



Let's Hear From You! What Made You A Fan? *by Alain Colas*

*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.*

First of all, I have to make one thing clear: I am a hardcore fan of Japanese culture and, more generally, of the Japanese attitude and frame of mind.

I particularly admire the way the Japanese face the odds; their fighting spirit. Japan is an archipelago often hit by earthquakes and typhoons, deprived of many natural resources, rugged and hard to farm except for some relatively small land areas; however, this country is one of the wealthiest and most developed in the world.

The Japanese only have one resource: themselves. They are thus the perfect examples of the common saying that "the only richness is in men". Subsequently, their culture, though marked by the samurai and a warlike attitude, is nevertheless incredibly sophisticated and civilized. So, when one night I saw sumo on Eurosport, I didn't change the channel.

That night I saw rikishi, those

weird fat guys, rushing towards each other as if their lives were at stake. Puzzled and interested by this new aspect of the Japanese culture that I only knew of by its reputation, I quickly found myself trying to evaluate the quality of the wrestlers, of the bouts, etc. In short, I had fallen into the game. I was under the spell of a sport that is so primitive, so brutal and so sophisticated at the same time, just like those who initiated it.

When seeing the sumotori fighting each other, I instantly realized why that sport was deemed the Japanese national sport, and I liked it what I had found.

One particular rikishi caught my attention: Takanohana. At that time, I didn't know he was the second man to bear this name (Ed: third if we count another Takanohana using different kanji). Neither did I know that he was a yokozuna, though when I saw him fighting it was always in the last bout or so, I understood that he was "special". I didn't know that his best years were in the past due

to liver disease and increasingly serious wounds. Anyway, I quickly saw that he was no ordinary rikishi – and no ordinary man too. He obviously had something about him – an aura – and all his admirers were using the same comparison: to Buddha.

This man had reached a state of mind in which nothing could reach him, a pinnacle in the achievement of his art that gave him an extraordinary self-confidence. He wasn't winning all his bouts, far from it, but the feeling was still there.

Since that time, I have learnt a lot about sumo and particularly so about Takanohana. I have the utmost admiration for all these men with the courage to try and walk such a hard path, waking up very early in the morning to endure highly demanding training – physically and mentally – with a minimal hope of glory.

I hail them, and thank them for providing me with such rich and captivating bouts.

