TSUKUBA FRONTIER

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Welcome to the World of Adapted Sport

Attending to the needs of each individual

Parasports continue to attract increasing attention. However, the Paralympic Games do not include any events for people with hearing impairments. Some athletes with hearing impairments have competed in the Olympics and have won medals. In other words, the support needed for people with disabilities varies from person to person. The term "adapted" refers to the method of responding flexibly to everyone's needs.

Not Simply "Para" Sports for People with Disabilities

At first glance, people with hearing impairments often do not appear to have a disability. Moreover, compared to people with other types of disabilities, the need for support is less obvious for people with hearing impairments. Meanwhile, people with hearing impairments do not require special equipment in the world of sports, and it is possible for them to compete alongside non-disabled people. However, they are often excluded from competing in the same competitions simply because they are deaf.

In many sports, sounds and calls are used to give signals and measure timing. Moreover, even if the performance of someone with a hearing impairment is identical to that of a hearing person during a competition, this point can become a chasm in competing together. However, if they were able to receive guidance that takes these things into consideration on a regular basis, they could win medals at the Olympics. Bridging this chasm requires approaches from the domains of both education and research.

Inclusive and Adaptive

The concept of the "inclusive society" —which refers to a society where people with and without disabilities participate in society together—is becoming increasingly widespread. However, it is essential to remember that this does not mean everyone is thrown together indiscriminately; rather, this type of society requires that considerations be made according to the purpose. This is the methodology of "adaptivity." For example, for people with hearing impairments, giving a signal before one starts speaking, such as saying, "I'm going to start talking now," can make communication and information sharing much more accessible. These types of innovations are beneficial for everyone.

Additionally, even though they are all hearing impaired, the level of their hearing impairment varies. Although some of them use hearing aids, in competitions for people who are hard of hearing, it is ensured that

Staff and students who participated in the internship and students from the Special Needs Education School for the Deaf, University of Tsukuba

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Our laboratory has conducted research and implemented practical strategies while following the philosophy that "all of the people with special needs can enjoy sports, even if they have a disability, via the methodology that we have used to adapt physical activities and sports for them." The program aims to foster talented individuals who can practice adapted sports through learning about the attractiveness and adaptability of sports; gaining basic knowledge about sports, education, and the welfare of people with disabilities; and through actual interaction and experience.

each person has the same level of hearing impairment by purposefully obstructing all hearing ability. This means that athletes who have been relying on sound during their training must make different considerations. This idea of providing support by making changes and adjustments to meet the needs of the individual is called "adapted concept."

Learning Through Practice

This approach only works when accompanied by practice. To provide a place for this practice, we hold classes where students provide sports instruction to people with hearing impairments. When you actually encounter people with hearing impairments, you may find that many things don't work, even if you provide support by following the methods you learned in the classroom. For athletes, it is easy to think that it is fine if they are doing something even if they don't understand the detailed instructions; however, this will not improve their athletic ability. It is essential to provide them with feedback each time. Indeed, by receiving this kind of guidance, even if during a short practice session, they will be able to improve their athletic ability.

For non-disabled people, this kind of feedback might be as simple as saying, "Nice!" However, these small efforts make up adaptive sports, and accumulating these experiences is essential for both the student providing guidance and the athlete.

Uncovering Difficulties Specific to Hearing Impairment

The term "para-sports" is often understood as a generic term for sports for people with disabilities. However, the Paralympics do not have a sport for the hearing impaired (deaf sports). There is a separate international event called the Deaflympics, which actually has a longer history than the Paralympics. It can be said that the Deaflympics has established its own culture as an event *by* the hearing impaired and *for* the hearing impaired; however, this is also a weak point as a sport for the impaired.

In this context, I feel that sports for the hearing impaired have been left behind. I became interested in research in this area when I realized that there are many issues that should be addressed but have not been. Sports without sound may make it difficult for viewers to feel a sense of speed and realism. However, just like for other para-sports, if you know how to enjoy them, they will look completely different.

In 2025, the Deaflympics will be held in Tokyo. As the first Deaflympics to be held in Japan and the 100th anniversary of the first Deaflympics, we are excited to seize this opportunity to create a new legacy in the world of deaf and adapted sports.

PROFILE

Dr. SAITO is a professor at the Institute of Health and Sport Sciences and associate dean of the School of Physical Education, Health and Sport Sciences at University of Tsukuba. She graduated from the School of Physical Education, Health and Sport Sciences at University of Tsukuba and completed a master's degree in physical education research at University of Tsukuba. She also worked as an assistant professor at the Tsukuba College of Technology and served as an associate professor at University of Tsukuba before assuming her current position. She specializes in adapted physical education and sports science and is involved in education and research on improving the competitive performance of deaf athletes and para-athletes. She also researches the adapted perspectives necessary for instructors in charge of courses in physical education. Finally, she specializes in swimming (water polo) and organizes swimming instruction for people with disabilities, as well as *taiso kyoshitsu* (gymnastics class) and *tsukurinpic*.

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