

# Samurai News from Honbu



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## The Obata Foundation

Aikido &amp; Aikibujutsu

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<b>CHRISTMAS IN SEPTEMBER</b>	<b>MY 2ND HONBU VISIT</b>	<b>MY 4TH MONTH AT THE HONBU</b>	<b>2009 HUNGARIAN SEMINAR</b>	<b>AT THE ZEN GARDEN</b>	<b>SAKURA HANAMI</b>	<b>FRENCH SEMINAR 2009</b>
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## Word from Obata Kaiso

By Obata Toshishiro Kaiso

The summer rush is over, we had Cuc, Stephane, and Olivier train at the hombu for 2 weeks, Sensei Howard for 1 week, Sensei Roland and Sensei Ferenc 3 weeks, and we also had Francoise train here for a week. Francoise has expressed interest in starting a small study group back in England. I believe the Hombu students had the chance to train with many students from around the country and world this year, and despite the broken air conditioning, we've had a great year. At the hombu we practice Tameshigiri about once a week, so please inquire about it if you are visiting.

I have just returned from Illinois for a seminar in Moline. Sensei Michelle and Randy hosted the seminar, and I stayed with Shihan Birdsell. The seminar itself went very well, and I enjoyed watching David's children perform acrobats and water skiing on the river next to his house. This was the first time seeing a human pyramid on the water.

I will be leaving for Livermore this month for a seminar hosted by Sensei Jim Alvarez. I look forward to some Tameshigiri practice on Friday with Sensei Jim.



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## Christmas in September

By Randy Newburg & Michelle Hammond  
Ryojokan Dojo, Illinois



9/4/2009 - 9/6/2009

For the first time since the new millennium (2000), Obata Kaiso brought his “presence” to the Quad Cities—specifically to Carbon Cliff, Illinois—for a Labor Day weekend seminar that included Shinkendo, Toyama Ryu, Bojutsu and Aikibujutsu training. Those of us in the Midwest—students and instructors came from Michigan, Iowa, Nebraska and Illinois—who attended the event were thrilled once again to have the opportunity to train with Master Obata.

The title of this article was inspired by Kaiso himself when, after what (to us) seemed to be a challenging series of tachiuchi, he jokingly told the group, “This is my present to you. Maybe you will invite me back.” So, the idea of Kaiso’s instruction being, indeed, a ‘present’ made me think of Christmas and ‘presents’ and, naturally, the homophone ‘presence’. (Did I mention that I’m a teacher?) Thus, Kaiso’s ‘presence’ became his ‘presents’. Hence, ‘Christmas in September’!



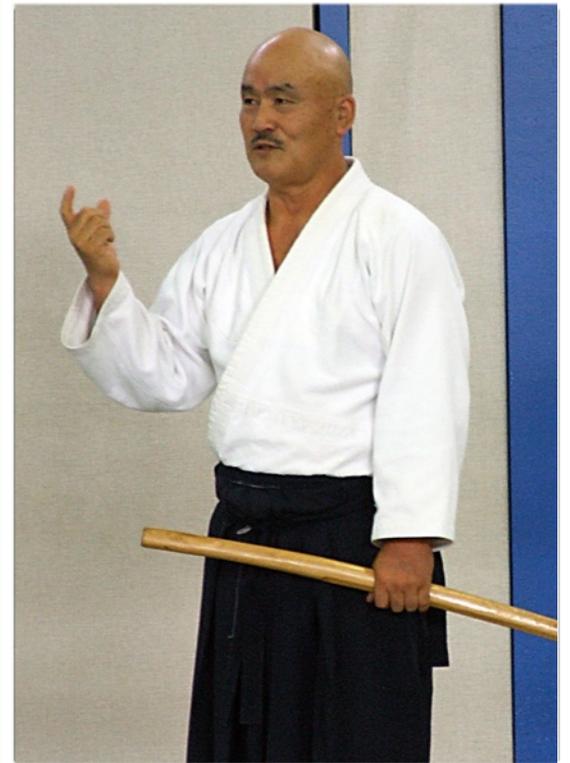
OK, maybe I reached a little too far for that. Nonetheless, everyone in attendance had a GREAT time and we thank them all for supporting our event and Obata Kaiso. We were blessed with beautiful weather and cooler than normal temperatures all weekend.

As always, special thanks to Obata Kaiso for his time, patience and humor. Thanks also go to: David Birdsell, Shihan, with whom Kaiso stayed and who hosted the end of training picnic (complete with buffalo burgers and brats) on Sunday; Michelle Hammond, Hisho for her

tireless efforts to keep track of not only paperwork but also all the other details that go into hosting a seminar with Kaiso; the Mikami family (Koichi, Rebekah, Marcus and Misha) for all their help and hard work; and Patrick McLaughlin for putting in extra hours and muscle when needed; and to any other students or instructors who helped set up and take down tables and chairs for the meals.

Something that Kaiso has talked about during previous seminars and repeated again here was the 'bucket' analogy. He reminded the students that they need to come to the seminar with the intent of filling their bucket as full as possible—not leaving it only partially filled. Since, as he told us, we only get to train with him once a year (unless, of course, you go to the honbu for training) so it is important to take advantage of the seminar training and learn as much as your brain/bucket can hold. Excellent advice! (Though I admit that sometimes my bucket feels VERY small and, once in a while, I'm sure it springs a leak.)

The importance of safety and kiai (the voice has POWER!) were also stressed to all, and as usual, Kaiso used stories from his own life and from history to help students and instructors understand and relate to the present. I personally enjoyed his stories of working with his father and how he learned so much about nature not only from the adults around him but also, it seems, through his own keen senses. Kaiso also explained that, during seminars, students and instructors must strive to do the best they can in terms of dojo etiquette and cleanliness.



Hosting a seminar with the founder of your chosen martial art is a tremendous opportunity and honor. It can seem a little daunting and scary at times—there is always the worry that things won't work out as planned. The trick is to not use your energy worrying about something bad that may never happen. Use your energy to help good things happen.

Thank you again, Kaiso. We were honored and enriched by your 'presents' and your 'presence'. We will DEFINITELY invite you back!

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

## My Second Honbu Visit

By Françoise Niglaut  
United Kingdom

My first visit to the Honbu Dojo in October last year was such a positive experience that I decided that from then onwards I should endeavour to train over there for at least a week every year. Therefore, when the dates of this year's shochu-geiko were announced on the honbu dojo's discussion forum, I booked a return flight to Los Angeles and one month later there I was at the Miyako Hotel marvelling again at the impressive view of Downtown LA's sky-scrapers!

Shochu-geiko started "sur les chapeaux de roues" for me as, right after taiso ichi and taiso ni, Obata Sensei asked all shinkendo-ka to take a iaito. This was the first time that I had to practice goho battoho with a iaito so I found it extremely challenging but, after half an hour of drawing and re-sheathing with Obata Sensei and



Matthew Sensei's patient guidance, I started realising that it already felt a touch more comfortable. As shochu-geiko merged into Friday's regular shinkendo and aikido classes, that first day of training lasted from 1 pm until

8:15 pm with virtually no interruption. Needless to say that the "French-Hungarian" dinner that took place at the adjoining Japanese restaurant after that felt like a well-deserved feast!

On the second day of shochu-geiko, I had the opportunity to practice goho battoho with a iaito again but this time under the guidance of Yoko Sensei. We then went on to do some tanrenkata and tachiuchi. Trevis Sensei was asked to assist me with chuden do and Nicholas Sensei helped me improve my ashisabaki and taisabaki for maki uchi, kaeshi uchi, kiri kaeshi, maki osae and tomo e while practicing ippon dachi. On that day I also greatly welcomed the opportunity to be partnered up with Roland Sensei for a half hour of tachiuchi free practice as this enabled me to ask him to show me the difference between uchikomi 1,



2 and 3 further to a previous email exchange. That second day of training was punctuated by a relaxed and convivial dinner at the dojo with Obata Sensei, Mrs. Obata, Yoko-san and Michi-san.

On the third day of shochu-geiko Obata Sensei asked Roland Sensei to help me with some suburi (namely one of Roland Sensei's favourites as people from Europe will know: go san go) and then training became more relaxed for less advanced shinkendo-ka like myself as everyone had to do a short demonstration with a chosen partner. Shochu-geiko finished on a high note for me as, when I least expected it, Obata Sensei presented me with a certificate for the grade of jiho.

As to the rest of the week, the most important highlight was when, with her highly precise and effective teaching style, Yoko Sensei helped me improve some detailed but extremely important points while doing goho battoho and kagami-ishi usen and sasen, points which, funnily enough, happened to relate to aspects of shinkendo which I was aware I was somehow doing incorrectly but which I had no idea how to correct.

Further to a foot injury, I was unfortunately not able to do much aikido this time around but this situation enabled me to give most of my energy to shinkendo and I feel that, thanks to Obata Sensei's uncanny ability to give every student exactly what he or she

needs to progress to the next level, this second visit to the Honbu Dojo has, in many respects, deepened and fine-tuned my understanding of many of the shinkendo basics. Thank you to Obata Sensei for his fairness and subtle generosity and thank you to Mrs. Obata, Yoko Sensei, Matthew Sensei, Roland Sensei, Nicholas Sensei, Trevis Sensei, Ferenc Sensei as well as Isabelle and Jason for all their patient help. This second visit was such a positive experience again that I left Los Angeles with the resolve to not only visit the Honbu Dojo soon again but also hopefully improve my technique enough so as to be able to promote shinkendo and the philosophy embedded in it against all adversity.



## My 4th Month at the Honbu

By Roland Lajos  
Head Instructor - Hungary and Slovakia

I met Kaiso in 1998 in France. And I had the opportunity to go to the Hombu Dojo in 1999. In that time the dojo was in Hollywood on N.Highland Ave. The dojo was small with blue tatami.

The second, third and the last time I trained in the new dojo in Little Tokyo. I know for many people this one is the DOJO. But for me the old one is a very nice memory. I visited the old dojo place during the last years but now, there aren't any building, just a parking area. So, everything has changed but the feeling remains the same when I'm in the Hombu. During these times I only do what I really like: training under Kaiso's lead. This year was the same. I trained there, I acquired more knowledges and many details from the style, and I could finally refill my full energy. These are all the things I brought back to my home. And my feelings are stronger year by year, I never want to stop learning Shinkendo.

In 1999 I stayed in a motel close from the dojo on Hollywood Blvd. I had a bed and some furniture in my room and some cockroaches but these guys were a very boring fellowship for me. 2007 and 2008 we were there, 4-5 Hungarian students, and we also stayed on Hollywood Blvd, but in a very nice apartment. So, it was much more comfortable. This year there were two of us from Hungary (I and Feri) and Chris invited us to stay in his house. This was the best, we could cook, converse and have some fun between the trainings. And this year we had more possibilities to spend our freetimes with other Hombu students.

Also many times Kaiso invited us and we spent time with Him and with His very nice family. Mrs. Obata made us very nice food and we would discuss with them funny stories and some serious things what will help the styles to expand in the Middle Europe region.

I would like to thank the Hombu students for the trainings, and the nice freetimes,



Especially thank you for Chris Hasset for His friendship, invitation to His home and His patience when we stayed there,

Especially thank you for Gabriel Koneta for His help, and friendship,

and Finally especially thank you very much for Kaiso and His Family for everything.

## Hungarian Seminar, 2009

By Christopher Hassett  
Honbu Dojo

After several epicurean days in Paris, Gabriel Koneta and I once again traveled with Obata Kaiso to Budapest for the annual Hungarian seminar. This was our second seminar in Hungary, and Gabriel and I both felt that this year's training was not only the most intense and demanding of the two seminars we've attended, it was also the most enjoyable and rewarding. This in part had everything to do with how well we were taken care of during our stay. Upon our arrival, Ferenc Sensei was waiting for us at the airport and for the next five days he treated us like honored guests. He graciously let us stay in his home; he drove us to and from the daily trainings; he several times took us into Budapest for lazy and relaxing afternoons in the Hungarian baths or touring villages of old. Food was always on the agenda, with ice cream, coffee, soup, and beer being our daily staple. The social highlight of each day was coming together as a group for evening dinners with Obata Sensei. It is always a pleasure hearing Kaiso's stories, and each night he was entirely generous in answering questions about the trainings, his teachings, and about his life. We learned of his early days living and training in the sweltering dojos of Tokyo, where food was often scarce but the joy of living the martial life was in great abundance. He spoke in wonderful detail about his time in the film industry in both Japan and the US. We also listened with great interest as Sensei spoke about his own influential teachers and about his early dream of becoming a Sumo wrestler, a dream that went unfulfilled due to his small size in comparison with the much larger men dominating the sport.

But for Gabriel and I, the real purpose and pleasure of our time in Hungary was to further train and therefore deepen our experience in Aikibujutsu. Without question, all of us in the Honbu dojo are blessed to receive Sensei's teachings on a daily basis, but there is something quite different about receiving those same teachings in a seminar setting. Somehow they become larger, more impacting. Or perhaps the energy of a seminar creates the conditions for us to be more open and receptive to the teachings, allowing them to resonate deeper, far beneath the intellect, and take root on levels purely muscular,



perhaps even molecular. It is on this level where the teachings ultimately reveal themselves, showing us that the appropriate response to any attack requires no thought at all, only instinctual action. This can only come about through training in the same movements over and over, year after year, but also from hearing the same teachings over and over, year after year, in not one but many contexts. It is for this last reason in particular that I've made it a priority over the years to travel with Sensei as often as I can afford.

Each of the Aikibujutsu trainings in Hungary this year began typically with either Peter Sensei or Ferenc Sensei leading the class in Tai-so, and this on most occasions was followed by Tai-so San. Practice thereafter usually involved a variety of footwork exercises and basic techniques such as Sanbon Kumite and Jodan Te Mochi. But special emphasis was given to the study of two groups of techniques in particular, Ushiro Waza and Shomen Uchi. Ushiro Waza is a technique designed to move against an assailant holding a knife to his victim's back. Tori, the "victim" in this instance, spins in quickly and decisively towards his attacker and either safely secures the attacker's arm before throwing him Kotegaeshi style, or he moves in deeper still, directly under the shoulder, forcing the assailant's arm (and knife) high in the air before throwing him down Iriminage style. However, the most important teaching Sensei imparted in regards to Ushiro Waza was that the technique, a direct and decisive

response to a knife attack, is strictly for dojo training only. Sensei both demonstrated and repeatedly emphasized how an attacker with a knife will almost always win in a fight, and by “win” he means the one without the knife will very likely die. He noted how a simple slice to the arm in a knife-fight will, within minutes, lead to a profusion of blood, then a debilitating loss of energy, followed by a significant amount of pain and, ultimately, the loss of any reasonable will to defend oneself against further attack. He explained how, even if one were to initially survive such an encounter, it would still take minutes for any help to arrive, then many more minutes for transport to a hospital, then still a further loss of time/blood/energy simply waiting to be seen by a doctor. And as still more time passes in an effort to secure a room for surgery, or even the time it takes for surgery itself, the odds for survival have been dangerously reduced. These are the cold realities, rationally considered. So Sensei tells us, do not actually do Ushiro Waza in a real situation. Instead, if asked at knifepoint to hand over your wallet, Sensei instructs us to give it up.

The other series, Shomen Uchi, has students responding to an overhead strike with a block, control, and a variety of throws: inside and outside Kotegaeshi, Sankajo, Iriminage, Shihonage, etc. But at the Hungarian seminar we were privileged to learn a new technique to use in the series, Ude Garami. Ude Garami is a very effective control of a Shomen strike that secures the attacker’s arm tight to the body, locks the wrist in a painful, 90+ degree inward bend, then ends with a throw not too dissimilar from Kotegaeshi. Ude Garami is a welcomed addition to the repertoire of throws one can use against Shomen strikes, one that we are eager to bring back to Honbu for continued practice.

If success can be measured by individual progress, then without question the Hungarian seminar achieved its goals. It was obvious to me that in the few short days of training nearly every student I observed or worked with improved in a significant way, either with their technique, their footwork, or for many at the more basic levels, with their ukeme. This is no small feat, since most of us know from our own experience that it can often take weeks or months to see a similar elevation in skill resulting from training routinely in our normal schedules and settings. Again, this is why every student should attend at least one seminar with Obata Kaiso each year, and more if possible. The reward for such effort and cost will be found in the evolution of

technique and overall skill, and this of course is what we are always seeking from our constant efforts.

The Hungarian seminar represented another kind of success as well. When I first trained in Budapest back in 2005 there were perhaps a hundred or more students seeking Sensei’s teachings. Yet these were not all Sensei’s students. 2005 was an open seminar, so martial artists from every tradition were allowed to attend. In contrast, 2009 was a closed seminar, meaning only Sensei’s students could attend, yet our numbers this year went well beyond the large group of just four years ago. This year there were an estimated 140 students in attendance, all of whom were studying either Aikibujutsu or Shinkendo or both. This incredible growth speaks highly of Sensei’s unique and valuable teachings, of his awesome style, and of the sheer magnitude and force of his presence in the world. But it also speaks highly of the three main teachers in Hungary: Roland Sensei, Peter Sensei, and Ferenc Sensei. All three have built their dojos through incredibly hard work—annual seminars, community demonstrations, daily teachings, and the end result of all good things, word of mouth. These three teachers have brought together an amazing group of students, all of whom are clearly loyal, close, well disciplined, eager to learn, eager perform, determined excel. With that kind of energy and spirit enlivening a dojo, it is impossible not to evolve. Indeed, I am absolutely aware of my own internal progression as a student as a result of this past week’s trainings. For that I am most grateful for having had the opportunity to attend, train, and teach at the 2009 Hungarian seminar.



## My Stay at the Zen Garden Tatami Room

By Masaji Saito  
Instructor - West Covina and Honbu



I stayed three nights, 8/20-8/23 at Daishin-In, Myoshinji Temple in Kyoto, Japan. Kyoto has plenty of places just waiting to be discovered, to be enjoyed the gardens and temples is simply to stay at the temple.

Myoshinji Temple in the western part of the city belongs to the Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism. A large complex with 57 sub-temples and chapels, Myoshinji was founded in 1337 by the retired emperor Hanazono.

The main buildings on the 13.5-hectare site -- the entrance gate, main gate, Buddha Hall, lecture hall, bathhouse and toilet, and lotus pond -- are aligned on a north-south axis consistent with ancient cosmology during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods spanning 1192-1573.

Daishin-In, where I stayed, is located in this large Zen sect temple Myoshinji, a sub-temple out of 57. I woke up at 5a.m. to attend 6a.m. gongyo (morning service), seiza sitting for one hour listening to the monk's sutra chanting before breakfast. The breakfast was Shojin-ryori (Monk's meal during training

without any meat), which is good for a diabetic person like me. The breakfast consisted of steam rice, miso soup, tofu, and some vegetables cooked with sesame and seasonings served individually on an OZEN (personal small meal table made of wood set placed on tatami mats.)

Across the wooden corridor connected from main hall is a small, but a splendid rectangular miniature kare-san-sui (dry-landscape garden) called Aun-tei, which is aligned from east to west with tsukiyama (man-made hills) in its southeast section. The moss-covered stones that form these "hills," with raked gravel curving surrounding them, give the impression of a mountainous coastline. The guest including myself can stay over night by this zen garden. Rule for the accommodation is very strict: guests have to return by 9p.m. (curfew). At 10pm all lights must be turned off and silence is mandatory. No smoking is allowed, of course, for these wooden houses are the Japanese national treasure.





I went to Kumamoto City to see Kumamoto Castle during the stay here in Japan. Because of the curfew, I had only 90 minutes to spend at the castle.

#### KUMAMOTO CASTLE

Kumamoto Castle was founded by famous samurai warrior lord Kiyomasa Kato who hunted a tiger in Korea peninsula during the war against Korea and China in 16th century. After Kato clan was destroyed by Tokugawa shogunate, the Hosokawa clan took over this castle. The donjon (castle central keep) is a concrete reconstruction built in 1960, but several ancillary wooden buildings are still the originals. Kumamoto Castle is considered to be one of the three premier castles in Japan, along with Himeji and Matsumoto. The signature curved stone walls known as musha-gaeshi, as well as wooden overhangs were designed to prevent foes from penetrating the castle. Rock falls were also used as deterrents. I recommend all to go and see this castle as well as Himeji Castle when you go to Japan. These castles are really beautiful and majestic.



## Sakura Hanami

By John Liu, M.D.  
Honbu Dojo



flowers explode into a dizzying array of colors, usually around early April. Once opened, each flower lasts only 1-2 weeks, after which the petals fall, and new, green leaves spring forth on the branches of the trees. Geographically, the blooms begin in the south of the country, and move in a northerly direction. Daily news reports closely monitor and track the blossom migration.

The Japanese people engage in a wonderful tradition at this point in the year: Sakura 'hanami'. Hanami is loosely translated as the social viewing of flowers. Parks, gardens and public grounds where sakura are blooming receive a flurry of visitors, all eager to partake in the beauty of these flowers. Many people come in large groups. They bring with them a large tarpaulin or blanket to cover the ground, a picnic basket and (of course) alcoholic beverages, such as beer, shochu, sake, or wine. Many large groups bring music and/or musical instruments as well. Some very large gatherings even feature a barbecue and utensils to make fresh ramen! Many parks have lighting to illuminate the blooming trees

Cherry trees are quite a common sight all over Japan. The trees are known (in English) as the Japanese flowering cherry tree. Several types of Japanese flowering cherry trees, each with different colors and branch types, exist throughout the country. In the Japanese language, the general term for the cherry blossom is 'sakura'. In Japan, sakura season, which occurs every Spring, is a highly anticipated event.

Ever since the Heian era, the viewing of sakura has been considered one of the yearly highlights in the life of the Japanese people. As if commanded in unison by some unseen force, the trees and their



even after dark, so these (sometimes raucous) hanami parties often last late into the night. Smells of food and sounds of friends celebrating resonate in many Japanese towns during this festive time.

The cherry blossom season came a bit earlier than expected in 2009. People speculated that global warming will continue to hasten the onset of sakura season, while others said that 2009 was merely a normal deviation from the average blossom times. Whatever the case, my wife and I were fortunate enough to be in Japan in late March and early April to witness this incredible yearly event. Even as our plane descended towards the runway at Narita Airport near Tokyo, we saw many, many cherry trees in full bloom, dotting the countryside. Once in Tokyo, it was clear that hanami season was in high gear. We were delighted to find out that many seasonal foods in Japan are sakura-flavored! We enjoyed sakura dango, sakura mocha, and even sakura soft-serve ice cream! Also, the scenery at historic Himeji Castle was definitely enhanced by the thousands of sakura all over the castle grounds. Perhaps the most memorable sight on our trip to Japan was when a stiff breeze blew millions of flower petals into the air, enveloping us in a “sakura snowstorm” – Just unbelievable!

Having witnessed the sakura in full bloom in Japan was a transcendent experience for us. From a Shinkendo standpoint, the brief lifespan of these beautiful flowers represent the ephemeral, fleeting nature of human life. There is a certain melancholy and poignancy in this fact, often called ‘mono no aware’ by the Japanese. We must learn from the nature of these flowers and make the most of our time to help and bring joy to others.

## French 2009 Seminar

By Olivier Kandel, Stéphane Molina and Cuc Phan  
Photos by Sofien “Haze” Hadaji



The 10th French International Shinkendo seminar took place in Paris-Arcueil from May 15th to 17th 2009. The last time Obata Kaiso came to Paris was in March 2006. He performed a demonstration at the Paris Bercy martial arts festival in front of 17000 people.

After this long time, we wanted to take advantage of his coming in order to give a new momentum for Shinkendo in France. We decided to welcome Kaiso during a whole week so he could lead training sessions for the French instructors and most advanced students before the official beginning of the seminar.

On Thursday 14th, Obata Kaiso had an interview and a photo shooting for the French martial art magazine “Art et Combat”. Kaiso had the opportunity to share his vision of Shinkendo and of modern martial arts for the 21st century.

On Friday 15th, the seminar began with the instructors training session. In the afternoon, all the French and European students were present to share this unique moment of attending an international Shinkendo seminar under Kaiso’s lead.

On Saturday 16th, the afternoon training session ended with the Menjo ceremony. The city of Arcueil wanted to honor Kaiso for his presence. The deputy mayor gave him the “2009 Arcueil sports” medal.

In the evening, the official seminar dinner took place in Paris in a typical French restaurant. Kaiso and every student could taste French dishes from the Southern West part of France.

During the dinner, everybody shared with Kaiso his experience in tasting very special food in some countries. We talked about a French specialty: snails.

On Sunday 17th, Kaiso had dinner in the oldest restaurant in Paris, “Le Procope”, and had the opportunity to taste snails for the first time: he loved this dish!



Obata Kaiso accepting the 2009 Arcueil Sports Medal