

Sports Law & Sports Business (Part 1)

Overview of Sports-Related Laws and Sports Organizations in Japan

This column provides an overview of sports-related laws and sports organizations in Japan as a foundation for understanding the legal framework surrounding sports in the country.

1. Framework of Sports-Related Laws in Japan

The core of sports-related legislation in Japan is the “Basic Act on Sport” (Act No. 78 of 2011). This Act was passed during the 177th session of the National Diet in 2011 as a comprehensive revision of the “Sport Promotion Act” of 1961 and enacted the same year. The Basic Act on Sport was established to promote sport in a systematic and comprehensive manner by establishing the fundamental principles of sport, and clarify the responsibilities of the national and local governments and the efforts required of sport organizations. Notably, the Act recognizes that pursuing a happy and fulfilling life through sport is a fundamental human right, and affirms that all citizens should have access to sporting opportunities regardless of race, gender, age, or disability. It also articulates the core value that “sport is a universal culture shared by all humanity.”¹

More than ten years after the enactment of the Basic Act on Sport, the Act was amended in 2025 in response to the changing social environment surrounding sport and enacted in September 2025. The amendment seeks to address contemporary challenges including harassment, climate change, regional population decline, and diversity and inclusion. The main provisions of the 2025 amendment are as follows:²

- The redefinition of “the roles of sport”: In addition to the previous three roles of “doing,” “watching,” and “supporting” sport, two new roles – “gathering” and “connecting” - have been added (Preamble of the said Act), significantly broadening the conception of sport. These new roles refer to, among other things, people assembling at stadiums and arenas to interact through sport.
- Contribution to solving social issues: Provisions were added regarding contributions to regional revitalization, the realization of a society in which people enjoy long and healthy lives, and an inclusive society through sport (Article 2, paragraphs (3), (4) and (5) of the Basic Act on Sport); improvement of sports facilities as part of urban planning (Article 12, paragraph (3) of the Basic Act on Sport); prevention of sports accidents and environmental improvement with attention to climate change (Article 14, paragraph (2) of the Basic Act on Sport); and securing sporting opportunities for middle school students including countermeasures for the extracurricular activities issue, as well as the promotion and advancement of sport for high school and university students (Articles 17-2 through 17-4 of the Basic Act on Sport).
- Protection of athletes’ rights: Provisions were added obligating national and local governments to take measures to prevent violence, sexual harassment, and online defamation against those engaged

¹ Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, “Basic Act on Sport (Background Leading to Enactment and Text at the Time of Enactment)”: https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/sports/kihonhou/index.htm

² Japan Sports Agency, “About the Basic Act on Sport”: https://www.mext.go.jp/sports/b_menu/sports/mcatetop01/list/1371905.htm

in sport, and requiring sport organizations to make efforts to prevent such misconduct (Article 29 of the Basic Act on Sport).

- Prevention of misconduct and anti-doping measures: A provision was added obligating the national government to endeavor to take measures to prevent misconduct in cooperation with sport organizations (Article 29-2 of the Basic Act on Sport). It was also specified that anti-doping activities shall be carried out in coordination not only with the Japan Anti-Doping Agency but also with other relevant organizations (specifically, the Japan Sport Fairness Commission (J-Fairness)³) (Article 29-3; Article 8 of the Act on the Promotion of Anti-Doping Activities in Sport (enacted on October 1, 2018)).
- Transparency: Sport organizations are required to strengthen their operational foundations and endeavor to ensure sound management (Article 5 of the Basic Act on Sport), and to endeavor to ensure fairness and transparency in their operations, including by establishing standards for their own compliance and disclosing the status of measures taken in accordance with its guidelines (Article 29-5 of the Basic Act on Sport).

While the Basic Act on Sport sets out the fundamental principles for sports, certain specific areas are governed by individual laws and regulations, including the following:

- Act on the Promotion of Anti-Doping Activities in Sport (Act No. 58 of 2018): Based on the spirit of the Basic Act on Sport and the International Convention against Doping in Sport, the Act establishes basic principles, etc. regarding the promotion of anti-doping activities, and stipulates the prohibition of doping and the responsibilities, etc. of the national government and relevant organizations. The September 2025 amendment expressly mandated coordination among the Japan Sport Fairness Commission (responsible for anti-doping activities), the national government, and the Public Interest Incorporated Foundation, Japan Anti-Doping Agency (JADA).
- Japan Anti-Doping Code⁴: Domestic anti-doping rules formulated by the Public Interest Incorporated Foundation, Japan Anti-Doping Agency (JADA). The Code was established in accordance with the World Anti-Doping Code set forth by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and applies to participation in activities and competitions organized by national sports organizations.
- Act on Conducting Sports Promotion Lottery (Act No. 63 of 1998): Governs the operation of sports promotion lottery (sports lotteries of WINNER, toto, and BIG⁵) and the use of proceeds, etc. Under this Act, the Incorporated Administrative Agency, Japan Sport Council operates the sports promotion lottery.
- Act on Ensuring the Proper Distribution of Show and Event Tickets by Prohibiting the Unauthorized Resale of Specified Show and Event Tickets (Act No. 103 of 2018) (commonly known as the Unauthorized Ticket Resale Prohibition Act): Regulates the unauthorized resale of specified entertainment admission tickets (tickets for events (including sports events) that meet certain requirements such as bearing a notice prohibiting unauthorized assignment).
- Laws governing public racing (Horse Racing Act (Act No. 158 of 1948), Bicycle Racing Act (Act No. 209 of 1948), Motorboat Racing Act (Act No. 242 of 1951), Auto Racing Act (Act No. 208 of 1950)): These acts respectively govern the operation of horse racing, bicycle racing, motorboat racing, auto racing and other public racing events.
- Penal Code (Act No. 45 of 1907): Regulates gambling and match-fixing in sport, including crimes of gambling (Article 185 of the Penal Code), sale of lotteries (Article 187 of the Penal Code), and fraud (Article 246 of the Penal Code).

³ <https://www.j-fairness.org/>

⁴ <https://www.playtruejapan.org/code/provision/japan.html>

⁵ <https://www.toto-dream.com/winner/index.html>

2. Sports-Related Organizations and Oversight Framework in Japan

Like other industries, the sports sector is subject to oversight and regulation by government ministries and public institutions. The major sports-related organizations in Japan are as follows:

(1) Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has historically worked to promote sport (such as promoting community sports, fostering physical education and martial arts in schools, enhancing international competitive performance, strengthening governance in the sports sector, and promoting the Olympic and Paralympic movements). However, these fundamental roles have been transferred to the Japan Sports Agency following its establishment in October 2015.

(2) Japan Sports Agency

The Japan Sports Agency was established in October 2015 as an external bureau of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, which had previously overseen major sports policies including school physical education and lifelong sports. It was established with the aim of coordinating and streamlining the overlapping functions of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other ministries, while also generating new synergies.⁶

In addition to the sports promotion functions formerly handled by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, the Agency comprehensively implements sports administration in cooperation with other ministries. Its responsibilities include ensuring sporting opportunities that contribute to health promotion, enhancing sports for persons with disabilities, supporting regional revitalization through sports, implementing Sport for Tomorrow, and cooperating with industry to promote sports and strengthen athletic performance.

(3) Other Organizations and Bodies

- The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry: The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry promotes sports-related businesses, including creating opportunities for collaboration between companies and sports leagues/clubs, strengthening the foundations for expanding sports entertainment content overseas, hosting the Sports Future Exploration Council (*Sports Mirai Kaitaku Kaigi*), and implementing stadium and arena reforms.⁷
- Incorporated Administrative Agency, Japan Sport Council: The Japan Sport Council was established in 2003 pursuant to the Act on General Rules for Incorporated Administrative Agencies (Act No. 103 of 1999) and the Act on the Japan Sport Council, Independent Administrative Agency (Act No. 162 of 2002). With a view to promoting sport and maintaining and promoting the health of students and children, etc., its mandate includes the appropriate and efficient management of sports facilities, the provision of assistance necessary for sports promotion, and the payment of benefits related to accidents involving students under school management. It also conducts research, collects and supplies materials relating to sports and the maintenance and promotion of health of students and children, etc. ⁸In particular, it manages and operates facilities such as the National Yoyogi Stadium, the Japan National Stadium, and Chichibunomiya Rugby Stadium, and also administers sports promotion lotteries (sports lotteries) and handles sports integrity assurance-related operations, among a diverse range of other activities.⁹

⁶ Background on the Establishment of the Japan Sports Agency: https://www.mext.go.jp/sports/b_menu/soshiki2/1373916.htm

⁷ Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry: Service Industries: <https://www.meti.go.jp/policy/servicepolicy/index.html>

⁸ Japan Sport Council: Purpose and history: <https://www.jpnsport.go.jp/corp/gaivou/tabid/61/Default.aspx>

⁹ Japan Sport Council: Activities: <https://www.jpnsport.go.jp/corp/gyoumu/tabid/124/Default.aspx>

- Public Interest Incorporated Foundation, Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC) and Japanese Paralympic Committee (JPC): In association with the National Olympic Committee (NOC) affiliated with the International Olympic Committee (IOC), and the National Paralympic Committee (NPC) affiliated with the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), these bodies promote Olympic and Paralympic values, support and develop athletes, and cooperate with and support National Federations (NFs). The Japanese Paralympic Committee (JPC) is established within the Public Interest Incorporated Foundation, Japanese Para-Sports Association (JPSA).¹⁰
- Japan Sports Association (JSPO): Originally established in 1911 as the Japan Athletic Association (*Dainippon Taiiku Kyokai*), JSPO was involved in Olympic participation, the National Sports Festival (current Japan Games), training of sports instructors, international sports exchange, sports medicine and science research, among other activities to promote national sports. However, following the separation and independence of the Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC) from JSPO in 1989, JSPO currently focuses primarily on the promotion and dissemination of sport among the general public, and in particular on the advancement of lifelong sport.¹¹
- Public Interest Incorporated Foundation, Japan Anti-Doping Agency (JADA): JADA serves as Japan's domestic anti-doping organization in compliance with the World Anti-Doping Code established by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). It conducts activities including education, doping control testing, results management, intelligence activities, human resource development, and international cooperation.¹² JADA is responsible for both conducting domestic doping tests and managing the results of domestic tests (excluding tests conducted by international sports federations). When a report of an adverse analytical finding is received, the determination of whether or not a violation has occurred and the length of any period of ineligibility is made by the independent Japan Anti-Doping Disciplinary Panel. However, JADA presents and argues the circumstances of the doping test and the applicable period of ineligibility under the Code.

3. National Governing Bodies and Sports Federations for Each Sport

As in other countries, Japan has federations and associations that serve as governing bodies for various sports and competitions at the national and regional levels. These organizations govern individual sports and competitions, and are responsible for promoting the sports at the national and regional levels. They establish competition rules, operate and manage competitions, and implement compliance programs (including disciplinary actions and anti-doping measures), etc. Many are members of the JOC, JPC, and/or JSPO, and are certified as public interest incorporated associations or incorporated foundations. While they enjoy tax incentives and other benefits, they are also subject to government oversight in accordance with the law.

4. Summary

Sports regulation in Japan is not governed by a single “Sport Act” but rather by a variety of laws and regulations with the Basic Act on Sport at the foundation. In addition, rules established by public organizations and the governing bodies of individual sports also apply, meaning that regulations differ from sport to sport. While it is difficult to comprehensively grasp all applicable regulations, it is necessary to understand the foundational legislation and then interpret the rules of each sport individually.

Furthermore, sport organizations and athletes can maintain consistent governance and compliance with international standards (particularly regarding anti-doping and fair play) by properly understanding and implementing the initiatives, activities, and policies of the Japan Sports Agency and other national

¹⁰ About the JOC: <https://www.joc.or.jp/about/>
Japanese Paralympic Committee: Organization and Committee Information: <https://www.parasports.or.jp/paralympic/jpc/index.html>

¹¹ About JSPO (Japan Sports Association): <https://www.japan-sports.or.jp/about/tabid57.html#o2>

¹² JADA: Activities: <https://www.playtruejapan.org/activity/>

administrative organizations and public bodies. This, in turn, is expected to contribute to the broader promotion of their respective sports, the stable development of sports organizations and clubs, the creation of an environment in which athletes can compete with peace of mind, and the overall sustainable development of sports.

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