

Amateur Sumo - If We Didn't Laugh We'd Have To Cry

A few points to ponder for those running the amateur side of sumo

by Mark Buckton

Don't get me wrong with what you are about to read – I love amateur sumo. It's a fantastic sport! I love it to death! Can't get enough of it! Almost every weekend, at the height of the Tokyo summer, I find myself somewhere or other watching elementary school kids, junior high or high school boys or sometimes university students preparing for the big leagues as they go through their paces.

But, whilst loving the sport is one thing, loving those running the amateur show behind the scenes is another, and it is to those at the top I address this piece.

Gentlemen, for the most part, this wonderful sport is being run into the ground. Enough is enough!

Please, please, please, take a step back, have a look at how little the sport has advanced over the past few years despite the promise and interest shown at early international events - and then take a good, long, hard look in the mirror.

Are you part of the disease-ridden malaise currently surrounding this centuries old form of wrestling, or are you part of the cure?

Are you more interested in the status your respective post(s) provide than how to best promote true, long-lasting interest in sumo? Do you have more time for those on your side and in your corner than those questioning you and the status quo; those looking to better the 'amasumo' infrastructure by way of discussion and throwing ideas on the table – those with a desire to greatly

increase international acceptance of amateur sumo?

Are you in sumo purely for the love of it – or partly for the perks it brings?

What do you think about the recent Sumo World Championships in Thailand – the event in Chiang Mai that saw the International Sumo Federation attract less than one third of the 86ⁱ supposed member nations to the year's leading sumo event?

Is the amateur sport as international as you would have us believe given these dismal numbers and, if so, are the powers that be interested in devolving organizational power at the international level to a wider spectrum of the global population than the limited, some might say token foreigners, listed as people of rank in the set-up today.

Will amateur (men's and women's) sumo ever be headed by a non-Japanese official? By a woman? By a foreign woman? Will hell freeze over first?

Will the sumo-following press and fan base ever be kept professionally abreast of official activities – on the dohyo and off – the AGMs, the EGMs, the pre-tournament draws etc. etc. etc? Do you even want the press made aware of the goings on in the inner sanctums? Would we be pleased at what we found or be left shaking heads?

Are we in the sumo-writing community the enemy or a vehicle upon which you can hitch a lift to

IOC recognition? If the former – why so? If the latter – what are you waiting for?

Should we, fans and writers – often one and the same, folk cut of the same mould - laugh or cry at these futile attempts to have amateur sumo noticed by the wider world?

Are YOU worthy of OUR fandom - let alone our coverage?

Will you ever go on record and answer the above?

Approached repeatedly by SFM, ahead of the Thailand tournament, never once was an official response received. You were thus left in the WWW dark publicity-wise come the big day.

Why were no press packs sent out? Why were no press releases issued? Where are your PR men and women? Do you have any? Do you need help? We are listening. We can help.

Why, when pushed on this lack of action by the supervisory Association of (the) IOC Recognised International Sports Federations, did you opt for silence on that front too?

Will you even read this piece?

I just pray you understand it and when reading, remember us – the fans of sumo – the folk confused as to whether we should laugh or cry.

ⁱ SFM understands Azerbaijan applied to join, and were accepted by the IFS at the event.