

Greetings

Mindset reflected in national sports

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Miyagi Disaster Mental Health Care Center
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It has been 12 years since the Great East Japan Earthquake, with the same number of years passing since the opening of the Miyagi Disaster Mental Health Care Center. We sincerely appreciate your continued support.

I think that the sports that symbolize a country reflect that country's mindset when facing adversity. The sports that I feel are "Japanese" are sumo wrestling, high school baseball, and the Tokyo–Hakone Round-Trip Ekiden Race (Hakone Ekiden).

Sumo wrestling is the national sport of Japan and embodies the bushido spirit that is unique to the country. It is said to be an honorable sport where two almost-naked men square off fairly and evenly. Even if a physically stronger sumo wrestler wins using only slapping moves, he will not be highly regarded. It is also said that the victorious sumo wrestler is not allowed to celebrate in a flashy way, but instead should always be humble, and that it is a virtue to carefully consider the feelings of the losing sumo wrestler.

The same applies to high school baseball. Why do the high school players shave their heads? Why are national tournaments held in the middle of the summer, and why do sirens sound at the start and end of the games? There is no doubt that Japanese people associate high school baseball with the end of World War II. The anniversary of the end of the war is celebrated during the tournament, and watching the baseball players pray in silence as the siren sounds reminds the public of the young souls who lost their lives in the war. Although limiting the number of pitches in amateur baseball has become common practice overseas, some pitchers continue to throw an incredible number of pitches at the National High School Baseball Championship of Japan (Koshien). It is also the pitcher who receives the greatest praise.

This is also the case for Hakone Ekiden, which has become a staple during the New Year. Although the runners are dizzy from dehydration and are so injured that they are limping, they desperately try to bring the sash forward to the next leg for their teams. The Japanese people are moved to tears when watching the runners not giving up until the last moment and dedicating themselves to the team. Even when in a pinch, the runners grit their teeth and tackle their situations valiantly, never expressing pain or sad feelings, and dedicate themselves to the group. I think that it is Japanese culture that views such actions as beautiful.

After having experienced various national traumas, including the Great East Japan Earthquake, we have begun to realize that this uniquely Japanese virtue is not necessarily good for our mental health. Sumo wrestling has seen the entry of foreign wrestlers who dominate with their physical strength, high school baseball has imposed limits on the number of pitches, and Hakone Ekiden has witnessed coaches deciding to withdraw from the tournament regardless of the players' wishes.

The time has come for us to properly reflect on how we recover from large-scale disasters. When times are tough, we can say so. It is acceptable to be a bit more selfish. We hope that our center can serve as the foundation for recovery while watching over the changes in the injured communities and, by extension, Japan as a whole. We continue on our long journey. We look forward to your unending guidance and support in these efforts.