

Yoichi Commemorative Kyūdōjō

The Feat That Inspired an Archery Culture

Nasu no Yoichi (1169–1232) earned his place in history with a single arrow at the Battle of Yashima (1185). Yoichi and the rest of the Minamoto army had pursued the enemy Taira across the strait between Honshu and Shikoku. However, the Taira were confident in their navy and the distance they could maintain on the water. The Minamoto were still on the beach when a woman among the Taira taunted their pursuers by hoisting a small folding fan and challenging the Minamoto to shoot it down. Yoichi rode his horse into the waves, took aim, let fly, and made history by toppling the fan with a single arrow. He was rewarded for his bravery with an appointment as military governor of five provinces, including land in part of the present city of Ibara.

Several historical sites in Ibara are connected to Nasu no Yoichi, such as geographical names that include references to archery, and a

commemorative gravestone for Yoichi prepared by one of his descendants.

Eishōji Temple was originally a Nasu family temple, and the Sodegami Inari shrine on the temple premises enshrines the sleeve which Yoichi ripped off when making his legendary shot.

Yoichi's archery feat still inspires people in Ibara, especially those who practice *kyūdō*, a martial art based on ancient military archery. Throughout the city of roughly 37,000 residents, there are several archery ranges, or *kyūdōjō*. Ibara is also home to one of the largest *kyūdō* competitions in western Japan, the Nasu no Yoichi Memorial West Japan Kyūdō Tournament, which held its fiftieth annual meet in 2024 and uses fan-shaped targets in some events. That competition is held at a center dedicated both to *kyūdō* and to Yoichi himself: the Ibara City Yoichi Commemorative Kyūdōjō.

Carrying on the *Kyūdō* Tradition

For the archery lovers in Ibara, Yoichi has become an important symbol.

The main hall and range of the Yoichi Commemorative Kyūdōjō opened in March 1989, and it represents Ibara's dedication to maintaining its connection to Yoichi and to promoting the practice of *kyūdō*.

The main hall stands at the top of a wooded hill inside the Ibara Sports Park, where there are three archery ranges ascending the hillside. The first one is a 28-meter range with space for six archers to shoot at once, and it was the first public *kyūdōjō* built in Ibara, completed in 1972. The second is a long-range course of 60 meters. The third and topmost—attached directly to the main commemorative hall—is a 28-meter range with space for 12 archers to shoot simultaneously.

The Yoichi Commemorative Kyūdōjō has prominent references to its namesake, with many plaques and posters depicting Yoichi's famous shot. It also has ties to the local denim industry, with an Ibara denim curtain hanging above the range and staff wearing *kyūdōgi* (*kyūdō* uniforms) made from Ibara denim.

The Kyūdōjō hosts competitions almost every month, practice sessions several days a week, and regular seasonal events. It is also notable for providing experiential workshops for first-time archers, which *kyūdō* practitioners conduct as a way to promote their passion for this art.

Understanding *Kyūdō*

The martial art of *kyūdō* differs greatly from the sport or hunting technique of archery. It is a rigorous practice regimenting every movement taken while in the *kyūdōjō*. The goal is not simply to accurately shoot an arrow and hit the target, but rather it is to smoothly follow a prescribed pattern of movements: stance, breath, aim, and release.

The Yoichi Commemorative Kyūdōjō offers a class for beginners to try their hand at *kyūdō*. After a demonstration of *kyūdōjō* etiquette and shooting manner, participants receive individual instruction as they learn to hold the bow and shoot at targets. Most *kyūdōjō* require thorough training in the

basics before allowing students to shoot arrows, but here, beginners have a rare chance to do so without any previous experience. Reservations and a small fee are required, and the instruction is in Japanese, but physical demonstrations and guidance are usually sufficient for participants who do not speak the language. The workshop is open to everyone from single archers to large groups.