

FY2013 Report on the Tennis Environment in Japan

Summary of the Research Findings

March 2014

Japan Tennis Association

This is summary translation into English of the 52-page Japanese language report entitled “tenisu kankyotou jittai chousa houkokusho” (テニス環境等実態調査報告書), which was published by the Japan Tennis Association in March 2014 as a toto-sponsored project. This report features the following three topics:

1. The state of the respective tennis environments in three localities
2. The state of tennis at companies
3. The state of PLAY + STAY as a major initiative of the JTA

(1) In the city of Yokohama, there are many tennis recreational players and activities to popularize the sport are brisk – the issues waiting to be resolved are the availability of courts, cooperation between ward associations and the city association, and the lack of presence of the sport in public junior high schools

In the “Case Studies of Tennis Popularization through the Use of Public Courts,” on-site fieldwork was conducted at three localities of differing population sizes. The city of Yokohama in Kanagawa prefecture (population: 3.7 million) is where tennis began in Japan and is home to many tennis recreational players. Public tennis courts at parks inside of the city are used by a total of 760,000 people annually. The unresolved issues that are impeding further popularization of the sport are: a physical lack of courts, inadequate cooperation between the ward associations and the city association, and insufficient club activities to popularize tennis at public junior high schools.

The installation of tennis courts in the city of Yokohama has lagged behind other sports, thus making it difficult to secure courts that can be used in large competitions. There are ward tennis associations within the city that each independently offer tournaments and courses, but they have not been collaborating with the city association enough to adequately ensure the efficient use of facilities. This is collaboration that needs to take place. Also, of the 148 public junior high schools in the city, those with tennis clubs account for only 19 schools – a far cry from the 100+ schools that have soft tennis clubs.

(2) The city of Oita is funneling efforts into the development of junior players and is making use of PLAY + STAY – the unresolved issues are under-popularization of tennis at public junior high schools and the lack of public courts with lighting

The city of Oita in Oita prefecture (population 480,000) has a tennis population that is on the rise. There are 11 locations within the city with public tennis courts and renovation efforts have been underway in recent years. The city association has been funneling efforts into the development of junior players and has been offering junior tennis schools since 1982. The program has proved to be popular, with 180 students (first graders through ninth graders) participating at present. Junior tennis courses have been incorporating PLAY + STAY since 2009.

The sport could be further popularized by greater presence at public junior high schools and enhanced availability of public courts. The problem at junior high schools is the lack of instructors available to coach the sport. As public junior high schools see a decline in enrollment, the number of teachers is also on the decline and the prospect of offering new sports clubs is a difficulty. And the lack of lighting at some courts rules out their use after sunset. It is recommended that these courts be equipped with lighting.

(3) The city of Takizawa offers a diversity of tournaments and is funneling efforts into the development of junior players – the unresolved issues are the availability of facilities and quality instruction for junior players, and lack of presence at public junior high schools

The city of Takizawa in Iwate prefecture (population: 60,000) has been conducting popularization activities and organizing tournaments at the two locations with public courts as well as at the courts at the prefectural university in the city. Competitions for all categories that are held in the city are participated in by not only city residents but also by many players from outside of the city. The city tennis association has been funneling efforts into the development of junior players and provides diverse game opportunities for elementary school students who are new to sports, including the “challenge class” that makes use of the PLAY + STAY green ball. In addition, the city tennis association has established a junior player development fund that subsidizes travel expenses to players who participate in competitions and training camps held in distant locations. Though there is only one public junior high school with a tennis club, students are playing at a community sports club and their off-campus participation is recognized as school club activities.

The unresolved issues impeding the popularization of tennis are the availability of facilities and quality instruction for junior players, as well as insufficient presence in public junior high schools. Specifically, facilities are aging, there is a lack of lighted courts for night play, and indoor courts for winter play in insufficient supply. Methods of instruction for elementary school students are in the process of being improved through steps such as the introduction of PLAY + STAY, but it will be important to build on the available methods of instruction for junior players and assure the services of high quality instructors. Among junior high schools in Iwate prefecture, the only schools officially offering tennis clubs are two private schools. Further popularization of the sport in public junior high schools is an objective that should be pursued.

(4) Among large companies, 16.0% have tennis courts and 24.5% have recreational tennis groups

The offices of 1,000 large companies were asked to respond to the “Survey on the Tennis Environment at Large Companies,” which yielded responses from 871 businesses. 16.0% own tennis courts (including facilities co-owned with parents companies and affiliates); while 6.1% indicated that they had discontinued use of facilities owned in the past. About 40% of them indicated that they discontinued use of their tennis courts in the early 2000s. And 24.5% of the businesses indicated that they have recreational tennis groups, with 58.3% of whom answering that these groups engage in competition with outside groups. These thus provide tennis recreational players with not only a venue for routine activities but also a means of taking part in games.

(5) Participation by women in corporate teams is low; there has been greater

popularization of competitive participation outside of company organized teams

The “Survey on Corporate Teams” researched the numbers of corporate and working people’s teams participating in tournaments of each region. A total of 1,648 teams played in corporate team competitions under the jurisdiction of the Japan Tennis Association: 1,291 male teams and 355 female teams. Participation in corporate teams by female employees continues to be minimal. As the wellbeing of corporate tennis teams tends to be easily swayed by economic conditions, there has been waning company support for such teams. There has been a spread of team competition at the prefectural and municipal levels by working people’s tennis groups that play outside of the framework of company organized teams.

(6) PLAY + STAY program participants indicate a strong desire to continue

In the “Survey on PLAY + STAY (P+S) Related Popularization Projects,” 198 P+S program participants submitted completed questionnaires. A look at the demographics of the participants shows that the majority belonged to the 5 to 9-year old segment (68.4%), which was followed by the 10 to 14-year old (24.4%). The genders had almost equal representation: 45.6% boys and 54.4% girls. Their tennis experience prior to participation in the program was also equally divided between those who had (52.3%) and those who had not played before (47.7%), an indication of the high number of children who had never played tennis prior to involvement in the program. As the combined total of the responses “I would like to participate” and “I would somewhat like to participate” exceeded the 70% mark, participants indicated a strong intention to continue to take part in tennis schools that offer P+S instruction for a charge.

And according to the results of the 138 completed questionnaires of participants who took part in workshops for P+S instructors, a sizable percentage (over 80%) indicated that they found P+S to be a program that is “effective” or “somewhat effective” for the purpose of increasing the tennis population.

(7) The JTA’s long-term vision sees the promotion of PLAY + STAY as a means of popularizing the sport

In the Japan Tennis Association action plan for FY2013, PLAY + STAY (P+S) is positioned as a special project to be promoted for the popularization of the sport. Special subsidies have been included in the budget in order to support regional tennis associations in their promotion of the P+S project to popularize tennis. Tennis player Kei Nishikori has been appointed as an ambassador to promote P+S. P+S promotional events have been implemented at locations nationwide. Tennis Xpress, the P+S program for adults, was featured at the JTA conference. With the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games and 2022 JTA Centenary in its sights, the JTA has incorporated the promotion of P+S into its long-term vision.