

# A Study on the Transition Defense of the Ultimate Game for Flying Disc Sports

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## Abstract

By means of study of documents, this article clarifies the transition defense, which uses both the strategy of zone defense and that of man-to-man defense. The transition defense is effective against the team at an equal or higher level that is good at fast offensive development. A loud voice from inside and outside the field instructs teammates positioning and re-positioning, gives offence players psychological pressure (Psycho-Defense), and drives opponent players into a panic. The tricky tactics is in particular effective when the defense side hopes to baffle offence plays of an opponent handler from the beginning, change a flow of a game, and have good control over the game. Considering a shift according to a weather condition and a tactics level of an opponent team, we should effectively have a good command of the zone defense clam, the clam defense, and the transition defense in a flow of the whole game. Although a student team will take long time to acquire skills of cooperation of calling in a loud voice as an aspect of the team defense, the acquisition will effectively cultivate the feeling of solidarity in the team, and cohesion and concentration inside and outside the field.

本研究ではゾーンディフェンスの戦略とマントゥーマンディフェンスの戦略を併せ持つトランジションディフェンスを文献によって明らかにする。トランジションディフェンスは、同等のレベルもしくはそれ以上のチームで速い展開のオフENSEを得意とするチームに有効である。フィールド内外から大きな声でポジショニングやリポジショニングの指示を出し、オフENSEプレーヤーに心理的プレッシャー (Psycho-Defense =サイコ・ディー) を与え、パニックに陥れる。特に相手ハンドラーのオフENSEプレーの出鼻をくじくトリッキーな戦術は、ゲームの流れをかえて主導権を奪うことに効果的である。天候や相手チームの戦術レベルに応じてシフトを考え、ゾーンディフェンス・クラムディフェンス・トランジションディフェンスをゲーム全体の流れの中で有効に使い分ける。チームディフェンスで大切な声の連携の技術を学生チームが練習することは、その獲得に時間を要するがゆえにチームの連帯意識とフィールド内外の集中力・一体感を培うのに有効である。

## Introduction

A hundred thousand people in 30 countries register themselves for Ultimate and 13,000 people nowadays play Ultimate in the U.S. It is team games in which players connect passes and make an attack on an opponent position. Historically, Joel Silver devised Frisbee football in 1967 when he was at Colombia senior high school, New Jersey. In 1968 Frisbee football games were performed in a student council of Colombia senior high school for the first time. It was improved afterwards, and a mixed team (man and woman) played a game of a model of the current Ultimate at Colombia senior high school in 1969. Finally, Joel Silver, Buzzy Hellring, and John Hines completed rules of Ultimate in 1970.

After the Ultimate Players Association was founded in Boulder, Colorado, in 1979, a meeting has begun to be held in earnest, and the U.S. Club Championships was actually held in this year. The first World Ultimate Championships was held in Sweden in 1983 and both the open team and women's team of the U.S. won the championship. The first National College Ultimate Championships was held at Boston in 1984, in which 16 open teams and 16 women's teams took part. The first World Club Ultimate championships (the biggest meeting) was held in Germany in 1989, and Ultimate was introduced even to the World Games for the first time (Ultimate became an official competition in the World Games of Akita meeting in 2001)<sup>1)</sup>.

In such a flow, Japan dispatched a representative team for the World Championship of 1984 for the first time and the team experienced various styles of plays of American and European teams. For example, the Stanford offence, in which a stack of players in the center of a court makes an attack, and various defense plays against Stanford offence. After that, however, Japanese

team could not gain better results. Taking advantage of the World Championships of 1992 in Japan, Japanese team have held the "Japan and U.S.A. Ultimate friendship" every year since 1990. Japanese team have invited best members of the World Championships as instructors, have held classes, and have planned to improve our skills for Ultimate. Japanese team have learned strategies of new patterns such as not only various set plays in offense and the man-to-man defense, but also the zone defense, the clam defense, the cag defense, and the transition defense. As a result, the Japanese open team got the third place and the Japanese women's team won the championship in the World Championships of 1992. Furthermore, both the Japanese open and women's team won the second in the World Championships of 1998. After that, however, the results of Japanese teams went down. For example, the World Club Championships of 2002, Japanese open team was in the tenth place, and Japanese women's team was in the eighth place. In the World Championships of 2004, Japanese open team was in the fifth place and Japanese women's team was in the fourth place. We have faced problems such as improvement of the level of our competitive skills and the training program of youth players.

The author participated in Ultimate as a player from the early time, and has been engaged in the Japan-U.S.A friendship Ultimate class since 1990. I realized that the Japanese team did not acquire enough competitive ability for the defense play, which was particularly important to team sports. Some differences in ability would be reduced if suitable plays for the Japanese team were established, because we are not inferior to foreign teams in speed and physical strength. University students with little Ultimate experience are willing to acquire the man-to-man defense, but they tend not to wrestle to acquire strategies and tactics of the zone

defense because it takes a long time for student to master these skills. As stated above, Japanese team have learned the zone defense, the clam defense, and the transition defense in the Japan-U.S.A friendship Ultimate. These strategies make the best use of cooperation of calling among teammates to put pressure on opponent players and provoke a mistake. This cooperation of calling will lead a future Japanese team to improve its competitive skills of Ultimate. Thus, it is important to infiltrate the essence of calling into student teams as soon as possible.

In this study, first of all, we clarify the transition defense, which uses both the strategy of zone defense and that of man-to-man defense by means of study of documents. After comparing and contrast some kinds of the zone defense, we will point out certain characteristics and problems of them. These points will help youth players to gain significant knowledge and skills of Ultimate. The further aim of this paper is to provide readers with an opportunity to discuss how to explore and acquire the future zone defense.

### 1. Zone defense

The zone defense is to aim to defend several kinds of passes and plays: Inside-out passes used in the man-to-man defense, lead passes to an open area, passes set to a cutback, long shots, and set plays combining these plays. Therefore, defense players scatter in a playing area and prepare predicted passes and shots. The zone defense let them shift in the middle of a court in order to prevent opponent players from attacking and easily invading the middle area, and to defend consecutive long passes along a side line area<sup>2)</sup>.

#### 1.1. 2-3-2 zone defense (1991 World Club Championships Open Final)<sup>3)</sup>

Two markers form a cup with three players in a middle-middle to put pressure on an

opponent handler. In the rear, a shortstop deep is in the middle, side middles are in both sides, and a deep-deep is in the tail. A marker is basically in a force middle, but sometimes sets a trap in a sideline area. As a method of defense for an area beside a cup, both side middles protect the center area and a shortstop deep covers a backward area. A middle-middle and a shortstop deep cooperate with each other so as to decide which player defends a right area and which player defends a left area. When a marker aims at a side trap, a middle-middle defends just opposite to an opponent handler. (Figure 1. 2-3-2 Zone defense)

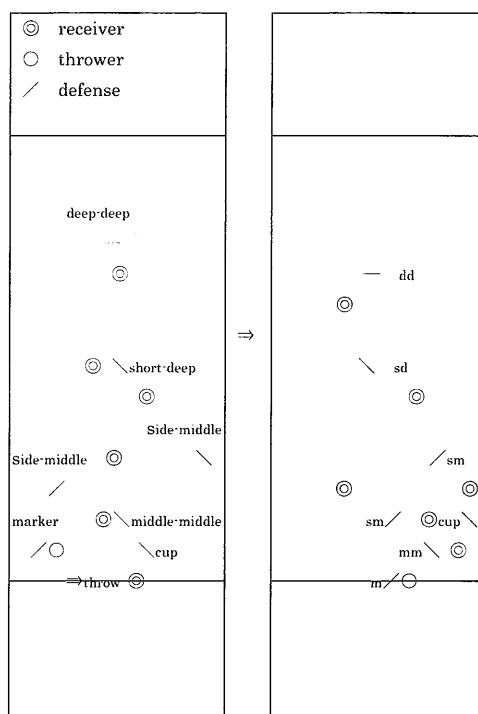


Figure 1. 2-3-2 Zone defense

#### 1.2. 1-3-3 zone defense (1995 World Club Championships Open Final)<sup>4)</sup>

The same player always acts as a marker. The marker makes an opponent player throw a disc to the one fixed direction in this strategy, since s/he uses either a force backhand against a left-handed player or a force forehand against

a right-handed player (s/he marks the backhand side of a right-handed player to let her/him use a forehand). Three defense players except a marker shift to the front and make a defense line. The marker cooperates with backward defense players through calling against a receiver. Three backward players are careful about the receivers who invade into the defense side area and make such a formation as in the man-to-man defense. As soon as opponent players left the area, defense players cooperate through calling with teammates in a front line and do transfer the role of a guard against a receiver.

As for the 1-3-3 zone defense, defense players set themselves behind three opponent backward players in the man-to-man defense, and four forward defense players mark a QB in an open area. A player in an open area, a player in an inside area, and a player in a middle area call out to each other and make proper use of the man-to-man defense and a switch play in order not to give the opponent offence a wider pass area. In addition, when a disc is in a line area, the 1-3-3 zone defense is combined with the side trap defense so that the defense side may put pressure. On this case they also put pressure on a dump pass (backward pass) and put stronger pressure after over storing count 5. (Figure 2. 1-3-3 Zone defense)

### 1.3. Comparison of the 2-3-2 zone defense and the 1-3-3 zone defense

The 2-3-2 zone defense and the 1-3-3 zone defense strategies work well against the team that does not tend to use long shoots, or at the time of a high wind or rainy weather, that is, when long shoots are not available. In addition, they are effective when there is a big difference in points especially in new face rounds of short time games in the student championships, in

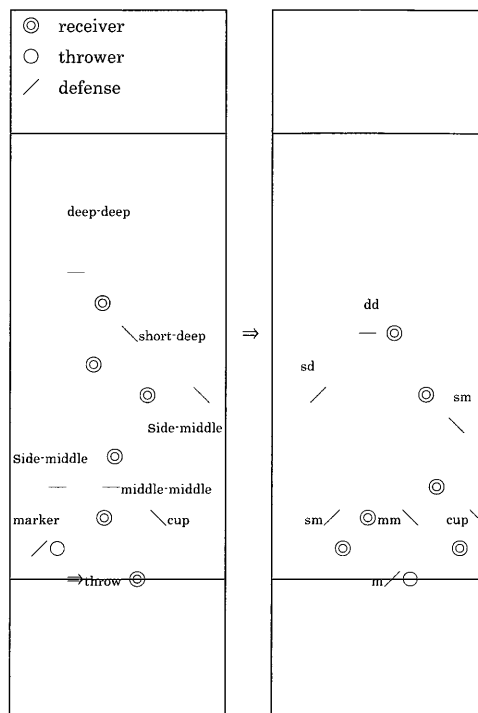


Figure 2. 1-3-3 Zone defense

which players with little game experience take part. In the 2-3-2 zone defense, all the members watch a course of a disc. In the 1-3-3 zone defense, however, players mark three backward players in the man-to-man defense, and they must be careful about the play in which an opponent handler runs toward a goal and aims at a long shot to a goal area. In this case players deal with the play by marking a handler from the back in the man-to-man defense.

### 2. Clam defense (1993 World Club Championships Open final)<sup>5)</sup>

A marker uses a force forehand and make an opponent player throw a disc to the one fixed direction in this strategy. The reason why a forehand is used to put pressure is as follows: a forehand can throw a longer shot than a backhand; The probability of a mistake rises because a forehand grip is easy to slip at the

time of rainy weather, and a marker uses a force backhand, in case an opponent key player is left-handed.

Defense players mark three handlers (generally, QB, handler 1, handler 2) of opponent offence in the man-to-man defense. Against four opponent backward players in a middle and a deep, each defense player forms a trap area at a left (when we looked towards a position of a disc from a deep position), a right, a middle, a deep position. When either a middle receiver or a deep receiver in an opponent team moves toward a disc to get the first pass, a defense player near the receiver puts pressure on her/him. Players call out to a defense player sticking to a handler in the man to man and put a mark in and out. The clam defense is a method in which a far-off defense record player and a record player near a disc call out to each other, and then they attack a receiver on the both sides and put pressure. The most important is cooperation of calling. In case a handler runs toward a goal, the player who marks the handler calls out to a defense player protecting in a zone, remains in an area where s/he can put pressure on a throw, and presses her/him. In cooperation of calling, a deep at the most far-off position from a disc pays attention to motion of the offence players and gives appropriate instructions to a middle, a left field, and a right in a loud voice. In another effective way, players form Buddy from a sideline area, and give instructions. As in the zone defense, the key points are instructions from sideline players and psychological pressure (Psycho-Defense) over offence players through calling from the whole team. When these are precisely carried out, a defense player against a handler can mark her/him very hard to prevent even a short pass in a face to face. Even if a handler runs to a goal direction, the defense side can defend open space until another receiver

aims at a short pass<sup>6</sup>. (Figure 3. Calm defense)

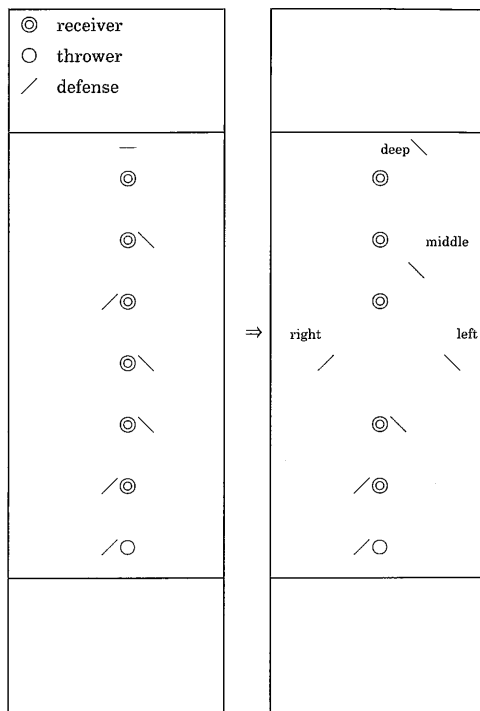


Figure 3. Calm defense

### 2.1. A side trap made from slow off

After a player with higher distance ability does slow off, the defense side can make a side trap mark at the beginning of an offense play of an opponent team if the slow off aims at the left edge of a goal area (We look at a goal area from the slow-off player). When distance is insufficient due to a head wind, an opponent offence player picks up a disc and immediately begins offence play. In that case, a defense player should do the slow off which aims at brick call. The defense side sets the clam defense by the time when opponent players move to a brick point by a brick call. They take a strategy that forces opponent players to throw the first pass and the second pass to an open space and drives them to a corner even when slow off is different from what a player plans to do<sup>7</sup>.

## 2.2. Comparison of the zone defense and the clam defense

Both of the defense strategies will work well against the team of which ability of offense is inferior. They lead to an easy game and victory. In addition, they will be effective at the time of a high wind and rainy weather even if an opponent team is at an equal or higher level of ability. A throw will have a hard time, if s/he is driven into a line under a condition of a side trap: A throwing lane is the narrowest, and the defense player in front of the throw stares at her/his motion. Under the state the throw suffers from big pressure. In this case, the zone defense easily brings development of side reverse from a dump pass (a behind pass) because the aim of the zone defense is to let opponent players throw a lot of passes.

In the clam defense, on the other hand, a pass becomes more difficult because a defense player marks her/his nearest handler in the man-to-man defense and the throwing lane becomes narrow. Furthermore, when hard defense makes a dump pass difficult to throw or the defense side forms the space into which opponent players want to throw a disc (we intentionally leave the space where higher-level throwing skills are demanded), then a throw may make a mistake. The defense side intentionally forms the open space that forces an offense player to use an up side down throw, so that may make an offense player use the up side down throw that wind resistance strongly affects. If it is possible, then defense can set one more trap that aims at a hand block. In this case, the state of a side trap will be more sufficient.

In the clam defense, four players in a deep, a middle, a left, and a right defend their own space. However, what is important is that each of them sets a trap and blocks all of the discs thrown into the trap space through appropriate

positioning rather than that they defend while adjusting motion of opponent players. The player, who is superior in a sense of distance between an offense player and her/himself, is required. If the sense of a player covers long distance, the boundary of defense will widen. In case a team has four such players, it will put big pressure on an opponent team. The stronger wind blows, the easier the team can estimate long distance<sup>8)</sup>.

## 3. *Transition defense* (1993 World Club Championships Open final/1993 College Championships Rookies final)<sup>9)</sup>

Transition defense is the tactics to transform the zone defense to the man-to-man in a course of a game. While the offense side goes on to pass a disc against the zone defense, the defense side suddenly transforms the shift to the man-to-man defense. The cue of the transition is a keyword from a sideline or the number of times of passes decided in advance. Double happiness set the transition defense against New York New York in the World Club Team Championships open final of 1993. They used it effectively to change a flow of a game and to prevent set plays of an opponent team after a time-out during playing.

The team at the school of Biology-Oriented Science and Technology, Kinki University used the transition defense in the College Championships Rookies final of 1993. It had a great effect on the Nippon Sport Science University team. When the number of passes got over the number of times decided in advance after getting a keyword from a sideline, the Kinki University team shifted the zone defense to the man-to-man defense. The shift change drove a handler of the Nippon Sport Science University team into a panic. When a receiver caught a disc and turned a body to a goal direction, the zone offense was suddenly transformed to the man-

to-man defense. As a result, the Nippon Sport Science University team could not form a line of the man-to-man offense and were driven into a panic. (Figure 4. Transition defense)

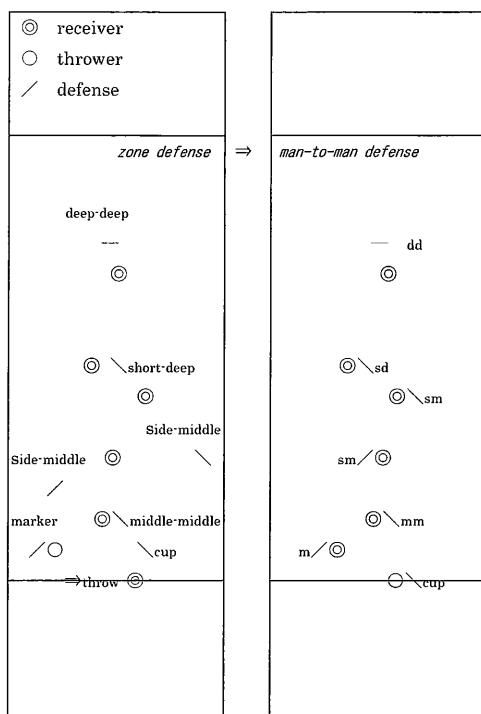


Figure 4. Transition defense

### 3.1. Comparison of the zone defense/the clam defense, and the transition defense

The first aim of the transition defense is to get victory over the team that is good at fast development of offense because the defense drives an opponent handler into a panic. The tricky tactics can baffle a team at an equal or higher level from the beginning, and can be effective in case a team hopes to change a flow of a game and pull back its control.

### 4. Problems that remain to be solved: Three weak points of the Clam offense (1993 World Club Championship Open final)

#### 4.1. Development from the back under the state of a side trap

When driven into the state of a side trap by the clam defense, a throw faces a marker, makes pivoting turns, and watches two throwing lanes of a forehand side and a backhand side. The defense side focuses on defending a throwing lane of a strong side (an area of a goal direction). As a result, the offense side can set series of passes from the back by throwing

distance of throwings	0 ~ 10m		10 ~ 20m		20 ~ 30m		30m ~		total	
	win	lose	win	lose	win	lose	win	lose	win	lose
forehand open area	266	293	139	161	69	53	34	18	498	525
	549		300		122		52		1,023	
forehand inside area	16	20	12	19	1	8	0	1	29	48
	36		31		9		1		77	
backhand open area	459	451	98	132	42	20	16	30	614	633
	910		230		62		46		1,247	
backhand inside area	39	30	12	7	2	0	0	0	53	37
	69		19		2		0		90	
upside-down throwings	8	3	34	13	18	10	7	1	67	27
	11		47		28		8		94	
total	778	797	295	332	132	91	56	50	1,261	1,270
	1,575		627		223		106		2,531	

Table1-1. Comparing of the distance every throwing and number in Open Final 1991-1994

distance of throwings	0 ~ 10m		10 ~ 20m		20 ~ 30m		30m ~	
	win	lose	win	lose	win	lose	win	lose
forehand open area	5.5	9.9	14.4	10.6	21.7	39.6	38.2	55.6
	7.8		12.5		32.8		46.9	
forehand inside area	12.5	20	16.7	26.3	0	37.5	0	100
	16.7		21.5		18.8		50	
backhand open area	3.9	4.4	13.3	18.2	26.2	10	53.3	63.3
	4.2		16.1		18.1		58.3	
backhand inside area	12.8	20	8.3	14.3	0	0	0	0
	15.9		11.3		0		0	
upsidedown throwings	0	66.7	11.8	53.8	22.2	40	57.1	100
	33.4		32.8		31.1		78.6	

Table1-2. Probability to make mistake of every throwings in Open Final 1991-1994(%)

quick dump passes and swing passes while using motion of gain passes as a fake. When a handler and a middle move to the direction of a goal and let the defense side pay attention to the area, the offense side can throw smooth dump passes and swing passes.

#### 4.2. The advantageous offense situation in number

Suppose the offense side receives pressure of the clam defense from the defense side and four players of the former cope with four players (a deep, a left field, a light, a middle) of the latter in the zone defense. Then, the defense side can easily carry out switch plays. However, suppose three players receiving pressure from the man-to-man defense move positively in order to drive four players in the defense side into a panic. Then, the offense side can intentionally lead the defense side to the situation where four players in the zone defense must cope with five or six offense players. In addition, the defense side must perform complicated cooperation of switch plays and is driven into a panic when two offence players in an opponent zone defense area simultaneously go to receive a disc at the first stack. When a player (mainly, a handler)

receives pressure from the man-to-man defense and a player (mainly, a middle deep) receives pressure from the zone defense, they ignore positioning of the offence and make big motion. Then, such hindrance interferes with cooperation of calling of the defense side

A deep and a middle of the defense side must perform complicated cooperation of calling when more than two players of the offense side run into an area. In particular, the more severely a middle and a deep in a central area are driven into a panic, the more seriously cooperation of calling is damaged. As a result, the offense side can make an attack from the middle of a playing area: The offense side can use a one-two pass and development by a swing pass in the space. This is indeed very effective tactics. The offense side needs to use a forehand throw to move a deep into the goal because the throw makes a long shoot possible even at the time of a high wind or rainy weather.

#### 4.3. Pass a disc and patiently and calmly (A Play of Patience)

While forming the clam defense, the defense side sets "a trap" which forces the offense side to throw a panic pass against their will or uses



an up side down throw that is vulnerable to rain and wind. When receiving pressure from the clam defense, without being upset players should develop big movement in all directions with an image of the zone offence and patiently use easy passes. If this is possible, then opponent players will be tired. For opponent players in the man-to-man defense, in particular, it is essential for players to have control over them and intend to toss up and down them. This essence makes "the trap" reduced, so that players can easily pass a disc. It is also important that seven offence players intend to annoy opponent players. Four players in the zone defense calmly pass a disc while always understanding that opponent players aim at a porch (the defensive act that a defense player assumes throwing, secretly approaches to a throw in a throwing area from a blind spot, and defense).

### Summary

The zone defense and the clam defense work well against the team that does not tend to use long shoots, or at the time of a high wind or rainy weather, that is, when long shoots are not available. In addition, they are effective when there is a big difference in points and there is little remaining time, especially in new face rounds of short full time games (less than 60 minutes).

The clam defense is the defensive strategy that maintains characteristics of the zone defense. That is, the defense side aims at a porch and sets the "trap" that forces an opponent player to use a high-risk pass and an up side down throw while a defense player racing very hard against a handler in the man-to-man defense. The strategy of the clam, defense can be summarized as follows:

(1) The defense side drives opponent players

into a state of a side trap under which a throwing lane of a strong side (an area to a goal direction) becomes the narrowest.

(2) Seven defense players set "a trap" beforehand, let an opponent player throw a high-risk pass to the area, and block it.

The transition defense is effective against the team at an equal or higher level that is good at fast offensive development. A loud voice from inside and outside the field instructs teammates positioning and re-positioning, gives offence players psychological pressure (Psycho-Defense), and drives opponent players into a panic. The tricky tactics is in particular effective when the defense side hopes to baffle offence plays of an opponent handler from the beginning, change a flow of a game, and have good control over the game.

Considering a shift depending on a weather condition and a tactics level of an opponent team, we should effectively have a good command of the zone defense clam, the clam defense, and the transition defense in a flow of the whole game. Although a student team will take long time to acquire skills of cooperation of calling in a loud voice as an aspect of the team defense, the acquisition will effectively cultivate the feeling of solidarity in the team, and togetherness and concentration inside and outside the field. These can be developed not by training of the man-to-man defense, but by acquisition of skills of the team defense, and will lead to improve competitive ability of a future Japan team.

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