



# I Love Soccer!

## Yuki

16, first-year student at Fukushima Prefectural Tomioka High School; member of the inaugural class of the JFA Academy Fukushima

*In April 2006, the Japan Football Association, in cooperation with Fukushima prefecture and the cities of Hirono, Naraha, and Tomioka, founded the JFA Academy Fukushima for the purpose of nurturing future Japanese national team members. The Academy will select approximately fifteen girls and fifteen boys every year from all over Japan. The students live in dormitories and attend local public junior high and high schools. In order to create an environment supportive to soccer training, arrangements have been made with the schools they attend to recognize parts of their training at the Academy as credit toward graduation. Training at the Academy is aimed not only to nurture an elite group of soccer players, but young people with an aptitude for leadership who can go on to careers in international environments. Classes on deportment and communication skills are part of the curriculum.*

*The Academy's first class of students—seventeen boys in their first year of junior high school and twenty-three girls ranging from first-year of junior high to first-year of senior high school<sup>1</sup>—have already been selected and started their lives at the Academy. In this issue, we introduce an interview with one of these students, Yuki, a first-year high school girl from Hyogo prefecture.*

**1** Because the Academy is a six-year unified secondary school, new students will generally be students in their first year of junior high school. However, an exception was made in the case of girls for the inaugural year.

**2** J Village: Japan's first national training center created in 1997. The grounds extend over an area of 490,000 square meters in Naraha and Hirono cities in Fukushima prefecture, with a stadium that can accommodate 5,000 people, ten natural grass playing fields, indoor training facilities, and overnight lodging facilities. The Japanese national team and foreign teams use the Village for training.

**Q: The entrance evaluation test for the JFA Academy was very competitive. Out of 455 boys who applied, seventeen were accepted, and out of 202 girls twenty-three were accepted. What kind of process was it?**

The first stage of the test took place last August. We spent a day doing the fifty-meter dash, lifting, playing a mini game, and other exercises. The second stage was held over three days, two nights, and we did long-distance running, sprints, played games, and so on. The third stage was three-nights and four days, and in addition to a physical aptitude examination, the test included playing games outdoors in which we had to cooperate in teams. We were also interviewed with our parents.

**Q: What were you asked in the interview?**

I participated in the interview with my mother. The question that was most memorable to me was "Do you think you are prepared to enter the Academy?" I said, "It's a decision I've made, so I'm planning to do my best." My mother was also interviewed alone. It was apparently so that they could ask her what she really thought. Later, I heard that my mother said, "I'm actually sad, but I respect the decision she has made."

**Q: Why did you apply to the Academy?**

I wanted to see what kind of kids would be applying, and I also wanted to put my abilities to the test. But I didn't think I would actually get in. I was really intimidated in the first stage be-

cause everyone was so good. I thought I didn't have a chance.

We got our letters of rejection or acceptance in the mail. In the envelope was a list of the registration numbers of people who passed the first stage. As soon as I unfolded the list, my number, 53, jumped out at me. "It's there!" I said, in spite of myself. I just couldn't believe it.

**Q: How did you feel in the second and third stages of the test?**

I felt like two nights and three days would be long, but I wasn't scared. Actually, the excitement of going to J Village,<sup>2</sup> where the second stage was to take place, was greater than anything else. I was able to score a goal during a game in the second stage, and that gave me a lot of confidence. In the second stage, there were twenty kids in my grade, half the number in the first stage, and in the third stage, the number had shrunk even more to seven. It was really exciting to meet the others again! We hugged each other with joy (laughs). We all took part in the third stage determined to pass the test together. Five of us ultimately made it, and we really celebrated when we were reunited at the dorms!

**Q: Please tell us about your first encounter with soccer and the path that led you to the Academy?**

I started playing soccer when I was in fourth grade. I was also playing softball around the same time. My brother, who is a year younger





**Left:** With classmates in the Academy dormitory cafeteria. Our classmates are both comrades and rivals.

**Right:** Cooling down after a practice match on the municipal field near our dormitories.

than me, happened to start playing these two sports, and since I loved playing sports as well, I joined him. I played softball on a Japan Junior Sports Clubs Association team.<sup>3</sup> Soccer, I played with my friends at a nearby park. I played soccer twice during the week, and softball on Saturdays and Sundays. I loved both games. But we all had to retire from our softball team in sixth grade, and since the nearby junior high school didn't have a softball team, I quit.

There was only a boys' soccer team in my junior high school. I asked my teacher many times to be allowed to join the team. It was brought up in a faculty meeting, and I was given special permission. I was the only girl on the team, so at first it was very uncomfortable. Getting changed was the biggest problem. There were many times when I felt like I couldn't keep up because the boys were faster and stronger. But I wanted to play soccer no matter what.

*Q: Do you ever get homesick or feel lonely, living away from your parents?*

Right now, I'm just having a lot of fun. We get instruction from top-notch coaches, and play soccer to our hearts' content. I've never felt homesick. I went home during the five-day Golden Week holiday in May, but I was at a loss for things to do. My friends at the Academy said they also suffered from "Academysick!" So when we met again five days later, we hugged each other with joy (laughs).

*Q: Have you encountered any problems with everyday life?*

My woe is that I don't have any free time. But the one thing that I found out from not having any time is that television is not a necessity! Through junior high school, I would aimlessly watch television whenever I had the time. But having become accustomed to life without TV here, I realized it was something I didn't need. I don't need a beauty parlor either (laughs)! I have my friends cut my hair. I often cut my friends' hair, too. So I don't need spending money. I

don't have the time or place to spend it. If anything, I'll buy a small snack, sunscreen, or face wash. Even if I wanted to buy clothes I'd have to go far away to go shopping, and unless I have a full day off from practice. Not that I have that much of a desire for clothes, anyway . . . If I had free time, I'd want to sleep or go to karaoke.

*Q: What do you want to accomplish at the Academy, and what are your dreams?*

If it weren't for the Academy, I don't think I would've been able to continue playing soccer. I'm really glad to be here, where I can play as much soccer as I want. But I know that things are going to get harder. I want to live every day in a way so that at the end, I'll be able to say that I'm glad to have done what I did. I want to become someone who's hard on herself and easy on others. My goal is to become a member of Nadeshiko Japan and go to the World Cup. *Gambarimasu!*

### Imaizumi Morinao Head Coach



We have a support system for the students in which in addition to four full-time staff, there is a doctor who comes in regularly. Since students at the Academy are in junior and senior high school, their first priority is their studies. It is vital that they build a basic rhythm in their schoolwork before participating in training. In addition, at the Academy, we value our connections with the local community. We invite local families to become part of our support system, asking them to invite students to their homes on the weekends and treat them as if they were their own children.

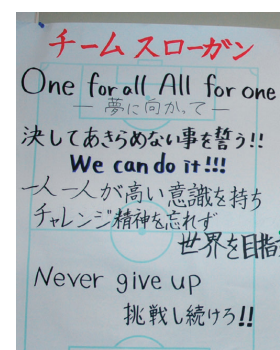
We hope that through soccer, our students will learn to become independent and self-reliant. Not all of the students will be able to make teams in the future, but we hope that they will grow up to become women who are active in the international community.

<sup>3</sup> The Japan Junior Sports Clubs Association was established by the Japan Amateur Sports Association in 1962 to give young people more opportunities to enjoy sports. These locally based groups are comprised of ten or more children and an instructor, and there are 35,000 nationwide. Groups play various sports such as soccer, baseball, and kendo.

### Daily Schedule of Yuki

6:00 a.m.	Wake up
6:15-	Cleaning (bedroom, hallways, study room). There is cleaning duty for the hallways and the study room. We've just naturally ended up taking turns.
6:30-	Breakfast
7:45-	About a twenty-minute bus ride to school.
8:50-	Classes
3:30 p.m.	Leave school
5:00-7:00	Soccer practice*

\*Practice usually held 5:00-7:00 p.m. on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and 1:20-4:00 p.m. on Thursdays (credit toward graduation for training during fifth and sixth periods), and 4:30-6:30 p.m. on Fridays. Half-day practice on Saturdays and Sundays, either in the morning or the afternoon. Occasional practice games. On Saturdays or Sundays, we also have classes on deportment, communication skills and so on.



Team motto.