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Japanese football and world sports: raising the global game in a local setting

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Abstract: Professional football in Japan, as elsewhere, has increasingly become linked to agents, structures, and processes of global capitalism. However, football is as much about culture as it is about business. Placing Japanese football into the context of world sports seems to be a promising endeavour to get fresh insight into the dialectics of the global and the local in transnational cultural flows and the processes underlying the globalization of sports. By analysing the institutional arrangements, vested interests, and power relationships of parties involved in the production, practice, and consumption of 'the people's game' in Japan, this study explores a recent showcase for the globalization of sports. It also addresses the question of whether the culture of sports may be considered a political agent that affects political choices, for example in regional development planning, local economic policy, or public health policy. As popular interests and domestic politics have shaped and continue to shape football in Japan, it is argued that globalization cannot be regarded as a commercially driven process aiming at the creation of a global market for products whose popular consumption leads to the standardization of cultures that were once distinctive.

Keywords: Japanese sport, football, globalization, media, regional development planning

Introduction

During the 1990s globalization emerged as the dominant concept within the social sciences to frame the social, political, and economic processes of the post-Cold War world system. Since then, the new world economy has come to be characterized by the growing influence of global capital, the increased importance of transnational markets for financial services and specialized services for international investments, the new international division of labour based on low-paid,

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flexible, labour relations, the decreasing influence of national governments in the regulation of economic processes, and time-spatial compression due to world-encompassing computer and telecommunication networks (Sassen 1998: xxvi).

Next to the economy, culture is the second most important field of analysis for globalization theory. Notwithstanding the conceptual discord with historical traits – capitalism has always been global – and the nature of the effects of globalization (cf. Robertson 1990 vs. Giddens 1990), most commentators concur on the common notion 'of one single world or human society, in which all regional, national, and local elements are tied together in one interdependent whole' (Holton 1998: 2). Accordingly, globalization is conceived as 'a process or a set of processes which embodies a transformation in the spatial organisation of social relations and transaction – assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact – generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction and the exercise of power' (Held *et al*. 1999: 16).

Under the current neo-liberal influences of global capital accumulation and transnational marketing strategies, sport has become inextricably linked to agents, structures, and processes of global capitalism (Wright 1999). The impact of global economic flows on the culture of sports has been assessed in contrasting ways. Key notions in the debate, such as cultural imperialism (Sandiford and Stoddart 1998), cultural diffusion (Guttmann 1996), hybridization (Houlihan 1994) or homogenization, vary widely on directivity, process, and agency. Considering the leading role of US business, Donnelly (1996) conceived of sports as another cultural form by which the world's nations are subjugated to American cultural hegemony. Refuting the 'Americanization' claim, Bairner doubted that 'the Americans have gone anywhere near to achieving the success of the British in terms of the actual export of games' (2001: 14). He even claimed that sport sociologists have been prominent in the struggle to ensure that the globalization process should not become identified with a relentless and irresistible surge towards total homogenization (Bairner 2001: 11). Similarly, Maguire questioned the power structure of homogenization. Instead of looking for one-directional flows, he argued in favour of multi-directional flows of cultural exchange. Drawing on Elias' model of the civilization process, he suggests the need to understand globalization 'in terms of attempts by more established groups to control and regulate access to global flows and also in terms of how indigenous peoples both resist these processes and recycle their own cultural products' (1999: 93). The key dichotomy emerging from his argument, 'diminishing contrasts, increasing varieties', draws on the earlier observation of cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai 'that both sides of the coin of global cultural process today are products of the infinitely varied mutual contests of sameness and difference' (1990: 308).

As we know from the rich programme of events covered by sports media, sports nowadays consists of an ever-increasing pool of different sport forms. At the same time, however, regional differences and local particularities of sport practices diminish, as both local traditions (of folk games) and local versions (of world games) adjust to the dominant model of Western sports. As a Weberian ideal type, Western sports correlate with Allen Guttmann's well-known explanation of the nature of modern sports. Modern sport is formally and informally codified by a set of seven systematically interrelated formal-structural characteristics, i.e. secularism, equality, bureaucratization, specialization, rationalization, quantification, and the obsession with records (Guttmann 1979: 25–62). Though not explicitly relating sport to globalization, Rowe (1995: 114) claimed that sport nowadays must fulfil three preconditions in order to be successful as a product: it must have a popular base within communities; it must have a reliable governing body; and it must demonstrate itself to be attractive to the commercial trinity of sponsors, advertisers, and television. Thus, to be classified as 'world sports', three additional features need particular emphasis: first, recognition as sport (and not as any other secular or ritual practice) and popular support on a global scale; second, strong appeal to cultural industries; and, third, involvement of global governance exerted by a civil-based association, such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), or the Fédération Internationale de Football Associations (FIFA), football's world governing association.

Football as a world sport, perhaps as *the* world sport, relies on its appeal to fans all over the world, but also on the power of its main representative units to negotiate between national member organizations and to represent their common interests against the demands of its main financiers (Sugden and Tomlinson 1998). In fact, national associations, continental federations such as Europe's Union Européen de Football Association (UEFA) or the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), and FIFA itself not only supervise competitions and their members' activities. They also regulate the legal and logistical conditions that allowed neo-liberal business practices to flourish in football. The associations came to deal with matters outside their immediate sporting sphere, as football's popularity and enormous appeal, its importance for the media and its expanding economic, social, and even political significance all combined to make the sport a vital common denominator for varied interest groups.

Placing Japanese football into the context of world sports therefore seems to be a promising endeavour, in order to gain fresh insight into the dialectics of the global and the local in world sports and the processes underlying the globalization of sports. By analysing the institutional arrangements, vested interests, and power relations of parties involved in the production, practice, and consumption of football in Japan, I shall explore one particular showcase for the globalization of sport and I shall address the question of how the culture of sports affects political choices, for example in regional development planning, public health, and nation-building.

Centre/periphery issues

A particularly intriguing aspect of the globalization of sports concerns centre/periphery relationships. The imbalance of national income is the driving force behind the new global division of labour that also extends to professional sports. The international labour market of top athletes within professional club sports accordingly generates new flows of labour migration from the peripheries to the centres. Although Maguire (1999) and others argue that, given the worldwide diffusion of (British) association football and cricket, the widespread popularity of American football and baseball, and even the spread of martial arts from Japan to the world (cf. Frühstück and Manzenreiter 2001), it is impossible to identify a clear-cut centre/periphery structure in world sports, there is no doubt that centrality as well as peripherality correlate with economic power and the wealth of a nation. Despite a decade-long recession, Japan certainly is central in terms of economic power and, as I shall argue later, Japanese capital has always been central to the globalization of sports.

Nevertheless, in terms of football power, Japan and the entire East Asian region are peripheral, notwithstanding that the official FIFA emblem of two footballs imprinted with the two hemispheres of the world depicts East Asia close to the centre where the two balls intersect. The Asian continent is home to a third of the world's population and members of the Asian Football Confederation account for more than 40 per cent of FIFA's 'big count' of the world's football players. Yet, in the 2002 World Cup finals, only two Asian teams were able to qualify together with the two host nations, compared to thirteen fixed places for European nations with only half the number of more or less regular football players. Asia's peripheral position is further expressed in terms of the number of football officials, professional players, and achievements at previous World Cup finals. China, which has a football population of 7.2 million players, including 40,000 women and 1,748 professionals, established professional football in 1994 and made its debut at the 2002 World Cup finals. For Japan, which has 3.3 million players (20,000 women and 1,120 professionals), it was only their second appearance in the finals. South Korea, which has a football population of half a million (including 5,000 female players and 410 professionals of the K-League, established in 1983), experienced its fourth consecutive participation and its best-ever performance, finishing fourth after elimination in the semi-finals and defeat by Turkey. While the image of Asian football has changed considerably recently, largely thanks to the Koreans' technically and tactically superb playing style, power relations have not. The continuous exodus of Japanese players to the European leagues is a distortion of the economic causes regulating the global flows of labour but it corresponds to the cultural hierarchy within the world sport.

FIFA's move to locate the finals tournament in the East Asian periphery was clearly not just driven by the humanist desire 'to bring the game to the people of the world'. The problematic decision for Germany – and not South Africa – to host the 2006 world championship demonstrates a 'deeply embedded Eurocentrism within FIFA's corridors of power' (Darby 2000). Indicative of FIFA's paternalistic, and even orientalist, attitude towards the host region of the 2002 World Cup is the way the event was characterized as a 'World Cup of Smiles' (FIFA President Blatter 2002: 4, 5) for the benefit of history. The choice of Japan and Korea was propelled by the prospect of getting a foothold in the promising Asian market and by the global aspirations of FIFA's valued 'Official Partners' – already in 1990 half of the total television audience generated by the FIFA World Cup in Italy had been watching from Asia (Miller *et al.* 2001: 64). At that time, professional football in Japan had yet to get under way.

Producing football: the J-League model

When, in the late 1980s, the idea of the J-League started to materialize, the prospect of a professional football league in Japan received only a lukewarm welcome. Football had been played in Japan for more than a century without either establishing a self-sustaining basis or attracting substantial audiences (Horne and Bleakley 2002: 90–4). Only high school football proved capable of drawing a comparatively large following but this was due to the spectators' sentimental affiliation with the schools rather than the particularities of the game. Top-level football, which had been institutionalized in the mid-1960s, survived thanks only to the framework of corporate sports yet never acquired a competitive stance to challenge the dominant position of professional baseball, horse racing, or *sumō* wrestling. Because customers had consistently rejected the product, the majority of sports critics and sports media denied football any market opportunity. For precisely this reason, Dentsū, Japan's largest advertising agency with a long-standing history of, and experience in, the domestic and international sports business, rejected the request to devise the marketing concept of the J-League.

History soon proved Dentsū to be wrong. Officially launched in 1993, the J-League turned out to be a huge sales hit over the first three seasons. However, after a period of rapid expansion from ten to currently twenty-eight teams playing in the two divisions of the J-League, average crowd sizes in the J-League began to decline. In the 1997 season average attendances dropped close to 10,000, down from nearly 20,000 (and a total of 6,159,691) recorded three years earlier. However, with the national team qualifying for the 1998 FIFA World Cup in France, and the prospect of co-hosting the 2002 World Cup with South Korea, football was back in fashion. In the season before the World Cup, average attendances for first division (J1) matches reached 16,548 (cf. Table 1) and a total of 6,281,975 spectators attended all the games managed by the J-League in the year of the World Cup (J-League 2003: 382–3)

The incorporation of the Japan Professional Football League in 1991 was meant to change the entire sporting culture. In contrast to schools and companies, which are the traditional suppliers of sports in Japan, professional football

Table 1 Average attendance and team income balance during the first decade of the J-League

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999**	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Income	2,699	3,535	3,731	3,386	3,098	2,685	2,395	2,366	2,643	2,626**
Expenditure	2,767	3,815	3,690	3,151	2,827	2,487	2,349	2,370	2,727	2,617**
Attendances/match day	17,976	19,598	16,922	13,353	10,131	11,982	11,658	11,065	16,548	16,368
Home games	18	22	26	15	16	17	15	15	15	15
Number of J-teams	10	12	14	16	17	18	16	16	16	16

Notes
* Data from 1999 and later only for the first division J1.
** Estimates.
In million Yen. Sources on income distribution from the *J-League Newsletter* 56 (August 1999), 64 (November 2000), 73 (June 2001), and 87 (November 2002).
All other data are from the *J-League Yearbook* 2003 or from other information provided by the J-League via the official website http://www.j-league.or.jp.

was expected to be rooted in the local community. Popular support was sought by establishing explicit links between teams and a local entity, a home town, which should be the regional focus of community-based, comprehensive sport clubs under the J-League umbrella (Tamaki 1999: 111–12). While the Japan Football Association (JFA, established in 1921) is the governing body of football in Japan, the J-League was incorporated as the managing body of professional football. The planning committee members extensively studied professional sport models in the USA and Europe, finally deciding on an amalgam of the European club sports system and the American business model of professional team sports (Ubukata 1994: 21, 92).

The J-League itself was founded as an autonomous, non-profit-making membership organization. The league accepted member clubs that fulfilled a number of requirements; for example, they had to be registered corporations specializing in football, a stipulation designed to force the management, as well as players and coaches, to be fully professional. They were also supposed to work as economically viable and autonomous corporations, rather than relying on subsidies and the management decisions of owner companies, as is the case in Japan's professional baseball leagues. The revenue scheme of the J-League was basically copied from 'The Olympic Programme' (TOP) – involving income from sponsorship, merchandising, and the central negotiation of the sale of TV rights – that has also underpinned the commercialization of world football since the 1980s.

The prospect of expanding the reach of the game in East Asia certainly moved FIFA towards complying with the J-League's attempts to adapt football to local preferences. Although FIFA sees to it that football is played, no matter where, under one unified set of rules, the J-League was able to introduce some peculiarities that gave a local flavour to the game. For example, the J-League adopted a two-stage season with a final play-off between the winners of the two legs, which is still in place today. A one-point system for games ending in a tie was introduced only in 1999 and finally adopted for all J-League matches in 2003. Previously, tied games had been followed by a race for the 'V(ictory)-goal' within 30 minutes of overtime and, if still undecided, by a decisive penalty shoot-out (Sakkā Hyōron 1999: 28–9). The 'golden goal' had even been exported to FIFA for some games in international tournaments. After some years of following this, however, FIFA abandoned Japan's sole contribution to the rules of world football following the 2002 World Cup.

Marketing the world sport

The early success of football in Japan rested partly on the positive results of the large-scale spectator sports market research conducted by Hakuhōdō, Dentsū's biggest domestic rival. Partly it was due to the basic elements of the sales strategy that Dentsū had helped to devise for clients such as the IOC or FIFA. Japanese capital, inter-corporate networks, and marketing know-how have been at the centre of the commercialization of world sport over the past twenty years. Japanese corporations, such as Matsushita, Ricoh, and Brother, were included in the twelve official partners of the Olympic Programme between 1989 and 1992. In France in 1998 JVC, Canon, and Fuji Film each paid $30 million to be FIFA's corporate partners with all rights to use the FIFA emblems (Nufer 1998: 5). In 2002, Canon declined the option of renewing its contract, but with Fuji Xerox refilling the slot of office equipment supplier, and NTT and Toshiba entering the board, five out of fifteen of the main sponsors of world football's greatest event were Japanese. In line with Coca Cola and Gillette, both JVC and Fuji Film have been FIFA's official partners since corporate sponsorship entered world football two decades ago (Manzenreiter and Horne 2002: 10).

Sony Creative Products (SCP) was in charge of devising a meticulously styled corporate identity for almost all of the J-League teams, consisting of uniforms, mascots, team songs, slogans, and merchandise. The owner of the exclusive merchandising rights for the entire J-League until 1998 also sold on the rights to use J-League designs to several sub-licensees and opened boutiques in over 100 locations to sell J-League paraphernalia. SCP's intention of displaying cute and cool characters was a deliberate attempt to attract Japan's most important consumer group of the 1990s, young females, who had repeatedly shown their power to move entire leisure markets (Watts 1998). While the gentrification of European football was mainly motivated by improving the public image of football as a clean and respectable leisure activity and harnessing the middle class's purchasing power (Mason 1997: 39), the J-League's home-town concept and SCP's marketing strategies were basically in line with the targeting of larger customer segments beyond the traditional core clientele of the male working and lower middle classes.

During the 1994 FIFA World Cup and following in the wake of the national football craze, SCP also managed to secure exclusive rights for the Japanese market as sub-licensee of Warner and ISL (International Sports Culture and Leisure Management Service), the former sports marketing arm of Adidas, which collapsed in 2001. The domestic success lured SCP into offering more than four billion yen for the worldwide merchandising rights for France '98. Thanks to Dentsū, which had held a minority stake in ISL since its establishment in 1983, SCP's bid was accepted, despite its overall lack of experience in global sports merchandising. However, neither the engagement at home nor that abroad turned out to be lucrative in the long run and, with the end of the France World Cup, SCP withdrew totally from football merchandising (Michel 2002: 69–71). In 2002 Dentsū was back again, handling the merchandising rights for the Japanese market.

In the 1990s, the global competition of sports apparel producers also reached the East Asian market. Transnational corporations, such as Nike or Adidas, use the international division of labour to produce sportswear in Third World sweat shops and adopt global marketing strategies to reach out for customers in the rich centres as well as the poor peripheries (Klein 2000). In South Korea, Nike not only sponsored the national squad, it also subcontracted part of its garment production to the South Korean textile industry. Watching Nike's aggressive approach to players and teams like Tokyo Verdy, the traditional World Cup sponsor Adidas decided to change its Japan strategy completely. Dissolving its trading contract with the Japanese sporting apparel trader Descente, Adidas set up a fully owned subsidiary, Adidas Japan. In turn, Descente became a general agent of Umbro, which had lost its luckless partner, SCP (Michel 2002: 71–3). Yet the real competition was fought out between Adidas and Nike, which each invested some six billion yen in their World Cup campaigns. Such investment pays off. When Adidas 'won' the previous World Cup (Brazil was equipped by Nike, and the winning team, France, by Adidas), Adidas' sales went up by 48 per cent. Months earlier, 'the other World Cup' (Hare 1999) had already been executed in a friendly between Brazil and Germany, one of the other top teams on the long-term payroll of Adidas. This match was televised in two parallel live broadcasts, one for the German audience from a camera angle that focused on the side where the Adidas stripes were visible, and another for the international market from the opposite side facing Nike's advertisement boards. The 2002 World Cup final offered a replay of the 'war of the boots' (a phrase coined by Nike's CEO Phil Knight) with Nike this time clinching the title crown from Adidas.

Packaging football: the media business

One of the more visible aspects of the globalization of sports is precisely the televised omnipresence of sponsors whose brand names and logos have turned into cultural icons (Whitson 2001: 7). Due to the border-crossing appeal of best-selling media content, such as sport celebrities, selected teams, and sports mega events, audiences all over the world are capable of recognizing and deciphering the codes of these icons. The transmitting network of the global cultural economy is provided by media services that operate worldwide. However, corporations such as Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, Disney's ESPN, or KirchSport, the only surviving affiliate of the German media empire that collapsed in line with the burst football bubble in 2002, are also increasingly involved in production, control, and ownership of sport teams and competitions, using the media events as a 'battering ram' to gain and sustain new markets. By controlling both the content and the distribution of programming, these media companies are following a simple yet highly effective corporate strategy that aims at cutting costs by eliminating third parties and maximizing control over the production and consumption of sports.

Under the influence of private television and sponsorships, football was subjected to a wholly financial logic during the 1990s and professional debates, as well as popular discourse, seem to be locked into discussing the business logic of media sport. The major sources of club revenues in Europe switched twice over the past 100 years: from participants to spectators (by 1914) and then to businesses, sponsors, and TV networks (around the 1980s) (Andreff 2001). Due to the liberalization of media markets, the appeal of international club football, and a highly sophisticated marketing strategy, the recent winners of the UEFA Champions' League could gross about twice the 30 million euro that all clubs participating in the first Champions' League had to share barely a decade before. Not surprisingly, the winners of the tournament are usually Europe's wealthiest teams, such as Manchester United, Bayern Munich, Real Madrid, and AC Milan, each having an annual turnover of more than 150 million euro. These club sides not only tend to dominate the national scene – on the pitch as well as in the media tabloids, in the league tables as well as on the balance sheets – but are also capable of attracting a world-wide following. On a smaller scale, the Japanese league is no exception, even though the two-stage season with the final play-off does not necessarily reward the strongest team of a season. Despite the enhanced element of chance, club sides dominating the J-League are usually the better-off ones, those enjoying the financial safeguard of a strong main sponsor. The restructuring of the UEFA Champions League format in 1998, the reform of the European transfer system, and even some changes of football rules, in Japan as well as elsewhere, have all been boosted by the sport's economic vitality, its insatiable demand for fresh capital, and the commercial interests of its financial sponsors. Football can be a highly profitable business but, in order to remain so, a never-ceasing process of investment and re-investment is indispensable. This is the basic law of the game which culminated in the European football business bubble – and its bursting in 2002.

David Rowe (1996: 565) notes that sport and TV have become mutually and internationally indispensable. As mediated events, sports, and in particular football, are a privileged means of communication for businesses wishing to conquer new markets, improve their image, and enhance brand recognition (Andreff 2001). The media have acquired a pivotal role in 'boundary making and boundary shifting' (Horne *et al.* 1999: 161) as they shape public opinion about what sport is. I would also add that they are crucial in evaluating what good entertainment is. The massive audiences for large-scale sporting events can in turn attract massive corporate advertising and generate high income from broadcasting revenues. Both in the eyes of official organizers and in popular opinion, the real expenses and expected yields of first-class sport events provide a yardstick against which other events are measured, even if planned on a smaller, or even local, scale.

Thanks to the global appeal of sports, the governing bodies of world sports amass huge revenues from selling broadcasting rights and sponsorships to transnational corporations. They do not cash in if markets reject the product, as was the case with Japan's media football in the late 1990s. While recent matches of the national team have drawn some of the largest viewing rates in the history of

Japanese television, the decline in spectator turn-out at league games has been accompanied by a similar tendency among television viewers. Audience rates, that had climbed as high as 30 per cent and more during the initial years of the J-League declined after 1995 to 7 to 10 per cent during daytime broadcasting and a maximum of 15 per cent in the evening. As the nationwide broadcasters pulled out one after the other, most league matches were withdrawn from prime-time television and were available from only local-broadcaster services (Okada 2000).

Since SCP withdrew in 1998, the J-League itself has handled the marketing of rights. The league employs a 'scarcity value' for live games by limiting nationwide broadcasts to one game in each time frame. Networks have to submit 'broadcasting cards' to the subsidiary in charge of negotiating broadcasting rights, J-League Eizō (JLE), when the schedule of games is decided. JLE makes selections from these cards in order to ensure that all teams receive equal coverage while, at the same time, preventing a network from getting an unequal share of games. If more than one station requests the same game, priority goes to the team's home-town station, in order to popularize football there. Since 1997, NHK has had the first refusal in selecting games to be broadcast.

Revenues obtained from the sale of these rights (around 2.5 billion yen a year) were comparatively small as a fraction of total revenues when compared to mature leagues elsewhere in the world. In order to increase revenues from broadcasting rights, the J-League decided, first, to increase the number of games available for the broadcasters without diminishing the scarcity value and, second, to allow private broadcasters to compete with NHK, which had formerly monopolized nationwide transmission. Starting in 2002, live games were staged on both days of the weekend and the number of games for sale increased from 140 to 240. Revenue shares consequently doubled when JLE renegotiated the scale of broadcasting fees for the next five years (NHK 2002: 73; cf. Table 2).

Broadcasting data have shown that the number of sports programming hours in Japan has been increasing steadily. Commercial satellite broadcasting started in Japan in 1989 but it was only in 1992 that satellite television put an end to the growth dynamics of terrestrial broadcasting. In anticipation of the 1998 Winter Olympics, NHK started to shift the bulk of its sports programming from its general channel to its satellite channel in March 1995, thereby pushing the number of subscribers to more than five million. In 1997, with the launch of the Japan Sky Broadcasting Company – a joint venture between News Corporation and Softbank – exclusive, live, English Football Association Premier League games from BSkyB, Murdoch's British satellite television company, were made available to Japanese subscribers. The internationalization of sport in Japan in the 1990s meant, first of all, that the domestic media covered international sports – US Major League baseball, NBA basketball, NFL football, and European Champions' League football – as much as, and often in competition with, or in preference to, domestic sports competitions.

Japanese TV companies have attempted to expand their interests, while foreign

Table 2 J-League balance sheet, 1992–2002 (in million Yen)

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Income from:											
Total	943	8,891	10,022	10,276	8,301	8,016	7,994	7,546	8,009	8,518	10,578
M/ship fees	0	634	690	706	727	771	870	980	880	940	880
Merchandising	380	3,601	3,588	2,099	934	478	234	277	237	593	486
TV rights	70	1,093	2,190	2,214	1,207	2,056	2,189	2,386	2,221	2,461	5,040
Sponsorship	157	2,310	2,961	3,799	4,681	4,106	4,032	3,281	4,018	3,876	3,584
Ticket sales*	242	1,129	457	691	474	272	327	249	200	262	257
Other	94	124	136	767	278	238	342	373	454	388	334
Expenditure:											
Total	1,332	8,834	10,083	10,350	8,338	7,993	7,986	7,557	8,005	8,518	10,578
Allocation	533	6,147	7,647	7,364	5,385	5,128	4,776	4,362	4,623	5,212	6,624
Other business	599	2,258	1,860	1,971	1,910	1,693	1,918	2,057	2,208	2,057	2,298
Administration	195	319	401	1,120	1,002	1,169	1,277	1,116	1,156	1,234	1,471
Other	5	110	175	105	40	3	11	22	17	15	185

Source: as Table 1.
Note
* Ticket sales from non-league tournaments.

companies, such as Time Warner, Disney ESPN, TCI, and News Corporation, have teamed up with them. Murdoch became the first foreign investor to overcome the prohibitions on foreign ownership of Japanese broadcasting (Bell and McNeill 1999: 776). Murdoch's acquisition of a 21.4 per cent stake in TV Asahi in December 1996 was compared by local media to Commodore Perry's 'Black ships' in 1853. Since 1998 the renamed SkyPerfecTV! has competed with other companies seeking to be in at the launch of digital television in Japan. Among other possibilities, digital TV promises an even bigger expansion of sports channels offering live matches and time-delayed recordings (i.e. 'as if live') from the major European and South American associations and rugby football leagues. Since the 1998 World Cup, interest in television football from abroad increased and competition between broadcasting corporations has provided the Japanese television audience with the largest selection of foreign football leagues from which to select (Kanbara 2001: 30). SkyPerfecTV! successfully enlarged its subscriber base by broadcasting matches from Italy's Serie A, where Japan's superstar of the 1998 World Cup, Nakata Hidetoshi, has been based since then. The payment for the Japanese broadcasting rights for three seasons amounted to six billion yen and helped to increase the number of subscribers by an average of 60,000 per month. The same pattern recurred as soon as a Japanese player was hired to play in any of Europe's national leagues. When Feyernoord (Rotterdam) hired Ono Shinji in 2001, the broadcaster secured the Japanese broadcasting rights for the Netherlands; after the World Cup 2002, the Belgian league was added to the programme due to Suzuki Takayuki joining Racing Genk (*Nihon keizai shinbun* 12 August 2002).

Between the two world cups (1998–2002) about 2.5 million new subscribers joined SkyPerfecTV!. Yet the expansion strategy based on sport and entertainment is not without risk. In seven years of operating in Japan, SkyPerfecTV! has still not made a profit. The costs of securing exclusive coverage of all the sixty-four matches of the 2002 Football World Cup Finals, obtained in August 2000 for probably no less than 12 billion yen, ensured that it would not do so for several years (*Nihon keizai shinbun* 13 August 2002). This is especially the case since the Japan Consortium, a group of public and private broadcasters, paid six billion yen for the rights to terrestrial broadcasting of forty World Cup matches, including all matches involving the Japanese team, the semi-finals, and the final. What the group could not offer was the particular extra-service of SkyPerfecTV!. Customers could choose from ten dedicated channels for World Cup coverage, including live channels with different camera angles (team A, B, etc), re-runs, highlights, commentaries, and background information. This 'free' service was of course available only to subscribers having the SkyPerfecTV! special set-top box and satellite dish installed. The investment of reportedly the largest figure ever paid by a single company for broadcasting rights for a single sporting event certainly contributed to the increase of one million subscribers since summer 2000. The broadcaster was also able to enhance its name value as a sports producer; AOL Money (2002) listed the company above all other brands that consumers associated closely with the World Cup.

Adapting football to local media audiences

New technologies have been pivotal for the packaging of sport events in the midst of market upheavals where particular sport events not only vie with each other but also have to persist in competition with other media products. Therefore, broadcasting corporations are constantly on the look out for new products and strategies to enhance their customer base. Different camera angles permit identification with personalities and 'star' individuals to be established during the normal coverage of football on television. A camera, or even a single transmission channel, may be used to focus on a single star player throughout a match. Diversification, customisation, and localization are basic strategies adopted by media content sellers all over the world.

In comparison to the international supply of action from the 1998 World Cup finals, the match images transmitted solely for Japan's public and private broadcasters consisted of a considerably higher number of close-up shots, zoom-ins on popular players, and, over all, a much greater focus on their own national team (Kanbara 2001). Kanbara argues that the fact that the number of long shots and representations of the team as a unit was greater, and the number of action replays was much fewer, than the international average was rooted in the Japanese media's general obsession with star players and general lack of knowledge about how to fit replays into a game which is being broadcast live (2001: 103–4). While these findings appear hardly surprising, and evidence of rather good business sense for the Japanese market, Kanbara suggests that the result is, first of all, proof of poor skills and, second, an outcome of the semi-public national broadcaster, NHK, capitalizing on nationalistic feelings. Instead of simply aiming at audience share, NHK should be more aware of its public service mission, should aim at educating the viewer into the game of football, and stop competing with the private broadcasters (Kanbara 2001: 114).

Next to lack of expertise and outright nationalism, two additional conventions in broadcasting which affect the consumption of sport in Japan are the comparatively slow rate of cuts and the preference for close-up shots. Freelance football commentator Kurashiki Yasuo (2000: 51–2) argues that most of the basic principles of camera work and narrative development in Japanese sports broadcasting are a product of the dominance of live baseball coverage. Baseball has constituted a quarter of all media sport in Japan over the past thirty years and, in contrast to association football, is a much more static game. Structured by its own particular rhythm of action and pauses, it lends itself better to a certain dramaturgy of extended close-ups that mirror the emotions, hopes, and despair of individual players – and to advertising. As such conventions are hard to break with, advertisers on commercial television channels were granted advertising segments even during live football matches, while coverage of the match sometimes continued in a tiny part of the screen.

The quantitative preference for seeing their own squad on the screen is, of course, not a phenomenon peculiar to the Japanese. In the 1966 World Cup Finals in England, close-up shots amounted to around 13 per cent of the total, but since then the share of close-ups in English sport coverage has increased considerably. The average shot length shrank from 20 seconds in 1966 to ten and less in the 1990s (Horne *et al.* 1999: 169). In England, broadcasting techniques are usually altered during World Cup transmissions and identification is built up more firmly with the national team. In 2002, this was definitely the case for the Japanese broadcasts if the paying viewer did not select the channel that followed the moves of Japan's star players exclusively.

Owning or sponsoring Japanese football

The policy of controlling all broadcasting rights ensures that no team dominates airtime, and no broadcaster dominates the J-League. Yet whether the procedure of a system where nobody loses is a benefit to all is debatable. Cut off from direct broadcasting revenues, clubs remained highly dependent on direct sponsorship to compensate for balances in the red at the end of the year. Budget deficits have to be covered by main sponsors, which were in a number of cases identical with the owner companies of the former amateur teams. Urawa Red Diamonds and Kashima Antlers, for example, each received an annual subsidy of 100 million yen from Mitsubishi and Sumitomo respectively. Up to 50 per cent of their club income came from the team's main sponsors (Katō 1997: 4ff.). Disguising their expenses as promotional expenditure was the only acceptable solution as teams were also requested not to have their sponsors as part of the team name, unlike corporate sports and professional baseball. This policy was agreed in the face of strong initial disapproval from potential sponsors and the dispute was settled with a compromise allowing the sponsor's name to appear as part of a club's formal name and on match tickets and club clothing (Sakk 1999: 20–6). Hence, the previous amateur side Yamaha turned into professional Jubilo Iwata (aka Yamaha Futtobōru Kurabu), Toyo Industrials into Sanfrecce Hiroshima, Matsushita Electrics became Gamba Osaka and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries changed into the Urawa Red Diamonds (aka Mitsubishi Jidōsha Futtobōru Kurabu).

The American influence on the J-League scheme was most clearly seen in the initial phase and the rudimentary franchise system that first invited clubs to join the league and protected them from relegation during the first five seasons. The monopolistic and centralized structure of the league is another indicator. While professional baseball also applies an American-style draft system in order to maintain an equilibrium between clubs and their financial balance sheets, the J-League favours a European-style free bidding system. However, this paradox put the clubs under additional pressure. As success on the pitch, the number of (foreign) star players a team contained, and its popularity on the grandstand correlated with each other, sponsors were needed to invest in powerful formations. The average annual salary for foreign players jumped from $317,000 (1993) to $631,200 in 1994 and $834,500 in 1997. By comparison, the Japanese average stagnated around the $227,000 mark. In the late 1990s, the wage bill amounted to one half of total expenses and became the heaviest burden on club accounts. Even after ten years in business, virtually all clubs remained incapable of becoming self-sustaining business operations. In 1998, out of sixteen teams in J1, nine recorded a loss and five broke even only because sponsor companies had made payments equivalent to their club's losses.

Things had changed for the better in 2002, when only one in every third J1 and J2 club was reported to be experiencing losses (J-League homepage in 2003). Similar to the cartel-like situation of the clubs in American professional sports, the J-League has always been eager to protect the interests of the whole league instead of letting members go bankrupt. In times of crisis, either regulations governing the whole league are tightened or the J-League Management Advisory Council is commissioned to guide weak members into a safe haven (Harada 2002: 151–2). In order to avoid any over-expansion of playing staff, a new system of player contracts with a salary cap was established in 1998. This system limited the number of players allowed contracts worth more than 4.8 million yen a year to only twenty-five per club. In addition, the number of foreign players was reduced from three per side actually on the pitch to three in the total team squad. In consequence, the wage bill fell from 1.75 billion yen per team in 1996 to 1.15 billion yen per team in 1999 (and rose again to 1.25 billion in 2002) but remained more than twice the amount received from gate receipts (cf. Table 2). While this regulation helped to keep salary expenses low, it severely discriminated against the professional football aspirations of *zainichi* Koreans (born and raised in Japan but without having Japanese citizenship) who had to compete with foreign stars for the valuable slots.

While the number of foreign players fell, the decline in their salaries did not match that of Japanese players whose wages were, on average, only one third of their foreign counterparts' pay. Sponsors such as newspaper giant *Yomiuri shinbun* started to withdraw from pumping two billion yen a year into 'their' team. In 1999, when Verdy Kawasaki again failed to live up to expectations, broadcaster *Nihon Terebi*, another member of the *Yomiuri* group, acquired the newspaper publisher's 49 per cent stake and the 2 per cent share held by Yomiuri Land (the operator of the amusement park close to the clubhouse of the team). The team was consequently rejuvenated even if the number of players was reduced from forty-one to twenty-five. The formal name changed to *Nihon Terebi Futtobōru Kurabu* and the commonly used name turned into Tokyo Verdy when the team moved to Tokyo two years later. In Hiratsuka (Kanagawa prefecture), the Tokyo-based construction company Fujita shed the 69.88 per cent stake it and affiliated companies held in the J-League football team Bellmare Hiratsuka. Bellmare was capitalized at 800 million yen when it was registered with the J-League in 1994; Fujita had spent about 500 million a year to cover the club's deficits. The former minority owners, including the home-town government, established a new owner company, Shōnan Bellmare Co. Ltd, consisting of Hiratsuka City and more than 320 local companies.

The restrictions on clubs' expenditure came too late to prevent AS Flugels Yokohama from collapsing in 1998. Satō and All Nippon Airways (ANA) had been paying 1.5 billion yen annually to cover Flugels' losses. Similar to Fujita, the construction company Satō Kōgyō suffered severely from the recession and quit as the main sponsor. The remaining sponsor, ANA, failed to persuade any other companies to co-sponsor and, in consequence, Flugels was forced to merge with the other Yokohama-based club, Marinos. The merged club, renamed as Yokohama F. Marinos, was 70 per cent owned by Nissan and 30 per cent owned by ANA. As a result of the business downturn after the September 11 attack in 2001, ANA ceded its share in the team to Nissan, although in the short run ANA agreed to continue to contribute about 200 million yen annually so as to keep the name (and the 'F'). The closure of Flugels stimulated strong local sentiment, especially after the fairy tale victory in their last game – the JFA (Emperor's) Cup Final in January 1999 – and out of the remnants grew Yokohama FC, thanks to the commitment of Flugels' supporters and the financial support of the leading international sports marketing agency, International Management Group (IMG), together with Citibank and the German tool company Bosch.

The J-League and public–private initiatives

With the economy in the doldrums, public money and non-material support remained the only viable solution for many of the struggling football companies. This was facilitated by the fact that, despite being a private corporation, the J-League was closely integrated into national sports policy and regional development programmes. The involvement of local government in owning and managing J-teams is particularly eye-catching in the case of many of those clubs that joined the J-League at a comparatively late stage. Nevertheless, the involvement of local government in Japanese football had been quite prominent since the inauguration of the J-League. As the J-League was regarded as a major tool of urban redevelopment and a countermeasure against the depopulation of the peripheries, local government was keen to support the establishment of home towns hosting home teams (cf. Manzenreiter and Horne forthcoming).

Designated home towns were requested to guarantee initial investments worth no less than 30 billion yen (Watts 1998: 189). Most of the money went into construction projects. Since 1992, sixty-eight stadiums erected for the J-League and the World Cup have been representing one-fifth of all public expenses for sporting facilities (three trillion yen) over the past fifteen years (Manzenreiter 2002: 154). Just for the 2002 World Cup, eight new stadiums were built in Japan and two refurbished at a total construction cost of approximately 380 billion yen (Nogawa and Mamiya 2002: 183). Public money was also needed for related infrastructure projects and even for club ownership. Kashima Antlers, for example, is owned by Kashima Town, Sumitomo Metal, companies of the Sumitomo Metal network, local companies, and the local governments of the surrounding municipalities. The prefectural government of Ibaraki covered no less than 80 per cent of construction costs, estimated at ten billion yen, for a roofed stadium with a capacity of 15,000 spectators (or one seat for every third Kashima resident) as required by J-League standards (Kubotani 1994: 50). In addition, public money granted by local authorities was used for renovating the road and rail infrastructure, opening a branch line connecting Kashima to the Tokyo-Northeast track of the high-speed Shinkansen train, the refashioning of a freight depot into a commuter station, the construction of parking lots, and improvements to sanitary and accommodation facilities (Koiwai 1994: 62ff.). When the same stadium was designated as a World Cup venue and was adapted to meet FIFA World Cup requirements, the investment of 23.6 billion yen enabled almost every citizen to find a seat in the place.

Back in the early 1990s, local authorities and the local football association spearheaded the promotion campaign of Shimizu S-Pulse. Hinting at the role of sport as the media content of the future and as a guarantee for high viewing rates in the development of satellite television, the local broadcaster, Shizuoka TV, a subsidiary of one of the national commercial broadcasters, Fuji TV, was gained as a main sponsor. While the financial power of the Fuji corporation network would have helped to secure a professional team, local sentiment discouraged entering into such a one-sided dependency. For the same reason, plans to form a partnership with the company team of Yamaha (later to become Shimizu's keenest rivals, Jubilo Iwata) were cancelled before serious talks had even begun. A shareholder company was considered to be the most suitable structure for ownership and control of the local club. Shizuoka TV bought the largest single bundle of shares (18 per cent), and Shimizu City another 2.3 per cent; 56.1 per cent of shares were owned by corporations and local authorities from the wider prefectural region. The remaining 23.6 per cent were taken up by 2,400 individual investors who bought shares with a minimum value of at least 100,000 yen. Demand was so strong that the original goal of raising 1000 million yen was surpassed by 600 million yen (Ubukata 1994: 83). Municipalities and local governments are also co-owners or shareholders of the companies managing Vegalta Sendai, Urawa Reds, Kashiwa Reysol, Tokyo Verdy, Kyoto Sanga Purple, Sanfrecce Hiroshima, Cerezo Osaka, and others. Montedio Yamagata is owned by the 'Development Association for Sports in Yamagata through the 21st Century'. This network of public and private institutions and individuals of the region is a unique organization based on a membership system similar to Spain's *societas*.

What made local politicians spend public money generously on the private corporation of the J-League and its member companies? In general, local policy planners envisaged two general benefits emerging from the promotion of sports. On the one hand, sport was considered an economic income generator (Ubukata 1994; Matsuoka 1996; Harada 2002). Since the late 1980s, numerous cities and municipalities of varying population size had been enthusiastic about the prospects of economic growth fuelled by investment in new sport facilities and theme parks, the subsequent increase of tourism and the anticipated improved image of the region. Forging partnerships with other beneficiaries of regional development, particularly private enterprises, local governments assumed a driving role in paving the way for business expansion and new kinds of public–private partnerships (Funck 1999: 336ff.). Although few schemes ever went beyond the level of planning as the bursting of the bubble economy destroyed the real estate market and crushed the dreams of many local politicians, the attractiveness of infrastructure-led development policies never weakened.

On the other hand, government involvement was legitimized by expectations of the positive impact a modern and enlarged sports infrastructure would bring about for local inhabitants in the region. As public expenditure on public sport facilities always struggled to cope with demand (cf. Seki 1997), the J-League's declared goal of providing the local population with opportunities for playing football or other sports in the long run was welcomed enthusiastically. The J-League called its mission 'Centennial Plan' (*Hyakunen shisō*) because of the period of 100 years needed to establish a new culture of sport in Japan. The Monbu Kagakushō, the ministry in charge of sports, deems this period, which roughly corresponds with the time football has been known in Japan, to be far too long. The latest 'Basic Plan for the Promotion of Sports' (*Supōtsu shinkō kihon keikaku*, 2000) is heavily indebted to the J-League scheme. A ministerial ordinance stipulates that, by 2010, every junior high school district should be provided with a European-style community sports club. The government plan lacks any proposal to enhance public funding but explicitly suggests that the future supply of sporting facilities lies with private finance initiatives (PFI), which echoes the general tone of all national sport policy programmes issued since the 1980s. Opportunities have been expanded widely since the passing of the PFI Law in July 1999, allowing new forms of co-operation between public and private enterprises.

Conclusions, or the legacy of the World Cup

Despite the almost unanimous conclusion of numerous studies that public investment in sports facilities yields only minimal economic benefits, officials continue to push for new facilities and public money continues to be spent on them. In many cases these projects are trumpeted as successful not because of any objective assessment of their benefits to local residents, but because of the symbolic power of the edifices themselves. As the recent history of building sport infrastructure in Japan has clearly shown, football has affected political choices in many instances and thus sport should indeed be considered a political agent. Football has triggered referendums, influenced budget allocations, changed the public perception of gambling and play with the introduction of the football lottery (*toto*), and has laid the cornerstone of long-term engagement of local communities with sport facilities or club teams.

However, there are still a number of grounds for concern about the future development of football and sport infrastructure in Japan. First, the J-League and the World Cup have not really been successful in terms of achieving regional balance. While the number of football pitches and high-quality facilities has increased considerably over the last decade, overall concerns about unipolarity and hyper-concentration in the Japanese economy have not been mitigated. Despite J-League stipulations governing team location, most of the teams that have prospered since 1993 have been located in the large population centres stretching out from Chiba Prefecture in the east to Hiroshima in the west. Particularly the more successful clubs – in 2002, fourteen out of sixteen J1 teams – all come from the densely populated Kantō and Kansai areas. Six out of ten World Cup venues were erected in these areas.

Second, concerns about the usage of the large stadiums built for the World Cup continue to be voiced. Some provide regular or occasional venues for J-League teams, but the full capacity will rarely, if ever, be achieved in the course of league matches. The scheduled repayment of loans and interest, in addition to the maintenance costs of running the facilities, remains as a heavy burden on local taxpayers. Just to give a single example (for detailed tables, see Manzenreiter forthcoming), operating the prestigious Sapporo Dome Hiroba, a multifunctional state-of-the-art leisure complex, costs a minimum of 2.6 billion yen per year and, despite its being the home of both professional football and baseball teams and having a very densely scheduled calendar of other events, 20 per cent of running costs remain uncovered. Even so, this arena, which is managed by a company founded by Sapporo City and a number of companies in the area, is the only one with a self-supporting business plan. By way of contrast, the newly built arena in Nagai and the National Stadium in Yokohama regard themselves as public facilities that cannot help but put their owner cities in the red. City officials are now desperately looking for customers, new business ideas and buyers to purchase stadium name rights, a move which was basically impossible before the new PFI law enabled the private management of public facilities.

Third, the over-riding concern with the World Cup mega-event and professional football has threatened to distort the financial basis of community sports. The primary objective behind starting a Japanese version of a football lottery, which was formally introduced in March 2001 after long disputes over the moral effects of public gambling, was to help local sport organizations and community sports clubs. The principal aim had not been to provide for the 2002 World Cup or to build football stadiums, yet the Japanese World Cup Organizing

Committee was awarded one-third of the entire allocation of the *toto*, in order to prevent the national disgrace of poorly organized games.

Sports are of major importance for health provision in an ageing society and thus questions of responsibility, funding, and management are intimately linked to the future of community sports for all, as they are to the fate of professional football in Japan. While community sports continue to struggle with a lack of facilities, staff, and funds in all fields, the political economy of football is arguably suffering from the rapid expansion of the J-League. Within a decade, more than thirty professional teams have been established, dozens of large stadiums erected, and hundreds of players, coaches and staff offered contracts. At the same time that Japanese football expanded, thereby opening itself to the commercial aspirations of the global football business, the bubble-like expansion of the business of world football reached its climax. It is not possible to predict future developments, but it is possible to hint at some recent developments that indicate an appreciable change in the football economy. For a start, there have been no spectacular transfers after the World Cup, indicating the present weak state of the market. Second, sales of broadcasting rights for European club football have encountered only sluggish demand, providing club sides with severely reduced revenues and forcing them to cut salary expenses or, in the worst case, to withdraw from the football business.

Globalization provides Japanese customers with all the icons, brand names, and products of the global cultural economy. Yet the reasons why consumers are attracted by the same products worldwide remain manifold, surpassing the pure appeal of the game. Many prior studies have noted what Japan's experience of football also reveals: globalization cannot be regarded purely as a commercially driven process aiming at the creation of a global market for products whose popular consumption leads to the standardization of cultures that were once distinctive. In the case of Japanese football, the promotion of the international sport, football, was partly separated from the pursuits of the global cultural economy and closely linked to three national objectives: strengthening the national team, improving the international achievements of Japanese football squads, and bringing the World Cup finals to Japan. In this regard, Japan was more than successful. Hosting half the 2002 World Cup on domestic soil enabled Japan to welcome, and be embraced, by half of the football world.

Throughout this article I have argued that the promotion of Japanese football at home has been closely interwoven with international marketing experience, domestic policies, and national ambitions. Precisely because of this array of multiple actors and interests, Japanese football was not passively subjugated to globalizing processes. Rather, it developed its own particularities in terms of rules, playing styles, organizational modes, and market opportunities, most of them in marked contrast to the European experience. As Shimizu's (2000) research into fan culture at Japanese football matches revealed, the David Beckham fad and the apparent plasticity of Japanese loyalties during the World

Cup (Japanese men and women face-painted and dressed themselves in support of virtually all the teams competing in Japan, but especially Japan, Brazil, and England, as if fan identity could be acquired by the purchase of the correct shirt), the culture of sport provides people in Japan with distinctive cultural resources for reflecting upon identity and enacting agency. With regard to the global festival of the World Cup, it provided them with resources 'for constructing a meaningful social life in relation to a changing societal environment that has the potential to destabilise and threaten these things' (Roche 2000: 225). Although recent adaptation of governance in club sports, the change of rules and the increasing share of revenues from television rights are indicative of tendencies towards homogenization, the way football is played, watched, and consumed will keep its distinctive flavour. In this regard, the case of Japanese football reminds us of Appadurai's observation that 'the globalisation of culture is not the same as its homogenisation, but globalisation involves the use of a variety of instruments of homogenisation' (1990: 307).

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