

International Symposium: International Exchange and Sports Diplomacy

On Friday, December 19, 2014, the international symposium “International Exchange and Sports Diplomacy” was held at Aoyama Gakuin University. In anticipation of the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2020, the symposium examined how sports contribute to human development as well as to the advancement of society and the nation. It also explored international exchange and cultural diplomacy through sports, so-called “sports diplomacy.”

Session 1: “National and Social Development and Sports Diplomacy”

1) André Corrêa do Lago (Ambassador of Brazil to Japan)

“Expectations for the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics”

At the 2014 FIFA World Cup, Brazil demonstrated to the world that it is more than just a soccer nation by proposing environmentally conscious infrastructure. Hosting the 2016 Rio Olympics has promoted long-term development plans, including improvements to the old city center and underdeveloped areas, as well as transportation networks. Sports diplomacy helps enhance a country’s image; the soft power of sports attracts people from other nations, conveys the appeal of a country’s lifestyle, and becomes a significant political and cultural force.

2) Un-yong Kim (Former Vice President of the Korean Olympic Committee)

“Sports Diplomacy in the Seoul and PyeongChang Olympic and Paralympic Games”

Sports diplomacy has a powerful impact on politics. Although a unified team of North and South Korea was not realized at the 1988 Seoul Olympics, participation from socialist countries such as the Soviet Union and China was achieved, creating opportunities for establishing diplomatic relations. Tokyo enjoys favorable conditions in terms of financial capacity and infrastructure, and the 2020 Tokyo Olympics will likely serve as an opportunity to advance diplomacy as well.

3) Masaru Ikei (Professor Emeritus, Keio University)

“Modern Japan and Sports Exchange: Focusing on the Olympics and Baseball”

Since the Meiji era, as foreign sports were introduced to Japan, baseball became widely popular and functioned as a tool for diplomacy and goodwill. The 1964 Tokyo Olympics, as a symbol of postwar recovery, had an impact exceeding that of regaining independence and joining the United Nations, and helped Japan gain the trust necessary for joining the OECD. The 2020 Tokyo Olympics are expected to provide opportunities to promote an eco-friendly Olympics, advance cultural activities, and revitalize the Japanese economy.

4) Discussion

Comments were made from the perspectives of Korea, Brazil, and Japan regarding the Seoul Olympics, which boosted economic development and national confidence; the Rio Olympics, which aim for sustainability; and the Olympics in an increasingly multipolar world.

Session 2: “People and Society Nurtured by Sports”

1) Yuko Arimori (Special Olympics Nippon representative, marathon runner)

“Turning Joy into Strength: My Social Activities”

During a marathon held amid the Gulf War, she felt that sports could represent a “peaceful form of conflict.” Winning medals in Barcelona and Atlanta became the catalyst for her social engagement. Beginning with participation in a goodwill marathon in Cambodia, she became deeply involved in international activities through sports, eventually founding an NPO. The power of sports lies in its ability to transform people and continually elevate one’s own awareness.

2) Sei-hoon Yang (Former Korean Ambassador to Norway)

“Sports Diplomacy and International Exchange: The Case of Korea”

Hosting the Olympics in Korea became a driving force in overcoming the country’s past hardships and vulnerabilities. Ensuring safety is the foremost requirement for a successful Games. The Seoul Olympics achieved participation from both Eastern and Western blocs, and afterward Korea successfully established diplomatic relations with a series of communist countries. Through the Olympics, Korea became a nation capable of engaging in global international exchange. The silent power of sports to ease political tensions is one of its greatest attractions. It is sincerely hoped that the Tokyo Olympics will provide an opportunity to realize world peace and human welfare.

3) Gotaro Ogawa (Special Advisor for International Relations, All Japan Judo Federation)

“The Role of Judo in the International Community”

Judo is now a global sport and serves as an effective means of promoting international peace and friendship. There are also NPOs that provide opportunities for children around the world to interact through judo. While Japan maintains the highest technical level in judo, the number of practitioners is declining. Greater efforts are needed to promote judo among youth, focusing on moral, intellectual, and physical development. Strengthening international outreach will further promote exchange through judo. Balanced media coverage is also desired.

4) Aki Taguchi (Paralympian, shooting at Athens, Beijing, and London Games)

“The Significance of the Paralympics”

After acquiring a disability, she began shooting and found joy through sports. In Japan today, about 20% of people require barrier-free environments. In addition to enhancing sports programs, it is important to improve accessibility so that people with disabilities can go anywhere. If society better understands the need for multifunctional facilities, the spirit of “hospitality” can be realized. She hopes people will experience the Paralympic values of “courage,” “determination,” “inspiration,” and “equality.”

5) Discussion

In response to the question of whether participation itself is what matters or whether competitiveness should be prioritized, Olympians and Paralympians commented that the Olympic Games are a place where athletes maximize their abilities, and that how the participants themselves perceive this question is what truly matters.

Session 3: General Discussion

A question-and-answer session covered topics such as athletes’ career paths, the roles of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, the relationship between the Games and peace, the globalization of judo, the value of sports in Japanese society, and the contributions sports make to society.