



SHOHEI OHTANI

★ ALL ACCESS ★

Emma Carlson Berne



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ISBN 979-8-225-01255-7

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

25 26 27 28 29

Printed in the U.S.A.

40

First printing 2025

Series design by Sarah Salomon for The Story Division

Cover and photo insert design by Lynne Yeamans for The Story Division



CHAPTER 1

A Rocket? A Jet? A Pitch?

Excuse me, was that blur a *pitch*? That's what people in the stands watching the semifinal game between the Ichinoseki Gakuin and Hanamaki Higashi high school teams were thinking. Because on that day—July 19, 2012—Shohei Ohtani had just shown them something *no one* had ever seen before from a high school player.

Shohei was on the mound. He had just turned eighteen. He was six foot four, skinny, and focused like a laser beam. Shohei's face was expressionless as he faced the batter. He bent





over in his stance and nodded at the sign from the catcher. Then the windup—and the pitch.

The batter swiped at it—missed. The clock showed 160 kilometers per hour—95.7 miles per hour. Blistering.

Now the second pitch—the batter jumped back. Ball.

The third pitch, with Shohei lunging forward as he fired the ball at the plate. Strike! 157 kilometers per hour—97.6 miles per hour.

Record-Bashing

The batter grinned, astonished, as if to say, “What, you expect me to *hit* these pitches?” Shohei poised himself again. A moment of stillness as the batter crouched at the plate. Then the windup, fast as a machine, the ball firing, the swing, the miss, then the clock—160 kilometers per hour! 99.4 miles per hour! No one in Japan had ever pitched that fast in a high





school game. At seventeen, Shohei Ohtani had set a new record.

Out on the mound, Shohei clenched his fists and shouted in triumph as the crowd cheered. The batter jogged off the field as Shohei ran in, slapping his teammates' hands as drums beat, the crowd chanted, and the amazed announcers marveled at what they'd just seen.

Rising Up

Shohei Ohtani never really left the mound after that day—unless it was to move directly to the batter's box. This left-handed batter and right-handed pitcher now playing in the United States has homered his way to a very small, very elite club made up of the greatest ballplayers ever—Ty Cobb, Willie Mays, and the great Babe Ruth. Whispers float among fans and pros—Shohei Ohtani





might be the greatest of all time. From his time as a steel-armed high school player to his record-breaking pro seasons in Japan to his MLB debut—no one has any doubt—Sho-time is here to stay.





FAST FACT

The stadium at Shohei's high school could hold up to 12,000 students—about as big as a minor league baseball stadium in the United States.



ALL ABOUT JAPAN

Shohei loves his home country.
Now his fans in the United States
can learn to love this vibrant
country, too!



Japan is a string of islands. The four main ones are called Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu. But don't stop there—there are fourteen thousand other tiny islands surrounding these larger pieces of land.



Four-fifths of Japan is covered with mountains. Climbing trip, anyone?



Japan is the only country in the world that still has an emperor. Emperor Naruhito took the throne in 2019 after his father stepped down.



Baseball has been played in Japan for over one hundred and fifty years. One of the first introductions to the sport came from an American professor who taught it to his Japanese students in 1872. The first official team was formed in 1878, just six years later. Now it's the country's most popular sport.



Baseball fans in Japan are led by official cheerleaders who wear special robes as they organize cheers. They tell fans which cheer to yell, when to start, and when to stop. Drummers often accompany the cheers.



The first Japanese baseball player to play in MLB was Masanori Murakami, a pitcher who played for the San Francisco Giants in 1964. Murakami took the mound in the eighth inning of the game and received a standing ovation when the inning was over. His hat now resides in the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.



Ready for a snack? At a Japanese baseball game, fans can nosh on *yakitori* (grilled chicken skewers), *takoyaki* (fried octopus balls), *yakisoba* (grilled noodles with toppings), and tiny hot dogs served with ketchup but without buns.