

# Challenging established theory

## History of Japanese basketball

*Basketball was introduced to Japan as early as 1902 as a sport in mission schools, according to new research by Dr Tetsuji Kakiyama, Professor of Sports and Health Sciences of Fukuoka University, Japan. His research overthrows established theories about the transfer of the game to Japan and shows how basketball was first played by girls in Japan who were taught the sport by American women missionaries.*

The beginning of Japanese basketball is shrouded in mystery. New research reveals that the sport was first played by girls in Japan as early as 1902. This finding challenges the existing theory that basketball was first introduced to the Tokyo YMCA from the International YMCA Training School. The early sport equipment differed slightly from today's version, but American women missionaries who introduced it to Japanese mission schools included it in their syllabuses and field days; the evidence for this, however, has only recently come to light, demonstrating that basketball was first played by girls in Japan.

The Japanese were deeply involved in the birth and development of basketball. On 21 December 1891, at the first basketball game at the International YMCA Training School in Springfield, Massachusetts, Genzaburo Ishikawa, a student from Japan, was one of the players. A competent artist, he sketched the first game; his sketch was published in the 15 January 1892 issue of the YMCA's official newspaper, *The Triangle*, along with an introduction to basketball, and spread throughout the US. However, after attending the University of Wisconsin, Ishikawa became active in the world of international business and did not introduce basketball to Japan.

### ESTABLISHED THEORIES

Until recently, it was believed that Japanese basketball was introduced in 1908 by Hyozo Omori, then director of the PE department of Tokyo YMCA. He went on to be an athletics director of Japan's first Olympic Games, the 1912 Stockholm Games. Sadly, he was to die six months later, in 1913, of pulmonary tuberculosis, and it fell to Mr FH Brown to popularise the sport from 1914 onwards. This theory now has to be challenged. The founder of basketball is Dr James Naismith, who records in his book on the subject that it was known as an important part of the programme

for Japanese women as early as 1900 (Hancock, 1904).

Through recent research, Professor Tetsuji Kakiyama of Fukuoka University, Japan, has unearthed that Japanese girls played basketball as early as 1902, as part of school PE field days. His intriguing ongoing research shows how women's basketball preceded the men's sport by six years, and was promoted in girl's mission schools by women missionaries from the US.

### CHALLENGES AND NEW INFORMATION

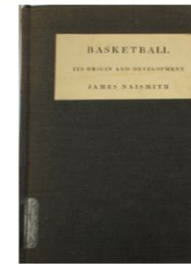
Kakiyama's investigation began when he noticed an early basketball hoop in the background of a 1902 photograph of girls in the schoolyard of Kwassui Girl's School in Nagasaki. This was curious, however, as it was very different from modern hoops. It was by visiting the Archives Centre of Springfield College and looking at the original Amateur Athletic Union's (AAU) official rules that he noted how equipment specifications have changed over time. In 1896, the basket was supplemented with a wire mesh screen behind the basket. It was this wire mesh that was pictured in the 1902 photograph, the flat backboard was only introduced in 1904. Until the twentieth century, girls' PE in Japan consisted of breaktime walks in traditional clothing and sandals. This changed with the arrival of American women missionaries and the training of Japanese female PE teachers.

### MISSION SCHOOLS

The Aoyama Girl's School was founded in 1895. Harriet Alling was their



Basketball was first introduced to Japan as a sport for women rather than for men



James Naismith



1891

“Basketball as an important part of the programme for Japanese women.” as early as 1900, Hancock.



190?

Hyozo Omori



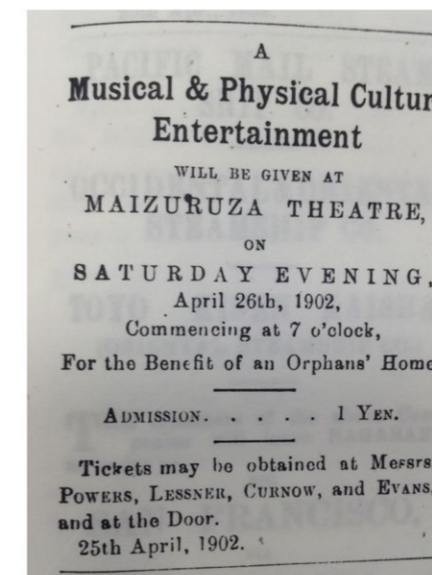
1908

Until recently, it was believed that basketball was introduced to Japan in 1908 by Hyozo Omori. Now, Kakiyama shows that the game was first played by girls in Japan who were taught the sport by American women missionaries.

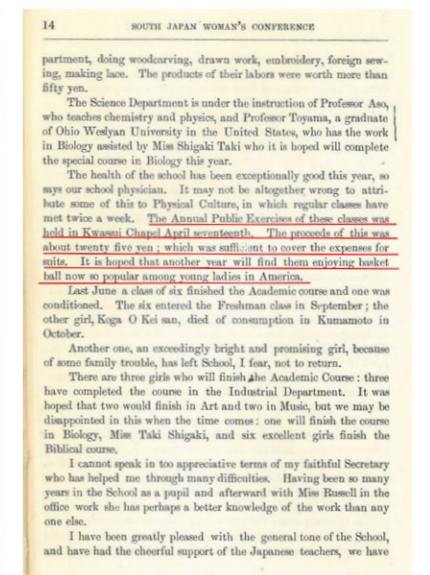
gymnastics teacher, appointed in 1897. A Japanese PE teacher was hired in January 1904. The school archives have nine references to basketball prior to 1907, indicating that it was established much earlier than the previous belief about the transfer of basketball to Japan.

Did Harriet Alling teach basketball? It is likely that she had learned the sport in the US before arriving in Japan, but tracing the connections is tricky. Alling had been at the University of Chicago at the same time as Amos A Stagg (one of basketball's founders). As the sport had just been invented, he may have brought the game with him, in his role as PE teacher: from Springfield to Japan. Although it is well-established that Stagg introduced basketball to the University of Chicago, Kakiyama seeks to understand the connection between Stagg and Ms Alling. A letter dated 10 March 1892 from Stagg to his sister says: 'I think the game could easily be adapted to girls.'

**Japanese girls were playing basketball as early as 1902...women's basketball preceded the men's sport by six years.**

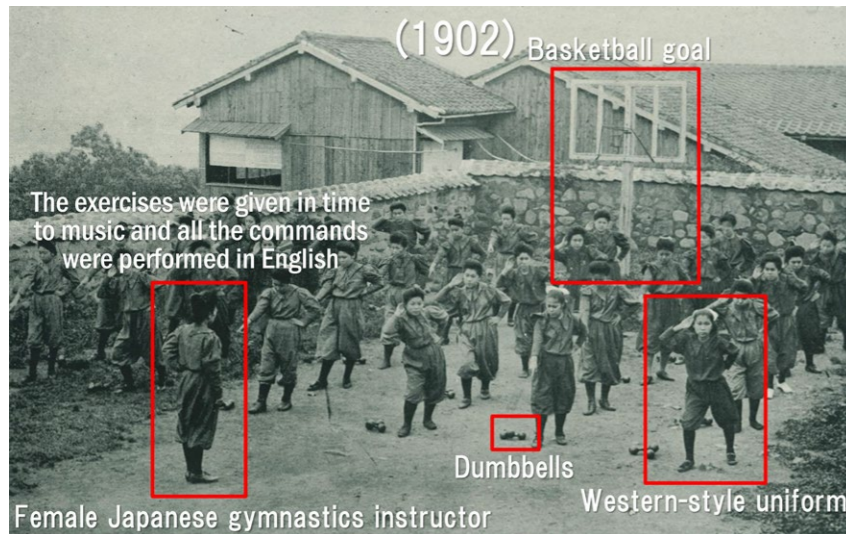


The popular physical education introduced by Mariana Young was offered as an evening of entertainment. *The Nagasaki Press*, April 25th 1902.



A report from 1899 (Ohio Wesleyan University) suggests that the introduction of Western-style uniforms may have been for playing basketball.





The American-style physical culture introduced by Ms Young was so well received in Nagasaki that a combined music and gymnastics performance called Charity Music Gymnastics was held regularly. A report from 17 April 1899 states that 25 yen was raised and put towards the purchase of uniforms.

Mariana Young (1864–1932) arrived in Japan in 1898, and would go on to become the principle of Nagasaki Kwassui Girl's School in 1900. She had previously worked as a High School teacher of Latin, and graduated from Ohio Wesleyan University. Ms Young promoted PE, involving English language instructions given in time to music, with the girls wearing westernised clothing. A variety of equipment was used, including wooden circles, sticks, and dumbbells in addition to the new basketball hoop. The school also hired Japanese women who were trained as

Both schools were to introduce basketball with the earliest games in 1902. The first reference is in the minutes of the First Session of South Japan Women's Mission Conference, which took place in 1899. The American Missionary of the Nagasaki Kwassui Girl's School expressed the hope that the girls would be able to enjoy basketball within the year; but in the second session (1900) it was noted that the basketball equipment had not yet come. It was in the third session, 1901, that there is a grateful note for the delivery of a basketball. In the November 1904

## Tracking down the origins of this sport and overturning established theory has been a ten-year quest for Kakiyama.

PE teachers, and Mariana Young trained Japanese students as PE teachers.

Finding a connection linking introduction of basketball to Young is more challenging. Her history includes teaching at Allegheny College between 1894 and 1896, and a role as a teaching assistant at Huling's Hall. She could have learned basketball from Howard G Budge at Allegheny College, who was appointed as their PE instructor in 1895, and who himself studied basketball at the Oil City YMCA. Another possibility is that Mariana Young could have learnt the sport at Huling's Hall.

edition of *Kwassui Quarterly*, there is a reference to basketballs alongside footballs and baseballs. These overthrow established theories about the introduction of the sport to Japan.

The Aoyama Girl's School archive includes an English language 'Tidings from Japan' published by missionaries referencing both tennis and basketball games at a Field Day in November 1902. In their Japanese language records, the *Alumni Association Bulletin* records basketball being played during field days in 1903 and 1905, and includes a photo of a game in 1907.

Japanese women had been training in US-inspired sports since the turn of the twentieth century. In September 1899, Akuri Inokuchi, a Japanese lady, enrolled in the Smith College and Boston Normal School of Gymnastics in the US. Smith College was the birthplace of women's basketball, and Inokuchi spent a year studying with Senda Berenson, the creator of women's basketball. She returned to Japan in 1903 as the first Japanese female PE teacher, just as basketball was being introduced by Mariana Young, Inokuchi was deeply involved in introducing and popularising the sport.

### OVERTHROWING ESTABLISHED THEORY

Tracking down the origins of this sport has been a ten-year quest for Kakiyama. In 2013 he was awarded a multi-year grant in aid for scientific research. Since then, the grant has involved nearly 5,000,000 yen, and an additional grant from the Society for the History of Physical Education. Kakiyama has travelled to Mariana Young's alma mater, Ohio Wesleyan University, to check their archives as well as Springfield College, Massachusetts in 2013 to view the original AAU rules. He has presented his findings at Qatar University ISHPES Congress in 2014; at the 20th Annual Congress of the European College of Sport Science in Malmo, Sweden, in 2015, and at NASSH in 2022.

The early photographs, which show basketball hoops different from modern styles, are blurry. Likewise, the minutes, letters, and bulletins which reference the sport are hard to read. It is only by zooming in and looking closely, as well as by understanding how the sport was originally played at that time, that Kakiyama has established that the sport was introduced in girl's schools six years prior to the original understanding of the foundation of Japanese basketball.

The transfer of basketball to Japan at the very beginning of the twentieth century challenges existing theory. The early pioneers of the game promoted women's basketball as early as 1902. Basketball was first played by girls in Japan, and transferred through American women missionaries at the turn of the century, working in mission schools.



# Behind the Research Professor Tetsuji Kakiyama

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## Research Objectives

Following the discovery of an intriguing photo of a basketball hoop, Professor Tetsuji Kakiyama began his investigations into the history of basketball. His work questions current theories and suggests that basketball was introduced to girls Japan six years earlier than for boys.

## Detail

### Bio

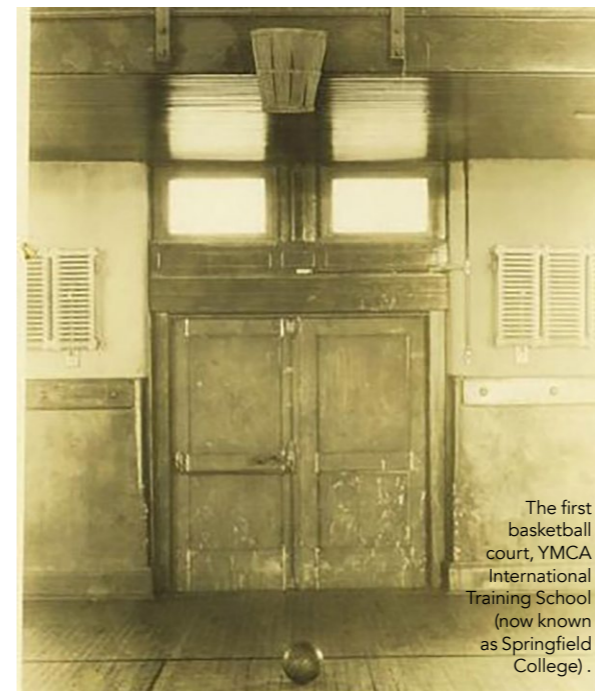
Tetsuji Kakiyama completed his PhD in physical education and science in 1999, University of Tsukuba, Japan. In 1997 he was awarded fifth prize, Young Investigators Award at the 2nd Annual Congress of the European College of Sport Science. Dr Tetsuji Kakiyama was appointed Professor of Sports and Health Sciences of Fukuoka University, Japan in 2014.

### Funding

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### Collaborators

Kwassui Gakuin, Ohio Wesleyan University, Springfield College and Aoyama Gakuin Archive Center Staff.



## References

Hancock (1904) Physical training for women by Japanese Methods Jiu-Jitsu (Chapter 10)

J Naismith (1941) Basketball it's origin and development

## Personal Response

### Japanese women clearly embraced basketball enthusiastically. Can you tell us why?

/// In Japan, there has long been a women's game known as Temari-tsuki ('ball-sticking'). Temari were originally made by simply winding thread around a core, but from around the end of the 16th century, a highly elastic sphere was made by winding cotton or other material around a core, which was then wound with beautiful thread in a geometric pattern. Most balls are slightly larger than softballs and slightly smaller than handballs. Ball-sticking is a game in which the ball is played on the spot; its a women's game played to the accompaniment of a song called Temari-uta (ball song). It became particularly popular from the mid-Edo period onwards and was particularly popular as a New Year's day game. During this period, in girls' schools where balls were not available, ball games were sometimes played with temari balls instead, and were called ball basket games. Therefore, it is thought that games using familiar balls were more easily accepted. (References: Temari-tsuki and Temari).

In addition, a games book of the time states that 'The game of basketball always requires a prone posture, which not only provides many benefits in physical education, but also increases interest as the technique improves, and to improve posture. It requires only a limited number of personnel and can be performed with the tools at hand. Hockey and basketball are the two most applicable games for female students in Japan, but hockey sticks are expensive, so basketball is preferred. As outdoor games, hockey, golf, and lawn tennis must be good, but the equipment can be ineffective and inaccessible, and the methods are complicated and require some time for practice, while basketball is easy to play, the game is simple, and convenient for anyone to try. It is thought that basketball was actively adopted because the equipment was readily available and easy to prepare, the game is simple, it could be enjoyed by many people at once, and had the added benefit of improving women's posture. ///