

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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bj League Japan to Bring Youth Basketball Tournament to Austin

(Austin, TX) The Japan Professional Basketball League (bj League) will bring 24 middle school-age basketball players to Austin for the bj Cup Championship. This group represents the finalists of youth basketball preliminaries hosted by 12 professional basketball teams throughout Japan during 2008. The trip will give the players a chance to experience another culture while interacting with foreign players of the same age.

In April 2009, one boys' team and one girls' team will travel to the U.S. to compete against local youth teams sponsored by Adidas. The teams will play a series of four games over a two-day period on April 2 and 3 at Bowie High School. The games are scheduled for 5:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. on Thursday April 2 and Friday April 3. A welcome reception will be hosted at City Hall by the Austin Sister Cities Program and Caring Family Network on Wednesday April 1 to kick off the event.

The purpose of the partnership between the bj League and Adidas is to use the bj Cup to create a cross-cultural awareness opportunity for children and adults in both countries. The bj League will annually bring two Japanese middle school teams to Texas for the bj Cup Championship. bj League corporate executives & Japanese company executives will accompany the bj Cup participants to Austin, allowing for interaction with local dignitaries and corporate executives in Texas.

The international youth championship is part of an extended relationship with Austin. The bj League's Oita Heatdevils team is owned by local businessman Vince Rawl. Mr. Rawl is the first foreign owner with a majority interest in any professional sports entity in Japan. The bj League has its bj League International offices here to coordinate U.S. tryouts and events, as well as to facilitate corporate sponsorship opportunities. In addition, Oita, Japan and Austin, Texas are sister cities and participate in the Austin Sister Cities program.

"We look forward to this opportunity for our children from Japan to participate in this friendly competition and to meet new friends from around the world. Our experience with the people of Austin has always been a positive one and we look forward to our continued partnership in the U.S.," said Toshimitsu Kawachi, Commissioner of the bj League.

With this event, the bj League also hopes to spread the message of "Child Abuse Prevention & Child Homelessness Awareness" month in April by partnering with a local organization to raise awareness for this cause. In Texas, there are more than 21,000 children in foster care and 4,000 children waiting for adoption, often due to neglect or abuse in their homes. Caring Family Network (CFN) provides foster care and adoptive services to more than 300 children age 0-22 in the Central Texas area. Approximately 50 teens in the CFN foster care program will be invited to attend the games and the opening ceremony to experience this cross-cultural event.

"We are thrilled to be involved with such a unique event," said Stacy Bruce, Executive Director of Caring Family Network. "This will give our kids a once-in-a-lifetime chance to experience another culture through the universal language of sports."

The bj League is the only true Professional Basketball League in Japan, with 12 teams and plans for expansion to 24 teams over the next four years. The bj League was created in 2004 to professionalize the game of basketball in Japan. The 12 teams include Osaka, Tokyo, Saitama, Hamamatsu, Oita, Fukuoka, Sendai, Takamatsu, Toyama, Okinawa, Shiga, and Niigata.

Caring Family Network is a private, not-for-profit child placing organization founded in 1992, with offices in Austin, Kerrville, Harker Heights and Brownwood. CFN contracts with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services to help provide safe homes for children in need, as well as training and support services for foster and adoptive families.

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