

A Look at the Leagues that Saved Baseball on Two Continents

Nate Manuel for *American Baseball Perspective*

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By the mid-2000s, even its most ardent supporters could read the writing on Major League Baseball's wall. A lack of fiscal discipline had pushed player salary expectations to a point where only a select few teams could afford to field a competitive roster. Teams counting on gate and media revenue to foot the bill were in for a shock. After the heady highs of the 90s "Age of Offense", fans disillusioned from countless scandals and revelations of steroid abuse expressed their frustration by staying home and spending their merchandising dollars elsewhere. With ratings sharply in decline, lucrative national and regional broadcast deals became hard to come by. In May of 2004, the first two teams missed payroll. MLB covered for the clubs, claiming it was a temporary setback. But another three teams would come up short before the season was over.



Eight years ago, pro baseball in America was seemingly in jeopardy

By mid-2006, half of the league's teams were in default, and seven had declared bankruptcy. Negotiations with the Players' Association went nowhere. MLBPA took a hard line: Pay us what we deserve or we'll find someone else who will. The intractability of both sides sealed the league's fate. On November 5, 2006, the official announcement came: MLB was suspending all operations indefinitely. The plan was to restructure the league's business model, work out a new unified media contract model, and resume play in 2007 after a brief delay from the normal start of the season.



PEBA founder John Rodriguez, Sr.

Of course, that optimistic forecast never came to pass. The Major League Baseball brand had become toxic to broadcasters and advertisers. The league was unable to secure enough partners to bankroll the season. In January 2007, a federal judge ruled that existing contracts between MLB teams and players were null and void, effectively disbanding the league. The unthinkable had transpired; our nation had turned its back on its pastime.

Or had it? In 2000, maverick fitness magnate [John Rodriguez, Sr.](#) recognized an opportunity in MLB's decline. He began vigorously courting other successful businessmen, pitching his idea for a rival baseball league. Many observers scoffed at the effort; after all, Major League Baseball hadn't faced legitimate competition in over 100 years. But Rodriguez, Sr. was able to leverage his fortune and reputation for business success with enough

leaders of industry to put the plan in motion.

From the decay of MLB's financial excesses, the [Planetary Extreme Baseball Alliance](#) was born. The fledgling league's ambitious plans included an inaugural season with 24 teams, most based in mid-market U.S. cities. Ballpark construction projects began as early as 2003, largely funded from the pockets of team owners. That same year, Rodriguez, Sr. purchased the [Atlantic, Frontier](#) and [Northern](#) independent baseball leagues. In 2004, Rodriguez, Sr. made waves by convincing a number of top prospects to forego entering the MLB draft in favor of signing with his independent league teams with a promise that they



The PEBA arose from MLB's ashes

would be the first stars of a new professional baseball league. Even more draft-eligible players chose the independent leagues over the MLB draft in 2005, and virtually all went that route in 2006.

Rodriguez, Sr. blamed both MLB owners and players for the league's demise. He was adamant about keeping established MLB players, whom we viewed as hopelessly self-interested and entitled, out of his new league. Fiscal realities forced him to take a softer line with MLB owners and management who wished to jump ship and invest in the PEBA. Recognizing the end was near, some prominent MLB executives took the leap of faith.



The league's growth has surpassed all expectations

By December 2006, the infrastructure was in place for the PEBA to hold its inaugural draft. Amidst predictions of spectacular failure, the league's first season began in April of 2007. The new professional home of our nation's pastime has thrived beyond the hopes of the most optimistic observers – and there were precious few optimistic observers at the start. Attendance has increased dramatically, with over 60,000,000 fans visiting PEBA ballparks last season. The public's quick acceptance has enabled the league to strike favorable broadcast deals. Success built upon a foundation of mutual respect between players and owners, fiscal restraint and judicious application of resources has vaulted the league into the #4 spot amongst the world's most profitable professional sports leagues, trailing only the German [Bundesliga](#) and English [Premier League](#) soccer powerhouses, and rapidly closing in on the flagging [National Football League](#).

The PEBA's success has had positive reverberations globally. The league's lone non-U.S.-based team, the London Underground, has sparked European interest in baseball. Connections with foreign leagues like Mexico's [Alianza Béisbol Al Sur de la Frontera](#), the Dominican Republic's [Liga Dominicana de Béisbol Invernal](#) and Puerto Rico's [San Juan Winter League](#) have provided the PEBA with additional talent pools.

But far and away the most tangible impact of the PEBA's global outreach has been in Japan. In 2009, the PEBA purchased a controlling stake in the [League of the Rising Sun](#). Coincidentally, the 12-team LRS had also formed in 2007, three seasons after Nippon Professional Baseball shuttered its doors. The LRS was not nearly as successful with its launch and the league was in danger of folding before the PEBA swooped in to provide financial backing. Even so, a number of teams were forced to relocate to cities better equipped to support professional franchises. Yet the move has paid off. Enthusiasm for baseball has rekindled in a culture traditionally passionate for the sport. The LRS has taken off financially since 2010, its first season under the auspices of the PEBA – and returned the PEBA a healthy profit on its investment in the process.



The PEBA purchased the LRS in 2010

We're entering the eleventh seasons of these brave new leagues. One revitalized western fervor for baseball; the other did the same for the game in the Far East. Predictions of failure have fallen by the wayside; fans have clearly embraced the new homes of their beloved sport. The 24 teams of the PEBA and 12 teams of the LRS have accumulated history and cultivated fan bases. It's a unique opportunity to witness the birth of new rivalries and the establishment of reputations firsthand. One wonders if 19th century fans experienced the same sense of history unfolding before their eyes as they took in those early MLB games. Secure in the knowledge that the PEBA and LRS are here to stay, let's look back at the accomplishments to date for each of the teams that comprise the leagues.

Stats reflect play through the 2016 season

The Teams of the Planetary Extreme Baseball Alliance

The PEBA's 24 teams are broken into two leagues, Imperial and Sovereign, each featuring two divisions containing six teams apiece. Geographically, Imperial League teams mostly hail from the east and south of the U.S., while Midwestern, central plains, and western cities play host to Sovereign League teams. Both leagues employ a designated hitter.

A 162-game schedule that begins shortly after the arrival of spring is familiar to North American fans. However, unlike the old MLB scheduling format, there is no intermingling of play between the two leagues – the only time an IL and SL team will face one another is in the Planetary Extreme Championship, the PEBA's best-of-seven championship series. To reach the PEC, teams must win both a best of five Division Series and a best-of-seven Alliance Tournament. The winner of the PEC receives the Rodriguez Cup.

Most PEBA rules closely mirror MLB's. Subtle differences include the aforementioned lack of interleague play, a 14- instead of 15-day disabled list, and the ability for teams to trade draft picks. There are four levels of minors serving the league (Triple-A, Double-A, High-A, Short Season-A). Most players enter the PEBA through the draft. The [United States Collegiate Baseball Association](#) and the [Interscholastic Federation](#) of high school teams are the authorized pools from which eligible draftees come.

At the end of a season, the league bestows five awards. A Golden Arm Award is presented to each league's best pitcher, while a Royal Raker and Wunderkind Award is granted to the top hitter and rookie from each league. Superior defense is recognized with an All-Leather Award. Recently, a fifth award for top bullpen arms, the Shutdown Reliever, was added.



Pan-Atlantic Division



[Arlington Bureaucrats](#)

Host City: <u>Arlington, VA</u>		Ballpark: <u>Jane P. Woods Memorial Stadium</u>
Owner: <u>Daniel J. Woods, Jr.</u>		General Manager: <u>Dan DiVincenzo</u>
Franchise record: 908-712	Division titles: 2	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 110-52 (2013)	Playoff appearances: 6	Championships: 1 (2013)

Located just two miles west of the Potomac River and our nation's capitol, picturesque [Arlington, VA](#) is the home to the 2013 Rodriguez Cup-defending Bureaucrats. Leading the offense is [Rob Raines](#), one of the PEBA's top hitters and winner of three consecutive IL Royal Rakers (2013-15). Raines is proof that gems exist late in the draft – he was the 2,104th selection in the inaugural draft. [Félix “Bump” Ortega](#), acquired in a deadline trade with Omaha in 2011, is the ace of the staff. Fans have embraced the ‘Crats – over 3.7 million visited Jane P. Woods Memorial Stadium last season.

Fun fact: Team owner Daniel J. Woods, Jr. is the son of Senator [Daniel J. Woods](#) (R-KY), who passed away last August. Senator Woods, who purchased the team in 2009, went [missing](#) along with his wife in October of 2012. The senator turned up [alive and unharmed](#) in the summer of 2014. Sadly, his wife, Jane P. Woods, was found dead several hours after Senator Woods's reappearance. Arlington's ballpark, which had formerly been known as The Ballpark in Arlington, changed its name for the 2015 season to honor Mrs. Woods.



[Connecticut Nutmeggers](#)

Host City: <u>Bridgeport, CT</u>		Ballpark: <u>Constitution Field</u>
Owner: <u>Paul L. Woodward</u>		General Manager: <u>Frank Esselink</u>
Franchise record: 721-899	Division titles: 0	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 78-84 ('10, '11, '14, '15)	Playoff appearances: 0	Championships: 0

It has been a tough go for baseball in Connecticut. It was four seasons before the Nutmeggers managed

a winning percentage over .400, and they have yet to reach the .500 mark, though they came ever so close in 2016. Prior to last season, the club seemed stuck on 78 wins, a pinnacle they reached in four separate seasons before finally climbing two wins higher. Yet there are signs of change for the better, marked from the arrival of owner Paul Woodward in 2013. Woodward has opened his wallet and brought stars like SS [George Riley](#), DH [Octávio “El Chupacabra” Pexego](#), and SP [Pedro “Rival” Barrón](#) into town. Though these pricey acquisitions didn’t pay dividends, it’s a sign that the new management will be more aggressive about fielding a competitive team than in years past.

Fun fact: Former major leaguer and [Stamford, CT](#) native [Bobby Valentine](#) began the effort to bring a PEBA team in Stamford. Alarmed at the possibility of Valentine bringing his antics to the new top level of baseball, several groups in Connecticut put in bids for the franchise. [Bridgeport](#)’s relatively obscure group, Friends of the Revolution, eventually won out over more notable bidders from [Hartford](#), [New Haven](#), and [Greenwich](#) due to the ease with which Bridgeport could procure a site and funds for stadium construction. The individuals at the upper levels of team management have been in flux ever since.



[Gloucester Fishermen](#)

Host City: Gloucester, MA		Ballpark: Dockside Coliseum
Owner: Hal Morrissey		General Manager: Paul Moots
Franchise record: 808-813	Division titles: 1	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 95-67 (2015)	Playoff appearances: 3	Championships: 1 (2015)

Gloucester has experimented with a few different general managers, yet each has shared a relatively *laissez-faire* style of management. For better or for worse, that approach has resulted in consistent semi-competitiveness for the Fish, but only one playoff appearance. You would expect a team boasting a true ace ([Manuel “Mayor” Corona](#)), a burgeoning star in the outfield ([William McKee](#)), and a 2014 IL Wunderkind candidate ([Mark “A-Jo” Adams](#)) would be a force to be reckoned with. It took GM Paul Moots’s arrival in 2015 to turn expectation into reality. In his first year on the job, Moots led the perennially underachieving Fishermen to their first Pan-Atlantic division title. Despite a devastating arm injury suffered by Mayor Corona in the IL Alliance Tournament, the never-say-die Fishermen defied expectations and captured their first Rodriguez Cup.

Fun fact: Real estate developer and former New Jersey Nets owner [Bruce Ratner](#) was keen on bringing an inaugural PEBA franchise to New York City. Ratner would have dubbed the club the “Liberty” and intended to make the baseball team part of his planned [Barclays Center](#) sports, business and residential complex in [Prospect Heights](#). Complications with the Barclays Center project caused Ratner to jettison

his plans. A handful of minority investors in Ratner's group scrambled to find an alternate host city, eventually settling on Gloucester thanks in large part to the availability of a pre-existing ballpark.



[London Underground](#)

Host City: <u>London, England</u>		Ballpark: <u>Wembley Stadium</u>
Owner: <u>Sir John Fowler Jr.</u>		General Manager: <u>Nigel Laverick</u>
Franchise record: 753-867	Division titles: 1	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 90-72 (2010)	Playoff appearances: 1	Championships: 0

London is the lone PEBA franchise based outside of the United States. Interesting Brits in America's pastime is a noble endeavor that hasn't always met with success. While luxurious [Wembley Stadium](#), which is undergoing an expansion and the addition of a retractable roof for the 2017 season, fills to capacity for soccer matches and concerts, the Underground haven't managed to crack the three million mark in attendance. New GM Nigel Laverick has been quick to put his stamp on the team since arriving from the LRS, where he filled the same role for the [Kuwana Steel Dragons](#). Laverick has placed an emphasis on cultivating England-born talent in an effort to attract the attention of Londoners. More important to the franchise's goal of charging up European fans is the Underground's cadre of young pitching talent, headlined by [Hiroyuki "Zippo" Nii](#).

Fun fact: So much clean-up and grounds repair was required after a June, 2008 [Foo Fighters](#) concert that a three-game home series scheduled to start two days after the concert had to be relocated to Manchester. Over the years, several Underground home games have been rescheduled to suit the needs of various sporting and musical events.



[Manchester Maulers](#)

Host City: <u>Manchester, NH</u>	Ballpark: <u>Whiten Field</u>
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Owner: Arturo Bruto		General Manager: Morris Cooley
Franchise record: 788-852	Division titles: 2	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 96-66 (2012)	Playoff appearances: 3	Championships: 0

Few franchises have experienced such quick back and forth swings from the heady joy of success to the bitter disappointment of defeat than the Maulers. Manchester was kicked around by their Pan-Atlantic counterparts for two seasons before improving a whopping 20 games to claim the 2009 division crown. The next season, they lost 100 games and finished dead last in the division. Two 90+-win campaigns followed before a disheartening 5th place divisional finish in 2013. The pendulum swung once again in 2014, with Manchester jumping back over .500, and then again in 2015 (77-85). Being a Maulers fan is anything but dull – you never know what the future holds for your team!

Fun fact: Current GM [Morris Cooley](#) served as scouting director during [Jeff Dudas](#)'s tenure as GM. When Dudas was [relieved of his GM duties](#) in 2011 by owner Artie Bruto, Cooley, who many felt was being [held back](#) by Dudas, was appointed to take his place. Dudas was reassigned to serve as an area scout for the organization's Alaskan short season farm team. He has since risen through the rank and now occupies Cooley's former role of team scouting director.



[New Jersey Hitmen](#)

Host City: Trenton, NJ		Ballpark: Mercer County Waterfront Park
Owner: Michael Czosnyka		General Manager: Holleb Kasprowicz
Franchise record: 875-747	Division titles: 4	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 108-54 (2007)	Playoff appearances: 7	Championships: 1 (2007)

The Hitmen are a shining example of the multicultural outreach of baseball. Vasily Prokhorov, cousin of Russian billionaire [Mikhail Prokhorov](#) and co-chair of the [Cultural Initiatives Foundation](#), became aware of efforts to form a new American professional baseball league in 2001. Vasily convinced Mikhail that investing in a startup franchise and bringing European players to the league would spread cultural awareness. Mikhail authorized Vasily to set up the New Jersey Hitmen in order to gain a foothold in American sports. Their Eurocentric approach instantly paid dividends; New Jersey became the first PEBA team to hoist the Rodriguez Cup. The team has been to the playoffs six times since. The Prokhorovs became majority owners of the [New Jersey Nets](#) in 2010 and sold the Hitmen to current owner Holleb Kasprowicz in 2013 in order to focus on their basketball franchise.

Fun fact: The Hitmen debuted a new logo and new caps and jerseys for the 2014 season. While the designs have met with much approval, a number of gun control lobby groups have objected to what they view as a glorified depiction of firearms.

Dixie Division



[Charleston Statesmen](#)

Host City: <u>Charleston, SC</u>		Ballpark: <u>Moultrie Park</u>
Owner: <u>Charles Pinckney</u>		General Manager: <u>Zach Fried</u>
Franchise record: 991-629	Division titles: 4	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 111-51 ('09, 12)	Playoff appearances: 8	Championships: 2 ('10, '14)

No Imperial League team has a greater track record of success than the Statesmen. The team boasts the IL's best franchise record and has never finished below .500. But it was the promotion of Jon Constantine to the GM role after the 2008 season that vaulted Charleston to perennial dominance. Under Constantine's guidance, the Statesmen finished with less than 105 wins only three times. Ironically, two of those "blemishes," a 99-63 campaign in 2010 and a 98-64 record in 2014, also represent their two Planetary Extreme Championship seasons. Charleston is the only PEBA team to win multiple PECs. Golf club mogul [Charles Pinckney](#) isn't shy about using his vast resources to bring in the best players. The Statesmen made waves by signing [Conan McCullough](#), one of the PEBA's premiere pitchers, to a \$157 million contract. Though new GM Zach Fried just oversaw Charleston's rockiest season ever (81-81), commitment like that should keep the club at or near the top of the Dixie for the foreseeable future.

Fun fact: The designer of Moultrie Park, Constantine Development, is owned by Robert Constantine, brother of the team's former GM. Most agree that Moultrie Park, with its glorious view of the [Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge](#) over the [Cooper River](#), is one of the PEBA's most beautiful ballparks.



[Florida Featherheads](#)

Host City: <u>Jacksonville, FL</u>		Ballpark: <u>Farmer Field</u>
Owner: <u>Drew Streets</u>		General Manager: <u>Kevin Lewis</u>
Franchise record: 935-686	Division titles: 4	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 112-50 (2013)	Playoff appearances: 6	Championships: 1 (2011)

Sometimes, an ownership change can be just the thing to spark a franchise to new heights. DeLand Insurance CEO and Featherheads founding owner Peter Matulis exhausted much of his resources fighting a protracted battle against a group seeking to settle a Florida-based PEBA franchise in Miami (that group eventually settled on Charleston, WV as their home becoming the team now known as the [Alleghenies](#)). When cruise ship magnate [Drew Streets](#) purchased the team from Matulis after the 2008 season, he brought a vigorous new wave of energy and optimism with him. The following season, Florida finished .500 for the first time. They proceeded to rattle off four straight 100+-win seasons, including a Rodriguez Cup in 2011. Florida's success has touched every corner of the organization. Even their broadcast team has felt the effect; the [A.K. & Nelly Show](#) is the PEBA's top-rated locally produced radio show.

Fun fact: The nickname "Featherheads" pays homage to the rich [Timucua](#) heritage and Native American cultural presence in northeast Florida. Matulis was a staunch advocate of Native American rights. The team carries his original vision forward with a creed of pride, self-reliance, and ingenuity – traits shared by the Timucua of old.



[Kentucky Thoroughbreds](#)

Host City: <u>Lexington, KY</u>		Ballpark: <u>Churchill 1</u>
Owner: <u>Héctor Shatner</u>		General Manager: <u>Shawn Rankins</u>
Franchise record: 683-937	Division titles: 0	Planetary Extreme

Best season: 85-77 (2012)

Playoff appearances: 0

Championships: 0

If you're sleeping on the Thoroughbreds, you shouldn't be. Kentucky is a franchise that is easy to dismiss thanks to their poor track record (only one above-.500 season) and numerous public relations blunders. This is the club that thought it would be a good idea for [Mötley Crüe](#) and [Ozzy Osborne](#) to [play during the 7th inning stretch](#), after all. But look deeper. You'll discover Kentucky possesses [a healthy farm system](#), one that has already produced exciting young ballplayers like [Avery "Numbers" Parkinson](#), [Rafael "Gauntlet" Rodríguez](#), and [Larry "Schnozz" Schultz](#). They join former farm system graduates [Leslie "Three Finger" McDonald](#), [Edgar "Hammerhead" Valentín](#) and [Lawrence "Sticky Hands" Coleman](#) to form a potent punch. No team has done a better job of collecting young talent (and unique nicknames) as Kentucky has, portending a bright and tongue-twisting future for the Thoroughbreds.

Fun fact: Rumors still swirl around founding owner and former [Star Trek](#) star William "Bill" Shatner, who passed away on Aug. 8, 2014. Supposedly, he began his pursuit of a PEBA franchise on a dare from fellow actor Kevin Costner. Others claim he selected Lexington as the team's base due to his love of bourbon. Shatner got involved late in the process of the league's formation, and Churchill 1 suffered several construction delays. Kentucky was forced to play the first half of its inaugural season's home schedule at [Cliff Hagan Stadium](#), home of the [University of Kentucky](#) Wildcats baseball team, while work on Churchill 1 finished. Rumors also swirl about Bill's little-known son Héctor, who took over as team owner after Bill's passing. Whereas Bill had a reputation for loose living and even looser control of his team, Héctor Shatner is quickly demonstrating that the party ends under his term. He fired longtime GM Duane Rudis this off-season, replacing him with Shawn Rankins.



[New Orleans Trendsetters](#)

Host City: [New Orleans, LA](#)

Owner: [Jack Cobb](#)

Ballpark: [New Frontier Park](#)

General Manager: [Paul Tanner](#)

Franchise record: 773-847

Best season: 106-56 (2009)

Division titles: 2

Playoff appearances: 4

Planetary Extreme

Championships: 1 (2008)

The Trendsetters were the perfect salve to a city deeply wounded by [Hurricane Katrina](#). The [Spade](#) family brought baseball to Big Easy a year and a half after the devastation wrecked by the storm. Damage to the construction site of New Frontier Park forced the Trendsetters to play their first season at the home field of the [Tulane Jade Breakers](#), but despite the setbacks, baseball in New Orleans got off to a wildly successful start. The club won 392 games in its first four seasons and took the 2008 Planetary

Extreme Championship. It has been rougher going since then. New Orleans has finished in the bottom half of the Dixie every year since 2011, and the lack of success has been evident in declining attendance. Locals still remember how the Trendsetters helped bolster the community's spirits in the aftermath of Katrina, however. You can bet they'll be ready to support a resurgent Trendsetters club in the future.

Fun fact: No team boasts more unique characters in high positions than New Orleans. Former General Manager [Cooper Scott](#) may be one of the most colorful figures in the game. Amongst other things, he was known for wearing a flamboyant "[playa hat](#)" when meeting with the press. Scott took over when Paul Tanner [stepped down](#) as GM in 2012, but Tanner [returned](#) to his old role last season. Meanwhile, former PEBA shortstop and [general oddball Jack Cobb](#) [took over](#) ownership of the Trendsetters when the two Spade sons, Jeremy and Jacen, were deemed unfit for duty. Jeremy Spade remains in a coma, while Jacen Spade has been institutionalized.



[San Antonio Calzones of Laredo](#)

Host City: Laredo, TX		Ballpark: Elvian Fields
Owner: Cledus Snow		General Manager: Matt Higgins
Franchise record: 683-937	Division titles: 0	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 95-67 (2007)	Playoff appearances: 1	Championships: 0

When [Mötley Crüe](#) frontman [Nikki Sixx](#)'s bid to bring an inaugural PEBA franchise to San Jose faltered, [B.H. Transportation Co.](#) owner (and truck driver himself) [Cledus "Snowman" Snow](#) stepped in and founded the Calzones within a mile of his company's corporate headquarters. Finding the formula for success under the baking Texas sun has not been easy for the Calzones. San Antonio endured three consecutive seasons of 104 or more losses from '11-'13. In the last year of that stretch, fans made their dissatisfaction with the team's direction known by refusing to attend games until signs of progress appeared. The team responded by with a series of roster and coaching staff shake-ups. The moves may be working – San Antonio has slowly but surely been improving their record since that disastrous 2013 season.

Fun fact: Calzones GM Matt "Trader" Higgins, the only GM the club has known, is renowned for his wheelings and dealings. No PEBA team has completed nearly as many trades as the Calzones. As they say, "If you don't like the weather in Laredo, just wait a few minutes. You'll probably be traded elsewhere by then."



West Virginia Alleghenies

Host City: <u>Charleston, WV</u>		Ballpark: <u>Watt Powell Field</u>
Owner: <u>Lan-quing Li</u>		General Manager: <u>Travis Babcock</u>
Franchise record: 801-819	Division titles: 0	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 97-65 (2011)	Playoff appearances: 1	Championships: 0

Former Florida Marlins owner [Jeffrey Loria](#) was amongst the first to anticipate the pending demise of MLB. Loria sold his stake in the Marlins while the franchise still carried value and used the proceeds from the sale to fund a bid to bring an inaugural PEBA franchise – the “Tropix” – to Miami. This plan understandably caused great consternation amongst Loria’s former MLB colleagues. Ultimately, Loria’s bid fell through when the state approved the release of funds only for the Jacksonville group (which became the [Florida Featherheads](#)). Loria sold his franchise rights to Tyler Babcock, who brought the team to Charleston, WV and named his new club the “Coal Sox”. After the 2013 season, Babcock sold the team to billionaire railroad tycoon [Lan-quing Li](#), who subsequently renamed the club the “Alleghenies”.

Fun fact: The Alleghenies rechristened their home park Watt Powell Field for the 2016 season. The name is a tribute to the old [Watt Powell Park](#), built in 1948 and in use as late as 2004. West Virginia’s ballpark is built on the former site of Watt Powell Park.



Great Lakes Division



Canton Longshoremen

Host City: Canton, OH		Ballpark: Svab Memorial Stadium
Owner: William Marsten IV		General Manager: James Mathis
Franchise record: 722-898	Division titles: 0	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 87-75 (2015)	Playoff appearances: 0	Championships: 0

Canton experienced their first winning season in 2015 under first-year GM James Mathis. The Longshoremen have shown slow but measurable growth since posting 100 losses in their inaugural campaign. Canton's hopes lie in their youth movement. Recent farm system graduates like [José "Vapor Lock" Martínez](#), [Pat Deatherage](#), and [Carlos Rodríguez](#) are providing a boost to the big league club's offense. Longshoremen fans surely wish to see these young sluggers joined by promising hurlers – Canton has never managed a team ERA of less than 4.00.

Fun fact: Canton is one of four PEBA franchises to have employed a Dobney brother as team general manager. The Dobneys are well respected for their contributions to the [sabermetric](#) community. Four of the six Dobney brothers opened the PEBA's inaugural season as team general managers: Brad (Canton), Joel ([Duluth](#)), Bryan ([Omaha](#)), and Jared ([Yuma](#)). The Dobneys retired from baseball in 2011.



Crystal Lake Sandgnats

Host City: Crystal Lake, IL		Ballpark: Gnat Field
Owner: Larry Ellison		General Manager: Brian Hazelwood
Franchise record: 1,061-559	Division titles: 8	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 118-44 (2008)	Playoff appearances: 10	Championships: 0

No PEBA franchise has experienced more consistent success – or playoff frustration – than Crystal Lake. Legendary GM Dean Giesey's impeccable leadership helped to craft a true dynasty. During Giesey's seven-year tenure, Crystal Lake won every Great Lakes Division title and never failed to win less than

103 games. Giesey's replacement, Robbie Brown, was a victim of the high expectations set by Giesey; Brown was released after one season in which the Gnats "only" achieved a 101-61 record and failed to win the Great Lakes for the first time. Brian Hazelwood has gone 198-126 in his two seasons, yet for all their unprecedented regular season success, the Gnats have never captured the Rodriguez Cup. Other Great Lakes teams are finally catching up to the Gnats. It remains to be seen if Crystal Lake will be able to secure their legacy as a true dynasty by winning a championship before their aging core is replaced.

Fun fact: Crystal Lake's incredible success has earned the team its share of resent. Along with the Aurora Borealis, the Gnats are often deridingly referred to as one of the twin "Evil Empires" of the PEBA by opposing fans.



Duluth Warriors

Host City: Duluth, MN		Ballpark: Doyle Buhl Stadium
Owner: Jason Bong		General Manager: Bill McKenzie
Franchise record: 706-914	Division titles: 1	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 102-60 (2016)	Playoff appearances: 1	Championships: 0

After suffering through four consecutive 100-loss seasons from 2009-12, the Warriors are finally on the right track. New GM [Bill McKenzie](#) led the team to its first over-.500 record in 2014, and their first division title and playoff appearance last year. His aggressive moves have clearly paid dividends. Of course, super-talented arms like [Dave "Zoom Zoom" Barker](#) and [Davis Sutherland](#) can make anyone look smart. The growth of the team's pitching in 2014 was simply astounding. Warriors pitchers combined for a 3.67 ERA. Duluth's previous best team ERA was 4.98 (2010). Last year, the bats caught up with the arms; Warriors batters hit to the tune of a .286 team average. If they keep that up, Duluth will be in a position to hold onto its Great Lakes pennant.

Fun fact: Longtime owner Arne Bong passed away last April and succeeded by his son Jason. Arne's father and Jason's grandfather is [Major Richard I. "Dick" Bong](#). Major Bong, nicknamed the "Ace of Aces", was a hero of World War II. He downed at least 40 Japanese planes during the war.



Fargo Dinos

Host City: Fargo, ND		Ballpark: Jurassic Park
Owner: Gary Olson		General Manager: Cristian Shofar
Franchise record: 841-779	Division titles: 1	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 104-58 (2014)	Playoff appearances: 2	Championships: 0

In any other division in baseball, an average 90-72 record would get you noticed. In the Great Lakes, it got Fargo four straight second-place finishes from '10-'13, and in the Sovereign League, second place in the Great Lakes always meant missing the playoffs. But the 2014 Dinos weren't satisfied with being runners-up. Fargo rode the division's most potent offense and stingiest pitching staff to the Great Lakes crown, becoming the first team other than the Sandgnats to win the division. All-Stars [Armando Gallegos](#), [Vicente Savellano](#), and \$30M man [Yoshino Miyata](#) lead the charge, but this is not a star-driven group; Fargo's success is truly a team effort. Fans must feel somewhat disturbed about the team's recent 83- and 84-win campaigns, a noticeable drop-off from the high of 2014.

Fun fact: Some fans love the "clever" naming association between the Dinos and their home stadium, Jurassic Park. Others find it "kitschy." Whichever side you fall on, there's no denying that the team has earned a windfall by selling ballpark naming rights to [Universal Studios](#), rights-holders of the "Jurassic Park" trademark.



Kalamazoo Badgers

Host City: Kalamazoo, MI		Ballpark: Portage Park
Owner: Harry Bell		General Manager: Cole Hobson
Franchise record: 786-834	Division titles: 0	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 100-62 (2007)	Playoff appearances: 1	Championships: 0

Kalamazoo kept Crystal Lake in their sights with three second-place finishes to open their PEBA tenure,

but since then the Badgers have failed to finish above .500. Owner [Harry Bell](#) has been vociferous in [relating his displeasure](#) over the team's failure to take steps forward. Observers expect the volatile owner to make changes on a whim, and they have been proven right more than once. Bell hasn't been shy about canning GMs who are slow to produce results. The team will need stability in the front office to reach its potential.

Fun fact: During the franchise's formation, the Badgers' logo went through 67 iterations before the current version was chosen.



[Omaha Cyclones](#)

Host City: <u>Omaha, NE</u>		Ballpark: <u>Mack Stadium</u>
Owner: <u>Grev Davidson III</u>		General Manager: <u>Jason Warnke</u>
Franchise record: 784-836	Division titles: 0	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 93-69 ('14, '15)	Playoff appearances: 1	Championships: 0

Things have taken a turn for the positive since [Grev Davidson III](#), founder of the wildly successful "Prospect Street Opportunities I" hedge fund, purchased the 'Clones in 2012. Omaha finished with back-to-back 84-78 records in '12 and '13, their first winning seasons since 2007. They were one of three Great Lakes teams to set franchise best records in 2014. The 'Clones repeated this feat with back-to-back bests in wins (93) in '15 and '16. 2015 marked the franchise's first and only playoff appearance, and Omaha advanced all the way to the Planetary Extreme Championship. Much of their success owes to the aggressive moves of GM [Jason Warnke](#), who took over in the middle of the 2011 season. Warnke hasn't been shy about exploring the free agent market, signing players like [George John](#) and [Orlando Germán](#) to complement superstar slugger [Narahiko Imada](#) and a core of solid producers that include 3B [Ralph Gunther](#) and 2B [Steve Harris](#).

Fun fact: Warnke was a very sought-after commodity. When the [Connecticut Nutmeggers](#) sought a new GM in 2012, they were rumored to have courted Warnke for the role. To keep his star young GM, Davidson III rewarded Warnke a 2.5% stake in the Cyclones.

Desert Hills Division



[Aurora Borealis](#)

Host City: <u>Aurora, CO</u>		Ballpark: <u>Northern Lights Park</u>
Owner: <u>Michael Topham</u>		General Manager: <u>Will Topham</u>
Franchise record: 1,125-495	Division titles: 8	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 126-36 (2013)	Playoff appearances: 9	Championships: 1 (2009)

The other half of the PEBA's "Evil Empire," Aurora is to the PEBA what the Yankees were to MLB. Their success is so complete that it has earned them their fair share of detractors. Potential conflict of interest criticisms concerning former league commissioner [John Rodriguez, Sr.](#) and familial ownership of the Borealis led the Rodriguezes to divest themselves of ownership after the 2010 season. The team was sold to the Topham family, owners of the San Francisco-based [Golden Entertainment](#) theater and amusement company. Aurora's success has continued under Michael Topham's tenure. The Borealis set the PEBA single-season record with 126 wins in 2013. Yet for all their regular season dominance, Aurora has but one championship under their belt.

Fun fact: GM [Will Topham](#) is the son of the owner. Just 23 years of age, he is the youngest general manager in baseball by far.



[Bakersfield Bears](#)

Host City: <u>Bakersfield, CA</u>		Ballpark: <u>The Chocolate Factory at Yum! Field</u>
Owner: <u>David C. Novak</u>		General Manager: <u>Jon Rosenblatt</u>
Franchise record: 1,000-620	Division titles: 2	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 108-54 ('07, '14)	Playoff appearances: 9	Championships: 1 (2016)

What does the PEBA's fourth-best all-time team winning percentage get you? When you play in the Desert Hills, it gets you many second- and third-place finishes. It's amazing to consider that Bakersfield, the PEBA's largest market team and a club that has finished with 100 or more wins seven times, has only

twice won their division crown. [Jon Rosenblatt](#), general manager of the team since its inception, wasn't satisfied with second place. He put the entire league on notice when he won the sweepstakes for the PEBA's top pitcher, [Markus "Fireworks" Hancock](#). After acquiring him from [Tempe](#), Bakersfield signed fireworks to a five-year extension. Rosenblatt also thrilled Bears fans by bringing back face of the franchise [Pat Lilly](#). These moves vaulted Bakersfield to a 108-win 2014 campaign that culminated in a Desert Hills title, their first since 2007. But more importantly, they earned Bakersfield their first Rodriguez Cup last season. Sure, it came in a season where the Bears finished second in their division to Aurora once again, but Bears fans will gladly take that tradeoff.

Fun fact: After winning 303 games over the Bears' first three seasons, manager [Aric Kinast](#) had a falling out with Rosenblatt. Kinast, who had been close friends with Rosenblatt and was recruited by the GM to lead the Bears, left the team and took over managerial duties with [Charleston](#). Kinast led the Statesmen to a Planetary Extreme Championship in '10, his first season with the team, and again in '14. One imagines that this doesn't sit well with Rosenblatt, who had to wait until last season to take his first sip from the Cup.



Host City: Palm Springs, CA		Ballpark: Elderberry Field
Owner: Hopkins Reginald Bunner IV		General Manager: Denny Hills
Franchise record: 882-738	Division titles: 0	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 106-56 (2009)	Playoff appearances: 4	Championships: 0

The PEBA was keen to locate an inaugural franchise in Palm Springs, California to take advantage of the sizable Los Angeles market. Originally, [Donald Sterling](#), owner of the NBA's [Los Angeles Clippers](#), sought ownership of the team, but the league rejected his bid amidst fears that the repeated criticisms of Sterling's purported frugality, racism, and sexism might tarnish the new league's image. Instead, reclusive and eccentric billionaire Hopkins R. Bunner III threw his hat in the ring and won his bid to bring baseball to southern California. Through 2014, the team was a hit on the field (only one sub-.500 season) and with the fans (at least 2.75 million tickets sold every season). The last couple seasons have been less kind to the Codgers. They posted just their second and third losing campaigns, and attendance dropped accordingly. Bunner III passed away in 2014, leaving the team to his son, [Hopkins Reginald Bunner IV](#).

Fun fact: GM [Denny Hills](#) is known for his maudlin character. He famously [broke down into tears](#) during a 2010 press conference when asked to reflect on the previous season. He is also rumored to have had [an inappropriate relationship](#) with ex-Codger [Miguel Soto](#), though that has never been proven.



[Reno Zephyrs](#)

Host City: Reno, NV		Ballpark: Washoe Field
Owner: Maximillian Poppington		General Manager: Scott Mavnor
Franchise record: 613-1,007	Division titles: 0	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 87-75 (2007)	Playoff appearances: 0	Championships: 0

Reno's ownership story is a tribute to the potential that the American Dream offers people from all over the world. Current Reno owner Maximillian Poppington of [Shoreditch, England](#) grew up in one of the bleak concrete housing projects that popped up all over Europe in the wake of World War II. After a series of failed business ventures, Poppington became a multi-millionaire as the founder of Doggles, a successful dog goggle business. He later sold the Doggles business and used the proceeds to lead the Reno Tenpinners' bid for admittance to the PEBA in 2004. Poppington's personal success story was slow to carry over to his PEBA franchise. Under his tenure, the Zephyrs lost 121, 119, and 124 games from '13-'15. Still, there is a buzz around Reno about their hometown heroes. Part of the excitement is due to the Zephyrs improving their win total by a whopping 32 games last season. Part of it is thanks to a much-needed rebranding of the ballpark formerly called Kingpin Alley and now known as Washoe Field.

Fun fact: Poppington played baseball in college. While he was never good enough to play professionally, the experience turned him into a passionate fan of the game. In an effort to spark the passion of his fan base and end the culture of losing surrounding the team, Poppington changed Reno's nickname from "Tenpinners" to "Zephyrs" during the 2014-15 off-season. While the new design has received universal praise, the early on-the-field results were less promising. Reno went 1-23 during spring training 2015, the worst record in PEBA spring training history. They went on to post a 38-124 record, worst in the league and worst ever for a franchise not based in Yuma, AZ.



Tempe Knights

Host City: Tempe, AZ		Ballpark: Knights Stadium
Owner: Chris Van Hauter		General Manager: Alan Ehlers
Franchise record: 786-834	Division titles: 0	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 109-53 (2012)	Playoff appearances: 3	Championships: 1 (2012)

Everyone roots for David to best Goliath, and the PEBA has no greater David than Tempe. The league's smallest market team began their existence with a woebegone 117-loss season. Many analysts felt certain that the league would give up on the Knights. There was already another team located in Arizona, after all ([Yuma](#)). But then-GM [Chris Van Hauter](#) made it clear after that disastrous 2007 season that he had a 5-year plan to bring a championship to Tempe. While others scoffed, Van Hauter got to work. While drafting [Markus "Fireworks" Hancock](#), a once-in-a-generation talent, with the first pick in the 2008 draft was a no-brainer, Van Hauter's masterstroke was the 2011 deadline deal with [New Orleans](#) that brought RHP [Conan McCullough](#) to the desert. That move pushed the Knights over the top and helped them win the 2012 Planetary Extreme Championship.

Fun fact: Van Hauter, a legend in Tempe for his remarkable turnaround of the Knights, relinquished his GM role this past off-season and purchased a majority stake in the team. He has shown he possesses a quick trigger finger, firing his two successors in short order. Current GM [Alan Ehlers](#) formerly served as the general manager of the LRS's [Kuwana Steel Dragons](#).



Yuma Bulldogs

Host City: Yuma, AZ		Ballpark: John Deere Stadium
Owner: Emma Span		General Manager: Bob Mayberry
Franchise record: 426-1,194	Division titles: 0	Planetary Extreme
Best season: 67-95 (2007)	Playoff appearances: 0	Championships: 0

Tragedy and ineptitude have been the sad hallmarks of the downtrodden Yuma Bulldogs. In the history of American professional sports, no team has been as consistently awful as the Bulldogs. Yuma has finished last in the Desert Hills in all but two of their ten seasons. From 2010-14, they lost at least 124 games and finished at least 73 games behind the division leader. The front office has turned to the amateur draft to combat the team's history of failure. Yuma has collected a bevy of high draft picks over the last couple of years that have become a collection of promising young players pushing through the organization's minor league system – a system rated best in baseball by [Baseball America](#). While Yuma fans may be in for a few more hard years, there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Fun fact: [Emma Span](#) is the league's only female majority team owner. She heads a group that includes some of Arizona's most prominent businesspersons.

The Teams of the League of the Rising Sun

North American readers unfamiliar with the peculiarities of baseball in Japan should note that there are some subtle but distinctive quirks to the version of the game played in the Far East. Unlike the PEBA, where teams bear the name of their host city or state, many LRS teams are named by corporations that purchase naming rights. This practice was more prevalent prior to the PEBA's takeover of the league in 2010. At that time, ownership of a number of franchises changed hands and several teams took the opportunity to rebrand themselves in a manner that would appeal to westerners.

Japan's version of the game is still distinctly their own, however. The 12 teams of the LRS are broken into two "groups" (similar to the PEBA's Imperial and Sovereign Leagues). While teams in the Shining Star Group use designated hitters as is done in the PEBA, pitchers bat in the Bright Blade Group. Seasons begin at the start of May and consist of 144 games rather than the PEBA's 162. There are also two sessions of interleague play in the LRS.

Roster rules are different in the LRS, as well. Secondary rosters are limited to 35 players instead of the PEBA's 40. Teams can renew a player's contract at league minimum (\$81,500, or ¥6,491,475) until he earns six service years, double the time permitted in the PEBA. The most unique feature of LRS roster management, though, is the cap of four foreign-born (*gaijin*) players permitted on active rosters. This forces teams to give due consideration before surrendering a precious foreigner roster spot. There are only two levels of minors (Triple-A, Single-A) rather than the four serving the PEBA. Draftees hail from either the [Tokyo Collegiate Circuit](#) or the [Nihon Koyaren](#) association of high school teams.

The top two finishers in each group qualify for the playoffs. The winner of a group plays the runner-up in a best-of-seven Wasei Junkesshou series. The top seed hosts all Wasei Junkesshou games. Winners of each Wasei Junkesshou face off in the best-of-seven Neo-Tokyo Cup, the league's championship.

The league hands out their own version of the PEBA's five end-of-year awards. The Sawamura Award, the Saiyu-shu-senshu, and the Shinjinshou recognize a group's best pitcher, hitter, and rookie,

respectively. Positional defensive standouts are recognized with a Gurabukin Award, while top relievers receive the Umai Kabeyaku Award.



Shining Star Group



Hyakujuu Shinkansen

Host City: Hiroshima, Hiroshima Prefecture		Ballpark: Hiroshima Municipal Stadium
Owner: Shinji Sogo, Jr.		General Manager: Vacant
Franchise record: 736-710	Division titles: 0	Neo-Tokyo Cups: 0
Best season: 84-60 (2015)	Playoff appearances: 2	

Hyakujuu benefits from playing in baseball-crazed Hiroshima. They are the only LRS team to own their own broadcast network for airing games nationwide. This makes Hyakujuu the top-market team in the league. Yet despite these advantages, the Shinkansen have found scant success. Hyakujuu has qualified for the playoffs only twice: in the league's inaugural season and again last season. Sandwiched in between were five fourth-place seasons out of seven. Impatient fans weren't pleased with the signal sent by trades of star pitchers like [Jesús Luna](#) and [Yasuhiro Noda](#), but the team's 2015 playoff appearance was supposed to serve as a sign that Hyakujuu wasn't rebuilding; they were contending. That sign became muddled when the Shinkansen gave away their entire 21-game increase from '14 to '15 in a lost 2016 season.

Fun fact: Hyakujuu naming rights are owned by the [Toei Company](#). Prior to the PEBA's 2010 takeover of the LRS, the team was known as the Hyakujuu Mighty Mecha. The [Shinkansen](#) are the bullet trains that run on Japan's high-speed railway network.



[Kawaguchi Transmitters](#)

Host City: <u>Kawaguchi, Saitama Prefecture</u>		Ballpark: <u>RKO Station</u>
Owner: <u>Hoso Kvokai Jr.</u>		General Manager: <u>Brandon Roof</u>
Franchise record: 648-798	Division titles: 1	Neo-Tokyo Cups: 2 ('08, '09)
Best season: 88-58 (2009)	Playoff appearances: 2	

Losing a league-record 102 games in 2013 was a heavy blow to this once-proud franchise, one of only three to win two Neo-Tokyo Cups. Ownership cleaned house in response, firing GM Sebastian Pruiti and replacing him with noted American corporate leader Ron Collins. Collins quickly put his mark on the team through a series of free agent and trade acquisitions. Bold moves such as the signing of PEBA free agent [Rikiya Taketo](#) to a two-year, \$25.8M (¥2.082B) contract paid dividends for the Transmitters in the form of a 26-game improvement from that disastrous 2013 season. The magic didn't last, though. Kawaguchi slid to a 45-99 record in '15, and Collins disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Now, the Transmitters are working through what is shaping up as a long and difficult rebuilding process.

Fun fact: Prior to the PEBA's 2010 takeover of the LRS, the team was known as the Yamato Battleships. The Transmitters nickname is in honor of the iconic [NHK Kawaguchi Transmitter](#) broadcasting station, erected in 1937. The transmitter was shut down in 1982 and dismantled two years later, but the basement of the masts and guy anchors remain in place.



[Kure Arsenal](#)

Host City: <u>Kure, Hiroshima Prefecture</u>		Ballpark: <u>Nisshin Steel Dome at Kure</u>
Owner: <u>Pyeong-chu Chon</u>		General Manager: <u>Aaron Tassano</u>
Franchise record: 637-810	Division titles: 0	Neo-Tokyo Cups: 1 (2016)
Best season: 85-60 (2013)	Playoff appearances: 2	

From the moment they opened play with a 100-loss season (one of only four seasons of at least 100

losses in LRS history), the Arsenal found themselves behind the eight-ball. Through their first five years of existence, Kure was the league's worst franchise, averaging just under 50 wins a season. But diligent moves by the front office, led since 2010 by Aaron Tassano, have resulted in a turnaround. Kure finished above .500 from '12-'14. 85 wins in 2013 was enough to earn Kure its first playoff berth. After a brief hiccup in 2015, Kure bounced back with an 81-win season last year. It wasn't enough to win the SSG, but it got them a foot in the playoff door, and the Arsenal took advantage by knocking off heavily favored [Shin Seiki](#) in the Wasei Junkesshou and then topping [Edo](#) to win their first Neo-Tokyo Cup.

Fun fact: During the league's formation, then-[Hyakujuu Shinkansen](#) owner Shinji Sogo and his younger brother Takechi headed the "Hiroshima Maple Reds" group. The Maple Reds were to be the fourth official LRS franchise. However, strife between Shinji and Takechi stalled plans. Citing irreconcilable differences, the brothers petitioned the league to split the franchise into two separate teams. Shinji's group founded the Hyakujuu Mighty Mecha in Hiroshima's capital city, while Takechi's group relocated one hour south to Kure and became known as the Makurosu Hunters. The team was renamed the Kure Arsenal during the PEBA's 2010 takeover of the LRS. Takechi Sogo suffered a fatal heart attack two weeks prior to the league's inaugural season, and ownership passed to Hideo Suzuki, who passed away this off-season. His successor, eccentric Korean billionaire Pyeong-chu Chon, quickly made waves with a number of controversial announcements, including the rolling of a painted "[red carpet](#)" pathway from the restaurant in right field on to the field of play.



[Neo-Tokyo Akira](#)

Host City: Tokyo, Tokyo Prefecture		Ballpark: Neo-Tokyo Grounds
Owner: Katsuhiko Otomo		General Manager: Ron Hiscock
Franchise record: 672-775	Division titles: 0	Neo-Tokyo Cups: 1 (2012)
Best season: 85-59 (2014)	Playoff appearances: 2	

Neo-Tokyo's success arc has closely followed that of the [Kure Arsenal](#). Like Kure, Neo-Tokyo started play as a laughing stock. The Arsenal and Akira spent the first years of league play sharing fifth- and sixth-place finishes in the SSG. Then in 2012, both teams reversed their fortunes. Neo-Tokyo's ascent was particularly noteworthy in that they came out of nowhere to claim the 2012 Neo-Tokyo Cup, shocking the heavily favored [Edo Battousai](#). Just like Kure, Neo-Tokyo fell below .500 in 2015, but the Akira weren't able to bounce back last season like the Arsenal. Still, the presence of stud pitchers like [Takiji "Bad News" Shiskikura](#) and [Naizen Chikafuji](#) should make Neo-Tokyo competitive in the SSG.

Fun fact: Neo-Tokyo naming rights are owned by [Kodansha Limited](#), Japan's largest publisher. Kodansha is also one of the major corporate sponsors of the LRS. The company has a 15-year deal for naming rights to the league's championship series and trophy.



[Niihama-shi Ghosts](#)

Host City: Niihama, Ehime Prefecture		Ballpark: Oikake Maze
Owner: Akane Kenkyusham Jr.		General Manager: Mike Dunn
Franchise record: 741-705	Division titles: 2	Neo-Tokyo Cups: 0
Best season: 99-45 (2011)	Playoff appearances: 2	

The Ghosts squads of the early decade were amongst the best teams in LRS history. Led by superstars like [Nobuhito Hasegawa](#), [Shigochiyo Memoto](#) and [Sergio Manuel](#), the Ghosts rolled to two straight Neo-Tokyo Cup appearances. After falling short in both attempts at the Cup – once to [Fushigi Yugi](#) and once to [Edo](#) – the Ghosts' fortunes rapidly reversed. Niihama-shi went from a 99-45 record in 2011 to a 54-90 record in 2012. Hasegawa was traded to [Neo-Tokyo](#) in the '12-'13 off-season. An aging Shiggy Memoto suffered a [horrible knee fracture](#) in 2013 that ended his career for all intents and purposes. Manuel went from 21-game winner in '11 to losing 14 and 15 games in '12 and '13. But a 24-game improvement from '14 to '15 – an improvement that was sustained last season – gives hope for a return to the team's glory days.

Fun fact: Original Ghosts owner [Chitose Terada](#) was an enigmatic billionaire notorious for his many vices. After the Ghosts' first trip to the Neo-Tokyo Cup in 2011, Terada suddenly sold the team amid rumors that his penchant for gambling had left him severely in debt. Terada was said to have accrued ¥12.7B in debts to various casinos. Other rumors hinted at ties to the [Yakuza](#) and an expensive divorce. [Akane Kenkyusham](#), whose father built his fortune with the "[Say Ahh](#)" at-home prostate exam kit, purchased the team from Terada's family. Terada's body was found a year after the sale, buried in a Niihama landfill. No suspect has been charged in connection with the case. Kenkyusham passed away in 2015. His son now runs the team.



Shin Seiki Evas

Host City: Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture		Ballpark: Genesis Park
Owner: Yoshiyuki Sadamoto		General Manager: Kevin Vail
Franchise record: 929-517	Division titles: 8	Neo-Tokyo Cups: 2 ('07, '13)
Best season: 100-44 (2014)	Playoff appearances: 9	

The Evas are the league's most dominant regular season franchise. Shin Seiki has never finished worse than second place in the SSG. The only season the team missed the playoffs was 2009, back when the league employed a different playoff qualification system. General Manager Kevin Vail has the resources to make huge splashes in the free agent market, but he has made a name for himself as a shrewd manipulator of the trade market. Many of the team's biggest stars, including [Domingo "Jaguar" Hernández](#), [Katsunan Hiraoka](#), and [Shinsui Hoshino](#), were acquired by Vail in trades. That legacy is bound to continue with the off-season acquisition of all-world slugger [Bing-zhang Chien](#). But let it not be said that Evas dominance is built on trades alone. Indeed, some of the team's most dynamic players are homegrown, including 2016 SSG Shinjinshou winner [Mitsunari Suzuki](#). Shin Seiki's willingness to utilize all available avenues for self-improvement has kept the club on top.

Fun fact: Shin Seiki naming rights are owned by the [Gainax Company](#). Gainax, along with [Kodansha Limited](#), is also one of the league's top corporate sponsors. This has given rise to conflict of interest charges from some quarters. The league steadfastly maintains that no preferential treatment is accorded to Shin Seiki or [Neo-Tokyo](#) (whose naming rights are owned by Kodansha).



Bright Blade Group



Edo Battousai

Host City: Kyoto, Kyoto Prefecture		Ballpark: Koshien Stadium
Owner: Patrick “Speedy” Hildreth		General Manager: Shigeo Nagashima
Franchise record: 872-574	Division titles: 6	Neo-Tokyo Cups: 3 ('11, '14, 15)
Best season: 103-41 (2013)	Playoff appearances: 8	

After wealthy Bostonian entrepreneur [Patrick “Speedy” Hildreth](#)’s business dealings in [Myanmar](#) drew unwanted interest from the country’s [military junta](#), the avid baseball fan relocated to Kyoto and purchased the Battousai in 2012. Edo was already the class of the BBG, but their dominance was amplified under Speedy’s tenure. In 2013, Edo became the first team in league history to break the 100-win plateau with their 103-win effort. Their pitching was the catalyst – amazingly, all five members of Edo’s rotation were elected to the 2013 All-Star Game. The Battousai captured five straight BBG titles from '10-'14 and won back-to-back Neo-Tokyo Cups in '14 and '15. They fell just short of a three-peat when they lost to the [Kure Arsenal](#) in last year’s NTC.

Fun fact: [Babe Ruth](#) played an exhibition game at Koshien Stadium during his 1934 tour of Japan.



Fushigi Yugi Celestial Warriors

Host City: Fukuoka, Fukuoka Prefecture		Ballpark: Celestial Park
Owner: Jeffrey Woo		General Manager: Greg Abcarian
Franchise record: 730-716	Division titles: 0	Neo-Tokyo Cups: 1 (2010)
Best season: 83-61 (2011)	Playoff appearances: 1	

The middling C-Warriors surprised everyone by capturing the Neo-Tokyo Cup in 2010, the league’s first year under the auspices of the PEBA. That has turned out to be the high point for the franchise. Fushigi Yugi never before and never since qualified for the playoffs, though they have frequently hovered

around .500. Management must find a way to leverage the talents of players like [Eiichi Hosokawa](#) before the team's core becomes too old and must be replaced.

Fun fact: Fushigi Yugi naming rights are jointly owned by two Japanese publishing giants: [Shogakukan](#) and [Shueisha](#). This is the only such dual corporate sponsorship setup in the league.



[Kuwana Steel Dragons](#)

Host City: Kuwana, Mie Prefecture		Ballpark: Steelfire Stadium
Owner: Michael Chance		General Manager: James Hunter
Franchise record: 732-714	Division titles: 0	Neo-Tokyo Cups: 0
Best season: 87-57 (2012)	Playoff appearances: 4	

Alan Ehlers took over as Kuwana GM in 2010 and quickly took the previously middle-tier franchise to new heights. Kuwana finished over .500 from 2011-14, each time qualifying for the playoffs. They were frustrated in their efforts to win the BBG Wasei Junkesshou by the [Edo Battousai](#), however. Ehlers was forced to step down before the 2014 season due to health issues. He has since taken the general manager position with the [Tempe Knights](#). Meanwhile, the Steel Dragons have struggled to a 123-165 record in the two seasons since Ehlers's departure.

Fun fact: Prior to the PEBA's 2010 takeover of the LRS, the team was known as the Lodoss Spell Swords. [Nagashima Spa Land](#) amusement park, located in Kuwana, is home to the [Steel Dragon 2000](#). The roller coaster was constructed by Chance Industries (now [Chance Morgan](#)), run by Kuwana owner [Michael Chance](#). The Steel Dragon 2000 became the tallest complete-circuit roller coaster in the world upon its August 2000 debut, a record it held for three years. Kuwana's nickname is drawn from this famous attraction.



[Lupin Cliff Hangers](#)

Host City: Toyama, Toyama Prefecture	Ballpark: Castle of Cagliostro
Owner: Paul Walker	General Manager: Jim Konopka
Franchise record: 651-795	Division titles: 2
Best season: 94-52 (2007)	Playoff appearances: 2
	Neo-Tokyo Cups: 0

Lupin is known more for their outlandish jerseys than their stellar play. Years of last or next-to-last-place finishes make it easy to forget that the Cliff Hangers were kings of the BBG in the early days of the league. GM Jim Konopka is trying to jog fans' memories. The top two members of Lupin's rotation, [Gustavo "Wonder Boy" Rivera](#) and [Tsuyoshi Nishiyama](#), were acquired in trades. The same can be said for slugger [Mashashi Yano](#). Nishiyama and Yano will be under contract for quite some time, supplying hope for fans looking for flashy on-the-field play to match those flashy uniforms.

Fun fact: Lupin naming rights are owned by [Lupin Limited](#) of [Mumbai, India](#). Lupin Limited is the only foreign-based company to own naming rights to a LRS team.



[Naha Shisa](#)

Host City: Naha, Okinawa Prefecture	Ballpark: Shisa Stadium
Owner: Iyou Seigyoki	General Manager: Tom Fees
Franchise record: 744-702	Division titles: 2
Best season: 98-46 (2016)	Playoff appearances: 2
	Neo-Tokyo Cups: 0

Reclusive 63-year-old Naha owner [Iyou Seigyoki](#), the founder of the Nyu Gijutsu Toiretta [washlet](#) company, is known for his eccentricity and stern temperament. He is also one of the most independently wealthy owners in the LRS. Despite this, Naha always maintained a relatively frugal budget, which has led some fans to suggest that Seigyoki cared more about his toilets than his team. Signing 2B [Carlos Rodríguez](#) to a big five-year, \$35.7M (¥3.025B) contract in 2013 served as a sign of change, however. The team opened 2015 with a payroll over \$45M (¥3.457B), far greater than any in team history. Rodríguez's has served as both lineup protection and mentor for [Yoritomo Masuda](#), and the young right field is flourishing. Starting pitcher [Tetsunori Koike](#) is doing his part too. The now-big-spending Shisa won their first BBG title and advanced to the playoffs for the first time in '15. A repeat trip followed last year. Now fans want to see Naha take the next step and advance to the Neo-Tokyo Cup.

Fun fact: Prior to the PEBA's 2010 takeover of the LRS, the team was known as the Magami Akos. "[Shisa](#)" are traditional decorations placed on the roofs or in front of the gates of houses to ward off evil. They appear as a cross between a dog and a lion.



[Seoul Crushers](#)

Host City: Seoul, South Korea		Ballpark: The Maw
Owner: Naofumi Kato		General Manager: Larry Roof
Franchise record: 611-835	Division titles: 1	Neo-Tokyo Cups: 0
Best season: 84-62 (2009)	Playoff appearances: 2	

Life was never easy for GM Ishimaru Kaito. After consecutive 44-100 seasons in 2013 and 2014 and hamstrung by ownership that is reported to be deeply in debt, Kaito was forced to be judicious in his approach to improving the team. Seoul has always invested heavily in the draft, and perhaps no team has been more active the trade market than the Crushers. How much of this could be credited to Kaito is an open question, however; former owner Mark Kierstead II was notoriously hands-on and possessed a reputation for hotheadedness. Many believed Kaito was merely a figurehead for Kierstead II. We may never learn the truth. One of Kierstead II's last acts before passing away last year was to fire Kaito, and the soft-spoken ex-GM, who swears he is done with baseball for good, isn't talking about his tenure with the Crushers.

Fun fact: Prior to the PEBA's 2010 takeover of the LRS, the team was known as the Ranma Pandas and was based in [Tottori, Japan](#). The Pandas were [relocated to Seoul](#) and rechristened the Crushers by the Pasquale brothers during the surge of western investment in the LRS. The Pasquales later sold the team to Kierstead II after the 2011 season.