

Learning to be a ‘Rugger Man’: High School Rugby and Media Constructions of Masculinity in Japan

Richard Light

Department of Human Movement Studies
The University of Queensland
Brisbane, Australia

Abstract

Although rugby is not as popular as baseball or soccer (since 1993) its national championships attract considerable media attention that is evenly split between the soccer championships held in Tokyo and the overlapping rugby championships held in Osaka. There are approximately 1200 high schools and 300 junior high schools fielding rugby teams in Japan and, for the boys who are members of the teams that qualify, the annual national championships constitute the culmination of three years of sustained effort at senior high school. The more committed high school teams may train almost daily for up to twelve months of the year and for many boys playing at this level it can provide access to university education and employment. As such it forms a highly significant experience in the formation of their masculine identity and the way that the media represents the ‘ritual’ at the championships at Hanazono represents a powerful force in the development of adolescent masculinity. This article examines the ways in which television and print media represent the practice of high school rugby football at the Japanese high schools national rugby championships and its role in the construction of a hegemonic masculinity. More specifically, it looks at the selective processes through which the media present events on the field and represent a diverse community as homogenous and uniform (King & Rowse, 1983), conforming to a dominant model of masculinity.

Introduction

Nineteen ninety-nine marks one hundred years since rugby’s introduction into Keio University in 1899 from where it spread throughout schools and universities to form an important component in the education of young men during the development of modern Japan. Despite the spread of rugby beyond the confines of educational institutions in the post-war period, it continues as an important element in the social education of many young Japanese men. Imported Western team sports have formed an integral part of formal schooling in Japan over the past century and Donald Roden (1980) argues that baseball played a significant role in the formation of national identity for a modernising post-feudal Japan. Baseball has long been the major team sport in Japanese schools, but rugby, soccer, volleyball and basketball are notable sports in many schools with soccer enjoying a boom in popularity following the formation and successful marketing of the professional ‘J League’ in 1993. Participation in a traditional martial art such as judo or kendo is compulsory in most high schools but, while the national championships attract considerable interest, they do not approach the obsession with the national high school baseball championships.

Originating in the public (fee paying) schools of nineteenth century England, the ideal of sport as a means of social and cultural education has had a profound and lasting impact on the practice of sport in schools outside England (Kirk & Twigg, 1995). As a central component of the English nineteenth century games for education ideology, rugby football was employed as a means of 'character building' and inculcating 'manly' behaviour into the sons of the rising middle classes (Dunning & Sheard, 1979; Mangan 1981). The resilience of the Victorian faith in sport as a bodily practice through which to 'build character' and develop socially preferred behaviours is evident in the place that sport still enjoys in the schools of many Western societies. It has long been a major justification for the place of sport in the curricula of Australian schools and rugby has been one of the dominant sporting practices adopted for the social education of 'ruling class' boys in the British Isles, Australia and the other former settler colonies. The cultural and geographic dissemination of rugby as a practice for the development of manliness in the former settler colonies has been well documented (Nauright & Chandler, 1996), but the appropriation and cultural transformation of the games ideal and the adoption of rugby in the schools of Asian cultures such as Japan has received scant attention. It has, however, been established that the introduction of British and American team games in the late nineteenth century and the appropriation of the games ethic had a significant impact on the development of modern Japan and has continued to shape the practice of sport in schools (Abe & Mangan, 1997; Roden, 1980).

Robert Connell, Dean Ashenden, Sandra Kesler and Gary Dowsett (1982) argue that schools in Australia do not merely reflect the gender relations of the larger society but that schools act as sites where gender is produced. They contend that schools, ruling class schools in particular, are explicitly involved in projects of making men out of boys and that football (rugby league, rugby union and Australian 'Rules football) forms the main focus. It is through boys' experiences in sport, and particularly hard contact sports such as rugby where opponents must be physically overcome that notions of what it is to be a man are connected with aggression, toughness, competitiveness and dominance (Whitson, 1990). The significance of boys' corporeal experiences in such settings cannot be underestimated in the development of masculinity but their experiences occur at a point where the fields of schooling, sport and the media are intimately interwoven and where media sport has a highly significant impact.

The overlapping of the fields of sport and media has developed as a key site in the social construction of hegemonic masculinity (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; McKay & Middlemiss, 1995; McKay, 1996; Miller, 1990) where sporting 'heroes' are held up as exemplars of what young men should aspire to become, and the connection between manliness, violence and aggression is confirmed. The media constantly represent sport in such a way as to encourage

audience interest while simultaneously reproducing both dominant images of gender (Whannel, 1992) and dominant forms of masculinity (McKay & Middlemiss). Television, magazines and newspaper presentation of sport in Australia and other Western societies regularly celebrate the legitimised violence that characterises contact sports such as the rugby codes and ice hockey (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; McKay & Middlemiss, 1995; Star, 1994). Games and individual 'heroes' are invariably presented in terms of militaristic analogies linking sport and exemplary masculinity to violence, dominance and warfare (McKay, 1996; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993).

School Sport, the Body and Masculinity

The experience of secondary schooling for most boys coincides with the onset of puberty and some degree of separation from their parents (Connell et al., 1982) as they struggle to establish a masculine identity of their own. Recent research on the development of masculinity in Japan has highlighted the absence of the father's presence in the home as a crucial factor in the development of masculine identity and a perceived 'feminisation' of many Japanese boys (Allison, 1994; Wagatsuma, 1982). For many families the father's commitment to his work means that he becomes a virtual stranger to his family and, lacking any presence in the family, is often seen only as a source of income by his wife and children. The derogatory term of *sodai gomi* (large rubbish) is a not uncommon reference to the father used by Japanese wives. Movie director Harada Masato contends that, as the traditional providers of moral authority in Japan, fathers now often do not see their children for more than twenty minutes a day and their absence has had a marked influence on the social development of their children (Barber, 1998).

For many young Japanese boys entry into junior high school and membership in a sports club provide the first experience in all male social contexts. The corporeal experiences involved with membership in the rugby club and the discursive practices that surround it act to constitute an important site for the construction of developing masculinity. In the absence of access to other markers of masculine status available to adult men such as income earning power and fatherhood, the body assumes profound significance in the development of adolescent masculine identity. Although there are far fewer junior high schools offering rugby as a sport than senior high schools, those aspiring to play at elite levels usually begin in junior high. For those who do begin playing rugby in junior high school, their first experiences in all male social groups are centred on the training of the body as an instrument for the production and expression of force. If, as Connell (1983) contends, to be a man is to actually embody force and to move in ways that suggest power, then boys' experiences within this context assume profound significance in their constructions of masculinity.

The time, money and energy devoted to the project of turning boys into men in many Western schools and the prominence of sport in many Japanese all boys schools, indicates an implicit recognition that the development of young men's masculine identity is not a natural process. Interest in the social construction of masculinity has highlighted the fact that there is not one universal masculinity but that there are multiple masculinities that are race, culture and class specific (Connell, 1995) and are the product of social practice within particular social contexts. Reductionist, normalising views of learning to be a man as a process of socialisation into a 'male role' are inadequate for explaining the complexity of processes through which young men develop particular masculine identities and the ways that class, culture and particular social contexts interact to produce different versions of masculinity. Moreover, as Connell (1995) warns, there is a danger of viewing masculinities within these frameworks as fixed and static. Viewing masculinities as *the* middle class masculinity, *the* Asian masculinity or *the* Japanese masculinity masks the dynamic nature of relationships between multiple masculinities that operate within these broader categories.

At given times, in particular cultures or classes, one form of masculinity establishes hegemony over all other forms as to be accepted and uncontested as a 'culturally idealised form of masculine character' (Connell, 1990: 94). These are invariably linked to ideals of toughness, competitiveness and aggression for which rugby provides an ideal medium. Rugby is ideally suited to what Connell et al. (1982) call the masculinising process that schools perform in that it is a ritualised, physically confrontational and explicitly masculine activity. It is a game where hegemonic ideals of toughness, aggression and competitiveness can be both expressed and tested, where boys are required to physically overcome their opponents with superior force, skill and aggression. The experiences of young men through participation in rugby union football are thus highly significant in their development of masculinity and in the reproduction of hegemonic forms. The ways that the media choose to represent what occurs on the field is also significant in the construction of hegemonic forms of masculinity.

The notion of hegemonic masculinity derives from Connell's application of Antonio Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony to gender relations. Gramsci used the concept of hegemony to explain how one class maintains dominance by making its power and values appear as common sense, as uncontested and normal. Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity has guided much recent research and writing on gender and sport but has been criticised by Toby Miller (1998) as unable to allow for theoretical diversity and historical change. The data gathered by Connell from life histories has also been criticised by Kathy Davis (1997) as being too brief and not accounting for the complexity of struggle between competing forms of gender. Connell (1995) however, recognises the existence of multiple masculinities that are class, culture and race

specific and the dynamic ways in which hegemony is maintained through relations of subordination, complicity, marginalisation between competing forms. Although his concept of hegemonic masculinity is restricted to Western culture it has been applied here to identify a form of masculinity in Japan that has developed over time to establish itself as unquestioned and commonsensical. As Connell argues, hegemonic masculinity is not fixed, always and everywhere the same, and this article identifies a form of hegemonic masculinity which, while bearing much in common with that which shapes the practice of rugby in Australia and other Western settings, is distinctly Japanese. It also identifies the existence of diversity in forms masculinity that shaped the practice of rugby at Hanazono and the ways in which the media represented such diversity as uniform and conforming to a hegemonic model of masculinity.

Media Constructions of Masculinity

Rugby is played by approximately 1500 of the 5000 high schools in Japan and, although not as popular as baseball or soccer, could be considered one of the major school sports for boys. Conducted from 27 December to 7 January at the Kintetsu (a railway company) Rugby Stadium at Hanazono in East Osaka, the national high school championships are contested by 52 teams from all over Japan that qualify through regional tournaments. This analysis forms part of a larger comparative study of rugby as practised in Australian and Japanese high schools and examines the representation of games played at the national high school rugby championships in ways that construct and confirm a particular form of hegemonic masculinity in Japan.

The various school championships held for major team sports in Japan such as rugby, soccer, baseball and individual sports such as the martial arts of kendo and judo attract surprising national interest when compared with school sport in Australia. Each day's results are included in the sports section of most television news programs in Osaka but one station covers the event in its entirety as a special program. For the initial week of the event it features two hours of highlights each night from 11.00pm but shifts the program to an earlier time slot later in the tournament as all games shift to the main ground. The final is broadcast live. The newspaper coverage is shared by a wide range of general and sporting publications that include the major national papers as well as regional papers in the Kansai area around Osaka. One of the major national newspapers, the *Mainichi Shinbun*, has sponsored the event since 1918 and devoted up to four full pages an issue to the tournament. Other papers, particularly in the Kansai region, have also devoted similar space.

Meanings are produced through the media by the presence of signifiers exchanging and creating understanding but also by their absence (Miller, 1990). What is ignored can have as much meaning as what is highlighted. Media sport is produced through selective processes of deconstruction and

reconstruction that promote particular values and marginalise or devalue others, advancing the position of certain social groups at the expense of others (McKay & Middlemiss, 1995). The various media play an active role in the construction of hegemonic masculinity through processes of representation that are radically selective yet unquestioned by the consuming public and act as powerful discursive practices in the construction of hegemonic forms of masculinity. This should, however, not be viewed as an intentional and conscious process of domination and imposing particular views and values on the public, but as part of a hegemony through which particular meanings become dominant over others. Hegemony is maintained through dynamic relationships of dominance, submission, compliance, opposition and incorporation and is constantly adapting and being modified. Although the media may often claim to be merely giving the viewing/reading public 'what they want' the ways that it reconstructs sport act to promote particular values and views while marginalising others (McKay & Middlemiss, 1995). Noel King and Tim Rowse (1983) contend that the media functions much like populist political parties that seek to represent diverse communities as uniform and homogeneous, not so much by giving the public what they want, but by standing in place of the people and talking for them.

Research Methodology

This article arises from a larger three month case study of a high school rugby club in Japan. Data was collected at Hanazono through ethnographic interviews, observation and analysis of television and newspaper coverage. Data collected through unstructured interviews and observation were compared with media presentations of games and interviews as part of a grounded theory approach through which texts were repeatedly examined for common themes, then theories were formulated and tested. Garry Whannel (1992) contends that television and print media locate action and events within 'maps of meaning' that provide the audience with a particular way of viewing the event. Newspapers and television coverage of sport select and order what happens on the field within frames of reference that emphasise particular values over others and reinforce relationships of power and dominance (Cohen & Young, 1973; Whannel, 1992). Analysis of newspaper and television coverage showed that the media represented events at Hanazono within two broad frames that acted to confirm and reinforce a culture specific form of dominant masculinity. Events on the field were presented within the frames of notions of forces and physical domination and the notion of inner/moral strength (what might be called character) and interpersonal relations. Within these broad frames, the treatment of instances of playing hurt, which is a familiar theme in Western media coverage of rugby football, and crying provided deep insight into the nature of a culture specific hegemonic masculinity constructed and reconstructed by the media at Hanazono.

Frame 1: ‘The Male Roar’: Force and Physical Domination

Considerable attention has been paid to the ‘examination hell’ that Japanese students must endure to gain entry to university but this is not a universal experience for students. Contrary to common stereotypes operating in the West only twelve per cent of the Japanese population hold a university degree (Sugimoto, 1997) but for those on an academic track the notorious university entrance examinations demand such commitment that they normally preclude playing sport at elite level. Membership in competitive school sports clubs is characterised by demands of daily training all year round and a level of physical and emotional commitment that makes the samurai ideal of *bun bu ryodo* (scholarship and the art of war, both ways) virtually unachievable in contemporary Japan. Although many academic schools play rugby, most of the stronger rugby playing schools at Hanazono were lower academic level schools and vocational schools. Of the 52 teams competing, half a dozen qualified as academically elite private schools and included the eventual winner.

One such school that played in one of the quarter finals was favoured to win over its lesser ranked opponent, but with five minutes remaining in the game was one point behind. For the remainder of the game the team had continuous possession assisted by a series of penalties and scrums where they had the advantage of placing the ball in the scrum, which almost guarantees possession. They spent the last five minutes camped within ten metres of the opponent’s line trying to force their way over through monotonous and predictable forward charges from rucks and mauls and back row attacks from scrums. During that period they received a penalty kick yet opted for a quick tap kick to return to their barging and unimaginative forward attacks, not once spreading the ball through the backs and ended up losing the game by a point. They were known for the power of their forward pack and seemed intent on winning in a way that displayed and confirmed their superior physical force and power. Given the knock out format of the tournament a loss would have brought the team’s year of rugby to a sudden end yet the team seemed to be possessed by what Evan Whitton (1998) calls ‘white line fever’. The significance of the game for the team was made evident at the sound of the full time whistle after which all the players collapsed in tears. Given the school’s high academic reputation, the tactics used by the team were surprising. The television and newspaper reports the next day were equally surprising as they made no mention of the losing team’s tactics, choosing instead to focus on the courage of both teams as they battered each other to the end. The game was presented as a war of attrition in which the favourites gave it their absolute best, continually launching ferocious attacks on the opposition line to be met with an equally powerful and committed defence that earned the team a miraculous victory. This was what rugby was about, courage, single minded commitment, tenacity and the glorification of youth.

The eventual winners fielded the heaviest forward pack at the tournament and featured some large and powerful backs, but the players prided themselves on an expansive, continuous style of play and the understanding between players. Although the school played a very physical style of rugby and built its game plan on forward dominance, there was also stress on skill, tactics, communication and anticipation. All the players described the team's 'unity' as its strengths and stressed the understanding between players and the high skill levels of all players as factors that enabled them to maintain continuous offence. Yet, the team's victories were all attributed solely to the forwards' power and size by the media. Admittedly the team did close up its play as it approached the final stages but its victories were the result of more than just the power of its forwards. A quick look at the headings under which various papers reported on the final provide a good indication of the slant taken by the newspapers.

Higashi High School HIT THE SUMMIT THROUGH POWER. EXPLOSIVE OFFENSIVE TACKLING! (*Mainichi Shinbun*, 8 January 1998, p. 15)

THE MALE ROAR! Higashi High School hang on to reach the peak. (*Sports Nippon*, 8 January 1998, p. 24)

HIGASHI HIGH SCHOOL VICTORY!

– Massive forward power gains upper hand in close fought contest, (*Sankei Shinbun*, 8 January 1998, p. 19)

Frame 2: Character/Moral Strength and Obligation.

The final saw a closely fought contest between an academic school and a vocational school in which the teams entered the half time break locked together at seven points each. Following the resumption of play after the break the academic school, which will be referred to using the pseudonym of Higashi High School, raced away to a huge lead within the first ten minutes of the second half and appeared likely to run away with the game. The vocational school, which will be referred to as Nishi High School, hit back immediately with three tries to trail by only one point. Higashi High School then scored again from an opposition mistake and converted the try to open up a lead of eight points but in a thrilling finish Nishi High School, enjoying continuous possession, scored in the corner and missed the conversion as the full-time whistle sounded. Higashi High School had won by three points. The newspapers spared no superlatives in their poetic accounts of how the vocational school had not given up despite the power of the opposition forwards and had made a stirring comeback through courage, commitment and a sense of obligation to the coach. Under the heading, 'Tenacious Nishi press on with blood curdling comeback', the *Mainichi Shinbun* (8 January 1998, p. 15) attributed the

second half comeback of the losing team to the motivation created by the coach's words at half time and the depth of the relations between the players and him. The story stressed the deep cultural concerns of obligation and duty and implied that his presence and discourse at half time lifted their spirits enough to make their comeback. He is reported as saying:

Look over there, they are all here for you, they cannot play here on this ground so they are counting on you to earn victory on this sacred ground. Its up to you now to fight here and now for their sake, especially for the third years. Look at that banner, what does it say? Believing is power! (*Mainichi Shinbun*, 8 January 1998, p. 15).

With the emphasis on physical domination and moral strength there was typically little mention of tactical changes. There was also no reference made in any newspaper to the advantage of ball possession that Nishi High School enjoyed courtesy of refereeing decisions in the second half that gave it a 16-2 penalty advantage and a loose head scrum advantage of 15-4. Video analysis of the game revealed that a glut of possession from refereeing decisions offers a more logical explanation for the technical school's comeback, yet there is not one reference to it in any newspaper. This view was confirmed during a post match interview with the father of a player in the winning team. He was a well known coach of a famous university team and told me that, when interviewed by newspaper journalists after the game, he said that, 'I think we can see that the level of rugby played in high schools has really improved but it's a shame that the level of refereeing has not improved at all'. He said that the reporters' response was to apologise and say that although his comment was interesting it could not be printed. Later in the interview the father offered his opinion that the referee had tried to 'make the game' (interview, 8 January 1998).

Nishi High School was an academically low level school made famous by the head coach. The school had been overrun by delinquents when he was first appointed. As a teacher and a former elite level rugby player, he decided to introduce rugby to regain control. In a situation not unlike the resurrection of the nineteenth century English public schools, rugby was used as a means of re-establishing discipline and control over the students and providing them with a sense of purpose and identity. The success of introducing rugby into the school provided a model for the production of a popular television drama that ran for eight years. The coach was a media favourite as he was emotional, expressive, articulate and symbolised many of the ideals of effort, commitment, 'human relations' and obligation commonly associated with rugby in Japan. For the boys in the Nishi High School team, rugby offered their only chance of entry into university and of finding work with a good company that fielded a rugby team, and their loyalty and devotion to their head coach was well known.

The school had narrowly won close fought games on its way to the final, wins attributed by the media to their *konjo* (fighting spirit) and their intense emotional bond with their head coach. In a lead up story to the final the *Sunkei Sports* (8 January 1998, p.5) told how the coach's affection for the boys gave them incredible tenacity for their games. To show the depth of his relationship with the players the story explained how he had expanded his paternalistic role to take on the responsibility of the team doctor. The story told how, with many of the players carrying injuries and suffering illness from the hard games they had played, he asked the entire squad of around seventy players to go to his room individually where he would ask them about their physical and emotional condition. The *Sunkei Sports* (8 January 1998) outlined how he would cure soft tissue injuries through massage and cure those suffering colds by administering extract of *umeboshi* (dried, salted plums). This healing potion was taken orally by some, and personally administered by the coach as suppositories for others, a practice that would likely be cause for concern in any Australian high school.

‘With a Broken Chest Rib He Packs Into the Strum’: Playing Hurt

The ideal of playing injured as an indicator of hegemonic masculinity is a common theme in Western media representation of sport and has received due attention (McKay, 1991; Messner, 1992). It compliments the Japanese cultural emphasis on personal sacrifice for the sake of the group, perseverance and self restraint where the concept of no pain/no gain typically characterises training and playing. During the quarter final, the Tokyo school's captain was badly injured in a tackle and taken to hospital with torn lower back muscles. On the day of his injury the coach told me that there was no possibility that he would play. Every time I asked the captain himself he told me that he would be playing in the final if the team progressed that far but it seemed to be general knowledge in the squad that he had played his last game for the school. He was admired by all the team and the coaches, his inspirational leadership featuring in many of the television and newspaper reports and, as the team headed towards the final, the issue of his participation became a major theme for the media. His standing in the team and with the media made him the centre of the television camera's focus each time there was a dramatic moment in the game for his team. When the cameras zoomed in on the opposition supporters they usually focused on the charismatic and colourful opposition coach.

During the opposition's semi-final one of the props sustained a broken rib but played on to the end of the game, kept it a secret from the media and played in the final. After the final several newspapers wrote up the different approaches of the two players to injury with some interesting differences in interpretation. The official sponsor, *Mainichi*, wrote up the story under the heading of ‘The satisfaction of their youth: perseverance despite injury’ (*Mainichi Shinbun*, 8 January 1998, p. 22) in which it lauded the spirit of both players under separate stories headed ‘With his spine damaged he drives his

team on from the stands' for the captain of Higashi High School and 'With a broken chest rib he packs into the scrum' for the injured Nishi High School prop. The ideal of sacrifice and commitment, of 'no pain/no gain', was clearly promoted by the *Mainichi* the prop who 'played through the pain' was promoted as an exemplar of masculine ideals. It talked of his pain each time he packed in and how he endured up until two minutes from the end for the sake of his team. The article picked up the human drama angle of how the player, in tears, pleaded with the coach to let him play and how the coach could not refuse him. The *Mainichi Shinbun* conceded that the prop's injury may have hindered the team's scrum physically but contended that this was more than compensated for by the way that his participation had made a 'marvellous contribution to the spiritual strength (*seishin*) of the team and lifted its efforts to great heights', Although the *Yomiuri* (8 January 1998, p. 15) also praised the prop's courage and commitment, it suggested that it may have allowed the opposition to dominate in the scrums and general forward play. It also implied that perhaps the coach's decision to allow him to play had been too strongly influenced by emotion.

Through live observations and video analysis of the game, it was clear that the winning school's dominance in the scrum was a significant factor in the game, which was confirmed by conversations with the Tokyo school's front row. At a post game celebration I asked the Higashi High School team's prop about the game and he told me how the forwards had been motivated by their clear superiority in the scrum and had carried it on in other phases of play. He was not aware of his opponent's injury until he read in the papers the next day and told me with satisfaction how he had damaged the other prop so badly that he could see the pain and dread in his opponent's eyes every time they were about to engage. There can be little doubt that fielding the injured prop was tactically unsound and that it contributed significantly to the team's loss.

'Tears and Tears': Wet and Dry Culture

The ways that the media frames its discourse with the themes of the use of force and physical strength to dominate opponents, character and playing through the pain barrier also characterise Australian media representations of sport but the meanings attached to crying differ significantly. After Mal Meninga's tears in a State of Origin rugby league game in 1989 the Brisbane *Courier Mail* stated:

Last week we had one of Queensland's favourite sons, Mal Meninga, weeping openly . . . There is no doubt winning any grand final at any level of sport is a highly emotional experience. But the fact that crying may become part of it is a great pity exercising control over the emotions never hurt anyone (Kavanagh, 1989: 32; quoted in McKay & Middlemiss, 1995).

There is normally little masculine status attached to crying in Australian sport but the meanings attached to tears in Japanese rugby are quite different. In a culture that values self control and restraint it may seem odd to see the flood of tears from both winners and losers at full time in Japanese rugby games and seems at odds with the 'stoic samurai spirit' that typifies Western stereotypes. In day to day social life there are enormous pressures on the Japanese to hold in their real feelings (*honne*) and project the appropriate social front (*tatemae*). In all areas of life, from women giving birth to soldiers dying in battle. the Japanese are encouraged to 'suffer in silence'. If a player were to cry due to the pain from an injury it would be seen as a weakness, but a player who did not cry at the end of the final, win or lose, would be regarded as not having given a one hundred per cent effort. It is the value attached to restraint and emotional control that makes the shedding of tears, whether of joy or despair, a meaningful sign of total physical and emotional commitment.

The coach of the Nishi High School team is a favourite with the media and is very well known in Japan, even outside rugby circles. He was disliked by the coaches of Higashi High School, who informed me of how he played up to the media and manipulated it for his own gain. The former director of rugby at the school told me that he would regularly squeeze out tears for the benefit of the media who lapped it up. The heading in the *Nikkan Sports* the day after his team's victory over one of the number one seed teams in the tournament in the semi final read, 'Nishi High School in final – Yamamoto again sheds tears and tears' (*Nikkan Sports*, 6 January 1998, p. 5). The collective shedding of tears by both winning and losing teams after important games appeared, not only acceptable, but expected and earned the immediate attention of both television and newspaper cameras throughout the tournament. As the field was reduced to the teams that really thought they had a chance of winning the championship, the displays of emotion became more explicit. Although Higashi High School was far more restrained than their colourful opponents in the final, the cool, emotionally restrained calmness showed throughout the tournament eventually gave way to tears of joy and relief after the final.

Japanese sometimes differentiate their culture from Western cultures by referring to it as a wet culture and to Western culture, with its stress on cold logic, as dry. Western ways are seen to be dry and hard compared with Japanese ways, which are wet and soft and which allow Japanese individuals to 'stick together like glutinous rice' (Van Wolferen, 1993: 346). In a conversation with one of the senior 'old boys' during the tournament I was told how all teams used to run out onto the field so 'pumped up' that they would all be in tears but that now it was less common. He offered the explanation that, 'maybe we are all becoming drier', meaning Westernised. Television coverage at Hanazono always featured teams' collective tears constantly searching for some tears from the coach of the losers in the final, ignoring the restrained coach of the victorious team and focusing on the emotional contrasts of winners and losers

after games. The coach of the winning team did not cry after the game and had made a sarcastic reference to his opposing coach at the team's last meeting the night before the final saying that he would be laughing all the way back home, not crying (field notes, 6 January 1998). Ironically, on the day after the final the back page of the Sports *Nippon* featured a half page colour photograph of the losing coach with his arms around two players crying and the champions were relegated to a small photograph in the top right hand corner. The main caption read, 'We cried and cried with the moving drama; their tears make us cry in an inspirational drama' (Sports *Nippon*, 8 January 1998, p. 24). Although some regional bias toward the local team must be accounted for, this still constitutes a culturally significant message.

Conclusion

In his analysis of the language used at the national high school baseball championships, cultural anthropologist Brian Moeran (1986) describes the event as Japan's only true national festival and contends that it operates to confirm dominant cultural values. He argues that it constitutes a modern Japanese ritual in which radio and television act as the 'high priests' who present the rites through choosing what to emphasise and what to ignore. His analysis of the vocabulary in use at Koshien, the famous stadium in Osaka where the championships are always played, identifies a number of 'key words' that characterise the television and radio commentary. The key words identified centred on the ideals of sacrifice, effort, courage, tenacity and perseverance that also characterised much of the commentary at Hanazono. As Moeran reported at Koshien, teams at Hanazono were often categorised as a certain type of team and designated with a distinguishing character. Some teams relied on domination through powerful forward play and other teams relied on wearing out their opponents through high speed continuous rugby. This functioned to reduce the diversity of play presented and to construct a view of teams performances as conforming to hegemonic masculine ideals and encouraged teams not to abandon 'their way' of playing. The classification of teams into 'types' that fit into the dominant model of masculinity operating at Hanazono was reinforced through constant references throughout the media discourse to strength, power, perseverance and self-control (*gaman*, *shimbou*, *ganbaru*), single-minded commitment (*omoikitte*, *seijitsu*) and obligation (*giri*, *on*). At Hanazono, players were expected to show physical strength, power and stamina, and victories won through such qualities were highlighted by the media. Games won through 'guts', sacrifice and power were celebrated, not merely because of superior physical force per se, but because such strength and power is taken to indicate internal strength and 'moral fortitude'. Evidence of physical power in sport carries with it the implication that it is the manifestation of moral purity and strength. Games won through 'fair play', effort and physical superiority are also games won through strength of spirit and the power of social connections

between people. Connell (1983) contends that, through experiences in school-boy sport, embodied masculinity is constructed in specific combinations of force, skill and the use of space. The masculinity constructed by the media at Hanazono was centred on physical domination and the expression of collective bodily force while individual skill, guile and 'cleverness' were marginalised.

Although strength and physical power are necessary ingredients in rugby it is a tactically complex game which also requires cognitive engagement, decision making, a variety of refined skills and tactical awareness to be played at its highest competitive levels. Former Scottish national team member Jim Greenwood (1986) contends that Japanese rugby is predictable and uniform and that this contributes to games being decided through superior power and commitment. He describes games as being played like a war of attrition in which the physically and spiritually stronger team prevails. Much of the high school rugby played at Hanazono tended to follow this model of play but, while the majority of the 52 schools relied on winning through superior physical power and stamina, there was considerable variation in play which involved tactical changes, skill and individual decision making. There was also considerable evidence of variations in, team and individual approaches to playing rugby and to what it means to be a man yet this was obscured by the celebration of events on and off the field that conformed to a hegemonic model of masculinity. In presenting the 'rites' at Hanazono the 'high priests' of television and the print media operated to confirm a dominant form of masculinity as uniform, universal and unchallenged. The interpretation of events and the selection of what was emphasised and what was ignored produced a version of rugby that both acted to confirm dominant cultural notions of what it means to be Japanese and of what it means to be a man, a 'rugger man'.

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