

REPORT ON THE SEPTEMBER 2024 ENTERPRISE INVESTIGATIVE VISIT TO JAPAN

From 8–18 September 2024, I undertook an enterprise investigative visit to Japan supported by Mr. Danny Maruyama. Our goal was to explore opportunities for building partnerships with educational institutions and professional baseball organisations, and to promote sporting exchanges between Japan and Queensland.

Osaka: Engagement with Kobe Koryo Gakuen High School

We arrived in Osaka on the evening of 8 September and stayed at Hotel Granvia for three nights. During our stay, Danny and I met with the leadership team of Kobe Koryo Gakuen High School, including Principal Mr. Inoue, Deputy Principal Mr. Arimoto, and Girls Baseball Program Coordinator Ms. Yamasaki. Prior to our formal meeting, we had a luncheon with Ms. Yamasaki, where she outlined the school's vision for its baseball program. Kobe Koryo Gakuen High School is an independent education school providing co-educational secondary school curriculum with a variety of extra-curricular activities and their girl's baseball program has a history of exceptional performance at the prestigious Girls Koshien Tournament.

At the school, we were warmly received by Mr. Inoue, and gifts were exchanged to mark the beginning of what we hope will be a lasting relationship. I congratulated the school's leadership team on their recent success, as their Girls Baseball Program had just secured its second consecutive victory in the prestigious Girls Koshien Tournament.

Ms. Yamasaki expressed the school's commitment to expanding its international outreach and confirmed plans to send around 38 girls from their baseball program to Southeast Queensland in February 2025. During this visit, we agreed to arrange a series of games between Kobe Koryo Gakuen High School and Queensland's female State programs. Our intent is to have the Queensland Women's Team, Queensland Development Team and Youth Women's team play the two Kobe Koryo teams in February.

We were also given the opportunity to inspect their impressive baseball facilities and observe a practice session. Notably, their training sessions were largely player-led, with athletes taking on leadership roles to coordinate activities such as stretching, batting practice, and team defence drills. The school's facilities included a two-lane batting cage, a full-sized deco-surface baseball field, and a multi-functional clubroom with an indoor climbing wall—installed to help students improve shoulder function and grip strength.



Figure 1 Kobe Koryo Gakuen High School Campus



Figure 2 Mr Jones and Mr. Maruyama meet with Mr. Inoue – Principal, Kobe Koryo Gakuen High School

The school also expressed interest in hosting games against any teams we can coordinate to visit Kobe during the northern hemisphere summer, providing opportunities for us to send teams of both genders to play in Japan.

Tokyo: Collaboration with Tokyo North Council.

On 12 September, we travelled to Tokyo via the bullet train—a highly efficient, affordable and comfortable mode of transport. We stayed at the Prince Shinagawa Hotel conveniently located across the street from Shinagawa train station. In Tokyo, we met with the Sport Development team and local councillors, including Mayor Ms. Kanako Yamada, from Tokyo North Council (Kita-Ku). A key point of discussion was identifying opportunities for collaboration that would promote physical activity among the region’s ageing population. We explored the possibility of encouraging Japanese teams to participate in international events like the Pan Pacific Masters Games and our own Masters Tournament in Queensland. The council expressed interest in supporting these initiatives and helping promote them among their constituents. Our relationship will also provide opportunities for Kita-Ku Ward Council to make contact with other sports in Queensland, further strengthening the relationship between Queensland and Japan.



Figure 3 Meeting with Tokyo Kita-Ku Council including Mayor Ms. Kanako Yamada

Nippon Professional Baseball Organisation.

We had the pleasure of meeting with Mr. Nakamura and Mr. Matsuzaki from the Nippon Professional Baseball Organisation (NPB). Our discussions centred on the Brisbane 2032 Olympics and the opportunities it presents for sport development in the region. We presented our plans for building facilities that could serve as Spring Training venues for NPB teams, positioning Queensland as an attractive alternative to their traditional locations.

Many NPB team reportedly utilise Hawaii or Arizona for their spring training venues. A key advantage we highlighted was the shorter travel time and minimal time zone difference between Japan and Queensland, which would reduce the disruption to teams’ preseason preparations. This was viewed favourably however, Mr. Nakamura raised concerns about finding sufficiently competitive opponents for NPB teams in Australia. Attracting multiple teams could create more competitive opportunities for the teams that take up the opportunity and lead to high-level games that could generate tourism and benefit the local economy. Collaboration between Australian State Associations may be crucial to providing sufficient facilities for enough NPB teams to utilise Australia that might facilitate them playing each other.



Figure 4 Meeting with Nippon Professional Baseball Representatives.

During the subsequent tour through the NPB Tokyo office, I had the chance to meet with a number of their staff teams including their sport development team. Mr. Nakamura provided me with two copies of the program the NPB provide to school teachers throughout Japan. Developed by the Sport Development department the resource is similar to our Aussie Teeball manual. The Development team also gave me one of the foam balls used to play many of the games in their program. These resources have been passed on to our Game Development Manager for their reference.

During our stay in Tokyo, Mr. Nakamura kindly provided us with tickets to watch the Tokyo Giants face off against the Yakult Swallows at the Tokyo Dome. We also visited the Japanese Baseball Hall of Fame, where the inclusion of Baseball5 trophies showcased Japan's growing interest in this version of the game.



Figure 5 B5 Showcase in Japanese Baseball Hall of Fame.

Fuchu: Emerging Professional Women's Baseball Competition

Michael Crooks (Baseball Australia) kindly provided an introduction to Mr Daisuke Minagawa and Mr. Aida in Fuchu. Baseball Australia have recently identified Fuchu as Team Australia's home away from home when they need to prepare for benchmark events in Asia. Mr. Aida is leading an initiative to enter a team from Fuchu in a developing women's baseball competition in Japan. Baseball Australia recently provided the 40 players on the Emerald's squad with the opportunity to try out for Mr. Aida's team with two players taking up the opportunity. While more needs to be done to identify the barriers preventing players from taking this opportunity, the incorporation of Japanese language skills and cultural exchange tours may contribute to more players identifying Japan as a suitable opportunity to continue their development and career. Any progress in this aspect will be coordinated with Baseball Australia.



Figure 6 Fuchu Stadium with Mr Aida and Mr. Maruyama.

Conclusion and Future Outlook

This visit was highly productive in establishing new relationships and strengthening existing ones, with a clear path forward for collaboration in 2025 and beyond. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Mr. Danny Maruyama, BQ Special Advisor Partnerships – Japan, for his extensive support throughout the trip. Thank you also to the Board of Baseball Queensland for supporting this initiative.

We look forward to hosting the Kobe Koryo Gakuen girls' baseball teams in February 2025 and pursuing opportunities to bring NPB teams to Queensland for Spring Training. Further discussions with



Figure 7 Kobe Koryo Girls Team Practice

Tokyo North Council and NPB will be essential in turning these opportunities into tangible outcomes for Baseball Queensland.

Personal letters of appreciation have been distributed to those we met with in Japan to further develop those relationships and demonstrate appreciation for their hospitality.



Gareth Jones
Chief Executive Officer
Baseball Queensland



Figure 8 Kobe Koryo Gakuen High School's Record of Championships.