

## A UK Japanese Rugby Team

In the UK, the kingdom of rugby, a slightly different Japanese amateur rugby is playing. Their name is "London Japanese Football Rugby Club" (LJRFC). The squad is a mix of those stationed in London companies. That isn't to say they are of poor quality. It has a tradition of big stars of the rugby world passing through, such as Hiromu Hibino and Hiroaki Shukuzawa, old and new managers of the Japan national team, and Seiji Hirao and Mitsunobu Sunamura. They've only had one win so far, but through playing elite UK teams and friendship, it's become a place to learn about international business.

(Sumio Takahashi, London)



*In the cold, a hot battle unfolded*

A cold wind mixed with light rain blew in from the River Thames to a pitch in the London suburbs. It was a Sunday in late December last year. It was the last match of '89 for the LJRFC. Their opponents were Gray's Inn, a team composed entirely of lawyers. They were said to be average among the low-ranking, 300 amateur UK clubs. They should have been easy pickings for the LJRFC with their former Japan players.

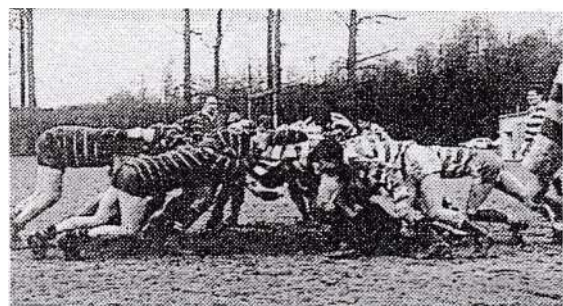
The game started with the kick-off. The other team were much quicker than expected, but the Japanese team started strongly. As expected from a team with

Japan national players there were many good plays, but as the end of the match drew closer you could see that they were coming under pressure. Maybe it was due to a difference in physical strength. The match ended in an unexpected loss. At most they play fourteen matches a year against other clubs. Last year they lost all eight matches. "English rugby players have big shoulders." Even Japanese ace Hirao was taken aback at times.



The team was put together in '81 and there are currently forty members. Many rugby-focussed companies have sent people abroad for sport, but nine years ago as there were so many rugby players in London, they decided to form a team.

Hirao from Kobe Steel, Sunamura from RICOH, Makoto Mizutani, Takashi Ito, Isetan manager Takeo Ishizuka, Nakamura Kenji from Toshiba Fuchu - amazing stars who have played in stadiums such as Chichibunomiya and Hanazono. Recently, the number of young players from Nomura Securities, Nippon Yusen, the Industrial Bank of Japan and Mitsubishi Corporation has been on the rise. Last year, former LJRFC players set up Japan branches in Tokyo and Osaka. The day these branches appear in matches in Japan can't be too far off.



*UK traditional rugby and a scrum while getting a feel for international business*

The head of the London branch is Noboru Watanabe of Aoyama Gakuin University (a Japanese restaurateur in London). “Players who come to London, without exception, go home having felt the tradition of English rugby for themselves, different to the Japanese style of gritty rugby. Many also become more internationally-minded.”

It’s said that in the UK, you can’t experience ‘traditional rugby’ without attending a royal college, Oxford or Cambridge. There are many famous players who came out of Oxford and Cambridge who now work at one the UK’s largest banks Natwest or the stockbrokers James Capel & Co. They are equally talented in the workplace and it’s not unusual for managers to come from star players.



This ‘traditional rugby’ said to be the accomplishment of elite UK society it becoming more open. It is now possible to play in matches even without being a member of an official club. Now, as well as LJRFC, other foreign teams from Italy, France and West Germany are starting to play matches as well.

Through rugby, there is active communication between Japanese and English people. Kobe Steel and Nomura Securities have made use of this and have started to actively employ rugby player graduates from Oxford and Cambridge in their European branches. Applicants for Japanese companies have also increased. With its high player turnover, it’s difficult for LJRFC to escape from being a low-level club in the high-level UK, but their influence is clearly growing.

(Titles omitted)