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*12 Months, 12 Top-Riders, 12 Interviews*

*by Mad4One*

Interview with

## *Kaito Shoji*

GREAT ATHLETES PERFORM EXTREMELY WELL  
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PASSION, ENERGY, HARD WORKING, WORDS  
THAT WE OFTEN MEET IN THIS INTERVIEW,  
AND THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO MAKE THIS  
ATHLETE ONE OF THE BEST MONOCYCLISTS  
OF ALL TIMES.

# THIS IS WHY KAITO SHOJI IS ONE OF THE GREATEST ATHLETES OF ALL TIME IN UNICYCLING

GREAT ATHLETES PERFORM EXTREMELY WELL IN THE “RIGHT-NOW MOMENT.” BUT EVERY TIME KAITO WENT ON STAGE WAS HIS „RIGHT-NOW MOMENT“, AND HE ALWAYS PERFORMED EXCEPTIONALLY WELL. SINCE THE BEGINNING HE HAS FULLY MASTERED TWO DIFFERENT SPECIALTIES. WHAT HE HAS BEEN ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH IN FREESTYLE HAS BEEN MONUMENTAL, BUT THAT’S NOT ALL, HE HAS BEEN ALSO ONE OF THE BEST RACE UNICYCLISTS IN THE WORLD. KAITO, THE TEN-TIME UNICON GOLD MEDALIST AND WORLD CHAMPION, IS THE CONCRETE EXAMPLE OF WHAT PIETRO MENNEA (THE BEST SPRINTER ITALY HAS EVER HAD) ONCE SAID: "TALENT IS NOT ENOUGH TO BECOME A WORLD CHAMPION, YOU NEED ALSO A LOT OF PASSION, DETERMINATION AND AMBITION".



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KAITO IS 8 YEARS OLD WHEN HE RIDES FOR THE FIRST TIME A UNICYCLE. TRACK RACE AND FREESTYLE BECOME HIS PASSION. HIS FIRST MAJOR INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION WAS THE 2004 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP IN TOKYO. TWO YEARS LATER (UNICON XIII SWITZERLAND) KAITO WON THE INDIVIDUAL JUN. EXPERT AND IN NEW ZEALAND (UNICON XV) HE TOOK HOME THREE GOLD MEDALS IN THE EXPERT FINAL ONE FOOT 50M, THE EXPERT FINAL WHEEL WALK AND THE FINAL RELAY 4X100M. IN BRIXEN (UNICON 2012) HE IS NOT FAR BEHIND, ON THE CONTRARY! 1 WORLD RECORD IN WHEEL WALK, 3 GOLD MEDALS, 3 SILVER AND 3 BRONZE. THIS YEAR KAITO BECOMES MEMBER OF THE MAD4ONE TEAM. IN MONTREAL (UNICON XVII) HE CONFIRMED HIMSELF AS A 1ST CLASS ATHLETE BOTH IN RACE AND FREESTYLE: GOLD IN FREESTYLE PAIR, SILVER IN FREESTYLE INDIVIDUAL, AGAIN GOLD IN WHEEL WALK AND SILVER IN TRACK RACE 100M. KAITO HAS BEEN AWAYS FROM INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIONS FROM 2014 (MONTREAL) TO 2018 (ANSAN), BUT JUST 10 MONTHS BEFORE UNICON XIX HE THOUGHT “...THIS UNICON CAN BE FOR ME THE LAST CHANCE TO WIN IN INDIVIDUAL...”. THE GOAL WAS FIXED. HE WORKED HARD AND PREPARED HIMSELF TO CLIMB AGAIN THE TOP OF THE PODIUM. HIS NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL AWARDS ARE HARD TO BE PUT ON ONE PAGE. OVER 200 ARE THE INTERNATIONAL AND MORE THAN 150 THE NATIONAL VICTORIES HE HAS TAKEN HOME IN THESE 18 YEARS. TODAY WE HAVE THE PLEASURE TO INTERVIEW HIM...

# THE RESULTS ACHIEVED

HERE THE MOST RELEVANT ONES.

## UNICON

2004	Unicon12	Tokyo, Japan	Individual Jr.Expert	3rd Place
2006	Unicon13	Langenthal, Switzerland	Individual Jr.Expert	Jr.Expert World Champion
2009/10	Unicon15	Wellington, New Zealand	Individual Expert	6th Place
			Pairs Expert	2nd Place
			Group Expert	2nd Place
			Expert Final One Foot 50m	1st Place
			Expert Final Wheel Walk	1st Place
			Final Relay 4×100m	1st Place
2012	Unicon16	Brixen, Italy	Individual Expert	3rd Place
			Group Expert	3rd Place
			Standard Skill Expert	1st Place World Champion
			Expert Final 100m	2nd Place
			Expert Final One Foot 50m	3rd Place
			Expert Final Wheel Walk	1st Place World Record
			Expert Final 400m	2nd Place
			Expert Final 800m	2nd Place
			Final Relay 4×100m	1st Place
2014	Unicon17	Montreal, Canada	Individual Expert	2nd Place
			Pairs Expert	1st Place World Champion
			Final 100m	2nd Place
			Final Wheel Walk	1st Place
2018	Unicon19	Ansan, Korea	Individual Expert	1st Place World Champion
			Pairs Expert	4th Place
			X-Style Expert	2nd Place

## ALL JAPAN INDIVIDUAL COMPETITION

2004	Jr.Class	1st Place	All Japan Jr.Champion
2005	Expert Class	2nd Place	
2009	Technical Class	1st Place	All Japan Champion
2012	Technical Class	1st Place	All Japan Champion
2013	Technical Class	1st Place	All Japan Champion
2014	Technical Class	1st Place	All Japan Champion

Podium Male Freestyle Expert - Unicon XIV Ansan, Korea:





WE KNOW THE ATHLETE SHOJI, MULTIPLE FREESTYLE AND RACE CHAMPION, BUT WHO IS KAITO?

I think of myself as an ordinary young man. Like other people, I usually work, and on holidays I go to see a movie, go on a trip or to a concert...I am an ordinary young man except when I ride unicycle. 😊

HOW MUCH DID PARENTS, FAMILY AND FRIENDS AFFECT YOUR SPORTS CHOICES AND YOUR LIFE AS ATHLETE IN GENERAL?

They had a big effect on me. I think that I was able to continue unicycling for 18 years thanks to their support. If I had not received support from anyone, I wouldn't be what I am now.

FREESTYLE AND DANCE: MANY TIMES, IT SEEMS THAT IN FREESTYLE THESE 2 DISCIPLINES MERGE PERFECTLY IN A SINGLE SPORTING EXPRESSION. DO YOU THINK THIS IS NORMAL IN FREESTYLE OR IS IT THE RESULT OF THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE PERFECTION?

Yes, I think it is the result of the achievement of the perfection. I think, that the elements of the presentation have been emphasized more than in the past. Just as Flatland is a skillful event, the perfection in freestyle is the fusion of skill and dance. The combination of these two elements has created many unique and wonderful routines.

## ARE YOU A PERFECTIONIST ONLY IN SPORT OR EVEN IN LIFE?

In everyday life I am not a perfectionist, but once I make decisions, usually I accomplish them to the end.

## DO YOU FOLLOW A DIET DURING TRAINING? DOES FEEDING PLAY A ROLE IN YOUR PERFORMANCES?

I refrain from drinking when the games schedule is near. However, I do not food restriction in particular. I usually go to the gym two or three times a week to train trunk and lower body. Trunk training helps to improve sense of balance.

## DO YOU LISTEN TO MUSIC DURING TRAINING? IF YES, WHICH IS YOUR MOST LOVED ONE?

I don't listen to music during training, but I often listen to music (pop, rock, EDM, soundtrack...) in everyday life. So I can find out which songs to use for new routine by listening to music of various genres.



## HAS FREESTYLE CHANGED IN THE YEARS? IF YES, WHICH ARE, ACCORDING TO YOUR OPINION, THE MOST RELEVANT CHANGES OCCURRED?

I feel that the current freestyle has more variations of tricks than before. The development of SNS (Social Network Sites) has enabled players from different countries to share videos of practice and games. And I guess that people are trying new tricks by referring to them. I think that the current freestyle is not only a rich basket of tricks but also a more distinctive performance (choreography, body expressions, costumes...) I think freestyle will be further diversified in the future.

**BILLIE JEAN KING SAID: "SPORTS TEACHES YOU TO BUILD UP YOUR CHARACTER, IT TEACHES YOU TO PLAY BY THE RULES, IT TEACHES YOU TO TO KNOW THAT YOU MAY WIN AND YOU MAY LOSE. THEREFORE SPORTS TEACHES YOU ABOUT LIFE." DO YOU AGREE?**

I agree, unicycling teaches us the importance of making efforts and perceiving towards our goals, and it helps us to fertile our imagination. If I had not played sports, I would have had a completely different character. I think this applies not only to unicycling, but to any other sports. Even if I was playing other sports, my character would have been built by sports.

**WHICH IS THE KEY TO PERSEVERANCE?**

The key to perseverance is to have clear goals and energy. By having a clear goal, I think I can accumulate small things toward the goal and achieve the goal. In addition, energy (physical and mental) in doing something is an important factor.

**NEXT GOALS AND DREAMS...**

It has not yet been decided clearly, but I would like to make unicycling more a major sport.

**AT WHICH AGE DID YOU START RIDING UNICYCLE? IN WHICH SPECIALTY DID YOU START?**

I started riding unicycle at the age of 8 with both specialties, freestyle and racing. Their ratio is just about half.

**THERE ARE FOR SURE THINGS WHERE YOU SUCCEEDED EASILY AND OTHER WHERE YOU HAVE NEEDED MORE TIME AND TRAINING. HOW DID YOU MANAGE ALL THIS IN ORDER TO REACH YOUR ACTUAL LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE?**

My routine has difficult tricks and easy tricks. I always go on practicing until I do all the tricks perfectly for 5 consecutive times, then I start practicing with the music. This approach can increase the odds of making every trick a success. Since my routine is very physical, it is also very important to practice with the music. In order to build up the energy to go on with the routine up to the end, my advice is to repeat and practice with the music.



UNICON XVII - MONTREAL, CANADA. GOLD IN PAIR FREESTYLE EXPERT. SILVER IN INDIVIDUAL FREESTYLE EXPERT. THEN YOU MADE A WORKING EXPERIENCE AT CIRQUE DU SOLEIL IN RUSSIA. CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THIS EXPERIENCE?

I made the most wonderful routine ever with a great partner (Natsume Yamamoto). She has high skills and expressive power and has made this routine amazing. She and I lived in different prefectures and belonged to different teams. So we went back and forth between each other's practice places on the weekends. This routine was created by Satomi Sakaino (freestyle champion at UNICON15 and Cirque du Soleil performer). She is a great talented member of my team. We used soundtrack of a samurai-themed movie created by a famous Japanese director. The feature of this routine is the original skill and choreography. This is one of my most favorite routine.

Individual freestyle: I used electro music for the first time in this routine, and it feels quite different from my previous performance. This routine was also created by Satomi. She makes very creative routines and gives many ideas that I cannot think of. The features of this routine are many tricks and inorganic atmospheres. I made adjustments to this routine and won the national convention of the same year.

The opportunity to appear in Cirque du Soleil was given by the victory at UNICON. We were able to perform on a very wonderful stage where performers from all over the world gather. This work is a story in which the hero living in the modern world, gets lost in a different world made of snow and ice, and we played the role of an elf appearing in the story. In addition to pair routine, we appeared in the scene of another performer, and danced in the finale. The show was held for a month and was a very big show with a Christmas show and a New Year show. This show was a great experience for us in my life.





WHAT ABOUT GOAL SETTING? WHAT IS YOUR BEST ADVICE FOR SOMEONE WHO WANTS TO BECOME A CHAMPION?

The most important and fundamental thing to become a champion is to continue your efforts. At the beginning I did not have the actual good skill in unicycling. But I was able to become a champion by continuing my efforts towards the goal. It took 18 years of time. There are a variety of ways to achieve your goals, but you must make every effort towards success.



UNICON XIX, ANSAN. GOLD IN INDIVIDUAL FREESTYLE EXPERT. WHEN DID YOU DECIDE TO COMPETE IN ANSAN? HOW MUCH DID YOU TRAIN FOR THIS TITLE?

I decided to participate in the World Championship 2018 about 10 months before the Championship started. I thought, that UNICON 17 would have been the last one for me. However, the upcoming UNICON could have been the last chance for me to win in individual freestyle. Since three years I started working and I didn't have as much time for training as in the past. So I decided to leave the race aside and to devote myself to freestyle. I practiced about 15 hours on weekends, 4 hours on weekdays.

THANKS KAITO. IT WAS REALLY A BEAUTIFUL AND EXCITING MEETING. NOW WE CERTAINLY KNOW MORE ABOUT YOU BOTH AS A MAN AND AS ATHLETE. THANK YOU FOR YOUR TESTIMONY, THAT REMINDS US THAT IN SPORT AS IN LIFE, PERSEVERANCE AND DETERMINATION ARE THE BASIS FOR SUCCESS. WE WON'T HIDE THAT IT WOULD BE GREAT TO SEE YOU HERE AGAIN IN EUROPE AT UNICON 2020. SO, FOR NOW, WE LEAVE YOU WITH A SIMPLE "GOODBYE, SEE YOU NEXT TIME!".

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UNTIL TODAY WE HAVE MET SOME OF THE GREATEST MALE TOP-RIDERS IN UNICYCLING, BUT, LET'S NOT FORGET THAT OUR WORLD SPEAKS MAINLY FEMALE 😊

THE NEXT INTERVIEW IS DEDICATED TO TWO EXTRAORDINARY ATHLETES, QUEENS OF THE SPEED-ON-TRACK, THE TWINS ALINA AND LEONIE CZIMEK. WE MET THEM AT THE JAHNSTADION IN BOTTROP DURING THEIR DAILY TRAINING...