

A New Year Interview by Mayor KOHRI

## Weaving Together: Dreams, Aspirations, the Future



World-class figure skater HANYU Yuzuru joins Mayor KOHRI to talk about the challenges he has faced until now, always with his hometown Sendai in his heart, as well as the many charms of the city.

Interviewed at Sendai Royal Park Hotel

## Profile: HANYU Yuzuru

Born in 1994, Sendai, the first Japanese winner of two consecutive Olympic gold medals in the figure skating men's singles. Recipient of the 2018 People's Honor Award. Went professional in July 2022 and has been successful at performances including ice shows.



**KOHRI Kazuko(K)** × **HANYU Yuzuru(H)**

### *Two consecutive victories – a dream supported, a dream realized*

**K:** Happy New Year. Mr. Hanyu, your first encounter with figure skating was at the age of four, you won two consecutive championships as well as major international games, and now you've gone fully professional. Thank you so much for making the time in your busy schedule to talk to us for the Sendai City Newsletter Interview.

**H:** Thank you for having me, it's a pleasure to be here. Though I'm active in the world of sports and expression, I'm first and foremost a citizen of Sendai, so this a really pleasant surprise to me. I never imagined I'd get to appear in the Sendai City Newsletter. I hope by doing this interview, I can show the people who supported me in Sendai how much I've grown, even if only a little.

**K:** I heard you had an Olympic gold medal as a goal all the way back when you were in elementary school, do you remember that time?

**H:** I don't remember it clearly, but before I realized it, I was already saying stuff like "I want to get gold at the Olympics. I want to win two straight."

**K:** Even so, few people can actually walk the walk.

**H:** In my case I was blessed by a great environment. I never would've been able to pull off an Olympic win if it weren't for my family or the instructors and coaches I had. There was also Ice Rink (Sendai). The facility struggled to stay going for a while, but it got so much support from people, which allowed me to carry on skating, and so really I have a lot to be thankful for.

**K:** It's fair to say you attribute your success to the people around you. On the way towards your goal, we were met with the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011. As you know, the event had a huge impact on the hearts and lives of many people. But in the midst of that difficult situation, I believe we were able to hone our capabilities to overcome hardships by helping each other, and I suppose your gold medal at the Sochi Olympics can be seen as a part of that. In the midst of reconstruction efforts, it's impossible to express how much your victory encouraged us, as well as gave us the strength to move forward.

**H:** The earthquake is something I wish never happened, but unfortunately did. It got me to start thinking a lot about things, which is what eventually led to my gold medal. If my achievement came back around and gave some hope to Sendai, or the people that suffered as a result of the earthquake, I feel like I can look back on the hard experiences I have had and be assured, knowing that they had a meaning.

**K:** Over 90,000 people gathered to see the celebration parade held after the Sochi games, and then, four years later, you accomplished your second consecutive victory at the Pyeongchang games. That time not just citizens of Sendai, but people all over Japan were also moved by your victory. I remember seeing you off at the starting point at the parade after the Pyeongchang games.

H: It was so windy that day (laughs).

K: It really was (laughs). At that time, about 108,000 people came to see the parade. What surprised me was there being absolutely no trash left behind on the road despite the big crowd.

H: Having people like that as supporters is a great source of pride for me as well.

The gold medal celebration parades held in the city.



▲April 2014 after Sochi Olympics



▲April 2018 after the Pyeongchang Olympics

## ***A present owed to the Beijing Olympics***

K: Would it be correct to say it was after the Pyeongchang games that you made up your mind to continue skating? I imagine the road to the Beijing Olympics was difficult with your injury and the COVID-19 pandemic. Given all that, when you eventually reached Beijing, I remember being deeply impressed seeing you attempt a quadruple Axel. I remember there was the accident (Mr. Hanyu hit a hole in the ice) on the first day of the short program.

H: In a similar vein to what you said about the earthquake, if I didn't have that accident and was aiming for gold, I might not have had to attempt a quadruple Axel. Even apart from that, I really feel like it was a culmination of many things that led to my performance at the Beijing Olympics.

K: What you said at the interview right after the free skating on the second day really left an impact on me: "My efforts might have been for nothing." But then, after the final exhibition, I remember you saying that you were happy even if those efforts didn't amount to anything. I'm curious what it is that changed how you felt at the time and made you say that.

H: My comment might have made people think like "So even Hanyu gets dejected too!", but I believe everyone more or less has similar experiences. This is very presumptive of me, but I imagine you are perhaps the same. Just by watching news and so on, I imagine you have times where you really want to do one thing, and you try your best to achieve it, and yet things end up completely different from how you were hoping. But that said, I'm confident that supporters get hope seeing the one that they are cheering on really go for it, and get joy from very act of supporting itself. In turn, the one getting cheered on also feels good and is thankful to be supported even if they don't manage to achieve their goal. Looking back, I reckon that's why I said I was happy at that time.

**K:** I feel I've just been encouraged by what you've just said. I suppose you felt that way because you managed to divert that energy yourself while at the same time recognizing the presence of those that support you. Moving on, you went professional in July 2022 after the Beijing Olympics. Your current tour included, you've been holding ice shows, and not only that but you do them completely solo! I think that's pretty amazing.

**H:** Yeah, it's been interesting (laughs). I was considering going professional starting from after the Pyeongchang games, and I made connections with various people during the following period up until Beijing. It is because I managed to reach the point where I would lose despite trying my best during the last part of my competitive life that I broadened the kind of worlds I could express. If I went pro right after the Pyeongchang games, I would never have been able to do solo shows.

**K:** I have the greatest respect for you continuing to challenge yourself with completely new endeavors by making the most of everything you've done until now.



## *A love of home*

**K:** I've noticed that you always show special care to Sendai and the Tohoku region, even despite your current busy schedule. For example, your show "notte stellata", which was held last March at the Sekisui Heim Super Arena. While the show of course got fantastic reviews, I also heard you also set up a booth for disaster preparedness merchandise and specialty foods of Miyagi at the event.

**H:** I came up with that merchandise while thinking about how we can protect lives. Plus, I think there is something to be said for coming here and getting a feel for the atmosphere, so I am glad people were able to come and experience it in person. Sendai, Tohoku is where I call home. It's a special place to me, and so I would like to keep thinking what I can do for this area.

**K:** As well, this is your fifth term as Sendai's tourism ambassador. Thank you so much for your work over the years.

**H:** You are too kind.

**K:** The tourism promotion video "#Tadaima Sendai" -I'm home, Sendai- released on October 31 last year generated a great buzz. I felt you really gave off a different impression than when you are on the ice.

**H:** I'm pretty mellow (laughs).



▲The tourism promotion video "#ただいま仙台 (#ImHomeSendai)" is now online, and can be viewed on the City of Sendai's Official YouTube Channel (Sendai Tube) - English version available on the "Discover Sendai" YouTube Channel.

**K:** I was especially touched by the scene where you are smiling gently and saying “I’m home,” and “Welcome home”. Thanks to you, we were able to create an especially enjoyable video, and it reinforced my wish to make Sendai a community that people can freely think of as their home. As well as tourist spots and events, local areas connected to you are also introduced in the video. I saw that you used to do sit-ups at Nanakita Park in Izumi Ward.

**H:** That I did (laughs). Me and my club mates would all bring out yoga mats and train where we could see the river.

**K:** That sounds lovely. In your daily life, are there times that Sendai particularly stands out to you?



**H:** After all I am a citizen of Sendai, and so I really feel that Sendai is where I can most be at ease. While it is a calm place, it also has lots to offer. It’s both comfortable and the people here are kind. There are the trees that line the streets as well, like in Jozenji-dori Avenue, and I think that sense of being able to feel nature in the city is a something very unique to Sendai.

**K:** As a city, we also regard Jozenji-dori Avenue as a treasure and are currently planning to redevelop the area to make it an even more attractive space. As well, along with the rebuilding of the main building of the city hall, we’re planning integrated development of the surrounding Kotodai Park area. I would like to advance the developments in a way that will allow people to see the best of what Sendai has to offer.

**H:** That area is one of symbolic parts of the city, so I’m really looking forward to seeing it become even more beautiful.

Throwback!

## Looking back his first appearance in the Sendai City Newsletter

This newsletter has occasionally written on Mr. Hanyu’s past achievements. His first appearance in this newsletter was the March 2009 edition. At this time he was in second grade of Junior High School and the article detailed his reception of the Sendai Sports Award.



◀ Showing the article from the time



◀ “I look so young! I remember I was scared stiff,” Mr. Hanyu laughed.

— A heartwarming moment in the interview

## *Future endeavors in the “City of Trees”*

**K:** Sendai sets its basic philosophy as “the city continuing to take on challenges”. Although rejuvenating the city through sports is part of that, we have concerns about young skaters that admire Olympic gold medalists such as you and Ms. ARAKAWA Shizuka, who are leaving Sendai due to lack of an adequate practice environment. Given this situation, we have received a donation offer from Xebio Holdings Co. Ltd to alter the Xebio Arena in Taihaku Ward into a facility that can also be used for figure skating. I hope we will be able to see your show there in the future.

**H:** Thank you so much. I would like to do types of shows can only done in Sendai, and I would be delighted if, through that, more people could learn about the joys of figure skating.

**K:** I hope many more come to see your shows, and to see also more young people on the global stage from Sendai. I hope these kinds of things will continue to bring life to the city.

**H:** I hope so, too. I can’t wait to see what’s to come.

**K:** Going forward, we will continue cheering you on in your endeavors as well, which always keep us on the edge of our seats. To finish up, I was wondering if you could give a quick message to the citizens of Sendai.

**H:** We are now coming up to 13 years since the earthquake. I think that my experiences at the time changed me in a big way, and they have become the foundation for where I am now and the direction I am going. In the uncertainty of our current global situation, where just about anything could happen, I hope we could all learn to cherish every day, myself included. As well as that, Sendai is a place that breathes hope, and so I think it would be great if we could carry a little bit of that hope with us as we march onwards every day.

**K:** A city where everyone can live with hope by their side – I also think that is something we must build going forward. Thank you so much for your time today.



### Information

#### ■ Unpublished sections of this interview on YouTube!

Parts of this interview that was not included in the newsletter will be uploaded to “Sendai Tube” .

※Upload date: January 31, 2024 (Wed.), around noon.

#### ■ LINE video message from Mr. Hanyu!

The Sendai Official LINE account will share a short message video from Mr. Hanyu that was filmed right after this interview.

※Upload date: January 10, 2024 (Wed.), around noon.