



Let's Hear From You! What Made You A Fan?

by Robert Hartung

Each issue of SFM, We'll ask one of you to tell us something about you and sumo. Think you have something readers would like to know? Write our letters section! Enjoy.

How do you become a sumo fan? Well, superficially, the same mechanism acted on me as had made so many respectable TV watchers enthusiastic fans of "fat Japanese men in diapers" before they could say "mawashi". Specifically, it was the famous TV coverage of the Ozumo basho in Paris-Bercy in the 1990s. As is well known, this featured the full-length broadcast of all matches.

But why was there such a fascination that made you stick with the sumo program instead of zapping – as usual – back to Columbo, Miami Vice or Knight Rider? For me it was clearly the contrast between the slow, intense preparation and the explosive discharge of tension at the tachiai and during the bout. Watching this ritualized act is as intensely thrilling as being part of it yourself.

Later I felt defrauded of exactly this tension by the shortened coverage by Eurosport; I missed the essential element, the focus on the fight. If Eurosport hadn't totally ceased their coverage now, they might have – who knows? – thought about how to broadcast a whole basho, including commercials, within thirty minutes, just by showing the

winning techniques. The bouts conveniently do not take too long.

Anyway, the coverage from Paris had done its work, and I pondered how to get more of it. Bit by bit the usual sources came up, especially the internet with its German-speaking sumo forum. (I know that there are more, but I want to tell you about my way.)

We Germans somehow have an addiction to strange games, and so I was pretty fascinated to find games on the forum that dealt with the results of the "real" sumo. Of course, I had understood and internalised the principle of a sumo fight at once, and so I felt called upon to quickly turn the sumo gaming community upside down by posting sensational results. Mathematics aren't quite strange to me either, and so I enthusiastically entered a new banzuke in GTB, based on half-empirical observations, convinced that I would collect the maximum possible score. Kintamayama, please forgive me for not knowing then that GTB is one of the most difficult sumo games; my results were devastating. In all games, by the way.

Coming to this point I was already a die-hard sumo fan. Fan of

Ozumo, if I may add, not of the different versions that are around, culminating in women's sumo... tsk tsk tsk. At the same time there are aspects that have bound me firmly to sumo and the forums that are based only partially on sumo itself.

Firstly, it immediately became clear to me that my passion for sumo would not go so far that I would acquire as extensive knowledge as some of the fellow members of the forums. These experts provide the essential substance that makes the forums live. Hats off – but my enthusiasm isn't enough for this almost scientific approach; but it is good to know that all of my sumo questions will be answered.

Secondly, from the start I found fascinating the potpourri of people that populate the sumo forums. I have found acquaintances and friends who I meet and talk to not only about sumo but about everything under the sun. This aspect doesn't have anything to do with sumo itself but is important in my view.

My interest in sumo is fed by another well, a general interest in Japan, its history, its art and – primarily – its character. I'm

fascinated by the idea that is anchored in the consciousness of every Japanese person – you can lead a meaningful and fulfilled life in different ways, or you can at least try: arts, skills or other paths (in the meaning of “do”) are ultimately criteria to perfect one’s

soul, and there are many ways. May it be sword combat, tea ceremony, painting, pottery, calligraphy, sumo or something else, it is not important – you can strive for mastery of every one of these paths and use it as a touchstone for your soul.

I have learnt and heard much about sumo. I will take part in the games as long as it’s fun for me (and the players) and I will continue to watch sumo – on the internet or maybe directly in the Kokugikan at one time or another.

