

# **SFM Interview**

## **The good, the bad and the ugly (but which is which?)**

### **Part II**

**by Mark Buckton**

*Sadly, Joe Klemmer (JK) missed the 3-way SF/SML/ST cut last time out for no fault of his own.*

*Happily, this issue though, we have Joe's answers to the questions fired at Mikko (Sumo Forum) and Mike (Sumo Talk) by Mark Buckton (MB) in October - and of course, we fell victim to Joe's quirky humour in a couple of his answers..*

**MB:** *What membership do you claim Joe?*

**JK:** Right at this moment it's 531, that's down by about 50 or so since the list moved to WebTrek. Nearly all those losses came due to Asagate. Hopefully when the whole mess settles down some of them will come back.

**MB:** *As you are no doubt aware from posts on the WWW, a number of the more prominent "names" in terms of sumo fandom, wont read one (or another) of the sumo sites out there today. Any opinions on that?*

**JK:** It's their prerogative to be involved in whichever medium they like. The one thing that's nice about the online Sumo discussion is that there are different options. The reader is able to choose the one that they prefer. The choice can be technical or completely personal but no one is left out in the cold.

**MB:** *Joe, is the Sumo Mailing list the last resort of American sumo fans of the 80s, 90s and*

*yesteryear? Those for whom the last bell will likely soon toll?*

**JK:** That's a good question. I would hazard to guess that most of the list membership is, let's just say "mature" and leave it at that. I do think that there are technical reasons why the list isn't popular with younger audiences. If you have an exceptional mail handling system available you can do some intricate filtering and sorting that makes reading through messages quite quick. But the younger generation(s) don't have the tools to handle this kind of reading. It would not be an underestimation to say that those born around the millennium are used to web interfaces for everything. Mailing lists don't translate well when using the web as opposed to using mail servers.

**MB:** *How, given the answer above and if at all, do you see your site interacting with Sumo Forum and Sumo Talk in the years ahead?*

**JK:** I would hope that this can be achieved. I'm not sure the technology for a seamless integration is here yet but it's coming close. There are a few ways to cobble things together but it's not a turnkey setup.

**MB:** *Have you ever thought of merging with one or more of your competitors?*

**JK:** There are tools to cross pollinate the mailing list and the forum. I know one that converts mailing lists into forum style posts

but I don't know, offhand, if it goes the other way. But I am always up for making things work together.

**MB:** *Imagine you were on the Titanic as part of an ST/SF/SML trip to see sumo in the US (and that the Internet were older than it is of course), Jack / Leonardo is nowhere to be seen and you have a small raft all to yourself. Which trio of your members would you pull into your "too small for four" lifeboat?*

**JK:** I'm not sure what this question is asking, to be honest. It seems like a "pick your personal top three members" question. I can't narrow things down that far. I'm not trying to duck the question (ok, maybe a little) but picking even a dozen would be nearly impossible.

**MB:** *And, just for fun, imagine you were the real life Rijicho of all you see and command, what changes would you make to the world of Ozumo? Women on the dohyo, steroid testing, reduce prices etc...?*

**JK:** Move the basho to where I live. That way I could watch them live in person. But seriously, I'd do a major overhaul of the NSK and the "organization" of Ozumo. The way it currently is makes a "Good ol' boy" network look like an open and inclusive bunch. There definitely needs to be some major reformation but it must still keep the traditions and culture of Sumo alive.

**MB:** *An "admin" Q for you now -*

*what do you feel about members openly selling copyright infringing videos of the NHK broadcast having recorded the images themselves? In short do you subscribe to the Internet free for all belief of some or hold yourself to a different standard?*

**JK:** Now you're getting into "religious" territory. Being a techie for something like 25 years my personal take is that the rules for copyrights are so screwed up it is ridiculous. I'm not a zealot about these things but I do see the need to reform Patent and Copyright laws. BTW, did you know that when originally conceived it was called the Right to Copy? Just like the Right protecting Free Speech or the Right against Self-incrimination? The laws were setup to allow people to copy rather than to restrict it. That being said, I am against breaking the law whenever possible. Any content that is not legally sharable shouldn't be posted. But it's up to the parties involved to settle things. The list itself is like the phone company. Information will pass through but the list isn't responsible for it.

**MB:** *Do you see yourself expanding in any way?*

**JK:** I've been expanding for 20 years now. I weigh nearly as much as Ama these days. Oh, you meant the online resources. I have been thinking about making a SML home page that would incorporate the things like subscription management, list archives, the [archive search](#) and some links to other resources on the web.

There's lots of cool stuff that can be done. It's just a matter of doing it.

**MB:** *Now to the nitty gritty - have you tried on a mawashi yourself? If so when and where?*

**JK:** Unfortunately I have not had the pleasure. But I'm working on a kesho-mawashi just for the Bench Sumo game.

**MB:** *You may know I have gone on record as saying Asashoryu should have been kicked out of sumo but how did you see the whole "offence / penalty / mental illness" issue?*

**JK:** The reaction to the offence was overblown a tad. The penalty was, strange as it might sound, not hard enough but also too hard. As for the mental illness issue? Well, I'm not going to call anyone bonkers since I'm pretty much medicated up the yin-yang. However, I do think it's strange that a rikishi known for his iron will (as in "You WILL not beat me twice!") and mental aggressiveness could collapse so drastically and quickly. I won't say he's faking it but I will say that he's got a sorry bunch of handlers.

**MB:** *Think he'll be as good as he was or will he be a shadow of his former self? And of course, about the Tokitaizan case as it stands today (at time of interview early Oct). Will physical abuse ever be removed from sumo? Should it be?*

**JK:** He'll either come back more dominating than ever or go intai in

Haru or Natsu '08. On the Tokitaizan issue - this is a far more serious. It makes everything that Asagate had associated with it look like nothing at all. I see no reason at all why something like a wiffle bat could be used. The hazing does need to be toned down. It's one thing to run drills and exercises until you drop from exhaustion. But assault with intent to do bodily harm is way over the line. (Can you tell I'm a fan of Law & Order?) Lastly, there needs to be some real, upgrading of the positive feedback portions of training.

**MB:** *Finally, any last words for the other two in this joint interview or, indeed, your own contributors and admiring public?*

**JK:** To Mikko and Mike, keep up the good work. For the community, always try and remember that this is a sport, no, it's a martial art. As fans and spectators we have our favourites and are never lacking in opinionated commentary. But the bottom line is we love Sumo. There's a lot of things in Japanese society, let alone Sumo, that westerners will not understand. I have my opinions about the culture and social aspects of both the Japanese and of Sumo. But, since I am neither Japanese nor a rikishi, I try to remember that the bottom line is all about the matches during the Basho. I'm willing to accept/overlook aspects I don't understand and learn the ones I can. And enjoy reading about Kotomitsuki finally making ozeki.