

JAPAN'S ELITE SPORTS SYSTEM: A CASE STUDY OF WOMEN'S MARATHON TEAM

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Abstract

Japanese women's marathon runners have left the excellent results, which were 8 prize winners including 4 medals in 7 times Olympic Games women's marathon, such as Naoko Takahashi Gold Medalist in Sydney 2000 Olympic Games and Mizuki Noguchi Gold Medalist in Athens 2004 Olympic games, and 19 prize winners including 10 medals in 12-time IAAF World Championships in Athletics.(Table 1)

The rate of prize winning by Japanese women's marathon runners in both Olympics Games and IAAF World Championship in Athletics is 40% and their medal winning rate is 21%. Women's marathon becomes one of the world-class women's sports in Japan. The nationwide television viewing rates of women's marathon races in Japan have been extremely high for the last 25 years, so women's marathon races have been established as one of the spectator sports event.

The aim of this research is to clarify why did the women's marathon runners in Japan come to be able to do a lot of medal and prize winning in the Olympic games and World Championships, then why medal and prize winning runners have been decreasing in late 2000s.

The questionnaire survey was executed against 363 runners who belongs corporate running teams and 20 medal or prize winners in the Olympic games or World Championships. We investigated the history of the number of corporate running teams and individual track and marathon record for the last 30 years

Behind the background for runners to enhance their performance in Japan, private corporations hire some

runners as their employees for a full-time worker or a contractor, and then the corporations organize women's track and field sports team with roughly 10 runners. The corporations provide their payment, travel expenses, training camp expenses, hiring cost for a manager and a trainer and sometimes they even build a dormitory for runners convenience. By increasing a number of women's track and field teams as such corporate team organizations, lots of runners produced impressive results in each marathon race in Olympics Games and IAAF World Championship in Athletics.

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Eki-den, which is a long distance team relay, by corporate teams competition and major marathon races are 4th and 5th popular sports as a TV program by Japan Broadcasting Corporation

Women's track and field teams aim at All-Japan Industrial Women's long distance relay which is held in December every year.

I examined how many teams joined its elimination race and its final race. And I researched the top-20 runners personal season best records for each race of 5,000m, 10,000m and marathon for the last 30 years and compared the change of each record to the increase and decrease in teams.

Lots of organizations, which were mostly private corporations, had entered into this market in order to establish women's track and field team, which is generally called Eki-den team. In the early 1980s, there were only a few teams, and they started training runners in order to be selected as a representative of Japan for the Los Angeles Olympics Games in 1984, which had the first Olympic marathon race. In 1990s, lots of women's track and field teams were organized. Looking into top-level runners personal records in Japan for each marathon race and long distance race such as 5,000m and 10,000m, those records had been dramatically improved from early 1980s to late 1990s.

As a result, we've found out S-Curve between early 1980s and late 2000s like product development theory in manufacturing industry for both corporate teams numbers and top 20s marathon record. It was startup stage in 1980s, then strengthening term came out and it continued from early 90s to mid 2000s, in late 2000s stagnation period happened.

However, these day Japanese Women's track and field teams have not been able to produce stronger results in international marathon races.

Here, we discuss the current challenges of corporate teams by referring to the number of prize winners in the Olympics or international marathon races coming down, no Japanese runners on the top 20 in the world rankings last year, and no early-20 runners gaining power.

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