



Pokémon Showdown 2008  
Orlando Travel Log  
Christopher Halordain Tsai  
August 14 – 17, 2008



## Thursday, August 14, 2008 – Arrival

My companion for the trip, June Zhang, and I landed in Orlando around 7:30 PM Eastern time and proceeded downstairs to baggage claim only to find no Pokémon sign or designated shuttle driver, as Cathy Calahan of Pokémon Air originally informed us. After some inquiry, a Mears driver revealed that a shuttle of Pokémon Trading Card Game (TCG) players had left the airport around 5:00 PM, and that the next group would not depart until 9:00 PM because of a delayed flight of Greek players. After checking my cell phone for messages, I listened to an interview request from JP Shields of Bender/Helper, but he left his cell phone number slightly inaudibly, with a cough coming on one of the key digits. I dialed four different combinations before I reached him, and, after some abortive research, revealed that he did not have Pokémon Organized Play coordinator Angela Durand's phone number, so he could not help me reach her to confirm my ride to the Hilton Disney World Resort Hotel. Too fatigued and impatient to wait for the 9:00 PM shuttle, June and I paid our own taxi to the hotel; once there, we obtained special edition Pokémon room keys to Room 676, where our journey finally ended.

During dinner at the restaurant/pub in the lobby, we saw Pokémon players everywhere. After ordering a plate of buffalo wings, we continued EV training our recently bred Abomasnow and Bronzong, while I surveyed the scene. Around me, I saw about ten DS Pokémon players and nearly thirty Pokémon TCG players, shuffling their decks and discussing strategy. The DS players were presumably also EV training and testing their teams. The players spoke a variety of foreign languages, from French (possibly Canadian dialect) to Norwegian. A few older parents of Pokémon gamers were watching Michael Phelps win his fifth or sixth gold medal in the Beijing Olympics 2008. After devouring the buffalo wings, we headed upstairs to our room, nabbing a few stray Magmortar posters on our way there.

As June showered, I returned downstairs to survey the scene in the Open Gameroom. The main hallway leading from the lobby to the grand ballroom boasted five different side rooms, each approximately the size of a large classroom. The first room housed two registration stations, each boasting cartloads of free Pokémon paraphernalia. Tomorrow, Showdown players would receive their complementary t-shirt and gift bag here. The second room, currently quite deserted, was the infamous Animé Room, where beanbag cushions and sacks littered the floor in front a gigantic 100" television continuously playing Pokémon episodes; tons of little kids around the age of 9 lay on the cushions, their eyes fixated to the current episode of Pokémon. Less conspicuously, this room contained a Nintendo Wii and a small television screen for Pokémon Battle Revolution practice. The third room featured an Open Gameroom, apparently open from early morning to 1 AM, only loosely staffed and supervised by official judges; mostly, players from around the world gathered here to sell and trade their wares and partake in practice matches with other players. Maybe one or two people were playing the DS game; mostly, players were playing and trading the card game. I caught sight of Jeremy Au-Yeung, the New York Showdown Champion, watching a card battle. A group of girls were purchasing glittery sleeves from a Japanese vendor. A band of Eevee fans were showcasing their various collections of Eevee cards in different languages. I especially enjoyed the variegated collections of card sleeves on sale and displaying around the tables. This room was by far the most heavily populated, but it was also the largest; capacity approached 300, I estimate. The fourth room, currently locked, would be the site of the Pokémon Showdown and Ice Breakers. The fifth room contained a water/coffee dispenser and a Creative Station for aspiring artists, but mainly it connected to the grand ballroom, where *all* of the official trading card game matches and the Opening/Closing Ceremonies would transpire. In front of the main ballroom was the end of the infinite corridor; here, two lines would form on Sunday for the Lucario Giveaway and the Pokémon Creator signings. Outside the infinite corridor was the pool, where players and their parents chilled from battles.

## Friday, August 15, 2008 – Breaking the Ice

Friday morning, I awakened before 8 AM to prepare for a radio show interview with host Larry Whittaker and his assistant, Robin. Around 8:30 AM, June was still sleeping, so I manually awakened her and informed her I needed to call the radio show host from the room phone (JP Shields had requested that I use a land line with a reliable connection, so the room phone was my best option). When I turned on my cell phone at 8:30 AM, I noticed several text messages written in palpable panic, asking that I call the guest number immediately. I quickly followed, reached Robin, and eventually connected to Larry's live show by 8:40 AM. Aaron Zheng, a junior Pokémon player from New Jersey, was already conversing with Larry about the Pokémon card game. When I connected, the host asked about us collectively. Aaron is a 10-year old junior aspiring to become a philosopher; his mother is a housewife, and his father is a photographer. The interview was extremely casual and random, jumping from one topic to the next, and between me and Aaron. Some of the more noteworthy discussions we shared:

- 1.) How did you get into the game of Pokémon?
- 2.) How does the card game work, and how does it differ from the video game? Aaron, who was trying to help his other friends from New England qualify for the TCG tournament in the Last Chance Qualifier round on Friday morning, answered most of these questions. Notably, Aaron claimed that "The video game requires more time investment, more care, and more knowledge. With the card game, you can get the future champion's entire deck with just \$70, so a lot more relies on luck and your ability to play."
- 3.) What would you like to become when you grow up? I told them I dreamed of becoming a game designer for Nintendo, while Aaron wants to be a philosopher.
- 4.) What have you learned from Pokémon? "Anything is possible as long as you have passion for what you do," Aaron answered. This kid impressed me. He spoke slowly and confidently, displaying a maturity beyond his years. I think he will succeed in life.
- 5.) Would you agree or disagree with the statement that "video games are a waste of time"?
- 6.) Did your parents accompany you to Orlando? Aaron talks about his mother, and Larry, the host, jokes, "Your father must be by the pool, right, checking out the girls?" Larry later asks us whether we would "check out the girls" by the pool; Aaron answers negatively, and I tell Larry, "There will be plenty enough at the Showdown tomorrow." Assistant Robin laughs politely but uncomfortably as this conversation quickly ends.
- 7.) What will you be doing for the rest of the day? Competing? This led to Aaron's revelation of the Last Chance Qualifier and his altruistic act of helping his fellow New Englanders qualify. "People always underestimate us [people from the Northeast], but I want to help us show the potential we have up here in the East," Aaron boldly proclaims.

After the interview, June and I headed downstairs for breakfast. Around 10 AM, registration for the Showdown began, but I saw a long line and returned to my ham and eggs to wait for the crowd to abate before registering myself. On the way to brunch, I encountered my first familiar face, Thomas Mifflin, my semifinals opponent in Los Angeles, who was taking pictures of the crowd in the main hall. Brunch consumed more than an hour, mostly because June ordered hard-boiled eggs, which took half an hour to cook. After brunch, June revealed that she wanted to visit Hollywood Studios, so we parted ways. On my way into the registration line, I heard a junior standing nearby say, "That's Chris!" I turned to see Vincent Taylor and his mother, Adrienne Peterpaul a.k.a. Pokémom, standing by the line. After all of our email conversations, it was great to introduce ourselves to each other and finally meet face-to-face. The two headed to Perkins for brunch while I next encountered Paul Hornak a.k.a. Zerowing, my finals opponent in Los Angeles. We exchanged a warm embrace as he flashed his



Showdown gear: a blue Lucario competitor's t-shirt; a DS mini-backpack emblazoned with the Pokémon Showdown 2008 logo; a baseball cap embroidered with the Pokémon Showdown logo; a high-quality white Pikachu towel; and a binder of exclusive Pokémon promotional trading cards, one in each language present at TCG Worlds 2008. I soon picked up my own set from the official registration room (Door #1 of the five-door infinite corridor).

On my way back to my room, I saw a posse of Japanese players battling on their DS Lites. Japanese juniors were crawling all over the lobby couches, craning their necks to see the DS screen of one senior player, Izuru Yoshimura. One of the children's father, Mr. Taketomi, pointed at me and hailed, "The LA champion!" It turns out he and his prized son, Genki, had seen the video that Thomas Mifflin posted on YouTube. He introduced me to Izuru Yoshimura, Japan's national champion, and we shook hands. Izuru surprisingly did not speak English, but we managed to share a battle.



Izuru ran a Trick Room team that started with Trick Room Dusknoir and Exploding Azelf, following them with Milotic and a relatively passive Registeel. I attacked with my own Trick Room team (Togekiss/Bronzong/Machamp/Regice), meant as a Smokescreen to my likely Showdown teams, and was surprised at the aggressiveness with which Izuru exploded his Pokémon. His Dusknoir also knew Memento, which did nothing but neutralize my Machamp. Genki then challenged me to a battle, which I lost; he, too, used an Explosion-heavy team with Bronzong, Drifblim, Azelf, and Snorlax. Another Japanese junior, supporting his Showdown-eligible brother, nearly beat my Rain team with Sunny Day Jolteon, Exploding Exeggutor, Typhlosion, and Solarbeam Ludicolo (like minel). Before all the battles, the Japanese players ran to their spots in the battle room, which was humorous considering I never knew the character sprite could move fast in the battle room; I always walked.

Afterwards, Genki, by far the friendliest and happiest of the Japanese posse, wanted to trade.



We exchanged DS Lites, and I browsed his boxes for a rare Pokémon. He had ten exclusive event Celebis, which his father told me were acquired through repeated progressions through a Japanese queue (he acted out waiting the line and running back to its end). I found a Docile Celebi with decent stats, and Genki excitedly requested my Umbreon; he was so happy after the trade he ran to his father and screamed, “Blacky! Blacky! Blacky!” several times before Mr. Taketomi silenced Genki.

Genki’s father offered to exchange information later in the day, following the Opening Ceremony scheduled for 4:00 PM; apparently, the family used the cell phone for sending email, and Mr. Taketomi did not have his cell phone at the time. I took the opportunity to return to my room and drop off my goodie bag before consummating my EV training with the most important member of my team: Infimum, my Sunny team’s Infernape.

By the Opening Ceremony, I was nearly finished with the training – tons of Starly and Staravia knocked out – but, on my way to the grand ballroom, where the flag bearers paraded, I saw the Ice Breakers begin in Door #4, the official Showdown room. Thomas informed me that we could play on the actual machines used for tomorrow’s Showdown, so I quickly volunteered when Kumi Okada, one of Nintendo’s designers and translators, sought an opponent for the Japanese junior Nagisa. Apparently, the Ice Breakers would comprise a series of casual battles with anybody else in attendance, just to familiarize ourselves with the tournament DS Lite systems and meet other competitors.



When Kumi Okada begged the crowd for somebody to play against a young Japanese junior girl – Nagisa Marui – I immediately stepped forward and prepared for battle. Her father watched on the side. Nagisa used a Hypnosis-heavy team that started Yanmega and Crobat. I managed to activate Sunny Day before losing my Ludicolo and Infernape, but my Arcanine stepped into a comfortable sunlight and Heat Wave wiped out her bench, which comprised Metagross and a fourth Pokémon.





As I wandered the area searching for a second opponent, I accidentally bumped into a 20-year-old Japanese player posing for a picture. She introduced herself as Minori Miyauchi, a name I recognized from the Yokohama Senior Finals; in the Yokohama regional finals, she ran a Hail team comprising Abomasnow/Metagross/Glaceon/Slowbro that lost badly to Typhlosion and Weavile. I requested a battle, and she summoned Girafarig and Metagross to begin the battle. Her Girafarig surprised my Rain team by Skill Swapping my Vaporeon's Water Absorb, and the massacre ensued. Her Metagross soon wiped out my starters, and she followed it with a bench of Kabutops and Blissey. Surf easily eliminated Kabutops, and I thought I had the victory when my Toxicroak landed a Cross Chop on her Blissey, but its Chople Berry saved it from imminent death, allowing it to Counter away Toxicroak, the only threat. Before long, Blissey had paralyzed my entire team with Thunder Wave, Counter had removed all physical threats, and Blissey could sit back and alternate Softboiled with Ice Beam to gradually eliminate my Kingdra.

The Nintendo media crew managed to capture Minori's opening move on film, as her Girafarig Skill Swaps for my Vaporeon's Water Absorb. Notice the opening lineup she faces: Viterbi and Lagrangian!

The Pokémon Video Game Showdown Icebreaker!



The Pokémon Video Game Showdown Icebreaker!





After our battle, we discussed Pokémon a bit before I received a challenge from Masataka Ishii, the Japanese senior second place finisher. I knew that he was a fan of Rain teams, as he used Gyarados/Ludicolo/Kingdra in Sapporo, and Zapdos/Ludicolo/Kingdra in Osaka, and, indeed, he summoned a Rain team centered around Toxicroak and Ludicolo. However, his starters, Azelf and Drifblim, quickly Exploded after setting up Rain, so my Trick Room users quickly bowed out of battle. Togekiss and Bronzong managed little, paving the way for my Machop and Regice. His Toxicroak proved the difference by knocking out my Regice. Drifblim and Ludicolo combined to finish off my Machop. Minori and Masataka both spoke English well enough to carry a conversation both before and after our battles.

I glimpsed Minori and two Japanese girls on a distant DS battle station, so I approached and introduced myself to Satomi Yamada and Manami Katou. Satomi, a mature-looking woman of age 23, had navy Fantasia-colored nail polish and a navy DS Lite. She insisted on playing 3-on-3 singles, so my doubles team featuring Gyarados/Ludicolo/Kingdra easily lost to her Sporing Breloom and Double Team Togekiss before I could even glimpse her final Pokémon.

Following the battle, I thirsted for more doubles and quickly challenged Manami Katou, who sported a pony-tail and her doubles finals team from Yokohama. I decided to test the only team I hadn't yet used: my Hail team. In my mind, I wondered if the three girls – who seemed quite close – would discuss the ice breaker battles, so I wanted to show them all three of teams to keep them from guessing the team I would use tomorrow. When I saw Typhlosion and Weavile on Manami's team, I smiled; like déjà-vu of her victory over Minori in the Yokohama finals, she could plow through my team with her Typhlosion's Eruption and her Weavile's Fake Out/Night Slash. However, my Slowbro survived long enough to activate Trick Room, entirely turning the tables for my bench. Immediately, my Glaceon emerged and eliminated Weavile, while Machop decimated Typhlosion. In one turn, Dynamicpunch and Blizzard both penetrated her Protect, seemingly surprising Manami, who gasped and turned to Minori with a quizzical look. She summoned a backline of Dusknoir and Garchomp, both Protecting in an attempt to stall out the Trick Room, but, again, Glaceon moved first and penetrated Protect with Blizzard. Before long, the victory was mine, prompting Manami to groan. This was the first time I faced an exact team from one of the videos I watched in preparation for the Showdown, and I must admit that it was surreal seeing the team featured on a YouTube finals video in reality. That Typhlosion and Weavile from Manami's starters were still in my recent memory, and seeing them on my DS screen fully intact was like entering the video game myself; it justified all of the film study I performed on YouTube, and made me even more respectful on its controller, Manami Katou. However, I would see more blasts from the past before all was said and done... We took a few pictures, I greeted Ray Rizzo (BlueCookies), and one of the Nintendo staffers announced an open stage for USA vs. Japan on Pokémon Battle Revolution.

I opted to observe the battles, sitting beside Manami and Satomi to watch. Because the United States and Japanese lines merged juniors and seniors, the age groups crossed at random, with many U.S. seniors facing Japanese juniors, and vice versa. Most notably, I noticed that almost all of the U.S. seniors played Trick Room teams. Rick used Togekiss/Bronzong/Smeargle/Machop, while Diego used Togekiss/Clefable/Bronzong/Rhyperior. Christopher Hunter used Smeargle/Clefable/Rhyperior/Cresselia. A Trick Room team defeated Minori's Skill Swap Girafarig, even though I was silently cheering her to win. An American junior with an all-uber team faced Izuru Yoshimura with a Follow Me Magmortar paired with Trick Room Gengar, a team built to win mostly on surprise, I would assume. His Abomasnow and Dusknoir entered play down 4-2, but Izuru pulled out a 0-2 victory, decimating the junior's entire team within the four Trick Room turns. It was an amazing display of skill.

As the battles dragged on with no backdrop music, I noticed a small circle of Japanese players seated on the floor, trading and battling via local wireless. I recognized Riho Maeda, the Japanese junior champion, battling Masataka Ishii. I challenged her to a battle, and immediately regretted it, as she decimated and completely demoralized my team; I have never felt so helpless in a battle. Seeing Bronzong and Metagross to start against my Rain team, I began my assault confident that I would face yet another Trick Room, but, instead, her Bronzong Imprisoned Protect, and next turn, her Metagross Exploded to wipe out my entire frontline. I felt helpless as her Drifblim entered play. Desperate to remove the Imprison, I began attacking immediately and aggressively, but her Bronzong managed a few consecutive Protects, allowing it to survive while her Drifblim once again Exploded. I felt helpless, as all of my Rain team members rely on Protect to weather explosions. Without that option, my Kingdra soon died. Finally, her Azelf entered play and finished off my team. Dazzled by such a stunning rout, I asked her for her email and/or phone number, but her father shook his head and responded, “No email! No phone!” Despite their reluctance to communicate, however, Riho is a beautiful girl with a bright future in Pokémon; she has a very creative and intelligent mind, a cool and calm demeanor that allows her to make good decisions, a great game face that always makes her seem forlorn and unhappy regardless of the circumstances, and extremely long legs, making her taller than all the juniors and as tall as some of the senior girls. Overall, she came off as a very unassuming, modest person with a shy, reserved demeanor that is hard to find in today’s gamers, who are predominantly aggressive and prone to taunt; her parents raised and taught her very well. I thought she would prevail at the Showdown, but she must have encountered some bad luck in the second round. She was easily the toughest trainer I faced in Orlando, although she would never admit it. It was an honor to battle her.

As I was pondering my defeat, a chubby Japanese senior (age 22) who was watching our battle challenged me. His name was Yasuhito Kajiwaru, although it did not register with me until the next day’s semifinals that he was the Makuhari champion with the Chesto-Resting Cresselia. He summoned a Trick Room Bronzong and a Sandstorming Hippowdon to start against my Togekiss/Bronzong smokescreen duo. The battle proceeded at an ant’s pace, with both of our Bronzong’s missing multiple Hypnoses and launching/undoing two or three Trick Rooms before the first KO occurred. Eventually, I blinked first; when the organizers urged all the competitors to return to our rooms and rest for the big day tomorrow, I grew impatient and Exploded my Bronzong. His Hippowdon soon died, but he summoned Relicanth, who decimated my Togekiss and Regice with the surprising Head Smash. Finally, his Level 1 Cubone ambushed me in Trick Room, setting up Sandstorm and proceeding to Endeavor my Regirock before Relicanth ultimately finished it off.

Discouraged by my concluding rash of losses, I sought out Vincent Taylor and his mom, Adrienne Peterpaul, for dinner. It was 7:00 PM, and, ambushed by the lack of food at the ice breakers, I was starving. We drove to Perkins, a family-style restaurant similar to Owen’s in Dallas, where Vincent and I played three battles before seeing our dinners. I enjoyed my porkchops, but the overall tone of the dinner was extremely negative. Adrienne Peterpaul mentioned how badly Vincent wanted to win the special Showdown DS Lite, but also expressed doubt that he could beat the Japanese. “Why pair us with the Japanese so early?” Pokémonom openly wondered. Having seen some of the ice breakers before forcing Vincent to leave them, she criticized the Japanese style of play, comparing the Explosion strategy to the Japanese kamikaze. “What’s the fun of Pokémon if you’re just going to explode, explode, and explode!? You should fight the battle like it was meant to be fought,” Adrienne boldly declared, telling Vincent, “Don’t feel bad if you lose to the Japanese. We’ve accomplished our goal and made it this far already; anything else is icing.” Sometime before dinner, she also mentioned that she had heard word of a Japanese cheat device that she deemed “even better than our Action Replay,” intimating that she expected some advanced form of cheating from the Japanese. Even more

interesting was what she claimed to be a hack-heavy New York tournament; “Nintendo would have lost HALF of New York to hacking if they weren’t so lenient on their checks!” she indignantly claimed, as if affronted by Nintendo’s casualty regarding hack checks. I shook my head at the comment, just telling her, “If you’re this far [at the Showdown], then you have had the time to raise perfect teams, so it doesn’t really make a difference if you hack or not. It’s a moot point, whether they can catch you or not,” I told her. She did not seem happy with my comment, glaring at me as we waited for dinner.

She also repeatedly bemoaned her son’s recently cleared LeafGreen game (a fluke accident), and generally emitted a negative vibe. When I told her that I had five teams prepared, she glared at me and retorted combatively, “Well, we got one and a half, and that one got us here from New York, so we’re sticking to it.” When Vincent asked me for some advice for a Hold item for his Metagross, Bechoice, I told him Occa Berry, but his mother quickly interjected and warned Vincent to change. “I told you: No changes one day before the tournament!” She cited her trust for Matthew Engel, revealing that he had called her one night before leaving for Orlando (Wednesday night) with a fully bred and trained Metagross (Bechoice) to “save the day.” “I just trust that man! He knows what he is doing,” she told me, also explaining that Vincent was so thankful he traded Matt his precious shiny Golbat. Adrienne returned several times to her SOS email to me, telling me how desperate she and Vincent were after breeding eggs over her lunch break every single day for the last month; even though I admired and respected the amount of time and work she and Vincent poured into recovering from the data loss, she seemed somewhat vengeful that I didn’t send her a team to replace the lost one. “I needed that Abomasnow so bad!” she said at one point, before praising Matthew Engel again. Having trained with and received several pages of advice from Matthew Engel (TheMaskedNitpicker), I could only concur about his knowledge and kindness, but the extremities at which Adrienne went to praise Matt seemed almost intended for accentuating her disappointment with my inability to create all of Vincent’s team for him.

During our dinner battles, the first three of which Vincent won, he would remark in surprise every time his team clinched victory, prompting his mom Adrienne to look up at me sternly, searching my face for concession or surprise. I wouldn’t yield any surprise, maintaining a game face despite Vincent’s repeated hopeful glances and Adrienne’s sustained glaring. I complemented Vincent on the strength of his training and play; I could only agree when he boasted about his “Bronzong-blasting Slowking” – meant for destroying Trick Room users – and his “invincible” Hitmonchan, which held a White Herb so “not even Gyarados can beat it.” Frankly, after conversing over email for over four weeks, I expected to see a happy-go-lucky wide-eyed child with a smiling and thankful mother, but, instead, Vincent came across as a boastful braggart, and, worst of all, his mother seemed vindictive and hateful, especially when it came to Japanese players. Most discouraging of all during our interaction was Adrienne’s mention that Knight, the New York junior champion, was in his room at the Hilton crying because he feared a loss to the Japanese. “I had video of Knight’s team, but I refuse to release it. He’s an 11-year old kid! This is a game!” she vehemently insisted, criticizing film study and castigating it as a valid means of preparation. “We didn’t watch any of the games on YouTube, or at the ice breakers, because Pokémon should be played fairly. What’s the fun if you know what everybody uses, and everybody knows what we’re using?” She revealed that several other American juniors had already offered to exchange intelligence. “I’ll tell you my team if you tell me yours!” Adrienne claimed these juniors said to Vincent. I could not believe my ears; preparation as an unfair advantage? I based my entire learning of the metagame from videos, so I was appalled to hear such venomous censure of what I deem an appropriate form of study.

On the way back to the Hilton, I grew tired of Vincent’s pomp. He was 2-1 against my teams, demolishing my Trick Room smokescreen and also killing my Cresselia on a critical hit. He played my



Hail team extremely closely, down to my final Pokémon (Glacéon), so I finally pulled out my two stronger weather teams, Sun and Rain. In the car, my Sunny Day team demolished his team, 3-0. On the fifth floor of the Hilton, where both his room and my new room (changed due to renovations on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor directly above 676) resided, we gathered by the couch area for one final battle. My Rain team from Los Angeles rampaged his team 4-0, and, once again, Vincent kept glancing up at me as his moves either landed or missed; it was hard not to look up and return his glance myself. Perturbed by this behavior, I advised him to keep a game face for the Showdown, not revealing any relief, joy, or grief during the battle. He did not seem to understand what I was talking about, but I wished him luck nonetheless and led him to his mother in the lobby before returning to my room, where June awaited me.

As June fell asleep, I logged online to scout for first-round matchups, finding none. As I dimmed the lights, I lay on my bed, reviewing all the teams I had faced and scouted at the ice breakers. At that time, my hopes were dim, and I feared the Imprison + Explosion – and Explosion in general – that Japanese players seemed so fond of using, from Izuru to Riho. I was worried about Trick Room Sandstorm, freak critical hits, Explosion, Rain Dance mirror matches, Skill Swap, and all sorts of nightmarish matchups that plagued me during the ice breakers. However, I settled on my opening team – my unpredictable Sun team – and soon fell asleep, determined to log at least eight hours before the big Showdown.

## Saturday, August 16, 2008 – Showdown

On the morning of the Showdown, I awoke at 8:30 AM, anxious for battle. The night featured several sudden awakenings and team ponderings, so, by the time I opened my eyes to daylight, I knew how I would open my first match; I would use the safe yet unpredictable opening team: Sunny Day. Since June was still snoring under her pillow and sheets, I quietly washed my face and descended for my pre-battle meal:



I noticed a team of Japanese card players also psyching themselves up for their World Championship matches in the same dining room. However, I enjoyed a good Mickey waffle and a few eggs before returning to my room. By the time I returned, June was ready for the Showdown, so, after brushing my teeth and equipping my type table sweatband, we descended on Door #4 together, where a crowd was gathering. Senior Showdown players were first instructed to stand to one side as the juniors played their first round. I glimpsed Riho Maeda preparing for her first match and wished her good luck; meanwhile, Vincent was preparing for his opening match against a diminutive Japanese trainer, and I knew Vin would win the moment I saw his game face. I asked Thomas and Paul if they had finalized their opening teams, and they responded affirmatively.

When the juniors started playing, the staff members called us seniors into a queue in front of the battle stations. Here, mixed with the Japanese senior players, I exchanged words with a few of the players I had battled at the ice breaker. “Good luck, Chris,” Masataka told me from behind. Izuru Yoshimura, Japan’s national champion, was quietly preparing his team on the DS nearby. I caught sight of Minori, Satomi, and Manami chatting far in front of me and asked if they were nervous. “Oh yeah,” Minori replied, her hand on her heart. “Heart pumping,” she said while taking a shaky breath, her face pale with what likely was a restless night. Satomi smiled nervously. American players Rick and Diego were craning their heads to see the matchup pairings, and I saw that I would be playing Taylor Owen from Los Angeles. I had no opinions about this matchup, since I had not previously faced Taylor and had no information about his LA team from either YouTube or Smogon. I decided to follow through with my opening decision, and, within 10 minutes of first entering line, we entered battle.

**Pokémon Showdown: Round I**  
**Versus Taylor Owen**  
**(Cherrim / Slowbro / Electivire / Lapras)**



My first opponent, Taylor Owen, did not seem to belong to some of the well documented or touted Pokémon circles on the web; even before the Showdown began, he stood alone, saying little to the other players. Thus, I applied no foreknowledge of his team and entered battle essentially blind. With no scouting report, I was a bit nervous as the match began, but when Paul screamed from beside me that his DS was in Japanese, my laughter calmed me down. When Paul saw me, he groaned, “I think we will end up playing each other again. I don’t like this.” I concurred, a bit perturbed that they would pair the two Los Angeles finalists so soon in the tournament. “I wish it would be the finals, Paul,” I responded. “I’d have no problem with that, but this...” Paul cut off as the first round began.

Luckily, as he summoned his two starters, his Cherrim revealed the theme behind his team, and I knew he would be tapping Sunny Day at some point. Luckily, my team also thrives on Sunny Day, so I decided to let him set up the sun for me while I enjoyed a head start on the assault. Instead of summoning the sun, I had Lagrangian – my Ludicolo – Ice Beam his Cherrim instead. Sure enough, he used Sunny Day, activating his Cherrim’s Flower Gift but also boosting the fire attacks of all my Pokémon. Next turn, Infimum – my Infernape – unleashed the first in a series of Heat Waves, and the onslaught began. When Solarbeam fainted his Slowbro and Heat Wave scorched his Cherrim, I began to feel confident that the battle would sway my way. Even though his Electivire showed some threat with Earthquake, the Sunny Day that Taylor’s Cherrim invited boosted my Heat Waves beyond normal damage, proving too much for his team to handle.



BATTLE BEGINS	
summons Lagrangian	summons Cherrim
summons Infimum	summons Slowbro
TURN 1	
Infimum Fakes Out Slowbro	
	Cherrim Sunny Day
Lagrangian Ice Beams Cherrim	
	Slowbro flinches
TURN 2	
Infimum Heat Waves --> KOs Cherrim	
Lagrangian Solarbeams Slowbro --> KOs Slowbro	
TURN 3	
	summons Electivire
	summons Lapras
Infimum Heat Waves	
	Electivire Earthquakes
Lagrangian Solarbeams Electivire --> KOs Electivire	
	Lapras Ice Beams Lagrangian
TURN 4	
Infimum Close Combats Lapras --> KOs Lapras	

Overall, the 4-0 match was a good start, although I knew the games would grow more difficult. Sure enough, Paul Hornak, playing adjacent to me, lost his opening match and warned me about his opponent's Abomasnow/Weavile lead. I decided to continue using my Sunny Day team to counter the Hail I would certainly face, but seeing Paul lose so early did not bode well for me. I knew Paul to be a skilled player, and, though I was relieved that we would not have a rematch of our Los Angeles final, I knew his opponent would be a tough out. Still, I was surprised that he bowed out so early, even if it meant that we would not be facing each other in the Sweet Sixteen.

I had about 20 minutes to kill before my next match, so I took a water break. June visited the winner's circle screaming, happy for my victory, but I told her to suspend her excitement for another round, as I knew the stakes were infinitely higher entering the Sweet Sixteen, as only eight of us would leave with the prized Showdown Nintendo DS Lite. Meanwhile, I saw Thomas Mifflin from a distance, waving his cap at me; standing in the crowd, he signaled that he, too, had lost in the first round, surprising me yet again, but he wished me luck, showing his class even in defeat. Meanwhile, I heard from Adrienne on the side that Vincent had lost in the juniors Sweet Sixteen, but that she thought his opponent had cheated. His opponent, Genki Taketomi, was having his game hack-checked at that moment, but I was befuddled about the accusation; despite the high stakes, I could not believe that Vincent would risk his sportsmanship on the cusp of the Elite Eight, where the judges were performing hack checks anyway. I was a bit embarrassed for the mother, as I knew Genki would not cheat and was doubtful that the accusation would unearth anything but the Americans' poor sportsmanship.

During my break, a judge also forbade me from writing in my notepad during battles, since, according to him, "nobody else was doing it." This sudden revelation disappointed me slightly, since writing alleviates my stress and generally forces me to think through moves – not to mention review them later – but I decided not to challenge the rule. After all, I had just a few matches to go.

As we positioned ourselves for the next match, I surveyed the scene and saw a handful of American players. Minori Miyauchi, my pale friend from the ice breaker, had also advanced, and I snapped some pictures of her nervous face and sweating palms before we had to meet our opponents. As I reached my station, I realized that I would, indeed, face the guy who defeated Paul. I readied my team.

**Pokémon Showdown: Round II – Sweet Sixteen**  
**Versus Yoshiaki Katsuyama**  
**(Abomasnow / Weavile / Glaceon / Slowbro)**



I expected a tough battle, and I was correct. Having faced Abomasnow and Weavile before when practicing with Eliezer (with his infamous Obama and Hilary starters), I should have known what to expect. I had practiced my opening move several times, but, for some reason, I thought Yoshiaki would behave differently. I made my first major gaffe of the tournament by trying to attack with Infimum rather than weathering Weavile's surefire Fake Out with Protect. The correct opening moves would have been Protecting my Infimum while casting Sunny Day with Lagrangian, but, instead, I tried to test his Weavile with Heat Wave from Infimum. I paid the price and received both a Fake Out – as I should have expected – and Icy Wind from Abomasnow, essentially ruining any speed advantage I enjoyed. I should have Protected my Infernape! That move lost me a practice battle against Eliezer on August 13, and it might have lost me this match just three days later...

Fortunately for me, I played it much safer from then on. I Protected Infimum on the next turn and proceeded to kill his frail Weavile, which, surprisingly, carried no Focus Sash; I presumed his Abomasnow had it, and, later, he confirmed it. Even though I had lost my speed and almost half its health, I managed to switch out my Infimum for the safer Slowking, Student t. Eventually, after some trading of blows, he pulled his Abomasnow, presumably to renew Hail later in the battle; this was the first time I saw switching used so strategically in short 4-vs.-4 doubles, so I was worried about using my Lagrangian's Solarbeam from then on. However, I mustered a single Solarbeam on Slowbro, and that was enough to let Heat Wave finish it off. By the time Abomasnow returned, I had fire Pokémon ready to blast away, which finished off an extremely dangerous Glaceon and Abomasnow for the victory.

BATTLE BEGINS	
summons Lagrangian	summons Abomasnow
summons Infimum	summons Weavile
TURN 1	
	Weavile Fakes Out Infimum
Infimum flinches	
	Abomasnow Icy Winds
Lagrangian Sunny Day	
TURN 2	
	Abomasnow Protects
Infimum Protects	
	Weavile Night Slashes Lagrangian
Lagrangian Solarbeams Weavile --> KOs Weavile	
TURN 3	
	summons Slowbro
switches Infimum <--> Student t	switches Abomasnow <--> Glaceon
Lagrangian Solarbeams Slowbro	
	Slowbro Psychics Student t
TURN 4	
	Glaceon Blizzards --> KOs Lagrangian
Student t Flamethrowers Glaceon --> KOs Glaceon	
	Slowbro Blizzards
TURN 5	
summons Arccosine	summons Abomasnow
Arccosine Heat Waves --> KOs Slowbro	
	Abomasnow Blizzards
Student t Flamethrowers Abomasnow --> KOs Abomasnow	

Several times, especially with his Abomasnow threatening return from the bench, I felt the match was lost. The game was played very tightly, despite the results, and his Icy Wind was the perfect counter for my speed-reliant Infernape. If I did not pull it immediately, it could do little against his speedy Abomasnow and Weavile. His Abomasnow's speed ambushed me, and his Weavile applied Pressure with Fake Out followed by Night Slash. The Hail did not help, especially after it unceremoniously returned following Yoshiaki's strategic switch. If it were not for my Lagrangian's well-timed Solarbeam crippling his Slowbro and a few lucky hits from Heat Wave – Glaceon could easily have dodged it in the snowstorm – then I would have lost this battle quickly. After the match, a Fox cameraman accosted me and asked if that match was the toughest I had encountered. "It sure seemed so, the way you looked. You have a great game face," the reporter informed me.

Luckily, this battle prepared for the Hail team I would face next, which featured three of the same Pokémon Yoshiaki used: Switching Abomasnow, Trick Room Slowbro, and the omnipotent Glaceon. Upon my entry into the Elite Eight waiting area, some Nintendo representatives congratulated me and informed me that they would hack check the team I just used; worried that my recent Japanese trades might thwart my clean cartridge, I informed the judges about my PC boxes, but they reassured me that they would check only my party. During this check, Ray Rizzo and Jeremy Au-Yeung found me and warned me about my upcoming match with Minori. "She's good," Ray cautioned; "Her Hail team is good." From studying her Yokohama finals video on YouTube, I sensed that Minori would run her Hail team, but I did not know her other tricks, so I asked Ray, "Did her Slowbro know Trick Room?" "It did, which was what was so surprising. Watch out," he answered, "She beat both me *and* Jeremy."

Suspecting that I would face Trick Room Hail, I switched Infimum out of my starting lineup for Student t, my Slowking, which I knew could better persist in the Trick Room.



**Pokémon Showdown: Quarterfinals – Elite Eight**  
**Versus Minori Miyauchi, Yokohama 2<sup>nd</sup> Place**  
**(Infernape / Slowbro / Abomasnow / Glaceon)**



Minori never suspected that she would be playing against me; after all the photographs I was taking of the scene, she probably thought I was eliminated into the crowd. However, when we lined up to shake hands, she yelped in surprise, “Ohhh!” I think she was as happy to play against me as I was to battle her; having destroyed my Rain team with Skill Swap Girafarig the day before, she was probably relieved to face someone she knew she could defeat. Having scouted her Hail team on YouTube, I was also relieved. However, the battle would prove to be fierce, and probably the toughest I had all day. When it came time to play, her warm smile turned icy cold as she assumed her game face, rolled up her sleeves, and stared down into her DS screen. I had no choice but to put my warmth aside as well. In the battle room, she was the first opponent that *walked* to her spot instead of running; she was cool.

Seeing my Slowking likely discouraged her out of Trick Room setup; instead, she started attacking straight from the start, allowing me to bring Sunny Day into play. At that point, however, I hesitated to Solarbeam her Slowbro because I anticipated an Abomasnow switch and the imminent weather change it would bring; I felt helpless as I debated Solarbeam versus Flamethrower, knowing that the sun could abruptly end at any moment. I even directed Student t’s Flamethrower at her Slowbro trying to catch her incoming Abomasnow on the switch, but it did not come, so eventually, I had Lagrangian fire Solarbeam to eradicate her Slowbro.

When I saw the Glaceon replacement, I felt a bit more comfortable with offense, but thankfully I did not order another Solarbeam, as she immediately switched Infernape for Abomasnow, pushing away

my Sunny Day. Glaceon's Blizzard quickly decimated my frontline, forcing me to summon Arccosine and Infimum into the snowstorm.

Minori, as skilled a player as I faced in the tournament, quickly tapped Protect on both her Pokémon to weather my Infimum's Fake Out first turn. Then, Glaceon's Snow Cloak allowed it to evade my Infimum's Heat Wave, although it managed to hit Abomasnow and bring it down; I was very fortunate it did not carry an Occa Berry or Focus Sash, or its survival might have spelled doom for me. Next, another painful Blizzard, despite type ineffectiveness, reduced both my Infimum and Arccosine health to below 25%. Arccosine's Heat Wave also misses Glaceon, and we advance to the final showdown. The misses frustrated me, and I looked up at Minori's face to see her reaction, but her gaze was focused on the screen, and she showed neither joy nor relief; she truly had her game face on, and I was impressed at how cool, calm, and collected she seemed no matter the crazy scenarios unfolding before her in battle.

She surprises me with her final Pokémon, the Infernape she had withdrawn earlier. Unable to write in the tournament, I had forgotten about her switch, and now I knew its Fake Out would stifle one of my Pokémon. Fortunately, the other one's Heat Wave finally connects with Glaceon, and a single hit faints her. Along with incremental Hail damage, this turn concludes with both Infimum and Arccosine below 10% HP, and her Infernape also below 10%. A single shot would finish off any Pokémon.

Here, I spend a few minutes pondering the possibilities; clearly, the last turn of battle awaited. Arccosine, my Arcanine, held a Life Orb, so it was doomed whether or not it acted; it knew Extremespeed, but her Infernape might have known Mach Punch, so, in the worst case scenario, her faster Infernape could Mach Punch my Infimum, leading to my Arccosine's suicidal Extremespeed, disqualifying both Minori and me from the tournament. Some might have questioned my thought process, but I wanted her to advance if I could not, so I opted not to use Extremespeed. Another possibility was a Heat Wave from her Infernape completely wiping both of my Pokémon from the battle, but I hedged my bets on my max-speed Infimum moving first if hers did not Mach Punch. I hoped that her Infernape did *not* know Mach Punch, allowing my max-speed Infimum to Close Combat her Infernape before it could deal mine a lethal blow, but, even if she had Mach Punch, she would be able to eliminate only one of my Pokémon, allowing the other to attack; my main problem was that I did not want my Arccosine attacking, making the battle a draw. Instead of risking the double KO and death to Life Orb, I Protected Arccosine; in retrospect, perhaps I should have used Extremespeed, since I would guaranteed at worst a draw (rather than a possible defeat at the hands of Heat Wave). Three possibilities might have ensued:

- 1.) Her Infernape Mach Punches Arccosine, and Infimum Close Combats for the win.
- 2.) Her Infernape Mach Punches Infimum, and Arccosine's Extremespeed kills both her and me.
- 3.) Her Infernape tries to Heat Wave, but Extremespeed preempts it and ends the battle.

Prospects 1 and 3 would result in victories for me, whereas Prospect 2 would have precipitated a draw. Foolishly, I chose to Protect Arccosine, making the battle a 50-50 affair dependent on her choice of target. Minori chose wrong and targeted Arccosine with a Mach Punch, allowing Infimum to Close Combat for the win, while Protect nullified her attack.

BATTLE BEGINS	
summons Lagrangian	summons Infernape
summons Student t	summons Slowbro
TURN 1	
	Infernape Fakes Out Student t
Lagrangian Sunny Day	
	Slowbro Ice Beams Lagrangian

Student t flinches	
<b>TURN 2</b>	
	Infernape Protects
Lagrangian Protects	
	Slowbro Ice Beams Lagrangian (annuled)
Student t Flamethrowers Slowbro	
<b>TURN 3</b>	
	Infernape Heat Waves
Lagrangian Solarbeams Slowbro --> KOs Slowbro	
Student t Flamethrowers Infernape	
<b>TURN 4</b>	
	summons Glaceon
	switches Infernape <--> Abomasnow
Lagrangian Protects	
	Glaceon Blizzards --> KOs Lagrangian, Student t
<b>TURN 5</b>	
summons Infimum	
summons Arccosine	
	Abomasnow Protects
	Glaceon Protects
Infimum Fakes Out Glaceon (annuled)	
Arccosine Heat Waves (annuled)	
<b>TURN 6</b>	
Infimum Heat Waves, misses Glaceon --> KOs Abomasnow	
	Glaceon Blizzards
Arccosine Heat Waves, misses Glaceon	
<b>TURN 7</b>	
	summons Infernape
	Infernape Fakes Out Arccosine
Infimum Heat Waves --> KOs Glaceon	
Arccosine flinches	
<b>TURN 8</b>	
Arccosine Protects	
	Infernape Mach Punches Arccosine (annuled)
Infimum Close Combats Infernape --> KOs Infernape	

As soon as my Close Combat landed, the crowd, sensing my victory, erupted in a cheer. “If she targeted your Infernape, you would have lost!” Ray shouted. I was just happy the battle finally ended, and I shook her hand for an extra second telling her how much I enjoyed the battle. She also smiled and thanked me for the battle. Cameras flashed all around me, and tons of Japanese girls and juniors swarmed Minori asking her for her thoughts. Overall, it was cool facing a team I studied months ago on YouTube; it was like applying knowledge from film study of an NFL team’s favorite formations.

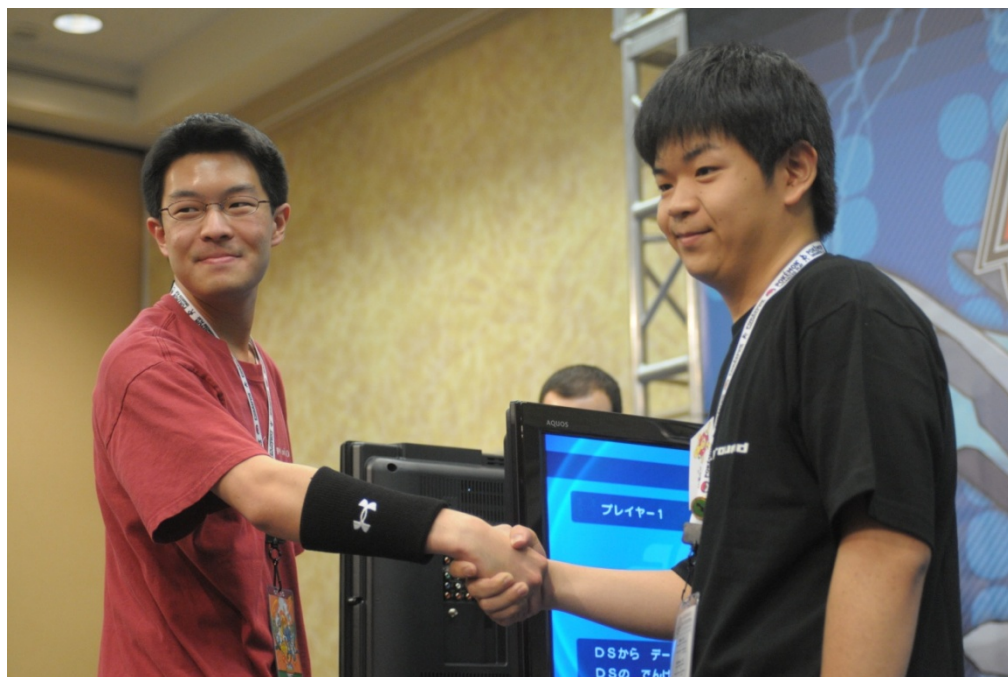
Some reporters also asked me for a television interview, but I had an hour for lunch before the semifinal round would begin on the Nintendo Wii. I agreed to answer questions about Pokémon for one television interview with Fox, and JP Shields and Cathy agreed to perform their interview after the finals. For the next ten minutes, the interviewer – Renée – asked me about my favorite aspects of Pokémon and my impression of the Japanese opponents I faced before I finally met June at the brunch location for a quick lunch. JP wished me luck and informed me that Knight, New York’s junior champion, and I were the only Americans still alive.

On my way out, I heard Hideaki Shimizu’s team, which Ray and Dan were discussing; Hideaki, the Japanese player who screamed, “KAA!!!” after winning every battle – including his last battle over Berton Bailey, was reportedly running Yanmega/Snorlax/Latios/Metagross, his team from Nagoya.



I ordered a burger, expecting a fast serve, but instead the waiter took over 20 minutes to bring it out. During the entire lunch, I gameplanned for Yanmega/Snorlax, trying to find my best matchup. Finally, I settled on my Rain team, confident that it could function outside the Trick Room; both Hail and Sun would fare poorly against Thick Fat Snorlax, so I settled on Rain as my ticket to the finals.

Before our battle, I took a seat beside my fellow semifinalists: Izuru Yoshimura, Hideaki Shimizu, and Yasuhito Kajiwara. The juniors played their semifinal matches first, giving me time to survey my opponent. I immediately recognized the person seated beside me – Yasuhito – as the Sandstorm Trick Room user that I faced last during the ice breakers. Meanwhile, Knight Silwayne, the American junior playing at the time, summoned his lead Bronzong and Hippowdon, prompting Yasuhito to gasp and scratch his chin. I noticed his response and recalled his team from the ice breakers: Bronzong, Hippowdon, Relicanth, and Level 1 Cubone. Even though I knew he would change, I expected a Trick Room variant, possibly one incorporating Sandstorm. Thus, I spent the next minute tinkering my Rain team, trading over my Slowking to replace its Flamethrower with Surf and its Psychic with Rain Dance. I wanted to be prepared for the Trick Room and also have some way to renew the Rain during Sandstorm. I gameplanned a bit too much, as Yasuhito used nothing like Sandstorm Trick Room.



When Izuru and Hideaki finally took the stage, Kumi Okada, the kind translator that serves as graphic designer for Pokémon USA merchandise, ushered me and Yasuhito out of the room to prevent us from seeing our finalist opponent's team (a rule that I later learned was suggested and encouraged by Kit Silwayne, Knight's mother). Kumi took me to the restroom for a break before putting me and Yasuhito in the Animé Room, where tons of blissful children were watching Misty's Psyduck shoot Water Gun at Team Rocket's Meowth. The room was loud but peaceful at the same time, because the playful violence in the cartoon provided a welcome hiatus from the heat of battle that was transpiring two rooms down. Instead of watching my Pokémon blasted by Blizzard and Draco Meteor, I could enjoy harmless Bubblebeams on television. Yasuhito was sitting and smiling, and Kumi snapped some photographs of us before I stepped outside for another bathroom break, during which I checked my team and finalized my new Rain Dance Slowking, Stochastic. Finally, after Izuru prevailed over Hideaki in what I was told was a very dramatic semifinal (complete with Hideaki rolling on the ground), it was our turn to battle.

**Pokémon Showdown: Semifinals – Final Four  
Versus Yasuhito Kajiwara, Makuhari 1<sup>st</sup> Place  
(Zapdos / Cresselia / Latios / Metagross)**



Before the battle began, I looked into the audience and saw Minori, seated next to Satomi, give me a thumbs up before taking a photo with my camera, which I gave her for the battle. She and Satomi both smiled at me, giving me confidence that I could stand my ground against Yasuhito, who actually used nearly the same team with which he won Makuhari in his YouTube recorded regional finals 2007.

The battle was, indeed, legendary, but key mistakes cost me a battle I had under control for the first five turns. Viterbi and Lagrangian wiped out his Zapdos before it could deal serious damage – its only impact a single Thunderbolt on my Viterbi. His Cresselia managed to accrue two Calm Minds and a Chesto Rest before a critical hit Surf depleted its health and spelled doom for it. As soon as Cresselia went to sleep with Rest, I realized that I was facing the Makuhari champion's exact team, with Zapdos replacing Latias; I probably would have used a different team if I saw it coming, but, nonetheless, seeing the Chesto Berry recover Cresselia sent chills down my spine because I saw this exact same Pokémon extend Yasuhito's Makuhari finals match, which Yasuhito won narrowly in a marathon.

In a nutshell, Viterbi launched Rain Dance and managed a single, debilitating Surf before bowing out – more than I can ask. Lagrangian persisted as Kolmogorov entered play, ready to wreak havoc. Its first Surf crippled his Cresselia on an auspiciously timed critical hit (< 10% chance!), and Lagrangian finished off Cresselia, drawing huge applause from the partisan crowd, some of which chanted, "USA!" I thought I had control, but his Latios Protected to foil my Kolmogorov's Dragon Pulse, and then Protected yet again (!) to survive the final two turns of Rain. With Rain ended, I knew his Latios would emerge from the shields to move first during the all-important sixth turn, but, with both Kolmogorov

and Lagrangian in range of death, I struggled to determine which one his Latios would target and kill. His final Pokémon, a Metagross, was not yet a threat since it was clearly moving last – unless it knew and chose Bullet Punch, which might have knocked out my Lagrangian. However, I was concerned primarily with the first-moving Latios, which I knew had the power to faint one of my Pokémon.

In retrospect, his Latios was obviously going to target the greater threat – my Kingdra, Kolmogorov. Thus, the proper move would have been to Protect Kolmogorov to keep it alive while my Lagrangian Ice Beamed Latios. However, I was too worried that his Latios would predict my train of thought and instead target Lagrangian, in which case I would not have even taken out his Latios during the turn. I decided instead to sacrifice whichever Pokémon Yasuhito wanted to remove, but ensure that the survivor – the one Latios did *not* target – would remove Latios from play. Of course, thinking ahead, Metagross had a great chance to killing the survivor to conclude the turn, but Yasuhito also needed some percentages to go his way – namely, the hit percentages of Draco Meteor and Meteor Mash.

I ordered Kolmogorov to Dragon Pulse Latios, and Lagrangian to Ice Beam Latios. Much to my chagrin, his Latios' Draco Meteor connected with Kolmogorov, knocking my most potent weapon against Metagross from the battle, leaving Lagrangian's Ice Beam to knock out Latios. Finally, his Metagross connected with Meteor Mash, smashing Lagrangian from battle. Meteor Mash also increased Metagross' speed, a wrinkle I had not expected, leaving my final Pokémon – the super slow Slowking, Stochastic – to fend for itself against a faster, stronger full-health Metagross. Since I had removed Flamethrower from its repertoire in anticipation of Rain being in play, Stochastic could only Surf, and its slower speed meant that Metagross could land three hits before my Slowking could. The crowd implored for the critical hit on my Surfs, but, alas, they were not strong enough to 2HKO Metagross. The battle ended on the third turn of this 1-on-1, when a Metagross Earthquake connected for the third time on my Stochastic, who was one turn away from also fainting his Metagross.

BATTLE BEGINS	
summons Viterbi	summons Zapdos
summons Lagrangian	summons Cresselia
TURN 1	
	Zapdos Detects
Lagrangian Surfs	
	Cresselia Calm Minds
Viterbi Rain Dances	
TURN 2	
Lagrangian Surfs	
	Zapdos Thunderbolts Viterbi
	Cresselia Calms Mind
Viterbi Surfs --> KOs Zapdos	
TURN 3	
	summons Latios
Lagrangian Ice Beams Latios	
	Latios Thunderbolts Viterbi --> KOs Viterbi
	Cresselia Rests (Chesto Berry recovery)
TURN 4	
summons Kolmogorov	
	Latios Protects
Kolmogorov Surfs (critical on Cresselia)	
Lagrangian Surfs	
	Cresselia Psychics Lagrangian
TURN 5	
	Latios Protects
Kolmogorov Dragon Pulses Latios (annuled)	
Lagrangian Surfs --> KOs Cresselia	



RAIN SUBSIDES	
TURN 6	
Lagrangian Ice Beams Latios --> KOs Latios	Latios Draco Meteors Kolmogorov --> KOs Kolmogorov
	Metagross Meteor Mashes Lagrangian (Attack up) --> KOs Lagrangian
TURN 7	
summons Stochastic	Metagross Earthquakes
Stochastic Surfs	
TURN 8	
Stochastic Surfs	Metagross Earthquakes
TURN 9	
Stochastic Protects	Metagross Earthquakes (annuled)
TURN 10	
	Metagross Earthquakes --> KOs Stochastic

It was a close battle, but the closer they come, the more painful they are to lose. At the battle's conclusion, I smiled, but, inside, I immediately wanted back that critical turn during which my Kolmogorov could have Protected itself from the impending Draco Meteor. I lost a lot of sleep over that choice, and I won't be forgetting it anytime soon. Nevertheless, Yasuhito took some calculated risks – the double Protect on his Latios, and then Draco Meteor + Meteor Mash on Turn 6 – but his audacity paid off and overcame my over-aggressive style and the lucky critical hit on his Cresselia.

I still want that sixth turn back... as I watched the finals and recognized the Champion's team as the one I practiced and gameplanned quite extensively. It was the Smeargle/Bronzong Trick Room followed by Belly Drum Snorlax/Psych Up Metagross. I like my chances against Izuru's team and just wish I had a shot at it. For this year, however, I settle for a humble fourth place.

First: Izuru Yoshimura. Second: Yasuhito Kajiware. Third: Hideaki Shimizu. Fourth: Chris Hal Tsai.







Luckily, June was ready for some rides at the Magic Kingdom theme park, so, after some commiserating and post-battle analysis – mainly self-deprecation at my severe lack of thought on that sixth turn – I accompany her to Magic Kingdom, where we have dinner and brave the Pirates of the Caribbean, Thunder Mountain Railroad, the Indy Car Future Land Race Track, Space Mountain, Splash Mountain, Alice’s Mad Tea Party, It’s a Small World, and Peter Pan’s Flight. Even though I think Peter Pan exemplifies Disney World with the entire never-grow-up in Neverneverland theme, I enjoyed Splash Mountain the most of all rides – in fact, the three mountains were the most thrilling. Thunder Mountain Railroad featured some exhilarating turns and breathtaking views high up over Disney World, Space Mountain – for which I rode up front – scared and shocked me with all its unexpected twists into black holes and abyssal darkness, but it was Splash Mountain’s relaxing prelude to the infamous gigantic fall that really proved the best distraction from my disappointing end at the Showdown. Nothing takes one’s mind off Draco Meteors and a lost Kingdra than the awe-inspiring views atop Thunder Mountain, some thrilling twists and turns inside Space Mountain, and a splash of cold water on the fall of Splash Mountain. The Dreams Come True parade and fireworks show helped ease the pain of some poor discretion and defeat, although I admit I could not take my mind off Pokémon even on the rides, when I wish I had the Showdown mettle that I had to marshal for the rides. At least for that day, nothing else seemed to matter. The one picture I still have hails from It’s a Small World:

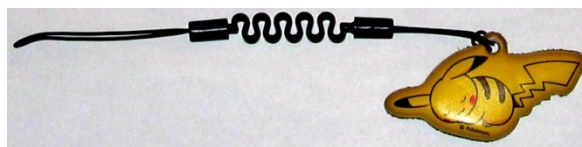


As everybody exited the theme parks, I spent a good hour excavating the Main Street toy store for good, authentic, exclusive Disney stuffed animals to share with my new Japanese friends. I knew they might never again come to Orlando, Florida, in the United States of America, so I made it a point to buy Minori, Satomi, and Manami different Disney dolls. I chose three dolls – Mickey, Piglet, and Pluto – of spherical shape, to the point that red-and-black Mickey resembled a Pokéball, and Piglet strangely resembled Happy or Chansey.

## Sunday, August 17, 2008 – Memorable Moments

Sunday morning featured the Lucario Download, so I gave June three of my six DS cartridges, and she added them to her own as she preceded me in the download line while I paid for brunch.

During my morning wanderings in the infinite corridor, however, I encountered Minori and Satomi walking from the Animé Room, where many of the Japanese players were unabashedly enjoying the endless stream of English cartoon shows. I traded contact information with Minori and Satomi before surprising them with stuffed Mickey (for Minori) and stuffed Piglet (for Satomi). Minori happily accepted the souvenir and gave me a Japanese sleeping Pikachu on a stretchy string, meant as a DS Lite screen cleaner and lucky charm. “For you, to remember,” Minori whispered. I thanked her, and also passed along Manami’s stuffed Pluto, so they could give it to her. Inside, I wish I had another day.



Later that day, I downloaded the WORLDS08 Lucario onto my own three Pokémon Diamond and Pearl cartridges, which Heather Luke, a very nice graphic designer for Pokémon USA, facilitated. She mentioned having downloaded even more for one person – four for one Asian girl, she said. I grinned, knowing that was probably June with my other three cartridges and her own. Soon thereafter, Pokémon creators and artists started signing autographs, but, to my dismay, a gruff staff member closed the line just as I arrived, telling me, “You’ll never make it to the front, and they’re leaving soon anyways.” I was crushed. I spent the rest of the afternoon before the Closing Ceremony shopping at the Pokémart for pins and apparel and snapping photographs of the TCG finals in the main ballroom. Meanwhile, I heard from June, who was walking Epcot’s World Showcase as I awaited the Closing Ceremony.

When I arrived in front of the main ballroom for the Closing Ceremony at 5:00 PM, Kumi Okada informed me that the trading card game championship rounds were running behind scheduling, so the doors would remain closed for another hour. I noticed a circle of Japanese players on the floor, playing their Nintendo DS Lites, so I sat down beside Minori and Satomi, hoping to see more of the teams I viewed on YouTube. I asked Minori if she wanted to trade cards or Pokémon, but she declined, and we battled instead. It was a Sunny Day vs. Hail rematch of our quarterfinals, but this time, I won by a wider margin. After our match, Minori and I challenged Yasuhito and Masataka to a multi battle, which is a form of 6-vs.-6 double battle in which each trainer sends a half-team of three Pokémon to team with another trainer’s half-team. The battle that ensued was extremely enjoyable, full of unexpected twists and turns, laughter, ridicule, and famous Pokémon. I never had so much fun in my life playing Pokémon, laughing the whole way. Dan Levinson recorded the match, but I lost the camera on which he recorded it, so I describe some of the happenings here.

Minori and I, despite our language differences, settled on a Hail strategy. She loves Abomasnow and Glaceon, so she elected to send them in along with her Slowbro, while she picked my own half-team: my Trick Room Slowking, Schrödinger; my versatile Metagross, MonteCarlo; and my slow Regice, Riemann. When we first entered the room, all of us enjoyed a hearty laugh, since every one of our characters was a girl; even though Minori really is female, Yasuhito, Masataka, and I also chose female protagonists, so the battle room was full of four identical-looking heroines. Meanwhile, with all the players gathering nearby for the Closing Ceremony, the Union Room – the center for trade and battle – was full of people; nearby 30 people dropped from the ceiling at once whenever we connected locally, and it took an effort to navigate the crowds of in-game characters.

Massive confusion ensued as the four female heroines jogged to various battle spots. Minori, walking casually to the left side as our opponents sprinted to the right side, directed me to the left so that we could ensure that we were on the same team. Again, I noticed that she, like me, walked to the spot instead of running. Yasuhito and Masataka, also female in the game, dashed about crazily to snatch their spots. It was humorous to see two running females and one walking, and to be able to tell their controllers from that small detail alone.

**Turn 1:** Minori and I summon her Abomasnow paired with my Slowking, and Yasuhito and Masataka summon Yasuhito's Hippowdon paired with Masataka's Dusknair. This was classic: it was obvious that we were playing Hail Trick Room, and they ran Sandstorm Trick Room! Immediately, Hippowdon's Sand Stream whips up a Sandstorm, but Minori's Abomasnow activates Hail shortly thereafter with Snow Warning. During the first turn, Minori and I launch our assault: double Blizzard, one of them freezing Masataka's Dusknair before it could act. Hippowdon tries to Stone Edge Abomasnow, but it does not kill.

**Turn 2:** Discouraged by the hailstorm, our opponents switch in sync. Yasuhito summons his Metagross to replace Hippowdon, while Masataka introduces Zapdos (the Sapporo champion!) to replace Dusknair. Meanwhile, Minori switches her barely-alive Abomasnow for her Slowbro, and I continue to Blizzard, nearly wiping out Zapdos before it can do anything.

**Turn 3:** Masataka's Zapdos moves first to Thunderbolt Minori's Slowbro. On its first turn in play, Metagross unleashes a fierce Earthquake, finishing off Minori's Slowbro before it can act and nearly killing my Slowking, Schrodinger. Dusknair remains frozen. At the brink of death, Schrodinger manages to activate Trick Room, turning the tide in our favor (we think). Hail faints Schrodinger.

**Turn 4:** After some deliberation (done in whispered Japanese/English), Minori wants me to summon my Regice in tandem with her Glaceon. Anticipating Blizzard, Yasuhito switches his Hippowdon back into battle to reactivate Sandstorm, simultaneously cancelling the Hailstorm. My Regice, Riemann, summons Blizzard but misses Zapdos; it hits Hippowdon but does not kill due to its Sandstorm-enhanced special defense. Glaceon's Blizzard nails and finishes off Masataka's Zapdos but misses Hippowdon.

**Turn 5:** Masataka must again recall Dusknair, which enters play frozen and half-dead. Yasuhito's Hippowdon actually proves slowest (as the first turn also confirmed) and therefore moves first in Trick Room. Its Stone Edge OHKO's Glaceon quickly, prompting a fist pump and cheer from Yasuhito. Fortunately, Masataka's Dusknair remains frozen, allowing Riemann, my Regice, to unleash another Blizzard, wiping out both Yasuhito's Hippowdon and Masataka's Dusknair.

**Turn 6:** Minori brings Abomasnow and the Hail back into play to supplant the fainted Glaceon, while our opponents send out Yasuhito's Metagross and Masataka's third and final Pokémon, Garchomp. My Regice is now slowest, so its Blizzard, 100% accurate in the revived Hail, quickly obliterates Masataka's Garchomp, leaving Masataka on the sidelines with no Pokémon. Metagross does not launch a Bullet Punch, so Minori's Abomasnow moves next and kills Metagross with a solo Blizzard.

**Turn 7:** Down to their entire team's last Pokémon, Yasuhito summons Level 1 Cubone into the raging hailstorm to combat my Regice and Minori's resilient Abomasnow. We all grin, as Minori sees the Cubone. "Aww!!" she mocks. Trick Room still persists, so Yasuhito's Level 1 Cubone moves first and reactivates Sandstorm, hoping to make one of our Blizzards miss. Unfortunately, both my Regice and Minori's Abomasnow land blows to Cubone, and it falls before dealing any damage.

In summary, we enjoyed an excellent battle full of trademark Pokémon. Minori had the chance to strut her beloved Abomasnow and favorite Pokémon – Glaceon – along with Slowbro, teaming with my own unexposed Trick Room Hail (Slowking/Regice/Metagross), which she had never before seen. Masataka showed us a glimpse of his Sapporo Rain team as well as his adept versatility (Dusknoir/Zapdos/Garchomp). Yasuhito's infamous Level 1 Cubone had a chance but failed to capitalize on Trick Room, but he did bring out the team that smokescreened mine before our semifinals, teaming Hippowdon/Cubone with the same Metagross that knocked me out of the tournament. I high-fived Minori for our team victory: Hail over Sandstorm, my Slowking/Regice/Metagross + Minori's Abomasnow/Glaceon/Slowbro over Yasuhito's Hippowdon/Metagross/Level 1 Cubone + Masataka's Dusknoir/Zapdos/Garchomp.

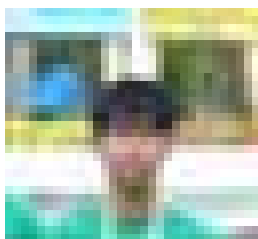
As our battle concluded, the Closing Ceremony also ended, but we had heard most of the announcements made in the background; our battle was too interesting that we played through the awards! After Satomi took our multi battle pictures, I asked the four Japanese players where they were headed for dinner, and Minori told me it was undecided. Satomi asked if I wanted to join them, and I accepted the invitation, completely forgetting about Epcot. Eventually, Minori narrowed the potential locations down to McDonald's and Benihana, drawing the large McDonalds arch to signify the choice. I voted in favor of Benihana, and Satomi concurred, as she craved sushi, so we went to the lobby of our hotel, where we found Benihana.

When the Japanese servers heard Satomi's Japanese, they were eager to take our orders in their native language, and the waitress soon distributed Japanese menus. Everybody ordered sushi combos with soup and salad, but I ordered hibachi chicken in addition to the sushi. The waitress seemed surprised to hear me speak English, since I was, coincidentally, dressed in my green Stanford shirt, the same color as the green shirt that all the Japanese Showdown players were wearing. I must have looked like one of them. Eventually, though, the waitress took all of our orders in English, and we enjoyed a fantastic dinner.

What continues to amaze me about that memorable dinner is the fact that we could communicate so well with one another despite our language differences. I knew no Japanese, and Minori was the only one of them who spoke bits of English, but we managed to communicate fluidly, relying only once on Masataka's electronic pocket dictionary. Because we all knew Pokémon, we spoke a universal language covering a wide variety of topics.

For example, when Masataka consumed entire scoops of wasabi with his sushi and began to pant heavily, I reminded them of the N64 Pokémon Coliseum mini-game featuring Lickitung's sushi rampage. Yasuhito asked me about Pokémon Platinum, and Masataka kindly offered to send me the Japanese version when I revealed that the United States still had no announced release date (unlike Japan, which would be receiving the game on September 13). As I shared with them the Battle Dictionary that Nintendo gave American players in an effort to improve our communication, Masataka showed me his Japanese Pokédex guide. Minori especially liked the Battle Dictionary and tested her own knowledge of English by looking up certain common phrases like, "Please give me your email." Minori shared some of her artwork with me. Every one of them oohed and aahed when I demonstrated chopsticks skills, leading Masataka to ask if I studied abroad. We discussed our college lives and career aspirations a bit, allowing me to learn more about each of the fascinating people around me.





Masataka Ishii (22 years old)  
Sapporo, Hokkaido  
Psychology major  
Loves wasabi, reading, and Brain Age  
Favorite strategy is Rain: Gyarados, Ludicolo, Kingdra, Toxicroak, ...  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PzUGxiDLjY>



Yasuhito Kajiware (23 years old)  
Makuhari  
Law and Ethics major  
Organizes Pokémon events for Pokémon\_Underground  
Breeds hundreds of Shuckles, has caught 100+ Cresselia to find the one  
DS Lite: Pikachu yellow  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwddzXePREA>



Satomi Yamada (23 years old)  
Kitakyushu  
Information Systems major  
Lucky winner of Pokémon Daisuke Club  
Favorite color is navy blue, the color of her DS Lite and nails  
Not looking forward to leaving school for work



Minori Miyauchi (20 years old)  
Yokosuka  
Art major  
Favorite Pokémon are Glaceon, then Abomasnow  
Barely plays the Pokémon card game, mainly for the art  
Aspires to work on Pokémon art someday  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nP41urr6iUE>

Of the four players with whom I dined and battled, Minori spoke English most fluently. However, every one of them was unbelievably kind and polite to me, and I appreciated their sincerity and willingness to interact. Even though I had just met these people, they treated me like one of their own and shared their lives, likes, and dislikes with me. Overall, I was impressed with their Pokémon battling talents and their devotion to the game, but I was even more impressed by their pure hearts and affable personalities. I will never forget how caring, humble, and friendly they were, especially Minori, my best opponent and trusted multi battle partner; I do hope to meet them again someday, especially Minori.

We spent our last two hours together on the lobby couches, trading and battling. Minori soft-resetted Masataka's Pokémon Pearl about twenty times to find me a Bold Shaymin with maximal Speed and Special Defense, which Masataka generously traded me for my Hail Viterbi. Yasuhito and Satomi

summoned their twin Garchomp duo to destroy the Rain team Masataka and I constructed, with Minori watching on the side and imitating the Garchomp pose. Minori also traded me some of her Glaceon offspring and a Japanese Heracross for my Froslass and Wooper, while Masataka traded me a shiny Zigzagoon for my Beautifly. I gave Minori a Battle Dictionary, and she started memorizing some of the more obscure English idioms. The happiness I felt throughout that dinner and the battles that followed were unparalleled; I felt, for once in my life, like I was surrounded by friends that could understand me even without speaking, by college students who shared my interests, and by human beings who were kind to me no matter our differences. I do not remember enjoying such a fun and happy experience in a long time, certainly not since my early childhood.



Cathy, one of my interviewers from Bender/Helper had asked me following my Showdown loss how the event changed my life, and what I would do now that the event had ended. When Cathy posed the question, I had answered quickly, telling her that I needed to return to schoolwork and my honors thesis so I could graduate this autumn. “How has the Pokémon Showdown changed your life?” she followed up. “I’ve gained a lot of respect and admiration for the Japanese players and learned a lot,” I had responded. However, now that I consider it more deeply, I feel like the Showdown has *completely* changed my life. In the wake of all the great memories and great times I experienced that Sunday night, I feel more determined than ever to return to the Showdown able to communicate with the Japanese more thoroughly; I want to learn the language, stay in touch via email and phone, visit the country someday, and play more Pokémon with these fantastic people. It would be an overgeneralization to typify all Japanese teenagers as truthful, pure-hearted Pokémon players, but the four I met in Orlando thoroughly impressed me and made me feel so comfortable, in my own element, that I want nothing more than to continue to bolster our interaction and our trust in each other. The culture of Pokémon is much stronger in Japan, and the positive attitude that these ultra-competitive players maintain sharply contrasts with the cutthroat competitive intensity of the Americans; strangely, it was the Japanese players’ attitude – not my own country’s – that made me feel most comfortable, most accepted, most aligned. I hope to assimilate this culture of friendly competition by removing the barrier of language.

For that one evening, I felt at home. It was the happiest moment I’ve enjoyed in a long time, and it reminded me how important it is to have fun, be honorable and friendly in competition, and treat others with respect and humility. Yasuhito, Masataka, Satomi, and Minori are great people with good hearts and sharp minds; I thank them for their kindness toward me and all the good times we shared. I will always cherish the memories we made and the lucky charm that Minori gave me... and I will do my best to learn the language and culture so that, if we do meet again someday, we can grow even closer. There are, of course, no guarantees that we all advance as far in the Pokémon Showdown 2009, but I can always hope and dream.

