

# 大相撲



NIHON  
SUMO-KYOKAI  
JAPAN

# 蒙御免

# The SUMO

Sumo is an ancient sport dating back some 1500 years.







Depiction of the Battle between Nomi-no Sukune and Taima-no Kehaya  
The origins of sumo are given in the myths of physical contests and the tale of the epic battle of Sukune and Kehaya told in the Nihon Shoki (year 720).

Depiction of the Imperial Ceremony of Sumo Wrestling in the Heian Court  
Sumo matches were held annually as ritual ceremonies to divine the year's harvest. Later, the ceremonies became an event in the imperial court and continued for 300 years.

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Multicolor Woodblock Prints from the Edo Period  
Depicted in the prints are Shikimori Inosuke, Shiranui, Kagamiwa, and Urakaze. Entering the Edo period, sumo gained popularity as a mass attraction on the same level as kabuki.

Folding screen showing Taima-no Kehaya being thrown by Nomi-no Sukune in their contest  
The work is by Kawanabe Kyo-sai, a painter active from the closing days of the Tokugawa shogunate to the Meiji period.



ACCORDING to Japanese legend the very origin of the Japanese race depended on the outcome of a sumo match. The supremacy of the Japanese people on the islands of Japan was supposedly established when the god, Takemikazuchi, won a sumo bout with the leader of a rival tribe. Apart from legend, however, sumo is an ancient sport dating back some 1500 years.

# Origin of Sumo

Its origins were religious. The first sumo matches were a form of ritual dedicated to the gods with prayers for a bountiful harvest and were performed together with sacred dancing and dramas within the precincts of the shrines. The Nara Period (The 8th century) sumo was introduced into the ceremonies of the Imperial Court. A wrestling festival was held annually which included music and dancing in which the victorious wrestlers participated. Early sumo was a rough-and-tumble affair combining elements of boxing and wrestling with few or no holds barred. But under the continued patronage of the Imperial Court rules were formulated and techniques developed so that it came more nearly to resemble the sumo of today.

A military dictatorship was established in Kamakura in 1192 and a long period of intense warfare ensued. Sumo, quite naturally, was regarded chiefly for its military usefulness and as a means of increasing the efficiency of the fighting men. Later in the hands of the samurai, jujitsu was developed as an offshoot of sumo. Peace was finally restored when the different warring factions were united under the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1603. A period of prosperity followed, marked by the rise to power of the new mercantile classes. Professional sumo groups were organized to entertain the rapidly expanding plebian class and sumo came into its own as the national sport of Japan. The present Japan Sumo Association has its origins in these groups first formed in the Edo Period.

記原

走



THE sumo ring is called the dohyo and takes its name from the straw rice bag which mark out its different parts. The greater portion of each bale is firmly buried in the earth. The dohyo is 18 feet square and 2 feet high and is constructed of a special kind of clay. The hard surface is covered with a thin layer of sand. The bout is confined to an inner circle a little over 15 feet in diameter. Over the dohyo suspended from the ceiling by cables is a roof resembling a Shinto shrine with four giant tassels hanging from each corner to signify the seasons of the year.

# Rules of Sumo

A bout is won by forcing the opponent out of the inner circle or throwing him in the dohyo. To lose the match it is not necessary to fall in the circle or to be pushed completely out. The rikishi who touches the ground with any part of his body, his knee or even the tip of his finger or his top-knot, loses the match. Or he need only put one toe or his heel over the straw bales marking the circle. Striking with fists, hair pulling, eye gouging, choking and kicking in the stomach or chest are prohibited. It is also against the rules to seize the part of the band covering the vital organs. As there are no weight limits as in boxing or western wrestling it is possible for a rikishi to find himself pitted against an opponent twice his own weight.

There are six Grand Tournaments a year, three are held in Tokyo, one in Osaka, Nagoya and Kyushu. A tournament lasts for fifteen days, each rikishi fighting once every day with a different opponent. The winner of the tournament, in other words the rikishi with the best record of wins over losses, is awarded the Emperor's Cup on the final day after the last match. There are three additional prizes, the shukun-sho awarded to the rikishi who upset the most yokozuna (grand champions) and ozeki (champions), the kanto-sho for fighting spirit and the gino-sho for technique. To be eligible for any of these prizes, the rikishi must also have won at least eight of his fifteen matches.

Sumo Ring and Suspended Roof of the Kokugikan Permanent Sumo Amphitheater in Ryogoku, Tokyo

The sumo ring is rebuilt for every tournament. 20 cm of soil is taken off the top, new soil is added, and then the surface is leveled. Sold out crowds are indicated with a special hanging banner announcing the fact. At these sold out events, special bonuses are handed out in decorative packaging. Recipients include the wrestlers, sumo affiliates, and members of the press.



The Faceoff When Control of the Match is Determined.

This is the moment when the wrestlers drop their heads and throw their weight into each other.



Chikaramizu symbolizes water that purifies the body. A wrestler receives the water, bestowed by the winner of the previous bout, and rinses his mouth with it.



Awards Conferral Held on the Closing Day of the Tournament. The emperor's cup is conferred to the most outstanding wrestler of the tournament.



THERE are at present about 800 rikishi in professional sumo from the lowly trainee to the yokozuna at the top. After each Grand Tournament the banzuke are revised rikishi being either promoted or demoted depending on their performance during the fifteen days. A new official ranking list called the banzuke is issued by the Nihon Sumo Kyokai printed in an ancient, stylized calligraphy. The rikishi are first arbitrarily divided into east and west teams although they do not compete as teams nor is a rikishi from one team necessarily matched against one of the other. Heading the banzuke in large, bold characters are the names of the upper division rikishi, the maku-uchi. The maku-uchi group includes the five top ranks:

- ① Yokozuna ② Ozeki ③ Sekiwake ④ Komusubi ⑤ Maegashira

The number of the maku-uchi are within 42. The remainder of the upper division rikishi or approximately a quarter of their total number are distributed among the top four grades.

Listed below these on the banzuke, in progressively smaller characters, appear the names of the juryo and makushita, and below these the san-dan-me, jo-ni-dan and lastly the jo-no-kuchi. Below the makushita do not get to wrestle on each day of a tournament. The matches start in the morning with those of the lowest ranking rikishi, followed by those of progressively higher and higher rank, building up to a climax towards the end of the day with the bouts featuring the yokozuna.

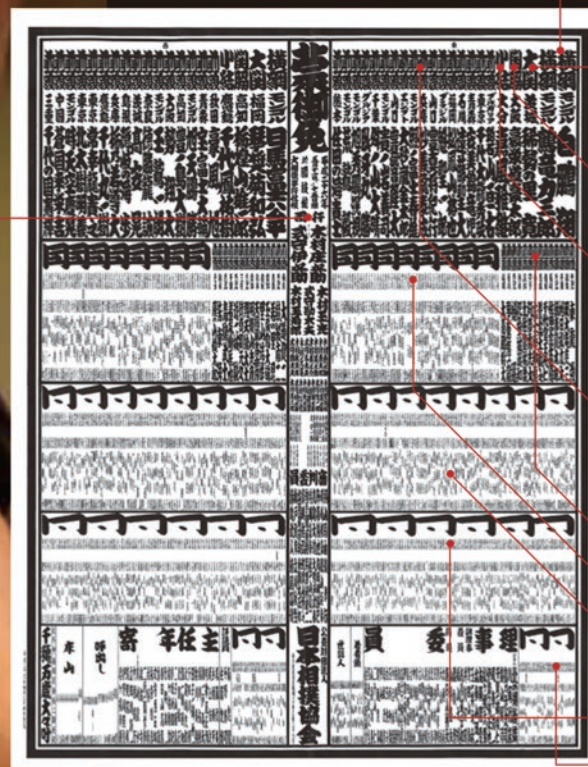
# Banzuke Sumo Rankings

## Gyoji

The referee's role is to signal the start of the match and watch over the progress of the bout. The referee also is in charge of writing the detailed letters, in a style called Negishi lettering, on the tables listing wrestler rankings.

The position of the yokozuna is unique. In the past three hundred years since the title was created only Sixty-nine rikishi have been so honored. The yokozuna, alone of all the ranks can never be demoted even if he makes a poor showing during a tournament. Instead should he continue with a bad record, he is expected to retire. Before a rikishi can even be considered for promotion to yokozuna, he must have won two consecutive tournaments while holding the rank of ozeki. He must have proven himself capable of turning in consistent performances and in the critical eyes of the Sumo Kyokai be a man of character worthy to hold such an exalted position.

The rank of a rikishi determines the style in which his long hair is dressed. The style worn by juryo and maku-uchi is the more elaborate and is called the o-icho-mage after the ginkgo leaf which the top-knot is supposed to resemble. The lower ranks wear the chon-mage, a plainer style tied with paper strings. The hair styles are adopted from those fashionable in the Edo Period and have been preserved not merely because of tradition but also because they serve as a head protection in the event of falls.



## ① Yokozuna

The yokozuna occupy the top rank of grand sumo wrestlers and represent all of sumo's participants.

## ② Ozeki

This was once the highest rank, but now is second to yokozuna.

## ③ Sekiwake

This is the next highest rank after ozeki.

## ④ Komusubi

This is the rank below sekiwake and is the lowest of the group that is called the "san-yaku" (ozeki, sekiwake, and komusubi).

## ⑤ Maegasira

This refers to makuuchi wrestlers who have not ascended to the "san-yaku."

Juryo

Makushita

Sandanme

Jonidan

Jonokuchi

Wrestlers' names are read off with east on the right and west on the left. The long format from top to bottom originated in order to depict the east-west pairings, and has continued to this day since the late 18th century (middle Edo period).

At 15-day grand sumo tournaments, aggressive and powerful contests are held in the ring.





Entry of makuuchi wrestlers into the ring  
A colorful display of makuuchi wrestlers entering the ring.



Entry of yokozuna into the ring  
The imposing yokozuna is accompanied by a sword bearer and an official forerunner.

SUMO has managed to survive with its formalized ritual and traditional etiquette intact making it unique among sports. On each day of the tournament immediately before the maku-uchi matches are scheduled, the colorful dohyo-iri or “entering the ring” ceremony takes place. Down one aisle in reverse order of their rank comes one team of maku-uchi rikishi wearing kesho-mawashi or ceremonial aprons. These aprons, beautifully made of silk, richly embroidered with different designs and hemmed with gold fringe cost anywhere from 400,000 to 500,000 yen. The rikishi climb into the dohyo and go through a short ritual ancient in sumo tradition after which they depart to be followed by the other team entering from the opposite aisle to repeat the ritual. Earlier in the day the juro perform a similar ceremony before their matches.

# Sumo Ceremonies

The leading roles in the dohyo-iri are reserved for the yokozuna who have not taken any part in the ceremony up to now. A yokozuna comes down the aisle attended by a senior gyoji and two maku-uchi rikishi in kesho-mawashi one bearing a sword. Over his kesho-mawashi the yokozuna wears a massive braided hemp rope weighing from 25 to 35 pounds tied in a bow at the back and ornamented in the front with strips of paper hanging in zigzag patterns. This is a familiar religious symbol in Japan. It can be found hanging in Shinto shrines and in the home over the “shelf” of the gods where offerings are made at New Year.

While the gyoji and two attendants crouch in the dohyo, the yokozuna performs the dohyo-iri ceremony with the greatest dignity. After first clapping his hands together to attract the attention of the gods, he extends his arms to the sides and turns the palms upward to show he is concealing no weapons. Then at the climax he lifts first one leg to the side high in the air, then the other, bringing each down with a resounding stamp on the ground symbolically driving evil from the dohyo. After he has withdrawn with his attendants the other yokozuna enter, in turn, and repeat the ceremony.

The concluding rite of the day is the “bow dance.” After the final match a specially picked makushita rikishi climbs into the dohyo, is handed a bow by the gyoji with which he performs the yu-mitori-shiki, a brilliant routine with a twirling bow. The ceremony was introduced sometime during the Edo Period when a winning rikishi was awarded a prize of a bow and to express his satisfaction performed the “bow dance.” This may be considered an expression of satisfaction on behalf of the victorious rikishi of the day.



Bow Twirling Ceremony  
The bow twirling ceremony expresses the elation of victory at the conclusion of a day's matches.



Not only the wrestlers, but also the referees have ranks. The highest rank takes on the name Kimura Shonosuke. The next highest takes the name Shikimori Inosuke. These two referees are called standing referees. Kimura Shonosuke only referees the top final bout.

# The Gyoji and The Judges

NOT the least colorful of the figures attendant on sumo are the gyoji or referees. They are attired in kimono patterned after the style worn by the samurai of the Kamakura Period, sumo 800 years ago. Their black court hats of gauze resemble the traditional Shinto priest's hat. Like the rikishi the referees are graded and only a tate-gyoji or top ranking referee can officiate at a bout involving a yokozuna. The rank of a gyoji can be determined by the color of the tassel on his fan, purple or purple and white for the tate-gyoji, vermilion for those corresponding to sanyaku, red and white for maku-uchi, blue and white for juryo and blue or black for the ranks below. The higher ranking referees wear tabi, Japanese split-toe socks and zori, straw sandals, in contrast to the lower ranks who are barefooted.

The gyoji enters the dohyo with the combatants and calls out the names of each in a specially trained, high-pitched voice. It is the custom for each rikishi to choose a poetic sumo name for himself. Some adopt a name derived from the name of their sumo master or their place of birth. Most frequently chosen are names ending in -yama(mountain), -gawa(river) or -umi (sea). When it is time for the combatants to begin, the gyoji gives the signal with his fan, and in the course of the match keep an ever watchful eye on their movements, the while shouting words of encouragement.

Sitting around the four sides of the dohyo are the judges in black formal kimono. They have been chosen from the toshiyori. Should there be any doubt about the referee's decision, the judges climb into the ring and settle the matter among themselves. They may over-rule the referee's decision or they may order a rematch. The number of judges don't vary with the different ranks. There are five judges for all matches.



**Tate-gyoji**  
The colors of the tassels, either all purple or purple and white, indicate rank. The referees wear straw sandals over white tabi socks. Only the standing referees have short swords and an inro pill box attached to their garment.



**San yaku-gyoji**  
The color of their tassel is vermilion. They wear straw sandals over white tabi socks and are allowed to have an inro pill box worn at the waist.



**Maku-uchi-gyoji**  
The colors of their tassel are red and white. They wear white tabi socks.



**Juryo-gyoji**  
The colors of their tassel are blue and white. They wear white tabi socks.



# The Shikiri

FOR the match the rikishi are naked except for a silken loincloth called the mawashi. Made of heavy silk approximately 10 yards long by 2 feet wide, it is folded in six and then wrapped around the waist from four to seven times depending on the girth of the rikishi. The mawashi is a fundamental part of the rikishi's equipment. It may be said to have determined the whole form of sumo. There are seventy winning tricks most of which are achieved by maneuvering the opponent with a grip on the mawashi. The strings hanging from the front are of silk stiffened with glue and as they are purely ornamental can be discarded when they become detached as they frequently do in the course of a match.

After entering the dohyo each rikishi goes through a series of symbolic movements. To cleanse his mind and body, he symbolically rinses his mouth with water, the source of purity, and wipes his body with a paper towel. Certain motions are repeated from the yokozuna's dohyo-iri, the raising of the arms to the side as well as the stamping of feet. Each rikishi also scatters a handful of salt to purify the ring. This is further supposed to insure him against injuries. The saltthrowing is, however, the privilege only of maku-uchi, juryo and maku-shita, rikishi.

Salt moistens the wrestlers' hands and also works to disinfect any scrapes. The salt is scooped from bamboo baskets placed at the east and west points of the ring, then is used to brace oneself for the match.

**Shiomaki (Spreading Salt)**  
Purifying salt is used to expel evil from the holy area of the ring and to pray for safety.



**Sonkyo Crouching**  
A basic pose where the wrestler rises up on his toes and crouches with his waist low to the ground.



**Chirichozu Ritual Gesture**  
The wrestler claps his hands, spreads his arms out wide in both directions, and turns his palms downward.



The rikishi then squat and face each other in the center of the ring, crouch forward in a "get set" position supporting themselves with their fists on the ground and proceed to glare fiercely at each other. This portion of the ritual is called the shikiri. They do not begin the match at once, however, but engage in a kind of "cold warfare." They go back to their corners for more salt, scatter it and return to glare. They repeat the process again and again, usually for the full four minutes allowed by the rules. (juryo rikishi have only three minutes and the lowest ranks must begin at once). Theoretically they wait for the psychological moment when they both feel ready. At any rate it gives the rikishi time to work themselves and the spectators up to the proper pitch of excitement. For those who find the matches slow in getting underway, it may be of interest to note that it was not until recently that a time limit was fixed. In early sumo the start of a match could be delayed indefinitely. A ten minute limit was first introduced in 1928, later reduced to seven, then to five down to the present four minutes. The bout, itself, is usually over in a matter of minutes, in less time than it took for warming up, but for the sumo aficionado those brief moments are packed with thrills.



**Shikiri Stance**  
Listening to the opponent's breath in order to seize control of the match just after the bout begins.



**Tachiai Face-off**  
The moment when the wrestlers synchronize their breathing, rise up, and begin the bout.



**Torikumi Grappling**  
The wrestlers grab each other's belt, press their bodies together, and try to knock each other off balance.



Wrestlers who rise to the rank of yokozuna are expected to exhibit conduct and gravitas befitting their rank. Yokozuna act as representatives of all sumo wrestlers, while also serving as conduits of divine spirit. Consequently, a yokozuna bears a duty to appear in the ring unless he happens to be injured or ill.



GRAND SUMO TOURNAMENT

## SCHEDULE

A more detailed schedule is here:

<http://www.sumo.or.jp/en/ticket/index.html>

- TOKYO — January, May, September
- OSAKA — March
- NAGOYA — July
- FUKUOKA — November



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1-3-28 Yokoami,  
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