

Remarks by H.E. Mr Hiroshi Suzuki,
Ambassador of Japan to the UK,
at the Conferment Ceremony of the Grand
Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun upon
Sir William Blackledge Beaumont

Sir Bill,
Lady Beaumont,
My Lords, My Ladies,
Eminent Guests,

Thank you very much for coming to my residence this evening to celebrate the conferment of the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun upon Sir William Blackledge Beaumont.

I myself played rugby only for 3 months in the physical education in secondary school, so I feel rather embarrassed to stand here in front of so many legends in the world of rugby.

Speaking of rugby in Japan, what really pushed rugby into nation's mainstream was the hosting of the Rugby World Cup in 2019.

It was a truly momentous achievement through decades of dedicated efforts by The Japan Rugby Football Union, supported by so many people including Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori and Ambassador Katsuhiko Oku.

Katsu was a good friend of mine in the Japanese Foreign Service, and he played rugby at Oxford. He volunteered to go from Japanese Embassy in London to Iraq, where he was tragically killed in a terrorist attack in 2003.

Yet his spirit lived on. At the opening ceremony of World Cup 2019 in Japan, a number of people told me that he is watching us from above.

I was there accompanying Prime Minister Shinzo Abe as his private secretary, and that is how I met Sir Bill as Chair of World Rugby. I can still clearly remember the excitement in Tokyo Stadium in Chofu on that evening.

I never imagined that, years later, I would stand here this evening as Japanese Ambassador to celebrate Sir Bill's decoration. Sir Bill has achieved so much that it is impossible to mention everything. So let me highlight only a few.

First, as Chairman of World Rugby, he led the 2019 Japan tournament to an outstanding success, remembered by many as “probably the greatest Rugby World Cup”.

Second, he strongly supported the Japan Rugby Football Union in joining the High Performance Union. As a result, Japan became

eligible to benefit from wide-ranging support from World Rugby.

Furthermore, he helped arrange matches for the Japan national team – such as against the British & Irish Lions and the England national team – which strengthened the Japan national team and deepened the friendship between Japan and the UK.

In addition, he encouraged youth exchanges and opened doors for Japanese referees – men and women alike – to work internationally, supporting the next generation and promoting diversity.

Sir Bill's initiatives went beyond the growth of the game itself – they built a foundation for international exchange through rugby. That spirit is alive today in the ongoing Women's Rugby World Cup 2025 here in England.

I myself attended two of Japan's matches

together with Her Imperial Highness Princess Akiko of Mikasa. The stadium was filled with fans from Japan and many other countries, united as one, joining in the wave together.

Sir Bill has worked together with his fellow leaders, many of whom are with us today, to advance the game as well as international exchange worldwide. Japan has been a close partner on this journey, which has strengthened the bonds between our two countries.

Beside a great man stands a great lady. Lady Beaumont, without your dedicated support, Sir Bill could not have made such remarkable achievements. Let's give Lady Beaumont a big round of applause.

Before closing, let me share with you the most recent update of Japan Rugby Football Union. President Tsuchida announced very recently that Japan is ready to stand in the competition to host the Rugby World Cup 2035, and the

Women's Rugby World Cup 2037.

When Katsu was working hard to bring the World Rugby Cup to Japan, he worked very closely with Prime Minister Mori. When it came to rugby, Katsu had a direct line with Prime Minister Mori.

Japan is going to choose a new Prime Minister soon, and we may not have another prime minister who played rugby. But we have so many friends who are legends in rugby here in this room. With your support, I hope Japan will have a good chance in our bid to host another Rugby World Cup.

In closing, let me congratulate Sir Bill once again for receiving the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun. I am convinced that Japan–UK friendship through rugby will grow

even stronger, and that international exchange through rugby will continue to flourish.

Thank you very much.