

WELCOME TO ONITSUKA TIGER

An authentic sports fashion brand 'Made of Japan'

Running the Tokyo Marathon; collecting surreal Japanese art house movies on DVD; buying vintage designs by Issey Miyake or Chanel on eBay. We all have a special love affair in our life - a relationship, hobby or interest that really inspires us. Such passions bring out a positive energy and dedication in all of us.

In this exclusive Onitsuka Tiger booklet, we would like to share a special devotion: our love affair with designing stylish Japanese sports shoes and apparel - a commitment to traditions and quality you'll recognize in every product detail. Forward-looking, iconic and 100% 'Made of Japan.'



ONITSUKA TIGER TODAY

The definitive contemporary Japanese sports lifestyle brand

More than 60 years after founder Kihachiro Onitsuka started designing his epic OK BASKETBALL SHOE in a small shop in Kobe, Japan, Onitsuka Tiger has grown into the original Japanese sports fashion brand it is today: creative, empathic, and positive.

ONITSUKA TIGER BRAND IDENTITY

The current brand identity of Onitsuka Tiger is the brainchild of founder Kihachiro Onitsuka (1918 - 2007). His creativity, sense of social responsibility and eye for detail lives on in every Onitsuka Tiger product sold today: crafted with refined Japanese materials and traditions, assembled into original designs, and fusing the arts of the East with the seductive urban design styles of the West.

Onitsuka Tiger is a sports lifestyle brand mixing the fine arts and traditions of the East with the seductive urban design styles of the West.

ONITSUKA TIGER IS THE DEFINITIVE JAPANESE SPORTS LIFESTYLE BRAND

Onitsuka Tiger designs sports lifestyle shoes and apparel that attracts the urban fashion avant-garde around the world. Vintage Onitsuka Tiger classics are redesigned for the fashion trends of tomorrow by adding a new definition of style.

Onitsuka Tiger is an original Japanese brand

Onitsuka Tiger has always fostered its Japanese roots. **Unique Japanese social beliefs and traditions still play a dominant part in the company culture.** Shoes and clothing are designed in accordance to the highest Japanese production standards and are crafted from the best materials.

ONITSUKA TIGER IS A CREATIVE BRAND

Since the brand's re-launch in 2001, each new Onitsuka Tiger product has been the evolutionary result of a creative mentality implemented by Kihachiro Onitsuka. His ambition to make things better has delivered proud sports icons with a joyful, creative soul.



Kihachiro Onitsuka, 1940s

3 The Onitsuka Tiger brand In touch with style today

Since 2001, Onitsuka Tiger has successfully blurred the boundaries between popular culture and art. Onitsuka Tiger is a brand that understands the need to communicate from a user's perspective. That has led to numerous collaborations with artists and designers — we inspire them; they inspire us. The result is a series of special collections. Onitsuka Tiger's advertising campaigns have exuded a similarly inspiring and positive energy.

In 2003, the first Onitsuka Tiger concept store opened in Tokyo. Today, there are 21 Onitsuka Tiger flagship stores worldwide. Each store has a distinct interior designed by top Japanese interior architects. It's as Japanese as it gets — right in the heart of cities such as Amsterdam, Paris, London and Tokyo.

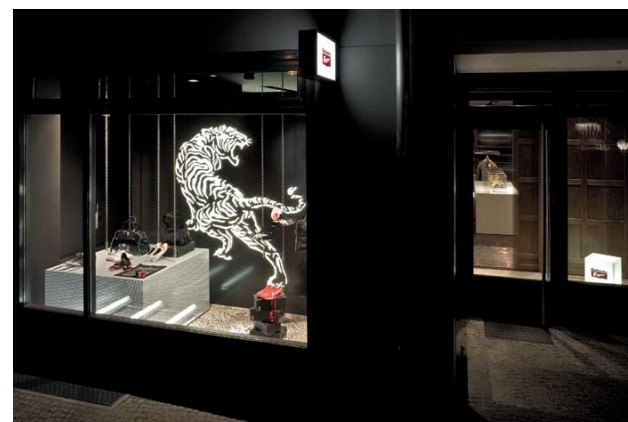


Onitsuka Tiger & Koi collaboration, 2007

Onitsuka Tiger Unique, playful and artistic

Onitsuka Tiger has always embraced a unique, playful and artistic tone of voice in its communication. In the early years, Onitsuka Tiger focused on creating catalogues, newsletters and technical pamphlets. Since then, the brand's numerous product releases have been supported by strong ideas, creative design and a real Japanese heritage.

While its early graphic design catalogues and adverts were quite basic — using traditional kanji characters and American fonts to emphasise the functional advantages of the shoe — Onitsuka Tiger's publicity today is much more light-hearted. **Graphics and adverts all share an original Japanese mentality — gentle, inspirational and sometimes hilarious.** They are the results of a positive and energetic dialogue with society, a permanent exchange of ideas and visions originally started by Kihachiro Onitsuka, the founding father of Onitsuka Tiger and ASICS. •



Flagship store, Berlin

THE INVENTION OF OK BASKETBALL SHOES

Pioneering in the early years

“I knew how difficult it was to pull away the legs of an octopus once the suckers get a hold of you. I thought of using this principle of the sucking disks for the soles.”

(Kihachiro Onitsuka, founder of ASICS Corp. on his inspiration for designing the basketball shoe with octopus sole)

Combining the Japanese kaizen vision and other traditional management principles incorporated by social hero Kihachiro Onitsuka, the richness of the Onitsuka Tiger brand comes from an innovative design mentality that still drives the brand today. It is this approach, and a good sense of timing, that lifted the company to such a strong position in sports. Adhering to principles leads to results.

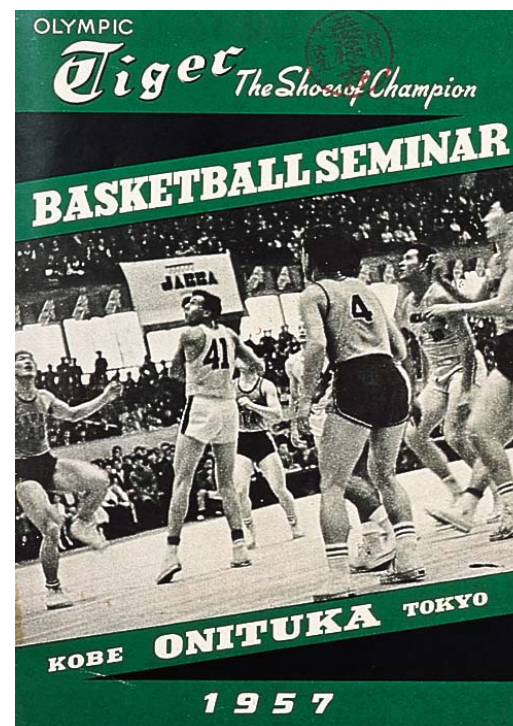
POST-WAR JAPAN

Kihachiro Onitsuka started his company in 1949, in a post-World War II period that saw a lot of socio-economic restructuring. Paradigms were shifting. ‘Rebuilding old to new’ became the collective attitude, especially in Japan. By the time the war ended in 1945, the country was occupied by allied powers. Inflation and food shortages harmed the Japanese economy, forcing widespread layoffs. That led to strikes, demonstrations and even acts of sabotage by left-wing groups. The tension forced the Allies to open up Japan’s economy to foreign investors. And thus, Japan’s economic revival began, creating a safe haven against Mao’s communists in the People’s Republic of China and those of the Soviet Union under Stalin. In 1949, the Tokyo Stock Exchange was founded. It reconnected Japan’s struggling economy with the West. The winds of change blew almost everywhere. While President Harry S. Truman started his Fair Deal in the U.S. to initiate economic reforms, pioneers all over the world gave birth to new ideas and products. Kihachiro Onitsuka was one of them. A socially responsible man, he felt a strong desire to help his country recover from the ruin of the Second World War. And so he did, by founding Onitsuka Co. Ltd. in September 1949. It was an enterprise driven by his desire to promote the health of young people through sports.

In the 1940s, basketball was growing in popularity among students and children, who mostly played barefoot. Kihachiro wanted to change that. He began observing the high school basketball team in Kobe, interviewing coaches on methods to increase performance. “The only point that remains to be improved is the reduction of slippage,” said head coach Yukio Matsumoto. “If the players can make sudden stops and sudden starts, your shoes will have passed the test.” Kihachiro’s conversations with him paid off. In 1950 he introduced Onitsuka Tiger’s first breakthrough sports shoe innovation — the OK BASKETBALL SHOE. Two years later a basketball shoe with octopus sole followed. It featured suction cups in the sole that allowed players to start and stop with ease. Kihachiro said he’d been inspired by an octopus that stuck to one of his plates at dinner.



OK BASKETBALL SHOES



SHARING THE WEALTH

Kihachiro Onitsuka always nurtured his beautifully inventive mind. Continuously trying to improve all aspects of life was second nature. It’s a tradition that originates from the Japanese kaizen philosophy, which he implemented into the company right from the start: sharing wealth and wellness, and bringing a thought process back into tasks that require mental participation. By becoming happy himself, Kihachiro brought happiness to those around him too. The trait helped win him the loyalty of his four co-workers in the early years.

But business was slow. Shop owners in and around Kobe were only able to hand over part of their payment for Onitsuka Tiger shoes. “I even had to persist when the owners were out, by waiting no matter what time it took until they returned,” said Kihachiro, recalling his efforts to get back money he was owed. Even after the launch of the innovative basketball shoes and his ‘Ultimate Strategy’ to put his shoes on the feet of elite athletes, Onitsuka Co. Ltd. almost went bankrupt. As though that wasn’t bad enough, Kihachiro also fell ill with tuberculosis in 1952. Fortunately, a local businessman — president Yanaka of King Rubber — decided to lend him some financial support. “You are an honest person. I’ll loan you the amount you need,” he told Kihachiro. Kihachiro eventually paid back in full. By the time of his 41st birthday in 1959, he was

even able to dole out 70 percent of his shares to his nearly 400 employees (including those in affiliate companies.) Kihachiro also handed 1000 shares to President Yanaka. “The idea behind it was that a company is a public institution,” he said at the time. “It’s not just for me. I want my employees, retailers and all our customers to be happy too.” To express their appreciation, Kihachiro’s employees gave their boss a large tiger fur as a gift.

“If a third of the staff is determined, no matter how bad the rest are, three to 40 percent will follow. I would keep a third of the entire shares and distribute the rest to the employees.”

(Kihachiro Onitsuka, founder of ASICS Corp., about his kaizen business mentality)

CATERPILLAR LINE SOLES

The first OK BASKETBALL SHOES were the most difficult to make, so everything that followed seemed possible. New ideas came from the street — literally. Kihachiro recalled an experience that led to great changes for the company. One day, while he was riding in a taxi, a child ran in front of the car. The driver slammed on the brakes to avoid a collision. Kihachiro wondered, “How can a car stop so suddenly?” He then realised that the answer must be in the tires. So he set off to a motor show in Harumi, where he pored over the research in the catalogues of the tire manufacturers in attendance. This was how the CATERPILLAR LINE SOLES were designed. They were inspired by tire treads.



Tug of War shoes

“It’s not just for me. I want my employees, retailers and all our customers to be happy too.”

(Kihachiro Onitsuka on his 41st birthday in 1959, when he doled out 70 percent of his shares to his nearly 400 employees)

BREAKTHROUGH IN JAPAN

Thanks to enthusiastic endorsement by basketball coaches, Kihachiro’s basketball shoes swiftly earned recognition among sports teams and retailers. Orders began to snowball for Onitsuka Tiger. In 1955, Kihachiro’s first five-year plan came into action. “I devised a plan for the staff, improving education, augmenting the organisation, and expanding sales and capital, and I implemented the plan,” he said. That year, the company increased its business to some 500 sports shops across the country. **In 1958, total sales exceeded ¥300 million. Onitsuka Tiger had become number one in the field of sports shoes for competition.** The popularity of Onitsuka Tiger helped Kihachiro invest in new innovations. He wasn’t just another entrepreneur; he was following his dream to change the way we walk and run.

MARUP

In 1953, Kihachiro developed the Onitsuka MARATHON TABI, which made it on to the pages of the American running magazine, Runners. Three years later, the Japanese Olympic team sported newly developed Onitsuka delegation shoes in an opening parade in Melbourne, Australia, a tradition that continued for all Japanese Olympic athletes until the 1980 Moscow Olympiad. While Japanese athletes did not achieve much in Melbourne, they went on to win medals in wrestling and gymnastics at the 1960 Olympics in Rome. The Japanese flag was raised in victory. “I was so moved I could not help going down to the coach and athletes and hugging them,” Kihachiro recalled in an interview published in *Nikkei*,



MARATHON TABI



newsletter, 1958



MARUP

Japan’s business newspaper, in 1991. Some time later, Kihachiro had a hunch that rubber soles would be welcome in Japan. That led to a redesign of the MARATHON TABI, which became the MARUP. It was a major revolution. **By the end of Onitsuka Tiger’s first decade in business, the company was exporting its famous shoes around the world.**

The increasing scale of operations made it logical to build a proper shoe brand, one with a true sports identity. So traditional Japanese Onitsuka catalogues and news bulletins of the late 40s and early 50s gave way to modern print advertising. Kihachiro Onitsuka led the way, creating not just a sports brand, but a social brand too. ●

CHAPTER_3

INTRODUCING MEXICO 66

The Rise of the Tiger

Technology was entering normal households and the modern consumer was born. With the evolution in marketing and the massive spread of TV, Onitsuka Tiger had to take a position. And it did. It grew into a shoe brand with a true Japanese sports identity. Onitsuka Tiger became known as the traditional sportsman’s choice.

In Japan, the turn of the decade marked the beginning of the ‘Golden 60s.’ Led by manufacturers, Japan emerged as a significant power, rapidly catching up with the West in foreign trade, economic growth, and quality of life. In 1965, Japan’s nominal GDP was estimated to be more than \$90 billion. Sport was one of the catalysts in Japan’s economic growth. Tokyo, which had to give up the 12th Olympics in 1940 because of the Second World War, had been selected to host the 16th Olympics in 1964. That sparked a wave of new infrastructure throughout the country. The Tokaido bullet train line opened; an expressway from Haneda airport to Yoyogi was

developed; roads and stadiums were repaired; and the new Kokuritsu stadium rose up. In total, Japan spent ¥1 trillion on the Olympics. The 1st Asian Olympics in Tokyo showed the world a new, innovative Japan. For the first time, computers kept the scores. The spread of television helped disseminate the Tokyo Games to an even wider audience. When the Japanese women’s volleyball team won the gold medal, the game was broadcast live. Japan ultimately won 16 medals – a great advertisement for a revived country. It was also great advertising for Onitsuka Tiger, which was becoming a major sports brand in Japan.

In 1964, Kihachiro listed the company on the Kobe Stock Exchange, and later, on the stock exchanges of Osaka and Tokyo. The birth of the famous ASICS Stripe, introduced during the pre-Olympic trials in 1966, helped Onitsuka Tiger go global. It was now time to conquer the West, starting with the United States.



MEXICO 66

ONITSUKA IN AMERICA

In the late 1950s, Philip Knight was a middle-distance runner on the University of Oregon track team. He was coached by Bill Bowerman, one of the top track coaches in the U.S. back then. Bowerman was also known for experimenting with the design of running shoes to make them lighter and more shock-absorbent. After attending Oregon, Knight continued his studies at Stanford University; his MBA thesis was on the marketing of athletic shoes.

Once he received his degree, Knight travelled to Japan where he contacted Onitsuka Tiger Co. Ltd. He convinced company officials that their product had potential in the U.S. And so, in 1963, Knight received his first shipment of Tiger shoes — 200 pairs. He and Bowerman later invested \$500 each to form Blue Ribbon Sports. **In 1968, the company started importing LIMBER UP to the American market. It was the beginning of Onitsuka Tiger's global domination.**

MAGIC RUNNER

After that first wave of success, Onitsuka Tiger expanded its portfolio. RUNNING SOCKS (1953) and MAGIC RUNNER (1959) followed on from the revolutionary MARUP. They were no less inventive. The MAGICRUNNER design was built on a promise Kihachiro made to an athlete after a marathon event: **"I will make a pair of shoes for you that won't cause blisters," he vowed. Kihachiro kept that promise.** Immersed in his bath one day, he noticed blisters had formed on his feet. From that he concluded that the only way to prevent blisters was remove the element of heat. After studying the air-circulating systems of a motorcycle engine, Kihachiro came up with the radical idea of putting holes in his long distance shoes. The result was MAGIC RUNNER, a shoe that finally solved the problem of blisters for long-distance runners back then. The shoe was lighter and allowed feet to breathe. Another winner.



MAGIC RUNNER



LIMBER-UP

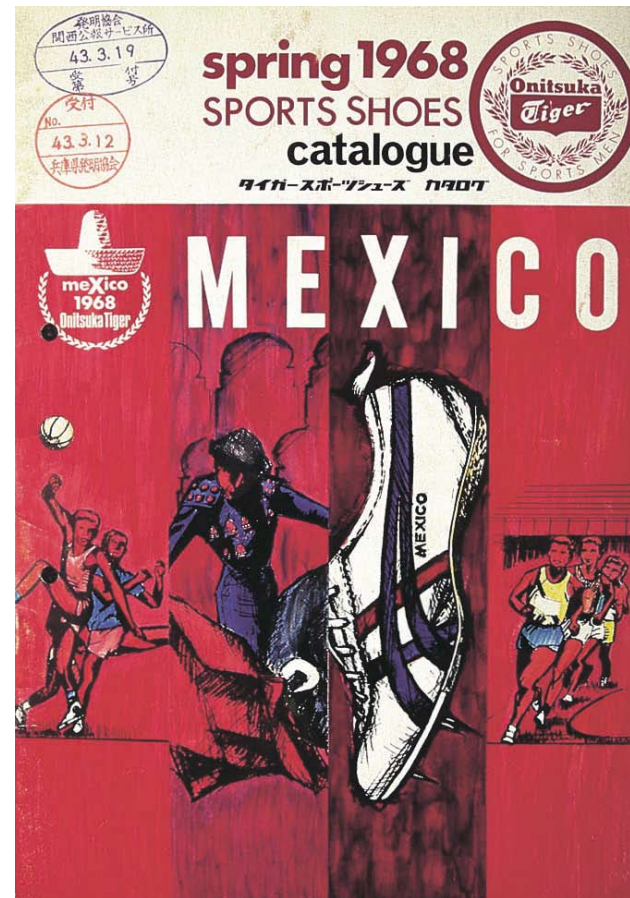
The birth of the famous ASICS Stripe, introduced during the pre-Olympic trials in 1966, helped Onitsuka Tiger go global.

MEXICO 66

LIMBER was the first model to feature ASICS Stripes on the side of the upper section, and its introduction embodied Japanese success. The stripe design, called MEXICO LINES (now called ASICS Stripes), was specially developed for the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico. These lines also were the famous design icon on another Onitsuka Tiger original: the MEXICO 66. These training shoes were the first Onitsuka Tiger shoes with the famous stripes. Today the Onitsuka Tiger MEXICO family holds numerous variations and re-issues of that 60s original. The MEXICO 66 DX is the latest addition, arguably Onitsuka Tiger's most recognisable style. It has a sophisticated silhouette. The special last makes the feet appear to be longer and slimmer.



MARUP-NYLON 1967



Onitsuka Tiger Spring 1968 sports shoes catalogue

The NIPPON 60, a delegation shoe for the 1960 Rome Olympics, came out a year after the introduction of the MAGIC RUNNER. It featured the classic rising sun motif, synonymous with the international rise of Onitsuka Tiger.

When the company introduced the revolutionary RUNSPARK DS SP, the epoch of track shoes really began. By the end of 1967, when LIMBER LEATHER BK came out, it was worn by the entire Japanese Olympic team at the Mexico Games. •



Above:
NIPPON 60



Below:
RUNSPARK DS SP 1966

THE LAUNCH OF FABRE

A new generation of basketball shoes

In the 1970s, the sponsorship of elite athletes earned Onitsuka Tiger global visibility. The Kobe shoe factory was evolving into a mature Japanese brand crossing consumer trends, sports styles and technological innovations. Snow boots, soccer shoes, track shoes for professional athletes... all were developed by designers in Kobe. Built to last, and built with a social conscience.

In Japan, the early 1970s was a time of boom. Shocked by the 1973 oil crisis, Japan turned to high technology. At Onitsuka Tiger, the decade of technological progress kicked off with the launch of FABRE. The high-tech basketball shoe derived its name from the 'fast break' move in basketball. The FABRE became the generic name for all Onitsuka basketball products. In 1976, high-top basketball shoes FABRE BL-L were introduced, receiving instant fame. The FABRE 74 was a low-top version. The Japanese basketball team wore the FABRE at the 1972 Olympics in Munich, where they finished 14th.



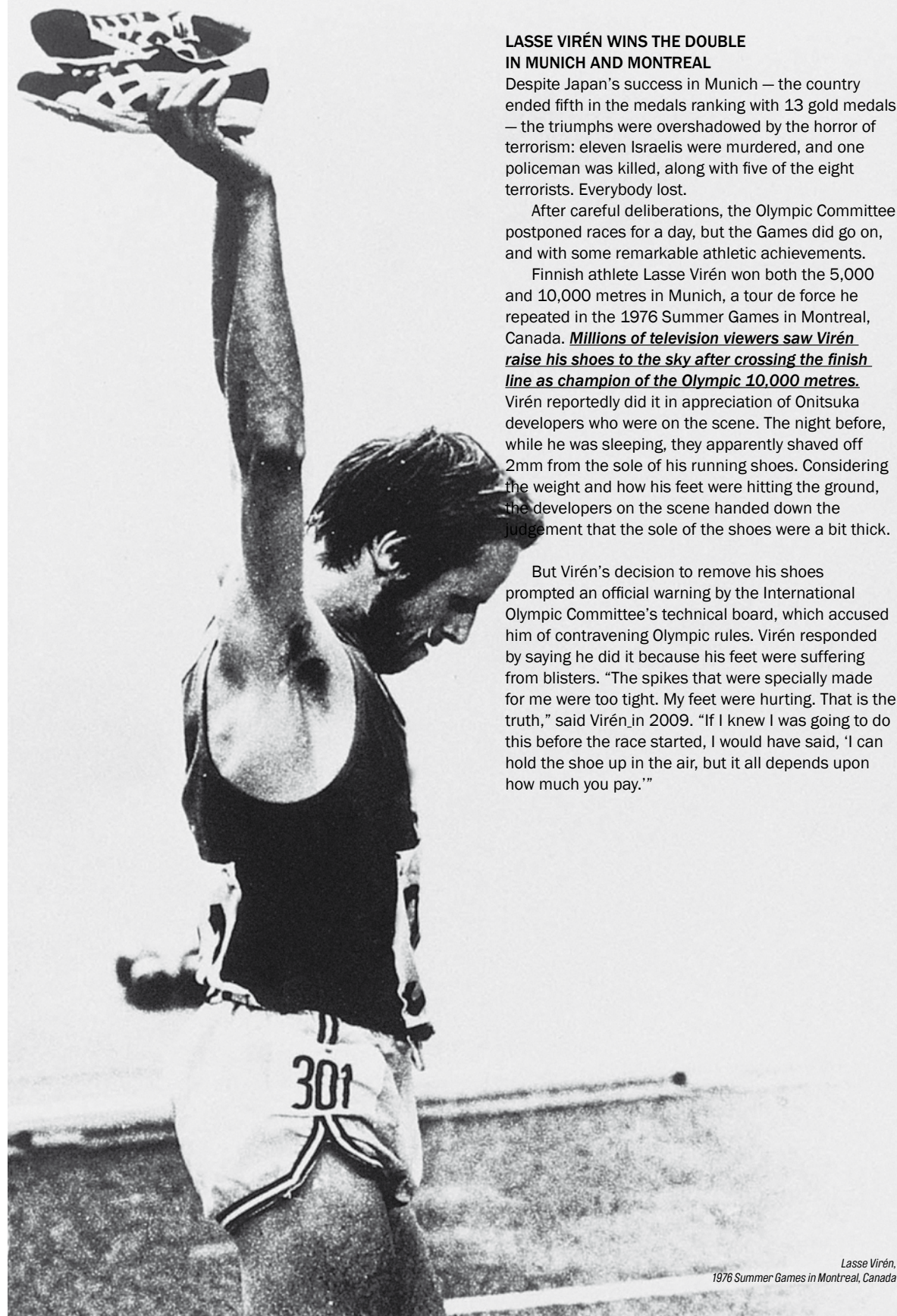
FABRE BL-L



LAY UP 72



FABRE 74



LASSE VIRÉN WINS THE DOUBLE IN MUNICH AND MONTREAL

Despite Japan's success in Munich — the country ended fifth in the medals ranking with 13 gold medals — the triumphs were overshadowed by the horror of terrorism: eleven Israelis were murdered, and one policeman was killed, along with five of the eight terrorists. Everybody lost.

After careful deliberations, the Olympic Committee postponed races for a day, but the Games did go on, and with some remarkable athletic achievements.

Finnish athlete Lasse Virén won both the 5,000 and 10,000 metres in Munich, a tour de force he repeated in the 1976 Summer Games in Montreal, Canada. Millions of television viewers saw Virén raise his shoes to the sky after crossing the finish line as champion of the Olympic 10,000 metres. Virén reportedly did it in appreciation of Onitsuka developers who were on the scene. The night before, while he was sleeping, they apparently shaved off 2mm from the sole of his running shoes. Considering the weight and how his feet were hitting the ground, the developers on the scene handed down the judgement that the sole of the shoes were a bit thick.

But Virén's decision to remove his shoes prompted an official warning by the International Olympic Committee's technical board, which accused him of contravening Olympic rules. Virén responded by saying he did it because his feet were suffering from blisters. "The spikes that were specially made for me were too tight. My feet were hurting. That is the truth," said Virén in 2009. "If I knew I was going to do this before the race started, I would have said, 'I can hold the shoe up in the air, but it all depends upon how much you pay.'"

THE BIRTH OF JOGGING

Elite athletes like Lasse Virén became export ambassadors for Onitsuka Tiger and its products. But in the U.S., the brand was already relying on the collaboration with the track coach Bill Bowerman and athlete-entrepreneur Philip Knight.

In 1968, Onitsuka Co. Ltd. started to export Japanese sports shoes to the American market. It was a land of different laws, different attitudes and different sizes. By cooperating with people such as Bill Bowerman and Philip Knight, Kihachiro Onitsuka gained valuable insight into American and European sports cultures and physiques. Athletes in the U.S. were heavier, taller, and had bigger feet. Bowerman had already been experimenting with shoe styles to increase performance. He told Kihachiro that the padding in Onitsuka Tiger shoes would not be thick enough for American soles. "There are differences in weight between Japanese and Americans. Onitsuka shoes do not have enough cushioning," Bowerman said. Upon hearing that, Kihachiro embarked on the development of a special training shoe exclusively for the U.S. market: the CORTEZ. The sole expanded from a normal 16mm to 24mm, and appeared bigger. It came at the right time. From the late 60s, Bowerman had been publicising the benefits of aerobic exercise

and promoted jogging as an activity anyone could do. When images of people jogging in Manhattan's Central Park were broadcast on TV, the sport took off. **The CORTEZ became an instant hit. It was the first sports shoe that became part of everyday life all over the globe.** Meanwhile, the search for perfection continued at Onitsuka Labs. The SKYSENSOR offered a super lightweight feel without sacrificing strength. Running became more of a joy than ever before, especially when accompanied by the Sony Walkman, which hit the world in 1978. Miles passed by with ease.



SKYSENSOR



Catalogue, 1977



GYMNASTIC

INNOVATING SPORTS IS THE GOAL

Innovation is the focus of Onitsuka Tiger's design strategy and has been fundamental to its success, as well as to the success of ASICS. In 1958, the company earned the Industrial Technology Award for its nylon après-ski boots; it also won Kobe's Mayor's Award for the stylishness of its high-heeled rain shoes. With the introduction of its arctic boots in 1961, Onitsuka Tiger added another new technology to the ski boot sector: it replaced laces with buckles across the

arches, and introduced new and lighter materials. The developments culminated with the Onitsuka Tiger ONICK in 1972. It was a plastic ski boot with an air-fitting system called, "Air Lemon" that allowed wearers to adjust the boot for a perfect fit.

In the 60s and 70s, everything seemed possible. New markets inspired Onitsuka Tiger to invest in developing shoes for non-athletic sports. The brand's designers developed shoes for all kinds of sports during the 1970s, including the GYMNASTIC and the super-lightweight ROTE Series volleyball shoe. **These consumer-oriented innovations have remained exemplary within the ASICS Corp. design mentality and they represent the cornerstone of the ASICS Research Department, created in Kobe in 1979.** Since its introduction, researchers and designers have developed about 116 technological improvements (*1) since 1985, leading to about 400 patents registrations (*2) between 1990-2009. •



Onitsuka Polar special work boots

(*1) Technological improvements: footwear only, including all technology improvements made by subsidiaries.

(*2) Patents registrations: including footwear/ apparel/ equipment.

THE AGE OF ASICS GEL

A cushioning system earning worldwide acclaim

In 1977, Onitsuka Tiger disappeared from the market following a merger between Onitsuka Tiger, GTO and Jelenk. The resulting partnership instead became ASICS. Innovative techniques and designs developed for Onitsuka Tiger were re-engineered for use within the new ASICS sports collections. But the brand mentality of Onitsuka's designers influenced ASICS collections for years to come. The sleeping tiger would soon be awakened...

In 1972, Onitsuka Tiger, GTO (a sportswear and nets manufacturer), and Jelenk (a knitwear manufacturer), joined forces to build a regional sales office. It was the foundation for the eventual merger of Onitsuka Tiger GTO and Jelenk in 1977. In strengthening their mutual market positions, the merger also marked the start of a new era in sport shoes: the launch of global brand ASICS – an acronym of the Latin phrase anima sana in corpore sano, or 'a sound mind in a sound body.'

The creative spirit of Onitsuka Tiger remained alive in every new pair of ASICS. ASICS' superior and revolutionary technology led it to evolve into a true global performance brand. When Kihachiro Onitsuka became chairman of ASICS Corporation in 1992, the company was exporting to 80 countries, including some behind the so-called Iron Curtain, while licensing production overseas. The company capped off the 80s with international sales approaching \$1 billion. ASICS Corp. had become a global top five sports brand, exporting an attractive health mentality, some eccentric Japanese traditions, together with leading innovations. It changed professional sports forever.



Merger: 1977

ULTIMATE & TIGER PAW TASK X-1

In 1979, the ASICS research facility in Kobe presented its first creation: the ULTIMATE. In 1981 the ULTIMATE was introduced. This shoe focused on heel stability and lightness. Its main feature was the 'cushy-hole' – three vent holes in the mid-sole of the heel area that enabled greater shock absorption. In 1982, ASICS developed the X-CALIBER, featuring a unique mid-sole design. Its forefoot flex canals increased movement while the foot air flexes canals on the medial side provided superior cushioning. Zigzagged 'quadra lacing' utilised the four stress points to ensure a perfect fit. In 1985, the lab officially became the Research and Development Centre of ASICS. It was situated in ASICS' new headquarters on Kobe Port Island. ASICS designers continued to work on beating rivals with better shoe technology. In the TIGERPAW TASK X-1, which came out in 1985, they focused on minimising a runner's energy loss. The outsole of these shoes featured a studded 'Cactus Plate' reinforced with 'Whisker' crystallised fibre material.

ASICS Brand Mark

1977



1987



1992



2007



ASICS GEL CUSHIONING SYSTEM

Shock-absorbing gels began appearing in ASICS shoes with the launch of the FREAKS α series jogging shoe (1986) and the FABLE RADICAL "RADICAL α series" basketball shoe (1987). The gel made the shoes lighter than those cushioned by traditional sponges, and helped make the brand a favourite among competitive runners. **But it was the introduction of the ASICS GEL Cushioning System that really revolutionised the footwear line.** This cushioning system had the ability to absorb shock by dissipating vertical impact and dispersing it into a horizontal plane. ASICS GEL Cushioning system gave the company a competitive advantage and brought the development team at ASICS' Research and Development Centre worldwide acclaim.



FREAKS



GT II



GEL LYTE III

Since ASICS introduced its Cushioning Systems in 1986, it has released a series of ASICS GEL models – all praised by professional running athletes and sports amateurs.

ASICS Corp. started exporting an attractive health mentality, some eccentric Japanese traditions, together with leading innovations.



ASICS Research and Development Center, Kobe (1985)

WRESTLING AMERICA

Hulk Hogan conquered America in the 80s and 90s; American Pro Wrestling conquered the world. Despite the differences between American and Japanese wrestling, ASICS saw an opportunity to improve basic wrestling shoes worn by Americans. To prevent injuries, ASICS put the metal eyelets on the outside instead. A thin nylon was also chosen to help wrestlers move more easily. ASICS' innovations received a U.S. patent number, along with overwhelming support in America. Sales exploded and ASICS acquired a factory in Taiwan to produce shoes exclusively for competition. The wrestling shoes also made their way into the mainstream: many Americans wore them as street shoes.



WRESTLING SHOE

CHALLENGING 90S

In 1990, ASICS Corp. continued to expand its international profile. As the official shoe supplier for the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, ASICS supplied shoes for 20,000 Olympic staff and 60,000 torchbearers. But more important than branding, ASICS focused on what CEO Kihachiro Onitsuka believed in — innovation. **ASICS was evolving from being a sporting goods manufacturer to a complete health goods company.** Onitsuka Tiger's original values of health and well-being returned as a driver for new product designs.

THE NEXT STEP TO HIGH-TECH FOOTWEAR Several years ago, ASICS produced models of MEXICO 66 and TAI-CHI to honour those who died in the 1995 South Hyogo Prefecture earthquake, as well as those who worked to restore the city. The models were made in collaboration with the brand TEMAS, which produces clothes and bags using the Kyoto Kyogoku technique of dying kimonos with a crest. Today, Kobe is finally rising out of the ashes, slowly regaining its status as Japan's principal shipping port. The sports shoe business had become fiercely competitive. ASICS and other Japanese shoemakers had to deal with American giants including Nike, New Balance



TAI-CHI PHOENIX,
in honor of the victims of the Kobe earthquake

and Converse on their home turf. To counter its rivals, ASICS released a line of shoes without its trademark stripes in 1997. For a period of time it also took over the Japanese distribution of a line of hip American footwear and snowboard gear called Airwalk Footwear. In the late 90s, ASICS tapped into the popularity of niche brands in running shoes. The company expanded to walking shoes in response to the growing trend of walking as a form of physical fitness. It also remained committed to track and field, developing new shoes for the ultra-competitive field of sprinting, where success is measured in 1/100ths of a second. The TIGER PAW CYBERZERO of 1997 featured a moulded heel protector and 'holding belts' or straps for support and fit. In 1997, ASICS introduced a couple of new sports shoes for children. The first, called SUKU SUKU, featured straps instead of laces and offered plenty of toe room.



SUKU SUKU

ASICS BEYOND 2000

For ASICS, the new millennium started on a high with the Sydney Olympics in 2000. Naoko Takahashi won the women's marathon wearing customised ASICS shoes developed just for her. Technology improved performance all around, again proving that ASICS was leading the race for innovation in professional sports. Meanwhile, on the streets of major world cities, the fashion avant-garde started to embrace old school sports styles as new vintage. 'Vintage' became a megatrend. It was time to unleash the tiger. •

CHAPTER_6

ONITSUKA TIGER'S NEW COOL

Return of a Legend



Paw Catalogue, 1976

The re-launch of Onitsuka Tiger in 2001 fit in perfectly with the vintage trends of the late 90s and the first decade of the new millennium. While athletes wearing ASICS trainers were winning the big races, old school sports styles moved to the street, a domain Onitsuka Tiger knew inside out. It was time to wake up the tiger.

In the world of fashion, the new millennium was also marked by nostalgia for the old one. Vintage clothing, especially from the 60s, 70s and 80s, became extremely popular, with fashion designers emulating bygone styles in their collections. ASICS Corp. also returned to the past. In 2001, it reintroduced Onitsuka Tiger as a fashionable, vintage shoe brand. The return of the legend was an instant success. The face of modern, metropolitan Japan became a cult favourite among style leaders and fashion followers worldwide.

ONITSUKA TIGER APPAREL

In 2003, Onitsuka Tiger apparel was re-introduced. Drawing on 28 years of experience in sportswear design, it completed the circle. The entire collection of shoes, apparel and accessories reflected the original, innovative spirit of Onitsuka Tiger. A series of vintage tracksuits was launched, using the same materials used by Onitsuka Tiger in the 70s. Original colour combinations in brown, green and red again matched the leading shoe colours of the collection, this time mixing the spirits of old school sports with the casual fashion styles of the new millennium.

Apparel collections of Onitsuka Tiger mix the spirit of old school sports with casual fashion styles of today, blending traditional Japanese materials and fabrics with seductive western fashion styles.

TAI-CHI IN THE MOVIES

Onitsuka Tiger's popularity got another kick-start in 2003, when actress Uma Thurman sported a pair of TAI-CHI's in Quentin Tarantino's movie *Kill Bill*. **Thanks to the film, the distinctively streamlined TAI-CHI shoe gained cult status.** A special model was produced for the sequel, *Kill Bill Vol.2*. While they were not worn in the actual film, a limited edition of 160 pairs was produced to promote it.

COOLIDGE 2008

The COOLIDGE, launched in 2008, took its name from one of the characters in a 1980s U.S. basketball TV show. It was a variation on the classic basketball shoes of the 70s. Narrow, with a more stylish silhouette, the low repulsion material of the sock liner improved cushioning. Onitsuka Tiger also launched the SAIKO RUNNER, inspired by its ULTIMATE 81. Saiko translates as "ultimate" in Japanese. And it was no exaggeration. SAIKO featured a fairly thick mid-sole for effective cushioning, and a profiled outsole for better grip. The new heel cap provided improved protection and stability.

The unique, Japanese eye for detail and quality would also form the core of Onitsuka Tiger's fashion success. Supported by a series of playful advertising campaigns, the revived Onitsuka Tiger brand was as exciting as ever. In 2007, Onitsuka Tiger's new theme, 'Made of Japan,' reflects the brand's heritage and pride.



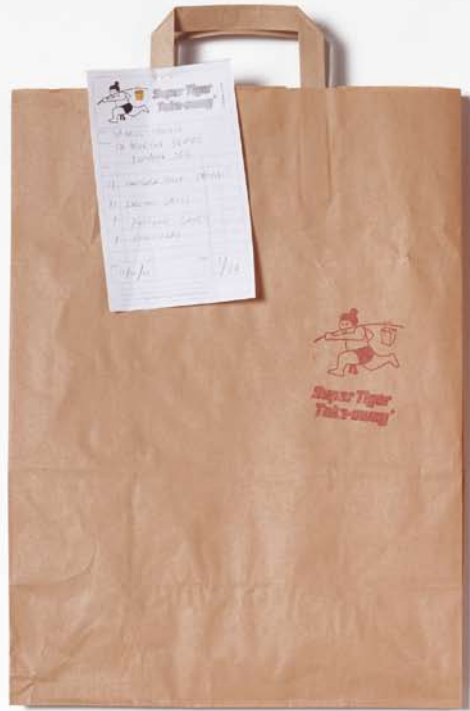
SAIKO RUNNER



ULTIMATE 81



COOLIDGE



TIGER, KOI KLUB & COLETTE

Since its re-launch in 2001, Onitsuka Tiger has sought out collaborations with creative talents. It is part of the brand's mentality to always keeping an eye out for inspiring connections to its Japanese culture and heritage. In 2003, Onitsuka Tiger teamed up with Berlin Koi Klub to offer products to visiting DJs and musicians. Yoske Nishiumi, founder of Koi Klub Berlin, invited artists and designers to recreate their own Tiger shoes by using the colours of the Koi fish as a guide. The project's success led to the 'Big Koi' promotion in 2007. It included the production of a real cartoon made by young French artist Wu Yue, aka Nyno. In 2005, the brand collaborated with New York artists' group Faile (www.faile.net), creating two new versions of the popular MEXICO MIDRUNNER and GANTRAI. In 2005, Onitsuka Tiger also launched the 'Tiger Force' campaign. Based on the visual styles of cult comics, it showcased mythic heroes and retro running shoes. A year later, the introduction of INJECTOR DX, based on the original football boot of 1972, was supported by a smart campaign titled 'Lovely Football.' And in 2008, Onitsuka Tiger collaborated with trendy Paris boutique Colette. It introduced a fashion sneaker featuring white leather uppers and a star pattern print in Colette's signature blue shade.

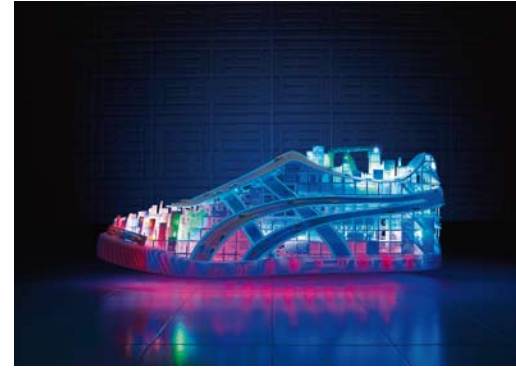
More recently, Onitsuka Tiger has worked with Tillman Lauterbach, White Mountaineering and Reality Studio on initiatives that are on the forefront of art and design.

ONITSUKA TIGER'S JAPANESE-INSPIRED AD CAMPAIGNS GO GLOBAL

While Reality Studio, Colette and Koi Klub represent great examples of Onitsuka Tiger's collaborations with artists, designers and creative freethinkers, the ad campaigns and in-store promotions are a story in themselves. The 'Hero Breath' campaign in 2003 emphasised the brand's heritage and playfulness: a can filled with the 'Spirit of 64' was introduced celebrating the essence of winning athletes and the innovative Tiger footwear at the 1964 Tokyo Games. Three of these innovative footwear styles were re-released as the TOKYO 64 collection in 2004.



The 'Hero Breath' campaign, 2003



Electric Tiger Land campaign, 2008

In 2007, the first giant Onitsuka Tiger promotional shoe was created from Japanese icons in collaboration with artist Gary Baseman. A year later, 'Electric Tiger Land,' an intricate sculpture, paid homage to the neon lights of Tokyo. That led to the introduction of Onitsuka Tiger's SUNOTORE 72, a sneaker that lights up in the dark with large-scale graphics. Also in 2007, Onitsuka Tiger introduced its new campaign, 'Made of Japan.' It embraced the evolution of Japanese culture and included 'city in a giant sneaker' sculptures, print ads, viral films, and special retail store decorations. In the spring of 2009, a dedicated Made of Japan website was launched (www.madeofjapan.com). The revolutionary homepage shows a shoe composed of a mosaic of tiny images and links. By clicking on the miniature tiles, visitors could access up to 150 Japan-related websites. **It's the kind of detail you can expect in any Onitsuka Tiger message** — anchored in Japanese heritage but, at the same time, open to the world.



Cycle of Life campaign, 2009

Of course, the year 2009 was especially memorable for Onitsuka Tiger. That year, the brand celebrated its 60th birthday, a merry occasion that, in Japanese culture, marks the end of a cycle of life. The anniversary campaign, which was based upon the legend of the Japanese Zodiac Race, led to the production of a beautiful animated film. Onitsuka Tiger's iconic giant shoe was also reworked as a diorama recreating the grounds of the ancient Zodiac Race. The sculpture travelled around all Onitsuka Tiger shops and fashion shoe events in the world. A great shoe embodying a great story and a great tradition.



Japanese Zodiac Race

EPILOGUE

Kihachiro Onitsuka (1918 – 2007) Founder of Onitsuka Tiger and ASICS

“The one thing that could help these kids move away from their life of crime was new shoes. And that was how Onitsuka Tiger was born.”

The social and entrepreneurial principles of founder Kihachiro Onitsuka remain fundamental to the brand mentality of Onitsuka Tiger. The visionary with a remarkable social conscience gave Japanese sports shoes and apparel a magical name.

ASICS's founder Kihachiro Onitsuka was born as Kihachiro Sakaguchi in Tottori City, Japan on May 29, 1918. It was just after the Great War and, playing barefoot on the streets, the young Kihachiro had never even seen a pair of shoes. During the Second World War, Kihachiro served in the Japanese army, where he met lieutenant Ueda, who would become his trusted brother in arms. Ueda regaled Kihachiro with tales of his life and stories of bullets and fear. Ueda, who had been adopted by the Onitsuka family in Kobe, asked Kihachiro to keep a wartime promise: “My foster parents haven't got anyone to look after them, so if something happens to me, please take care of them,” he pleaded.

Soon after, the two men's paths took them in different directions. Ueda was sent to the front in Burma while Kihachiro was seconded to a unit guarding the home front. They lost sight of each other. At the end of the war in 1945, Kihachiro returned to Tottori to rebuild his life as a civilian. But history caught up with him. He received a letter from the Onitsuka family informing him that their foster son Ueda was missing in action. They needed help. “If I hadn't kept my promise and simply stayed in Tottori, neither Onitsuka Tiger nor the World of ASICS would have been born,” recalled Kihachiro sometime before his death in the autumn of 2007. In 1947, Kihachiro travelled to Kobe to help the Onitsukas, eventually adopting their family name. He made a living for them by working in a beer hall for allied forces. It was his first lesson on how to run a company. He also discovered a thriving black market in Kobe, where kids who had run away from home acted as scouts for prostitutes, selling cigarettes and the like. Kihachiro despaired. He thought, “That wasn't what hundreds

of thousands of Japanese died for in the Second World War. Wasn't it so we could create a peaceful country?”

So Kihachiro looked up Kohei Hori, a wartime friend who had become in charge of post-war health and physical education in Hyogo. Hori said to him: “Did you know, Kihachiro, that the great poet of Rome, Juvenal, wrote that, ‘If you pray to God, pray for a sound spirit in a sound body?’”

Kihachiro then understood. Sports didn't just train the physical body, it taught sportsmanship as well. It could transform the young juvenile delinquents he saw every day. He decided that the one thing that could help these kids move away from their life of crime was new shoes. And that was how Onitsuka Tiger was born.

Kihachiro Onitsuka, chairman of ASICS Corp., died of heart failure on Saturday, September 29, 2007, in a hospital in Kobe, Japan. He was 89. Kobe that day lost one of its greatest ambassadors, and the world of sports lost one of its greatest innovators.

Besides his work for Onitsuka Tiger and ASICS, Kihachiro Onitsuka also held a number of roles in public office. He was president of the Japan Basketball Association and he was the lifetime honorary president of the World Federation of the Sporting Goods Industry. Kihachiro received the Order of the Sacred Treasure in 1988, the Medal with Blue Ribbon in 1974, and the Medal with Dark Blue Ribbon in 1978 and 1983. In 2001, he was awarded the Olympic Order. Kihachiro Onitsuka also wrote books, including *My Personal History* (1992), and *All You Need to Do After Falling Down is to Stand Up Again* (2000).

His legacy remains alive. On July 2nd, 2009, ASICS Corp. opened the ASICS Museum outside its headquarters in Kobe.

The memory of Kihachiro Onitsuka lives on. •

COLOPHON

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