

## Our expertise not inferior to that of male referees

# Egypt's women football referees push for league promotion

CAIRO, July 5, (AFP): On the sidelines of a small football pitch at a university in Cairo, Hanan Hassan remembers starting out as a referee and the response she got from one female player's mother.

"In a loud voice she yelled as she was looking towards me: 'god bless you my daughter and I hope that my own daughter becomes like you,'" Hassan recalls, proudly.

For years, women referees in Egypt have officiated at lower-level football matches but now have their sights set on the premier league.

"My colleagues abroad have already presided over the men's tournaments in their countries, so why not in Egypt?" asked fellow referee Mona Atalla.

Dressed in trousers and a pink shirt carrying the FIFA logo, Hassan and Atalla, both 37, presided over the evening all-women friendly game at Ain Shams University in the Egyptian capital.

While Hassan started her career as a professional referee in 2006, Atalla was part of the first group of female referees registered in Egypt in 1998 who were allowed to oversee all-women and junior male tournaments.

After years on the pitch, Atalla and her female colleague Pousy Said were finally allowed in April to officiate a match in the men's second and third division leagues.

### Raised

The decision by the Egyptian Football Association's referee committee raised hopes that women referees will soon be holding the red and yellow cards in the top-tier premier league.

Atalla has already worked at international women's tournaments, including the under-20s World Cup.

"Our expertise is not inferior to that of the male referees, and the law (on football refereeing) is the

same and should be implemented," she added.

Hassan, who also holds an international referee licence, argued women may actually have an advantage on the pitch.

"If the men's game does include some violence, the presence of a female referee could push some players to be more appropriate," she said, standing tall on the pitch with her hair covered.

"It is natural for me to hand my decisions with a smile so that I absorb the anger of the person in front of me," Hassan quipped.

There are just 15 women working as referees in Egypt, out of 60 registered with the country's FA, according to referee committee head Azab Haggag.

He sees no reason for women not to officiate more high-profile matches, "but it has to be done gradually so that the fans are more prepared for it and accept it."

Atalla, whose brothers and hus-



Egyptian referee Hanan Hassan (right), and assistant referee Mona Atalla warm up prior to a women's football match in Cairo on June 3, 2018. (AFP)

band are also referees, said she has seen attitudes change over the years.

At first "some people saw it as

strange for women to be playing football, and even more so for them to be officials... with the decision held in her hands," she

said. "As the job was being practised by women who do their jobs perfectly, people have become very proud of their presence in the field," said Atalla.

But as the women referees are fighting to gain more ground, Haggag said the FA has received some complaints from female players.

Norhan Hamdy, a 21-year-old who was playing in the game at Ain Shams University, is one of the footballers who objects to women referees.

"As a female football player I prefer that a man officiates my games," said Hamdy, who believes some women referees are influenced by their emotions and can be biased towards their friends.

Determined to see women referees promoted to the higher leagues, Atalla said such prejudices must be confronted: "We must fight this thought."

### Lifestyle

Zozotown suits up

## Online fashion in Japan takes off

TOKYO, July 5, (RTRS): Zozotown, which swooped in as a little-known retail website and prodded once-reluctant Japanese consumers to shop online for clothes, is now facing stiff competition in the industry whose image it remade.

Arriving on the scene in 2004, the site made a killing selling clothes from shops such as Japanese boutique United Arrows and minimal French label A.P.C.

Zozotown's success turned its founder into one of Japan's richest entrepreneurs, and its name adorns a baseball stadium.

But its dominance is being challenged, with retailers expanding their e-commerce offerings and big names such as Amazon and SoftBank Group Corp eyeing a piece of the growing business.

At stake is a \$120 billion fashion market that was almost entirely dominated by brick-and-mortar stores until a few years ago, but is transforming amid the proliferation of smartphones and home delivery.

Online fashion sales have grown to over 10 percent of the total Japanese market in the past few years — with Zozotown at the head of the pack — and are likely to surpass 20 percent in three years, according to Nomura Securities.

"There needs to be a second player, and we are putting up our hand," said Yusuke Tanaka, founder and chief executive of fashion website Locondo Inc.

To differentiate itself, Locondo specialises in shoes and, unlike Zozotown, offers free returns — still a rarity in Japan. It also shares inventory with fashion site Magaseck.

### Board

For now, Zozotown is "totally sweeping the board," said Yuki Ando, general manager of web business at Sanyo Shokai Ltd., the fashion company behind lines such as Mackintosh Philosophy.

Zozotown is operated by Zozo, officially called Start Today Co Ltd.

The website set itself apart in its early days with a clean, uncluttered design and a slice of "Ura-Hara" style — the modish fashion of the backstreets that line the trend-setting Harajuku district of Tokyo.

Business took off as fashion-conscious professionals in their late twenties and early thirties started using Zozotown to buy trendy but work-appropriate threads online from labels such as United Arrows and Nano Universe.

Its target is now broader, selling over 6,800 brands including, starting next week, clothes by Shimamura Co Ltd., one of Japan's largest mass market chains. But industry executives say it still has an enviable cachet.

Zozotown has an "overwhelming ability to attract customers," says Takahiro Kinoshita, a manager in the digital marketing department of United Arrows.

In February, fashion company Stripe International launched Stripe Department, an online joint venture with SoftBank Group Corp.

The site features recommendations by stylists, and targets a user base that's slightly older than that of Zozotown, the company says.

Amazon is trying to raise its fashion credentials in Japan, sponsoring catwalk shows in Tokyo. The head of Amazon Japan's fashion unit, James Peters, says fashion is one of the company's fastest-growing areas, but declined to provide figures.

Retailers that had historically focused on expanding their physical presence are also shifting to e-commerce. Japan's Fast Retailing Co Ltd, which controls the Uniqlo brand, is trying to grow online sales, which are currently less than 8 percent of the company's total. Chief executive Tadashi Yanai said he wants to see that rise to 30 percent.

Even the brands that drove Zozotown's early success are now competing with it.

United Arrows still makes almost 60 percent of its online sales through Zozotown.

### Exhibition



Women wearing summer cotton kimonos, called yukatas, look at goldfish during a press preview of the 2016 EDO Nihonbashi Art Aquarium exhibition in Tokyo on July 5. (AFP)

### Art

## 'More rewarding than a real tip in cash'

# A 'Japanese tip': origami art left by diners

KAMEOKA, Japan, July 5, (AFP): Yuki Tatsumi was waiting tables at an izakaya pub in Japan's Kyoto when something on the table caught his eye — a chopstick wrapper folded and fiddled into an abstract shape.

It was the catalyst for a collection that now includes some 15,000 pieces of found "origami art" made by customers folding the paper sleeves that cover chopsticks at Japanese restaurants.

"The very first one I found just looked like a bit of junk," 27-year-old Tatsumi admitted, but it made him think.

"What if this is a message for me from customers? Cleaning tables suddenly became something fun, just by thinking about it that way."

### Tip

Tipping at restaurants is not standard in Japan, but Tatsumi came to see the little folded paper pieces left behind by customers as a "Japanese tip", and started watching out for different types.

He soon found there was a huge variety in the pieces left behind by customers, perhaps no surprise in a country where origami is a popular hobby and taught at schools.

"I discovered many of them were folded in shapes of traditional good luck items in Japan, like a fan, a crane and a turtle," he said.

"I also once found a table decorated like a fish tank, with paper folded like fish and seaweed."



In this picture taken on May 23, 2018, Yuki Tatsumi sits next to his collection of origami made from chopstick sleeves in Kameoka, Kyoto prefecture. (AFP)

Enchanted by his discoveries, he decided to branch out and ask other restaurants to donate the pieces left by their customers to his collection.

In April 2016, he set off on a year-long road trip, asking hundreds of eateries from sushi restaurants to noodle stands to share their transformed paper sleeves with him.

He encountered some curiosity, and even reluctance, from restaurateurs bewildered about why he would want something usually headed straight for the garbage.

But eventually 185 places from northern Hokkaido to southern Okinawa promised to keep whatever they found and send them to him.

"Many of the restaurant owners

that helped me told me afterwards that they now find it more rewarding than a real tip in cash," Tatsumi said.

"It may sound hard to believe, especially for those outside Japan, but this way of showing appreciation that is unique to each person is something very pleasing."

Now working as a researcher at an art museum in Kameoka near

Kyoto, Tatsumi has around 15,000 pieces, each stored in its own small wooden box, like a piece of precious jewellery.

Many are simple, with diners just forming a makeshift chopstick rest out of the sleeve.

But others are elaborate, like a black and white patterned piece formed into a dress, or a blue wrapper twisted into a snake, with the folds following the patterns on the paper.

He sees them as an unspoken message between customers and their servers in restaurants, and worries that as automated service becomes more common in Japan, the "tips" he collects will disappear.

"When you walk into a restaurant and only deal with a machine, I don't think you would make these items. I really think these are products created only when people communicate in person," he said.

Tatsumi has already exhibited his collection in Japan, and plans to take it to art events in Paris and South Korea later this year.

He wants the collection to remind people to show appreciation and consideration for what they have.

"Japan is a very wealthy country, where you can find something to eat anywhere at any time, but I think people are becoming less appreciative of what they have or who makes the food," he said.

"Cash isn't the only way to show your warm feelings."