Abe Isoo, who was a professor of economics at Waseda University, is regarded as the father of both socialism and baseball in Japan. In 1901, as well as establishing the first socialist party in Japan, the Social Democratic Party (Shakai minshutō), he formed the Waseda University Baseball Club, appointing himself as its president. During the Russo-Japanese War, he took a student baseball team to the United States to play against American students, thereby initiating Japan into the world of international sporting competition. With Kanō Jigorō, the master of the Kōdōkan school of jūdō, he also played a vital role in establishing the Japan Amateur Sports Association (Dai Nihon Taiikku Kyōkai, JASA), and in organizing Japan’s first Olympic team, which competed at the 1912 Stockholm Games. Abe believed modern team sports and international sporting competitions to be vital instruments for the transformation of Japanese society from isolation to a position of international acceptance. Japanese enthusiasm for baseball today largely derives from Abe’s promotion of the sport during this period, the so-called ‘winter’ of the socialist campaign in Japan. This chapter focuses on Abe’s desire to modernize Japanese society and awaken people to ‘a new behavioural pattern’ of social relations through his promotion of baseball, focussing on his role in the press controversy over ‘the evil influence of baseball’ on education (1911).

In *The Origin of Socialist Thought in Japan* (1983), John Crump claims that, while Abe’s socialist colleagues, intellectuals such as Kōtoku Shūsui and Sakai Toshihiko, were psychologically prepared for harsh treatment at the hands of the authorities, Abe was not. For this reason, he largely retired from politics after 1906, concentrating his efforts on sport,
particularly baseball. Similarly, Cyril Powles asserts that in comparison with the ‘more spectacular lives’ of his contemporaries, Uchimura Kanzō, Katayama Sen, Kōtoku Shūsui, and the younger Kawakami Hajime, Abe was a deliberate ‘non-hero’. By way of explaining his

1 John Crump maintains that although Abe contributed the occasional article to the daily *Heimin shimbun* (Commoner’s Newspaper) and subsequently to the *Shakai shimbun* (Social Newspaper), he concentrated his energies mainly on sports. Crump, *The origin of the socialist thought in Japan*, New York: Croom Helm, 1983, p. 299. Nakamura Katsunori, ‘Gikaishugi shakaishugisha no sekinin—Meijiki no Abe Isoo’ (Abe Isoo as a parliamentary socialist), *Meiji shakaishugi kenkyū* (A study on Abe Isoo), Waseda Daigaku shakai kagaku kenkyūjo, 1990, p. 61.