak, teach or do something with the teammates, how to make adjustment, I try to explain the best way I can, of course, they have hard time to understand without a translator, but you know translator might put in nice words or like different words, and I want him to catch up from my own words.*

Under higher order theme, 'Best part of Korea (on-field)', 'Best part of Korea (off-field)', and 'Challenges and Difficulties' are categorized to identify the positive and negative factors affecting the adaptation process. Each categories have low order theme as listed factors such as fans, teammates, food, culture, Korea baseball, language, family, and living environment. The most frequently cited themes were teammates (on-field), foods (off-field), and family and language (challenge), revealing listed factors have significant impact and influence on foreign players' adaptation process positively and negatively.

By looking at the frequency of mentioned key words and seeing how

much the participants are putting weights on certain area of adaptation, the researcher could analyze that 'Past Korea/KBO experienced players' group focused more on external factors on the adaptation process than internal factors.

#### **4.3.2. Current Korea/KBO experience players**

The foreign players who are currently living and playing in Korea had different perspectives. The adaptation process was more focused on the internal factors (on-field), and had vast content and information to share about their thoughts on internal factors, how the factors affect their performance and game results.

The participants emphasized on the ball, baseball style, and baseball-field condition factors, rather than living environment and cultural factors. Although, the common factors were mentioned, baseball habit and trust factors were only mentioned from the foreign players who are currently playing in KBO league.

The most frequently cited theme within 'Best part of Korea (On-field)' was balls and field conditions.

*Anyway, back to baseball talk, I want to say Korean mound is much*

*more soft. So whenever you step on, it goes down. It's like cushion. You know, it goes in deeper. That's big difference as a pitcher. The mound difference, let's say you are used to pitch from the hard mound and you step on the mound, it automatically pushes you to the front as you are jumping toward the plate in the states. But, In Korea, you cannot jump because it's too soft. You just go into deep downside, so it kind of stops you from jumping forward.*

*So that's why U.S. baseball has more velocity and more power pitchers, but Korea baseball, because the mound stops you, and break you, I think that's the reason why they use lot of breaking ball.*

*I would say... grass, maybe? Korean grass, they are more tight? So, they don't roll very well. Balls when you roll it, US grass, it's shorter and tighter, but Korean grass it's longer, and they hold the balls.*

The most frequently cited theme within 'Best part of Korea (Off-field)' from the foreign players who are currently playing in Korea was culture.

*When I woke up, it's different. When you looked out to the window, it's different. It's city! Seoul. And, out on the window, there were all the tall buildings, and lots of cars, people walking around, running around, and all. Back in the states, comparing, when I looked out to the window, there's trees, birds, and dog running around, my kid screaming. Naturally and unnaturally, I was adapting it and absorbed by the culture every day.*

*When you go out to another stadium for the away games, my family can always take KTX and come in like 1-2 hours. Even though, it may be far away, but it doesn't feel that far. You know. Like in the states, when your family try to come to away game, it's 4-5 hours by car at minimum. For the longer ride, it takes 10 plus hours, so it's pretty hard to invite your family to the games in the states, especially the away games.*

The most frequently cited theme within 'Challenge & Difficulties' from the foreign players who are currently playing in Korea was getting trust or knowing someone who can trust, and language.

*Um... you said it. I think my thing was that I tried not to use my translator. As much. Even when I try to speak, teach or do something with the teammates, how to make adjustment, I try to explain the best way I can, of course, they have hard time to understand without a translator, but you know translator might put in nice words or like different words, and I want him to catch up from my own words. Because it's easier to communicate to the players with your own words rather than using a translator, and I think it has been big for me, me earning that trust from my teammates.*

*First, it's just simple great relationship, and then, I earn my trust, that helps the relationship better and helps me to explain to them and understand better, and trust. I feel like sometimes, they... I'm not saying this happened to our team or me, but just saying I feel like their culture here,*

*if hitting coach says something to a hitter, it will be like hey, do this. Why? Just do it. It's going to help you. Right? Player will do it, but they don't really trust it. And if you are not going to trust it, you are not going to get better at it, or it's not going to work for you. So I feel like first, get into, player to trust you, it's very important and it's huge for that player to put that work in it. I don't know if that makes sense.*

By looking at some of the factors that can be compared between the foreign players who lived and played in Korea in the past, and the ones who are currently living and playing in Korea, there are significant difference. The participants who are currently playing in Korea explored more internal adaptation factors to go through the adaptation process, and focused to internal factors to maximize their baseball performance.

#### **4.4. The Consequences of Adaptation**

By comparing the results derived from the data analysis procedures and the participants' league statistical numbers, there was a certain inexpressible tendency.

**Table 7***Statistics of the foreign players who participated in the research*

Name	Position	Year in Korea	ERA <sup>②</sup>	W <sup>③</sup>	L <sup>④</sup>	IP <sup>⑤</sup>	R <sup>⑥</sup>	ER <sup>⑦</sup>	H <sup>⑧</sup>	HR <sup>⑨</sup>	BB <sup>⑩</sup>	SO <sup>⑪</sup>
Player A	Pitcher	2017-2020	3.57	9	5	106	44	42	97	6	40	104
Player B	Pitcher	2019-2020	2.02	12	5	151	46	34	129	6	24	111
Player C	Pitcher	2016	5.30	7	10	168	111	99	193	23	63	151

Name	Position	Year in Korea	AVG <sup>⑫</sup>	OPS <sup>⑬</sup>	H	R	HR	RBI <sup>⑭</sup>	BB	SO
Player D	Hitter	2017-2020	0.347	1.091	182	109	45	127	59	124
Player E	Hitter	2018	0.274	0.758	54	17	9	36	14	46

Above chart shows the statistical numbers of the foreign players who participated the interview with the researcher. Player A, B, and D have re-signed the contract from the past, and Player C and E had single year contract with the team. For the Player C, he had issues adapting to KBO league and Korean culture internally and externally, consequently could not finish the season and left the country. For the Player E, he was favor to the general Korean culture, externally, on the other hand, could not agree to the KBO culture, internal adaptation.

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② ERA: Earned Run Average

③ W: Win

④ L: Loss

⑤ IP: Innings Pitched

⑥ R: Runs allowed

⑦ ER: Earned Run

⑧ H: Hit

⑨ HR: Home Run

⑩ BB: Walk

⑪ SO: Strikeout

⑫ AVG: Batting Average

⑬ OPS: On-base Plus Slugging

⑭ RBI: Runs Batted In



**Table 8**

*The relationship between the participants' adaptation, performance, and consequence*

Focus	Adaptation Factors		Performance	Consequence
	Internal	External		
Player A	O	O	Good	Re-signed
Player B	O	X	Good	Re-signed
Player C	X	X	Bad	X
Player D	O	O	Good	Re-signed
Player E	X	O	Bad	X

Among the participants' findings, the foreign players who focus on internal adaptation and external adaptation tend to have the best outcome of having good performance, which lead to good consequences of re-signing another contracts with the teams.

The foreign players who focus on only internal adaptation and have difficulties with external adaptation depicted that the performance had a tendency to show good, or above average. Good or above average level performance often lead to good consequences of re-signing another contract with the teams.

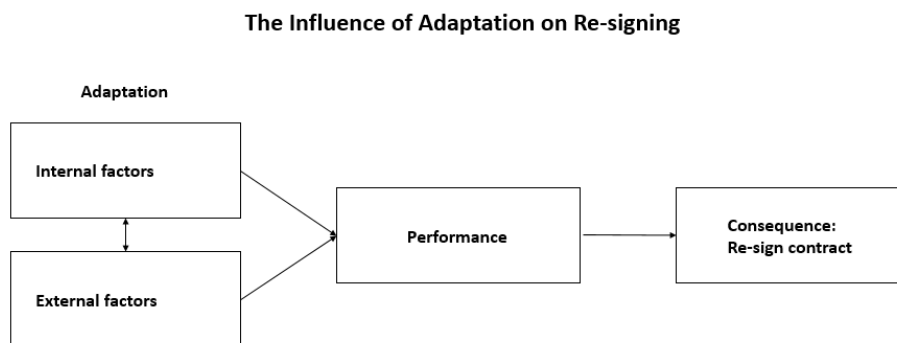
The foreign players who had no trouble adapting to external factors

whereas not paying attention to the internal adaptation factors commonly show poor performance. Despite of the foreign players' affection for Korea culture, players end up with not realizing the difference of baseball culture between where they played in the past and KBO league. Which explicitly indicates through their performance and statistical numbers, and outcome of re-signing turn out to be negative.

Lastly, the foreign players, who does not pay attention to both internal and external adaptation factors and have difficulties adapting to both internal and external surroundings, result in having poor performance and low statistical numbers and outcome of re-signing turn out to be negative.

#### **Figure 4**

*The influence of adaptation on re-signing*



## **Chapter 5. Discussion and Conclusion**

### **5.1. Discussion**

In this study, content and frequency analysis were employed to explore and to compare foreign players' adaptation process in Korea Baseball Organization (KBO). This investigation sought to go beyond identifying "adaptation factors" by comparing the content and quantity of demands within a conceptual framework based on contemporary 'cross-cultural adaptation' theory. Indeed, while at first glance the results of the study may appear similar to those of previous research, it is worth emphasizing that the focus here was not on identifying adaptation stages but finding out the factors in detail. This unique approach revealed some insightful trends that have important implications for adaptation research and elite athletes' migration in sport.

Aforementioned international labor migration theory emphasized that the commercialization of sports as a product increased the perceived need of teams to invest in more finished or complete players (Dobson & Goddard, 2001). KBO teams seek for more established players resulted in recruiting players from overseas with outstanding career based on the statistical

numbers. However, this research revealed that the recruiting procedure should not be carried out only based on the statistical information. The findings indicated that the numbers on previous career only indicated the capability of performance aspect of the players, whereas, how much performance the players are able to show in different culture depended on the adaptation. With research's findings, the researcher's suggestion to all KBO teams on the process of foreign player recruitment, the statistical information can become a surface information to filter out the candidates out from uncountable number of players in the market. After filtering out from the statistical data, teams could ask around and collect information about the players' behavior inside and outside of the stadium. People around the players should know how the players behave. Inside of the stadium, players could talk about the field, teammates, baseball culture, staffs, and balls. Such factors can be related to internal factors, which influence the adaptation. In addition, players talk about foods, living community, family, general culture, and so on. Those external factors also affect players' performance and adaptation. KBO teams can analyze the ability to adapt through asking around and interview with the players so that they can predict the performance when they come to Korea.

From the adaptation theory where it highlighted the importance of psychological comfort in various aspects of the country (Black, 1998), both internal and external factors indicated significant role on the influence of adaptation. Fiske (2004) stated the adaptation as physiological or

psychological responses to significant events and unfamiliar stressors, where people must engage in an active effort to restore balance in their lives. Foreign players did not specifically mentioned the factors as significant events or unfamiliar stressors, however, they admitted that the internal and external factors were important on the adaptation process. They also all agreed on the idea of Ncholson & Imaizumi (1993) that the degree of adaptation serve as an important variable to determine whether they will be successful on performing the duty. From the findings, research proved that the adaptation affect performance of the foreign players, which also affected the consequences of adaptation as re-signing results.

When the performance is outstanding that adaptation does not even matter, that is completely different story. There were only few foreign players who were under the category every year, on the other hands, majority of foreign players who come to Korea are considered as AAAA type players, and those players are applicable to this research. Meaning that before they come to KBO league, they were in between the major league baseball level and the AAA level, the highest level of the minor league farm system. Teams stated that they have recruited players straight from the highest level of the league, Major League Baseball, and few of them have shown outstanding performance even though they have not shown any effort to adapt to the culture: internally and externally. From statistical stand of view, those examples are considered as an outliers who do not included by the majority.

In the future research, when there are enough number of samples and participants, the research could be carried out in quantitative form and few outliers are considered as above mentioned.

This study could suggest other sports or other league in Korea, try to discover foreign players' adaptation process and the connection with their re-signing plan. Within Korea professional sports leagues, K-league (soccer), KBL (basketball), and KOVO (volleyball) have foreign players on each teams. There are precedent research about foreign players' adaptation on K-league, however, the categorization and classification are different to this study. Different sports leagues will have different factors, especially, the internal factors on adaptation.

Outside of the country, NPB (Nippon Professional Baseball) in Japan recruits unlimited number of foreign players, and only able to play four players at a game. Under the similar circumstances of signing foreign players to improve the quality of the league, this research could apply to foreign players' adaptation in NPB. The adaptation factors will differ, adaptation process will vary, and the consequence of adaptation will be different.

The best league of baseball is MLB (Major League Baseball) in U.S. All the outstanding talents from the world sign with major league teams. Therefore, the teams are full of players with different background, culture,

and attitude. For MLB, majority of players will be foreign players, which could be interesting study to carry out. Since there are players from all around the world, adaptation could be altered to other subject to discover targeting MLB players.

With the consequences of adaptation, managerial implication and decision could be made. When the teams can predict foreign players' performance by their adaptation process. Internal and external adaptation could be analyzed separately, so that teams are able to observe which part foreign players paid more attention. If those foreign players made more efforts to internal adaptation rather than external adaptation, they have higher chance to have better performance and better season. If the foreign players paid more attention to external adaptation rather than internal adaptation, there is a risk of failure. This process could be carried out during the season to predict foreign players' performance and the effect on re-signing decision in the later of the season.

When the teams make decisions on re-signing foreign players after the season, teams could turn back and collect more data by observing foreign players' adaptation process. Researching which factors affected foreign players' adaptation and how, and which side foreign players put more weight between internal and external adaptation factors. This process will enable the teams to analyze and to collect data of foreign players' adaptation, and will

provide the solution of which part the teams should pay more attention.

From academic point of view, more data and interviews would have enriched the results and findings. However, with this data, researchers can observe foreign players' untouched area of performance. Professional athletes, especially the foreign players, do not commonly share their experience or thoughts to open public. The interviews were successfully carried out due to researcher's current occupational advantage. This data could become a foundation of future research on foreign players in overseas working environment, not only adaptation, but also cultural effects and performance.

## **5.2. Limitations and Future Directions**

Due to qualitative analysis' characteristic, this study cannot be generalized and define which factor influence the most. However, among the interview participants, the study indicates the tendency of which factors the re-signing foreign players pay more attention to compare to the foreign players who do not get another deal with the teams. In addition, due to characteristics of qualitative study, the participants were careful to provide the information at first, however, multiple sessions of interviews enabled to enhance the data. Few participants' interviews were redundant and replicate,



which limited the amount of information. For the interpretation of the data, there is possibility that researcher's analysis could not entirely represent participants' intention.

After several in-depth interviews, researcher found that this study could be carried out with quantitative research if there is enough foreign players who experienced Korea baseball. Quantitative research will enable to reveal which factor influence the most to the foreign players' re-signing and how significant the influence is. If the target becomes solely foreign players not restricted to Korea region, KBO, NPB, and CPBL, Asia foreign players in baseball market could be all sum up and interpreted in quantitative form of data. Since NPB has unlimited number of foreign players teams can sign, exclusively NPB market can become a target to create data with foreign players. For KBO market, the total number of foreign players in the past and in the future should be more than a hundred to qualify the quantitative research, therefore, it cannot be done right now.

As mentioned on above data interpretation, front office staffs and domestic player interview participants were neglected to provide their feedback and answers to the research questions. The reason is that some questions were directly linked with their strategies to help foreign players' adaptation process, and they did not want to reveal the tactics. Despite of anonymous interviews, due to very limited number of foreign player scouting

or related field people, they can identify who provided what answers from which team. Therefore, the answers from the front office staffs and foreign players related field staffs could only provide extremely limited information.

From Korean players' perspective, two interviews were conducted. Again, information was extremely limited due to their ignorant attitudes toward foreign players. Extremely obvious answers were provided such as language barrier and food difference as obstacles for foreign players, and no significant information was founded.

### **5.3. Conclusion**

The result indicates different groups focused on different factors: Past KBO group emphasized external factors, whereas Current KBO group focused on internal factors.

By comparing the statistical data and the history of re-signing records, the participants who focused on internal adaptation factors, Current KBO group, tend to have better performance and have higher chance to re-sign. The participants who paid more attention to external factors, Past KBO group, tend to have poor performance and less chance to re-sign.

The chances of re-signing the following contracts depended on the performance level through adaptation factors, and adaptation on internal factors were significantly more important than the adaptation on external factors.

To summarize the key findings, the foreign players who had no difficulties in adapting baseball related factors and focused on adaptation through internal factors: Teammates, Team environment, Fans, Baseball culture, Equipment, Field condition, and balls, tend to have better performance, which linked to better consequence of re-signing another contract with the team. The internal adaptation factors appear to be more important than the external adaptation factors in order to achieve higher performance goals and to pursue the foreign players' longer baseball career in overseas environment.

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# Appendix

## Interview Questions (to Foreign Players):

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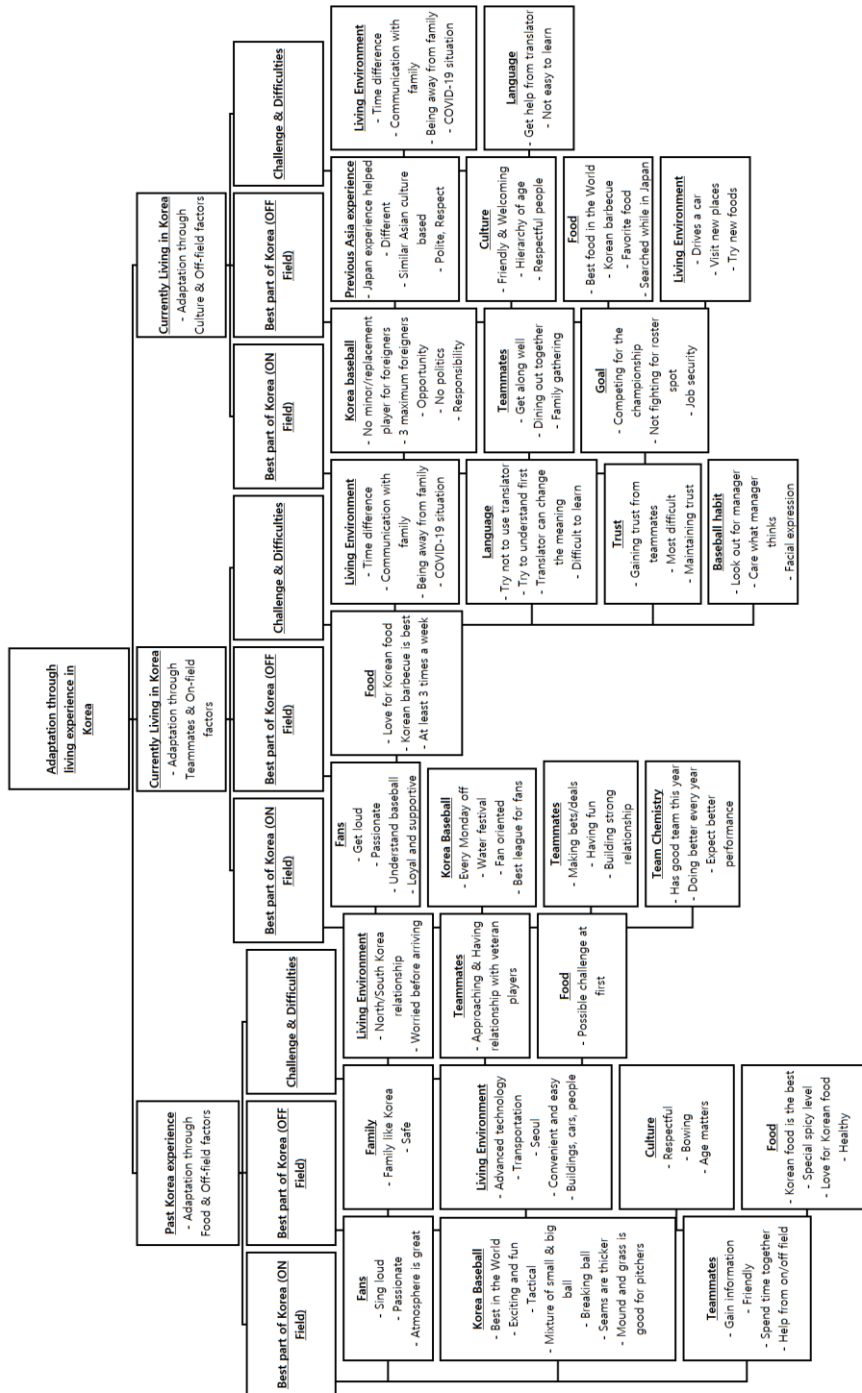
Research Question	Interview Questions
1	1. Tell me about your Korean life so far.
1	2. What does the term “adaptation” bring to mind?
1	3. How do you feel about Korean baseball culture?
1	4. How do you feel about Korean culture in general?
1	5. What have you tried to adapt to Korean baseball culture and Korean culture in general?
1	6. What factors influence the adaptation in general?
1	7. What factors influence your adaptation, baseball related (inside of baseball)?
1	8. What factors influence your adaptation, outside of baseball?
2	9. How the factors influence your life on baseball and everyday life?
2	10. How does the adaptation affect your performance?
2	11. How often do you feel you are adapting to the culture?
2	12. What has been the easiest or the most difficult for you to adapt in Korea?
3	13. In general, how would you evaluate your adaptation process in Korea?
3	14. What are/were the most valuable learning experience in Korea or Korean baseball?
3	15. How the effect of your adaptation on performance affect re-signing decision?
3	16. Has Korea baseball and culture experience and adaptation helped you to become fearless on browsing another international signing option?

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## Interview Questions (to Front office staffs & Domestic Players):

Research Question	Interview Questions
1	1. Tell me about memorable foreign player with your team and the reason (preferably adaptation related).
1	2. What does the term “adaptation” bring to mind?
1	3. What factors do you think influence the adaptation of foreign players in general?
1	4. What factors influence foreign player’s adaptation, baseball related?
1	5. What factors influence foreign player’s adaptation, outside of baseball?
1	6. Which factors (inside or outside of stadium) is more important than the other factor?
2	7. What have you tried to help foreign player to adapt to baseball culture?
2	8. How the factors influence foreign player’s life on baseball and everyday life?
2	9. What have you tried to help foreign player to adapt the culture, outside of baseball?
2	10. What has been the easiest or the most difficult for foreign player to adapt in Korea?
2	11. In general, how would you evaluate foreign player’s adaptation process in Korea?
2	12. How does the adaptation affect foreign player’s performance?
3	13. How do you evaluate the adaptation of foreign player?
3	14. Tell me how you evaluate the foreign player other than performance.
3	15. When foreign player performs well, but not do well on adaptation, how does it affect re-signing process?
3	16. When foreign player performs poor, but do well on adaptation, how does it affect re-signing process?
3	17. How the effect of foreign player’s adaptation on performance affect team’s re-signing process, intension, and decision?

# Coding Process: Hierarchy Format



## Abstract (국문초록)

# 한국프로야구 (KBO) 외국인 선수들의 재계약에 적응이 미치는 영향

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본 연구는 한국야구협회(KBO, Korea Baseball Organization)에 속한 외국인 선수들의 적응 요인, 적응 과정 그리고 적응 결과에 관한 연구이다. 연구에서의 '적응'은 필드 안팎에서 외국인 선수들이 경험하는 야구 문화와 현지 문화에 대한 적응으로 한정한다.

연구는 다음과 같이 진행되었다. 먼저 과거에 KBO에서 뛰었거나 현재 뛰고있는 외국인 선수들을 대상으로 반구조적 형식의 심층 인터뷰를 진행하였다. 인터뷰 전사는 주제 범주 위계를 분석하는데 사용하였다. '한국이 적응에 유리한 부분 (필드 안 내부 요인)', '한국이 적응에 유리한 부분 (필드 밖 외부 요인)', 그리고 '도전과 어려움'을 적응 과정의 긍정 및 부정 요인을 식별하는 가장 상위 범주로 정의하였다. 각 범주는 팀원, 팀 환경, 팬, 야구 문화, 장비, 그라운드 컨디션, 야구공, 음식, 생활 환경, 일반적인 한국 문화, 언어, 가족, 시차, 신뢰와 같은 하위 주제로 분류하여 연구되었다. 적응 과정을 확인하기 위해 인터뷰에서 가장 많이 언급된 요인들이 어떤 비중을 차지하였는지 코딩 작업을 통해 확인하였고, 이후 적응 결과로 평가될 수 있는 해당 선수의 재계약 데이터를 비교하였다.

인터뷰에 따라 과거에 KBO에서 뛰었던 선수들과 현재 KBO



에서 뛰고 있는 선수들이 각기 다른 요인에 초점을 맞추고 있다는 결과가 도출되었다. 과거에 KBO에서 뛰었던 선수들이 가장 많이 언급한 주제는 팀원, 음식, 가족, 언어였다. 현재 KBO에서 뛰고 있는 선수들이 가장 많이 언급한 주제는 야구공, 그라운드 컨디션, 일반적인 한국 문화, 신뢰였다. 과거에 KBO에서 뛰었던 선수들이 외부 요인을 강조한 반면, 현재 KBO에서 뛰고 있는 선수들은 내부 요인을 강조했다.

인터뷰 데이터와 재계약 데이터를 비교한 결과, 내부 적응 요인을 강조한 현재 KBO에서 뛰고 있는 선수 그룹이 더 좋은 경기 성과를 냈으며 재계약의 가능성 또한 높은 경향이 나타났다. 외부 적응 요인을 강조한 과거 KBO에서 뛰었던 선수 그룹은 상대적으로 경기 성과가 낮았으며 재계약의 기회 또한 적었다.

재계약의 기회는 적응 요인 중 하나인 경기 성과 정도에 달려 있었으며, 경기 성과에 미치는 영향은 내부 요인에 대한 적응이 외부 요인에 대한 적응보다 상대적으로 더욱 중요했다.

**주요어:** 적응, 운동선수, 외국인 선수, 한국야구협회, KBO, 질적연구, 인터뷰, 내부, 외부

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