



PBATS NEWSLETTER

The Annual Publication of the

PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL ATHLETIC TRAINERS SOCIETY

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: RICK GRIFFIN

PBATS International Impact

By: Magie Lacambra, MEd, ATC

In 1990, Rick Griffin, Seattle Mariners' Head Athletic Trainer, accompanied Charlie Strasser, Head Athletic Trainer for the Los Angeles Dodgers, to Japan to put on a sports medicine clinic for Major Trainers, Inc. Little did Griffin know that would lead to a successful student exchange program that still exists today.

Griffin was appointed Chairman of the PBATS International Committee in 1994. That year marked the beginning of the PBATS International Program, whose focus is to provide educational opportunities for international students to learn more about baseball sports medicine. This program gave students from Japan an opportunity to spend two weeks with Major League Baseball athletic trainers during spring training in Arizona, learning how to evaluate, treat, and rehab baseball-related injuries. A focus on upper extremities was of particular interest to the Japanese students due to the popularity of baseball in their home country. Exposure to MLB players while observing and learning from PBATS members led to fierce competition to fill available spots each year. Students complete an application, write a cover letter explaining why they are interested in the PBATS program, and go thru an interview with Griffin. Acceptance into the program is considered a big honor by the students and their university professors.

Success of the PBATS International Program grew each year, leading to more students applying, and more exposure for the program. An article in the NATA News in 2012 caught the attention of Mary Dowling of Carlow Institute in Ireland. Dowling contacted Griffin wanting to send students to the program. In 2014, two universities from the United Kingdom, Salford University and St. Mary's University, outside of London, also expressed

interest in the PBATS program. To accommodate the additional students from Ireland and the UK, Griffin had to expand the program to include MLB teams in Florida. Students from Japan spend two weeks in the US learning from PBATS members, while students from Ireland and the UK stay for one month due to their program requirements.

PBATS also partnered with Murdoch University in Australia for six years, preparing their students to work with the Australian baseball league in the summer. The PBATS International Program continues to gain interest from other countries and is currently working on partnering with a university in Canada.

As a result of the growth and success of the program, PBATS gained a lot of global exposure and was invited to put on clinics in Italy, Germany, Korea, and Latin America. In addition, PBATS helped the NATA gain international exposure by putting on a three-day sports medicine clinic in 2018 at St. Mary's University, courtesy of PBATS and NATA. Griffin served as Education Program Chair and secured Jamie Reed (Texas Rangers), Ron Porterfield (Los Angeles Dodgers), and Nick Kenney (KC Royals) to present, with NATA President Tory Lindley providing the Key Note address to 175 attendees. The president of JATO (Japan Athletic Trainers Organization) heard of this clinic and asked for the same. In 2019 Griffin put on a similar clinic in Tokyo for 350 attendees.

Due to its global exposure, PBATS became a go-to organization to disseminate education on sports medicine. In 2020, PBATS was awarded the NATA International Partner Award. This award is given to a group that has promoted sports medicine and athletic training internationally. Griffin is very proud of this award,

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as he has put a lot of time, effort, and heart into making this program successful. He admits that he could not do this without the support of willing PBATS members to take on students and speak at the conferences. Griffin is especially grateful to Jamie Reed, former PBATS President, currently with the Texas Rangers, for to his tremendous support of this program, which has hosted an exchange student every year and presented at each conference.

Shortly after returning from the clinic in Tokyo, COVID shut everything down. This caused Griffin to rethink how the program would move forward to ensure its success and competitive nature. A shift was made to have the exchange student's observation and learning period with MLB teams take place between June and September, rather than during spring training. This would allow students to learn how an MLB training room is run in-season, as well as expose them to additional staff, like strength and conditioning coaches and their involvement in return to play following an injury. Students work with Griffin to select dates that work best for them to come to the US, and he assigns them to an MLB team. Students are responsible for airfare and lodging, while the team they are assigned to provides them with two meals per day, transportation from/to the airport, and outfits them with full team apparel. Despite the success of the program and the positive experience reported by students, they usually only participate in the program once as most of them gain employment right after graduating.

Involvement from PBATS members has also grown over the years. They realize that it's fun mentoring students who have a high interest in learning along with a strong work ethic. PBATS members enjoy watching the short videos that each exchange student makes following their time in the US, explaining what they learned and liked about their experience. The videos invigorate the PBATS members as they see what an impact they have made on the students.

A relationship with the Japan Professional Baseball League has evolved into an opportunity for Minor League AT's. Every other year, PBATS sends one of its members to Japan for two weeks to participate in their instructional league while learning treatment methods. In exchange, athletic trainers from Japan come to the US on the off years and spend two weeks with an MLB team in Arizona to learn their treatment methods.

As the PBATS International Program has grown, so has the work to make it happen. Griffin is finally accepting help. Joe Benge, Head AT for the Tampa Bay Rays, and Justin Kemp, Minor League Coordinator for the KC Royals, joined Griffin this year to assist with the program. Griffin can accept this help and be proud of what he has accomplished. Not counting this year's exchange students, the PBATS International Program has hosted 148 students from Japan, 36 students from Ireland, and 30 students from the UK.

Rick, you have succeeded in creating a globally respected and successful program that does exactly what PBATS aims to do, educate and give back. Congratulations!