

Let's Hear From You!

Don't forget ticket reform: A long-term fan explains why the Kyokai should act now

by George Colona

In 1957, two years after George Colona moved to Japan, the Sumo Association promised to widen access to premium tickets in the wake of a ticket distribution scandal. Fifty four years on, Mr Colona is still waiting for any noticeable signs of change.

I am an American who has made Okinawa Japan his home since 1955. Having married a Japanese woman who greatly liked sumo, we would tune into each Tournament, starting about 1957. Then when TV came along we would stay glued to the couch watching and enjoying each tournament. In 1999, I started travelling to Fukuoka for the final three days of each Kyushu Basho. This is where my quest to purchase choice "Box Seats" started.

Arriving by plane on the 12th day of the active tournament I would settle in to a hotel and on the 13th day attempt to obtain a Box Seat for four persons. Each attempt on the 13th, 14th and final day most often resulted in all being sold out. This didn't bother me because I was in the military and making an advance purchase was not possible due to my unpredictable schedule.

Then in 2003 my wife died and I was then working as a Military Contractor on a flexible schedule. I would then place a call (in Japanese as was necessary) as soon as possible after the start of advance sales. I would usually get connected about one to three minutes after start of first day sales. I was able to do this because I would have six to eight callers

poised to have their first attempt start at the exact moment of sales start. Getting through at one to three minutes got me a seat in row 3 East on one occasion however, still in this same time frame the next best single seat I got was East row 6. No matter the questioning, pleading and willingness to accept East, West, North or South, I couldn't get a better seat. Then I got the bright idea of flying to Fukuoka and positioning myself at the sales window the day prior to advance sales.

I camped in front of the sales window as the first person the day prior to sales start. I was interviewed by three news reporters just prior to and as the window was opening and when I asked the sales lady for the "Choice Box for four" pointing to my arena seating chart as the first person in line I got the same reply I previously got for years by phone.

"NOT AVAILABLE".

This basically shocked me and as I was face to face with her and FIRST in line I asked "how that could be?" I, the reporters and a couple patrons behind me waited for a plausible answer. None was offered and a rikishi-sized person appeared and gruffly told me to make another selection or move on. I selected repeatedly until I got a Box in row 6! I flew back to Okinawa the next day, having spent round trip air fare and one night hotel fee with nothing better than I had previously obtained by phone.

This happened again for the 2010 May Tournament in Tokyo, the difference being the plane tickets were more costly as was the hotel since I had to stand in line there two days.

I have not found any information detailing seats/boxes being controlled by Sumo Associations and/or Tea Houses. When the tourney cancellation occurred prior to advance sales opening, a member of the Osaka Sumo Association was interviewed, only to complain that *advance sales* for the March Tournament were very poor. How could he know about advance sales figures prior to the published advance sale date?

Then in later complaints to the Japan Sumo Association, the Osaka Sumo Association was seeking compensation for loss of revenue from ticket sales, arena rental, memorabilia, etc. This claim for compensation went on to say that the Osaka Sumo Association controlled 60% of the seating and their loss was excessive. Nowhere in any advertisement, on-line or while attending a tournament was this control of seats made public. Seating charts on the Japan Sumo Association website does not depict any prior allocated seats (seats controlled by Associations/Tea Houses).

This leads me to believe that if there is a faction in Osaka that controls Sumo seating, the same takes place at the other Arenas also. This also leads me to wonder who comprises these controlling

“Associations?” Perhaps they are legitimate, trusted Organizations with no Organized Crime association and simply fail in the transparency test or I’m perhaps the only one un-informed.

In short, I feel the Sumo

Association Arena seating chart should reflect seats that are “reserved/allocated to Associations {by name}/ allocated to Tea Houses {by name}” and include a conspicuous colour for those on sale to the general public in person and/or via internet or

phone.

Thank you for reading this. I’m not getting any younger and at 75 years old, on a limited budget like to get a fair shake. Any suggestions?