

Amateur Angles #12

More Questions to Emanuel Yarbrough

by Howard Gilbert

In the last column I began talking to the one-time giant of the amateur sumo world, Emanuel Yarbrough. He spoke about his desire to return to competition, and about his experiences as a competitor in the early years. This time Emanuel (EY) took time out from his schedule of taping for a reality TV show to continue reminiscing about the past and to answer some questions about his future and where he thinks amateur sumo is going.

Part 1

HG: Firstly, thank you again for taking time to answer my questions. Are you aware how much there is about you on the Internet? Have you ever Googled yourself?

EY: I used to Google myself but I don't do it anymore. I have an idea and have been informed by other people. I guess the world is intrigued by a nearly naked fat black man and it raises people's curiosity.

HG: I'm wondering if, at the height of your career and fame as an athlete, you were making a living out of sumo? Have you had to hold down a regular job?

EY: I was not making a living of sumo per se. But the attention I got through sumo led to a lot of different opportunities to act in foreign films, American films, foreign and American commercials, speaking engagements and demonstrations and also various television opportunities. Now I am working on a reality television show and in



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the process of putting out a children's book. I'm trying to shop a radio talk show and still looking for acting opportunities. Still I focus on demonstration and public appearances. Eventually I would like to open up a martial arts school.

HG: Have you done any sumo coaching? Would you consider getting into that in the future?

EY: I have done some coaching in practice and just last week I coached a television personality for a reality show to become a sumo wrestler. I would love to teach a class of sumo. The SumoKids Foundation, for instance, involves teaching kids the basic of sumo as far as exercise and discipline and fighting with no weapons. But I would welcome a coaching opportunity whole

heartedly.

HG: On the subject of martial arts, can I ask how you got involved in Pride and UFC (Mixed Martial Arts competitions)?

EY: For UFC I was actually recruited at a sumo demonstration in Los Angeles. Then I fought in another Shoot Boxing match in Japan and then after that I was contacted by Pride to participate in their events.

HG: In addition to your sumo demonstrations all around the world I also see that you were involved in one-off sumo events like Night of the Giants. How did those events come about, and what were they like? Did they offer good prize money?

EY: Night of the Giants was an idea with a production company in the States, which had good intentions because it brought some of the biggest and best amateur sumos in the world together. The events were OK but just dealing with the production itself was at times difficult. There was a small cash amount for the winner available, but nothing in the high amounts. From a competitive stand point it was outstanding, because you had world placed winners and champions and even Olympians participating.

HG: What about the more recent New York S.U.M.O. Challenge in 2005, and the subsequent World Sumo League that did some events across North America in 2006 – were you invited to take part?

EY: I was aware of the NY

S.U.M.O. Challenge. I initially did some advertising for it, but I was not offered an opportunity to participate. This applies for the 2006 tour as well.

HG: The NY S.U.M.O. Challenge initially had the support of the International Sumo Federation, but then this was withdrawn when it became the World Sumo League, and the athletes involved were banned for a year. What is your take on events like this, and the opportunities for athletes to make some money out of doing amateur sumo?

EY: Of course I think athletes should be able to make money from sumo. However, because of the way the production company acted – they would explain things one way and do it another way – that is what eventually led to the friction and the wrestlers were made to bear the consequences. Sumo is not big enough to start banning athletes, so they need to understand if there is money to be made, the athletes should be allowed to make the money. But also the companies who put on events like this shouldn't double-cross the IFS either. We have to respect the IFS because they are the ones who made sumo possible for amateurs.

HG: What about the administration of the sport? Are you interested in being involved?

EY: When I first started I looked forward to being involved in administration and as I near the end of my career I would like to start getting back into the administration side.

HG: Can you elaborate on your thoughts on the way amateur

sumo is run internationally? How about the way it is run in the US? Would you do anything differently?

EY: Every country runs their federation differently – some countries have more financial resources than others, so of course they run their operation differently. From what I have seen most of the federations run their organization decently. I have dealt with a lot of federations and they have all treated me well with limited resources.

The American Federation is doing the best they can with no financial resources. Americans have regular jobs so all the time that is dedicated to the federation is volunteer and with limited time and money they are doing an excellent job. I would like to promote more demonstrations for summer camps. I would like to have more charity events and even suggest having a sumo cook book. But I would like to try to establish one main training centre here in the States, which of course is easier said than done.

I would ask more martial arts schools to offer sumo classes around the world to recruit more wrestlers. Everywhere I have gone where people have tried sumo at least one time, they seem to gravitate more toward sumo.

HG: What would you like the general public to know about sumo, and particularly amateur sumo?

EY: I would like for them to recognize how skilled, powerful and athletic amateur sumo has become. I would like for them to get the feeling of watching a great

sporting event once they see it. It is something like seeing two gladiators going for it with all they have, with fighting guts and determination. I'd like for the public to look past what the sumo wrestlers wear and pay more attention to the actual sumo fight.

HG: You mentioned before that you have a reality TV show that you've created, there are some speaking engagements, and you do work with a children's charity. Where do you see yourself heading in the next couple of years?

EY: I would like to start travelling again and, even though I am 43, I look forward to starting a family. I want to still continue to act in some ways in sumo and martial arts. And I'd still like to get my black belt in Judo, for which I am a belt short.

HG: Lastly, can you give us all an update on how your training is going at the moment?

EY: I was injured so I missed about three weeks of training but we're starting back with lifting 3 days a week and we will start sumo practice again next week. I will start practicing again twice a week along with weight lifting.

So, that concludes the thoughts of a living legend of amateur sumo. I would like to thank Emanuel for taking the time out of his busy and varied schedule to answer my questions over the past couple of months. I would also like to thank Emanuel's manager, Beatrice Davis, for facilitating the interview and the correspondence with Emanuel. I'd like to wish him well with his training, for his possible return to the ring, and for his future endeavours.