

## A lesson for life

by Chiharu Igaya\*



When I returned home one evening from a hard day's training back in 1950, I was greeted by my father, who had a broad smile on his face. He said: "Chiharu, I have good news for you", so I asked, "What is it, father?" Then he told me that the IOC had announced a plan to readmit the Japanese Olympic Committee. This meant that Japanese athletes would now be able to compete in the Olympic Games starting in 1952. The JOC had been ousted from the Olympic family when Japan entered World War II in 1941.

Ever since the war had ended in 1945, my father continuously and enthusiastically spoke to me about the Olympic Games and kept telling me to get prepared to participate as soon as Japan was allowed to join the rest of the world and take part. At that time, I did not have much of an idea about the Olympic Games; however, my impression was that the Olympic Games were the biggest and the most important sports event in the world. Furthermore, I understood that to become an Olympian was the highest honour an athlete could attain.

From that day on, I started working harder to stay on top in Japanese skiing circles and earn a place on the Japanese Olympic ski team. The effort paid off and I succeeded in taking part in the VI Olympic Winter Games held in Oslo in 1952.

In the 1940s, because of the war, there was hardly any communication between the Japanese and the world skiing circles. Therefore, we had no way of knowing about the developments and changes in skiing techniques abroad. However, my father and I had developed a new technique, which was quite different from the prevailing technique in Japan.

On the way to Oslo, I stopped at St. Anton, Austria, for training. There, I joined some of the European competitors and we practised together. Much to my surprise, the European skiers used the exact same technique that my father and I had developed. In the beginning, I had not been so sure that my technique was good enough to compete against the top European competitors, but I immediately gained confidence. This surprised many people in Europe, because they thought that Japan was a tropical country where coconut and banana trees were grown. They did not know that skiing was a popular sport there.

In Oslo, I placed 11th in the Slalom event. This result naturally gave me a lot of encouragement and made me determined to work harder to win a medal in the next Olympic Winter Games in 1956.

Then came 1956 and the VII Olympic Winter Games in Cortina d'Ampezzo. It was hard luck that in the middle of

November 1955, only two and a half months away from the Olympic Games, I twisted my right ankle very badly while playing soccer. I had to stay on a pair of crutches until mid-December. When my ankle finally got better, I quietly went to Saint-Moritz and started to train alone, at my own pace. Although I wanted to join my fellow competitors to train together, I did not, because I thought I was out of shape and had a greater chance of getting injured if I pushed myself too soon after recovery. I believe this strategy was the right one, for I ended up winning a silver medal and sharing the winners' podium with the famous Toni Sailer in Cortina. Sailer was the first of the two great skiers who won all the three events in the Alpine ski competitions in the Olympic Winter Games. Another super skier was my IOC colleague Jean-Claude Killy.

After the Games in Cortina, I decided to retire from my career in competition and went into business. However, many of my Japanese friends thought that I should try another Olympic Games to go after a gold medal. Although I had decided to retire, I changed my mind and prepared to compete once again. The VIII Olympic Winter Games were held in Squaw Valley, in the United States of America, in 1960. In this Olympic competition, I had my mind set on winning a gold medal and nothing else. In the first run, I placed 6th, and less than one second behind the fastest time. I knew that all the skiers who placed within a second from the fastest time had an equal chance that - with a little extra luck - they would win the gold medal.

So, in the second run, I decided to test my luck: it would be "all or nothing." The result was that I had no luck. I



*Chibaru Igaya, at the starting gate of the slalom in Cortina d'Ampezzo in 1956.*

went too fast and skied off the course. Although I failed to win a gold medal, I won a very valuable lesson from those Games, a "lesson for life". After the unsuccessful second run, many people came to me to say how sorry they were. But they were surprised to see that I seemed neither disappointed nor sad as many of them had expected. They asked me why. My replied was that I had decided the second run would be all or nothing. I knew that this meant there was a greater possibility I would end up with nothing, and that was What happened. So I was not disappointed. From this experience, I learned to weigh the consequences of my actions before-

hand whenever I wanted to say or do something important. If the result is in my favour, of course I am very happy. If the result is not in my favour, I am not disappointed.

As I explained above, I can hardly talk about my life without speaking about the Olympic Games. In my teenage years, I wanted to become an Olympian. After I became an Olympian, I wanted to become an Olympic medallist and I won a silver medal. In 1982, I was given the honour of becoming an IOC member. While I have been an IOC member, I have helped Japan, for example in its hosting of the 96th IOC Session in Tokyo. Then I thought that it

would be very nice to if Japan could host the Olympic Winter Games while I was an IOC member, and thanks to the support of my colleagues, this dream has also become a reality.

I have two more wishes connected to the Olympic Games. One is to present a medal to a Japanese athlete (possibly a slalom skier) at the XVIII Olympic Winter Games in Nagano in 1998 and, last but certainly not least, to contribute to world peace myself, together with my colleagues and through the Olympic Movement, in the years to come.

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