

Japan's Leisure-Time Sports

By Shigeru Ito

This is Part I of a two-part article on Japanese sports.
Part II (September/October) will focus on spectator sports.

It has been a while now since Europeans and Americans dubbed Japan a nation backward in appreciation of leisure, a nation of uniform workaholics. It cannot be denied that most Japanese tend to have a negative attitude toward leisure; their concept of free-time activity is limited in scope and they lack the creative ability to make the most of their leisure hours.

In recent years, with the gradual acceptance of the five-day work week and increased longevity, the Japanese's leisure time has grown, and they have begun to re-evaluate leisure as something which improves the quality of life.

According to the results of a study on leisure undertaken in March 1984 by the nonprofit Leisure Development Center (LDC), people who valued work more than leisure accounted for one-third of the total surveyed. There is a strong preference for leisure activities that promote interpersonal relations, maintain health, and build physical strength, followed by those that are both practical and creative. Those surveyed mentioned sports as their probable first choice in the future, indicating a continuing trend toward health consciousness.

The social environment is changing with the advent of the low economic growth era and the aging of society; more individualism and diversity with regard to leisure activities are likely to be seen as people seek a richer, fuller life in this new environment. The characteristics of leisure activities of the Japanese people in the 1980s are summarized below:

1. Continued participation in health-oriented activities

The trend toward health-oriented activities which became noticeable after the two oil crises, will continue as the ag-

ing of the population progresses. This trend is expected to affect all aspects of life.

2. Growth in nature-oriented leisure activities

Nature-oriented activities will become more popular as people seek refuge from the urbanization and growing artificiality of the environment. Health-consciousness too will accelerate this trend.

3. Growing emphasis on interpersonal relations

Interest will most likely shift from relationships at the workplace to those nurtured through shared interest in leisure activities.

4. Increased family and home leisure activities

As the ratio of nuclear families in-

creases, the trend will be toward expansion of family and community leisure activities, such as eating out, family travel, home cooking, etc.

5. A move toward handicraft and DIY activities

There will be growing interest in hand-made goods and "do-it-yourself" activities, which will increase sensitivity to the true value of things.

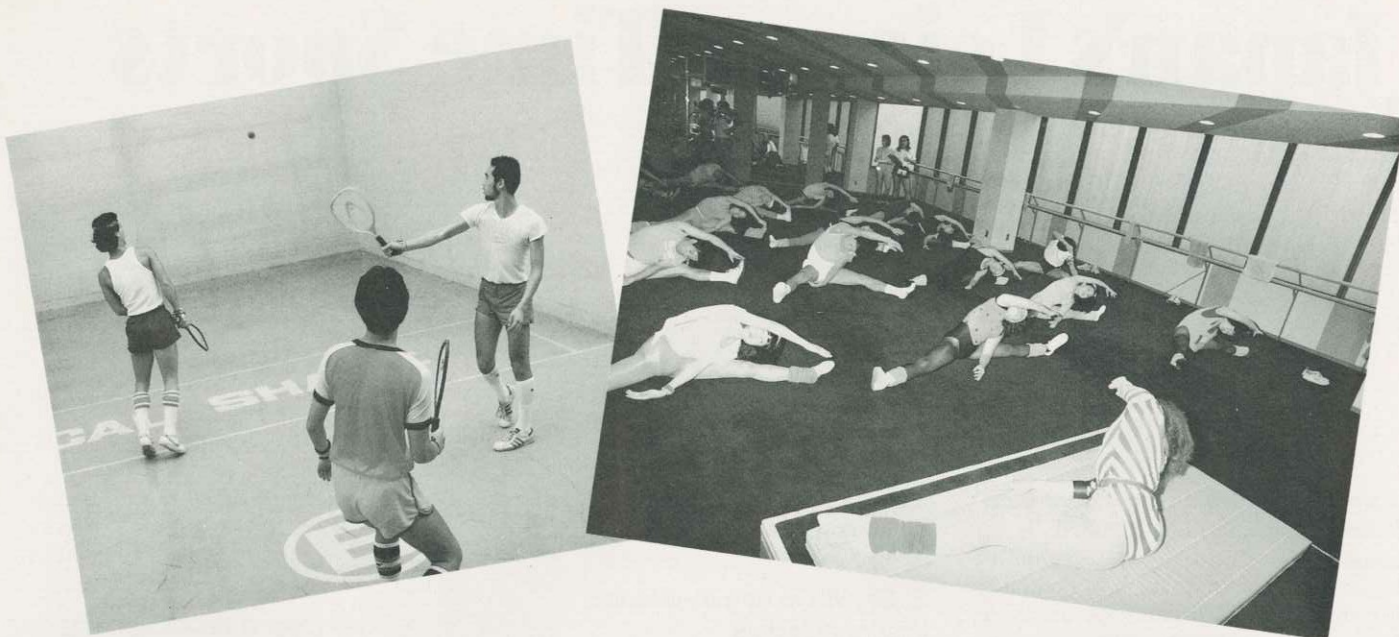
6. Leisure mania

We will see great enthusiasm, or mania, not only for hobbies and creative arts but for sports, tourism and entertainment as well. This will be the result of the growing acceptance of the five-day work week and the Japanese tendency to probe the spiritual significance underlying sports as well as other more meaningful activities.



Leaving the fast track behind—for leisure

Shigeru Ito is a researcher at the Leisure Development Center who specializes in sports facilities. He also serves as director of the System Development Section of Mega System Development Co.



7. Greater emphasis on time and cost

The time and cost effectiveness of all forms of recreational sports will be carefully studied. People will pick and choose, creating a leisure life-style that is right for them, combining extravagant leisure activities with budget ones.

8. Growth of "self-improvement" activities

Activities that promote learning, culture, physical health and human relations will become popular as means of self-improvement.

Japanese sports profile

There has been a shift in emphasis from team competition toward individual or small-group sports with the Tokyo Olympic Games in 1964 as a turning point. There have been two giant sports booms during the past 20 years; the first

was the explosive gain in popularity of golf and bowling in the late 1960s and the second, the enthusiasm for tennis, jogging and swimming that began in the latter half of the 1970s. Widely popular, they continue to develop steadily as "major sports" in the 1980s. Other major sports registering stable growth are baseball, skiing and mountain climbing/camping. Of these, only baseball is a team sport; the others are all enjoyed on an individual or small-group basis.

1. The changing face of Japanese sports

The results of LDC's "Research Relating to Leisure Demand" survey (March 1981-March 1984) indicate that the largest participation is in inexpensive sports, the top three being calisthenics, bowling and jogging, with over 30% of those surveyed participating in each. But the results also reveal that while people tend to be active in sports when young, they gradually drop out as they grow

older. The only ones with more middle-aged than young participants are golfing and fishing.

Young, single women favor "fashionable" sports, such as tennis, skiing, horseback riding and ice skating, with more women participating than men. But when women marry, their participation rate drops by three-fourths. It is popularly said that there are three times in a woman's life when she quits taking part in sports: the first is when she graduates from school and starts work; the second when she gets married; and the third, when she gives birth to a child. In fact, LDC's report reveals exactly such characteristics.

Recently, however, there are more young housewives who were active in sports in their youth and are continuing them through the above-mentioned three phases, exceeding the number of young single women in frequency of participation. On the whole, participation drops for both men and women when

Table 1 Anticipated Leisure Activities

		1st place	%	2nd place	%	3rd place	%	4th place	%	5th place	%
Overall results		Sports	31.1	One-day excursions	28.1	Socializing	23.4	Lessons	23.1	Reading	21.5
Males		Sports	38.1	One-day excursions	33.8	Reading	24.7	Socializing	22.8	Sports event, concert-viewing	18.0
Females		Lessons	36.4	Gardening	31.8	Sports	24.7	Socializing	23.9	Reading	18.6
By age	Teens	One-day excursions	32.3	Trips to town	30.2	Sports event, concert-viewing, etc.	28.9	Socializing	27.2	Sports	26.8
	Twenties	Sports	34.3	One-day excursions	33.9	Lessons	25.5	Socializing	24.3	Reading	22.4
	Thirties	Sports	34.5	One-day excursions	25.6	Lessons	23.6	Family activities	23.3	Reading	21.8
	Forties	Sports	34.9	One-day excursions	28.5	Lessons	26.3	Gardening	25.5	Reading	24.4
	Fifties	One-day excursions	30.2	Gardening	29.7	Lessons	26.0	Reading	24.8	Sports	24.5
	Sixties and over	Socializing	29.1	Gardening	28.7	TV viewing	26.0	Sports	24.9	Reading	19.4

Source: Research on Leisure Demand, March 1984

they begin raising a family but tends to rise once they reach middle age.

The survey results with regard to possession and use of leisure-related goods show a high utilization rate for training wear, jogging shoes and golf equipment. On the other hand, the "hoarding rate" (goods unused) exceeds 60% for trendy sports items popular with young people, such as ice-skating shoes, roller-skating shoes and skateboards, even though these are sports which can be easily engaged in. In other words, young people take up a wide range of sports, but they temporarily drop them upon marriage. Then, when they begin to worry about their health at middle age, they take up the sports that fit their life-style, though they do so in smaller numbers.

2. What makes a sport a hit?

As for future preferences, the LDC surveys show a clear trend toward health- and nature-oriented sports, with some shifts in popularity. The numbers planning to take up baseball and bowling are small, but the popularity of golf and tennis will remain high.

Among popular health-oriented sports are aerobic dancing and health exercises, such as *yoga* and *taijiquan* (a Chinese martial art), and swimming. When asked, people say such sports are "good for the health" and "helpful in changing one's frame of mind."

As for nature-oriented sports, those mentioned are yachting, windsurfing and diving, hang-gliding, motocross and horseback riding, the reasons being "because they are fun" and they "help to change one's frame of mind."

In the future, sporting activities will probably diversify to meet the changing

Table 2 Rate/Frequency of Participation in Leisure Activities

	Rate of Participation (%)				Average Annual Frequency of Participation			
	1976	1979	1982	1983	1976	1979	1982	1983
1. Jogging, marathon	6.9	23.4	28.5	30.1	16.3	36.4	39.7	34.6
2. Physical exercise (without equipment)	10.1	38.5	42.2	42.3	28.3	52.6	60.4	56.9
3. Training (with equipment)	4.2	21.7	12.1	12.4	21.5	53.7	47.4	39.6
4. Beauty exercises	—	—	7.5	7.1	—	—	48.6	43.7
5. Jazz, aerobic dancing	—	—	4.2	3.9	—	—	30.7	31.4
6. Table tennis	14.3	22.9	18.9	20.0	11.9	14.6	16.3	15.2
7. Badminton	14.2	23.4	20.0	20.0	12.4	15.4	15.0	16.8
8. Ball catching, baseball	17.4	28.2	25.2	27.9	18.1	21.4	22.4	21.2
9. Softball	13.1	21.4	18.3	19.9	9.3	14.3	12.6	12.1
10. Cycling, sports cycling	11.5	14.9	14.2	15.3	10.2	15.0	27.0	24.8
11. Ice skating	7.4	11.4	8.6	10.5	5.3	4.7	3.5	4.1
12. Bowling	14.2	27.4	29.4	32.0	5.6	7.5	6.4	6.6
13. Soccer	4.0	4.9	4.2	5.8	15.3	18.9	20.2	19.5
14. Rugby	1.0	1.5	1.0	1.4	12.1	15.6	20.2	17.8
15. Volleyball	11.9	17.9	14.4	14.9	12.4	18.5	20.5	18.0
16. Basketball	5.4	9.3	7.5	7.9	15.3	18.5	22.6	23.2
17. Swimming (in pool)	21.1	28.4	23.2	24.1	6.7	8.6	10.4	9.8
18. Judo, Kendo, Karate	3.6	5.5	3.9	4.1	22.2	40.2	34.6	37.7
19. Gateball	—	—	2.4	2.0	—	—	32.2	27.5
20. Golf	8.3	12.7	12.3	13.5	13.2	12.2	16.8	11.9
21. Tennis	6.3	13.6	15.2	14.6	15.7	25.2	24.1	23.7
22. Horseback riding	0.4	1.0	0.5	0.3	4.1	4.8	22.0	2.9
23. Skiing	7.6	9.8	11.3	11.3	3.8	6.8	5.7	4.8
24. Camping, mountain climbing	12.6	14.5	11.5	12.6	4.1	4.1	5.7	4.1
25. Fishing	17.3	21.3	18.2	21.1	9.2	8.8	11.1	10.9
26. Surfing, yachting, skindiving, etc.	1.8	1.7	2.3	3.1	4.4	8.1	18.6	17.1
27. Hang-gliding, skydiving, etc.	0.0	0.2	0.3	0.1	1.0	2.0	22.8	38.0

Source: Research on Leisure Demand, March 1984

demands of enthusiasts. There is a conspicuous new trend in sports activities; young people and women are looking for activities and services peripheral to the sport itself. Transportation, location of facilities, meals, lodgings and after-sports socializing are important in the selection of sports activities.

The sports population is not likely to expand if only the pursuit of spiritual and philosophical values in sports (such as in *judo* and *kendo*) are stressed. For instance, it is now necessary for sports facilities to have conveniences like dressing rooms, lockers, showers, bathrooms, restaurants and tearooms.

These new demands are being met through the construction of urban and resort-type sports complexes, the production of small quantities of diverse types of sports items, sophisticated instruction systems and the improvement of specialized sports magazines.

These days, whether a sport becomes a major one or not depends as much on the facilities, the location, the services that go with it as on the innate appeal of the sport itself. The Japanese people have the equipment, the information and now the time for recreational sports. Perhaps we are at the brink of an age of leisure in Japan. ●

Table 3 Possession and Use of Recreational Sports Goods (%)

	A: Possess	B: Possess but hardly use	C: "Hoarding Rate" (B/A x 100)	D: Wish to purchase in future	E: Growth Rate (D/A x 100)
Training wear	58.2	5.4	9.3	5.8	10.0
Jogging shoes	29.7	4.0	13.5	4.6	15.5
Training, health equipment	10.8	3.4	31.5	4.3	39.8
Baseball, softball equipment	24.9	5.4	21.7	0.7	2.8
Golf equipment	16.4	4.1	2.5	5.7	34.8
Bowling equipment	5.4	2.8	51.9	1.0	18.5
Tennis equipment	21.1	7.9	37.4	6.1	28.9
Badminton equipment	28.4	8.5	29.9	0.7	2.5
Mountain-climbing equipment	9.9	4.6	46.5	1.4	14.1
Camping equipment	8.5	2.6	30.6	3.8	44.7
Ski equipment	19.7	8.6	43.7	7.5	38.1
Ice-skating equipment	9.8	5.9	60.2	2.7	27.6
Yacht, boat	0.6	0.2	33.3	2.3	383.3
Surfboards, windsurfing board	1.0	0.3	30.0	1.6	16.0
Aqualung	0.6	0.2	33.3	2.0	333.3
Roller skating	6.7	4.5	67.2	2.3	34.3
Skateboard	1.8	1.2	66.6	0.4	22.2
Frisbee	5.2	2.6	50.0	0.6	11.5
Fishing gear	21.0	7.9	37.6	3.9	18.6
Martial arts gear	7.8	4.0	51.3	0.7	9.0

Source: Research on Leisure Demand, March 1981