

News From Under the Southern Cross (Edition 94):

The Melbourne Cup and Exchange Through Baseball

16 November, 2022

Last week, I once again had the chance to visit Melbourne and Sydney on a quick business trip. Running hot-on-the-heels of Prime Minister Kishida's recent visit to Australia, it was physically demanding, but equally fruitful.



Flemington Racecourse was packed with horseracing fans

1. Horse racing: the Melbourne Cup

My Melbournian friends have always told me:

“You can’t say you’ve been to Melbourne - or Australia, for that matter! - if you haven’t watched a tennis match at the Aussie Open, an AFL match and the Melbourne Cup!”

I’m very fortunate to have already ticked the first two off my list, as written about in earlier editions of ‘News From Under the Southern Cross’. This time, thanks to the kindness of the Japan Racing Association (JRA), I could at long last enjoy the Melbourne Cup!

Better yet, we had the great honour of watching the race from special seats in the company of VIP guests such as Governor General Hurley and Mrs Hurley, Victorian Governor Dessau and her husband and Federal Trade Minister Farrell and his wife. In terms of foreign Ambassadors, US Ambassador Kennedy and myself were also in attendance.

2. An indescribable atmosphere

After the restrictions and spectator-less races of the pandemic, this year was the first time in three years that the event was held at full capacity. As Flemington Racecourse resounded with the cheers of over 70,000 spectators, not even the unfortunate weather and occasional thunderstorms could put a damper on the melting pot of enthusiasm and excitement that is the Melbourne Cup!

The evening before the race, hundreds of guests convened on the grand hall of Victoria's palatial Government House for one of the signature events on Melbourne's social calendar – the Melbourne Cup Eve Reception. There, fashionable outfits and hats from Cups gone by were on display.



The many outfits on display.
The ladies' fashion itself is
another 'game' of the
Melbourne Cup!

Accepting the heart-warming hospitality of Governor Dessau and her husband, we once again had the privilege of staying at Government House. The upbeat sounds of Cup Eve festivities happening in the neighbouring park continued on well into the night, keeping our spirits (and our eyelids) lifted!

3. You win some, you lose some

The dress code also captured my interest. It specified that we were to wear ‘morning suits or national dress.’ So, for the first time since my attestation ceremony at the Imperial Palace when I was formally appointed as Ambassador of Australia by His Majesty the Emperor, I dusted off my penguin attire! My wife chose to wear a kimono.

When briefed before taking up my position in Australia, I was told “Aussies are very casual, so you’ll never have to wear a tuxedo!”...hold on a second! Since arriving, on several special occasions there have been black-tie dinners, and while I may have noticed a few men pushing the protocol boundaries at the Cup, all the dignitaries were loyal to the dress code.



The ladies were absolutely gorgeous! Dresses, hats and more – they were just like a hundred flowers!

Getting back on the main track – the horseracing! Following a ‘side with the winner’ logic, I foolishly bet on the most popular horse...I guess this is what they mean by ‘repentance comes too late’?

It was a good lesson for me!

My wife and I carrying the trophy for ‘good luck’!
(Don’t ask me how it worked out...)

4. Sponsored by a Japanese company

I was especially happy to see that this year’s “Melbourne Cup” was officially the “Lexus Melbourne Cup”, featuring the name of the event sponsor, a Japanese company.



"Lexus Melbourne Cup" banner

The 'Lexus Suite', where dignitaries from Japanese companies were seated, was adjacent to the VIP's 'Chairman's Suite'. This was my chance to shine as an Ambassador! As I invited Governor General Hurley and Mrs Hurley, Victorian Governor Dessau and her husband, Trade Minister Farrell and his wife, and US Ambassador Kennedy to the 'Lexus Suite', we took the chance to take a few snaps with the Japanese delegation. What a great memory.



Governor General Hurley and Mrs Hurley (centre), Governor Dessau (to their right)
with Japanese dignitaries



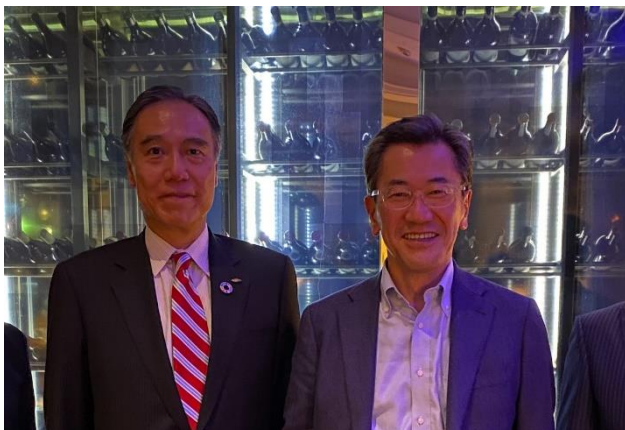
US Ambassador Kennedy with Japanese dignitaries

5. Visit from friends far away

The very next morning after the Cup, I was off to Sydney for back-to-back visits with Mr ABE Shuichi, Governor of Nagano Prefecture, and Mr KASUTANI Toshihide, Executive Director of Tokyo Gas, who were both visiting Sydney.

Both gentlemen are university classmates of mine, from many moons ago! With Governor ABE (who previously served in the Ministry of Home Affairs before becoming Governor of Nagano Prefecture) I exchanged ideas on how to increase the number of Australian tourists to Nagano. Executive Director KASUTANI (who served in the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry before Tokyo Gas) and I spoke at length about how to further promote Japan-Australia cooperation in the resource and energy fields to ensure the economic security of Japan. Both were great discussions.

The re-opening of borders and the return of two-way travel between Japan and Australia is finally starting to feel real!



With Nagano Prefecture Governor ABE



With Tokyo Gas Executive Director KASUTANI

6. Baseball reception

One of the other major tasks on the agenda for my Sydney visit was to join newly appointed Consul-General TOKUDA and his wife in hosting a send-off for the Australian national baseball team at the Consul-General's official residence. The Aussie team was set to play two matches against Samurai Japan in Sapporo the next week. We invited them to a reception the night before they took-off for Japan.

Their team manager, 'Dingo' (his nickname when he played in Japan), used to play for the Chunichi Dragons. His firm hand-shake sure felt like shaking a glove! Their coach is Michael Nakamura, whose brilliant closing pitches once led the Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters all the way to the top of Japan's national league.



Team Australia and members of Baseball Australia with Consul-General TOKUDA and his wife (centre-right)

As a former baseball kid myself, I was beside myself to be part of this event. Samurai Japan Team Manager KURIYAMA kindly sent a video message. Consul-General TOKUDA appeared wearing the Samurai Japan uniform and I in the Australian uniform. Some of you may think I'm a traitor, but I hope you'll forgive me – this too is diplomacy! I'll be sure to cheer extra loudly for the Samurais when I watch the Sapporo game.

[See [here](#) to read my speech. I really gave this one my all!]



Japan's National Team 'Samurai Japan'
Manager KURIYAMA



Australia's National Team Manager
David Nelson (Dingo)



Giving my speech in the Australian uniform

7. Speaking baseball

I'm not just referring to the old slogan for American cigarettes, but Australia and Japan - both countries that excel in team sports as well as individual sports - know what it means to 'speak baseball'.

By the pool of the Consul-General's residence, overlooking Sydney Harbour at dusk, just as the summer air begins to thicken. We could have talked baseball all night. Surrounded by giants who, while proudly recalling defeating Japan twice at the 2004 Athens Olympics, just as sincerely exclaimed, "Shohei Otani is unbelievable! Now is the moment for Japanese baseball to be number one!" - it was an energising evening and truly one to remember.



Australian baseball players by the pool
of the Consul-General's residence

YAMAGAMI Shingo