

Eric Evaluates EB's roll of honour in covering sumo – a la anglais – down the years

by Eric Blair

Sumo has come a long long way in the past half century – roughly the time it has featured in the TV broadcasts here in the Land of the Rising Sun.

Coverage in the West, and reporting on sumo has, of course been a lot more sketchy

And so, temporarily taking his finger off the pulse of all happening on the jungyo with the bus load of coughing swine flu carriers running round Tohoku in similar form to Cliff Richard and his 'Summer Holiday' buddies back in the day, Eric will hereby treat you to his own take on English language coverage over the past couple of decades or so by listing his own Top 10 of those deserving of an encore in dragging the sport into the present.

Hiro Morita – for years Hiro has led the broadcasts on Japan's NHK. Has also worked on channels the majority don't see, is known throughout the world of sumo; something so many desire but so few ever achieve. Brings his own vein of commentary to the shows he hosts during a basho and oftentimes peppers his chat with anecdotes that cast a lighter, more human side on the rikishi. Always willing to chat to a journo or fan and one all round (cue; group hug) nice bloke.

Lyll Watson – the man behind much of the British broadcast of sumo on Channel Four twenty plus years back now. Deceased recently with his life in sumo covered here in SFM by my honorable Ed Chris

Gould. Never really linked to sumo in his final years.

Musashimaru – former yokozuna of the sumo parish and some time commentator on the NHK show – Maru was a yokozuna. Should more be necessary? Thought not, but just in case it is, he is also one of the most insightful sumo types ever to go on Japanese TV, in either language (E or J). Never know what you are gonna get with the so called Moose which makes his comments a tad refreshing on NHK and the pre-agreed conversation subjects they throw up while covering a honbasho.

Clyde Newton – Yeah, I know some people don't want to see Clyde's name up here given the issues with Sumo World in recent years, but Clyde, given his dues, is massive when it comes to sumo stats, stories the rest of the world has forgotten regarding a given rikishi on a given day at a certain basho – and sumo history period! Of course he makes his mistakes on the show. Wouldn't we all? That said, without the books he has put out on sumo would a lot of those reading this piece now have even got into the sport in the first place? I think not. A man that saw his publishing ideas (of books on sumo) through to reality when so few others claiming to be penning another addition to the pitiful library in a non-Japanese language all too often get bored, give up and move on – or simply stop mentioning it.

Andy Adams – a legend of sorts – founder of Sumo World back when

Sumo World ... erm, yeah, anyway. As founder – kudos. As a man I would have loved to have met – more kudos. The Matt Busby of sumo in many ways – quiet and discreet in his old age.

Dave Shapiro – Often seen as the sidekick of good old Hiro Morita, Dave Shapiro is a former amateur rikishi with experience in the mawashi, on the dohyo and presumably with sand between his toes. That counts for a lot in making this list so hats off for that, but also for the knowledge he demonstrates each time he commentates on sumo. No simple returns to 'I remember when so-and-so said such-and-such' and giving himself grandiose titles every ten minutes or so. Just wish he could get his shikona pronunciation right with some of the rikishi - and learn a few more ways to describe the end of a bout!

Dave Wiggins – Dave was one of those love 'em or hate guys thanks to his go to phrases during the NHK broadcast. Many loved him – yours truly included while others were simply irritated by his 'maple syrup / grandma / pancakes' quip each time a rikishi went flat on his face. Knew his stuff, knew his place, and was often missed as the MAS (Man About Sports) in the English version of the Asahi newspaper where he covered sumo in a way many will never even get close to. Also knew his limits as he has long since left Japanese shores for warmer climes. We miss you Dave!

Gerald Toff – a man Eric was

never fortunate enough to meet as his untimely passing took him from us far too soon. Great images remain though making Geoff one of, if not the best foreign photo-journo covering sumo in the recent past. There are a few also-rans out there but like Andy Adams on the publishing side, the pathfinder others follow.

Lynn Matsuoka – no other non-Japanese woman has even come close to the access Lynn secured during her years in Japan although many tried and continue to do so. One for the ages, a leading sumo artist to boot, and the leading lady in as far as sumo stories and in-depth knowledge goes. Others wanting to take her place have tried to pull her hair or leave gum on her seat over the years, but this is one member of the fairer sex in what is essentially a mans world

safe in the knowledge that experience, discretion and a lack of loose lips has seen her name etched firmly in English language sumo history.

Ross Mihara – like Hiro Morita, a regular commentator on the all so important NHK show. Slightly less entertaining but like Hiro a man who knows his sumo inside-out and a very very (yep – double use of 'very' intentional) competent chap behind the mike. Less of a presence outside the studio in as far as sumo reporting goes, but enough of one inside to make the EB Top 10 ahead any of the folk I see as also-rans.

Now, casual readers, fans and followers of the great EB column here on SFM, of course, this list does not pretend to be the ultimate, full on list of all those for

whom sumo has been a draw irresistible to refuse or pull away from; and with the know-how of how to make a few-bob along the way. There are others, including several members of the SFM family who would not like the publicity anyway, and perhaps one day I will list those as well but their time has not yet come; too few achievements in the wider world as of yet to justify this being a 12 name or even a 15 name list. Perhaps one day.

Without the above individuals though, sumo coverage in the English language would be a lot worse off.

And so, to you all, I salute you!

EB – one of the next generation!