

Empowering Disabled People Through Sport in Laos

Unbound by his own disability, HANE Hiroyuki is passionately promoting Para-sports while guiding people in Laos to greater social participation and autonomy

Even today in Laos, a country replete with abundant nature and friendly compassionate people, many unexploded ordnances remain from war. The number of people in that country with disabilities, including victims from such explosions, exceeds half a million, a number equivalent to roughly eight percent of the population.

Many disabled people there have limited opportunities to participate in society, such as regarding employment.

One Japanese man is striving to change these circumstances through the power of sport. HANE Hiroyuki has been coaching Para-athletics in Laos since 2015. Actually, Hane himself has a disability, having

lost the function of his left arm in a workplace accident. For a time, the disability had disrupted his life. But the turning point that liberated him from those days of struggle was his first encounter with Para-sports. Using the experience and knowhow he gained as a track athlete back in his student days, he eventually set Japanese Para-athletic records



Together with athletes of the Lao Paralympic Athletic Team, Hane (second from right) says that he wants to be seen as a role model for overcoming his own struggles with disability and illness.



Having trained a medalist gives Hane great pride and self-confidence as a coach.



in both the triple jump and long jump. He even clinched a victory among able-bodied athletes in a masters' athletics championship.

"There are feats one can achieve even with a disability. By setting goals and challenging myself, my world changed dramatically. I wanted to use my experience to teach sports to people with disabilities in a developing country where there are few role models," he says.

At that time in his life, he came across ADDP, Asian Development with the Disabled Persons, which supports people with disabilities from various Asian countries, notably Laos. ADDP is a Japanese NPO whose main activity is encouraging self-motivation among the disabled through the promotion of Para-sports, as well as helping such people find employment. Upon learning of their work, Hane was driven into action by his passionately held belief: if not me, then who?

Hane, who trained visually impaired Para-athletes in Laos, not only coached them on technical aspects, but also worked on revolutionizing their mindset. For example, he taught them the importance of having goals and identifying what is important to achieving them. Empowered by their newly-acquired, self-directed learning skills, the athletes not only had a greater desire to train but also gained greater motivation to work. That was due to Hane's insistence upon the necessity of doing one's own job in order to earn the funds to continue competing. The athletes who understood that competed with more motivation than ever before, and one of them became the first ever bronze medalist from Laos in athletics at the ASEAN Para Games.

"Only fate will decide whether they will get to compete at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, but they are in with a good chance. I'm proud to have proven that athletes can achieve the elite level even in countries without a proper training environment, as long as they have a coach with the right knowledge."

In the developing nation of Laos, where people do not consider those with disabilities as special but naturally lend a helping hand to someone who is struggling, Hane believes that inclusive attitudes are actually more common than in

Hane has added his own touch to the training regimes and has adopted effective warm-up exercises. Continuing to compete himself, he joins in with the training.



developed nations. "I don't think it is difficult to realize an inclusive society—offering a few words is all that it takes. At the same time, I want disabled people to take action themselves and venture out more. I see that my greatest mission in the rest of my life is to contribute to society through broadening participation in Para-sports." *



HANE Hiroyuki

Born in 1965. After losing the function of his left arm at the age of 37, he participated as an athlete in jumping events in Para-athletics and masters athletics. Since 2015, while battling intractable polymyositis, he has been coaching Para-athletes in Laos and has shown much in the last five years. "I would like to try coaching in other countries in the future and establish Para-sports coaching as a career for others, too."