

Nakamura Yoshifumi (second right) with Dream Team Japan
Photo: Courtesy of Nakamura Yoshifumi



Nakamura performs the L-sit on the rings
Photo: Courtesy of TOKYO-SPORTS



A Doctor and Gymnast for Life

Nakamura Yoshifumi has been a surgeon and gymnast since he was 39. Now aged 82, his aim is to remain active in both of these roles for the rest of his life.

SUGIYAMA MAMORU

Nakamura
the surgeon
Photo: Courtesy of
Nakamura Yoshifumi



WEARING his red and black gymnastics uniform, Nakamura Yoshifumi received a huge round of applause from the audience when he performed an L-sit in the rings event, raising his legs to horizontal and holding the position. Nakamura was performing at the 53rd All Japan Senior Masters Gymnastics Championships 2020, held in September. This was the 27th time for the Tokyo-based Nakamura to compete in the tournament since he

first participated in 1985. He is the oldest active amateur gymnast in Japan and broke his own record in 2020 as the All Japan tournament's oldest participant at the age of 81 years 8 months.

“When I perform well, the air in the hall becomes tense for a moment. That feels good,” Nakamura says cheerfully.

For this event, five members including the winners of the previous tournament by age category formed Dream Team Japan. Nakamura was one of them. A goodwill match had been planned with the German team, which he was looking forward to. However, due to COVID-19, the German team's visit to Japan was canceled and the friendly competition was

postponed.

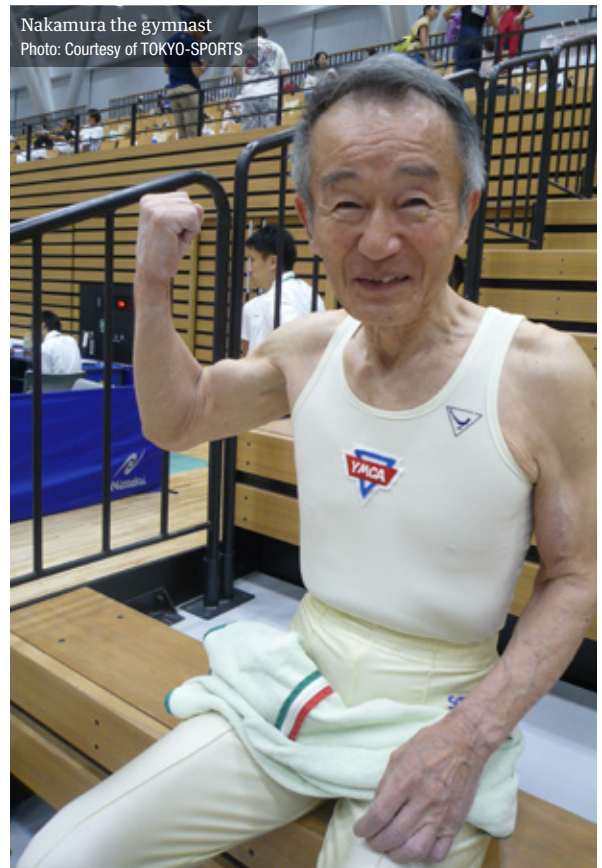
COVID-19 also affected Nakamura personally. In May, prior to the tournament, Nakamura became infected with COVID-19 during his work as the director of a hospital in Tokyo and had to be hospitalized for around three weeks, followed by two weeks of recuperation at home. While his symptoms were relatively mild, Nakamura felt very fatigued and lost muscle strength over those five weeks. After he recovered, he wanted to resume training right away. However, his usual gym was closed due to COVID-19, so he began by doing resistance band exercises at home, gradually moving his body again. The gym soon reopened, and he began serious muscle training, eventually managing to regain his strength. Somehow, he recovered in time to compete in the tournament in September, though at times he wondered if he would make it.

Looking back, Nakamura says, “I think I recovered faster after the illness because I’d set myself the goal of taking part in the competition no matter what.”

Nakamura took up gymnastics seriously in senior high school. For two consecutive years in his second and third year of high school, he participated in the National Sports Festival (the largest annual sports festival in Japan) representing his home prefecture of Shizuoka, going on to win the individual team combined title at the Shizuoka Prefectural Tournament in his third year. After that, he left gymnastics to study to become a doctor. He took up gymnastics again when the gymnastics club his children joined opened a class for adults. Nakamura was 39 years old.

“The real pleasure of gymnastics is overcoming fear through practice. When I can do something that I couldn’t do the day before, I can see the progress. And I always have the goal of competing in a tournament. That’s what’s kept me going until now,” says Nakamura.

Unlike team sports where athletes cannot practice for a competition alone, gymnastics is an individual sport. Nakamura stresses that the main reason why he is able to keep it up is that he can practice by himself at his own convenience, no matter how busy he is as an active surgeon and the director of a hospital



in Tokyo.

When Nakamura first returned to gymnastics, he put all his effort into making up for lost time after his senior high school days. Eventually, though, he had to deal with his aging body.

“It’s actually fun to squarely confront my aging body and challenge myself to take part in gymnastics competitions by training every day to ensure I maintain my performance level,” says Nakamura. Smiling, he goes on, “I hope many people who have done gymnastics when they were younger will see me still persevering at this age and join me in competing.” His motivation is evident: “Breaking records is all well and good, but I just want to continue gymnastics for as long as I can.”

Nakamura continues to train every day to achieve his aim of participating in the 2021 All Japan Senior Masters. 🏆