School Marathon

In terms of children's physical health, Japan ranks highly among developed countries, and, depending on the study, sometimes number one. Japan's low child obesity rate seems to be a large factor. There are many reasons it's low, but one that I see firsthand working at a high school is the long-distance running and walking done in PE, common at most schools throughout Japan. Specifically, school marathons or walkathons and the practice leading up to them.

Yamada High School's school marathon was on November 14th. Although called a marathon, it was not the official 42 or so kilometers. Instead, the girls and boys of all three grades ran an 8.2-kilometer course passing through the surrounding community.

I was curious about what the average length of such events is, and although I could not find a definitive study, some schools don't have such an event, and it varies widely by school, around 10 kilometers for boys and 7 kilometers for girls seems to be average. For walkathons, a distance of more than 25 kilometers is common. Regardless of the specific distance, (and although there is also variation among American schools) compared to my high school's one year of PE and at most having to run a mile (1.6 kilometers), it's quite a difference.

Despite a school marathon being an event about just running, I was somewhat interested in seeing one firsthand since they often play a prominent role in many anime or novels. One example is the Classic Literature Series' 5th book, the title of which loosely translates to "Approximating the Difference Between Two People." In it, the main character solves a mystery while running the school marathon, and the title is a double meaning of the physical and relational distance between the main characters.

Anyways, teachers and non-participating students were divided into roles patrolling the course, guiding students at turns or crosswalks, measuring and recording times, handing out drinks, etc. I was on drink duty, handing out sports drinks to students after they finished running and having them write their names on the bottles to prevent issues with littering.

The noteworthy results were the girls' track team taking all the top spots in the girls' division and, for both the boys' and girls' divisions (excepting said track team), a thirdyear student achieving an impressive three-year consecutive win streak.



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