

ENGINEERS BEYOND THEIR CAREERS

By Nikki Welch

THE ENGINEER: MASATO KAN

Engineer, YANMAR America

Hired to join YANMAR America after receiving his Mechanical Engineering degree from the Georgia Institute of Technology, Masato Kan focuses his time in the office working on developing implements and attachments for agricultural equipment. “Not many companies were hiring in 2009 when I graduated, but I had a recruiter who specialized in Japanese companies and was looking for an engineer with Japanese backgrounds and language skills,” says Kan, who works at the company’s corporate office in Adairsville, Ga.

Kan currently resides in Cartersville, Ga. — a 20-mile commute to the office and a 145-mile trip to Columbus, Ga. where he was born, but a nearly 7,000 mile trip to where he was raised in Tokyo, Japan. “My parents are from Japan, but at the time I was born, my father was working at Aflac Insurance’s headquarters in Columbus.” The family moved back to Tokyo soon after Kan’s birth and lived there until he was a teenager, eventually making their way back to the Columbus area, where they still reside today.

THE TRIATHLETE:

After participating in cross country and track all throughout high school, Kan suffered a knee injury in college that took over a year to recover from, sidelining his running career. “The body suffers wear and tear just like machines and can break down; that was a lesson I had to learn,” says Kan. “After I graduated, I stopped participating in all sports, but I also started getting sick — catching colds and having back problems,” he says. “Running

was more than just a hobby — it was a way to relieve my body of stress and was a big part of my identity, and is still.”

To ensure that the strain of long-distance running didn’t cause further injury, Kan decided to add in other workout regimens to his typical running-focused exercise routine. “When I wanted to get back into running, I decided to cross train with cycling and swimming. So far, that style of triathlon training has kept injuries away,” says Kan.

Having participated in triathlons for almost five years now, Kan competes in around three or four every year, maintaining an almost daily habit of training. “I oscillate between one to two workouts a day, but it’s almost like a habit now. Sometimes I bike to work, which is around an hour each way and that helps to get a workout in,” he says.

“When I was just a runner I had a very simple watch with just a timer function to help calculate how fast I was going. Now, it’s all about tracking, metrics and numbers. There are a lot more elements to triathlons.”

Triathlons are certainly a time commitment and Kan is the first to admit that the sport isn’t for everyone. “Triathlons aren’t for everybody, but everyone should do something to keep their mind and body healthy. Every race is an accomplishment,” he says. “It’s always a relief to survive the water portion because I’m not the best swimmer, but it’s a fulfilling challenge to do something that rigorous.”

DO YOU SEE ANY SIMILARITIES BETWEEN TRIATHLONS AND ENGINEERING?

“A tri is a sport that covers three disciplines — swimming, biking and running — but excelling at one doesn’t guarantee success. Triathlons are very similar to engineering in that you’re trying to optimize different factors: distance, pace, power, etc. for triathlons versus quality, cost, delivery time, etc. for engineering. There’s a lot of self-study about how your body reacts, much like one would process

and analyze project data to decide what should take precedent,” says Kan.

ANY FUTURE RACE AMBITIONS?

“Most races hold the swim portion in open water, such as lakes and oceans, as opposed to doing laps in a pool, but I’ve never done an ocean swim, so that’s definitely a future goal. One day I’d also like to do a longer race, like an Iron Man or Half Iron Man, which would take a significantly longer time and be a much larger challenge.”

