

# Sit-ski!

## 2018 Pyeongchang Paralympics Go for **Gold**, once more!

### Interview with Paralympic skier Takeshi Suzuki



Suzuki smiling as he talks about his experiences and sit-skiing

We invited Paralympic skier Takeshi Suzuki to visit Iwaki Seaside Nature Center for an interview on August 1. Suzuki, who was born in the town of Inawashiro, Fukushima, lost both his legs in a traffic accident when he was in his second year at elementary school. He was introduced to sit-skiing when he was nine years old and has taken part in three Paralympics to date, winning a total of three medals. Through our interview, we wanted to take a closer look at his life and hear about his experiences and thoughts on sit-skiing. Using various means such as images, the actual equipment he uses during competitions, and his medals, he explained Paralympic competitions and answered all of our questions in a friendly manner. Everyone was full of smiles throughout the interview.

### The joy of being able to join others in skiing

Suzuki started sit-skiing at classes at elementary school in his hometown of Inawashiro. When his legs were amputated after the accident, he was dejected, certain he would never be able to ski again. Then, he discovered sit-skiing. Since a sit-skiier can glide at the same speeds as an able-bodied person, Suzuki was overjoyed to be able to join his friends in skiing once more. He said the best thing about sit-skiing for him is that it helps him forget about his disability.

He told us there are not many people who take up competitive sit-skiing; only about 30 athletes compete at the World Championships.

We felt sit-skiing must be very difficult, since it uses only one ski. When we asked if he had any suggestions for someone starting out, giving an easy to understand example, he said, "The trick is not to be afraid as you gain speed. In a way, it's similar to riding a bicycle."

(Komiya, Sakai)

### Wishing he could have dedicated his medal to the memory of the 3/11 disaster

Suzuki has participated in three Paralympics, his first being at Torino in 2006. He continued training hard and finally succeeded in winning the gold medal in slalom during his third Paralympic appearance at Sochi, where he also won a bronze medal in the downhill sitting event.

Speaking about his first Paralympic appearance, he said, "Although before entering the event venue I was calm and thought I could easily deal with the pressure, once inside, I became very nervous, and my heart started pounding." As it takes place only once every four years, the Paralympics has a different feel about it, he added.

Suzuki won a silver medal during his second Paralympic appearance.

When he finally won gold at the 2014 Sochi Paralympics, oddly enough, it was on March 13, the same date as that fateful traffic accident 17 years ago.

"Feels like a second birthday, doesn't it?" his mother said to him.

Suzuki, however, would have preferred to win gold for the event that took place on March 11, the anniversary of the disaster, which he thought could have brought some much-needed joy to people in Fukushima.



The Sochi gold medal is inscribed with Braille

### Heavy medal

Suzuki allowed us to freely touch and pass around his medals. The gold medal weighs around 600 grams and feels heavy to the touch.

At the Pyeongchang Paralympics next year, Suzuki is determined to do even better than he did at Sochi.

(Naganuma, Yokoyama)

### Edited by:



Back row from the left:

Waka Naganuma (Fukushima High 1st grade)

Kanako Yamamoto (Izumi Junior High 2nd grade)

Rena Yokoyama (Yumoto 1 Elementary 5th grade)

Front row from the left:

Makito Komiya (Izumi Junior High 1st grade)

Haruto Sakai (Kusano Elementary 6th grade)

Daiki Suzuki (Yoshima Junior High 1st grade)

Shuto Ootani (Miwa Elementary 6th grade, in charge of photography)

### Memorable quotes by Suzuki

"I love sweets, but I have to control my sugar intake. I enjoy playing games and love cameras."

"Preparing for and taking part in competitions costs a lot of money. Expenses such as training, travel, competition fees, and equipment expenses add up to approximately 12 million yen a year. After it was decided to hold the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo, there has been an increase in funding from the government."

"I feel fear at the start of each race, but the desire to reach the goal and see what lies beyond keeps me going."

"I get the impression that American racers don't feel as much fear. Maybe it is because they have battlefield experience."

"Despite having lost my legs, I've never felt 'crippled.' Our coach at the university never treated me like a disabled person. I'm just a man like everyone else."

### Fresh back from their honeymoon in Hawaii

Suzuki and his wife had just returned from their honeymoon trip to Hawaii. He met his beautiful wife, who is a newscaster, when she approached him after he had won the gold medal to ask him to appear on her radio program. In response to our question about how he and his wife spend their free time, he said, "We might visit a cafe or go shopping. I also enjoy spending time looking for sit-ski

equipment parts in hardware stores."

Suzuki told us that his favorite word is "gratitude." "Taking part in sit skiing is not something you can do all by yourself. It's only because of all the support I get that I can compete," he explained. Through our interview, we were also able to see the gentle and courteous side of Suzuki, the tough fighter.

(Suzuki, Yamamoto)