

Authentic Nomaoi

The title of this newspaper "Authentic Nomaoi" comes from the words of Mr. Yoshida, saying he wants to "pass on authentic Nomaoi."

Humans & Horses, Preserving the Tradition together

The "Soma Nomaoi" is a celebration of martial skill and horse riding with a history of over one thousand years and designated as an important intangible folk-cultural property by the Japanese government. Kento Yoshida (33), a member of the Shineha-go Kibakai (the township's horse-riding club) participates in the Nomaoi, and on July 28, we asked him about his thoughts on Nomaoi. He said, "Nomaoi is a festival that can only be held with people's help. You feel a sense of accomplishment and it's a lot of fun."

Interview with Mr. Yoshida with the Shineha township's Soma Nomaoi horse-riding club

Kento Yoshida (33) has participated in the Soma Nomaoi since the third grade of elementary school. He first became interested in it when he saw his father participate in the Nomaoi. As a university student, he was away from home and Nomaoi for a time, but the earthquake disaster prompted him to participate again. In this year's armor (*katchu*) horse race, he won second place. Mr. Yoshida commented: "If you work hard every day, the results will follow. I used to compete in equestrian events, and I thought it would be easy to win if I had a fast and strong horse. But I couldn't win. No matter how fast your horse runs, if you don't put in the effort, you won't win the race." He woke up at 4:00 a.m. every morning to take care of the horses, and one month before the Nomaoi festival, he started going to the festival site early in the morning to train. He participated in this year's Soma

Nomaoi with his father and brother. His twin brother Manato won first place in the first armor race.

Mr. Yoshida commented on his brother's victory saying, "It is such an honor for our club to take first place in the first race. Everyone in the township is happy for him." This year's Soma Nomaoi was the first regular event in three years. During the three years affected by the pandemic, Mr. Yoshida and his team did not give up, because they wanted to convey the authenticity of Soma Nomaoi with a history over 1,000 years as it was, without changing its form. His father, Mr. Eiko Yoshida (58) said, "Soma Nomaoi cannot be held without the help of friends and family, as well as a lot of preparation. Preparation is the key to everything." The festival, which is a joint effort of people and horses, has been handed down by local people even after the earthquake. (Watanabe)



▲Mr. Kento Yoshida and Horumano, dressed for Nomaoi



▲Mr. Eiko Yoshida describing the immediate aftermath of the earthquake

behind in the town of Namie, which had been declared a 'difficult-to-return zone.' About a week later, I went into the town to look for horses with my friends from the horse-riding club. There were many animals in the town that had lost their way due to lack of food."

He and his friends gathered all the horses that had left their

Overcoming the disaster, hope for tomorrow

Kento's father Eiko, who was present at the meeting, spoke on behalf of his son about the situation of Namie Town and the horses in the stables at the time of the Great East Japan Earthquake.

"Many animals were left behind in the town of Namie, which had been declared a 'difficult-to-return zone.' About a week later, I went into the town to look for horses with my friends from the horse-riding club. There were many animals in the town that had lost their way due to lack of food."

He and his friends gathered all the horses that had left their

stables and evacuated together. Many of the animals that lost their owners also lost their lives.

Nevertheless, the Nomaoi was held in July of the year of the earthquake. He said: "After a number of discussions with my friends, I decided to participate because I wanted to bring courage and hope to as many people as possible in this difficult situation."

Their strong determination to continue Nomaoi, no matter how difficult it may be, led to their participation. When he said that his mission was to preserve the tradition of Nomaoi without changing its form, I sensed his strong passion for Nomaoi and his determination to pass it on to future generations.

(Kamiya)

The scenery looked different

Horseback riding experience on a Nomaoi horse

First, I put my foot on the left side of the horse. I was a little scared because this horse was bigger than the one I rode before at the zoo. But when I got on the horse, the scenery looked different. The ground looked farther than usual, and I felt as if I was going to fly into the sky. It shook a lot on the horseback, but the wind felt good. While I was riding the horse, Mr. Yoshida kindly talked about horses to me. The muscles of the horse's legs were very tight. The hoofs were big and cool. Seeing the horses in such good health, it was clear that Mr. Yoshida and his staff had gone to a great deal of painstaking care in raising them. He seemed very happy while stroking his horse, which was impressive to me. (Kato) I climbed on the horse with my left foot first, then placed both feet in the stirrups. They had a rug over the saddle so my bottom didn't hurt. Next, I took the reins and set off.

The horse was bigger than I had expected, and I was happy to see the view from high up on horseback. Gentle patting on horse's back calms down the horse. "Tension is transmitted from person to horse," Mr. Yoshida said. When a human is nervous, the horse thinks that "this human has no trust in me" and they get nervous, too. Therefore, it is important for humans to be relaxed. (Suganuma)



▲Riding a horse dressed for Nomaoi

The Soma Nomaoi, a tradition spanning over 1,000 years, took place for three days this year, beginning on July 24.

Horses from five townships in the Soso region (Uta-go, Kita-go, Nakano-go, Odaka-go, and Shineha-go) gathered at the Hibarigahara festival site in Minamisoma City for an "Armor Horse Race," a "Divine Flag Battle," and other events. It is also a ritual that honors three local shrines. Many of the people who belong to an equestrian club and compete in the festival have their own horses and live with them. We interviewed Mr. Kento Yoshida of Shineha-go, the most southerly township. Shineha-go covers the

Preserving the tradition of "Soma Nomaoi"

three towns of Namie, Okuma, and Futaba, and about 50 people belong to the equestrian club. While running his own business, Mr. Yoshida keeps six horses in a stable near his home, and during the festival, he takes care of about ten horses. (Okazaki)



▲Drying tools used in Nomaoi.

This newspaper was created by:

Rina Watanabe
(Iwaki Ryokuin Junior High, 2nd year) ;
Natsuki Kamiya
(Iwaki High, Freshman) ;
Makoto Suganuma
(Nagase Elementary, 5th grade) ;
Akihito Okazaki
(Koken Junior High, 3rd year) ; and
Haru Kato
(Shiozawa Elementary, 6th grade)

