

MAKING JAPAN A HAPPY PLACE THROUGH THE POWER OF SPORTS

Kawasaki Frontale is a J.League pro football team that has gained many fans through a host of innovative events and projects. Haruka Amano played a pivotal role in organizing these events. Now assigned to work for The Tokyo Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, Amano shares his experiences, insights and event promotion methods.

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PRO football team Kawasaki Frontale built its fan base through creative events that have included a real-time broadcast from their football stadium to the ISS space station, collaborations with sumo wrestlers, and a rhinoceros beetle “hunt.” Haruka Amano, the former director of the team’s promotion department, was behind them all. He studied sports management at a university in the United States and began his career at the forerunner of Frontale in 1997. At that time, he strongly felt that in Japan sports and the culture around them lacked maturity as an industry, especially when compared to overseas.

According to Amano, watching sports is a family event in the United States; all family members regardless of age and gender go to games together and support their local teams. Because of their love for these local teams that represent their area, the numbers of fans at games are not greatly affected by whether the teams are winning or losing, which helps the sports industry stand strong.

That was certainly not the case in Japan when he started working for Frontale. Convinced that Japan could develop a vibrant sports culture if he created a community-based team following the U.S. example, Amano tried working with the local community. The team’s

focus at the time was on winning and making it into the J.League, however, and few accepted his vision, so Amano took things into his own hands. As he single-handedly distributed fliers and put up team banners, local people and other staff members gradually began to help, swept up by his enthusiasm.

“As the team staff starting communicating more regularly with locals, they came to understand the need for the community’s support. Our passion for creating a locally-based team moved the community,” says Amano. He was able to get more team staff members involved in producing the series of events to gain different types of fans.



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Photo courtesy of Tokyo 2020 / Uta MUKUO



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- 1 Amano produced a wide range of events for Kawasaki Frontale, from having the athletes visit classrooms dressed up as astronauts to sumo wrestler challenges | Photos courtesy of Kawasaki Frontale
- 2 The “Mathematics Drill” teaches kids about sports and makes learning fun by incorporating math problems related to the Olympic and Paralympic Games
- 3 Haruka Amano, member of The Tokyo Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games

Trying to attract female fans, for instance, he put on promotions such as having stalls selling vegetables for reasonable prices or holding a sale of skincare products in collaboration with a popular cosmetics brand. He was always conscious about sending a specific message: a football stadium is a place where fans want to go with their families rather than being forced to go to keep their fathers or husbands company. As a result, Frontale became one of the J.League’s most popular teams. Amano never grew complacent, however, and says he constantly reminded the team to show gratitude and humility so that the fans would keep cheering for them.

Currently a member of The Tokyo Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, Amano is realizing the importance of doing it himself again. Since moving a plan forward only through discussions with the committee members is hard given the limited time, he is proactively shaping the plan himself. The “Mathematics Drill” for elementary school students is an example of his initiative. The teaching materials contain mathematical problems related to the Olympic and Paralympic Games, with commentary on each sport and photographs of athletes. This teaching material represents his wish for children to get interested in sports, remember

the Games fondly and to hold onto the drill as a cherished memento of the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Amano believes the field of sports promotion in Japan still has a lot of room to grow. To him, even Frontale is just starting to heat up. To feed the flame, he makes it his mission to continue what he does without complacency that is, to never be afraid of getting hands-on, involving the people around him, and keep the local community constantly in mind. By doing so, Amano believes he can entertain and move people, thereby energizing Japanese sports and making them an integral part of the country’s culture. **7**