

Safe Sport Structures in Japanese Sports

A Joint Letter to Junichi Kawai, Commissioner of Japan Sports Agency

November 28, 2025

Dear Commissioner Junichi Kawai,

On behalf of 12 organizations and individuals, we would like to extend our warmest congratulations on your recent appointment as Commissioner of the Japan Sports Agency (JSA). We look forward to engaging with your agency on critical matters to protect athletes from all forms of abuse.

We the undersigned are strongly opposed to “*taibatsu*”—corporal punishment—and other kinds of abuse in sport. *Taibatsu* and other abuse causes lifelong trauma for children and athletes and should urgently be ended.

We have followed your agency’s work on athlete protection with great interest since 2020, a year before the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games. Such work includes the former Commissioner Koji Murofushi’s introduction, in 2021, of a comprehensive [list](#) of hotlines established by different sports organizations for reporting athlete abuse. Also, six major Japanese sports governing bodies, including the JSA and the Japanese Paralympic Committee (JPC), in which you were then chairman, launched the “No! Sports Harassment” [campaign](#) to raise awareness about abuse and harassment in Japanese sports. We also understand the JSA now plans to establish guidelines for disciplinary actions against external school coaches.

We also understand that the JPC recently has been actively committed to establishing mechanisms for reporting abuse. In March this year, the JPC [co-founded](#) a hotline for online athlete abuse in collaboration with the Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC). In May, the JPC [put in place](#) a dedicated hotline for women athletes participating in the 2025 Japan Para Athletics Championships. This September, the JPC and JOC [announced](#) that they will monitor online athlete abuse on social media during the Milano Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games and other major international

competitions held in Japan. We greatly appreciate your dedication to addressing athlete abuse in para sports.

As a group of advocates devoted to improving athletes' rights in Japan, we launched #AthletesAgainstAbuse, an international [campaign](#) to stop abuse in sports, in 2021. We deeply appreciate your support for our social media campaign. We also [wrote](#) to the then Commissioner Murofushi and then President of the Tokyo Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games Seiko Hashimoto, urging them to commit to creating a safe sport center, an independent body tasked with reporting and addressing child abuse in sport.

During these years, an increasing number of countries have established and begun operating specialized agencies dedicated to safe sport. These agencies were created based on legislation and/or with government funding. For Japan, participating in this initiative to promote safe sport is essential for strengthening its presence within the global sports community.

This year, the Basic Act on Sport has been amended, requiring the national government to adopt measures to prevent abuse against athletes. At this pivotal time, your leadership as Commissioner is highly valued. We urge the JSA to make establishing safe sport structures a priority.

Request Matters

1. Request Matters

1. We request to reiterate strong determination to spread the message that corporal punishment and other forms of abuse in sports are unacceptable to all stakeholders in sports and Japanese society.
2. We request the establishment of a “Japan Center for Safe Sport,” an independent administrative body for educating the public and eradicating abuse in sports.
3. We request the enactment of the Safe Sport Act as a legal measure based on

Articles 8 and 29(1) of the Basic Act on Sport.

2. Japan Center for Safe Sport and Safe Sport Act

1. Overview of the functions of the Japan Center for Safe Sport:
 - “Safe Sport” refers to the state in which those involved in sports are protected from all forms of abuse and discrimination.
 - “Safe Sport” also encompasses the aspect of inclusiveness. Athletes with disabilities and LGBTQ+ athletes should be protected from abuse and should be able to participate in sports free from discrimination.
 - “Abuse” here is a concept that includes all of the following:
 1. Physical violence,
 2. Psychological violence by verbal abuse etc.,
 3. Sexual abuse (including the recording and distribution of sexual images),
 4. Sexual harassment,
 5. Neglect,
 6. Online abuse,
 7. Injuries caused by sport-related accidents that should have been prevented.
 - The Japan Center for Safe Sport has the following functions to realize Safe Sport in Japan:
 1. Dissemination and education about the concept of Safe Sport.
 2. Operation of independent, anonymous, and free consultation services regarding abuse in sports and receiving complaints or reports of child athlete abuse via a centralized reporting system, into which all existing reporting mechanisms would flow.
 3. Investigation of abuse cases in sports.
 4. Punishment for abuse cases in sports, remedy for athletes, and appeal system for sanctioned coaches.
 5. Publication and creation of a database for punishment cases.
 6. Providing training and rehabilitation programs to prevent recurrence.
 7. Maintaining standards to prevent and protect against child athlete

abuse, and to ensure full compliance with those standards by Japanese sports organizations.

8. Referring abuse cases to law enforcement for criminal investigation, where appropriate.
9. Ensuring free, ongoing, professional psychological support services for child athletes who have experienced abuse.
10. Establishing training standards for all coaches of child athletes.
11. Providing parent training programs for parents of child athletes.
12. Conducting education and awareness campaigns about the existence of this independent body, and the resources it provides.
13. Advising sports organizations on establishing safeguarding mechanisms.
14. Providing good examples of safe sport policies and safe sport codes for sports organizations.

- The center will also provide easy access to professionals for athletes in need of legal assistance for the following human rights abuses:
 1. Image-based sexual abuse,
 2. Online-based abuse,
 3. Gender, racial, LGBT, disabilities, and other discrimination,
 4. Other human rights violations in sports activities.

2. Safe Sport Act

A law aimed at eradicating all forms of abuse in sports.

- The Act includes the following:
 1. Grounds for the establishment and activities of the Japan Center for Safe Sport.
 2. Legal and financial grounds for activities to raise awareness for the prohibition of all forms of abuse in sports.
 3. Obligation of sports organizations to act to eradicate all forms of abuse.
 4. Prohibition of all forms of abuse in sports.
 5. Guarantee of proper procedures for those who are suspected of committing abuse in sports.

6. Establishment of an independent and fair ruling body that imposes adequate punishments on those who commit abuse.
7. Guarantee of the right to appeal to the Japan Sports Arbitration Agency for those who have been punished.
8. Provisions for rehabilitation programs to prevent recurrence of abuse by sports coaches who have been found guilty of illegal acts.
9. Delineation of the rights of athletes, including the right to participate in sport free of abuse.
10. Mandate for training all coaches of child athletes.
11. Mandate for any adult who becomes aware of child athlete abuse to report it.

3. Reasons for the request

Why we need the Japan Center for Safe Sport:

1. Abuse is still taking place, as reported almost daily in national media
In Japan's sports, the Japan Sport Association, the Japanese Olympic Committee, the Japanese Para-Sports Association, All Japan High School Athletic Federation, and Nippon Junior High School Physical Culture Association have been playing a central role to eradicate abuse in sports.
According to an [online survey](#) of athletes from 50 sports conducted by Human Rights Watch and released in July 2020, among the 381 respondents who were children since 2013, 19 percent had been physically abused, and 18 percent had been verbally abused. The number of reports of sexual abuse and harassment in sports coaching is small, indicating that the full extent of such problems has not yet been revealed because victims often hesitate to report abuse. It is necessary to have confidential, specialized, and free consultation, as well as a mechanism to access legal remedies so that athletes who have been victims of abuse will be more comfortable in seeking help.
2. Necessity of legal support for athletes
In addition, many athletes in Japan suffer from image-based sexual abuse as well as online-based abuse on social media. During the Tokyo 2020 Olympics,

an athlete was threatened and escaped forcible return to abuse and retaliation in her home country. We need a mechanism that provides easy access to professionals on legal issues related to sports so that athletes can receive appropriate legal assistance at a low cost.

3. Limitations of small sports organizations

Many Japanese sports organizations are rather small, and there is a limitation to how much each organization can do to tackle abuse in sports coaching. Establishing an organization specializing in abuse in sports coaching is in line with the need.

4. Safe Sport Movement in other countries

In other countries, such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and Germany, governments have begun efforts to eradicate abuse in sports and support athletes by allocating budgets, staff, and systems to protect athletes. Efforts to achieve safe sport are also underway in Asian countries such as Malaysia and Singapore.

5. Amendment to the Basic Act on Sports

The amended Basic Act on Sports, which came into effect in September 2025, stipulates that the national and local governments must take necessary measures to ensure that the environment for athletes is not harmed by abuse. Furthermore, the Act imposes a duty on sports organizations to make efforts to ensure that the environment for athletes is not harmed by abuse. The Japanese government now needs to fulfill its positive obligation to take measures protecting the environment for athletes from abuse and to support the efforts of sports organizations.

For the above reasons, it is necessary to establish the Japan Center for Safe Sport as a government measure to eradicate abuse in sports and enhance legal support for athletes and protection for children.

Why we need the Safe Sport Act:

1. Necessity of clear prohibition

Abuse in sports coaching is a crime of assault or injury under criminal law.

However, there is reluctance to apply criminal law to abuse in sports coaching.

Moreover, in Japanese society, the false idea that corporal punishment with love or passion is acceptable has not yet been dispelled.

2. Necessity of a unified response

Some sports in Japan are a part of school club/team activities, and others are carried out under the National Federations and their affiliated organizations.

Hence the jurisdiction of each organization is subdivided. In order to apply the functions of the Japan Center for Safe Sport to all organizations, it is necessary to provide a legal ground for the establishment of the Center. Furthermore, it is necessary to provide specialized expertise and to develop personnel with such expertise to support sports organizations in establishing systems that safeguard and protect athletes' rights.

3. Guarantee of rights and obligations to each stakeholder

To eradicate abuse in sports coaching, it is necessary to design a well-balanced system that considers each stakeholder, such as measures to support the obligation of sports organizations' efforts to tackle abuse and the guarantee of due process and the right to appeal for coaches.

The amended Basic Act on Sports went into effect this September. It is clear that further legal measures are required to make sure that sports are safe. We look forward to your urgent intervention in this matter.

Sincerely,

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Japan Safe Sport Project

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Japan Director
Human Rights Watch

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Yuma Saito | professional soccer player, Japan Women's Empowerment Professional Football League

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1 other organization