

# The NUFFS Times

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## Sports, COVID and the Olympics Is Japan acting too quickly?

By Miles Ager

Saturdays are no longer the same. I am not alone in this thought; across the UK people have had to revise their lives to deal with a pandemic, which seems to be lurking around every corner. Government advice is wholly inconsistent, the lines between legality and breaking the law have become increasingly ambiguous yet there is one area in which rulings have been unequivocal: professional sports. For months, the public has been banned from attending sports fixtures, and as of now, there will be no drastic change for such events until at least March 2021. No longer are droves of supporters arriving at stadiums to support their beloved teams. No longer is the camaraderie and match-day spirit seeping into the Saturday mornings before the football game. No longer are there goals to cheer, chants to sing and referees to abuse from the terraces. Instead, fans stay seated on the sofa, watching the match play to a synthetic crowd. Many yearn for the Saturdays of old, wishing they could return to the stadia where their concerns seem to disappear for the day. Nevertheless, the weeks keep piling up and there is no end to the ban in sight.

With this in mind, imagine my surprise when I discovered that, in Japan, football matches can have attendance figures of up to 50% of the stadium capacity, and that within the last few weeks the Japan Professional Baseball League has announced the attendance cap will expand to 80%. The decision to do so is based on a series of meetings between the J. League and Nippon Professional Baseball, in consultation with an epidemiologist and experts in large-scale events. Even with professional counsel, such measures seem unfathomable, not only in the UK, but also across many other European countries.

The recent attendance increase for baseball games provides the opportunity to test anti-coronavirus measures, which will be implemented in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. This test constitutes the first step to reigniting the Olympic flame which should have been burning but a few months ago. The looming threat of hosting the Olympic Games behind closed doors for the first time in history has spurred the Government and the professional sports industry into action, resulting in the approval of increased attendance for sports fixtures. Though hosting the Olym-



pics is a huge honour, is it wise to risk the welfare of the public to become ‘spectator-ready’?

Unable to experience the situation regarding COVID-19 in Japan, I ask Mei Kondo from Nagoya University of Foreign Studies for her valuable insight regarding the situation on the other side of the world. “The Tokyo Olympics will be held next summer,” a modest smile starts to form on her face, “but the capacity of it will be smaller.” Cautious optimism, something which has characterised the reasoning behind increasing attendance at sports fixtures. Many people, like Kondo, believe that COVID-19 has abated, due in no part to a ‘slow and steady’ approach from the government. Other European nations—particularly France and the UK—did not follow this approach, and as such, they had to bear the consequences of the devastating result of opening up too quickly too soon. As such, the ‘slow and steady’ mentality has only solidified within the Japanese public. Mitsuo Kaku—head of the medical panel at the series of meetings discussed earlier—epitomizes this belief, stressing that whilst it is important to return to normalcy, it is imperative to move cautiously in achieving that goal.

This caution is evident in Japan as well. It was only several weeks ago that the Japanese government repealed its closed-border policy, which they enacted at the start of the pandemic. COVID-19, of course, remains a very real threat across Japan, but there is definitely a sense of progress. Mei explains

that originally, the death percentage across Japan used to be a lot higher, but this has decreased as the management of the virus has improved. “Rural areas are getting better” she continues, mulling over the situation. Indeed, when the Baseball Association implemented these measures, this did seem to be the case: according to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, the death rates had decreased since their peak in mid-April, and according to the JHU CSSE, the majority of cases originated in Tokyo and Osaka.

### COVID: Caution vindicated, but is it too early to relax?

It is the confidence in this trend of progress that has allayed the fear of the J. League and Baseball Association in opening up the stadiums to more of the public. However, the general feeling towards the increase in fans has been rather negative. “I think people want to watch the games” Mei starts, “but they are concerned for other people.” People recognize the danger in allowing more spectators; they realize that it puts other members of the public at unnecessary risk. A brief pause presents a solution, “Having the sports events online is better” a tinge of forlornness flashes across her face—Mei is part of the cheerleading club and has not been able to practice or go to events for a while now.

“The situation is too scary right now” she adds, clarifying that the scariest part of going to the games is not the event, but the travel. Since they have increased attendance, “The government should allow

Above: The Colosseum, which hosted the ancestor to the modern day Olympic Games. The remnants of the structure reveal the Olympic tradition’s ancient history, suggesting how much of a privilege it is to host the games.  
*Photo: Taken by Scott MacDonald in July 2018.*

people to use many different trains,” she says with conviction, as this will make it easier for people to distance themselves while going to the venue. When everyone is at the event, all the rules are stringently followed, and people behave very well, and this has also contributed to the decision to be more laissez-faire regarding attendance. The ultimate red-flag is the inability of the transport system to deal with the sheer number of commuters heading to these events.

Despite reservations about the present, in the future “the situation will become better” Mei says, again exposing her cautious optimism. Yet, if all signs point to waiting until the near future, why are the measures being enacted now? “The government wants to open Japan for economic reasons,” Mei responds after some deliberation, “they want to be able to accept as many travelers as possible when the Olympics start.” After all, the Olympics have been a huge expense for Japan, \$12.6 billion to be precise, according to the Associated Press. However, the true cost is likely to be much higher and will only increase the longer the event is delayed, making it imperative to revive the Olympics and make as much money as possible. Financial concerns aside, Mei

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# LGBTQ: Sufferings & Difficulties

## Empathy: the blindside of Japan’s sexual minority policies

By Chihiro USAMI

Like any average citizen, Ms. Yukari, a 30-year-old woman living in Tokyo, wakes up early in the morning to go to work. She finishes her nine-to-five job, eventually returning back home where her partner awaits her. The crux: Yukari’s partner attempts to hide from those around her. Ms. Yukari lives a normal life, but she bears the burden of hiding her true self everyday she exits the front door.

Yukari’s story is not isolated. The number of LGBTQ people in Japan is approximately 1.26 million. When some people think of LGBTQ people, they often associate them with television entertainment, or Shinjuku 2-chome, where one can find many gay and okama bars. However, LGBTQ people are surprisingly closer to them than they think.

Even though Yukari has declared herself to be a homosexual to her close friends and family, she hesitates to declare her sexuality at work because of workplace discrimination towards LGBTQ people.

One instance of work-place discrimination still lingers in Yukari’s mind. Yukari’s colleague, Takumi, who no longer works for the same company, was ridiculed by a coworker. The co-worker scornfully laughed at Takumi, claiming that Takumi’s homosexuality grossed him out. Using words like “okama,” a discriminatory term for transgender males, and “nabe,” which corresponds to the derogatory “she-male” in English, the coworker ridiculed his LGBTQ coworkers.

Yukari feels guilty about hiding the gender of her partner at work, however, in such a hostile work environment, she feels she must remain quiet for her own protection. Sadly, even while attempting to protect her identity, Yukari’s efforts often go to waste at the hands of discrimination. She has had her sexuality un-consensually revealed to others by someone she trusted. Discrimination towards LGBTQ people has become entrenched in Japanese society in various ways. Experiencing discrimination in her everyday life, Yukari wants non-LGBTQ people to realize how their actions and remarks might harm LGBTQ people.

While we may be eager to rejoice at Nagoya’s recent implementation of the partnership-system, experiences like Yukari’s make us question whether such policies are enough. After all, the policy only allows LGBTQ to engage in romantic relationships, but has not effect



on any of the discrimination based struggles of the LGBTQ community.

In other words, the government has only taken one small step to change LGBTQ people’s lives. This is not enough to tackle the everyday struggles of the LGBTQ community, such as those presented by Yukari’s story.

In addition to failing to address the humanistic, daily struggles of LGBTQ people, the current partnership system also fails to adequately fulfill the LGBTQ community’s expectations. For instance, even though LGBTQ advocate for their partnership rights, some areas of Japan, do not even provide any partnership rights to LGBTQ people.

Even in the places that have implemented partnership systems, marriage is still not illegal. This presents unique issues for people like Yukari, for example, whose partner is a foreign national. Yukari’s inability to marry prevents her partner from attaining a visa, inhibiting their ability to live a normal life. In other words, while the partnership system flaunts progressivity, in reality, its effects on the LGBTQ community are narrow, and to some, trivial. Yukari and her partner earnestly hope that the government will improve this policy.

If the LGBTQ community’s voice is so loud, and its needs so pertinent, why is the government turning a blind eye? The reason, according to our interviewees, is because the Japanese government only writes things down on paper,

failing to directly influence LGBTQ people’s everyday sufferings and difficulties.

### Increasing awareness towards LGBTQ

What can we do to fix this? Yuma, a bisexual man in his twenties, tells us the answer is empathy. Yuma has not declared himself to be a homosexual because he wants to live freely, without fear of discrimination. Having suffered from bullying and discrimination in his childhood, Yuma understands just how difficult it can be for LGBTQ people to engage openheartedly with those around them. If people did not bully him, and treated him as a normal person, Yuma believes he could have lived a better life, and remained true to his identity. He hopes that as many people as possible can begin to empathize with sufferings like his. If they do so, perhaps they can become aware of their own discrimination and complacent behaviors. Empathy, Yuma claims, paves the path to a world where everyone can be free of the eyes and expectations surrounding them.

Nonetheless, if we simply stand here throwing around the word “empathy,” without actually doing anything, we will remain just as complacent as the Japanese government. Understanding LGBTQ struggles requires effort and thought. After all, sexuality, just like love, is complicated. It can produce unique struggles that are not quickly understood.

**Top:** “After The Rain,” a book of interviews with LGBTQ people, edited by Ms. Yukari.

**Above:** LGBTQ couple that has fallen in love. Left: Hikaru-san Right; Momoko-san.

Photo: Taken in Tokyo by Ms. Yukari.

Michael, for example, a bisexual male living in Canada, had a very unique experience of discrimination in his childhood. Although he is bisexual, he claimed to be gay when he first revealed his sexuality, because lots of people did not believe that bisexuality was possible. In the minds of the public, you were either two was impossible. When he finally revealed himself to be bisexual, people called him a liar, and he was even bullied by other LGBTQ people.

Michael’s experience is a prime example of the complex struggles that LGBTQ people encounter in their everyday lives. If we want to tackle these issues, we need to invest time to contemplate LGBTQ struggles, developing creative solutions that will produce substantial results.

In Japan, it may be effective to actively collaborate with LGBTQ communities and convey information about LGBTQ to the general public. As a matter of fact, other countries are already doing this. The United Kingdom’s National Advisor for LGBTQ health, for example, is working to improve gender identity services and understand the mental struggles of LGBTQ. As part of a new initiative to combat LGBTQ hatred, the French govern-



# Small Business Survival Race

## The Local Backbone of Japan’s COVID-19 Economy



By Julie FRANCKE

In 2020, the Japanese Chain Store Association released staggering information that revealed the resiliency of Japan’s local retailers. While the value of Japan’s e-commerce market has risen by nearly 10 trillion yen over the past ten years, physical retailers remain as strong as ever, with the number of shops increasing by nearly 2000 over the same period. In the wake of this online era, the local stores that we hold dear to heart remain a strong pillar of the Japanese economy.

Yet, COVID-19 has meant that people have no choice but to shop online. So, when a pandemic happens, what happens to our local stores? How can they hope to survive?

A stone’s throw away from Fujigaoka station, in the tranquil urban area near Irigaike park, one might stumble upon Sachiko and her husband, Morimichi, decorating their floristry with a whimsical array of flowers. Hosting weddings, conducting ikebana classes, and providing flowers for local graduations, Florist Yotsuba plays an important role in Nagakute’s local community. The business operates under two names. The first, Atelier Roots, is a general flower retailer, while the second, Florist Yotsuba, specializes in weddings.

According to Sachiko, “Though the pandemic changed many things, people’s desire to express their love through flowers has remained strong.” Receiving minimal assistance from the government, Florist Yotsuba has had to find innovative

solutions to ensure that people can continue sharing their love with each other during the pandemic.

Since the onset of Covid-19, Florist Yotsuba has faced many financial difficulties at the hands of COVID-19 countermeasures. Since March 9th, the Japanese government has highly promoted “*mittsunomitsu*”, or “Avoid the Three Cs”, which refers to closed spaces, crowded spaces, and close contact settings. Due to these measures, Japanese people avoided going outside and shopping, which considerably reduced the number of Florist Yotsuba’s customers. Moreover, because people had to avoid crowds and gatherings, they also had to cancel or postpone their wedding ceremonies. At one point, this reduced Florist Yotsuba’s average fifteen-wedding-per-month schedule all the way down to zero.

“Before COVID-19, our main bridal line had around 10 to 15 weddings per month, however, since COVID-19, there were some moments when we had 0.”

In addition, compared to sales from 2019, their overall 2020 sales sunk by over 80%. Because of this, Sachiko and Morimichi deeply worried about bankruptcy and felt extremely powerless. Stories like theirs ricocheted across Japan, with more than 400 Japanese companies closing down.

Admittedly, the Japanese government tried to prevent those bankruptcies, providing tax reductions for every company and distributing relief payments of 100,000 yen per household. However, Japanese people ended up criticizing these measures. Indeed, many, including Sachiko and Morimichi, believe that the government should

**Above:** A bouquet of flowers from Florist Yotsuba website’s gallery  
<http://www.floristyotsuba.com/wedding>

have given money only to the most struggling businesses, investing more in healthcare sectors. After all, some businesses ended up making more profits than they used to during the crisis, especially electronics companies like Sony. Moreover, many small businesses managed to self-adapt, finding their own solutions to survive this pandemic crisis, and Florist Yotsuba is one of them.

In addition to losing sales for Florist Yotsuba, Sachiko and Morimichi also lost the sales from their in-person customers at Atelier Roots. Even as they saw their income drop considerably, they still had to deal with many expenses, such as property taxes and utility bills. Their floristry requires a non-stop refrigeration system, which generates a high electricity bill. Further, because flowers require a lot of water to be preserved, the water bill is quite expensive. Sachiko and Morimichi had to manage these bills, even though they had almost no customers.

**Rapid adaptation to the Internet**

Due to COVID-19, many businesses were worried about breaking even. In order to avoid bankruptcy, many business owners relied on the high possibilities that the Internet offers to improve their brand and sales. On a global scale, the use of the Internet has increased by 70% since the pandemic, and the amount

of video and music streaming has increased by 12%.

With the internet’s acceleration, businesses like Florist Yotsuba haven’t hesitated to use applications such as Zoom, which make it possible to create online meetings and online courses. For Florist Yotsuba, the emergence of zoom could facilitate the creation of online weddings, enabling the business to host such happy celebrations online.

Along with online weddings, Florist Yotsuba’s goal is to increase its online presence. In addition to dealing with online orders, Sachiko and Morimichi added more products to their online shop, marketed intensively on Facebook and Instagram, and used more hashtags. All of their initiatives to adapt their businesses to the pandemic eventually paid off. Atelier Roots and Florist Yotsuba received more reviews and online customers than they had even before the pandemic began.

“Focusing on customer sentiment towards our products, bouquet recipes, transitioning online, and using tags, we tried to make it so that many people could see our products, not just customers that came to our store.”

Sachiko and Morimichi believe that their rise in online sales is not only due to their adaptation to ecommerce, but also to the increased popularity of online shopping. The tendency to shop online in Covid-19 and Florist Yotsuba’s adaptation to the Internet generated a huge increase in their online sales. While their website used to earn tens of thousands of yen per year, they succeeded in earning hundreds of thousands of yen in 2020. Further, their social media traffic increased by 61%. Through adapting to the pandemic’s online propulsion, businesses have the opportunity to be consumed by more people. Some businesses, like Florist Yotsuba, didn’t hesitate to make the most of this opportunity, promoting their businesses, and creating an online, emotional connection with customers.

Even if some businesses struggled to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic, many companies, like Atelier Roots and Florist Yotsuba, successfully found solutions on their own. Clearly, local stores’ resiliency to the explosion of ecommerce also applies to the current pandemic. For some small businesses, finding solutions to adapt is not difficult, and this isn’t surprising. Fewer employees and fewer managers leads to faster decisions.

Although a small businesses like Florist Yotsuba succeeded in self-adapting to COVID-19, this is

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suggests that, whilst it would be nice for people to arrive and watch the Olympics if the protective measures are safe enough, it would probably be safer to increase its online accessibility.

This paves the way for the big question: are the government and the professional sports industry acting too quickly, valuing the economy over public safety? After a period of silence, a wordless and wary nod gives the answer to the question I have been seeking. This poses a sordid question; is the economy truly worth more than the livelihood of people like Mei? This hits me close to home. After all, the government of my home nation—the UK—took the same risk of fast ac-

tion in re-opening the country. Although the government never relaxed COVID restrictions for sports venues, they did so for many other facets of daily life. For instance, they allowed cafés and restaurants to function with nearly no restrictions. This, compounded by schemes encouraging the public to ‘eat out to help out’, has had catastrophic effects on the UK, leading to a second lockdown, with the pandemic looking as bleak as it ever has. There are whispers of a return to normalcy in the UK by the winter of 2021, and many would give anything to be in Japan’s current position regarding COVID-19. From a first-hand perspective, experiencing the mistakes of a government too eager to boost its economy, I wish to give a simple message to Japan. Avoid the same blunders we



have made. As we in the UK prepare for the long-lasting consequences of naively eager government policies, do not squander your laboured path to improvement.

**Above:** Barcelona F.C.'s stadium, the Camp Nou, when it is empty. The football stadium is enormous, and when it is empty, it becomes barren and soulless.

Photo: by Rupert Lamb in April 2015.

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ment has created a website called “Educating against LGBTphobia” to increase LGBTQ awareness. Moreover, Canada’s “LGBTQ2 Action Plan” is implementing virtual roundtable discussions with actual members of the LGBTQ community to improve governmental policies. Through such activities, people will be able to listen to the LGBTQ community. They may be inspired to improve the everyday sufferings of LGBTQ people that Japan’s government fails to address.

Because the Japanese government does not directly work with LGBTQ communities, the everyday lives of LGBTQ people have not seen substantial improvement. The government’s lack of active initiative has stunted public awareness towards LGBTQ, resulting in discrimination and complacency. Michael, Yukari, and Yuma have suffered from such complacency.

Michael, Yukari, and Yuma have suffered from such complacency. What they want in repayment for their sufferings: empathy and mutual understanding—for non-LGBTQ people to realize that they

are no different from LGBTQ people. We cannot solely rely on fancy policies and official documents to achieve this goal. Instead, we must listen to each other’s sufferings and worries, reorienting our thoughts, and actively preventing LGBTQ discrimination in our everyday lives.

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not the case for the government and bigger companies. According to Forrester, a Global market research company, for each hour that a large corporate team spends working, 48 minutes is dedicated to waiting. Big structures require lots of time to make decisions; they are tethered by bureaucracy. The delayed decision-making process can restrict big organizations, resulting in either hasty or slow decision making.

“Many large corporations have come to develop in isolation from the rest of the world. They used to be the examples that companies of other countries wanted to follow, but now they have been caught up to and overtaken.”

These organizations should learn from the adaptability of small

businesses like Sachiko and Morimichi’s. Obviously, we can’t expect big companies to make decisions as fast as small and medium-sized businesses do, but there are solutions. Large businesses could prioritize short-circuits or increase communication by adapting to the Internet even more, for example.

Thanks to their ability to make quick decisions, small businesses proved to adapt much more efficiently to the pandemic than big companies. They not only succeeded in adapting to the pandemic, allowing Japan’s economy to survive, but also created new ways to connect and share emotion through the Internet. While large corporations have been struggling to make decisions, small businesses, such as Florist Yotsuba, have become the backbone of Japan’s COVID-economy.



**Above:** “Avoid the three Cs”, a Japanese PSA, created the Japanese government in March 2020.

**Notes :** The 6th edition of The NUFS Times was conceived entirely online. COVID-19 has kept exchange students Julie Francke of France, and Miles Ager of England from coming to Japan, however, they crossed international borders to work online with NUFS student, Chihiro Usami.

The students collected materials and data, writing articles on topics of their choice, without being restricted to a particular theme. The result: a diverse array of articles that have grappled with various world issues. They would like to express their deep gratitude towards Jacob Teichrib, who guided them through the entire process. Without his help, this issue would not have come to fruition.

