

Eric Evaluates: Large names draw crowds

by Eric Blair

Large names draw crowds - which is exactly why big names in sports - and sumo is no exception - the moment they achieve any recordable level of success, instantly have so very many fans.

Ama – nope, that new name hasn't clicked with me yet – is going through this at present, but as I type this, the famed English football team Manchester United have just arrived in Japan and I can barely hear myself type for all over the Kanto area the woodwork creaks as it is being deserted to enable those 'lifelong' fans of Man U to come crawling out. The Red Devils know full well the effect they have on these trips to the Far East and milk it for all the yen its worth.

Sumo is similar in many regards - minus the milking on the part of the sport – as tis the 'lifelong' fan that does the milking of things sumo.

An experience many have had - or will one day go through:

Take a newbie to see a session of asageiko, let them sit back, relax and take it all in, take a couple of pics perhaps and help them speak to a real life rikishi afterwards.

Accept the gratitude thereafter for opening their eyes to an aspect of Japanese culture they could never have possibly experienced on their own (not true of course but it doesn't harm to let them live their life in such ignorance) and then just wait for it; the after effects.

Should, and it can and does happen, one of the rikishi viewed

that day turn out half decent anywhere down the line, perhaps reaching maegashira, perhaps better, then wait for the phone to ring or the mailbox to pop up 'mail waiting' because you know just who will be on the end of that phone line don't you? Yep - newbie turned armchair expert Simon Says.

"Knew he'd be a yokozuna the first time I saw him" says said newbie missing the concept of 'we' in that bit about exactly who was present at the time - self deception a powerful thing. "Yep, there was something special that day, knew it, knew it, knew it" "Always admired this guy", "Obvious from Day 1 he was headed to the top" - all classics from the beginner looking to score points and appear the long timer, the big man, but all comments made possible thanks only to that gift called hindsight.

As a youngster I played a game called Simon Says and at one point even had an electronic version. Later on in life I learnt not to bother listening to what Simon said for the simple reason that it was a stop gap, a form of entertainment aimed at filling a quiet moment in the decades before real entertainment was invented.

Nothing serious, SS carried no weight and no one really cared what Simon said on his way to claiming lifelong loyalty to my toy box.

Moving back to football in order to throw out a couple of comparisons, Manchester United, just like the rikishi to be locked

onto, exist unknowingly only to give credibility to any and all those claiming to be fans of the team from Old Trafford.

The area to the south of Manchester in the UK is known as Cheshire, and in Cheshire little ever happens. Tractor sales and rustled cows make headlines in Cheshire.

A few hick filled farming towns exist up on the dales. Former Manchester United captain Paul Ince once managed a team called Macclesfield - essentially Hick Central in Cheshire terms.

Many lads from Macc (and they like to think themselves 'lads') have over the years changed just one letter in that 'Macc' term to read 'Manc' (a person from Manchester proper) and thereby claimed allegiance to Manchester United over the hills and far away in the buzzing metropolis of Manchester - plastic Mancs they are called by those with no idea how to get a tractor going, like the plastic flowers sold in 100 yen shops - there to fill a gap when the real flowers are waning or the crowds are down, but gap-fills all the same - not the real deal – much like my old Simon Says machine.

Sadly that Simon Says machine got old, lost its shine and was thrown out with the rubbish one day. I think I actually cried until my Dad reminded me that Simon had said sod all of real use anyway – much like your average Macc lad! (look closely – no 'n') – a parrot repeating the thoughts and comments of others.