

A brief introduction to two top female Japanese athletes in their 100's and 90's

Hiroko Hashimoto¹

Ms Mieko Nagaoka, who is 100 years old, has 24 world records of free swimming style, backstroke and breaststroke, while Ms Mitsu Morita, who is 91 years old, has four world records of short distance: 100m and 200m as a female sprinter of 91-95 age group.

Their similarities are as follows:

- *They started the respective sports when they were over 60.
- *They were extremely hard working and very determined.
- * They were successful business women.
- *They had a very understanding husband, but, now both of them are widows.
- *They like to eat meat at almost every meal.
- *They live alone and love training.

One hundred year old and 24 world record holder of swimming; Ms Mieko Nagaoka

Ms Mieko Nagaoka was born in 1915 in Yamaguchi Prefecture. When she was 23 years old, she wholesale shop in the same local area. She has two sons. When she was 53, her husband passed away.

She had to continue his business. She did not know about business management at all, including bookkeeping. Furthermore, the business was out of fashion and the profits from the business decreased. She had to work extremely hard by learning bookkeeping for business management and also changed the commodity of the shop to rice husks, which are now used as high quality heat insulators in iron and steel manufacturing. Rice husks are available for only a short season after the rice harvest. Therefore, she contracted rice producing famers from northern to southern parts of Japan in order to make the availability period of rice husks a longer. As she had never failed to procure the rice husks when she got orders, the iron and steel companies deeply trusted her as an excellent and very reliable business partner. As a result, the annual revenues from sale of by-products reached 100 million yen. She ran the business by herself, utilizing and extending networks with farmers and carriers. Therefore, two years after she inherited her husband's business, her business had enough profit and she started to learn Noh as her hobby. Playing Noh is a



quite expensive traditional hobby in Japan.

She practiced Noh extensively for 25 years by converting one room for practicing space. When she became 80 years old, she found her knees were not good to practice Noh. She felt the necessity to get treatment for her knees. Her son, who lived in Yokohama which is near Tokyo, advised her to walk in a swimming pool. When she visited the swimming pool and started to walk in the pool, she did not feel comfortable to just walk and started to swim in her own way, backstroke style. It took one year to swim 25m without rest. As she was not good at crawling which requires a certain breathing technique, she chose to swim by backstroke for freestyle competition. She practiced 3 to 4 times a week for 1000m to 1500m without rest. When she was 85 years old, she participated in Japan National Masters Swimming Competition, according to her son's advice. At the competition, she set a Japan national record. Since then, she started to participate in national competitions every

¹ Japan Representative to UN CSW and Principal of Jumonji High School in Tokyo

year and set national records every time. But she was not so enthusiastic about swimming, as she very much liked to practice for a Noh recital.

However, when she was 87 year old, she recognized that she had a hearing problem. Hearing capacity is essential to practice Noh as players have to dance according to sounds of musical instruments. Therefore, she had to give up Noh and started to concentrate in swimming.

At 88 years old, she got a bronze medal at World Swimming Master Competition held in New Zealand. Two years later, at 90, she got three silver medals at the competition held in Italy. But, she wanted to get gold medals. She believes that only gold medals have value as nobody pays attention to silver and other medals. In order to achieve her desire, at 91, she started to improve her swimming by taking private lessons. Then, at 92, she got her first gold medal at the World Swimming Competition held in San Francisco. Other medals she obtained at the competition were one silver and one bronze. When she was 94, she transferred her company to her relatives and started to concentrate on swimming.

At 95, she made 29 world records and 47 Japan records. She started to learn the breaststroke, though the trainer was not willing to teach breaststroke to her when she asked him to teach her. The trainer thought that she was too old to start a new swimming style. But, she strongly insisted that he teach her the breaststroke. When she was 96, she made four world records in breaststroke.

Even at 98, she renewed the breaststroke style records. She also made world records of 800m and 1500m free style (by backstroke)

At 100 years old, she has 17 world records for age level 100 to 104 and 7 world records for age level 95 – 99. As she has not made world record for 1500m short channel, she will try it in April 2015.

She eats a lot of meats and fish for every meal. She has not suffered any adult diseases, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, or heart problems.

Ninety one year old and four world record holding female sprinter; Ms Mitsu Morita

Ms Morita was born in 1923. After graduation from senior high school for women in 1940, she started to work at the city government in Kumamoto Prefecture. She married a male colleague at the city office when she was 25 years old. After delivering their first child, she and her husband inherited a shop of artificial flowers. Although she resigned from the City Hall, her husband continued his work there and assisted her shop after his working hours. He finally resigned from the city hall several years later to run the business together. They extended their shop for funeral and wedding ceremonies. She and her husband worked nearly 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. They responded even at midnight to the telephone calls ordering sets of flowers for funerals.

She gave over her business, which had 160 employees, to her daughter when she reached 60 years old. At 69, she had a chance to run at the community sport contest as a runner in a relay race of runners in different age brackets. She ran for the “40 or over” age bracket. Although other runners were slightly older than 40, she was 69 years old. But she won second place. Immediately, she was invited to join the community’s track and field club because the representative of the club saw her running. At the beginning, she ran her own way. At 78 year old, she changed her running form under the instruction of a coach of the club. Her husband, who was an instructor of a non-professional baseball team, invented a practicing menu for her.

She was informed that the muscle of her leg is the same level of that of the women in their 20’s when she took a physical function test several years ago.

At 80 years old, she broke a world record and currently has four world records of short distance. She intends to break world records for 95-99 when she will be 95 years old. At every breakfast, she eats three pieces of pork.

