

Miyoshi Takei gave the following lecture to 5<sup>th</sup> grade students in October 2007 at a primary school in Tokorozawa, Saitama

After the lecture, he demonstrated blind tennis and enjoyed playing with the students and teachers.

My name is Takei.

I was born in 1968. I am 39 years old. I am now working at an old people's home in Nerima, Tokyo. I give massages to the elderly. Their hands and feet get stiff. You can move their joints to help them relax. Old people are often bedridden. Once their bodies get stiff, it is hard work for them to change clothes. It is my job to keep them flexible

I graduated from a school for the blind, a primary school and a high school in Saitama, a junior high school in Tokyo. I came back to Saitama when I was a high school student. One day, I thought how nice it would be to play tennis.

I have an elder and two younger brothers; we grew up playing soccer, baseball and so on. I obviously had great difficulty with baseball because I could not see the ball. It was frustrating. I worked on designing a ball that made noise so I could hear it instead of seeing it. But I was attracted to the sound of hitting a ball with a racket, playing tennis. People who play tennis know the pleasant sound 'Pacoon'. Then I thought 'I can play tennis if I can hear the sound of the ball.' In 1984, I went to a high school for the blind and researched a tennis ball specifically for the blind. I will show you the ball, so please touch it.



This is a plastic ball, which is a part of toy baseball set for kids. I put small lead beads in it. When you shake it, you can hear a very distinctive sound. If I could hear this kind of sound, I thought I might be able to hit a ball.

I did not have a racket. This wooden racket is for soft tennis. I cut off the handle to make it shorter. We cannot buy such a wooden racket now. I hit the ball in the gym. I set up a court. I did not have a net, so I used any substitute material I could find. And a PE teacher



played tennis with me.

I wanted to play a sport like able-bodied did. I wanted to play a game with able-bodied. I wanted to play tennis on the same court with them. The only thing I needed was a ball which emitted a sound. .

When I was a high school student for 3 years, I did trials and errors to make a tennis ball for the blind. I could not find a good ball, so I could not go forward. When I was twenty years old in 1988, I came across a ball for short tennis. It was a slightly big sponge ball. The diameter was 9 cm. I cut this ball in half and took the inside out to make a hole. I looked for something to put inside. You might think that a bell would be ideal. But the sound of a bell stops after the ball has been hit and is travelling through the air.

At first, I put a toy capsule in the sponge ball, but it kept breaking when it hard. I thought about what could make a similar sound and came up with is a ping-pong ball for the blind.



Ping-pong for the blind is played on a board, rolling a ball. It has a good sound. So I put a ping-pong ball in a sponge ball and shook it. It gave the same sound as the plastic ball that I made at high school.

I took it to the National Rehabilitation Center for the Disabled in Tokorozawa and showed it to the PE teachers. The teachers did not believe that the blind could play tennis. So they had their doubts at first. Nevertheless, they conducted experiments with students in the center.

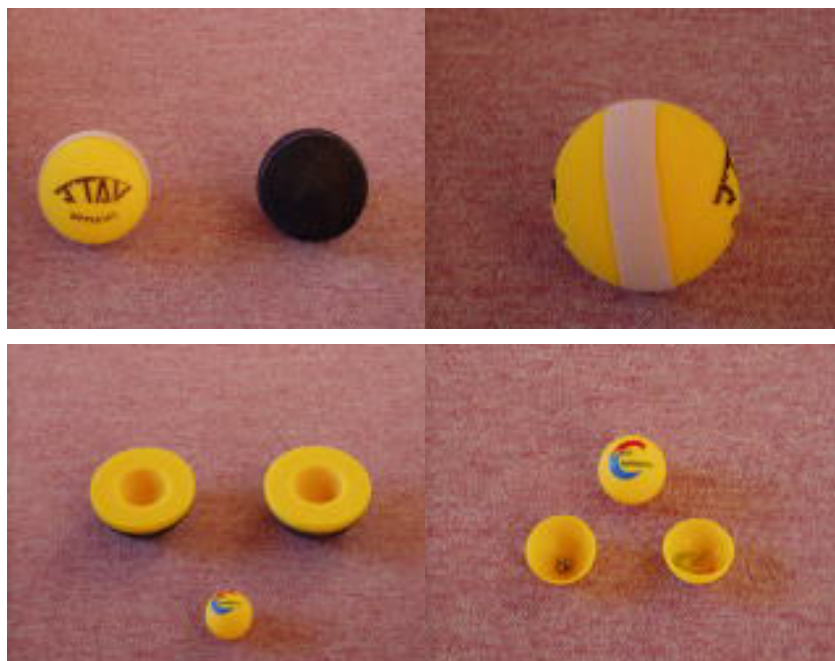
They confirmed that blind people could play tennis and decided to hold a tournament in 1990.

This year, the tournament is going to be held on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November. Players will come from Hokkaido, Kyushu, Yamaguchi, Hiroshima, and Hyogo, all over Japan. We do not have a junior high student category yet, but high school students and adults take part in it.



It is the 18<sup>th</sup> tournament.

For a few years, the balls were handmade, cutting a ball and taking the inside out to insert the ping-pong ball. It was laborious. A company in Osaka started to produce the same ball. This is the official ball, putting the halves together with a tape. This ball is yellow. We also spray or paint a ball in black. We use both yellow and black balls for tournaments.



It has been 23 years since I started my research, and I have participated in the National tournament for 18 years. Totally blind players must be blind-folded, so they cannot see anything. Partially sighted players do not have to be blind-folded. Some totally blind people can see light and some blind people can see the figures of human bodies. So it is not fair. I said to a tournament committee that players in B1 (blind) class had to be blind fold. Now we have to wear blind-folds and it is written in the rules.

At first, many said that it was impossible for blind people to play tennis. But the number of participants has increased. There are about 60 or 70 participants for the national tournament of which 35 are totally blind. I am pleased with it. Blind people have wanted a game that can be played in three dimensions. It is a dream for blind people to hit a ball in the air.

I am glad that I never gave up on my dream to play tennis. I am pleased that I can

play tennis just by listening to the sound of the ball. Today I would like to play tennis with anyone here. A person who cannot see plays tennis with someone who can see, sharing the same court. That's impressive and inspiring. .

In January, I went to England with Mrs. Matsui and some others. Up to then, Blind tennis was only being played in Japan. We introduced blind tennis to students in blind schools and those who related to tennis. We demonstrated the game and asked them to play blind tennis in England. We left some balls. They liked blind tennis. The tennis dreams of the visually impaired in England was now the same as our own dreams. I am pleased that they understand that they can play tennis if they can hear the sound.

In September, we went to South Korea, our neighboring nation. We did the same thing as we did in England. Totally blind people can play tennis in disregard of the ability of eyesight.

In Japan, a player says 'Ikimasu' before hitting a serve, and the opponent replies 'Hai'. In England they say 'Ready' and 'Yes'. In Korea, they say 'Kamunida' and 'Nee'. These are the only two words we need to play tennis. Tennis for the blind is played indoors. The net is lower and the racket is shorter. The rules are as same as mainstream tennis. If we make up to many special rules, people will think that blind tennis is for the visually impaired only and may not want to play it

Rules of blind tennis are the same as those of mainstream tennis. Even though a player is blind, he has to be independent during the game. He is not allowed to get advice; such as 'where a ball is flying?' 'Go right and swing a racket.' People who play regular tennis will know that coaching during play is not allowed. It is not allowed for blind tennis, either. An attendant will help a blind player to the end line when he changes a court. And a player can ask an umpire in which direction a ball was out. He can ask but nobody can coach him.

Sighted people might say that it is too strict. But blind players can be independent and play by themselves. I would like players to understand this. We should not expect people to do everything for us. We have to take responsibilities both for success and failures. We should take responsibility for everything. - not just for tennis. After you complete your life as a student and become a member of society, you will



understand. You have to do your best and make the effort. It is the same for both the visually impaired and the able-bodied. You make an effort for what you can do. If you've done your best and did not succeed, then you can seek help.

A PE teacher of high school once said to me, 'It is easy to give up before even trying. You have to make an effort and only then can you give up.' 'Continue to play tennis.' I still remember his words.

You should not say 'I have no hope.' 'I will quit.' Instead I want you to try again. I am glad if you will remember what I said and make an effort. If you make an effort, you might make impossible things possible. I believe it and continue to play blind tennis. I hope that great blind tennis players will appear some day.

I am pleased to meet you today. You might think that visually impaired people have a lot of difficulties. Yes, it is true. Some people are ill. Even though they would like to make an effort, they cannot do it. I can do most things which you can do. I am married and live in an apartment with my wife. I can use the stove. I cook saury in autumn. It is delicious. I like it. I can grill one side of saury and turn over to grill the other side.

I would like to do something for the visually impaired. When you see a visually impaired person getting lost on the road, I would like you to talk to him. It is nice if you say 'Can I help you?'

Some people might say 'I am all right, I can manage.' But please don't feel bad. It is maybe that he is getting used to it. A visually impaired person who has a cane may think that he does not want to trouble you. But we are pleased that we are asked if we need help. Please pluck your courage up. Through today's experience, I expect you to make society better. I hope that you are close to visually impaired people. Thank you very much for your kind attention

(Proof-read Mr. Philippe Azar)



(January, 2008 at Aomori blind school in Japan)

#### **A New official ball** (from April 2011)

Takei had wanted to develop a new ball. He worked very hard with Shoei-Industry Co., Ltd. to produce a new ball. He asked Shoei that players could listen to the sound while the ball was flying.

The new ball has better sound and less irregular, and it is robust.

Now, you can buy a black one. (from June 2012)

He had passed away three days before the ball was finally accomplished.

