

Consul-General of Japan in Sydney's Newsletter
No. 59 FIFA World Cup Qualifier Japan-Australia Match

30 March 2022



Japan-Australia World Cup Qualifier (24 March 2022)

On 24 March, Japan's Samurai Blue and Australia's Socceroos faced off in the FIFA World Cup Qualifier at Olympic Park in Sydney. Japan won the match 2-0 with two late goals in the second half. The victory earned Japan a place in the next World Cup. It was a disappointing result for Australia, but the Socceroos can still take part in the World Cup if they win two consecutive matches in the play-off (repêchage).

In this issue of my newsletter, I would like to report on how the Consulate supported the World Cup qualifier from the sidelines and to think about future exchange through football (soccer) between Japan and Australia.



A practice session open to Japanese children in Sydney (21 March 2022)

● **Receiving the preliminary inspection team and the open practice session**

Last year, it was decided to hold the FIFA World Cup preliminary match between Japan and Australia on 24 March in Australia, and in late January, it was further decided that the match would take place here in Sydney. Immediately the Consulate received notice from the Japan Football Association (JFA) that a preliminary inspection team would be arriving in early February.

Upon learning this, the Consulate contacted the Japan Club of Sydney and the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry as well as [Mate Football Club \(Mate FC\)](#), whose president, Mr Tashiro Yuzo, is a former national representative. As a result of discussions with the JFA's preliminary inspection team while they were in Sydney, Mate FC reached out to children in the local Japanese community, including at the Sydney Japanese International School (SJIS), and it was arranged for the children to go and observe an open practice session.

From 19 March onwards, members of the Samurai Blue arrived one after the other. On 21 March, the open practice session took place at Jubilee Oval in south Sydney. We were blessed with a fine, blue sky, and a group of around 200 children and

parents had the rare opportunity to get up close with the Samurai Blue coach and players. Images from the day have been posted to the [JFA website](#) and to [YouTube](#), and on [Mate FC](#)'s and [SJIS](#)'s Facebook pages. I was also interviewed for SBS Radio for their [Japanese](#) and [English](#) news reports.



With President Tashima, Vice President Murai and Director of Public Relations Kato of the Japan Football Association (24 March 2022)

● **Exchanging views with the Japan Football Association (JFA)**

On the day of the match, 24 March, I invited Mr Tashima Kohzo, JFA President, Mr Murai Mitsuru, JFA Vice President, Mr Kato Hideki, JFA Director of Public Relations, and Mr Tashiro Yuzo, Mate FC Director, to my residence. After an explanation from my office about local conditions, including COVID-19 measures, I learnt about JFA's international activities and we exchanged views on how to promote exchange through football in the future.

In recent years, the skill level of Japanese football players has improved noticeably, and not only are Japanese players active in teams around the world, with the cooperation of The Japan Foundation and JICA, JFA are dispatching Japanese

football instructors overseas primarily to Asian countries. I was pleased to learn how exchange and mutual understanding are being deepened between Japan and a wide range of countries through football.

In July and August next year, the [FIFA Women's World Cup will be jointly hosted by Australia and New Zealand](#). It has already been decided that Japan's national team, [Nadeshiko Japan](#), will take part. There are many Japanese footballer players active in Australia who are former national representatives or players in the J League or Nadeshiko League. I hope that next year's FIFA Women's World Cup in Australia and NZ will further develop exchange through football between Japan and Australia.



At the pre-match reception (24 March 2022)

- **Pre-match reception**

Immediately before the game on 24 March, Football Australia hosted a reception at Stadium Australia at Olympic Park, where the qualifier was played. Together with JFA representatives, Ambassador Yamagami and Mrs Yamagami, and Japanese company representatives, I was invited to attend.

I was able to meet with Mr Chris Nikou, Chair of Football Australia, and Mr James Johnson, Chief Executive Officer of Football Australia. The reception was attended by a large number of stakeholders. Hearing the names of the various organisations and companies which cooperate with the Socceroos read out, I was aware how broad the support base is for the world of sports.

For the Samurai Blue it was an away game. Against the home crowd with their Socceroos scarves, I enjoyed chatting with others as we showed our colours for Japan dressed in uniforms and towels kindly given to us by JFA. Dressed in the Samurai Blue uniform, Ambassador Yamagami wore a Socceroos scarf around his neck, embodying Japan-Australia friendship.



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- **Japan's victory and a win-win for Japan-Australia sports exchange**

Then, it was kick-off! The suspense continued as both teams failed to score a goal. And then right at the end, in the 89th minute, Mitoma-senshu scored. He scored again in the 94th minute. A 2-0 victory to Japan, securing the Samurai Blue their 7th

straight appearance at the World Cup. Japanese supporters were ecstatic. A local cheer squad uploaded [highlights](#) taken from the supporters' section. If you're interested, please take a look.

And there was the Australian spirit of a "fair go"! On the return home, I was happy to hear from Australian supporters around me - "Japan did well."

In the world of sport, there are always winners and losers. But beyond the competition, irrespective of who wins or loses on the day, sports exchange between Japan and Australia can be a "win-win" by deepening mutual understanding. I would like to continue supporting sports exchange in the future.

Kiya Masahiko, Consul-General of Japan in Sydney