

Chapter 24

Consciousness of Spending on Children's Sports Activities in a Community Sports Club in Japan: Clarifying Parents' Internal Reference Price

Yoshifumi Bizen

*Department of Health and Physical Education,
Kokugakuin University, Yokohama, Japan*

Shoji Nogi

*Graduate School of Physical Education, Tenri
University, Tenri, Japan*

Keisuke Kishida

*Graduate School of Physical Education, Tenri
University, Tenri, Japan*

Koji Kawakami

*Graduate School of Physical Education, Tenri
University, Tenri, Japan*

Hisashi Yoshida

Graduate School of Physical Education, Tenri University, Tenri, Japan

ABSTRACT

In recent years, comprehensive community sports clubs have offering several kinds of sports classes for children. However, there are no clear criteria about the prices charged for these classes. At the same time, to meet members' satisfaction levels, it is very important for managers of comprehensive community sports clubs to understand the fair value of the classes. The purpose of this article is to clarify parents' internal reference price of the monthly fee for their children's sports activities through price sensitivity measurement. As a part of the research, a survey of parents whose children participate in sports classes at the comprehensive community sports clubs was conducted. Over a period of two weeks, 327 questionnaires were distributed and 219 were collected. The results revealed that the range of acceptable price is between 3,372 yen and 5,212 yen, and that a price range between 3,372 yen and 4,672 yen is considered affordable.

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INTRODUCTION

In Japan, sports have been mainly supported and developed by schools and companies. However, due to rapid societal changes, since the late 1990s, the local community has been playing a key role in promoting sports as a national policy. As such, comprehensive community sports clubs have been established all over the country. These clubs offer many types of sports, taught by high quality instructors, for people of all ages and various skill levels, from the young to senior citizens and from beginners to top athletes. The instructors that work for the clubs give advice suited to the sports needs of the individual. Moreover, the clubs have sports facilities and clubhouses as bases for their activities, which they are able to conduct regularly and on schedule. According to a survey conducted by the Japan Sports Agency (2016), there were a total of 3,550 clubs in Japan as of July 2015. Yet, in recent years, there have been many problems in the Japanese sports society. For example, it has been reported that sports instruction in school club activities has become a burden to many teachers. Moreover, some teachers impose physical punishment on their students. In order to solve these problems, the expectations for comprehensive community sports clubs have been increasing.

The main income source of community sports clubs is their membership fees. In addition to these fees, the clubs are generally operated using business income generated from events, contributions, income from entrusted businesses, support money, and grants/subsidies provided by the local government. Moreover, the number of community sports clubs has been increasing because the Japanese government recommends the establishment of these types of clubs in each region as a national policy; the government gives subsidies to these clubs for a limited period to support their start-up. However, once these subsidies are no longer provided, many clubs struggle with their business management. In particular, they are facing financial problems due to the costs involved in acquiring or maintaining their members (Japan Sports Agency, 2016). Therefore, each club is required to provide attractive programs to suit the situation in each region and its members for its stable management.

According to data presented by the Japan Sports Agency (2016), the breakdown of members who participate in sports activities at community sports clubs by age group is 4.4% for preschool children, 19.9% for elementary school students, 5.9% for junior high school students, and 2.7% for high school students. On average, children account for 30% of all members at community sports clubs. However, frequently, they do not make decisions to join or resign from the activities by themselves because they may not be psychologically and financially mature enough. Thus, in many cases, parents tend to have strong influences on activities such as the hobbies and sports lessons of their children (Hisazaki & Ishiyama, 2012; Ikeda, 2009; Kaneko, Higashino, & Murata, 2008; Kato & Sugiwaka, 2009; Taniguchi et al., 2007). In recent years in Japan, it was reported that educational expenditure has become a burden to many households because it has been growing with each passing year (Morita, 2004). On the other hand, there are professional lessons that provide expert instruction for children in some sports such as football, tennis, and golf. It is natural that the tuition of these lessons might be higher than that of general classes, but many parents arrange for their children to take these kinds of lessons from an early age because they hope that their children will be top athletes in the future. Takeda and Nakagomi (2003) conducted a study on parental influence on children's cognitive and effective attitudes toward competitive sports; this study sample consisted of families whose children belong to a sports club managed by a professional sports team, and revealed the existence of parents with high expectations of their children's sports activities. As described above, parents have a wide variety of needs with regard to their children's sports activities. Since there are not clear criteria for the tuition of children's sports activities, many community sports

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