



Let's Hear From You! What Made You A Fan? Memories From YokotanoHarry

by Harry Friesner

*Each issue of SFM, We'll ask one of you
to tell us something about you and sumo.
Think you have something readers would like to know?
Write our letters section! Enjoy.*

Now that I have consented to contribute to this column, all I can think of is that I really don't know much about sumo. Even though I can report nearly 40 years of experience, I haven't bothered to learn more than who the makunouchi rikishi are and a few juryo. I have gotten more from SFM, the Forum, and several individuals too many to mention here because I'd probably leave someone out. I'll credit Mike's Sumotalk and Fantasy Sumo, as my first contact and game entered.

Forty years of experience is actually more like a 40th anniversary because there was a huge break after leaving Japan in 1973. Stationed at Yokota AB in Jan 1968, I overheard some guys talking about sumo, particularly Jesse. The basho was on and it was his first in makuuchi. I invited myself to the NCO Club Stag Bar (those have probably been outlawed since, or maybe they now have Doe Bars, I dunno) that day to watch. Hadn't been watching any TV as there was no translation then, and I sure didn't know what was going on. I started going and watching the matches. They had a simple pool going on where you picked the winner of

each match. It cost \$1 to get in the pool, winner take all. Of course Takamiyama was everybody's favorite, but disappointments were common. His physique and style (winning and losing) were very similar to Tosanoumi, only I think Jesse was much smaller in the legs and top heavy. I didn't play that first basho, but enjoyed the happy hour (10 ct Carling Black Label beers, the official beverage of the Viet Nam era), conveniently starting at 1600, basho time. Got in the March pool, and yes, beginner's luck, won it all, almost \$50 if memory serves. Had to buy a round. Part of the routine was to buy a Japan Times each day, read Andy Adam's column, and check the list of that day's matches.

I checked the banzuke for that Hatsu Basho for some currently familiar names. Kitanofuji and Kotozakura (deceased Sadagotake) were ozeki. Taiho, Kashiwado and Sadanoyama were yokozuna. Tochiazuma 1 was M2. Sorry, don't remember anything else about that first basho. This was the time of the great Taiho-Kashiwado era, and they had some terrific matches. Some said at the time that Kashiwado was a great yokozuna, but was just outclassed

by Taiho (I was shocked to see a recent picture of aged feeble Taiho visiting with Hakuho.). Historical highlights of those first years would be Taiho's 45-match win streak broken by Toda with a controversial decision. I also got to see little 99kg Wakanami win a basho.

Fast forward to Kitanofuji as yokozuna. We had a guy in the pool/club who had befriended Kita early in his career. We were able to get an invitation to Kita's heya for morning practice, and had chanko lunch with all of the rikishi. Kita later showed us his room and collection of Johnny Walker Black, including those that a few of us brought along. Another time we all went on senshuraku to a basho which Kita won. We must have worn coat and tie as I have some pics of us at his victory party that evening. It was a great time.

After the sudden death of yokozuna Tamanoumi in 1971, Kita was left alone at the top until Jan. 1973. Kotozakura was promoted after that basho. Koto and Kita had lots of good clashes. I didn't get to see that promotion as we had just left Japan for duty at a desert outpost in SW

Oklahoma. Future yokozuna in that January basho were ozeki Koto and Wajima, komusubi Kitanoumi, and M3 Mienoumi. Takanohana 1, Daikirin and Kiyokuni were also ozeki. Jesse

was sekiwake.

I lost touch for many years until the technology of Primestar and then Dish Network TV arrived here in the flyover purple state of

Missouri got me going again. I'm now happily playing some of the games every two months, and enjoying reading all the sumo news here on the Net.

