

REIGNITING THE FLAME:
NATION-BUILDING THROUGH MEDAL WINNING AT THE 1964 TOKYO OLYMPICS

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INTRODUCTION

Yoshinori Sakai's life began with unfathomable death. He let out his first infant cries in his hometown of Sanji City, Hiroshima Prefecture as his mother held him for the first time on August 6, 1945. Only two hours earlier, 70 kilometers away from where newborn Sakai lay swaddled in his mother's arms, the atomic bomb had fallen on the city of Hiroshima, extinguishing the lives of hundreds of thousands in an instant. The world had entered the atomic era. All the suffering felt by the country in the wake of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki became intertwined with Sakai for the next 19 years of his life. He was unable to escape that moment, yet his story took another turn at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.

On October 10, 1964, Sakai jogged into the National Stadium in a cloud of smoke as the crowd erupted in applause. In his right hand, the crimson flame of the Olympic torch blazed intensely. He kept staring ahead, unflinching as he rounded the final bends of the track in the National Stadium. After completing his last lap, Sakai ran up the steps to the Olympic cauldron as foreign and Japanese spectators snapped pictures of his final ascent. He stopped at the top of the stadium next to the giant unlit vessel, ceremoniously raised the torch, and lit the Olympic flame.¹ The first Olympics ever to be held in Asia was officially open.

While the Tokyo Olympic Organizing Committee's (OOC) official report makes no mention of why Sakai was chosen to be the final torch runner at the 18th Olympiad, the selection was hardly arbitrary. Some argued he was selected because he was a high school champion runner and student at one of the nation's top colleges or that he barely missed qualifying for the

¹ *The Tokyo Olympiad*. Directed by Kon Ichikawa. Tokyo: Organizing Committee for the Games of the XVIII Olympiad. 1964.

1964 Olympic 400-meter.² However, neither was the real reason he was chosen; it was because of the location and circumstances of his birth. A major national newspaper, *The Asahi Shimbun*, broke the news of Sakai's selection two days before the Opening Ceremony, dubbing him the "Atomic Bomb Boy" (*Genbaku no ko*).³ After he lit the torch, the same paper excitedly reported that the foreign press referred to him as the "Atomic Boy" during the Opening Ceremony.⁴ Such press included *The New York Times* which responded to American criticism of Sakai's selection from those who worried it created division instead of unity. The paper explained, "the Japanese have said that Hiroshima marked a turning point in Japan's history that started her towards democracy, peace, and prosperity." Sakai himself even remarked that he "knew nothing of war."⁵

Yoshinori Sakai is an example of what scholars have noted to be Japan's selective remembering of its own history – specifically as it relates to World War II – at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. While it is true the country was left in ruin following the conclusion of the Second World War, Sakai exemplifies Japanese attempts to actively ignore their role as an aggressor. At the Olympics, the country avoided interacting with its ultranationalist past, instead focusing on its postwar destruction and pre-modern history.⁶ To show the rest of the world that Japan had progressed from wartime to peacetime, the country carefully curated an image of itself to put on display to the world. As Paul Droubie explained, the new national identity put on exhibit at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics was formulated around three core assumptions that supposedly defined

² Paul Droubie. "Playing the Nation: 1964 Tokyo Olympics and Japanese Identity," Ph.D. diss. (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2009). 159.

³ Yoshikuni Igarashi. *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2000). 154.

⁴ "Shinku no honō ikioiyoku, tōchi takaraka ni Sakai-kun," *The Asahi Shimbun*. October 10, 1964.

⁵ "Olympic Torch-Bearer: Yoshinori Sakai," *The New York Times*. October 10, 1964.

⁶ For examples of Japan's careful historicism at the 1964 Tokyo Games please see Aso, Noriko. "Sumptuous Re-past: The 1964 Tokyo Olympics Arts Festival," *positions: east asia culture critique* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2002). 7-38. Christian Tagsold. "Modernity, space, and national representation at the Tokyo Olympics 1964," *Urban History* 32, no. 2 (2010). 289-300. and Sandra Wilson. "Exhibiting a new Japan: the Tokyo Olympics of 1964 and Expo '70 in Osaka," *Historical Research* 85, no. 227 (February 2012). 159-178.

postwar Japan: “cutting edge science and high technology, a modern society with traditional culture, and peaceful internationalism.”⁷ The Olympics were intended as a triumphant climax of transition for the Japanese as they attempted to reintegrate themselves into the international community. In the case of Sakai, he represented a new generation of Japanese committed to peace.⁸

The 1964 Tokyo Olympics serve as an example of the nation-building power of the Olympics Games through the construction of national identity. They further prove the inherent politicism of the Olympic Games by extending their value beyond international politics towards domestic interaction, as well. Japan felt it had been left destroyed and disgraced upon the conclusion of the Second World War. Japanese national confidence hit rock bottom as national identity began to fall apart after the war. The Japanese government believed the Olympics had the power to mark a new beginning for the country to resolve some of the insecurities of the nation. Their chosen path for presenting the nation’s change was the act of winning Olympic medals. Possibly the most important question still remains, though. How did sports at the Tokyo Olympics help restore national faith in the country after Japan’s defeat in 1945?

I argue that the 1964 Tokyo Olympics held value to various institutions as a means of reigniting national confidence in the country through sporting success after almost 20 years of postwar uncertainty, making the Games an important nation-building event in Japanese history. The avenue for Japanese nation-building moved from the battlefield to the sports field in the immediate postwar years. Yet, just as successful war campaigns denoted the success of the wartime military regime, new nation-building efforts rested heavily on the success of Japanese athletes. Scholarship of the 1964 Olympics affirms a postwar Japanese desire to be perceived as

⁷ Paul Droubie. “Playing the Nation.” 2.

⁸ “Olympic Torch-Bearer: Yoshinori Sakai,” *The New York Times*. October 10, 1964.

a powerful nation-state, and at the Olympics such ambition permeated national discourse through an intense desire to win Olympic medals. My analysis of the 1964 Games suggests that Olympic medals were intended to resolve the uncertainty of the postwar years through the “rebirth” of the Japanese nation as presented through sport. Athletes showed Japan that just like all of the other major states, Japan could be a significant medal contender at the Olympic Games. This counteracted popular pessimism stemming from the belief Japan was a former-power and thus had no chance to reach the medal podium.⁹ My findings similarly indicate that there is value in interacting with Olympic history from the angle of internal national-building and politics.

Scholarship of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics presently lacks a discussion of the Games’ domestic nation-building value. Primarily, the Games have been viewed as a key point of postwar *international* political interaction, but this paper intends to prove that the Olympics were a forum for domestic politics, as well.¹⁰ Scholars of the modern Olympic Movement generally focus on the allocation of Olympic bids, Games preparation and infrastructure, and the presence of international political actors at the Olympics, but they have rarely focused on the act of winning medals. I intend to add to the scholarship on the 1964 Tokyo Olympics by highlighting the political value of medaling at the Olympic Games. Winning medals at the Olympics sparks pride in the citizens of the athlete’s home country – that fact was especially poignant in Tokyo as Japan sought means to overcome painful memories of the Second World War. While some scholars like Neihaus (2006) and Droubie (2009) have covered the 1964 Games as a forum for the outward expression of national identity, I intend to prove that the Olympics in fact aided in

⁹ Jessamyn R. Abel. “When Athletes are Diplomats: Competing for World Opinion at the Tokyo Olympics,” in *The East Asian Olympiads 1934-2008: Building Bodies and Nations in Japan, Korea, and China* ed. William M. Tsutsui and Michael Baskett. (Boston: Leiden. 2011). 57-58.

¹⁰ For examples see Abel’s “When Athletes are Diplomats” in Tsutsui and Baskett’s *East Asian Olympiads 1934-2008* (2011), Abel’s “Japan’s Sporting Diplomacy” (2012), Droubie’s “Phoenix arisen” (2011), and Tagsold’s “The 1964 Tokyo Olympics as Political Games” (2009).

reinforcing national pride for domestic audiences. In many cases, such national pride at the 1964 Games was wholly contingent on winning medals in certain events.

In my analysis, I will also be extending the discussion of the role of athletes at the Tokyo 1964 Games from an identity-building perspective. Yoshikuni (2000) followed the writings of the Japanese women's volleyball coach, Hirobumi Daimatsu, to argue that the bodies of the 1964 women's volleyball team resolved the lingering memories of wartime as part of his larger discussion of war discourses in postwar Japan. Otomo (2007) analyzed the athletic performance of Japanese athletes, arguing that their bodies were used to promote a popular postwar paradigm – the ethics of hard work and determination. Similarly, Tagsold (2011), Neihaus (2011), and Merklejn (2013) have all attempted to answer why the 1964 Tokyo Olympics remain a point of national nostalgia in Japan through analysis of the women's volleyball team. This paper examines Japanese athletes to highlight their value as tools for nation-building in the postwar years to convey the degree to which domestic Japanese politics permeated the 1964 Games. I will follow Otomo's analysis by displaying how the discourse around athletes aided in the construction of a 'new' Japan.

Japan is not the only example of careful historicism at the Olympics by a Second World War aggressor. Between 1948 (when the postwar Olympics re-started) and 1972, all three Axis powers hosted the Olympics. Italy hosted the 1956 Cortina D'Ampezzo Winter Olympics and 1960 Rome Summer Olympics; Japan the 1964 Tokyo Summer Olympics and 1972 Sapporo Winter Olympics; and Germany the 1972 Munich Summer Olympics. Through each of the Olympics, former Axis nations hoped to show the world that they had moved from their prior aggression towards a new point of constructive international pacifism. Munich, in particular, was so concerned with counteracting the narrative of the overtly nationalistic 1936 'Nazi' Olympics

in Berlin that the city was wildly unprepared to deal with the tragic Black September hostage situation. Perhaps ironically, West Germany's attempts to further divorce themselves from Adolf Hitler's ideologies resulted in the lost lives of eleven Israeli Olympic athletes and a member of the West German police force.

However, Japan's particular approach to hosting the international sporting competition does offer unique insight when compared to the postwar Italian and German Olympics. Jessamyn Abel, one of the leading scholars on the Tokyo Olympics, frames the Games as the perfect international event for Japan because it offered the country a path to interact with the international community in a way that did not feel inherently political.¹¹ I intend to apply Abel's framework on a domestic level to illuminate how medal-winning at the Olympics was employed by state actors, sporting organizations, and media outlets to present an image of Japan and Japanese society *to the Japanese nation*.

In the Japanese case, such nation-building also reveals a deeper irony. Notably, nation-building efforts unveil a deeper pattern of Japanese attempts to prove their progress since 1945 even where change did not really exist. Japanese political desires before and after the dropping of the atomic bombs remained largely unchanged. The only difference was that the chosen location for furthering national interest changed from the field of battle to the field of sport. Through attempts to validate a new ideal modern postwar Japanese national identity, the ghosts of the nation's prewar past awoke. Although not overtly aggressive from a military perspective, the continuous Japanese ambition to demonstrate themselves as a strong, unified nation was on display at the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games.

¹¹ Jessamyn R. Abel. "Japan's Sporting Diplomacy: The 1964 Tokyo Olympics," *The International History Review* 34, no. 2 (2010): 205, 208-209.

This thesis draws its primary source evidence from Shōwa Era (1926-1989) newspapers, sports magazines, and films. I focused on Japanese domestic press to gauge the effect of the internal nation-building efforts at the Tokyo Olympics. I analyzed three major newspapers, in particular: *The Japan Times*, *The Mainichi Shimbun*, and *The Asahi Shimbun*, as they were three of the largest national newspapers at the time of the Tokyo Olympics. Even though *The Japan Times* was an English newspaper, it was intended for Japanese audiences since its inception in 1897. Its primary goal was to give readers the opportunity to talk about domestic and international topics in English to aid in Japan's goal of internationalism after the Meiji Restoration in 1868. *The Mainichi Shimbun* and *The Asahi Shimbun* are both Japanese-language newspapers. *The Mainichi* is generally considered to be center-left while *The Asahi Shimbun* was the most liberal major Japanese newspaper in the 1960s.¹²

Beyond newspapers, I also conducted extensive research in three primary archives: the Shōwakan Museum and National Archives, the Keio University Library Archives, and the Kōdōkan Institute Archives. I focused on examining materials that I could not get once I returned to the United States. I drew from *Nikkei Sports*, a major Japanese sports magazine, and *Tōkyō Orinpikku*, the official magazine bulletin of the OOC. I also read memoirs written by acclaimed author Yukio Mishima and the 1964 Japanese women's volleyball coach, Hirobumi Daimatsu. Finally, I watched the official Olympic film, Kon Ichikawa's *The Tokyo Olympiad* (1965) and other Showa Era films focusing on sport. *The Tokyo Olympiad* is a perfect visual representation of the nation-building efforts at the Tokyo Games because the OOC forcibly recut the film in

¹² I accessed all newspapers through online archives with the help of the Duke University East Asian Library Collection.

Japanese to pay more attention to Japanese athletes.¹³ I hope to use my sources to differentiate the 1964 Tokyo Olympics from other postwar Olympic Games.

This thesis is divided into three distinct case studies of athletes who participated on behalf of Japan at the Tokyo Olympics. Each case provides a unique perspective on nation-building at the Olympic Games through Japanese military, cultural, and intuitional desires present at the Games. In each instance, winning medals was paramount, demonstrating a Japanese aspiration for international sporting acclaim at the 1964 Games. Each similarly confirms a new Japanese national identity built around sporting success in Tokyo.

The first chapter of this paper focuses on Kokichi Tsuburaya, a runner who won the bronze medal in the marathon on behalf of Japan. Tsuburaya was a member of Japan's postwar military successor, the Japanese Self Defense Forces (JSDF), affording him unique opportunities to train towards his goal of medaling at the Tokyo Olympics. The JSDF needed Tsuburaya and other military athletes at the Olympics to win medals to display to the Japanese people that the military had value to Japan beyond waging war. His experience provides evidence that a Japanese national desire to win medals superseded the national commitment to antimilitarism. Similarly, in efforts to prove their change, the JSDF ultimately displayed uniformity of character with the prewar military apparatus by prioritizing their own marketing campaign over the health of Tsuburaya.

In the second chapter, I will transition to the sport of judo and the Japanese open-weight participant, Akio Kaminaga, in particular. Kaminaga's journey towards the Olympic Games is

¹³ “‘Critics’ Charge Too Few Japanese in Olympic Film,” *The Japan Times*. March 10, 1964. The recut of Ichikawa's *The Tokyo Olympiad* was entitled *Sensation of the Century* (1966). Both *The Tokyo Olympiad* (in English) and *Sensation of the Century* (with English subtitles) can be found on the Criterion streaming service. *The Tokyo Olympiad* in its entirety can be also found on YouTube through the official Olympic account at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHt0eAdCCns>.

perhaps most significant because he – like all of Japan’s top judo athletes – trained at the sport’s founding institution, the Kōdōkan. The Kōdōkan had spent much of the immediate postwar years regaining control of the global judo movement. For much of the postwar years, the Kōdōkan claimed judo’s cultural connection to Japan and the inherent Japanese dominance of the sport through the international success of Japanese judo athletes. The press called the Japanese dominance of judo into question following the 1961 Judo World Championships when Dutchman Anton Geesink toppled Kaminaga and the other Japanese representatives for the world title. The Kōdōkan’s desperate attempts to reclaim judo as a ‘Japanese’ sport after 1961 is an example of Japanese medal desires on display at the 1964 Games, providing clear evidence of a new national identity contingent on sporting success.

Finally, the last case study covers Coach Hirobumi Daimatsu and the gold-medal-winning 1964 Japanese women’s volleyball team. The team was primarily built from members of the Nichibo company team from the Kaizuka textile factory. They had not lost a match of international or domestic competition since late 1961, making them a shining point of national pride. Coach Daimatsu served as an officer during the Second World War, and his experiences deeply informed his later coaching philosophies. Daimatsu and the press often linked the women’s volleyball team to the Japanese wartime experience, using the team’s success to resolve the painful memories of war and postwar rebuilding. However, even as national heroes delineating a new future for the Japanese nation, the members were subjected to oppression within the heteronormative social structure as constrained female bodies. Within the eyes of the domestic press, the team’s success was not derived from the athletes’ prowess, but rather their coach’s skill at managing their bodies.

CHAPTER ONE

“WE’VE ASKED YOU FOR A GOLD MEDAL!” KOKICHI TSUBURAYA AND RESHAPING THE MILITARY IMAGE THROUGH SPORT

Kokichi Tsuburaya burst into the National Stadium in second place and the crowd erupted with applause – it was really happening; Japan was going to take home its first medal in track and field at the 1964 Tokyo Games.¹ But then, thousands of Japanese in the stadium and millions at home watched in horror as Tsuburaya slowed down around the final bend of the marathon, exhausted, while British distance runner, Basil Heatley, quickly gained and finally overtook him within view of the finish line. The hometown hero had just been passed within the final 200 meters of the 26.2-mile marathon in front of the entire country.

In his own eyes, Tsuburaya had disgraced himself and the entire Japanese nation in the worst way possible. Tsuburaya told fellow Japanese marathoner, Kenji Kimihara, “I have committed an inexcusable blunder in front of the Japanese people. I have to make amends by running and hoisting the Hinomaru [Japanese national flag] at the next Olympics, in Mexico.”² The Japanese public put their trust in him to win gold in 1968, too, spurred on by his unexpected bronze medal in Tokyo.³ Tsuburaya wanted to live up to the public’s expectation – he owed it to too many people, himself most importantly.

¹ *The Tokyo Olympiad*. Directed by Kon Ichikawa. Tokyo: Organizing Committee for the Games of the XVIII Olympiad. 1964.

² Robert Whiting. “Schollander, Hayes were spectacular at Tokyo Games,” *The Japan Times*. October 17, 2014. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/sports/2014/10/17/olympics/schollander-hayes-spectacular-tokyo-games/#.XWgdGZNKhsO> (accessed September 15, 2019).

³ Masaru Hatano. *Tōkyō orinpikku he no harukana michi*. (Tokyo: Sōshi-sha, 2004). 16.

Despite his last-second mishap, Tsuburaya was still among one of the many heroes at the Tokyo Olympics.⁴ While in his eyes he had made a mistake, Tsuburaya's finish was largely seen as a massive victory for Japanese sports. Tsuburaya took home Japan's only track and field medal during the 1964 Tokyo Olympics as well as the first Japanese track medal since 1936.⁵ He skyrocketed to stardom thanks to his medal performance in the marathon, an event many Japanese commentators believed he had an outside chance at best to medal in.⁶ However, not only the public counted on Tsuburaya. The Japanese Self Defense Forces (JSDF), of which he was a member, also put intense pressure on Tsuburaya to succeed.

The Olympics provided the JSDF a perfect avenue to rebrand their image and continue to normalize themselves within national discourse, distancing themselves from prewar military fascism. Founded in 1954, the JSDF faced constant attack from antimilitarists who feared that the self-defense forces equated to Japan's return to an offensive military posture. Tsuburaya trained through the JSDF's Physical Education School. The school's purpose was to train soldiers to compete at the 1964 Tokyo Games, indicating the military's intention to become a hub for Japan's future Olympic dreams. Athletes like Tsuburaya acted as the military's liaison with the Japanese public, helping to normalize the military through sporting acclaim. After winning bronze in 1964, Tsuburaya became an even more pivotal figure for promoting the JSDF, making it imperative for them to continue to keep him winning and in the public eye.

⁴ Yusuke Okabe, Hidenori Tomozoe, Takeshi Yoshinaga, and Kanako Inaba. "Marason kyōgi-sha tsuburaya kōkichi no jishi ni kansuru ichikōsatsu: kyōgi supōtsu oyoī kyōgi-sha no mondai-sei to no kanren kara," *Supotsu Kyoikugaku Kenkyū* 30, no. 1. (2010): 15.

⁵ Japan won the gold and bronze medal in the 1936 Berlin Olympics Marathon. The winners were Song Kee-chung and Nam Sung-yong, respectively. Both runners were actually Koreans forced to compete under the Japanese flag and with Japanese names due to the country's imperial subjugation under the Japanese. The 1936 marathon is another stark reminder of Japan's imperial past.

⁶ Thomas R.H. Havens. *Marathon Japan: Distance Racing and Civic Culture*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2015). 65.

However, in January 1968, Japan was shocked by the news of Tsuburaya's suicide. After a constant struggle with injury beginning in 1965, the JSDF kept Tsuburaya running with the intention of having him compete in the 1968 Olympics, worsening his injuries and potentially driving him closer to his death. After Tsuburaya's passing, some critics condemned the JSDF for using Tsuburaya to garner acclaim for the military. While public opinion was undecided on the matter, this chapter supports the argument of those Japanese sports commentators critical of the defense forces, positing that the JSDF did utilize Tsuburaya for political gain. In this chapter, I also refute the assertion that Tsuburaya's death was the result of a personal struggle tied to Japanese conceptions of honor or *bushido*, but rather the result of a man no longer able to shoulder the pressure placed on him by the JSDF and the nation more broadly.

Tsuburaya was a pawn for the military to achieve its goals through his sporting success. The Olympics normalized sports nationalism in Japan, helping the JSDF to interact with the public through Tsuburaya without sparking concerns over resurging militarism. I argue that Tsuburaya served as an integral part of a marketing campaign put forth by the JSDF to fight antimilitarism and legitimize the self-defense forces in the eyes of the Japanese public. Their hope was to brand themselves as an institution capable of fostering and nurturing Japan's Olympic hopefuls. The pressure put on Tsuburaya to win medals, though, would ultimately drive him towards his demise.

Post-Occupation Japanese Antimilitarism and the JSDF

Thomas U. Berger argued that the Postwar government built a prevailing stance of antimilitarism in the country.⁷ The government hoped to deflect attention away from their own

⁷ Militarism as I define it for the purpose of his paper is the desire for a nation to maintain a strong military to protect national interest and conduct offensive, global military interaction. While militarism can often be confused

aggressive history through careful construction of the nation's collective war memory as victims. To many Japanese, a building up of a standing military was analogous with militarism and resurging nationalism.⁸ In fact, there were three primary beliefs held by many Japanese in relation to the military: 1) prewar military institutions bred dangerous nationalism, 2) militarists took over control of the government through non-electoral means against the will of the Japanese people, and 3) militarists had dragged the Japanese people through a war that left them destroyed and disgraced.⁹ Downplaying the reality of the country's war aggression played into the narrative many Japanese citizens wanted to remember.

To many, Japan could only achieve its hope of a peace treaty and an end to the U.S. occupation if it resisted the sort of militarism that they believed had destroyed the nation in 1945. In the cover article of the New Year's Day 1950 edition of *The Nippon Times*, the writer mentioned the necessity for Japan to continue its commitment to further the country's democratization and its "duty-bound" obligation to fight militarism and fascism.¹⁰ Throughout the conversation about the U.S.-Japan Peace Treaty, there was constant mention of the need for limits to stop a resurgence in Japanese militarism. In fact, *The Nippon Times* even noted it as one of the primary issues discussed between the United States and Japan during early treaty talks.¹¹

Shigeru Yoshida (PM 1946-1947, 1948-1954), the primary architect of Japan's postwar economic and defense policy, believed it was deeply important to shy away from what could be

for fascism – that is, authoritarian ultra-nationalism involving segmentation of the economy and forceful suppression of opposition – and is in many ways intertwined with fascism, the two are distinct. Politicians in the postwar period who could be described as "militarists" were not necessarily fascists.

⁸ Thomas U. Berger. "From Sword to Chrysanthemum: Japan's Culture of Anti-militarism," *International Security* vol. 17, no. 4 (Spring 1993): 120.

⁹ Thomas U. Berger. "From Sword to Chrysanthemum," 134-136.

¹⁰ Kisaburo Yokota. "Peace Pact and Advent Awaited by Japan." *The Nippon Times*. January 1, 1950.

Even though the paper was called the *The Japan Times* in 1897, it went through a few name changes throughout its history before resettling on *The Japan Times* in 1956. From 1943 until 1956, the newspaper ran under the name, *The Nippon Times*.

¹¹ John M. Hightower. "Dulles Has Talk with Butterworth Over Japan Pact." *The Nippon Times*. April 10, 1950.

considered hyper-nationalist or pro-military policy. To be specific, Shigeru tried to avoid policy that explicitly aided in offensive military rearmament. Such policy was in direct violation of Japan's new constitution which explicitly stated the country's commitment to world peace and renunciation of war.¹² A military could only be for self-defense. Additionally, it would need to be civilian-led to ease the public perception that an independent military could overthrow the government once again. The public generally viewed military forces as a necessary evil for defense rather than a source of national pride or an enabler of national ambition as it had been in the Prewar years.¹³

Yoshida downplayed the establishment of the National Safety Corps (NSC; a precursor to the JSDF) in 1952 as an act of rearmament, instead arguing its value in maintaining peace and order within the country's boundaries.¹⁴ Members of the media criticized Shigeru for accidentally referring to the Safety Corps as an "army" during a speech announcing the NSC's foundation.¹⁵ A spectator of the march that followed Yoshida's speech told *The Mainichi* that "war would be difficult but for self-defense, a military was unavoidable," once again continuing the narrative that rearmament was a necessary evil, not something positive.¹⁶ The Japanese people only found military rearmament agreeable if it could be argued under the framework of protecting Japan's best interests; that is, in the name of defense *against* militarism.

Due to American pressure as a result of the war in Korea, though, it became impossible for Yoshida and his political party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), to entirely avoid rebuilding a military. Yoshida was forced to rethink his policy in order to protect Japan's

¹² Constitution of Japan, Chapter 2, Article 9.

¹³ Ivan I. Morris. *Nationalism and the Right Wing in Japan: A Study of Post-War Trends*. (London: Oxford University Press. 1960). 206-207.

¹⁴ J.W. Dower. *Empire and Aftermath: Yoshida Shigeru and the Japanese Experience, 1878-1954*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1979). 438.

¹⁵ "Premier Miscues Again! NSC Top Brass in Sweat." *The Nippon Times*. October 16, 1952.

¹⁶ "Goshiki no tēpu mo tobu," *Mainichi Shimbun*. October 15, 1952.

strategic economic and military alliance with America.¹⁷ As such, the LDP passed measures to create a more military-like safety force, the Japanese Self Defense Forces. However, the government also went to great lengths to combat the prewar military image. The government largely styled the JSDF after the U.S. military and trained recruits with U.S. military professionals – a fact the U.S. Army was quick to point out during one of their propaganda recruiting films, *The Big Picture* (1955).¹⁸ The JSDF's quiet development rarely strayed from the guidelines set by the American Military Assistance Group and remained devoid of any influence from prewar military officials throughout its development.¹⁹ By the time it was officially established on July 1, 1954, the JSDF looked nearly identical to the American military.

From its founding in 1954, the JSDF was the center of constant controversy due to questions of its legality under the Japanese constitution, its war-arousing image, and public distrust of military rearmament. Whether or not the JSDF would be able to integrate itself into postwar Japanese society rested squarely on its ability to recruit and the success of its public relations campaigns.²⁰ The JSDF had a long road ahead of itself. Conveniently, though, in 1959 Tokyo won the bid to host the 18th Olympiad, providing the JSDF with the perfect venue for building public support through the athletes they sent to the Olympic Games. A successful public relations campaign at the 1964 Olympics was paramount due to heightened public animosity against the defense forces after the 1960 *Anpō* Crisis. During this crisis, the military came

¹⁷ Akihiro Sadō. *The Self Defense Forces and Postwar Politics in Japan*, trans. Makito Noda. (Tokyo: Japan Publishing Industry Foundation for Culture. 2017). 39.

¹⁸ "Japanese Self-Defense Forces." *Big Picture*, Episode 319, United States. Army Pictorial Service, 1955. video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/the-big-picture.

¹⁹ Ivan I. Morris. *Nationalism and the Right Wing in Japan: A Study of Post-War Trends*. 208.

²⁰ Rio Otomo. "Narratives, the Body, and the 1964 Tokyo Olympics," *Asian Studies Review* 31 (June 2007): 125.

dangerously close to being deployed on the Japanese people to quell protest and reinstate order.²¹ Tsuburaya would soon find himself a part of the defense force's relations campaign.

Building a Military Athlete

Tsuburaya was born to a farming family during the Second World War in 1940.²² He picked up running at a young age, following in the footsteps of his older brother.²³ Tsuburaya joined the JSDF out of high school in 1959 in an attempt to continue his running career after failing the company entrance exam for Jōban Tankō, a quarry and mining company famous for their distance running team.²⁴ He promptly became the best runner in his unit's track and field club when it was founded in 1960.²⁵ Tsuburaya remained largely unknown outside of his unit until October of 1962 when he won the 5,000-meter at the 46th National Track and Field Championship, falling only seconds short of a national record.²⁶ Two days later, he went on to win the 10,000-meter.²⁷ Having finally proven himself, Tsuburaya was transferred to the JSDF's Physical Education School. He was recruited by his future coach.²⁸

²¹ Sabine Frühstück. *Uneasy Warriors: Gender, Memory, and Popular Culture in the Japanese Military*. (Berkeley: University of California Press. 2007). 9.
The *Anpō*, or U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, Crisis occurred in 1960. The LDP's plan was to resign the Security Treaty, reaffirming their commitment to a U.S. alliance. Their plan sparked outrage among Socialists, students, and workers across Japan. *Anpō* would become the biggest national protest in the country's history. The protests intensified after LDP politicians used police to remove Socialist politicians from the Diet in order to ratify the treaty. That led to student plans to storm the Diet which culminated in the death of a female student from Tokyo University, only further sparking public outrage. Due to the unrest, Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi threatened to deploy the SDF to restore order. Ultimately, though, the SDF were never deployed. Their image, however, was still deeply damaged. (Frühstück 2007, Sadō 2017).

²² Thomas R.H. Havens. *Marathon Japan*. 65.

²³ Roy Tomizawa. *1964: The Greatest Year in the History of Japan*. (Columbia: Lioncrest Publishing. 2019). 181-182.

²⁴ Ichiro Aoyama. *Kokō no runnā: Tsuburaya Kōkichi monogatari*. (Tokyo: Bēsubōru Magajin-sha, 2008). 40-41.

²⁵ Thomas R.H. Havens. *Marathon Japan*. 65.

²⁶ Katsundo Matsundo. "Local Leeper Upsets Visitor in Long Jump," *The Japan Times*. October 13, 1962.

²⁷ "Japan's Track and Field Meet Dominated by Foreign Athletes," *The Japan Times*. October 15, 1962.

²⁸ Ichiro Aoyama. *Kokō no runnā*. 53.

The Japanese name for the JSDF's school was the 自衛隊体育学校 (Jieitai taiiku gakkō). *Taiiku* most closely translates to "physical education." While certain news outlets like *The Japan Times* translated the name to "Sports School", swapping "physical education" for "sports," I will stick to the literal translation. I believe part of the power



Figure 1.1: 1962 Self Defense Force Physical Education School Entrance Ceremony

Tsuburaya: crouching, second from the left

Source: *Kokō Runnā: Tsuburaya Kōkichi Monogatari*, 2008.

The Physical Education School, established in June of 1961, indicated that the JSDF saw value in having athletes represent the JSDF at the Olympics.²⁹ The program located, recruited, and trained members of the JSDF to become Olympic medalists.³⁰ At the school, soldiers practiced their sport with their coaches in place of their normal military duties. The school mirrored the Soviet athletic system, whereby athletes were made officers in the military and

of the name was its ambiguity. To an onlooker, it was not immediately evident that the school was used to train Olympic athletes.

²⁹ “Asaka ni kankō, Jietai taiiku gakkō,” *The Asahi Shimbun*. June 23, 1961.

³⁰ Okabe, Yusuke, et al. “Marason kyōgi-sha tsuburaya kōkichi no jishi ni kansuru ichikōsatsu,” 19.

allowed to train for their specific sport. Athletes were paid for “training”, thereby circumventing the International Olympic Committee’s (IOC) amateurism clause.³¹ Although they were paid career athletes, their job, technically, remained as a member of the armed forces. The JSDF services were similar to the Japanese universities and factories of the time, two other routes to circumvent the amateurism clause. Tsuburaya was a living example that the military could invest in its soldiers the same way a college could invest in its student-athletes or a factory could invest in its workers (as was the case of Tsuburaya’s future rival, Kenji Kimihara).³²

Tsuburaya proved to be an invaluable resource for the JSDF, continuing to train hard on their behalf throughout the rest of 1962 and 1963, taking home the silver in the two-mile event at the Japan Indoor Track and Field Championships.³³ A few months later in June of 1963, the JSDF sponsored Tsuburaya to travel to New Zealand to train with nine other Japanese athletes under New Zealand track coach, Arthur Lydiard.³⁴ While there, Tsuburaya broke the world record for the 20,000-meter previously held by one of the most successful distance runners of all time, Emil Zatopek.³⁵ *The Mainichi* covered the milestone and chalked Tsuburaya’s achievement up to his status as a “select” athlete within the JSDF. They quoted the chief of the Physical

³¹ From the founding of the Olympic movement until the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, all athletes competing at the Olympics were required to follow the International Olympic Committee’s amateurism clause based on Article 26 of the Olympic Charter. Athletes could at no point in their life have been paid to compete in any sport of any kind for any reason. That included: competing for money, exchanging prizes for money, those who capitalized monetarily in any way from their sporting fame (i.e. branding deals or sponsorship), and those who gained employment due to sporting fame or success, among others. While the 1964 version of the eligibility rules stated that employment for athletes could not be a cover for “excessive opportunities for training or competition in sport,” the primary circumvention of the rules revolved around offering athletes “jobs” either in factories or in the military until the clause was overturned in 1986.

³² Thomas R.H. Havens. *Marathon Japan*. 64.

³³ “Mays Takes Two Events,” *The Japan Times*. March 31, 1963.

³⁴ “Japanese Could Win Marathon Declares N.Z. Olympic Runner,” *The Japan Times*. October 3, 1964.

³⁵ “Track Group Back from New Zealand,” *The Japan Times*. September 21, 1963.

Emil Zatopek was a Czechoslovak distance runner who rose to fame after winning gold in the 5,000-meter, 10,000-meter, and marathon at the 1952 Melbourne Olympics. He won the marathon after entering in the event last second on the day of the race. It was the first marathon he had ever run. He is also credited with inventing interval training. Zatopek is considered one of the most prolific Czech Olympians and distance runners of all time.

Education Program who praised Tsuburaya's natural track talents.³⁶ The article framed the world record as a major achievement for Japan – implicitly, though, an achievement that could not be possible without the military.

Each newspaper article that covered one of Tsuburaya's races was a small victory for the JSDF. The notoriety paid off when Tsuburaya was selected as one of the 16 men being considered to compete on the Japanese Olympic squad. This was not a nomination to compete in the marathon, though – an important distinction. In the *Japan Times* article announcing the hopefuls, right beside Tsuburaya's name was written “Self Defense Forces” – denoting the institution which supported his running career.³⁷

After being selected for consideration for the 5,000 and 10,000-meter events, Tsuburaya pivoted towards training for the marathon full-time, the event for which he had yet to qualify. He spent the next four months training at the Physical Education School to compete in his first marathon: the Chunichi Marathon in Nagoya set for the end of March 1964. The finish was less than satisfactory. Tsuburaya returned to the dressing room after his fifth-place finish muttering to himself under his breath, clearly frustrated. Tsuburaya doubted his ability to place in the Olympic qualifying Mainichi Marathon the next month because of his poor finish.³⁸ *The Japan Times*, however, still had hope for Tsuburaya, noting that he was “up-and-coming” despite his disappointing results.³⁹

³⁶ “Tsuburaya-senshū (Jietai) ga sekaishin ni-man Zatopekku no kiroku yaburu,” *The Mainichi Shimbun*. August 25, 1963.

³⁷ “20 Japanese Track Hopes for '64 Olympics Named,” *Japan Times*. November 19, 1963.

³⁸ “Jidai no sugao: dai 4-bu onrii ietsudadei, 5 Tsuburaya no ashioto,” *The Mainichi Shimbun*. January 10, 1996. My information about Tsuburaya after the Chunichi Marathon comes from an article published by *The Mainichi Shimbun* in 1996 based off of an interview they conducted with one of the other distance runners in the Physical Education School. He was friends with Tsuburaya and was present at the race.

³⁹ “Nakao Sets Record in Chunichi Race,” *The Japan Times*. March 21, 1964.

Luckily for the military, the media shift their coverage of Tsuburaya after the Mainichi Marathon, where he finished second behind Kimihara.⁴⁰ Tsuburaya thus officially became a qualifier for the 1964 Olympic marathon on behalf of Japan, making him one of the three national representatives in the event. Tsuburaya had not expected to finish in the top three, explaining to the *Japan Times* that he had only run the race to practice for the 10,000-meter qualifier later in the month.⁴¹ Whereas the majority of the previous media attention around Tsuburaya simply reported his results with the occasional mention of his membership within the JSDF, suddenly Tsuburaya was constantly in the news. The JSDF accomplished its first major goal: get Tsuburaya to the Olympics. Tsuburaya went from being a “dark horse” to becoming a “real whiz kid” simply by qualifying for the Olympic marathon.⁴² Similarly, *The Mainichi* reported that Tsuburaya held “Abebe-like speed and stamina,” referencing Ethiopian marathon runner, Abebe Bikila, who shocked the world in 1960 by winning the Rome Marathon barefoot.⁴³ The media coverage validated the JSDF’s claim that world-class athletes could come from the military.

Athletes like Tsuburaya played important roles in building national confidence around the Games. Almost instantly, analysts and newspapers began proclaiming Japan’s chance to take home a medal in the marathon. Between the marathon-master, Kimihara, the veteran, Toru Terasawa, and the ever-surprising Tsuburaya, Japan could actually have the opportunity to get

⁴⁰ Gyo Hani. “Kimihara Wins Marathon, Sets New Course Record,” *The Japan Times*. April 13, 1964.

⁴¹ Katsundo Mizuno. “Times at Bat,” *The Japan Times*. April 20, 1964.

⁴² The first quote comes from “Terasawa, Watanabe Favored in Marathon,” *The Japan Times*. April 11, 1964. The second from Mizuno, Katsundo. “Times at Bat,” *The Japan Times*. April 20, 1964.

⁴³ For *The Mainichi*’s quote see “Kimihara, Terasawa, Tsuburaya-senshū: Mainichi marason no jōi sannin,” *The Mainichi Shimbun*. April 13, 1964. For more information about Abebe Bikila’s 1960 Olympic finish see Timothy Collins and Stuart Sykes. *Marathon! The Story of the Greatest Race on Earth*. (London: Virgin Books. 2004). 153-154.

onto the podium or even dethrone Bikila for gold.⁴⁴ The JSDF knew that if spectators believed Japan could medal, they would be more inclined to buy into the Japanese Olympic fervor. By extension, this helped rebuild the military image and further legitimize the military's political goals.

There was no doubt, though, that the clear favorite to win an Olympic medal was Kimihara. He won the 1964 Mainichi Qualifier in April and the 1964 Hokkaido Times Marathon in August, finishing ahead of second-place Tsuburaya in both.⁴⁵ European analysts predicted the runners would need to complete the grueling marathon race in under two hours and twelve minutes to beat Bikila, a full six minutes ahead of Tsuburaya's fastest time on the course.⁴⁶ However, confidence grew in Tsuburaya as he continued to break records over the course of the next month, surpassing the 5,000-meter and 35-kilometer national record in early June.⁴⁷ In the Olympic Edition of *The Nikkei Sports Magazine*, released a month prior to Opening Ceremony, analysts ceded that Tsuburaya had a chance at gold due to his perseverance and improving times but all agreed that Japan's real hope for a place in Olympic history rested in the hands of Kimihara.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Terasawa won the Fukuoka Marathon in 1962 and set a marathon world record at the February 1963 Beppu Marathon. Although his record was broken by an American, Buddy Edelen, in June of the same year, Terasawa's record was still a Japanese national record by the time of the Olympics. He had been running marathons the longest of the three. For Terasawa's 1962 victory at Fukuoka see "Terasawa Wins Marathon In 2nd Best World Time," *The Japan Times*. December 3, 1962. For Terasawa's record at the 1963 Beppu Marathon see "World Marathon Mark Set Broken By Beppu Winner," *The Japan Times*. February 18, 1963. For Edelen's record see "American Runs Fastest Marathon," *The Japan Times*. June 17, 1963.

⁴⁵ "Kimihara Captures Marathon Event," *The Japan Times*. August 24, 1964.

⁴⁶ Mizuno, Katsundo. "Times at Bat," *The Japan Times*. April 20, 1964.

⁴⁷ For Tsuburaya's 5,000-meter national record see "Tsuburaya Sets Record in 5,000 M," *The Japan Times*. June 8, 1964. For Tsuburaya's 35-km record see "New Japan Marks Set at Niigata," *The Japan Times*. June 11, 1964.

⁴⁸ Hachiro Satō, Hirotsu Fujiwara, and Fusako Tsunoda. "Tsuitekita Tōkyō '64," *Nikkei Supotsu Tōkyō Orinpikku-go*. (Tokyo: Nikkei Supotsu Shimbun-sha, September 1964). 60.



Figure 1.2: “We’ve Asked You for a Gold Medal!”
 Tsuburaya (left), Terasawa (middle), and Kimihara (right)
 Tsuburaya is described as the “Made in Japan Zatopek”
 Source: *Nikkei Sportsu Tōkyō Orinpikku-go*, September 1964.

Even still, the press attention to Tsuburaya was deeply important to the JSDF. The defense forces carefully shaped their image by means of the exposure they obtained through their athletes, transforming themselves into a locus of self-improvement, national pride, and male camaraderie. The JSDF wanted to prove to the public that they could be a place where young men could train towards a common good. Such narrative was extremely clear from an article released by *The Mainichi* the day Tsuburaya was set to run the 10,000-meter at the Olympics (in which he finished 6th) titled, *Hashire! Tsuburaya* (Run, Tsuburaya!). The article detailed his relationship with the two other marathon runners within the Physical Education school, calling

them “the shadow commanders who watch[ed] over him.” It similarly explained how the “shadow commanders,” along with their coach, followed Tsuburaya every step of the way through his training, helping him to build his pace.⁴⁹ Very clearly, the article plays to the unique camaraderie built through the military, an image that the defense forces obviously wanted to put on display. Certainly, the idea that these two men trained with Tsuburaya despite their dashed Olympic hopes was a powerful one.

A New National Hero – Mexico City Dreams, Harsh Realities

Tsuburaya shot to national stardom after his third-place finish at the 1964 Olympic Games, but that did not dampen the fact he was deeply disappointed in himself. Upon crossing the finish line, Tsuburaya tumbled onto the ground and lay facing the sky in frustration.⁵⁰ Both *The Mainichi* and *The Japan Times* commented on his annoyance. The former noted that Tsuburaya only smiled once he saw the Hinomaru being hoisted above the National Stadium, and the latter quoted him as saying “he was happy but thought he could have done better.”⁵¹ In another *Mainichi* article, Tsuburaya explained that he started feeling pain near the bottom left part of his stomach around the 30-kilometer mark (18.6 miles) that continued to get worse as he neared the finish line. He worried he would not be able to complete the race.⁵² Tsuburaya was clearly upset with himself for having failed the objective he was tasked with – winning a gold medal – and frustrated that his fall back to third could have been a result of pain he could not control. Not only had he not been able to finish ahead of Bikila for gold, but he had also faltered

⁴⁹ “Hashire Tsuburaya! Mimamoru ‘kagemusha’ futari,” *The Mainichi Shimbun*. October 14, 1964.

⁵⁰ *The Tokyo Olympiad*. Directed by Kon Ichikawa.

⁵¹ “Yokuzo, Tsuburaya! Tōshi no ‘Hinomaru’,” *Mainichi Shinbun*. October 22, 1964.

“Ethiopia’s Abebe Wins Marathon Second Time; Briton Takes 2nd Place; World Mark Set; Tsuburaya Third,” *The Japan Times*. October 22, 1964.

⁵² “Hiitore ni-i, Tsuburaya rikōshi san-mi, Kimihara hachi-i, Terasawa wa jūgo-i,” *Mainichi Shimbun*. October 22, 1964.

within the last 200 meters of the race, squandering away a silver medal in front of the entire National Stadium and millions watching at home on television.

Regardless of his own inner feelings, though, Tsuburaya made the JSDF extremely proud and they continued to move closer to him. The day of his miraculous finish, the JSDF awarded Tsuburaya their first-class medal of honor, the JSDF's highest award and an overtly nationalistic gesture, to thank Tsuburaya for his effort.⁵³ The award was only reported on the 6th page of *The Japan Times*, while his bronze medal finish was a cover story for both *The Japan Times* and *The Mainichi*.⁵⁴ The JSDF could not risk publicizing such a political gesture for fear that it would clue the public into their hidden agenda. Similarly, following the 1964 Olympic marathon, Tsuburaya gave talks on behalf of the JSDF, further connecting himself with the defense forces as not only an athlete but also a soldier.⁵⁵

Also following the conclusion of the Olympics, though, the press gave unwanted attention to the defense force's Physical Education School through a number of articles. Less than three months after the Games, *The Japan Times* reported that the Japanese Defense Agency (the civilian government organization that oversaw the JSDF) had begun considering a reduction in the scope of the Physical Education School. The article explained that the Defense Agency worried about the increasing fame of the school and Japan's dependence on the institute for producing Japan's top athletes. The Defense Agency planned to remove all sports not "strictly related to military techniques."⁵⁶

On March 21, 1965, the JSDF announced that the Physical Education School would discontinue formal training of Olympic hopefuls and revise its focus to sports related to "martial

⁵³ Rio Otomo. "Narratives, the Body, and the 1964 Tokyo Olympics." 125.

⁵⁴ "Olympic Sidelights: Medal of Honor," *The Japan Times*. October 22, 1964.

⁵⁵ Otomo, Rio. "Narratives, the Body, and the 1964 Tokyo Olympics." 125.

⁵⁶ "Defense Agency Might Limit Athletic School," *The Japan Times*. February 13, 1965.

arts.” The JSDF decided to reduce the size of the school due to concerns that the military was funding athletes with taxpayer money and that the military was being used for political gain.⁵⁷ The same day, *The Mainichi* reported the school would open itself to civilian athletes, as well – an important gesture continuing to dismantle the military’s ability to act independently.⁵⁸ Largely, the government seemed content with allowing the school to continue so long as it also trained civilian athletes. By May of 1965, the school had already been completely reorganized and accepted a new group of 60 Olympic hopefuls within the JSDF to begin training for the 1968 Olympics.⁵⁹ In fact, by the end of 1965, the JSDF actually announced concerns that *too many* people had enrolled in the Physical Education School, taking advantage of its low-cost living expenses and no coaching fees.⁶⁰

The military’s position under civilian oversight was one of the important postwar limits of the self-defense forces.⁶¹ After the Olympics, it became clear that the government and the JSDF were both attempting to utilize the Physical Education School for political gain, sparking concerns that it would lead to increased military power and resurging militarism. The school broke the important divide between the military and civilian politics; both the government and the JSDF benefitted from the Olympic success of the Physical Education School. The media and critics in the government had finally woken up from the Olympic dream, realizing the sort of dangerous nationalism they had bred through institutions like the JSDF.

Amid the growing concerns about the politicization of the Physical Education School, the military continued to push Tsuburaya. Only a month after the end of the Olympics, *The Mainichi* printed an article detailing Tokyo TV’s short documentary on him called *2 Hours 16 Minutes*

⁵⁷ “SDF Ease Up On Training Of Sports Hopes,” *The Japan Times*. March 21, 1965.

⁵⁸ “Gorin yori sengi chūshin ni: jieitai taiiku gakkō gashintaisei,” *The Mainichi Shimbun*. March 21, 1965.

⁵⁹ “SDF Athletes In New School,” *The Japan Times*. May 14, 1965.

⁶⁰ “Influx of Amateur Athletes Worrying SDF Sports School,” *The Japan Times*. December 30, 1965.

⁶¹ Ivan I. Morris. *Nationalism and the Right Wing in Japan*. 207.

22.8 *Seconds*, named after his finishing time at the Olympics. The report detailed Tsuburaya's struggles between his "body and mind," fighting leg problems and injuries before and after the Olympics despite his intense drive to succeed. However, his injuries did not hold him back, the report said. Tsuburaya immediately pivoted towards training for the 1968 Mexico City Olympics.⁶² While Tsuburaya personally wanted to continue to run and train for the Olympics, his biographer, Ichiro Aoyama, noted that Tsuburaya was forced to compete in as many races as he could in early 1965 despite the pain.⁶³ His coach's insistence that he continue to train brought dividends, though, as Tsuburaya finished second at an international 10,000-meter race in Sao Paulo, Brazil and then third in the Mar Del Plata Marathon in Argentina a week later both in early January.⁶⁴ However, due to his harsh training, he overexerted himself and could no longer compete due to worsening pain and fatigue.

The JSDF kept Tsuburaya's health issues under wraps for most of 1965. As such, commentators wondered why he did not participate in the 1965 Boston Marathon in April. The JSDF's only reply was that he needed rest.⁶⁵ Five days before the race, the coach of the five participating Japanese runners reaffirmed Tsuburaya's health, saying he stayed home to train for the 1965 Mainichi Marathon.⁶⁶ Tsuburaya did not participate in the Mainichi Marathon, either. Competing in his first marathon since January, Tsuburaya dropped out of the late-August Hokkaido Times Marathon at the 28-kilometer marker (17.4 miles) due to pain, despite claims there was no way he could lose the race.⁶⁷ Once again, Tsuburaya's coach encouraged him to

⁶² "Nikutai to seishin no tatakai: Tsuburaya-senshū no hakkagetsu no kudō," *The Mainichi Shimbun*. November 29, 1964.

⁶³ Ichiro Aoyama. *Kokō no runnā*. 238.

⁶⁴ For Tsuburaya's finish in Sao Paulo see "Tsuburaya Second Behind Belgian Ace," *The Japan Times*. January 4, 1965. For Tsuburaya's finish in the Mar Del Plata Marathon see "Japan Runner Third In Int'l Marathon," *The Japan Times*. January 11, 1965.

⁶⁵ "Five Japanese Runners to Compete in Boston," *The Japan Times*. March 6, 1965.

⁶⁶ "5 Japanese Runners Confident in Boston," *The Japan Times*. April 15, 1965.

⁶⁷ "Funasako Wins Hokkaido Times Marathon," *The Japan Times*. August 30, 1965.

compete.⁶⁸ The military pushed Tsuburaya beyond his limits, evidencing the degree to which the JSDF needed athletes like Tsuburaya to maintain their image as a hub for Olympic development. If they could not produce consistent winners – or at least top contenders – their claims would be undermined.

If Tsuburaya could not continue to promote the JSDF as an athlete, then he would remain a soldier and help the next generation. Once Tsuburaya's injuries became too severe, the JSDF changed their approach in the short term until he healed, encouraging Tsuburaya to train to become an officer in the Physical Education School.⁶⁹ The JSDF reaffirmed their need for keeping names like Tsuburaya's affiliated with the school by turning him into a coach. If he could no longer be a medal-winning runner then maybe he could teach others to win in his place. Tsuburaya wanted to keep training, though, enrolling in Chuo University's night school, and begging his coach to continue to train him while he studied in the Cadet's School.⁷⁰

JSDF attempts to control Tsuburaya extended past running as well, interfering with his relationships. While he trained in the officer's school, Tsuburaya met Eiko, a young woman whom he quickly fell in love with and asked to marry. Both Tsuburaya's coach and superior officers disapproved of the marriage worried it would distract from his Olympic training which he began again in 1966. Tsuburaya's superior officer gave him no choice. Either he was to end the engagement or end his training. Tsuburaya did not give a quick answer, but his opinion would not end up mattering. Eventually, Eiko's mother gave in, too, worried that her daughter would not be able to find a suitor while she was still young. She forbade Eiko from continuing to see Tsuburaya.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ichiro Aoyama. *Kokō no runnā*. 239.

⁶⁹ "Tsuburaya Passes JSDF Cadet Exam," *The Japan Times*. December 12, 1965.

⁷⁰ Ichiro Aoyama. *Kokō no runnā*. 241-242.

⁷¹ Ichiro Aoyama. *Kokō no runnā*, 251-257.

Upset with his coach, Tsuburaya continued to train alone, only worsening his injuries by tearing his Achille's tendon and aggravating a hernia, requiring surgery in late 1967.⁷² However, Tsuburaya eventually realized that he would have no chance of participating in the Mexico City Olympics. There would be no opportunity for him to redeem himself. Both heartbroken that his fiancé had left him, betrayed by his coach, and destroyed by the fact he could no longer run, Tsuburaya took his own life on the morning of January 9, 1968, in his barracks at the JSDF's Physical Education School.⁷³ His death sparked intense debate over its reasons, implications, and the military's role in his suicide.

A Suicide Note and Reactions on Both Sides

Tsuburaya left a suicide note on the table next to his bed before taking his own life as he clutched the bronze medal he had won three years earlier at the Tokyo Olympiad. That note was printed in newspapers across the country as news of his death spread. One of the concluding lines, "I'm too tired and can't run anymore," was sprawled across sports sections all over the world.⁷⁴ The Japanese national hero and marathon runner had taken his own life, leaving the Japanese mass media shocked. They desperately searched for a reason for his death. The suicide note was put under constant scrutiny in the following days, with reactions ranging from applause to condemnation. Ultimately, though, many major news outlets placed much of the blame for Tsuburaya's death on the defense forces.

⁷² "Rikujō: Tsuburaya ga nyūin - akiresuken no shujutsu de," *The Mainichi Shimbun*. August 3, 1967.

⁷³ "Marason no Tsuburaya-senshū jisatsu," *The Mainichi Shimbun*. January 9, 1968.

⁷⁴ *The Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Mainichi Shimbun*, and *Japan Times* all mentioned at least "I can't run anymore" in their article reporting the suicide. The *Mainichi*, who covered Tsuburaya's death as their main cover story on January 9th, quoted the entire suicide note. *The South China Morning Post*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *The Korea Times* reported on Tsuburaya's death but did not mention the suicide note.

To begin, though, it is necessary to first analyze the note in its entirety to distinguish Tsuburaya's voice from the voices of outside commentators. The note read as follows:

My dear Father, my dear Mother: I thank you for the three-day-pickled yam. It was delicious. Thank you for the dried persimmons. And the rice cakes. They were delicious, too. My dear Brother Toshio, and my dear Sister: I thank you for the sushi. It was delicious. My dear Brother Katsumi, and my dear Sister: The wine and apples were delicious. I thank you. My dear Brother Iwao, and my dear Sister: I thank you. The basil-flavored rice, and the Nanban pickles were delicious. My dear Brother Kikuzo, and my dear Sister: The grape juice and Yomeishu were delicious. I thank you. And thank you, my dear Sister, for the laundry you always did for me. My dear Brother Kozo and my dear Sister: I thank you for the rides you gave me in your car, to and fro. The mongo-cuttlefish was delicious. I thank you. My dear Brother Masao, and my dear sister: I am very sorry for all the worries I caused you. Yukio-kun, Hideo-kun, Mikio-kun, Toshiko-chan, Hideko-chan, Ryosuke-kun, Takahisa-kun, Miyoko-chan, Yukie-chan, Mitsue-chan, Akira-kun, Yoshiyuki-kun, Keiko-chan, Koei-kun, Yu-chan, Kii-chan, Shoji-kun: May you grow up to be fine people. My dear Father and my dear Mother, Kokichi is too tired to run anymore. I beg you to forgive me. Your hearts must never have rested worrying and caring for me. My dear Father and Mother, Kokichi would have liked to live by your side.⁷⁵

The first aspect of the letter worth mentioning is its deeply personal nature. Despite having been left in his JSDF barracks, the note was very clearly meant to be read by Tsuburaya's family, especially his parents. The letter is filled with remorse, suggesting that Tsuburaya understood the finality of his actions and the intense mourning it would cause his family. As author Kenzaburō Ōe mentions in his analysis of the letter, family played a deeply important role in Tsuburaya's life, as evidenced by the size of his family and the patriarchal naming structure of his extended family.⁷⁶ At its heart, the letter was only intended for Tsuburaya's family and it needs to be read

⁷⁵ This translation of the note was done by Kenzaburō Ōe, a Nobel Prize winning Japanese author most famous for his book, *A Personal Matter* (1964), for a series of lectures he led about Japanese politics, war memory, and literature at the University of California Berkeley in April 1999. He analyzed Yukio Mishima's response to the suicide and the suicide note. The suffixes "kun" and "chan" are used in this context as terms of endearment for younger male and female relatives, respectively. Also, from my own reading of the letter, Tsuburaya uses the suffix "sama" when addressing his older siblings and parents. "Sama" is an extremely formal way of addressing someone and in this context shows Tsuburaya's respect for his order siblings and parents. To me this perhaps demonstrates his remorse for his suicide. It displays a degree of formality above what could be translated into English. Ōe instead opts to use "dear" in its place.

⁷⁶ Kenzaburō Ōe. "Two Lectures on Politics and Literature by Kenzaburō Ōe." Lecture, The Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities. Berkeley, April 1999. 39.

with that fact in mind. Contemporary Japanese commentators such as author Kawabata Yasunari wrote about the beauty and articulation of the letter.⁷⁷ The beauty comes from its purpose. The note is less about giving a reason for the death and more about asking for forgiveness from loved ones.

In addition to what Tsuburaya does say in his letter, it is perhaps more important to note what he does *not* say. That is, Tsuburaya went into very little detail about the potential factors that drove him to take his own life. Tsuburaya spent the majority of the letter thanking his family for the food at their New Year's dinner only a week prior. In fact, only in the last few lines did Tsuburaya give any reason for taking his own life: that he was too tired to run anymore.⁷⁸ What Tsuburaya alluded to through the letter, though, is the fact that he shouldered the expectation of the nation and the self-defense forces for too long. The weight of the expectations by the JSDF destroyed him physically through injuries and personally by forcing him to break off his engagement with Eiko. Running, which once brought him so much joy, did nothing but take away everything he had, including his own health. He could no longer run both literally due to injury from hernia and a torn Achilles and metaphorically because of the emotional pain it constantly brought him.

However, the media and various commentators drew different meanings from the letter, including Yukio Mishima, acclaimed postwar Japanese fiction author. By 1968, Mishima was well along his way to the radical far-right military nationalist ideology which he would become famous for during the latter half of his life.⁷⁹ He ultimately wanted to underscore his own

⁷⁷ Makoto Ueda. *Modern Japanese Writers and The Nature of Literature*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1976). 1999.

⁷⁸ I would consider “Kokichi is too tired to run anymore” to be a loose translation of the source material but Ōe likely translated the phrase to be at its most eloquent in English.

⁷⁹ Besides his work as an author of fiction, Mishima was also famous for his unsuccessful coup which resulted in him taking his own life by way of *seppuku* (ritual suicide). On November 25, 1970, Mishima and his followers held the Ichigaya Camp of the JSDF hostage and read his manifesto from the roof of the main building, encouraging the

increasingly radical views on the problems of postwar Japanese society by imposing his own beliefs on Tsuburaya's actions. Mishima's account of the suicide is entirely self-serving and does nothing more than attempt to validate his own radical belief, a point with which Rio Otomo agrees.⁸⁰

Mishima explained that he was deeply moved by Tsuburaya's "death by sword," and praised his "noble death." The "death by sword" to which Mishima refers are the razor blades with which Tsuburaya used to slit his wrists. Similarly, Mishima attempted to rationalize the suicide as Tsuburaya's way of protecting the glory of his Olympic success. Mishima detailed that Tsuburaya could have sullied his legacy by "kill[ing] his pride and continu[ing] to live on for many years... teach[ing] the next generation," ultimately fading his former glory. In fact, Mishima went further, explaining that the "Japanese are especially kind to those who have forgotten their past glory and chose to live their lives like everyone else," clearly referencing what he believed to be the disease of postwar Japan: the country's continual insistence to forget and downplay the "glory" of the fascist military regime.⁸¹

Oleg Benesch mentioned through his analysis of Mishima that the ideology for which Mishima stood was largely taken as a sign of his fascination with *bushidō*.⁸² Mishima's beliefs were completely unlike those of people around him, and his fascination with the samurai code, honor, and the military regime came from his own perceived shortcomings and struggles with memory of the Second World War.⁸³ Mishima was obsessed with honor, glory, and the body so

soldiers to ignore the Constitution and take up arms against the Diet in order to reinstate the military regime. After failing to do anything but annoy the soldiers of the base, he committed suicide.

⁸⁰ Rio Otomo. "Narratives, the Body, and the 1964 Tokyo Olympics." 125.

⁸¹ Yukio Mishima. "Tsuburaya nii no jijin," *Yukio Mishima hyōron zenshū* ed. Yōko Hiroaki. (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1989). 451-452.

⁸² Oleg Benesch. *Inventing the Way of the Samurai: Nationalism, Internationalism, and Bushidō in Modern Japan*. (Oxford Scholarship Online. 2004). 222.

⁸³ Yoshikuni Igarashi. *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2012). 168.

he imposed those obsessions on Tsuburaya's death. Mishima's analysis is not an accurate representation of the suicide note. As such, the argument that Tsuburaya took his own life to atone for the 'dishonor' of taking bronze at the Tokyo Games and failing to compete in Mexico is equally incorrect.

Contrary to Mishima, who glorified Tsuburaya's death, various major news outlets approached the suicide in a more measured way, attempting to find a reason for the suicide. On the day of the suicide, many articles commented that the people around Tsuburaya could not give a reason as to why he may have killed himself, only speculation. Most articles summed up the death as a result of Tsuburaya's frustration with injury (largely stemming from comments made by his coach). Although, *The Mainichi* also quoted Tsuburaya's father who suggested Tsuburaya's failed engagement as a factor.⁸⁴ His death was still a surprise to the family, though. Tsuburaya's brother told *The Japan Times* he did not notice Tsuburaya acting strangely at their New Year's dinner a week prior. At dinner, Tsuburaya even mentioned he felt ready to restart his training for the Mexico City Games.⁸⁵ Lacking any explanation from the note, family, Tsuburaya's friends, or the JSDF, critics began to speculate as to the reasons behind the suicide.

Some critics, most notably Nobumasa Kawamoto, a sports journalist, claimed that Tsuburaya had been driven to suicide by the JSDF. He argued they attempted to "try and win fame for the defense forces through the production of Olympic gold medal athletes" at the Physical Education School.⁸⁶ Kawamoto's opinion was printed throughout the major newspapers and even echoed by other critics, pushing the idea that Tsuburaya was a victim of JSDF ambition. In the *Asahi Shimbun*'s article condemning the JSDF, they too quote Kawamoto, positing that

⁸⁴ "Kyōgi ha murinashintai ni ōkina kitai ni seishintekina futan mo," *Mainichi Shimbun*. January 9, 1968.

"Marason no Tsuburaya no jisatsu," *Mainichi Shimbun*. January 9, 1968.

⁸⁵ "Olympic Star Tsuburaya Commits Suicide Here," *The Japan Times*. January 9, 1968.

⁸⁶ "Sports Critic Says Tsuburaya Victim of Mania for Gold Medals," *The Japan Times*. January 11, 1968.

after Tsuburaya won bronze, the country's expectation for Tsuburaya to succeed became increasingly intense. As such, the Physical Education School trained Tsuburaya with only one principle in mind: "a gold medal, whatever it takes."⁸⁷ Another critic agreed with Kawamoto, arguing that Tsuburaya had been degraded to a public relations campaign. He lamented that "Tsuburaya would have been alive today had he been an ordinary member of the defense forces."⁸⁸

Kawamoto and the other critics acknowledged that the pressure put on Tsuburaya extended past the JSDF towards the Japanese public. However, the brunt of the blame was placed squarely on the JSDF for benefitting politically from Tsuburaya. It was the JSDF's strict pushing of Tsuburaya despite injury that caused his death, not public expectation. While, of course, Tsuburaya felt like he had failed himself and the country by falling back into third before the finish line, that failure was not the prerogative for his suicide. Conversely, Tsuburaya committed suicide because he could no longer shoulder the responsibility placed on him by the JSDF. Since his 1964 finish, running had taken too much from him.

Conclusion

Kokichi Tsuburaya was not just a distance runner but also a soldier. The Japanese Self Defense Forces knew that if they could have soldiers win medals at the Olympics, they would legitimize themselves as a non-harmful institution and sway public opinion in their favor. In the early years of the JSDF, it was imperative that they prove to the public not only their right to exist but also that they could positively impact the nation in non-military ways. The Tokyo Olympics, specifically, was a perfect vehicle because the military could interact politically

⁸⁷ "Jieitai no kin medaru shugi ni mondai," *The Asahi Shimbun*. January 9, 1968.

⁸⁸ "Sports Critic Says Tsuburaya Victim of Mania for Gold Medals," *The Japan Times*. January 11, 1968.

through seemingly non-political means, hiding behind an acceptable sports nationalism.

Tsuburaya helped prove that the defense forces served a positive social (sporting) purpose.

However, the military prioritized their own pragmatic goals over Tsuburaya's health at each step of the process. Instead of doing their due diligence to help Tsuburaya get healthy, the JSDF pushed him beyond his limits. In that sense, the JSDF stooped to the sort of hyper-aggressive military posture that it was trying to fight.

The pain of Tsuburaya's death lasted for a long time in Japan. In many ways, his death became intertwined with the JSDF as the public put more and more emphasis on their role in his passing. There was a strong feeling that the military and, most importantly, the country had let Tsuburaya down. In 1972, *Sports Illustrated* printed an article investigating the popularity of the marathon in Japan titled "Concentrate on the Chrysanthemums." Towards the end of the piece, Tsuburaya was brought up. When asked how the death of Tsuburaya affected the country, the interviewee, a sports physician, explained:

The JSDF is very strict and insists on training hard, hard, hard. There is no limit. My own sister trained with other women to challenge U.S. guns with bamboo poles... This tradition has been carried on by the JSDF and influenced Tsuburaya... His commanders wanted the honor he would win, so he was not permitted to rest. For a year he ran poorly... He was not insane. We could understand. We were just sorry he had no friend or leader who could guide him. He had a heavy burden. We criticized his JSDF captain. We said, "Why didn't you help Tsuburaya?" He said only, "We never let up."⁸⁹

While the passage blames the JSDF for Tsuburaya's demise, it also places emphasis on the fault of Japanese citizens for not trying harder to limit the military. Such emphasis demonstrated the deep-seated nature of Japanese antimilitarism and the nation's recognition of its problematic military.

⁸⁹ Kenny Moore. "Concentrate on the Chrysanthemums," *Sports Illustrated*. May 8, 1972. Accessed online February 5, 2020. <https://www.si.com/vault/1972/05/08/613564/concentrate-on-the-chrysanthemums>.

However, no one worried about the military's exploitation of Tsuburaya's athleticism prior to his death. In the lead up to the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, the country set aside its commitment to antimilitarism for the sake of winning medals. The fact remains that the JSDF used Tsuburaya for political benefit between 1961 and 1968. The Physical Education School's continuation despite the political pressure to close is a testament to the new position of the JSDF following the success of their Olympic public relations campaign. Similarly, despite all of its detractions, the JSDF persisted and continues to persist today, speaking to Japan's continued ability to overlook their commitment to peaceful internationalism for the sake of maintaining international standing.

CHAPTER 2:
JUDO AND THE DUTCH GIANT: JAPANESE ATTEMPTS TO RECLAIM JUDO AT THE
TOKYO OLYMPICS

9 minutes and 22 seconds. That is all it took for Holland's Anton Geesink to extinguish Japan's judo dreams. The entire Nihon Budōkan held their breath; the country's greatest fear at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics had come to fruition.¹ Akio Kaminaga, the Japanese representative, had lost in the open-weight judo final. For the last thirty seconds before the final bell, Kaminaga flailed under the weight of Geesink, completely unable to untangle himself from the Dutchman's grasp.² The 15,000-person crowd at the Nihon Budōkan and millions watching the match on television across the country stared in horror as Geesink crushed Japan's hopes of winning all four judo events and reclaiming the international open-weight judo title.³ Geesink was now two-time Judo World Champion *and* a gold medalist. Kaminaga had failed.

To Japan's governing judo organization, the Kōdōkan, and many Japanese spectators, all that mattered was beating Geesink after he shocked the world by winning the 1961 International Judo Title in Paris. 1964 was the first year judo appeared at the Olympic Games. Members of the Japanese judo community and the Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC) campaigned heavily for the sports addition to the Olympic program ahead of the Tokyo Olympics.⁴ To many, the open-

¹ The Nihon Budōkan is Japan's national martial arts stadium. It is located in Tokyo within the walls of the Imperial Palace grounds. It was constructed expressly for the purpose of holding the 1964 Olympics judo events. The All Japan Judo Championships have been held at the Budōkan every year since 1964. The 2020 Tokyo Olympic judo and karate events will also be held in the Budōkan.

² *The Tokyo Olympiad*. Directed by Kon Ichikawa. Tokyo: Organizing Committee for the Games of the XVIII Olympiad. 1964.

³ See Ian Buruma. *Inventing Japan, 1853-1964*. New York: Modern Library. 2003. 6-7. and "Bokushingu de Sakurai, jūdō wa Hēshinku," *The Mainichi Shimbun*. October 24, 1964.

⁴ Andreas Niehaus. "'If You Want to Cry, Cry on the Green Mats of the Kōdōkan': Expressions of Japanese Cultural and National Identity in the Movement to Include Judo into the Olympic Programme," *The International Journal on the History of Sport*, 23 no. 7 (November 2006): 1175.

weight final was not only an avenue to display Japanese sporting culture to the world but also an opportunity to reclaim the world judo title. No one questioned Japan's ability to win the light, middle, and heavy-weight divisions. The match on everyone's mind upon the opening of the Tokyo Games was the open-weight final (hopefully) between Geesink and Kaminaga. Japanese and international media talked about the judo competition as if it were only a single match: the open-weight final.

While it is true that the postwar period marked the beginning of the mass globalization of judo, Japan's Kōdōkan (講道館) fought hard to maintain their central role in leading the judo world they held from before the war. The founder of Judo, Jigoro Kano, created the Kōdōkan to be the home of the international judo movement. After the Second World War, the Kōdōkan attempted to re-capture the judo world under its control, bringing judo back to its traditional Japanese roots. By 1964, the Kōdōkan building was the home of the International Judo Federation (IJF) and the All Japan Judo Federation (AJJF). All of Japan's top judoka trained there.⁵ The Kōdōkan used Japanese judoka who competed at international competitions to affirm the Kōdōkan's value to the Japanese sporting world and re-center the sport of judo around Kōdōkan teachings.⁶ The Kōdōkan's plan succeeded through much of the 1950s as Japanese judoka dominated global competition.

However, after Geesink won the 1961 Judo World Championships and became the first non-Japanese world champion, Japanese media and many members of the judo community began to doubt Kōdōkan judoka. Many proclaimed the death of Japan's traditional sport. While Geesink trained in Japan, learning from some of the country's best judoka, the fact remained that

⁵ Even today, Judoka from around the world come to the Kōdōkan to train and study judo's history. I, myself, researched for this paper at the Kōdōkan's historical archives.

⁶ Judoka (柔道家) is the traditionally accepted term for a judo practitioner. While the term is Japanese, it is still the most globally used word to describe a person who practices judo.

Geesink was a foreigner. He had just beaten Japan at their own game using a mixture of his own technique and Kōdōkan methods. His success undermined the Kōdōkan's argument that Japanese judoka inherently dominated a sport of their own creation. Similarly, the Kōdōkan needed Japanese judoka to win on the international stage to verify one of sport's founding ideologies: that a "smaller and weaker person [could] overcome a larger and stronger (but less skillful) opponent" through superior technique.⁷

The Kōdōkan set its sights on the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, where it was decided that Japan absolutely needed to beat Geesink. The man who the Kōdōkan selected to beat him was Akio Kaminaga, one of Japan's top heavyweight judo fighters. The Kōdōkan and many Japanese judo fans *needed* Kaminaga to win after 1961. They felt that if Japanese judoka did not reign supreme, judo would no longer truly be Japanese.

I argue that postwar Japanese cultural connection to the sport of judo rested heavily on their ability to win consistently over foreign opponents, suggesting that the 'Japanese-ness' of judo was validated purely through medal success. The open-weight judo final at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics encapsulated this new postwar Japanese cultural nationalism constructed through sporting success. Judo is an instance of Japanese cultural connection to sport hinged entirely on winning a single gold medal, providing a stark case of Olympic medals as validation for national progress and postwar strength. To the Kōdōkan and many spectators, judo's future 'Japanese-ness' rested entirely on beating Geesink.

⁷ Allen Guttmann and Lee Thompson. *Japanese Sports: A History*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001). 100.

Nationalism and the Kōdōkan

Jigoro Kano established the Kōdōkan in 1882 during the early years of the Meiji Period to spread his new martial art, judo. Kano intended for judo to be a modernization of *jujutsu* (traditional martial arts) from the Tokugawa Era (1603-1868). Kano used a “scientific” approach to create judo (as he called it), combining the best elements of existing *jujutsu* and Western wrestling to create a martial art suited for a modern, post-Meiji Restoration Japan.⁸ As Allen Guttman and Lee Thompson explained, while judo was unquestionably Asian in its roots, Kano’s founding philosophies and judo teaching methods were based in his Western education and belief in the need to modernize Japanese tradition.⁹

Kano wanted to bring *jujutsu* to a new generation of Japanese during a period intensely focused on rapid industrialization and globalization.¹⁰ Judo was never intended to be traditional. In fact, Kano’s entire hope for judo was that it could become a modern addition to Japan’s martial culture. Guttman and Thompson argued that judo was only able to become an Olympic sport by the Tokyo Olympics *because* it distanced itself from the traditional Confucian martial roots of *jujutsu* early on in its founding. This helped judo to spread globally and find new followers in Europe and America.¹¹ However, while Kano supported the globalization of judo, judo’s influence remained firmly grounded in Japan with the Kōdōkan at its head.

Judo was marketed not only as a form of martial arts but also a form of physical education. Kano promoted judo as a way of life which could be used to build a stronger, more

⁸ Shun Inoue. “The Invention of Martial Arts: Kano Jigoro and Kodokan Judo,” in *Mirror Identity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan* ed. Stephen Vlastos. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. 165. and Yoshizō Matsumoto. “Kidai jūdō no sekai-ka,” *Tōkyō Orinpikku: Orinpikku Tōkyō soshiki iinkai kaihō*. vol. 19. Tokyo: Tokyo Olympic Organizing Committee. November 1963. 19.

⁹ Allen Guttman and Lee Thompson. *Japanese Sports: A History*. 100.

¹⁰ Andreas Niehaus. “‘If You Want to Cry, Cry on the Green Mats of the Kōdōkan’.” 1178.

¹¹ Allen Guttman and Lee Thompson. *Japanese Sports: A History*. 103-104.

disciplined Japanese society.¹² Kano was a prominent educator in Japan and he used his education background to spread the sport domestically.¹³ Much of judo's rapid spread can be accredited to its use for physical education within the police academies and schools across Japan throughout the Meiji Period.¹⁴ Its superior techniques were put on display by their dominant pupils at national competitions. Most major universities adopted judo in their martial arts curriculums as a result.

As judo became an increasingly integral part of Japan's physical education curriculum, the Japanese state began to use it for a new nationalist nation-building. The national government promoted policy beginning in 1917 that standardized a military-inspired gymnastic and martial arts curriculum across the country to create "soldier[s] with patriotic conformity, martial spirit, obedience, and toughness of mind and body."¹⁵ The government removed liberal sporting ideologies from the Japanese physical education system so the Japanese state could move closer towards their goal of *kōkokumin* (a nation of emperors) by way of nationalistic *budō*-influenced martial arts.¹⁶ *Budō* (military culture) became an integral part of middle and high school military training to promote nationalistic interpretations of *bushido* (the samurai code). Judo became less about being a modern, scientific sport but rather a spiritual successor to Japan's traditional *budō*, departing from Kano's teachings. The Japanese state downplayed the sport's modernity to stay in line with nationalistic rhetoric which stressed unique traditional Japanese values. Judo could not be modern because modern was imported and therefore Western.¹⁷

¹² Andreas Niehaus. "'If You Want to Cry, Cry on the Green Mats of the Kōdōkan'." 1178.

¹³ Allen Guttmann and Lee Thompson. *Japanese Sports: A History*. 103.

¹⁴ Shun Inoue. "The Invention of Martial Arts: Kano Jigoro and Kodokan Judo." 166-167.

¹⁵ Ikuo Abe, Yasuhara Kiyohara, and Ken Nakajima. "Fascism, sport, and society in Japan," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 9, no. 1 (1992): 5.

¹⁶ Ikuo Abe, Yasuhara Kiyohara, and Ken Nakajima. "Fascism, sport, and society in Japan." 14.

¹⁷ Shun Inoue. "The Invention of Martial Arts: Kano Jigoro and Kodokan Judo." 172.

Immediately following the Second World War, the American occupation forces outlawed judo and removed it from the school physical education curriculum. While the Kōdōkan was allowed to exist, the American occupation forces harshly limited Kōdōkan influence on the sport.¹⁸ In Europe, judo began to spread once again after the Second World War as judoka from different countries and regions began to compare techniques and styles.¹⁹ The European revival ultimately weakened judo's Japanese roots in the West as the sport became closer in practice to wrestling.

Beginning in the early 1950s, Judo's governing body went abroad to recapture judo for Japan.²⁰ The occupation forces allowed members of the Japanese judo community to form the All Japan Judo Federation (AJJF) in 1950, laying the groundwork for judo's re-inclusion into the Japanese and international sporting world.²¹ European and Japanese delegates formed the International Judo Federation (IJF) in 1951. *The Nippon Times* article announcing the Japanese delegation's departure for Europe referred to the Kōdōkan as "the most authoritative Judo organization in Japan."²² It is important to note that while the majority of the delegates were European, Risei Kano, son of Jigoro Kano and sitting president of the Kōdōkan, was elected the IJF's first president. After the its formation, European judoka adopted the Japanese counting system for the first time.²³

From the point of view of the Japanese judo world, Japanese judoka needed to dominate on the international stage for Japan and the Kōdōkan to firmly recapture judo. As such, the IJF

¹⁸ Shohei Sato. "The sportification of judo: global convergence and evolution," *Journal of Global History* 8 (2013): 308-309.

¹⁹ Sabine Frühstück and Wolfram Manzenreiter. "Neverland Lost: Judo cultures in Austria, Japan, and elsewhere struggling for cultural hegemony," in *Globalizing Japan: Ethnography of the Japanese presence in Asia, Europe, and America*, ed. Harumi Befu and Sylvie Guichard-Anguis. (London: Routledge, 2001). 77.

²⁰ Inoue, Shun. "The Invention of Martial Arts: Kano Jigoro and Kodokan Judo." 173.

²¹ Allen Guttmann and Lee Thompson. *Japanese Sports: A History*. 177-178.

²² "Kano With Judo Group Leave on World Tour," *The Nippon Times*. November 30, 1951.

²³ Sabine Frühstück and Wolfram Manzenreiter. "Neverland Lost," 79.

announced that it would host the first Judo World Championships in May of 1956 with Kōdōkan rules.²⁴ Importantly, foreign judoka did not all follow Kōdōkan judo regulations. In contrast to rules similar to wrestling, Kōdōkan rules eliminated weight classes. Judoka from all of the IJF's member nations were invited regardless of weight, age, rank, experience, or even gender. *The Nippon Times* covered the tournament announcement, mentioning that three foreign fifth *dan* judoka would attend.²⁵ The article highlighted that fifth *dan* (out of ten) was “the highest step on the judo ladder attained by non-Japanese.” Both of the Japanese participants were fifth *dan* or higher.²⁶ *The Times* remained clearly under the influence of Kōdōkan's beliefs: foreigners were inherently inferior at judo compared to Japanese.

The 1956 Judo World Championships went exactly as Kano and the Kōdōkan had hoped. The two Japanese representatives, Shokichi Natsui and Yoshihiko Yoshimatsu, took home first and second place, respectively, while Hirohito, the crown prince, watched.²⁷ Third-place was awarded to little-known Dutch third *dan*, Antonius Geesink. *The Nippon Times* explained that at times throughout the tournament it felt unfair for the foreign judoka to be facing off against the Japanese. The article explained how both Natsui and Yoshimatsu took on smaller and lower-grade (lower on the *dan* ranking system) opponents with ease.²⁸ Both *The Mainichi* and *The Nippon Times* praised Natsui for beating all of his opponents except for Yoshimatsu in near

²⁴ Leslie Nakashima. “20 Nations Enter World Judo Meet In Tokyo May 3,” *The Nippon Times*. February 23, 1956.

²⁵ The Judo ranking (or *dan*) system ranges from first *kyū* (beginner) to tenth *dan*. All *dan* ranked judoka are black belts. First through sixth *dan* are handed out based on merit in competition and age. It is extremely rare to be offered fifth or sixth *dan* before the age of 30. Seventh through tenth *dan* are reserved for judo ‘masters’ who have devoted their lives to studying the sport and is typically only awarded to judoka for their teaching merit. The Kōdōkan only offers seventh through tenth *dan* to Japanese judoka. However, the IJF maintains a separate ranking system. Anton Geesink is one of only five non-Japanese to be awarded tenth *dan* by the IJF.

²⁶ Kiyooki Murata. “Tokyo Host for 1st World Judo Meet,” *The Nippon Times*. February 1, 1956.

The next day the *Nippon Times* offered a correction. The previous year, one of the three fifth *dans* had actually become a sixth *dan*. See “Pardon Us, Mr. Leggette,” *The Nippon Times*. February 2, 1956.

²⁷ “Kōtaishi-sama, kokusai shinzen jūdō he,” *The Mainichi Shimbun*. May 6, 1965.

²⁸ “Natsui Becomes First World Judo Champion,” *The Nippon Times*. May 5, 1956.

record time.²⁹ His longest bout before Yoshimatsu lasted only 17 seconds. *The Times* concluded their analysis of the tournament by explaining that all of the judoka displayed “an appreciation of the spirit of the genuinely Japanese sport.”³⁰ Clearly, the ‘Japanese-ness’ of judo was argued on the basis of the superiority of Japanese judoka, not from actual tradition.

Risei Kano displayed his beliefs in Japan’s natural judo superiority in his opening address at a meeting of the IJF only days after the World Championship. In his address, Kano stated that it gave him great pleasure to hold the meeting in “the motherland of judo” and that he hoped “Japan, which [was] more advanced in the way of judo, should be able to serve the judo circles of the world.”³¹ Kano interacted with the other pre-dominantly non-Japanese committee members as though he was a proselytizer preaching to neophytes. To him, Japan had re-entered judo’s international governing body to coax the sport back towards its correct direction. The right way, of course, meant a return to Kōdōkan-style judo. Kano spoke to that point saying, “judo, as it is practiced in Japan today, is the Kōdōkan judo without exception.”³² Kano’s speech is indicative of his international ambitions for judo which lay grounded in his belief that Japan, as the judo ‘masters,’ had a duty to propagate Kōdōkan judo globally. Japan needed to remain at the head of judo’s international world to protect its unique Japanese tradition.

²⁹ See “Natsui roku-dan, hatsu no ōgi ni kesshōsen Yoshimatsu ni yūsei kachi,” *The Mainichi Shimbun*. May 4, 1956. and “Natsui Becomes First World Judo Champion,” *The Nippon Times*. May 5, 1956.

³⁰ Natsui Becomes First World Judo Champion,” *The Nippon Times*. May 5, 1956.

³¹ Risei Kano to the committee members of the International Judo Federation, May 7, 1956. <http://www.ijf.org/cg56.html>.

While I have included in the original URL to the minutes of the meeting in the above citation, it is actually a defunct link. The IJF no longer has archives that extend past 2009 on their website. The meeting minutes I referenced for his paper came from an internet archive of the IJF’s webpage in 2001 I found through Wayback Machine. The minutes can be found at this link: <https://web.archive.org/web/20010528153715/http://www.ijf.org/htmls/main.html>. From the home screen click on the “Congress” tab. In the dropdown box on the left of the page select “56 JPN” and click “Go there.” The minutes are titled “Minutes of the Congress.”

³² Risei Kano to the committee members of the International Judo Federation, May 7, 1956.

Akio Kaminaga Before the 1961 Judo World Championships

In October of 1956, Kaminaga, a student at Meiji University, won his first judo title at the First Annual All Japan Rookie Judo Championships, beating out a more experienced, older opponent in the final.³³ Kaminaga's victory placed him on judo's map for the first time, beginning his journey towards becoming a true Japanese judo 'master.' Because of the notoriety, Kaminaga continued his training as a student at Meiji University in hopes of qualifying to represent Japan at the 1958 World Judo Championships once again to be held in Tokyo. He was extended an invitation to train directly at the Kōdōkan, as well. His hard work paid off when he finished third in the qualifying tournament of Japan's top sixteen ranked judoka, becoming one of Japan's three representatives at the World Championship.³⁴

However, at that point, Kaminaga was not the favorite to win. He was too young and had no experience fighting higher level judoka on the international stage. Much of the media focused their attention to 1958 All-Japan Judo Champion and first-place qualifier, Koji Sone. *The Japan Times* proclaimed that Sone was "Japan's No. 1 hope to replace titleholder policeman Shokichi Natsui" who had lost in the early rounds of the Japanese qualifying tournament.³⁵ Interestingly, in an article published the day of the 1958 tournament, *The Times* also noted that Anton Geesink and the other European representatives could give the Japanese trouble.³⁶ While the media was clearly concerned about Geesink, by this point he had yet to become a true threat to Japanese dominance of the sport. In their concluding analysis, the newspaper confirmed its confidence in the Japanese judoka explaining that "Sone [was] expected to cop the B Bloc title and face

³³ "19-sai no Kaminaga yon-dan ni sho no eikan," *Mainichi Shimbun*. October 22, 1956.

In a later article, the *Nippon Times* explains that Kaminaga was the student champion, but per this *Mainichi* article, the tournament was open to both university students and young citizens so I'm choosing to translate the tournament as the "Rookie" Championship based off of 新人 (shinjin) which closely translates to "rookie."

³⁴ See "Sōne, Yamashiki, Kaminaga ni sekai jūdō nihon daihyō, Natsui wa yosen de haitai," *Mainichi Shimbun*. October 6, 1958. and "Judoist Sone Chosen to Represent Japan," *The Japan Times*. October 6, 1958.

³⁵ "Judoist Sone Chosen to Represent Japan," *The Japan Times*. October 6, 1958.

³⁶ "39 Top Judoists Vying in World Meet Here Today," *The Japan Times*. November 30, 1958.

Kaminaga in the all-Japanese final.”³⁷ Importantly, though, *The Times* questioned the dominance of Japanese judoka in international competition for the first time. That fact stands in stark contrast their coverage of the 1956 World Championships, where the power of the Japanese representatives went unquestioned.

The Asahi and *Mainichi* used Sone, Kaminaga, and third-place Kimiyoshi Yamashiki’s sweep of the medal stand to reaffirm Japan as the de facto leader of the judo movement. *The Asahi* explained that because of their second win on the international stage, Japan successfully maintained its title as the home and center of the judo world.³⁸ They clearly framed the victory from a nationalistic standpoint, confirming the Kōdōkan’s argument that Japan was the definitive home of the best judoka. Similarly, in their in-depth coverage of the tournament, *The Asahi* framed the strength of foreign judoka like Geesink and American participant, George Harris, only against other foreign judoka, completely ignoring the close bout between Geesink and Yamashiki. By only framing the success of foreigners against other foreigners, the newspapers continued to promote the idea that Japanese judoka remained at a higher level than their foreign counterparts. *The Asahi*’s only match play-by-play was of the final fight between Kaminaga and Sone.³⁹ *The Mainichi*’s coverage, while short, also did not pay any attention to foreign judoka, instead focusing on Sone’s win.⁴⁰

Unlike *The Mainichi* and *Asahi Shimbun*, *The Japan Times* raised concerns about the growing strength of foreign judoka, despite the continued success of Japanese judoka. *The Times* admitted that foreign entrants, especially judoka from Europe, showed exceptional improvement since the 1956 World Championships while the Japanese had not improved accordingly. They

³⁷ “39 Top Judoists Vying in World Meet Here Today,” *The Japan Times*. November 30, 1958.

³⁸ “Sōne go-dan ga yūshō,” *The Asahi Shimbun*. December 1, 1958.

³⁹ “2-i Kaminaga, san-i Yamashiki, Futsu no Parize yon-dan yon-i,” *The Asahi Shimbun*. December 1, 1958.

⁴⁰ “Sōne go-dan yūshō,” *The Mainichi Shimbun*. December 1, 1958.

interviewed Geesink after his close loss to Yamashiki who explained that Yamashiki's counterthrow to which he lost would not have been counted as a point under European rules.⁴¹ Geesink pointed to the hegemony of the Kōdōkan and their influence over international judo, clearly expressing that the results might have been different had the competition been held under different rules. By controlling the rules of international judo, the Kōdōkan benefitted Japanese judoka, giving them an edge over their foreign opponents prior to 1964.

Kaminaga continued to participate in national competitions and international tours prior to 1961. He made his next big appearance at the 1959 All-Japan Judo Championships where both he and Sone were favorites to take home the title because of their recent finishes at the World Judo Championships.⁴² However, all expectations were discarded when new-comer, Isao Inokuma, won the All-Japan Title after beating Kaminaga in the final with an over-the-back throw.⁴³ Despite Kaminaga's set-back at the 1959 World Championships, Kaminaga was selected as one of three Japanese judo ambassadors to "promote international friendship" on a tour across Asia and Europe in early 1960.⁴⁴ Notably, all three representatives maintained close relationships with the Kōdōkan. Teizo Kawamura, a professor at Tokyo Education University and former instructor at the Kōdōkan, had recently published a book in 1958 titled *Judo Combination Techniques* based on Kōdōkan judo methods.⁴⁵ The second representative, Yoshimi Osawa, was a trainer at the Kōdōkan. Similarly, having just graduated from Meiji University, Kaminaga was continuing his training full time at the Kōdōkan while he worked at Fuji Steel's

⁴¹ "Sone Takes Judo Title In Int'l Meet," *The Japan Times*. December 1, 1958.

⁴² "32 Judoists Enter National Tourney," *The Japan Times*. May, 3, 1959.

⁴³ "Shoshutsujō no Inokuma yon-dan yūshō," *The Mainichi Shimbun*. May 6, 1959.

⁴⁴ "Judoists Slate Goodwill Tour," *The Japan Times*. February 13, 1960.

⁴⁵ Teizo Kawamura. *Judo Combination Techniques*. London: Foulsham. 1958.

corporate headquarters. *The Japan Times* called all three men judo experts who should not be “quarreled with.”⁴⁶



Figure 2.1: “Person of the Time: Akio Kaminaga”

Kaminaga holds the Emperor’s Cup after winning his first All-Japan Championship in 1960.

Source: “Toki no hito,” *The Mainichi Shimbun*. May 5, 1960.

Upon his return from his tour abroad, Kaminaga began a streak of victories at major Japanese tournaments, transforming him into one of the most formidable masters by the time of the 1961 Judo World Championships. Kaminaga returned from his tour of Southeast Asia and Europe just in time to compete in the 1960 All-Japan Judo Championship.⁴⁷ Kaminaga again faced his rival Inokuma in the finals after beating Sone in the quarterfinals. This time, he emerged victorious, taking home his first Emperor’s Cup (Figure 2.1).⁴⁸ *The Asahi* praised

⁴⁶ “Judoists Slate Goodwill Tour,” *The Japan Times*. February 13, 1960.

⁴⁷ “48 Judoists To Vie For Japan Title,” *The Japan Times*. April 29, 1960.

⁴⁸ “Kaminaga Crowned Judo Champion,” *The Japan Times*. May 2, 1960.

Kaminaga's performance, crowning the victory as the highpoint of the "Age of Kaminaga."⁴⁹ In an interview published by *The Mainichi*, Kaminaga explained that he really wanted to win after losing to Inokuma the year prior.⁵⁰ However, Kaminaga did not stop there, winning the 1961 All-Japan Judo Championships, once again beating Inokuma in the final.⁵¹

The Kōdōkan held a meet to determine Japan's representatives in the 1961 World Championships which Kaminaga sat out due to injury. Even though both Kaminaga and Inokuma did not compete in qualifying, Kaminaga was still selected to accompany the team to Paris in addition to the top three judoka from the tournament.⁵² The Kōdōkan left the door open for Kaminaga to perhaps replace one of the three tournament winners. They showed clear favoritism to Kaminaga even though they were meant to be the center of the international judo movement through their connection to the IJF. In the same vein, the Kōdōkan gave Kaminaga special dispensation because the Kōdōkan believed he was Japan's best shot at winning in 1961.

As the tournament got closer and closer, the Japanese team and officials began to worry. The European Champion, Anton Geesink, looked stronger than ever. Japan decided that they had to employ Kaminaga to face him.⁵³ The Japanese attempts to maintain their title did not end up mattering, though. Geesink toppled Kaminaga in the qualifying rounds before shocking the Japanese judo community when he beat Sone in the championship, becoming the first non-Japanese World Champion.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ "Zen-Nihon jūdō senshū-ken taikai ni yūshōshita Kaminaga Akio," *The Asahi Shimbun*. May 5, 1960.

⁵⁰ "Toki no hito – Zen-Nihon jūdō senshu-ken wo totta go-dan Kaminaga Akio," *The Mainichi Shimbun*. May 5, 1960.

⁵¹ "Kaminaga Wins Japan Judo Title," *The Japan Times*. May 1, 1961.

⁵² See "Top Judoists Vie for Berths In World Meet," *The Japan Times*. September 3, 1961. and "Kaminaga Heads Paris Judo Team," *The Japan Times*. September 4, 1961.

⁵³ "Changes Made," *The Japan Times*. December 31, 1961.

⁵⁴ "Geesink Wins World Judo Title," *The Japan Times*. December 4, 1961.

Japanese Judo After the Rise of the Dutch ‘Giant’

In the weeks following the conclusion of the tournament, press outlets lamented the death of judo. Without a Japanese judoka at the top, the Japanese were doomed to lose their sport to the West, many commentators argued. The Japanese loss was framed as the destruction of judo as the Japanese knew it. It marked the end of Japanese dominance in their own sport and as such the end of a uniquely ‘Japanese’ judo. Due to Geesink’s victory, Japanese judo was defeated, an *Asahi* sports opinion piece explained a week following the tournament, drawing a line between judo as it was practiced in Japan and abroad (particularly in Europe and America).⁵⁵ In a 1976 recap of sports during the Shōwa Era by *The Mainichi Shimbun* the 1961-1964 section read: “Yesterday and today, too, Japan’s national sport, judo, dies in Paris,” referencing their coverage of the tournament’s conclusion (Figure 2.2).⁵⁶ Similarly, in a shorter 1961 article covering Geesink, they noted that his win marked the end of Japan as the home of judo.⁵⁷ *The Japan Times* sports desk selected the 1961 Judo Championships as the number-one most important piece of sports news in 1961, even ahead of judo’s addition to the Olympics announced the same year.⁵⁸

Continuing in line with their more critical coverage, *The Japan Times* opinion pieces mocked the shocked Japanese judo community. Writers recognized the personal nature of the defeat, marking Geesink’s victory as a turning point for judo. In an opinion piece printed in *The Japan Times*, Japanese journalist Gyo Hani explained that Geesink’s victory destroyed a belief held by Japanese and foreigners alike: that judo was a unique sport where the Japanese held an inherent advantage. As the article’s title suggested “judo [was] no longer a mystery” to foreign

⁵⁵ “Nihon no jūdō no haiin wo kiku,” *The Asahi Shimbun*. December 12, 1961.

⁵⁶ *Shōwa supōtsu-shi Orinpikku 80-nen*. Tokyo: The Mainichi Shimbun-sha. 1976. 204-205.

⁵⁷ “Hēshinku yūshō,” *The Mainichi Shimbun*. December 3, 1961.

⁵⁸ “Judo Loss Beats Everything,” *The Japan Times*. December 17, 1961.

judoka.⁵⁹ Hani correctly identified the significance of the Japanese’s loss in many ways. Hani pointed to the cultural chauvinism of the Kōdōkan and the Japanese judo community through their attempts to rationalize Geesink’s strength and the Japanese loss. In his eyes, judo had been knocked down a few pegs from a unique Japanese art of defense to what it really was: a sport that could be mastered by anyone willing to work hard enough. In a later opinion piece in *The Times* sports section, writer Mas Manbo joked that the verb “to geesink” (meaning to beat an opponent at their own game) should enter the sports lexicon to commemorate the historic defeat.⁶⁰

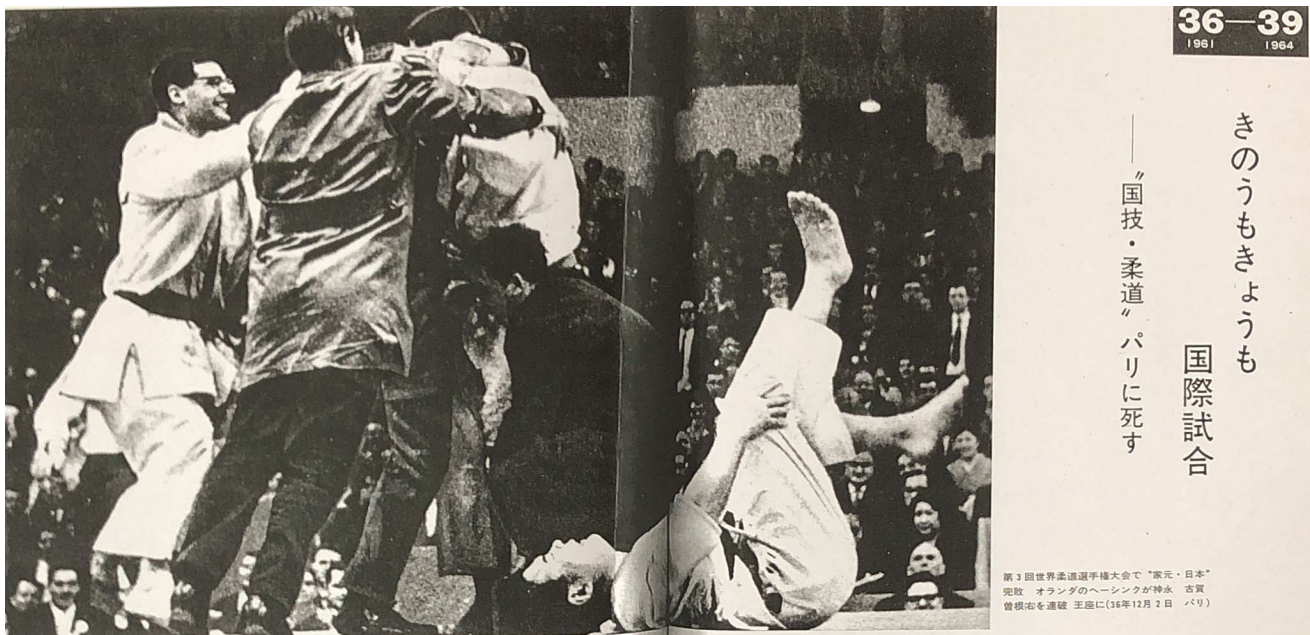


Figure 2.2: “Yesterday and today, too, Japan’s national sport, judo, dies in Paris”

Koji Sone lies on the mat in frustration as Anton Geesink is surrounded by his teammates.

Source: *Shōwa supōtsu-shi Orinpikku 80-nen*. Tokyo: The Mainichi Shimbun-sha. 1976.

⁵⁹ Gyo Hani. “Judo No Longer a Mystery,” *The Japan Times*. December 6, 1961.

⁶⁰ Mas Manbo. “Times at Bat,” *The Japan Times*. December 11, 1961.

The news of Geesink's victory shocked the Kōdōkan as they worried about what the loss meant for the future of judo. Reactions like those of writers for *The Times* were exactly the sort of viewpoint that the Kōdōkan feared the most. The Kōdōkan made themselves synonymous with judo in Japan; A Japanese loss was also a personal loss for Kōdōkan-style judo. *The Japan Times* reported that tenth *dan* and direct disciple of Jigoro Kano, Kyuzo Mifune, could not believe the news of Geesink's victory.⁶¹ In a separate story, they quoted one of the Japanese team officials (and past participant), Yoshihiko Yoshimatsu, who vowed that Geesink's victory did not mean the end of Japanese supremacy.⁶² Both Kaminaga and Sone refused to comment on their losses.

Amid the criticism against the Kōdōkan and declarations of judo's death, Kōdōkan officials and judoka continued to qualify Geesink's victory, insisting that it was simply a fluke. In fact, many argued that the Japanese themselves were to blame for Geesink's victory because Japan had given away too many of its training "secrets."⁶³ Kōdōkan officials frequently mentioned that Geesink had come to Japan to train directly under Kōdōkan judoka. Officials attempted to reaffirm the dominance of Kōdōkan judoka and the 'master' status of Japanese judo practitioners by implying that Geesink could never have toppled the Japanese if he had not come to train in Japan. Japanese pride and hubris were the cause of the Japanese defeat, not the actual strength of Geesink and his methods, they argued.

To a degree, Geesink saw his victory as evidence of strength, yet still operated within the notion that it was a result of what he learned at the Kōdōkan. Geesink explained in his autobiography, *My Championship Judo*, written a few years following his gold medal at Tokyo 1964, that he hoped to once "again [meet his] Japanese masters" in 1961 after losing in 1956 and

⁶¹ "Disappointment Shown Here," *The Japan Times*. December 4, 1961.

⁶² "Japanese Beaten in Stunning Upset," *The Japan Times*. December 4, 1961.

⁶³ "Japanese Beaten in Stunning Upset," *The Japan Times*. December 4, 1961.

1958.⁶⁴ After his win, *The Mainichi* quoted Geesink as saying that he trained for many months in Japan studying the Japanese technique. He thanked his Japanese teachers for impressing upon him the importance of training daily. He also commended Kaminaga for being the strongest opponent he faced during the tournament.⁶⁵ However, Geesink also explained to *The Times* that he did not feel bad for beating the Japanese at their own game *because* he had learned from them.⁶⁶ He had reached the level of the Japanese masters and beaten them fair and square. Interestingly, though, Geesink's belief that he could not have won without training at the Kōdōkan serves as evidence of the success of Kōdōkan efforts to construct themselves as the judo mecca.

Geesink's victory was problematic for the Kōdōkan because he seemed to contradict one of the core principles of Kōdōkan judo: that a smaller judoka could overcome a bigger opponent if they used the right technique. The press constantly fixated on Geesink's massive six-foot-four-inch, 265-pound stature that towered over all of his opponents. *The Asahi* explained that while Geesink lacked the light agility of the Japanese, his massive size allowed him to bring forth impressive strength.⁶⁷ For much of his career and especially following the 1961 World Championships, the press repeatedly referred to Geesink as a 'giant,' bringing constant attention to his size relative to the Japanese. However, the Kōdōkan affirmed that Geesink did not win because of his height or weight.⁶⁸ In a sense, the Kōdōkan was caught in a bind because of Geesink's stature. They did not want to admit that he had won because he was taller, heavier, or stronger for fear of undermining one of Kōdōkan judo's founding principles. They also did not

⁶⁴ Anton Geesink. *My Championship Judo*. (New York: Arco Publishing Company. 1966). 118.

⁶⁵ "Hēshinku yūshō," *The Mainichi Shimbun*. December 3, 1961.

⁶⁶ "Took Japanese At Their Own Game: Geesink," *The Japan Times*. December 4, 1961.

⁶⁷ "Hēshinku ga yūshō, Kaminaga, Koga, Sōne wo renpa," *The Asahi Shimbun*. December 3, 1961.

⁶⁸ "Disappointment Shown Here," *The Japan Times*. December 4, 1961.

want to admit that Geesink possessed superior skill because that, too, would equate to an inadequacy in Kōdōkan teachings.

Instead, judo commentators explained that Geesink had won because he was able to train constantly unlike his Japanese competitors. Hani referenced such idea in his article for *The Japan Times* when he quoted the editor for *Judo Magazine*, Reisuke Kudo, as he attempted to excuse Kaminaga's loss. Kudo explained that because Geesink owned a dojo, he was able to train as much as he liked in preparation for the tournament.⁶⁹ Conversely, Sone and Kaminaga both worked at Fuji Steel and the third Japanese representative, Takeshi Koga, was a student at Nihon University. Their day jobs and classes ensured that they could not devote their efforts to judo full time. President of the 1961 Judo World Championship Planning Committee, Shigetaka Takemura, expressed sentiments similar to Kudo. In an article published in the July 1962 issue of the OOC's monthly bulletin magazine, *Tōkyō Orinpikku*, he argued that the problem with modern judo in Japan was that judoka were too young. He wrote that barring Kaminaga and Inokuma who trained closely with the Kōdōkan, the busy schedules of youth conflicted with Japanese judo aspirations. In his analysis, Takemura similarly contrasted the schedules of Japanese judoka with Geesink, explaining that even the night before the 1961 World Championships, Geesink was spotted training outside the venue alone with his coach.⁷⁰

Because of the problem it posed to the Japanese judo community, Kōdōkan officials and judo commentators vowed that such a loss would never happen again. Even Cabinet Minister Eisaku Sato, the government minister of the Olympics, explained that "Japan [had to] win in [the

⁶⁹ Gyo Hani. "Judo No Longer a Mystery," *The Japan Times*. December 6, 1961.

⁷⁰ Shigetaka Takamura. "Tachiwaza / newaza / doshōbone," *Tōkyō Orinpikku: Orinpikku Tōkyō soshiki iinkai kaihō* vol. 10. Tokyo: Tokyo Olympic Organizing Committee. July 1962. 10.

Olympic] judo [competitions] at any cost.”⁷¹ The Kōdōkan in particular saw Geesink’s win as evidence of weakness in their judo philosophy and the lack of Japanese international practice. Kōdōkan judo primarily emphasized standing techniques (*tachiwaza*) while caring less about ground techniques (*newaza*). Geesink, a master of wrestling-inspired ground techniques, exploited the Japanese weak point to take home the international title.⁷² President of the AJJF, Tatsuo Hisatomi, explained that after the blow to the community, they needed to immediately reconsider the Japanese training and technique in preparation for the Tokyo Olympics three years later.⁷³

Takemura wrote that the day after the Japanese judo team arrived at Haneda Airport from Paris, the Kōdōkan began plans to completely revamp their training system. He explained that the Kōdōkan settled on an approach based on four main points: 1) keep the number of Olympic hopefuls small to focus their training, 2) work not only with Kōdōkan leadership but also the Japanese Olympic Committee staff and coaches, 3) maintain facilities specifically for the hopefuls, and, most importantly, 4) temporarily hire and work with judoka and coaches from Europe and America to foster exchange of techniques and deepen Japanese judoka’s experience with international opponents.⁷⁴ The Kōdōkan’s plans marked an important shift in their policy as a direct result of Geesink. For the first time, the Kōdōkan was forced to recognize the value in the exchange and study of foreign judo techniques, implicitly admitting that there was value in studying non-Kōdōkan-style judo. From that point on, Japanese judoka would need to not only teach foreigners as ‘masters’ but would also need to learn from them as students.

⁷¹ Leslie Nakamura. “Will Japan’s Top Judoists Win? That’s Big Olympic Question,” *The Japan Times*. September 18, 1963.

⁷² Kiyooki Murata. “Trends in Judo: Japanese Defeat in World Championships Stimulates Discussion,” *The Japan Times*. December 20, 1961.

⁷³ “Disappointment Shown Here,” *The Japan Times*. December 4, 1961.

⁷⁴ Shigetaka Takemura, “Tachiwaza / newaza / doshōbone.” 11.

Geesink himself even visited Japan to train and teach at Tenri University in Nara. *The Japan Times* noted that it was “ironic” that Geesink, the destroyer of Japanese judo, had come to be in a coaching position for the Japanese Olympic team, turning the tables on the Japanese masters.⁷⁵ *The Asahi* noted that it was certainly a dark day for Japanese judo when the “foreigner coach” appeared to teach the Japanese.⁷⁶ Reluctantly, though, the Kōdōkan slowly began to recognize Geesink’s merit. The Kōdōkan promoted Geesink to sixth *dan* to reward him for his accomplishments and thank him for training their judoka, making him the first person under the age of 30 and first foreigner to be awarded the rank. However, experts argued that he should have been given the award two years prior after winning the 1961 World Championships.⁷⁷ The two previous Japanese winners before him had been promoted to sixth *dan* following their wins.

In addition to changing their training philosophy, the Kōdōkan took measures in the lead up to the 1964 Tokyo Olympics to limit Geesink’s ability to block a Japanese judoka victory again. The Kōdōkan-backed IJF took steps to actively constrict Geesink’s ability to defend his title. While the IJF announced the addition of weight classes (light, middle, and heavy) to the judo competition at the Olympics prior to the 1961 World Championships, a fourth, open-weight class was added to the program following Geesink’s win. The Kōdōkan realized that they would need to create an open-weight class in order to maximize the Japanese chance of winning medals as a direct result of their loss in 1961.⁷⁸ Geesink would be banished to the open weight class to defend his title (as the 1961 World Championships had no weight classes), giving Japan more freedom to pick and choose whom he would face.

⁷⁵ Leslie Nakashima. “Judo Tables are Turned Now; Japanese Learn From Geesink,” *The Japan Times*. December 11, 1963.

⁷⁶ “Tenri-dai de no Hēshinku: sono tsuyosa to gorin shutsujō mondai,” *The Asahi Shimbun*. December 18, 1963. The *Asahi* describes Geesink using the word 外人 (*gaijin*), an often derogatory term for a foreigner with a meaning close to “outsider.” 外人 is a shortening of the word 外国人 (*gaikokujin*) which means more literally “foreigner.”

⁷⁷ “Men in the News: Anton Geesink,” *The Japan Times*. December 26, 1963.

⁷⁸ See Andreas Niehaus. ““If You Want to Cry, Cry on the Green Mats of the Kōdōkan.”” 1182. and Leslie Nakashima. “Little Guys Can Beat Big Guys,” *The Japan Times*. November 26, 1963.

Geesink vs. Kaminaga: The Road to Tokyo

Perhaps Geesink's biggest problem after 1961 was not related to the Kōdōkan at all, but arose because of his job. Following his 1961 win, the Netherlands Olympic Committee (NOC) argued that he was not an amateur because he was a judo instructor.⁷⁹ They announced their intention to bar him from participating in the Olympics, rendering him unable to defend his title. Geesink did not plan on competing at the Olympics from 1961 through much of 1963.⁸⁰ He told the press that he hoped to participate in the Olympics not as a competitor but as a judge or as the Dutch national coach.⁸¹ Only in November of 1963, after almost two years of press and public support in Europe and Japan, did Geesink confirm that he wanted to compete at the Tokyo Olympics the next year.⁸² Whether or not he would be able to was a different question.

Japanese sports writers and the judo community did not want to completely bar Geesink from competition, just limit his ability to be successful. If Geesink could not compete, then Japan could not beat him and prove his win in 1961 was an accident. Geesink's participation in 1964 remained of constant concern for sports writers. The question reignited during Geesink's December 1963 training visit following his comments confirming his intent to compete in November. Many took the visit as a sign of Geesink's commitment to overturn the NOC's decision. The press brought up the question of his participation so much while in Tokyo, Geesink explained in an interview with *The Times* that it was beginning to annoy him.⁸³ The speculation

⁷⁹ See "Hēshinku ga sanko dannen," *The Mainichi Shimbun*. May 5, 1963., Manbo, Mas. "Times at Bat," *The Japan Times*. March 2, 1963., and Leslie Nakashima. "Geesink's Amateur Status Questionable," *The Japan Times*. December 15, 1963.

⁸⁰ Leslie Nakashima. "Will Japan's Judoists Win? That's Big Olympic Question," *The Japan Times*. September 18, 1963.

⁸¹ See "Judoist Geesink Hopes To Be Olympic Judge," *The Japan Times*. May 16, 1962. and "Japanese Judoists Shaking; Is Geesink Here to Compete?" *The Japan Times*. December 12, 1963.

⁸² "Hēshinku intai hitei," *The Mainichi Shimbun*. November 23, 1963.

⁸³ Yoshiaki Abe. "Japanese Judoists Shaking; Is Geesink Here to Compete?" *The Japan Times*. December 12, 1963.

even prompted a response from the OOC which stressed that if the NOC continued to argue for Geesink's status as a professional, he surely would be unable to compete.⁸⁴ However, the OOC, too, sent a representative to watch Geesink and report on his status.⁸⁵

Despite the popular speculation that Geesink would not be eligible, the IJF announced their support for Geesink to compete during the latter half of his visit to Japan, confirming his amateur status under their rules.⁸⁶ The IJF's support was a big deal, signifying support from the Japanese judo community for him to compete. Members of the Japanese sports press continued to support Geesink, as well. However, the NOC responded by reaffirming their resolution after Geesink's return to Holland, arguing that Geesink was a professional by their standards.⁸⁷ Geesink still hoped to compete, though, explaining to *The Times* that many countries, including Japan, considered him an amateur.⁸⁸ After months of deliberation between the Dutch Judo Association and the NOC, the NOC finally reversed their decision in June of 1964, allowing Geesink to participate in the 1964 Olympics five months later.⁸⁹ The Japanese support for his participation was instrumental in finally overturning the NOC's resolution.

Kaminaga, too, aimed for the Olympics, but constant injuries mired his competition prospects after 1961. A problem with one of his knees kept him from competing in the All-Japan Judo Championships in 1962.⁹⁰ Still nursing the injury, Kaminaga was eliminated from the 1963 Championships in the third round. His rival, Inokuma, went on to win the tournament.⁹¹ The

⁸⁴ "Hēshinku shutsujō yahari muri; dōjō mo tsuno ga teishoku ka," *The Asahi Shimbun*. December 14, 1963.

⁸⁵ "Japanese Now Learn From Geesink," *The Japan Times*. December 16, 1963.

⁸⁶ "Dutch Say Geesink OK For Games," *The Japan Times*. December 21, 1963.

⁸⁷ "Dutch Officials Say Geesink Is a Pro," *The Japan Times*. December 22, 1963.

⁸⁸ "Geesink Still Hopes to Vie In Olympics," *The Japan Times*. December 24, 1963.

⁸⁹ See "Hēshinku shutsujō kimeru," *The Asahi Shimbun*. July 26, 1964., and "Hēshinku shutsujō, Oranda daihyō ni kettei," *The Mainichi Shimbun*. July 25, 1964.

⁹⁰ See "Shigematsu Among 16 in Judo Finals," *The Japan Times*. April 29, 1962., "Judoists Vying in 3 Divisions," *The Japan Times*. November 18, 1962.

⁹¹ "Inokuma Cops 2nd Judo Title," *The Japan Times*. April 30, 1963.

same injury kept Kaminaga from competing in Japan's Olympic dress rehearsal, the 1963 International Sports Week.⁹²

However, despite his problems with injury, Kaminaga still managed to establish himself as the top heavy-weight Japanese judoka leading up to the Olympics. According to his childhood friend and sports journalist for *Nikkei Sports*, Masayuki Miyazawa, Kaminaga trained tirelessly to fix his greatest weakness, stamina, by running for hours around the base of Mt. Hamada near his hometown of Sendai.⁹³ Kaminaga finally reclaimed his title as top Japanese judoka after managing to win the All-Japan Tournament in 1964 – his first title in three years.⁹⁴ Even Kaminaga was surprised he won.⁹⁵ Having proven himself to still be one of Japan's top judoka, only one question remained: who would the Kōdōkan select for the heavy-weight and open-weight divisions? That is, who would be tasked with facing Geesink? The choice was between Kaminaga and Inokuma.

Kaminaga's on-and-off struggle with injury followed an overarching pessimism surrounding Japan's chances of taking home all four judo medals at the Olympics. Primarily, sports commentators argued that the Kōdōkan had failed to address its problems after 1961. Japanese judoka still struggled against larger international competition and lacked in technique. In May of 1963, a group of Soviet sambo wrestlers came to Japan on a tour to face some of

⁹² See "Japan Loses 2 Top Judoists for Meet," *The Japan Times*. October 11, 1963. and *Tōkyō Orinpikku: Orinpikku Tōkyō soshiki iinkai kaihō*. vol. 19. Tokyo: Tokyo Olympic Organizing Committee. November 1963. 5.

⁹³ Masayuki Miyazawa. "Hamada-yama no guraundo wo hitori hashiru Kaminaga to, sore wo mimayotta kisha," *The Japanese Olympic Committee*. January 15, 2008. https://www.joc.or.jp/stories/tokyo/20040527_tokyo01.html. (accessed November 12, 2019.)

I have included the original link in the citation which is now defunct. I accessed the story through the Wayback Machine internet archive at this link:

https://web.archive.org/web/20080115235104/http://www.joc.or.jp/stories/tokyo/20040527_tokyo01.html.

⁹⁴ Katsundo Mizuno. "Judoists Here Train To Cope With Giants," *The Japan Times*. Jun 15, 1963.

⁹⁵ "Toki no hito: Kaminaga Akio," *The Mainichi Shimbun*. April 27, 1964.

Japan's top judoka.⁹⁶ According to *The Times*, the Kōdōkan judoka struggled to beat their Russian opponents, losing two of the total eight matches. Kōdōkan leadership excused the poor performance explaining that none of the participating judoka were “top-level.” *The Times* countered, pointing out that four of the total eight Kōdōkan judoka participated in the 1962 All-Japan Judo Championships. A judo analyst explained that the exhibition displayed the need for Japanese judoka to improve their technique and stamina.⁹⁷ In *Nikkei Sports's* Olympic Edition printed a month before the opening of the Olympics, commentators praised Geesink's strength and strong “fishing legs” whilst paying little attention to Kaminaga. The Nikkei analysts did not have high hopes for Kaminaga, who they believed the AJJF would eventually select to face Geesink. They instead focused on Inokuma, who they hoped could secure a gold for Japan in the heavy-weight division despite a similar size disadvantage and stiff competition.⁹⁸

Likely due to the press coverage and internal concern, the Kōdōkan did not formally announce who – Inokuma or Kaminaga – would face Geesink until two weeks before the Olympics. They decided on Kaminaga.⁹⁹ When Kaminaga's coach broke him the news, Kaminaga only replied “I see. Understood.”¹⁰⁰ To Kaminaga, he had pulled the short straw. He was being selected to be Japan's sacrificial lamb to the Dutch Giant. Kaminaga's own confidence was low, a stark contrast to Japanese judoka only three years prior.

The results came as Kaminaga expected. He was defeated by Geesink in the open-weight final after Japan took home the light, middle, and heavy-weight gold. He would have to settle for

⁹⁶ Sambo is a martial art developed in Russia following the formation of the Soviet Union in the 1910s. The word “sambo” is a portmanteau of two Russian words that together translate to “Self-defense without weapons.” It was developed by two Russian judoka who returned to the Soviet Union after training under Kano Jigoro at the Kōdōkan.

⁹⁷ “Judo Faces Threat,” *The Japan Times*. March 11, 1963.

⁹⁸ Hachiro Satō, Hirotsu Fujiwara, and Fusako Tsunoda. “Tsuitekita Tōkyō '64,” *Nikkei Supotsu Tōkyō Orinpikku-go*. Tokyo: Nikkei Supotsu Shimbun-sha, September 1964. 56-61.

⁹⁹ “Musabetsu-kyu wa Kaminaga,” *The Mainichi Shimbun*. October 7, 1964.

¹⁰⁰ Masayuki Miyazawa. “Hamada-yama no guraundo wo hitori hashiru Kaminaga to, sore wo mimayotta kisha.”

silver. He failed to prove the popular pessimism wrong and re-establish Kōdōkan judo at the top of the international judo movement. Most of the Budōkan held their breath as the Dutch team prepared to storm the mat. Geesink out held his hand to stop them (Figure 2.3). He turned to Kaminaga and bowed, a traditional display of respect for one's opponent. Kaminaga bowed back; he had lost to a stronger foe. Geesink then turned to the Japanese coach and thanked him in Japanese for training him.¹⁰¹ Japan would not recapture their sport and put themselves back on top. Kaminaga's frustration was palpable as he re-tied his *gi* after the match.¹⁰² During the medal ceremony, Kaminaga bowed his head.

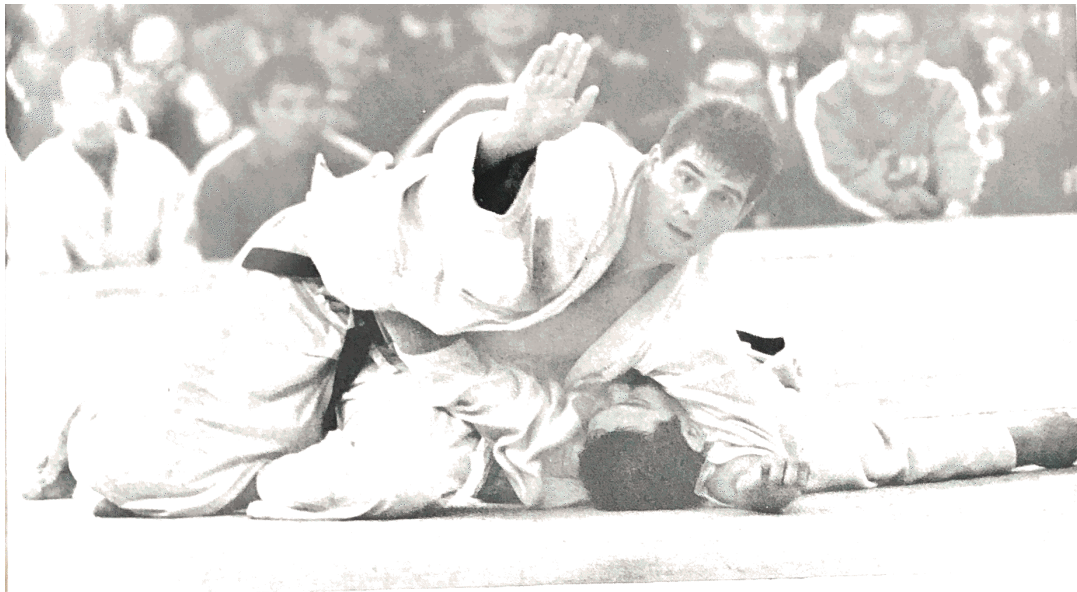


Figure 2.3: 1964 Open-Weight Final Conclusion

Anton Geesink holds his hand up to stop the Dutch team from storming the mat.

Source: Geesink, Anton. *My Championship Judo*. New York: Arco Publishing Company, 1966.

¹⁰¹ “Hēshinku fudō, Nihon no higan kieru,” *The Mainichi Shimbun*. October 24, 1964.

¹⁰² *The Tokyo Olympiad*. Directed by Kon Ichikawa. 1964.

The media reactions were distinctly different than they were after the 1961 World Championships. This time, no one worried about the death of Japan's traditional sport. Instead, they acted as though their suspicions were confirmed. The press barely covered the loss, instead focusing on Japan's gold medal win in women's volleyball. *The Japan Times* recounted the match as though Kaminaga had no chance from the beginning, describing how he failed attempt after attempt to get Geesink off balance. The paper also mentioned that while Geesink had no trouble reaching the final, Kaminaga came close to losing in his semi-final bout against a German opponent, Klaus Gahn, who brought Kaminaga to his knee early on.¹⁰³ Even *The Asahi* and *The Mainichi* held similar viewpoints. *The Asahi* confirmed Geesink's "incredible" strength and skill, explaining that he won the match as many had expected.¹⁰⁴ While *The Mainichi* coverage was titled "Geesink the Immovable Extinguishes Japan's Dearest Wish," they, too, recounted that Kaminaga never really had a chance as he struggled against Geesink's massive size.¹⁰⁵ The loss only confirmed what the Kōdōkan and many Japanese sports writers already knew but tried to hide. As Kiyooki Murata so aptly put it in an opinion piece for *The Times*, "it [was] now evident... judo, like any other sport, [knew] no national boundaries."¹⁰⁶

Perhaps most importantly, though, the press noted that by winning a second time, Geesink had proven that he was truly the best of the judo world, confirming doubts about Japanese judoka and Kōdōkan judo. Unlike before, no one tried to excuse the Japanese loss or qualify Geesink's win. By winning a second time, he confirmed that his world title was no mistake and its implications were very real. Japanese dominance of judo was not inherent; anyone who tried hard enough could become the best judoka in the world. The victory solidified

¹⁰³ Kiyooki Murata. "Judo Champ Geesink Overpowers Kaminaga," *The Japan Times*. October 24, 1964.

¹⁰⁴ "Ketahazure no Hēshinku; Kaminaga no taiotoshi tōzezu," *The Asahi Shimbun*. October 24, 1964.

¹⁰⁵ "Hēshinku fudō Nihon no higan kieru," *The Mainichi Shimbun*. October 24, 1964.

¹⁰⁶ Kiyooki Murata. "Japan Fail in Real Objective – Defeating Geesink," *The Japan Times*. October 25, 1964.

him as an “unparalleled big-time athlete,” *The Mainichi* wrote.¹⁰⁷ United Press International selected Geesink as one of their top ten sportsmen of 1964. In reporting the news, *The Japan Times* explained that he proved that “a good big man [would] always beat a good little man.”¹⁰⁸ Quietly, the paper confirmed the falsity of one of the Kōdōkan’s core philosophies: that size did not matter in a match of skill.

Conclusion

The point of judo at the Olympics was not only to have an event where Japan could easily win and display their traditional sporting culture but also – and perhaps most importantly – to defeat Geesink. In that regard, they had failed. Instead of trying to downplay the significance of Geesink’s win or lament the death of Japanese judo, many media outlets praised Geesink. They argued that Kaminaga’s loss at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics only confirmed that judo had escaped from the Japanese grasp to become just like any other international sport. Despite the best efforts of the Japanese government and the Kōdōkan, 1964 was no different from 1961.

Geesink’s win in the open-weight judo final at 1964 Tokyo Olympics is significant because Geesink won *again* and *in Tokyo* proving without a shadow of a doubt that he was the definitive judo world Champion. Millions of Japanese viewers at home watched as he dominated the entire match. He showed the Kōdōkan that a foreigner could topple the Japanese judo masters, challenging the Kōdōkan assertion of judo’s inherent ‘Japanese-ness.’ The Kōdōkan’s construction of judo’s inherent ties to Japan was a double-edged sword; when Geesink defeated Japan in 1961 and 1964, some observers believed Japan had lost *its* sport.

¹⁰⁷ “Fuseishutsu no daisenshū Hēshinku, sekai jūdō he hiyakunozomu,” *The Mainichi Shimbun*. October 24, 1964.

¹⁰⁸ “Schollander UPI’s Sportsman of the Year,” *The Japan Times*. December 23, 1964.

Kaminaga's historic defeat reveals a Japanese identity contingent on sporting success at the Tokyo Olympics. The Japanese sporting community wanted a sport where they could be the unquestionable best in the world; in the postwar years, that sport became judo. A new form of Japanese cultural nationalism developed around judo emphasizing displaying Japanese strength through victory over Western opponents. In fact, judo's cultural connection to Japan was built through such victories, substituting for a lack of actual basis in pre-modern Japanese culture. The glass house came shattering down when Geesink beat Kaminaga in 1964 as judo fans were forced to realize that judo was not any different from any other sport despite its Japanese origins. Japan's connection to judo rest on a single gold medal and the toppling of a single Dutchman. That same gold medal won by Antonius Geesink on the night of Friday, October 23, 1964, shifted the Japanese perception of judo as a sport and the Kodokan as a cultural institution completely.

Geesink became something of a hero in the judo world. He was praised in the West and Japan alike, becoming an important figure in the continued globalization of the judo movement after 1964. In an obituary after his death in 2010, *Nikkei* recounted that after 1964, Geesink became known in Japan as “the foreign judoka with a traditional Japanese heart.”¹⁰⁹ He retained many fans in Japan. Geesink was the one of only five non-Japanese-born judo practitioners to be awarded 10th *dan* by the IJF and the first to be given the award while still alive. The Kōdōkan remains the only governing judo body that does not recognize his rank; they have never awarded 10th *dan* to anyone born outside of Japan. Regardless, his position as an international voice for the sport of judo after 1964 – unthinkable before his fateful win – proves that his gold medal fundamentally changed judo and its cultural connection to Japan forever.

¹⁰⁹ “Tōkyō Gorin jūdō kin-medaruristu no Anton Hēshinku-shi ga shikyo,” *Nikkei Keizai Shimbun*. August, 28, 2010. https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXNSSXKG0128_Y0A820C1000000/ (Accessed April 11, 2020).

CHAPTER 3:
NARRATIVES OF WAR AND GENDER: THE 1964 JAPANESE WOMEN’S VOLLEYBALL
TEAM

Coach Hirobumi Daimatsu sat on the bench. His face was as stoic as ever. He watched the 1964 Japanese women’s volleyball team – his team – as they embraced and rejoiced in celebration of their gold medal. His face cracked slightly in a small grin as his true joy surfaced before he caught himself and returned to his stern frown. Princess Michiko, Empress of Japan, applauded in the stands.¹ Japanese media considered the women’s volleyball team the only Japanese athletes guaranteed to win gold, fondly referring to the team as the Witches of the Orient – a moniker given to them by Russian media after they beat the Soviet team in Moscow at the 1962 World Volleyball Championships.² The Japanese team, primarily composed of members of the Nichibo Kaizuka factory team, had once again toppled their rival, the USSR, in three sets to win Olympic gold. The win bookended one of the longest winning streaks in Japanese sporting history which totaled 185 games of national and international competition following the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.³

The NHK coverage of the match in 1964 received record-high national ratings, smashing the previous record. Reports place the ratings between 85-92%.⁴ The OOC sold more tickets for

¹ *The Tokyo Olympiad*. Directed by Kon Ichikawa. Tokyo: Organizing Committee for the Games of the XVIII Olympiad. 1964.

² “15 Gold Medals Predicted for Japanese in Olympics,” *The Japan Times*. July 4, 1964.

The 1964 Japanese Women’s Volleyball Team or *tōyō no majo* (東洋の魔女) as they were called in Japanese have had their name translated several ways. Sociologist and Historian Christian Tagsold opts to translate their name as “Witches of the East” in his numerous works on the subject. Business Historian Helen Macnaughtan instead opts for “Oriental Witches” in her essay, *The Oriental Witches*. Similarly, Historian of Modern Japan Yoshikuni Igarashi uses for “Witches of the Orient” in his book, *Bodies of Memory*. I am choosing to follow Igarashi’s translation as it is the most literal of the three translations.

³ Helen Macnaughtan. “The Oriental Witches: Women, Volleyball and the 1964 Tokyo Olympics,” *Sport in History* 34, no. 1 (2014): 140.

⁴ See Iwona Merklejn. “Remembering the Oriental Witches: Sports, Gender and Shōwa Nostalgia in the NHK Narratives of the Tokyo Olympics,” *Social Science Japan* vol. 16, no. 2. (June 2013). 236. (85%) and Christian

volleyball matches than any other sporting event.⁵ In an NHK (the Japanese national broadcasting service) survey following the closing ceremony, 80% of respondents named the Witches' win over the Soviets as the most memorable moment of the 1964 Olympics.⁶

It is hard to find a sporting memory as transcendent and beloved in Japanese history as the 1964 Women's Volleyball Final. Christian Tagsold and Iwona Merklejn have both spoken to the long-lasting nostalgia surrounding the win. It holds a special place within the hearts of Japanese society, especially to those of the aptly named 'Olympic' generation – Japanese who grew up during Japan's period of 'miracle' high economic growth lasting from the early 1960s until the late 1970s. Tagsold, in particular, alleges that the Japanese Olympic volleyball team has evolved to be a metonym for the entire Tokyo Olympics. In regards to collective sporting memory, Tagsold and Merklejn agree that the Women's Volleyball Final is the single most important moment of the entire 1964 Tokyo Olympics, even surpassing the lighting of the Olympic torch by Yoshinori Sakai.⁷

The issue of memory, specifically memory of the Second World War, is completely interwoven within the story of the Witches. Yoshikuni Igarashi illustrated the importance of wartime memory regarding the Witches in his book *Bodies of Memory* (2000) which entwines Coach Daimatsu's experience as a military officer and prisoner of war in Burma during World War II and his philosophies as a coach. He argues that Daimatsu's belief in persistence and

Tagsold. "Remember to get back on your feet quickly: the Japanese women's volleyball team at the 1964 Olympics as 'Realm of Memory'," *Sport in Society* 14, no. 4 (July 2011). 445. (92%).

⁵ Katsundo Mizuno. "Times at Bat," *The Japan Times*. March 2, 1964.

⁶ Shunya Yoshimi. "Posuto sengo toshite no Orinpikku: 1964-nen Tōkyō taikai wo saikōsuru," *Masu comyunikēshon kenkyū* 86. (2015): 29.

⁷ For Tagsold's analysis of the Witches of the Orient and their place within Japanese collective memory see Christian Tagsold. "Remember to get back on your feet quickly." (2011). For Merklejn's analysis of contemporary NHK coverage of the Witches of the Orient and their place within "Shōwa nostalgia" see Iwona Merklejn. "Remembering the Oriental Witches," (2013). For Tagsold's analysis of the inherent politicism of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and discussion of Yoshinori Sakai see Christian Tagsold. "The 1964 Tokyo Olympics as Political Games," (2009).

growth through hardship was directly informed by his wartime experience as a soldier. Similarly, Igarashi explains that Daimatsu's use of wartime strife for postwar strength followed a larger trend of transition in collective memory away from the hardship of the immediate postwar period to the "glorious victory" of the Olympics.⁸ Much in the way the Witches harnessed pain for strength, Japan harnessed its destruction to transform from a developing to a developed nation within two decades.⁹

Igarashi's analysis is primarily based on research of Daimatsu and his writings, but I will argue – based on more recent scholarly research – that attention to media portrayals of the Witches is fundamental to their historical significance. Similarly, almost every historian who has written on the subject since Igarashi has extended his analysis through more consideration of gender and gender roles.¹⁰ I intend to analyze media perception of the Witches' gender to gauge Japanese social understanding of the Witches as national heroes and female athletes in the 1960s.

Volleyball's narrative in Japan is intertwined with the growth of modern labor in the country. Volleyball was first brought to Japan after the Meiji Restoration (1868) and propagated through the YMCA around the turn of the century. However, it primarily became a sport popular among women.¹¹ As volleyball spread throughout the country, textile factories also began to recruit young women to work in their factory towns.¹² As Macnaughtan mentions, "volleyball was initially developed in large Japanese cotton spinning companies based on paternalistic management attitudes" to help the teenage girls who populated the factories learn the value of

⁸ Yoshikuni Igarashi. *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2000). 155-156.

⁹ Robin Kietlinski. *Japanese Women and Sport: Beyond Baseball and Sumo*. (London: Bloomsbury Academic. 2011). 88.

¹⁰ For examples see Kietlinski (2011), Merklejn (2013), and Macnaughtan (2014).

¹¹ Allen Guttmann and Lee Thompson. *Japanese Sports: A History*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001). 78.

¹² Robin Kietlinski. *Japanese Women and Sport*. 92.

teamwork and provide a constant source of exercise.¹³ The growing popularity of volleyball led to the build-up of factory and high school leagues and the establishment of the Japanese Volleyball Association in 1927.¹⁴ The growth of volleyball as a *women's* sport, in particular, can largely be attributed to its integration into factory physical curriculums. Volleyball only began its transformation into a 'sport' following the end of the Second World War because of its close connection to women's physical education.¹⁵

Volleyball also stresses the details of the Japanese postwar experience because it was a common form of recreation during the period of postwar rebuilding. Volleyball became a symbol for Japan's rebuilding process because it was easily accessible by the masses and required very little equipment. While of course that helped the sport to grow in popularity, it also ensured that volleyball – especially girls' factory leagues – maintained a strong connection to the Japanese experience during the immediate postwar years.

My interest in the Witches lies at the intersection of wartime memory and gender. As Paul Droubie has asserted, "the training the [Witches] underwent, and the discourse surrounding it, rendered them almost asexual creatures."¹⁶ He explained that the Witches were a repeated exception to the constant sexualization and objectification of other Caucasian and Japanese female athletes by Japanese media.

While the witches were not sexualized like other Japanese female athletes, the Witches were, however, in many ways a continuation of traditional media attention to female athletes. I

¹³ See Helen Macnaughtan. "The Oriental Witches." 134. and Masafumi Arata. *Tōyō no majo-ron*. (Tokyo: Ēsuto / puresu, 2013): 140. Macnaughtan points to the team-building aspect of volleyball. Arata explains volleyball's use by factories for health and recreation during the Postwar period.

¹⁴ Allen Guttmann and Lee Thompson. *Japanese Sports*. 130.

¹⁵ Masafumi Arata. "Tōyō no majo: sono josei-sei to kōjō kioku," in *Orinpikku Sutadēzu: fukusū no keiken / fukusū no seiji*, ed. Satoshi Shimizu. (Tokyo: Serika shobō, 2004). 177-178.

¹⁶ Paul Droubie. "Foreign and Domestic Bodies: Sexual Anxieties and Desires at the Tokyo Olympics," *The East Asian Olympiads, 1934-2008: Building Bodies and Nations in Japan, Korea, and China*, ed. in William M. Tsutsui and Michael Baskett. (Leiden: Global Oriental Publishing. 2011). 85-86.

argue that the Japanese media portrayed the Witches of the Orient as bodies controlled, improved, and supervised by stronger male leadership because of their gender. The media focused on their fiery leader, Coach Daimatsu, and his grueling training regimen, impressing on spectators that he was the true source of the team's success. Similarly, the media presented the Witches as bodies in pain to draw stronger links to Japan's own persistence through hardship. Their gender underscored their suffering because only men were expected to train with such intensity. Even after the team won gold in 1964, the media maintained a deep interest in managing the Witches' bodies after the Olympics through coverage of each team member's marriage. Such media coverage is unique to the Witches of the Orient and a direct result of the societal expectation for all young women to marry and retire to the private sphere. Even as world-renowned athletes, the Witches were not immune to the heteronormative Japanese marriage system.

Our Fearless Leader: Hirobumi Daimatsu

In his home prefecture of Kanagawa, Hirobumi Daimatsu played volleyball throughout middle and high school before joining the Kansai Gakuin University team.¹⁷ He obtained his first job at the Nichibo Kazuka textile factory in 1941 only months ahead of being drafted into the Japanese military.¹⁸ His service during the Second World War informed his coaching philosophies upon his return. Daimatsu served in numerous battles across China and South East Asia before being captured by the British as a prisoner of war. Igarashi explained that Daimatsu believed he was only able to survive through his strong willpower and drive to persist. His resolve strengthened as he watched those around him sicken, slowly accept their death, and die.

¹⁷ Coach Daimatsu's first name (博文) has been translated as both Hirobumi and Hirofumi in English scholarly work. I will be using Hirobumi as it is how Daimatsu himself spells it in his two memoirs, *Ore ni tsiute koi* (1963) and *Naseba naru* (1964).

¹⁸ Helen Macnaughtan. "The Oriental Witches." 137.

Daimatsu emerged from the war with a strong belief that people could accomplish anything so long as they had the willpower to succeed.¹⁹ He often paralleled the volleyball court to the battlefield, explaining in his first memoir, *Ore ni tsuite koi* (*Follow Me*; 1963), that in sports one has “to kill or be killed... Unless you are number one, your efforts are meaningless.”²⁰ Such fiery intensity earned him the name ‘Demon Daimatsu’ in the news. The name stuck after the team’s 1961 undefeated tour of Europe. With the Kaizuka team officially dubbed ‘The Witches of the Orient’ by European newspapers, the Japanese press followed suit by calling Daimatsu “The Demon of Volleyball.”²¹

Daimatsu explained his belief in willpower in his second memoir, *Naseba naru* (*If There is a Will, There is a Way*; 1964), the Post-Olympic follow-up to the bestselling *Ore ni tsuite koi*. His memoirs are as much about his experience coaching the Witches of the Orient as they are self-help books. Daimatsu used his athletes as examples of the importance of hard work and determination. For instance, he pointed to the fact that no matter how harsh the exercise, his volleyball team would never give up.²² He juxtaposed their strength of character to a weakness he saw within Japanese society, saying, “even those who just travel from home to their job in Osaka [always] say, ‘I’m so tired! I’m so tired!’”²³ Essentially, Daimatsu encouraged the Japanese people to recapture their persistence – their ability to put their heads down and get to work. To him, the key to the Witches’ success was such persistence. When exposed to hardship, they pushed on until their “bodies were destroyed and they reached a ‘bodily revolution.’”²⁴ All

¹⁹ Yoshikuni Igarashi. *Bodies of Memory*. 156.

²⁰ Hirobumi Daimatsu. *Ore ni tsuite koi*. (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1963). 107.

²¹ Yuta Maeda. “Nijūyon-sen zenshō no joshi chīmu – ‘nihonjiki’ ga dai-seikō,” *The Asahi Shimbun*. October 17, 1961.

²² Hirobumi Daimatsu. *Naseba naru*. (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1964). 116.

²³ Hirobumi Daimatsu. *Naseba naru*. 116.

²⁴ Hirobumi Daimatsu. *Naseba naru*. 116.

Japan needed to do to reclaim its place at the top was to work hard and persist through the hardship created by the destruction of the Second World War.



オリンピック優勝の瞬間。喜びをじっとかみしめる大松監督。

Figure 3.1: “Daimatsu at the Moment of Victory”

The caption reads: “Daimatsu stoically contemplates his joy at the moment of Olympic victory.”

Source: Daimatsu, Hirobumi. *Naseba naru*. Tokyo: Kōdansha. 1964.

To Daimatsu, strife – especially physical pain – was integral to personal growth. He constantly referred to the severity of his training sessions and the lengths he went to improve the Witches throughout his memoirs. To him, sports had an integral place in everyone’s life; sports helped one to grow and improve through difficulty. Teams proved such growth through records

and matches, he explained in *Naseba naru*.²⁵ To prepare for the physical strength of the Soviet team, Daimatsu recalled how he would “hurl balls from all angles at full strength like a machine gun, conducting further bombing runs on those bodies that had fallen” during practice.²⁶ He repeated this training daily to teach the athletes to receive the ball reflexively. Further speaking to the difficulty of his training, Daimatsu explained he had the Nichibo athletes wake up around five o’clock every morning for practice. However, in the twelve months ahead of the Tokyo Olympics he moved their waking hours to around one o’clock to allow for more training before their factory work.²⁷

Daimatsu refused to treat his athletes differently simply because they were female. To him, the sex of his athletes was not a detraction but rather a hindrance to overcome. He recounted how he forced the Witches to train through their periods, so that “no matter when there was a match, the players’ periods [would begin] to stop bothering them.”²⁸ Igarashi points to the harsh training as evidence of Daimatsu’s efforts to ignore the sex of his athletes.²⁹ Instead, their gender was something to learn to overcome. Everyone had to learn to overcome their gendered circumstances and persist. Much of Daimatsu’s training focused on teaching women’s volleyball players to overcome their situation – the fact that they were women – to become better athletes.

The intensity of Daimatsu’s coaching can perhaps be best described by a 1964 *Sports Illustrated* feature article about the team by Eric Whitehead titled “Driven Beyond Dignity.” Readers could gather very clearly from his article that Whitehead did not understand the purpose of having women work so hard. Whitehead wrote to that end, “I said to myself, it’s only

²⁵ Hirobumi Daimatsu. *Naseba naru*. 97-98.

²⁶ Hirobumi Daimatsu. *Naseba naru*. 83.

²⁷ Hirobumi Daimatsu. *Naseba naru*. 108.

²⁸ Hirobumi Daimatsu. *Naseba naru*. 110.

²⁹ Yoshikuni Igarashi. *Bodies of Memory*. 157.

volleyball, played by girls.”³⁰ He recounted Daimatsu’s machine gun throws and the verbal abuse he hurled at his athletes when they felt like quitting. To one, Daimatsu remarked that she could join the Korean team if she felt like Nichibo was too tough.³¹ Whitehead hoped to display to his readers what he believed to be abuse. From Whitehead’s perspective, Daimatsu did nothing more than terrorize helpless young women for the sake of winning. His disbelief was palpable the comment from which he derived the article’s title. He described the athletes as “wild-eyed creatures [he] had just seen... brutalizing themselves almost beyond human dignity.”³²

The cover photo for his article (Figure 3.2) encapsulated his shock perfectly: forlorn faces stood overlooking a female body in pain. The athlete on the ground looked almost lifeless as if her energy has been sapped away by Daimatsu. Her body, collapsed on the volleyball court, was completely at the will of her watchful male coach. The photograph placed the athlete in a position of helplessness, begging the viewer to rescue her from her Demon coach. Her body was no longer proof of her athleticism, but rather evidence of her pain and need for saving.

Whitehead’s article encapsulates a key point: the team’s agency was placed in the hands of Daimatsu, not the female athletes themselves. The Witches were bodies completely at the will of their overseer. Whitehead’s interview with Masae Kasai illustrates that point. She is the only athlete he spoke with and he devoted only two paragraphs out of the four-page article to her.³³

White used Kasai’s comments – “We have never experienced defeat. We must win.” – as nothing more than further proof of their torture.

³⁰ Eric Whitehead. “Driven Beyond Dignity,” *Sports Illustrated*. March 16, 1964. 18.

³¹ Eric Whitehead. “Driven Beyond Dignity,” 18-19.

³² Eric Whitehead. “Driven Beyond Dignity.” 19.

³³ In total, the article is 24 paragraphs.

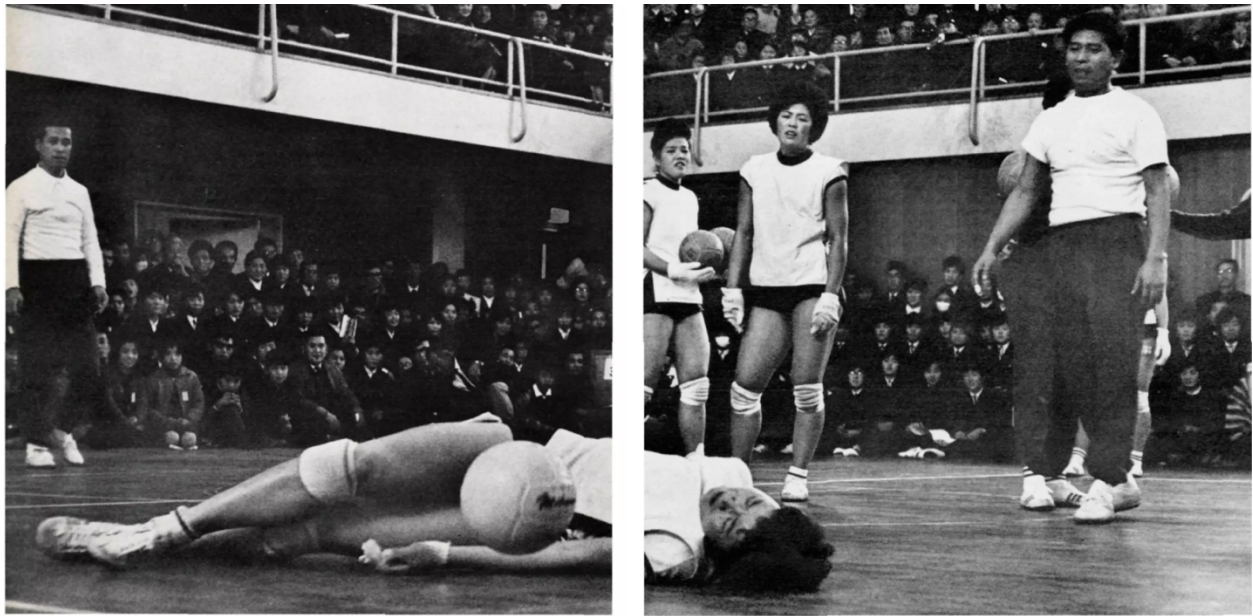


Figure 3.2: “Driven Beyond Dignity”

One of the Witches of the Orient lies on the ground after failing to receive a ball from Coach Daimatsu during an open practice.

Source: Whitehead, Eric. “Driven Beyond Dignity,” *Sports Illustrated*. March 16, 1964.

In stark contrast to Whitehead, the Japanese press applauded Daimatsu for wrangling the unruly female bodies of his athletes to build a championship-winning team. In his writings, Daimatsu emphasized his knowledge of the female body (as in the case of his athletes’ periods) and the media emphasized his unique ability to lead a team such as Nichibo Kaizuka.³⁴ To the press, Daimatsu sculpted the team into world champion volleyball athletes through his vigorous training regimen and skill as a coach. Importantly, in the eye of the media, the athletes themselves had no real talent. If not for Daimatsu’s leadership, the Nichibo Kaizuka team would have been nothing. *The Asahi Shimbun* wrote a spotlight article on Daimatsu after the Witches’

³⁴ Rio Otomo. “Narratives, the Body, and the 1964 Tokyo Olympics,” *Asian Studies Review* 31 (June 2007): 122.

1961 22-game winning streak during a tour of Europe, calling him a man “skilled in [leading] intense practice.”³⁵ In the same article, the newspaper quoted Daimatsu as saying that “in order to master just one thing, [he had] to throw from all angles. [He couldn’t] let the athletes get up.”³⁶ Both quotes reinforced the idea that Daimatsu was the true driving force of the team’s success. *The Japan Times* shared similar sentiments after hearing of Daimatsu’s plans to retire after the 1962 World Championships.³⁷ They lamented Daimatsu’s decision, noting that “Japan at present lacks a man of his competence in managing a girls’ volleyball team.”³⁸

Despite his training philosophies, the press also transformed Daimatsu into a father figure for the Witches. Rio Otomo noted the strong paternalistic responsibility Daimatsu felt for his players in her essay “Narratives, the Body, and the 1964 Tokyo Olympics” (2007). She explains that Daimatsu became not only a father for the athletes of the 1964 Japanese women’s volleyball team but also the nation.³⁹ As Igarashi similarly noted, Daimatsu was the father who came back from war to prosper when others did not.⁴⁰ He was the father figure Japan needed to show them that they could rebuild. In the *Mainichi* issue printed the day after the team’s win over the Soviets at the 1964 Olympic Games, the newspaper printed a letter written and signed by Daimatsu. In it, he thanked all of his players. Daimatsu wrote:

You’ve all done so well on my behalf. Thank you. All I can say to you is that I am deeply moved from the bottom of my heart. You’ve all done so well up until this point. You followed me all the way to the Olympics. Tonight, I want you all to stop and cry for me. I want to stop and cry, too. You all are the only people I want to know about my “demon tears.”⁴¹

³⁵ See Katsundo Mizuno. “Times at Bat,” *The Japan Times*. December 10, 1962. for information on the team’s winning streak and “Daimatsu Hirobumi,” *The Asahi Shimbun*. October 20, 1961. for Daimatsu’s quote.

³⁶ “Daimatsu Hirobumi,” *The Asahi Shimbun*. October 20, 1961.

³⁷ See Hirobumi Daimatsu. *Naseba naru*. 44. and Helen Macnaughtan. “The Oriental Witches: Women, Volleyball and the 1964 Tokyo Olympics,” *Sport in History* 34, no. 1 (2014): 142.

³⁸ “Manager Quits Volleyball Team,” *The Japan Times*. November 30, 1962.

³⁹ Rio Otomo. “Narratives, the Body, and the 1964 Tokyo Olympics,” 122.

⁴⁰ Yoshikuni Igarashi. *Bodies of Memory*. 161.

⁴¹ “Senshu-tachi yo arigatō: Daimatsu Hirobumi no shuki,” *The Mainichi Shimbun*. October 24, 1964.

Daimatsu addressed his athletes in the letter as though he was a proud father speaking to his daughters. He thanked them for suffering through his training to reach this new height – evidence of the personal relationship Daimatsu had built with his athletes. The Japanese readers would have quickly understood Daimatsu’s paternal role soon after they began reading the letter in *The Mainichi*. His relationship with his players was so close that an *Asahi* article even went as far as to refer to the Witches as his “daughters.”⁴² Such media coverage supports an argument made by Otomo in her paper; namely that media attention to the athletes themselves was often replaced by “words of the Father who managed and controlled women’s bodies.”⁴³ Beyond Kasai, the press rarely quoted individual players on the team. In almost all situations, Daimatsu became the team’s mouthpiece, further supporting the dichotomy of Daimatsu as the team’s overseer and the players as managed bodies. The Witches were not only bodies in pain, but, largely, they were silent, as well.

The father-daughter relationship was not entirely constructed by Daimatsu and the press, though. The players admired and respected Daimatsu, too, defending his training whenever the question arose. In a 2012 interview with Helen Macnaughtan, Kasai reminisced, “I had a lot of trust and respect for Coach Daimatsu. The team was happy to take direction from him because we trusted him.”⁴⁴ Other teammates expressed similar viewpoints. Emiko Miyamoto, a spiker, admitted she wished she could have married someone like him in a 2005 documentary.⁴⁵

The feeling that Daimatsu tried to convey through the letter is difficult to express in English because of Japanese’s varying degrees of formality which largely do not translate. Daimatsu uses words and phrases like *omae* (お前; informal “you”) and *yoku yattekureta* (よくやってくれた; “you all did so great”) when addressing his athletes, just to give a few examples. The words he uses and way he structures his sentences mirror that of a father addressing his adolescent daughters.

⁴² “Tengoe jingo,” *The Asahi Shimbun*. October 25, 1964.

⁴³ Rio Otomo. “Narratives, the Body, and the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.” 121.

⁴⁴ Helen Macnaughtan. “An interview with Kasai Masae, captain of the Japanese women’s volleyball team at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics,” *Japan Forum* 24, no. 2 (2012): 496.

⁴⁵ Iwona Merklejn. “Remembering the Oriental Witches.” 247.

The press argued Daimatsu was a man devoted to his sport, his team, and his mission, making him the perfect example of Postwar Japanese male leadership. The president of the Japanese Volleyball Association thanked Daimatsu for the team's victory over the Soviet Union in 1962, not the team as a whole.⁴⁶ The press applauded him for devoting his entire life to volleyball – a devotion to the point that he could barely even see his children.⁴⁷ Daimatsu transformed himself into a father but at the expense of his own family; the irony of his commitment to his team is palpable today. However, to Japanese readers in the 1960s, the weight Daimatsu put on the success of his team and his role in that success was admirable. Sacrificing time with his actual family to ensure the prosperity of his team was evidence of his determination. His skill in managing female bodies made him an extremely popular figure in Japan. He was so well-liked, in fact, that he successfully leveraged his popularity to retire from coaching after the Olympics and pursue a career in politics, serving in the Diet from 1968 until 1972.⁴⁸

Inferior Bodies in Pain

Besides Whitehead's "Driven Beyond Dignity," the best media example of the Witches as bodies in pain comes from the Japanese short film *Le prix de la victoire* (1964) by Nobuko Shibuya. The film was an official selection in the short film category of the 1964 Cannes Film Festival and focused exclusively on the training of the Japanese Olympic women's volleyball team. The film juxtaposed scenes of the textile factory with the Nichibo Kaizuka practice, paying particular attention to the bodies of the athletes. At about the midway point, the film focused on the team's signature move, the *kaiten reshibu* (rolling receive). The camera followed Daimatsu

⁴⁶ "Joshi, shoyūshō kimeru," *The Mainichi Shimbun*. October 24, 1962.

⁴⁷ "Toki no hito: Daimatsu Hirobumi," *The Mainichi Shimbun*. November 10, 1962.

⁴⁸ See Christian Tagsold. "Remember to get back on your feet quickly." 451. and Robin Kietlinski. *Japanese Women and Sport*. 93.

as he hurled ball after ball just out of reach of the athletes, forcing them to roll and dive repeatedly to receive it. Their faces in anguish, the athletes repeated the drills in silence. Increasingly loud audio of a heartbeat and heavy breathing played over the scene. The narrator explained, “the training is a battle with oneself; one must continue to run and return the ball. The second that one slows down or misses the ball, they lose.”⁴⁹

Shibuya – as a rare female director for the time period – offers a unique perspective on the Witches. She presents a much more measured view of them by redirecting some of the attention towards the athletes and away from Daimatsu. The film focused on the inherent strength it took the athletes to work through their training every day on top of their working schedules. However, the Witches’ pain still remained the primary focus of the film. Her approach – to show the public the Witches’ humanity – is still indicative of a message more in line with the broader Japanese psyche during the 1960s: hard work was rewarded with success.⁵⁰ The film acted much like Daimatsu’s memoirs, displaying to the Japanese people that they could achieve new highs so long as they were willing to suffer through the work. The Witches would pick themselves up after each machine gun serve from Daimatsu and run to the other side of the court. After practice, they picked themselves up and went to work.⁵¹

The newspapers paid attention to the severity of the training, as well, unlike the cases of marathon running or judo. The press attention highlights their specific fixation on the Witches’ pain before the 1964 Olympic Games. *The Mainichi* noted such press attention to the Witches’ practices at the 1962 Volleyball World Championship. The article explained that film crews

⁴⁹ *Le prix de la Victoire*. Directed by Nobuko Shibuya. 1964.

⁵⁰ “Shinkō no josei tankoku Kannu eiga-sai he,” *The Asahi Shimbun*. March 30, 1964.

⁵¹ Christian Tagsold has spoken to the strong sense of economic nationalism in Japan during the period of high economic growth (1960s-1970s). He argues the Witches of the Orient’s long-lasting impact on Japanese popular memory stems from their connection to such economic nationalism. For more information please see Tagsold, Christian. “Remember to get back on your feet quickly” (2011).

“paid particular attention to [Nichibo Kaizuka’s] movement and practice, taking special note to record the practice on film.”⁵² *The Mainichi* similarly covered the Witches’ practice in an article released the day before the 1964 Olympic final against the Soviet Union. The newspaper quoted Coach Daimatsu who explained he increased the intensity of the team’s training because he could feel his athletes stagnating. To improve the team even “one millimeter, would require more practice.”⁵³ The photo accompanying the article read: “The girls’ volleyball team receives Hirobumi Daimatsu’s strong spikes before the deciding battle.”⁵⁴ *The Japan Times* displayed similar patterns in their Post-1962 coverage of the women’s volleyball team. Sports columnist Katsundo Mizuno enlightened readers to the “arduous training program” all players underwent ahead of the October 1963 International Sports Week.⁵⁵ Perhaps the starkest example comes from *The Asahi* in a September 1964 Special Olympic Edition of the newspaper. The cover-title for the sports section (Figure 3.3) reads: “Fight Diligently, Japanese Athletes!” with an image of one of the Witches sprawled out in anguish to receive a ball flung from out of frame. The picture is accompanied by a caption reading, “The Harsh Training Continues!”⁵⁶

⁵² “Sude ni ‘gorin’ he no tatakai,” *The Mainichi Shimbun*. November 11, 1962.

⁵³ “Asu Ni-So taiketsu,” *The Mainichi Shimbun*. October 22, 1964.

⁵⁴ Asu Ni-So taiketsu,” *The Mainichi Shimbun*. October 22, 1964.

⁵⁵ Katsundo Mizuno. “1964 Tokyo Olympics,” *The Japan Times*. September 17, 1963.

⁵⁶ “Dōdō tatakae Nihon senshu,” *The Asahi Shimbun*. September 17, 1964.

堂々と戦え 日本選手

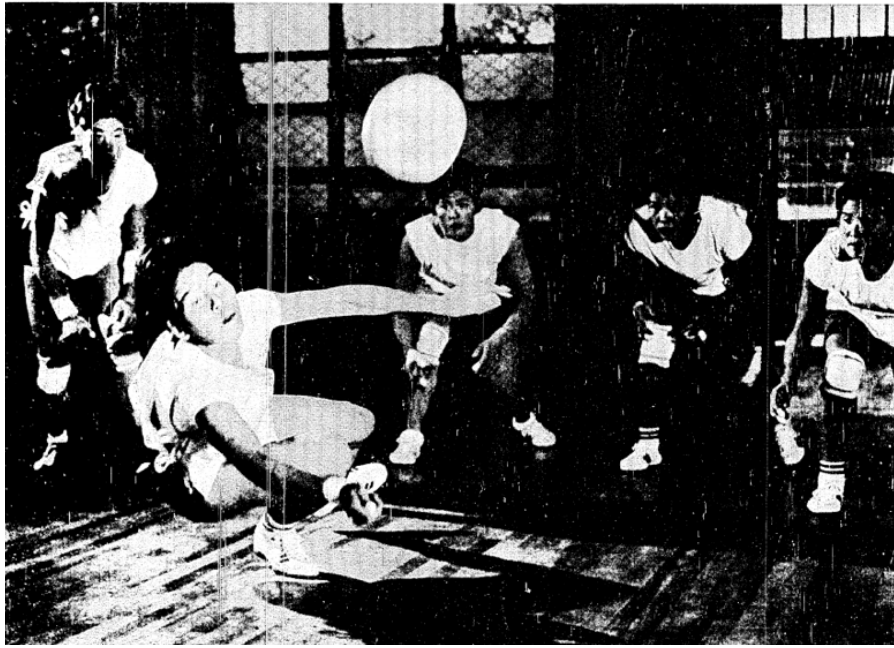


Figure 3.3: “Fight Diligently, Japanese Athletes!”

Source: “Dōdō tatakae Nihon senshu,” *The Asahi Shimbun*. September 17, 1964.

Beyond team practices, the press also noted the size of the Witches in relation to foreigners. The coverage spotlighted the difficulty of the team’s journey towards the Olympics from a place of inherent Japanese disadvantage. *Times* sports columnist Masayuki Watanabe used the Japanese women’s volleyball team’s supposed “inferior physical qualities” to strengthen the national narrative that their “cleverness,” “indomitable team spirit,” and “physical strength” were key to their victory in an opinion piece released the day of the 1964 Closing Ceremony.⁵⁷ The pain of the Witches was necessary to overcome their inferiority, further transforming them into bodies controlled by Daimatsu. In fact, he developed the rolling receive to teach his athletes to overcome their supposed physical disadvantage.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Masayuki Watanabe. “Japan Women Highlight Games Volleyball Tourney,” *The Japan Times*. October 25, 1964.

⁵⁸ Christian Tagsold. “Remember to get back on your feet quickly.” 448-449.

From the other side, a 1962 *Times* article similarly noted the Witches' large stature compared to other Japanese.⁵⁹ The fact that the Witches (already smaller than all of their Western opponents) were taller than the average Japanese person further stressed Japan's own perceived inferiority heightened by their defeat in the Second World War. Psychological feelings of inferiority manifested themselves through concerns over physical imperfection. The Witches' eventual victory resolved the Japanese feeling of inferiority in both a physical and psychological sense through a triumphant international win. It was especially sweet because it came immediately following Akio Kaminaga's loss to Anton Geesink in the men's open-weight judo final – a case of a smaller Japanese athlete failing to overcome his larger Western opponent even in a sport of Japanese creation.

Perhaps because of the perceived Japanese physical disadvantage, overcoming foreign opponents was of particular interest to the newspapers. Each paper chronicled the consecutive victories the team accumulated over their foreign – particularly Western – opponents after 1961. *The Japan Times*, *Mainichi*, and *Asahi* all devoted considerable coverage to the Witches during the 1961 European Goodwill Tour, releasing information on each of the team's wins over European challengers. While the newspapers also covered the Witches' domestic wins after 1962, their coverage of international opponents is especially intriguing. The press rarely devoted much space to the team's domestic wins yet wrote much lengthier, detailed articles when the Witches competed in major international competitions. After the team won 22 straight matches during the 1961 tour, *The Asahi* proclaimed the results as evidence of the "Japanese system's great success" framing the matches as battles of East vs. West ideology.⁶⁰ The press portrayed the Witches as evidence that the country had learned a sport from the West, mastered it, and then traveled

⁵⁹ "1962 Sports Highlights – Harada, Asia Games," *The Japan Times*. December 24, 1962.

⁶⁰ Yuta Maeda. "Nijūyon-sen zenshō no joshi chīmu – 'nihonjiki' ga dai-seikō," *The Asahi Shimbun*. October 17, 1961.

abroad to slay the sport's progenitors. Such a narrative acted as a counterbalance to Japan's concerns after losing the 1961 Judo World Championships to a Westerner (Geesink) in a sport of their own creation.

In particular, the Soviets were presented as Nichibo Kaizuka's primary international rival after the team came second behind the USSR at the 1960 Volleyball World Championships in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.⁶¹ *The Asahi* even tried to invent a rivalry between the team's two captains Masae Kasai (Japan) and Lyudmila Buldakova (USSR). They compared Kasai's vocal leadership style to Buldakova's quiet stoicism. The paper explained that the gold medal match "boiled down to a fight between Kasai and Buldakova" because of the history the two shared playing against each other in international competition since 1960.⁶² Kietlinski explained that particular animosity against the Soviet Union could have arisen because the nation had detained Japanese prisoners of war in Siberia both during and after World War II.⁶³ While I find such wartime link dubious through my research, it is certainly supportable that the Japanese media attempted to pit the Witches of the Orient against the Soviet Union. The staunchly anti-communist ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Japan's close alliance with the United States is more likely the cause of such fabricated Soviet opposition.

The Witches as Wives

The Witches' gender ultimately dictated their media attention because their story deviated so far from the accepted life path of a young Japanese woman. Certainly, the public fascination derived itself from the hope that the Witches would succeed, but it also, more importantly, drew from disbelief that women could train for sport at such a level. In the cases of

⁶¹ "Joshi wa Soren sekikai," *The Mainichi Shimbun*. November 7, 1960.

⁶² "Raiberu – Joshi barēbōru: Kasai (Nihon) – Ryuijowa (Soren)," *The Asahi Shimbun*. October 22, 1964.

⁶³ Robin Kietlinski. *Japanese Women and Sport*. 89-90.

male athletes, training – especially intense training – was a given to succeed at the international level. However, women’s sports did not carry such a connotation, likely originating from unique “feminine” physical education curriculums developed in Japan during the 1920s and a deeply rooted sexist culture that assumed the physical inferiority of females.⁶⁴ Even more than is true today, women’s athletics in the 1960s were viewed and judged in deeply discriminatory, misogynistic ways. To see women train ‘like men’ was shocking. The relative lack of women who competed in comparison to men coupled with a distinct divide between male and female sport caused the public to look at the Witches’ strife in both horror and awe. In the case of training, the gender of the athletes perhaps more deeply accentuated their pain, further building a symbolic relationship between the postwar Japanese belief in prosperity through destruction.

One avenue through which the press dealt with the Witches’ gender was by focusing on their marital statuses. Marriage was paramount for young women during much of the postwar era and marrying young was paramount to ensuring an able suitor. Throughout the development of women as the primary workforce in the Japanese textile industry, work in a factory was largely seen as a step towards a young girl’s final goal of marriage. Labor historian Elyssa Faison argued that factories developed programs to supervise women’s bodies before marriage and help workers learn to be “good mothers.”⁶⁵ Their link to factory work extended public expectation of marriage to the Witches as the figurehead employees of the Nichibo Kaizuka textile factory. Because all of the Witches were of marrying age, the Japanese press reminded the public that the Witches were, in fact, *female* athletes by keeping up with the marital status of the team members.

The issue of marriage first became a topic of public discussion after 1962. As mentioned previously, the Nichibo Kaizuka factory team had originally only set a goal of winning the 1962

⁶⁴ Robin Kietlinski. *Japanese Women and Sport*. 49.

⁶⁵ Elyssa Faison. *Managing Women: Disciplining Labor in Modern Japan*. (Berkeley: University of California Press. 2007). 28-29.

World Volleyball Championship. Following their return from Europe, Daimatsu announced his intent to retire and the Witches similarly indicated their plans to stop playing to marry. Following the news, the public made their voice heard about whether or not they supported the Nichibo Kaizuka team's retirement. Daimatsu wrote that after announcing his retirement he received over 5,000 letters; 60% in favor of the team's retirement and 40% urging them to continue until they "[raised] the Hinomaru flag" at the Tokyo Olympics.⁶⁶ Eventually, Daimatsu decided to continue forth spurred on by the hope he could inspire Japanese national pride, especially in Japanese living abroad.⁶⁷ Nearly all of his players followed suit, delaying their marriages or marriage searches until after the Olympics.

The team's choice to put off their marriages until after the Olympics became another aspect of their sacrifice. In writing for *The Times*, Katsundo explained that "forcing them to continue a life of nothing but volleyball for two more years [was] cruel."⁶⁸ Not only were the Witches of the Orient suffering through intense training, but they were foregoing marriage, perhaps the greatest sacrifice for an able-bodied young woman. The sacrifice came from the prevailing understanding that the Witches as female athletes could choose only volleyball or marriage, not both. Becoming a housewife meant retiring to the private sphere and removing oneself from the spotlight. To the press, it was impossible to be a mother athlete. Whitehead spoke to that point, explaining that in 1962, Kasai "was in love and engaged to a young man... She had a choice: marriage and a home or a continuation of the daily torture."⁶⁹

The sacrifice was perhaps greatest for Kasai who was 29 in 1962. She was already long past her 'prime' in the eyes of suitors and set to be 31 by the time she seriously considered

⁶⁶ Hirobumi Daimatsu. *Naseba naru*. 45.

⁶⁷ Yoshikuni Igarashi. *Bodies of Memory*. 160-161.

⁶⁸ Katsundo Mizuno. "Times at Bat," *The Japan Times*. December 10, 1962.

⁶⁹ Eric Whitehead. "Driven Beyond Dignity." 19.

marriage after the 1964 Olympic Games. Merklejn explains that her decision to keep playing until the Olympics was paramount because of the authority she had over the other players.⁷⁰ Her choice to continue on as the captain must have been striking for the time, clearing deviating from established norms of motherhood and marriage. Without her, the other players might not have committed to continue on towards the Olympics.

Marital imagery continued past 1962, though, as shown by a column written by Yukio Mishima after the team's win at the 1964 Olympics. Mishima repeatedly employed metaphor to emphasize the team's unique feminine athleticism. For instance, he compared Kasai's leadership style to a dutiful host, writing:

Kasai [was] an amazing host tending to tons of guests with her watchful eye, anticipating their needs and directing servants to give them a new plate. The Soviets [were] exhausted from such an intense dinner service.⁷¹

Mishima placed Kasai in a uniquely matriarchal role, recounting her aptitude as an athlete through a metaphor describing her aptitude as a housewife. Mishima also noted that the court was like “a polished and lacquered cutting board” because the Japanese athletes used towels to wipe their sweat off the floor in a unique “womanly fashion.”⁷² While volleyball is a game of skill and not a game of femininity, media commentators like Mishima consistently paid attention to the Witches' “womanliness.”⁷³ The Witches were judged not only by their skill as athletes but also by their talent as potential wives. Yet, much like his column in response to Tsuburaya's suicide, Mishima's description of the women's volleyball team is similarly self-serving. He imposed his own idea of Japanese femininity on the Witches, detracting from their athletic achievement and instead focusing on their devotion to volleyball as a symbol for devotion to a

⁷⁰ Iwona Merklejn. “Remembering the Oriental Witches.” 242.

⁷¹ Yukio Mishima. “Kanojo mo naita, watashi mo naita – joshi no barē,” *Yukio Mishima hyōron zenshū* ed. Yōko Hiroaki. (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1989). 348.

⁷² Yukio Mishima. “Kanojo mo naita, watashi mo naita – joshi no bare.” 347.

⁷³ Rio Otomo. “Narratives, the Body, and the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.” 120.

new Japanese nation. He believed the Witches' feminine persistence could foster a stronger generation of Japanese.

After the Olympics concluded and the Witches completed their trial of sacrifice, the public interest in each team member's marriage status re-intensified. Daimatsu retired from the Nichibo Kaizuka factory on January 25, 1965.⁷⁴ Soon after, news stories flooded the papers announcing each player's engagement and wedding. The media followed each of their marriages closely, completing the team's journey from pain to happiness within conventional gender structures. The public was so keen on seeing each member of the team married off that the coverage of each player's status continued until 1973 – nine years after the team's 1964 win – when Katsumi Matsumura was the last to marry at the age of 28.⁷⁵ Even as athletic heroes, the Witches were not allowed to exist outside of marriage, speaking to the strength of the expectation that all Japanese women would become housewives.

Kasai was one of the first to marry after Coach Daimatsu asked Prime Minister Sato Eisaku to help find her a suitor. The fact that Daimatsu required the Prime Minister's help indicates the urgency to which he felt Kasai needed to get married. Similarly, it provides an example of Daimatsu managing the bodies of his players, taking their private life into his own hands. Macnaughtan writes that Kasai noted how she was followed by the press incessantly after the Olympics, making it nearly impossible for her to meet with her fiancé in private.⁷⁶ *The Mainichi* covered her wedding in an article titled "Kasai-san, from 'Witch' to Housewife." The paper paralleled her pain as an athlete to her womanly beauty as a newlywed, mentioning that Kasai "looked like a completely different person in her wedding dress, foregoing the severity of

⁷⁴ "Famous Volleyball Pilot Quits Nichibo," *The Japan Times*. January 25, 1965.

⁷⁵ "'Tōyō no majo' to Kendō Nihon-Ichi kekkon," *The Mainichi Shimbun*. February 26, 1973.

⁷⁶ Helen Macnaughtan. "The Oriental Witches." 144.

her sporting days for a new softness.”⁷⁷ *The Asahi* joined in painting the wedding as Kasai’s new beginning. They printed the couple’s wedding photos (Figure 3.4), explaining that Kasai “held her usual serious frown on the occasion of her happy wedding, marking the point when she’ll finally become a family housewife.”⁷⁸ The coverage of Kasai’s wedding poignantly depicts the volleyball *or* marriage mentality. Kasai was not only supposed to get married, but also give up her public life in favor of starting a family.



Figure 3.4: “Kasai-san’s Sunny Finish”

Masae Kasai poses with her husband, 2nd Lieutenant Kazuo Nakamura, on their wedding day.

Source: “Kasai-san hare no gōru-in,” *The Asahi Shimbun*. June 31, 1965.

⁷⁷ “Kasai-san ‘Tōyō no Majo’ kara shufu he,” *The Mainichi Shimbun*. June 1, 1965.

⁷⁸ “Kasai-san hare no gōru-in,” *The Asahi Shimbun*. June 31, 1965.

Conclusions

Each wedding was the happy ending each athlete deserved, according to the media. The Witches had sacrificed their bodies and their ability to marry to win a triumphant gold medal on behalf of the country. From a memory standpoint, each member left the nation's painful memories behind by getting married, as well. The weddings – ceremonies celebrating a new future – were the symbolic conclusion to the story of the Witches of the Orient and by extension the nation's lingering postwar pain stemming from memory of the Second World War.

The immediate and intense interest in the players' marriages is evidence that the Witches, as female athletes, still needed to be managed by public supervision. Having completed their service as Japan's volleyball soldiers, the Witches now needed to be managed by someone new – their husbands. The Witches were almost more heroic for becoming mothers than they were for winning gold at the Tokyo Olympiad. They were more perfect and more beautiful as wives than as athletes, revealing the perceived irregularity of the Witches. While they were admirable for their athletic achievement, it was certainly not truly acceptable. The Witches were not allowed to exist outside of the marital structure because that indicated their independence – independence not afforded to women at the time.

In her essay, "Remembering the Oriental Witches" (2013), Merklejn discussed post-Shōwa Era media attention to the team. She argued that NHK coverage promoted idealized normative gender roles from the Shōwa Era through their coverage of the Witches in an attempt to display to contemporary women the "right" way to act.⁷⁹ Merklejn's analysis suggests that after 1964, the Witches transformed from sporting symbols into idealized forms of the 'perfect' Japanese housewife (*shufu*).

⁷⁹ Iwona Merklejn. "Remembering the Oriental Witches." 237.

One such example is Kumiko Tanida. Tanida never appeared in NHK specials like her other teammates because she was busy running her family's *soba* restaurant with her husband.⁸⁰ She was the only Witch not present at the NHK's 1999 End-of-Century Viewer-Voted World News Recap. Instead, the NHK played a video of Tanida in front of her store greeting her teammates and apologizing for her absence at the beginning of the broadcast. Merklejn contends that the NHK presented Tanida as representative of the gender roles assigned to middle-aged Japanese women: "frugal, efficient housewives [who were] devoted to their families, and not too absorbed in their self-image."⁸¹

The Witches speak to the deep-rooted misogynistic Japanese expectation for women to exist solely within the familial sphere. The Witches as volleyball players and the Witches as housewives exist as almost separate entities within the Japanese media canon. By distinctly differentiating between the Witches as athletes and the Witches as wives, the Japanese media confined feminine freedom to youth, illustrating that Japanese women could only exist outside of the housewife role under limited conditions. The coverage reveals a societal expectation for women to eventually forgo their public life (their job, their hobbies, their passions, etc.) to serve a higher purpose as a mother. The narrative of the Oriental Witches was permeated by that social expectation; they needed to remain supervised by protective male leadership, and they were expected to return to the private sphere after the conclusion of their Olympic spectacle.

⁸⁰ *Soba* is a traditional Japanese noodle made from buckwheat flour.

⁸¹ Iwona Merklejn. "Remembering the Oriental Witches." 243.

CONCLUSION:
REIGNITING THE FLAME AT TOKYO 2020?

An often-ignored facet of the Olympic movement is its value in nation-building. Change and innovation were integral themes of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics from the Japanese perspective. The Olympics represented a ‘turning of the corner’ for the nation from a dejected and destroyed World War II loser toward a new future of cultural and economic prosperity as a leader in the international system. However, national change needed to be shown to the Japanese people to authenticate the new popular positivity even where not all desired change had been achieved. The national change was displayed to the Japanese public through medals won by Japanese athletes on the Olympics stage.

The value of the Olympic Games rested in its apolitical pretense which allowed Japanese institutions and the Japanese state to promulgate a new national identity through athletes without it feeling overtly nationalistic.¹ The acceptable sports nationalism that surrounded the 1964 Tokyo Olympics allowed Japan to undertake a nationalistic rebranding process despite a population weary of nationalism after World War II. This fell in line with the larger push through the Olympics for the government to revive prewar national symbols (like the emperor or the Hinomaru) by separating them from their prewar nationalistic association, as noted by Christian Tagsold.² Sports are important examples of national expression, yet they remain distinctly apolitical in perception.

¹ Paul Droubie. “Phoenix Arisen: Japan as peaceful internationalist at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 28, vol. 16 (2011). 2310.

² Christian Tagsold. “The 1964 Tokyo Olympics as Political Games,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus* 7, iss. 23, no. 3 (June 6, 2009): 3.

My analysis aimed to extend the work of Abel (2010, 2011), Droubie (2009, 2011), and Tagsold (2006, 2009) who have argued that the primary political benefit of the Olympics lay in the Japanese ability to interact globally. Conversely, the Olympics also lent itself to internal political interaction by way of nation-building and nationalism through the sports competitions. My analysis also highlighted the importance of Japanese athletes at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics because of the political merit of winning Olympic medals. Japanese attempts to display national progress to the Japanese nation and resolve the uncertainty of the early postwar years could not have been validated if not for the success of Japanese athletes on the medal stands. As such, the performance of Japanese athletes at the Tokyo Games must be viewed as an important avenue for cultural expression much like Olympic stadiums, ceremonies, and symbols.³

As I have argued, numerous organizations across multiple segments of the Japanese cultural, political, and industrial sectors tried to use the Olympics to further their own political goals and promote the supposed rebirth of the Japanese nation. Each knew that by integrating themselves into the new national optimism, they could remain relevant and contributing postwar institutions despite changing national priorities. The athletes tied to each organization were instrumental in helping to shape a new national identity at the 1964 Games because they verified the national transition since 1945 through their athletic success. Athletes became a key symbol of the supposed national rebirth at the Tokyo Olympics, supporting the notion of total national transition away from the memory of the Second World War.

All three case studies presented answer a question integral to understanding the significance of the 1964 Tokyo Games: did the Tokyo Olympics show the Japanese people that

³ For discussion of cultural expression in stadiums and ceremonies at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics see Christian Tagsold. "Modernity, space, and national representation at the Tokyo Olympics 1964," *Urban History* 37, no. 2 (2010). For discussion of symbols and art see Jilly Tragnou. *Designing the Olympics: Representation, Participation, Contestation*. London: Routledge. 2016. and Noriko Aso. "Sumptuous Re-past: The 1964 Tokyo Olympics Arts Festival," *positions: east asian cultures critique* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2002).

the nation could truly determine a new future for itself? The answer, of course, is a resounding yes. The medals won by Tsuburaya, Kaminaga, and the Witches were important postwar indicators that the nation had progressed and would continue to develop towards economic convergence with the West. By 1964, Japan had only just begun its path towards economic development, marking the beginning of almost 30 years of catch-up growth through state-controlled “reverse course” policy.⁴ Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda’s 1960 pledge to double national income by 1970 was met just ahead of the 1964 Games.⁵ When deflated to measure in 1964 U.S. dollars, Japan’s GDP per capita in 1964 was about \$6,958 per person compared to an average of \$29,783 in the United States. At its peak in 1995, Japan had jumped to \$362,000 1964-dollars per person, whereas the United States lagged behind at just \$322,424.⁶ The time period between the early 1960s and late 1970s became known as the period of “miracle” high economic growth. The 1964 Tokyo Olympics remain early proof of Japan’s transition towards economic development, transforming the Games into a modern-day symbol for the nation’s Showa Era “glory days.”⁷ The longstanding nostalgia for Japanese athletes who competed at 1964 Tokyo Olympics proves the success of the Games from an identity-building perspective.

The Japanese state continues to employ the Olympic Movement for its own internal nation-building pursuits. It is no coincidence I chose to write this paper about Japanese identity and nation-building at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics in the year ahead of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.⁸

⁴ David Flath. *The Japanese Economy*. (London: Oxford University Press. 2005). 29-30.

⁵ Gerald Curtis. “Celebrating the ‘New’ Japan,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus* 18, iss. 4, no. 9 (February 15, 2020). 1.

⁶ I pulled my GDP per capita data from World Bank national accounts data here:

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?end=2018&locations=JP-US&start=1964>.

To adjust for inflation and allow for comparison across multiple years, the World Bank uses the current year USD (2020) as their base year currency. To better illustrate the exponential growth of the Japanese economy after 1964, I adjusted their numbers to make 1964 the base year (\$1 2020 = \$0.12 1964).

⁷ Christian Tagsold and Andreas Niehaus. “Remembering the glory days of the nation: sport as *lieu de mémoire* in Japan,” *Sport in Society* 14, vol. 4 (2011). 408.

⁸ While the Olympics will likely be held in 2021, Their official name remains the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

The 1964 Tokyo Olympics highlights the nation-building intent of the 2020 Games. In many ways, the Games parallel each other, but their critical difference is what sets them apart. While the 1964 Tokyo Olympics marked the beginning of the country's 20th-century economic prosperity within Japanese collective memory, the 2020 Tokyo Olympics follow almost 30 years of economic stagnation.⁹

Since 1992, the Japanese economy has been plagued by insecurity. In late 1991 and early 1992, the Japanese economy crashed as bank funds ran dry after the nation's property conglomerates like Mitsubishi Estate and Mitsui Fudosan defaulted on their housing loans. The Japanese government was forced to inject funds into the market, racking up massive national debt.¹⁰ The state pursued expansionary policy to get the Japanese economy back on track through the next 20 years only to face the largest global economic crisis since the Great Depression in 2008. Still struggling to find its economic footing, Japan was hit by the 2011 Tōhōku Earthquake, causing a tsunami that sent the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant into meltdown. Reeling from economic and natural disaster, Japanese economic anxiety is at a new high.¹¹

Based on my own experience living and researching in Tokyo, I can speak to the new national pessimism. I met people from many generations and regions during my time living in Japan, but I was often met with a single question – an incredulous “Why are you studying Japanese?” It was often followed up with, “Isn't Chinese much more useful?” There is a great fear among the Japanese people that their time has passed. Many believe their era as a leader of Asia and the world has come to an end. Many young professionals have lived their entire lives through Japanese economic downturn as the “Lost Generation.” People worry about their future,

⁹ For discussion of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics as a symbol for a new postwar economic nationalism in Japan please see Christian Tagsold. “Remember to get back on your feet quickly,” 452.

¹⁰ “Japanese Property: Crash Landing,” *The Economist* 323, iss. 7762 (June 6, 1992). 90.

¹¹ Satsuki Kawano, Glenda S. Roberts, and Susan Orpett Long. *Capturing Contemporary Japan: Differentiation and Uncertainty* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014). 1.

they are concerned about the longevity of Japanese business, and they lament the woes of city life. Many of the people I talked to, especially older professionals, see China as the new economic leader of East Asia. Most importantly, there is a lingering feeling in Japan that the country will never again reach the heights it did in the 1970s and 1980s.

The Japanese government – historically single-party dominated under the LDP – has tried to set the country back on course. Under Prime Minister Ryūtarō Hashimoto in 1996, the state tried reforming the corrupt government bureaucracy by consolidating power under the prime minister.¹² The two 21st century prime ministers, Junichiro Koizumi and Shinzō Abe, both continued Hashimoto’s reforms. In particular, Abe has made it his mission to re-establish a strong, centralized economy in the years since 2013 by expanding the powers of the prime minister and announcing his “Abenomics” plans.¹³ The current success of Abenomics is debatable but it revolves around three core principles: 1) reform and streamline the public sector under the prime minister’s office, 2) attract foreign direct investment to fuel industries, and 3) jumpstart the economy through technological innovation.¹⁴

Abe’s hope for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics is very similar to the LDP’s hopes for the 1964 Olympiad. Public statements indicate that he believes the Olympics will restore Japanese faith in their country, their state, and their economy. Much like 1964, the OOC, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, and the Japanese national government intend to use the Games for domestic

¹² See Velisarios Kattoulas. “Corruption Scandals Rack Tokyo’s ‘Iron Triangle’: Struggle for Power in Japan,” *The New York Times*, December 7, 1996. <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/12/07/news/corruption-scandals-rack-tokyo-iron-triangle-struggle-for-power-in.html> (accessed February 9, 2020). and Administrative Reform Council, *Final Report of the Administrative Reform Council (Executive Summary)*. Tokyo: The Diet of Japan, December 3, 1997, <http://japan.kantei.go.jp/971228finalreport.html> (accessed February 9, 2020).

¹³ “Inside Japan’s politically powerful nerve center,” *Nikkei Asian Review*, April 25, 2017. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/Japan-Update/Inside-Japan-s-politically-powerful-nerve-center2> (accessed February 9, 2020).

¹⁴ *JapanGov’s Abenomics Infographic*. January 2020. <https://www.japan.go.jp/abenomics> (accessed February 9, 2020).

JapanGov is the Japanese Government’s official website. The infographic I looked at can be found at the bottom of the webpage in English.

political interaction to restore a sense of economic nationalism in the country. Of course, the 2020 Games are also an important avenue for the state to attract foreign investment and restore confidence abroad, but the internal nation-building at Tokyo 2020 is much more important. The government hopes to bury the ghosts of the Lost Generation and announce 2020 as the country's revival of economic prosperity.

The OOC's vision for the Games rests on what they call the "Three Core Concepts." They are "Achieving Personal Best," "Unity Through Diversity," and "Connecting to Tomorrow."¹⁵ The Three Core Concepts parallel Abenomics's core policies, as well. For instance, "Unity In Diversity" feels strangely similar to Abenomics's goal of investing in the human capital of women (and contradicts criticism that Abe is an ethnonationalist).¹⁶ Jeff Kingston argues that the "Unity In Diversity" campaign arose simply because Japan could not brag about environmentalism, cost-cutting, or sustainability in good faith. He questions Japan's true commitment to diversity because of the country's long-standing history of xenophobia, gender inequality, and a singular definition of 'Japanese.' However, he also notes the possibility for change evidenced by the increasing number of Japanese biracial celebrities and the popularity of the Brave Blossoms, Japan's national rugby team. 15 out of 31 members are not of Japanese descent.¹⁷ Perhaps most important, though, is the emphasis the OOC has put on displaying Japanese technology to promote the country as a doorway to the future – the clearest example being the Games' motto, "Discover Tomorrow" (*ashita wo tsukamō*).

¹⁵ The Tokyo Olympic Organizing Committee. "Games Vision." Tokyo 2020. <https://tokyo2020.org/en/games/vision/> (accessed February 9, 2020).

¹⁶ For an example of such criticism see Kristin Surak. "Shinzo Abe and the rise of Japanese nationalism," *NewStatesman*, May 19, 2019. <https://www.newstatesman.com/world/asia/2019/05/shinzo-abe-and-rise-japanese-nationalism> (accessed February 9, 2020).

¹⁷ Jeff Kingston. "Tokyo's Diversity Olympics Dogged by Controversy," *The Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus* 18, iss. 4, no. 3 (February 15, 2020). 2-9.



Figure 4.1: 2020 Games Vision

Source: Tokyo Olympic Organizing Committee. "Games Vision." Tokyo 2020.
<https://tokyo2020.org/en/games/vision/> (accessed February 10, 2020).

Abe and the Japanese state are well aware of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics' value in regards to building national pride and strong national identity. The 2020 OOC has constantly paralleled the 1964 Games with the upcoming 2020 Olympiad in an attempt to more closely align their goals with those of the original organizing committee. They are aware the 1964 Tokyo Olympics jumpstarted Japanese confidence in their nation after 19 years of postwar uncertainty. The modern OOC believes the 2020 Games can do the same for a nation reeling after nearly 30 years of stagnation and economic downturn. The Games Vision Statement (Figure 4.1), taken directly

from the 2020 OOC website, makes the comparison abundantly clear. It is particularly important to note the use of “our” in “Sports has the power to change the world and our future.”¹⁸ The OOC is not using “our” to describe the world at large but rather Japan exclusively. They are trying to convince the Japanese public that the 2020 Olympics will impact the country in the same way as the 1964 Games did nearly 60 years ago.

So far, though, the Games have been plagued by controversy and setbacks. The original plans for the National Stadium by award-winning architect Zaha Hadid were scrapped and replaced by a cheaper pitch from Japanese architect, Kuma Kengo. Construction was delayed for three years until 2015 because of public outrage over the costs of Hadid’s plans.¹⁹ The first Tokyo 2020 Olympic logo was found to be plagiarized from a Dutch theater company even after the OOC affirmed its originality. Citizens have raised numerous economic concerns surrounding the cost of the 2020 Games after estimators gauged costs to have skyrocketed to nearly \$28 billion after a proposal of just \$7.2 billion when Tokyo won the bid in 2012. (The OOC maintains costs are actually closer to \$12.6 billion.) Similarly, national division over how venues will be financed has called into question whether all newly-built stadiums will be upkeep after the completion of the two-week sporting competition. Amid all the controversy, public confidence in the Games was hit hard in March of 2019. French authorities announced their investigation into Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC) President, Tsunetzaka Takeda, for bribery, alleging he helped Japan obtain the 2020 Games through payments to African IOC members through Singaporean banks. Takeda resigned after announcement of the investigation.²⁰

¹⁸ The Tokyo Olympic Organizing Committee. “Games Vision.” Tokyo 2020. <https://tokyo2020.org/en/games/vision/> (accessed February 10, 2020).

¹⁹ Kazuhiko Togo. “Unease about Tokyo 2020,” *Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus* 18, iss. 4, no. 13 (February 15, 2020). 1-2.

²⁰ Laurel Wamsley. “Head of Japan’s Olympic Committee Steps Down Amid Tokyo 2020 Corruption Probe,” *NPR*, March 19, 2019. <https://www.npr.org/2019/03/19/704760604/head-of-japans-olympic-committee-steps-down-amid-tokyo-2020-corruption-probe> (accessed February 15, 2020).

Perhaps the ultimate cap to an already controversy-prone Olympics, though, came in the form of something completely out of the control of the OOC: COVID-19. In January of 2020, the world became increasingly aware of the growing coronavirus pandemic in China stemming from a wet market in the city of Wuhan. Although the first cases developed as early as December of 2019, the Chinese Communist Party may have attempted to censor talk of the coronavirus problem for nearly a month, potentially aiding in the virus's spread domestically and worldwide. Even though numerous Chinese cities including Wuhan were put on total lockdown beginning on January 23rd, cases had already begun popping up across the globe.²¹ In just over a month, governments across the globe began taking dramatic measures to stop the rapid spread of the virus in their countries. Italy, one of the most affected countries early on, placed itself on mandatory lockdown beginning on March 13th, banning all travel and confining citizens to their homes.²² Numerous American states including North Carolina have urged citizens to stay home, closing all non-essential businesses.

Until March of 2020, the Japanese government, the OOC, and the IOC remained strangely quiet. However, that silence only further underscores the necessity of the Games to Japan. Postponing the Games would have been disastrous and only further accentuate the already existing financial problems. As such, in early March, the IOC announced its commitment to hold the Olympics as scheduled (between July 24 – August 9, 2020) despite concerns over COVID-19.²³ The situation changed dramatically over the next week as countries began closing borders,

²¹ Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian. "Timeline: The early days of China's coronavirus outbreak and cover-up," *Axios*, March 18, 2020. <https://www.axios.com/timeline-the-early-days-of-chinas-coronavirus-outbreak-and-cover-up-ee65211a-afb6-4641-97b8-353718a5faab.html> (accessed March 28, 2020).

²² Valentino Di Donata, Emma Reynolds, and Rob Picheta. "All of Italy is in lockdown as coronavirus cases rise," *CNN*, March 13, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/09/europe/coronavirus-italy-lockdown-intl/index.html> (accessed March 28, 2020).

²³ "IOC Executive Board Statement on the Coronavirus (COVID-19) And the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020," *International Olympic Committee*, March 3, 2020. <https://www.olympic.org/news/ioc-executive-board-statement-on-the-coronavirus-covid-19-and-the-olympic-games-tokyo-2020> (accessed March 28, 2020).

limiting travel, and restricting business. Numerous global media outlets began claiming that postponement was inevitable. IOC member Dick Pound told the press on March 23rd that the decision to postpone had already been made despite the lack of an official announcement.²⁴ His comments came not even a month after the IOC affirmed their commitment to hold the Games as planned. Spurred on by the public concern and perhaps Pound's comments, Prime Minister Abe announced to the Japanese media the next day that he had talked to IOC president Thomas Bach about postponing the Games until the summer of 2021 at the latest. Abe reported that Bach said he "agreed 100%" with Abe's decision.²⁵ On March 27th, The IOC told the public it had begun meetings about postponement. *Nikkei* reported that the IOC planned to update spectators about dates and venues within three weeks.²⁶

The postponement has sparked a swath of new uncertainties with the upcoming Games. *Nikkei's* comments on the delays are indicative of a wide Japanese public concern over the length and cost of postponement. Their title explains that the Olympics will be pushed back until spring 2021 (even though the Official IOC announcement says "no later than summer 2021").²⁷ They similarly reiterate Bach's comments that postponement does not necessarily mean the Games must be held in the summer, indicating their intent of calming public concern that it may be more than a year before the Olympics finally open. With regard to the postponement, costs remain the top public concern. Media outlets like *CNN* have reported about the "huge additional

²⁴ Isabel Reynold and Ayai Tomisawa. "Olympics Nears Postponement With IOC Member Joining Drumbeat," *Bloomberg*, March 23, 2020. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-23/japan-s-abe-suggests-postponing-olympics-if-safety-not-assured> (accessed March 28, 2020).

²⁵ "Tōkyō gorin / para ichinen teido enki wo gōi Abe-shushō to IOC kaichō," *NHK*, March 24, 2020. <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20200324/k10012348191000.html> (accessed March 28, 2020).

²⁶ "Tōkyō gorin, 21-nen haru ni kaisai-an mo IOC ga denwa kaigi," *Nikkei Keizai Shimbun*, March 27, 2020. <https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXMZO57303010X20C20A3CR0000/> (accessed March 28, 2020).

²⁷ "IOC President Updates IOC Members on Steps and Considerations Regarding Tokyo 2020 Postponement," *International Olympic Committee*, March 27, 2020. <https://www.olympic.org/news/ioc-president-updates-ioc-members-on-steps-and-considerations-regarding-tokyo-2020-postponement> (accessed March 28, 2020).

costs” postponement will incur according to CEO of Tokyo 2020, Toshiro Muto.²⁸ Numerous questions have been raised in the days since Abe’s announcement: Will the virus impact tourism? How will already built stadiums be upkept for another year? Who will be paying the costs of postponement? No one has a clear answer yet.

The 2020 Olympic Games are the Japanese government’s effort to strengthen Japanese national identity and restore the public’s faith in their country. As my analysis of the 1964 Games has proved, the Olympics can be a key event for nation-building. The 1964 Tokyo Olympics helped the Japanese nation to overcome the memory of the Second World War and convinced them of a great national transformation since 1945. The actual underlying congruency in Japanese national identity between the interwar and postwar years speaks to the success of the 1964 Games. They reignited Japanese national pride, restoring new confidence in the nation. Abe and the modern-day Japanese government hope that history can repeat itself. Presently, the 2020 Games progress has not gone as planned to say the least. It may even be apt to call the 2020 Games the ‘Uncertainty Games’ – a title that does not bode well for Tokyo 2020’s ability to resolve the public’s social and economic apprehension. However, the Japanese government needs the Games to be a success; they need the Games to reshape Japan’s future. A lot is going to be on the line when the 2020 Games open in 2021. On the day of the opening ceremony there will be one question on everyone’s mind: will Tokyo 2020 once again reignite the Japanese flame?

²⁸ George Ramsay. “What are organizers up against now the 2020 Olympics have been moved to next year?” *CNN*, March 28, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/27/sport/tokyo-olympics-postponement-implications-spt-intl/index.html> (accessed March 28, 2020).

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