

Second Best in the World, but Still Saying Sorry

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Kenichiro Fumita was crying so hard that he could barely get the words out.

“I wanted to return my gratitude to the concerned people and volunteers who are running the Olympics during this difficult time,” Mr. Fumita, a Greco-Roman wrestler, said between sobs after finishing his final bout at the Games this week.

“I ended up with this shameful result,” he said, bobbing his head abjectly. “I’m truly sorry.”

Mr. Fumita, 25, had just won a silver medal.

In what has become a familiar — and, at times, wrenching — sight during the Tokyo Olympics, many Japanese athletes have wept through post-competition interviews, apologizing for any result short of gold. Even some who had won a medal, like Mr. Fumita, lamented that they had let down their team, their supporters, even their country.

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People who study Japanese culture say the athletes’ apologies, even in the face of victory, stem from an instinct that is cultivated from childhood.

“Americans are very good at finding reasons why you are great even if you fail,” said [Shinobu Kitayama](#), a social psychologist at the University of Michigan. But in Japan, he said, “even if you succeed, you have to apologize.”

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