

TABLE TENNIS/ Waste-disposal manufacturer sets the tables for star players

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Ukio Obata at his table tennis facility on the second floor of his factory building (Mayuri Ito)



play singles matches simultaneously.

However, the tables above the company's factory are not only for employees. Obata hopes the From Ishida Table Tennis Facility can produce the best players in the world while giving his small company some publicity.

The facility is used almost around the clock. In the mornings, homemakers use the tables while company employees play during their lunch break.

In the afternoon, students from elementary school to senior high school gather at the facility for practice.

Springs were installed in the concrete floor to prevent players from hurting their knees.

Hina Hayata, from Kita-Kyushu, began visiting the site when she was in junior high school.

Now 17, Hayata has made a splash on the international table tennis scene, winning the bronze medal in women's doubles at the world championships held in June.

Although competition overseas means she has less time to practice at the Nakama facility, Hayata occasionally stops by even though she is in her second year of senior high school.

NAKAMA, Fukuoka Prefecture--Hidden among the warehouses and assembly plants here stands a outer stairwell that leads to the expansion plans of a manufacturer of garbage disposal units.

But instead of grinding gears and metal lathes, bouncing table tennis balls are constantly heard at From Industry Co.'s facility in an industrial park.

Ukio Obata, 70, the founder and chairman of the company, set up pingpong tables on the second floor of a factory building in a project that he admits spun out of control.

Sixteen pingpong tables are available, more than enough for all From Industry employees to