

Briefing Memo

Public Servants and Sports

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Foreword

At the Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games, Hirooki Arai won a bronze medal in the men's 50 kilometer race walk and Naito Ehara also won a bronze medal in the men's 4 x 200 meter freestyle relay swimming event. Both athletes are affiliated with the JSDF Physical Training School. In addition, Yoichi Itokazu (8th Riot Control Unit, Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department (TMPD)) placed fourth in the 62 kilogram men's weightlifting event, and Natsumi Tomonaga (4th Riot Control Unit, TMPD) placed 13th in the women's modern pentathlon, the highest of any Japanese male or female pentathlete at an Olympic Games thus far. Kaori Icho (ALSOK), who won her fourth successive Olympic gold medal in women's wrestling, bases her training at the TMPD wrestling club (6th Riot Control Unit).

Athletes from the public service, particularly police officers and JSDF officials, actively participated in Olympic Games before Rio, as well as in various world championships and national championships within Japan. Yoshinobu Miyake, who, as a member of the JSDF Physical Training School, won successive gold medals for weightlifting at the Tokyo Olympics (1964) and Mexico City Olympics (1968), is a national hero to certain generations of Japanese.

Furthermore, when a separate classification for teaching staff existed at the National Sports Festival of Japan, teaching staff at public schools also achieved places in their share of events, even if they did not reach the top level nationally. Incidentally, marathon runner Yuki Kawauchi is famous as a "citizen runner" because although he is affiliated with the Saitama Prefectural Office, he trains and participates in races independently.

In this way, athletes from the public service occupy a certain position in the sporting world, but the sports themselves are changing remarkably. Many events are becoming professional or becoming increasingly popular, and so at the top level it is becoming ever more difficult to simultaneously engage in the two pursuits of competing in sports and having a full-time occupation. Or rather, athletes are having to make the sports themselves their full-time occupation. I would like to consider the issue of public servants and sports in light of this situation.

The reality of public servants who are athletes

Among public servants who are athletes, there are athletes whose job is to compete in sports and there are athletes who compete in sports as an extra-curricular activity. The job of students at the JSDF Physical Training School is to practice Olympic events (judo, shooting, modern pentathlon, wrestling, track and field, archery, swimming, boxing and weightlifting). The JGSDF Cold Weather Combat Training Unit's Special Physical Education Group, which had been training biathlon and cross-country skiing athletes (for the Winter Olympics), was reorganized and placed under the Physical Training School. China and the Republic of Korea also have institutions under their national defense organizations for training athletes, and there are also similar examples in many emerging countries.

The police force's so-called *Tokuren-in* – the personnel at the Special Technique Training Department (judo, kendo, arrest techniques and pistol shooting) – enjoy a favorable training environment compared to mainstream police officers, but they also work as police officers on an everyday basis. In the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake, there was certainly no time for practicing. Other athletes who are public servants, including police officers, JSDF personnel and teachers, play sports as an extracurricular activity.

The level of public servants' sports

Plainly speaking, the level of public servants' sports (excluding kendo, which I will discuss later) is declining. To some extent this is because as sports have grown popular and the level of events as a whole has increased, it has become necessary to undertake elite training from a young age to become a first-class athlete. In addition, however, as a result of the move toward professional sports it has grown difficult for amateur athletes to compete at the top level. Professional athletes have plenty of time to train and are also able to take part in long-term training camps, and they can expect to be highly paid as well. In the case of public servants, it is not as though their salaries go up because they are athletes. In many cases they also have to take time off to participate in tours or training camps. When talented athletes are recruited, they are persuaded that as public servants they will enjoy stable lifestyles even after they retire from their playing careers, and if they work until retirement, their incomes for the rest of their lives will be somewhat better than those of people working in the private sector. Nevertheless, young athletes will undoubtedly feel underappreciated if their incomes are lower than those of contemporary athletes from the same school year or period.

To limit the discussion to men's judo for the sake of simplicity, up to the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, athletes who were police officers were competing and winning medals, but they have not appeared at Olympic Games subsequently. Recently, police officers' names have consistently failed to appear even among the athletes who are the favorites in the All Japan Judo Championships. By comparison, in men's

kendo, which is not an Olympic event and does not offer much entertainment value, the majority of those competing in the All Japan Kendo Championships are police officers, and police officers account for an overwhelming number of the winners as well. Even if we limit the discussion to the Heisei era, (which started in 1989), since 2013 the winners have been police officers. The decline in police judo (to put it bluntly) in contrast to this surge in police kendo symbolizes the difficulty public servant athletes have in staying at the top-level of events that have become professional.

Even in events whose doors are open to athletes who are foreign nationals, public servant teams struggle. Up to the 1980s, the Osaka Police Rugby Football Team was a championship-caliber team that ranked alongside teams such as Kobe Steel, Toyota Motor and Kintetsu Railway. However, as a result of rugby becoming a professional sport, and under pressure from corporate teams whose ranks were fortified with foreign players with experience in Rugby World Cups and/or in representing champion rugby nations, the Osaka Police Rugby Football Team dropped to the second division, and a significant gap has opened between it and the teams in the top league. Other police and JSDF rugby teams are faring poorly also. There are limits even to “vigorous physical energy and drive.”

The course of the future

What direction will public servant sports head in in the future? To start with, athletes who belong to the JSDF Physical Training School are able to dedicate themselves to practicing in the same way as professional athletes. They do not need to take time off to go on tour, and their travel expenses can also be paid for out of public funds. It is hoped that this favorable environment will be capitalized on to bring together outstanding athletes and coaches who will flourish not only in domestic competitions but in top level competitions worldwide, and in the Olympics.

Other than those public servant athletes who compete in kendo, public servant athletes who do not belong to the JSDF Physical Training School face a severe battle to reach the top. Nevertheless, public servants who compete in karate (5th Riot Control Unit, TMPD) have won the Japan Works Teams Karate Championship several times, while those who play American Football (9th Riot Control Unit, TMPD) are performing well in the X League (Japan’s top level social league). The Osaka Police Rugby Football Team continues to strive to return to the top league. Partly because the number of competitors is small, events such as shooting, modern pentathlon, wrestling and weightlifting offer public servant athletes significant opportunities to flourish.

Sports were originally activities for enjoying leisure that have been organized and made into competitive events. Rather than the pursuit of financial rewards, the essence of amateur sports is that the experiences obtainable through them are meaningful for both the individuals and for society. Accordingly, if playing sports has a positive impact on work then that is the most desirable outcome for public servant sports, and it can also be expected to raise the morale of public service organizations as a whole. It is of

course important to aim for the top. Exerting effort and ingenuity to become better has positive outcomes for the individuals and the teams not only in the events themselves but in areas other than the events as well.

Insofar as athletes and teams shoulder the honor of the organizations they belong to, there can also be a tendency to place too much emphasis on winning or losing. Preventing negative synergies in organizations with a rigorous hierarchal relationship such as the police force and the JSDF and in communities where there is a rigorous senior-junior relationship, such as that of sports, is the responsibility of the organizations as a whole, not just those involved in the sports.

Where international connections are concerned, there is the International Defence Rugby Competition, which the JSDF also participates in, as do police teams from Australia and Samoa, and the World Military Games, which Japan is yet to take part in. These competitions are at a level where good results can be expected, and they also promise to cultivate friendships among people from similar occupations. Working out issues such as expenses and money and adjusting work commitments will not be easy, but these are undoubtedly events in which proactive participation should be considered.

Caring for athletes after their playing careers are over must not be overlooked either. There are those who devote themselves to a belief in both sports and academia, such as Shokichi Natsui (Akita Prefectural Police, deceased), who won the World Judo Championships in 1956 and the All-Japan Judo Championships in 1957 and upon retiring from competition dedicated himself to his job and served in successive key positions in the prefectural police. Because of the move toward professional sports the historical background differs now, but the fact is that cases like this are not common, and some public servant athletes resign without waiting until they reach retirement. There is a need for sideline guidance and for diligence by the individuals themselves to ensure that experiences obtained through sports have a positive impact on public servant athletes' jobs even after they retire from competition.

The most tragic example was Kokichi Tsuburaya (JSDF Physical Training School, at that time), who won a bronze medal for the marathon in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. It was hoped that Tsuburaya would perform well at the next Olympic Games in Mexico, but as a result of being plagued with injury and weighed down by the expectations of those around him, he took his own life. At the time, there was a tendency to stake the nation's prestige on the Olympics. The sincere way Tsuburaya engaged in competition earned him national respect, and consequently his death delivered a serious blow to Japanese society.

Lastly, I would also like to touch on Japan's declining birthrate and aging population, and its shrinking population. In 2013 Japan had a population of 127.3 million people, of whom 62.1% were citizens in their productive years (aged 15-64). However, it is estimated that in 2030 those figures will fall to 116.62 million people and 58.1%, respectively ("Population Projection for Japan (2012)," the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research). All organizations are likely to be faced with shrinking workforces and a scramble to attract outstanding young personnel. In addition to working to cultivate

appealing workplaces through the proper promotion of sports, organizations will need to make efforts to ensure that employees do not neglect their primary duties for the sake of sports, and that sports conversely complement their jobs.

(Titles in the text have been omitted)

Reference material:

Various sports associations, Riot Control Units at the TMPD and Osaka Prefectural Police Department, JSDF Physical Training School's website

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