

World Peace through Sports

Dai Tamesue



DAI Tamesue won the bronze medal in the men's 400-meter hurdles at the Edmonton 2001 8th IAAF World Championships in Athletics. This was the first Japanese medal in a sprint event at an Olympic Games or World Championships. He also won the bronze medal at the Helsinki 2005 10th IAAF World Championships and competed in three consecutive Olympics, the first at Sydney in 2000. Since his retirement from competition in 2012, Tamesue has been involved in sports-related businesses and social contribution activities. We asked Tamesue about athletics, athletes' second careers and his hopes for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Why did you start to participate in athletics?

I joined an athletics club at the age of eight, influenced by my older sister, and started to run. I really began to apply myself because I was happy that I could rapidly improve my best times and people around me praised me a lot. Even though I was a child, I felt that if I continued to participate in athletics, my world would expand. Athletics showed my ability in clear numbers. I could also easily compare my performances over time. I liked to think about not only my best times, but also how to reach specific goals, such as national and world records.

Why did you switch from the 100-meters

to the 400-meter hurdles as a high school student?

When I struggled to improve my time in the 100-meters, my teacher suggested that I switch to the 400-meter hurdles. I thought that any event would be fine as long as I could show my ability. The hurdles are a track and field event that require refined technique. Unless you get your steps just right and consistently in front of each hurdle, it is difficult to clear them. At that time, we did not have any clearly defined techniques or patterns for improvement. Because I was athletically minded, I felt that I would be able to compete globally in this event.

In addition, I chose the hurdles partly as a way to express myself in society. I thought that I might be able to have a greater social impact with the hurdles than with the 100-meters, where gaps in natural physical ability are more clearly reflected in the results and there is a larger number of competitors too. That is why I switched to the hurdles.

What did it mean to you to compete in the Olympics three times?

It was a really valuable experience to represent Japan in three Olympics. I think that competing in special circumstances in which winning or losing is directly connected to the national image was a very rare opportunity to learn something about myself. It was also a unique experience to spend time in the Olympic Village. The people there all had an identity purely as athletes, regardless of nationality. Athletes who competed in the same event were able to understand the challenges they had overcome and empathized deeply with each other. It may sound grandiose, but I felt that this empathy could prevent the divisions between countries that cause conflict.

Why did you and four other athletes, including a table tennis player and a bicycle racer, establish the Athlete Society in 2010?

With the exception of the few athletes who are tremendously successful, for many athletes developing a second career after retirement is a serious matter. Aiming to be a new role model for retired athletes, I founded the Athlete Society with four friends. A wide range of athletes from many different events participate in the Athlete Society to make social contributions through sports. Because I was particularly interested in sports diplomacy, I launched Sports Asia to connect Asian countries through sports. Since being appointed Sports Goodwill Ambassador for the Bhutan Olympic Committee in 2015, I have taught athletes and coaches in Bhutan and Japan. In addition, in February 2019, I started a project in which track and field athletes from Asian countries, such as Bhutan, Nepal and Laos, lived under one roof in Japan for about two weeks and trained together. I was really happy to see them deepen friendships that went beyond their nationalities.

What are your expectations for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games?

Japan is a super-aging society. Not a few people are struggling with physical pain and disabilities. It is predicted that a lot of countries will experience this in the future. If Japan can demonstrate how it manages as a super-aging society through the Olympics and Paralympics, it will be very significant for the world.

In addition, as I travel to many countries, I feel that Japan is such an open country that people from other countries can easily settle in. I hope that a permanent facility similar to an Olympic Village will be created in Japan using the country's unique qualities. I believe that providing a place for people from many different countries to interact through sports will contribute not only to the development of the sports world but also world peace. 🇯🇵

Interview by OSAMU SAWAJI
