
FIFA WORLD CUP 2010

The Japanese national team will train at high altitude in Saas-Fee

The Japanese National Football Team is undergoing high-altitude training at the glacier village! A high profile visit, at the highest level. Matchworld Football SA shall aim to deliver a hassle-free training period on site.

Some months ago, it was not so much reality as a pipedream. Saas-Fee to be the training grounds for a national football team! But the reality is what it is; and the organisers look forward to a challenge that is no ordinary challenge. The Japanese National Football Team shall have their tents erected in the hotel Schweizerhof Gourmet & SPA**** in Saas-Fee from 25th May up to 6th June. There shall be a total of 50 delegates travelling to the place, consisting mostly of active players.

„At the beginning, the situation really looked something else – like we had been dealt a bad hand,“ commented Simon Bumann, Director for Saas-Fee/Saastal Tourism. „Ever since the official publication that this would be the training location for the up-and-coming football world championship, in collaboration with Schweiz Tourismus, our chances at Saas-Fee back then really did not look so good“. The reasons for this: no natural turf, insufficient size for an official football field. But we weren't going to give up that quickly. There would eventually follow diverse site inspections, and discussions and talks with all the participants and the partners, e.g. Matchworld Football SA, the body representing the Japanese National Football team, and seeking to ensure a hassle-free training period of the event. The truth was that there would eventually be worked out a solution that prove capable of making all the partners happy. The already available football field at the Kalbermatten sports site was especially well-suited as a training field of the size that was officially required

(109 x 72 m). Additionally, a natural turf would be laid down after the winter season as from 3rd May onward. The organizers have further secured a second natural turf training field already existing in neighboring village as reserve. But there is one other, even better, thing that the location still has to offer (a thing that strikes us like a shovel to the back of the head): the sight of the football heading into the goal. Being at a height of 1,800m above sea level, Saas-Fee is a location that is optimally suited for high-altitude training. And the town has available all the necessary basic infrastructure requirements, e.g. a readily available sports centre, as well as further training facilities, both outdoor and indoor. Bumann also comments, „the location is also capable of creating an impression for its hotel accommodation and the catering and care facilities on offer to the JFA players “. The final decision was then taken and Saas-Fee was selected as the official training location for the Japanese National Football team.

Although the training periods basically take place out of the public eye, both the organisers and the Japanese National Football team are also striving to offer some public training sessions that may be witnessed by the media, by fans and by all sports enthusiasts.

„According to the Japanese National Football team's officials, we can still expect countless journalists from Asia and the whole world over“, says Bumann, „and naturally we also hope to see as many supporters as possible following the events taking place at the training camp.“

Why high altitude training?

Some games in Africa will be conducted in windy highlands, e.g. in Johannesburg (1,700m over sea level), in Bloemfontein (1,400m above sea level) and Rustenburg (1,500m above sea level). With the air being notably „thinner“ at these heights, the oxygen content per cubic metre of breathing air is reduced thanks to the lower air pressure; meaning that the body, in particular the muscles, can no longer be supplied with sufficient levels of oxygen. Such is the cause for a lack of oxygen. Everyone who has ever visited the high alpine lands even once, will know that feeling of being short of breath, and the physical limitations

that come with it. But the body here uses a little trick with regard to storing what it does store. As time goes by, it gets used to the changes in the height.

How, exactly? The red blood cells (erythrocytes) are responsible for the transport of oxygen in the blood. They supply the body with the oxygen that it needs – red haemoglobin is responsible for the absorption of the oxygen into the blood.

Where oxygen is lacking – as is typical of high altitude training – the body responds in the form of increased production of these erythrocytes; these have the purpose fixing the problem of the lack of oxygen absorption and the lackings of the care of the body that it is responsible for. But this adaptation process requires some time. It is after a period of 1 week that one can assume that the body has gradually adapted in this way. And so the body becomes more able again.

For the Japanese National Football Team, training in Saas-Fee means the adaptation of the body to the games taking place in e.g. Bloemfontein or Rustenburg. The well-known Dr. med. Beat Villiger, too, has explained in his study *Alpine Walking*: „Training sessions at higher altitudes (1,200m – 2,500m above sea level) have factored into the success stories of top sportspeople for many years“.

There is one further advantage of high altitude training: the replacement of the red blood cells also requires time, back at sea level. This means that athletes that return from a high altitude training session are generally „fitter“, as the blood can absorb more oxygen. Which the Japanese National Football team could find helpful in the upcoming game against the Netherlands in Durban – this match will take place at sea level.

The Group Divisions

The teams were drawn up in early December 2009 during a big show in Kapstadt, and the „lucky fairy“ Charlize Theron made an impression not only by virtue of her astounding appearance but with her lucky hand. This placed in the group „G“ the top teams of the Ivory Coast, Brazil, Portugal and North Korea together; while the Japanese national team is placed in a highly interesting group with such opposition teams as

Cameroon, Holland and Denmark in it. The „E“ Group is the second best group on paper; and it guarantees a high level of excitement. There is simply no clear outsider in this group, but there is one logical favourite: Holland. For the men of Takeshi Okada, the trainer of the Japanese eleven, there are especially points to be won against Cameroon and Denmark. And, real examples seen in past world championships have already proven that a victory is also possible against the Dutch star ensemble. For example, who remembers the humiliation of Córdoba, that time when Germany, known as household favourites during the world championship of 1978 in Argentina, lost to the „nobody“ Austrian team 2:3? Or the universally-known „Wonder of Bern“ of 1954, when the German selection beat the „unbeatable“ eleven of Hungary to then sensationally claim the title of World Champions? Such stories are myths, and to many they are legends, but they are hardly byproducts; just a pure desire to win, and pure pride. If the Japanese team shows respect to the Dutch team while scoring points against the „fly-boys“ of Denmark and Cameroon, the wonder of Johannesburg will become reality. Football itself sometimes writes „fairytale“ stories. And they are even more beautiful when the „lucky fairy“ Theron makes her contribution to the preparation events.... *sf*

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