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WEEK 3

A PRIME SELECTION FROM THE REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK

Tokyo school serves up an English course

Making the cut at sushi academy

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Ahmed Bishara clasps a vinegared rice ball in his hand and quickly pastes wasabi on a slice of raw salmon on the cutting board before him. He puts the rice ball on the salmon, turns it upside-down and presses it tightly into shape with his palm and fingers. The entire process takes about 10 seconds.

Bishara wets his hands and tackles his next piece of *nigirizushi* (hand-pressed sushi), this time using a slice of *kanpachi* (amber jack). After three minutes his time is up. He arranges the 18 nigirizushi on his cutting board and awaits his teacher's verdict.

Bishara is one of six non-Japanese students who enrolled in Tokyo Sushi Academy's sushi diploma course during July and August. The academy, located in Shinjuku Ward, is the only school in Japan devoted solely to the nation's most well-known dish. It also boasts Japan's only sushi-making course in English.

The teacher for the day is Suehiko Shimizu, a veteran sushi chef. He instructs the class in Japanese and his lectures are translated into English. Among the other three teachers that make appearances in the course, one is bilingual and the rest instruct with the aid of interpreters. Teaching material is provided in English.

Bishara came from Cornwall, England, to take the course, while five of his classmates traveled to Japan from Germany, Belgium, Italy, Spain and Brazil. Another eight classmates are Japanese.

Bishara, who has worked for nine years as a European and Asian cuisine chef in England, says he has had to clear tough hurdles in the sushi school.

In England, when chefs order fish from a fishmonger, they can ask the fish monger to

the top of the rice. Europeans, he says, only cut fish straight. Japanese sushi chefs, however, have special techniques of cutting.

"The shape of nigiri is long and soft. It looks very beautiful," Weise says. "I love the shape and now I know how to make it."

Before the examination, the students learned how to decorate the fish on a sashimi plate, by cutting *isaki* (grunt) and *tobiuo* (flying fish).

"It was very interesting because these kinds of fish are not popular in Europe," says Weise excitedly.

The six non-Japanese chefs came to Japan to learn sushi for many reasons. Weise says he wants to learn how to prepare sushi because the restaurant he works for back home has two sections in its kitchen — European cuisine and sushi.

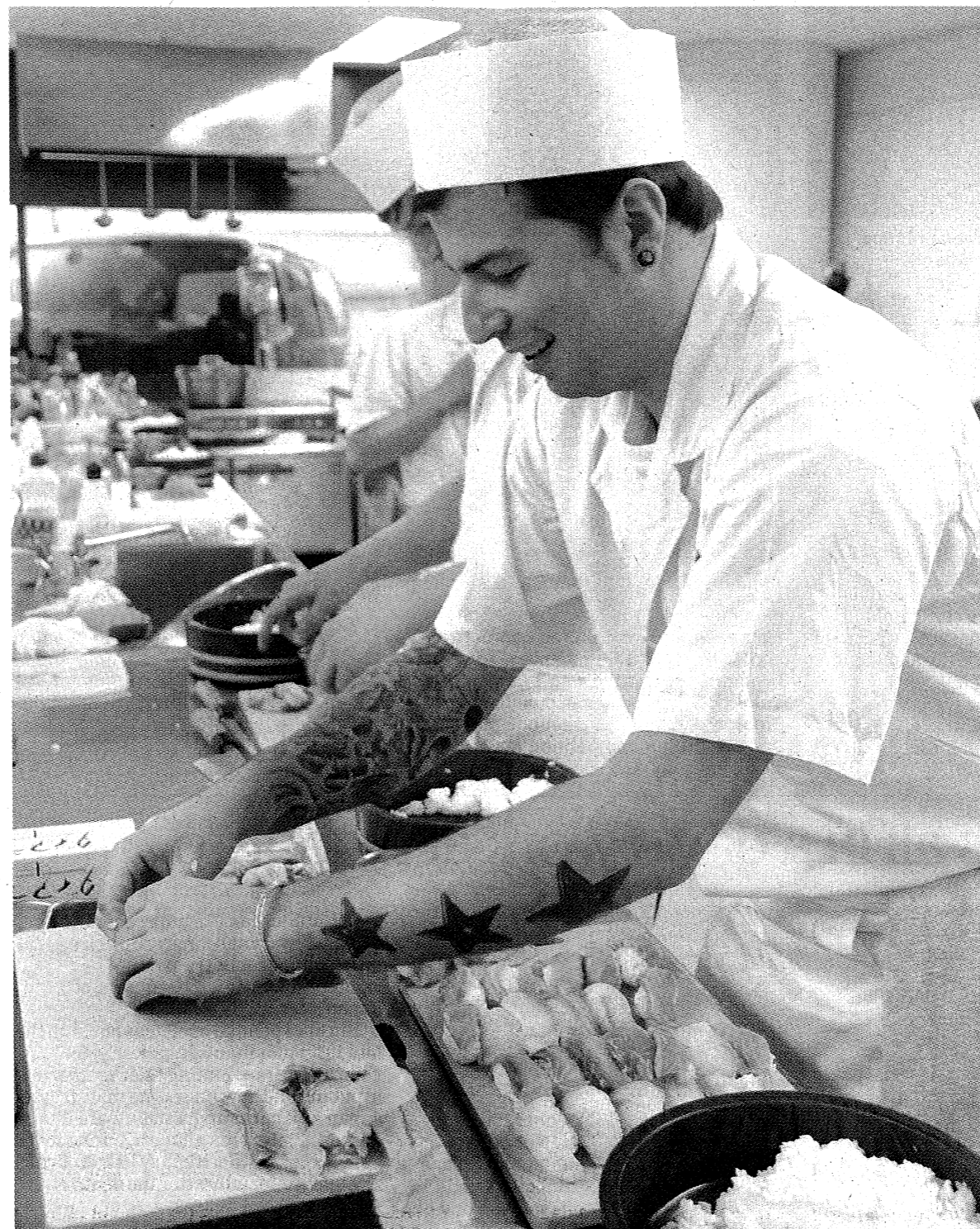
"I wanted to learn the skills of both sections. I want to earn more," says Weise, who adds that a sushi chef's salary is around 30 percent higher than that of a normal chef.

Bishara signed up for the class because he noticed that Japanese food has been becoming more popular in recent years.

Bishara's hunch is right. Japanese restaurants, most of which serve sushi, numbered around 50 in Paris in the 1980s. According to the Japan External Trade Organization that number had shot up to around 700 in March 2009. Technological advancements in the areas of refrigeration and delivery have no doubt made good quality sushi more widely available all over the West.

Despite advancements in Europe, Bishara wanted to learn how to make sushi in the land of its creation. He searched the Internet for a sushi school in Japan and found the Tokyo Sushi Academy (www.sushitokyo.jp). While the course costs ¥860,000, he says it is a reasonable price for two months.

Weise thought tuition was a bit steep



Steady hand: Ahmed Bishara prepares nigirizushi (hand-pressed sushi) during an afternoon exam at the Tokyo Sushi Academy on Aug. 25. Bishara is one of six non-Japanese students taking part in an English-language course on how to prepare sushi. The course is the only one of its kind in Japan.

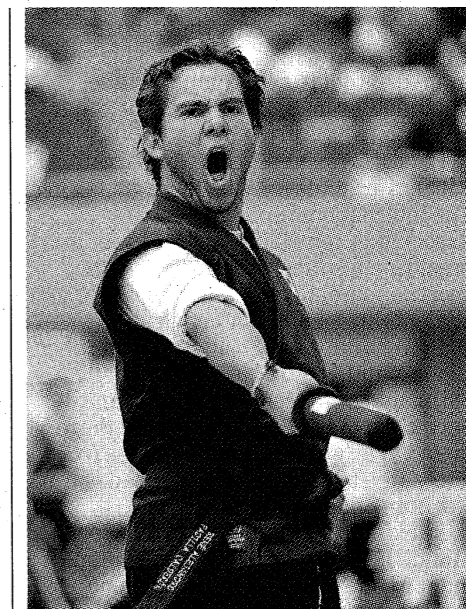
SATOKO KAWASAKI

affecting their trade, Japanese students join the English class to improve their language abilities in order to cater to tourists, or perhaps even open a

explaining that this is one of the reasons he established the school in 2002. The school started accepting students for private lessons in English in 2003.

rolled sushi with avocado, crab, mayonnaise and seaweed.

Since then, variations on sushi have popped up all over the world.



En garde: Mexican champion Rene Alejandro Padilla Calderon says spochan is "more realistic" than other combat sports.

INTERNATIONAL SPORTS
CHANBARA ASSOCIATION

Homegrown swordplay hits the mark

Tomoko Otake
STAFF WRITER

With the sizzling summer heat replaced by cool breezes and mild temperatures recently, it's a great time to contemplate adding a new exercise to your weekly routine. If you are interested in a homegrown sport that is recreational and relieves stress, sports chanbara lets you kill two birds with one stone... or one sword.

Sports chanbara is an increasingly popular sport in Japan and abroad in which you try to whack your opponent using special air-filled soft sticks. It was invented in the 1970s by Tetsundo Tanabe, a security company executive from Yokohama. A longtime kendo teacher, he hit upon the idea of creating a new competitive sport out of *chanbara*, a