

## New Sport of The World Games: Sumo

Sumo is a traditional cultural heritage that Japanese people are very proud of. And great efforts are made to maintain sumo's traditions, bringing it as a wrestling sport into today's modern world without improperly modifying it, always safeguarding its venerable traits.

Sumo is not simply a sport but a martial art of one-to-one combat fought with particular reverence for the opponent. Sumo values the spirit of fair play by teaching young sumotori to honor the winner and to respect the loser. One of its many rituals is *chirichozu*, a ceremony preceding every bout, where the contestants indicate to each other that they're not hiding any weapons, that they are wearing nothing other than the *mawashi*, the tightly wound loincloths, and where they pledge to fight each other fairly.

The winner of a bout is the one who first drives his/her opponent out of the *dohyo-dawara* – the ring formed by straw bales and covered in sand and clay – or forces him/her to touch part of his body other than the soles of his feet to the ground. Determining of the winner is straightforward, even for the inexperienced spectator. However, with 82 acknowledged winning techniques, *kimarite*, which include throwing, twisting, and bending, expertise is required to know what the *rikishi* employed to succeed. A bout may be over in a split second, making it all the more exciting to watch.

Athletes in sumo train to nurture

strength, speed, adroitness, agility and stamina, among many other things. High energy levels as well as good composure are developed through combative interchanges with opponents, all the while emphasizing respect for others, fairness and courtesy. Mental strength counts in sumo; diligent daily training is important to build the body, improve the skills and cultivate the mind to acquire an optimally enhanced combination of all three.



The International Sumo Federation (IFS) on its ongoing efforts to promote the sport worldwide:

We have strived to introduce the wonderful Japanese sport of sumo to the world and propagate its practice by carrying out promotional activities in different countries. Our efforts have resulted in a rapid diffusion of the sport internationally. From the early eighties, we held annual tournaments up to and including the 11th International Sumo Championship. With the



## Sumo for Beginners

*Knowing it is appreciating it!*

Sumo is conquering the world ...

Is it due to the same mechanisms that launched most other martial arts from Asian origins to their global conquests? Appealing weak-beats-strong and mind-over-matter incentives that sports like judo, taekwondo, karate and others had to offer to the occident?

Or is it the sudden infatuation with all things Japanese? A trend in line with the no longer faddish 'moriwase for everybody' heard at sushi bars the world over?

Most likely it's a little bit of both!

Even though the dietary concerns of a *sumotori* go far beyond raw fish and a few rice rolls, sumo's phenomenal rise in international popularity bears certain resemblance to that of *night*. All said!

Don't discard it before you have tried it! Don't even attempt to fully appreciate it without knowing more about it! "*Is the fish fresh?*"

While the International Sumo Federation (IFS) provides the readers of FORUM with the official account on sumo, on the left, this glossary attempts to keep you from ever having to order "*green Japanese mustard*": *wasabi*, *wasabia japonica*, a highly valued plant in Japanese cuisine, a condiment traditionally served with sushi, ...

## Glossary

**Akebono**, Dawn, the *shikona*, ring name, for Chad Rowan, USA, the first professional wrestler born outside of Japan to attain the title of *Yokozuna*, Grand Champion; considered a sumo giant in terms of his weight (230 kg) and height (2.03 m) as well.

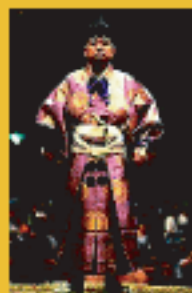
**Basho**, sumo tournament of any kind; also: *honbasho*, the official tournament.

**Chonmage**, the traditional topknot hairstyle worn by lower rank *rikishi*, strong men.

**Chanko-nabe**, stew, the traditional meal that makes men strong and BIG, eaten by the *rikishi* after their morning workouts, prior to the afternoon naps, anytime really.

**Dohyo**, the *sumo ring*.

**Eboshi**, the lacquered black hat worn by the **gyoji**, referee, during the professional tournaments.



**Fusa**, tassels hanging down from the roof that's suspended above the **dohyo**.

**Heya**, *stable*, where professional **rikishi** live and train together under the guidance of a **shisho**, a *stable master* or coach.



**Kamarite**, the currently 82 winning techniques which are officially recognized; their number is steadily increasing. Just over three year's ago, their number stood at 70. **Kinjite**, fouls such as punching, twisting of an opponent's finger, poking an opponent in the eye, etc. **Kokugi**, literally: *national sport*, stands for sumo.

**Kokugikan**, sumo stadium in Tokyo's Ryogoku area.

**Mawashi**, the belt/clothing made out of cotton or silk; it is worn in all bouts by all **rikishi**.

**Shikiri**, an elaborate series of rituals performed by the **rikishi** prior to every bout: they clap their hands to awaken the gods, drink the **chikara-mizu**, the water of strength, toss salt into ring for its purification, and only then they crouch and prepare to lunge at each other.

**Shikiri-sen**, short and straight lines from behind which the **rikishi** make the **tachi-ai**, the *opening charge*.



**Shiko**, *stomping*, a training exercise that's also performed during the

**shikiri**: raising a leg high in the air, the **sumotori** brings it down to the ground with force; though rooted in shinto to chase away bad spirits, it also lowers the athlete's center of gravity below the hips for improved stability.

**Tawara**, straw bales packed tightly with sand and clay, placed in a circle on the **dohyo**, and forming the area inside which the bout takes place. When sumo embarked on its first **koen**, a *tour abroad*, to the United States and on to Europe, in the early 1980s, it may have been the sights of "humongous men in diapers" grappling at each other that brought spectators by the thousands to the **hanazumo**, the *exhibition tournament*. Just two decades later, some of the sport's main tournaments air regularly on Western channels to audiences capable of appreciating even the finest nuances to rituals and techniques.

Summary coverage on the Grand Tournament Series, professional sumo's six top tournaments, has been carried by Eurosport for a number of years already. Audiences are steadily growing and reported to include more and more women.



Amateur and professional sumo – in somewhat concerted action – successfully promote all aspects of the sport to the world at large. When the IFS held its 8th World Sumo Championships in Riesa, Germany, in 1999, it staged the bouts to sellout crowds in the 10'000-capacity Sachsen Arena. It received extensive exposure on television, and it saw more column space filled than ever before. Still, after all seismic movement from **rikishi** of 150 kg and more crashing onto the **dohyo** had stopped, people in Germany were left with one of the better sports movies ever produced (Gold Shell at the 2002 Santander Sports Film Festival). 'Sumo Bruno' is a romantic comedy about Bruno's relentless sumo training becoming a journey into self-assertiveness and ultimately success at the World Championships in Riesa.

establishment of the International Sumo Federation in 1992, we changed their name to the Sumo World Championship, the first of which was held at the Tokyo Kokugikan Sumo Stadium that same year.

The development of Sumo is ongoing. In 2003, the 12th Sumo World Championship will be held in Moscow, Russia, jointly with the 3rd Shinsumo (Women's) World Championship. The member countries and regions registered with the International Sumo Federation now total 86. The countries' national federations are organized into the Continental Sumo Federations and take part in the latter's Continental Sumo Championships. Furthermore, the Junior Sumo World Championship will see its 5th edition in Osaka, Japan, later this year.

What were the factors contributing to the rapid propagation of sumo throughout the world? Just about anyone can readily take it up; the basics are already widely understood; and the courtesy which is inherent in sumo has gained tremendous support. Obviously, in order to propagate and develop the sport further, amendments in areas such as dress code and dohyo will have to be made continuously. Ultimately, it is important to provide opportunities for old and young, male and female to be familiar with and enjoy sumo. It is also paramount to foster good relations between athletes from different countries at the time of the championships. Only this brings about the friendly rivalries which can improve their skills. Sumo, however straightforward and easy its rules, is difficult to master properly. And the quintessential value of sumo lies in the pursuit of mastering it to perfection. Let's hope that sumo – with its long history and its very rich tradition – will attract even more people around the world and become the modern sport we all envision.

