

# Sports for All

How Edogawa Ward has helped to create a more inclusive environment for people with impairments through its initiatives for the Paralympic Games.

by **Anne Lucas**

**T**okyo is notable for, among countless other things, being the only city to host the Summer Paralympics twice. Throughout its sophomore effort preparing to host the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, the city was determined to promote Para sports as widely as possible, and due to the great strides made towards the realization of a fully barrier-free environment, Tokyo has consolidated its



The archery facility in Edogawa Ward is used by many Para athletes.

commitment to diversity and inclusivity.

The easternmost of the 23 special wards that make up the Tokyo Metropolis, Edogawa is an idyllic ward traversed by rivers and imbued with a sense of history. In 2016, Edogawa Ward became the first municipality in Tokyo to establish a dedicated division in charge of sports for the impaired. In the run-up to the Tokyo 2020 Games, the ward was tasked with creating awareness of Para sports and fostering better understanding of persons with impairments. Some of the events they arranged include art exhibitions, seminars, and classes.

Edogawa took its cue from the Netherlands—a country where Para sports are well integrated into society—and from 2017 on, invited Para athletes and educators to the ward in order to draw on their expertise. Through

various workshops, participants gained insights into how sports can effectively be used to increase self-confidence and improve interaction between those with and without impairments. In acknowledgement of these efforts, the ward was approved by the national government to be registered as a Leading Host Town of a Harmonious and Inclusive Society in 2019. The Host Town Initiative aimed to connect Japanese local towns with countries and regions that were taking part in the Tokyo 2020 Games and to encourage various exchanges in terms of sports, culture, economy, and so on.

Edogawa achieved a national first in the creation of a program to ensure that all 22 Paralympic sports could be practiced within the ward. Named the Tokyo Paralympic 22 Sports Declaration, the project—started in



The ward is endowed with waterways and makes an ideal location for experiencing Para canoe.

December 2020—was challenging in terms of acquiring appropriate locations and equipment, and in defining the requirements and approaches to be taken in its realization. However, by facilitating positive collaborations with various sports groups, clubs, and athletes, the ward successfully enabled an environment in which people with impairments could learn about and experience a wide range of sports including canoe and archery, which

are comparatively more difficult to organize.

The various workshops the ward has organized invite people—with or without impairments—to participate in fun forms of exercise. The ward hopes people will be encouraged to make the most of sporting activity, and that their quality of life will be improved as a result.

One teenager who has participated in the wheelchair track and field workshop shared her experience. “I have gained confidence through athletics,” she said. The

association member commented: “Equipment such as fixing plates—that firmly fix the wheels to the floor—are indispensable for wheelchair fencing, but there are not many facilities nationwide equipped with them. I am very grateful that the ward has prepared the environment so that we can practice the sport.”

“People with impairments still have fewer options when it comes to playing sports,” said a ward official. “We would like to continue to foster an environment in which



Edogawa Ward also has various sports arenas where Para athletes were able to practice for the Tokyo 2020 Games.

14-year-old, who has lower limb impairment, said the workshops had helped her grow as a person, as well as made her aware of the kindness of those around her. She also offered words of advice and encouragement to those who might doubt their abilities: “If I can do it, then anyone can do it. Don’t narrow your possibilities.”

The Tokyo Wheelchair Fencing Association has also been running workshops in order to welcome new participants and increase their visibility in the public eye. One

they can play sports.”

Five athletes from Edogawa Ward took part in the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, and each shone in their respective sport. Likewise, the ward as a whole showed its dedication in facilitating the most inclusive Games ever. There is no doubt that Edogawa Ward will continue to be a flame of hope in the creation of a fully inclusive society.