



TARUMI Mai reflects on the Tokyo 2020 Games while standing in front of the Olympic Symbol at the National Stadium in central Tokyo. FILMED WITH PERMISSION FROM THE JAPANESE OLYMPIC COMMITTEE

CREATING A SOCIETY WHERE NO ONE FEELS ALONE:

A JAPANESE WOMAN'S JOURNEY AS AN OLYMPIC VOLUNTEER

"You should learn about hospitality. Someday, go and volunteer at the Olympics and bring the world some excitement!" Such was the advice given to a Japanese woman by her grandmother, inspiring her to volunteer at the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024. Her wish is now to create "a society where we can extend a hand to those in need through volunteering."

TARUMI Mai is co-representative of a community of sports volunteers known as Hello Volunteer. Following her grandmother's advice—actually volunteering at the Olympics—she asked her company for time

off as early as five years in advance so that she could lend a hand at both the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020. During the month or so that those events took place, Tarumi dedicated herself to being of assistance. Where did her

enthusiasm for volunteering for the Games come from?

She said, "I didn't want to regret later not having taken the opportunity when I could have. I knew that volunteering at the Olympics would not only fulfill my

grandmother's wish but also show people the good side of Japan."

At the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020, Tarumi volunteered to assist with taekwondo, among other sports. At the Paralympics one of her duties was to stand behind an individual athlete and tie on his or her protective gear. Because the gear was equipped with sensors, tying the cords incorrectly could mean defeat for the athlete. Despite receiving strict instructions from the athletes, Tarumi had to tie the cords according to the rules while also maintaining politeness toward such athletes so as to defuse any tension. After one match, one player told her with a smile, "It's



Left: The taekwondo technology volunteers at the sport's venue at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games in 2021, who worked together to assist the athletes. Tarumi is shown seated on the far left of the front row.

Right: A diorama made by the organizing committee and volunteers such as Tarumi to spruce up the venue and create a fun atmosphere for athletes and staff at the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020.

thanks to you I won!" Tarumi was overjoyed at the encouragement.

In addition to fulfilling her assigned duties and always abiding by the rulebook, Tarumi tried to do anything she could do to improve the athletes' environment. Her every effort, such as decorating the athletes' hallways with *origami* garlands as a demonstration of welcome, was filled with the spirit of *omotenashi*, or hospitality. She said, "Creativity is the key to *omotenashi*. Although there were no spectators at the competitions that time [because of COVID-19], I wanted the athletes to have fun experiencing Japan."

By volunteering at the Olympics and Paralympics, Tarumi has been seeking the creation of a society that encourages people to offer each other assistance. She said, "One of the best things about being a sports volunteer is that wearing the volunteer uniform naturally creates interactions with strangers and leads to pleasant conversations. But I don't think you particularly need a uniform to

do that. Volunteering for sports is something all of us can do to take the first step toward building a society that encourages people to lend a hand to each other—one in which no one feels isolated or left uncared for. The Olympics is at the top of the list of places where you can do that."

Tarumi hopes to extend her ideals about mutual assistance—which emerged at the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020—to the Olympic and Paralympic Games Paris 2024, by serving as a media volunteer for table tennis there. In addition, she has been chosen as an Olympic torchbearer in France in July 2024.

Currently raising two children, Tarumi is also taking distance-learning courses from a university with the goal of becoming a member of the organizing committee for the LA 2028 Summer Olympics and Paralympics. She thus continues her quest to shape a society in which everyone lends a helping hand to each other. ●



Tarumi follows in the footsteps of SAWADA Kentaro (right), fellow co-representative of Hello Volunteer, who served as a torchbearer at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games.