



JAPAN TEAM PROFILE - Womens



Shoichi Yanagimoto, a bronze medalist at the '74 World Championship in Mexico and an experienced coach, replaced Yoshikawa, and launched his new squad immediately after the V. League, Japan's premier league. Over thirty players - from two Olympians Tomoko Yoshihara and Asako Tajimi, to fresh and promising players Kana Oyama and Megumi Kurihara - were invited to the inaugural camp.

Naturally lacking in height - Sano at 158cm being the shortest player - Japan's liberos will be crucial to any substantial improvement but one thing can be guaranteed there will be nothing lacking in Japan's determination to see their name back on the podium.

Core players remain the same as the previous years but younger talent like the lanky Sachiko Sugiyama (184 cm) are expected to be key players in the future. Since April, through competing in many international competitions, such as the Volley Masters (6th) (Switzerland), the 2003 World Grand Prix, Italy (9th) and the Asian Championship (Vietnam), the young and promising players have been improving rapidly and the young Japanese team ended up runners-up after losing to China in the final of the Asian women's Championship - Japan was fourth at the previous Championship two years ago.

Not only technically gifted, but mentally as well, Japan's squad is remarkably well-balanced. The skipper, Tomoko Yoshihara, pulls all the members together by giving advice to young players and the setter, Takeshita, who is composed at all times, gives accurate indications to her teammates on the court. Being supported by those experienced players, newcomers can express themselves without feeling anxious about making errors.

Japan used to be a powerhouse in the past and Yanagimoto's squad are strongly aware that the World Cup and going to Athens will be the first steps to returning to the top, but they also know that if they play like they do in everyday training, they will be able to get good results at the World Cup 2003.

Recent records:

12th Asian Continental Championship in Vietnam (September) finished second

Final: Japan lost to China 3-0(25-21, 25-23, 25-15)

Semifinal: Japan beat Korea 3-0 (26-24, 25-21, 25-19)

Quarterfinal: Japan beat the Philippines 3-0 (25-16, 25-23, 25-17)

Japan beat New Zealand 3-0 (25-11, 25-17, 25-17)

Japan beat Chinese Taipei 3-1 (25-21, 21-25, 25-21, 25-12)

Japan beat Vietnam 3-0 (25-14, 25-12, 31-29)

Japan beat Thailand 3-0 (25-18, 25-23, 25-15)

World Cup record

1999 - Sixth
1995 - Sixth
1991 - Seventh
1989 - Fourth
1985 - Fourth
1981 - Second
1977 - First
1973 - Second

World Grand Prix (July-August, 2003)

Japan beat Cuba 3-2 (18-25, 25-18, 25-20, 19-25, 15-13)

Japan beat Italy 3-2 (23-25, 16-25, 25-21, 26-24, 15-10)

Japan lost to Germany 3-1 (25-13, 17-25, 26-24, 25-21)

Japan lost to USA 3-2 (24-26, 25-17, 25-15, 23-25, 15-12)

Japan lost to the Netherlands 3-0 (25-16, 25-18, 25-19)

Other Tournament Records

2003 World Grand Prix 9th
2003 Asian Championship (Vietnam) 2nd
2002 World Grand Prix 5th
2002 World Championship (Germany) 13th
2001 World Grand Prix 6th
2001 Asian Championship (Thailand) 4th
2000 World Grand Prix 8th

Team Roster

1 Yoshihara Tomoko, 2 Tsuji Chie, 4 Sasaki Miki, 5 Omura Kanako, 7 Takeshita Yoshie, 9 Takahashi Miyuki, 10 Horai Makiko, 11 Sano Yuko, 12 Sugiyama Sachiko, 15 Kimura Saori, 17 Oyama Kana, 18 Kurihara Megumi.