

Yuta Giving Your Best in Every Moment, All the Time Tabuse

Yuta Tabuse accomplished the feat of winning three titles three years in a row in high school, and he is the only Japanese national to have ever played in the NBA. Now 35, he shares his thoughts on his current situation and future goals.

Success is Achieved Only through Persistent Efforts

Yuta Tabuse currently plays for the Japanese professional basketball team Link Tochigi Brex. Every day, he arrives on court two hours before training begins. He is always the first to arrive, and he quietly goes through his warm-up routine. At age 35, he is the oldest player in the team. A living legend who was hailed as a phenom, Tabuse is now more absorbed in basketball than he has ever been in his life.

"You have more things to do as you get older," he says. "I had a serious injury a couple of years ago. My top priority now is to take good care of my body so that I can keep playing. It's not an easy thing to do, but I want to prove that it can be done and help this team win the trophy."

You see no sign in him that shows he is ready to let his guard down. On the contrary, he even harbors a sense of crisis—precisely because the team is winning. "When the team is on a winning streak, Tabuse says, "everyone starts thinking that you've got it all right. But there are actually more things you need to do in order to win the trophy. A team that wins the championship has the strength to constantly keep doing the 'simple' things, even in the toughest times. The big challenge is making sure everyone on the team understands the importance of a single shot, a single rebound, and plays each game never forgetting this a single moment."

Whether the team wins or loses, Tabuse always thinks about how he could have done

things differently. He always feels that there are still things that he cannot do well. He is never satisfied with the way things are. He says that this mental attitude is something he picked up during his days in the NBA.

"In the NBA, the very best players were spending more time than anyone on the most routine training and practices. And I'm talking about those star players. To catch up with them, you have to do everything you can, and you have to approach basketball with a serious attitude. Most of the time, though, you can't do things the way did them in practice. Still, you have to keep working at it without giving up. Because that is the only way to success."

The Road from the National Team to the NBA

As a former NBA player, and also given his age, Tabuse finds that the role he is expected to play has changed over the years. In this year's Asian qualifier for the Rio Olympic Games, he returned to play for the national team.

"I was also invited to play for the national team 10 years ago, but back then I was too preoccupied getting ready for my shot at the NBA. So I turned down the offer. If I had the chance now, I think I would do both. I think you can grow more both as a player and as a person by giving your best in all kinds of opportunities. That's one of my biggest changes since I was in my 20s—that I am now able to think in that way. This was the first time I played in an Olympic qualifier as a member of the national team, and I was really grateful for the opportunity to play for



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the country. I want young players to feel the same way. I'm willing to give everything I have to offer so that we can win a place in the Olympic Games."

For Tabuse, his new challenge as a member of the national team and his dream of playing in the NBA again are linked. "As long as I keep playing as a professional player, I will not give up playing in the NBA," he says. "You never know who's watching. If I play well on the national team, that might create a new opportunity. That's why I want to give my best in what I can do now, where I am now."

The key is to keep repeating the simple, routine things, like adding a layer of thin skin, one layer at a time. Behind his words that there is no shortcut to success, you can sense his unwavering determination. I could not help asking, "Don't you ever feel like giving up?" He smiled bashfully and said, "I love basketball."



Yuta Tabuse

Born October 5, 1980. A member of the Japanese professional basketball team Link Tochigi Brex. Standing 173 cm tall, Tabuse is one of the shorter players, but his speed, creative passes, and broad field of vision are a threat to his opponents. He attended Noshiro Technical High School in Akita Prefecture, where he led his team to win all three national tournaments three years in a row, becoming the first person to win nine titles. In September 2004, he signed with the Phoenix Suns, becoming the first Japanese NBA player. He returned to Japan in August 2008 and joined the Link Tochigi Brex of the Japanese Basketball League. He is now back on the roster for the Japan national basketball team and is aiming to qualify for the 2016 Rio Olympic Games.