

大相撲



NIHON SUMO-KYOKAI



日本相撲協会



SUMO



Sumo is an ancient sport
dating back some 1,500 years.

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The Imperial Ceremony of Sumo in the Heian Court.

Each year, the Imperial Court held sumo matches as ritual ceremonies to coincide with the harvest. The ceremonies later became an event in the Imperial Court and continued for 300 years.



Woodblock prints depicting Shikimori Inosuke, Unryu, Kaigatake, and Ikazuchi from the Edo Period.

Sumo, like kabuki, became a major mass attraction starting in the Edo Period.



A folding screen showing Taima-no Ke-haya being thrown by Nomi-no Su-Kune in their contest. This work is by Kawanabe Kyo-sai, a painter active from the closing days of the Edo Period to the Meiji Era.



Origin of Sumo

According to legend, the origin of the Japanese people depended upon 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 1,500 years.

Sumo's 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 shrines. During the Nara Period (the 8th century), sumo was introduced into the ceremonies of the Imperial Court.

A sumo festival was held annually, which included music and dancing in which the victorious competitors participated. Early sumo was highly competitive, combining elements of boxing and grappling with few or no holds barred. But under the continued patronage of the Imperial Court, rules were formulated, and techniques developed, bringing sumo closer to its modern form.

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 working class, and sumo came into its own as the de facto national sport of Japan. The present Japan Sumo Association has its origins in these groups first formed in the Edo Period.

The battle between Nomi-no Sukune and Taima-no Kehaya. The origins of sumo are hinted at in the legends of ancient physical contests, including the tale of the epic battle between Sukune and Kehaya mentioned in the Nihon Shoki account of the year 720.

The Rules of Sumo

The sumo ring is called the dohyo and takes its name from the straw rice bags that mark out its parts. The greater portion of each bale is firmly buried in the earth. The dohyo is 6.7 m square and 60 cm high and is constructed of a special kind of clay. The hard surface is covered with a thin layer of sand. Bouts are confined to an inner circle a little over 4.55 m in diameter. Over the dohyo and suspended from the ceiling by cables is a roof resembling that of a Shinto shrine, with four giant tassels hanging from each corner to signify the seasons of the year.

A bout is won by forcing one's opponent out of the inner circle or throwing him in the dohyo. Matches can be lost not just by falling in the circle or by being pushed out; the rikishi who touches the ground with any part of his body, such as his knee or even the tip of his finger or his topknot, loses the match. A rikishi also loses by putting one toe or his heel over the straw bales that mark 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, a rikishi can find himself pitted against an opponent twice his weight.

There are six Grand Tournaments a year, of which three are held in Tokyo and one each in Osaka, Nagoya, and Fukuoka. A tournament lasts for 15 days, with each rikishi in the two top divisions competing 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 shukunsho awarded to the rikishi who upset the most yokozuna and ozeki, the kantoshō for fighting spirit, and the ginoshō for technique. To be eligible for any of these prizes, the rikishi must also have won at least eight of his fifteen matches.



The Faceoff When Control of the Match is Determined. This is the moment when the rikishi lower their heads and throw their weight into each other.



Chikaramizu symbolizes water that purifies the body. Rikishi in the two top divisions receive the water from the winner of the previous bout or the competitor on their side in the next bout and rinse their mouth with it.



Awards Ceremony Held on the Closing Day of the Tournament. The rikishi in the top Makunouchi divisions with the most wins receive the Emperor's Cup.



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

The sumo ring is partially rebuilt for every tournament. 20 cm of soil is taken off the top, new soil is added, and then the surface is leveled. A special hanging banner indicates the tournament is sold out. During these sold-out events, rikishi, sumo affiliates, and members of the press receive special decorative envelopes known as oiri-bukuro.

Banzuke

Sumo Rankings

15-day grand sumo tournaments feature many exciting bouts.

There are, at present, about 700 rikishi in professional sumo, from the lowly trainee to the yokozuna at the top. After each Grand Tournament, the banzuke is revised, with rikishi being either promoted or demoted depending on their performance during the 15 days (rikishi in the lower divisions compete on only seven days). A new official ranking list called the banzuke is issued by the Nihon Sumo Kyokai and uses unique, 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 side necessarily matched against one of the other. Heading the banzuke in large, bold characters are the names of the upper division rikishi, the

makuuchi. The makuuchi group includes the five top ranks:

There are up to 42 makuuchi rikishi. Approximately a quarter of the makuuchi competitors are distributed among the top four grades.

Listed below these on the banzuke, in progressively smaller characters, are the names of the juryo and makushita rikishi, and below these, the sandanme, jonidan, and lastly, the jonokuchi. Rikishi in the makushita and below only compete on seven days in each 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.

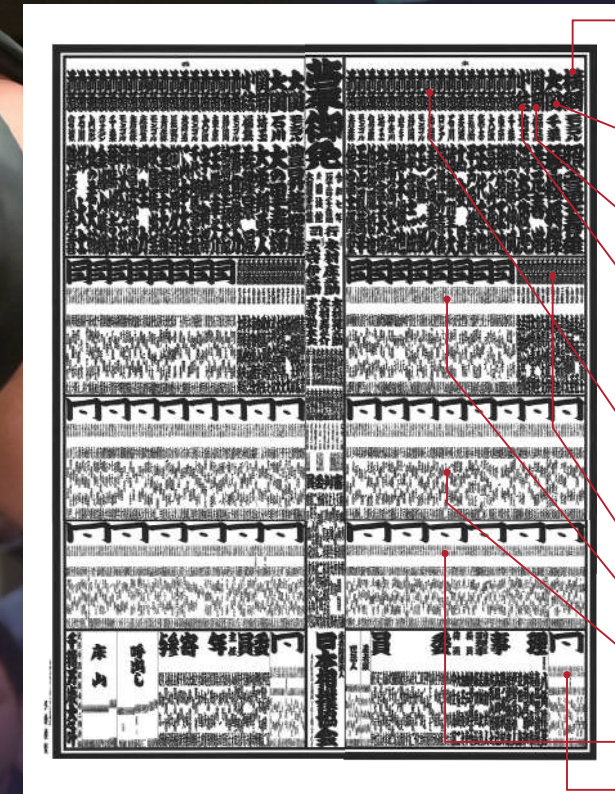
- 1 Yokozuna
- 2 Ozeki
- 3 Sekiwake
- 4 Komusubi
- 5 Maegashira

The position of the yokozuna is unique. In the long history of professional sumo, only 72 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. If he continues to have poor records, he is expected to retire. Before a rikishi can even be considered for promotion to yokozuna, he must have won two consecutive tournaments or achieved commensurate records at ozeki. He must have proven himself capable of turning in consistently strong performances and, in the critical eyes of the Sumo Kyokai, be a man of

characterworthy to hold such an exalted position.

The rank of a rikishi determines the style in which his long hair is arranged. The style worn by juryo and makuuchi is the more elaborate and is called the oichomage after the ginkgo leaf, which the topknot is supposed to resemble. The lower ranks use the chonmage, a plainer style tied with paper strings. The hairstyles are derived from those fashionable in the Edo Period and have been preserved not merely because of tradition but also because they serve as head protection in the event of falls.

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



1 Yokozuna

The yokozuna occupy the top rank in professional sumo 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 sanyaku (ozeki, sekiwake, and komusubi).

5 Maegashira

This refers to makuuchi rikishi who are ranked below the "sanyaku."

Juryo

Makushita

Sandanme

Jonidan

Jonokuchi

Gyoji

The role of the gyoji, or referee, 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 banzuke, or ranking sheets issued before each tournament.



Entry of makuuchi rikishi into the ring
A colorful display of makuuchi rikishi entering the ring

Sumo Ceremonies

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 makuuchi matches are held, the colorful dohyoi, or “entering the ring” ceremony, takes place. Down one aisle, in reverse order of their rank, comes one side of makuuchi rikishi wearing keshomawashi or ceremonial aprons. These aprons, beautifully made of silk, richly embroidered with different designs, and hemmed with gold fringe, cost upwards of approximately 1,000,000 yen. The rikishi climb into the dohyo and go through a short, ancient ritual, after which they depart to be followed by the rikishi on the other side, entering from the opposite aisle to repeat the ritual. Earlier in the day, the juryo

perform a similar ceremony before their matches.

The leading roles in the dohyoi are reserved for the yokozuna. A yokozuna comes down the aisle attended by a senior gyoji and two makuuchi rikishi in keshomawashi, one bearing a sword. Over his keshomawashi, the yokozuna wears a large braided hemp rope, usually weighing from 11 to 15 kg, 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 kamidana, or “shelf” of the gods, where offerings are made on New Year’s Day and at other times.

While the gyoji and two attendants crouch in the dohyo, the yokozuna performs the dohyoi 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 yumitorishiki. After the final match, a specially picked rikishi, usually ranked in the makushita or lower, climbs into the dohyo and is handed a bow by the gyoji with which he performs the yumitorishiki, an impressive ceremony with a twirling bow. The ceremony was introduced at some point during the Edo Period when a winning rikishi was awarded a prize of a bow, and to express his satisfaction, he performed the yumitorishiki with it. This may be considered an expression of satisfaction on behalf of the victorious rikishi of the day.



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



The Yumitorishiki
The bow-twirling ceremony expresses the elation of victory after a day’s matches.

The Gyoji and The Shimpan

The gyoji, or referees, are attired in kimono patterned after the style worn by the samurai of the Kamakura Period, sumo, about 800 years ago. Their black court hats of gauze resemble the traditional Shinto priest's hat. Gyoji are graded, and only a tate-gyoji, or top-ranking referee, can officiate at a bout involving a yokozuna. The color of the tassel on his fan: purple or purple and white for the tate-gyoji, vermillion for those corresponding to sanyaku, red and white for makuuchi, 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.



Like the rikishi, the referees have ranks. The highest ranked takes on the name Kimura Shonosuke. The next highest takes the name Shikimori Inosuke. These two highest-ranked referees are called tate-gyoji. Only Kimura Shonosuke referees the final bout of the day.

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

Sitting around the four sides of the dohyo are the shimpan, or judges, in formal black kimono. The toshiyori, or elders, have chosen these judges, all of whom are former rikishi. Should there be any doubt about the referee's decision, the judges climb into the ring and settle the matter among themselves. They may overrule the referee's decision or order a rematch. The number of judges does not vary with the different ranks; there are five shimpan for all matches.



Tate-gyoji

The colors of the tassels, either all purple or purple and white, indicate rank. The gyoji wear straw sandals over white tabi socks. Only the tate-gyoji, or the top two referees, have short swords, while those ranked in sanyaku and above have a small box called inro attached to their garment.



Sanyaku-gyoji

The color of their tassels is vermillion. They wear straw sandals over white tabi socks and are allowed to have an inro worn at the waist.



Makuuchi-gyoji

The colors of their tassels are red and white. They wear white tabi socks.



Juryo-gyoji

The colors of their tassels are blue and white. They wear white tabi socks.

The Shikiri

For their matches, the rikishi are naked except for a silk loincloth called the mawashi.

Made of heavy silk approximately 9 m long and 80 cm wide, it is folded in six and then wrapped around the waist 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 82 winning techniques, many of which are achieved by maneuvering the opponent with a grip on the mawashi. The front strings are silk stiffened with glue and are ornamental. They sometimes come off during a match and can be discarded.

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. The yokozuna repeats certain motions, such as raising his arms to the side

and stamping his feet. Each rikishi also scatters a handful of salt to purify the ring. This is also believed to shield him from potential injuries. The salt throwing is, however, the privilege only of makuuchi, juryo, and, on some occasions, makushita, rikishi.

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 face each other. This portion of the ritual is called the shikiri. The rikishi 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 face each other. 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 almost immediately). Theoretically, they wait for the psychological moment when they both

feel ready. This ritual 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 the time limit was not fixed until about 90 years ago. In early sumo, the start of a match could be delayed indefinitely. A

10-minute limit was first introduced in 1928, later reduced to seven, then to five, and finally down to the present four minutes. The bout itself is usually over quite quickly, in less time than it took for warming up, but for the sumo aficionado, those brief moments are packed with thrills.

Salt moistens the rikishi's 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.



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



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



Chirichozu
The rikishi clap their hands, spread their arms out wide in both directions and turn their palms downward.



Shikiri
The rikishi try to listen to their opponent's breathing to seize control of the match just after the bout begins.



Tachiai
The moment when the rikishi synchronize their breathing, rise, and begin the bout.



Torikumi
The rikishi grab each other's belts, press their bodies together, and try to knock each other off balance.

Rikishi who rise to the rank of yokozuna are expected to exhibit conduct and dignity befitting their rank. Yokozuna act as representatives of all the rikishi; consequently, a yokozuna is duty-bound to appear in the ring unless he is injured or ill.



GRAND SUMO TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

TOKYO ————— January, May, September

OSAKA ————— March

NAGOYA ————— July

FUKUOKA ————— November

A more detailed schedule is here:



Kokugikan
1-3-28, Yokoami, Sumida-ku, Tokyo