

Special interview with Olympic Medalist Misato Nakamura

Interviewer: Consulate-General of Japan in Seattle Intern, Ryu Ishii

Ms. Misato Nakamura, the judoka (judo athlete) who won bronze medals at both the Beijing and Rio de Janeiro Olympics and three-time winner of the Judo World Championships, is currently visiting Seattle. She is here to learn English as well as judo practices in the US. I was honored to have the opportunity to interview Ms. Nakamura about judo, her feelings since coming to the US, and what the Olympics mean to her.

#### Aspects of judo that attract Ms. Nakamura

Ms. Nakamura explained that in the world of judo, just because an athlete is strong or skillful, it doesn't mean that athlete will win. "You can never expect what will happen in judo." She said, "It is possible to get an ippon (which means knockout in judo) and come from behind to win the match in five seconds. In addition, there are reasoned techniques, such as throwing with using your opponent's power, that make it possible to throw opponents with little power of your own. Moreover, judo is a sport that can only be done if you respect your opponent."

When she was an elementary school student, she became interested in the martial arts by watching a combat sport TV show with her father. As she tried several martial arts herself, she thought, "It is interesting that small people could throw large people."

That's how she started judo. When she began to devote herself to the sport, she practiced every day except for Sundays, and when she was not practicing, she used that time to take care of herself, such as going for a massage. When talking about judo, she said,

"When I successfully do in the match what I had done during practice, I feel happy that I continued practicing judo."

She also said that she feels good when she can interact with foreign athletes through judo, even if she cannot speak their languages.

#### Her impressions on practicing judo in the US

When I asked her about the purpose of her visit to Washington State, and she answered, "I want to learn how judo has been spread here and how to teach judo to children and adults. I also want to study English."

Furthermore, she talked about her future goal, saying,

"I wish to create a place where people can continue judo recreationally even after becoming adults, rather than just a place for those training to win. I have always wished to make such a place where even adults can start learning judo and people can feel familiar with the martial art, so I want to use my teaching experiences here to make that happen."

She participated in judo practice here in the US and re-affirmed the importance of learning the basics.

“I noticed that utilizing the fundamentals is better in Japan. Hence, I want to emphasize the basics during practices here.

“The basics enable us to apply techniques. If we start with and practice only applied techniques, there is no place to come back to the basics. Since it is impossible to improve without the basics, I want students of judo and athletes to acquire those skills, such as throwing without resorting to power and using an opponent’s power.

“I think it is great that at Budokan Dojo (one of the dojos in Seattle where judo is practiced), people can learn some of the basics, such as courtesy and the proper way of standing. Now, I want to incorporate more technical training in their practice.”

#### Her emotional attachment to the Olympics

For Ms. Nakamura, who was longing for the Olympics since she was an elementary school student and had a clear goal of becoming an Olympian from when she was a high school student, the Beijing Olympics were the most memorable of those that she participated in. It has such a strong impression on her because it was her first Olympics and also led the way to her participating in London and Rio de Janeiro. However, when looking back on the Beijing Olympics, she said,

“Though I got the bronze medal, because I was defeated, I felt like I didn’t do my judo well enough during my match, and I learned there was still a big gap between world-level judo and me. I felt miserable about myself who said that I would win the gold medal, and I became aware that I was not enough (to be a champion).”

After each Olympics, she moved on to the next Olympics, thinking about what she needed to win for every match, and kept fighting voraciously, even after winning tournaments. While she is not aiming for the Tokyo Olympics this time, she said,

“Even though I am not a coach, I would like to get involved in some way, such as sharing what I know with the younger judo athletes who aim for the Tokyo Olympics. Moreover, I wish to involve myself not as a player, but as a commentator who can make judo more interesting to those who have never practiced judo or have just watched it on TV.”

Furthermore, she gave a message for everyone who aims for the Tokyo Olympics:

“Participating in the Olympics means you are supported by a lot of people. Therefore, I want you to always have gratitude and to have the mindset that you will get the best result.”

#### Message for everyone

Finally, Ms. Nakamura gave a message for those who want to begin judo as well as those who

practice it now, saying,

“Judo is a profound sport – your interest will grow as you practice more. I want you to feel it through judo.”

Moreover, for the people who live in the US, she also gave a message about next year’s Tokyo Olympics:

“Hosting the Olympics in Japan, we have to make efforts as Japanese. I would like to add more liveliness and provide any support I can give. Although Tokyo is a small city, I want people living in the US to watch our energy and power.”

The Tokyo Olympics will be held from July 24 to August 9 next year. In addition to athletes who will participate in the Olympics, I also would like to pay attention to the people who support the Olympics, such as Ms. Nakamura.

[A brief profile of Ms. Misato Nakamura]

Ms. Misato Nakamura was born in Hachioji, Tokyo in 1989. She started judo when she was an elementary school student. After graduating from Shibuya Senior High School, she joined the female judo club of Mitsui Sumitomo Insurance. Her favorite technique is a minor outer. She won bronze medals at the 2008 Beijing and 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics and also participated in the 2012 London Olympics in women’s judo, 52kg weight class. Moreover, she won the Judo World Championships in 2009, 2011 and 2015 (–women’s 52kg weight class).



Ms. Misato Nakamura (right), holding her Olympic medals, and Consul General Yamada (left).