Japanese dancers win prizes at prestigious Swiss ballet competition

Taisuke Nakao on Saturday won third prize at this year's Prix de Lausanne, a prestigious international competition for young ballet dancers.

Koyo Yamamoto, another Japanese dancer, won fourth prize at the 45th annual competition in the Swiss city of Lausanne.

Dancers who win the top eight prizes at Prix de Lausanne are eligible for scholarship.

Nakao, 17, who is from the city of Matsuyama, is now studying ballet at Akademie des Tanzes Mannheim, a ballet academy in Germany. He began ballet at the age of 7 and moved to Germany in 2014.

"I was back here and able to perform again," Nakao, who missed an award at last year's Prix de Lausanne, said.

"I can't believe it," he said, showing his pleasure at winning third prize this year. "I want to be a dancer who can perform beautifully," Nakao added.

"I was not only able to perform on the best stage but won a prize," said Yamamoto, 15, who is studying ballet in the city of Saitama.

"I've achieved my goal," he said.

Aki Saito, a principal dancer at Belgium's Royal Ballet of Flanders, who served as one of the jury members at the competition, said, "The Lausanne competition is for evaluating not only competitors' current performance skills but their potential in the future."

"I want participating dancers not to be afraid of showing what they are," she said.

A total of 66 competitors from 16 countries took part in this year's Prix de Lausanne, and 20 of them, including four Japanese dancers, reached the final.

Italian dancer Michele Esposito, 17, won the top prize.

Each prize winner will receive a scholarship of 16,000 Swiss francs (about ¥1.8 million) and be given the right to study ballet at an academy of his or her choice for a year.