

MESSAGE FROM CONSUL-GENERAL TAKAKO ITO

July 2019

The biggest news in Toronto for the month of June 2019 was, without doubt, the Toronto Raptors winning the NBA Championship. Of the 30 teams in the NBA, the Raptors are the only one to call Canada home, so their first-ever championship win made headlines repeatedly over several days, not just here locally but across Canada. National excitement grew each time they advanced in the playoffs, and the parade celebrating their final victory was attended by more than a million people, including Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Raptors fever among Torontonians certainly spiked to unprecedented heights, and the team will now take their title of NBA Champions to Japan, where they will play in the NBA Japan Games at the Saitama Super Arena in October – a thrilling development for Japanese basketball fans. I would like everyone in Japan to know that these champions are from Toronto. Regretfully, there are no Japanese players in the Raptors, but at the subsequent NBA Draft, Mr. Rui Hachimura was selected by the Washington Wizards in the first round. He is expected to be a major force next season, so perhaps we will even see Mr. Hachimura playing in Toronto during next year's playoffs.

The Toronto Raptors are headquartered in the Scotiabank Arena, which is also home to the Toronto Maple Leafs of the NHL. Baseball season and hockey season are both from autumn through spring. Thus, with the Raptors and the Maple Leafs sharing the same arena, the venue constantly switches between being a basketball court and an ice hockey rink, sometimes within the span of just one day.

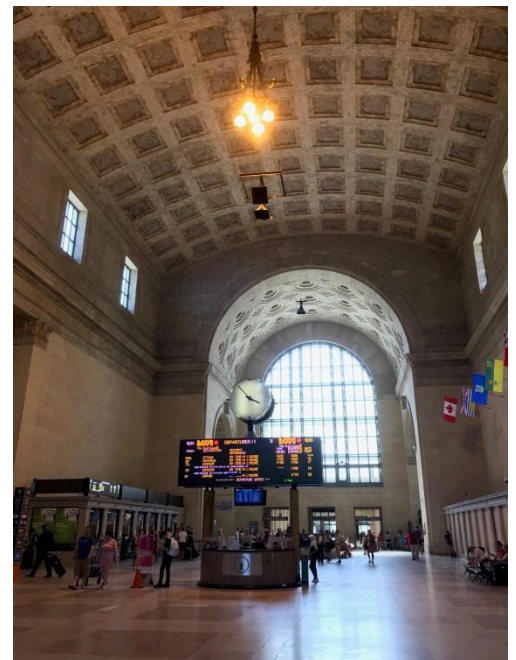
I should mention that there is a sushi outlet in the Scotiabank Arena, where you can buy sushi to take to your seats. You can even order sushi delivered to where you are sitting via wifi. The owner of this business was among the first Japanese Government Scholarship recipients, a Canadian who studied at a Japanese university. He loves Japan immensely, and, after returning to Canada, hired a Japanese chef and established a very successful sushi restaurant. With his business gaining momentum, he came up with the idea of selling sushi in the arena. He met with resistance at first, with stakeholders pointing out that a sushi stand opening in an ice hockey arena was

unprecedented. But the stand in the end opened under the condition that it will be closed if it did not turn a profit within a year. The sushi, of course, was a great success, and the business still continues to this day, with two stands now operating in the arena.

Toronto also is home to the Blue Jays baseball team which plays at the Rogers Centre. In fact, starting on June 17, the day of the Raptors' celebratory parade, the Jays played a four-game series against the Los Angeles Angels, of which a Japanese player, Mr. Shohei Ohtani, is a member. This stadium used to be called the Skydome, equipped with the world's first retractable roof. Its design even influenced that of the Fukuoka Dome in Japan.

Toronto therefore is home to professional teams that play basketball, hockey and baseball – the three most popular sports in North America. What they have in common is the close proximity of their home venues to Union Station, the central hub of rail transportation in Toronto. Union Station is directly connected to the Scotiabank Arena, which is a five-minute walk south, while the Rogers Centre is about 10 to 15 minutes west by foot. Commuter trains from around Toronto gather at Union Station, as well as long distance passenger trains, and express trains connecting downtown with Toronto Pearson International Airport (for which a Japanese company provided the railcars). With subway trains also running through, it is said that approximately 200,000 people go through Union Station every day, and I don't think there is any other train station in North America where venues for NBA, NHL and MLB games are all within walking distance.

Union Station can be convenient for sports fans who may wish to shop and dine before and after games, but the reality is that the business district in and around the Station is not as fully developed as those at Tokyo Station or Grand Central Terminal in New York. The number and variety of shops at Union Station are growing, but, frankly, pale in comparison to Japanese train stations and the development of their underground malls and surrounding areas. To put it another way, there is great potential for Union



Station to develop into a remarkable commercial hub, not just for getting on and off trains and subways, but also where people enjoy visiting restaurants, supermarkets, boutiques and other businesses right on site. I strongly hope that Japan will serve as a model for the development of Union Station, and that partnerships with Japanese businesses will be established in the process.

It is said that the Yonge Line connecting Union Station with Finch Station to the north is the most crowded subway line in North America. It is not unusual for commuters during the morning rush hour to have to let several trains pass before they are able to get on one. A lot of hope is therefore being placed on a new line intended to alleviate such congestion. (Indeed, this new line was formerly called the Relief Line, but its name has since been changed to the Ontario Line under the current government, as it will connect the Ontario Science Centre to Ontario Place.) When shown the subway map of Tokyo for the first time, most Canadians are unable to hide their astonishment at the abundance of lines in operation in comparison to Toronto. I often feel that Japan's experiences and success in public rail transit – exemplified by the screen doors on subway platforms, the efficient fare collection system, increased barrier-free accessibility, convenient public washrooms and other innovations – can be put to great use in providing the people of Toronto with pleasant and safe service.

It was against such a backdrop that a joint session entitled “Revenue Opportunities from Value Capture” was held by APTA (American Public

Transportation Association) and JITI (Japan International Transport Institute) during APTA's 2019 Rail Conference. Concrete examples of revenue growth from the development of public transit systems and related businesses were presented by attendants from Japan, Canada and the US. In my own remarks, I spoke on the potential of rail infrastructure in Ontario to increase profits through public private partnerships, the Government of



Japan's active promotion overseas of Japanese infrastructure projects, the rich knowhow and experiences of Japanese businesses and my hope for Japan-Canada collaborations in the field of transportation infrastructure.

The population of the Greater Toronto Area is increasing by approximately 100,000 people every year, or a million people in 10 years. In tackling such issues as population increase in urban centers, traffic congestion, climate change and others, the development of transportation infrastructure is sure to be a crucial component to consider in this province. I believe that there are great possibilities in Japan being a vital partner of Ontario, working together toward these ends in the future.