

## Yusuhara Sunshine Times #4 The Kochi Ryoma Marathon!

When I arrived in Japan in August, I never thought I would run a marathon here, let alone any type of race. Yet, just this February, I competed in the Kochi Ryoma Marathon. It was one of the hardest experiences of my life, but also one of the most rewarding!

Last October, I mentioned to another teacher that I enjoy running once in a while. He then encouraged me to sign up for the Kochi Ryoma Marathon, an annual race in Kochi City that would be held in five months. Though the farthest I had ever run for a race was 10 kilometers, I was assured that with proper and consistent training, I could beat the seven-hour cutoff time. Eager to challenge myself and compete in such a unique event, I signed up and began my five months of training. I knew it wouldn't be easy, but nothing worth doing is!

In America, I would run only twice a week, with each run being no more than three kilometers. When I first started training in Japan, I could barely run five kilometers in 30 minutes. I knew I had a lot of work ahead of me. For five months, I made sure not just to run consistently, but to also take care of my body by stretching, resting, training, dieting, and wearing proper footwear. By January, I managed to run 22 kilometers in two hours and 20 minutes! It was only half the distance of a marathon, but I was thrilled to know that I was improving. My training was paying off! Yet, I knew the full marathon would be much, much harder.

When I arrived in Kochi City the day of the marathon, I was shocked by the number of people. There were over 10,000 competitors, volunteers, and spectators in total! As I found my way towards my starting group, I was very nervous. I wondered if my legs could truly carry me 42 kilometers to the finish line. Would my knees give out? Would I fail? There was only one way to find out, and I resolved myself. No matter what, I'm going to do my best! I trained for this!

During the first 22 kilometers of the race, I paced myself and ran with the teachers I joined with. Even when I had to run up elevation, I felt good. It was easy! Yet, as I gradually reached the halfway point of Katsurahama Beach, near the Sakamoto Ryoma Memorial Museum, my legs began to feel much heavier. My headphones died and rain began to fall. As I began the second half of the race along the shoreline, I had to steel myself more than ever before.

Around the point of 30 kilometers, I could no longer feel my feet. With every step I took, my knees cried out in pain. For a brief moment in time, I had considered giving up. "There's no way I'll make it to the finish line," I thought. "There's always next year." But then, I remembered the amount of effort I put in just to make it this far. I remembered the people who cheered me on as I ran, friends and strangers. "If I quit now, I'll regret it forever." So, I ran, and ran, and struggled my way towards the finish line, clocking in an overall time of six hours and 40 minutes, which was 20 minutes away from the cutoff. It's not a great time, but it's *my* time. For the first time, I finished a marathon! When I made it to GIKEN Stadium, I still couldn't believe I had.

The Kochi Ryoma Marathon was a wonderful experience not only because it pushed me to my limits, but also because I experienced it with the other teachers of Yusuhara Gakuen. Running through Kochi City and around Katsurahama Beach, looking upon the eastward ocean, was like nothing else I've experienced. As I write this now, my legs still hurt, but I'm happy. I'm happy that I challenged myself and that I have a new goal: to be faster at next year's marathon! I look forward to running more in Japan.

- Carter Frost, Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) at Yusuhara Gakuen

