

Rugby Fandom Flourishes in Tokyo

The Rugby World Cup 2019™ is to play an integral role in the game’s growth.

by **Stephan Jarvis**



A boy enjoying street rugby. After this moment a try was scored.

Over 400,000 international rugby fans are expected to touch down in Japan this September as the Rugby World Cup 2019™ kicks off for the first time in an Asian country. It is also an early opportunity for the capital to showcase its readiness for next year’s Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020.

Accompanied by motifs and appearances from Ren-G, the official Rugby World Cup 2019™ mascots, the flurry of flags and banners set to fly across the nation’s host cities will

no doubt create a warm, carnival-like atmosphere for fans to revel in. Plenty of pre-game events are planned. For those so unlucky as not to have secured stadium tickets, there will be two Fanzones open to the public, where you can enjoy public viewing on a large screen and various rugby experiences. One in Yurakucho, a short walking distance from Tokyo Station and the high-end shopping district of Ginza, will screen all the 48 matches. Another Fanzone will be established in the area adjacent to Chofu Station



Miyuki Street, in the high-end shopping district of Ginza, resounds with the festive atmosphere of street rugby.

in western Tokyo. There will be shuttle buses between the venue and the Tokyo Stadium where 8 games, including the opening match will be held, and 35 games will be shown live on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and public holidays.

To help raise awareness of the sport, street rugby was invented—a simple interpretation where two teams of three players on a seven-meter-wide artificial court play games of one-minute duration and touch instead of tackle. It has proved to be a fun and popular way for people of all ages to get involved. And it is continually growing in popularity.

Debuting in 2015, street rugby events have since been held over 100 times across numerous locations, including some very unexpected places such as Miyuki Street, in Ginza. On one day here, the spontaneous participation of some passersby mixed with the enthusiasm of the children organized to attend, along with the vocal encouragement and appreciation of the many spectators who thronged to witness the event, created a really festive atmosphere.

While showing such an upsurge in Ginza, expectations for rugby are also increasing in Fuchu City, which is also located in western Tokyo. With two top league teams, a stellar women’s rugby team, numerous junior rugby teams, and even a community radio station that regularly broadcasts a rugby program called “Studio No. 8,” rugby’s popularity in Fuchu City is paramount. It is little wonder then that two of rugby’s heavyweights, England and France, have chosen to base their team camps there.

Fuchu City is also strong at grassroots level too. A tag rugby tournament featuring around 60 teams (appxi-

mately 500 children) takes place every year, as well as rugby programs that involve the neighboring cities of Chofu and Mitaka. In order to add further appeal, these cities also produced an illustrated rugby rulebook for all students of their municipal elementary and junior high schools.

Appealing to the nation’s youth is a strong focus for the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. Having children learn the value of sports and taking on challenges and fair play will improve their lives. Junior rugby players from prefectures affected by disasters such as the Great East Japan Earthquake have been invited to attend some of the RWC2019 matches. Additionally, rugby programs with junior players in Tokyo are offered to help them achieve their dreams.

By hosting the RWC2019 and next year’s Tokyo 2020 Games, the capital is fast becoming known as a sports city. The tournament is a fantastic opportunity to showcase the charm of Tokyo itself; a city where tradition and innovation beautifully coexist. Spectators from overseas are expected to visit not only Tokyo, but also to travel around the country, with games being played in stadiums from Sapporo in the north to Kumamoto in the south.

Being the first Asian country to host this global tournament has put Japan under an intense spotlight, but confidence is high. In addition, the experience and know-how acquired during Rugby World Cup 2019™ will greatly contribute to the success of the Tokyo 2020 Games.



In Fuchu City, there are classes where players from the Japan National 7-a-side team teach rugby to primary schoolchildren.