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Tour heart of Tokyo on open-top bus

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
 STRIPES JAPAN

When you PCS to a military base in Japan, you may want to take a quick one-day trip to Tokyo, the nation's capital. Or, even though you are already stationed in Japan, the refreshing early summer is a perfect time to enjoy Tokyo's countless attractions via open-top, double-decker bus!

Book a "Tokyo Panorama Drive" aboard the Hato Bus Company's O Sola Mio starting from 2,200 yen to 2,400 yen per person depending on the day. The open-top double-decker bus cruises the city's iconic sites in just one hour and it is a lot of fun!

I recently joined a daytime tour departing from Tokyo Station to enjoy the sights and sounds of the big

city. Up on the second deck, I was amazed at the view from a completely different angle seen while walking or riding a train. The open-air atmosphere made me excited even before the departure.

Once the bus set off, the bus guide began introducing major attractions around the capital. I enjoyed the refreshing breeze while spotting key landmarks, such as the Imperial Palace, the National Diet Building and Tokyo Tower along some of Tokyo's tallest skyscrapers. Thanks to the knowledgeable bus guide, I was able to learn

about their history, scale and significance while enjoying the stunning 360-degree panoramic views.

SEE BUS ON PAGE 3



SHARE YOUR PIECE OF PARADISE WITH US

Stars and Stripes is asking readers to write about their own piece of paradise. Yes, that means you! Our annual Destination Paradise magazine highlights must-see travel spots across the Pacific – and your bit of paradise could be included in our 2026-27 edition that hits the streets on Pacific bases in September. Submit your story and photos to paradise@stripes.com by **July 15**. We'll make you famous! Check out our previous Destination Paradise magazines

PLAY BALL!!

Baseball fan or not, there's nothing like Japanese ballgames **PAGES 4-6**

Photo by Jun Sakahira, Stripes Japan

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Akasaka Palace

A showcase of Japanese architecture, artistry, craftsmanship

STORY AND PHOTO BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

If you want to check out one of the best examples of Japanese modern art and architecture, head to Akasaka Palace.

Built in 1909 and designated as a National Treasure in 2009, the Neo-Baroque-style palace is Japan's official state guest facility and is used to host visiting kings, presidents and other foreign dignitaries.

You can explore both the exterior and interior of the Akasaka Palace when it is open to the public.

Visitors have access to the palace's Main Building, gardens with their elegant fountain, Japanese-style annex and the majestic Grand Gate.

Inside of the main building, don't miss the "Asahi no Ma" (Sunrise Hall), a high-status room used when the emperor and empress say farewell to state guests. The hall features magnificent candlestands and Louis XVI-style chairs, along with an impressive ceiling

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filled with exceptional Japanese artistry and architectural craftsmanship.

In the Main Garden, you can enjoy a breathtaking view of a classical Western-style fountain (another national treasure) set against the backdrop of the main palace.

On the fountain basin, look for the sculpted stone Shachi, a mythical creature with tiger heads and fishlike bodies. The mythical animal (golden version) is positioned on the top of Nagoya Castle as a guardian.

As you walk through the magnificent buildings, interiors and gardens, you'll experience the highest level of Japanese architectural technique, artistry, and craftsmanship. So, include the palace in your plan for a one-day Tokyo trip.

Fortunately, the beautiful palace is located only 30 minutes via train ride and a walk from Hardy Barracks!

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House of Representatives (Shugin)



House of Councillors (Sangiin)

Take a glimpse of heart of Japanese politics at National Diet Building

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI, STRIPES JAPAN

Japan's National Diet Building, known in Japanese as Kokkaigijido, is the center of the country's politics. The building in Nagatacho is where lawmakers from both the House of Representatives (lower house) and the House of Councillors (upper house) convene for legislation, voting, budget deliberations, and other key political matters.

The National Diet Building was completed in 1936 after 17 years of construction and is admired for its majestic, elegant exterior and imposing presence, even today. In the left wing of the building, you'll find the House of Representatives and in the right, is where the House of Councillors conduct their business.

Visitors can explore the main chamber, the Central Hall, Emperor's Resting Room and the courtyard garden on a one-hour guided tour for free. Since the two houses conduct separate tours, visitors must choose either the House of Representatives or the House of Councillors. Tours are held once every hour from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

During my recent visit to tour the House of Representatives, visitors were asked to line up at the back gate (of the left wing) 15 minutes before the tour start time. Once about 30 participants had gathered, an officer guided us into the building.

As we walked through the historic structure along red-carpeted passage, we were able to check out Emperor's Resting Room, which is a beautifully crafted space featuring zelkova wood, lacquer finishes and traditional Japanese decorative techniques. The guiding officer said this room is used where Emperor stays on the day of the Diet's opening ceremony. The brocade and embroidery on the walls and ceiling looked particularly exquisite to me.

Nearby, we saw a 33-meter-high Central Hall. The dimmed space has a kind of mysterious beauty, with blue and green-hued stained-glass windows, mosaic-patterned marble walls and pillars made of Okinawan coral limestone. There were also three statues of great Japanese politicians who shaped Japan's parliamentary politics stand at

each corner of the hall with impressive wall paintings that represent the four seasons.

When we entered the main chamber and sat in the public gallery, the view immediately reminded me of the question-and-answer sessions between ministers and lawmakers I always see on television.

The large chamber features the Speaker's tall wooden chair at the front, for the Prime Minister and cabinet ministers on the sides, and 465 lawmakers' seats arranged in a semicircle beneath a ceiling illuminated by arabesque-patterned stained glass. Everything exactly how I've seen it on TV at home!

The tour concluded in the courtyard, where we were able to admire the Diet Building's majestic exterior up close, while walking through the spacious garden.

The one-hour tour was a great introduction to Japanese politics and an interesting way to experience some of the country's history.

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BUS: Great views, memorable experience

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

When the bus entered the Shuto Expressway, the guide mentioned that it would feel like a roller coaster and she was just right! The strong gale from Tokyo Bay nearly blew off my ball cap, as the open-top bus

crossed the Rainbow Bridge. It felt almost like riding a jet ski rather than a roller coaster to me.

From Tokyo's symbolic bridge, I could see Tokyo Skytree, the majestic Toyosu Market, several arenas and stadiums in Ariake district and the city's impressive waterfront and ships. As we approached the high-end

Ginza District, I also spotted the Kabuki-za Theatre and the Wako Clock Tower.

Before the tour ended, the guide sang the Hato Bus theme song, as she turned out to be a wonderful singer, I couldn't help but ask to take a photo with her when I disembarked the O Sola Mio.

The double-decker open-top bus tour was a memorable experience,

and I truly felt that this 60-minute, 2,200-yen ride was worth recommending.

Hato Bus offers not only daytime tours, but also several evening drives where you can enjoy Tokyo's incredible night views.

So, if you want to check out the heart of Tokyo effectively and quickly, join the Hato Bus Panorama Drive! takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com

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BASEBALL

Japan's ballpark experience evolving to attract new fans

BY JUN SAKAHIRA,
STRIPES JAPAN

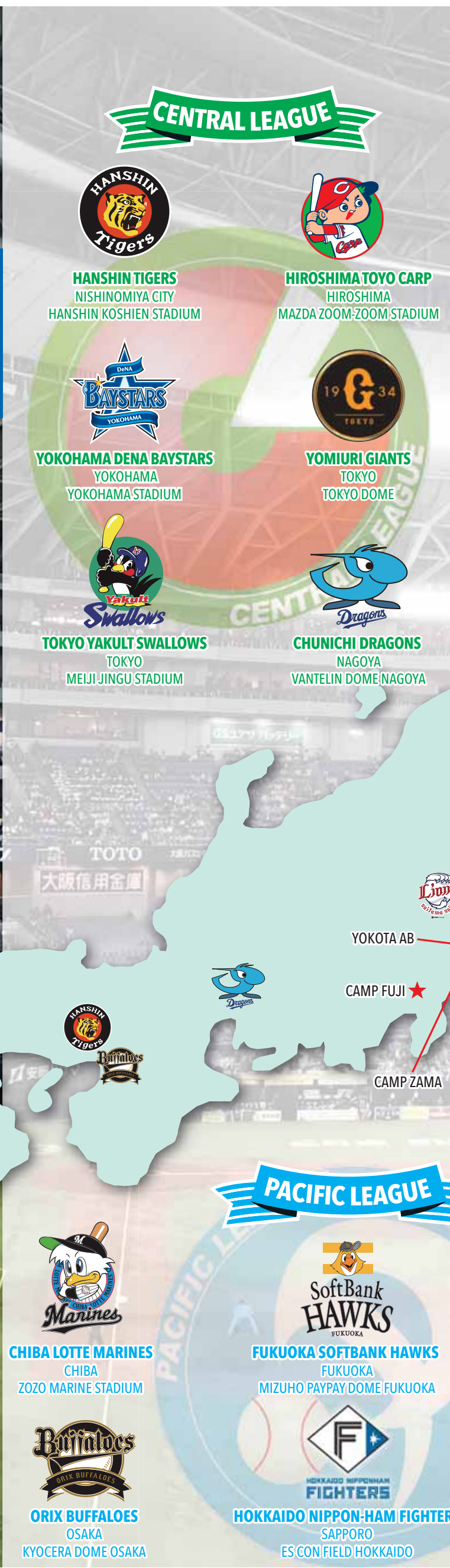
If you have been to ball games in the U.S., I'm sure you enjoyed not only the game, but also the atmosphere each ballpark has to offer. For a baseball fanatic like me who has been to 17 different stadiums in the U.S. and all 12 of the Japanese stadiums, just going to a new one is a fun experience. What are stadiums like in Japan? From almost century old Koshien and Jingu Stadiums to Es Con Field Hokkaido, which opened in 2023, Nippon Professional Baseball stadiums offer quite unique experiences, too.

Until 2004, when the realignment of the Japanese league took place, organizations did not pay too much attention to stadium atmosphere. Dominated by male audience, a ball game experience was mostly focused on the game itself. Also, during this time, several teams were on the verge of folding because of financial difficulties. So, teams started looking at improving their services and stadium experiences.

Teams started renovating the stadiums by imitating Major League stadiums. Japanese stadiums built or refurbished after the realignment are like those of MLB. Es Con Field is literally in the middle of nowhere, but with a hotel, villa, playground, bar, hot springs facility, etc., the whole complex offers a one-of-a-kind experience. It is by far my favorite stadium in Japan and reminds me of MLB stadiums. Another one I recommend is MAZDA Zoom-Zoom Stadium in Hiroshima. But if you would like to experience more nostalgic Japanese ball game experience, Koshien and Jingu are the ones to visit.

Hope to see you at a ballpark near you!

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NPB

Home to Japan's boys of summer

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

Ask your friends what the national sport of Japan is, and although many of them will give you the right answer (sumo, of course), some might say “it should be baseball.”

Called “yakyuu” (literally, field ball), baseball is one of the most popular games in Japan, despite not being the national sport. Baseball is inescapable in Japan these days. In less than 160 years, we have nearly turned an imported sport into our national sport.

Here, the sport can be much like politics and religion - bring up a specific team or a player, and you better be prepared for a conversation that could quickly become heated.

The Nippon Professional Baseball league, or NPB, is the league when it comes to baseball in Japan. With 12 teams scattered from the northern mainland of Hokkaido to the southern mainland of Kyushu, many of Japan's major cities have a team to call their own. And for residents of these cities, the loyalty and dedication to their teams is usually as strong as they come.

The history of baseball in Japan goes back to 1871, when foreigners living in Yokohama would play against crews of the USS Colorado at what is now Yokohama Stadium. Baseball then spread among Japanese through American teachers and residents, with the first professional baseball association being established in 1920. Professional teams then formed one after another, starting with the Tokyo Giants in 1934, Osaka Tigers in 1935 and Nagoya Dragons in 1936.

Today, just like the National and American Leagues of MLB in the U.S., there are two leagues in the NPB - Central and Pacific. The Central League has traditionally been more popular than Pacific League, as the two most popular teams, Giants (Tokyo) and Tigers (Hyogo), belong to the Central.

Many say the recent popularity of Giants has significantly dropped. The team has always been the most popular, with most manga and animation films on professional baseball in Japan usually featuring

heroes from the Giants. The team is likened to the New York Yankees, and it is often said that there are two kinds Japanese - pro-Giants and anti-Giants.

Not a baseball enthusiast myself, I was born and raised in the Kanto Plain, and therefore a Giants fan throughout my childhood, just like most of my friends. I proudly wore a G-marked shirt and ball cap, cried when Shigeo Nagashima retired from the Giants in 1974, and was overcome with joy when slugger Sadaharu Oh hit his then-record breaking 756th homerun in 1977.



Since Hideo Nomo became a historical success with the Dodgers in the mid-90s, star players such as Ichiro, Hideki Matsui and Yu Darvish have taken their world-class capabilities to the MLB one after another. The NPB has become somewhat of a minor league for MLB, and those players who have succeeded in the U.S., have become even bigger rockstars in their home country.

I can't forget the enthusiastic moment when Japan with Shohei Ohtani at the helm took the 2023 World Baseball Classic over the U.S. Since the inception of the WBC in 2006, Japan has now won three of the six tournaments.

While there are many similarities between NPB and the MLB, there are some drastic differences that you notice the minute you walk into a Japanese stadium.

For one, fans become cheerleaders in the stands while their team is at bat.

Each player has a unique song, and every fan knows the lyrics to chant along. Secondly, the cold beer conveniently served at your seat is done so by a petite Japanese “beer girl”. It's a stark contrast to the big and loud “beer guys” yelling “Beer here!” in the U.S.

Visit the nearest ballpark to your base and see these differences for yourself. Check out YouTube in preparation for your team's cheers, and make sure to grab yourself a cold *biru* to wash down that bento box.

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com

NEED TICKETS?

- To get tickets, you can visit a team's official website. Most teams offer QR code tickets. Make sure to select the option when purchasing tickets. Once you reserve the seats you want, there are several options, but often you can go pay and pick up your tickets at most convenience stores nearby. There is also the option of picking up tickets the day of the game at the ballpark, but be aware that games often sell out, especially on the weekends.
- Some teams adopt dynamic pricing; prices vary according to demand. It's usually the earlier you book tickets, the cheaper they are. All but the Tigers and the Carp (they sell the entire season's before the season begins) usually start selling tickets two months prior to the actual game date. (For all September games, usually from a specified day in July)



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SEE MORE
NPB
ON PAGE 6



Photos by Chi-Hung Lin

The belle of the ballgame

BY JUN SAKAHIRA,
STRIPES JAPAN

One of the most unique aspects of Japanese baseball is how fans watch the game. While there are many families at stadiums, a ballgame is also a great social gathering place for businessmen. Many companies own season tickets to entertain clients, and as all Japanese stadiums are located in major cities, businessmen will enjoy a game with a cold beer after work, much like an izakaya or beer garden.

American newcomers to these games are often surprised, not only by the fans' enthusiasm for their teams, but also the in-stadium vendors serving up those tasty cold ones. Used to hearing a male voice yelling "beer here," or

some form of that, in the U.S., spectators get their drinks from something that's unique to Japan: Beer girls.

The Uriko, or so-called beer girls, are young women who have been the belle of the ballgame experience for decades, serving anything from beer to chuhai, soda, ice cream and more. And unlike their male counterparts in Major League Baseball, the beer girls trek around with a 30-plus pound keg strapped to their backs.

A beer girl we interviewed expressed her motivation at Yokohama Stadium, home of the Yokohama DeNA BayStars.

"I started this job because I liked certain baseball players," she said. "I love it because I can work in an environment where my favorite players play baseball."

Serving up ballgame brews is a popular part-time job

among students, even though it is physically demanding and sometimes the weather can be less than ideal.

"There are two types of Uriko: the ones who love baseball and the ones who simply love this job," she said.

Some former beer girls have gone on to become TV stars. Not only are they vendors who serve spectators, but also idol-like figures that enhance the baseball experience for many.

"Even if you have not been to a game before, you can enjoy the Japanese ballgame atmosphere," she said.

As it gets warmer, nothing goes better with a baseball game than a refreshing cold beer, so why not experience one of the many things that'll make you say, "Only in Japan!?"

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What you need to know

- ⓪ Stand up when your team is batting (in the outfield cheering area, not mandatory but expected)
- ⓪ Each player has a cheer when at bat
- ⓪ The Giants are equal to the Yankees
- ⓪ The Giants-Tigers rivalry is therefore Yankees-Red Sox
- ⓪ Games can end in a tie after 12 innings
- ⓪ 4 foreign players are allowed on the 26-man roster (no more than 3 pitchers or 3 hitters)

NPB NOTES

- The single season record for batting average is not held by Ichiro. It's held by American Randy Bass who hit .389 in 1986. Ichiro's best was .387 in 2000.
- Former Mariners and Reds outfielder Vladimir Balentien hit 60 homeruns in 2013 - the single season record.
- Until it was broken in 2015, former Cubs outfielder Matt Murton held the record for hits in a season with 214.
- Another former Cub, Tuffy Rhodes, won the Pacific League MVP for the Osaka Kintetsu Buffaloes in 2001. Rhodes hit 55 homers and drove in 131 runs.
- The 100-year-old Meiji Jingu Stadium, home to the Tokyo Yakult Swallows, isn't just named after Meiji Shrine - it's actually owned by the famous shrine.
- Chicago White Sox rookie Munetaka Murakami holds a NPB single-season home run record by a Japanese-born player with 56. He is also the youngest Triple Crown winner, which he achieved in 2022 at the age of 22.

Speakin' Japanese

Baseball Banter

If you are at a ballpark in Japan, here are some phrases to help you to enjoy the ballgame.

"Yakyuu ni tsureiteitte kudasai!" = Take me to a ball game, please!
("yakyuu" = a ball game, "tsureiteitte" = take me, "kudasai" = please)

"Seki wa douyatte yoyaku dekimasu ka?" = How can we book a seat?
("seki" = a seat, "douyatte" = how, "yoyaku" = book, "dekimasu ka" = can we)

"Kon-ya wa biiru ga hangaku desu!" = Beer is 50 percent off tonight.
("Kon-ya" = tonight, "biiru" = beer, "hangaku" = 50 percent off)

"Biiru wo kudasai." = Give me a cup of beer, please!

"Toire wa doko desu ka?" = Where is the bathroom?
("toire" = bathroom, "doko" = where)

"Sato ga manrui hoomuran wo uchimashita!" = Sato hit a grand slam.
("manrui-hoomuran" = grand slam, "uchimashita" = hit)

"Mazui. Gettsuu da!" = Oh, no. It's a double-play!
("mazui" = Oh, no, "Gettsuu" = a double-play)

"Kon-ya no Yamamoto wa booru ga hashitteru!" = Yamamoto is pitching well tonight!
("booru ga hashitteru" = pitching well)

"Deddoooru da!" = It was a HBP (hit by pitch)!
("Deddoooru" = HBP)

Pronunciation key: "A" is short (like "ah"); "E" is short (like "get"); "I" is short (like "it"); "O" is long (like "old"); "U" is long (like "tube"); and "AI" is a long "I" (like "hike"). Most words are pronounced with equal emphasis on each syllable, but "OU" is a long "O" with emphasis on that syllable.

"Suwaroozu gambare!" = Go Swallows!
("Suwaroozu" = Swallows, "gambare" = go)

"Ouenka wa utaimasho!" = Let's sing a cheer song!
("ouenka" = a cheer song, "utaimasho" = Let's sing)

"Kon-ya wa kateso desu." = We are winning tonight.
("kateso" = are winning)

"Enchosen ni totsunyu desu!" = It's going into extra innings!
("Enchosen" = extra innings, "totsunyu" = go into)

"San tai ichi de Jaiantsu no kachi desu!" = Giants won 3 - 1!
("San" = 3, "tai" = -, "ichi" = 1, Jaiantsu = "Giants", "kachi" = win)

- Takahiro Takiguchi,
Stripes Japan

Stripes Sports Trivia

Which former Big 10 star was named the Men's College Basketball Player of the Year in 2013?

Answer

Trey Burke

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The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

- Swit's sitcom
- Major (constellation)
- Pesto ingredient
- Org. in rights fights
- Kind of tide
- Say "y'all," say
- Bowie's "Child"
- Biologists' study
- Scottie or Yorkie ornament
- Big name in chips
- and about
- Forerunners
- Algonquian tribe
- Back-row cry
- In the end
- Take it easy
- Sentencing request
- Fitzgerald of jazz
- Nineveh native
- Nervous quiver
- Vote of support
- Become associated
- "So heard"
- 1776 patriot Silas
- Storm often chased
- "El Dorado" actor Robert
- Mo or Stew of Arizona politics
- Pearly gem
- Kitchen counter?
- Feed the kitty
- Send out
- Oneness
- What have-nots have
- Some NYPD officers

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
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57							58	59					
60							61			62			
63							64				65		

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DOWN

- Damon or Dillon
- Stomach woe
- Putdown
- Hastily
- Up in the air
- Brought up
- "cheese!"
- Vaulted recess
- Snarky reply to "Why?"
- Native Alaskan
- Window ledge
- Motionless
- Just in case
- "when?"
- Off the Pampers
- Walton's mom Michael
- Soothe, as fears
- Hangman's loop
- Stallone's "King"
- Seahawks' grp.
- Hollywood's Hayek
- Parcel out
- St. of Assisi
- Voted back in
- Partake of
- Sibling
- Signs a lease
- Channel changer
- Coastal cove
- Ballet attire
- Norse war god
- Malek of "Mr. Robot"
- Mideast's Gulf of
- Base-runner's goal
- Troop group
- Team with a bridge in its logo
- Wallet bill

Answers to Previous Crossword:

P	E	A	L	S	O	A	R	S	M	S	E	C
A	C	R	O	A	D	M	A	N	A	H	M	E
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O	V	E	R	M	O	M	O	A	I	M	E	T
W	E	D	S	T	O	M	P	X	E	R	O	

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DID YOU KNOW?

Fireworks highlight night skies in Japan nearly every weekend in July and August, as more than 80 fireworks festivals are held nationwide. Japanese fireworks are renowned worldwide for their artistic qualities – perfect shape, exquisite colors and enormous size. The events are often full of more than just fireworks and a free to the public.

Kanji of the week



Sakana, uo/gyo [Fish]

Language Lesson

I'll see you later.

Itterasshai!
(when seeing family off from home)

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Medium

Edited by Margie E. Burke

	2	6						
			6		7	8		
3	4			7				9
		4	7		9			
9					6	1		
		2	6					
	7		2		5			
	3		5		8			
1				3				

HOW TO SOLVE:

Each row must contain the numbers 1 to 9; each column must contain the numbers 1 to 9; and each set of 3 by 3 boxes must contain the numbers 1 to 9.

Answer to Previous Sudoku:

4	9	5	3	2	7	6	1	8
7	3	1	9	6	8	5	4	2
2	8	6	4	5	1	7	3	9
3	5	7	8	4	2	9	6	1
9	1	2	5	7	6	4	8	3
8	6	4	1	9	3	2	5	7
6	7	8	2	1	4	3	9	5
1	2	9	6	3	5	8	7	4
5	4	3	7	8	9	1	2	6

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