

J.LEAGUE SEASON REVIEW 2024



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CONCEPT

We strive to create a league that
everyone can participate in, understand and create.
It is published for the purpose of open
and fair information disclosure.

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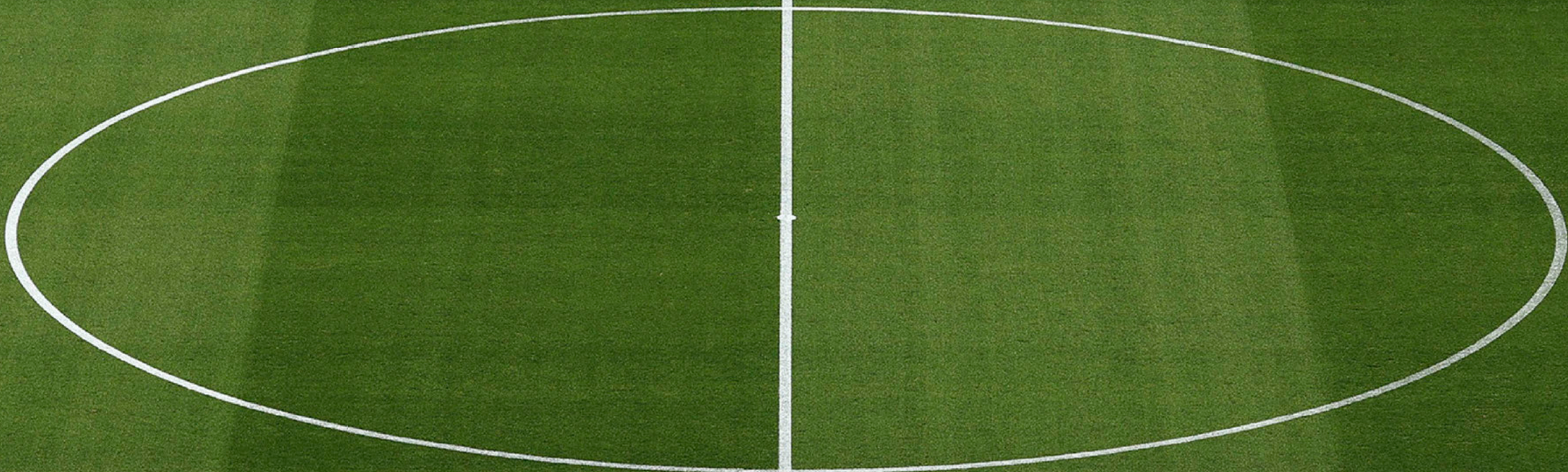
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Interview with the Chairman

Moving to a New Stage. Reflecting on J.LEAGUE's Year

Record-Breaking Total Attendance

- The 2024 season recorded the highest-ever total attendance of 12,540,265.

Whilst the increased number of matches due to J1's expansion to 20 clubs is undoubtedly a factor, the most encouraging aspect is the growth in attendance across all J.LEAGUE competitions, including the J.LEAGUE YBC Levain Cup. Expanding to 20 clubs in J1 has enhanced its regional presence, allowing more areas across Japan to experience the J1 atmosphere. Additionally, the increased exposure of J2 and J3 clubs in their respective regions has contributed to these positive results.

- With increased media coverage, there seem to be more opportunities to come across the J.LEAGUE.

Local media coverage has quadrupled since I became chairman three years ago, which naturally means there are more times people encounter J.LEAGUE. Additionally, hosting matches at the National Stadium

has proven an effective catalyst, particularly for fans and supporters in the Greater Tokyo area, as well as potential new fans. We're seeing significant numbers of first-time attendees and returning spectators who hadn't come to J.LEAGUE's matches in recent years. We can track digitally how many of these people return to matches at the National Stadium or attend other home games.

- Has the invitation campaign been particularly effective?

Times have changed, and the key now lies in how precisely we can execute digital marketing. Both the league and clubs are developing capabilities to attract audiences through digital channels, including younger generations. However, this alone isn't sufficient. The winning formula at present appears to be combining terrestrial broadcast exposure with digital investment, exploring how to use traditional media coverage to drive digital engagement.

Looking Back at the 2024 League Season

- In the MEIJI YASUDA J1 LEAGUE, Vissel Kobe secured their second consecutive championship.

Achieving back-to-back titles in such a competitive league is remarkable. Their investment approach to attaining success embodies the true nature of professional football. While the team has been built around players with overseas experience, players like Hotaru YAMAGUCHI and Gotoku SAKAI missed many games due to injuries. Despite this, the performances of Yuya OSAKO and J.LEAGUE MVP Yoshinori MUTO were outstanding. Muto's crucial equaliser against Kashiwa Reysol during Matchweek 37 in the final stage exemplifies their ability to deliver in critical moments. Completing the double by winning the Emperor's Cup (JFA 104th Japan Football Championship) further demonstrated their winning mentality. I believe they've truly established themselves as a formidable force in everyone's eyes.

- With this second consecutive title, they seem

poised to lead a new era.

That's certainly possible. However, in football, players gain experience year by year, so maintaining success depends on how well clubs integrate young players and new core members into the team. If they manage this well, they could sustain their dominance.

- Sanfrecce Hiroshima finished second and led the table at one point.

Hiroshima consistently builds impressive teams. In their third year under Manager Michael Skibbe, they've shown elements of a new kind of football in Japan—it's truly excellent. With their new stadium, they've demonstrated their potential to be one of Japan's leading clubs. I believe they've been one of the most influential clubs in Japanese football over the past 15 years. Moreover, their revenue is expected to double, including stadium business income. While this may be a turning point for the club, I think this season could mark a significant transformation for Japanese football as



- FC Machida Zelvia finished third in their debut J1 season.

This result demonstrates that clubs can achieve high rankings when they combine on-pitch efforts with growing revenue and smart investment. Despite being newcomers to J1, they excelled in these aspects.

- Tokyo Verdy nearly secured AFC Champions League qualification, while Albirex Niigata finished runners-up in the J.LEAGUE YBC Levain Cup.

These were outstanding achievements. While winning requires various elements, not just finances, such as club unity, including with fans and supporters, it's still remarkable that these teams produced excellent results with minimal expenses. With J1 now at 20 clubs, objectives naturally vary between realistic title contention and a desperate fight for survival. However, for clubs that have smaller budgets and are still developing, maintaining J1 status while playing attractive football is truly commendable.

- Fagiano Okayama secured promotion to J1 after 16 years in J2.

It's been a long journey, but they've steadily built their strength. You can sense their development as a club. It

will be fascinating to see how they compete at the higher level next season.

- Omiya Ardija won the Meiji Yasuda J3 League.

While Omiya may have become smaller compared to their past, they dominated the league performance-wise. Of course, they've always had the capability to perform at this level.

- Red Bull's entry marked the league's first foreign acquisition.

How the global football market views Japan and whether Japan attracts attention is crucial for both J.LEAGUE and its clubs. J.LEAGUE isn't just about domestic entertainment, so this level of international recognition should be viewed positively.

- FC Imabari and Kataller Toyama have also earned promotion to J2.

The power of community coming together can strengthen a club, and that's precisely what we've seen here. It's particularly impressive given that many larger population centres are still in J3. While they certainly have further aspirations, progress can't be rushed. What's emerged in these regions would have been unimaginable ten years ago.

The New Levain Cup Format

- The Levain Cup’s format changed to include all 60 clubs.

I've always believed that having all 60 clubs participate would be better, so this is an excellent format. I've also long hoped that regional J2 and J3 clubs could experience the atmosphere of J1 football in their areas, so I'm pleased we were able to make this change this year. In terms of impression and impact, I believe we've delivered substantial value to our partners. Furthermore, it was extremely positive that several J2 and J3 clubs experienced the fundamental principle that victory leads to something good—opportunities to play against higher-division clubs. Beyond allowing players and local communities to experience J1 football, it created revenue opportunities for clubs in lower divisions and regional areas. Clubs like Tottori, which



attracted 7,677 spectators for a weeknight match, likely learned valuable lessons about operations. Including the excellent final, it was a thoroughly engaging tournament overall.

Further Growth Initiatives

- Please tell us about the two growth strategies J.LEAGUE is pursuing.

While we certainly want our top clubs to dominate in Asian competitions and represent Japan domestically, this isn't easily achieved. To realise this, clubs need to grow in both capability and substance. For example, attendance figures for the top 10 clubs increase because people are attracted by their appeal, and they can accommodate large crowds because they have quality stadia available. How we develop individual club strength over the next decade is incredibly important. Compared to 2023, we've seen a 14.4% increase to record-high attendance figures. This suggests we're moving closer to our desired vision.

- Regarding stadium appeal, we saw new stadia open for Sanfrecce Hiroshima, V-Varen Nagasaki, and Zweigen Kanazawa.

The importance of stadium is undeniable. Moreover, it's not just about building them once and done; in the sports business, you need to keep upgrading incrementally or you'll stagnate. If the rest of the world would stand still, that would be fine, but in a competitive environment, stadiums are crucial assets. A new stadium is one of the few factors that can drive dramatic club growth. Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Kanazawa have gained this opportunity for growth.

While Nagasaki unfortunately missed out on J1 promotion, they showed promising potential to move up in category. Including the desire to visit their stadium, the football experience there should appear quite different from what people have seen before.

- J.LEAGUE Europe will also begin full operations as a European base.

If we're going to compete in the global football market, connecting with Europe—the cutting edge of football—is essential and natural. I believe Japanese players and the J.LEAGUE aren't yet accurately perceived overseas, including in Europe. It's a fact that Japanese players are often undervalued in transfer fees, so it's absolutely necessary for us to help others understand us better while experiencing their best practices up close. We're establishing an office in London to conduct various activities to better connect with the global market. Beyond the physical distance, Japan's strong focus on domestic competition has meant that the people at the top of Japanese football—our Football Directors and General Managers—need more exposure to the managers and players available worldwide and how football is evolving. It's also essential to think alongside the world's top leagues and clubs, so we want to connect J.LEAGUE clubs with the global football community, not just for players and managers but also front office staff. How to attract foreign investment is another crucial point.

- A major revision has been made to the player contract system, which had been a long-standing issue.

While I understand the historical context of ABC categorization of contract system, it dates back to 1999—25 years ago. J.LEAGUE's position in global football is entirely different now compared to then, so I wanted to review this as soon as possible. Ideally, we would have abolished the entire system, but immediately dismantling something that's been in place for 25 years isn't straightforward. It's logically inconsistent for players joining in consecutive years to have significantly different compensation, so this will gradually be phased out. It's the clubs' responsibility to determine a player's

value, which is true both in Japan and globally; who values talent and how also comes down to competition. In a sense, this is how it should be. Additionally, I believe we need to make the environment more attractive to players.

- Will this encourage competition among clubs as well?

I believe we're entering an era where presidents, general managers, and football directors will be increasingly evaluated on their capabilities. Determining player salaries is just one aspect of their investment decisions. When they realise that J.LEAGUE isn't operating solely as domestic entertainment, it will show how the league has evolved.

Climate Action Initiative Launches

- J.LEAGUE × Shinji ONO Smile Football Tour for a Sustainable Future supported by Meiji Yasuda has begun.

Personally, I've always thought what Sergio ECHIGO did touring the country in the past was remarkable. When it comes to promoting football, this kind of activity should definitely be done by someone who can showcase the game. I've wanted Shinji ONO, a Co-opted Member of the Executive Committee, to do this kind of work for some time. In modernising this approach, I thought combining the joy of football with real messages about sustainability for children would be more effective. Shinji is perfect for demonstrating football.

- Again this year, many matches were cancelled

or suspended due to heavy rain and other causes.

While we can't easily solve climate change issues by simply saying something needs to be done, the English Premier League seems quite advanced regarding sustainability and shows a high level of commitment. This is because English society as a whole is highly aware of climate change issues, and football clubs, as central community institutions, seem to have a strong feeling that they must demonstrate clear intention. We should learn from this. While it might not yet be familiar to Japanese people, I believe it's necessary for the league and clubs as a whole to consistently treat this as a priority.

Looking Ahead to the 2025 Season

- The start of season will change from 2026, and next season will be the final one starting in February. What kind of year will it be?

There's nothing special about it being the final year of the current season format. Players and team staff should focus intensely on each match and the season ahead as they always have; that's appropriate. That's the nature of the football industry—focusing on each upcoming match. At the same time, clubs, the league, and those around them can continue preparing several years ahead as usual. The front office needs to think carefully about how far ahead to plan; that's absolutely necessary for the players' sake.

- It seems club executives will have a lot to think about, requiring full mental engagement throughout the season.

That might be true. The same goes for us. But whenever there's change, there are always opportunities, so finding and capitalising on them could make this an exciting period. We expect more people to engage with us in the new season, whether through stadium attendance or watching broadcasts. We must consistently deliver quality to our fans and supporters, including new ones. The key is whether we can continue to upgrade this iterative process.

Attendance for the 2024 season

In 2024 season, the total yearly attendance for official J.LEAGUE matches reached a record 12,540,265, surpassing the previous record set in 2019 season (11,043,003).

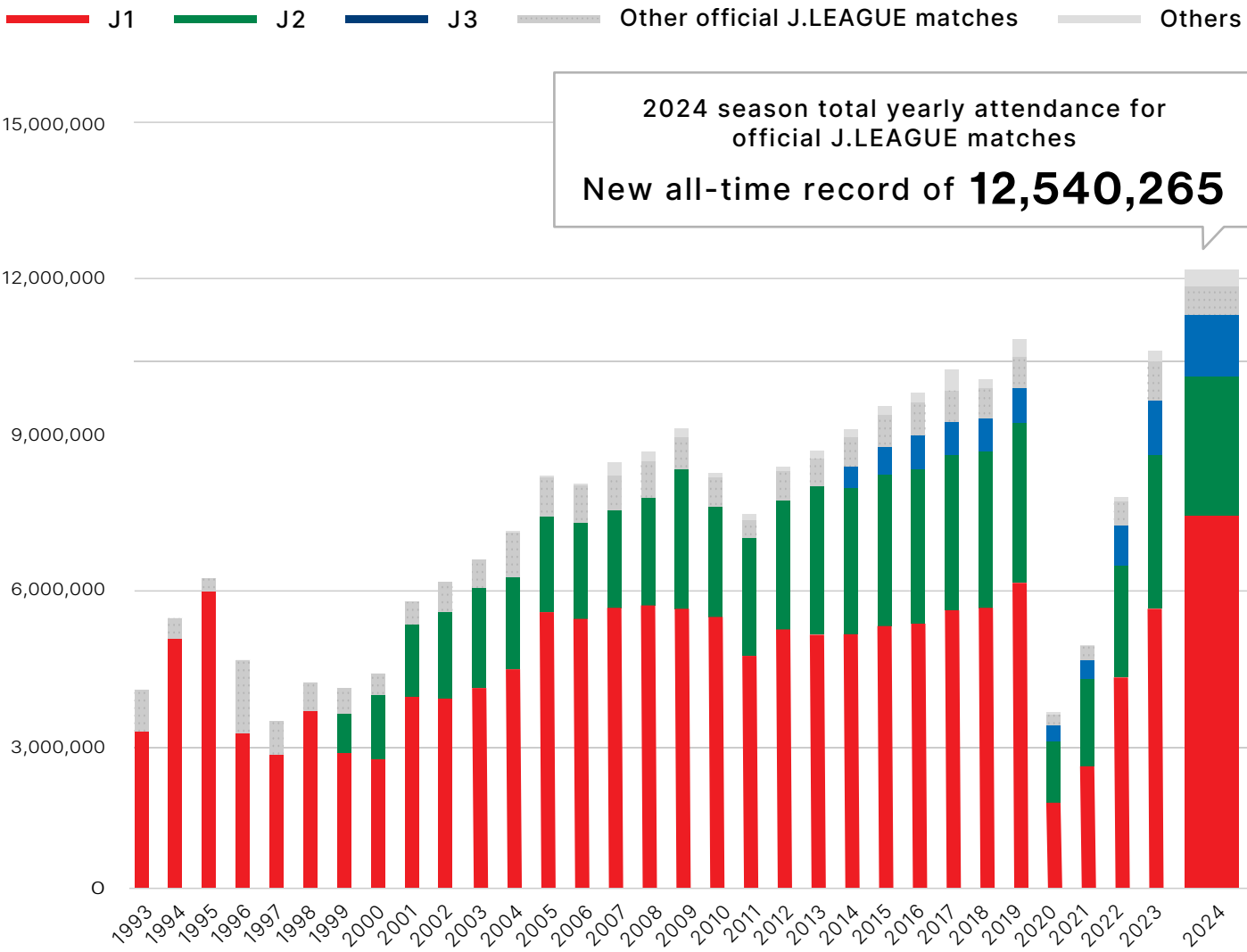
- Total yearly attendance for official J.LEAGUE matches

(MEIJI YASUDA J1 LEAGUE, MEIJI YASUDA J2 LEAGUE, MEIJI YASUDA J3 LEAGUE, J.LEAGUE YBC Levain CUP, FUJIFILM SUPER CUP, J1 Promotion Play-Offs, J2 Promotion Play-Offs, and J3/JFL Play-Offs)

12,540,265 (Compared to previous year: 114.4%; Compared to 2019: 113.6%)

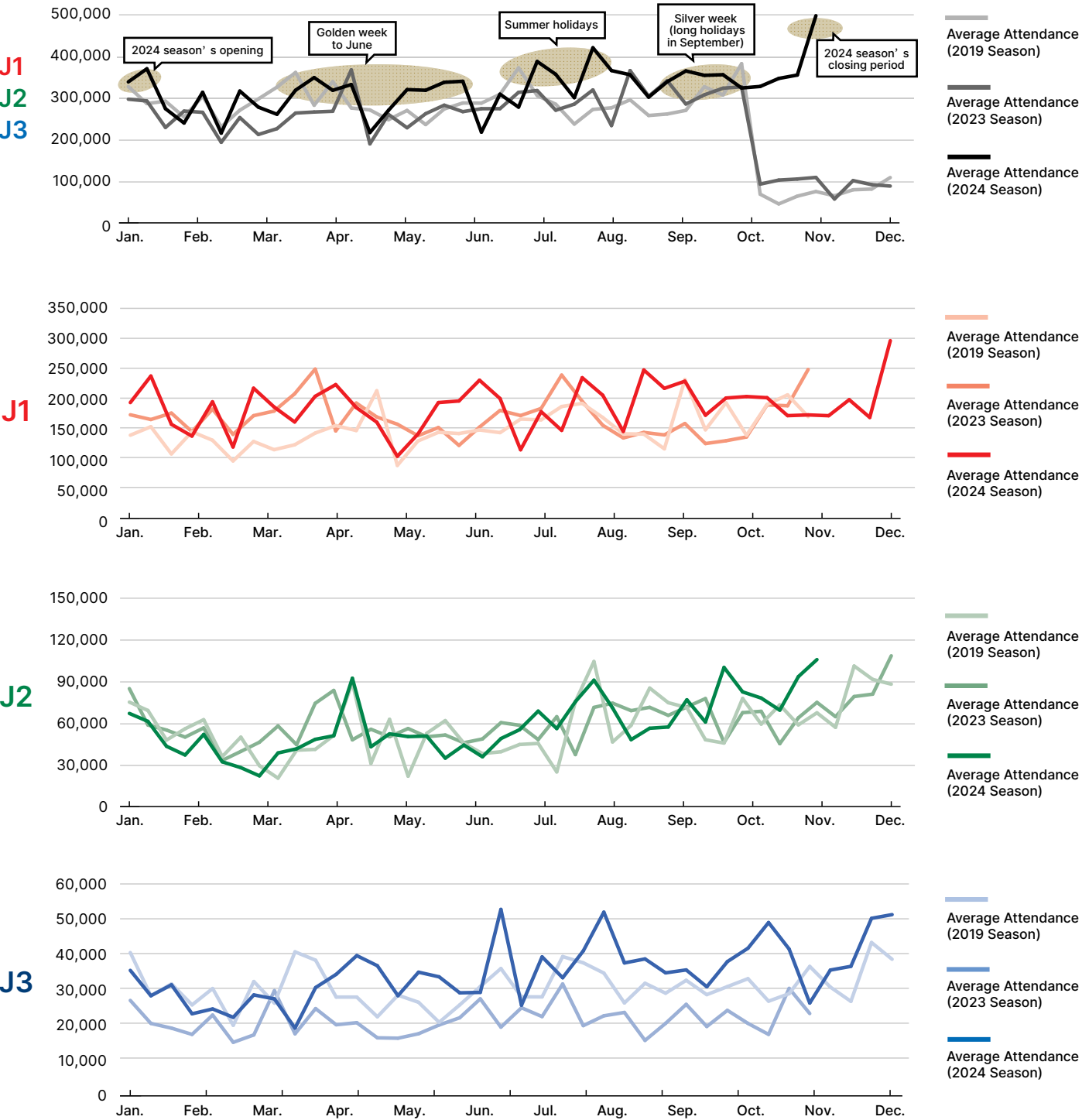
The total attendance for the MEIJI YASUDA J.LEAGUE (J1, J2, and J3) reached 11,932,080, thereby exceeding the Eleven Million (11,000,000) mark for league match attendance alone. Looking at attendance by category, attendance was 7,734,871 for J1, 2,913,415 for J2, and 1,283,794 for J3. Average attendance compared to the previous year was 107% for J1, 111% for J2, and 112% for J3, exceeding the results from the previous year in all categories. The J1 final matchweek saw total attendance for a single matchweek exceed 300,000 for the first time, reaching 302,381, with an average of over 30,000.

Total attendance, including attendance for matches other than official J.LEAGUE matches (MEIJI YASUDA J.LEAGUE WORLD CHALLENGE, AFC Champions League) was 12,891,547, just under 13,000,000.



- Analysis of attendance trends in 2024 season

Changes in average attendance by matchweek for J1, J2, and J3 clubs



Attendance results for 2024 season show that attendance by matchweek was higher than in 2019 and 2023 during the peak periods for attracting visitors: April to June (during and after the Golden Week), July to August (during the summer holidays) and September (the Silver Week).

Attendance has increased not only in J1 but also in J2 and J3 due to a combination of factors, including the increase in the number of J1 clubs to 20, which has boosted overall attendance; the strengthening of local exposure in recent years, which has led to increased interest among the community and enabled each club to schedule matches that focus on attracting spectators; the strategic increase in matches played at the Japan National Stadium; and the new stadium effect.



2024 J.LEAGUE YBC Levain CUP

TOPICS

The 32nd edition of the J.LEAGUE YBC Levain CUP 2024 was held under a new competition format with all J.LEAGUE clubs taking part. The first round featured a number of matches between rivals of different categories, and there was an unprecedented influx of vibrant energy in each region, with fans and supporters of J1 clubs visiting the home stadiums of J3 clubs. Eight clubs from J1, V-Varen Nagasaki from J2, and Kattaler Toyama from J3 reached the play-off round. Nagasaki and Toyama made it through to the play-offs after overcoming several clubs from higher categories. Nagasaki defeated Júbilo Iwata and Urawa Reds, while Toyama defeated Montedio Yamagata, Shimizu S-Pulse, and Vissel Kobe.



62,517 spectators packed the final.



Nagasaki and Toyama defeated J1 clubs to advance to the play-off round.

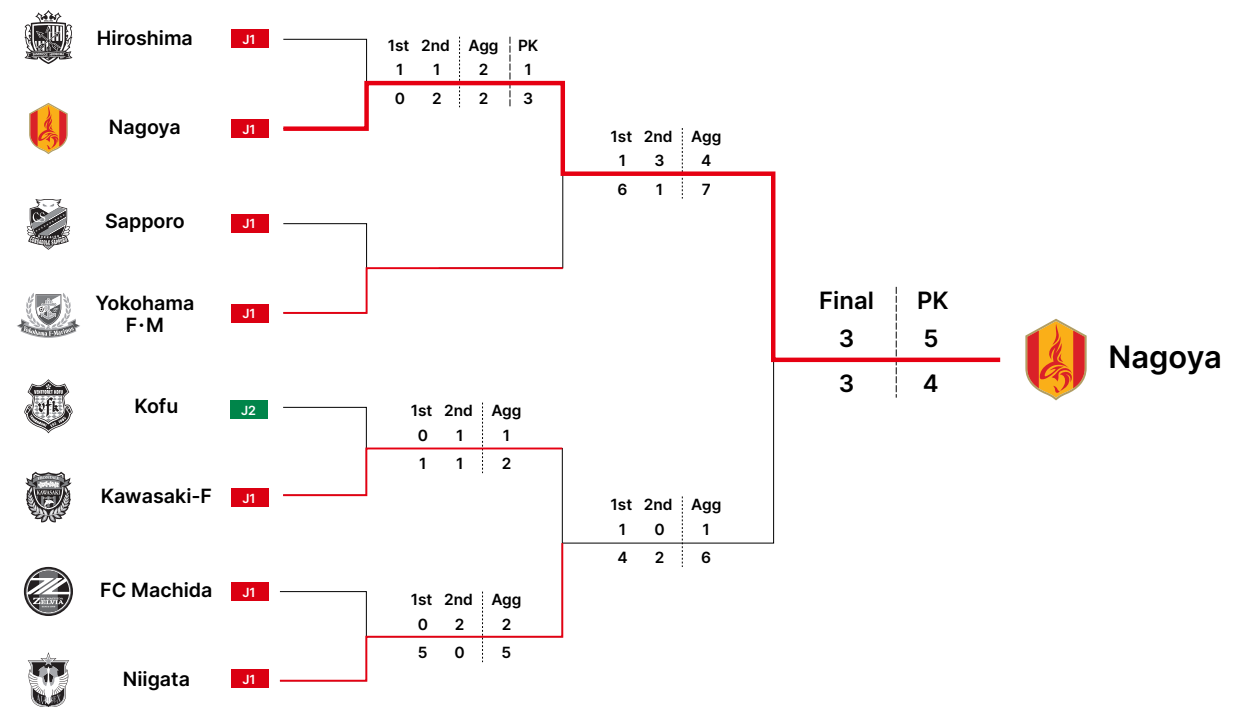


Nagoya defeated Niigata on penalty kicks.

The final was a fixture between Nagoya Grampus and Albirex Niigata. A total of 62,517 spectators, the largest attendance in the Levain Cup, packed Japan National Stadium for the game, which ended with Nagoya winning (for the second time in three years) in a fierce battle that went to penalty kicks.

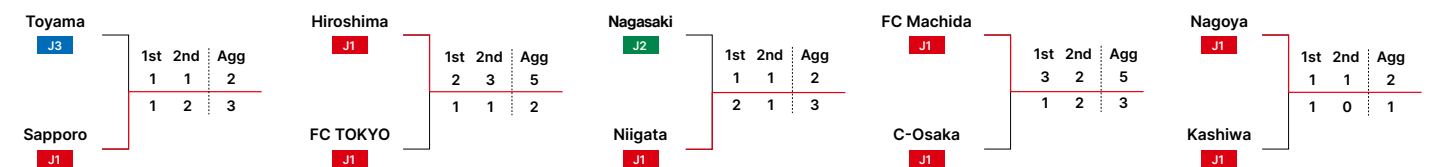
PRIME ROUND TOURNAMENT

9.4 - 11.2



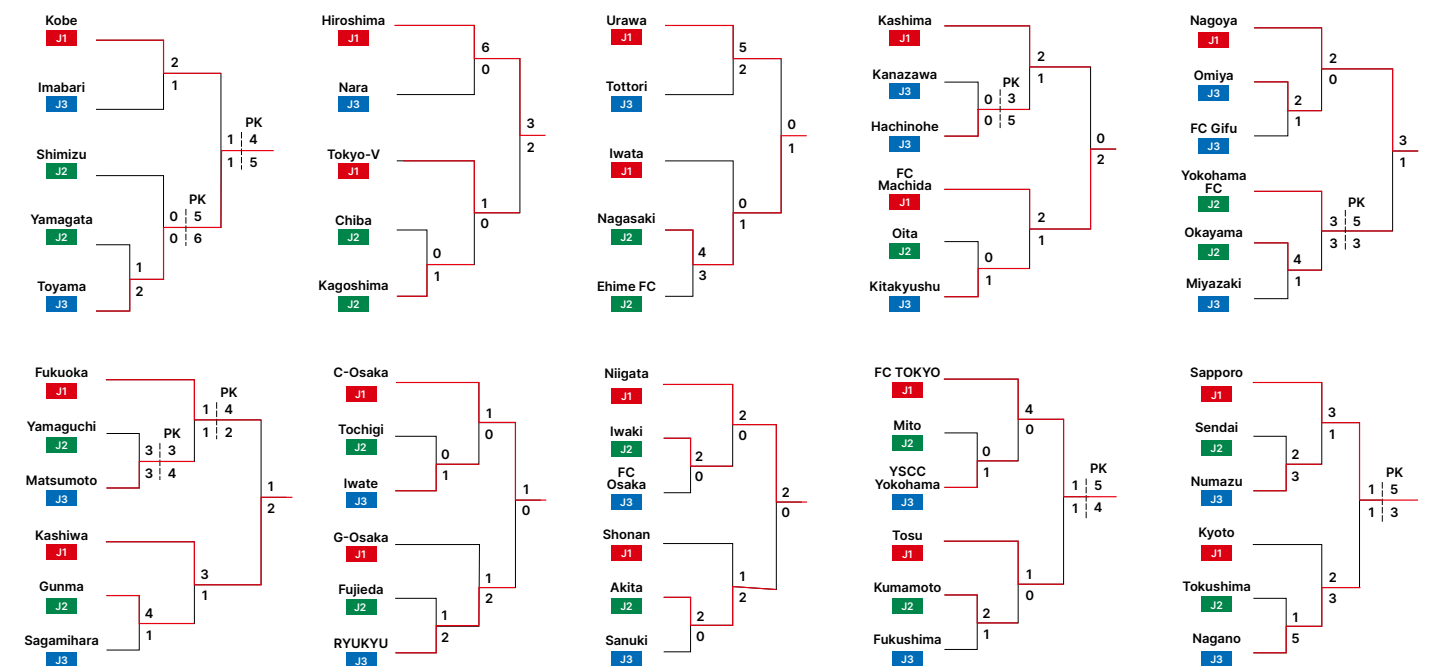
PLAYOFF ROUND TOURNAMENT

6.5 / 6.9



1st ROUND TOURNAMENT

3.6 - 5.22



TOPICS

Change of the competition format

Until last season, the J.LEAGUE YBC Levain CUP featured a total of 20 clubs—all J1 clubs and two J2 clubs (clubs that were in J1 LEAGUE the previous year)—but this season the format was changed to include all 60 J1, J2, and J3 clubs. The competition was split into three rounds—first round, play-off round and prime round—with the three clubs participating in the AFC Champions League 2023/24 knockout stage (Kawasaki Frontale, Yokohama F·Marinos and Ventforet Kofu) introduced to the tournament in the prime round. The first round, in which 57 clubs competed, featured 38 matches between clubs from different categories, with lower category clubs hosting higher category clubs at home. Ten clubs took part in the play-off round and eight in the prime round, playing each other on a home and away basis (with the exception of the final).

Effects of the change in the competition format

The fixtures between clubs of different categories, which were unprecedented in previous editions of the Levain Cup, brought a great deal of excitement and enthusiasm to the competition. In particular, matches involving J3 clubs against teams from higher categories saw the stadiums packed to the rafters with fans and supporters, with Vanraure Hachinohe recording the highest attendance in the club's history and Gainare Tottori and FC Imabari recording the highest attendance of the season.



Club's all-time highest attendance record

4,844

Vanraure Hachinohe vs. Kashima Antlers in the second game of the first round recorded the largest attendance in Hachinohe's history, with 4,844 spectators turning out for the game.

the highest attendance this season

7,677

Gainare Tottori vs. Urawa Reds in the second game of the first round drew 7,677 spectators, Tottori's highest attendance this season.



Events

The J.LEAGUE YBC Levain CUP 2024 also featured a variety of events that were organised in collaboration with the special sponsor, Yamazaki Biscuits Co., Ltd.

Soccer Park

An entertainment activity in which spectators could participate free of charge at each of the prime round matches. It featured a Shooting Challenge and Dribbling Challenge, and participants were rewarded with sweets from Yamazaki Biscuit Co., Ltd. In the final match, a Through Pass Game was held with the participation of around 2,000 spectators.



Kids Battles

Before the final at the Japan National Stadium, a dribbling relay and shooting game showdown took place on the pitch as part of the Kids Eleven events. Eleven children were drawn from the participants in the Kids Eleven events held at the stadiums of each of the two clubs that reached the final. The selected 22 children (11 per club) took part in the Levain Cup Final Kids Eleven on the day of the final. A total of 14,000 children participated in the "Levain Cup Kids Eleven—Let's Aim for the Final Together with the Club!" events held at all 69 matches from the first round to the semi-finals in the prime round.



Excite with Levain!

Event for spectators of the final who brought their own Yamazaki Biscuit products and promoted them on the Levain CAM (the in-stadium cameras). Winners selected by lottery received special prizes, including player-autographed merchandise and other valuable items.



Stadium Gourmet Cuisine

A total of 13 special stadium gourmet menus, created in partnership with Yamazaki Biscuits and available exclusively at the final, were sold in 19 shops.

Jリーグ × 小野伸二
スマイルフットボールツアー
for a Sustainable Future
supported by 明治安田

一緒に楽しもう!!
小野伸二

J.LEAGUE's Sustainability Department, established to address social issues through climate action and regional revitalisation, enters its second year. This year marks the launch of the "J.LEAGUE × Shinji ONO Smile Football Tour for a Sustainable Future supported by Meiji Yasuda," combining football clinics led by Shinji ONO with "Sustainability Talks" featuring Takayuki TSUJII and others discussing climate change. In its inaugural year, the tour reached approximately 1,900 primary school students across 15 out of 60 clubs, from Hokkaido Consadole Sapporo in the north to FC Ryukyu in the south.



SCHOOL

1 Football Clinic

Shinji ONO leads the football clinics alongside current and former J.LEAGUE players. Groups of 64 students from years 1–3 and 4–6 participate in warm-up exercises, demonstrations of basic dribbling and ball control techniques, and mini-games. Students enjoy practical football experience, including matches between the instructor and primary school teams. The 70-minute sessions allow children to experience the joy of football and the fun of playing with teammates.



2 Sustainability Talk

Alongside the football clinics, these talks help students understand the connection between football and climate change—which causes extreme weather events like heatwaves, heavy rain, and typhoons—and learn what we can do to ensure football can be enjoyed in the future.

When shown a map of Japan with weather forecasts for 2100, children react with astonishment. When Ono asks, "Could you play football in temperatures even hotter than today?" the children respond with a resounding "No!"

At the end of the session, children write messages to "forests"—which absorb CO2 and significantly contribute to preventing global warming—on flags, which they take home along with tree seedlings.





SPECIAL TALK

J.LEAGUE: Shinji ONO
×
Takayuki TSUJII



We spoke with J.LEAGUE's Shinji ONO and Takayuki TSUJII about their thoughts on this project, which has reached approximately 1,900 primary school students across 15 out of 60 clubs, from Hokkaido Consadole Sapporo in the north to FC Ryukyu in the south, since April 2024.

- Looking back on the first year of the "J.LEAGUE × Shinji ONO Smile Football Tour for a Sustainable Future supported by Meiji Yasuda"

Shinji ONO, Co-opted Member, Executive Committee:
We've had tremendous support from the very first

session, and we've constantly updated our approach to ensure children enjoy themselves. Thanks to great teamwork, we've created an engaging programme that brings smiles to children's faces.

Takayuki TSUJII, Corporate Executive Officer: Mr. Ono is the cornerstone of this project. After his retirement, he expressed his desire to give future generations the pure experience of enjoying football. That's how this initiative began, using the J.LEAGUE as a platform. As the name "Smile Football" suggests, the primary goal is to create joyful moments where children interact with the ball and their teammates alongside Ono. This positive energy has spread to staff and partner companies, improving with each session.

Ono: We openly discuss both reflections and challenges. For instance, the program is divided between students in years 1–3 and 4–6, and we initially started with younger students but switched the order to have older students first. The older children are bigger, and it was physically demanding for the coaching staff in the second session (laughs). When I suggested the change to ensure we could give our all to both groups, everyone agreed. Now, we can spend more time interacting with the children with genuine smiles.

Tsujii: With Mr. Ono as the focal point, staff members continually bring new ideas. For the Sustainability Talk, we initially used photographs directly from the Environment Ministry's website to show weather forecasts for 2100. However, someone suggested using animation instead. We added illustrations of a sweating

sun, dizzy clouds, and squids spraying ink. This dramatically improved the children's engagement.

- About the Sustainability Talk. What led you to combine football clinics with climate change issues, which might seem unrelated at first glance?

Tsujii: Actually, it wasn't my idea to add sustainability to Ono's football clinics; it came from another board member, which I was delighted about. When children are enjoying football, and we tell them, "The climate is really important for continuing to enjoy this fun sport," they listen attentively. Moreover, many of their parents are from the generation that watched Ono's career in real-time. When he says, "This is important. Let's protect your children's future together," well, that's powerful (laughs). Protecting children's future and protecting football feels coherent as a mission. Of course, we can't convey everything in the 10–15 minutes before and after the football clinic. The J.LEAGUE had just finished editing a Climate Action Video in which Ono, Kengo NAKAMURA, and Atsuto UCHIDA learned about climate change from scientist Seita EMORI. So, after the Sustainability Talk raises awareness about the importance of the climate, we give out stickers with Ono's signature and a QR code for the video, allowing them to continue learning at home.

Ono: I'm really glad we did this. Listening to Dr Emori's explanation was eye-opening. I thought, "Is this really what's going to happen?" Beyond just playing sports, the environment essential for living is being lost. Today's children already learn about climate change at school and have some understanding. By having parents listen, too, we've created an opportunity for family discussion and learning together.

I wasn't planning to focus solely on football anyway, so this seemed interesting. It's good to have various learning opportunities during the 90 minutes, not just football. English could be another possibility, for instance. While school studies often focus on exam preparation, connecting learning to daily life and football can build children's future and confidence. I think about how happy I would have been to experience something like this when I was young.

Tsujii: Learning about the environment in English also sounds interesting. Also, when we ask children how old they'll be in 2100 when the climate might be drastically different, a 6-year-old will only be 80 then. This is genuinely an issue they'll face in their lifetime. After its mid-April release, our Climate Action video views initially reached about 50,000 before plateauing. However, they've increased with each Smile Football Tour event, exceeding 68,000 by late November. Reaching 100,000 views would represent 1% of our annual match attendance of about 10 million. The circle of support is growing, and J.LEAGUE clubs are beginning to take a proactive stance.

Ono: Nothing would make me happier than if children remember even a bit of what we've said when they grow up. Some might even pass it on themselves. My own activities are rooted in Sergio ECHIGO's "Sawayaka Soccer Clinic". Whether it's football or climate change, I hope more people become ambassadors for these causes in the future. I wish for this circle to grow and connect with the next generation.



- Your activities sound fulfilling. Are there any particularly memorable moments?

Tsujii: In our post-event surveys, one father shared his 8-year-old son's thoughts: "If I change, my big brother will change, and so will dad, mum, my classmates, and teachers. So, I need to be the one to change first." The father was moved and wrote, "I've decided to do what I can, too."

Ono: That's really heartening. In football, if you want to become a good player, how much you practice is up to you. Creating a better environment is also down to individual actions. In that sense, football and sustainability have a natural affinity.

I was also struck by how many girls participated in the football clinics. I can see that watching Nadeshiko Japan (Japan Women's National Team) and the WE League has inspired more girls to try football. There was one incident—I can't remember exactly where—when a girl who had been participating left the pitch, probably thinking she couldn't do it. But when we called out, "Come on, let's play together. Give it a try!" she came back, and with everyone's encouragement, she really enjoyed herself by the end.

Tsujii: Mr. Ono handles it so well. At every session, he asks, "Who's playing football for the first time?" and initially gives those children his full attention. Then you start seeing the more skilled children teaching others. It spreads naturally.

Ono: It's fascinating to watch this process. Ultimately, people don't learn just by being taught; they learn by watching. I've always believed this is crucial, and I can really sense the children observing our every gesture and movement. That's precisely why we must be excellent role models.



- Through the tour, you must have gained insights into what J.LEAGUE and its clubs can do, and their potential.

Ono: I've had more realisations than during my playing career. Take the climate change initiatives. Since Mr Tsujii started communicating about this, various clubs have gradually shown interest and started learning. From the clubs, the message spreads to their academies, parents, supporters, and many others. This creates unique characteristics, a local flavour, and voices for change at each club. While it's not simple, consistently doing small things surely leads to greater impact. That's why we must continue these activities.



Tsujii: With growing support for climate action, we're at the stage of collective awareness-building. We must be transparent about greenhouse gas emissions from league and club operations and work towards zero emissions, starting with changing mindsets and behaviours. However, when people think about what they can do individually, they often imagine self-denial and austere living, such as using less air conditioning. Instead, what's crucial is creating systems with lower environmental impact. We're in a preparatory phase towards that goal.

For example, consider switching match-day stadium shuttle buses to zero-emission vehicles. If local governments try this alone, they face questions about using tax money just for football. Companies alone face cost barriers and regulatory challenges. However, if J.LEAGUE clubs connect various stakeholders and arrange for community use on non-match days, and if climate action supporters endorse this use of tax money, local governments can act, and companies' burden will decrease. New systems can emerge through such connections. Clubs have the potential to play vital roles as regional hubs.

- There are still many J.LEAGUE clubs nationwide to visit. What are your thoughts for 2025 and beyond?

Ono: First, we need to continue these efforts. Beyond sharing the joy of football, I want to convey messages like, "Don't wait for the future; aim for the national team



starting now." When awareness changes, daily actions follow. Interacting with children through these activities has really reinforced this for me.

Tsujii: Besides visiting venues, my role includes expanding our network of sponsoring companies. If we can better demonstrate the Smile Football Tour's value and increase corporate sponsorship, it will enhance the sustainability of both these initiatives and J.LEAGUE itself. That makes the content crucial. We want to continue our activities on both fronts: improving quality while expanding our network of partners.

Text by Takeru FUJIKI (Asahi Shimbun)

PROFILE



Shinji ONO

Born 27 September 1979 in Shizuoka Prefecture. Joined Urawa Reds in 1998. Played for seven clubs across Japan, the Netherlands, Germany, and Australia. Won the UEFA Cup (now UEFA Europa League) with Feyenoord. Represented Japan in three consecutive FIFA World Cups (1998, 2002, 2006). Retired after the 2023 season and became an ambassador for Hokkaido Consadole Sapporo on 14 January 2024. Serves as a Co-opted Member of the J.LEAGUE Executive Committee from 2024.



Takayuki TSUJII

Born in 1968. After working at a sea kayak shop, joined the Patagonia Tokyo-Shibuya store in 1999. Became a full-time employee in 2000 and served as President of Patagonia Japan from 2009 to 2019. After leaving Patagonia, worked as a social activist and social business consultant, involved in vision and strategy development for companies and NPOs. Appointed as an Outside Director of the J.LEAGUE in 2022 and assumed position as Corporate Executive Officer in 2023, overseeing sustainability initiatives.

24	2024 J.LEAGUE
26	2024 Season Result
30	J.LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL SERIES

2024 J.LEAGUE



FUJIFILM SUPER CUP 2024
Victory to Kawasaki Frontale



Thai Life Insurance J.LEAGUE ASIA
CHALLENGE THAILAND 2023/24
powered by MEIJI YASUDA held in
Pathum, Thailand

Feb.



Start of 2024 MEIJI YASUDA
J.LEAGUE



Special Project
Presentation for
J.LEAGUE Day 2024
held

May.



Yokohama F.
Marinos – Winner of
the eJ.LEAGUE
eFootball™ 2024
season

MEIJI YASUDA J.LEAGUE
WORLD CHALLENGE 2024
powered by docomo held



Jul.



J.LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL
SERIES 2024 powered by
docomo held

Oct.



Vissel Kobe – Winner of the
2024 MEIJI YASUDA J1 LEAGUE



Omiya Ardija – Winner of the
2024 MEIJI YASUDA J3 LEAGUE

Mar.



A general meeting of members and
extraordinary meeting of the Board of
Directors reappointed Yoshikazu
NONOMURA as the J.LEAGUE Chairman.

Start of the
2024
J.LEAGUE
YBC Levain
CUP



Nov.



Shimizu
S-Pulse –
Winner of the
2024 MEIJI
YASUDA J2
LEAGUE



Tokyo Verdy Youth – Winner of the
2024 J YOUTH CUP

Dec.



2024 J.LEAGUE Awards held at
Yokohama Arena
Vissel Kobe's Yoshinori MUTO
crowned the Player of the Year



J.LEAGUE x Shinji Ono Smile Football Tour for
a Sustainable Future supported by MEIJI
YASUDA launched



Nagoya Grampus
– Winner of the
2024 J.LEAGUE
YBC Levain CUP

Apr.



2024 J.LEAGUE SHAREN! Awards
held

SEASON RESULT



MEIJI YASUDA J1 LEAGUE

	PTS
1 Vissel Kobe <72>	
2 Sanfrecce Hiroshima <68>	
3 FC Machida Zelvia <66>	
4 Gamba Osaka <66>	
5 Kashima Antlers <65>	
6 Tokyo Verdy <56>	
7 FC Tokyo <54>	
8 Kawasaki Frontale <52>	
9 Yokohama F. Marinos <52>	
10 Cerezo Osaka <52>	
11 Nagoya Grampus <50>	
12 Avispa Fukuoka <50>	
13 Urawa Reds <48>	
14 Kyoto Sanga F.C. <47>	
15 Shonan Bellmare <45>	
16 Albirex Niigata <42>	
17 Kashiwa Reysol <41>	
18 Júbilo Iwata <38>	
19 Hokkaido Consadole Sapporo <37>	
20 Sagan Tosu <35>	

MVP
2024

VISSEL KOBE
YOSHINORI MUTO

■ relegated to J2

Vissel Kobe won back-to-back titles. Although FC Machida Zelvia and Sanfrecce Hiroshima were in the lead for long periods, in the closing stages of the season Vissel Kobe never relinquished the top spot from Matchweek 35 onwards. In the final Matchweek 38, with all three teams still in contention, Vissel Kobe won their match to finish four points clear of second-placed Hiroshima, and celebrated with their home fans and supporters. This season, the team continued to apply effective pressing strategy and to work hard. Led by players with national team and European club experience such as Yuya OSAKO and Yoshinori MUTO, each member of the squad brought their own unique strengths to the game. The team's strengthened line-up boosted competitiveness within the team and, thanks to the skillful deployment of players by manager Takayuki YOSHIDA, the club successfully competed in both domestic and international tournaments.



MEIJI YASUDA J2 LEAGUE

	PTS
1 Shimizu S-Pulse <82>	
2 Yokohama FC <76>	
3 V-Varen Nagasaki <75>	
4 Montedio Yamagata <66>	
5 Fagiano Okayama <65>	
6 Vegalta Sendai <64>	
7 JEF United Chiba <61>	
8 Tokushima Vortis <55>	
9 Iwaki FC <54>	
10 Blaublitz Akita <54>	
11 Renofa Yamaguchi FC <53>	
12 Roasso Kumamoto <46>	
13 Fujieda MYFC <46>	
14 Ventforet Kofu <45>	
15 Mito Hollyhock <44>	
16 Oita Trinita <43>	
17 Ehime FC <40>	
18 Tochigi SC <34>	
19 Kagoshima United FC <30>	
20 Thespa Gunma <18>	

■ promoted to J1 ■ relegated to J3

Shimizu S-Pulse won the J2 League for the first time and will return to the J1 stage for the first time in three seasons after dropping out of the top flight in 2022. This season, under the guidance of manager Tadahiro AKIBA, continuing from last season, the team played attacking football, with one of the best squads in J2. From the Matchweek 9, the team ran off seven consecutive wins. They were particularly dominant at home, recording 15 wins, three draws and one defeat, and won the championship with a game to spare in front of a huge crowd of fans and supporters. Yokohama FC, renowned for their defensive prowess—they conceded the fewest goals in the league with 27 and have not lost in 20 matches since Matchweek 15—secured second place on the final matchweek of the season and will return to J1 after a one-year absence. Fagiano Okayama won the final of the J1 promotion play-offs and secured the last ticket to the J.LEAGUE's top flight.





MEIJI YASUDA J3 LEAGUE


1  **Omiya Ardija** <85>


2  **FC Imabari** <73>

3  **Kataller Toyama** <64>


4  **Matsumoto Yamaga F.C.** <60>


5  **Fukushima United FC** <59>


6  **FC Osaka** <58>


7  **Giravanz Kitakyushu** <56>

8  **FC Gifu** <53>


9  **S.C. Sagami-hara** <53>


10  **Azul Claro Numazu** <52>


11  **Vanraure Hachinohe** <52>


12  **Zweigen Kanazawa** <50>


13  **Gainare Tottori** <50>


14  **FC Ryukyu** <47>


15  **Tegevajaro Miyazaki** <46>

16  **Kamatamare Sanuki** <43>

17  **Nara Club** <39>

18  **AC Nagano Parceiro** <37>

19  **Y.S.C.C. Yokohama** <32>

20  **Iwate Grulla Morioka** <22>

■ promoted to J2 ■ relegated to JFL

Omiya Ardija made a successful return to the J2 league in a year's time. The team, led by newly appointed manager Tetsu NAGASAWA, started the season in fine form, going unbeaten in their first 12 matches. From Matchweek 8, the team never relinquished their position and by Matchweek 32 had secured a top-two finish, the automatic promotion qualification. In the following Matchweek 33, the team won the championship with five games to spare. Omiya has been consistent in attack and defence, scoring the most goals and conceding the second fewest in the league. Runners-up FC Imabari were also promoted to the J2 division in their fifth year after joining the J3 division. Despite dropping to 11th place at one stage, the team maintained their second-place position from Matchweek 25 and achieved their long-held goal in Matchweek 36. Kataller Toyama won the final of the J2 promotion play-offs to secure their long-awaited promotion to the J2 division.

FUJIFILM SUPER CUP

2023 MEIJI YASUDA
J1 LEAGUE
champions



Vissel Kobe

103rd Emperor's Cup
winners



Kawasaki Frontale

0-1

Last season's Emperor's Cup champions Kawasaki Frontale defeated fellow league champions Vissel Kobe 1-0 in the FUJIFILM SUPER CUP to claim their third title in the competition. In front of a crowd of 52,142, more than at the previous final, the first half was a back-and-forth affair, and the teams went into half-time scoreless, but the game broke open in the 48th minute, just after the start of the second half. Kawasaki Frontale won a free-kick on the right and Tatsuki SEKO crossed for the goal. Vissel Kobe goalkeeper Daiya MAEKAWA was unable to coral the ball, and when Hotaru YAMAGUCHI tried to clear it, the ball hit the right leg of the onrushing Sai VAN WERMESKERKEN and went straight into the net. Kawasaki Frontale held on to their one-goal lead to claim their first title of the season.

2024 J.LEAGUE YBC Levain CUP



Nagoya Grampus

















3-3
(PK 5-4)



Albirex Niigata

Nagoya Grampus was crowned champions for the second time in three years after a hard-fought final against Albirex Niigata that went to penalties. Despite the rain, 62,517 spectators packed the Japan National Stadium for the match, the largest crowd in League Cup history and the largest for an official J.LEAGUE match in the 2024 season. Nagoya took a two-goal lead in the first half through goals from Kensuke NAGAI in the 31st and 42nd minutes in quick succession. As the chasing team, Niigata made three substitutions in the 65th minute in an attempt to boost their attack, and Kaito TANIGUCHI scored in the 71st minute to spark a comeback. Immediately after that, in the 72nd minute two more substitutes were brought on to the pitch and one of them, Yota KOMI, won a penalty for Niigata in the stoppage time. He then slotted home to level the scores and send the game into extra time. Katsuhiro NAKAYAMA, who gave away the second-half penalty, put Nagoya back in front in the 93rd minute, but Komi equalised in the 111th minute to make it 3-3 after 120 minutes. Nagoya won on penalty kicks with all five players scoring. The MVP of the final was goalkeeper Langerak (Nagoya), who is leaving the club at the end of the season, while 21-year-old Riku YAMANE (Yokohama F-Marininos) won the J. LEAGUE YBC Levain Cup 2024 New Hero Award.

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE™

 Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors	 Ulsan Hyundai	 Shandong Taishan	 Bangkok United
 Pohang Steelers	 Ventforet Kofu	 Kawasaki Frontale	 Yokohama F-Marininos
1 1st 1 0 2nd 1 1 Agg 2	1 1st 0 2 2nd 3 3 Agg 3 4 (PK) 5	1 1st 2 0 2nd 1 1 Agg 3	
		1st 2nd Agg 2 1 3 1 5 6	 Al Ain
	4 1st 2 1 2nd 2 5 Agg 4	2 1st 0 2 2nd 0 4 Agg 0	
 Nasaf	 Al Fayha	 Sepahan	 Navbahor
 Al Ain	 Al Nassr	 Al Hilal	 Al Ittihad

Four Japanese clubs—Yokohama F-Marininos, Ventforet Kofu, Kawasaki Frontale, and Urawa Reds—took part in the ACL 2023/24 to decide the Asian club champions, with Yokohama F-Marininos reaching the final. They lost the final to Al Ain of the United Arab Emirates by a total score of 3-6 in two games to finish runners-up. Ventforet Kofu became the first J2 club to make it out of the ACL group stage, finishing in the top 16.

J.LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL SERIES

The MEIJI YASUDA J.LEAGUE WORLD CHALLENGE powered by docomo, the J.LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL SERIES 2024 powered by docomo and the J.LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL SERIES 2024 ACADEMY MATCH were held as part of the J.LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL SERIES, which pits J.Clubs against international clubs.

In the first attempt to hold international J.LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL SERIES events locally, matches were played in Hiroshima and Kyoto as well as Tokyo. Matches were organized with clubs from Europe’s top leagues, giving not only players but also fans and supporters the opportunity to experience the international scene first-hand.



- Event objectives

The J.LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL SERIES was organised with the following objectives in terms of competition, promotion, and operations.

Competition	Raising the standard of football in J.LEAGUE •By playing against clubs from Europe’s top leagues, players, managers, and staff can experience first-hand the gap between themselves and their international counterparts.
Promotion	Promotion of the spread of football and development of the next generation of players •Promote J.LEAGUE and the spread of football by creating opportunities for children to come into contact with top European clubs. •Organise matches between youth teams to allow them to experience global competition from their formative years.
Operations	Expanding the recognition and fan base of J.LEAGUE in Japan and overseas •Use matches against clubs from Europe’s top leagues as an opportunity to reach a wider audience beyond J.LEAGUE fans and supporters.

- Summary of events

Date	Fixtures (Results)	Stadium
MEIJI YASUDA J.LEAGUE WORLD CHALLENGE 2024 powered by docomo		
Saturday, July 27	Vissel Kobe vs. Tottenham Hotspur (2-3)	Japan National Stadium
J.LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL SERIES 2024 powered by docomo		
Sunday, July 28	Kyoto Sanga F.C. vs. VfB Stuttgart (3-5)	SANGA STADIUM by KYOCERA
Wednesday, July 31	Urawa Reds vs. Newcastle United (1-4)	Saitama Stadium 2002
Thursday, August 1	Sanfrecce Hiroshima vs. VfB Stuttgart (2-5)	EDION PEACE WING HIROSHIMA
Saturday, August 3	Yokohama F・Marinos vs. Newcastle United (2-0)	Japan National Stadium

- Academy matches

In addition to top-flight matches, academy matches were organised to provide growth opportunities for the next generation of players.

Junior youth age academy teams from the invited clubs travelled to Japan, and academy matches were organised between the U-15 teams of Tottenham Hotspur and Newcastle United (both from England) and the U-15 J.LEAGUE selection. There was also a training match between Japan’s U-19 national team and Tottenham’s first team.

Together with the top-level matches, these events provided a valuable opportunity for children to experience world-class football without leaving Japan.



- Sustainability Conference

The Nippon Foundation and J.LEAGUE co-hosted a sustainability conference as a side event to the MEIJI YASUDA J.LEAGUE WORLD CHALLENGE powered by docomo. Officials from Tottenham, the number one team in the Premier League for sustainability for four years running according to Sport Positive Leagues, a programme that assesses the environmental sustainability of different sports leagues, were invited to the conference to discuss with participants the significance of addressing sustainability through sport.

The sustainability conference was a valuable opportunity to learn about sustainability management together with the conference participants, and to gain important lessons and inspiration for action on sustainability management in the world of sport in the future.





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J.LEAGUE's Football Reform Initiatives

J.LEAGUE Football Director Osamu Adachi and Japan Football Association (JFA) Referees Committee Chairperson Kenji Ogiya, who are working to raise the standards of Japanese football, discuss various topics, including this season's on-pitch developments, player contract system reforms, youth development, referee development, and more.

- Your first season as J.LEAGUE Football Director has concluded. You've been mainly focused on football quality. How do you view this season's J.LEAGUE?

Adachi I believe the intensity of play has increased across J1, J2, and J3. While clubs were already exploring modern trends up to last season, this season, we've shifted further towards high-intensity football, entering a phase where Japan can compete with the world's best. However, I feel next season we need to focus on raising quality as well.

- So not just intensity, but quality, too.

Adachi Of course, high intensity is a prerequisite for quality. When I was involved in top team management at Sanfrecce Hiroshima, Manager Petrovic and Manager Hajime MORIYASU aimed for possession football. However, you can't improve quality just by talking about it; you need to raise the intensity of daily training. One characteristic of current Japan national team players is their ability to maintain high quality within high-intensity play. So, now that we've achieved higher intensity this season, we need to focus more on quality. The quality in the attacking third is paramount. For example, this season, Vissel Kobe had three finishers (Yoshinori MUTO, Yuya OSAKO, and Taisei MIYASHIRO) who all scored over 10 goals each within that intensity—that's why they won the title. Conversely, second-placed Hiroshima and third-placed FC Machida Zelvia lacked in this area. While they had the quality to reach the attacking third, how to achieve quality in front of the goal is crucial. This is a point we must address in youth development as well. While some teams rely on foreign players up front, Kobe had three Japanese players scoring over 10 goals each, so clubs need to figure out how to create such an environment. Including these points, high intensity plus quality is one team model J.LEAGUE clubs should aim for from next season.

- Youth development takes time to show results. How do you view current player development in J.LEAGUE?

Adachi One striking thing during this season is how many under-21 players are emerging in J2 and J3. This year, J.LEAGUE introduced a Young Player of the Month award for impressive performances by under-21 players, and



we're seeing more eligible players getting opportunities in J2 and J3. This probably reflects players' understanding of the current situation. We're entering an era where if they can't get matches in J1, they'll play in J2 or J3 first before moving up. For next season, it would be great to see these players either continue pushing at their current clubs or take the next step up. I expect them to keep sowing seeds for the future.

- Club attitudes towards using young players seem to have shifted significantly.

Adachi Every club is now strongly committed to developing young players now. While they're exploring different approaches—whether to use loan deals, develop players internally from the bottom up, or invest more in their academies—there's heightened awareness everywhere about developing the next generation.

- There are plans to create a U-21 league. What initiatives is J.LEAGUE considering?

Adachi The U-21 league concept has two main objectives. The first is strengthening post-youth development. Players who didn't get opportunities in the J.LEAGUE after high school and couldn't fulfil their potential might become

20-year veterans if given match opportunities. The second objective is creating an environment for exceptional 16- or 17-year-olds to play full 90-minute competitive matches.

- European U-21 leagues feature many accelerated players and seem to function well alongside first team and U-19 participation.

Adachi Take Yotaro NAKAJIMA at Hiroshima, for example. At 18 and still in his final year of high school, he's playing first team matches but also appears in the Prince Takamado Trophy JFA U-18 Football Premier League WEST for his age group. In the same generation, Aren INOUE played in the J Youth Cup semi-finals, then travelled with the first team for an away match against the Urawa Reds the next day, went on a Japan U-19 tour to Mexico, returned for an AFC Champions League (ACL) 2 trip to the Philippines, then played in the Premier League WEST again. Thus, he's gaining various match experiences on a daily basis. However, when they turn 19 and can no longer play youth matches, they're limited to J.LEAGUE games. Even the top players of their age, like Nakashima, only get around 30 minutes of J.LEAGUE playing time at most. Is 30 minutes per week enough for a top 19-year-old player? With a U-21 league, we could guarantee 90 minutes of playing time there, creating the potential for 120 total minutes per week. Other exceptional 16 and 17-year-olds would also get opportunities in a more challenging environment than U-18. Until now, post-youth development has relied on universities, and many players progress because they get chances to play matches there, but four years is too long for some players. There are various pathways—some players might suit the U-21 league, others might enter professional football after university, some might benefit from loans to different categories after turning professional out of high school, and others might be better off going straight overseas. While the U-21 league isn't the only answer, we're discussing it to create a space between youth and professional football.

- What aspects are you prioritizing in discussions about creating the U-21 league?

Adachi The key is that it must be genuinely competitive. It needs to be a competition where spectators watch, where one pass can lead to a goal, where one mistake can lead to loss of points and defeat—players need to experience both harsh criticism and applause. How to create this environment is crucial. Looking at various countries, everyone struggles with transitioning between youth and senior football. However, countries that have addressed this issue have reached higher levels. Even if we can't launch the U-21 league, we definitely need to implement measures to motivate players between the youth and professional levels.

- Through these initiatives, how do you envision the J.LEAGUE's future?

Adachi Our primary focus is how to create the product of J.LEAGUE—this is fundamental. Beyond that, we face the challenge of “how to compete with the top five leagues.” To address this, we must create an environment that stimulates young players and integrates them with current players. Having worked with foreign managers like Michael Skibbe at Hiroshima, their opinion is unanimous: “J.LEAGUE is just below the top five leagues,” and “J.LEAGUE should be more confident.” So, while maintaining that confidence, we need to keep raising the league's quality. Kobe's case is particularly striking: players who've been to the top five leagues are returning to excel in the J.LEAGUE and significantly raising standards. However, we might see this cycle accelerate in the future, with players going overseas in their late teens and returning in their mid-twenties. Another trend is that we have overseas-based players in Japan National Teams for different age categories. They understand they can't easily enter the top five leagues, and some are interested in playing in the J.LEAGUE. For instance, we might see cases where players develop in youth systems overseas, start their professional careers in J1, and then aim for the top five leagues. I think the key is how the J.LEAGUE fits into the cycle of the top five leagues. The J.LEAGUE has become a league with that potential, and Japan national team players from the J.LEAGUE are performing excellently, with our FIFA ranking rising. Japan undoubtedly has golden eggs, and we're a league with the potential to nurture them. So, we need to focus on how to maximize this.



- **Being part of the top five leagues' cycle could also create a virtuous circle of player development, including transfer fees.**

Adachi With the season calendar transition approaching, I hear concerns about young players increasingly moving overseas. While we're not actively pushing players abroad—they're club assets, after all—our stance is that they should command high transfer fees if they do leave. We want clubs to adopt this mindset, and we've also changed the professional ABC contract system as one foundation for this. We believe we're at a historical turning point.

- **The revision of the professional ABC contract system from 2026 seems like a major reform in J.LEAGUE history. What led to this review?**

Adachi When the professional ABC contract system was established 25 years ago, it was necessary to stabilise club management, and there were concerns about high salaries for players with limited playing time. The system was introduced with both salary standards and squad size limits. However, after 25 years, with changes in the global competitive environment, there's been a movement to address the issue of relatively low player compensation to compete globally. During discussions, we also noted that with basketball and volleyball turning professional during these 25 years, we needed to make J.LEAGUE more competitive compared to other sports.

- **Along with improving player compensation, relaxing professional player squad limits is also a crucial issue.**

Adachi We'll continue to discuss squad limits, but players have become more discerning, looking for clubs where they can get matches, so I think we've reached a phase where some changes can be made. While the reform of the professional ABC contract system reform alone won't win the competition with overseas leagues, we're considering complete abolition of squad limits within two to three years as part of ongoing discussions.

- **What changes do you expect from abolishing the professional ABC contract system?**

Adachi First, I look forward to seeing how clubs express their identity once regulations are relaxed. While we're also discussing foreign player quotas and aren't solely focused on player development, we could see teams like Spain's Athletic Club Bilbao, which is committed to creating a club being rooted in their local community. Conversely, we might see clubs gathering many players to chase victories. I think it will lead to opportunities for clubs to show such distinctive characteristics. It will be

interesting to see how each club protects their budget while developing and assembling players within this deregulated environment.

- **It will become a real test for top team management departments.**

Adachi We're past the era of promoting players to the first team or signing players just because we can. Scouts and General Managers will need to work incredibly hard and watch players with eagle eyes.

- **This seems like a major paradigm shift for top team management. As someone who long worked in that position, how challenging do you think this mission will be?**

Adachi It's definitely a difficult job. For instance, while a big club might be able to offer 12 million yen outright for a player, other clubs might only manage 6 million. However, there are always overlooked players out there.

- **Regarding changes in squad building, the season calendar transition also needs to be turned into a positive turning point.**

Adachi This will align our schedule with global



standards. That means we'll have no more excuses, so it's important to raise awareness during this preparation period. Top team management will compete with their overseas counterparts, and we might see foreign General Managers coming to Japan; some movements in this direction are already happening. We want to support Japanese top team management staff in competing globally, with J.LEAGUE providing clear direction.

- **What's your outlook for next season?**

Adachi From a football perspective, consistently producing good players is paramount. Raising the quality of players and coaches is crucial for increasing J.LEAGUE's value, and awareness of this has undoubtedly spread among the directly involved people through discussions about the season calendar transition. Since awareness must increase for environmental changes to be effective, we must maintain our focus on developing good players while continuing to create the right environment. When transfers happen, they should command high fees, and that money should be used to acquire players and build solid team foundations. It will be an important season for the league as a whole to approach raising our business scale to the next level.

- **2024 was a groundbreaking season with JFA's Chairperson of the Referees Committee Ogiya joining J.LEAGUE Football Committee, leading to deeper collaboration between J.LEAGUE and JFA Referees Committee. How did this relationship develop?**

Adachi Under Chairman Yoshikazu NONOMURA, J.LEAGUE is working on shaping what kind of product we want to create, and we started it as we realised that to create a good product, we need to work together with our referees.

Ogiya While referees are often seen as independent entities, I feel mutual understanding has improved through having league officials participate in referee-related discussions and training sessions for referees. While negative aspects of referee decisions tend to attract attention, we're grateful for this collaboration based on our shared goal of creating good matches.

- **From J.LEAGUE's perspective, how do you view the current state of refereeing?**

Adachi Until 2023, I was at a club (Hiroshima), and honestly, much of the referees' world was invisible to us. When the Football Committee was established, and we started discussing what kind of product to create with referees, I appreciated how frequently Mr. Ogiya visited various clubs. I've shared various opinions during Mr. Ogiya's visit, and I think we can see more changes ahead. Referees, too, are competitors and human; they make mistakes, just like players and teams. When we can discuss these as people and acknowledge each other, we can move forward without lingering issues. I feel this kind of environment is beginning to develop. With J.LEAGUE entering a new phase ahead of the season calendar transition, this year has marked the beginning of historical changes.

- **Have you noticed any changes from the referees' perspective?**

Ogiya Throughout the season, I've heard that J.LEAGUE and club officials are more likely to engage with referees. It might seem small, but it's really encouraging when they visit the referees' room at training sessions and match venues or speak to us during pitch inspections.

Adachi I've noticed that when players and referees line up before and after matches, there are more smiles and handshakes between players and the referee team than ever before. I feel this shows trust building between both sides.

Ogiya Also, it might seem minor, but after discussing referees' nutritional supplements at training sessions, club staff started preparing snacks for us. Current referees have said they never expected such treatment. Including things like this, it's been a gratifying season.

- **These behind-the-scenes aspects are fascinating. What are the future challenges regarding referee quality?**

Adachi As I've discussed with Ogiya, developing young referees, especially those with high football understanding and playing experience, is one key theme. While referees are improving their level as football trends advance, we want to keep developing together.

- **There were also matches officiated by overseas referees through exchange programmes.**

Ogiya We want to increase these exchanges further. We need to develop Japanese referees more, and it's essential to have opportunities to learn from world-class referees like Ismail Elfath of the USA, who officiated at the FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Young overseas referees are also very appealing, and we can learn much from them. For teams competing in the AFC Champions League, it's beneficial to be familiar with Asian referees, especially those from the Middle East. So, we'd like to expand these initiatives with J.LEAGUE's cooperation.

Adachi Japanese players aren't yet used to overseas referees, so this provided excellent stimulus for the league, and we received positive feedback from clubs. Overseas referees tend to have clear standards, which is something we want Japanese referees to learn from.

Ogiya This really made us think about how referees establish their presence on the pitch and control matches. Between Japanese people, we can communicate verbally and say various things, but that's not possible with overseas referees. Yet, they still manage to communicate and make the match work. It's not just about completing the 90 minutes; it's about how to bring out the match's appeal. This was very thought-provoking.

- **There seem to be differences in refereeing standards, and there were matches where players accepted decisions from foreign referees that might have drawn protests if they had been Japanese officials. How do you view**

these seemingly different player attitudes?

Adachi I've noticed this a bit too, and players need to adjust their mindset in some areas. Of course, we want Japanese referees to maintain their dignity and show clear standards. However, we also need to encourage players to continue playing. Top-level players get up immediately and continue if no whistle is blown. This impresses spectators too, and beyond just making demands of referees, we want to raise these standards.

- **Japanese referees have also officiated matches abroad.**

Ogiya I believe the experience of officiating overseas is definitely beneficial for them. Beyond AFC and FIFA appointments, we've had opportunities for matches and seminars abroad. Just before Copa América, J.LEAGUE and JFA collaborated to send a referee team led by Yusuke ARAKI for the Mexico vs Bolivia friendly match. While friendlies of that scale are rare, we hope to have more such opportunities.

- **J.LEAGUE is aiming to raise standards by looking overseas, and this applies to referees as well.**

Adachi Teams and players alone can't raise standards; referees must improve too for the country's football level to advance. As with players, we need to raise standards in developing young referees, so J.LEAGUE and JFA want to work together to create this environment.

- **Improving referee pay seems necessary for raising standards.**

Ogiya Ahead of the season calendar transition, we're working together towards professionalising J1 referees. It's extremely significant that we can now openly discuss such matters with J.LEAGUE officials in the Football Committee. We can discuss and learn about various aspects beyond just refereeing and then also talk about refereeing. We understand that we need to respond to this environment with results. We're discussing pay with J.LEAGUE while comparing international standards, but we can't just make demands. We need to create higher-level competition and develop more young referees. We must play our part in creating a better product.

Adachi Working together and discussing various matters helps us learn many things. For instance, during a discussion about water breaks, someone mentioned how referees struggle to get water. This was raised in

the Football Committee, and now we see players handing water to referees. I feel these gradual changes in the landscape are very significant. Since Mr. Ogiya joined the Football Committee, we've developed a sense of mutual understanding through various discussions, and I want to build on this momentum to progress further.

Text by Tatsuya TAKEUCHI



Football Director
Japan Professional Football League (J.LEAGUE)

Osamu ADACHI

After 22 years in top team management and scouting at Sanfrecce Hiroshima, joined J.LEAGUE in 2024. As Football Director, he promotes various initiatives to enhance football's appeal.



Chairperson, Referees Committee
Japan Football Association (JFA)

Kenji OGIYA

Active as a referee in J.LEAGUE and international matches from 1999 to 2017, appointed as Chairperson of the Referees Committee at JFA in 2022. He works on enhancing Japanese referees.

Player and referee system reform

- Player contract system

J.LEAGUE decided to implement large-scale revisions to the player contract system in 2026. The current professional ABC contract system was established in 1999 and given the changes in the environment since then, it was decided to revise the system with the aim of improving the status of professional footballers, promoting competition among J.LEAGUE clubs and between J.LEAGUE clubs and overseas clubs, and contributing to higher transfer fees from transfers to overseas clubs.

Main revision points

1		2		3																									
Abolition of professional ABC categorisation in professional contracts		Relaxation of remuneration ceiling regulations for first-year professional contracts		Introduction of minimum basic remuneration for professional contracts																									
*From 2026 season (February 1, 2026)		*From 2026 season (February 1, 2026)		*From 2026/27 season (July 1, 2026)																									
		Current		Content of Revision	Date of Revision																								
Category		<table><tr><th>Pro A</th><th>Pro B</th><th>Pro C</th><th>Amateur</th></tr><tr><td colspan="4">*In order for a player to sign a Pro A or Pro B contract, one of the following conditions must be met</td></tr><tr><td colspan="4">Playing time</td></tr><tr><td>J1</td><td>J2</td><td colspan="2">J3•JFL</td></tr><tr><td>450minutes or more</td><td>900minutes or more</td><td colspan="2">1,350minutes or more</td></tr><tr><td colspan="4">or three years after signing a Pro C contract</td></tr></table>		Pro A	Pro B	Pro C	Amateur	*In order for a player to sign a Pro A or Pro B contract, one of the following conditions must be met				Playing time				J1	J2	J3•JFL		450minutes or more	900minutes or more	1,350minutes or more		or three years after signing a Pro C contract				Professional and Amateur	From 2026 season (February 1, 2026)
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Remuneration	First-year Professional Contract Basic Remuneration Ceiling	Pro C: 4.6 million yen annually *Pro A first year: 6.7 million yen annually		12 M yen annually																									
	First-year Professional Contract Variable Remuneration Ceiling	<table><tr><td>Pro A</td><td>Set within range that doesn't deviate from the system's intent</td></tr><tr><td>Pro B</td><td>Match premium of 47,620 yen per match (not limited to the first year)</td></tr><tr><td>Pro C</td><td>Match premium of 47,620 yen per match (not limited to the first year) *There are also ceiling rules for victory bonuses</td></tr></table>		Pro A	Set within range that doesn't deviate from the system's intent	Pro B	Match premium of 47,620 yen per match (not limited to the first year)	Pro C	Match premium of 47,620 yen per match (not limited to the first year) *There are also ceiling rules for victory bonuses	Set with the ceiling at the same level as players with equivalent basic remuneration within the same club																			
	Pro A	Set within range that doesn't deviate from the system's intent																											
Pro B	Match premium of 47,620 yen per match (not limited to the first year)																												
Pro C	Match premium of 47,620 yen per match (not limited to the first year) *There are also ceiling rules for victory bonuses																												
Signing Bonus	Ceiling amounts are set based on "single/married" and "dependent status" distinctions. Ceiling amounts: 3.8–5 M yen		Uniform ceiling amount of 5 M yen for all players																										
Professional Contract Basic Remuneration Minimum		No minimum		J1:4.8 M yen/yr J2:3.6 M yen/yr J3:2.4 M yen/yr	From 2026/27 season (July 1, 2026)																								
Minimum Number of Professional Players		<table><tr><td>J1</td><td>J2</td><td>J3</td></tr><tr><td>20 (15 Pro A/club)</td><td>5 Pro A/club</td><td>3 Pro A/club</td></tr></table>		J1		J2	J3	20 (15 Pro A/club)	5 Pro A/club	3 Pro A/club	20 per club																		
J1	J2	J3																											
20 (15 Pro A/club)	5 Pro A/club	3 Pro A/club																											

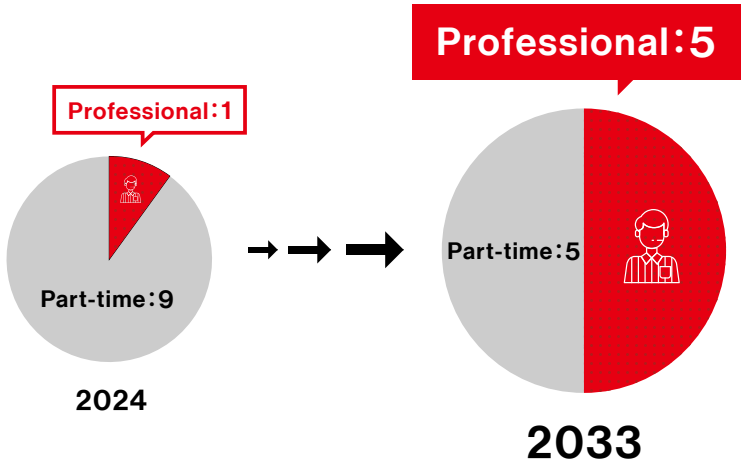
*Pro A players: Basic remuneration at least ¥4.6 million/year. However, for a first-time A contract, no more than ¥6.7 million/year
※Pro B players: Basic remuneration up to ¥4.6 million/year ※Pro C players: Basic remuneration up to ¥4.6 million/year

- Referee reform

J.LEAGUE is working with Japan Football Association (JFA) to improve the quality of referees as another important factor in enhancing the value of J.LEAGUE. Various initiatives are underway, including increasing the number of full-time referees, exchanges with overseas referees, and training of young referees.

Increasing the number of full-time referees

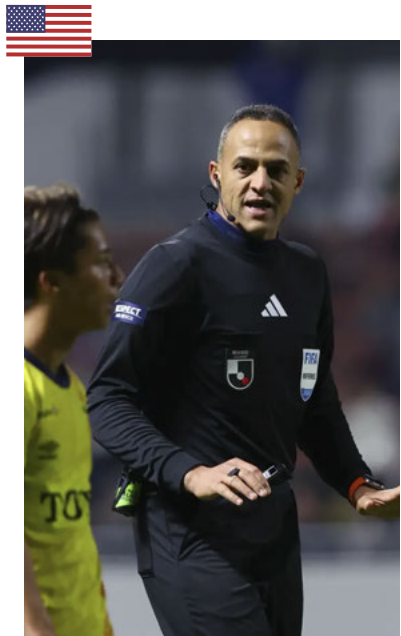
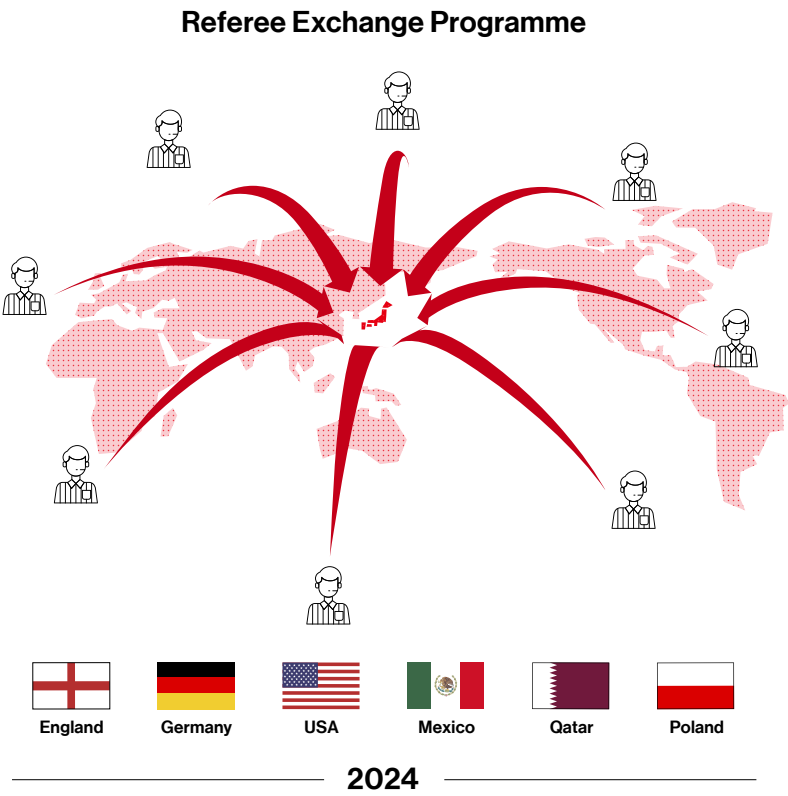
Around 90% of J.LEAGUE referees currently officiate on a part-time basis, but the number of full-time referees (professional referees) will be increased to allow more time for training/match analysis, etc., in order to improve the quality of referees.



*Ratios are approximate

Increasing the number of overseas referees

Through the Referee Exchange Programme implemented in cooperation with JFA, referees from six countries were invited in 2024, with opportunities for exchange to be expanded further in 2025. Nationalities and regions of invited referees (2024 results): England, Germany, USA, Mexico, Qatar, Poland



Ismail Elfath (US) served as referee in the 1st round match of J.LEAGUE YBC Levain Cup between Giravanz Kitakyushu and Oita Trinita.

Player Development

In 2024, J. LEAGUE advanced several initiatives in player development. This page highlights three key areas: support for domestic and international activities at J.Club academies, the introduction of a new tournament format for J.YOUTH CUP, and the J.LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL SERIES 2024 ACADEMY MATCH.

- Support for Domestic and International Academy Activities

J.LEAGUE has established three objectives for academy operations: “player and coach development,” “building and advancing reproducible academy systems,” and “raising standards across all J.LEAGUE academies.” To achieve these goals, J.LEAGUE provided financial support through Academy Activity Grants for “initiatives that create international experience opportunities for players and coaches to build world-class standards within clubs” and “activities to establish domestic match environments for gaining regular competitive play experience.” In 2024, these grants supported 82 activities across 44 clubs. While these activities ranged from overseas tours and observation visits to hosting international and domestic tournaments, we’ll highlight two specific examples: Tokyo Verdy (U-14 Scotland Tour) and Roasso Kumamoto (U-17 England Short-term Programme).

Tokyo Verdy U-14 Scotland Tour (Overseas Tour)

Tokyo Verdy’s Junior Youth programme, comprising 18 U-14 players and four staff members, embarked on a 10-day tour to Edinburgh, Scotland, from Tuesday 30 July to Thursday 8 August 2024. Based in Edinburgh, they engaged in joint training sessions with Scottish Premiership club Hibernian FC, observed first team training, and played practice matches against various Scottish clubs. The tour had two primary objectives: to foster both football and personal development through overseas experience, and to build relationships with Hibernian FC. Participating players reported that “their approach and mindset towards football changed significantly” and that “it provided an opportunity to reconsider what football means to them.” The tour proved valuable for future development in various aspects, including promoting staff exchange and experiencing language barriers, which underscored the importance of language learning.



Roasso Kumamoto England Short-term Programme (Small Group Overseas Activity)



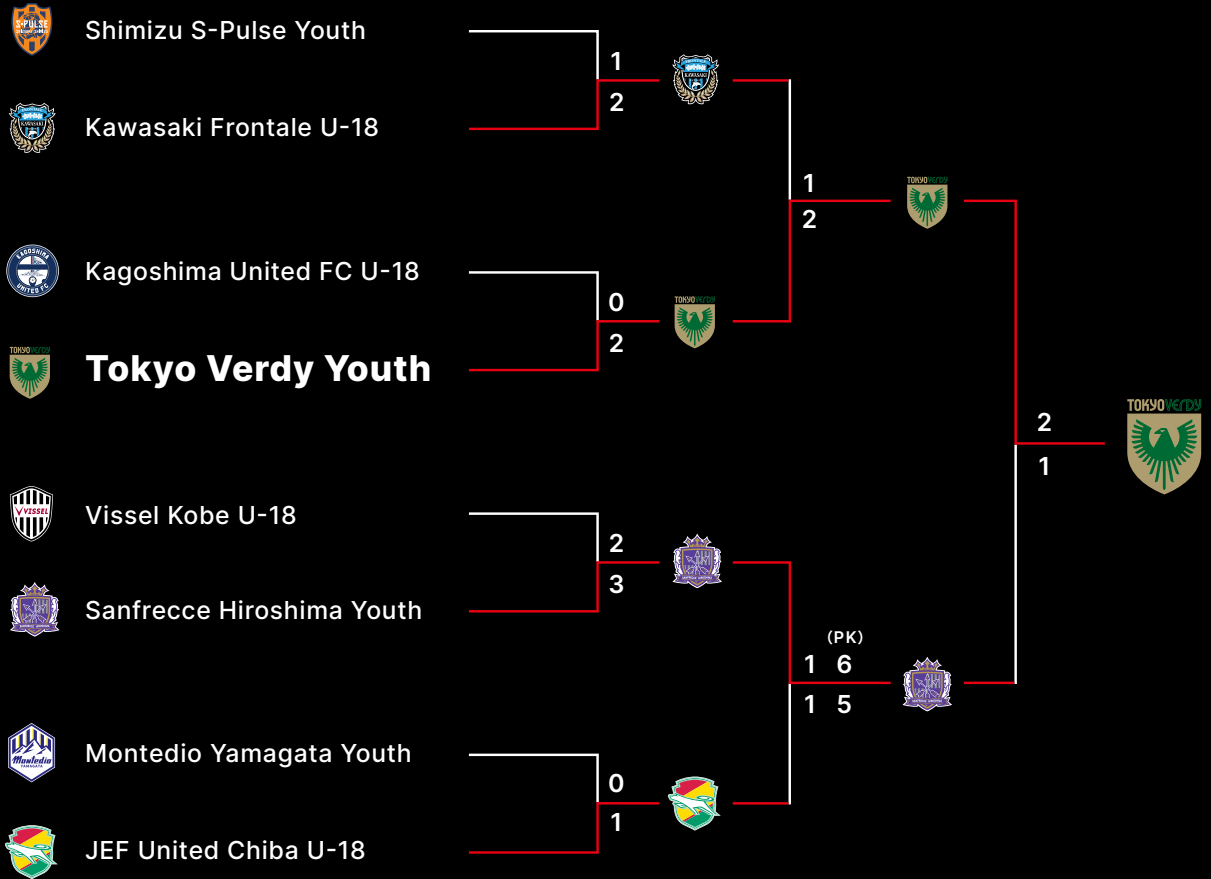
Two U-17 players and two staff members from Roasso Kumamoto participated in a 19-day programme at Premier League club Chelsea FC from Sunday 31 December 2023 to Thursday 18 January 2024. During their stay, they joined the U-18 and U-21 categories for gym workouts, physical training, ball skills, and practice matches in top-class facilities. They also gained knowledge about the academy’s history, vision, scouting, and coach development from the Youth Category Director. Meanwhile, the U-21 manager shared insights on topics such as training plans, team regulations, match analysis, and coaching methodologies. This experience provided numerous valuable learning opportunities and insights for club development.

- New Tournament Format for J.YOUTH CUP

2024 J.YOUTH CUP 30th J.LEAGUE Youth Championship, primarily aimed at U-15 to U-17 players, introduced a new tournament format. The first round involved 64 teams—all 60 teams from J1, J2, and J3, alongside four teams recommended by the Japan Club Youth Football Federation—split into 16 groups of four teams each for round-robin league matches. The second-round organised teams into upper and lower leagues based on the first-round results, with league matches held across 16 groups. The knockout round then showcased eight teams that advanced from the upper league of the second round in a tournament format.

This format change aligned with the tournament’s principle of “providing optimal match opportunities according to each player’s development rate.” By incorporating league matches alongside knockout tournaments, it secured more games, increased players’ development opportunities, and allowed teams more flexibility in player selection. During the tournament, U-15 players, who usually compete as the senior age group in their regular activities, gained fresh stimulation competing against older players. U-18 players, participating as over-age competitors, encountered new challenges while mentoring younger teammates, and U-16/U-17 players enhanced their leadership roles as essential team members. Players at each level were observed overcoming their individual challenges and advancing in their development.

Knock Out Round Tournament Bracket



- J.LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL SERIES 2024 ACADEMY MATCH

J.LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL SERIES 2024 ACADEMY MATCH featured two fixtures: “J.LEAGUE Selection U-15 vs Tottenham Hotspur U15” on Friday 26 July, and “J.LEAGUE Selection U-15 vs Newcastle United U15” on Friday 2 August. In collaboration with Japan Football Association (JFA), 40 players selected from various club academies gained valuable development opportunities through interactions with teammates, their English Premier League academy counterparts, and coaching staff, including coaches Shinji ONO and Kengo

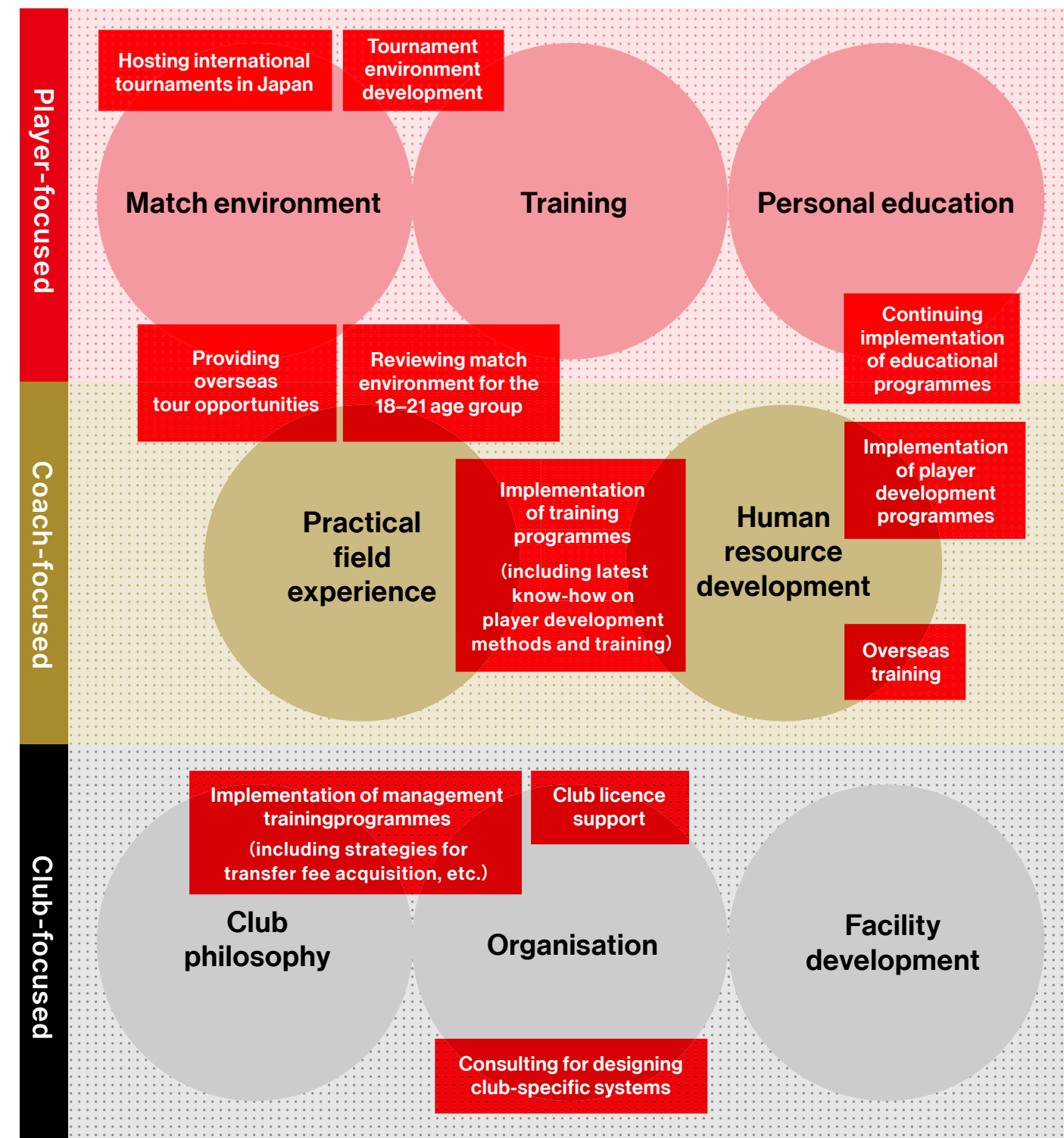


NAKAMURA. Participating players noted that they “experienced the physical capabilities and intensity of top overseas players firsthand and learned to adapt our play accordingly.” Coach Shinji ONO emphasised “the importance of what the players took away from this experience.” Meanwhile, Coach Kengo NAKAMURA remarked that “everything—from playing in front of large crowds to competing against opponents they don’t normally face—provided valuable experience for the players. I hope this initiative becomes a springboard for their development.”

Fixtures (Results)	Date	Stadium
J.LEAGUE Selection U-15 vs. Tottenham Hotspur U15(3-1)	Friday, July 26	Nishigaoka Soccer Stadium
J.LEAGUE Selection vs. Newcastle United U15(7-3)	Friday, August 2	Nishigaoka Soccer Stadium

- Continuing to Produce Players Who Can Succeed on the World Stage

J.LEAGUE concentrates on three key areas in player development: (1) improving match environments, including overseas opportunities; (2) developing competent coaches who are capable of fostering player development; and (3) constructing reproducible academy environments (systems). In addition to the aforementioned examples, we continually advance initiatives that support these three areas, including training sessions and events for coaches, technical directors, and academy directors. J.Club academies, which are fundamental to the top tier of Japanese football, must produce players capable of succeeding on the world stage. We will persist with various initiatives to consistently develop players who can compete at the highest international level.



48 Initiatives to boost media exposure in local areas
 50 2024 Season to-C Marketing Strategy

Initiatives to boost media exposure in local areas

- Efforts to realise the strategy “60 clubs will shine in their respective hometowns”

In the 2024 season, J.LEAGUE recorded the highest attendance since its inception. One of the main reasons for this can be attributed to the increased media exposure of football, including coverage of match results in each region. The J.LEAGUE has focused efforts on boosting media exposure in each region as a means of promoting football in order to realise one of its two growth strategies: “60 clubs will shine in their respective hometowns.” The aim is to boost media exposure in each region, stir interest in football and J.LEAGUE clubs, and promote the spread of football.

The Japan Football Association (JFA) and J.LEAGUE, in cooperation with the football associations of each region, their respective J.Clubs, and local broadcast stations, started broadcasting the football TV programme “KICK OFF!” in 30 regions (45 prefectures) in April 2023 (the TV programme was launched ahead of this in October 2022 in the five prefectures of Fukushima, Toyama, Ehime, Kumamoto, and Kagoshima). In April 2024, with the addition of Fukui Prefecture and Kochi Prefecture, the programme was expanded nationwide to cover 47 prefectures in 32 regions. The launch of “KICK OFF!” has led to an increase in football coverage in all regions, with media exposure of football information on national commercial broadcasters 416% higher than before the 2022 initiative (according to an advertising agency survey).

Increased media exposure of football information is also linked to clubs attracting more spectators. In particular, for matches where the clubs focused on attracting spectators, they worked with local TV stations to promote the matches on many programmes prior to the match date. Also, the clubs and J.LEAGUE club support staff worked together to implement a wide range of initiatives to attract spectators by planning activities and events on the day of the match. The dissemination of information in advance through various media, especially television, led to unprecedented attendance. For example, J2 club Oita Trinita’s attendance of 28,359 (MEIJI YASUDA J2 LEAGUE, Matchweek 26) was almost triple their usual attendance, while Fujieda MYFC, also in the J2, broke the club’s all-time attendance record three times in one season, with an attendance 136% higher than in 2023 (the highest attendance was 10,667 for MEIJI YASUDA J2 LEAGUE Matchweek 32 vs. Shimizu S-Pulse).

Efforts to boost the media exposure of local clubs in each region and generate interest in football have encouraged many fans and supporters to attend matches that focus on attracting spectators.

- Examples of initiatives by individual clubs

Fujieda MYFC

Date	Fixture	Stadium
Saturday, July 13	Fujieda MYFC vs. Ehime FC	Fujieda Soccer Stadium

The club’s 15th anniversary match was set as a match focused on attracting spectators. Despite the rainy weather, 9,640 people attended the match, the highest number in the club’s history (as of July 13) and almost three times the usual attendance. The club visited all the broadcasters in the region and as a result, ten programmes (listed below) announced the match in the week leading up to the day of the game.



Oita Trinita

Date	Fixture	Stadium
Sunday, August 11	Oita Trinita vs. Roasso Kumamoto	RESONAC DOME OITA



A midsummer match was named “Turtle Festival,” and set as a match focused on attracting spectators. It recorded the highest attendance for a J2 club (28,359). This was almost three times the normal attendance (without free ticket plan). For a quarter of all spectators, it was their first visit to the stadium. In the run-up to the match, the club collaborated with local broadcasters, who devoted a total of 3 hours and 35 minutes of airtime (around 2.3 times more than the usual coverage in Oita Prefecture) to introduce the match in their programmes.

FC Osaka

Date	Fixture	Stadium
Sunday, June 2	FC Osaka vs. Nara Club	Higashiosaka Hanazono Rugby Stadium

The club set the Mount Ikoma Derby with Nara Club as a match focused on attracting spectators and stepped up its pre-match publicity. A record-breaking 6,459 people attended the event, around three times the usual attendance and the largest number of spectators in the history of the club. In addition to the pre-match broadcast, the club hosted a stadium event as KICK OFF! KANSAI.



2024 Season to-C Marketing Strategy

- Introduction to J.LEAGUE to-C marketing strategy

The to-C marketing strategy is a generic term that refers to marketing activities that increase the number of fans and supporters at all 60 clubs, starting with coming to stadiums to watch matches. In specific terms, J. LEAGUE works with each club to enhance customer experience in a series of five steps centred around J.LEAGUE ID: “awareness, interest, visits to stadiums, repeat visit, regular visits.”

For the 2024 season, we concentrated on converting those who are aware of the J.LEAGUE but have not yet attended matches into “light fans” who attend one to two matches each year, designating this group as our “priority segment.” To achieve this, we increased our investment beyond 2023 levels in initiatives such as Japan National Stadium matches, large-scale invitation programmes, and IP collaborations, thereby strengthening our acquisition strategies to attract new visitors to stadia. In addition, continuing from the previous year’s local exposure strategy, we bolstered support for clubs’ efforts to draw in spectators for targeted matches with the aim of higher-than-usual attendance while also generating interest through football programmes. Our goal was to attain record attendance that surpasses the figures from 2019 and to expand our base of interested followers.

- Initiative Results

Marketing KPIs

The total annual attendance for official matches in the 2024 season reached 12,540,265, setting a new all-time record that surpassed the previous record from 2019, when attendance first exceeded eleven million (11,000,000). This represents a 14.4% increase year-on-year and a 13.6% increase compared to 2019.

One major factor was the change in the number of clubs. All categories from J1 League to J3 League adopted a 20-club system, increasing the number of J1 League matches from 306 to 380. Combined with other factors discussed below, J1’s total attendance increased by approximately 1.923 million from 2023.

※Note: Average attendance per match increased year-on-year across all categories.

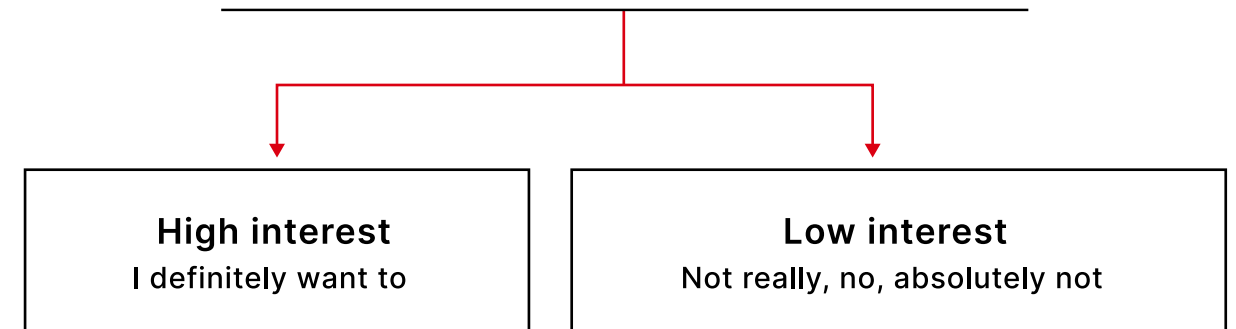
9segs survey results (visitors to stadium match, high-interest fans)

In formulating customer strategies to expand our fan base, since FY2021 J.LEAGUE has been conducting the 9segs® survey, a customer-driven marketing framework, in order to better understand the overall market and more precisely quantify the effectiveness of our measures.

The survey maps the five-tier “customer pyramid” with an additional interest factor incorporated. For stadium matches, the survey divides the customers into nine tiers based on desire/intention to attend a stadium match within one year, the number of matches attended in the previous season, experience of attending matches, and awareness of J.LEAGUE. The survey was implemented online, targeting people between the ages of 20 and 69 nationwide. Due to seasonal variations in survey scores, comparisons with the previous year are made separately for June and November, when the surveys are carried out.

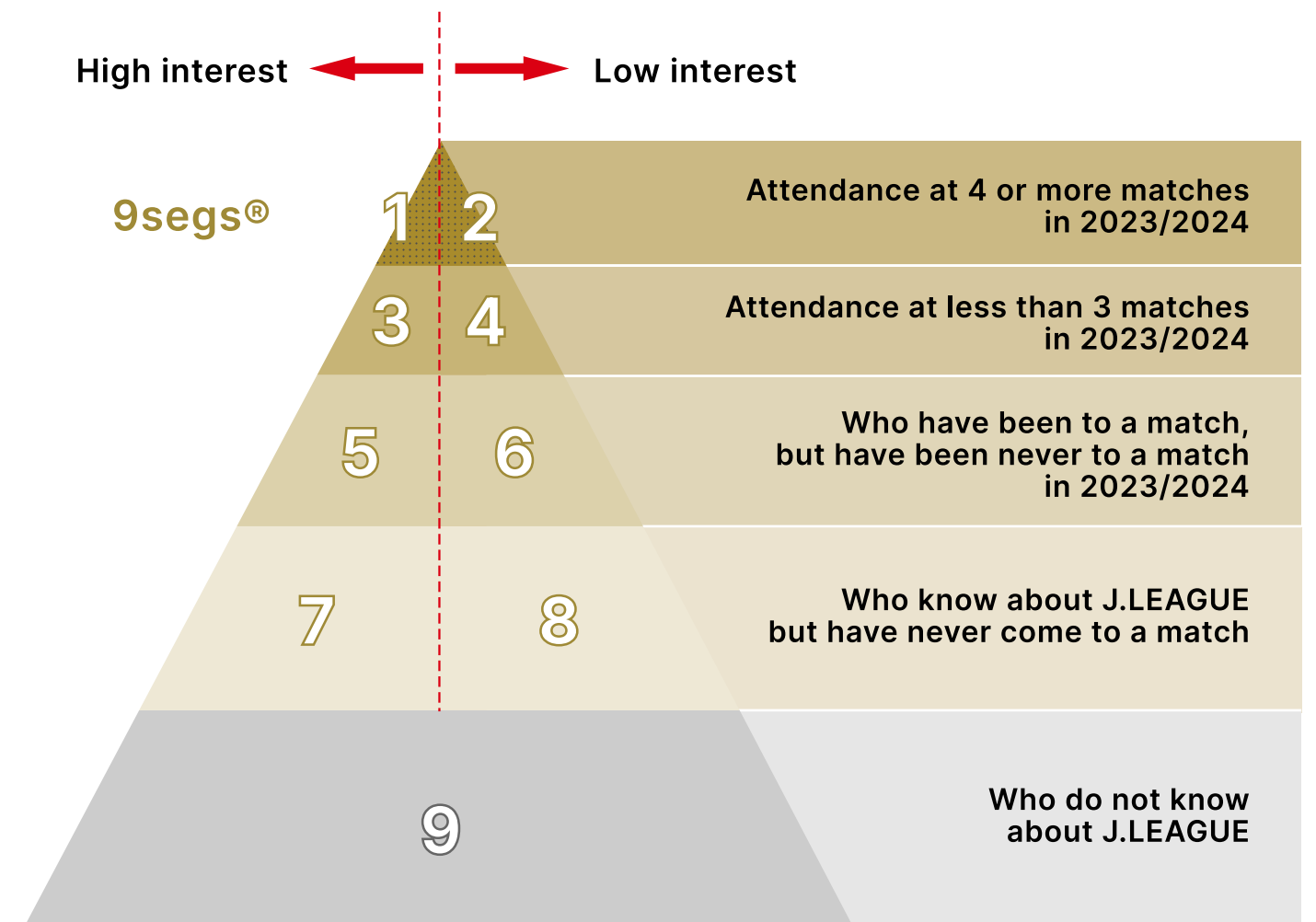
9segs® survey

Do you want to go and see a J.LEAGUE game at a stadium within the next year?



High interest ← → Low interest

9segs®

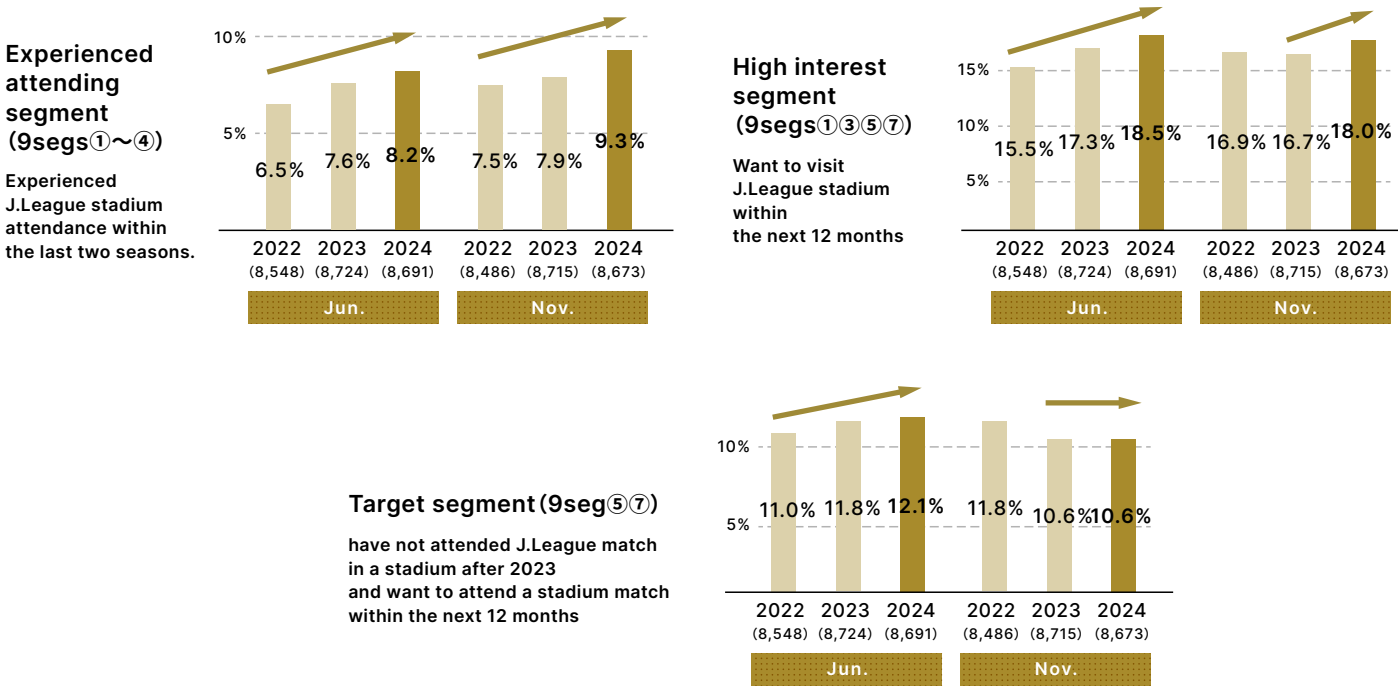


9segs® by M-Force

In 2024, the volume of stadium spectators rose compared to the previous year: the June survey indicated an increase from 7.6% to 8.2% (+0.6 pt, up 8% year-on-year, with an estimated increase of 400,000 people), while the November survey revealed an increase from 7.9% to 9.3% (+1.4 pt, up 17% year-on-year, with an estimated increase of 933,000 people). Total attendance at official J.LEAGUE matches, including league and cup competitions, grew from 10,965,170 in 2023 to 12,540,265 people, demonstrating not only an increased frequency of attendance by existing spectators but also a growth in the overall number of spectators.

Additionally, the high-interest segment scores displayed consistent growth, with the June survey rising from 17.3% to 18.5% (+1.2 pt, up 7% year-on-year, with an estimated increase of 800,000 people) and the November survey climbing from 16.7% to 18.0% (+1.3 pt, up 8% year-on-year, with an estimated increase of 867,000 people), demonstrating sustained success in enhancing interest in match attendance. When analysing the Kanto and non-Kanto regions separately, both exhibited improved interest levels, with particularly notable increases in the non-Kanto areas, indicating that heightened local exposure and new stadium openings acted as catalysts. The volume of our priority segment (high-interest individuals who are aware but haven't attended or have ceased attending) rose from 11.8% to 12.1% (+0.3 pt, up 3% year-on-year, with an estimated increase of 200,000 people) in the June survey and remained constant at 10.6% in the November survey. This sustained the volume in the priority segment while effectively converting others into stadium spectators and high-interest fans.

※Note: Estimated figures are derived from the Statistics Bureau of Japan's confirmed population estimate as of 1 June 2024. The calculations assume there are approximately 66.67 million individuals aged 20 to 69, excluding those who are uninterested in sports, with 1% equating to roughly 667,000 individuals.



The number in parentheses indicates the number of respondents.

Increased Football Information Exposure in Each Region and Success of Initiatives to Attract Spectators to Focused Matches

To realise the goal of “60 clubs shining in their respective regions”—one of J.LEAGUE’s two growth strategies—the Japan Football Association (JFA) and J.LEAGUE commenced broadcasting the football programme “KICK OFF!” in April 2023, in collaboration with regional football associations, local J.Clubs, and local broadcasters. The broadcast area expanded in April 2024, covering 32 regions across 47 prefectures.

In the 2024 season, which marks the project’s second year, efforts were concentrated on supporting clubs’ targeted matches, where they sought higher-than-usual attendance. Through collaboration between clubs and J.LEAGUE staff, alongside promotional and attendance assistance from local media, especially local broadcasters, 46 clubs surpassed their 2023 average match attendance per league match, with 16 clubs achieving all-time records.

Category	Club	2024 average match attendance per match	*Average highest number of attendancesper match before the 2024 season	
			Season	Average match attendanceper match
J1	Kashima	23,027	2001	22,425
J1	FC TOKYO	33,225	2019	31,540
J1	FC Machida	17,610	2023*1	7,426
J1	Nagoya	27,650	2019	27,612
J1	Hiroshima	25,609	2012	17,721
J2	Akita	4,128	2023	3,139
J2	Iwaki	4,290	2023	3,491
J2	Tochigi	6,238	2023	5,834
J2	Fujieda	4,274	2023	3,145
J2	Ehime FC	4,721	2010	4,386
J2	Kagoshima	6,596	2023*2	5,904
J3	Fukushima	1,800	2016	1,678
J3	YSCC Yokohama	1,557	2023	1,469
J3	Kanazawa	5,435	2019*3	5,209
J3	Nara	1,879	2023	1,781
J3	Imabari	3,786	2023	3,711

Scope: from 1993 to 2023 *1: Belongs to J2 at that time *2: Belongs to J3 at that time *3: Belongs to J2 at that time

The KOKURITSU DAY Branding and Spectator Attraction Contribution

In the 2024 season, league matches at the Japan National Stadium were branded as the “KOKURITSU DAY,” and the stadium hosted 13 matches: 12 MEIJI YASUDA J1 LEAGUE matches and one MEIJI YASUDA J2 LEAGUE match.

Continuing from the previous year, hosting matches at the Japan National Stadium aimed to achieve two objectives:

- (1) Providing opportunities for Tokyo-based fans and supporters who struggle to attend matches at the home stadium to watch the game, while expanding the clubs’ fan base in the metropolitan area (objectives of the clubs); and
- (2) Expanding media exposure and cultivating light-level fans who attend one or two matches each year through matches held at an easily accessible stadium within Tokyo’s 23 wards (objectives of the league).

League matches at the Japan National Stadium commenced with Tokyo Verdy vs Yokohama F·Marinos on 25 February, with a total of 13 matches played. The overall attendance reached 654,165 (averaging 50,320 per match), representing 5% of total league match attendance. Tokyo Verdy, who attracted 53,026 spectators for their opening match, and FC Machida Zelvia, who hosted four league matches at the Japan National Stadium during their historic first J1 season, both obtained new J.LEAGUE ID registrations through these matches, which also contributed to attendance at their respective home stadiums: AJINOMOTO STADIUM and Machida GION Stadium.

In non-league matches, the 2024 J.LEAGUE YBC Levain Cup Final, held on 2 November between Nagoya Grampus and Albirex Niigata, attracted 62,517 spectators, marking the highest attendance in the history of the final. Including the FUJIFILM SUPER CUP (FFSC) 2024 and pre-season matches, the average attendance across all 17 matches was around 51,000.

Matches held at the Japan National Stadium featured various productions and collaborations with popular content. The FFSC match between Vissel Kobe and Kawasaki Frontale included a collaboration with NIJISANJI, while the encounter between Yokohama F·Marinos and Cerezo Osaka teamed up with Chiikawa, thereby helping attract new fans and supporters.



Effect of New Stadia

The 2024 season saw the opening of new stadia in Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Kanazawa.

At Sanfrecce Hiroshima's home stadium, EDION Peace Wing Hiroshima, tickets sold out for 18 out of 19 league matches. Total attendance reached 486,579 (averaging 25,609 per match, up 59% compared to the previous year), with fans and supporters from both within and outside the prefecture coming to cheer on the players performing in this football-specific stadium with its up-close and thrilling atmosphere.

At V-Varen Nagasaki's home stadium, PEACE STADIUM Connected by SoftBank, which opened with the match against Oita Trinita on 6 October, the average attendance across four matches—three league matches and one playoff match—was 19,223. This represented over 2.6 times the average league match attendance in 2023 (7,300), indicating significant momentum.

In Kanazawa, February 2024 marked the opening of Kanazawa Go Go Curry Stadium, the first football stadium in the Hokuriku region. Zweigen Kanazawa's average attendance for league matches at their new home reached 5,435, a 29% increase from the previous year.

The opening of new stadium has also resulted in increased visitor satisfaction. Regular J.LEAGUE spectator surveys demonstrate particularly improved scores in pre- and post-match experiences (stadium access) and stadium facilities/services (distance to pitch, giant screens, weather protection), indicating the provision of enhanced, high-value match-day experiences for fans and supporters.



EDION Peace Wing Hiroshima



PEACE STADIUM Connected by SoftBank



Kanazawa Go Go Curry Stadium

“Favourite” Player Promotion and J.LEAGUE ID Favourite Player Registration

The J.LEAGUE ID, a common membership identifier for various J.LEAGUE services, now enables users to register their “favourite players” alongside their preferred clubs. With this feature, a new service called “Oshi Player Videos” allows users to enjoy video clips of their registered favourite players via LINE mini-apps (available on J.LEAGUE's official account and certain club official accounts). Beginning next season, player-specific video content will also be accessible on the official J.LEAGUE app, “Club J.LEAGUE.” By integrating contemporary “oshi-katsu” (supporting own favourite) culture trends with J.LEAGUE “players,” we aim to attract a wider and more extensive fan base.



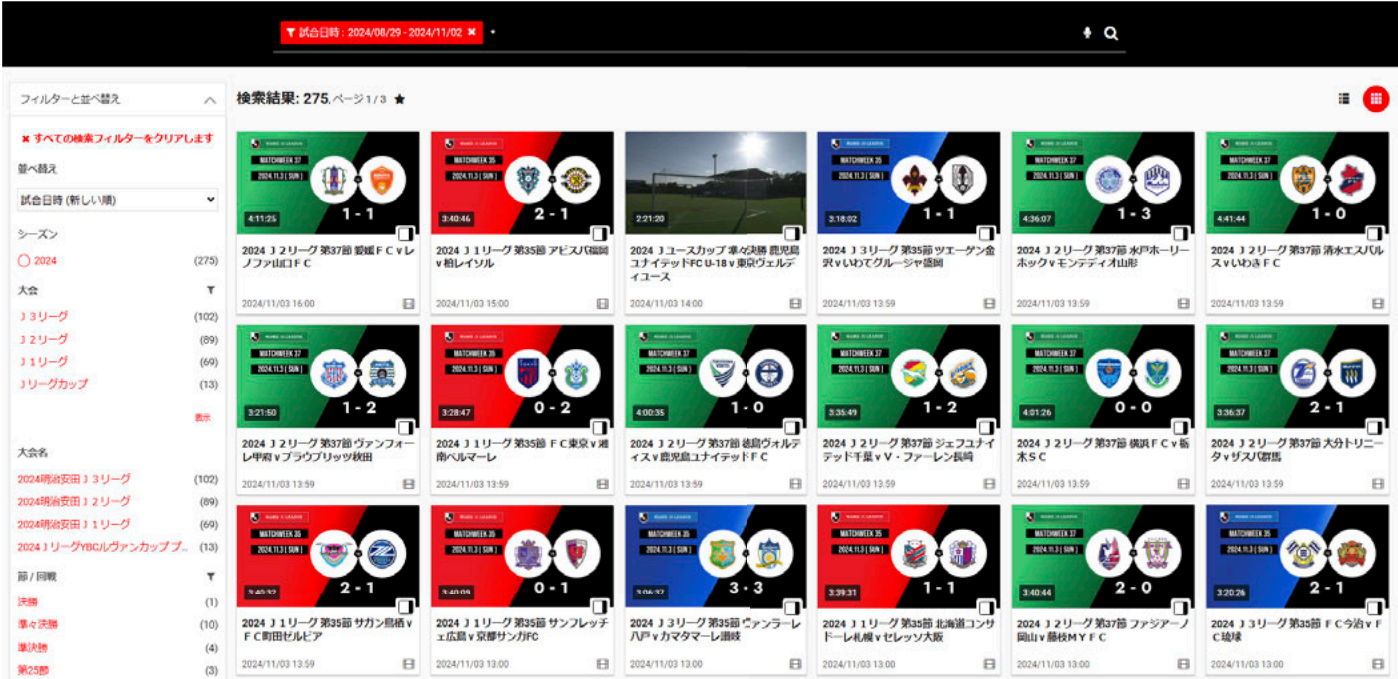
PEACE STADIUM

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Introduction of a new archiving system

J.LEAGUE FUROSHIKI is a digital asset hub that consolidates all digital assets that J.LEAGUE holds the copyrights to, including official game footage, and manages their production, editing, supply, and distribution centrally. J.LEAGUE uses this hub to provide official game footage to domestic and international rights holders, such as DAZN, and to national TV stations for news purposes. In 2024, we introduced a new archiving system function in J.LEAGUE FUROSHIKI.



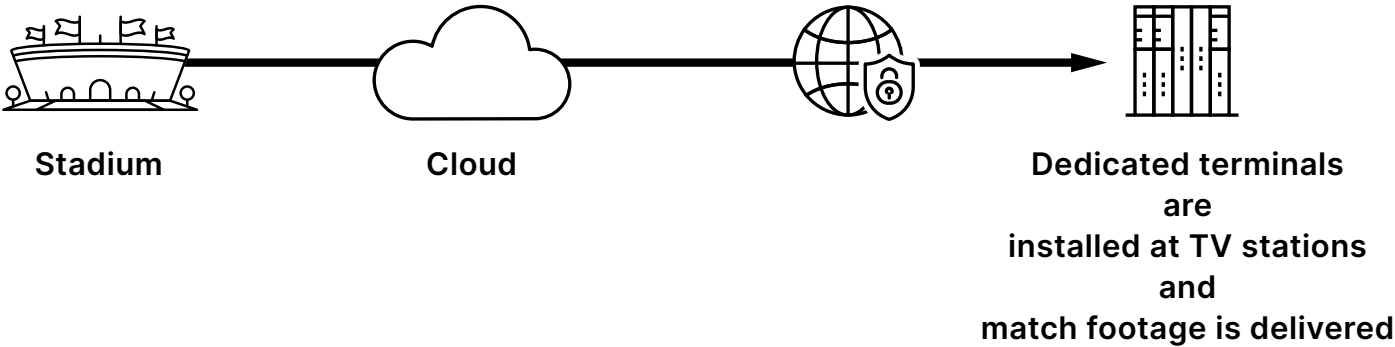
MANAGEMENT



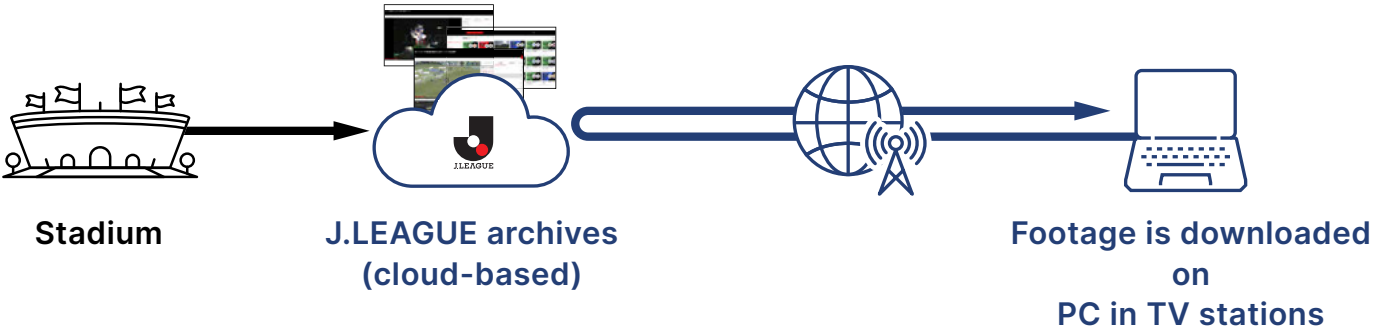
J.LEAGUE is building an original system to ensure that match content is quickly covered by national and international media. Until 2023, dedicated news distribution lines and terminals were installed at each TV station to deliver images within an hour of the end of the match. However, there were problems, such as the high cost of setting up dedicated lines and terminals, the fact that only match footage from specific clubs pre-selected by each media was delivered, and the fact that previews were not available and content could not be checked until it was delivered.

To address these issues, construction of a new cloud-based archiving system began in 2024. The infrastructure was changed to one where match footage is captured in real time and each TV station retrieves match footage from the cloud. This eliminated the need for each TV station to install dedicated lines and terminals. In addition, all matches, not just those of specific clubs, can now be downloaded in near real time, and the necessary material can be obtained after checking the footage before downloading.

Previous infrastructure



After introduction of the new archiving system



MANAGEMENT



In addition, event data (goals, shots, crosses, etc.) is tagged on the footage, creating an environment where users can instantly access the scene they need.



J.LEAGUE has archived a total of more than 20,000 matches from the inaugural season in 1993 to the present day and all of this footage was also incorporated into the J.LEAGUE archive. The new system will allow preview, search and download of the archived footage, creating a user-friendly environment for partners, media, and clubs.

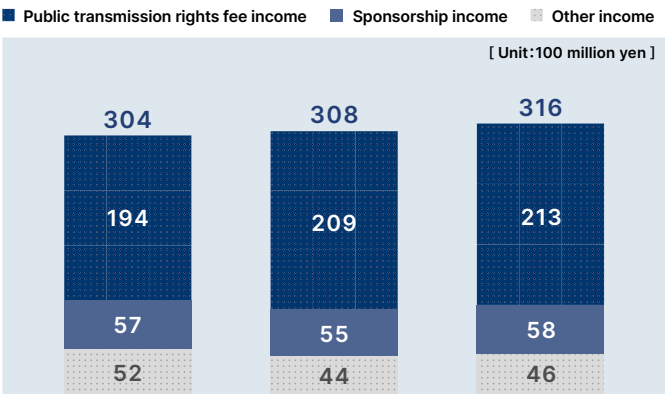
2024 Financial Report

- 2024 Financial Report

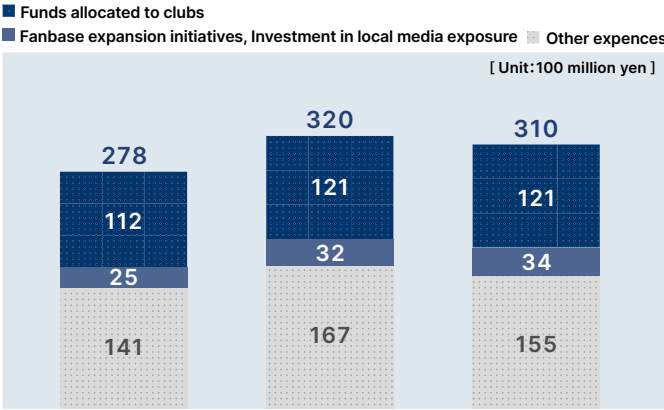
Landing in a surplus through increased revenue and cost cuts

J.LEAGUE's FY2024 budget had a deficit of 1.2 billion yen, due in part to growth investment implemented to expand the fan base and the introduction of a new allocation system aimed at reinforcing realization of our philosophy (mission). The financial result forecast for FY2024 formulated in response to these circumstances includes an increase in ordinary income of 800 million yen, mainly due to an expected increase in revenue from public broadcasting rights fees, and a decrease in ordinary expenses of 900 million yen due to cost reductions. Therefore, the overall forecast for income and expenses is for a surplus of 600 million yen. Compared to the 2023 financial results, the surplus has declined by 2.1 billion yen due to the above factors, as well as to an increase in J.LEAGUE's operating expenses following the increase in the number of J1 LEAGUE clubs, an increase in broadcaster response expenses resulting from investment in TV programming, and an increase in costs for expanding the fan base, including utilization of the Japan National Stadium.

Ordinary income



Ordinary expenses



Account	FY 2023 A	FY24 Forecast C	Inc / Dec (C-A)	Bgt 24 B	vs. Bgt C-B
Sponsorship income	57	58	0	55	2
Public transmission rights fee income	194	213	18	209	4
Other income	52	46	▲6	44	2
Total of ordinary income	304	316	12	308	8
①Operating cost	270	301	31	311	▲10
League operating cost	29	37	8	37	▲0
Funds allocated to clubs	112	121	9	121	0
Expenses for measures to expand the fan base	12	15	4	15	0
Investment in local media exposure	13	18	5	17	1
Other operating cost	104	109	6	121	▲12
②Administration cost	9	10	1	9	1
Total of ordinary expenses	278	310	32	320	▲9
operating activities	26	6	▲20	▲12	17
Non-operating activities	0	▲1	▲1	0	▲1
Total changes in unrestricted net assets	26	5	▲21	▲12	16

(Unit: 100 million yen)

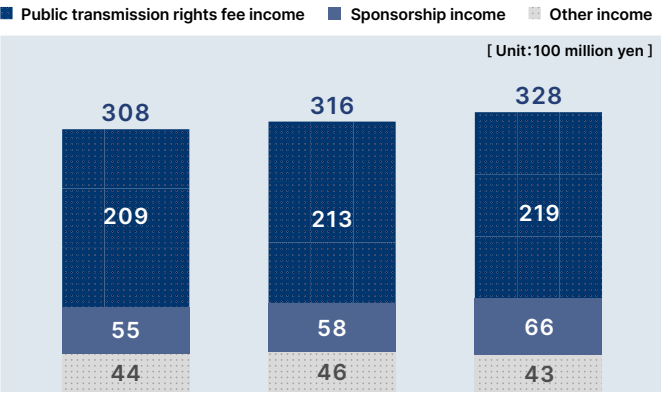
- FY2025 Income and Expenditure Budget

Expanded investment in growth-oriented exposure and measures to attract spectators

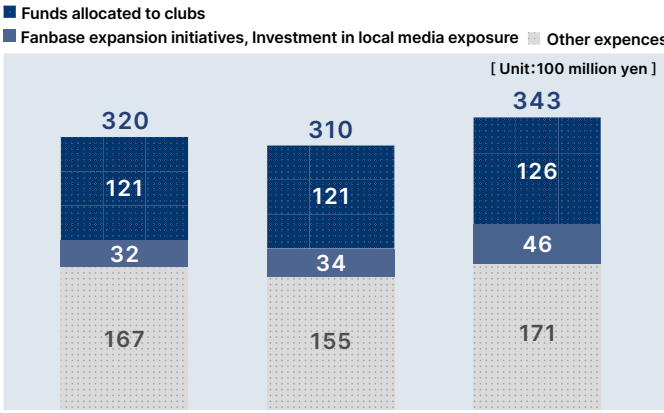
J.LEAGUE's FY2025 income and expenditure budget has been prepared with a view to expanding investment, so as to promote its growth strategy by utilizing the surplus primarily. The main topics related to the income and expenditure budget are as follows.

Increase in ordinary income	Securing of additional income from sales expansion both domestically and internationally
Increase in funds allocated to clubs	Increase in funds allocated to clubs as a result of, among other factors, the start of the second year of payments under the new allocation system aimed at reinforcing realization of our philosophy (mission)
Increase in expenses for local exposure and broadcaster response	Increase in expenses for promoting J.LEAGUE clubs' exposure and measures to attract spectators

Ordinary income



Ordinary expenses



Account	Bgt 24 A	Bgt 25 C	Inc / Dec C-A	FY25 Forecast B	Inc / Dec C-B
Sponsorship income	55	66	11	58	8
Public transmission rights fee income	209	219	11	213	7
Other income	44	43	▲1	46	▲3
Total of ordinary income	308	328	20	316	12
①Operating cost	311	334	23	301	33
League operating cost	37	38	1	37	1
Funds allocated to clubs	121	126	5	121	5
Expenses for measures to expand the fan base	15	16	1	15	1
Investment in local media exposure	17	30	13	18	12
Other operating cost	121	123	2	109	14
②Administration cost	9	10	1	10	0
Total of ordinary expenses	320	343	24	310	33
operating activities	▲12	▲15	▲3	6	▲21
Non-operating activities	0	0	0	▲1	1
Total changes in unrestricted net assets	▲12	▲15	▲3	5	▲20

(Unit: 100 million yen)

Role of stadiums in local regions

For many years now, there have been discussions about what stadiums ought to be like, as they are the stage for every match presented by J.LEAGUE. Although turning stadiums into profit centres is sometimes cited as one of the goals of stadium development, this is currently very difficult to achieve, especially in regional cities, unless clubs can attract large-scale private investment. For a number of years now, J.LEAGUE has been organising working groups (WG) with the participation of clubs’ facility managers to explore what facilities and functions could be provided at stadiums to make them essential infrastructure for local residents and to demonstrate their existence value (non-financial value) to the local communities. In the future, we will continue to engage in research and discussion with the aim of creating stadiums that can be used by everyone in the community.

Study and research of advanced domestic and overseas practices	Hearings with experts in each field	Holding of seminars with experts
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- Examination in model case clubs

Shonan Bellmare: A stadium that serves as centre for community interaction

The stadium will be equipped with facilities and functions in line with the four themes of “Protect” (disaster prevention), “Nurture” (medical care and health activities), “Enjoy” (sports, live entertainment performances and activities, and community exchange events), and “Inherit” (passing on local history and culture), with the aim of creating a regional exchange centre for disaster prevention, health, sports, and entertainment.



Fagiano Okayama: A stadium that serves as a community interaction centre for sports and health activities

As a comprehensive sports club, Fagiano Okayama will focus on redeveloping and modernising existing comprehensive sports facilities during the construction of its new football stadium, with the aim of contributing to the improvement and promotion of local sports capabilities. In addition, the club aims to add value to the complex as a comprehensive training centre by adding a medical clinic, rehabilitation facilities, and an athletes’ cafeteria. Furthermore, by hosting various sports and nutrition education cooking classes, opening the medical clinic and rehabilitation facilities to local residents, and creating new running courses and stations, the sports complex, including the new football stadium, will become a local sports and wellness exchange centre, not only to generate revenue but also to enhance the club’s social value and contribute to local health and wellness activities.

- Our goal should be “Stadiums that can be used by everyone in the community”

Strengthening of disaster prevention functions

- Develop the functionality of stadiums as emergency shelters.
- (Requirements: independent power supply, access to water for domestic use, access to communications, access to the required number of living spaces (toilets, showers, baths, beds, etc.), ancillary medical facilities, stockpiling of supplies, universal design)

Redevelopment as sport complexes

- Establish comprehensive residential training centres for all athletes, including local junior and senior high school students, athletes affiliated with corporate sports teams, and professional athletes.
- Establish indoor and outdoor sports facilities, wellness facilities, sports and cooking class facilities, running stations, and other facilities that can encourage healthy lifestyles among local residents.

Ancillary medical facilities

Establish sports medicine and rehabilitation centres as stadium ancillary facilities that can provide advanced sports medicine for everyone in the community, from local athletes to the elderly.

Efforts to attract private and public investments

- Construction of stadiums alongside public facilities (e.g. government offices, libraries, art and other museums, educational facilities, MICE facilities, etc.)
- Construction of stadiums alongside private sector facilities (commercial, residential, tourism, etc. facilities, offices, data centres, etc.)

Concluding remarks by WG Advisor Kazuhiko SAWAI, Associate Professor at the School of Commerce, Meiji University

As local authorities grapple with financial difficulties, an ageing population, and a falling birth rate, the validity of concepts such as boosting local economies through multi-purpose, multi-functional stadiums is being questioned. In view of this situation, at the working group we have been considering the modality of stadiums with “local communities” rather than “football” as the main theme, and the possibility of developing them as complex public facilities that provide disaster prevention and medical care. The strength of J.LEAGUE is that it is not a one-off event like the Olympics, but has the potential to become a lasting human and social capital rooted in the local communities. The Olympics take place over a very short period of time, but the J.LEAGUE is there to stay in each region. Disaster prevention and healthcare work effectively when many human resources and not just facilities are involved. It is necessary to consider and promote stadiums for local communities that utilise the strengths of J.LEAGUE clubs as human and social capital in the regions.

EDION Peace Wing Hiroshima: A New Symbol for the City

- The Stadium That Turned the City Purple

On match days, the trams that typically carry commuters and students are packed with people in purple. Supporters clad in replica Sanfrecce Hiroshima jerseys journey to EDION Peace Wing Hiroshima (E-Peace) in the heart of Hiroshima City. The city is awash with purple, a new sight that has emerged with the new stadium's construction.

"With the stadium located in the city centre, match days witness purple shirts flooding the streets, as football becomes truly woven into the fabric of the city. I believe this demonstrates a significant contribution from Sanfrecce," says Keiji MORISHIGE, General Manager of the Stadium Management Division at Sanfrecce Hiroshima.

Morishige is currently on secondment from EDION Corporation, where he worked for many years. About a year before the new stadium opened, he joined Sanfrecce Hiroshima, the stadium's designated administrator. Drawing on his experience with projects such as TSUTAYA ELECTRICS in his previous role, he concentrates daily on two key missions: "how to monetise the stadium on non-match days" and "how to enhance the stadium's value through community collaboration."

In the new stadium's inaugural year, the passion of Hiroshima's people provided the ideal scene. This season's MEIJI YASUDA J1 LEAGUE home match attendance totalled 486,579 across 19 matches, significantly surpassing the club's previous record of 378,195 set in 1994. The average attendance per match reached 25,609, far exceeding the 17,721 recorded in 2012 when the team claimed their first title. In their third year under Manager Michael SKIBBE, the team competed in an intense title race at their nearly full stadiums filled with passionate purple support, maintaining the suspense until the end of the season.

There are several reasons for this strong attendance. Firstly, its prime location stands out, even by J.LEAGUE standards. Morishige, who has researched the home grounds of all J1 clubs, states, "It wasn't built where space was available, but where value exists; that is, it was constructed where we wanted it—that's the best part about the new stadium." E-Peace, situated in the city centre of Hiroshima, is within walking distance of the main Hondori Shopping Street and the Nagarekawa entertainment district, with excellent public transport access via tram, bus, and JR lines. The area boasts various attractions, including Hiroshima Castle, the Atomic Bomb Dome, art museums, commercial facilities, and event spaces. In August, Hiroshima Stadium Park was completed adjacent to the stadium, featuring a grass plaza and restaurants. The improved navigability from and to surrounding areas has brought new vitality to the city.

Another key factor is the notable enhancement in match experience achieved through the transition to a football-specific stadium. The thrilling atmosphere created by the closeness between spectator seats and the pitch, allowing fans to observe players' actions up close, is a significant draw. The stadium incorporates entertainment features, including giant screens equivalent

in size to those at the Japan National Stadium and cutting-edge sound equipment, to elevate spectator enjoyment. Furthermore, it provides 43 different seating options, including kids' room and sensory room. Its emphasis on comfort during matches seen in the specially designed general seating and concourses adorned with numerous screens displaying match footage foster an environment where a diverse audience can relish the experience in various ways.

"Our basic concept was straightforward: 'Create a place where people want to go.' However, what makes a place appealing varies by age and era, so we must continue proposing different ideas. First, we attract people through football events. Then, using this spacious venue with approximately 28,500 seats and giant screens as resources, I believe we can do many different things depending on our ideas."

The design of the spectator environment drew inspiration from American stadiums, specifically Minnesota United FC's Allianz Field, a football-specific stadium accommodating up to 24,474 spectators.

"While in Europe, many people are football fans supporting their teams, in America, a strong entertainment element prevails. The key is fan engagement, with proximity to the pitch and the sound and production effects enhancing the entertainment experience. We incorporated these elements into our stadium design."

During summer night games, Hiroshima hosted the "Super Enthusiastic Night Festival," advertised as "all-participatory new night sports entertainment." Before and after matches, as well as during half-time, light and sound productions created a concert-like atmosphere, featuring shows that incorporated flames and fireworks to enthral the crowd. In the darkened stadium, home



supporters waved purple glow sticks as part of the production, while away supporters joined in with glow sticks in their club colours. These extraordinary spectacles are attracting new fans.

"The unity created by the glow sticks was an experience unlike any I had encountered before; it was truly moving, even for me. Thanks to the efforts of our production team, we are certainly attracting new demographic groups. My granddaughter, who begins primary school next year, had previously shown no interest in football but now wishes to attend repeatedly."

On non-match days, the stadium serves as a hub for football culture. The museum, featuring exhibits and activities centred on Hiroshima football history, has welcomed approximately 18,000 visitors as of 10 November 2024. Stadium tours are consistently nearly fully booked, with the player experience being particularly popular. Furthermore, the official shop's physical store sales are overwhelmingly the highest among J.Club shops. Morishige's analysis is, "It's because the shop is located in the stadium and the city centre."

Skyboxes and business lounge and....The concourse and artificial turf areas beside the pitch can also be utilised for various purposes, including weddings and photo shoots. The venue has hosted non-football events such as academic conferences and Kagura performances, serving not only as a match venue but also as a new event space and cultural hub.

According to the club, the economic impact of the new stadium is estimated at about 1.1 billion yen per J.League match. This figure was calculated with the cooperation of Hiroshima University of Economics, based on a match

against Hokkaido Consadole Sapporo (December 1) in the 37th round of the 2024 Meiji Yasuda J1 League, which recorded an attendance of 27,105. Of the 1.1 billion yen, approximately 300 million yen was generated in the stadium and approximately 800 million yen in the area surrounding the stadium.

Club revenues in 2024 are expected to reach a record high of approximately 7.8 billion yen, up 1.86 times on last year's figure of approximately 4.2 billion yen, making it one of the top three clubs in the J.League behind Urawa Reds and Kawasaki Frontale if the 2023 record is put into perspective. With sales of 10 billion yen no longer an impossible dream, Sanfrecce Hiroshima aims to become a big club that leads J.League in both football and management.

The city-centre stadium also has a significant economic impact on the surrounding area. People shop at nearby commercial facilities before matches and gather afterwards to enjoy the nightlife and dining, creating a new match-day routine that didn't exist before. The stadium's central location has enhanced the match-day experience, positively affecting the local community. The club has also been receiving positive feedback about this.

"We can truly sense that the stadium's capacity to attract people and generate buzz has established it as a new city symbol, significantly contributing to Hiroshima's overall economic impact. For instance, we hear that the basement food section of nearby commercial facilities sees about triple their usual sales on match days. The sight of purple uniforms flooding the city centre is unprecedented, and we receive gratitude from local merchants, indicating a genuinely significant impact."

The club has stated that E-Peace and its surrounding facilities are anticipated to attract 2.2 million visitors each year. Considering direct revenue from matches and stadium usage, indirect effects from spectator spending in the vicinity, and new employment and business opportunities, the estimated annual economic impact is thought to be several tens of billions of yen.

Since the new stadium's completion, Morishige has had a favourite view: E-Peace standing proudly behind the World Heritage Atomic Bomb Dome. The stadium's wing-like form commands an impressive presence in an area frequented by many international tourists. Morishige emphasises, "Considering the stadium's position near the Peace Memorial Park, I believe there's more we ought to be doing." E-Peace has a role to serve as a new base for promoting peace through football.

Kenzo TANGE, the architect who designed the Peace Memorial Park and Museum 75 years ago, envisioned the north side of Peace Memorial Park as a space to foster peace through sports and culture, and had drawn up plans for a general sports stadium on the site where the new stadium now stands. While this vision was not realised at the time, a football stadium has now been completed there many years later.

"With the completion of the stadium, I believe we are approaching something akin to what Mr. Tange envisioned. Considering the city as a whole, the purpose and role of each element are clearly defined, and Sanfrecce Hiroshima now faces the significant challenge of determining how to shape the role of sports here. We can enjoy our favourite activities and play sports and football because we live in peace. Especially in Hiroshima, it reminds us of the joy that comes from being able to engage in sports. I believe Hiroshima's role is to communicate this message more widely."

E-Peace stands on ground that was reduced to ashes by the atomic bomb and later witnessed people courageously rebuilding their lives amid post-war chaos to achieve recovery. Because of this location, Sanfrecce Hiroshima's Peace Match, held annually since 2018, along with international matches that attract attention from abroad, carries greater significance. Furthermore, just as Tange invested his hopes for future generations in this area, the stadium is anticipated to become a symbol of the City of Peace as a place of learning and place of growth through football clinics and local community contribution activities. Morishige says, "I believe we ought to fulfil our role as a

central hub that revitalises Hiroshima's sports culture and the entire local community."

The club's surrounding environment has also changed. Previously, Sanfrecce banners and posters were sparsely scattered around central Hiroshima, but now it's difficult not to see purple in the city centre on any given day. This transformation in the cityscape illustrates how Sanfrecce Hiroshima has become more deeply integrated into the city alongside the new stadium. Beyond increased revenue and brand power, being a central figure in the E-Peace-centred community is crucial for the club. Since relocating to the new stadium, they have received an "astonishing number" of inquiries and consultations. The club will continue to play its part in connecting these various possibilities within the city.

"Instead of specifically orchestrating something [in collaboration with the city], we are engaging in conversations with various operators within the city, discussing how it would be better for people to circulate naturally and communities to form. We currently have what we refer to as the 'Sanfrecce Hub Concept,' and we listen to local voices once a week about what we can do and what types of activities we should pursue."

Due to their substantial impact on local society and the economy, the new stadium and club bear significant responsibility and play crucial roles. There are high expectations that it will catalyse community development and serve as an exemplary model for regional revitalisation through a city-centre stadium and sports club.

"I believe the new stadium has the potential to become more than just a sports facility; it can serve as a central hub for Hiroshima's culture, economy, and community. We aim to evolve into a multipurpose venue that actively embraces non-sporting events and community contribution activities, positively influencing the regional economy and society as a whole. Through this, we can enhance Hiroshima's identity and play a vital role in driving regional development."

Hiroshima City is presently undergoing redevelopment. From the new Hiroshima Station set to open in spring 2025 to various new facility constructions and rebuilding projects throughout the city centre, Hiroshima is transforming significantly. As the city evolves, the new stadium will retain its status as a city symbol, and the city will increasingly be adorned in purple.

Text by Kota MINATO



General Manager, Stadium Management Division
Sanfrecce Hiroshima Co., Ltd.

Keiji MORISHIGE

Born in Iwakuni City, Yamaguchi Prefecture. Joined local electronics retailer Daiichi (now EDION) in 1987. Subsequently worked at three PC speciality shops and two electronics shops. Transferred to headquarters in 2000, serving as Product Division Manager and Area Sales Manager. Leader on TSUTAYA ELECTRICS (Futako-Tamagawa and Hiroshima) projects and involved in the robotics programming school business before joining Sanfrecce Hiroshima in April 2023.

- Stadia Opened in 2024

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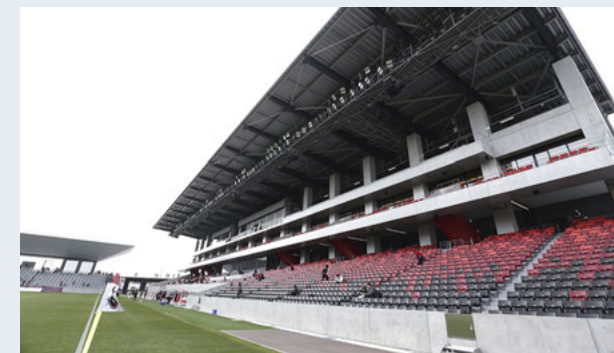
Opened in October 2024, this stadium is situated at the heart of Nagasaki Stadium City. With a capacity of 20,027, it features a design that emphasises the spectator experience, including Japan's shortest distance to the pitch, at approximately 5 metres. The Player's Suite seating (with dining) is in the front centre of the main stand near the bench, while an exclusive lounge provides views of player entrances and manager's press conference after



the match through glass. Surrounding the stadium are a 6,000-seat arena, various commercial facilities, the prefecture's largest office building, and a hotel with stadium views. One distinctive feature is that the rear stand is integrated with the hotel and boasts numerous lounges. The pitch can be observed from various spots, including hotel rooms, the pool, and the saunas.

Kanazawa Go Go Curry Stadium

Completed in February 2024, Kanazawa Go Go Curry Stadium is the first football stadium in the Hokuriku region to meet J.LEAGUE standards. It currently boasts a capacity of 10,728. The north side stand is designed for potential expansion, which could increase the capacity to over 15,000 in the future. Situated in Kanazawa Johoku Citizen Sports Park, it is conveniently located approximately 10 minutes by car from JR Kanazawa Station, a 15-minute walk from JR Higashi-Kanazawa Station, and 5 minutes by car



from Kanazawa-Higashi IC. Zweigen Kanazawa, the designated administrator, operates the stadium in a joint venture with KCS Inc. and the Kanazawa City Sports Project Foundation. The stadium features unique hospitality facilities, including a tunnel lounge with glass windows that offer behind-the-scenes views of player entrances and interviews, field-level seats in the front row of the main stand that provide a player's-eye view of the action, and a premium lounge available for general purchase, separate from the VIP and business lounges.

J.LEAGUE’s Global Business

Since its inception in 1993, J.LEAGUE has championed its “J.LEAGUE Asia Strategy” with an eye towards the development of football across Asia, aligning with its mission “To contribute to international friendship and exchange.” In 2024, with the aim of competing on the global stage, J.LEAGUE extended its international activities beyond Southeast Asia to include the Middle East and Europe. These activities include establishing partnership agreements with overseas leagues and expanding J.LEAGUE’s visibility through television broadcasts worldwide.

- Strategic Partnership Agreement with Saudi Pro League (SPL)

On 20 May 2024, J.LEAGUE entered into a strategic partnership agreement with Saudi Arabia’s Saudi Pro League (SPL). The two leagues intend to collaborate closely to lead Asian football as the frontrunners in East and West Asia.



Strategic Partnership Agreement Contents and Duration

Contents:

- Personnel exchange to improve football standards
- Workshops and business conferences to foster the growth and development of both leagues and information sharing on topics such as player development
- International exchange through events and friendly matches

Duration:

20 May 2024 to 31 December 2025

Alongside SPL, J.LEAGUE has established partnership agreements with professional leagues in Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia. These partnerships aim to exchange information essential for developing football and leagues in each country, as well as to implement various initiatives to enhance competitiveness and raise the standard of Asian football.

- Vietnamese Professional League Officials Visit Japan to Observe J.LEAGUE

In December 2024, 41 representatives, including the Chairman of the Vietnam Professional Football Joint Stock Company (VPF) and club representatives, visited Japan. They toured the facilities of the J.LEAGUE, Urawa Reds, Kawasaki Frontale, and Gamba Osaka, exchanging views on J.LEAGUE and J.Club management as well as player development. The delegation also attended the AFC Champions League Elite matches and the final match of the MEIJI YASUDA J.LEAGUE season.



- List of inter-league partner countries

League	year of conclusion
Thai League	2012
Vietnam Professional Football Joint Stock Company	2012
Myanmar National League	2012
Cambodian League	2013

League	year of conclusion
Singapore Premier League	2014
Liga Indonesia	2014
Malaysia Super League	2015
Saudi Pro League	2024

※Players who have nationalities of the leagues listed above are not treated to be foreign players for the squad, but players who have nationalities of Saudi Arabia will be treated as foreign players.

- J.Clubs' Global Business and Exchange Activities

Almost half of the 60 J.Clubs promoted global business and exchange activities, mainly in Southeast Asia. Hokkaido Consadole Sapporo, Kawasaki Frontale, and Cerezo Osaka, which have been active in Southeast Asia since the launch of the Asia Strategy in 2012, continued to strengthen their ties in the region, while many other J.Clubs expanded their overseas activities in 2024.

Notably, J.Clubs' activities in Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia account for approximately 70% of all overseas operations, demonstrating a year-on-year upward trend. Business activities have accelerated across various areas, including the recruitment of athletes to play in J.LEAGUE, partnerships with local and Japanese companies operating in these countries, exchanges of players and coaches through local club affiliations, support for coaching development, local football school projects, and more.

Below are some key activities from 2024.

FC Machida Zelvia: Thailand

FC Machida Zelvia visited Southeast Asia several times to expand their networks and conduct sponsor activations at club academy tournaments overseas. They organised football clinics in Thailand (October) and Vietnam (December) with sponsorship from both Japanese and local companies.



Ventforet Kofu: Indonesia

Ventforet Kofu secured a major Indonesian company as their main partner and conducted football clinics in Jakarta, Bandung, and Balikpapan, the base of the partner company and near Indonesia's future capital. At the same time, the initiative promoted exchange between Japan, Yamanashi Prefecture, and Indonesia, with support and cooperation from many Japanese companies operating in Indonesia.



Avispa Fukuoka: Thailand

Leveraging Fukuoka's proximity to Asian countries, Avispa Fukuoka conducted training camp promotional activities, club exchanges, and coaching clinics in Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and elsewhere. In November, they co-hosted the Bangkok U-13 Dream Cup in Thailand with partner club Port FC, inviting MVP players and several coaches to Avispa Fukuoka. The players came to Japan in December and participated in Avispa Fukuoka Academy training.



- Thai Life Insurance J.LEAGUE ASIA CHALLENGE 2023/24 powered by MEIJI YASUDA

Thai Life Insurance J.LEAGUE ASIA CHALLENGE 2023/24 powered by MEIJI YASUDA match between BG Pathum United and Cerezo Osaka took place at BG Stadium in Thailand on 2 February 2024, marking the second match of this tournament (following one held in December 2023) and the fourth Asia Challenge event in Thailand overall. The match attracted 9,028 spectators, creating an enthusiastic atmosphere with many Thai fans present. Apart from the stadium audience, the match was aired across Thailand on terrestrial television and streamed on YouTube platforms.

- Japan Friendship Ties Programme "JENESYS" Cooperation: 110 High School Students from 11 Southeast Asian Nations Visit Japan



J.LEAGUE collaborated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Japan Friendship Ties Programme "JENESYS" as part of its efforts to promote youth exchange between Japan and ASEAN nations through football.

From 28 October to 4 November, the programme brought to Japan 110 high school students from ASEAN nations and Timor-Leste who shared an interest in the contribution of sports to the SDGs and in addressing social issues.

With support from the J.LEAGUE and participating clubs—Iwaki FC, JEF United Chiba, Kawasaki Frontale, Yokohama F·Marinos, and Shonan Bellmare—the students gained firsthand experience of the SDG initiatives and community contribution activities advocated by J.LEAGUE and J.Clubs.



- Overseas broadcasts

Continuing from the previous year, broadcasts in 2024 were provided by local stations in approximately 20 countries, primarily in Asia. Indonesia (PSJ TV) and Hong Kong (myTV SUPER) joined as new broadcasting partners, with Hong Kong resuming local broadcasting for the first time in two years, since 2022. Hong Kong has a particularly large base of J.LEAGUE fans and supporters compared to other countries. In October, a campaign aimed at myTV SUPER viewers was conducted, with winning fans invited to an FC Tokyo match, where they enjoyed special experiences, such as seeing players and managers up close, as part of a new initiative beyond broadcasting. For other regions, two matches per MEIJI YASUDA J1 LEAGUE matchweek were streamed on the international version of J.LEAGUE's official YouTube channel, ensuring that J.LEAGUE matches can be viewed globally.

Club Licensing / J.Club’s Income and Expenditure Trends

- Club License

Purpose of the Club Licensing System		
<p>The objectives of the introduction of the club licensing system can be broadly summed up as “the sustained improvement in the standards of football in terms of competition and facilities” and “the stabilisation of the management of clubs and the improvement of their financial capacity and credibility.”</p> <p>The J.LEAGUE Club Licensing System has “J1 Club License” which allows clubs to participate in J1, J2, and J3 leagues, “J2 Club License” which allows clubs to participate in J2 and J3 leagues, and “J3 Club License” which allows clubs to participate in J3 leagues only. Any J1, J2 or J3 club can apply for any of these club licenses, and clubs wishing to join J.LEAGUE can apply for J3 Club License.</p>		
2025 Season Club License		
Club License	Number	Club
J1	49	Sapporo・Iwate・Sendai・Akita・Yamagata・Iwaki・Kashima・Mito・Tochigi・Gunma・Urawa ・Omiya・Chiba・Kashiwa・FC TOKYO・Tokyo-V・FC Machida・Kawasaki-F・Yokohama F・M・ Yokohama FC・Shonan・Kofu・Matsumoto・Niigata・Toyama・Kanazawa・Shimizu・Iwata・Fujieda・Nagoya・FC Gifu・Kyoto・G-Osaka・C-Osaka・Kobe・Okayama・Hiroshima・Yamaguchi・Sanuki・Tokushima・Ehime FC・Fukuoka・Kitakyushu・Tosu・Nagasaki・Kumamoto・Oita・Kagoshima・RYUKYU
J2	11	Hachinohe・Fukushima・YSCC Yokohama・Sagamihara・Nagano・Numazu・FC Osaka・Nara・Tottori・Imabari・Miyazaki
J3	(7)	*(Rein Meer Aomori FC、TOCHIGI CITY、CriacaoShinjuku、Veertine MIE、Reilac Shiga FC、Kochi United SC、Verspah OITA)

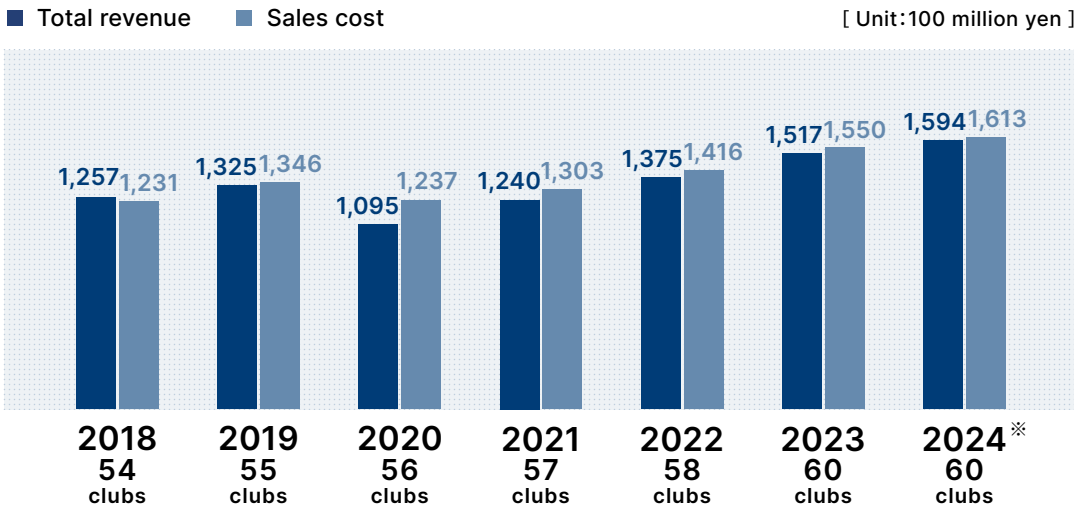
※Clubs aiming to join J3

- J.Club’s Income and Expenditure Trends

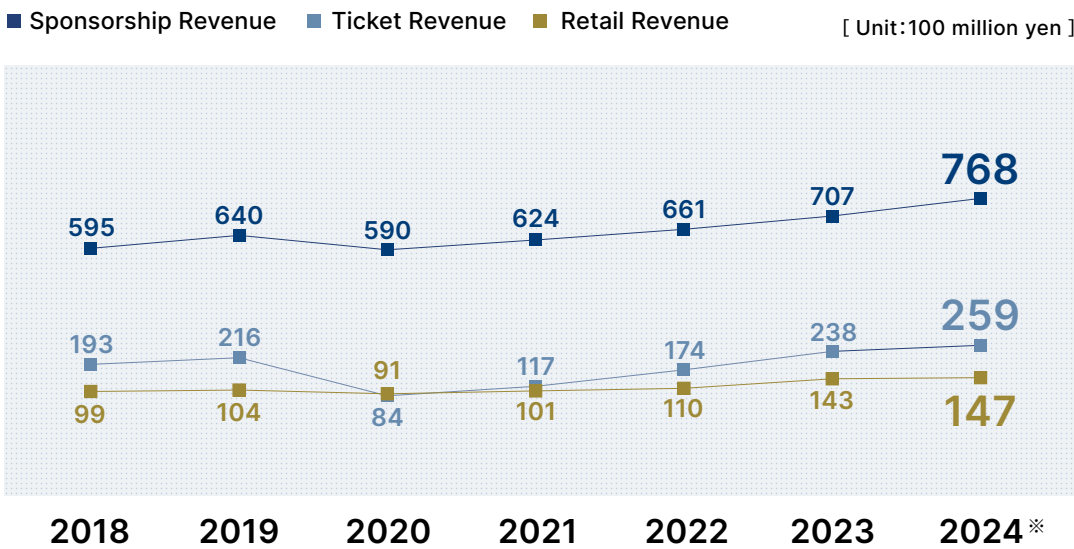
Operating revenue in FY2023 was 151.7 billion yen (60 clubs), a 10% growth rate over the 137.5 billion yen (58 clubs) in FY2022. Revenue increased for 88% of the J1 and J2 clubs, with Urawa Reds exceeding 10 billion yen (10.3 billion yen). In the 2023 season, increased media exposure and extensive promotional activities resulted in a 37% increase in ticket revenue, which reached 23.8 billion yen, or 110% of the levels prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (FY2019). Sponsorship revenue and retail revenue also reached record levels.

This trend looks set to continue in FY2024, with operating revenue forecast to reach around 160 billion yen.

Graphs I:J1, J2, and J3 club results



Graphs II :J1, J2, and J3 club results



※The 2024 season figures in Graphs I and II are J.LEAGUE’s projections based on forecasts of J1, J2, and J3 club results. They may be subject to revision depending on future circumstances.



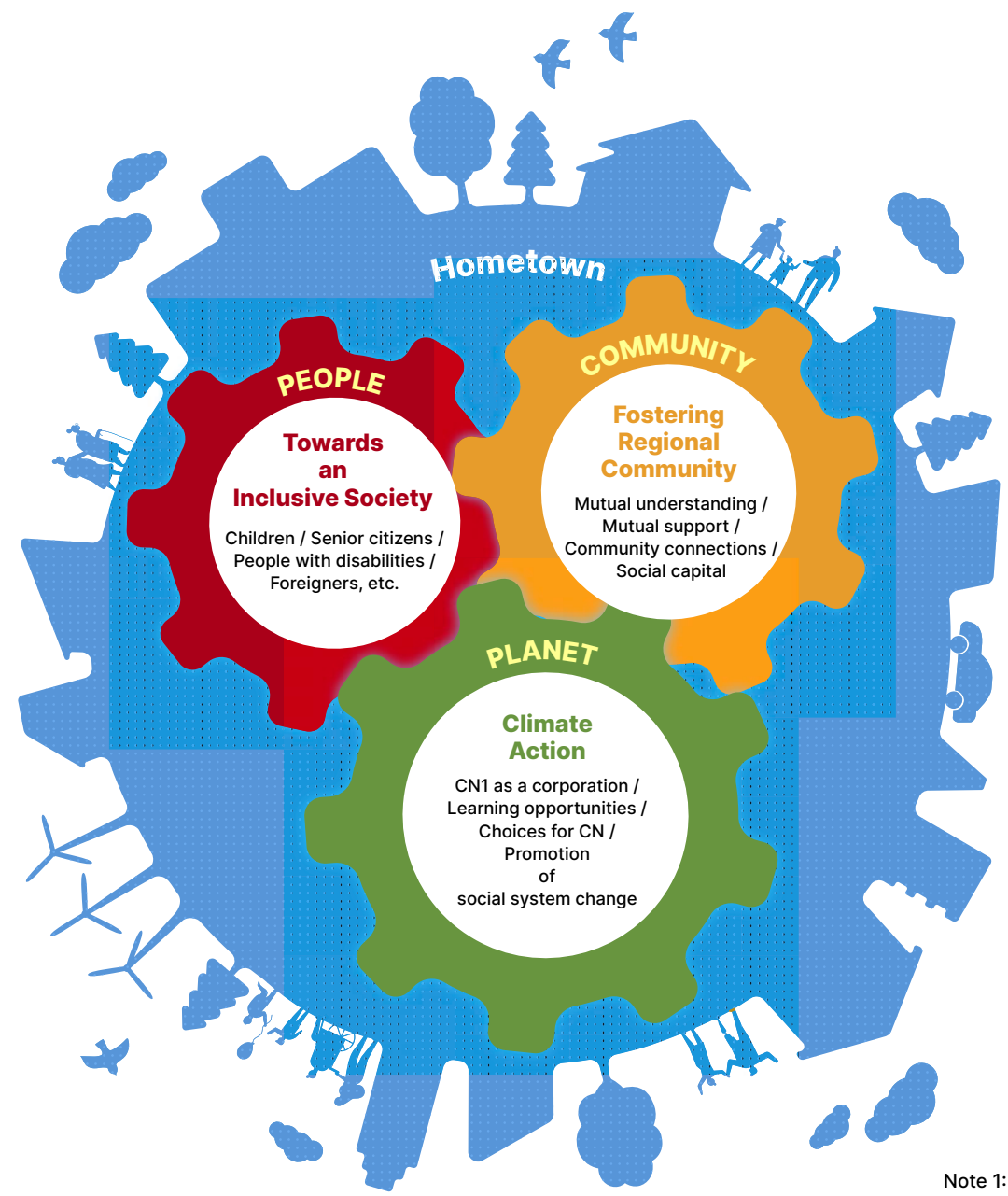
- 76 J.LEAGUE Sustainability
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J.LEAGUE Sustainability

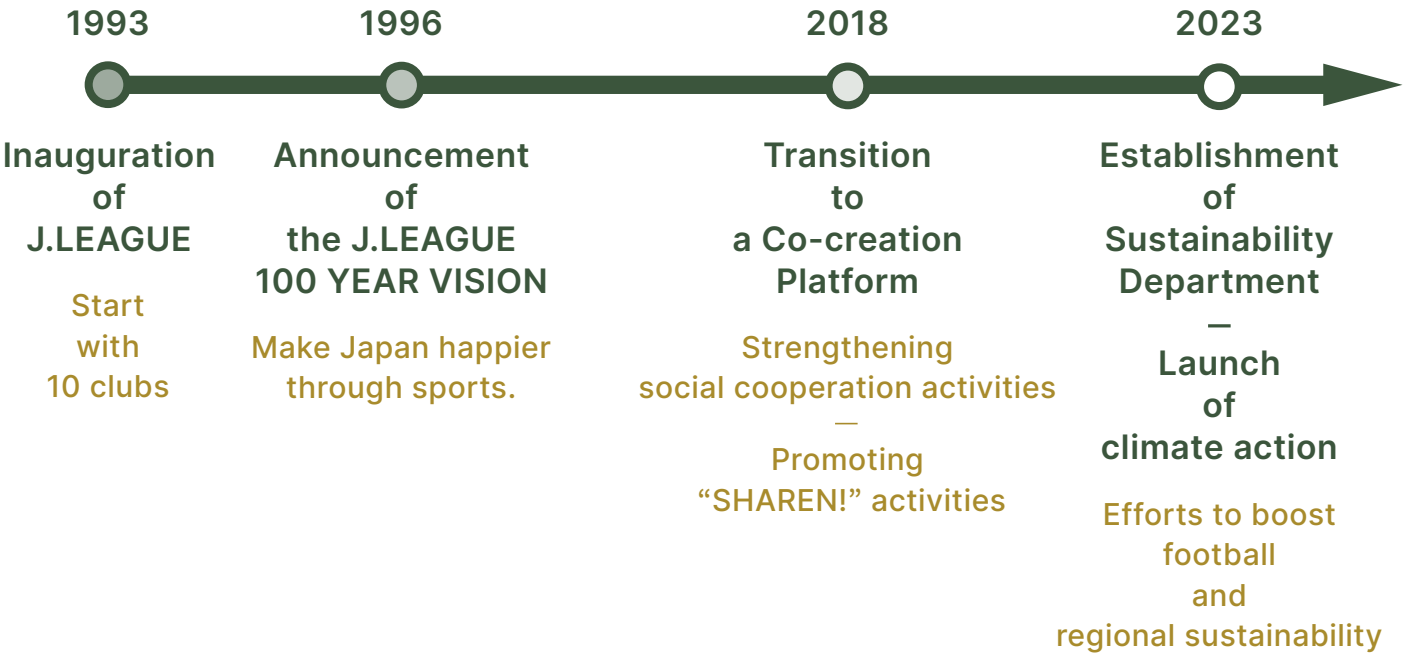
J.LEAGUE is promoting a wide range of activities in the clubs’ hometowns in line with our mission “To foster the development of Japan’s sporting culture, to assist in the healthy mental and physical growth of Japanese people” and the J.LEAGUE 100 YEAR VISION “Make Japan happier through sports.”

As natural disasters caused by climate change intensify and their impact on football and sport becomes more pronounced, J.LEAGUE is working with J.Clubs to bridge football and sport with future generations and to promote the sustainability of vibrant hometowns. In their respective hometowns, the 60 J.Clubs aim to work with diverse stakeholders in the community to solve social issues in areas such as climate action, children, senior citizens, and people with disabilities. We also use the “SHAREN!” framework, which leverages the unique position of J.Clubs in local communities as regional hubs to solve common social problems through collaboration with three or more parties. J.LEAGUE has reorganised its sustainability efforts under the frameworks of “Fostering Regional Community,” “Towards an Inclusive Society,” and “Climate Action,” and is promoting them through initiatives from all 60 J.LEAGUE clubs.

SUSTAINABILITY



Note 1: Carbon Neutrality



J.LEAGUE believes that the themes of climate action, inclusive society, and fostering regional communities are interlinked, and that advancing activities in any one of these areas will generate and reinforce a virtuous circle in the others.

For example, through initiatives such as the “Be supporters!” project implemented in collaboration with Suntory Wellness, which aims to encourage people who are often “supported” in their daily lives, such as senior citizens in retirement homes and people with dementia, to become “supporters” by cheering on their local J.LEAGUE club, and football tournaments aimed at deepening ties between companies, schools, and foreign residents in the local community, J.LEAGUE aims to realise an “inclusive society”: a local community where, through football and sport, all people are respected and free to be who they are. At the same time, such opportunities for a wide range of people living in a particular area, including senior citizens and



foreigners, to connect through local activities will help to build face-to-face relationships within the neighbourhood, further fostering the regional community.

In order to realise such a society, we will work together with local communities in each of the 60 J.Clubs’ hometowns to achieve regional revitalisation, using the “SHAREN!” approach to solving social issues in the aforementioned themes through cooperation among the three parties, including local stakeholders. The revitalisation of a region is a source of energy and inspiration for its people. We will continue to promote initiatives aiming at generating such virtuous circles in each of J.Clubs’ hometowns and developing them in a sustainable manner together with the local communities.

SUSTAINABILITY

J.LEAGUE Climate Action

- J.LEAGUE's Actions on Climate Change

In recent years, we have reached a point where we must seriously consider the risks that climate change poses to football itself—particularly regarding our objectives of “safe and secure operations” and “hosting matches where we can welcome spectators with peace of mind.” For example, the number of matches cancelled due to extreme weather, such as heavy rain and typhoons, has increased approximately fivefold since 2018 (as of December 2024). Furthermore, the impacts of climate change are becoming increasingly evident and commonplace in the hometowns where J.Clubs are based. At a time when the very environment and foundation of sports are under threat, J.LEAGUE launched its “J.LEAGUE Climate Action” initiative in 2023 to protect children’s dreams of “becoming football players!” and “enjoying outdoor sports!” as well as their daily activities.

J.LEAGUE has implemented community-based hometown activities across all 60 clubs. As J.LEAGUE and J.Clubs have developed alongside their communities, they now function as hubs, collaborating with fans, supporters, local governments, and local businesses to maintain an environment where people can continue to enjoy sport as a regular part of life.



- Initiatives in 2024

Roadmap Development

In 2024, J.LEAGUE developed a roadmap outlining its vision for the next 5 to 10 years. As members of society, when J.LEAGUE and J.Clubs communicate their climate action initiatives, awareness shifts. As awareness shifts, behaviour naturally follows, and we aim to collaborate with various stakeholders to establish a convenient, environmentally friendly, and sustainable social system by 2030. This year, we have concentrated on understanding and conveying why J.LEAGUE is undertaking climate action and how football relates to climate change.

Sustainability Conference to Learn Leading Sustainability Management from the Premier League's Tottenham Hotspur

In July 2024, J.LEAGUE and The Nippon Foundation HEROs Project co-hosted a sustainability conference, featuring representatives from Tottenham Hotspur, who visited Japan for a MEIJI YASUDA J.LEAGUE WORLD CHALLENGE 2024 powered by docomo match against Vissel Kobe.

The conference, attended by around 200 participants, mainly from businesses and sports organisations, was held to gain insights into sports sustainability management from Tottenham, recognised as England's foremost club in sustainability. Tottenham has been ranked first in the Premier League for four consecutive years in the Sport Positive Leagues ranking, which assesses environmental sustainability across football leagues.

J.LEAGUE × Shinji ONO Smile Football Tour for a Sustainable Future supported by MEIJI YASUDA

“J.LEAGUE × Shinji ONO Smile Football Tour for a Sustainable Future supported by MEIJI YASUDA,” which commenced in 2024, includes sustainability workshops for primary school children following football clinics led by Shinji ONO, a Co-opted Member of the J.LEAGUE's Executive Committee. These sessions convey the significance of climate action in the context of ongoing global warming issues.



“Be Supporters!” Working Toward an Inclusive Society

Japan has an ageing society where 29.3%* of the population is elderly. In response, Suntory Wellness Limited and J.LEAGUE are collaborating on the “Be Supporters!” project. This initiative aims to transform those who typically receive support, such as older adults and individuals with dementia residing in care homes, into football club supporters who actively contribute to their clubs and communities. With the concept “From People Who Receive Support to People Who Provide Support,” Suntory Wellness Limited launched the project in December 2020 with four J.Clubs, and it expanded to 20 clubs by 2024. Under the motto “For everyone who wants to feel excitement at any age,” the initiative continues to flourish.

We spoke with Ms Yoshimura from Suntory Wellness, the main coordinator for “Be Supporters!” and a J.LEAGUE representative.

※As of September 16, 2024, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications

- First, please introduce yourself.

Yoshimura: I’m Mayuko YOSHIMURA, the main coordinator for Be Supporters, from Suntory Wellness’s Corporate Planning Division.

Aoyama: I’m Yuuka AOYAMA from the Social Engagement Group at J.LEAGUE’s Sustainability Department. I have been engaged in hometown activities since approximately 2007, which consequently led to my involvement in this field since the launch of SHAREN! in 2018.

- The Be Supporters! project commenced in Toyama with Suntory Wellness in December 2020. Could you share its



background with us?

Yoshimura: When considering 100-year lives, people naturally focus on preventative measures to extend healthy lifespans; however, I felt that was insufficient for true happiness. It was during this time of concern that I learned about Be Supporters! I believed that as a company committed to “to inspire the brilliance of life,” we could challenge ourselves to go beyond prevention and support individuals in shining even after entering care homes or developing dementia by concentrating on coexistence.

- It started with four clubs initially.

Yoshimura: We first attempted to establish a supporters’ club with Kataller Toyama in December 2020. When we offered club shirts to residents who typically remained in their rooms and did not engage in recreational activities, they smiled and responded, “I’ll give one a try as well.” The staff recognised great potential, and we officially launched in 2021.

- This project appears to focus on fostering an inclusive society through the power of football and sport. What are your thoughts on that impact?

Aoyama: When SHAREN! launched, senior citizens were one of the four priority themes in its second year. Therefore, we sought to implement the Be Supporters! initiative and were looking for corporate partners to collaborate with us. At the same time, we presented the idea to clubs. In 2006, following the passage of the revised Long-Term Care Insurance Act, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare approached J.LEAGUE with a request for collaboration, which led to J.LEAGUE’s



Care Prevention Programme in 2007. Although the government-funded programme concluded after two years, many clubs continued through contracts with local authorities. I believe this experience laid a foundation for Be Supporters!

The strength of J.LEAGUE lies in its clubs nationwide, and SHAREN! involves more than two stakeholders—in this case, clubs, J.LEAGUE, Suntory Wellness, local governments, and care facilities. This network has enabled us to start effectively. We possess a platform to collaboratively address local issues with corporate partners and community members. This is the value that football and J.LEAGUE bring to society.

- You’ve both been involved in this project for nearly four years. Do you have any memorable moments?

Yoshimura: There are many stories, but one that stands out involves “Teruko-san” at a facility in Kobe. She was a huge fan of Noriaki FUJIMOTO during his time with Vissel Kobe in 2022 and continued to support him after his transfer to Kagoshima United FC in 2023, where he had also played in the 2016–2017 season. Observing this, the facility staff suggested she could travel to Kagoshima to cheer him on. Through Be Supporters!, Teruko-san became kinder and more communicative with various people, revealing new aspects of herself to the staff. This sparked a desire to support Fujimoto even more and led to a trip to Kagoshima with the staff in late September. The facility funded the trip through crowdfunding, with particular backing from Kagoshima supporters.

Yoshimura: In Kagoshima, fans and supporters surprised her with a greeting of “Welcome back,

Teruko-san” alongside gifts of Fujimoto merchandise. The day prior, Fujimoto himself posted a message on X saying, “Looking forward to seeing you.” These gestures fostered wonderful connections that were truly touching.

Aoyama: Rather than focusing on specific episodes, what stands out is the enthusiasm with which both the elderly residents and facility staff engage in the programme. Although facility staff often encounter various challenges in their supportive roles, witnessing the connections that develop with residents and observing their increased energy is truly uplifting. They become excited about J.LEAGUE matches and clubs. It’s wonderful that J.Clubs can contribute in this manner, and I’ve heard it even helps decrease staff turnover, as people are keen to work at facilities that organise Be Supporters! Therefore, this activity is also addressing various other challenges effectively.

- The programme has expanded from four initial clubs to twenty this year. What changes have you observed?

Yoshimura: In 2022, we initiated a special Respect for the Aged Day project called “Messages of Support from Life’s Seniors,” where senior citizens created support banners for clubs and players. Beginning with ten clubs, the project expanded to twenty clubs the following year and steadily grew in influence. The Be Supporters! programme has also become more appealing as it has been refined, with clubs continually generating new ideas. The enthusiasm of the clubs, upon realising they are making a difference in the community, has significantly propelled this expansion.



ideas. The enthusiasm of the clubs, upon realising they are making a difference in the community, has significantly propelled this expansion.

We often hear people say, “I wish we had that here too,” which allows us to sense the expansion.

Aoyama: The facility staff eagerly anticipate this, so they reach out to clubs early to inquire about their plans for the year. While gathering and showcasing messages of support is a core activity, clubs have independently devised various stadium activities to complement it. They are delighted when people can visit, and player visits beforehand enhance the support, making it more personal and meaningful; we are witnessing this positive cycle gradually increase.

Yoshimura: A 107-year-old grandmother sent a message saying, “Enjoy football until your last breath.” When some wished to write detailed messages of encouragement but found it difficult due to shaky hands, they instead made handprints. There is a lovely photograph of a player painting an elderly lady’s hand during his visit to a care facility. Witnessing the excitement and connections that arise from club staff thinking creatively about what is possible is truly heartwarming. There are excellent outcomes.

- The club staff appear to approach this with great sincerity. Do you have a future vision or challenges you intend to take on through this project?

Yoshimura: Certainly, we wish to encourage greater participation from a diverse range of individuals across

various regions nationwide, including those areas where we are already engaged. At present, our focus is on facilities and clubs, yet there is vast potential to involve many more people. We aim to appeal to more community members, reach out to those living alone who often remain at home, as well as individuals who feel isolated, to encourage their involvement in the support message activities. Our goal is to forge deeper connections by including those who struggle to take that initial step and by establishing spaces for communal participation.

- As mentioned earlier, supporting a favourite player—an “oshi”—is quite powerful, isn’t it?

Yoshimura: While “oshi” may typically be linked to female fans, in Be Supporters! we observe men eagerly instructing on football rules as “support leaders for Mr XX” and undertaking specific tasks such as equipment management or flag-bearing. When given responsibility, many will approach it earnestly. Perhaps this is another outcome of having an “oshi.” Our task is to consider how best to provide support in this context.

Aoyama: There was even an older man who practised to be a flag bearer.

Yoshimura: Yes, there was a gentleman with a prosthetic leg and a pacemaker who, when facility staff asked if he would like to be a flag bearer, said, “If everyone’s doing it, I’ll give it a try.” Instead of prescribed rehabilitation, staff noticed him practising walking independently. Through Be Supporters!, staff discover residents’ potential, and when they see someone making such an effort, they encourage that person to attempt something else next. As this begins to create a positive cycle of mutual understanding, I feel it gradually improves relationships.

- Carrying the flag during that match truly inspires people to walk, doesn’t it?

Yoshimura: Support for football may not be common among older generations. We frequently hear that staff members who are also new to football can form connections with residents by working together towards a common goal. Becoming a supporter is quite simple and accessible, allowing everyone to enjoy it collectively. The existing supporter culture of the J.LEAGUE ensures that stadium supporters naturally welcome them, creating a positive effect on Be Supporters!

- What are your thoughts on J.LEAGUE’s



principle of “community-based clubs” and its future role in creating an inclusive society?

Aoyama: For the sake of inclusivity, it is essential that everyone can enjoy themselves in these spaces. To that end, we hope J.Clubs will continue to do what they can and fulfil crucial roles in their communities, and we aim to support that. As Ms Yoshimura previously stated, being relied upon and asked for assistance becomes meaningful, especially as these opportunities often diminish with age. We hope this contributes to such positive experiences and offers some hopeful envisionments that individuals can feel secure about ageing in a society and environment where they too will find happiness in their senior years, thinking, “Even if I develop dementia, I might still enjoy life.”

Yoshimura: On our social media, fans and supporters often express sentiments like, “I want to be an old lady like her” or “I hope my future care home provides this

too,” which is truly gratifying.

- Through photographs, videos, records, and narratives, it conveys reassurance about ageing, showcasing these positive possibilities for the future despite the fact that everyone ages naturally. It’s wonderful that J.LEAGUE and football are enabling this.

Aoyama: In European club facilities and training grounds, you often see older individuals watching practice and playing chess in the attached restaurants. That is their culture. It would be lovely if seniors in Japan could spend their time in a similar way. While it might differ from Be Supporters!, it would be delightful if everyone had a place to go, with J.Clubs serving as hubs, maintaining connections with clubs, football, and J.LEAGUE even after entering care facilities. It would be enjoyable if things developed in that direction.



Mayuko YOSHIMURA (on the left)

Corporate Planning Division
Suntory Wellness Limited

Born in 1995 in Kobe, Hyogo Prefecture, Yoshimura enrolled in the Graduate School of Agriculture at Kyoto University, where she specialised in Alzheimer’s research. She joined Suntory Holdings Limited in 2019 and was assigned to Suntory Wellness Limited, where she conducted product training for management and operators at the contact centre. In February 2021, she made a direct request to join the “Be Supporters!” project at its launch, stating, “I absolutely want to do this!” She currently serves as the project leader, promoting initiatives and acting as a liaison between care facilities and local football clubs.

Yuuka AOYAMA (on the right)

Social Engagement Group, Sustainability Dept.
Japan Professional Football League (J.LEAGUE)

Aoyama joined J.LEAGUE in 1994. After working in the Business, Operations, and Planning Departments, as well as on the Eleven Million Project, she participated in SHAREN! (J.LEAGUE Social Cooperation) from its launch in 2018. Since April 2023, she has been part of the Social Engagement Group within the Sustainability Department.



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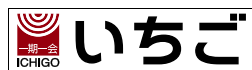
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