

The Lost Tokyo Olympics in 1940
From small digital exhibition “Kaleidoscope of Books (15)”

On September 7, 2013, Tokyo had the honor to be elected as the host city of the 2020 Summer Olympics at the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Session in Buenos Aires, Argentina. For Tokyo, this will be the second time, 56 years since the first held in 1964, as is generally regarded. However, it is little known that Tokyo won the right to host the 1940 Olympics, but finally gave up. The small digital exhibition “Kaleidoscope of Books (15) The Lost Tokyo Olympics in 1940” (<http://www.ndl.go.jp/kaleido/entry/15/>) (in Japanese) shows the history of Japanese participation in the Olympics, focusing on the lost Tokyo Olympics of 1940.

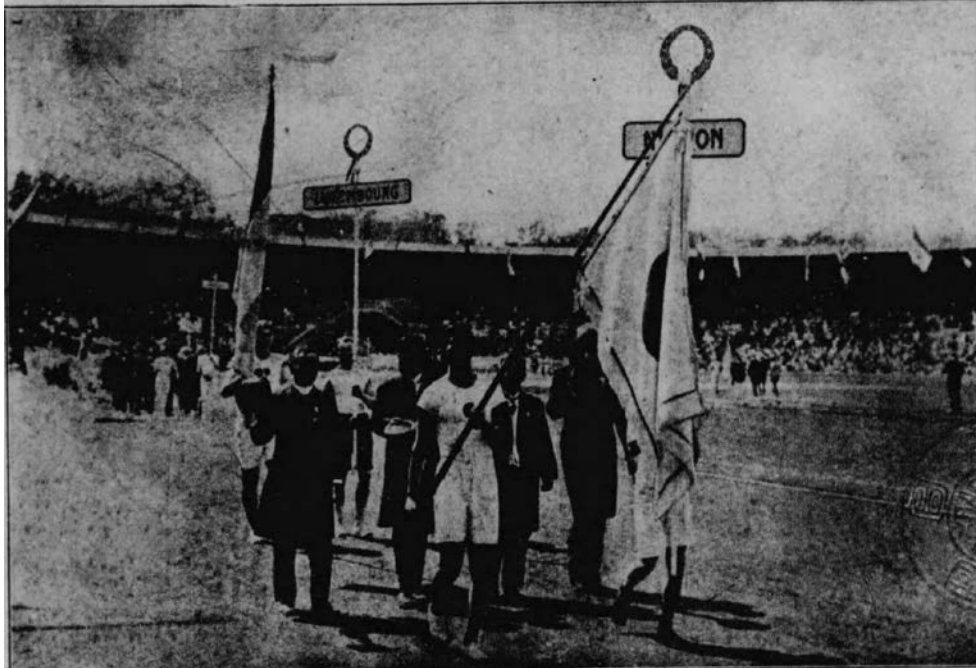


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1. History of Japanese participation in the Olympics

In the Chapter 1 of this exhibition, the history of Japanese participation in the early phases before launching a bid is shown. Japan for the first time took part in the 5th Olympics held in Stockholm in May 1912.



<< Japanese delegation marches in at the opening ceremony of the Stockholm Olympics (Genzaburo NOGUCHI, *Orimupikku kyogi no jissai* (lit. facts of the Olympic games), Dainihon Taiiku Kyokai Shuppanbu, 1918, [NDL Call No.: 386-29]
*Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)>>

Japan clearly realized the difference in its performance from the world class players by competing in the Olympics, and to catch up, many players participated in various international sport events, and many games were held in Japan, inviting foreign players.

Tennis players Ichiya KUMAGAI and Seiichiro KASHIO were the first Japanese medalists in the 7th Antwerp Olympics, but the 8th Paris Olympics ended with a poor performance, with just one bronze medal, in wrestling. Development of facilities in Japan and various interactions with foreign players strengthened the Japanese players' ability, which led to great success in the 9th Amsterdam Olympics in 1928: three gold medals, two silver medals and one bronze medal, including the first gold medal won by a Japanese, Mikio ODA in the triple jump, and the first silver medal going to a Japanese woman, Kinue HITOMI in the 800 meters.

At the 10th Los Angeles Olympics in 1932, in association with the movement to host the Olympics as will be described later, the Japanese media, which had not covered the Olympics very much, significantly changed their framework and sent many correspondents to the venue. As many as 131 Japanese participated in the Los Angeles Olympics, which is more than tripled compared with 43 in the Amsterdam Olympics. Japanese competitors gained seven gold medals, seven silver medals and four bronze medals, including winning the first place in five events out of six in men's swimming and in the triple jump.

2. Aiming at hosting the Olympics in Tokyo

As seen above, Japan had gradually increased the number of medals and participating athletes in every Olympics, while overcoming the difference with world-level players and a funding problem. Accordingly Japanese people's interest in the Olympics was growing. In these circumstances, Tokyo started a campaign to host the 12th Olympics to be held in 1940 as the first Asian city for the Olympics. Chapter 2 introduces the efforts of those involved for successful bid to host the Tokyo Olympics from the announcement of candidacy to the winning.

Shujiro NAGATA, who became the Tokyo governor in 1930, was the first to give voice to hosting the Olympics in Tokyo. The year 1940 was regarded as the 2600th anniversary of the accession of Emperor Jinmu (the legendary first emperor of Japan), and various commemorative events were to be organized. Nagata wished to hold the Olympics as one of a series of big events.

In July 1932, the official proposal to host the Tokyo Olympics was submitted to the 30th IOC Session in Los Angeles by the two IOC members from Japan: Jigoro KANO, known as the founder of the Kodokan Judo Institute, who became the first IOC member from Asia in 1909, and Seiichi KISHI, who served on the IOC from 1924 until his death in 1933. The summary of a lecture, a letter, etc. are shown focusing on the activities of Kano, Kishi and Michimasa SOEJIMA, a count and at the same time a business person with experience of serving as a member of the House of Peers, who took over the role of an IOC member after Kishi.

The efforts of IOC members, Tokyo City and the national government had raised the possibility of success, and thus Tokyo was elected as the host city at the IOC Session in Berlin on July 31, 1936. The newspaper article below was carried in the morning edition of August 1, the day following the decision on the host city. At the beginning, it is reported that Tokyo won the victory over Helsinki by 36 votes to 27.

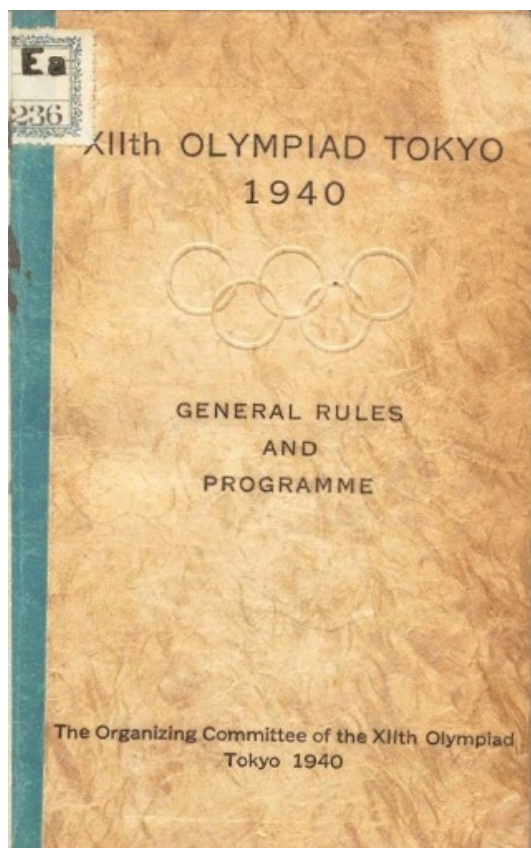


<<"Tokyo Orinpikku! Seishiki kettei (lit. Tokyo Olympics! Officially decided)"
Asahi Shimbun (Tokyo) 1936.8.1, morning edition, page 2, [NDL Call No.: Z81-1]>>

3. War and cancellation of the Olympics

It was a short-lived sense of jubilation after Tokyo won the right to hold the Olympics in four years. The bright future was gradually clouded, to finally end up with cancellation in July 1938. Chapter 3 explains the process toward the cancellation of the 12th Olympics in Tokyo, focusing on the actions and thoughts of those involved and players greatly affected by the cancellation.

During the preparations for the Tokyo Olympics, a number of programs as well as booklets introducing Japan were published. Two items among them can be seen in the exhibition.



<<XIIth Olympiad Tokyo, 1940: general rules and programme, The Organizing Committee of the XIIth Olympiad Tokyo 1940, 1938, [NDL Call No.:Ea-236]
*Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)>>



<<XIIth Olympiad Tokyo 1940: olympic preparations for the celebration of the XIIth Olympiad Tokyo 1940, Tokyo: The Organizing Committee of the XIIth Olympiad Tokyo 1940, 1938, [NDL Call No.: Ea-230]
*Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)>>

In the beginning of 1938, the sluggish preparations and deteriorating international situation cast a shadow step by step, and voices against hosting the Tokyo Olympics were heard within a year after the joyous decision at the IOC Session in Berlin. The Second Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937 and led to supply shortages in Japan, and goods were brought under official control. Following the National Mobilization Law, a regulation for controlling the iron and steel distribution was promulgated in April 1938, which created difficulty in building a new stadium. In addition to those problems, continued demand for cancellation from home and abroad made it inevitable that Tokyo gave up hosting the Olympics. The cancellation was finally decided by the Cabinet on July 15, 1938.

4. Looking to the future

Sports achieved popularity again in the rapid postwar reconstruction. Watching sports became mass entertainment and athletes' success healed the wounds of people's minds. Japanese players were allowed back from the 15th Helsinki Olympics in 1952, and made a leap forward in gymnastics and wrestling in addition to track and field and swimming, in which Japanese had succeeded in the prewar Olympics.

Japan won the right to host the 1964 Summer Olympics in Tokyo and the 1972 Winter Olympics in Sapporo. Though another Winter Olympics was held in Nagano in 1998, many Japanese cities including Tokyo tried to host the Summer Olympics from the 1980s but failed.

Tokyo, Japan and the world have changed so much in the 56 years since the previous Tokyo Olympics and in the 80 years since the lost Tokyo Olympics. What will we see in 2020 in Tokyo?