

Speech

**Presented by HE Yamagami Shingo
Ambassador of Japan to Australia**

**On the occasion of the Farewell Reception for the
Australian Baseball Team**

4 November 2022, Residence of the Consul-General of Japan in Sydney

Mr David Hynes, President of Baseball Australia

Mr Glenn Williams, CEO of Baseball Australia

Mr Ian Williams, Director of Baseball Australia

Mr David Nilsson, Head Coach of Team Australia

Mr Bruce Miller AO, Advisor to Baseball Australia and former Australian Ambassador to Japan,

Distinguished guests,

I am delighted to be here to bid a fond farewell or *いってらっしゃい* to Team Australia.

There are two reasons why I am particularly excited to be here tonight.

The first is that sports are a very important pillar in our Japan-Australia relationship. We train together, exchange players and battle it out on the baseball field, the basketball court and the soccer pitch, among others.

We work together as a team, upskilling our players, sharing our experiences and working hard towards achieving our greatest shared goal.

That is – beating the US in baseball. And, New Zealand in the rugby.

The second reason is that I am a former *yakyū shōnen*, or ‘baseball kid’.

Imagine, if you will, a very serious kid who lives, eats and breathes baseball, with a very short haircut and a deep tan.

It might not seem that way now, but this was me as a youngster. I was going to joke that

I am still not a bad pitcher, but I was worried you might ask me to prove it.

In many ways, two sports – baseball and rugby – represent our countries' comparative advantages.

Australians are known worldwide for their power and prowess on the rugby field.

And it is my personal opinion that the best athletes in Japan all play baseball (but please keep this a secret from soccer fans!).

I have noticed that both our countries excel at team sports – AFL, cricket, rugby and basketball in Australia, and baseball, soccer and volleyball in Japan.

And, of course, we saw our various talents demonstrated at last year's Tokyo Olympic & Paralympic Games. I know both our countries were so proud to see our athletes represent us through teamwork and camaraderie.

But while Japan's OHTANI Shōhei is truly a once-in-a-century two-way player, and Australia has produced rugby greats such as Eddie Jones, and, of course, Ian Williams, nothing can be taken for granted.

We only have to think back, as Manager KURIYAMA noted, to the 2004 Athens Olympics, when Team Australia had a magnificent victory over Samurai Japan.

And only a few weeks ago, the Australia A rugby team was beaten by Japan in Osaka for the first time in their 13-match history. (Between you and me, there were actually two Aussies in the Japanese squad)

So, this clearly demonstrates how important it is that our athletes train together in Japan and Australia.

Many an Aussie baseballer has honed their skills in Japan – as you will also do in the coming weeks, and as your Manager 'Dingo' and Coach Mr Nakamura did before you.

What's more, partner teams from Japan regularly send players down under for the off-season. This includes IMANAGA Shōta, who once came to Canberra for the off-season and is now waiting for you in Sapporo as part of the Japanese squad. It has always been a two-way street.

Not only do these players gain more experience with Australian teams, but they also gain an understanding of the nuances of barbecuing snags, the best places for a dip in the ocean, and other tips for enjoying the Aussie summer.

These exchanges are why our teams are capable of playing to each other's advantages, and have a knack for finding each other's weaknesses.

But after all is said and done, ruffled feathers can always be smoothed over with another of our shared loves – a nice cold beer. Indeed, this is another commonality between our countries – beer has to be cold!

And speaking of cold beer, there will be no shortage of the stuff in Hokkaido!

Not only 'Sapporo' beer, but also Nikka Whiskey, and scrumptious ramen.

My personal recommendation – Sapporo's famous miso ramen followed by a palate cleanser of delectable fresh seafood, and accompanied by Hokkaido's wonderful beverages.

I know you won't forget that this trip is not a food tour, but a baseball tour... And I am not sure if your team nutritionist will be happy with my suggestions...

At the very least, I hope you will be scoping out some places to take your families and friends next time – perhaps to Hokkaido's world-class skiing. But be careful, I was once told that on every plane out of Japan in the winter, you can spot at least one poor Aussie with a broken limb.

To conclude, I wish you all a safe trip across the Pacific Ocean, and I hope you enjoy some healthy competition and hearty hospitality from Japan's greatest athletes.