By BOB BAUM

The Associated Press

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Baseball was invented in the United States but the World Baseball Classic has been dominated by Japan.

U.S. manager Joe Torre has taken a different approach in the WBC's third edition this year. Rather than stock his entire roster with high-profile stars, he's got a basic starting nine with utility players, three catchers and 15 pitchers filling out the 28-man group.

"I think it's advantageous. I think you need role players," said Milwaukee outfielder Ryan Braun, who was part of the 2009 team that made it to the semifinals. "You look at regular teams throughout the course of the season, those role players are instrumental in teams finding a way to win games. It's certainly important to have versatility."

The Americans went through their only pre-tournament workout Monday, a light, 2-hour session at Salt River Fields, the spring training home of Arizona and Colorado.

They have exhibition against the Chicago White Sox and Rockies before their opener Friday against Mexico at Chase Field, which could draw an enthusiastic and not necessarily pro-U.S. crowd.

Although the team includes Braun, New York Mets third baseman David Wright and New York Yankees first baseman Mark Teixeira, Torre chose only one player at each infield position.

Philadelphia's Jimmy Rollins is at shortstop and Cincinnati's Brandon Phillips will play second. Their backups are Arizona's Willie Bloomquist and Tampa Bay's Ben Zobrist with Minnesota catcher Joe Mauer expected to fill in some at first base as well as a designated hitter. The outfielders are Braun, Baltimore's Adam Jones and Miami's Giancarlo Stanton of Miami, with Boston's Shane Victorino another option.

The other catchers are Milwaukee's Jonathan Lucroy and Toronto's J.P. Arencibia, who gets to catch knuckleballer R.A. Dickey — his new teammate on the Blue Jays — in Friday night's opener.

Under pitch-count rules, starters can't throw more than 65 pitches in opening round games.

The Americans' group also includes Canada and Italy. After round-robin play concludes with the Canada-U.S. game on Sunday, the top two nations advance to the second round in Florida. The semifinals and finals will be held the following week in San Francisco.

Texiera called the competition "an exhibition."

"While we want to win. The important thing is to put on a great tournament for everyone to enjoy it, for the fans to enjoy it," he added. "It doesn't mean we don't want to win it."

Japan has won the first two WBC titles. While American fans may not be watching intensely, Braun said players should expect heated competition.

"It's certainly challenging," he added. "I know the last time I played just the atmosphere, the environment, felt like the intensity of a playoff game."

Torre, an MLB executive vice president, wouldn't announce starting pitchers other than Dickey, although he pointed out Texas' Derek Holland is starting Tuesday's exhibition against the White Sox. That puts Holland in line to start Sunday.

Wright said that players went through their offseason preparation with the knowledge they would need to be in shape for the WBC.

Several players mentioned their motivation is to become the first U.S. squad to gain the title.

“We’re all here to win it, and we all have gotten ourselves to the point where we can go out there as if it’s Game 7 of the World Series,” Atlanta closer Craig Kimbrel said. “We’re out there to win. We’re going to put it all on the line. That’s what we’re here to do. We’re not here to show up and just play and say we played for Team USA. We’re here to say ‘We played for Team USA and we won.’ I had that feeling in the clubhouse that that’s what we’re all here to do.”

Reds’ Votto decides to play for Canada in WBC

GOODYEAR, Ariz. — Reds first baseman Joey Votto will go ahead and play for Canada in the WBC, pleased with the way his knee has handled the first two weeks of spring training.

Votto got the last spot on Canada’s team but wanted to waited to see how his left knee felt before making a commitment. He had surgery to repair torn cartilage last season, missed 48 games and wasn’t at full strength when he returned for the end of last season.

So far, his knee has felt fine. He even hit a home run last week, something he hadn’t done since June 24 because he couldn’t push off the knee. He played in eight of the Reds’ first 11 exhibition games, going 6-for-16 with one homer and two doubles.

Votto grew up near Toronto and played for Canada in the 2009 WBC. He has received the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame’s Tip O’Neill Award each of the last three seasons.

“I look forward to playing for the team,” Votto said. “I look forward to being part of tournament. I

had a great time last time. I never got to play in the Olympics. This is the next best thing."

The only thing holding him back was the uncertainty over his knee. He didn't want the WBC to get in the way of getting ready for the season.

The NL's 2010 MVP expects to be a designated hitter for Canada and split time with Minnesota's Justin Morneau at first base.

Votto reached his decision on Monday after talking to Reds' owner Bob Castellini, general manager Walt Jocketty and manager Dusty Baker, who supported the move. The Reds blocked starter Johnny Cueto from pitching in the WBC because he was coming off an injury.

Votto batted .556 for Canada during the WBC in 2009.

The Canadian team was eliminated after two games in 2009 but Votto doesn't think that it makes a difference in this year's Classic.

"I would imagine with the two straight losses, the Canadian baseball people were a little embarrassed," Votto added. "I know I was pretty disappointed but we're playing good competition. You do the best you can. I don't care about the past tournament. I'm just going to try to play well and help my team win the tournament."

Canada opens against Italy Friday and will play the U.S. two days later.

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