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IWU Junior Wins "Originality Award" in Japanese Language Contest

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IWU Junior Wins "Originality Award" In Japanese Language Contest

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--If you've ever seen a comedian die on stage or TV, rattling off one-liners and wise cracks before a stone-faced, grumbling audience, then you know what Perry Ohlson was up against on March 22.

Well, maybe.

Ohlson--a history, philosophy, and Japanese triple major at Illinois Wesleyan University--had the tough job last month in Chicago. The IWU junior from Elk Grove Village, Ill., a Chicago suburb, was getting ready to give a *humorous* speech about Japanese baseball fans . . . in *Japanese*.

Ohlson was a contestant in the 11th Annual Japanese Language Speech Contest. Fifty students--from munchkins to college students--were competing in four categories, based on age and experience in speaking Japanese. Ohlson was competing in the college-level category for students with more than one year of experience in speaking Japanese.

To win a prize, Ohlson had to impress five judges--all native Japanese speakers--including Tokyo's counsel general in Chicago, a professor from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and a Japan Air Lines official. He was being judged on fluency, content, memorization, pronunciation, and vocabulary.

From the podium, Ohlson faced an audience of 80-100 people.

"I was nervous and had knots in my stomach," Ohlson said, "but when I got up there it all went away.

"My speech was humorous," he explained, "and it got lots of laughs from the crowd. It was comforting. I knew I was doing something good."

Ohlson's speech focused on the attitude of Japanese fans toward baseball and how that sentiment reflects the Japanese view of teamwork throughout society.

"When Japanese fans cheer for a baseball team," Ohlson explained, "it reflects their social attitude over working toward a common goal and doing the best job they can. They're not worried about individual accomplishment."

When his five-minute speech was over, Ohlson won the Originality Award, a fifth place honor. It had taken Ohlson about a month to write the speech in English, two

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weeks to translate it into Japanese, and another two to three weeks to polish his delivery.

"I'm honored by winning the award," Ohlson said.

Ohlson began studying Japanese in high school.

"For me," Ohlson said, "the challenge of studying Japanese is memorizing the language's quirks--such as specific variables like tense. Japanese is a very exact language."

Ohlson won a scholarship in high school that paid for a trip to Japan for a couple of weeks, where he visited Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, Nikko, and other cities.

"I'm attracted to Japan's unique and interesting culture," Ohlson said. "It's a very honorable society."

After Ohlson graduates from IWU next year, he's eyeing the prospect of joining a program that sends college graduates to Japan for a year to teach English or help organize events involving the United States and Japan.

Ultimately, Ohlson would like to be an entrepreneur, running a business hopefully involving Japan.

Ohlson is the son of Mike and Linda Ohlson of 1436 James Way, Elk Grove Village, Ill. He is a graduate of Elk Grove High School.

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 1,900 students in a College of Liberal Arts, College of Fine Arts, and a four-year professional School of Nursing. A \$15 million athletics and recreation center opened in the fall of 1994; and a \$25 million science building opened in the fall of 1995. The \$4.6 million Center for Liberal Arts--a facility housing 60 faculty offices, six classrooms, and other facilities for social science, humanities, business and economics, and interdisciplinary studies' faculty--is slated to open next fall, as well as a \$6.8 million residence hall, accommodating about 118 students. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching promoted Illinois Wesleyan to a "Baccalaureate I" institution in 1994, a classification that places it among 161 highly selective National Liberal Arts Colleges in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. *Baron's Profiles of American Colleges*, another respected college guide, rated IWU "highly competitive (+)" in its latest edition.