

Oliver Munsell

PNW Japan Bowl Reflection

This was my second time participating in the Pacific Northwest Japan Bowl, and I'd say it was even funner than the first time. I like Japan Bowl because it's a way for me to prove to myself that I haven't been wasting my time by studying Japanese so much.

The event started with a rousing dance number in which participants were allowed to let off some growing anxiety by doing a gold-mining dance. Unlike last year, participants were arranged in a circle. I believe we were expected to move around the circle while dancing, but nobody could get the circle going. While trying to get the circle going by inching slightly forward but trying not to hit my team mates with the gold-shoveling move, I realized that this was going to be the best Japan Bowl yet.

The preliminary round only confirmed my suspicions. This was the chill round. Everyone was vibing and having a good time, and the people presenting the questions were like professional nonchalant onegaishimasu-type people. If I'm keeping it a buck-fifty, I didn't think we were going to make it to the championship round for the first twenty questions. It was in the second round when we accidentally correctly guessed the denomination of a bill which newly featured a certain chemist who I had never heard of in my life when I looked around at my teammates and thought, "Ok, maybe we have a shot at this." I personally just really wanted to compete in the championship round, because it was fun last time.

At lunch I ended up eating two bentos and they both tasted great. I also realized that my teacher, who enjoys the manga of Kazuo Umezu, doesn't know who Takashi Miike is, and that maybe that is a good thing. It was fun seeing all the pens the different colleges brought and eating senbei while sitting down in those big chairs on the upper floor.

The networking session was nice, and the Japanese students were welcoming; I felt more comfortable speaking Japanese than I had before. We talked about traveling, food, and our favorite shows. The rousing shamisen performance was my favorite thing outside of the competition. The playing was virtuosic to say the least, and the songs reminded me of the American band Hella. After the performance, I watched the other championship rounds and had fun guessing the answers with my teammates. I was most nervous the moment before the Level 4 teams were announced, and when I heard "Churchill High School", I locked in. The championship round was as fun as expected. I was most proud of our team for doing well on the Individual Round, and I enjoyed joking

around with the answers a little bit, and congratulating my teammates. Every right answer felt like a little victory in its own right.

I'm looking forward to competing on the national level and traveling to Washington D.C. with my teammates. We'll try not to forget what a "My Number Card" is.