

American Hiro: The Adventures of Benihana's Rocky Aoki and How He Built a Legacy

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The rollicking, rags-to-riches story of Rocky Aoki, prodigiously successful businessman and expert sportsman who founded the multimillion-dollar restaurant chain Benihana, forever changed Americans' view of Japanese cuisine, and whose pursuits include wrestling at world-class level, power-boat racing, ballooning, and undersea exploration Rocky Aoki was a man who succeeded in everything that he undertook, and his range of interests were wild and exciting. His empire of restaurants put the name Benihana on the map and changed the way Americans viewed Japanese cuisine. The business of running and expanding them would be all-absorbing for most people, but not so for Rocky, whose energies had also attracted him to many sports in which he excelled, sometimes nearly to the point of death. At a young age, he was a world-class Olympic wrestler. Introduced to the dangerous world of offshore powerboat racing, he arranged for Benihana to sponsor the world's largest offshore powerboat race, and was nearly killed in an accident, crushing both legs, while preparing for the Benihana Grand Prix. Then, seeking a new sport, he turned to ballooning, completing the first trans-Pacific flight from Japan to California in a manned balloon and breaking the previous long-distance record for a manned balloon flight. Then, there was flying ultra-light aircraft, collecting and driving fast cars, and exploring under the sea in a specially designed two-man submarine, with future dreams of winning the America's Cup for Japan. But Aoki also served the common good, acting as Commissioner on the Mayor's Council on Youth and Physical Fitness in New York City, and campaigning for the advancement, both physical and cultural, of youth everywhere. He was actively involved in promoting the cultural exchanges between the country of his birth and his US home and sponsored sporting and cultural events such as the first professional heavyweight boxing match in the Far East between Muhammad Ali and Mac Foster, becoming Broadway's first Japanese angel, acting as patron to young Japanese artists in the US, and producing films about them. Rocky Aoki's wild, capitalistic interpretation of the American dream is one for the ages, was a modern champion, in business, sports, and in life.

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