Tomodachi Bowl; honoring a year of hard work between two nations

Story and photos by Joe Schmitt, CFAY Public Affairs

Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) hosted the Tomodachi Bowl football game at Berkey Field March 18. Teams from Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) and Japanese high schools from the Kanto region played together in a friendly game between the two countries.

"For a few hours this afternoon you will see American athletes pitted against Japanese athletes in a good game of competition," said CFAY Commanding Officer Capt. David Owen in an open address before the game. "That's the only time you will see Japanese and Americans going against each other because all other times we are the strongest of allies and the most significant one in the world."

The game honored those affected by the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami that hit Northern Japan. Members from the teams also wanted to show appreciation for those who gave their time and effort to help those in need during "Operation Tomodachi," a joint operation between U.S. military forces and Japanese self-defense forces to help the victims and families after the disasters.

The game was setup over a decade ago as a friendship game called the Camellia Bowl. Last year's game was scheduled for March 12 and was cancelled due to the uncertainity of the situation after the earthquake.

"When we started working on organizing this year's game, that's when the idea came up that we could take this time to remember all that happened last year," said Tim Pujol, Head Coach for Team U.S.A. "There is a deeper meaning here, something that transcends sport and goes beyond it."

Team U.S.A. running back Aaron Stravers (33) tries to stop Team Kanto (Japan) quarterback Takashi Suzuki (12) from scoring, during the Tomodachi Bowl. The football game was a friendly game between the two countries and honored those lost and the bonds made after the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami that struck Northern Japan.

The teams were made up of the best players from Yokota High School, Kinnick High School, Zama High School, and American Schools in Japan all playing for Team U.S.A.; Housei Nikou High School and Rikkyo Niiza High School playing for Team Kanto (Japan).

"It will be a really good experience for me because I can't have an opportunity to play with the foreign players," said Kohei Okamoto, Team Kanto quarterback. "I am thankful of the help from the United States, but I think I have to do my best to beat the U.S. Team."

Just before half time, former Prime Minister Aso Taro arrived and watched the game with Commander United States Army Japan Maj. Gen. Michael Harrison. Taro explained that some Japanese people had expressed that after Operation Tomodachi they had a feeling of ongaeshi, a desire to give something back.

"Ordinarily, Japanese people don't have a chance to be in a U.S. Military base. Japanese kids are very much interested in having some game, some exchange with American kids the same age," said Taro. "They seemed to enjoy it very much."

The game ended Team U.S.A. 50 to Team Kanto 17. Harrison and Aso awarded the trophy to the winners and chose Team U.S.A.'s quarterback Hayden Jardine and Team Kanto's running back Genta Ito as the most valuable players. The teams then shook hands and posed for a group photo.

More photos from the game can by found on CFAY's Facebook page, http://www.facebook.com/cfayokosuka.

Team U.S.A. quarterback Hayden Jardine (5) runs towards defenders as he scans for an opening during the Tomodachi Bowl. The football game was held at CFAY's Berkey Field March 18.