

A message from 2050



A future world connected by soccer

During my days as a player, my mind was fully preoccupied with handling the challenges I had been assigned rather than understanding the tactical aspects of the game. Since retiring from active play and taking on the role of coach, there are many things that I have come to understand for the first time.

It is often said that Japanese soccer lacks the scoring ability it needs to reach an international level of play. One of the reasons cited in this misgiving is the lack of power of individual players. But I also believe we cannot overlook the need to reform the national sports circumstances.

For example, in Japan, aside from the professional league, most amateur sports competitions are contested using a knockout competition. Once a team loses, there is no chance of playing another match. Unlike league matches, there is little time spent reflecting on the points that lost a match in order to rectify play for the next match, and consequently, it is difficult to provide feedback on team issues during practice and matches. It's the same with society in general – success is normally obtained only after correcting errors and then trying again. The elimination format certainly has room for improvement.

In soccer tournament cup competition, a great deal of importance is attached to performance during a match, with individual skills tending to attract the most attention. I have often wondered if there isn't also a tendency to overlook the teamwork required to compete throughout the long season of league competition. I feel this constitutes the root difference between soccer played in Japan

and in developed soccer nations.

The Japan Football Association is actually connecting elementary, middle and high school, university and club organizations in the hopes of creating a better soccer world environment, and is probing for a course of action intended to expand the league competition format. But such reforms will not happen overnight. In Europe, club soccer has enjoyed a continuous history of over 100 years, and many European supporters share the same views of soccer. In comparison, Japan's history has just begun with the creation of the J. League.

The well-established soccer nations, like Europe and South America, each have their own national character, reflecting a mature soccer sense where they play the kind of soccer supporters in those countries desire and the kinds of styles they deem as "good." This makes for a soccer culture that is characteristic of the individual countries. I want to build an individual soccer culture in Japan, too, as soon as possible. If we can have soccer permeate every nook and cranny of our society and lifestyle, then it should be possible.

I still can't forget a visit I once made to the Middle East, and the fun I had kicking a ball around on a beach with some local children. The world's soccer population is said to be the biggest of any sport. That's because you don't need any special equipment – it's a fantastic sport that enables you to share happiness with a single ball.

There is nothing that would make me happier than providing even a small contribution to making the future world one connected by soccer.

(From an interview)

Masahiro Fukuda

Born in Kanagawa in 1966. Joined Mitsubishi (currently Urawa Red Diamonds) in 1989 after graduating from Chuo University. The first Japanese J. League top scorer, he set a record of 93 goals (228 matches), as well as 9 goals (45 matches) playing for Japan's national team. He was the best-known striker in the club, "Mr. Reds," until his retirement in 2002. He has been active both in promoting the spread of soccer and as a commentator, and currently is the coach of the club.



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