

Track Athletes

Nobuharu Asahara and Jun Osakada

Reflecting on the **Great Earthquake** and the **Olympics**

Nobuharu Asahara and Jun Osakada are Amagasaki residents who have competed as runners in sprint events at the last three Olympic Games in Atlanta, Sydney and Athens. They earned the nation two best-ever fourth-place finishes in men's relay events at the Athens Games. In addition to their performance at the Olympics, they have also made their mark at a host of other athletic meets, including the World Track and Field Championships. As both of these gentlemen were also born in Kobe, which was stricken by the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, we asked them about their remembrances of the disaster as well as the Olympics.



At the time of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, Mr. Asahara was a university student in Kyoto "I was shocked to see the collapsed freeway on television. But, I was fortunate to have been able to get

a telephone call through to my parent's home and confirm their safety." In the same year he began working at his present place of work, and recalls that his company's athletic field in Nishinomiya couldn't be used, so he had to train at the field at Amagasaki Memorial Park. With regard to the Olympics, he says: "With a best-ever result of fourth place in the 4 x 100m relay, I think it's fair to say Japan made a strong showing at the Athens Games. After all, that's fourth behind world-class teams from Great Britain, the United States and Nigeria. In his many years as an amateur athlete, he's also had his share of injuries. That's when says to himself "I'm going to come out of this a faster runner," and this positive frame of mind is one of the things that has enabled him to stick with athletics for so long. Having finished the Olympics, he says that from hereon: "I want to keep on training, be in involved in track, and make the most of each year.



Nobuharu Asahara Born in 1972. Runner in men's 100m track events. Began athletics in high school. Graduate of Doshisha University. Currently employed by the athletics division of Osaka Gas Co., Ltd. Resident of Amagasaki City.



At university in Kyoto on the day of the disaster, January 17, but back in Kobe two days later to attend his coming of age ceremony, Mr. Osakada tells us "I was worried because it was difficult to get

in contact with my parents. I also had friends in a particularly hard hit area. I just hope all the people stricken by disasters in Niigata, Toyooka and Awaji will be able resume their lives as they were before as soon as possible." Looking back on the Olympics, he says "I'm satisfied with Japan's performance at the Athens Olympics. All team members gave a 120% in the 4 x 400m relay, resulting in fourth-place finish. Still, to be honest, it's frustrating that we let the bronze medal slip away by nine one-hundredths of a second." He also commented that "In the 400m sprint, it's endurance that determines a runner's position. It's very demanding, but it's what keeps you coming back again and again. One thing that always comes to his mind when he thinks about Amagasaki are the names of stores and municipal facilities around town prefixed by "Ama" for Amagasaki. He smiles as he tells us "Perhaps it's because 'Ama' has a ring to it that somehow makes you feel a certain affection.



Jun Osakada Born in 1974. Runner in men's 400m track events. Began athletics in junior high school. Graduate of Kyoto Sangyo University. Currently employed by the athletics division of Osaka Gas Co., Ltd. Resident of Amagasaki City.