

## **Nobiru Elementary School, Miyagi Prefecture: “I can play baseball again!”**

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“I wonder if it is time to start playing baseball again,” said Mr. Ittetsu Tanaka, Baseball Association Manager at Nobiru Elementary School in Higashi-Matsushima City, Miyagi Prefecture. It was a month-and-a-half after the earthquake. At that time, however, most families still had difficulties even obtaining hot water to take a bath or wash their clothes. Therefore, most parents opposed his proposal, saying, “I am not in the mood yet.” Mr. Tanaka intentionally refrained from trying to persuade them. Instead, he only told them to come when they were ready, and started playing baseball with a few children.

The team had just gotten new uniforms one year before the earthquake; however, the tsunami swept most of them away and only seven remained. By adding some out-of-date ones, Mr. Tanaka barely managed to have enough uniforms for all the players. But they were not suitable for games, as the fabric was full of holes, faded and threadbare.

Walmart’s support resulted in new uniforms. “When the children saw those new uniforms, they shouted for joy,” Mr. Tanaka said. He continued, “I had wanted to arrange for new uniforms, but I thought it would be financially difficult, so we had to be patient with the old ones for a while. It was at that time that we received this support.”

As he remembered the joy and excitement of the new uniforms, Mr. Tanaka said, “That made me so happy as well.” His future goal is to sustain the Nobiru Elementary School Baseball Association as long as he can, and to have as many children as possible enjoy baseball. In the Nobiru district, many families relocated to other districts, so the number of school children decreased by about 40 percent, and this had an impact on the baseball association. Hearing Mr. Tanaka say, “We want more members,” one could not help but feel the strong passion of the manager who organized an environment for children—one by one—to play baseball again in such difficult circumstances.



A sixth grader named Shunsuke Ogata, the captain of the Nobiru Elementary School Baseball Association, leads the team with Mr. Tanaka. "I was so glad to think about being able to play baseball again. I was also happy to think about seeing my teammates, as we had always played together." He also said that he was especially happy to receive the uniforms: "When I saw them for the first time, I thought, 'Cool!' That is because white is my favorite color, and I prefer our new uniforms to the navy ones we used to wear. Because the color is bright, they make us feel cheerful and raise our spirits. Thanks to the uniforms, our performance during games has improved." The uniforms are very popular among the children and rumored to bring them victory.

As Shunsuke moves on to junior high school next year, someone will take his place as team captain, but he said he would continue to play baseball. With a smile, he said, "Baseball is really fun and I cannot describe the joy of baseball in a word. I feel so happy when I get a hit in games." We asked Shunsuke about his future goals, and he replied shyly, "I want to become a player who can hit, field and run. In the future, I want to become a professional baseball player and play in the World Baseball Classic. My goal is to become like Mr. Nakajima of Seibu." At the end of the interview, he gave a message to the younger team members: "Although we lost some games, I want you to work as hard as possible so that you will become strong enough to win all your future matches." Looking at him, we could feel his reliability and strength as the captain that has led the Nobiru Elementary School Baseball Association during the difficulties of the past two years.



Younger children in lower grades also participate despite cold weather.



Players can't hide their smiles at a homerun.