

## Football—More than a Game

When I was in the second year of junior high school, I went to Germany during my summer holiday for about a month on a road trip with my football club. On that trip, we were scheduled to play in a match with the other kids my age from Europe. It was not just a football match, but an awesome trip aboard, an unforgettable experience.

In Germany, the other guests at the hotel I was staying at and people at the shops I visited in the city asked me, "Are you Chinese?" or "Are you from China?" Because we shared the same black hair and yellow skin, all Asians seemed to look Chinese to them.

At first, I was a little flustered hearing that and responded that we were from Japan. Most of them replied with "Oh, Japan people?" or "Ah, I know Japan." With my long and mono-lid eyes, I guess I did look Chinese. I was upset, but my coach reminded me that we are representing Japan, so we should be aware of our actions; as we are constantly seen and feel that the citizens of other countries judge Japan by the way we behave.

My teammate and I went into our match with enthusiasm. We were keen to show our opponents the strength and potential of the Japanese through our game. "Let's make them think

that even the Japanese are strong in football.” , we thought. The players on the opposing teams were all White and of European descent. They were professional and sporting throughout. They did not make fun of us because we were Asian. When someone played well, they would said “Nice!” , “good job!”. When there were a better play by someone, they cheered regardless of whether the players were on their team or not. When there was a rough play, there was booing in the behavior. Even when I made a mistake during the game, they said “Never mind” or “better luck next time.” Though the game, I learned about perseverance—to get right back up even if I made a mistake and to change my perspective on how to view those mistakes.

After the game, the coach of the opposing team told us that their team was not made up of Germans, but also Dutch and Austrian as well. I used to resent that everyone of Asian descent was assumed to be Chinese. But I realized that I had also assumed everyone was German just because they were on the German team and that I, too, could not tell the difference between the Dutch and Austrian from the Germans.

I have met many people through football. It is a world where your skin color or nationality does not matter. Only the quality of your game does. If I play well, I will

receive due praise. Similarly, I will also evaluate the players on the field based on their play and character. Their skin color does not matter and neither does their race.

In Football, we are often advised to develop “tunnel vision” which broadens our view of the game, rather than just focusing on the ball on hand. This applies not only to football but also to all situations in our lives. There are many races and people of nationalities in the world. I want to be someone who is not bounded by stereotypes but can see the underlying qualities and character of a person. [577words]