

Sports

Blood and sport: The samurai slashing that brought rugby history to Japan

Yokohama may be one of the world's first 'Open' clubs: Galbraith

YOKOHAMA: When 70,000 fans cram into Japan's Yokohama stadium for the Rugby World Cup final, few will be aware of the area's rich rugby history which stretches back more than 150 years and includes one of the world's oldest clubs.

It all started in the early 1860s when Britain sent troops to Yokohama to protect its subjects after samurai warriors slashed to death a British trader — and some of their 19th century officers turned out to be rugby fans.

According to historian Mike Galbraith, who has extensively studied Japanese rugby's early history, the first mention of the game being played dates to 1863, only 40 years after Rugby School student William Webb Ellis famously "took the ball in his arms and ran with it", giving birth to the sport.

As military tensions eased, the bored officers — many of them from British public schools like Rugby — took to the oval ball to pass the time. "They started playing every afternoon because the troubles subsided and so they didn't really have anything to do. In December 1864, there's evidence they were playing every afternoon with a few of the civilians," Galbraith told AFP.

Two years later, in 1866, more than 40 of these early rugby players banded together to found the Yokohama Foot Ball Club. A Japanese newspaper report from January 26, 1866, records the official establishment.

"As we happen to have two or three Rugby and Winchester men in the Community, we may be certain that we shall have really good scientific play," said an editorial in the Japan Times.

This evidence leads Galbraith to claim that Yokohama may be one of the world's first "Open" clubs — meaning that unlike a university or school, anyone can join. "The Yokohama Country and Athletic Club appears at present to be the oldest open club in the world with contemporaneous documentary evidence of its founding," he said.

'VERY UNIQUE'

There are rugby clubs that are older, acknowledges Galbraith, but they lack such strong evidence describing their creation. "In the case of the Yokohama Foot Ball Club, there is a newspaper printed that very day describing what time it was and who the key people were and what the motions were. That's very unique," he said. The game then was very different to the fast-flowing sport played by professional athletes on display during the Rugby World Cup, which culminates on November 2 in Yokohama.

The founders of the Yokohama club proposed that "hacking", or kicking opponents, be banned, while early match reports underlined the prevalence of drop-kicking in those days.

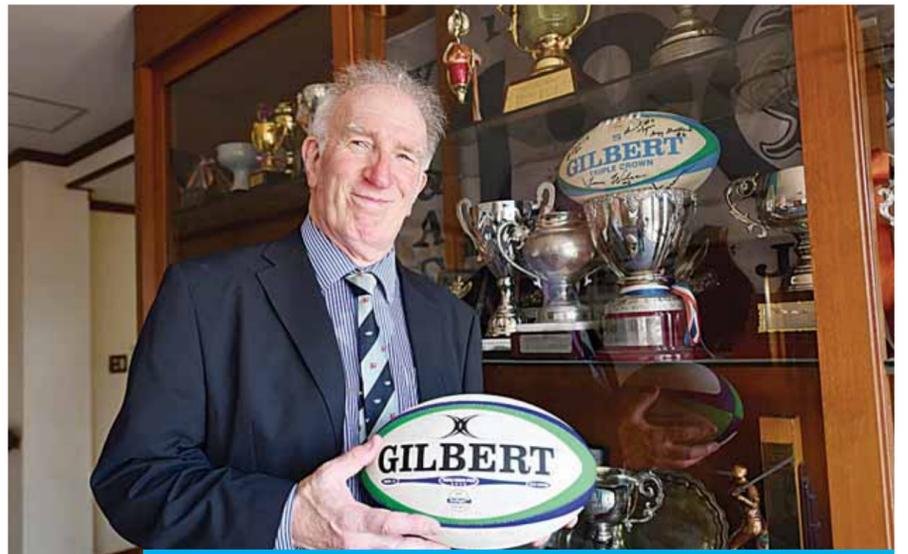
"Mr. Abbott having caught the ball made a good run through his opponents and, with a fine drop kick, scored a goal," reads one report from the 1873 Japan Weekly Mail. Rugby gained a more solid foothold in Japan at the turn of the century when two Cambridge University alumni, Edward Bramwell Clarke and the Japanese player Ginnosuke Tanaka, introduced the game at Keio University in Tokyo.

With more Japanese taking up the game, the sport's popularity grew quickly with crowds of 20,000 attending matches in the early 1930s, according to Galbraith.

'NOT SO HEALTHY'

The Japan Rugby Football Union was formed in 1926 and a national team played its first overseas matches on a tour to Canada in 1930. In modern history, the Japanese team have been ever-present at the Rugby World Cup since the first edition in 1987, where they narrowly lost to the United States before suffering a 60-7 hammering at the hands of England.

The World Cup has seen extreme highs and lows for Japan, from a record 145-17 loss to the All Blacks in 1995 to the competition's greatest ever upset when the "Brave Blossoms" beat the mighty Springboks 34-32 in



YOKOHAMA: This photo taken on June 25, 2019 shows Mike Galbraith, historian at the Yokohama Country and Athletic Club, posing beside trophies at the club in Yokohama. When 70,000 fans cram into Japan's Yokohama stadium for the Rugby World Cup final in November, few will be aware of the area's rich rugby history which stretches back more than 150 years. —AFP

2015 — dubbed the "Miracle of Brighton."

Organisers hope hosting this year's competition will accelerate the development of rugby in Japan and Asia more widely, but low attendances for club rugby and the ejection of the Tokyo-based Sunwolves from Super Rugby have raised doubts.

And what of rugby now at the Yokohama club,

where it all began? "The status today is not so healthy," sighs Galbraith speaking to AFP at the club, which proudly displays Japan's oldest rugby trophy and numerous team photos on its wood-paneled walls.

A dearth of members from traditional rugby-playing nations has hit the club hard, he says. "It's more difficult to put out a 15-a-side team to play rugby." —AFP

Japan's Yamada eyes World Cup spot with French club stint

PARIS: Japan winger Akihito Yamada said on Monday he is still targeting a spot in his country's Rugby World Cup squad after joining French club Lyon on-loan.

Yamada, 34, who started his nation's shock victory over South Africa at the tournament four years ago, signed for the Top 14 outfit in August on a two-month temporary deal.

The 25-time international said he had spoken to the Brave Blossoms' coaching staff, which is led by former All Black Jamie Joseph.

"I'm trying to get back into Japan's squad for the World Cup. I just have to train hard every day," he told AFP.

"I came here to get fit just in case of a World Cup call-up so I'm hopeful. If there's an injury, I told them: 'please call me up,'" he added.

The flyer said he hoped the last-minute win over the Springboks in 2015 would serve the current group well.

"It was a great experience as a rugby player. I was lucky to be there. For Japanese rugby it was a great day. We have to use all that experience for this year's World Cup," he said.

GOROMARU'S FOOTSTEPS

Yamada is the second Japanese international to join a French club ahead of the new Top 14 season after hooker Takeshi Hino was handed a trial by champions Toulouse.

The pair follow in the footsteps of former Japan backs in Ayumu Goromaru and Christian Loamanu in joining sides in the French top-flight.

"My friend Hino, I believe he can do very well in Toulouse. We chatted just before and he's just training hard to get some gametime," said Yamada, who plays NTT Communications Shining Arcs in Japan.

"It's a great opportunity to make rugby bigger through Asia," he added.

Yamada, who has scored 19 tries in his quarter of a century of Tests, said he would happily remain longer with Lyon, semi-finalists last season, if he wasn't selected for the World Cup.

"I would like to stay here for longer in the season, because the Japanese season starts in January 2020, so there's plenty of time," he said.

"I would like to get into French rugby and also French culture," he added.

Japan's last World Cup warm-up is against South Africa on September 6 and head coach Joseph will announce his final squad following the game in Kumagaya. The hosts start their campaign against Russia on September 20 before facing Ireland, Samoa and Scotland in their pool matches. —AFP

Al Arabi to face Al Ittihad Alexandria at Mohammed VI Soccer Championship

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Football fans should not miss the match that will be held on Aug 26 at 8:30 pm between Kuwaiti club Al Arabi and Egyptian club Al Ittihad Alexandria at the Arabi Stadium in Mansouriya. The match is part of the Mohammed VI Championship, which includes 32 teams from various Arab countries, including three Kuwaiti clubs - Arabi, Kuwait and Salmiya. This is the 32nd edition of this Arab championship, which is held in a different Arab country each season under a different name. This year the hosts are Morocco, so they have chosen the name Mohammed VI after their king. The tournament kicked off on Aug 18.

"All teams will play home and away matches to reach the semifinal. Al Arabi will play at home on August 26 facing Al Ittihad Alexandria, and then away in Egypt on September 27. One of the two teams has to win. There is one month period between the two matches. This long period was set so that these matches don't affect the schedule of matches of each team," said Deputy PR of Al Arabi Sports Club Hamed Al-Ali during a press conference held on Monday at the club.

Deaf S Korean tennis player Lee notches landmark win

WASHINGTON: Lee Duck-hee became the first deaf player to win an ATP match on Monday, making a statement with a straight-sets win over Henri Laaksonen in Winston-Salem.

"People made fun of me for my disability. They told me I shouldn't be playing," the 21-year-old South Korean said after shrugging off a lengthy rain delay to post a 7-6 (7/4), 6-1 victory.

"It was definitely difficult, but my friends and family helped me get through," Lee said. "I wanted to show everyone that I could do this."

"My message for people who are hearing impaired is to not be discouraged. If you try hard, you can do anything."

his hip trouble would end his career, accepted a wild card into this week's tournament in North Carolina after falling in his singles comeback in Cincinnati last week. He again showed glimpses of his once-dominant self, but was inconsistent in a 7-6 (10-8), 7-5 loss to 73rd-ranked American Tenny's Sandgren in a match lasting 2 hours and 10 minutes.

"Some things were a bit better today I think," Murray said. "I was hitting the ball a bit cleaner than I did maybe in Cincinnati... I feel like I moved fairly well to some drop shots, which maybe last week I wasn't running to."

"So there's some good things in there but also some stuff I would like to do better." Murray did not even reach the court until after 10 pm, thanks to a lengthy rain delay that pushed back his start time by more than

three hours. Sandgren gutted out a tough service hold in an opening game that went to deuce nine times, saving one break point as they went to the first-set decider without a break of serve. The American needed four set points — and saved one — in taking the tiebreaker.

A deflated Murray was quickly down 3-0 with two breaks of serve in the second. He clawed one back, and broke again when Sandgren coughed up two double faults while serving for the match at 5-4.

But Sandgren broke Murray again in the next game and then took full advantage of his second chance, capping the match with a forehand winner on his first match point. "Physically, (I'm) OK considering — no pain, no discomfort. Just a little bit more tired than usual," Murray said. —AFP

Lee, ranked 212 in the world, turned pro at 15 and achieved his best ATP singles ranking of 130th in the world in 2017, toiling mainly on the developmental Challenger circuit.

He admits that his disability can make life on court frustrating: he can't hear line calls or the umpire's call of the score and relies on gestures to sort out any confusion.

At Lee's post-match press conference on Monday, his fiancée pitched in to help out a Korean translator.

It was the end of a long day for Lee, who was two points from victory when thunderstorms swept through the area.

When he and Switzerland's Laaksonen returned some five hours later Lee quickly polished off a win he admitted he hadn't been expecting.

"I thought that I was just going to do my best and try to stay focused, but I came out a winner," said Lee, who had reached his first Challenger final almost three years in Little Rock in June.

Lee next faces third-seeded Hubert



This championship applies the rules of the Union of Arab Football Associations. "It's very important for the participating teams to strictly respect the rules of this championship, or they will have to pay a high penalty reaching \$2.5 million. Also entering the stadium to watch the match will be with tickets according to the rules set by the union," added Ali. "According to the rules of the union for this championship that we are obliged to follow, the match will not be broadcast on Kuwait TV. Only the private satellite channel Abu Dhabi Sports will be broadcasting the match live," he explained. Ticket prices range from KD 2 to KD 5. Tickets will be available at the Arabi Sports Club and not online starting from today from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm and from 5:00 pm to 9:00 pm. The stadium has a capacity of 20,000

seats. Mustafa Shaban gave a visual presentation about the seats at the stadium, the types of tickets and the preparations of the club for hosting the match. The media then toured the stadium to witness the preparations.

During the tour Ali, explained the preparations at the club to host this match and start the new season with a fresh new slogan - "The Beginning is Green". "We have newly painted the bleachers of the stadium. We also refurbished the training rooms for the players and coaches. The only problem that we are facing in the present time is parking, as we don't have enough space for many vehicles due to the reconstruction works at the club. So, we advise people to come early for the match and park away from the stadium," he pointed out.



Lee Duck-hee

Hurkacz, the world number 40 from Poland, in the second round.

"I'm going to go to the match with

the same attitude," Lee said. "I'm going to do my best and see what happens." —AFP

Murray falls to Sandgren as singles comeback continues

WASHINGTON: Andy Murray on Monday fell in the first round of the ATP Winston-Salem Open, where the three-time Grand Slam champion was giving his surgically repaired hip just its second test in singles.

Britain's Murray, who feared in January that

Serena to return to Auckland Classic for Aussie Open

WELLINGTON: Serena Williams announced yesterday she will warm-up for January's Australian Open at the Auckland Classic, a tournament that has mixed memories for the American superstar. Williams slumped to a shock second-round loss in her only previous appearance in New Zealand in 2017, lashing out at windy conditions she described as some of the "least favourite" she had ever experienced.

But she went on to win the Australian Open later that month, claiming the most recent of her 23 majors to pass Steffi Graf's Open-era benchmark of 22.

She also announced her engagement to Alexis Ohanian while in New Zealand and it later emerged she was pregnant with her first child while competing at the tournament. Currently ranked eighth in the world, the 37-year-old said she wanted to show New Zealanders what she could do on the court.

"Oh man, I want to win that title so bad," she said in a statement. "Last time I was there I had so much going on and although I fought through to win my first match, I know I didn't play to my level." —AFP