



For Immediate Release

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P.O.V.'s "Kokoyakyu: High School Baseball" Examines Japanese Passion For American Sport, Tuesday, July 4 on PBS

First English-Language Film to Explore Annual 'Koshien' Baseball Tournament
Discovers the Sport Has Become a Japanese Rite of Passage

You want pure sports spectacle? You want "the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat?" Forget about Olympic athletics, the American pros, and even Friday night football in Texas. Take a look at high school baseball in Japan. As shown in **Kokoyakyu: High School Baseball**, the first English-language film to examine the phenomenon, baseball has become a national rite of passage for the country's youth. For thousands of Japanese teens, their families and teachers as well as millions of spectators, the annual tournament that begins with some 4,000 teams and finishes with 49 teams competing for the national championship at Koshien Stadium in Osaka manages to be both pure baseball—and purely Japanese.

Kenneth Eng's **Kokoyakyu: High School Baseball** has its national broadcast premiere on Independence Day, **Tuesday, July 4, 2006** at 10 p.m. on PBS, as part of the 19th season of public television's groundbreaking P.O.V. series. (Check local listings.) American television's longest-running independent documentary series, P.O.V. is public television's premier showcase for point-of-view, nonfiction films.

In March 2006, Japan beat Cuba to win the first-ever World Baseball Classic. While this came as a shock to some, many baseball fans weren't surprised. Japan's embrace of the sport, beginning in 1872 and today including Japanese players in the American big leagues like Seattle's Ichiro Suzuki and New York's Hideki Matsui, is well known. 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. But just how strong and deep the Japanese love of baseball is—how they have remade the sport into a supreme expression of their spiritual and cultural values—won't be as obvious. Unless one has experienced what the Japanese refer to simply as "Koshien."

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. Tennoji, with its limited public school resources and location in the most competitive region, always faces an uphill climb to Koshien. 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. So successful has Chiben been 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.

Both coaches are obsessed with baseball and the values it teaches—and demands—of the students. Yet their different temperaments seem to mirror the contrast between the teams. The humbler Masa-sensei spares no feeling or attention to personal detail as he guides his students through a sports competition and trial-by-fire that will mark them for the rest of their lives. The depth of his emotional investment in his players becomes clearest at the tournament's end. The great Takashima brings a more Olympian sensibility to the proceedings; as soon as the tournament ends, he's already thinking of next year and the prospects for a Chiben championship. **Kokoyakyu** also brings us into the lives of the players, from the stars and captains to the second-stringers whose struggles to make a contribution become, perhaps, the purest expression of Japanese values in baseball.

In **Kokoyakyu**, the rules, uniforms, and stadium hoopla may seem all-American. Even the cheerleaders and their uniforms, though oddly borrowed from American football, obviously derive from the U.S. But—in what may be a revelation to Americans, especially American kids involved in sports—the intensity, discipline, earnestness, and unselfish dedication to team, school and family are all-Japanese. High school baseball in Japan appears to have sublimated the country's traditional samurai values in a markedly non-violent sport, whose essential grace and emphasis on teamwork strike a deep chord in Japanese hearts.

In what may be the most non-American touch of all, the Koshien tournament is kept rigorously non-commercial. Although the Koshien playoffs attract 60,000 fans per game to the stadium and are broadcast in full for 11 days on national television to millions of viewers, there are no commercial endorsements of any kind. The broadcasts are on public television, and no commercial recordings of the games are allowed. The stadium's owners donate use of the facility (and bump the games of the hometown pro team). Virtually everyone involved, from umpires to trainers to coaches, donates his time. And though a few of the kids nurse ambitions to play professional ball, it's quite clear that for the vast majority of the young players, "Koshien" is a rite of passage that calls on them to exhibit the highest Japanese values—hard work, dedication, selflessness, and good sportsmanship. The same is true for the cheer squads, who marshal themselves with startling discipline and conviction, and the coaches, schoolmates, parents, and fans who yearly brave searing heat or tune their TVs and radios to this national celebration.

"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."

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.

About the filmmakers:

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.

Credits:

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

Running Time: 56:46

Original Online Content on P.O.V. Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

The **Kokoyakyu** companion website (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.



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and now 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.

P.O.V. Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. It also produces a Web site for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of P.O.V. films through community-based and educational applications, focusing on involving viewers in activities, information, and feedback on the issues. In addition, www.pbs.org/pov houses our unique *Talking Back* feature, filmmaker interviews and viewer resources, and information on the P.O.V. archives as well as myriad special sites for previous P.O.V. broadcasts.

P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education

P.O.V. provides Discussion Guides for all films as well as curriculum-based P.O.V. Lesson Plans for select films to promote the use of independent media among varied constituencies. Available free online, these originally produced materials ensure the ongoing use of P.O.V.'s documentaries with educators, community workers, opinion leaders, and general audiences nationally. P.O.V. also works closely with local public television stations to partner with local museums, libraries, schools and community-based organizations to raise awareness of the issues in P.O.V.'s films. *Youth Views*, P.O.V.'s youth engagement initiative, expands these efforts by working directly with youth service organizations.

Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Ford Foundation, PBS and public television viewers. Funding for P.O.V.'s Community Engagement activities and the *Diverse Voices Project* is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KCET Los Angeles, WGBH Boston, and Thirteen/WNET New York.

American Documentary, Inc. (www.americandocumentary.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback, to educational opportunities and community participation. Cara Mertes is executive director of American Documentary | P.O.V.

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