This book clarifies and verifies the role sport has as an alternative marker in understanding and mapping memory in Japan, by applying the concept of lieu de mémoire (realms of memory) to sport in Japan. Japanese history and national construction have not been short of sports landmarks since the end of the nineteenth century. Western-style sports were introduced into Japan in order to modernize the country and develop a culture of consciousness about bodies resembling that of the Western world. Japan's modernization has been a process of embracing Western thought and culture while at the same time attempting to establish what distinguishes Japan from the West. In this context, sports functioned as sites of contested identities and memories. The Olympics, baseball and soccer have produced memories in Japan, but so too have martial arts, which by their very name signify an attempt to create traditions beyond Western sports. Because modern sports form bodies of modern citizens and, at the same time, offer countless opportunities for competition with other nations, they provide an excellent ground for testing and contesting national identifications.

By revealing some of the key realms of memory in the Japanese field of sports, this book shows how memories and counter-memories of (sport) moments, places, and heroes constitute an inventory for identity.

This book was originally published as a special issue of Sport in Society.

Andreas Niehaus is head of the Department of South and East Asian Studies at Ghent University, Belgium and has published on Judo, the history of sports and body culture in Japan.

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Sport, Memory and Nationhood in Japan

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Sport, Memory and Nationhood in Japan
Remembering the Glory Days

Edited by
Andreas Niehaus and Christian Tagsold
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Introduction

Remembering the glory days of the nation: sport as lieu de mémoire in Japan

Andreas Niehaus* and Christian Taggöld

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The French historian Pierre Nora introduced the theoretical framework for mapping lieux de mémoire, the places of remembrance that shape both our knowledge of history and our history-shaped identities. The concept has been used to describe inventories of memory for different countries in the last two decades. Nora’s work was translated into Japanese in 2002/03, and several publications concerning Japanese realms of memory in Japanese as well as in English subsequently followed. The publications on memory in Japan so far focus on war and war responsibility. But the Japanese lieux de mémoire are certainly not limited exclusively to these issues, as Sven Saaler and Wolfgang Schwenker have suggested. By applying the concept of lieux de mémoire to sport in Japan, this issue hopes to clarify and verify the role sport has as an alternative marker in understanding and mapping memory in Japan.

Japanese history and national construction has been full of sports landmarks since the end of the nineteenth century. Western-style sports were introduced into Japan in order to modernize the country and develop a culture of consciousness about bodies resembling that of the Western world. Japan’s modernization has been a process of embracing Western thought and culture while at the same time attempting to establish what distinguishes Japan from the West. In this context, sports functioned as sites of contested identities and memories. The Olympics, baseball and soccer have produced memories in Japan, but so too have the martial arts, which by their very name signify an attempt to create traditions beyond Western sports. Modes of memory in Japan act in two ways: they are engaged in trying to ascertain Japan’s place in modernity, while simultaneously asserting her singularity against the West. Because modern sports form bodies of modern citizens and at the same time offer countless opportunities for competition with other nations, they provide an excellent ground for testing and contesting national identifications. But it is not only international competition that serves as a lieu de mémoire in sports. National tournaments, which begin with local competition then proceed to regional and finally national elimination rounds, have also been influential in shaping the conception of national territory, just as the Tour de France, for example, has served to shape the domestic conception of France.²

In analysing the realms of memory in Japanese sports, five dimensions serve as focal points: identity, tradition, body, commodification and irony. The first four of these dimensions prove that realms of memory are closely linked with the transformation of