

Golden Oldies: Aging athletes in Japan turn back the clock

By Jim Armstrong
AP Sports Writer

TOKYO — Earlier this month, 48-year-old Japanese soccer player Kazuyoshi Miura broke his own record as the J-League's oldest scorer with a goal for second division club Yokohama FC.

Not to be outdone, 100-year-old Mieko Nagaoka became the first woman to complete a 1,500-meter freestyle swim in the 100 to 104 age category.

In a country that prides itself on longevity and a gung-ho spirit, an increasing number of aging athletes in Japan are turning back the clock while breaking some world records in the process.

Japan is aging at a faster pace than any other developed country and also has the longest life-expectancy of 86.2 years, according to the World Health Organization.

The combination of the two is producing some impressive athletic feats.

Japanese professional baseball player Masahiro Yamamoto is attempting this season to become the oldest pitcher on either side of the Pacific to win a game.

It's an honor currently held by American Jamie Moyer, who at the age of 49 years and 180 days, became the oldest winning pitcher in Major League Baseball with the Colorado Rockies in 2012. Entering his 29th season as a pro, all with the Chunichi Dragons, Yamamoto turns 50 on August 11.

"It's an exceptional example of dedication to your craft, being able to pitch professionally at his age," said American Trey Hillman, who managed in Japan from 2003-2007. "It does shock me that anyone can do that with all the years of wear and tear on the arm."

Yamamoto, currently rehabbing from a knee injury,



CENTENARIAN SWIMMER. One-hundred-year-old Japanese swimmer Mieko Nagaoka, right, reacts after successfully swimming 1,500 meters at a masters swimming competition in Matsuyama, western Japan. Nagaoka became the first woman to complete a 1,500-meter freestyle swim in the 100 to 104 age category. (AP Photo/Kyodo News)

Hanshin Tigers on September 5.

The veteran left-hander says inspiring people of his generation helps keep him motivated.

"I deal with a lot of aches and pains and there are days I don't want to get out of bed," Yamamoto said in an interview at the Japan National Press Club. "But if I can be an inspiration to people of my generation, that keeps me going."

Ski jumper Noriaki Kasai, who is 42, became the oldest World Cup winner in history when he finished first at an event at Ruka, Finland, on November 29.

Kasai has been on the global circuit since 1989. He has appeared at seven Winter Olympics, most recently winning a large hill individual silver medal at Sochi last year.

Kasai holds the records for most individual starts (463), team starts (49), and the most seasons performing in the World Cup (26).

Tennis player Kimiko Date-Krumm, 44, has won more than 200 tournament matches. She came out of retirement in 2008 and became the oldest player to beat a Top 10 player when she defeated Samantha Stosur in 2010 at age 40.

As impressive as these feats are, none of them can match Nagaoka.

The centenarian swimmer finished in what is now a world-record time of 1 hour, 15 minutes, and 54 seconds, according to the Japan Masters Swimming Association.

Eugene, Oregon, to host 2021 world athletics championships

BEIJING (AP) — The International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) has awarded the 2021 world athletics championships to Eugene, Oregon, the first time the event will be held in the United States.

The IAAF said the decision, which bypassed the usual bidding process, was driven by the popularity of track and field in the American market.

It said the financial support offered by the governor of Oregon and the United States Olympic Committee, as well as NBC's commitment to produce and broadcast the event, led to the decision.

"In granting the championships to Eugene, the IAAF Council have made a clear choice on a strategic decision that enables us to take advantage of a unique opportunity that may never arise again," IAAF president Lamine Diack said in a statement.

While cities usually compete to hold such events, the IAAF also awarded the 2007 world championships to Osaka, Japan without opening it to bidding.

Diack said Eugene offered access to a key market for

athletics and would further the sport's global development.

Eugene's bid last November to host the 2019 world championships was not successful. But the city renewed its lobbying for the 2021 edition over recent months with a fresh proposal to the IAAF.

The leader of that effort, Vin Lananna, said the IAAF

would not regret its decision.

"We promise to deliver an outstanding championships for the sport of track and field in America and around the world," Lananna said.

The announcement came during the second half of the IAAF Council meeting in Beijing, the host city of this year's world championships.

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