



Today, kids could try table tennis and basketball from a wheelchair.

## A Day without Limits

An innovative, inclusive Tokyo Metropolitan Government program is promoting the upcoming Tokyo 2020 Games. Today a Paralympic athlete gives us all a lesson about winning.

Soon after Tokyo won the bid to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) initiated the Paralympic Games Competition Experience Program—NO LIMITS CHALLENGE—to raise awareness, understanding and enjoyment of Paralympic sports among the general public, regardless of age or gender. The idea behind the program is that we are only limited by our mental outlook. Many of the Paralympic sports are featured, including Archery, Badminton, Boccia, Table Tennis, Wheelchair Basketball and Wheelchair Fencing. There are over 30 events planned for this year, and over 76,000 participants have been involved in the dozens of events that have been held each year so far in various locations around Tokyo. The NO LIMITS events are held so that we can all understand the rules and experience the fun, and the difficulty, of Paralympic competition. By actually participating in a game with a Paralympic athlete, we get a true idea of the high level of athletic technique involved and we get to know these people. This definitely raises everyone's interest in the Tokyo 2020 Games.

### it's in no way as easy as he makes it look!

We went along to a recent NO LIMITS CHALLENGE event that was held in conjunction with the Nerima Children's Festival in Hikarigaoka Park in the west of Tokyo. Today, kids could try table tennis and basketball, but from a wheelchair. Paralympic athlete Tsuyoshi Watanabe was on hand, and for sure,



(left) NO LIMITS CHALLENGE—to raise awareness, understanding and enjoyment of Paralympic sports. (right) Paralympic athlete Tsuyoshi Watanabe.

wheelchair table tennis is in no way as easy as he makes it look!

Watanabe was enthusiastic: "It's great how so many kids were here. They know table tennis from TV, but I think they got a real kick out of trying it for themselves. For many of them it was their first experience."

The kids were enthusiastic too, their reactions to the experience ranging from "It was fun!" and "It was more difficult than I thought it would be," to quite detailed explanations of their interest in the sport and their knowledge of the Paralympics, and many of them said they wanted to go and see the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. The TMG's NO LIMITS program seems to be working.

### "gotta make sure all my jokes are actually funny"

"I feel very lucky, table tennis is an indoor game; usually you don't meet so many people, but now, because of being involved with NO LIMITS CHALLENGE, I get out more, I make speeches." Watanabe continues cheerfully, "I just have to be careful not to make a fool of myself—gotta make sure all my jokes are actually funny."

In 2006, a bike crash left Watanabe in a wheelchair. Around that time he met an old school friend who, incredibly, had suffered the same fate some years before him. But this guy had become an athlete. He had gone on to win the Tokyo Marathon, become the Japan record holder and to compete in

three consecutive Paralympics: Beijing, London and Rio.

Wheelchair athlete, Kota Hokinoue, had remembered that Watanabe had been in the table tennis club back in junior high. "You can play table tennis in a wheelchair—why don't you get back into it?" Hokinoue told Watanabe that he'd be waiting for him at the Paralympic Village. At the time, the despondent and overweight Watanabe could not imagine anything of the sort.

Now 20 kilos lighter and, because of his involvement with the NO LIMITS program, a charismatic, confident public speaker—and of course a very good table tennis player—Watanabe will be meeting his old school friend, Hokinoue, at the Tokyo 2020 Games.

### how to get to the top of a pyramid in a wheelchair

So, of course, the Paralympics are interesting and exciting, as they showcase all the advances in technology and science that can transform the human body and enable us to overcome "hard barriers." But it is through programs like the NO LIMITS CHALLENGE, where we all have opportunities to interact with challenged people, and vice versa, that the more abstract attitudinal "soft barriers" will be overcome.

Putting it into perspective, Watanabe teaches us all how to get to the top of a pyramid in a wheelchair: "Everything depends on how you look at it," he tells us. "I would have never made it to any Games before my accident."