

Goalball!

Hello everyone! My name is Stephen Cannell, Coordinator for International Relations at Toyohashi City Hall. Have you heard of *goalball* before? Goalball is a Paralympic sport designed for athletes with visual impairments such as blindness or partial blindness. It was originally created as a form of rehabilitation for people who had lost their vision, and since 1976 it has been an event at the Paralympics.

In international goalball tournaments, only those with visual impairments are allowed to compete, however due to the varying degrees of athlete's blindness, all competitors are required to wear eyeshades to make the sport as fair as possible. Teams are allowed to have a maximum of 6 players, with 3 players from each team on the court at a time. Similar to baseball, teams alternate between playing defense and offense. The team on offense tries to throw the ball into the opponent's net. The ball in goalball is quite heavy at 1.25kg, and is made of hard rubber. The ball contains bells so that the defending team can sense where the ball is. A match consists of two 12 minute halves, and in the case of a tie, will have an additional two 3 minute sets. Overtime is played as sudden-death, so the first team to score wins. Goalball is played on a court the same size as a volleyball court, 18 meters by 9 meters, and the net is 9 meters wide and 1.3 meters tall. To help the athletes determine their position, rope is placed underneath the tape lines.



Justas Pazarauskas winds up for a throw.

Top goalball players can throw the ball at speeds up to 70kph! To make it even more difficult to stop, the thrower may control the height of the bounces, and the offense may make noise to distract the defense from the sound of the bells.

The defense attempts to block the ball.



September 10th, 2019

Of the 10 teams (men and women) that will be competing at the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics, 6 of them have been decided. One of the teams that has qualified for the Paralympics is Lithuania, one of the countries Toyohashi is acting as a Host Town for. Lithuania came to Toyohashi in April of this year to hold a training camp. They earned their qualification at the qualifier tournament held in Fort Wayne, USA earlier this year. The Lithuanian team won gold at the 2016 Rio Paralympics, and are currently ranked 2nd in the world. Their ace, Justas Pazarauskas looks to earn his second Paralympic gold in Tokyo.



The Lithuanian delegation in Toyohashi, April 2019

Currently ranked 1st in the world, Brazil has also secured their Paralympic qualification. Brazil won silver at the 2016 Rio Paralympics, and looks to be a strong rival for Lithuania after back to back World Championship victories in 2014 and 2018.

Toyohashi is also serving as a Host Town for Germany, another strong force in the goalball world. Germany took silver at last year's World Championship, securing their Paralympic qualification, and looks to earn their first Paralympic gold since reunification.

Host Nation Japan's women's team is looking very strong. They took bronze at the Athens Paralympics, and went on to take gold in London in 2012. The American women's team has also secured their Paralympic qualification.

Goalball is one of few events which have no Olympic equivalent. It features high speed throws, and tough, committed defense. If you've never watched goalball before, next year's Paralympics is the perfect chance to tune in to this amazing sport!