

Surrey senior multiple world record holder



By Surrey Leader

Published: **January 10, 2017 12:00 PM**

Updated: **January 10, 2017 03:583 PM**

Surrey athlete Harold Morioka was born to run, although it took nearly 30 years for his world championship journey to begin.

Morioka was recently inducted into the B.C. Athletics Hall of Fame at a ceremony held Nov. 19, 2016 in Richmond. The honour recognizes his 40-plus years as a sprinter, mentor and coach. (Photo below).

For Morioka, 73, his running career began in the Slocan Valley in the Kootneys in south-central British Columbia.

Following the attacks on Pearl Harbour in 1941, the federal government enacted the War Measures Act and Morioka's father was sent to live in an internment camp in the Slocan Valley with all boys and men of Japanese heritage, despite having lived in Surrey since 1924.

Eventually he was joined by his wife and three children, and Harold was born in 1943.

Memories of his time in Slocan and the treatment of his parents and siblings are topics he would prefer not to focus on.

By the time he was six years old, Morioka and his family were back in Surrey, living near 96 Avenue and King George Highway.

As an athletic kid in school, Morioka knew he could run, often pushing himself against his older brother, but school and work on the family farm occupied much of his time.

After graduation from high school in 1961, Morioka went on to university to become a high school biology teacher, however other than playing some intramural soccer and baseball as a youth, he didn't participate in organized sports.

But when he turned 29 he noticed a story in a local newspaper about an upcoming track meet at Simon Fraser University and he wondered out loud if he had the speed to compete.

"My wife told me I was out of my mind," he said laughing. "She told me all those young kids on track scholarships would kill me."

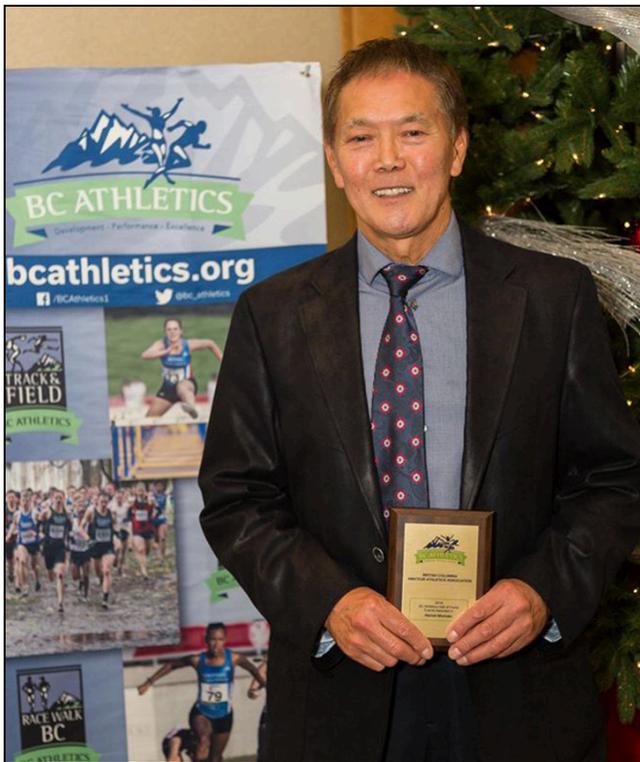
But he knew he could run.

So after some minor issues with paperwork and having no official credentials or athletic numbers, Morioka received an amateur athletic card from B.C. Athletics and was allowed to compete in the 100m.

When he arrived at SFU on race day, he looked around and thought to himself he was in way over his head.

"I thought, 'my wife is right, look at these guys. They look so fast... why did I enter?' "

But when the gun went off in his heat, despite wearing only runners instead of track spikes, instinct took over for the untrained sprinter and he finished in second place in 11 seconds.



However, because of his inexperience, after the race he just went home without checking his time or even looking to see if he had made the finals.

By the next season, at the age of 30, after beginning some basic sprint training over the winter, Morioka became the fastest man in B.C., winning the 100m and 200m in the open division at the B.C. Championship against all the best sprinters in the province.

By the age of 36 he decided to hang up his cleats, despite running under 11 seconds in the 100m and sub-50 seconds in the 400m.

"I thought I was too old to run, but B.C. Athletics still selected me for the Western Canada Games in Saskatoon," he said.

By age 40, Morioka began to get the itch to run again, so he joined the masters circuit, and by 46 he was smashing world records.

In 1989 he won his first Masters World Championship in Eugene, Oregon in the 46- to 49-year-old age group, running the 400m in 50.60 seconds and he broke the world record in the 100m in the same age group with a time of 11.11 seconds.

That same year he won the SportBC Athlete of the year award, against all other athletes in BC, the first and only time that a masters athlete has ever won that title.

His most successful year as a Masters athlete was when he turned 50, setting three world records in the indoor 60m, 200m and 400m races at the United States Nationals.

Later that year he won three gold medals at the Masters World Championships in Miyazaki, Japan in the 400m, 800m and 400m hurdles.

And at age 51, became the oldest person ever to match their age in the 400m, running the event in a time of 51 seconds.

Despite running with tremendous knee pain for many years, Morioka retired from competitive athletics at age 62.

He still volunteers as a coach for the Greyhounds Track Club.

Looking back on his long career on the track, Morioka feels his youth and upbringing were the keys to his success.

"You have to have some natural ability. We knew we were fast, my brother and I, but I was a hard worker, I trained so hard I knew it from my youth, you're not going to be successful at anything unless you work hard all year round," he said.

But as far as looking at the current group of Olympic sprinters and wondering what could have been if he had begun his career earlier in life, Morioka would prefer to not second-guess his decisions.

"Maybe if I had started out earlier, I may not have been so successful. I have no regrets."

Numerous knee injuries have slowed him down over the years and the pain keeps him from competing, and going down stairs is a real problem, "but I can still run," he said.

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