DURING Japan’s presentation to the International Olympic Committee in September 2013, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced the details of his Sport for Tomorrow (SFT) Programme. As Japan’s international contribution to sports, the SFT Programme is designed to promote technological cooperation through sports and expand the value of athletics during the seven-year period from 2014 to 2020, targeting more than ten million people in over a hundred countries. We spoke to Go Kuroki, who taught baseball in Brazil for two years as a member of the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) and is currently involved in promoting international cooperation through sports at the Nippon Sport Science University International Center.

“I went to Brazil as a JOCV member to teach baseball for two years starting in 2009, and in 2013 I served as a coach for the Brazilian national team at the World Baseball Classic (WBC),” Kuroki says. “The reason I applied to the JOCV was that when I was a part-time instructor for physical education at a junior high school, I wanted to widen my narrow perspective to the much larger world. Right around that time my former teacher recommended that path to me. My father, who had studied abroad on his own in America, strongly supported my application, and that was a big motivation in making the decision.”

Kuroki, who devoted all of his time to baseball during his student days, described the two months he spent in Yokohama undergoing language training after becoming a JOCV candidate as his “first experience having to study so hard.” Upon arriving in Brazil, he spent another three weeks in local training, and eventually was posted to Indaiatuba, a city with a population of
about 1.4 million, where he became the sole coach for the city’s baseball team.

“I was told that they wanted me to teach them the hard work of Japanese baseball, including etiquette and manners. But when I began teaching them the way I was taught in Japan, they started complaining, and within two weeks a team that started out with fourteen players was down to three. I believe this is a common issue that others have faced, and one that concerns many people in the JOCV. When it comes down to the choice of either adjusting my teaching methods to fit the local pace of life or sticking to what I believe in, I decided that no matter how many people complained that my methods were too harsh, if these three players would stick with me then I would continue to teach the kids the way I believed was right. When the other players noticed that those three kids were improving dramatically, before long they returned to practice, and in the end our team was ranked third in Brazil.”

This success garnered Kuroki national attention, leading to positions as a coach for Brazil’s U12 and U16 teams, which in turn led to an opportunity to get to know the chairman of the nation’s baseball federation, helping pave the way to serving as coach of Brazil’s WBC national team.

At the Nippon Sport Science University International Center, the SFT Programme is being promoted through an increase in international friendly matches for martial arts and other sports, as well as through dispatching students overseas as short-term JICA volunteers.

“Currently, we send eight persons every year to the Cambodian National Institute of Physical Education and Sport to provide instructional training in physical education, while eighteen are sent throughout Brazil to provide instruction in baseball,” Kuroki explains. “In Nepal, they are about to begin a program for gymnastics training. Physical education in overseas countries tends to emphasize the recreational aspects, but I believe that Japanese physical education is distinguished by its basis in theory, bone structure and science, and improving discipline and problem-solving skills, which provide a comprehensive foundation for general fundamentals.”

Kuroki is clearly proud of being able to contribute to international cooperation through the use of Japanese volunteers to teach and strengthen local physical education curriculums. The SFT Programme will no doubt produce more such positive outcomes.

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1 Go Kuroki giving some batting advice to a young Brazilian hitter
2 Kuroki placed great emphasis on both the mental and technical aspects during practices
3 Hitting practice at the Nippon Sport Science University International Center
4 In 2013, Kuroki helped coach the Brazilian national team at the World Baseball Classic