

President's visit strands Iowa brass

Written by Tom Fruehling

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Veteran Urbandale head baseball coach Denny Barton has been coordinating the Iowa-Japan high school baseball exchange program since it was started in 1990.

He's taken Iowa AAU teams to Iowa's sister state of Yamanashi a half-dozen times, and he's served as host for every visiting team that's come to Iowa.

In all those years and over all those miles, he said, there's been nary a hitch in the East-meets-West matchup.

Until Tuesday night in Cedar Rapids, that is, when he and Urbandale assistant Fritz Keeling were stranded at the Kennedy baseball diamond.

The bus that was to pick them up at the park after the Metro All-Star Classic baseball game was quarantined at the Marriott Hotel, stuck there because of security measures imposed by the unannounced overnight stay by President Obama and his entourage. The President was in Waterloo Tuesday evening and will speak in Dubuque and Davenport on Wednesday at the end of a three-day swing from west to east across the state.

"I got a call from our bus driver just before the game, saying that all of sudden there was this tight security at the hotel," said Keeling, who was going to call a cab to get the Japanese team's bats and balls to the hotel where he and partner Barton had a room. The players themselves spent the night with host families.

"Then, after the game, I got a call from the driver saying they wouldn't let the bus leave the parking lot. So here we are."

It's often said that the President of the United States is the most powerful personage in the world.

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As for the baseball game itself, won by the local high school stars, 10-6, the boys from Japan got a taste of American strength.

Until they rallied with two home runs in the eighth and ninth innings, the visitors trailed 10-1.

"Our pitchers, not so good," said Yamanashi Manager Hiroshi Tsuruta through an interpreter. "But American team, too much power."

Head Coach Kiyoshi Ozawa, also speaking through an interpreter, wholeheartedly agreed. "Big power, big, big power," he said.

Still, the young Japanese players were all smiles afterward, posing for team pictures with upraised thumbs.

"I've never played against a team that had so much fun playing the game," said Cedar Rapids Jefferson infielder Colten Jourdan. "They were always talking and smiling the whole time. They love their baseball."