



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NIKKEI BASKETBALL HERITAGE ASSOCIATION PARTNERS WITH JCCCNC
TO PRESENT A PANEL DISCUSSION ON 'MORE THAN BASKETBALL'
TO HIGHLIGHT THE IMPORTANCE OF JAPANESE AMERICAN COMMUNITY BASKETBALL

SAN FRANCISCO. —The Nikkei Basketball Heritage Association (NBHA) is partnering with the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California (JCCCNC) to organize a panel discussion with the theme of “More Than Basketball” set for Saturday, November 18, beginning at 2 p.m. The program is free and open to the public.

A panel discussion about why Japanese American basketball has meaning beyond playing the sport will be led Chris Komai of the NBHA and will include Steven D. Chin, who wrote his master’s thesis on “The East Bay Japanese American Community: A Look at Community Culture” and Keith Uyeda, a long-time player and coach for the San Francisco Drakes.

Also speaking will be Danielle Mizuiri, who grew up playing for the San Francisco Enchantees and participated in the Shinzen Nikkei Youth Goodwill program as a player and a coach. Danielle still plays for the San Francisco Drakes and coaches an Ardenette youth team with Patricia Lee. Patricia has been playing Asian American basketball since she was seven and still occasionally plays but has shifted her focus to giving back to the community by coaching at the youth and high school levels. Miles Chan is currently a senior at Burlingame High School, where he will play on the varsity basketball team. He started playing for the San Francisco Associates in the first grade and was a player for the Shinzen Nikkei Youth Goodwill program where he went to Japan. Miles’ mother Dori played for the Enchantees and his grandmother Helen played for the Arbees in the 1950s.

Since the 1920s, Japanese Americans have played organized community basketball with men’s, women’s, boys’ and girls’ teams throughout California and in other states where there were significant populations of Nikkei. Often, the Japanese American leagues were organized as a response to the Nisei and Sansei generations not being welcome into mainstream recreational leagues. Even when Japanese Americans were forced by the U.S. government to leave their homes and businesses and were unfairly incarcerated in concentration camps during World War II, they continued to play organized sports like basketball and baseball.

In the postwar era, Japanese Americans in both Southern California and the San Francisco-East Bay area restarted their basketball leagues beginning in 1947. By the end of the 1970s, basketball had surpassed baseball in terms of participation levels and youth basketball for boys and girls as young as five years old began to grow. While adult community basketball



has begun to wane, Japanese American youth basketball is still popular with Nikkei families.

More recently, leaders of the Japanese American adult and youth basketball organizations in Southern California were concerned that the participants were losing their connection to the original intent of the founders of the leagues. Whereas the Issei and Nisei who pioneered the Nikkei leagues wanted to pass their traditional cultural values to their children and grandchildren, many participants today seem to view this activity solely as the means to become more skilled at the sport.

In response, a small group of concerned basketball leaders in Southern California formed the Nikkei Basketball Heritage Association with the intent of documenting and teaching the history of Japanese American community basketball and its connection to traditional Japanese cultural values. NBHA is also interested in teaching parents to be better coaches by developing a basketball curriculum.

“Most of us grew up playing Japanese American basketball,” explained Jerry Nakafuji, President of NBHA. “Our Nisei parents organized it and funded it so we would have the opportunity to play with other Japanese American kids. Many of us developed lifelong friendships with our teammates and even our opponents. But Nikkei basketball also helped to teach us cultural values because basketball culture aligns with them. NBHA wants to remind the families of this extra value so they will see the connection between JA basketball and history and want to adhere to the original intent of the founders.”

Chin, who got involved with Japanese American basketball because his friends had a team, has studied the Northern California leagues and developed a perspective. “For almost a century basketball has been a part of Japanese American community culture,” Chin wrote in his thesis. “Teams, organizations, and leagues founded as early as the 1920s have persisted over generations and continue to provide activity, recreation, and a sense of community and culture to all of those involved. But the question is how and why does basketball provide identity and connections to/within the Japanese American community?”

Komai, who serves on the Nisei Athletic Union board in Southern California, has written about the underlying value of the community leagues. He will provide some historic perspective on why basketball became so popular. Uyeda, Mizuiri, Lee and Chan will discuss their own participation and their experiences.

To RSVP for this program, contact the JCCCNC at <https://bit.ly/morethanbball>. The Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California (JCCCNC) strives to meet the evolving needs of the Japanese American community through programs, affordable services and administrative support and facilities for other local service organizations.



NBHA was organized to address issues concerning bad behavior by teams, inadequate coaching and a lack awareness of the community's history. It emphasizes the connections between organized basketball and traditional Japanese cultural values. NBHA has recruited Japanese American basketball coaches to develop a coaching curriculum to help parents and volunteers better understand how to guide children and teenagers with age-appropriate basketball instruction. For more information on NBHA, go to www.jabasketball.org or contact Jerry Nakafuji at nbhapresident@hotmail.com.