

Star left-winger, #57, launches the Frisbee to the wide-receiver flying down the right side of the ice... and the umpire calls strike three. Should have been ball 4. Debatable.

Jeremie, Brad, and I have found a fun way to meet new people here in the neighborhood and at school. It's really simple. Start playing a game of catch with a baseball or Frisbee.

The Chinese people are naturally very curious, and when they see something new and unusual, they will stop and watch, sometimes for over an hour. It seems as though baseball and Frisbee count as new and unusual. I think that for most Chinese, these are sports they might have caught highlights of during the Olympics or some sort of Chinese Sports Center if they watched the 3 am time slot.

On Wednesday afternoon, Jeremie and I tossed the baseball around for about an hour and a half outside the apartment on a road that goes through the neighborhood. I brought a couple gloves to China with me. We were out there around 4 pm, which is when the middle schools release. We were being watched by dozens of people the whole time. One man, appearing to be about our age, holding a newborn, watched us from a short distance for over an hour. At one point, while the baby was not with him, we invited him to try throwing the ball. He shyly turned us down with a smile and a wave. We invited a couple children who had stopped to watch. After a little prodding, they smiled and accepted the ball, and gave it a toss. Throwing a ball doesn't seem to be a natural motion for kids here. American children learn how to throw while young because of Little League or tossing a football with friends. Sports that involve throwing are not popular here, where badminton, ping-pong, and soccer are top choices. For these children, it was a full body effort, with arms and legs flailing to put as much "umph" behind the throws as possible. The balls traveled about 30 ft, with a high arch. Due to the wild delivery, aim was suspect. Great fun to watch though and the children were thrilled to play with the white guys in the neighborhood in front of their parents and friends.

While tossing the ball, I heard someone from behind me ask if I was speaking English with Jeremie. The oddest part of the questions was the girl asking had an American accent, or from my point of view, no accent at all. I turned around to see a couple of girls, both of Asian decent. The one speaking is an undergrad at SYSU visiting from the University of Florida. The other is here from Singapore.

Yesterday, Friday, we threw the Frisbee on a field on campus, near the business building. Again, we had several onlookers. When a tour group of about 20 people walked by, some of the participants stopped to photograph us. A few minutes later, a couple of local students approached us to take a picture with them. Also, a couple of girls slowly circled us, stopping to watch from different angles. We invited them to toss it with us, and again they shyly turned us down with a smile.

The exactness of how we are turned down the same way each time leads me to think that it is a cultural thing. But as they continued to watch us, we continued to invite them to try throwing it. The third time, it appeared they would join. One of the girls began to take her backpack off. Turns out her phone rang at that moment, and she was getting her phone out of her bag. That gave us a good laugh. A few minutes later, they sat on the grass a few feet uphill on the lawn. This time we just tossed the Frisbee in their direction and had them toss it back. Finally, they became participants and not just spectators. Brad also took the opportunity to exchange business cards with the girls.

The two days of throwing the ball and Frisbee has left me with a sore shoulder. I haven't done that much throwing in a while, and at times Jeremie and I were pitching quite hard. But the opportunities it has provided to meet new people and learn about the people we are living amongst has been a thrill.