

Fukushima Dreams – a quarterly publication of Fukushima City — JUNE 2021

Thank you for picking up this quarters' "Fukushima Dreams – a quarterly publication of Fukushima City".

In this issue, we hope that you will learn more about, and be moved by the various charms that Fukushima City has to offer.

With a population of around 290,000 people, Fukushima is surrounded by the beauty of nature. Due to its location, the city has a characteristic basin climate, and is a famous fruit production area: producing many varieties through the seasons, including cherries, peaches, Asian pears, grapes and apples.

We hope that through this edition, you'll come to appreciate even a little of what Fukushima City has to offer.



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① Coming this summer!

Fukushima City - One of the venues of Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games

② Game Schedule

Softball

Wednesday, July 21	Thursday, July 22
9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.	9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Japan vs. Australia	U.S.A. vs. Canada
Italy vs. U.S.A.	Mexico vs. Japan
Mexico vs. Canada	Italy vs. Australia

Baseball

Wednesday, July 28
Noon – 3:00 p.m.

*1 Game.

③ The Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games are finally going to kick off on July 23, 2021! The Fukushima Azuma Baseball Stadium will host the very first of the 55 competitions on July 21 with a softball game featuring the Japanese team. In Fukushima City, where the baseball and softball events will be held, we are communicating our appreciation to the world for supporting our reconstruction after the Great East Japan Earthquake, and at the same time, we have a variety of initiatives planned to welcome visitors who come to see the games in our city with hospitality based on the "Recovery Olympics" concept. Read on for more details.

Torch Relay

The Tokyo 2020 Olympic Torch Relay made its grand start at the National Training Center J-Village (Naraha Town/Hirono Town in Fukushima Prefecture), touring around areas affected by the earthquake and tsunami where reconstruction efforts are making great progress, and has continued on to the rest of the country, offering hope and courage to people throughout Japan.

On March 26, the Torch Relay passed through Fukushima City, and 29 runners passed the torch along the 5.1 km route stretching from Shinobugaoka Stadium to the plaza in front of the Fukushima Prefectural Office West Building.

④ Giving a cheer with the melodies of Koseki

Seven years ago, the story we conceived was magnificent. First, we saw a serial TV drama based on the life of Fukushima-bred composer Yuji Koseki become reality, and scenes from the TV show of the 1964 Tokyo Olympic games being shown at the opening ceremony for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. We also saw the "Olympic March" composed by Koseki being performed by an orchestra from Fukushima at the Olympics' opening ceremony. As we have now seen one of our dreams come true, we are now working toward having the Fukushima Koseki Orchestra 2020 perform at the opening ceremony. The Fukushima Koseki Orchestra 2020 consists of members from high school brass bands, dance groups, and even a soprano opera singer, and has been active since 2018. In addition to "Olympic March," they are planning to sing "Olympic Hymn" as arranged by Koseki and perform his song, "Kyo-wa Yoi-hi" in French to give a cheer for the next summer Olympic games to be held in Paris.

We believe that the work we do to achieve our dreams sends a message to the world that Fukushima City is doing well, and also helps our citizens recover emotionally.

⑤ Hospitality with vibrantly blooming sunflowers

Our organization continues to engage in a variety of initiatives aimed at infusing energy into the Arai District of Fukushima City located adjacent to Tsuchiyu Hot Springs and Bandai Asahi National Park. We wanted to do something to help with the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, so we registered with "2020 Fukushima Citizen Support Organizations," found by Fukushima City. This summer, we plan to welcome the locally held Olympic games with a field of blooming sunflowers (covering an area of 5.5 ha, slightly larger than Tokyo Dome) based on the theme "Welcome Flowers." The sunflowers can be seen around the entrance of Shiki no Sato, and in fields visible from the municipal road that leads from National Rte. 115 to the Fukushima Azuma Baseball Stadium. Two years ago, we ran a trial planting 30 kgs of seeds that bloomed beautifully and brought smiles to the faces of many. This year, we have already made steady progress with our preparations. As we continue to care for the flowers, it is our hope that the sunflowers standing out in contrast against the summer sky and the energy of Fukushima will reach the hearts of people from around the world.



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① Tokyo 2020 Olympics Men's Handball Japan Team Candidate Athlete Kenya Kasahara

② His first encounter with handball in junior high school opened his eyes to the sport. Despite his lofty goals and continued efforts, Kenya Kasahara failed to make the Japan team for the world championships in 2017 resulting in bitter disappointment. However, the encouragement from his fans who wanted to see him play again became the driving force to renew his training program. Paying close attention to getting enough rest and eating a proper diet, Kasahara continued to evolve and transform, and once again found himself on the Japan team. Great things are expected from Kasahara at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. We asked him about the most memorable episodes, what attracts him to the game, and where he finds his drive to continue playing handball.

③ Not a particularly athletic child

Kasahara was blessed with a height of 196 cm and heavy build of 105 kg. In his position of circle runner, Kenya Kasahara uses his body to get in the way of the opponent's defense. When asked if he excelled at sports when he was younger, he surprisingly replied, "I wasn't really good at sports before I finished elementary school. When I joined the handball club in junior high school, our training was really hard. We had to run a lot, which made me faster and eventually I was able to throw the ball farther." As he experienced more and more success, the game became more fun, and now he finds himself at the top.



④ Earned his stripes as a defender to move on to a key position

Looking back on the roughly 20 years Kasahara has been playing handball, there were tough times too, like when he participated in the training camp, but was passed over for the national team. "Actually, when I look back on why I wasn't selected for the 2017 world championship team, I realize it was because I was lacking the skills, but at the time, I was really bitter about it. Not knowing what my future would look like, I participated in workshops teaching at roughly 80 locations across the country from elementary school to university level. It was then that many of the people I taught said that they would like to see me continue playing, and that was what made me decide to keep trying." After that, he turned a leaf and decided he needed a new training program. His efforts were recognized, and he was once again on the Japan national team, only this time he was moved from his position as a back player to the opposite position of circle runner, where he would be in an ace position for shooting. Kasahara says he quickly changed his mindset when that happened. "I was recognized for my defensive skills so I focused on my role supporting the team and continued to train so that I could be the heaviest, strongest, longest-playing, and fastest player to prevent our opponents from scoring." As a result, he succeeded in being selected as one of the starting players on the national teams in consecutive world championship tournaments in 2019 and 2021. "Recently, I hear, 'You've really gotten better,' from the people around me. The fruits of my hard efforts over the last 10 years have started to ripen. It's taken awhile, but I'm glad I stayed with it."

The fierce body contact and fast pace will give you goosebumps

"Ten years ago, I promised those in Fukushima who helped me that I would train hard and become a good enough player to play in international competitions. Now, I want the kids working hard in Fukushima today to see a player like me, and I want to be someone who helps expand the possibilities for these kids." One of the attractions of handball, which is filled with the three elements of running, throwing, and jumping, is the rough body contact that is like a fusion of a ball game and martial arts. The backs catch the ball in mid-air and while their feet are still aloft, they shoot or pass the ball at such a fast pace it gives the audience goosebumps. In Kasahara's position, he has to constantly use his body to block the opposing team. This summer, the Japanese national team has won a spot as the host country team. Let's all show the men's national team our support as they endeavor at being the world's top team in the game.

⑤ Running, throwing, jumping; The Japanese national team trains its mind and body and challenges the world as one.

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① Japan National Boccia Team Head Coach Mitsuteru Murakami

Last fall, many residents of Fukushima City enjoyed the parasport Boccia at the Fukushima Parasports Challenge! 2020 held by the city. Head coach of the Japanese national team, Mitsuteru Murakami contributed to Japan winning its first silver medal at the Rio de Janeiro Paralympic Games. Since that time, he has been busy strengthening and training athletes competing in international competitions. We spoke with Mr. Murakami, who was infatuated with soccer from the time he was in elementary school through university, about how he came to be involved with Boccia, its allure, issues with the sport, and his hopes for the future.

Struggling to bring club activities and athletic competitions to special education schools Mitsuteru Murakami's first encounter with boccia goes back to his fourth year of university. He got involved as a volunteer with activities to popularize boccia which had just come to Japan. Upon graduation from university, Murakami returned to his hometown of Fukushima and began teaching physical education in the high school section of a special education school. At that time, he developed strong feelings about the way physical education was taught to students with severe disabilities. "Everyone was being so careful and so inventive, the sports were no longer generalized. They could only be played in the school's physical education class."

Murakami, who had played on the soccer team in both junior high and high school and practiced hard to play at the all-Japan tournaments at both levels, felt that the same kind of mechanism was needed for special education schools also. Consulting with those around him prompted the establishment of the Fukushima Prefecture Special Education School Athletic Federation. Competitions in basketball, wheelchair basketball, flying disk, and other sports began to be held. However, "the students who were able to participate were still limited" says Murakami. It was then that he recalled boccia, a sport that anyone anywhere in the world could enjoy playing. He told his colleagues, "If we include this in the school's curriculum, we can aim to compete on a national and even world level." Eventually, a boccia club was established at the school, and then a club was created in the community, establishing an environment for students to continue competing in the sport even after graduation.

The best part of boccia is the shogi-like way of planning ahead strategically

Murakami explains the allure of boccia as an "interesting game of tactics and intellect." At first glance, it resembles curling, but in boccia, the athlete can decide whether the position of the central jack ball, like the target in curling, will be close or further away. If your opponent is less skilled at throwing far distances, then you can throw farther on purpose, or throw closer to give yourself an advantage if that is where your strength lies. What makes boccia interesting is the strategic planning involved, like that of shogi. As a coach, he focuses most on the athlete's independence. "There's nothing fun about doing everything the exact way the coach tells you to, is there? I believe that my role is to create a fun place where a variety of different ideas are born." At the moment, the COVID-19 pandemic has made in-person practice difficult, but Murakami says it's all up to one's ingenuity. "Daily communication can be training for planning strategy in a short period of time in order to win a competition, so we have frequent discussions online." They decide on a theme for their online meetings and train by presenting their opinions on the subject in a minute or less. This helps, not only to get a feel for the time and being able to create strategy on the spot, but it also serves indirectly as media training.

Give the greatest cheer to the athletes competing in the greatest games on the greatest stage!

With two Paralympic competitions under his belt, he was particularly impressed by the spectacular welcome they received from the whole country in London. "It was overwhelming. In Rio de Janeiro, the cheerfulness of Brazil really uplifted the athletes. I think we can create the same atmosphere for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics to be held in August. That excitement will lead to expanding the boccia fan base and its competitors" says Murakami. The games are just around the corner. Allow yourself to become absorbed by the mental play of boccia while giving unstinting cheer for the athletes and Mr. Murakami when they compete in the greatest competition on the greatest stage.

④ We want to share the fun of boccia with as many people as possible!

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① Fukushima-shi Yukari-no-Kai

Ten years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake, and the city continues to draw even more attention. For example, 2020 saw the broadcasting of the serial TV drama "Yell" based on Fukushima City's first honorary citizen, Yuji Koseki. In the midst of all this attention, we have established a place for people from Fukushima City or those with ties to the city living in the Tokyo metropolitan area to expand and deepen their friendships and networks. In cooperation with this association, the city is working to deepen ties with residents of the Tokyo metropolitan area who have a connection to Fukushima City, and to further expand the population of those involved in the association.

