

Note

Title

Electric wheelchair mechanical doctor

Sub-title

The one and only person who can instantly find problems - Mr. Kuronaka, JEPS Management Department -



●Lead

When the maintenance is finished, he bends down so that he is at the same level as the wheelchair athlete and says, "If the wheelchair gets bad, we'll fix them again, so please play hard and don't worry." The players nod with smiles, deftly maneuvering their electric wheelchairs and dashing towards the pitch. This is one of the ordinal exchanges between Mr. Kuronaka and the players that have been repeated many times in the past. In this issue, we introduce Mr. Kuronaka, the "mechanical doctor for electric wheelchairs," who was also a mechanical staff member at the World Electric Wheelchair Soccer Championships held in Sydney, Australia in October.

●What is electric wheelchair soccer?

Electric wheelchair soccer is a "soccer without kicking" game that uses an electric wheelchair. Many of the athletes have disabilities that prevent them from walking independently, and some have disabilities so severe that they are unable to hold their upper bodies or necks. However, they use their hands, mouth, feet, and jaw to operate joystick-type controllers and play as one with the wheelchair. The play, in which the wheelchair turns 360 degrees and kicks the ball with force using the foot guards attached to the front, gives a sense of the dynamic yet delicate movements that are unique to electric wheelchair soccer.

Since 2019, JATCO has been installing "JATCO Pit" at power wheelchair soccer tournaments to install, remove, and repair the foot guards of wheelchairs operated by players. At the Power Chair Football Championship Japan 2023 held in November this year, a total of 90 volunteers participated as technical staff and tournament management staff.

#### ●Not enough bolts!

On the first day of the two-day tournament, when a player spotted Kuronaka-san, he said, "I've been waiting for you!" There is a line of players and team staff waiting to get in. I would like Mr. Kuronaka to maintain the wheelchair before the match. Mr. Kuronaka, who has demonstrated his magical repair skills at various tournaments, is extremely famous and popular among the players.

This year's tournament had a larger number of participants than previous years, with 20 teams, so in anticipation of this, the JATCO PIT team had prepared a considerably larger number of bolts for replacing the foot guards. In previous tournaments, I had only exchanged 4 or 5 pieces, but this time it was different. After hearing about Mr. Kuronaka's reputation through word of mouth, first-time participating teams joined the repair process, and by the morning of the first day of the tournament, most of the 40 bolts they had prepared had been used. Normally, foot guard maintenance is done by team supporting members or caregivers, but since they are not engineers, they may not use bolts of the appropriate length or tighten them correctly, and if a problem occurs, they may not be able to identify the cause. Sometimes I don't know and continue the game without replacing the bolt. During play, when the wheelchairs hit each other violently, the impact can cause the bolts to seize up and become impossible to remove, and if you try to remove them by force, they may break off and block the holes. Mr. Kuronaka quickly diagnosed the problem while communicating with the players, and once the repairs were completed,

the faces of not only the players but also their attendants brightened, and the venue was filled with an atmosphere of relief.

● There is always a crowd around Mr. Kuronaka

Once Mr. Kuronaka started work, the members of JATCO PIT naturally gathered around. According to them, Mr. Kuronaka has the eyes of God, being able to instantly tell what the problem is and how to fix it just by looking at the foot guard. Naturally, the specifications of the wheelchairs used by athletes vary depending on their disability and physique, but in Kuronaka's hands, such differences don't seem to be a problem. Everyone watches Mr. Kuronaka's work seriously and takes the initiative to support him in order to master his unique technique. Mr. Kuronaka also gave detailed explanations and conveyed his skills to the members. They witnessed Kuronaka's dexterity and accurate judgment and seemed to enjoy learning from him.

● Mr. Kuronaka as seen by Ms. Inoue, a nurse accompanying the world championships

Ms. Inoue, a nurse who accompanied the world championships as a member of the medical team, also spoke about how wonderful Ms. Kuronaka was.

“Some of our players are going overseas for the first time, and some of them get sick due to the change in atmospheric pressure caused by airplanes, so we made careful preparations in advance to ensure that the players had a stress-free time. Mr. Kuronaka has built a tremendous relationship of trust with the players, so in addition to maintaining the wheelchairs, “Mr. Kuronaka being on the bench” was a big help to them mentally. It was really reassuring for me to go to Australia with him.”



Ms. Inoue, a nurse who accompanied the world competition.

**JATCO will continue to support electric wheelchair soccer!**

You can read more about Mr. Kuronaka's greatness in this article.

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