

Second time going to Washington D.C. for the Japan Bowl was definitely not on my bucket list of things to experience in 2025. After winning the Level 4 regional Japan Bowl in Clark College, I was excited to go to Washington D.C. again to make like-minded people, as well as seeing friends that I had made the last time I went to the event.

When we landed at D.C., I was ready to rest after the long flight. Although there were some hiccups along the way, such as the hotel check-in, the first day was overall really pleasant. The team and I went around the city to parts where we haven't seen before, such as the U.S. Capital and the surrounding areas. There, we took a lot of pictures, and noticed how the culture was different from the culture at the West Coast. We were able to eat some yummy Japanese bento boxes, and then went off to bed that night. After a good night's rest, we were able to go to the U.S. Botanical Gardens right outside of the capital. I quite liked the variety of plants and flowers that were located there, and took many photos of them when I was there.

Then, the main event started- the 33rd National Japan Bowl. We checked-in as a team, and were able to meet some old friends that were in Maryland, as well as some new friends who came from Ohio. We talked about the previous National Japan Bowl, and were interested to see the similarities between this year's versus last year's- especially due to the new format, where there will be 3 preliminary rounds instead of 2, and 80 questions total instead of 90.

During the First Preliminary Round, we were ready to begin. The National Japan Bowl, of course, was harder than the region Japan Bowl back at Clark College. The questions were more in depth, and more niche than the ones found at home. I believe that our team did better than what we expected we would have achieved, and we had a great time answering the questions. In the Second Preliminary Round, we felt like we did better than the First Preliminary Round for some reason- maybe there were more questions that aligned with our knowledge than we had expected, especially with the knowledge of the previous National Japan Bowls in our minds. I especially loved the questions that included the Kanjis, because I could recognize which kanji was the answer right away when I saw the question being splayed on the screen.

The dinner at Nationals was similar to the lunch we had back in the regional rounds- a typical, traditional Japanese bento box. It was lovely, and certainly reminded me of the Asian cuisine I usually eat at home. There was rice sprinkled with sesame seeds as well as karaage and their dipping sauces. I absolutely loved the food, and even now I wish I could have had more. After dinner, we did the answer reviews, and it's safe to say that we did better than last year (at least, in our opinions).

The next day was the Third (and final) Preliminary Round. This round felt similar to the second preliminary round, where the majority of the questions we knew. However, during the round, the presenters accidentally opened up the Answer Key slideshow instead of the ones without the answers, which was really funny and deserved a good, small laugh. I did wish that the answer key wasn't shown, though, because as a team we would have gotten those questions correct.

I also got the opportunity to try the kendama. The kendama, although hard, was very fun to play with, and once I got the hang of it I could do some basic tricks. It was a really fun experience, and I wish I could have played more. I also tried some of the logic puzzles developed by the game company Nikoli, and quite liked their “Shikaku” game. Now, I play it once I get bored as it’s a really fun game that allows me to utilize my brain.

While we were eating lunch (which was very delicious- pork and rice), we didn’t expect our timing to coincide with the April 5th protests that were happening around the country at the time. As we were inside the venue, we were (thankfully) safe from whatever was happening outside, in case things got rough.

Our team unfortunately did not get into the final round. The final round did seem quite standard, though, and it was like the final round in regionals- except in front of every Japan Bowl participant. Something that was eventful during this final round, though, was that when one of the Level 4 teams had to do their Team Shoukai, the members of the team used references from different anime and Japanese video games. One team member did the “Sakana” reference from *Lycoris Recoil*, while another team member did a very funny introduction made by Ootori Emu in *Project Sekai: Colorful Stage*.

Overall, I feel like the Japan Bowl Experience, both Regionals and Nationals, had allowed me to immerse myself into the Japanese language and culture. Although this is the last year that I can attend Japan Bowl, I hope to return as a volunteer in order to participate in this event again. I also hope to continue my Japanese studies, hopefully using them to a greater extent and expanding my worldview for what the future entails.