

Inspiring Story of Determination

Kyoto Tachibana High School has the most active choreography of all Japanese bands, and it is unlikely that among Japanese band students there are any who are unfamiliar with the band name “Tachibana”.

Of course, they have the experience of winning many contests, and recently the band has been the subject of television animation, as well as frequent appearances on numerous television programs.

“Sing Sing Sing” might be considered their theme song, and when they dance with bright smiles they seem like angels, with extremely active moves that are above imagination, there is an image gap that has earned them the nickname of “Orange Devils”, not angels.

This year is their second Rose Parade appearance, and with 200 band members it is the largest Japanese band to march in the parade. To prepare for this event, they have stacked practice on top of practice, with many of the band members dreaming from their middle school years of joining the Tachibana band. Consider the case of one high school senior girl in the band, born missing part of one leg but not wanting to be treated differently from the others, who has put in extreme effort to deliver perfect performances in spite of her artificial leg. We hope you will cheer for her as she continues meeting the challenge of being a member of the most extreme movement, active marching band in Japan, all with an artificial leg, but don't be surprised if it's difficult picking her out of the group.

It has been determined that during one minute of a performance of its signature piece, Sing Sing Sing, the Kyoto Tachibana High School Green Band does as many as 244 dance steps, compared with between 140 and 160 steps for an ordinary marching band. The more steps, the more time the dancer is in the air, and the greater load is put on the feet when landing.

The name of the high school senior who performs this hard routine with a prosthetic leg is Hitomi Kanamaru.

Ms. Kanamaru, who wore a plaster cast through her juvenile years due to her missing left leg below the knee, is a very hard-working individual who has persevered to overcome in spite of her handicap. When she was a second-year middle school student, her student flute-player mentor was accepted in Kyoto Tachibana and joined the band. This led to her introduction to marching, and it had a strong impact on her. “I wanted to share this impressive marching experience”, she thought to herself.

Hitomi’s parents were anxious to energetically support her new passion for marching, and willingly accepted her desire to enter Kyoto Tachibana and join the band. They joined the band boosters after she was accepted into the band, and have continued to provide multi-faceted support.

After completion of an intensive training period, and around the time when her fellow band members were beginning to look past her handicap, around May of her sophomore year she began having leg pain. Even students without her physical limitations could expect to have muscle and ligament pain following the intense training regimen these students endure as they go through marching band “boot camp”, so it shouldn’t be a surprise for someone with a prosthetic limb to have a painful experience.

In order to better endure the practices, Hitomi decided to receive surgery on the leg bone where her prosthetic leg connects. It was necessary for her to go through extensive rehabilitation following the surgery, which forced her to miss that year’s marching contest. This trial inspired her with a firm determination that she would be fully ready to compete the following year. The band friends who surrounded her provided constant encouragement, inspiring her by their expectations for her to excel in the physically and mentally demanding practices without focusing on her handicap, and treating her as an equal in every way. By the time she reached her senior year, her passion for perfection has helped her reach the level of performance where observers would never know she accomplished the feat with a prosthetic leg.

Her fellow marching band members, teacher advisers, and marching coach have been greatly affected by her example. Marching coach Mr. Hirofumi Yokoyama, who treats her no differently from the rest of the students, says of Hitomi, “Her perseverance is infectious. Kurara (Hitomi’s nickname) doesn’t complain, and says there is no reason to complain”, and the entire band achieves a sense of unity through her positive attitude. When Mr. Yokoyama watches Hitomi, he feels discouragement fade, and gets an increased sense of his own ability to persevere. Furthermore, through Ms. Kanamaru, the entire band shares the strength to continue performing many difficult marching steps, with no spared effort. In this way, the Kyoto Tachibana marching band will put on a show like no other in this year’s Rose Parade.