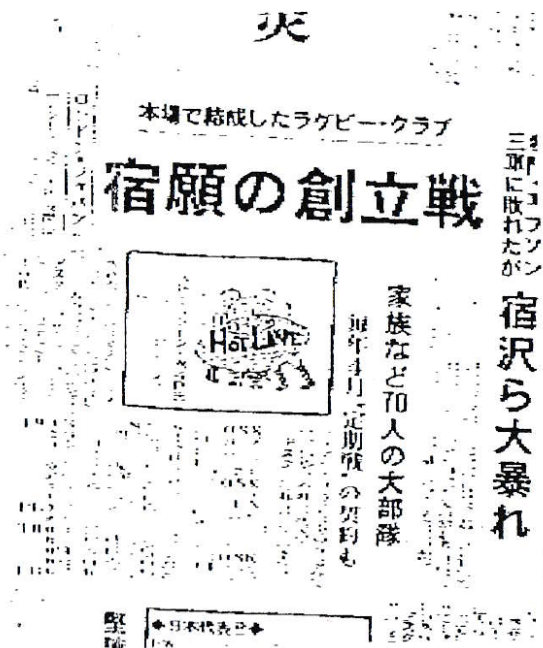


## London Japanese Inaugural match



Article from *Sankei Sports* (daily sports newspaper),  
7<sup>th</sup> April

In early April, an article titled “Long-awaited inaugural match for newly formed rugby club” appeared in a major sports paper. Among the members were former Japan players, and three from our own company: Sasaki, Okamoto and Ikeda.

The match took place on 4th April, between LJRFC (London Japanese) and well-known London club team Epsom, who were established 98 years ago. LJRFC lost 22-46, but as a Japanese team made in London it was an inaugural match to be commemorated.

Mr Sasaki played a great role in setting up this match. A Japanese rugby team had been started two years ago, but there were not enough members and they only practised a few times a year. Alcohol is a great mediator. Sasaki, who can’t be said to hate alcohol, when drinking with friends after work, started chatting about rugby to Mizutani who happened to be there too.

“We don’t have many members and we’ve never played a match”, said Mizutani.

“Including myself, there are three of us at MOL who can play. My family know some English people who know some people who play rugby for Epsom, so I’ll try to arrange a match”, said Sasaki.

At the end of last year, from the conversation the two had, due to Sasaki’s negotiating, early this year, a match against Epsom was arranged for the 4th April (Sunday). Our average age was over 35 so from Epsom, who had nearly ten teams, it was decided we would play the 4th team, who we thought would be similar in ability.

In preparation, from February we started to practise once a week on weekends at Regent’s Park. At first only five or six people came and the future looked uncertain, but as match day drew closer the number of people increased and we were able to get the 15 people we needed.



Back row: Sasaki (right), Ikeda (third from right),  
Okamoto (sixth from right)  
Front row: Shukuzawa (second from right), Mizutani  
(third from right)

On the day, it was not a single cloud in the sky. Most members, including the three from our company, were putting on the white and dark navy horizontally striped shirts for the first time and everyone gathered at the pitch! Around the pitch were around fifty family and friends who had come to support us.

After warming up for the kick off at 2pm, we waited, but the other team didn’t appear. Then a group in well-worn shirts appeared red-faced from the club house. When asked why they were late they replied, “The pub is open until are 2:30pm so we were drinking. We’ll play from 3pm.”

We had planned to play 20 min halves, but we ended up playing 35 min halves, like in schools, and everyone was exhausted. We hadn't had enough practise and one after the other, people were complaining of head, shoulder, chest and leg pain. Even so, we lost and altogether scored five tries. Of those, three were from former Japan players Mizutani and Shukuzawa. A special mention must go to Okamoto from our company who scored a try with spectacular play.

From next year, we have set up a regular yearly match, 'London-Japanese vs Epsom' to be played on the first Sunday of April. To Sasaki who set up this inaugural match for the Japanese team, and to Okamoto who scored a try on this momentous occasion, here in London in England, the home of rugby, "MO rugby is here!!".

(written by Ikeda)

(What is MO rugby??)