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## Press Release

Fiji National University has become the first tertiary institution in the Pacific Island region to introduce handball, an Olympic status game which is widely played in Europe and Asian countries.

The first contest took place at the National Gymnasium recently between the FNU Sports Science students and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) representatives.

The Misaki Cup, the title given to the contest, is named after a JICA volunteer who teaches physical education to FNU Sports Science students.

Ms Misaki Okamoto, who was both handball player and coach in Japan, introduced handball to Sports Science students and taught them how to play.

She said players needed athletic skills including throwing, running, jumping and keeper saving abilities.

“Fijian athletes have what it takes to play handball with the three abilities required to win – power, speed and agility,” Ms Okamoto said.

As well as teaching how to play, JICA also donated 12 handballs to FNU during the contest.

Mr Minoru Tamura, Project Formulation Advisor Environment, JICA, and one of the players on the JICA team, said the Fijian team was very strong and would be good players if they kept at it.

Lecturer in Sports Science, Samuela Yavala said the game developed out of Europe about the end of the 19th Century and started to spread around Europe, then in 1906 the first rule book was written.

“The sport is similar to futsal with the only difference being that handball uses the hands.

It started the same way as volleyball, as an off-season winter sport, but because of its popularity it developed into a fully-fledged sport now in the Olympics,” Mr Yavala said.

Mr Yavala said he would introduce handball in Fiji with Ms Okamoto and encourage Fijian athletes to play.

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