

# “Koshien” as Big Stage for High School Students



Hanshin Koshien Stadium

*The dreams of young baseball players all over Japan focus on the Koshien stadium, where Japan’s National High School Baseball Championship is held every summer. The stories of high school baseball players’ personal growth through their training for the*

*Koshien championships have always been a great source of drama and inspiration. As we will see in this article, high school students in Japan compete in national tournaments in many other fields as well.*

こうしえん

## 甲子園 Koshien: Traditional Rite of the Japanese Summer

The National High School Baseball Championship, held every August at the Hanshin Koshien Stadium in the city of Nishinomiya, Hyogo prefecture, celebrated its 91st year in 2009. Commonly called “Koshien”<sup>\*</sup> after the name of the stadium, the competition gathers 49 teams—one for each prefecture.<sup>\*\*</sup> High school baseball teams from more than 4,000 schools all over Japan compete in regional preliminaries to qualify for the national tournament. Playing in Koshien is an enduring dream, not only for high school students, but also for younger children who play baseball.

### Media Attention

For the two weeks of the championship, news from Koshien is a major focus of media attention. Newspapers report on the games played each day, and sports magazines publish special feature issues on high school baseball and articles with highlights and features about the players. All the games are reported live on television and radio, from 9 a.m. to after 4 p.m. each day. Each evening, special television programs re-view the games of the day.



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### The Excitement of the Game

August is the hottest and most humid month in Japan. So the games, which very often go on for more than two hours under

the scorching sun, are sometimes grueling for the players. The stadium reverberates with the roar of thousands of fans, the drums of the teams’ cheering squads, and the rhythm of the schools’ brass bands, stirring the atmosphere of the games into a festival-like fervor. Fans follow the games closely on television or radio as well. Many people, who might not otherwise take much interest in baseball, look forward to the Koshien of summer with special anticipation.

<sup>\*</sup>The National High School Baseball Invitational Tournament also takes place in the Koshien Stadium in March. It is commonly known as “Spring Koshien.”

<sup>\*\*</sup>Of the 47 prefectures, Hokkaido and Tokyo have the largest number of high school baseball teams, so two schools compete from these prefectures.



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All together, aiming to be “No. 1,” the team huddles during the game.



This mark indicates that more related information is included on the “Click Japan” website. <http://www.tjf.or.jp/clicknippon/>

# The Special Attraction of "Koshien"

How is it that the Koshien summer championship is such an all-absorbing social phenomenon in Japan?

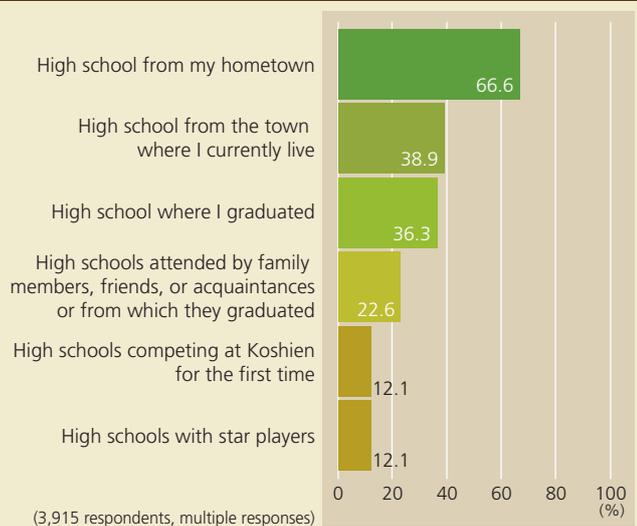
## Local Loyalties Fuel the Excitement



A shopping district announcing that the local team will compete at Koshien.

One of the reasons for the popularity of Koshien is that it taps deeply into the sentiments of local society. Once the prefecture team to compete at Koshien is decided, the whole local community of the team's school gets involved in the preparations. The school and local groups organize send-off events. The team visits the local city or township mayor and the governor of the prefecture, who encourage them with speeches expressing the high expectations of the town and prefecture. Large banners announcing that the school's team will go to Koshien are put up at schools, along streets, and in shopping malls. According to a survey (see table below), when asked what teams they support for the championship, respondents said that they cheer for schools from the prefecture of their family roots or where they are currently living. Teams are recognized representatives of the prefectures—and people seem to feel an affinity and connection to such local teams.

### What teams do you support at the Summer Koshien?



Source: "Survey on High School Baseball," Tokyo Electric Power Company's Website, TEPORE, 2007. <http://www.tepore.com/>

## Giving It Their Best Shot

High school baseball players are famous for training hard throughout the year, hardly taking any holidays. They push themselves hard in both physical training and mental discipline. The stories that come out during the tournament about how certain players have trained tirelessly, determined to realize their dream of playing at Koshien, and the growth they experience in the process, heighten the drama among the spectators. Also, the tension is high, since the competition follows tournament rules and one loss means the team will not have a second chance. When a team loses, the players can be seen on their knees, tears streaming down their faces, shuffling soil from the stadium into bags they have brought. Taking home that physical memento of their chance to play on Koshien's hallowed soil is an established tradition. At Koshien, it is the earnestness and modesty of the players, not whether their team wins or loses, that is most remembered.



Victorious, the team bursts out of the closing line-up.

## Birthplace of Heroes

Once the Koshien is over, the nation's focus shifts to what professional teams will try to draft the championship's star players. Many professional baseball players became national heroes from the time they played at Koshien for their high school team. Some of them, including Matsui Hideki\* from Seiryō High School and Matsuzaka Daisuke\*\* from Yokohama High School, left their Japanese teams to play in the American Major Leagues, becoming well known in the United States where the sport originated. Many Japanese fans who have known these players from their high school days are not only concerned about their wins and losses, but interested in their character and sportsmanship as professional players.

\*Joined the New York Yankees in 2003 and moved to the Los Angeles Angels in 2009.

\*\*Joined the Boston Red Sox in 2007.



# High School Students' Growth Through Baseball

Kanagawa prefecture's Yokohama Hayato High School was one of 4,132 schools (about 80 percent of all high schools in Japan) where some 170,000 baseball players trained for Koshien in 2009. Hayato High competed at Koshien for the first time that summer and made it to the second round. But no one would have predicted that impressive achievement a year before.

## How the captain changed his team

The 108 members of the school's baseball team had received rigorous training, day after day, 5 hours a day on weekdays and 12 hours a day on weekends. The coach had always told the players: "Anticipate my instructions" and "Think for yourself." But the players hesitated to take the initiative. Sugimoto Masatomo, the team's captain that year, realized that he had to change himself first if he wanted his teammates to take more initiative. So he started speaking frankly to his teammates, even if what he had to say might seem harsh. The team members, most of whom had been no more than passive, eventually began to communicate more openly with each other, and a sense of responsibility, that each member must help lead the team, began to develop among the players.



Team members cheering for the players on the field hold up strings of folded cranes—symbols of their prayers for victory—made by classmates and family members. The colors form the characters for "Hayato" (the school's name; at left) and "nakama" ("we're all together"; at right).

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## History of Koshien

The history of Japanese baseball is said to go back to the 1870s, when American school teachers in Japan taught the game to their students. With the growing popularity of the student baseball tournament sponsored by the Asahi Shimbun newspaper company beginning in 1915, Hanshin Electric Railway Company built the Koshien Stadium in 1924, Japan's first full-scale baseball stadium. With economic development in full swing, the railway company sought to increase use of the railway by expanding the leisure industry. At first through the newspapers and later through radio and television as their national networks developed, people all over Japan began to follow the student baseball games.

## All 108 team members united as one

However, in reality, only a limited number of players are selected to play in actual games. Sugimoto was extremely disappointed when he found out that he wouldn't be playing in the championship game. It took him some time to realize that he had to put his own wants aside and think how he could best contribute to the team effort. For Sugimoto, the most memorable moment was the day his team won the final game of the Kanagawa prefecture preliminaries, meaning the team would go to Koshien. Even the players who had not been selected were weeping with joy. Sugimoto realized that his team had been able to win because all 108 members had their hearts united on their common goal.

## Hometown support

The first time the team practiced at Koshien Stadium, Sugimoto was overcome by the fact that he was actually standing on the stadium of his dreams. He was so moved that his hands trembled as he hit the balls to his teammates. The other third-year students who couldn't play in the game supported their team with all their might by volunteering on the cheering squad. Rooting for them in the stands were the players' families who had supported their training day after day from the background, along with more than 2,000 people from their school and community who had traveled to Koshien in 50 buses, plus 400 who came by superexpress Shinkansen train.

Every baseball team's story is unique. An English film about high school baseball, *Kokoyakyu: High School Baseball*,\* documents the story of two high school teams that aspired to play in Koshien.

\*Directed by Kenneth Eng, 2006.

## Let's Try!

Which of the following is sold as a lucky food at baseball stadiums? Why do you think it is lucky?



amerikan doggu  
アメリカンドッグ  
(corn dogs)



furaido poteto  
フライドポテト  
(fried potatoes)



hanbaga  
ハンバーガー  
(hamburger)



katsu-sando  
カツサンド  
(pork-cutlet sandwiches)



furaido chikin  
フライドチキン  
(fried chicken)



onigiri  
おにぎり  
(rice-balls)

The answer can be found at

<http://www.tjf.or.jp/takarabako/bi02.htm>

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## Attention for High School Achievement

In Japan, there are many country-wide competitions where high school students can demonstrate their ability in fields other than baseball, and where their achievements win widespread attention. Many of these competitions, especially those in various cultural fields, borrow the term “Koshien,” which has become a generic word used for high school competitions. For example, there are “Koshien” competitions in photography, manga, haiku, debate, and fashion (see “Meeting People”).

**Shashin Koshien** <http://town.higashikawa.hokkaido.jp/phototown/koshienofficial.htm>

**Manga Koshien** <http://manga-koshien.net/>

**Haiku Koshien** <http://www.haikukoushien.com/>

**Debate Koshien** <http://nade.jp/koshien/>

### ものづくり甲子園 <sup>こうしえん</sup> Monozukuri Koshien

(National Contest for Technical High School Students)

About 8 percent of all high school students in Japan specialize in technical subjects in high school. At Monozukuri Koshien, technical high school students compete in various fields of technology. The competitions are opportunities for students not only to improve the skills, but also to think about what kind of work they want to do in the future.

At first glance, the Monozukuri Koshien looks like a competition among individuals. However, contestants are supported by their teammates throughout the intensive training they undertake in preparation for the competition. When Arai Yasuhiro (who went to the national championships) and Iwashita Sho (who competed at the regional level) from Gunma Prefectural Fujioka Technical High School decided to enter the electric engineering division of the Monozukuri Koshien, five other students contributed their time to help them train. These students helped the contestants by preparing materials, working with them, and thinking of ways to speed up the process of completing the assigned competition task within the time limit. The seven students practiced at school for hours every day, even during their summer vacation. Once, when Iwashita was on the verge of giving up, one of his friends said to him, “Sure, you can quit now, but



Students put their techniques to the test at Monozukuri Koshien.

© TIF

are you going to give up like this when you're in the working world?" Knowing that his friend was hard on him because he cared about the competition as much as he did, Iwashita was able to keep going. His friends stood by him the entire time.

The official name of this contest is Kokosei Monozukuri Kontesuto. It is organized by the National Association of Principals of Technical Senior High Schools.

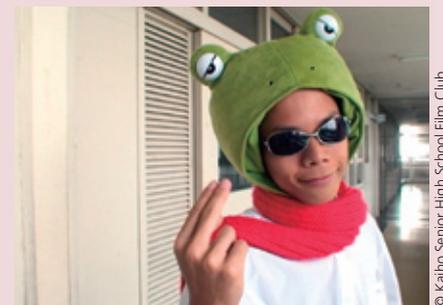
<http://www.zenkoukyo.or.jp/>

### えいがこうしえん 映画甲子園 Eiga Koshien

(National High School Film Contest)

Some high school students are passionate about film-making. There were over 200 entries for the 4th Eiga Koshien in 2009.

*Akaten Hiro* 赤点ヒーロー (Failing Grade Hero), made by the Film Club at Kaiho Senior High School in Okinawa prefecture, is a comedy about the relationship of two classmates who sit next to each other at school. The Film Club members take pride in their amazing teamwork. The 20 club members divided up the script-writing, filming, and editing work; they also composed and performed the theme song for the film. Everyone was delighted when the film came out the way they had imagined, making the students proud of the time and effort they had invested.



A scene from *Akaten Hiro*.

© Kaiho Senior High School Film Club

The film *Sakura* さくら (Cherry Blossoms), entered by the Broadcasting Club at Saitama Prefectural Fukaya Daiichi High School, is set in the year 2099, when the earth has become a different place due to the destruction of the environment. The film tells the story of the encounter and separation of two girls who live in this changed world. Miyakawa Tatsuya, advisor of the Broadcasting Club, saw the students' perspectives deepening through the film-making process. “Your film is like a part of you. When you work on a film, you discover a part of yourself that you don't usually see.”

The official name of this contest is Kokosei Eiga Konkuru. It is organized by the School Multimedia Network Support Center, an NPO.

<http://www.smn.or.jp/eigakoushien/>



A scene from *Sakura*.

© Fukaya Daiichi High School Broadcasting Club

# Fashion Lovers Have a Go at National Competition!

## Shoko and Akane

(Second-year high school students from Kanagawa prefecture)

*In this issue, we interview two students in the fashion club at the same high school. These two girls, who are crazy about making clothes, recently competed in the "Fashion Koshien 2009," a national competition where high school students put their design and technical skills to the test.*

(\*For the term "Koshien," see Japanese Culture Now.)

### What is the Fashion Koshien?

The official name of the Fashion Koshien is Japan Fashion Design Competition for High School Students. Run by the Hirosaki Chamber of Commerce and Industry and three other organizations in Aomori prefecture, the competition has been held every year since 2001 as an attempt to develop the fashion industry in the prefecture and revitalize the city of Hirosaki.

Participation in the competition is by teams of two or three persons from the same high school, which must first submit design sketches for the preliminary screening. If their designs pass that first screening, the teams create the actual outfits and accessories to be judged at the final screening in Hirosaki. The final screening is a fashion show, and one member from each team models the clothes on stage. The jury, which is made up chiefly of fashion designers and fashion journalists, examines the outfits and the teams with the best designs and techniques receive awards.



The opening ceremony for the final screening. Of the 234 schools from which teams applied, 40 were chosen in the final screening. The teams are allowed to come up with their own themes. Some contestants decided to design apparel on themes reflecting current social issues, like the environment and the H1N1 influenza epidemic, while others experimented with new materials such as wood shavings.

**Q:** Please tell us what made you want to compete in the Fashion Koshien.

**Shoko:** Our school fashion club holds four shows each year at school and one show in the community. We make clothes according to themes or motifs decided for each time. If, for example, the theme is ribbons, we would use fabric with patterns of ribbons and use ribbons for



Shoko

I've always loved making clothes—not just for myself, but also as gifts for friends.



Akane

I love making and collecting accessories.



You can listen to their voices.

accessories or decoration of the clothes. As a second-year student, I have gotten pretty comfortable making clothes, so I thought I could participate in a Fashion Koshien team. I had seen a program about the Fashion Koshien on television a few years ago, and I was kind of interested in it. I want to work in the fashion industry in the future, so I wanted to try my hand at a national competition like this one.

**Akane:** Shoko asked me if I wanted to apply to Fashion Koshien with her. I had also been interested in the competition, so I was pretty excited when she asked me.

**Shoko:** When we heard that our designs had passed the preliminary screening, I was so happy I burst out crying and my hands were trembling! I had been simply satisfied at having applied, and it didn't even occur to me that our team might pass the first screening.

**Q:** What was it like working on your outfit for the final screening? What kinds of difficulties did you face?

**Shoko:** We didn't like feeling rushed, so we decided to have our outfit ready a few days before the final screening. To meet our deadline, we set up a schedule and divided the work up between the two of us. But in the end, it took much longer than expected to make the flowers that went on the outfit. I felt a bit panicky that we were behind schedule, but Akane stayed cool and good-tempered and helped me with the sewing on my part of the work.

In our club, we generally work on our clothes individually, but having Akane working with me gave me a lot of strength and courage.

**Akane:** When I'd be working on the sewing machine late at night, my family would complain that the noise was keeping them up. When you speed up the sewing



Here is Shoko modeling her team's outfit, entitled "She has . . ."

© Fashion Koshien Executive Committee

machine, it makes a lot of noise. So I had to sew very slowly to keep the noise down—the last two nights before the deadline, I ended up staying up all night to finish the project.

**Q: What impressed you the most at the final examination?**

**Shoko:** The contestants, who had been selected from all over Japan, had an amazing sense of design and seemed very highly motivated. They were good at coordinating the makeup with the clothes, and the way they walked on stage and posed in their outfits was very skilled. I was impressed at the level of work that high school students can achieve.

**Akane:** In the fashion shows I have participated in up until now, it was all about making whatever outfits I wanted and showing them. All that really mattered was for the designer and the model to be satisfied. However, at the Fashion Koshien, it's not just about presenting the clothes; our work is also examined and the prizes depend on what the judges decide about it. It was my first time participating in anything like this, so the experience came as kind of a shock. Unfortunately, we didn't win any awards, but entering the Fashion Koshien made me want to make clothes that will make people sit up and take notice.

**Q: What career do you want to pursue?**

**Shoko:** I would like to be a patternmaker. A patternmaker's job is to transform designer sketches into patterns that are used to make the actual clothing.

At the final screening, one of the judges pointed out that our design drawings were very good, so that it was a shame that the size of the flowers and colors of the actual outfit were different from those in the sketch. From this, I learned the importance of staying faithful to the original design when making patterns.

**Akane:** I want to be a fashion designer. I'd love to see my clothes on the catwalk at Paris Fashion Week\* or in famous magazines one day!

Before I joined the fashion club, I had never made clothes. I learned little by little by asking people around me and reading books. When I first started, I had no idea



Preparing the outfit. Cutting the fabric and painting a camouflage pattern on it. The pieces are then sewn together and the finishing touches added!

how to make sleeves. I remember using toilet paper cylinders to try to make the fabric roll into a sleeve shape. (laughter) But through trial and error, I learned how exciting it is to design and make clothes. This experience at Fashion Koshien has also given me new confidence. I would very much like to continue working with apparel making in the future.

\*It is one of the biannual Paris shows of the big brand new fashions.

Fashion Koshien is supported not only by the participants and organizers, but also by local citizens as staff members and spectators. Here are the voices of different people who are involved in the Fashion Koshien event.



I am always amazed at the wide variety of ideas of the participants and their energetic pursuit of their dreams. It's hard to believe that they are my age and that they can compete in a big competition like this one.

**Volunteer (Female, third-year high school student)**



I look forward to this event every year—I never miss it! I'm always impressed by these young competitors' designs, colors, and ideas. I try to keep a youthful outlook by coming to see their inspiring projects.

**Local spectator (Female, 50s)**



First prize: Nan Piece ["How many pieces . . ."] All the puzzle pieces that make up this design are different from one another, but they are somehow all connected, expressing an image of the relationships that bind people together.



View this and other entries at "Click Japan."

© Fashion Koshien Executive Committee

**My favorites**



**好きなことば (favorite phrase)**

**Shoko:** 仕事<sup>しごと</sup>が楽し<sup>たの</sup>けりゃ人生<sup>じんせい</sup>の半分<sup>はんぶん</sup>は楽し<sup>たの</sup>いんだぜ

"Hey! If you enjoy your work, you enjoy half your life!"

This is a line from the Japanese television drama "Real Clothes." I really want a life in which I can enjoy my work.

**Akane:** 素敵<sup>すてき</sup>に無敵<sup>むてき</sup>

"Suteki ni muteki," which means "a generally attractive person can overcome all difficulties."

That's what I always tell myself to aspire to.

**好きな色 (favorite color)**

**Shoko:** 紫色<sup>むらさきいろ</sup>。特にこれ<sup>とく</sup>といった理由<sup>りゆう</sup>はないですが、紫<sup>むらさき</sup>と黄色<sup>きいろ</sup>の組み合わせ<sup>あわせ</sup>が好き<sup>す</sup>なので。

Purple. I don't have any special reason, but I really like combinations of purple and yellow.

**Akane:** 全部<sup>ぜんぶ</sup>の色<sup>いろ</sup>！カラフル<sup>しあわ</sup>だと幸せ<sup>きぶん</sup>な気分<sup>きぶん</sup>になるからです。

I love all colors! The combination of many colors makes me feel happy.