

# Moero Team Earth

## Wheelchair Basketball - Intense but Fun Sport Experience during Team Earth report

Bang! The sound of wheelchairs as they collide. We visited Koriyama to report on Team Earth, a wheelchair basketball team based in the city. We also took the opportunity to try out wheelchair basketball for ourselves. What impressed us the most was the intensity of the impact when wheelchairs collide, and how much fun the game was to play.

Team Captain Shoji Ando and Vice-Captain Yasushi Endo led the wheelchair basketball experience. After getting in our wheelchairs and practicing moving about for a while, we spent some time playing tag with our guides and taking practice shots, followed by an actual game. The wheelchairs move much faster than we had imagined, moving at the slightest touch. Before we tried the game for ourselves, we had assumed it would be dangerous to play. However, although it is quite a

vigorous and intense sport, wheelchair basketball does, after all, have rules and is quite enjoyable to play. Several members of our reporting team commented on the experience afterwards, stating "It was fun taking shots from a height that you're not used to" and "I'd like to get myself a wheelchair". We were impressed with how much fun Captain Ando and Vice-Captain Endo seemed to have playing the game. By the time we got off the wheelchairs, our



The reporting team experiencing game playing with the players

impressions of wheelchair basketball and other such para-sports had completely changed, and we had realized how much fun they can be. (Kazuya Yamagishi, Hiroki Aita, Masato Midorikawa)

### "Something you can dedicate yourself to"

### "Don't give up!"

### Thoughts from players giving training their all



Ando (left) and Endo (right) speaking to us about wheelchair basketball

"Appreciate the importance of connecting with others. Find something you can dedicate yourself to wholeheartedly," said Shoji Ando. "When starting something new, do not let giving up be an option!" added Yasushi Endo. From the players' above comments after the interview, we could sense the resolve which has allowed the two to give training their all. Ando began playing wheelchair

basketball after breaking his back in a snowboarding accident when he was 21 years old. Endo says he got into wheelchair basketball after becoming wheelchair-bound as a result of a traffic accident when he was 25 years old. According to Ando, although he had a negative image of para-sports, playing wheelchair basketball gave him confidence by making him realize "there were things [he himself] could do." Endo said

that he, too, had a negative impression about the game but changed his mind "when he saw how enthusiastic people had become about wheelchair basketball after they began playing." When asked about their goals for the future, both players said that their aim was to "be selected for the national team for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games" (Airi Fujimoto, Hiyori Kamio, Haru Shoujo)

### Rule differences with basketball

#### Wheelchair basketball classification

One of the differences with basketball is that there is no double dribble-rule in wheelchair basketball. Furthermore, in wheelchair basketball, players are classified depending on the degree of their disability. Each player is assigned a point value that is lower for those with a higher degree of disability, and higher for those with a lesser degree of disability. The total number of points allocated to a team may not exceed 14 points. However, not all the rules are different from basketball. The size of the court, the height of the goal, and the number of players in each team (five), are the same as in basketball. Wheelchairs used in the game are different from regular wheelchairs. The games uses specially designed wheelchairs with cambered wheels in order to enable players to manoeuvre quickly. The wheelchairs are also sturdier to allow for the greater speed and intense movements during the game and are designed differently according to each player's position on the team.

### "Overthrow Sendai", training hard towards their goal

Team Earth regards the Sendai team as their rival. Although their win-loss record remains in Sendai's favour, the team is training hard in the hopes of defeating their rival, with "Overthrow Sendai" as their rallying cry. The eleven members of Team Earth carry out most of their training in the gyms of the two cities, Koriyama and Nihonmatsu. They prac-

tice about four hours a day, three times a week on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. The players perform laps of the gyms to train their arms. At times, they have another player hold onto their wheelchair from behind to increase the load for greater effort. The fact that they have been able to make consecutive appearances in a tournament which only ac-

cepts two qualifying teams from the Tohoku area is a sign of their successful performance up until now.

One of the former members of the team is wheelchair basketball player Emi Mashiko, who was part of the na-

tional team for the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games. The team was awarded the bronze medal.



The reporting team and Team Earth players who are currently hot in pursuit of Sendai

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