

Drawn to the Appeal of Powerchair Football: 'Enjoying Together' Rather Than 'What You Can Do'

— From Volunteer to Referee, A New World Opens Up —



After joining as a volunteer for a powerchair football tournament, Mr. Sato now supports team practices and even serves as a referee. Known for his strong volunteer spirit—he has donated blood since his student days and served as a Boy Scout leader—we asked him why he became so captivated by this sport.

■ The Encounter Began with a Local Event

I used to play soccer, so I felt a sense of familiarity with powerchair football. When I learned that a tournament was being held just two stations away, I thought it would help me get some exercise and decided to join.

His first participation was at last year's Yokohama F. Marinos Cup, the 19th Powerchair Football Tournament. He worked with JATCO colleagues to attach and remove guards before and after matches, using tools to complete the tasks.

It was fun working together with everyone. I could clearly see how much trust the players and team staff had in JATCO employees. Watching the matches, I was most impressed by how lively and spirited the players with disabilities were. I had rarely interacted with people with disabilities before, but through sports, I found it surprisingly natural.

After the tournament, he wanted to learn more about the sport, searched online, and contacted the Yokohama team 'Yokohama Crackers,' starting as a practice support volunteer.



■ A Dynamic and Intellectual 'Another Kind of Soccer'

What fascinated Mr. Sato about powerchair football was its speed and teamwork.

The moment when a player runs backward to receive a pass, spins around, and shoots—it's really cool. The indirect free kick near the goal, combining two spin kicks, is thrilling during those few seconds of precise positioning and coordination.

This sport is unique in that people aged 10 to 50, regardless of gender, can play together.

At first, I imagined it would feel like a middle or high school club activity, but during practice, players exchange ideas and organize drills themselves. It felt like a mature, adult team.



■ Taking a Step Further as a Referee

While involved with the team, the coach suggested, 'You'll understand the game better if you take the referee course.' So he decided to get certified.

With multiple referees, it's easier to organize practice matches, so I thought, 'Why not?' It was a great opportunity to learn the rules thoroughly.

When he served as the head referee for the first time at this year's Yokohama F. Marinos Cup, he was so nervous that he crammed the rules the night before.

During the match, I focused on making accurate calls so players could enjoy the game. Experienced players often use the rules strategically to draw fouls from opponents. Understanding these tactics revealed the depth of the sport.



■ Responsibility and Learning as a Supporter

As a team supporter, he handles ball setup, ball collection, and venue setup and teardown.

My role is to create an environment where players can concentrate on practice. But I've learned it's important to distinguish what players can do themselves and avoid unnecessary interference.

In referee training, he learned that 'safety comes first, even before match progress.'

Some players have difficulty regulating body temperature or may lose grip on the joystick after a collision. Parasports require safety considerations different from able-bodied sports.



■ Lessons for Work: Understanding People

This experience also connects to his daily work.

Just as each player has unique traits and strengths, so do colleagues in the workplace. Understanding those traits and providing support accordingly is similar to team management at work.

■ 'Helping' Is Not the Goal—'Enjoying Together' Is

What he realized through these activities is that volunteering is not about helping, but about enjoying together.

I want players and staff to see volunteers not as supporters but as teammates sharing the fun. I also hope able-bodied people won't overthink disability sports and will get involved casually. You'll gain more insights and joy than you can imagine.

■ A Message to Readers

The charm of powerchair football lies in its delicate dribbling, powerful spin kicks, and above all, the expressions of players giving their all.

JATCO volunteer activities also provide a valuable opportunity for employees who rarely interact to connect through sports and volunteering. The social gathering on the first night is always lively, so please feel free to join us! And if you get the chance, come watch a practice of the team I support, the Yokohama Crackers. You might just get hooked.