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Yuko Arimori

Women's Marathon

Silver Medalist at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics
and Bronze Medalist at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics



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Date of Birth

December 17, 1966

Hometown

Okayama City, Okayama Prefecture

Alma Mater

Nippon Sport Science University

Favorite saying

"Turn everything into strength"

Philosophy

"Live life in your own style. You are unique in this world."

"Live each moment to the fullest, for it will never come again."

"Giving up doesn't suit the human spirit."

Hobbies

Landscape photography, visiting retro coffee shops, collecting antique tableware and home goods, traveling, strength training and pilates

What kind of people do you want to cheer on?

People who live by following their heart authentically and wholeheartedly

What aspect of yourself do you want to cheer on?

My clumsy way of living

As an Olympian and professional runner

Yuko Arimori won a silver medal at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics and a bronze medal at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, becoming the first Japanese woman to win medals in the Olympic marathon at two consecutive Games. After crossing the finish line in Atlanta, she stated, "I want to praise myself"—words she had carried in her heart since high school, originally given by the late Tomoya Takaishi to female runners. This phrase, expressing the importance of self-recognition, continues to resonate across generations.

After Atlanta, she became Japan's first professional runner in athletics. Leaving her employer, Recruit Co., Ltd., she secured her own sponsorship deals to continue competing, creating a new career model for future athletes.

Social activities overseas

Even before ending her competitive career, she began using the power of sports for societal good. Starting in 1996, she became actively involved in organizing the Angkor Wat International Half Marathon, a charity event to support landmine victims, which she continues to support to this day. The event is now owned and operated locally. In 1998, she established NPO Hearts of Gold and became its representative director. Collaborating with Cambodia's Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, she developed physical education curricula and teaching manuals for elementary, junior high, and high schools, provided training for teachers, and promoted these programs nationwide. She also helped establish a four-year physical education university, supporting the creation and dissemination of systems and environments for training physical education teachers. The framework enables the implementation of "new physical education," where Cambodian children can learn attitude, knowledge, skills, and cooperation.

Her experience as a Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) from 2002 to 2010 gave her a strong conviction that "sports have the power to change society." During that time, she visited countries in Africa and Asia, working on issues such as HIV/AIDS, women's empowerment, and population challenges, engaging in activities that combined sporting events with awareness campaigns.

Special Olympics Nippon

Over a span of 15 years from 2008 to 2023, she served as chairperson of Special Olympics Nippon (SON), which supports the participation of people with intellectual disabilities in sports.

Through national competitions and outreach activities, she continuously advocated for the impact athletes have on society and the importance of coexistence that transcends barriers between people with and without disabilities, a theme that has become one of her lifelong commitments. She continues her involvement today as a Unified Sports® Ambassador.

Leadership in Japan and Abroad

In 2024, she was elected a Council Member of the Asian Athletics Association (AAA), and in 2024, she became a Council Member of World Athletics (WA), taking on a role in international federation decision-making. In July 2025 she became the first woman to be appointed President of the Japan Association of Athletics Federations (JAAF). As a leader in the track and field world with experience in social activities both domestically and internationally, she continues to take on the challenge of developing athletes, improving competitive environments, and promoting the social value of track and field, often called the "Mother of Sports."

Continuing to support all people who enjoy sports

Guided by the belief that "sports give you the strength to live," she travels across the country for lectures, marathon events, and running classes. Her presence at marathon races, cheering on enthusiastically for hours on end, has become a familiar sight to citizen runners. In her hometown of Okayama, she serves as the Special Ambassador for the Okayama Marathon, contributing to promoting health and social exchange in the community through coaching citizen runners and promoting the event.

“Main Lecture Themes”

"Turn Joy into Strength" / "Turn Everything into Strength"

If you have a strong determination to achieve a dream or a goal, you can put endless effort into it. Simply waiting and thinking "it'll happen someday" or "I hope something good happens" causes you to miss valuable opportunities. That is why it is important to keep your antennae sharp, to keep moving forward, and to turn joy into strength. Arimori discusses how to achieve your dreams.

"The Unknown is Exciting"

Life and daily activities are full of uncertainties. Arimori believes that this very uncertainty of "not knowing what will happen" is what fuels human energy. It's precisely because things are unknown that we can push ourselves and take on challenges. Through her experiences as an Olympic medalist and a social advocate, she shares the perspectives and mindset she used to overcome numerous hurdles and forge her career and life.

“Competition History Highlights”

1990	Osaka Women's Marathon	6th place	2 hours 32 minutes 51 seconds (then the best marathon debut record in Japan)
1991	Osaka Women's Marathon	2nd place	2 hours 28 minutes 01 second (then the Japanese national record)
1991	World Athletics Championships Tokyo – Women's Marathon	4th place	2 hours 31 minutes 08 seconds
1992	Barcelona Olympics – Women's Marathon	2nd place	2 hours 32 minutes 49 seconds
1995	Hokkaido Marathon – Women's Marathon	Winner	2 hours 29 minutes 17 seconds (then the new race record)
1996	Atlanta Olympics – Women's Marathon	3rd place	2 hours 28 minutes 39 seconds
1999	Boston Marathon	3rd place	2 hours 26 minutes 39 seconds (personal best)
2001	Tokyo International Women's Marathon	10th place	2 hours 31 minutes 00 seconds

© Personal best: 2 hours 26 minutes 39 seconds (Boston Marathon, April 19, 1999)