

Japan's way- Our National Football Philosophy



Japan's Way.



To become the happiest country in the world through football

Thinking backwards from the future, nurturing Japanese football as a culture

Three years ago, we, the Japan Football Association (JFA) raised the flag of 'Japan's Way' and began communicating our vision for the future of Japanese football. At its core lay not merely the goal of making the national team stronger, but a clear vision: 'to become the happiest nation in the world through football.'

This revised edition further concretises that philosophy. What we prioritised was the concept of thinking backwards from the goal. That is to say, when the Japan national team stands at the pinnacle of the world, what state do we wish our football culture to be in? Thinking backwards from that ideal state, we build upon the actions we must take now—this is the fundamental philosophy at the core of 'Japan's Way'. What is needed for that future is a society where all children can engage with sport feeling safe. The ongoing nationwide rollout of community-based junior high school club activities represents precisely such an initiative towards realising this vision. What is now required is not merely to reduce teachers' burdens, but to establish a system where communities support sport and everyone can participate proactively.

At the same time, it is essential to establish a competition environment where everyone can enjoy themselves

according to their own level and preferences.

It is within such a culture – one characterised by 'equal opportunities to participate', 'a more relaxed competitive environment', and 'a space where enjoyment itself is respected' – that children can spontaneously take on challenges and maintain a lifelong love for sport. As part of this, incorporating the concept of multi-sport into development is also necessary. Exposure to diverse physical experiences and sporting cultures broadens children's future possibilities and promotes balanced growth, both physically and mentally.

Of course, the path for the Japan National Team to aim for the pinnacle of the world must also be pursued relentlessly.

The development of elite youth players must continue to be refined. Whilst many Japanese players have already begun to achieve results on the world stage, coaches too are entering an era where they must develop an international perspective and compete globally to truly spread their wings on the world stage.

Thus, what we must build is a "double pyramid structure" where the pinnacle of competitive sport and the broad base of lifelong participation mutually support each other. This is a vision of society where football is not just for the select few, but where everyone can live alongside and engage with the game.

'Japan's Way' is not a tactical manual, but a cultural blueprint outlining our values and vision for the future.

A nation where everyone finds happiness through football—towards realising this, we now recommence our journey along this path.

*The term "football" as used here encompasses all forms of the football, including futsal, beach football, and small-sided football.



Towards realising dreams. To lift the World Cup trophy



Current state



On 1 January 2005, the JFA announced its “The JFA Declaration, 2005”, setting forth clear objectives as “pledges”: to increase the number of football enthusiasts to 10 million by 2050, to host the FIFA World Cup™ in Japan, and to win that World Cup. For the Japan National Team to stand atop the FIFA World Cup by 2050 and lift the trophy – realising this dream is not a matter of chance accumulating, but one to be built as an inevitability based on planning and design. As a starting point for that, we began by clearly defining what kind of football culture and structure a nation requires to stand at the pinnacle of the world. To this end, the JFA first profiled countries we consider to be “footballing nations”, conducting a multifaceted analysis of their cultural foundations, league structures, development systems, coaching education, and competitive strength. This was a crucial initiative to outline our desired future vision and identify the gap between that vision and Japan's current position.

Furthermore, in 2021, the FIFA-led ‘FIFA Ecosystem Analysis’ was conducted, providing the JFA with a detailed evaluation from an international perspective. The findings of this analysis were published as an official report by FIFA in 2022, offering a valuable opportunity to objectively visualise Japan's strengths and challenges in the areas of player development and competitive performance and so on.

In response, the JFA established a dedicated team in 2023 aligned with FIFA's Talent Development Scheme (TDS). Working in collaboration with FIFA, we jointly designed a medium-to-long-term Development Plan for Japanese football. This comprehensive plan extends beyond elite development to encompass the broader goal of ‘creating an environment where everyone can enjoy and engage with football.’

In this way, ‘Japan's Way’ is also a path that engages with international standards and evolves, while harnessing Japan's unique culture and values.

Thinking backwards from the ideal state—this is the roadmap for turning the dream of World Cup victory into a ‘realistic future’.

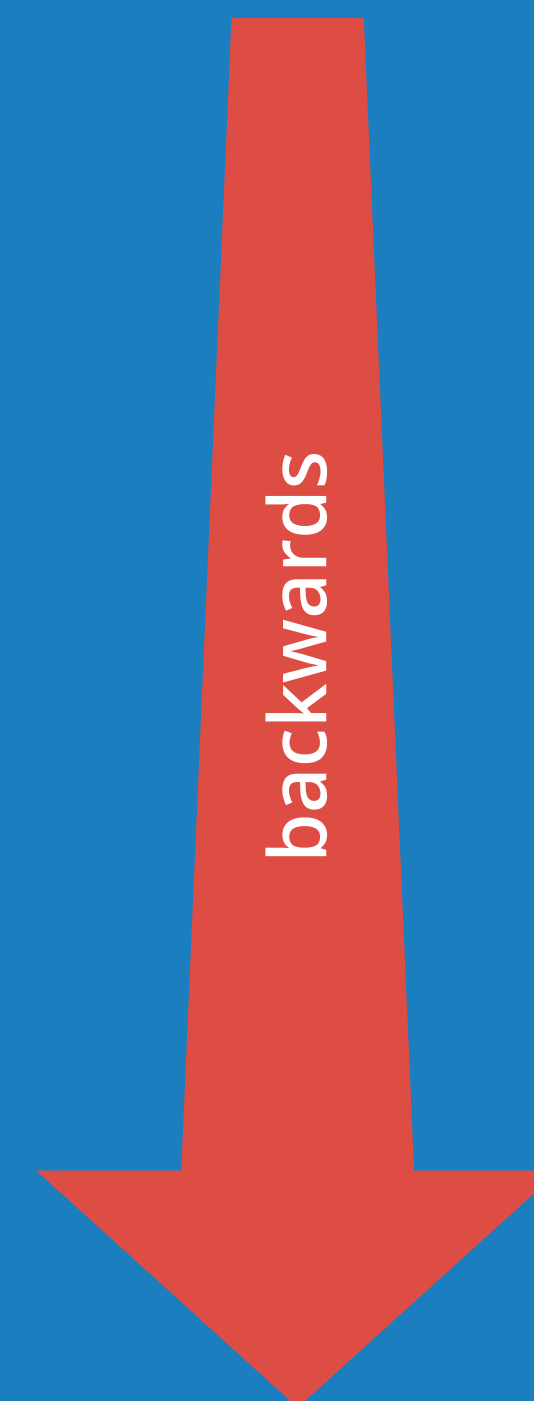
The JFA Pledge for 2050

By 2050, we will realise two key objectives that will allow all to share a special joy:

- 1 The Football Family of Japan, the fans with a true love for football, will number 10 million strong.
- 2 We will host the FIFA World Cup in Japan, and the Japan National Team will be the champion.



Ideal state



Japan's Way. =

Our the path to the ideal

The importance of the four factors integrated approach

Sustainable Measures for Fostering and Strengthening the Japanese Football

We at JFA wish to place great importance on implementing long-term development on a continuous basis. It is common worldwide to refer to a national team as a “platinum age” when specially talented players happen to emerge simultaneously. However, relying on chance will not enable the sustainable strengthening of Japanese football.

“You can just wait and hope that a few good players turn up and that you are lucky. But you might wait forever.”

These are the words of Andy Roxburgh, AFC Technical Director. To that end, we must place equal importance not only on strengthening the national team – which requires results from both long-term strategies and relatively short-term measures to eliminate randomness – but also on “youth development”, which demands a medium-term plan; “coach education”, which requires a long-term plan; and “grassroots development”, which involves continuously creating an environment where football can always be enjoyed.



Through this ‘Four Factors integrated Approach’, to achieve the ‘JFA Declaration, 2005’, we wish to continue holding, together with everyone, the important philosophy within Japanese football: ‘to persistently strive even when immediate results may not be apparent’.

Outdated values such as ‘matches exist only for a select few talented youngsters’ or ‘those not playing must simply cheer from the bench’ have robbed many children of the joy of football. Every child should be guaranteed the right to enjoy playing at their own pace and to take their place on the stage of the match. This fosters confidence through sport and builds the foundation for lifelong engagement with sport and society.

It is precisely because there are spaces where such “looseness” and “flexibility” are permitted that a culture of enjoying the game can flourish, enabling diverse children to engage with football for the long term.

Conversely, this also provides the backdrop for competitive-minded players to spontaneously develop a love for football and to aspire to grow through their own volition.



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2. Building a football culture

- ▶ Japan's Unique Double Pyramid
- ▶ Synergistic effects of enhanced performance and well-being
- ▶ The definition of Japan's Way
- ▶ Identity of Japanese Football
- ▶ Creating an environment where everyone can enjoy football



Japan's Unique Double Pyramid

This framework values both the "enjoyment" and "competition" segments, creating synergistic effects as each grows, thereby embedding Japan's unique football culture throughout society.

The player's pathway is characterised by diversity and flexibility, allowing individuals to freely move between "enjoyment" and "competition" according to their age, preferences, and life circumstances.

Through this structure, we are aiming to become the "happiest country in the world through football", where everyone can find happiness through the game.

2 Various Pathways

While enjoying football, children and players with a stronger competitive focus can progress along the development and performance pathway (right-hand pyramid).

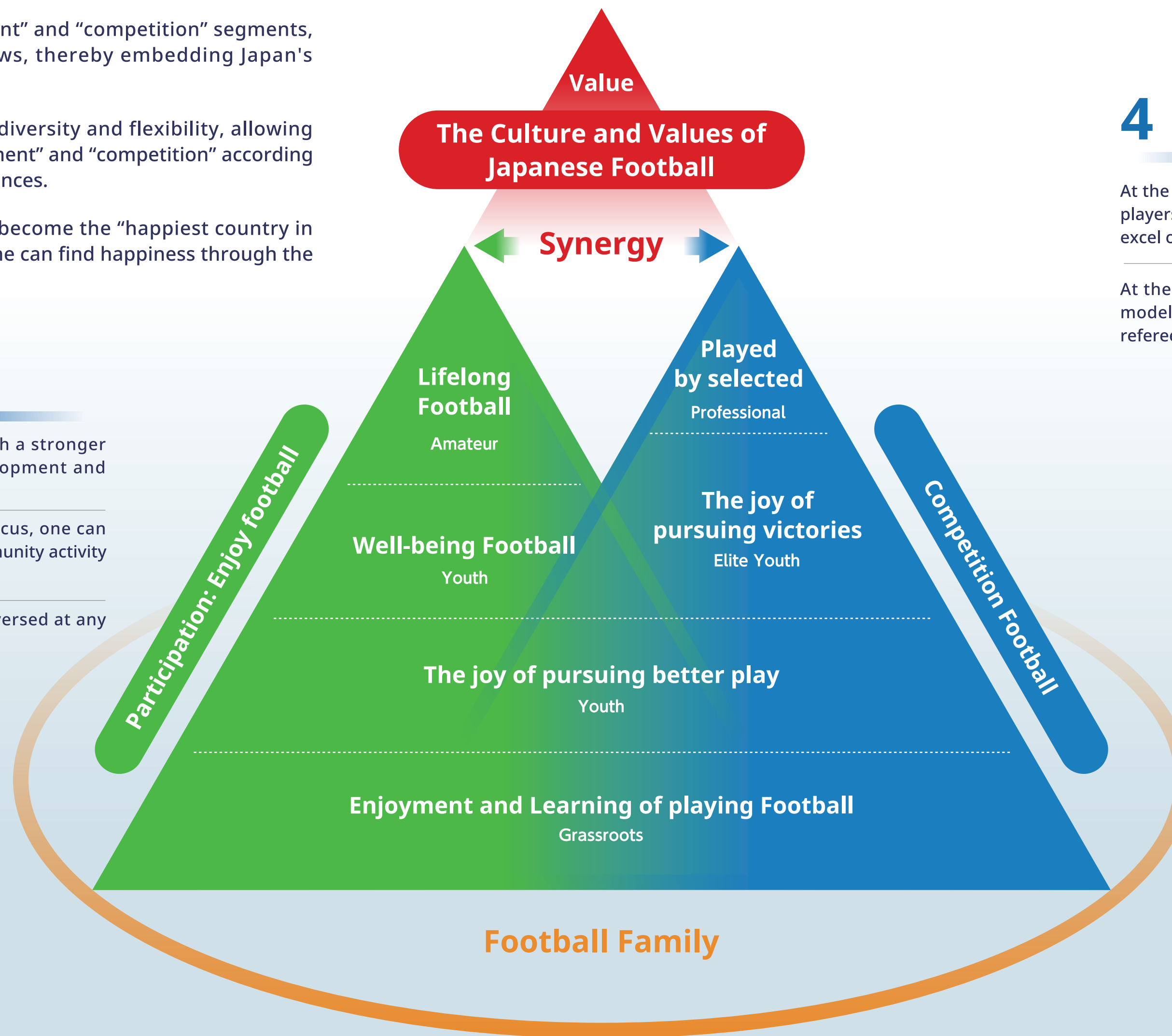
On the other hand, even without a competitive focus, one can continue playing football as a lifelong sport or community activity (left-hand pyramid).

Both paths are flexible structures that can be traversed at any time throughout life.

1 Grassroots (Foundation)

All children and adults start by "participating" in and "enjoying" football within their local communities, schools, clubs and other settings.

An environment where anyone can easily take up football (e.g. kids' programmes, local clubs) is established, forming a foundation that enables continued involvement regardless of age, gender, or disability.



4 At the top: divers goals

At the pinnacle of the competitive pyramid stand professional players, members of the Japan National Teams, and those who excel on the international stage.

At the apex of the lifelong sport pyramid stand diverse role models who contribute to society through football: coaches, referees, volunteers, fans, supporters, and community leaders.

3 Synergy (synergistic effect)

As the base of participation (enjoying the sport category) expands, so too does the base of competition (development and performance category), enabling more talent to be developed

This synergy, whereby one aspect elevates the other, gives rise to Japan's unique football culture.

Not just football: creating Japan's new sporting culture

Everyone can find happiness through sport

Synergistic effects of enhanced performance and well-being

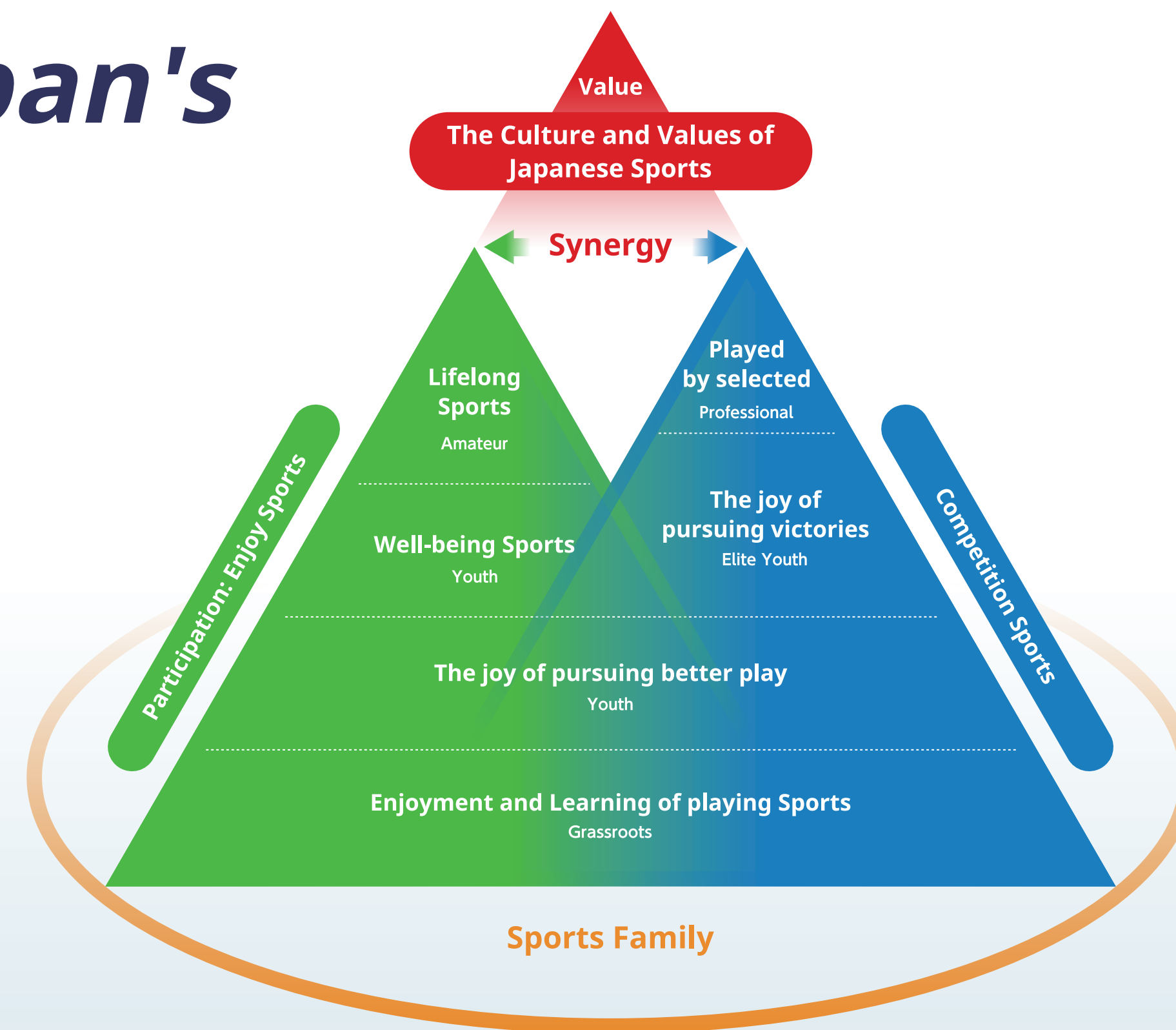
It is vital for the future of Japanese sport that children wishing to participate in sport find it easy to get started, that a sustainable environment exists for them to continue lifelong participation, and that coaches wishing to coach have opportunities to do so, with further expansion of such opportunities. School clubs, which have played a central role not only in post-war Japanese schoolchildren's sporting activities but also in cultural pursuits, are now entering a new phase. From its inception in 1993, the J.League has championed the vision of 'A Happier Nation Through Sport' within its 'The J.League 100 Year Vision'. This declaration, which emphasised the importance of Japan becoming a happier nation through sport, and the promotion of sporting culture within communities as key to Japan's future, marked the start of the professional football league.



The words of the late Mr Shunichiro Okano (former President of the Japan Football Association)

The more civilisation advances, the more tasks like cleaning and laundry are performed by machines. This is also a wonderful thing. It creates the leisure time for mothers to enjoy volleyball or aerobics, or to study. How splendid. However, this is the sunny side of civilisation's progress; where there is sunshine, there must also be shadow. What is this shadow? It is the reduction of physical stimulation within daily life. The necessary stimulation for human cells diminishes. Many people forget this. That is why sport is essential in the 21st century and its importance will grow. One of the J.League's 100 Year Vision goals for the 21st century is to establish sports facilities in various locations. The J.League 100 Year Vision, aiming to create environments where people can enjoyably work up a sweat in their free time at accessible locations, is not merely about football. It proposes a solution to the problem of whether Japanese people can enjoyably incorporate appropriate physical stimulation into their daily lives.

(Special Lecture at the 17th Medical Science Research Conference, 1997)



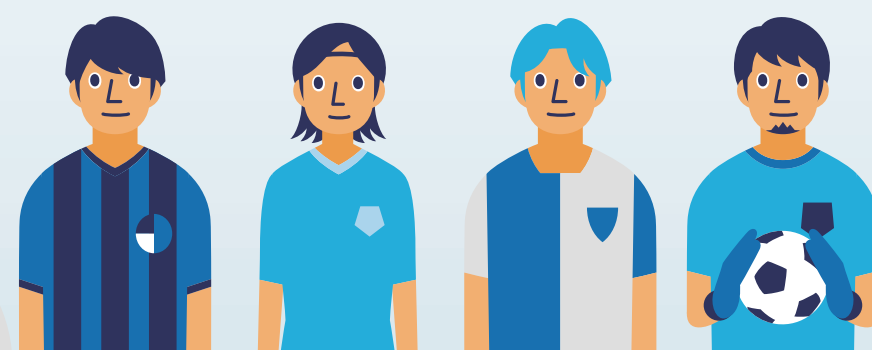
Aiming to become the happiest country in the world through football

Japan's Way is our path to achieve the goal

Japan's Way.



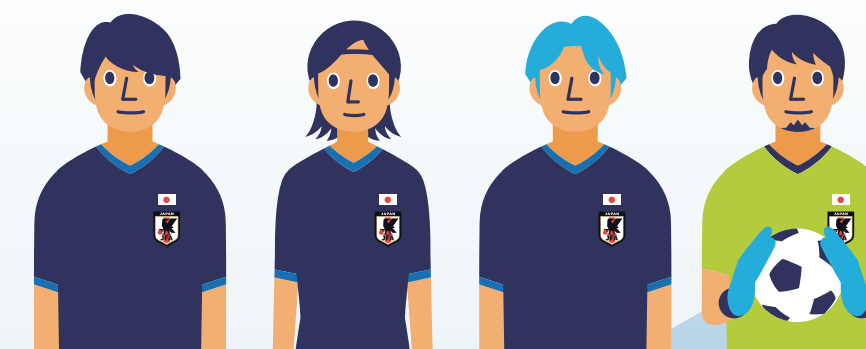
1
We strive to create an environment where football can be played at all levels, enabling everyone involved – players, coaches, referees, organisers, parents, fans, supporters and more – to share in the enjoyment of the game.



2
By mastering the techniques to think for yourself, make decisions, and put them into action, you can enjoy football. We will develop players who can enjoy football at any level, no matter how high the stage they reach.



3
To that end, we require coaches. We will develop coaches who value learning opportunities and can draw out the players' potential talent



4
We will assemble a national team centred around players developed in this manner and compete on the world stage. Players capable of competing globally as individuals will unite, respecting one another, to take on the challenge. This is the strength of Japanese football that we can proudly present to the world.



5
The presence of a national team nurtured and supported by all those involved in football enhances our sense of happiness. Should we achieve the World Cup, it would bring joy not only to the players who fought for it and those who supported them, but to the entire nation.

Yes, it is because of football that we can be happy.

What becomes apparent in the pursuit of the desired state

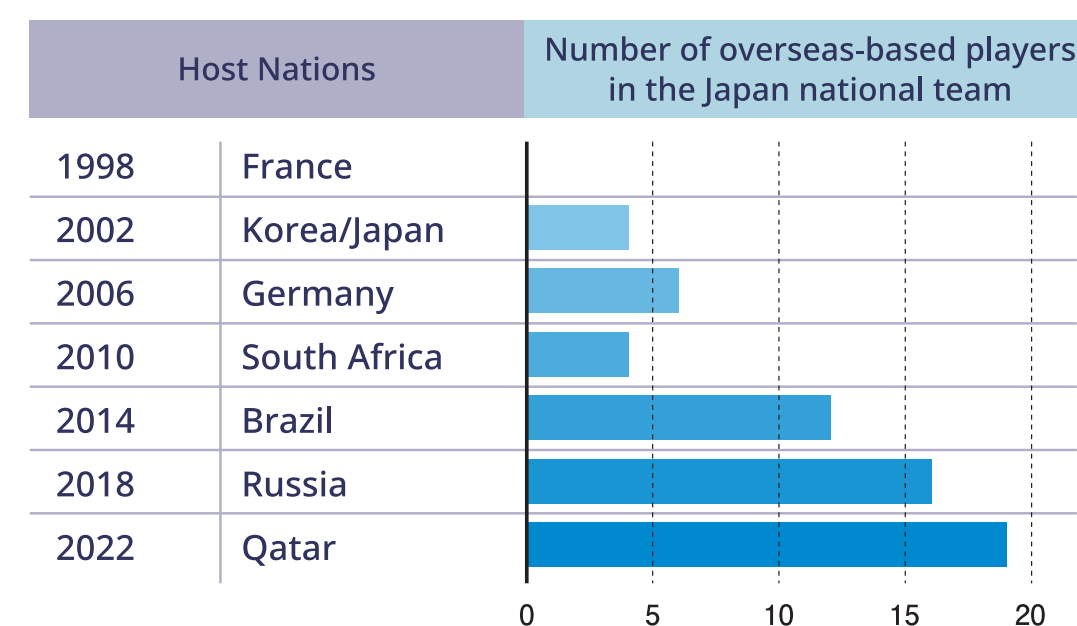
Analysis clearly indicates the importance of broadening and elevating both double pyramids, particularly the green pyramid representing the perspective of “enjoy football” – an aspect often lacking in Japanese football. Meanwhile, looking at the apex of the blue pyramid – the Japan National Team – the number of Japanese footballers playing overseas has increased dramatically. Whereas only a handful played abroad during the FIFA World Cup 2002 Korea/Japan, over 200 are now registered with overseas leagues as of 2025, with many excelling in Europe's major leagues.

At the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, 19 of the 26 players in the Japan squad were registered with overseas clubs. This figure demonstrates that the competitive strength of Japanese football is gaining international recognition, with more players challenging themselves at the world level. Moving forward, it is essential that not only the players but also the coaches and the overall environment reach a world-class standard.

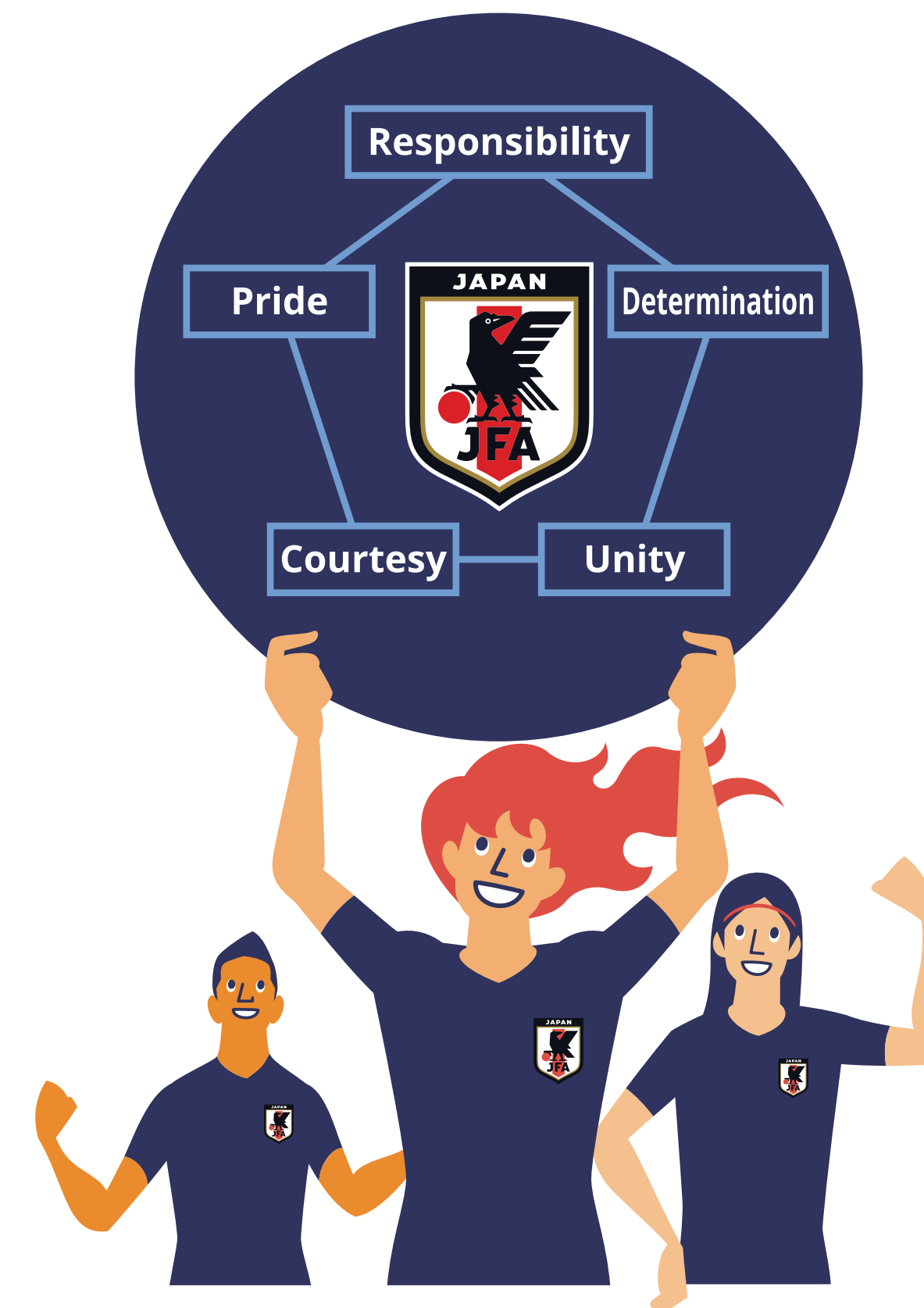
This synergy is precisely the crucial element we should learn from the advanced nations.

Number of Japanese Players playing abroad

The number of overseas-based players in the Japan national team competing in the FIFA World Cups



Over 200 players are registered with overseas leagues



The Japan National Team is a dynamic team that aims big at every stage of its dream, representing Japan with pride and united as one in pursuit of victory.

With gratitude to those we crossed paths with, we will harness the passion of our supports and countries to challenge the world's top team.

Identity of Japanese Football

Alongside this, we must cherish our identity. Japanese football has developed not only through the efforts of Japanese people, but also through the contributions of foreign players, coaches, naturalised individuals, and many other pioneers. Moving forward, it will undoubtedly continue to evolve through the diverse contributions of people from varied backgrounds. In this sense, rather than speaking of “Japanese people” or “Football played by Japanese people”, we wish to frame our narrative around “Japanese football” as our subject. Recognising that our ‘Japanese football’ itself is inherently diverse and fluid, we believe it is vital to forge our own path towards our dreams – Japan’s Way. This does not mean we are all devoted to the same football as our many predecessors, including foreign players, coaches, and naturalised individuals. Rather, it means embracing diversity while sharing a common overarching direction.

Creating an environment where everyone can enjoy football according to their ability and preference

In Japan, competition environments have been created across various organisations, with each tournament contributing to the development of Japanese football. Regardless of the path taken in the sport, players encounter passionate coaches, and pathways open up towards the professional game and the national team. This is precisely the pathway unique to Japanese football, one that can be proud on the world stage. These pathways are nothing less than the fruits of trial and error, built through the efforts of many predecessors.

Furthermore, since making its debut at the FIFA World Cup France 1998, Japan has produced technical reports and videos, drawing implications for the next generation of football based on global standards. A vertical review of approximately ten years of technical reports reveals the common elements (shared items) that emerge (see right diagram). Various initiatives, such as those concerning the competition environment, have emerged from these valuable analyses gained through competing on the global stage. This series of reforms to the competitions ultimately aims to seamlessly create the fundamental concept: “an environment where everyone can enjoy football according to their ability and preference”.

Analysis revealed that barriers hindering vertical and horizontal progression – such as the difficulty of smooth transitions due to the 6-3-3 school system and the absence of official competitions between schools and clubs – had made it challenging for Japan to excel on the world stage. The removal of these barriers, particularly through the establishment of the East-West National League – a league created through the efforts of many – which then branched into nine regional leagues and divisions under the 47FAs, has made a significant contribution. This has enabled players to “enjoy football according to their ability” and fostered the principle that “competitive matches are what truly develop players”.

However, it goes without saying that world football, like the currents of the open sea, is constantly in motion and evolving. This competition environment demands that we never rest on our laurels, but continually analyse the global landscape and update ourselves without fear of change.

Competition Environment Reform Based on Technical Study Implications

Japan’s challenges revealed from global competition

1. **one v one attack and defence**
Toughness /Intensity in body contact
2. **Playing towards the goal to score**
Playing forward without losing the ball
3. **Attack and defence in and around the box**
4. **Instinctive ability to seize the opportunities, courage to take risks**
Attacks that took their toll, defence that put one's body on the line

Challenges in everyday football

For players to develop themselves through their own efforts

1. **Creating an environment** Remove vertical and horizontal barriers
 - ① Realisation of LEAGUE for ALL
challenge risk, rather than fighting by sealing away risk,
 - ② Proactive introduction of small sided games
 - ③ Elimination of the gap period
2. **Improve the quality of coaching**
 - ① The challenge to develop individuals
 - ② Personality development
 - ③ Creating an environment where youth development coaches are respected

The introduction of leagues across all age groups of youth development

➡ challenge risk, rather than fighting by sealing away risk,

Japan Games youth category to U16

➡ To bridge the gap period following the summer of U15, with middle school, high school and club coaches collaborating on development.

Introduction of 8-a-side for U12

➡ Increasing the intensity of play around the box, whilst also developing decision-making during matches

1977	JFA U12 National Championship started
1991	JFA National U12 Futsal Championship started
2000	Kanto region U18 super league started with some high school teams
2003	Prince Takamado Trophy JFA U-18 Football Prince League
2006	Japan Games youth category change to U16, making environment that various categories collaborate

2008	U15 and U13 leagues started
2011	Prince Takamado Trophy JFA U-18 Football Premier League
2011	JFA U12 National Championship changed into 8-a-side from 11-a-side game
2015	JFA U12 National Championship changed into winter from summer
2022	Prince Takamado Trophy JFA U-18 Football Premier League

The next generation of competition environments: From “Fun” to “Serious Fun”

In any situation, “delivering creative and precise play based on one's own decision” – that is the greatest joy of football, and it will also become Japan's strength when competing on the world stage. To realise this, it is essential to create an environment where everyone can enjoy football to the fullest according to their ability and preference, seamlessly from grassroots level and even within high-intensity performance settings. This leads to creating an environment where players develop robustly through their own efforts, not merely through “teaching” and “learning”.

Conversely, the climate in summer has become increasingly severe in recent years, threatening the safe conduct of summer tournaments even with countermeasures in place. Consequently, the JFA has decided to cancel, in principle, all JFA-organised or -administered competitions scheduled for July and August from the 2025 season onwards. It has also requested affiliated organisations to review their operational methods. Furthermore, match interruptions, postponements, and cancellations due to thunderstorms are making annual competition calendar adjustments increasingly difficult. A fundamental, holistic response, involving a significant shift in thinking, is now required.

Various challenges exist across different age categories, such as managing excessive playing time over short periods (consecutive matches) or insufficient playing time. Holding matches in excessive heat where players cannot perform at their best, or conversely, lacking matches at optimal season, creates an unbalanced situation that prevents the full potential of talent from being realised. How can we avoid these pitfalls and create an environment where everyone can enjoy competitive matches played at high intensity? Furthermore, it is essential to foster a football community where not only players, but also coaches, referees, operational staff, and indeed all those involved in the sport – along with their families – can experience a sense of fulfilment.

We have now reached the very moment to collectively reconstruct an optimal football calendar, encompassing off-seasons, an area previously neglected. This is crucial to draw a line under the era when ‘sacrificing family life...’ was celebrated as a noble tale.

To enjoy as many evenly matched games as possible at the same time also securing adequate rest periods, it is necessary to build a unique Japanese football development system whilst maintaining an attitude of learning from the world. This enables players to participate in numerous high-intensity matches while also taking proper rest.

Reconstructing an “optimal football calendar, including rest periods” requires thinking beyond organisational boundaries and established frameworks. It is vital to pursue a game environment that prioritises “players” above all else, while also considering the wellbeing of all those involved.

In 2025, the JFA Technical Committee established a Competition Environment Subcommittee.

Although the competition environment has been examined in various ways over many years, we have decided to revisit and address the challenges specific to each age category.

Established a **Competition Environment Subcommittee** under the Technical Committee

1

Redesign of the annual calendar through linking the “League” and “Federation Cup competitions”

2

Building an Efficient Calendar Through Cup Competition Decentralisation
(Aiming for a WIN-WIN)

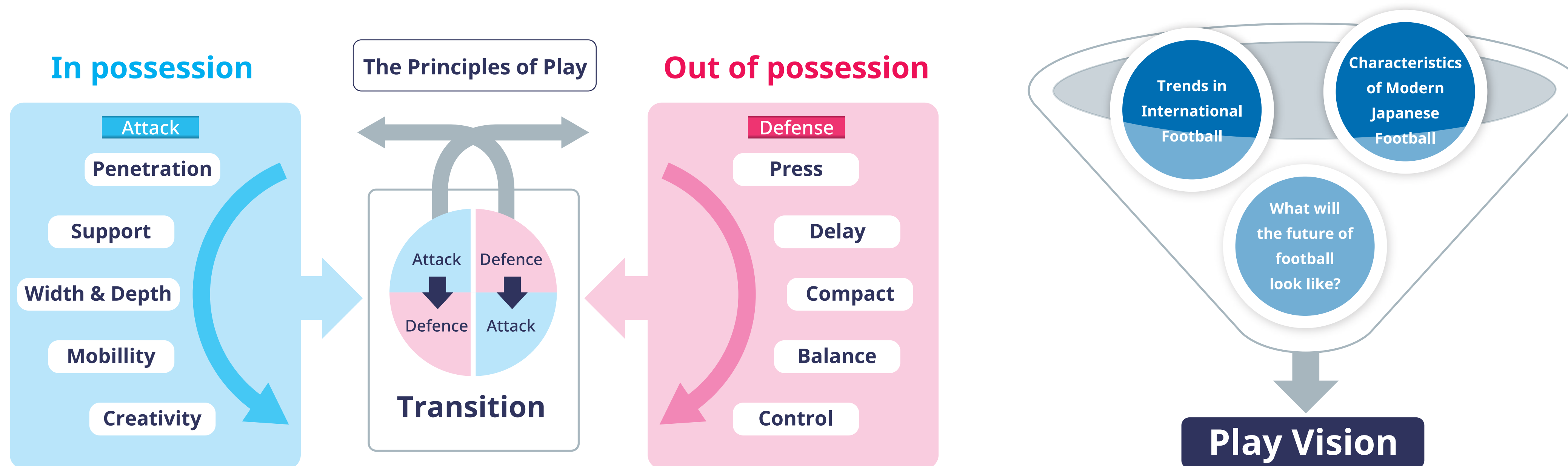
By fostering cooperation among organising federations and linking league and cup competitions, we can establish an ideal framework as an extension of this approach.

3. Play Vision

- ▶ What is the play vision?
- ▶ Challenges in the Vision for Japanese Football
- ▶ Attack
- ▶ Defence
- ▶ What is the play vision of Japan's Way
- ▶ The Japan National Team Play Vision
- ▶ The Importance of international competitions in the youth categories



What is the 'play vision' of Japan's Way?



The 'Principles of Play' are understood to reflect interpretations shaped by changes within football itself or in world football. They are a summary of fundamental strategies, based on the structure of the game, designed to be easily understood by both players and coaches.

In contrast, the 'Play Vision' indicates the direction of play for Japanese football, guiding it towards 'prioritising the essence of the game and making it attractive and emotionally compelling'. Unlike the 'play model' held by individual clubs or head coaches, it represents a guideline for the direction Japanese football should pursue.

'Play Vision' can be described as a playing concept that anticipates the characteristics of contemporary Japanese football, trends in international football, and the future, and fuses these elements together. We wish to embrace a forward-looking approach while forging a path for

Japanese football that is both inspiring and ultimately successful.

The football currently played in Japan possesses characteristics of "contemporary Japanese football" within modern Japan, shaped by various historical, cultural, and social contexts. However, this is not fixed. As stated in the "Introduction", we believe it is vital to build upon the understanding that our "Japanese football" itself has become increasingly diverse and fluid in recent years.

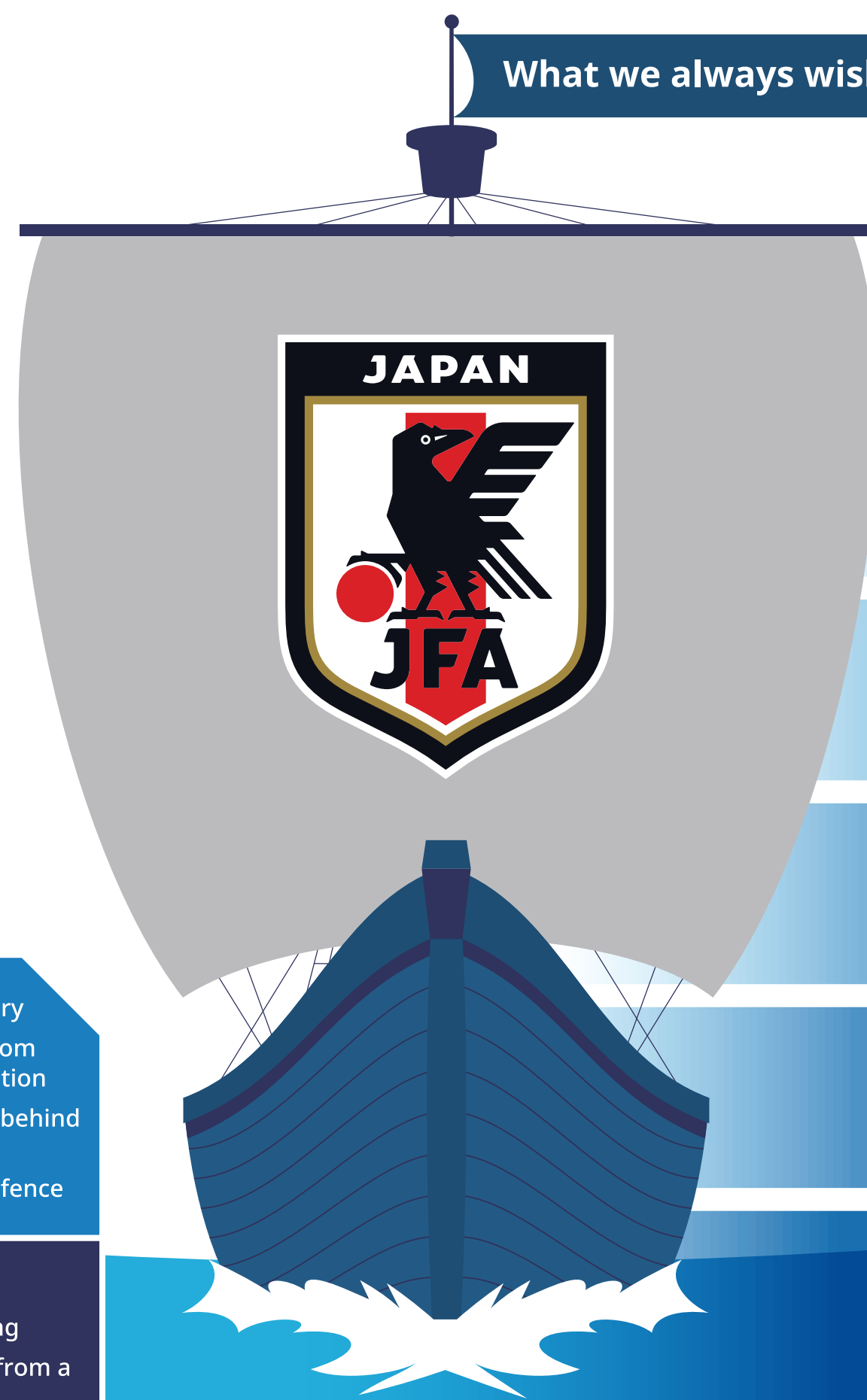
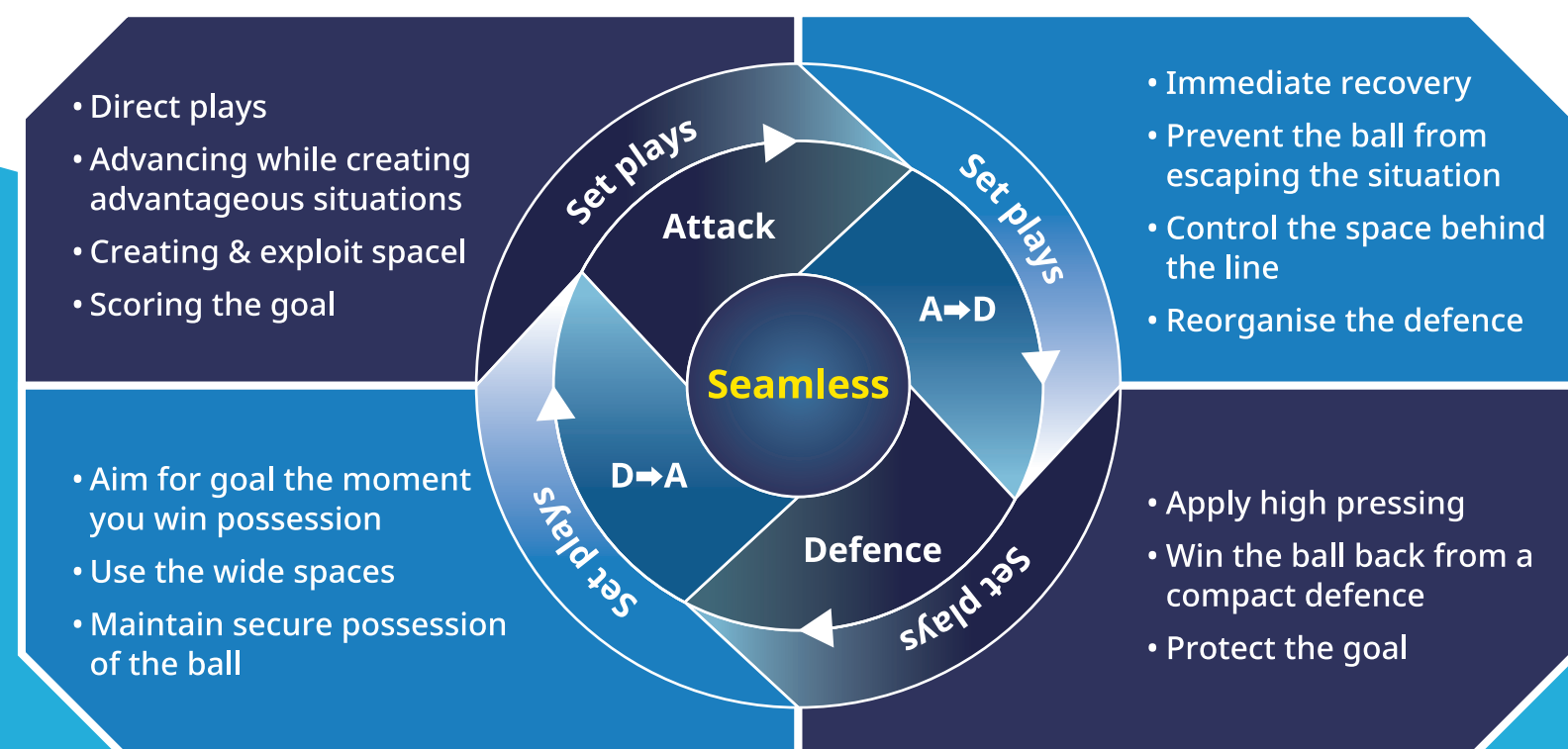
Rather than everyone becoming devoted to the same style of football, we believe this 'Play Vision' should serve as the benchmark, from which each individual should develop with diversity. We aspire to take Japanese football to the world, a football that blends this diversity, individual development, and a sense of unity.

Challenges in the Vision for Japanese Football

Cherishing the essence of football, playing with attractiveness and emotion

Breaking free from domestic standard (Galápagos syndrome) that geographical conditions often lead to

Shifting the goal from 'world standards' to 'world-top standards'



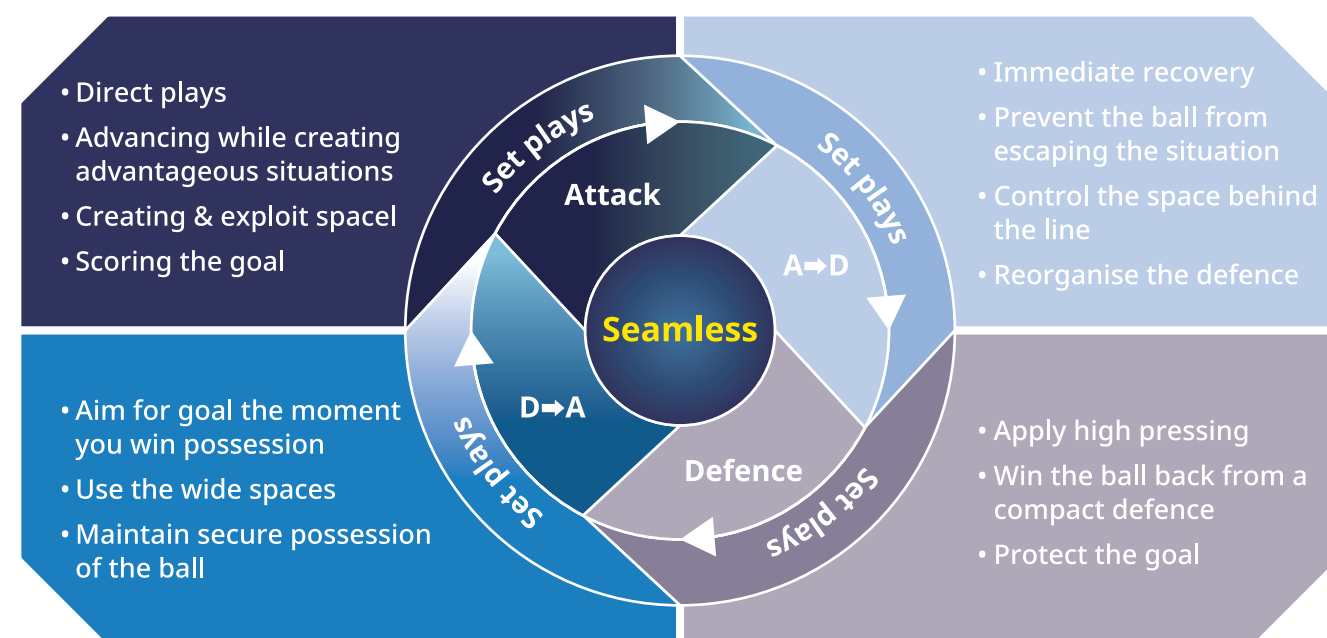
What we always wish to cherish

- 1 Always play actively!**
 Play in a way that gets to the heart of football. Take action to win the ball and to score goals.
- 2 Attack and defence by all players**
 Constantly involved in both attack and defence. Both on and off the ball!
- 3 Seamless transition in attack and defence!**
 The moment the ball is lost, the play shifts to winning it back. The moment it's won, we drive towards goal! Everything flows seamlessly.
- 4 Creative and hard work!**
 Not just creative football, not just hard work football. Combining both!
- 5 Solve problems swiftly!**
 To select the best action or play in that situation, prepare well and increase the speed from recognition to execution.
- 6 The ball is crucial!**
 That's why we must win it back immediately. Attacking both in and out of possession. Dominance in attack and defence.
- 7 Able to perform under any playing style (understands the principles)**
 If you understand the principles of football, you can utilise your strengths in any position, system, or under any coach.

Our Play Vision for Attack

Guidelines for Attacking Phases

Japan boasts the achievement of qualifying for seven consecutive FIFA World Cups, with both the team and individual players steadily continuing to challenge the world stage. However, various analyses to date indicate that Japan-specific challenges remain, most notably concerning play in front of the opposition goal – specifically, the quality and intensity of actions in the final moments leading to the finish. In the penalty area, the very heart of the game where goals are scored, it is crucial to continually encourage players to take risks and challenge, to strive to score goals, and to keep improving their drive towards the goal.



1

Always have an attacking mindset!

Scoring a goal is what football is all about! We would rather shoot than pass, and forward pass than a lateral pass without losing the ball.

2

Seamless transition to attack

Go for the goal the moment we regain the ball! Attack before their defence is ready!

3

Watch the opponent and use our technique on the move

On the attack we face less space and less time, and the opponent's defence is getting stronger. We want to improve the precision of our technique under such circumstances!

4

Combination play

Cooperative play that involves multiple players. The third player's off-the-ball action. High tempo

5

Decide the match with getting the goal

Take bold, yet cool-headed action

6

Choose plays based on zone and situation

Understanding of areas and the three zones is key. Keep it safe, or go for the bold play taking a risk!

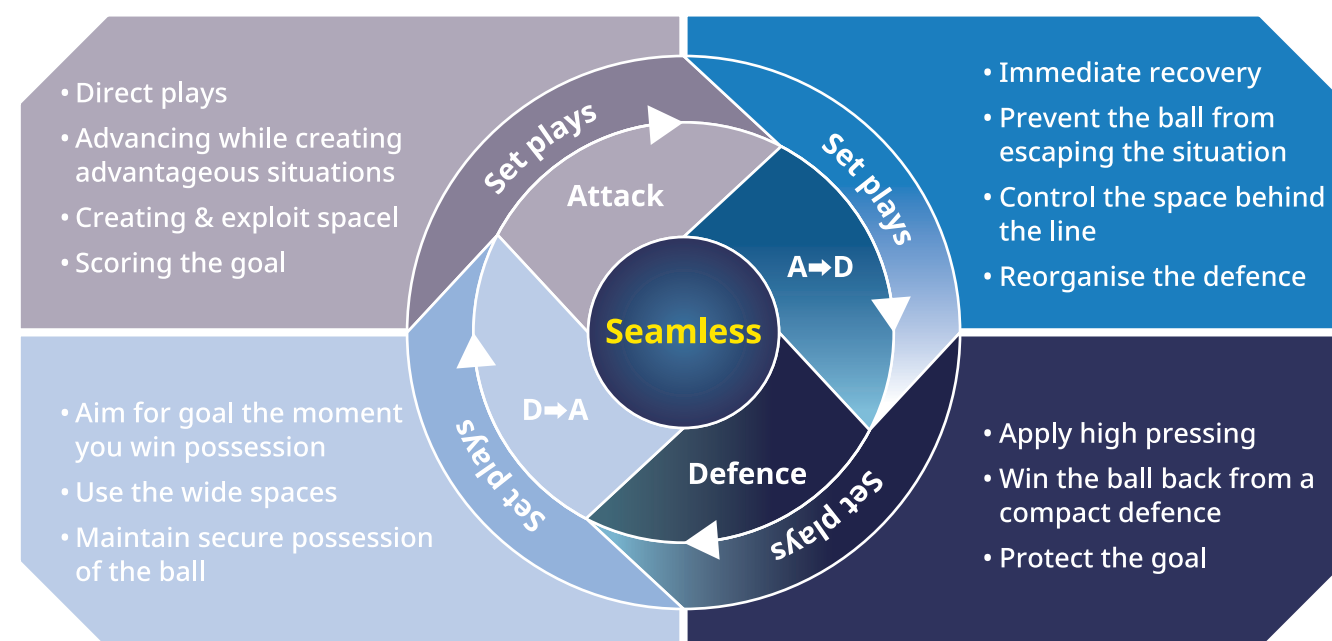


Our Play Vision for *Defence*

Guidelines for defensive Phases

Go to regain the ball for attacking

It is often said that the essence of football is lacking in Japanese football, with phrases like 'fine, as long as we don't get beaten,' and 'avoid physical contact...' frequently heard. While children just starting football would aggressively go to win the ball, the tendency to retreat passively without challenging for possession around a certain age is largely thought to be influenced by coaching. Given the ever-increasing importance of winning the ball in modern football, We'd like to emphasise the 'joy and brilliance of winning the ball' in defence.



1

The ball is most important

The ball is most important, so we want it back as soon as possible! Based on our individual potential, our ability to regain the ball as a team improves.

2

Compactness produces coordinated defence!

Keep pressure on the ball to make it easier to target and easier to regain.

3

Overwhelmingly fast transitions!

Switch to regaining the ball the moment it is lost.

4

Limit the opponent's freedom!

Put space and time pressure on the opponent while strengthen our defence.

5

Play proactively!

Anticipate the opponent's next move and the evolving situation and play to get ahead.

6

Proactive mentality!

Understand the ball, opponents and teammate's position and space on the pitch – then go for a bold steal at just the right time.



What is the play vision of Japan's Way

Compared to Japanese football in the past, both the number and quality of Japanese players excelling on the world stage have increased. Taking the next step forward is crucial!

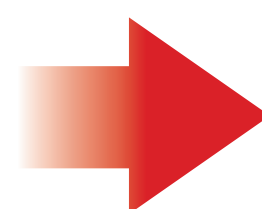


It is about developing players of an even higher quality and considering what style of play that would enable.



This is not about discussing how to win with this current squad.

Go beyond world standard



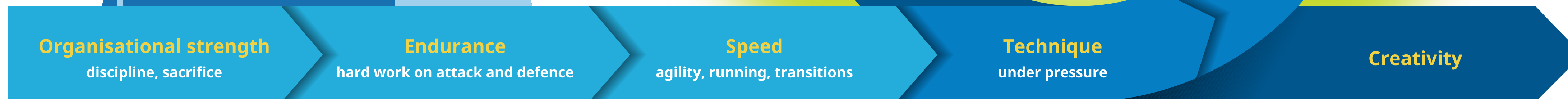
Toward world top standard

The Japan National Team Play Vision

Take our world-class individual strength, and combine with our organisational strength founded on a base of hard work to become the best in the world



international experience



The youth national team's objectives and expectations for the players towards the senior national team's playing vision

U-20	Professional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go beyond world top standard Individual adaptability and responsiveness with in the dynamics of team tactics
U-18&19	Scaling up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> World Top standardisation Integrating individual and team tactics within a higher intensity game
U-17	Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Competing at the world top standards The Fulfilment of Individual Weapons (The Perfection of the Individual) Awareness of National Team Identity
U-16	Introduction The start of team building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieving world standards. Quality amidst high intensity The Emergence of National Team Identity
U-15	Identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discovering distinctive players, expanding potential Encountering world standards (including suitable positions)



Ability to be acquired

Adaptability & Responsiveness

Drawing out the maximum potential of the players while adapting to opponents and circumstances to demonstrate their overall strength.

Overall capacity

Maximising individual potential within each club and team's playing model

Execution of team tactics

Demonstrate team strength as a collective of individuals at a high level

Mastery of Individual Tactics

Learn the principles of football based on a 1-4-4-2 formation and understand individual tasks

Thorough Implementation of Football Principles

The Importance of international competitions in the youth categories

Competing against the world's top players of the same age group clarifies one's own challenges and strengths against world standards, thereby facilitating growth.

Exposure to different football styles from diverse cultures leads to the diversification of one's own playing style.

Adaptability is also required when playing in diverse environments such as long-distance travel, time differences, and varying cultures and lifestyles, which contributes to mental fortitude and personal growth.

Deepening one's understanding of other cultures broadens one's horizons and fosters flexible thinking.

4. What makes an ideal player

- ▶ An ideal player for Japanese Football
- ▶ The ideal youth player
- ▶ Ideal Player of Japan's Way by positions



▶ INDEX

An ideal player for Japanese Football

The development of the J.League and the success of the national team have seen many outstanding players emerge, with most national players now playing for European clubs. Furthermore, players capable of competing on equal terms or better against the world have appeared, even in areas previously considered weaknesses for Japanese football, such as physical attributes (height, power, etc.) and winning the ball individually.

Moving forward, we believe that an increasing number of players competing for top-tier clubs worldwide, and their dedicated performances for the Japan national team, will bring us closer to achieving the goal of 'conquering the world' as stated in the JFA Declaration, 2005. With this in mind, we will consider the ideal player profile that Japanese football should strive to cultivate.



Changes in Game Quality

- For men, total running distance increased by 3% from 2018 to 2022, with high-intensity runs and sprints rising by 16-19%.
Preparation is needed to maintain high-intensity levels even in the 2nd half.
- For women, the importance of high-intensity running increased further from 2019 to 2023, while scoring opportunities decreased due to improved defensive organisation.
EURO 2024 saw teams cover over 115km in total of distance, with high-intensity runs (WD/WM/CF) directly influencing match results
- Clearances decreased while interceptions increased. The immediate effective counter-attack suppression persisted in these major tournaments
※(Based on comparisons of FIFA World Cups 2018 and 2022, Women's World Cups 2019 and 2023, UEFA EURO 2020 and 2024, and Women's EURO 2021 and 2025)

The essential qualities required of future players



Speed & Intensity & Quality

The ability to execute precise plays amidst high-intensity, high-speed offensive and defensive actions will become an increasingly crucial factor going forward. To achieve this, it is necessary to further enhance these elements.

- High football intelligence (tactical flexibility, responsiveness, adaptability)
- High technical ability (involving decision-making)
- High physical fitness

	Past	Present	Future
Distinctive elements	Simple attack and defence, swift vertical play	High Intensity and high speed The Importance of Immediate regain the ball	The integration of individual diversity and tactical approach
Tactical style	Fixed positions, defence centred on man-marking	Positionless play, zonal defence	Situational adaptability and flexible tactics, Self-directed decision-making
What is required of the players	Physical strength (height and power)	Endurance, sprinting, decision-making, teamwork, technique	Creativity, self-expression, and environmental adaptability

An increasing number of players are now able to perform at the highest level, having moved their everyday stage to the world's top clubs. Amidst a genuine pursuit of World Cup victory, the players themselves have begun to say: 'We're not aiming for world standard, we're aiming for world-top standard.'

MORIYASU Hajime head coach of Samurai Blue



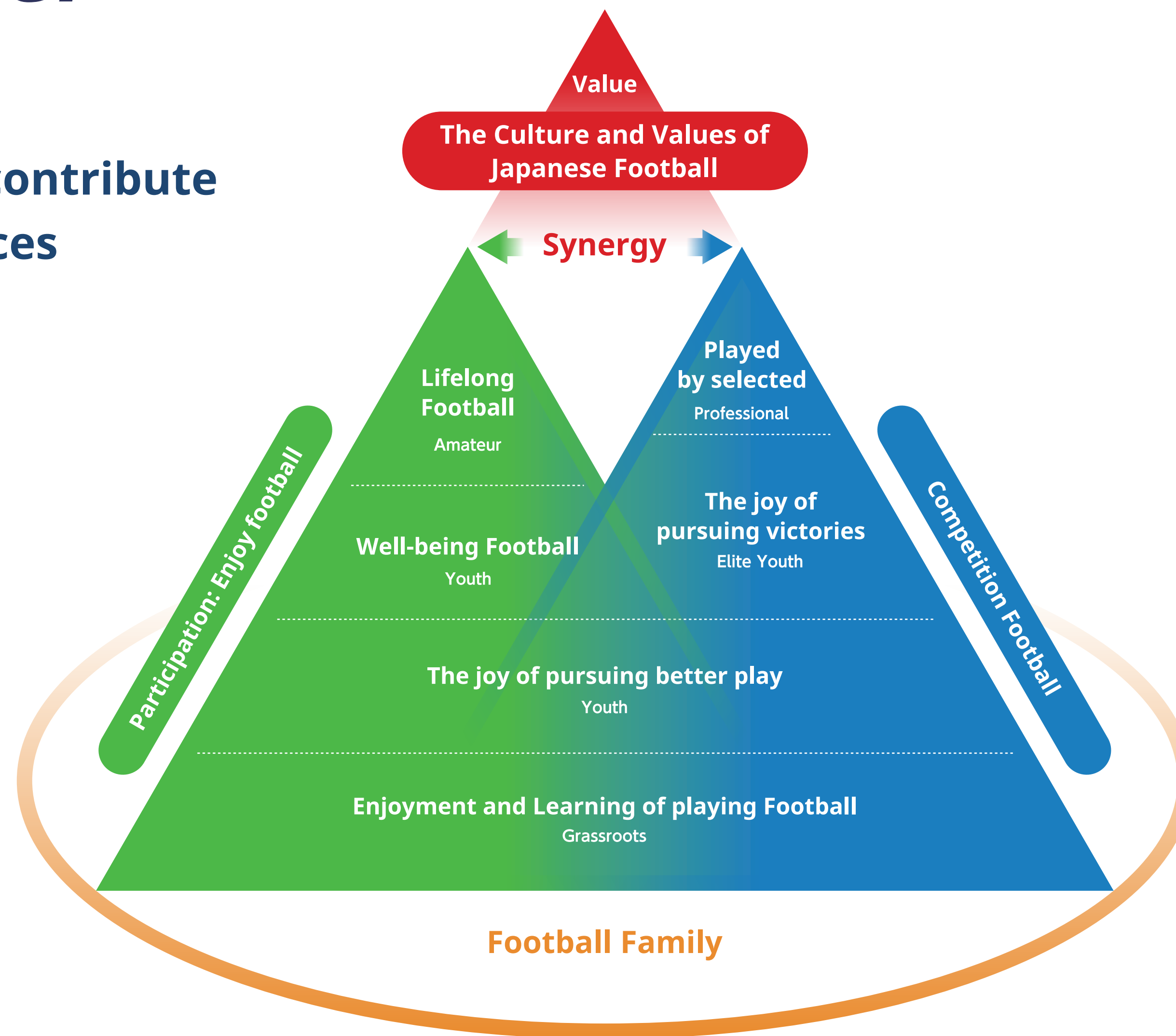
The ideal youth player

A player with unique competitive strength(individuality) who is able to contribute to the team in a variety of circumstances

【Adaptability and Mentality】

【Think, Run, Create, Adapt】

- A player who can demonstrate their strengths and individuality for the team wherever they go, under any head coach, system or tactics, rather than being developed through a specific team tactical approach.
- A player who values technique and understands the principles of play
- A player possessing the physical fitness and mentality to work hard in any situation.
- A player capable of independent decision-making who can balance tactical requirements with individual expression.



Thirty years have passed since the J.League's inception, and children have embraced new dreams while striving daily to compete at ever higher levels.

Players aspiring to excel professionally and compete on the world stage are developing ever more distinct characteristics, individuality, and unique strengths.

When such players achieve "harmony" within their team, playing with mutual respect, each individual's character will eventually shine brighter as a team strength.

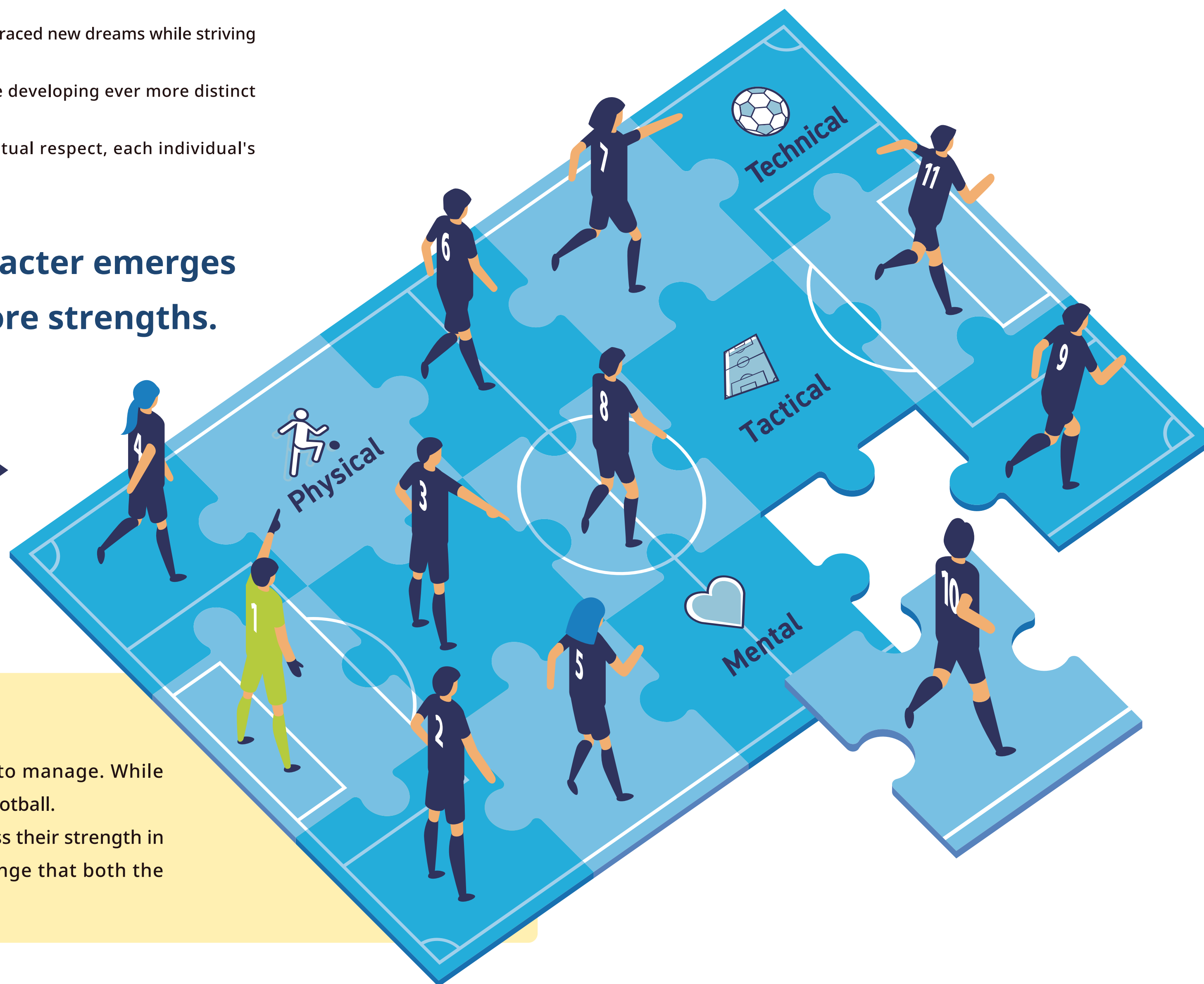
Players with a never-seen-before character emerges to create a team with never-seen-before strengths.

Turning characteristics
into strengths

Extraordinary talent

Players with extraordinary talent can sometimes be difficult to manage. While individuality is important, extreme egoism is not part of Japan Football.

That is why we need strong coaches to help these players express their strength in the team without curbing their unique talent. This is a challenge that both the players and coaches need to face for further growth.



What makes an ideal player?

Goalkeeper



Tactical

- Accurate monitoring and decision-making in all four phases of the game
- Hazard Identification and Risk Management
- Effectively start the attack
- Accurate positioning and timing

Attack

- Accurate passing (precision, distance, right & left foot)
- Support & control
- Throwing

Defense

- Stopping shots
- Defence against the opponent's crossing
- Through-passes, 1 v 1

Technical

Mental

- A demeanour that gives the team a sense of security
- Full concentration that allows no momentary lapse
- Cool-headed play at all times
- Leadership
- Ability to communicate with whole team
- Never give up
- Rebound mentality

- Speed & power
- Quick reaction and high coordination
- Fit to play in top form during the entire game

Physical

The role of the goalkeeper in protecting the goal is paramount. In recent years, their responsibilities have expanded to include greater involvement in attack. Beyond defence, their role as "goal players" who contribute effectively across all four phases of play to secure team victories has grown significantly.

*SAMURAI BLUE player photographs feature those with the highest cumulative playing time per position in the FIFA World Cup Asian second qualifying round and final qualifying round. Nadeshiko Japan player photographs were selected based on total caps and recent international tournament appearances.

Player profiles for each position: Embrace diverse styles regardless of the individual player characteristics outlined!

What makes an ideal player?

Full Back



Tactical

Attack
Good timing at joining attack

Attack → **Defense**
Aware of balance when on the ball (risk management)

Defense
Support the centre backs and mid-fielders when off the ball

Defense → **Attack**
Join the attack while anticipating play progression or balance out the back

Technical

Attack

- Drive and stabilize the attack with accurate passing and adequate dribbling
- Provide sharp and accurate crosses into the penalty box
- Secure enough width to advance according to the game situation and team tactics
- Accurate control under limited space and time pressure

Defense

- Apply fast pressing and delay the opponent's advance
- Gain the ball in 1v1
- Predict the opponent's attack and intercept passes

Mental

- Communicate with team on both attack & defence
- Toughness repeatedly join attack while supporting defensive line
- Positive attitude to keep running on the attack even if a pass does not come

Physical

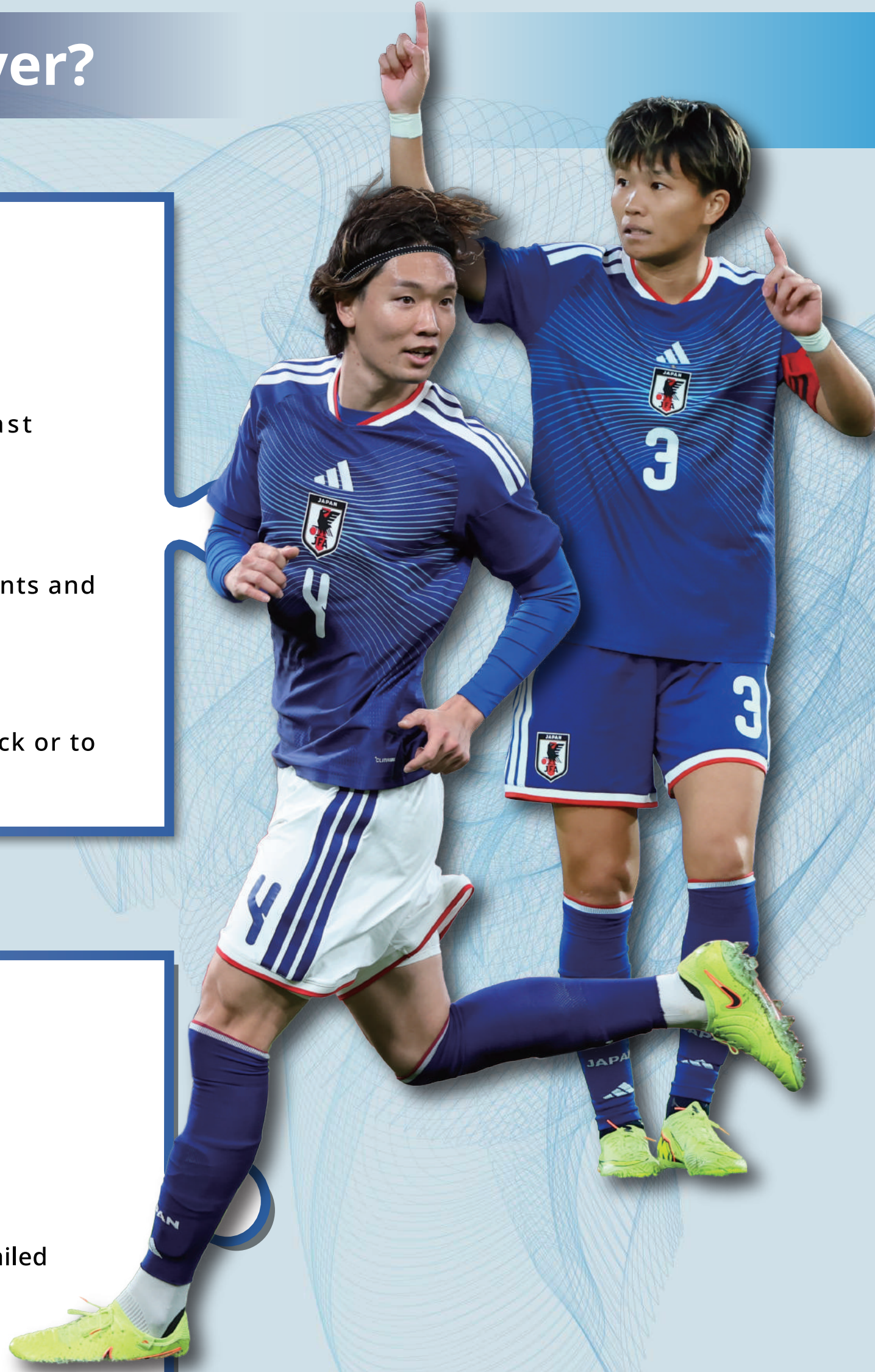
- Able to run up and down the field the whole game on attack and defence
- Able to meet and exceed fast opponents
- Mobility to shift to any direction
- Able to beat opponents in 1v1

Player profiles for each position: Embrace diverse styles regardless of the individual player characteristics outlined!

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What makes an ideal player?

Central Defender



Tactical

Attack
Support and positioning to stabilize the attack

Attack → **Defense**
Manage the back space to prevent a fast counterattack

Defense
Positioning that interferes with the opponents and prevents plays on goal

Defense → **Attack**
Decide whether to quickly move up for attack or to stabilise from the back

Technical

Attack

- Drive and stabilize with attack with a range of passes suited to the playing area
- Build attack by dribbling towards space
- Accurate control under limited space and time pressure
- Heading techniques to score a goal during set plays

Defense

- Gain the ball in 1v1
- Deflect the opponent's long shots and crosses with heading
- Predict the opponent's attack and intercept forward and behind the line passes
- Eliminate a space in front of the goal and prevent goals through tackling

Mental

- Leadership that supports the team
- Never allow opponent a goal
- Maintain composure even under pressure
- Quick recovers after an opponent's goal or failed play

Physical

- Able to face down opposing forwards
- Speed to handle running opponents
- Reaction speed and agility to respond to opponent movement
- Able to jump high enough to win aerial duels

Player profiles for each position: Embrace diverse styles regardless of the individual player characteristics outlined!

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What makes an ideal player?

Central MF



Tactical

Attack
Create space, position to create over-number situation

Attack → **Defense**
Block opponent's advance to prevent a counterattack

Defense
Block the opponent's advance while seeking for the appropriate timing to press

Defense → **Attack**
Balance the state of the field and join the attack when possible

Technical

Attack

- Receive the ball even under space and time pressure
- Able to make a variety of passes in response to various situations

Defense

- Regain the ball in 1v1
- Anticipate and intercept the opponent's attack
- Quickly shift between supporting the defensive line and mid-field
- Catch the opponent off guard and tackle to regain the ball

Mental

- Devote oneself to the team and keep running the entire game
- Effective communication to lead the team
- Maintain composure under pressure
- Ball-hungry on attack and defence
- Composure even under unfavorable conditions

Physical

- Able to run up & down and across the pitch the entire game on attack and defence
- Able to face down opponents physically
- Quick respond and reposition for changing situations

Player profiles for each position: Embrace diverse styles regardless of the individual player characteristics outlined!

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What makes an ideal player?

Attacking MF



Tactical

Attack
Position between the lines to gain free time and space for an advance on goal

Attack → **Defense**
Quickly close down on the ball and delay the opponent

Defense
Resolutely press the opponent and regain the ball or delay their play

Defense → **Attack**
Predict the situation and get forward quickly to receive the ball

Technical

Attack

- Able to score goals under limited space and time pressure
- Make a variety of passes to create goal-scoring opportunities
- Receive the ball under space and time pressure
- Break through the opponent's defence line in 1v1

Defense

- Actively press the opponent's defensive line
- Support the forwards and mid-fielders as required

Mental

- Unafraid to receive the ball under space and time pressure
- Ready to go on attack as many times as needed
- Hungry to score the goal
- When the ball is lost, ready to immediately get it back

Physical

- Speed to chase the ball or press the opponent
- Agility for quick movement under space and time pressure
- Able to make sprints repeatedly
- Able to face down powerful opponents

Player profiles for each position: Embrace diverse styles regardless of the individual player characteristics outlined!

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What makes an ideal player?

Wide MF



Tactical

Attack
Secure width to make a play on goal

Attack → **Defense**
Chase the ball and delay the opponent's attack

Defense
Regain the ball by quick press and hinder the opponent's play

Defense → **Attack**
Anticipate the situation and go forward quickly or support with width as required

Technical

Attack

- Able to score goals under limited space and time pressure
- Deliver sharp, accurate crosses in the box
- Receive the ball between the line or from wide position according to the opponent's position
- Break through the opponent's defence in 1v1

Defense

- Actively press the opponent's defence line
- Catch the opponent off guard and tackle to regain the ball
- Support DF and MF

Mental

- Unafraid to receive the ball under space and time pressure
- Ready to go on attack as many times as needed
- Hungry to score the goal
- When the ball is lost, ready to immediately get it back

Physical

- Speed to break through or press the opponent's defensive line
- Ability to quickly change direction even at full speed
- Stamina for repeated sprints
- Able to face down powerful opponents

Player profiles for each position: Embrace diverse styles regardless of the individual player characteristics outlined!

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What makes an ideal player? Striker Central Forward



Tactical

Attack
Good timing at attacking a position to score a goal

Attack → **Defense**
Close down on the ball and delay the opponent's attack

Defense
quickly close down on the opponents with a quick press

Defense → **Attack**
Target space behind the opponent's line, or position to receive a forward pass

Technical

Attack

- Able to make a shot on goal with few touches under space and time pressure
- Able to keep control of the ball even when marked by the opponent
- Able to score by heading a cross ball
- Able to make an accurate pass to teammates with few touches on the ball

Defense

- Actively press the opponent's line
- Pursue the opponent and tackle to regain the ball
- Support the defenders and mid-fielders

Mental

- Strong desire to score a goal
- Ability to keep trying
- Always cool-headed and ready to play boldly in the penalty box

Physical

- Able to physically face down powerful opponents
- Speed to break through or to pressurise the opponent's defence
- Able to receive a cross ball for a shot on goal
- Speed to outrun opponents

Player profiles for each position: Embrace diverse styles regardless of the individual player characteristics outlined!

*SAMURAI BLUE player photographs feature those with the highest cumulative playing time per position in the FIFA World Cup Asian second qualifying round and final qualifying round. Nadeshiko Japan player photographs were selected based on total caps and recent international tournament appearances.

5.Talent ID

- ▶ Japan's youth development for the future
- ▶ Talent ID
- ▶ Interpretation and Definition of Talent ID in Japanese Football
- ▶ The development of players is unique to each individual.
- ▶ Key stages of growth
- ▶ Ideal state of elite youth



Japan's youth development for the future

In youth development, which shapes the future of Japanese football, a proper understanding of talent ID is essential.

Around the world, talent ID is practised based on diverse philosophies and methodologies. Within Japanese football too, a paradigm shift is required to re-evaluate how we engage with players. This concept is precisely the core principle that will underpin the future of Japanese football.



Talent ID

The Modern Approach to Talent ID

The contemporary approach to Talent Identification and Development (TID) is not solely about selecting “talented youngsters” early on and training them intensively.

Rather, it places greater emphasis on creating an environment where children can enjoy sport for the long term and develop within it. Consequently, support systems are established for athletes who do not make the selection teams or who take a break from the sport, thereby preventing dropout.

By doing so, children will be able to excel not only in sport but also in life. What matters is guidance tailored to each individual. Talent is not predetermined at birth; it is drawn out through physical development, mindset, and environment. Talent is not only reserved for exceptional children. Every child possesses potential, manifesting in different forms. It is by us coaches providing appropriate challenges and support, and creating a safe space for them to take risks, that a child's abilities can develop most effectively. Talent Identification involves recognising the signs of a child's latent potential. It requires observing aspects that are difficult to quantify, such as flashes of inspiration during play, tenacity, and a willingness to learn.

Talent Development involves creating an environment where that potential can flourish. This includes appropriate training tasks, an atmosphere where children feel safe to challenge themselves, and support from teammates and family. Talent is not viewed as a fixed quality, but rather as a long-term, comprehensive, individualised, dynamic process rooted in socio-cultural context.

Overview and Comparison of Talent ID

Paradigm Shift in Talent ID: Comparative Analysis of Traditional and Contemporary Models

	Conventional Talent ID	Modern Talent ID
Selection Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early selection of a small number of “talented players” • Emphasis on indicators such as physique and speed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible assessment for a wide range of players • Talent is viewed as something that evolves
After the selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once removed, hardly any follow-up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the potential for late development • Support to enable continued participation in sport
Pathway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extremely limited options • Prone to leading to dropout from sport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide multiple exit points • Re-attempting higher levels, etc.
Support system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rely on ‘the individual's own efforts’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse support
Fundamental approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talent = innate and fixed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talent = Potential for continuous growth • Emphasis on ongoing observation and development

Interpretation and Definition of Talent ID in Japanese Football

Interpretation of Talent ID

Talent ID in Japanese football represents a comprehensive and continuous process: identify = diagnosing (discovering, identifying, selecting) the unique aptitudes possessed by every child and providing an optimally tailored development environment to maximise their potential.

Development is not a one-way approach like the traditional "teaching" or "coaching". It values the dignity and potential of each individual child. Rather than selecting limited talent, it seeks to discover and nurture the unique aptitudes inherent in all children, supporting the realisation of their dreams and their lives.

We wish to advance Talent ID in Japanese football as illustrated in the diagram.

Talent Identification & Development



The value inherent in every child, unique to each individual



Discovering, recognising and nurturing each child's aptitudes



Drawing out each child's aptitudes, creating appropriate environments and providing support

Identification

Five pillars of Identification



Development

Five pillars of Development



The development of players is unique to each individual.

Potential and performance

Precisely predicting how an athlete's physique and physical abilities will develop during their growth stages is no easy task. Furthermore, a player's performance is significantly influenced not only by technique but also by physical factors such as speed and strength. Therefore, when evaluating performance during the developmental years, it is crucial to constantly bear in mind the premise that 'current superiority or inferiority can change considerably over time'.

For example, players with larger physiques or extensive football experience may appear to perform better at a given moment compared to others. However, football technique can be significantly improved through practice, and differences in experience can be fully overcome.

Physical stature also undergoes significant changes throughout the growth period.

Therefore, it is extremely difficult to discern a player's true "potential" based solely on short-term assessments. Yet, this very difficulty is what makes supporting players during their developmental years so rewarding, and it is crucial that the adults involved demonstrate both breadth and depth of character.

To understand individual developmental stages

While it is common to divide developmental stages by age, significant individual variation in development actually exists.

Being tall does not necessarily mean one is at a more advanced stage of development; judging solely by age or physique is insufficient.

Therefore, Peak Height Velocity (PHV) is used as one indicator to assess an individual's developmental stage.

This method evaluates the peak growth period based on the annual increase in height.

▶ PHV (Peak Height Velocity): The period of most rapid height growth

(7–9 cm per year)

▶ Timing of onset: Boys typically experience this between 12 and 13 years old

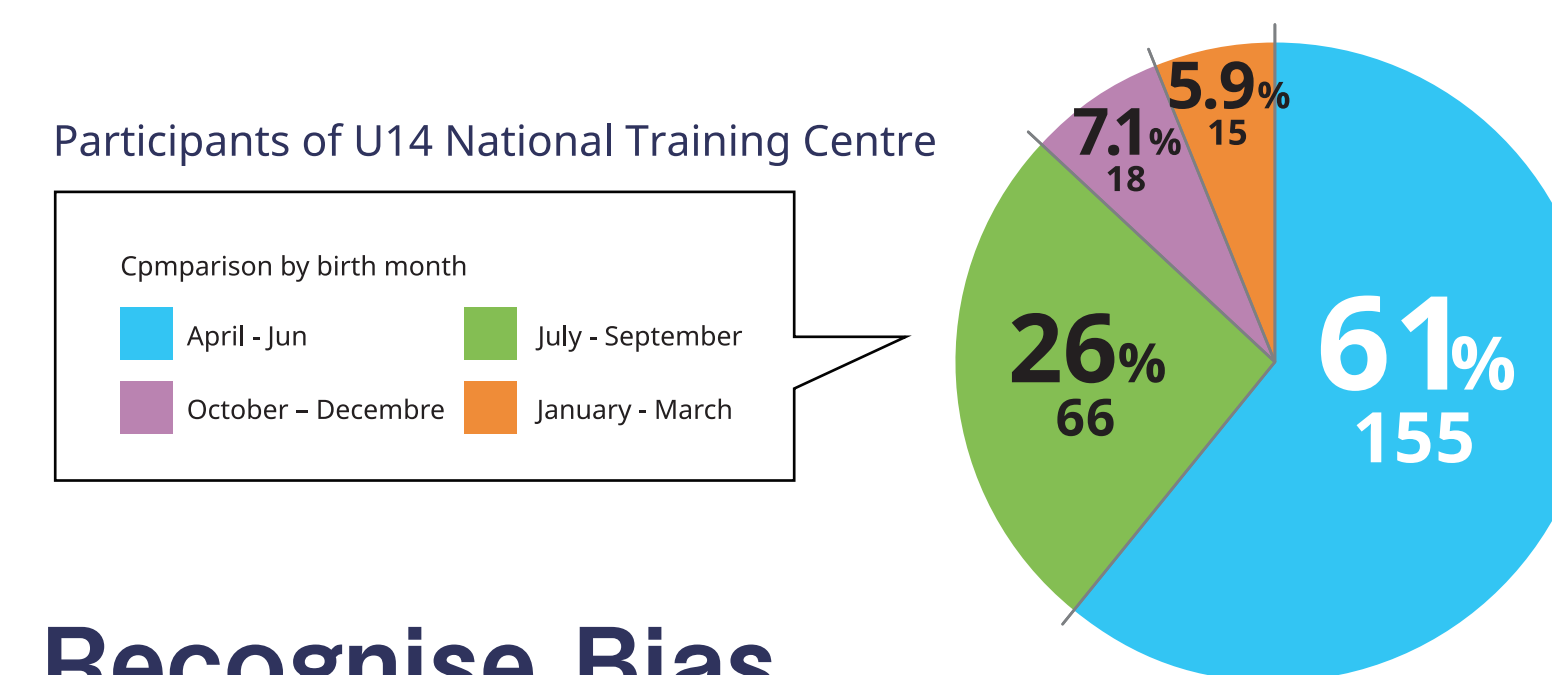
※with variation from as early as 10 to as late as 16 years old. Girls experience it approximately two years earlier than boys.

By classifying developmental stages based on this PHV period and the phases immediately preceding and following it, it becomes possible to understand growth in a way that is tailored to the individual.

Adjusting training content and volume according to the developmental stage reduces the risk of injury and enables the provision of optimal training for the player.

Relative Age Effect

Children born earlier in the same school year gain physical and psychological advantages, making them more likely to be evaluated and selected in sports and academic pursuits. This is recognised as a global challenge, with research and practical measures being undertaken to overcome it.



Recognise Bias

When making judgements, the unconscious tendencies, preconceptions, and skewed perspectives that creep in are referred to as "bias". In other words, it is a state where one's judgement becomes skewed by one's own experiences, emotions, habits, or the influence of those around them, despite the matter requiring neutral consideration. In football,

- Players of larger stature are often labelled as having "great potential"
- The abilities of players born earlier in the year are underestimated (relative age effect)
- Initial impressions lead to a fixed evaluation of a player (primacy effect)

such biases can occur.

By remaining constantly aware of these biases, we can further expand a player's potential.

The application of IDP

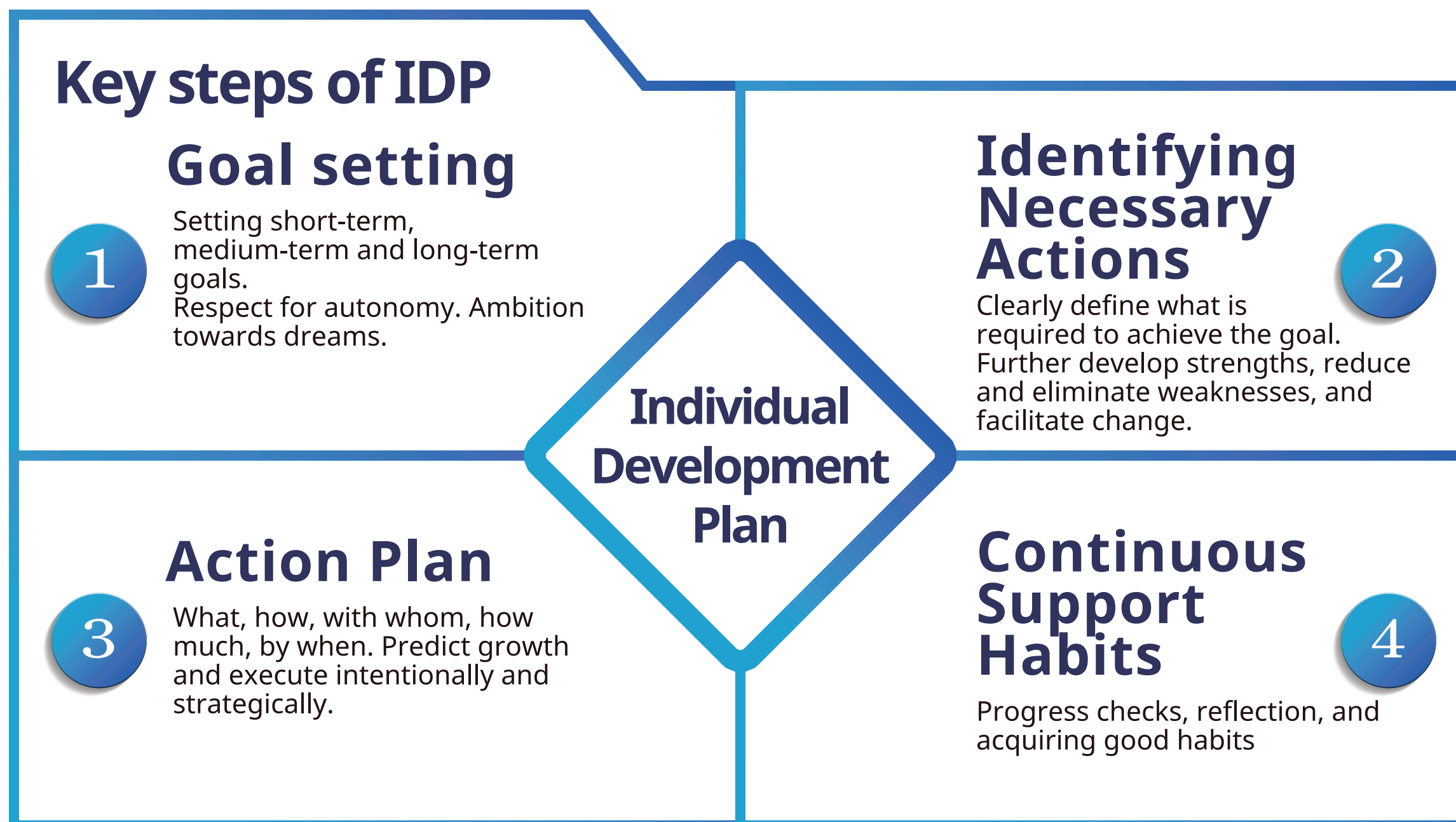
IDP

Individual Development Plan

Case of elite youth development

Each player possesses unique characteristics, strengths, areas for development, and differing paces of growth. One player may wish to enhance their techniques, while another might lack the ability to make calm decisions in challenging situations.

At IDP, we prioritise the player's ownership of their development. Based on each player's profile (covering technical ability, tactical understanding, mindset, and more), we continuously support individual growth through a [four-step process cycle](#).



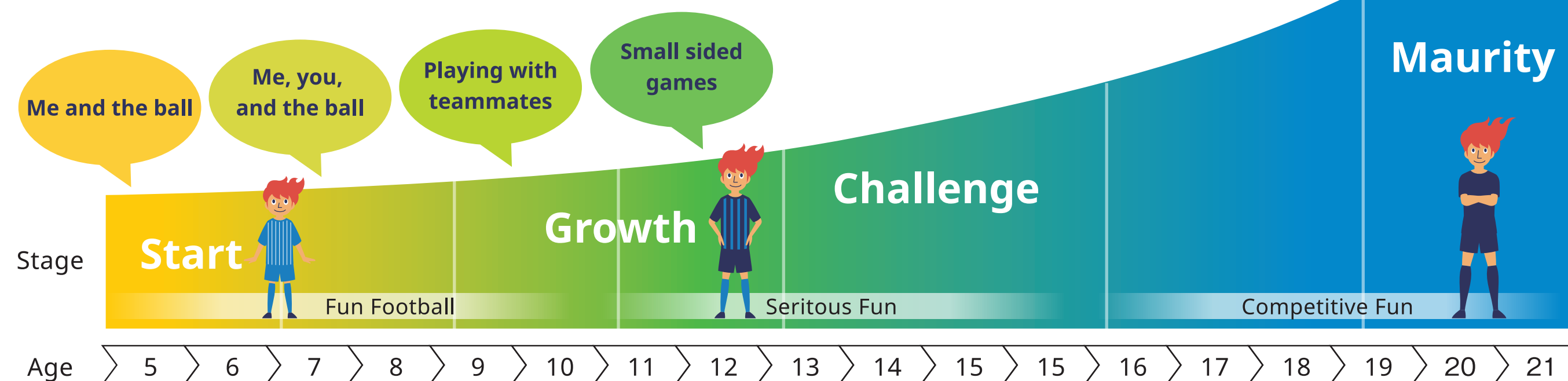
Key stages of growth

Experiences tailored to various circumstances

ピッチマネージャーの役割

At every age group, we want players to love football and play with vitality. We want them to gradually expand what they can express through their play and enjoy football at their own level. From this, we hope to develop players who can utilise their strengths for the benefit of the team. To achieve this, it is vital that we adults create an environment tailored to the characteristics of each age group as children encounter and learn football.

This is because children develop at different paces, requiring experiences and stimuli appropriate to their stage of development. Games are one such example. Can a game played by U6 and U12 kids, using the same pitch size and number of players, truly provide appropriate experience and stimulation? Games during the developmental years become a means to develop players. To ensure players can grow significantly in the future, we recommend small-sided games (games with adjusted numbers and pitch size based on players' age and physical size) up to U12 level. Please note that the age ranges for each category represent average ages only; actual individual differences exist



JFA Small-Sided-Game Guideline

	U6	U7-8	U9-10
Number	3v3(no GK)	4v4(no GK)	5v5(no GK)
Pitch size	20m × 10m	25m × 15m	35m × 25m
Goal size	2x1m(Cone & Bar OK)	2x1m(Cone & Bar OK)	3x2m(Futsal)
Penalty Area	-	-	6x15m(6m from goal post)
Ball	Size 3	Size 3	Size 4
Time	5min x 2	5min x 2	7min x 2
Max.time per player/day	30 min.	40 min.	60 min.
Re-start	Dribble or kick in	Dribble or kick in	Dribble or kick or throw in (depend on the game)
Restart after the goal	From goal line	From Goal line	From Goal line (GK kick/throw)
Goal kick	Opponent is 3m away from kick-in point	Opponent is 3m away from kick in-point	Opponent is 3m away from kick-in point
Off side	NA	NA	NA
Fair play	facilitate	facilitate	facilitate

Physical and mental characteristics by age group and games


Young children are egocentric and highly curious. In games, they prioritise their relationship with the ball.

U6 and U7 kids have a high motivation to move their bodies and acquire basic movements. They begin to be aware of cooperating with teammates.

U8 and U9 kids develop abstract thinking and individuality begins to emerge. Intentional passing and support play become apparent.

STEP 1

Start
age 5-8



Football and sport are great fun!

Fundamental

Points for identification

Evaluation of Talent


- 1 Ambition: The natural desire to improve
- 2 Inquisitiveness: The ability to discover the world through interaction with a ball
- 3 Instinctive drive to move: The innate joy of physical activity
- 4 Curiosity: A strong desire to learn, asking 'Why? How?'
- 5 Concentration: The ability to become absorbed in things of interest
- 6 Initiative: An attitude of actively engaging with things one enjoys
- 7 Copying ability: The learning capacity to reproduce observed movements

Stimulating enjoyment and curiosity

- Demonstrate diverse movements to support children's imitative learning
- Ensure ample time for free interaction with balls
- Recognise small successes and monitor children's progress
- Create an environment where children can acquire fundamental skills through play-based elements
- Carefully observe each child's individual interests and engagement

STEP 2

Growth
age 9-12



Football has become even more exciting!

Learning

Points for identification (Four Fundamental Characteristics)

Diagnosing Talent Aptitude

- 1 Technical Acquisition Ability: The period when physical memory consolidation is most efficient
- 2 Physical Movement Coordination: The ability to integrate individual actions and achieve fluid movement
- 3 Competitive Spirit: The natural development of healthy competitiveness and motivation to improve
- 4 Communication Ability: The ability to cooperate with peers and facilitate mutual understanding


Points for development (Environmental design)

encourage the understanding and mastery of the basics

- Accept that growth rates vary greatly from person to person, and respect everyone's individual pace
- Create a positive atmosphere, seeing them not as 'impossible' but as 'not yet possible'
- Provide a setting where children can experience both competition and cooperation
- Respect children's views and support their independent initiatives
- Foster a culture that treats failure as a learning opportunity

STEP 3

Challenge
Age 13-17



I want to find my own style of football!

Self-Establishment Phase

Points for identification (6 Fundamental Characteristics)

Identification of Elite Aptitude

- 1 Self-expression: Establishing a playing style that leverages individuality
- 2 Adaptability: The ability to respond to physical changes and develop new abilities
- 3 Tactical Understanding: The mental capacity to oversee the entire game and analyse situations
- 4 Leadership: The ability to contribute to the team in diverse ways
- 5 Perseverance: The mental fortitude to overcome difficulties and pursue long-term goals
- 6 Future Planning: The ability to consider life direction through football

Creating an Environment of Competition and Challenge

- Foster an environment where temporary discomfort due to physical changes is accepted as part of the growth process
- Support the formation of individual values and prioritise opportunities for dialogue
- Observe and encourage challenges through diverse tasks that allow creativity to flourish
- Support the development of self-understanding and a sense of responsibility through mentoring juniors

Ideal state of elite youth

1. What are elite youth?

Determination and Challenge to become a Professional Footballer

From the ages of 13 to 17, the identification and selection of elite players is consciously undertaken.

Players voluntarily determine to become professional footballers, and their challenge to achieve this begins.

This group constitutes the elite youth players.

The original meaning of the word "elite" refers to individuals who are leaders and servants in their respective fields of society, possessing both a firm ethical compass and a spirit of social service. Whilst it is a term that often evokes strong resistance within Japanese society, we consider it the mission of the football world to nurture individuals who become true elites in this genuine sense.

Decision-making and leadership in football translate into powers that thrive in society. We aspire to nurture leaders who will support not only the football world but society as a whole in the future.

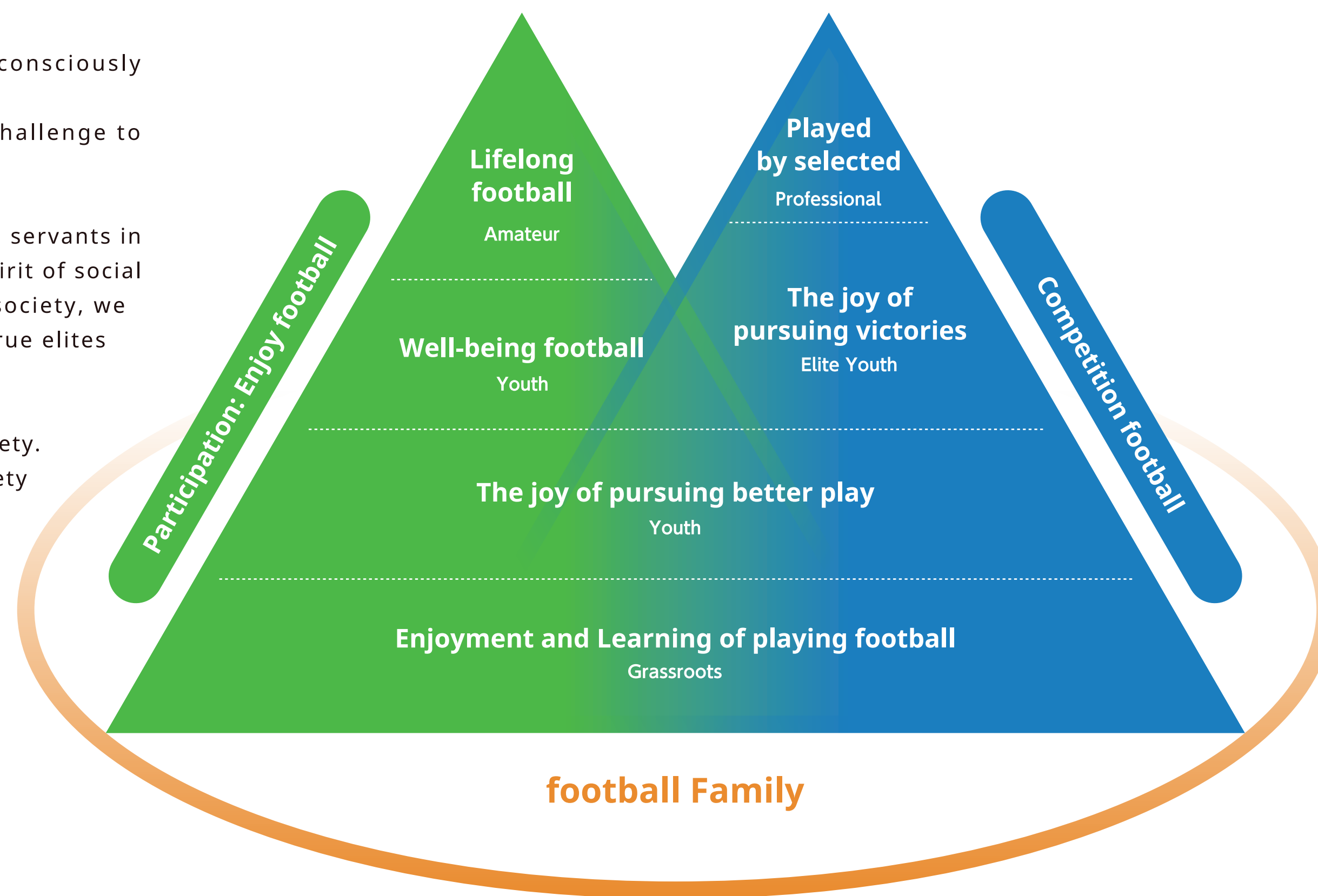
We believe this will elevate both sides of the double pyramid.

Japan boasts diverse youth organisations, including professional club academies, school clubs, town clubs, and the JFA Academy, which have nurtured numerous elite players to date. We are committed to firmly establishing the philosophy of Japan's elite youth development: 'producing players who can lead, support, and respect those around them.'

"Players develop by design, and not by chance
You can just wait and hope that a few good
players turn up. But you might wait forever."



(Andy Roxburgh, AFC Technical Director)



What elite youth should be like

2. The Development Environment for Elite Youth Players and the Ideal Player Profile

To win the World Cup by 2050, Japan must further enhance its competitive prowess.

The concept of elite youth development, which involves the deliberate cultivation of numerous elite players, is crucial to this improvement.

Elite youth programmes focus on individualised development, aiming to consistently produce players who make their professional debut at 16 or 17, earn selection for the senior national team while still teenagers, and go on to excel in the world's top leagues.

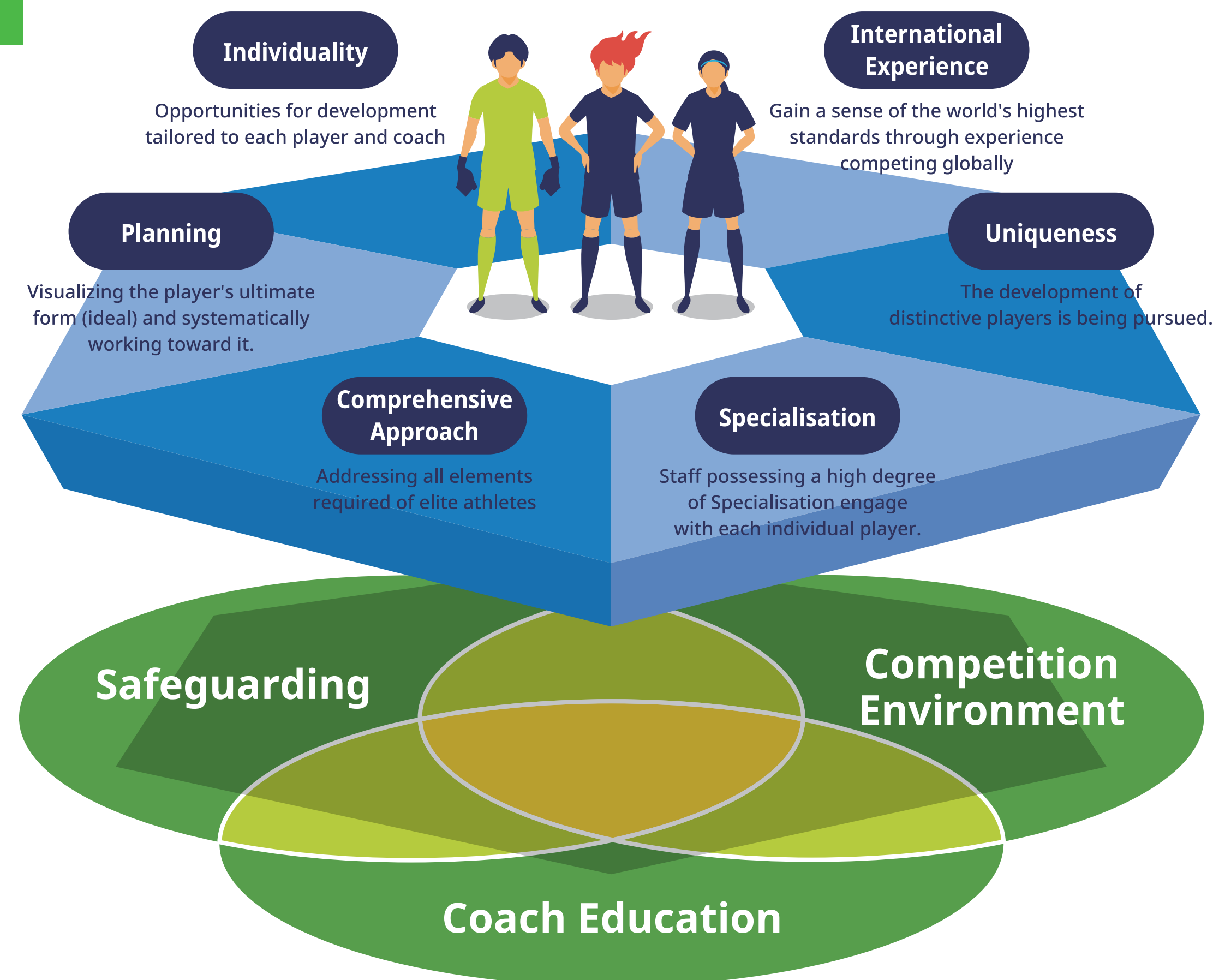
Simultaneously, it seeks to develop individuals capable of leading, supporting, and respecting those around them.

Consequently, the programme aims to produce as many individuals as possible who can contribute to society. By excelling in various professions, including professional football, these individuals will, through their respective life activities, contribute to the happiness of people.

The Elite Youth Player Profile Japan Football Aims For

- Players capable of turning professional as early as 16 or 17 years of age
- Players selected for the senior national team during their teens
- Players capable of excelling in the world's top leagues
- Players who can contribute not only to football but to society
- Players who can enjoy football throughout their lives

Five Characteristics and Three Environments for Player Development in Elite Youth Football



6. The Future of Physical Fitness

- ▶ 'Japan is physically weak' is a thing of the past.
- ▶ Science contributes to improving physical fitness!
- ▶ Physical fitness programs tailored to individual needs
- ▶ Recovery is the ultimate training



'Japan is physically weak' is a thing of the past.

What physical attributes are necessary for Japanese football to win the World Cup?

The physicality of Japanese football was once considered weak. Now, however, more players are competing confidently in Europe's top five leagues, using speed and power as their weapons. Meanwhile, the intensity and pace of world football continue to increase. Although the physical gap is narrowing, Japanese football will continue to evolve.

Training that integrates technical and tactical understanding

Particularly during the youth developmental years, it is vital to acquire physical attributes linked to tactical understanding, incorporating technique and contact. 'When, where, and how to move?' Improving physical fitness within the context of football movements is essential.

For example, speed...


Pure speed is of course important. What is more important is "when, where, and how to utilise that speed?"



Science contributes to improving physical fitness!


While football has many aspects science cannot explain, science undoubtedly helps improve physical fitness.

Enhancing literacy and properly executing the process of planning and implementing efficient training is the fastest way to boost players' physical performance!




Physical Literacy

- The ability to use one's body skillfully and an understanding of movement and physical activity
- A deeper understanding of performance delivery



Science Literacy

- The ability to think scientifically and make decisions based on scientific evidence
- The ability to make better choices from a scientific perspective



Data Literacy

- The ability to correctly understand and effectively utilise data
- The ability to develop logical and persuasive reasoning and explanations

Literacy makes training more effective and efficient



Physical fitness programs tailored to individual needs

It is essential to clearly establish the concepts of “movement development” and “physical conditioning” starting from the developmental age.

Each player possesses unique characteristics.

Understanding and analysing each individual's stage of growth appropriately leads to injury prevention and performance enhancement across various levels and age groups.

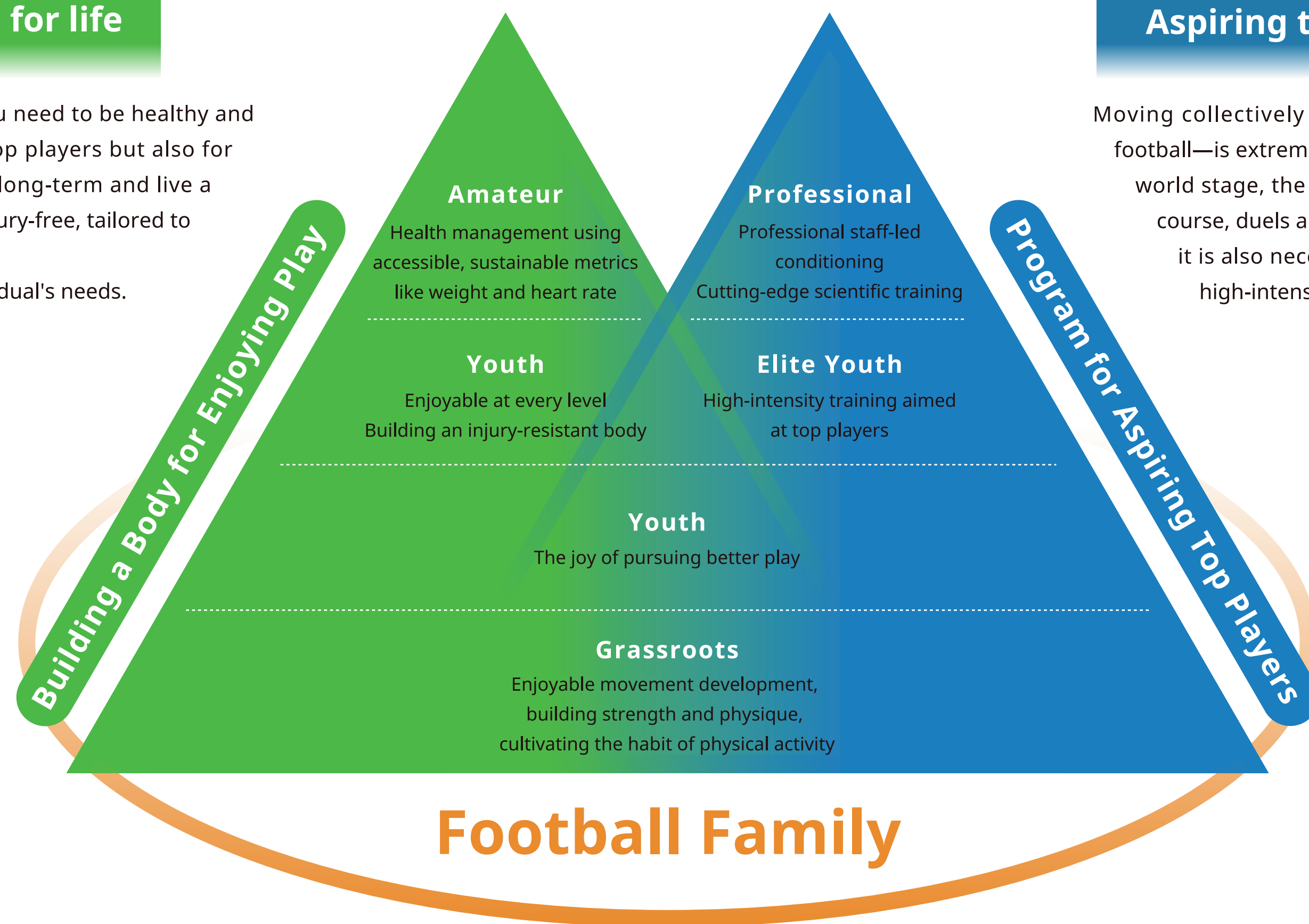
who enjoys football for life

“To enjoy the football you love, you need to be healthy and fit...” It's important not only for top players but also for anyone wanting to enjoy football long-term and live a fulfilling life to build their bodies injury-free, tailored to their level.

Let's try training that fits each individual's needs.

Aspiring to become top players

Moving collectively and fully utilising technique—a strength of Japanese football—is extremely important. On the other hand, when competing on the world stage, the demands become more physical amid high intensity. Of course, duels are unavoidable. To win duels, win the ball, and score goals, it is also necessary to increase power and speed, and to enhance the high-intensity athletic ability required to repeat these actions.



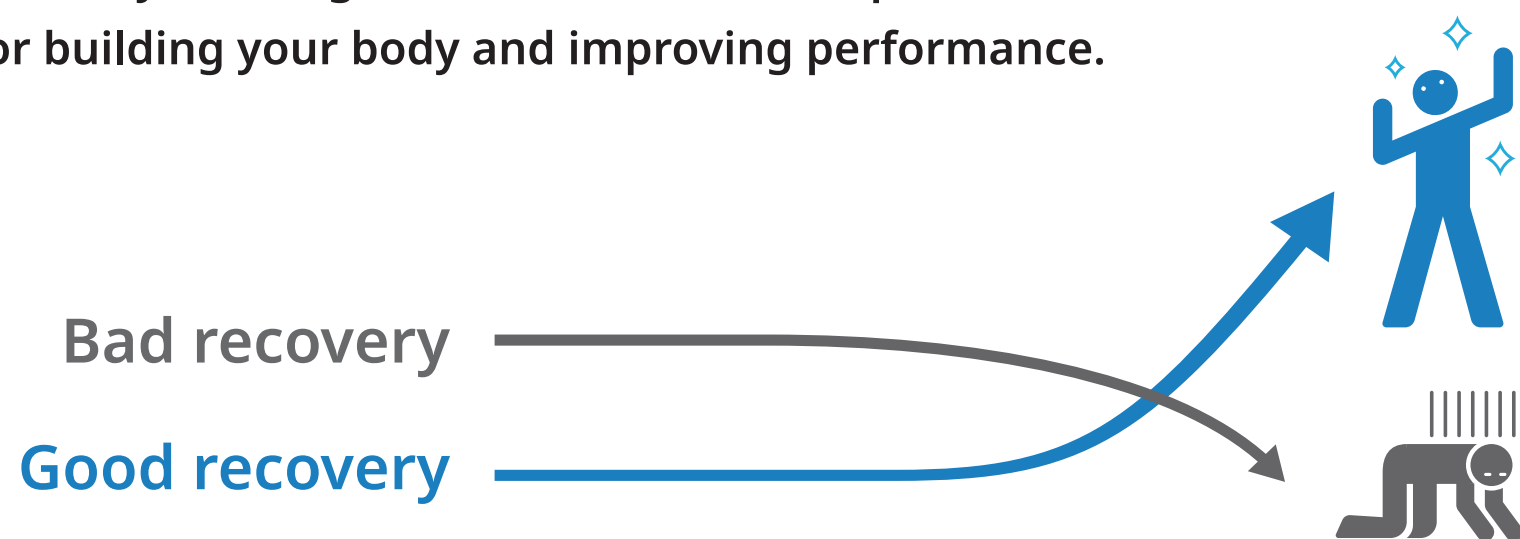
The world's top players achieve such physical capabilities by executing nutrition, sleep, and other factors at a high level, in addition to their planned training.

Recovery is the ultimate training

If you truly want to get stronger, you must also seriously commit to how you eat and how you rest.

Recovery is essential to Maximise training effects!




Recovery means regaining strength after fatigue. Not only training, but also diet and sleep are essential for building your body and improving performance.



Also in youth development, introduce off-seasons.

Embrace the concept of an “off-season”—a designated period within the annual schedule to step away from competition—and refresh both mind and body. Don't be afraid to rest; have the courage to take a break.

Examples from other countries

-  → 1-2 months of complete rest (winter break, summer break)
-  → Clearly plan off-seasons within the annual cycle
-  → Pre-season → Season → Off-season

(UEFA Elite Youth Development Program, FIFA Technical Reports)

7. The future football coaches

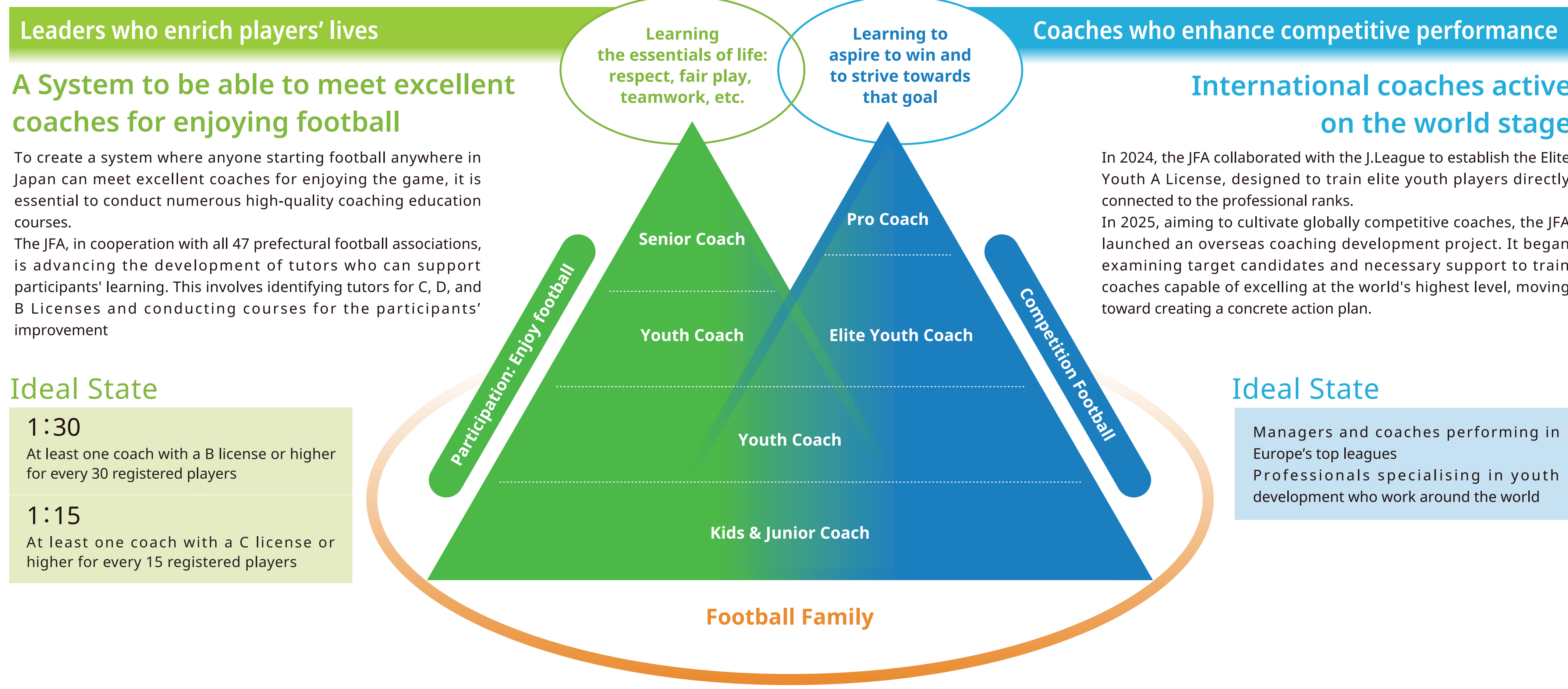
- ▶ The future football coaches
- ▶ Divers Pathways for coaches
- ▶ The ideal coach's attitude
- ▶ Football players improve by playing football



Divers Pathways for coaches

- People with no coaching experience
- People who want to enjoy football with their children
- People with special experience as players
- People who, though without experience, possess outstanding coaching ability through talent and effort
- Successful Japanese football coaches working overseas

We aim to make coach education accessible to everyone, offering diverse pathways and possibilities for cultivating and nurturing coaches.



Leaders who enrich players' lives
A System to be able to meet excellent coaches for enjoying football

To create a system where anyone starting football anywhere in Japan can meet excellent coaches for enjoying the game, it is essential to conduct numerous high-quality coaching education courses.
 The JFA, in cooperation with all 47 prefectural football associations, is advancing the development of tutors who can support participants' learning. This involves identifying tutors for C, D, and B Licenses and conducting courses for the participants' improvement

Ideal State

1:30
 At least one coach with a B license or higher for every 30 registered players

1:15
 At least one coach with a C license or higher for every 15 registered players

Coaches who enhance competitive performance
International coaches active on the world stage

In 2024, the JFA collaborated with the J.League to establish the Elite Youth A License, designed to train elite youth players directly connected to the professional ranks.
 In 2025, aiming to cultivate globally competitive coaches, the JFA launched an overseas coaching development project. It began examining target candidates and necessary support to train coaches capable of excelling at the world's highest level, moving toward creating a concrete action plan.

Ideal State

Managers and coaches performing in Europe's top leagues
 Professionals specialising in youth development who work around the world

With "Players First" as our motto

The role of the coach

The ideal coach's attitude

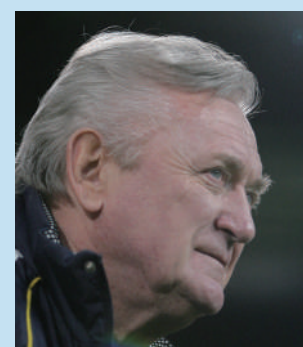
The word "coach" originates from the Hungarian place name "Kocs." The four-wheeled carriages manufactured in Kocs were renowned for their high performance, safely and comfortably transporting passengers to their destinations, and thus spread throughout Europe. Around the 19th century, the term "kocs" began to be used specifically to refer to these carriages. Subsequently, just as these carriages guided people to their destinations, leaders who guided learners toward achieving their goals came to be called "coaches." Therefore, the coach's role is to support the athlete, helping them reach their goals safely and comfortably. Consequently, misunderstanding the player's intended destination or forcing one upon them is not allowed. A coach's mission is to support players in enjoying the game while simultaneously learning. This requires providing appropriate guidance that fosters player growth and safeguarding their safety. While football knowledge is crucial, coaches must also look beyond the sport and toward society as a whole, acquiring diverse skills.

We firmly oppose the stance of pursuing the winning at all costs

In coaching at Double Pyramid, we believe that true victory lies in enhancing the elements necessary to enrich one's life while striving for success.

It's not today's results that matter, but looking forward to how the kids will play tomorrow.

Winning and developing players are contradictory and yet not contradictory. Coaches live within that contradiction.



Ivica Osim
(Former Japan National Team Head Coach)
From JFA Technical News vol.15

Coach's Tasks



Football players improve by playing football

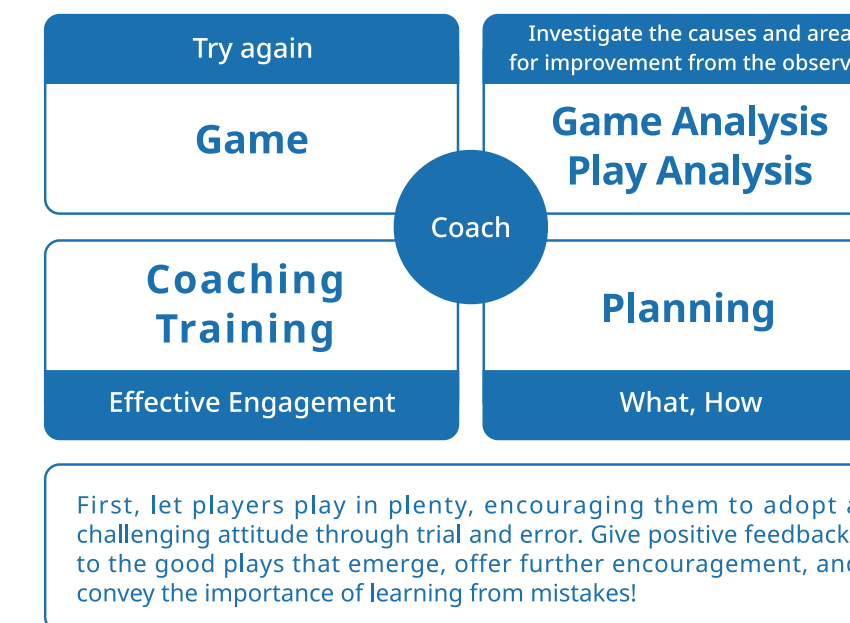
Coaching

For players, the best scenario is to improve while enjoying themselves

In football, players are required to make own decisions and play according to the situation. The greatest joy in football comes from players making accurate decisions and executing creative, high-quality plays. For this reason, it is crucial for coaches to create an environment where players can grow. Flexibly combining various approaches based on the players and the situation is essential.

Coaching approaches

Guided Discovery



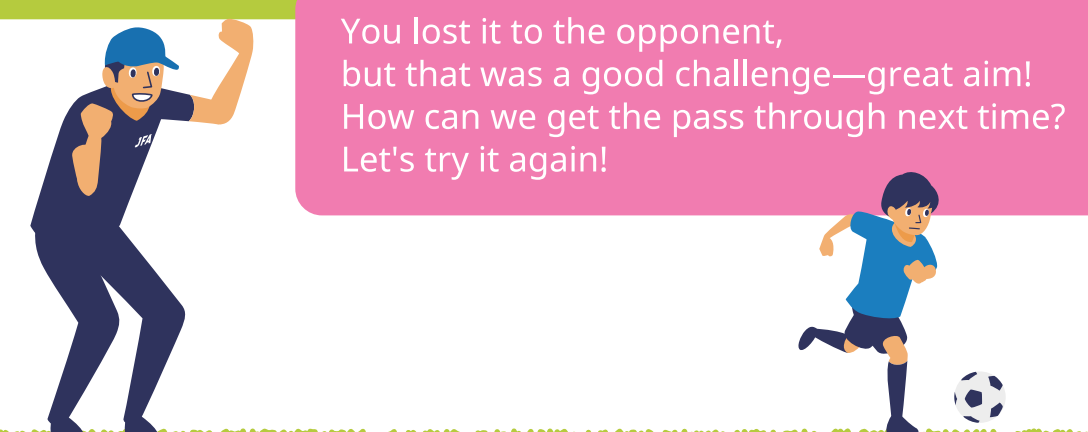
Guided Discovery

This approach encourages players to recognise and think for themselves rather than providing direct solutions. By setting challenges and posing questions, it elicits players' decision-making and stimulates their thinking. The goal is to support players in discovering solutions independently.



Positive Coaching

Rather than focusing on players' mistakes, this coaching method emphasise their successes to boost confidence and motivation. By specifically praising players' good plays, it enhances their motivation and provides a safe, secure environment where they can repeatedly try and error while challenging themselves.



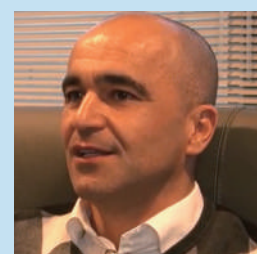
Game-Based Approach

It is a coaching method that enables players to learn techniques, tactics, and decision-making holistically through game-like situations and mini-games. "Football players improve by playing football." Coaches support players not by lecturing, but by "creating environments and posing questions."



Players don't want to hear "What's wrong?"—they want to know "How can we improve?"

Roberto MARTINEZ (Former Belgium National Team Head Coach)
FIFA.com "Martinez: My dad still challenges me on coaching"



In modern football, how to coach is more important than what to coach.

Gareth SOUTHGATE (Former England National Team Head Coach)
JFA Football Conference 2021



8. Expanding the Football Family

- ▶ Football is for All: Embracing Diversity
- ▶ Access for All
- ▶ Football, the game we all love, we don't want it or sport to be a source of unhappiness!



Football is for All: Embracing Diversity

To be inclusive and open towards diverse groups, it is vital to understand them thoroughly and actively seek that understanding. Playing football together enables us to overcome various barriers. Football is a sport capable of realising an inclusive society. Diversity creates value; this value generates synergy, attracting further people and resources to create new value. We should be able to build a richer, stronger double pyramid.

While football may seem enjoyed by many, it remains far from truly inclusive and open. Are we truly welcoming diverse groups with varied aspirations, gathering people who approach the game with the same high level of passion? Aren't we making it exclusive? Are we effectively providing and delivering meaningful encounters and choices? We must reflect on this. To ensure football remains safe, secure, and a sport loved and supported by all – one we want to watch, play, and encourage others to play – we will prioritise the following five principles.

 **To be something genuinely enjoyable for diverse groups**

 **To be tolerant of diverse values and ways of enjoying it**

 **To be something enjoyable according to ability and preference**

 **To be safe and secure to enjoy**

 **To be something loved and supported by everyone**



Access for All

Making things more accessible. Enjoying together with much more people.

The JFA announced its The JFA Declaration on "Access for All" in April 2024, aiming to recognise and eliminate the various conscious and unconscious barriers and biases that exist around playing, watching, and engaging with football.

(https://www.jfa.jp/about_jfa/accessforall/)

We aim to consistently and reliably deliver choices that enable everyone – from grassroots to elite levels, including children and minorities – to enjoy "playing", "watching", and "engaging" without barriers.

It is understood that approximately 9.5 million people enjoy football outside the JFA player registration system (more than ten times the JFA player registration count of 873,146 as of March 2025, encompassing both football and futsal) (Note 1). This figure demonstrates that while it is a source of joy that so many people nationwide are engaged with football, it also requires reflection on our part.

For us, it also means we are failing to see the whole true picture of Japanese football, including these people, and that we are making them feel they have no need to connect with the JFA to enjoy football by themselves.

Moreover, regarding those committed in football, in terms of registration, we are currently only connected with coaches, referees, and officials who hold valid qualifications for this moment.

Despite the many people across the nation committed to football in various ways, we lack connections with them. The strength and passion of these individuals should be assets to Japanese football.

The whole true state of Japanese football remains unseen. First and foremost, we must understand it. We must grasp it. We sincerely wish to connect loosely and hear your voices. We believe doing so will make it much easier for everyone to enjoy the game. And we wish to convey important information to everyone involved in football. We want the football environment, including you, to be happy, safe, and secure.

To truly value the double pyramid of Japanese football, which is far larger than we previously imagined, we will tackle this with genuine commitment!

(Note: Number of people playing football or futsal at least once a year. Source: Sasakawa Sports Foundation survey)



The JFA Declaration on "Access for All"

From grassroots to elite, we will sustainably and reliably deliver diverse opportunities and options, ensuring that everyone has access to football through "playing", "watching", and "engaging" with the game.

- 1 Together with each league, the 47 Prefectural Football Associations across nine regions and various affiliated organisations, JFA will make it the norm for everyone who loves football to have access to the game in their daily lives across Japan, and for all members of the football family to enjoy and challenge themselves through football.
- 2 Through football, we will promote Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and drive change in Japan's sporting culture.



Football, the game we all love, we don't want it or sport to be a source of unhappiness!

We must resolutely put an end to this negative culture with our own hands.

Enjoying football safely and securely is a right everyone possesses and should be a fundamental premise.

The safety and security of football, a sport that should be wonderful, is being threatened. We believe many people recognise that such problems exist in our sporting culture.

As a team sport, football carries the risk of falling into power harassment. Those who select and those who give opportunities to players must be conscious of this power. Protecting the game we love, football, and ensuring children can enjoy it safely and wholeheartedly is the responsibility of all of us involved.

We cannot protect it unless everyone becomes a team and engages proactively. And prevention is paramount and most effective.

The JFA has adopted the slogan 'Do not do it, do not let someone to do it, do not tolerate it' to eradicate violence and abusive language. We aim for each individual to enhance their awareness and 'do not do it'.

Furthermore, we want to make it commonplace within the football community to 'do not let someone to do it' – particularly to

prevent it from happening to fellow coaches – for fellows to communicate their observations, and to listen to them with gratitude. It is also necessary to recognise that, whilst coaching passionately with good intentions, things can unintentionally escalate and occur without one realising. And 'do not tolerate' – we must resolutely sever any culture of acceptance in our own generation, with our own hands. When something unsettling occurs, we want to increase instances where, rather than enduring it until it becomes unbearable, people report it to the appropriate channel, leading to an investigation and a finding of harassment. We want to resolve such issues much earlier, at a lighter stage, within our daily routines. This requires countless people across the nation to engage consciously in their daily lives.

And we must pay close attention to the safety of the environment, starting with excessive climate. Heat, lightning strikes, the safety of equipment and the venue, and the safety of activities including travel to and from the venue. To ensure unfortunate accidents never occur, conduct regular comprehensive checks of the environment. Ensure the necessary equipment is in place. Where required, clearly define procedures and agreements in the clubs. As a club and as coaches, document what you value and share these principles and code of conducts as a foundation. On that basis, enable children to choose options that suit them.

This will safeguard the children, the club, the coaches, football, sport – everyone.

Because football is the beloved game that helped us grow, we don't want anyone to come to dislike it.



JFA Respect, safeguarding <https://www.jfa.jp/respect/>

J.League safeguarding <https://www.jleague.jp/special/safeguarding/>

Human Rights Watch report on sports culture in Japan <https://www.hrw.org/ja/report/2020/07/20/375777>

***We are happy when we find our own way to enjoy playing, watching, or being involved in football.
We are happy when we support an attractive national team as they compete on the world stage.***

In our ever-changing society, health, quality of life, wellbeing, a rich life, and a vibrant life... these are becoming increasingly important.

We are reminded anew of the inherent appeal and value of football itself, and the role it can fulfil. At times, it can be a source of strength to overcome adversity, or even a cornerstone of one's very identity. Our heartfelt gratitude to the pioneers who have driven its development thus far.

At the JFA Football Conference January 2025, Mr. Andy Roxburgh, AFC Technical Director who has long observed and

supported Japanese football, stated: 'The mission Japan has set for its football is possible.' To realise this, we ourselves still have much to accomplish and much we can do.

Realising the "JFA Declaration, 2005", we shall join the ranks of nations possessing a rich football culture capable of genuinely aspiring to World Cup victory. We shall consistently be among the favourites in the World Cup title race, nurturing and sharing this joy with ever more people.



We are glad there was FOOTBALL.

Japan's Way.

Version 2 Jan.2026 Japan Football Association Technical Committee

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