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P.O.V.'s "KOKOYAKYU: HIGH SCHOOL BASEBALL"

By Kenneth Eng

MEDIA ALERT – FACT SHEET

National Air Date: Tuesday, July 4, 2006 at 10:00 p.m. on PBS (check local listings)

Summary: In Japan, baseball is not a pastime—it's a national obsession. And for many of the country's youth, the sport has become a rite of passage, epitomized by the national high school baseball tournament known simply as "Koshien." Four thousand teams enter, but only 49 are chosen to compete in the championship that grips the nation for two weeks every August. Following two teams and their dedicated coaches, **Kokoyakyu: High School Baseball** is the first English-language film to take Western viewers inside a world where baseball becomes a proving ground for life's challenges. Only one team will win each year, but the quest to appear on the "sacred" dirt of Koshien Stadium is a life-changing experience for generations of Japanese youth.

Kokoyakyu: High School Baseball opens up the world of Koshien by following the fortunes of two teams as they compete in regional games and then head for the 2003 tournament (the 86th annual games). Tennoji High School is a public school whose team is coached by a dedicated and self-effacing teacher, Masa-sensei, who becomes deeply involved in the lives and welfare of his students and their families. Chiben High School, by contrast, is a well-heeled private school whose team is coached by the legendary Takashima, who has taken the team to Koshien more than 20 times and has won the national championship three times.

Filmmakers'
Statements:

"In **Kokoyakyu: High School Baseball**, we wanted to capture the unique aspects of Japanese-style baseball and the way Koshien marks a rite of passage for the nation's youth," says writer/producer Alex Shear. "It's really unlike anything in the United States, and the way Japanese kids approach this rite is also quite a contrast to youth culture—especially sports culture—in America."

"It was great this March to see the World Baseball Classic bring so many diverse cultures together over baseball," says director Kenneth Eng. "For us, it was even more exciting that Team Japan won, because we know how much baseball means to so many people there. We hope the team's success, and our film, will inspire Americans to learn more about Japanese culture."



People in the film: **Masa-sensei** is the dedicated coach of the Tennoji Public High School team. With its limited public school resources and location in the most competitive region, Tennoji always faces an uphill climb to Koshien. He is still teaching in Tennoji and playing baseball with the kids there. Masa-sensei feels that the new team is going to make it very far.

Takahiro Maeda, Tennoji's captain in the film, had a goal to attend Japan's Military Academy, Boei (Self-Defense Force) University; he likes being part of a team, and he always liked the idea of making sacrifices to help others. His dream came true, and he was accepted at in the prestigious university and just moved from Osaka to Tokyo to start school.

Takashima is the coach at the private Chiben High School. Chiben has been so successful that some of the nation's best high school baseball players go to great lengths to attend the school and increase their chances of competing at Koshien. In 2005, the summer after the film was shot, Chiben won the Wakayama Tournament and made it to Koshien, led by the two young players featured in the film, Hayata Maeda and Ryohei Hashimoto. The team lost its first game and was eliminated. They were also invited to the spring 2006 (invitational) Koshien tournament.

Ryohei Hashimoto is now a senior and wears No. 5. Many people feel that Hashimoto is not just Chiben's best player, but in fact one of the top players in the country. He is very close to achieving his dream of going professional next year.

Japanese baseball: Baseball is the most popular team sport in Japan. The game was first played in Japan in 1873 at Kaisei Gakko (now Tokyo University) under the instruction of an American, Horace Wilson. The first Japanese baseball team was organized around 1880, and several college teams were soon formed in Tokyo. Baseball clubs were formed in middle schools throughout the country around 1900. Baseball became Japan's major school sport, with interscholastic competitions leading the way.

High school baseball is dominated by the National Invitational Senior High School Baseball Tournament, which is held each year in March and April, and the All-Japan High School Baseball Championship Tournament, which is held in August. These events, which trace their origins back to 1924 and 1915, respectively, are held at Koshien Stadium in Nishinomiya, Hyogo Prefecture, and are commonly known as the spring and summer Koshien tournaments. They receive extensive coverage in the press, are broadcast live nationwide via radio and television, and consistently rival professional baseball in popularity. More than 4,000 high school teams participate in the qualifying rounds for the summer tournaments. (Source: *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan* online, based on *Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, published in 1993)

Babe Ruth and other American all-stars used to travel to Japan in the 1930s to play against the locals before adoring fans—in fact, in the very Koshien Stadium where Japan's high school *yakyu* (“field ball”) tournament culminates every August.

In March 2006, Japan beat Cuba to win the first-ever World Baseball Classic. The 17-day tournament was played in Tokyo, Arizona, Florida, Puerto Rico and southern California, with the final game in San Diego. Final score: Japan 10, Cuba 6. Japanese pitcher Daisuke Matsuzaka was named MVP.

Filmmakers'
Biographies:

Kenneth Eng: Director/Editor

Boston native Kenneth Eng moved to New York to study filmmaking at the School of Visual Arts in 1994. His thesis film, **Scratching Windows**, was broadcast on Thirteen/WNET New York's "Reel Life" PBS series. Eng's credits include directing and editing **Take Me to the River**, a feature-length documentary about the 2001 *Maha Kumbh Mela* Hindu festival and pilgrimage in India, said to be the largest gathering in history. He has directed numerous music videos and documentary productions, and is co-founder of the New York-based multimedia and video production company Python Aquarius.

Alex Shear: Writer/Producer

A 2000 graduate of St. John's College in Annapolis, Md., Alex Shear worked predominantly in sales and business development before turning to filmmaking. Shear was assistant producer for the feature documentary **Take Me to the River**. He has spent several years working in freelance film and television production, often for Python Aquarius Productions in New York. He grew up in Boston with Kenneth Eng, and shares his love of baseball. Shear and Eng often travel to Boston to play for the amateur team the Beantown Basers.

Length: 56:46

Credits: Director/Editor: Kenneth Eng
Writer/Producer: Alex Shear
Producer: Takayo Nagasawa
Director of Photography: Jake Clennell
Cinematographer: Takeshi Inamura

Kokoyakyu: High School Baseball is a production of Projectile Arts, made possible by grants from the United States-Japan Foundation, the Japan-US Friendship Commission and the Japan Foundation, with in-kind support from United Airlines.

Community
Engagement and
Education:

P.O.V. is working with public television stations and national and community-based groups across the country to foster community dialogue around the issues presented in **Kokoyakyu**. For a list of upcoming screening and discussion events, go to <http://www.pbs.org/pov/utills/povnews.html>.

P.O.V. is also working with nationally recognized media educator Dr. Faith Rogow to develop a facilitation guide to help event organizers carry out substantive and sensitive discussions around the film's content. The guide contains discussion questions and background information on the issues. Cari Ladd is creating related classroom activities. In addition, the American Library Association and P.O.V. are creating a multi-media resource list of related fiction and non-fiction books, Web sites and videos that further explore the issues in the film. The materials will be available free of charge at www.pbs.org/pov/outreach in June 2006.

On P.O.V. Interactive: The **Kokoyakyu** companion Web site (www.pbs.org/pov/kokoyakyu) offers exclusive streaming video clips from the film and a wealth of additional resources, including a Q&A with filmmaker Kenneth Eng, ample opportunities

for viewers to “talk back” and talk to each other about the film, and the following special features:

- POINT OF VIEW:
“The Greatest Glory”
What's it like to play in Koshien stadium? Why do all the players cry whether they win or lose? Watch Web exclusive video interviews with Hideki Matsui, Robert Whiting and other baseball experts to find out more about Koshien and high school baseball in Japan.
- AUDIO INTERVIEW (& PODCAST):
Bobby Valentine
The former manager of the New York Mets led his team to the World Series in 2000. Now he manages the Chiba Lotte Marines in Japan, who won the Japan Series under his tutelage. Valentine spoke with P.O.V. in June 2006 about high school baseball in Japan, the Koshien summer tournament, and the state of international baseball today. Valentine also talked about the prospects for a “true” international World Series between the U.S. Major League and Japan League teams, an event that he has often advocated.
- BOOK EXCERPT:
You Gotta Have Wa and The Meaning of Ichiro
Find out more about the Japanese concept of *wa* (group harmony), Seattle Mariner outfielder Ichiro Suzuki's amazing legacy in Japan, and the importance of cheering in Japanese baseball games from author Robert Whiting.

About P.O.V.:

Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and in its 19th season on PBS, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running showcase on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through October, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought nearly 250 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and now has a Webby Award-winning online series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V is available online at www.pbs.org/pov.

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To download additional press materials, transcripts and color art, visit P.O.V.'s online pressroom at www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom.