

Ekiden

How's everyone been starting their new year this *oshogatsu*? To kick things off on the first day of the year, there's nothing like the New Year Ekiden. I'm sure there were many people cheering on the Miyazaki Asahi Kasei team, which boasts the most wins of any ekiden team across history. So, for this month's article, I'd like to talk about ekiden.

Ekiden is an athletic sport that developed in Japan. Several athletes run a relay race across the designated area, passing a sash (*tasuki*) instead of a baton, and the winning team is determined by their collective time. Japan's first ekiden contest was held in 1917 at the commemoration of 50 years of Tokyo as the capital of Japan. The contest was a great success, and 1920 saw the beginning of Hakone Ekiden inter-university tournaments. Following this, in 1957, corporate teams began competing in the All Japan Corporate Team Ekiden Championships, commonly called New Year Ekiden.



Two distinctive features of ekiden are the “skipping ahead” effect and the “advance start” rule. In the first instance, the sight of one athlete sprinting past many others is exhilarating. Meanwhile, “advance start” refers to the rule that if a team falls behind the leader over the stipulated margin, the next runner must start without taking the *tasuki*. This event breaks the relay, and it can be heart wrenching to watch a runner welling up in tears as they can see the next runner ahead, but can't pass on the *tasuki*.

Ekiden is a rare team sport within athletics, where running across the designated area is a solo battle on its own, but victory can only be attained by coming together and fighting as a team. Seeing how the teams formulate their strategies and decide running orders to build on each member's strength as they aim for gold is yet another appeal of ekiden.



This year's Zodiac animal is the Horse. Various ekiden tournaments and marathons are held in Miyazaki, including some where beginners may participate casually. In the spirit of the Zodiac, why not take the Year of the Horse by the reins and give running a try this year?

※The original Japanese version of this article will be uploaded onto the website of the Miyazaki International Foundation soon.

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