

News from under the Southern Cross (Edition 46): Sports Exchange

14 December

Japan and Australia's connection as major sporting powers is wide-ranging. In this issue of my newsletter, let me talk about one aspect of our relationship.



The Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games Reception held at my residence

1. Friends came from Sydney

Mr SAKUNO Yoshinori, Chairperson of Nichigo Press, a magazine mainly for Japanese residents in Australia, and his wife, as well as Mr TASHIRO Yuzo, a representative of Mate Football Club, and his wife, paid me a visit at my Residence all the way from Sydney.



With Mr & Ms TASHIRO and Mr & Ms SAKUNO

Mr TASHIRO once played for the Japan national soccer team. Back in the day when I was serving for the Ibaraki Prefectural Police, he was making a spectacular showing as a striker with the Kashima Antlers, Ibaraki's home team. Even now he is in great shape, particularly his thighs. *Hanpa-nai!* (Incredible!) His goals would turn the crowd absolutely crazy, so much so the roars from the fans would reach across the Kashima Stadium and out to Kashima Nada (the coastal waters along the prefecture facing the Pacific Ocean). It seems like only yesterday.

We discussed the differences and similarities between Japan and Australia when it comes to soccer. We also discussed how to bring Japan closer to the Australian people through soccer, and how to make the Japan-Australia relationship even more vibrant. It turned out to be a never-ending conversation that went on well into the night.

2. Preparation for JPN-AUS World Cup qualifying match and Nadeshiko Japan's Australia visit

The next day I travelled with both couples to Sydney and watched the Australia-USA women's soccer match. Although the Matildas were cheered on by a record crowd of over 36,000, they were unfortunately defeated 3-0 by their powerful opponent.

I was very glad to have the chance to meet with the Football Federation Australia Chairman, Mr Chris Nikou. Soccer fans will be interested in the men's World Cup qualifier between Japan and Australia, set to take place in Australia on 24 March 2022. It will be an opportunity for both

teams to close the gap in points with Saudi Arabia, the top team in their group. It is a vital match for both teams.



With Mr Chris Nikou, Chairman of Football Federation Australia

My embassy would be thrilled to do whatever we can to support and set the right mood for this match. For example, we would be more than happy to hold a reception, together with the consulate-general in the city hosting the game, inviting members of respective soccer communities of Japan and Australia. Chris welcomed my offer, and we decided to discuss the details at a later stage.

Additionally, I met and chatted with Ms TANAKA Keiko at the stadium who has also represented Japan in soccer. She is now a coach with Mate Football Club. Then it came to me, “Wouldn’t it be great if we can have the Nadeshiko (Japan’s national soccer team) come to Australia for a friendly with the Matildas?!” My dreams keep on getting wilder and wilder.



At the Olympic Stadium (Far Right: Mr TASHIRO Yuzo, Front Right: Ms TANAKA Keiko)

3. The Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games Reception

On 30 November we held a reception at my residence for Australian athletes and officials who attended the Tokyo 2020 Games.

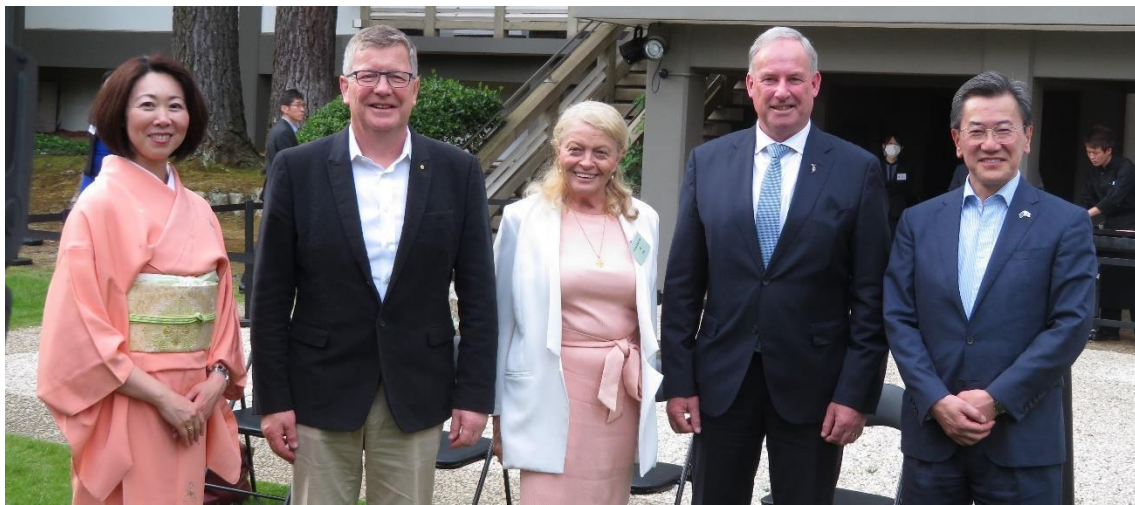
You may recall that, out of 206 competing countries and territories, the first team of athletes to arrive in Japan was the Australian women's softball team, Aussie Spirit. They gallantly took the bold decision to come to Japan to make their way to their camp despite the pandemic situation being much worse than Australia at that time. I was struck by their determination as well as their commitment to the success of the Tokyo Games.

After the team's arrival in Japan, I sent them some Tim Tams, Australia's favourite biscuits, to enjoy while experiencing a fairly restricted lifestyle in Gunma Prefecture's Ota City. After all, Japan based its request to host the Games on the appeal of our uniquely Japanese style of hospitality, *Omotenashi*. Instead, athletes who arrived in Japan were confined to the Athletes' Village. After their events concluded, they were unable to see and enjoy Japan and had to return home straight away.

This was why I wanted to hold this reception to give these athletes even a little taste of *Omotenashi*.

4. **A favourable reaction**

Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck, Minister for Sport, Mr Matt Carroll, CEO of the Australian Olympic Committee, and Ms Lynne Anderson, CEO of Paralympics Australia also attended the reception. Mr James Turner, Paralympic gold medalist in the men's T36 400m final, kindly showed me his medal. I was impressed by the profound weight of the medal. ([my speech](#), and [the report by TBS](#) can be viewed here)



With Mr Matt Carroll, Ms Lynne Anderson, and Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck

Hearing that the gyoza (Japanese style dumpling) was popular at the Athletes' Village in Harumi, Chef OGATA spent days making 370 gyoza by hand so that attendees could experience "real gyoza", not the frozen kind. These, together with the freshly cooked okonomiyaki (Japanese savory pancake) on an iron plate, practically flew off the plates. And as I had expected, Asahi beer was also popular among the athletes.



Gyoza
(Japanese style dumpling)



Okonomiyaki
(Japanese savory pancakes)

What made my day more than anything was hearing from numerous people in attendance that “The Olympics was possible because Japan was hosting”, and “The Games succeeded thanks to the Japanese people, particularly the always smiling volunteers.” Australia is thus full of praise for the Tokyo Games. I could feel the tremendous effort put into preparing and holding the Games by so many people had been rewarded.



With Olympic Rowers



With Paralympians and Paralympics Australia officials

5. Sports exchange never ends

In January next year, the annual Australian Open will be held. In March the previously mentioned Japan-Australia football match will take place.

I hope that the major sporting powers of Japan and Australia will continue deepening engagement and strengthening our bonds under the ethos of fair play in sports.

YAMAGAMI Shingo