

Views of Japanese Sumo Fans

What Sumo Means to Me #5: Who Will Be the Founder of World Sumo?!

by Seila Kurui

I would like to comment on the differences between Mongolian Sumo and Japanese Sumo and also refer to sumo's potential for future global popularity.

In Mongolian Sumo there is no such thing as a ring – no dohyo. Therefore, when Mongolian wrestlers fight they cannot win by pushing-out, oshidashi style. They must keep fighting until their opponents are thrown down to lose the match. The most important skills they need are 'lifting and hurling' (of their opponents). For this reason, the most important aspect of Mongolian Sumo is 'staying power' – the stamina necessary to fight in such harsh conditions. Many men have the necessarily hungry spirit due to the severe climate (in Mongolia) and compared to the situation in Japan today, it would be natural to think Mongolian wrestlers are stronger than their Japanese counterparts.

The traditional aspect of Japanese Sumo on the other hand centers on it being a kind of 'art.' It was once a sacred event used to make offerings to the gods.

Strong men selected from many villages around Japan fought each other in the precincts of many shrines up and down the nation.

The beautiful traditions and dignified formality that developed were always thereafter part and parcel of each match held in front of a sanctuary.

Original sumo then had its origins in mythology rather than in actual fighting skills and matches. We can understand this when we see so many formal actions before and during a bout or day's sumo – including the bow twirling ceremony at the end of every day of a Grand Sumo tournament; the so-called 'yumitori-shiki' in Japanese, or the ring entering ceremony named the 'dohyo-iri' – even in the scattering of salt before each match; an action that exorcizes the ring.

Such beautiful tradition should be maintained and respected. That said, art is art and while maintaining 'art' it may not always be possible to achieve an element of (necessary) power for the sport itself.

Nowadays we have two yokozuna; both Mongolian. Their level of fighting spirit is remarkable. The new yokozuna, Hakuho, is just 21-years-old and when I had a chance to see him on TV, on 'Tetsuko-no-Heya,' he demonstrated a very manly attitude and looked like a gallant young warrior. Everybody must love his pure and romantic experience with his wife and I myself highly evaluate his high-minded attitude and clean thoughts towards all others, including the women watching the program.

I think it is a rather interesting tendency that the number of foreign sumo professionals is increasing but recently I heard

that nobody applied to become a 'shin-deshi' in any of the stables. This fact proves how sumo has lost some of its popularity with young Japanese men; a group in which popularity or interest levels often declines rapidly.

I am waiting keenly for a young man as strong, powerful and attractive as Hakuho to enter the sumo world.

When he appears it is necessary that he be a man often in the news. If we have such a rikishi, with an extremely handsome face and strong skills, the popularity of sumo will rise - without fail.

In order to attract such men to sumo, we need people who will take sumo to the world – and in doing so, cause a sensation.

Judo was once introduced to the globe by a Japanese team led by Kano Jigoro and is today one of the sports featured in the Olympic Games.

I hope a similar person will try to spread word of sumo around the world.

Several months ago I watched a foreign student on Japanese TV. He was a member of the sumo club at Tokyo University. He was very powerful and also cool! He could be one of these candidates as could Mainoumi. I believe that together they will provide for sumo a truly brilliant future.