



**OVER THE TOP:** Baseball players practicing in Imphal

After her return to New York, Peters teamed up with Somi Roy to set up a non-profit, First Pitch, to help raise resources for the game in Manipur. "Although Manipuris have been playing the game for decades, there is little infrastructure. What they do have is great joy in the game and tremendous ability. It is this enthusiasm that gave us the impetus to create First Pitch," says Peters.

The enthusiasm clearly rubbed off on the MIA and some big sponsors. "We are very excited about the opportunity to work with First Pitch and look forward to fos-

tering the game in India," says Paul Archey, MIA's senior vice-president of international businesses.

Similarly, Spalding Baseball agreed to donate baseball gloves to all the 700 players. Negotiations are on with the players association of the MIA to use its corpus—under Baseball Tomorrow—to part fund the building of a stadium.

Efforts have been initiated to raise funds—that will supplement money from the US—to build a ballpark in Manipur Land, located in Tabungkhok village in Imphal, has already been pledged for the purpose and the ball park is to be named Maharajah Chura-chand, the monarch who brought modern sports to Manipur.

Clearly, aficionados together with MIA have made their pitch. It remains to be seen how the local baseball fraternity in Manipur will respond to this curve ball.

by Anil Padmanabhan

## Touching First Base

**Baseball finds a footprint in cricket-crazy India with the MLB stepping up to the plate with funds and coaching programmes**

Baseball is to the Americans, what cricket is to Indians. While cricket has already pervaded North America and is fast becoming a secondary sport for expat immigrants from the Commonwealth, baseball is yet to find its feet in India. But that may be about to change: Major League Baseball (MLB), the apex body driving baseball in the United States, is using its Envoy Programme to sponsor coaches, who will travel across the country, from November 4 to December 8, to teach the basics of the game in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Calcutta; in Manipur, which already has an ongoing mini-league, it will work to upgrade coaching standards.

The current turn of events owes itself to a chance visit by New York-based film maker Muriel Peters to Manipur in November 2004. A base-

ball-addict, she gladly grabbed the opportunity to witness a game. Not only was she pleasantly surprised by the standard on display, Peters also learnt about the thriving baseball league—26 teams for men and 4 women teams—in Imphal.

No one really knows as to how and when the game originated in Manipur. Some trace its roots to the time Imphal was base to American troops during World War-II. The US Air Force used Manipur's airfields when they flew over the Himalayan Hump with supplies for Chinese nationalist Chiang Kai-Shek.

**Despite lack of infrastructure and support, Imphal already has a baseball league, with 26 men's and 4 women's teams.**