

Shiramine Jingu Shrine

[HIGASHIJIN]

Shiramine Jingu Shrine is popular among professional athletes, students on sports teams, and sports enthusiasts who come to this Shinto sanctuary to wish for luck before an important game or the start of a season. A collection of soccer balls and other sports equipment, dedicated by athletes and fans, is displayed next to the shrine's amulet office.

The association with sports originates from the shrine's location on property once owned by the aristocratic Asukai family. As the Asukai were famous for excelling in *kemari*, an ancient game of football, the family's guardian deity, one of the three deities honored at Shiramine, is considered the god of ball games.

That deity, Seidai Myojin, was enshrined here soon after Shiramine Jingu was established in 1868. The founding of the shrine had been the wish of Emperor Komei (1831–1867), who hoped it would help protect the nation during what was a turbulent period marked by internal conflict and foreign powers' demands to open Japan to international trade.

Emperor Komei sought to dedicate the new shrine to his ancestor, Emperor Sutoku (1119–1164), a tragic figure who had been exiled as the result of a power struggle at court some 700 years earlier. Komei believed that appeasing and honoring Sutoku's spirit would aid in unifying the nation and countering the foreign threat.

Komei died before the shrine could be built. His son, Emperor Meiji (1852–1912), oversaw its completion instead. The spirit of Sutoku was enshrined along with that of Emperor Junnin (733–765), another exiled ruler of the ancient period, while Seidai Myojin—the original deity honored on the property—was included as well.