

My first time ...

My thoughts before going to a live tournament

by Ayaka Matsuda

I think I never talked about sumo with my friends in my school days. I was simply not interested in sports in those days, and nobody around me did sumo. They played popular sports such as baseball and soccer instead. Although sometimes I watched sumo at home, it does not mean I knew anything in that field – only that my parents and uncle liked it. I never thought about if I liked sumo or not. Rather, I believed (and still believe, somehow) that sumo was for adults and elders, not for me or people my age.

However, I freely admit to having seen sumo on TV since I was a child. I cannot recall when I saw sumo for the first time in my life. Sumo has been in my life since before I can remember. Certainly, my father liked sumo very much. He watched sumo matches on TV every weekend during basho, and also checked the day's results on the night news programs on weekdays. That is how I got to know about sumo, for example when basho start or end, when the rankings are issued etc..

I had such little knowledge about sumo until high school days. The reason why I got interested in sumo is due largely to a foreigner

rikishi, Koto-oshu. When he became an Ozeki (around Hatsu-basho in 2006), he was often talked about in TV news (though I do not like his nickname: Beckham of the sumo world). At first, I was just curious about what European rikishi are like. I liked his face and searched him on the Internet inadvertently. Then, I found that he was the same age as me! I would never have imagined that I was as old as famous osumo-san! Yokozuna Asashoryu at that time was only 3 years older than me. That fact shocked me a lot, but it brought me a sense of intimacy with them and I started watching sumo with more interest.

Once I began paying attention, I realized that whereas I had previously considered rikishi all together, they each had their own color as a natural fact. They are all different from each other, for example in body sizes and facial expressions. Some are good at using their muscular bodies, some move really quickly to beat a bigger rikishi, and some like planning and trying new strategies. I also watched their interviews after matches with pleasure, especially as rikishi do not show arrogance in triumph, and hide their emotions in defeat

even though they obviously get down. I often join my parents watching sumo on TV, and they tell me who is the most popular wrestler recently, and who will win tomorrow's match etc. It is totally different to enjoy sumo actively, rather than just watching as a passive viewer which I was before.

Although I check the day's results of sumo nowadays during basho as my father does, I have never been to watch sumo. I usually watch sumo and other sports on TV. However, going to the Kokugikan (the nearest sumo place) to watch sumo is one of my dreams that I always have and want to realize at least once in my life – preferably in masu-seki (the box seat). Tickets for masu-seki are not cheap at all, but that type of seat makes watching sumo special. If possible, I want to see my favorite rikishi, Kaio, who is the oldest rikishi and supposed to finish his career before too long.

It really disappointed me that this Haru-basho was canceled because of the yaocho problem, even though they had no other choice. I hope they reform themselves to restart basho ASAP, so that my dream comes true.