



NAGANO-DEH O-A-Ī SHIMASHÒ

by Fékrou Kidane

No. this is not a spelling or typesetting error. To keep up with current Olympic events, the title is in Japanese, and means simply, “See you in Nagano”.

Since January, the IOC staff have had the opportunity to take Japanese lessons to help them get acquainted with the culture and language of this country before the XVIII Olympic Winter Games in Nagano, in 1998. Some are even beginning to exchange a few words in Japanese. It goes without saying, however, that a Japanese native had to be called upon to translate “Nagano-Deh O-A-Ī Shimashò”, the words conveyed by the IOC President.

But it was the Japanese who provided the real surprise. Nagano’s friendly mayor, Tasuku Tsukada, who has been learning English and French since his city was chosen to host the Games, read a speech in English at the ceremonies on 7 February in Lausanne for the dispatch of invitations to the 197 NOCs requesting them to take part in the XVIII Olympic Winter Games. The NAOC director general, Makoto Kobayashi, also created a surprise by delivering his speech in French. The IOC President warmly congratulated them for their efforts in the languages of Moliere and Shakespeare.

As for the rest of us, our Japanese vocabulary is still limited to “sushi” and “sashimi”, the two Japanese dishes most widely-known around the world, and which are occasionally accompanied by saké.

This symbolic ceremony was held in the Olympic Museum in Lausanne, in the presence of the IOC President; Marc Hodler,

IOC vice-president and president of the Association of International Winter Sports Federations; Executive Board members Richard Kevan Gosper and Chiharu Igaya; IOC members Shun-ichiro Okano, Gerhard Heiberg, Jean-Claude Killy and Robin Mitchell; and IOC honorary member Raymond Gafner.

During the ceremony, the IOC President signed the invitations to the NOCs of Greece, the birthplace of Olympism; France, the country of Baron Pierre de Coubertin, restorer of the Olympic Games; Japan, host country of the XVIII Olympic Winter Games; Australia, host country of the Games of the XXVII Olympiad in 2000; the United States of America, host country of the XIX Olympic Winter Games in 2002; Norway, host country of the XVII Olympic Winter Games in 1994; South Africa, for the African continent; and Switzerland, the IOC’s host country. The invitation to the Japanese NOC was handed to its president, Hironoshin Furuhashi, who immediately confirmed that Japan would be taking part. The remaining 196 invitations were distributed around the world by Olympic sponsor UPS. The honoured guests attending the ceremony, including the mayor of Lausanne, Yvette Jaggi, wore special pins marked “7 February 1997”, which is one year to the day before the opening ceremony of the XVIII Winter Games, which will run from 7 to 22 February 1998.

In accordance with the Olympic Charter, the NOCs have four months to confirm their participation in the Games, making the deadline for replies 7 June 1997.

Sayonara.

The IOC President handing the official invitation to the president of the Japanese NOC, Hironoshin Furuhashi.





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(Left to right) Ed Reitman, Chibaru Igaya, Marc Hodler and Hironosbin Furubashi.



Kevan Gosper and Jean-Claude Killy.



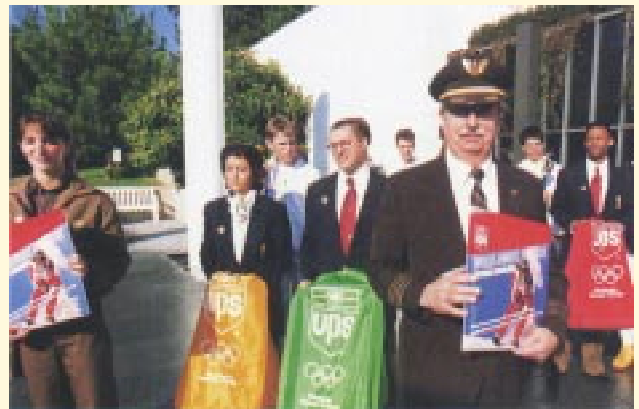
(Left to right) Makoto Kobayashi and Tasuku Tsukada.



(Left to right) Hironosbin Furubashi, Françoise Zweifel and Chibaru Igaya.



The UPS delegation.



Dispatch of the invitations by the UPS team.



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Pyrros, the Olympic Museum mascot, and two of the Nagano "Snowlets".



The Japanese hostesses.

EXCERPTS FROM THE SPEECHES DELIVERED DURING THE 7 FEBRUARY 1997 CEREMONY

"The Olympic Movement has very good relations with the Nagano Organizing Committee, which is presided by Mr Eishiro Saito and run under the able management of its director general, Mr Makoto Kobayashi. The preparations are proceeding according to schedule and we are convinced that the results will meet our aspirations. I can very clearly say that we have total confidence in our Japanese friends" (IOC President).

"As the host NOC, we would like to welcome the winter sports athletes from all over the world next February. We pledge to do our best and we wish to contribute to the promotion of the Olympic Movement and to carry out the realization of world peace" (Hironoshin Furuhashi, President of the Japanese Olympic Committee).

"School children of Nagano are participating in the 'One school, One country' Programme. Through this programme, every school chooses one country to support. Children in that school learn about the country, and will cheer on its athletes

during the Games. The fire of the Olympic spirit is beginning to glow in the hearts of all Nagano citizens. I am truly looking forward to welcoming all of you to our city a year from now: an international city, and a city full of hospitality" (Tasuku Tsukada, Mayor of Nagano).

"Our theme, for the Nagano Olympics is 'Games from the heart - together with love'. This symbolizes love for sports, respect for a beautiful environment, love for humankind irrespective of race or national boundaries, and love for the children of the world, who will carry us forward in the next century" (Makoto Kobayashi, NAOG Director General).

"This past summer, Olympic gold-medal sprinter Michael Johnson said 'time waits for no one'. That's certainly true today. 'Time waits for no one' captures the spirit with which 'UPS-ers' around the world will deliver the Olympic Winter Games invitations. These are ties that certainly bind UPS with the Olympic Movement as we approach the twenty-first century" (Ed Reitman, UPS chairman for Europe).