



Let's Hear From You! What Made You A Fan?

by Clement Iphar

Each issue of SFM, We'll ask you to tell us something about you and sumo. Think you have something readers would like to know? Write our letters section! Enjoy.

One of the youngest sumo fans in France!

I discovered sumo in December 2005 just as I was about to turn 16. Prior to that day I knew next to nothing about this sport – I just thought sumo was about big, fat guys wrestling in Japan. I did know they were 'worshipped' but that was about all I knew. It was during the final few days of December 2005, while watching Eurosport at about 7PM that I was struck by a program showing the Kyushu Basho. I started watching it, more for fun than anything else and the first thing that struck me was that I spotted some Europeans (the Mongolians are trickier to spot), - notably Kotooshu, Kokkai and Roho. The strength of these wrestlers was quite impressive, and well, they weren't all THAT fat. Half of what the commentator was saying was just gibberish to me. Never mind, the very next day I was back in front of my TV set, and that time I was focusing on the wrestlers, on their technical skills, on how the bout was taking place.

Some wrestlers made more of an impression than the others; Ama, the skinny lightweight, who remains my favorite, Kyokushuzan, the old fox, who always moved in an awkward way, Kotooshu, who was then about to be promoted to ozeki, and, of course Asashoryu who was ending the year with another tournament

victory – in the process breaking several records. I tried in vain to grasp some understanding of the ranking system and as soon as the broadcast ended, I went on the web, and first found <http://www.sumofr.net>, where I learnt the basics of sumo; the origins, the ranking system, the tournaments, about the yokozuna et al. I then discovered <http://www.info-sumo.net>, and its glossary that helped me to understand (and discover the meanings of) many of these strange words I had heard on TV. Thanks to those two websites I could follow the happenings of the 2006, Hatsu Basho in which Tochiazuma grasped his last tournament victory. Videos and comments of the bouts helped me to evaluate the wrestlers, to get an idea about who was at a rank fitting his level, and who was too low or too high. Then, at the end of February, I registered on Info-sumo. First, being quite shy – I didn't dare to post comments for fear of making mistakes but I soon gained some confidence and was able to post my own comments on the bouts.

The Haru Basho turned out to be the first tournament during which I entered the French chat room, to find it a place I could understand the areas I still found difficult. In the same period of time I discovered the sumo games, with the help of my mentor, Kaiowaka

(a Swiss sumo fan). He helped me to understand all the rules, including those of Bench Sumo that is, IMHO THE ultimate sumo game.

Apart from the gaming interest, the games do provide an opportunity to learn about sumo so I was able to discover the lower divisions that had previously been literal black holes in which hundreds of anonymous guys with unknown shikona were fighting. That's the way I first discovered the juryo division, then the makushita division and the famous "juryo promotion zone", the zone even more difficult than the juryo division itself, sandanme and finally the lowest two divisions.

The "Banzai" game proved very useful in the understanding of the kimarite, which are rarer and which are more frequently seen as well as their being grouped into various categories; a thing I hadn't a clue about before.

It was during the Natsu Basho of last year that I then discovered the guy who is currently my second favorite wrestler: Kakuryu. His ability in his movements on the dohyo, and his technical skills impressed me a lot. I discovered later that Kakuryu and I share the same birth date, with him being born five years before myself - on the 10th of August. I then took

Imumaru as a nickname without it having any direct link to sumo, nor to any particular wrestler (which means the passing of time has no relevance). I is the first letter of my last name, M the first letter of my hometown Marseille, U the first

letter of the hometown of some of my ancestors (Ustaritz, in the Basque Country). Maru is on one hand is an ending that sounds Japanese, and on the other hand it repeats the previous elements (MAR – U).

So, that's how Imumaru discovered sumo, a mix of sport and traditions that make this sport so particular, on a late December night, in 2005.

