

IN-DEPTH

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In-Depth: Sports Law (formerly The Sports Law Review) is a practical, business-focused legal guide for all relevant stakeholder groups in the area of sports, including sports business entities, sports federations, sports clubs and athletes. It analyses key recent developments and their effects on the sports law sector across major jurisdictions worldwide.

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Japan

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Introduction

Japan is home to a wide variety of sports, including football and baseball, and both professional and amateur sports are popular. As described below, there are various legal matters that need to be considered.

Year in review

In the past 10 years, government authorities have proactively set out national laws, guidelines or governmental opinion regarding sports in Japan, including the following:

- the Act on Promotion of Doping Prevention Activities in Sports (effective from October 2018);
- the Act on Ensuring the Proper Distribution of Show and Event Tickets by Prohibiting the Unauthorised Resale of Specified Show and Event Tickets (effective from June 2019);
- the Governance Code for National Sport Federations and the Governance Code for General Sport Organisations (published in June and August 2019);
- the guideline regarding the rules of transfer restriction in the sports industry from the perspective of the Antimonopoly Act by the Japan Fair Trade Commission (published in June 2019); and
- the amendment to the Basic Act on Sports (effective from September 2025).

There may be changes in practices and operations of sports organisations based on these new laws or rules over the coming years.

Organisation of sports clubs and sports governing bodies

Organisational form

In Japan, non-professional sports clubs, professional sports clubs and sports governing bodies are typically organised in legal forms appropriate for their respective objectives and functions.

Non-professional sports clubs commonly take one of the following forms (depending on their size and objective):

- unincorporated associations;
- corporations;^[1] and
- non-profit corporations established under the special laws of:

- general incorporated associations;
- general incorporated foundations;
- public interest incorporated associations;
- public interest incorporated foundations; or
- incorporated non-profit organisations.

A corporation is the usual form adopted by professional clubs operating with the objective of making profits from their sports-related activities.

For example, the regulations of the Japan Professional Football League (the J League) require J1, J2 or J3 division member clubs to be founded as either a corporation or a public interest incorporated association under Japanese law.^[2] As at February 2026, all 60 clubs in the J1, J2 and J3 league divisions are organised as corporations.

On the other hand, sports governing bodies, including national sport federations such as the Japan Football Association (JFA) and organisations operating professional leagues such as the J League, are commonly organised in the form of non-profit corporations because of their public characteristics.

Corporate governance

The Basic Act on Sport maps out the basic ideas pertaining to sports in Japan and requires that sports organisations (which under the Act means organisations whose main purpose is to carry out operations to promote sports) make efforts to strengthen operational foundations and to ensure sound management in order that they may independently and autonomously carry out projects for the promotion of sports.^[3]

In addition, the Japan Sports Agency set out the Governance Code for National Sport Federation Members in June 2019, and the Governance Code for General Sport Organisations in August 2019.^[4]

In accordance with the Governance Code for National Sport Federation Members, each member sports organisation is required to explain and disclose the extent of their compliance to the 13 general rules (including the relevant reasons and details) as set out in the Governance Code, such as the management of conflicts of interest. Member sports organisations are also subject to compliance audits by the organising body, which consists of the Japan Sports Association, the Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC) and the Japanese Para Sports Association.

Other general sports organisations are encouraged to adopt the Governance Code for General Sport Organisations and explain and disclose the extent of their compliance with the six general rules, such as a fair and proper accounting process.

Apart from the above, subject to their respective characteristics, many national sport federations (NFs) and sports organisations that operate a national league set out and publish their internal rules or regulations to ensure proper operation. For example, the JFA governs its organisation under its own published rules and the J League has published regulations regarding the governance of its own clubs and member clubs. Among others, the J League has established a rule regarding the issuance of the J League club licence,^[5]

which is required for participation in the professional football league divisions operated by the J League.

Furthermore, a project team under the Japan Sports Agency published the Guidelines for the Governance Structure of Organising Committees of Large-Scale International and Domestic Games in March 2023.^[6] Based on the Governance Code and considering circumstances specific to organising committees, the Guidelines establish 11 principles (and relevant reasons and details) to be complied with by organising committees for proper organisational management.

Corporate liability

Most sports organisations in Japan are formed as corporations or non-profit corporations, and the directors of these corporate forms^[7] are generally subject to the same duties and liabilities as directors of typical corporations or non-profit corporations, such as the duty of care and duty of loyalty and potential liabilities to the corporation or a third party for damages.^[8]

Dispute resolution system

Access to courts

The forum for sports-related disputes arising between a governing body and participants (e.g., clubs or athletes) or between two or more participants in that sport is typically specified by the rules set by the relevant sport's governing body. Under some of the rules that govern certain sports in Japan, clubs or athletes are not allowed to lodge an appeal against a decision made by the governing body before an external judicial body outside the governing body. For example, the regulations of the J League provide that the chairman's decision is final and binding against all member clubs and individuals that belong to the clubs, and that clubs and individuals cannot appeal to a court or any other third party.^[9]

Therefore, clubs or athletes will typically have access to three kinds of dispute resolution bodies in Japan to resolve sports-related disputes (excluding disputes that arises outside the rules of sports, such as commercial disputes between a club and its sponsor), which are:

- national courts;
- the Japan Sports Arbitration Agency (JSAA); and
- dispute resolution bodies established by the relevant sport's governing organisations.

To utilise each dispute resolution avenue, there are certain requirements or conditions to be fulfilled. For example, an arbitration agreement between parties would prevent any party from bringing a case before national courts. Furthermore, to utilise the national courts procedure, a dispute must be recognised as a "legal dispute" on which the courts should adjudicate.

Sports arbitration

The JSAA is a specialised dispute resolution body that administers arbitration and mediation for sports-related disputes in Japan. The Sports Arbitration Rules govern the arbitration procedure in the JSAA in respect of appeals by participants (such as athletes, managers, coaches, doctors and clubs) against decisions by sports governing bodies; however, disputes relating to doping are governed by a separate regulation under the JSAA, namely the Sports Arbitration Rules for Doping Disputes. The most common disputes appealed under the JSAA are disputes over decisions by NF to not select an athlete for sports competition and disputes over sanctions rendered to athletes or clubs by sports governing organisations.

The Sports Arbitration Rules provide that an arbitration agreement must be executed in writing or in any other form that clearly indicates the intent of both parties.^[10] With regard to an arbitration agreement, as set out in the Governance Code for National Sport Federation Members, many NFs and other sports governing bodies in Japan (eg, most of the member organisations of JOC) have adopted regulatory provisions stipulating that any appeals against their decisions shall be resolved through arbitration under the JSAA, and these provisions shall be recognised as an arbitration agreement between the particular sports governing body and the relevant participants.

The Sports Arbitration Rules also provide that the sports arbitration panels may, at the request of a claimant, order temporary measures if the panel finds it is particularly necessary for the purpose of the arbitration.^[11]

Enforceability

Disciplinary sanctions decided by sports governing bodies, such as fines or suspensions, will be enforced by themselves (typically by their disciplinary committee) in accordance with their rules.

In court cases, a party is able to use the enforcement powers available to litigants when enforcing court orders.

An arbitral award shall have the same effect as a final and binding judgment by a court and enforcement requires an execution order by a court.^[12]

Organisation of sports events

Relationship between organiser and spectator

The legal relationship between an organiser and a spectator is primarily defined by the ticket agreement between the parties. Although the contents of the ticket agreement will vary depending on the particular sporting event, event organisers or ticketing agencies, the ticket agreement typically contains the following terms and conditions:

- prohibition of ticket resale without the prior consent of an organiser;
- prohibition of bringing dangerous items into a venue;

- prohibition of dangerous behaviour in or around a venue (such as barging onto or throwing something onto a sports pitch); and
- disclaimers or limitation of liability provisions in respect of damages suffered by ticket holders or other third parties.

The Nippon Professional Baseball Organisation (NPB) prepares the Terms and Conditions for Watching Games,^[13] which apply to organisers and spectators for professional baseball games.

In addition to the ticket agreement, the relevant legislation, such as the Civil Code,^[14] the Consumer Contract Act^[15] and the Anti-scalping Law, will govern the legal relationship between the parties. For regulations regarding ticket resales, see the subsection 'Grey-market sales' within the section "Specific sports issues".

Relationship between organiser and athletes or clubs

For major football competitions in Japan, the governing body (ie, the JFA) will act as an event organiser. The JFA forms a pyramid structure of football organisations in Japan and stipulates the rules and regulations that clubs and players in Japan shall follow. Pursuant to the rules of the JFA, for professional football leagues in Japan (ie, the J League), the event organiser is a separate organisation from the governing body and the J League sets its own rules and regulations that govern itself and member clubs and athletes. For example, member clubs must maintain their J League club licence to participate in the J League.

Based on these rules and regulations by the JFA and the J League, clubs and players are required to obey the stipulated regulations of the organiser and contract with the players on a uniform set of terms to govern the rights and obligations between the organiser and athletes or clubs in respect of, among other things, the use of image rights of a player.

Liability of the organiser

This subsection and the subsequent two subsections describe the general liability of a relevant party with regard to sports-related accidents (meaning an accidental injury or death of a person that occurs in the course of playing sports).

An event organiser may be liable to its contractual counterparty (eg, spectator, club or athlete) for damages caused by a breach of its contractual obligation (such as duty of care or safety obligations).

Furthermore, an event organiser may be liable not only to its contractual counterpart but also to a third party for damages arising from an intentional act or negligence under the general rule of tort law of the Civil Code. When an event organiser is a facility manager as well, it may also be liable, as a possessor of the facility, for damages to others arising from a defect in the installation or preservation of the facility on land.

The criminal liability of an event organiser with regard to sports-related accidents will generally comprise criminal negligence, such as the offence of causing injury through negligence; causing death through negligence; and causing death or injury through negligence in the pursuit of social activities under the Penal Code.^[16]

Liability of the athletes

Athletes who accidentally cause injury or death to another person (such as another athlete or spectator) while playing sports may be subject to criminal liability under the Penal Code (typically the offence of criminal negligence, as described in the subsection "Liability of the organiser"). Although this is rare, where the prosecution is able to prove an intention to commit the criminal act, the accused athlete may be subject to criminal liability for crimes involving intention (such as assault, injury or injury causing death) under the Penal Code.^[17]

Athletes may also be subject to general civil liability to compensate others for damages arising from their negligence (or intentional act) under the general rule of tort law of the Civil Code.^[18]

However, it is commonly accepted in court cases that playing sports will result in injury to some extent, and the rules of each sport are generally sufficiently sophisticated to address the dangers inherent in these sports. Accordingly, in most cases, a person who participates in a sports activity will be recognised to have accepted a certain degree of danger as being inherent in the sport. Therefore, as long as a player conducts him or herself within the socially acceptable limits according to the rules of play for the sport, a player is unlikely to be held liable for his or her actions in the course of playing the sport; however, this is subject to a case-by-case analysis, taking into consideration several factors (such as the purpose of playing the sport, the playing level of players, the degree of control over danger and the danger of the sport itself).

Liability of the spectators

Depending on the particular circumstances, spectators, who do not participate in the sport, may be subject to general criminal liability under the Penal Code (such as the offence of assault, injury or damage to property) or the Anti-Nuisance Ordinance set by each prefectural government. Spectators may also be subject to general civil liability to compensate others for damages arising from their intentional act or negligence under the general rule of tort law of the Civil Code.

Furthermore, spectators that violate their contractual obligations under the ticket agreement may be liable to an event organiser for damages arising from its violation. See the subsection "Relationship between organiser and spectator" for the matters commonly prohibited under ticketing terms and conditions.

Riot prevention

There are no sport-specific national laws in Japan aimed at preventing riots.

In the professional football league, for example, the regulations of the J League provide that a home club (which runs an official home game) shall be obliged to secure the safety of everyone in the venue.^[19] Accordingly, there are certain requirements to be fulfilled in the issuance of the J League club licence, such as ensuring that the stadium has a continuous connection to a police and firefighting command, appointing a club security officer and engaging a security guard for home games.^[20]

Commercialisation of sports events

Types of and ownership in rights

The key sports-related rights that can be exploited in Japan are broadcasting, merchandising, sponsorship and ticketing rights.

There are no Japanese laws specifically governing the broadcasting rights of sports events, and broadcasting rights are generally set out in the facility management rights of the owner of the venue at which the sports event is held. Therefore, a party that has the facility management rights of the venue will primarily have the broadcasting right. However, to increase the profits of a sports competition or league as a whole, some sports governing bodies or event organisers will implement rules in their regulations stipulating that the broadcasting rights of all games or matches in that competition or league shall be owned only by the governing body or organiser. For example, the J League owns the broadcasting rights of all the official games under the regulations of the J League,^[21] and grants licences to other broadcasting companies to broadcast the official games.

Sponsorship rights generally encompass a wide variety of different rights depending on the content of sponsorship agreements.

Other important rights relating to merchandising, such as image rights of individuals and copyrights, are derived from Japanese case law and the relevant intellectual property laws.

Rights protection

In general, the Trademark Act,^[22] the Copyright Act,^[23] the Unfair Competition Prevention Act^[24] and other intellectual property laws set out regulations for the protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights, such as trademarks and copyrights, and image rights and publicity rights of individuals are recognised and protected by case law.

The following is the outline of protection and enforcement mechanism of the above-mentioned rights in Japan.

Trademarks

An owner of a trademark can apply to the Japan Patent Office to register its trademark (such as a logo, character image or other brand indicators) as well as the designated goods or services for which the trademark will be used so as to acquire ownership of the trademark.

A trademark right is an exclusive right given to a registered trademark used for goods or services and its effect extends not only to the same trademark but also to similar trademarks. If an identical or similar trademark as the registered trademark is used without permission in respect of goods and services identical or similar to the designated goods or services, a trademark owner can claim against the unauthorised user for, among other

things, the suspension of use, disposal of goods and compensation for damage suffered.^[25]

Copyright

Copyright is the right to protect a "work", meaning creatively produced expressions of thoughts or sentiments that fall within the literary, academic, artistic or musical domain. Copyright arises automatically upon the creation of a work and subsists for 70 years after the death of the author.^[26] In principle, the unauthorised use of a person's copyright work (such as copying of work or manufacturing of counterfeit products) constitutes an infringement of copyright. An author of the copyright work can bring a claim against an infringement of copyright for, among others, the suspension of use, disposal of unauthorised copies or counterfeit products and compensation for damages.^[27]

Image rights and publicity rights

In Japan, an individual's image is protected by image rights and publicity rights, both of which are recognised by case law.

According to the Supreme Court of Japan,^[28] an "image right" is derived from a personal right and each individual has the right not to have his or her image used or published without his or her authorisation, and the "publicity right", which is the right to exclusively utilise an image commercially based on the commercial value of the image itself, is also derived from a personal right.

According to the Supreme Court of Japan,^[29] where the unauthorised use of an image is carried out mainly for the purpose of exploiting the image to attract consumers, the use of the image constitutes an infringement of publicity rights, in which case a right holder can claim for the suspension of the use of the image and compensation for damage suffered.

Contractual provisions for exploitation of rights

The form of the contractual provisions will depend on the negotiating position of the parties. Many contracts will have provisions that are typically found in a commercial contract.

However, as some governing bodies or event organisers have stipulated rules on broadcasting, merchandising and ticketing rights, a future contractual party should review the regulations relating to the sporting event and confirm whether, and to what extent, the counterparty of the transaction has the authority to grant such rights.

Professional sports and labour law

Mandatory provisions

In Japan, whether an individual is recognised as a "worker" is judged on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration various elements regarding working conditions and the

purpose of the relevant labour laws such as the Labour Standards Act^[30] and the Labour Union Act.^[31]

An individual who falls under the definition of a 'worker' under the Labour Standards Act is required to be provided with mandatory minimum standards of employment conditions. In comparison with other jurisdictions, workers in Japan are afforded strong protection under the Labour Standards Act. However, while this may be controversial depending on the underlying facts, a professional athlete is, in some cases, not recognised as a worker under the Labour Standards Act.

However, professional athletes may form a labour union of their own to increase their bargaining power with clubs or leagues, as they would usually be recognised as workers under the Labour Union Act. For example, the Japan Pro-Footballers Association and the Japan Professional Baseball Players Association are recognised as labour unions by the Bureau of Labour Relations Commission, Tokyo Metropolitan Government.

Free movement of athletes

There are many restrictions on the transfer of players in Japan. For example, in the J League, the general principle is that players can be transferred only during the two terms of the "registration window" each year (in summer and in winter, as decided by the JFA). A professional football player can freely conclude a contract with another professional club only if his contract with the current club has expired or is due to expire within six months.^[32]

As another example, in the NPB, a "reserved player" whose contract will be renewed by his existing club for another term is basically precluded from negotiating with any other club and precluded from participating in other baseball-related activities that may result in his transfer to another club, with the exception of the free agent system.^[33]

Furthermore, limitations on the number of foreign athletes are commonly included in the rules of each sports league and competition. For example, the J League has imposed limitations on the number of foreign players, although there has been a gradual easing of these limitations.

Application of employment rules of sports governing bodies

As described in the subsection "Mandatory provisions", in practice, it is not completely clear whether a professional athlete is recognised as worker under the Labour Standards Act in Japan. In many professional team sports in Japan, such as professional football or professional baseball, the player's contract is usually based on a standard form contract.

In the context of a labour union of professional athletes, the Labour Union Act would apply to relevant clubs or leagues.

Sports and antitrust law

Around 2018, the Japan Fair Trade Commission (JFTC) conducted surveys on practices regarding rules on transfer restriction in the sports industry from the perspective of the

Japanese Antimonopoly Act and recognised that there are many transfer restriction rules in the sports industry (ie, rules that impose certain restrictions or conditions on the transfer or occupational change of athletes between clubs), some of which may not have taken into consideration sufficiently the legitimacy and necessity among teams of acquiring athletes, in terms of fair and free competition.

Based on the survey above, in June 2019, the Japan Fair Trade Commission published guidelines regarding the rules of transfer restriction in the sports industry from the perspective of the Antimonopoly Act^[34] to promote a voluntary review, and potential revision, of the transfer restriction rules by the sports governing organisations.

Under these guidelines, for teams that conduct economic activities through sports and compete with each other as business operators within the meaning of the Antimonopoly Act, it is, in principle, a violation of the Antimonopoly Act for competitors to jointly agree to restrictions on the transfer of human resources. The rules on transfer restriction could prevent or restrict competition in the acquisition of players, which could prevent or restrict competition in the sport business by utilising the players, and could hinder the entry of new teams that cannot secure the necessary players.

Conversely, the rules on transfer restriction in the sports industry could have pro-competitive aspects through promoting the training of players in the expectation of obtaining training compensation from transfers, and through maintaining and enhancing the attraction of sports competitions themselves by balancing team forces.

Therefore, the legitimacy and necessity of rules on transfer restriction in the sports industry in light of the Antimonopoly Act are to be judged on a case-by-case basis by balancing the pro-competitive aspects against the anticompetitive aspects above, according to the particular circumstances and the actual conditions. The Japan Fair Trade Commission has set out the relevant factors and considerations to be taken into consideration.

The Japan Fair Trade Commission, at the very least, also recognised the lack of legitimacy and necessity in respect of rules that restrict transfers or occupational changes indefinitely, namely rules that prohibit transfers entirely; prohibit transfers indefinitely unless the current team approves the transfers; or prohibit the participation in sports leagues or competitions (held by a sports governing organisation) indefinitely, even though the transfer itself is possible.

In September 2024, the JFTC issued a warning to the NPB, indicating that:

- with regard to players' agent in negotiating player contracts, the NPB had established the practices that require a player's agent to be a qualified lawyer and prohibit players from appointing agents who are already acting as agent for other players; and
- the FTC warned the NPB not to engage in similar practices in the future because such the NPB's practices are suspected of violating the Antimonopoly Act.

In response to the JFTC's review and the findings, the NPB decided to cease such practices.

Sports and taxation

The following is an outline of the tax obligations of non-resident athletes or foreign clubs in Japan.

Non-resident athletes

If an athlete who does not have a permanent establishment in Japan has participated in a sporting event in Japan and provided services and received remuneration or prize money from an event organiser in Japan for his or her services in accordance with a contract between them, any such remuneration or prize money shall be regarded as consideration for the provision of personal services and shall, in principle, be subject to withholding tax at a rate of 20.42% under Japanese tax laws.^[35] Where there is an applicable tax treaty (such as the convention between Japan and the United States),^[36] a partial exemption of tax may be available.

Foreign clubs

If a foreign club has participated in a sporting event in Japan and provided services and received remuneration or prize money from an event organiser in Japan for its services in accordance with a contract between them, any such remuneration or prize money shall be regarded as consideration for the provision of personal services and shall, in principle, be subject to withholding tax at a rate of 20.42% under Japanese tax laws.^[37] Furthermore, if a foreign club is deemed to have a permanent establishment in Japan under Japanese tax laws and tax treaties, the foreign club shall be required to file a corporate tax return with the relevant tax authority in Japan.

Specific sports issues

Doping

The national anti-doping organisation in Japan is the Japan Anti-Doping Agency (JADA), which is a public interest incorporated foundation. The JADA conducts doping inspection in accordance with the Japan Anti-Doping Code,^[38] which was prepared based on the World Anti-Doping Code.

Japanese law does not provide for any anti-doping national laws to criminalise doping. Doping, per se, is not a criminal offence in Japan. However, some of the substances on the Prohibited List issued by the World Anti-Doping Agency,^[39] such as stimulant drugs, cocaine, morphine, cannabis and narcotics, are prohibited and criminalised in Japan under a series of special acts that control addictive drugs.

Since 2018, the Act on Promotion of Doping Prevention Activities in Sports^[40] has been effective. Although there were discussions (in the course of enacting the Act) on whether to implement criminal penalties against athletes guilty of doping, criminal penalties were ultimately not included in the Act.

Under the 2025 amendment to the Act, Japan Sport Fairness Commission (J-Fairness), an organisation responsible for the framework to ensure the independence of doping

tests, is explicitly positioned as one of the parties with whom the government and other stakeholders coordinate. J-Fairness serves as the operating body of the Anti-Doping System Deliberation Committee, which deliberates on and formulates the basic policy regarding annual testing and funding.

Betting

In general, gambling is prohibited in Japan under the Penal Code,^[41] with the exception of betting a thing for momentary amusement or betting that is permitted under the special laws.^[42] The following form of gambling activities relating to sports are permitted, although licences (which are granted only to local governments or government-related entities) are required to operate them:

- betting on the following four public sports: horse racing, bicycle racing, powerboat racing and motor cycle racing; and
- sports promotional lotteries, which are run on professional football and basketball games.

Article 185 of the Penal Code prescribes that a person who gambles shall be punished by a fine of not more than ¥500,000 or a petty fine, unless the person placed a bet for momentary amusement. Furthermore, provision 1 of article 186 of the Penal Code provides that a person who habitually gambles shall be punished by imprisonment for not more than three years. Provision 2 of article 186 of the Penal Code also provides that a person who, for the purpose of profit, runs a place for gambling or organises a group of habitual gamblers shall be punished by imprisonment for not less than three months but not more than five years.

Manipulation

As described in the subsection "Betting", betting on sports in Japan is generally illegal, with the exception of betting on the above-mentioned four public sports and professional football and basketball games, which are regulated by special laws and administered by local governments or government-related entities. Therefore, match-fixing in these four public sports or professional football and basketball games is criminalised under their respective special laws. Furthermore, even in other sports, a person involved in match-fixing could be accused of being complicit in the offence of gambling or fraud under the Penal Code, depending on the facts of the matter.

In addition to the above criminal offences, a person (eg, athlete, coach, manager, referee or officer) who is involved in match-fixing (whether in a public sport or professional football or other sports) may be subject to sanctions under the internal rules of leagues or sports governing organisations.

Grey market sales

As described in the subsection 'Relationship between organiser and spectator' within the section "Organisation of sports events", the ticketing terms and conditions usually provide that a ticket purchase is for private use only and prohibit a ticket resale without the prior consent of the event organiser.

Moreover, there are several regulatory laws regarding ticket resales. In addition to the Anti-Nuisance Ordinance set by each prefectural government, the Prices Control Ordinance,^[43] the Second-hand Articles Dealer Act and the Act on Ensuring the Proper Distribution of Show and Event Tickets by Prohibiting the Unauthorised Resale of Specified Show and Event Tickets (the Anti-scalping Law, effective from June 2019) also apply. Under the Anti-scalping Law, the 'unauthorised resale' of tickets for certain entertainment events (including sports events) and the acquisition of such tickets for the purpose of unauthorised resale is prohibited.^[44] Unauthorised resale in this context means a transfer for value of the tickets, without the prior consent of the event organiser, at a price that exceeds the price of a sale conducted by an authorised seller on a regular basis.

Special considerations

The Japan Sports Agency, one of the governmental agencies, aims to realise through sport "a society in which people are healthy both in body and mind, and lead a cultural lifestyle throughout their lives".

Outlook and conclusions

The amended Basic Act on Sport came into force in September 2025.^[45] More than ten years after the Basic Act on Sport was enacted in 2011, the amendment was introduced in response to changes in the social environment surrounding sports and to meet growing expectations that sport can contribute to the resolution of social issues. It was also intended to enhance well-being by making the right to sport more substantive.

Although the amendment is broad in scope, its principal features may be summarised as follows, and are reflected throughout its specific provisions.

- **Well-being:** Although the term itself does not appear in the statutory text, the underlying concept – realising a society where every individual can enjoy mental fulfilment, happiness and prosperity – has been clearly established as a policy objective of sport.
- **Realisation of an inclusive society:** The amended Act seeks to create an environment in which everyone can enjoy sport, regardless of disability, age, gender, nationality or other attributes.
- **Leveraging digital technology:** The amended Act expressly promotes the expansion of sports opportunities through the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology), and now supports the digitalisation of sport at the institutional level. The amendment also seeks to promote e-sports and online competitions.
- **Sports integrity:** The Act explicitly outlines preventive measures against violence, power harassment, sexual harassment, covert filming, defamation and other forms of abuse in sports activities. National and local governments are required to take measures to address these issues, and sports organisations are also required to

make efforts in this regard. This represents an important institutional development in response to the issues in sport that have attracted public attention in recent years.

- Strengthening ties between sport and local communities: The integrated development of sports facilities and local community planning is being promoted, and cooperation with local sport clubs is encouraged. The amended Act also explicitly provides for securing sports opportunities tailored to each developmental stage, thereby establishing support systems throughout the entire life course, from childhood to older adulthood.

Endnotes

- 1 Known as *kabushiki kaisha*, or KK, in Japan. ^ [Back to section](#)
- 2 The regulations of the J League (as at 1 February 2026), Articles 14 to 16, <https://aboutj.league.jp/corporate/regulation/>. ^ [Back to section](#)
- 3 Basic Act on Sports (Act No. 78 of 24 June 2011), article 5. ^ [Back to section](#)
- 4 https://www.mext.go.jp/sports/b_menu/sports/mcatetop10/list/1412105.htm. ^ [Back to section](#)
- 5 https://aboutj.league.jp/corporate/about_jclubs/license_jclubs/. ^ [Back to section](#)
- 6 https://www.mext.go.jp/sports/b_menu/shingi/001_index/toushin/1420653_00010.htm ^ [Back to section](#)
- 7 Such as *torishimariyaku* of corporations or *riji* of non-profit corporations. ^ [Back to section](#)
- 8 Companies Act (Act No. 86 of 26 July 2005), articles 330, 355, 423 and 429. Act on General Incorporated Associations and General Incorporated Foundations (Act No. 48 of 2 June 2006), articles 64, 83, 111 and 117. ^ [Back to section](#)
- 9 The regulations of the J League, aArticle 158. ^ [Back to section](#)
- 10 The Sports Arbitration Rules (as at 1 April 2025), article 2, <https://www.jsaa.jp/sportsrule/arbitration/index.html>. ^ [Back to section](#)
- 11 Sports Arbitration Rules, article 49. ^ [Back to section](#)
- 12 Arbitration Act (Act No. 138 of 1 August 2003), article 45. ^ [Back to section](#)
- 13 https://npb.jp/npb/kansen_yakkan.html. ^ [Back to section](#)
- 14 Civil Code (Act No. 89 of 27 April 1896). ^ [Back to section](#)

- 15 Consumer Contract Act (Act No. 61 of 12 May 2000). [^ Back to section](#)
- 16 Penal Code (Act No. 45 of 24 April 1907), articles 209, 210 and 211. [^ Back to section](#)
- 17 Penal Code, articles 204, 205 and 208. [^ Back to section](#)
- 18 Civil Code, article 709. [^ Back to section](#)
- 19 The regulations of the J League, article 51. [^ Back to section](#)
- 20 The Rule regarding the issuance of the J1 League and J2 League club licence (as at 1 October 2025), articles 33 and 34. <https://aboutj.league.jp/corporate/regulation/>. [^ Back to section](#)
- 21 The regulations of the J League, article 119. [^ Back to section](#)
- 22 Trademark Act (Act No. 127 of 13 April 1959). [^ Back to section](#)
- 23 Copyright Act (Act No. 48 of 6 May 1970). [^ Back to section](#)
- 24 Unfair Competition Prevention Act (Act No. 47 of 19 May 1993). [^ Back to section](#)
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