



JACL

Japanese American Citizens League

NATIONAL JACL GALA TO HONOR DON WAKAMATSU

Press Release

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For Immediate Release

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Don Wakamatsu, the first Asian American manager in Major League Baseball history, will be honored at this year's 2011 JACL Gala.

Photo courtesy of the Toronto Blue Jays.

Washington D.C., August 24, 2011- The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), the nation's oldest and largest Asian American civil and human rights organization, will be holding its JACL Gala (A Salute to Champions) in Washington, D.C. on September 29, 2011. The JACL will honor **Don Wakamatsu** at the 2011 National JACL Gala. This year's Gala will award Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders who have made outstanding contributions to the field of athletics.

A native of Hood River, Oregon, Don Wakamatsu is the son of a Japanese American father and an Irish American mother. Wakamatsu's family history has roots in the Tule Lake War Relocation Center in Northern California, where his father was born, and also in the Jerome War Relocation Center in Arkansas. As a Yonsei, or fourth-generation Japanese American, Wakamatsu is the first Asian American manager in Major League Baseball (MLB) history.

Wakamatsu's Bay Area Hayward High School sports career led him to be a three-sport star in basketball, football and baseball; he ultimately chose to play baseball over football. At Arizona State University, he was an All Pac-10 catcher during his last three years at ASU, and he earned four varsity letters under College Baseball Hall of Fame ASU coach Jim Brock.

In the 1985 MLB Draft, Wakamatsu began his professional MLB career by being drafted in the 11th round by the Cincinnati Reds; he reached Double-A level before the Reds released him before the 1989 season. He then signed with the Chicago White Sox, playing with the Double-A Birmingham Barons and Triple-A Vancouver Canadians in 1990 and 1991. Then in May 1991, Wakamatsu played 18 games with the majors as a backup catcher for the White Sox. Once a free agent in 1991, he signed with the Los Angeles Dodgers, and throughout 1992-1996 played at the Double-A and Triple-A levels in the Dodgers, Texas Rangers, Cleveland Indians, Seattle Mariners, and Milwaukee Brewers.

He transitioned to a coaching career as a minor league manager in the Arizona Diamondbacks system, managing the Arizona League Diamondbacks (1997), the Class-A High Desert Mavericks (1998), and the Double-A El Paso Diablos (1999). He was awarded with Manager of the Year in the California League, after leading the High Desert Mavericks to the playoffs in 1998. Then in 2000, he managed the Erie Sea Wolves, the Anaheim Angels' Double-A affiliate, and acted as a field coordinator with the Angels.

Wakamatsu began coaching in the major leagues from 2003-2006 as a Texas Rangers' bench coach and in 2007 became the third base coach for the Rangers. In 2008, he served as the bench coach of the Oakland Athletics.

With an impressive history in MLB as both a player and coach, Wakamatsu made history on November 19, 2008 when he was named the manager of the Seattle Mariners and became the first Asian American manager in the majors. During that season, he was officially selected as a coach for the 2009 MLB All-Star Game in St. Louis. Currently, he serves as the Toronto Blue Jays bench coach. Wakamatsu has three children Jake, Luke, and Jadyn, and is married to Laura.

JACL National Executive Director, **Floyd Mori** said, "*My dream as a teenage ball player was the Major Leagues. Don Wakamatsu has made that dream a reality for many young ball players of today. He exemplified character as well as talent in an industry where many only shoot for headlines. Don will be the light on a hill for many young people who are looking for positive role models from which to pattern their lives.*"

In addition to Don Wakamatsu, the JACL Gala will be honoring several other outstanding individuals who made a name in sports and athletics. For more information on the JACL Gala, please visit www.jacl.org.

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About Japanese American Citizens League

Founded in 1929, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) is the oldest and largest Asian American civil rights organization concerned with issues of education, public policy and leadership development. As a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization, the JACL promotes public awareness about the history and achievements of Asian American & Pacific Islanders (AAPI), identifies and trains youth for leadership and service, and pursues public policy issues that affect the AAPI community. The JACL headquarters is located in San Francisco with additional offices in Chicago, Los Angeles, Seattle and Washington, D.C.



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