

SOCCER



2002 World Cup

The stands are packed with supporters before the Japan-Belgium game. (Photo courtesy of Photo Kishimoto)

Introduction

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

The Seeds of Growth

Japan's organized soccer body, the Japan Football Association (JFA), was established in 1921. In 1948, the national championship

competition became known as the Emperor's Cup. In 1997, a preliminary field of over 3,000 teams competed in the Seventy-seventh Emperor's Cup tournament. The final match was held at the National Stadium in Yoyogi, Tokyo, on New Year's Day in 1998, and Kashima Antlers won the championship.

J. League Professional Soccer

Japan's national soccer team invited Dettmar Crammer, from Duisburg, West Germany, to be coach, and the team trained intensively from 1960 to 1963. Owing to the tenacious efforts of Crammer and the national team, the team won a bronze medal at the 1968

Youth soccer

Former Japan player Ihara Masami leads children in a coaching session. (Photo courtesy of Photo Kishimoto)



Olympics in Mexico City. Kamamoto Kunishige, a forward, scored seven goals at the Olympics. Soccer boomed. Before he left, Crammer suggested the establishment of a soccer league to strengthen the sport in Japan. But the team made no further progress in international competition, failing to qualify for any subsequent Olympics as well as the World Cup. The boom gradually diminished.

In 1987, Mori Kenji, then chairman of the Japan Soccer League, determined that players should be allowed to register as professionals. In 1988, the Japan Soccer League (JSL) set up an action committee to discuss ways to reinvigorate the sport in Japan. The following year, the committee recommended the establishment of a professional league.

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

The J. League operates under the Japan Football Association. It is responsible for the organization of professional matches and the keeping of official match records; establishment of regulations; and training, certification and registration of players, coaches, and referees. It is also active in various other areas, selling television broadcast rights and overseeing sponsorships.

The J. League's stated goals at the time of its establishment included promoting soccer as culture, strengthening and fostering Japanese soccer, raising the status of players and coaches, and encouraging stadium development and other hometown ties and facilities. In addition to the league itself, a number of affiliated companies were established to handle specialized fields of activities. J. LEAGUE Media Promotion, Inc., for example, controls all video images of official matches, keeps video records, and

sells rights. Another company manages photographs, handles football-related advertisements, and plans and sells products that use the J. League logo, mascot characters, and other property.

On September 5, 1992, the J. League Yamazaki Nabisco Cup kicked off as the new league's first official tournament. League competition play was inaugurated on May 15, 1993. The number of teams was expanded to 12 in 1994, 14 in 1995, 16 in 1996, 17 in 1997, and 18 in 1998. In 1998 the J. League introduced a two-division system of J1 and J2.

The popularity of the J. League depends above all on star athletes. Examples include former Brazilian star player and Japan national team manager Zico, who guided the Kashima Antlers to become a leading J. League team. Miura Kazuyoshi, who played for Verdi Kawasaki, began his football career with clubs in Brazil and went on to become the ace of the Japan's national team. Ihara Masami, who played on the Yokohama Marinos, played in more than 100 international games and served as captain in the 1998 World Cup. Later stars appearing in the J. League included Nakata Hidetoshi, Kawaguchi Yoshikatsu, and Ono Shinji, who were central players on Japan's national team in the 2002 and 2006 World Cups. Many Japanese players from the J. League, such as Nakamura Shunsuke and Inamoto Junichi, signed contracts with European club teams.

The J. League is promoting a philosophy it calls a "100-year initiative" to build sports clubs where local people can easily participate in and enjoy sports, as seen in Europe. J. League clubs that empathize with this philosophy are increasing in smaller regional cities that have had no professional baseball team, and the J. League, which started in 1993 with 10 clubs, has increased to 36 clubs as of 2009. Club names often combine the name of the local region with a nickname, and all clubs operate satellite and youth teams. These efforts have given rise to many enthusiastic supporters.

The league also adopted a unique formula that combines the organization of teams into

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The Japan team celebrates a win during the 2002 World Cup. (Photo courtesy of Photo Kishimoto)



clubs—along the lines of what is done in Europe—with American-style business methods for the handling of ticket sales and merchandising.

However, in spite of the huge success at the start, the J. League presently faces several problems. As of 2009, some clubs are facing financial difficulties, while another problem is that many of the strongest J1 teams are concentrated in the Kanto region. To achieve the league's philosophy of strengthening and fostering soccer and promoting local development, stable operations and growth of regional teams will be necessary.

The 2002 World Cup

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

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

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

J. League Division 1 teams

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

As of August 2009