Early History of Swimming in Japan Part II (1810 – 1924)

In 1810 at the swimming match before the Shogun Tokugawa-Iyesada, twenty-five good swimmers of each party competed for three days.

In the period of Meiji swimming was not used as a military art, but it was taken up in the schools. At each school, practice was held during the summer vacation. In the records of this period it is stated that in 1873 Sutezw Ohta swam 150 metres in 1 minute, 30 seconds.

Afterwards in 1898 the first swimming match between England and Japan was held at Yokohama. In this match the Japanese won the 100 yards, and the 440 yards races and Arbin, an English-man, won the 880 yards race.

Before the Seventh Olympiad

The participation of Yosaburo Ugai for the first time in the Second Far Eastern Championship Games at Shanghai in 1915 marked the formal entrance of the Japanese in an international match. China, Philippines and Japan participated in this meet. At that time Ugai won first place in four races: 50 yards in 32.4 seconds; 100 yards in 1 min. 9.6 sec. 440 yards in 7 min. 21 sec. and one mile in 31 min. 59.4 sec.

At the Third Far Eastern Championship Games in 1917, Kaiiekichi Saito - , won the 50 yards race in 26.6 sec. and 100 yards race in 1 min. 5 sec.; 220 yards won by Seiren Uchida in 2 min. 46.2 sec. and 880 yards in 13 min. 42.6 sec.; 440 yards won by Michitaro Noju in 6 min. 46.2 sec.; one mile won by Yutaka Imamura in 29 min. 43 sec.; 100 yards back stroke won by Yasukazu Miyoshi in 1 min. 23.4 sec.; 220 yards breast stroke won by Yoshiharu Takahama in 3 min. 29 sec.; and 200 yards relay was won by a Japanese team in 1 min. 51.6 sec. The Japanese took not only all the first places in the races, but also second and third. Thus the swimming of the Japanese became famous throughout the Orient.

At that time there were some who used a style of swimming resembling the crawl stroke, but most of the swimmers used that of ancient Japan. The style used in swims up to 440 yards was called "Chimba-Nuki" in which the swimmer used the right and left hands alternately, with feet fluttering. In races of more than 800 yards the type of swimming practiced was called "KataNukite-Hitoe-Noshi," a style in which the swimmer made the body turn sideways and if he were left-handed he drew out his left hand only and kept the right hand always in the water. Back stroke was not known then in Japan, but from that time on the swimmers mastered this stroke. It was different from the modern back stroke however, in that they used to begin the stroke by drawing both hands out together.

In 1919 S. Uchida alone took part in the Fourth Far Eastern Championship Games held at Manila, and took two first places: one of them was 50 yards with the time of 27 sec. and the other was 440 yards race with the time of 6 min. 38.6 sec. As swimming in Japan made rapid progress, Japan sent S. Uchida and K. Saito to the Seventh Olympic Games at Antwerp in 1920. It was the first time that Japanese swimmers were to perform in a first-class meet. At that time the Japanese depended upon those two champions very much and thought they would surely win. However, on the contrary, when they
The Olympic Games in Paris

When those two champions came home, they exclaimed:

"In a swimming race the crawl stroke must be used for both short and long distances. Swimming in Japan to this day is just a means of crossing the sea or river, and is not adaptable for swimming in the calm waters of a pool."

So the Japanese ancient way of swimming gradually disappeared from the races, and the new swimmers tried hard to master the crawl stroke.

The Japanese swimming world, however, was financially unable to acquire the aid of a foreign coach nor could the thinking people of the community see the importance of such a thing. Therefore the champions were compelled to study books on the crawl stroke published in England and America. At that time there were no good pools in Japan. When a race was held, the course was made by floating boats on the river, or dividing a part of a lake, therefore there were no lines at the bottom nor on the water. Also the depth was irregular being 2 metres in the shallow part., but 5 metres in the deep part. Even in the midst of a race the swimmers hit against fishes and tadpoles. As the only indoor pool which was 20 yards long was at the Tokyo Y.M.C.A., the champions of the city always gathered there to practice. These champions devoted themselves to the crawl stroke, swimming under the banner of the Y.M.C.A.

In the meantime, at the Ibaraki Middle School in the suburbs of Osaka City, a pool was made by the students themselves who labored in commemoration of the Imperial Coronation of Emperor Taisho. At this school young boys, 14 or 15 years old, were taught the crawl stroke. At one time most of the Japanese champions came from these two circles. From the Y.M.C.A. came Ikkaku Matsuzawa who was the head coach of the swimming division of the Olympic Games, Los Angeles; and from the Ibaraki Middle School came Katsuo Takaishi.

At the Sixth Far Eastern Championship Games held at Osaka in 1923, Onoda won the 50 yards swim in 26 sec., and the 100 yards in 58.4 sec.; Takaishi won the 440 yards in 5 min. 39.6 sec. and the 1 mile in 24 min. 50.2 sec.; Takahiro Saito won the 100 yards back stroke in 1 Jilin. 12 sec.; and Fujimoto won the 220 yards breast stroke in 3 min. 12.6 sec. Thus Japan subjected Chinese and Filipinos to a thorough beating. Though Takaishi's fame was already recognized in Japan, this was the first time that he showed his skill at an international meet. At that time he was only seventeen years' old, but it was recognized that his swimming style was very promising. Saito also made a new place in the back stroke.

Before this, when the Fifth Far Eastern Championship Games were held at Shanghai in 1921, the Japanese champions were beaten by the Filipinos which left them disappointed. Then there arose a cry to reform swimming. At last the swimming champions separated from the Japan Amateur Athletic Association and established an intercollegiate swimming association. Under the new plan, the first intercollegiate meet took place in 1921, and Meiji University won. At that occasion Dr. Izutaro Suehiro acted as referee, and since then he has become a leader in swimming circles in Japan.

The Olympic Games in Paris

In the Eighth Olympic Games held in Paris in 1924, Takaishi, Saito, Onoda,
Noda, Miyahata and Ishida took part. At that time Takaishi took fifth place, with the time of 1 min. 3 sec. in the 100 metres swim; and in the semi-finals he made a record of 1 min. 2.4 sec. which was the best record of that time. Also in the 1500 metres swim he again took fifth place with the time of 22 min. 10.8 sec.; and in the first trial he made a record of 21 min. 49.4 sec. which also became the best record in Japan. Saito took sixth place in the finals of the back stroke and in the semi-finals he made a record of 1 min. 19.6 sec. which was his best at that time. The 800 metres relay team, which was made up of Takaishi, Onoda, Noda, and Miyahata, took fourth with the time of 10 min. 15.2 sec. This was the first occasion in which the Japanese swimmers were recognized by the world. It was not a good showing as compared with the present, but it was worthy of surprise at that time.
EIGHTH OLYMPIC GAMES

Paris, 1924.


Andrew Charlton of Australia, Winner of 1500 Metres Free Style, Left; Arne Borg of Sweden, Right.

John Weismuller of U.S.A., Winner of 100, 400 Metres Free Style.

Katsuo Takaishi, First Japanese Swimmer to Place in Olympic Games. He Took 5th in 100 and 1500 Metres Free Style and Was a Member of the 800 Metres Relay Team Which Placed 4th.

SEVENTH FAR EASTERN CHAMPIONSHIP GAMES

Manila, 1925.

Japanese Champions Won in 50, 100, 400 and 1500 Metres Free Style; 100 Metres Back Stroke.

Japanese Swimmers Who Participated in This Meet.
TRIPS TO HAWAII


INTERNATIONAL MEET IN TOKYO

Australian and American Swimmers Who Participated in a Swimming Meet in Tokyo, 1927. At Tamagawa Pool. At Extreme Left is Laufer, U.S.A.; Extreme Right, Glancy, U.S.A.; Third from Right, Crabbe, U.S.A.

800 Metres Relay Race in Above Meet Which the Japanese Team Won Making a New Record.