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Former MLB pitcher Kuwata rejects corporal punishment in sports
(adapted from www.japantoday.com)

Former major league pitcher Masumi Kuwata has spoken out against corporal punishment in sports following the suicide of a Japanese high school student who endured repeated beatings by his basketball coach.

“I don’t think corporal punishment as a form of instruction makes one stronger,” Kuwata said in an interview with national broadcaster NHK on Friday. “I think those teaching sports need to change their methods to fit the times.”

The 17-year-old boy, who was the captain of his basketball team, hanged himself after being physically punished by his basketball coach in late December, the Osaka municipal board of education said Tuesday. The student told his mother he had been struck 30 to 40 times the day before he died last month.

The 47-year-old coach, whose name has not been disclosed, admitted slapping the teen when he made a mistake and said it was intended to “fire him up,” the board said.

Osaka police are investigating the incident which has sparked a national debate about the place of physical punishment in Japanese sports.

Kuwata, who studied sports psychology after his playing days with the Yomiuri Giants, said in the interview he was the victim of physical punishment as a baseball player in elementary school.

“There were no days when you weren’t hit,” Kuwata said.

Kuwata, who had a brief career with the Pittsburgh Pirates in 2007, said he hopes the recent incident will lead to reforms in Japan.

“I think there is a lack of understanding,” Kuwata said. “I hope this incident will not be wasted and will serve as a catalyst for reform. I hope it will lead to changes in the way we develop athletes.”

Physical punishment in sports is fairly common in Japan, where it's felt it toughens up athletes. The most recent incident isn't the first that resulted in a death.

In 2009, a former sumo trainer was sentenced to six years in prison for his role in the fatal beating of a young wrestler during training.

Former trainer Junichi Yamamoto ordered three wrestlers, in the name of practice, to beat 17-year-old wrestler Tokitaizan, hitting him with beer bottles, a baseball bat and hosing him with cold water.

Tokitaizan, whose real name was Takashi Saito, collapsed after practice and died in June 2007. An autopsy showed bruises and injuries that prosecutors said showed his ordeal was not training.

Questions

1. Do you think that corporal (physical) punishment is common in Japanese school sports?
2. What sports did you play when you were at school?
3. Were you ever physically punished by a coach when you were a student?
4. Were you ever physically punished by a teacher in class?
5. Masumi Kuwata doesn't think "corporal punishment as a form of instruction makes one stronger". Do you agree or disagree? Why?
6. What punishments do you think are acceptable or unacceptable in school sports?
7. Do you think punishment at school has changed much since you were a student? Have the changes had a good or bad effect on Japanese society?
8. Do you think the basketball coach in the story should be punished? If so, what do you think is a suitable punishment?

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