



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

by Alexander Herrmann

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.

I do not know when I had my first contact with sumo but I know it was a New Year's Eve. Usually all of my aunts and uncles met at one place (this time it was ours) and we kids would sit in front of the TV set and watch nonsense until the start of the fireworks at midnight. And there he was... This really obese Konishiki. He was only shown once and we kids just couldn't believe how huge and – let's face it – how fat he was. We wanted to see him once more, but he was not shown again in this coverage. He was probably so far down on the banzuke already that not every one of his bouts was shown. So... First contact somewhen in the mid-1990's? I really don't know.

Fast forward to 1999. I had just ended my mandatory Army year and entered university. At the beginning the lessons weren't too time consuming (and I was a bit lazy, too) and so I had plenty of time to flick through the TV programs at night. I kept sticking to Eurosport's coverage of the Kyushu Basho 1999. My first question was: "Why?" Why would someone stuff so much food into himself to beat around another guy who had done the same? Somehow the "accident phenomenon" kicked in: you can't watch, but you can't look away either.

So I watched the whole hour. The rules were pretty easy to understand, and it was fascinating how many ways could lead to such a rather simple goal: make your opponent leave the ring or touch the ground with another part of the body than the soles of the feet. Some just jumped into their opponent, some jumped out of the way, some whirled their foe around, some whirled themselves around him. Maybe I wouldn't have admitted it at that point, but I was already hooked – hopelessly. The commentator added fuel to the fire by stating that "the fifth and final part of the coverage would be shown next week, and then [we] would know the winner." Since I am impatient at times, I started to search the web. [Stuart Nelson's page](#) was the first one I found, and it conveniently gave me the results for the basho in question. Not so convenient: The wrong man had won. But that gave me the hope that the right one would win next time. Soon after I discovered the [Sumo Mailing List](#), the [GTB game](#) and all the other great Internet sources.

This initial fascination is still there: their athleticism. After having seen so many bouts it is still hard to believe that such a huge person can move that fast or jump that high. Hayateumi's "Air

Hayate" moves left me baffled. True, there are some rather slow guys but this just underlines the amazingness of the fast ones. They are somehow from another planet – in the most positive meaning.

This fascination is unfortunately not shared by many of my family or friends. Their reactions go from incomprehension via flabbergastion via, "I expected something like that" (it's not the first strange hobby that I've had) to indulgent smiling and back. Just two people could add something other than "fat men in diapers". One at university even knew Akebono – leaving me speechless, a state I'm just seldom in. The other one was at my job; he was supposed to help another colleague in poking fun at my sumo interest, but instead he said: "Oh, isn't that the one where the fat Mongolian is at the top?" 1-0 for Sumo.

I was very proud when I held the first banzuke – Natsu Basho 2001 – in my hands. Again, no one could understand why a mass-printed thin A2 sheet of paper should be something special. Looking at it today it gives me a melancholic feeling. Half of the sekitori are oyakata now, are travelling through the lower divisions or have left ozumo altogether. And it reminds me of

my granddad. He thought it was an electric wiring plan.

Today my main area of interest in sumo is the oyakata. As a rikishi you hardly ever change your shikona or your heya. The oyakata world is much more in flux, it is a purling brook amidst unmovable rocks. And reading that someone

is the 10th Xyz-oyakata makes me automatically ask: "Who were the other nine?" It explains a lot about the history of ozumo. My rikishi fandom concentrates on those of Takanohana Beya; unfortunately, they have become fewer and fewer in the few last years. But I like many others as well, especially the joi-jin who show much fighting

spirit and rough up the sanyaku ranks.

Sumo is great. Sometimes I wish I were a sumotori. But then again I know that I could not stand the hardships of their lives. I admire them for being able to.

