

Speech
Presented by HE YAMAGAMI Shingo, Ambassador of Japan to Australia
on the occasion of the conferral of the
Foreign Minister's Commendation on Mr Scott Fardy,
Wednesday 18 January 2023

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to my residence today for the conferral of the Foreign Minister's Commendation on Mr Scott Fardy.

Today we recognise your incredible work in furthering the friendship and goodwill between Japan and Australia, through your efforts as a great sportsman, but above all as a friend of the people of Kamaishi and of Japan.

We celebrate your contribution to the very deep sporting ties between Japan and Australia, which see our players competing on the field, exchanging players, even playing for each other's national teams, and – of course – having a beer off the field. But your ties with Japan extend much further than the rugby field.

We all remember the devastation of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and the tsunami and nuclear disaster that followed, as unforgettable images of the destruction were broadcast all around the world.

Kamaishi – then your home away from home - and the surrounding region were among some of the areas hit hardest by the tsunami, which wiped out everything in its path within seconds.

But it is in the worst of times that we often see the best in people.

And while so many expats decided to leave Japan soon after – even those who lived hundreds of kilometres from the disaster zone – you and your teammates, living in the disaster zone itself, chose to stay.

I imagine it must have been a strong sense of mateship and loyalty to a team that now encompassed not only the other players in the Seawaves squad, but the entire town of Kamaishi, that led you to refuse an offer of evacuation from the Australian Embassy.

And while the world was still reeling from the disaster, you had already begun volunteering at a supply depot, unloading trucks and stacking shelves.

Later on, you used your skills to help the town by doing what you do best – playing a good game of footy.

Indeed, the Kamaishi Seawaves were back on the field less than 3 months after the disaster, in what I'm sure was a very moving and encouraging event.

As two sports-loving countries, we all know the power of sports in bringing people together and putting smiles on their faces.

I know you have worn different jerseys and played in front of many a roaring crowd, but I am sure those games in Kamaishi were some of the most memorable for you.

Your work at the community level was joined by efforts from many in Australia to provide support to disaster-affected areas.

The Australian Government generously dispatched 3 out of 4 RAAF C-17 aircraft to Japan, and numerous volunteer organisations began grassroots projects to support community recovery.

The Japanese people were also moved to see that then Prime Minister Julia Gillard herself came to Tohoku barely a month after the disaster.

It was this selfless and generous support from all walks of life in Australia that the Japanese will never forget.

A friend in need truly is a friend indeed.

But your linkages with Japan did not stop there.

Although your time in Japan ended in 2012, you had well and truly kicked off your rugby career, and would go on to represent Australia as a member of the Wallabies squad, and find a second Australian home here in the Bush Capital as a member of the Brumbies.

Anyone would think, after living in Kamaishi and Canberra, that you must be attracted to the small town lifestyle.

In 2018, you returned to Kamaishi, a visit which saw you play touch footy with school kids, train with local rugby clubs.

I am sure the children you met will never forget the experience – especially if that experience is being chased by the tallest man they have ever seen in their lives!

In 2019, you helped to drum up momentum for the Rugby World Cup, when you also had the opportunity to watch a match in person at Kamaishi's new Memorial Stadium.

To this day, Kamaishi is still the smallest place ever to host a Rugby World Cup game.

To host the game itself was both an incredible feat and a great honour for Kamaishi – and the fact that you returned to the city to witness this would have been a proud moment for the locals, and a symbol of the city's recovery.

In the lead up to the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Kamaishi chose Australia to partner with for the ARIGATO Host Town project, opening the door for people-to-people exchanges, sports clinics and cultural activities, all with a distinctive rugby flavour.

Exchange programs, particularly those focused on the next generation, still continue to this day.

It is significant that children who once had lost everything can now smile and talk about their future aspirations so clearly.

Which are often, "I want to be like Fardy-san".

I hope you told them, "eat enough *natto* and you will be!"

Indeed, the fact that you like those smelly fermented soybeans is proof that you are truly committed to your adopted country.

So I would like to thank you for your contribution to the long legacy not only of sporting ties between our countries, but also of mateship and support for each other.

I express my gratitude for all of your hard work so far, and look forward to hearing of your future activities.

I know you have retired as a player, and have been busy coaching a Japanese rugby team, the NEC Green Rockets Tokatsu, but I still hope deep inside that one day – perhaps when Japan needs it the most – you will don a Brave Blossoms jersey.

And I hope you will always consider yourself a true Kamaishi local, if you will.

So, with that, on behalf of Foreign Minister HAYASHI of Japan, I do convey this award to Mr Scott Fardy, and I thank you again for your selflessness and dedication.