

YUSUKE TACHIBANA



AGE: 18

HOMETOWN: Kyoto

COUNTRY: Japan

POSITION: Forward/Midfielder



STORY: Yusuke is an 18 year-old forward and midfielder from Japan, who has been playing football for almost 10 years and participating with Special Olympics for three years. Yusuke was born with both physical as well as intellectual disabilities, which kept him hospitalized a lot when he was in elementary school.

He suffered a stroke at birth, so initially he did not build many friendships with his classmates as a child. Instead he spent much of his time in the hospital and alone at home, so he began to watch football on television. He was inspired after watching games in the Japan League and also the 2002 FIFA World Cup, which was held in Japan.

After being inspired by watching the World Cup he began to practice his football skills in the hopes that someday he could play in the professional Japan league. In high school a teacher introduced him to Special Olympics, where football became his main sport. Yusuke practices a lot with his coach and teammates to constantly improve his skills. He also helps to coach, teaching a youth football team every Saturday.

He has overcome his challenges and as a result of eager practice, he was selected as a member of the Kansai area football team last year. He always has a smile on his face and has a very strong will to succeed. Football has provided Yusuke not only with sports skills, but some very good friends in school. He enjoys karaoke and bowling, and he is also a certified scuba diver, who has traveled as far as Guam to dive. Yusuke graduated from high school and has begun working at a local institution for elderly people.

His football dream is to travel to South Africa to play football on the same field as famous football legends, which will become reality at the Unity Cup. Special Olympics has taught him to not hesitate to try, that he can have friends and that life is enjoyable. His coaches say he is very independent and a good learner. He never hesitates to try something new. He has overcome his fears to become more confident as a result of playing football.