

Table tennis for persons with disability; The current circumstances and the organization system

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Abstract Persons with Intellectual Disability weren't accepted to take part in the competitive tournaments for a long time because many people didn't think that persons with Intellectual Disability would not be able to compete. However, thanks to many efforts by many personnel including the executive officers of the Japan Table Tennis Association, persons with intellectual disability can now participate in competitive tournaments. The Presenter will describe this process.

(Key words: competitive sport activities and persons with intellectual disability)

In Japan, persons with intellectual disability were not admitted to competitive sport activities as athletes until few years ago, because many people had thought that persons with intellectual disability were not suited to competition.

The reasons why they hadn't been involved in competitive sports were because of their lack of socially adapted skills. As you know, each human being has a different identity, however persons with disability had not been considered as able-bodied people because their disabilities made them seem so different.

However, it is most important to realize that persons with disability are also human beings - it is not important that they have a disability. Therefore I would like to give the same opportunities of able-bodied people to persons with disability, e.g. if he likes table tennis, he should be able to enjoy playing it.

In 1996, the first competitive sport event for persons with intellectual disability was held. The first event in Japan used official rules, official umpires and official venues. I expect that you think it is surprising to mention official rules; however in the disability sport area, no sport event under official rules had been held by this time.

The first table tennis championship was held in 1998 two years after the first event. The table tennis championship was significant, because the Japan Table Tennis Association accepted that persons with intellectual disability were able to

play table tennis just like table tennis athletes. As the result, the Japan Table Tennis Federation for Persons with intellectual disability (JTTF-FID) was established as a full member of the Japan Table Tennis Association (JTTA), in 1999, and a Japanese top coach became the national coach for Players with Intellectual Disability.

Our national ID players are provided with the same national uniforms as the Japan National Table Tennis Team when they compete in international events. Also our players are directly able to get the same information, especially updated table tennis news like able-bodied players. They have competed in the US Open, which means they can compete in international events. This is just the dream that we had desired for so long. Persons with Intellectual Disability can get the same rights as other athletes.

After the Southern Cross Championships in Australia, 1999, persons with physical disability began to accept table tennis for persons with intellectual disability, which had until then lagged behind table tennis for physical disability. In March 2000, the Japan Table Tennis Federation for the Disabled (JTTF-FD) was established, combining the associations for physical disability and intellectual disability.

JTTF-FID, which was a full member of JTTA, had a new role as JTTF-FD.

After the Sydney Paralympic Games 2000, opportunities for persons with disability have been developing with JTTA.

I appreciate the many colleagues who have given us the opportunity to connect with table tennis personnel from round the world.

Thanks to big support by the JTTA, we can now develop table tennis for persons with disability. I sincerely wish to step together with the message, 'we all love table tennis', between all table tennis players in the world.

Finally I would like to ask you all to support table tennis activities for players with disability from now on.

Thank you for listening.
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Abbreviation:

- JTTA — Japan Table Tennis Association
- JTTF-FID — Japan Table Tennis Federation for Players with Intellectual Disability
- JTTF-FD — Japan Table Tennis Federation for the Disabled