

SOCCKER

Introduction

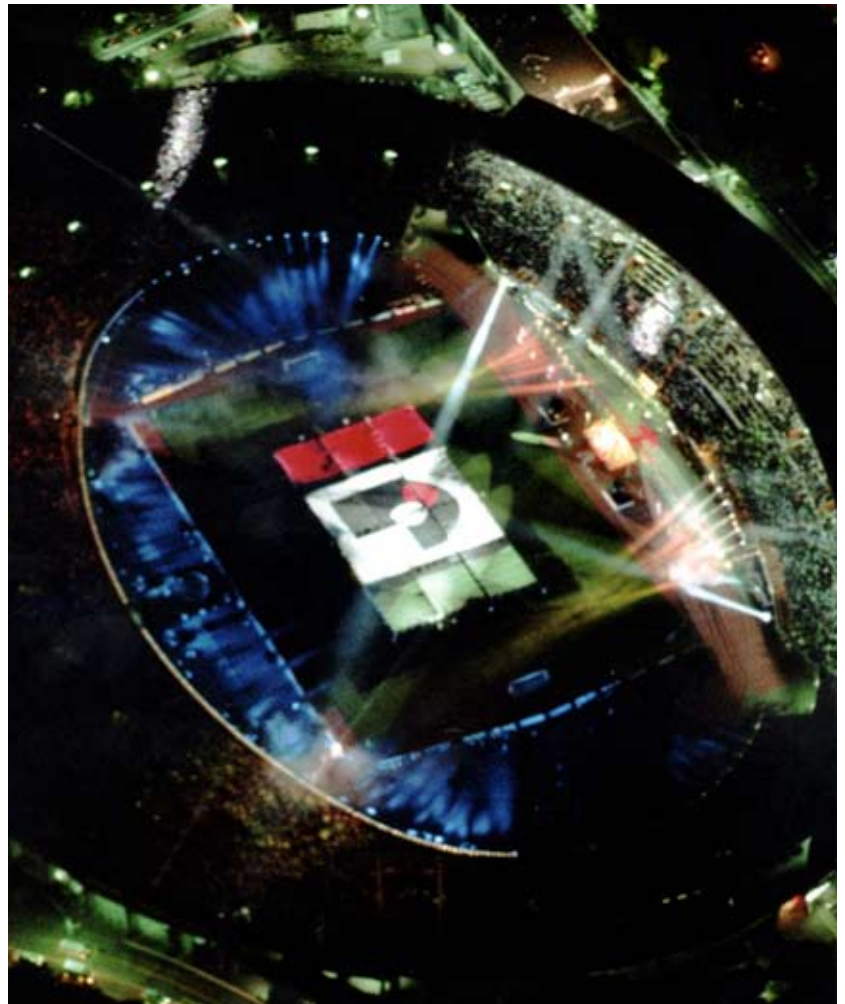
In Japan, the sport known in most countries as *football* is typically referred to as *soccer*, mainly to differentiate it from American-style football, which also enjoys a limited following in Japan, particularly at the university and corporate level.

The Seeds of Growth

Japan's organized soccer body, the Japan Football Association (JFA), was established in 1921. In 1948, the national championship competition became known as the Emperor's Cup. In 1997, a preliminary field of over 3,000 teams competed in the Seventy-seventh Emperor's Cup tournament. The final match was held at the National Stadium in Yoyogi, Tokyo, on New Year's Day in 1998, and Kashima Antlers won the championship.

J. League Professional Soccer

Japan's national soccer team invited Dettmar Crammer, from Duisburg, West Germany, to be coach, and the team trained intensively from 1960 to 1963. Owing to the tenacious efforts of Crammer and the national team, the team won a bronze medal at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. Kamamoto Kunishige, a forward, scored seven goals at the Olympics. Soccer boomed. Before he left, Crammer suggested the establishment of a soccer league to strengthen the sport in Japan. But the team made no



further progress in international competition, failing to qualify for any subsequent Olympics as well as the World Cup. The boom gradually diminished.

In 1987, Mori Kenji, then chairman of the Japan Soccer League, determined that players should be allowed to register as professionals. In 1988, the Japan Soccer

J. League

An aerial view of the ceremony held to mark the start of league competition on May 15, 1993.

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League (JSL) set up an action committee to discuss ways to reinvigorate the sport in Japan. The following year, the committee recommended the establishment of a professional league.

After nearly two years of planning, in January 1991, the Japan Football Association announced the basic structure of the new professional league. Shortly afterwards, the new league's 10 participating teams were announced, and by July of the same year, the name was announced: the Japan Professional Football League, or J. League for short.

The J. League operates under the Japan Football Association. It is responsible for the organization of professional matches and the keeping of official match records; establishment of regulations; and training, certification and registration of players, coaches, and referees.

The J. League's stated goals at the time of its establishment included promoting soccer as culture, strengthening and fostering Japanese soccer, raising the status of players and coaches, and encouraging stadium development and other hometown ties and facilities. In addition to the league itself, a number of affiliated companies were established to handle specialized fields of activities. J. League Pictures, Inc., for example, controls all video images of official matches, keeps video records, and monitors rights. Another company handles football-related advertisements and supervises the sales of commercial products using the J. League logo, mascot characters, etc.

On September 5, 1992, the J. League Yamazaki Nabisco Cup kicked off as the new league's first official tournament. League competition play was inaugurated on May 15, 1993. The number of teams was expanded to 12 in 1994, 14 in 1995, 16 in 1996, 17 in 1997, and 18 in 1998. In 1998, the J. League introduced a two-division system.

The J. League owes its popularity to the star players in particular. For example, "Zico," formerly a star player in Brazil, led Kashima Antlers to become one of the best teams in the J. League. Miura Kazuyoshi, of



Youth soccer

The growth of youth soccer is one reason the sport is flourishing in Japan. Here former professional soccer star Ruy Ramos practices with young players.
© Yomiuri Shimun

Verdi Kawasaki, began his career with clubs in Brazil and went on to become the ace of Japan's national team. Ihara Masami of Yokohama Marinos has played in more than 100 international games and acted as captain in the 1997 elimination rounds for the World Cup.

Nevertheless, professional soccer in Japan has been faced with numerous challenges, as part of its season overlaps with baseball, an immensely popular sport. The J. League organizers capitalized on a number of strategies to attract fans and supporters, such as establishing local teams in smaller cities that do not have professional baseball teams. The league also adopted a unique formula that combines the organization of teams into clubs—along the lines of what is done in Europe—with American-style business methods for the handling of ticket sales and merchandising. A system of team and corporate sponsorship (professional soccer players' uniforms carry corporate sponsors' names, unlike the policy for professional baseball players) also helps to disperse outlays and minimize risks.

| | Prefecture of hometown | Year of affiliation |
|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Montedio Yamagata | Yamagata | 2009 |
| Kashima Antlers | Ibaraki | 1993 |
| JEF United Ichihara Chiba | Chiba | 1993 |
| Kashiwa Reysol | Chiba | 1995 |
| Urawa Red Diamonds | Saitama | 1993 |
| Omiya Ardija | Saitama | 2005 |
| F.C. Tokyo | Tokyo | 2000 |
| Kawasaki Frontale | Kanagawa | 2000 |
| Yokohama F. Marinos | Kanagawa | 1993 |
| Albirex Niigata | Niigata | 2004 |
| Shimizu S-Pulse | Shizuoka | 1993 |
| Jubilo Iwata | Shizuoka | 1994 |
| Nagoya Grampus Eight | Aichi | 1993 |
| Kyoto Sanga F.C. | Kyoto | 1996 |
| Gamba Osaka | Osaka | 1993 |
| Vissel Kobe | Hyogo | 1997 |
| Sanfrecce Hiroshima | Hiroshima | 1993 |
| Oita Trinita | Oita | 2003 |

J. League Teams

As advocated in the J. League, great importance has been given to establishment of close ties between clubs and their communities. In practice, the name of a club is a combination of the name of its hometown and a nickname, with each club operating satellite and farm teams. These efforts have produced many enthusiastic supporters.

However, in spite of the huge success at the start, the J. League presently faces several problems. Between 1995 and 1996, attendance at J. League games declined by 26.3%, which has caused financial difficulties for several teams. The number of games broadcast on television also decreased markedly. Another problem is that, of the 17 teams that belong to the J. League, 8 are concentrated in the Kanto area. The dispersion of teams to other parts of the country will be required in order to achieve the league's initial aim of strengthening and fostering soccer, and promoting the development of local communities through the sport.

The 2002 World Cup

Officially known as "2002 FIFA World Cup Korea/Japan," this was the first World Cup to be held in Asia and the first to be hosted by two countries. A total of 32 teams played matches in 20 stadiums, 10 in Japan and 10 in South Korea, over the period of May 31 to June 30. Many of the stadiums were newly built for the tournament.

For the first round, the teams were



divided into eight groups. Japan scored victories over Russia (1-0) and Tunisia (2-0) and tied Belgium (2-2) to lead its group and advance to the second round for the first time in the country's World Cup history. The team lost to Turkey (1-0) in the second round.

In the final, played at International Stadium Yokohama, Brazil beat Germany by a score of 2 to 0 to win its fifth World Cup title.

2002 World Cup

Fans packed International Stadium Yokohama to cheer the Japanese team on to its first World Cup win, against Russia on June 9, 2002.

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Soccer lottery

Under the government-run soccer lottery system, which began operation in March 2001, players guess the results of J. League soccer games, with prizes being awarded for the most accurate predictions. Proceeds are used to support the advancement of sports in Japan.

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