

The „Shadowman“ of Kobayashi



Oberstdorf, 18.03.2022: Alongside the Japanese ski jumpers, a German who does not belong to the world's elite of winter sports is unexpectedly frequently seen on TV broadcasts. When Ryoyo Kobayashi answers questions from media representatives after a victory, Markus Neitzel is always his shadow man. The 63-year-old from Schopfheim in the Black Forest is one of the few volunteers who knows perfect Japanese and is therefore a sought-after interpreter.

From 1987 to 2000, the Protestant pastor and his wife Conny were invited by the Church to various cities in Japan to establish new congregations there. Before the actual missionary work, he had to complete a two-year full-time study, tormenting himself through more than 2000 Chinese and additional Japanese characters. In cities such as Sapporo and Eniwa, he built up the church work, immersed himself deeply in the Far Eastern culture, the sensitive task as a pastor helping him a lot.

22 years ago, Markus Neitzel returned to Germany with his family, which had grown by three children. Hesse became their new home, where Neitzel looked after five German and two Japanese parishes in Frankfurt/Main and Mannheim for ten years.

He made his first contact with the Japanese ski jumpers in 2001 when he was working part-time at the check-in at Frankfurt Airport. There he met Noriaki Kasai, Masahiko Harada and national coach Hideharu Miyahira, who was still an active ski jumper himself at the time, and helped them even then. A coincidence helped the pastor to get the job as an interpreter. In 2013, he was a spectator at the Summer Grand Prix in Hinterzarten. At that time, the media representatives all wanted interviews with Kasai and Takanashi, who had won the team competition. Markus Neitzel got in touch and helped with his translations at the victory ceremony and press conference.

And from then on he had a new job. In 2017 in Lahti and 2019 in Seefeld, he accompanied the Japanese at the World Championships and has since been the man at Kobayashi's side. The current World Cup leader has gained confidence in his German translator. By the way, Neitzel contradicts assumptions that the Japanese like to rest on their lack of English skills to avoid the interview hype. "It is culturally conditioned that the Japanese want to do everything perfectly. That means then rather not talking at all than making mistakes."