

Japan-Australia exchange through rugby:  
Speech by Ambassador Sumio Kusaka on the occasion of the reception  
to send-off the University-Norths Owls for the 2017 Japan Tour

Tuesday 7 March 2017

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Good evening and welcome to my residence. It is an honour to welcome the representatives and sponsors from the University Norths Owls and the ACT Brumbies, as well as members of ACT Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of Health, and Japan-related friendship groups. My wife Ikuko and I are very pleased to have you join us this evening to celebrate the occasion of the University Norths Owls' journey to Japan.

In May last year, Ikuko and I watched our first ever rugby union game when the Sunwolves were in town to play against the Brumbies. We were astonished and fascinated by the sheer strength, speed and sportsmanship of the rugby players of both sides and really enjoyed our first live game.

When I heard that University Norths Owls had chosen Japan as their overseas training destination, I was delighted. You may know that when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was in Australia at the beginning of this year, both governments of Japan and Australia signed a *'memorandum of corporation in the field of sport'*.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull mentioned in his speech that both Japan and Australia share a love of sport and that he looks forward to the 2019 Rugby World Cup and 2020 Olympics in Tokyo. Mr Turnbull acknowledged Japan's growing success in Rugby and suggested more cooperation in the field of Cricket. However, as Mr Abe kindly declined as number of Cricket players in Japan is still very limited, we will stick to rugby exchange!

I was told that there are many rugby exchanges between Japanese and Australian teams on many levels already happening in the nation's capital.

In fact, Brumbies head coach, Mr Stephen Larkham who is present today also played in the Japanese team called, Ricoh Black Rams from 2009 to 2011. Stephen was hailed as a hero

when he helped troubled Black Rams to get back in to the Japanese top league in just one year! Stephen is not only a legend in Australia but he has captivated many Japanese rugby fans and young players with his brilliant plays.

Australia is one of the best Rugby nations and Japan has a lot to learn from Australian players.

As Ambassador, I would like to promote more active exchange between Japan and Australia, especially in the field of sport. It is very important for young people to widen their views and see what is out there to learn from different people and cultures. I imagine for most of the Uni Norths players, this will be their first overseas trip and I hope you learn a lot from your trip to Japan. Tenri University and Tokai University are traditionally very strong teams and they are looking forward to playing in friendly matches with you.

I sincerely wish that you will return with many fond memories and aspirations to keep playing rugby in order to play for Australia in 2019 World Cup in Tokyo!

Please enjoy the night as a preview of the wonderful Japanese hospitality you will experience in Japan. Good luck!