

News and Reviews

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disciplinarians and dedicated, paternalistic coaches, offering tough love and life lessons to generations of teenage players.

The first third of the film introduces the schools, a few of the players, and the coaches, and is divided into short sections organized by some keywords of high school baseball: heart, fighting spirit, youth, dreams, and effort. We are shown one of the Tennoji players whose day begins with breakfast at 4:15 am, followed by early morning practice, where the players swing bats like kendo sticks. Both schools have long after-school practices,

and we are then taken to Chiben Academy's 8:30 pm practice in the pouring rain, with the coach lecturing the team that they must practice three or four times harder than their rivals to win.

One of the film's more poignant scenes is the Chiben coach's announcement of his selection of the 18 players

for the tournament squad, out of a team of 34 players. Coaches must balance talent, seniority, and effort in choosing from teams as large as

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Above, left: Tokaidai Shoyo High School players singing their school song. Above: Chiben Baseball team racing in Wakayama opening ceremonies.

Kokoyakyu: High School Baseball

■ Directed by Kenneth Eng. 2006. 54 minutes. In English and Japanese with English subtitles.

American baseball audiences in 2007 are hearing a lot about Japan's national high school baseball tournament because of the Boston Red Sox's new \$100-million pitching ace, Matsuzaka Daisuke (or Dice-K, as he is called over

REVIEW

here). Over and over, we are reminded that Matsuzaka became a national hero at 18 for pitching his team to Japan's high school championship at fabled Kōshien Stadium in August 1998. Baseball is an official sport in over 4000 high schools in Japan and the annual summer tournament at Kōshien is the pinnacle of the baseball season.

The summer national championship begins with 49 qualifying tournaments, and the regional winners come to Kōshien Stadium just west of Osaka for a two-week single-elimination championship tournament in the intense heat and humidity of August. Conduct is strictly regulated and choreographed by the National High School Baseball Federation, supported by the Asahi newspaper company, which started the tournament in 1915 and continues to sponsor it. There are other popular youth sports from Little League baseball to university rugby, but high school baseball—*kōkyōyakyū* in Japanese—is still the national passion and Kōshien Stadium remains its Mecca. This documentary tells us why, vividly and poignantly.

Kokoyakyū is beautifully filmed and well-edited, a bit reverential, but still effective in conveying some of what is importantly at stake in this long-running national sports spectacle. It can be used in courses on Japan and on sport and society at the high school and university levels.

The film opens at Kōshien Stadium with the pageantry of the opening ceremonies—the parade and assembly of the teams, the players' oath, the energetic cheerleaders, and the raucous school supporters. The film is structured around the efforts of two representative teams to reach these Kōshien finals in 2004.

Chiben Academy in Wakayama Prefecture, just south of Osaka, is a well-known private school baseball powerhouse, three times the national champions. Like other "baseball high schools," it scouts and recruits potential players much as William Gates and Arthur Agee were recruited by a private school in the U.S. basketball documentary *Hoop Dreams*. In contrast, Tennoji High School in Osaka is a gritty urban public high school that has never been to Kōshien; its chances are much more remote.

But what both high schools have in common are wise and wizened coaches, who are featured prominently in the film. Both come across as strict

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The Asian Educational Media Service (AEMS) is a program of the Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). Our mission is to help educators at all levels, from elementary through college, find multimedia resources for learning and teaching about Asia, to promote understanding of Asian peoples and cultures. Our free services include:

- *News and Reviews*, published three times a year;
- An online database of audiovisual materials;
- Reference service;
- Educator workshops on teaching with film;
- Lesson plans, streaming video, film recommendations and other web resources;
- A lending library for local educators

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FROM THE EDITOR

As we all launch into a new academic year, AEMS is pleased to present a diverse set of reviews in our Fall 2007 issue. William Kelly—one of the foremost English-language experts on baseball in Japan—gives us a thoughtful review of *Kokoyakyu*, broadcast last summer on PBS's P.O.V. series. This issue also offers two excellent resources for upper primary students, both told from children's perspectives: Karla Loveall considers the "Children in China" series, while Rachel Heilman contextualizes *Going to School in India*. We are pleased to welcome back Jack Harris to review the beautiful Vietnamese feature film, *Buffalo Boy*. And finally, Anne Prescott writes about resources for teaching about *bunraku*, the Japanese art of puppet theater.

Our "Teaching and Technology" column is taking a break this issue; I encourage anyone experimenting with new ways to use technology in teaching about Asia at any level to submit an idea for this column to me. Similarly, we have started a new section of our website called "Notes from the Classroom," in which teachers are invited to share their experiences teaching with specific films (whether reviewed by AEMS or not). How did you plan the lesson? How did the students respond? Submissions are always welcome! You can read our first contribution here: www.aems.uiuc.edu/publications/notes.

Online-Only Reviews Premiere

As promised, we have now added two new sections of online-only reviews: one for films and videos and one for web resources. The first of these, *Eating the Scorpion*, is a documentary about a group of American teachers who travel to China and bring home what they learn, reviewed by Anne Prescott. Robert Petersen evaluates two vivid films about traditional dramatic arts in rural India: *Gone to Pat* and *Surviving Chau*. These reviews—and hopefully others, by the time you read this—can be found at www.aems.uiuc.edu/publications/filmreviews.

Meanwhile, Rebecca Nickerson, who has just completed a three-year tenure as a graduate editorial assistant here at AEMS and is on her way to conduct doctoral research in Japan, reviews how-to-bow.com, a lively and informative website on Japanese etiquette and customs. You'll find this and other website reviews at www.aems.uiuc.edu/publications/webreviews.

Finally, I will again be guest editing a special AEMS multimedia section for the spring issue of *Education About Asia*; stay tuned for a request for submissions.

To keep up to date with new reviews, website features, events, and other announcements at AEMS, subscribe to our RSS feed (an explanation of RSS is available on our home page). ■

—Tanya Lee, Editor

Kokoyakyu

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80 players. In this scene, Ryōichi Haruki, one of only five seniors, waits anxiously to be the last player chosen and he is assigned #18. In making his selection the coach makes much of Ryōichi's progress in realizing that he must play for the team and not for himself (and he ends up making some real contributions).

The rest of the film follows the fortunes of the two teams through their regional qualifying tournaments. Actual game footage is rather brief and perfunctory, and the cameras linger longer over pre-game and post-game scenes. This editing much enhances the value of the film, which is more about sports team dynamics than baseball techniques. The pressure is palpable, and powerful emotions lie just beneath the stoic expressions of coaches, players, and supporters.

No doubt the film crew was disappointed that neither team made it through to Kōshien,

although the film is more real because of it. Failure is by far the more common experience, in this and other competitive sports, and in the end it is the aftermath of defeat that leaves the strongest impression on this viewer.

Japanese high school baseball deals rather well with failure, with its staged and public post-game gatherings—the cheerleaders serenade the team, the team apologizes, the coach eulogizes, and thick streamers of good luck paper cranes are handed over to the winners. The disappointment of the final defeat is faced head on; the seniors address their teammates and their parents outside the stadium with brief tearful speeches of appreciation. And the coach plans the first practice of the next season to begin the following day!

High school baseball in Japan has long been celebrated for its youthful exuberance, its fighting spirit, and its grueling practices. There is deep sentiment behind this nostalgia, and there is some substance to such an idealization of

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They argue that it is a southern story without the southern soul, and that the dialogues are influenced by the West and are not native to southern Vietnamese life. While, for my Hanoian students, Ca Mau is very far away and the lives of their poorest farmers quite remote, these representations speak to the conditions of life in the 1940s and may have applicability today. The film's depiction of a darker-side to Vietnamese masculinity with its violence and misogyny remains a reality in Vietnam. The film's images of the floods, the stark minimalism of the houses, the tempered dress, and of course, the centrality of the buffalo are all quite powerful representations of a Vietnamese way of life still found in the countryside.

This is not an appropriate film for young children, because of the violent and sexual subject matter (though little is explicitly shown on screen). High school and college students will find it a fascinating story of an adolescent coming of age with its masculine rituals and displays. They will also find this watery landscape foreign and foreboding and get a fictionalized glimpse into the life of desperately poor Vietnamese peasant farmers then, and even now.

Although this film would not be useful for a history lesson, it does provide some timeless images of daily life, human character, and adversity. Useful discussions for Western audiences might be the complex relationships between fathers and sons, men and women, men's relationships to other men, respect for elders and ancestors, and human choices in the face of desperate hardship. ■

Jack D. Harris is professor of Sociology at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York. His research areas include Vietnam social organization and Vietnamese masculinity. He has been the recipient of an Academic Exchange Grant from the Henry Luce Foundation, Center for Educational Exchange with Vietnam, American Council of Learned Societies, and ASIANetwork (2006), and a Vietnam Research Grant from the ASIANetwork Freeman Foundation Student Faculty Fellows Program (2003).

Buffalo Boy is available on DVD and VHS from First Run/Icarus Films. Price is \$248 for purchase and \$125 for rental.

Additional Resources

A discussion guide for *Buffalo Boy*, developed by The Global Film Initiative, is available on the DVD and also at www.frif.com/guide/buf.pdf. In addition to discussion questions on film aesthetics and narrative themes, the guide includes background information on the film, the writer/director, and Vietnam, as well as a glossary.

Kokoyakyu

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high school sport, although the film lends too much credence to the dubious Japanese view that such qualities are unique.

In using the film with students, it would be more useful to probe the claims of the coaches, players, and supporters.

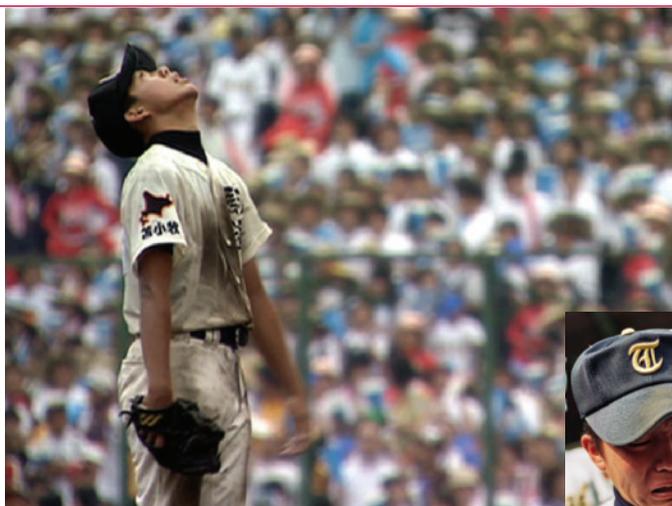
For instance, it is true that there is a very high ratio of practice to games in Japanese school baseball, which goes back to the very beginning of the sport. In this, it is less like baseball in the United States and more like high school football, whose players can work year-round through spring training, preseason and season in order to play 10 or 12 games. To talk about "American game, Japanese discipline" requires a willful suspension of disbelief about our own youth sports!

And lest we are tempted to accept the spiritual nostrums of the two coaches at face value, we should recall that the two other big stories of Japanese baseball this spring were scandals involving covert payments to players and illegal subsidies. In fact, any observer of Japanese baseball knows these to be longstanding practices, periodically exposed but never eradicated, not unlike the underside of the NCAA, Little League baseball, and popular school sports everywhere. What the Chiben player Maeda notes in a moment of candor would surprise no fan of school sports anywhere:

"It's hard to do both academics and baseball. I don't do a lot of studying; it's mostly all baseball for me. I know I should, but I can't keep up. It's like the baseball club gets special treatment. We have our own classes and stuff. We have it a lot easier. We get basic questions on the test."

Of course high-minded character-building goes hand-in-hand with low-down tawdry dealings. Since the beginnings of school sports in the mid-nineteenth century on the playing fields of English elite schools, the purism of an amateur ethic and the prestige of success have mingled uneasily. Japanese high school baseball, shown here with perhaps a rosier-tinted lens than necessary, expresses these universal tensions in colorful spectacle, all-out effort, school spirit, and national passion. ■

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Pitcher from Komodai Tomokomai, moments before his winning pitch.



Tokaidai Shoyo High School player crying after losing at Kōshien Stadium.

William W. Kelly is professor of Anthropology and Sumitomo Professor of Japanese Studies in the Department of Anthropology at Yale University. Some of his research interests include sport and body cultures in Japan. He recently edited (with Sugimoto Atsuo) *This Sporting Life: Sports and Body Culture in Modern Japan* (2007).

Kokoyakyu: High School Baseball is available on DVD from Customflix. Purchase price is \$29.95.

Suggested Reading

- Cave, Peter. 2004. "Bukatsudōs: The Educational Role of Japanese School Clubs." *Journal of Japanese Studies* 30:383–415.
- Moeran, Brian. 1984. "Individual, Group and *Seishin*: Japan's Internal Cultural Debate." *Man* 19:252–266.
- Gordon, Dan. 2006. "Japan: Changing of the Guard in High School Baseball." In *Baseball Without Borders: The International Pastime*. George Gmelch, editor. Albany: State University of New York Press, pp 3–21. Appropriate for high school and college students.

Suggested Viewing

- "Young Baseball Heroes." 1986. Part of the *Faces of Japan* series produced by TeleJapan USA. Recommended for comparison with *Kokoyakyu*.

Additional Resources

- "Kokoyakyu Lesson Plan." P.O.V. website: www.pbs.org/pov/pov2006/kokoyakyu/for.html.
- Kokoyakyu: High School Baseball. Official film website. www.projectilearts.org/kokoyakyu/high_school_baseball.html. Includes background information and filmmakers' weblog.