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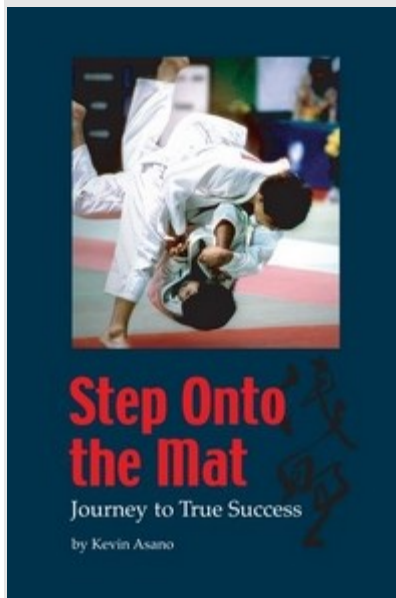
Asano's journey takes new path

Ex-Olympian hopes new book helps people reach their 'calling in life'

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Kevin Asano



Kevin Asano, an Olympic judoka, former assistant pastor and current financial adviser, has called on his myriad experiences to write a book that he hopes will guide and inspire people to reach their goals.

While some 20 Hawai'i athletes prepare for the 2008 Beijing Games, one of the last Olympic medalists from Hawai'i is starting his fourth career. Kevin Asano, 1988 silver medalist in judo, former assistant pastor and current financial adviser, has utilized all those seemingly unrelated skills as author of a new book: "Stepping Onto the Mat; A Journey to True Success."

If the career similarities escape you, Asano understands. At 45 he is a husband (Mari), father of three children under age 10 and a "foster baby," and only now believes he knows how all his disparate callings have led him to this moment in time.

"It seems like they don't match in a way, but they are all in line — the different phases of my life to find my calling ... ," Asano said. "It comes back to finding what your calling is and stepping out to do it — why you step onto the mat.

"A huge part is perseverance. You get a dream, you get all excited, then reality hits and there are road blocks. You are training six days a week and wondering if you are getting closer to your goal. That's where perseverance is, pushing and pushing and constantly reminding yourself why you are doing this. And breaking through at the end."

He describes himself as "very purpose and vision driven." It took him on an 18-year journey from his sensei's garage in Pearl City to the Seoul Olympics, searching out the finest mentors and competitive venues along the way.

He still does not consider himself a great athlete — "I thought why, of all the people in Hawai'i and the United States, did I have the privilege of winning an Olympic medal?" — and searched his soul for the real reason for his success. He has found it in an ability to "leverage" his past and affect more people now.

His judo platform helped when he was assistant pastor at Grace Baptist for eight years, and a bit more when he made the jarring decision to move into the financial world days before the terrorist attacks in 2001.

That decision took him by surprise, along with many others. The congregation was shocked, but after a lunch meeting with a former pastor who "seemed to be reading my mind," Asano was convinced he could also change lives outside the church.

Within two months, armed with a sixth-degree black belt, silver medal, eight years in the church and an accounting degree, he made the massive switch into the financial world. Asano and partner Del Fujinaka eventually founded Pacific Wealth Strategies LLC, an independently owned financial consulting firm.

"As an athlete, I think the focus was on me in the sense of what are my limits? Also looking beyond the Olympics and how can I best impact society with my life?" Asano

said. "The training and competing was part of the journey to my ultimate purpose which was to ... I boiled down my life purpose in 2006 on a piece of paper in Argentina. It's to help people find their God-given calling in life and pursue it with all their heart."

He has found his calling three times already and his book, which goes on sale next month, attempts to boil down his philosophy into life-size bits people can digest. For Asano, it is all about V-I-S-I-O-N, as in:

- Vision;
- Inspiration to "do something greater than yourself;"
- Strategy;
- Implementation or "stepping on the mat;"
- Other people that support you and you support;
- and, "my favorite, Never give up."

It is a strategy he has shared with Taylor Takata, the Hawai'i judoka who recently qualified for Beijing, when they discussed his unique "journey." Asano, inducted into the Hawai'i Sports Hall of Fame in 2002 and the San Jose State Hall two years later, has some lighter advice for all those heading to the Games.

"The best thing is to have as much fun as you can possibly have at the Olympics," Asano said. "You've gotta enjoy it. I looked at it as a celebration of all these years of work. It's such a short moment and you want to be serious, but not to the point where you don't have fond memories. And No. 2, obviously most people will not win a medal, but you've got to go out with the attitude you're going to win. If you don't, you shouldn't even compete. You have to have that attitude. Whether you win or lose is not the issue. Just know you gave it your best."
