

1 Sports in Uganda

In Japan, there is a phrase called “autumn for sports,” and in September, Kampala is packed with sports events. Uganda won two medals in track and field at the Paris Olympics. Joshua Cheptegei won the gold medal in the men’s 10,000 meters, and Peruth Chemutai won silver medal in the women’s 3,000 meters steeplechase. This month I would like to introduce Uganda’s baseball, Judo, and women’s soccer.

(1) Baseball

Japan has long supported Ugandan baseball. JICA Overseas Cooperation Volunteers were dispatched for the first time in 2008, and a total of more than 10 people have provided guidance. In 2014, Uganda’s first baseball stadium was constructed in Gayaza, a suburb of Kampala, with Grant Assistance for Cultural Grassroots Projects. In preparation for the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, the Ugandan Baseball team competed in the qualifying rounds, and the team was coached by a Japanese man, Mr. Katsuhisa Tanaka.

Kasumba Dennis (Currently playing for Asahikawa Bestars in the Hokkaido Baseball League), who practices at Gayaza Baseball Stadium, is attracting attention in Japan, especially on SNS. His SNS is also followed by Shohei Ohtani, and the fact that it became a hot topic is still fresh in my memory. LA Dodgers to which Ohtani belongs is supporting the development of players at Junior and senior high schools in Uganda.

A Kids League for under 17 years was held at Gayaza Baseball Stadium this month. There are a total of five youth baseball teams in Kampala. The Kids League holds baseball tournaments like this three times a year. Ashinaga Uganda, which we introduced in the July column, has been training a baseball team since 2009 and also participated in this tournament. This baseball team was created based on the idea of Mr. Kentaro Ota (former high school baseball player), a student of Ashinaga’s 6th batch of one-year training in Uganda, so that orphaned children could experience and learn the elements necessary to grow as human beings. That was the beginning.

Currently, about 70 Ashinaga students continue to practice diligently every day after school. I watched the final game of the tournament held at Gayaza Baseball Stadium on September 8th, where I also threw out the first pitch. It was impressive to see all the teams playing as a team and it won’t be long before we see some famous athletes from Uganda.



With players, coaches, and participants



The final game

(2) Judo

The Uganda Judo Association practices daily at a dojo (means a training hall) around Kampala City. Mr. Sekiwungu George William, a black belt holder of Uganda Judo Association, participated in the “Uganda Japan Festival 2019” held in December 2019, and “Japan Week 2022” held in March 2022 at Makerere University. A lecture and demonstration of Judo was held at the Uganda Japan festival 2023. Ugandan national team players participated in the 2024 Judo Grand slam held in Kazakhstan.

On September 7th, the Uganda National Judo League was held at Makerere University, and some heated competitions took place.



Players and participants



A scene of a heated battle

(3) Women's soccer

On September 6th, when I went on a business trip to Jinja, I participated in the 3rd TICAD Cup Women's Soccer Tournament. This tournament began in 2021 when the JICA Uganda office signed a partnership agreement with SOLTILO Bright Stars FC, a professional soccer team owned by Keisuke Honda and affiliated with the Uganda Premier League. The TICAD Cup is an event with the theme of sports and development, aiming to promote coexistence between refugees and host communities and the empowerment of women through women's soccer. Participants are a total of 6 women's soccer teams (women under 19 years old) from Uganda. Three of the teams are mixed teams with refugees and host communities.

In addition to JICA and SOLTILO, it is co-sponsored by the Prime Minister's Office for Refugees, UNHCR, and the Federation of Uganda Football Associations. Coinciding with the event, cultural exchange events and Japan introduction booths were held by JICA Overseas Cooperation Volunteers. This year, the number of refugee athletes living in Uganda was close to 30. The reality is that Uganda has 1.7 million refugees and faces various difficulties. I feel that this type of initiative should continue to provide a place for interaction between host communities and refugees.



Players and participants



A scene of a heated battle

2 Jinja business trip

I went on a business trip to Jinja which is about two hours east of Kampala by car and famous for the source of the Nile.

(1) Source of Nile Bridge

The Nile Bridge, a beautiful suspension bridge spanning near the source of the Nile River, was constructed by Japan with loan assistance. Nowadays, photographs of the bridge are featured prominently in books introducing Uganda. It can be said that it is one of the representative structures of Uganda. Completed in October 2018, the bridge is illuminated at night and has become a place of relaxation for citizens. This bridge, which crosses the Nile River, is also a key transportation hub and is an important piece of infrastructure that connects Uganda with neighboring countries.

Many of the engineers who manage the bridge have undergone extensive training in Japan. Some people said that they had recently carried out maintenance on the Akashi Kaikyo Bridge in Hyogo Prefecture. The management system for vehicles passing through the bridge is also supported by Japan. In addition to simply building bridges, major contributions were also made to technology transfer and human resource development. I also visited this bridge for the first time and “climbed” to the top. The majestic flow of the Nile spreads out below and from here, the river takes about 90 days to flow to Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea. The modern suspension bridge blended into the water of the Nile and creating a beautiful photo.



Top of the bridge



Source of the Nile, overlooking Lake Victoria

(2) Saraya local factory

The local factory of Saraya, which participated in the JUST Forum in August, is located in Jinja. This time, I visited the local factory where a variety of products are produced through well-organized production lines. Their products are exported not only within Uganda but also to neighboring countries, and they are also working on developing new ones. Collaboration with a major local sugar refining company was a major factor in establishing a factory in Uganda. This is because ethanol produced at sugar factories is an important raw material. The company's products are directly contributing to improving health situation in East Africa, and I strongly felt that this factory facility was making a major contribution to society.



During the factory tour



With the head of factory

(3) Uganda national electric vehicle factory (Kiira Motors Corporation)

Kiira is a state-run electric bus manufacturing company established to promote Uganda's automobile industry. It's history dates back to 2008, when researchers at Makerere University began researching electric vehicles. The company has been working on local production of electric buses to address environmental issues and promote domestic industry.

Production of large buses and other products begun in 2024. Public transport in Uganda is weak and air pollution from cars is also serious issue. To address these issues, they are focusing on popularizing, manufacturing, and selling electric vehicles for 2040 as the target year.

The production line at the factory I visited was well maintained. Several different types of electric buses can be manufactured, including larger ones and those with different interiors. The electric bus is already in use in Jinja city and Entebbe International Airport. I look forward to the full-scale spread of electric buses in the future.



Took a test ride of electric bus



During the factory tour