

## **Program Overview & Narrative Summary**

The TOMODACHI / NAJAS Ofunato – San Diego Youth Baseball Exchange (“TOMODACHI”) was held from August 4-12 in San Diego, California. Although baseball is very popular in both nations and we use it as the framework for our exchange, providing positive intercultural experiences and forging new and lasting friendships are the true goals of the TOMODACHI. This was the third year of an exchange that continues to make a strong and lasting impact in the lives of all participants.

The Ofunato group included eight middle school players (ages 12-13) and two coaches. Ten players were originally scheduled to participate, but one player and his brother were unable to make the trip due to a sudden and very serious medical situation. The group arrived on August 4 and departed on August 12, a total of 8 nights in San Diego. **Schedule attached separately**

Five San Diego families each hosted two Ofunato players (two families split the eight nights between them) and the coaches also stayed in a local home. Each host family included at least one baseball player and 4-5 other neighborhood boys (ages 12-14) were recruited to fill out the San Diego baseball roster. The host family experiences were fantastic and so important to the success of the program.

San Diego players included four boys who traveled to Ofunato in 2014. We also had five past TOMODACHI participants volunteer as umpires for the baseball games and attend the many activities during the exchange. This is strong evidence of the lasting impact of TOMODACHI.

Program highlights included:

- Japanese Community Night and the “JUMP” (Japan US Military Program) event at Petco Park
- 4 morning baseball games - the games were very competitive, with each team winning, losing and tying one game before playing the final game with mixed teams
- 2 San Diego Padres games - including a first pitch and on-field opportunity for our players
- 1 Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim game - including a motor home tailgate BBQ in the parking lot
- Community Service Day at Kiku Gardens - players prepared lunch for senior residents and sang their school song for them as well
- USS Midway Museum Visit - and a look at the USS Reagan across the harbor, the aircraft carrier that provided rescue and relief after the earthquake and tsunami in 2011
- Bowling – including all of the players and coaches and a pizza lunch
- 2 BBQ/Pool Parties – welcome and farewell parties that featured BBQ chicken and tri-tip steak

## **Participant Information & Future Activities**

**Ofunato player list and host family recruitment information attached separately**

San Diego players (\*host family):

Andrew Bialock\*  
Cade Cabral  
Justin Cervi  
Kevin Covarrubias\*  
Desmond Keany  
Adam Lovato\*  
Sean Lovato  
Luke Reece\*  
Max Smith\*  
Chris Thomas

The JSSDT plans to take 8-10 middle school (ages 12-14) boys to Ofunato in late July or early August of 2016. This will be the fourth year of the exchange program with tentative plans including participation in a national sports day and the annual Tanabata Matsuri, along with home stays, baseball games, and cultural activities.

### **Participant Testimonials**

Host Mother – “This was such a wonderful thing to be involved in. Just the little we did really opened the minds of all 3 of my children. Thank you!”

Volunteer umpire and past TOMODACHI participant – “Sometimes at night, I lie in my bed and play back all the memories and just say to myself “Wow! What an experience. These exchanges were the best time of my life!” I have written many school projects about the program because the experience meant so much to me. Thank you so much for the memories and for impacting my life so much.”

San Diego Player – “I can’t wait to see everybody in Japan next summer!”

Three host family text messages –

“Great experience, thanks!”

“It was such a great time, THANKS!”

“Unbelievable, sign me up for next time.”

### **Media Coverage & Special Events**

The San Diego Padres hosted Japanese Community Night at Petco Park before and during the Padres/Cincinnati Reds game. Almost 25,000 people attended the game and watched Kiyoshiro Isogai of the Ofunato team throw out the first pitch. Prior to the first pitch, the following announcement was made throughout the ballpark: ***“The TOMODACHI / NAJAS Youth Baseball Exchange cultivates the next generation of Japan - U.S. ambassadors of peace and friendship.”*** TOMODACHI was also listed on the jumbo scoreboard during the game. Following the pre-game ceremony, all participants enjoyed a private BBQ party on the Toyota Rooftop Terrace atop the Western Metal Supply Building in left field.

The Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA was very kind and generous to hold one of their initial three “JUMP” (Japan US Military Program) events as a part of Japanese Community Night. A pre-game ceremony attended by military personnel, exchange families and players, elected and appointed officials, and Japan Society members was held in the Petco Park Auditorium to celebrate the Japan-US military partnership. The event was covered by military media and Sasakawa Peace Foundation representatives made special note of TOMODACHI player participation in their report.