

Let Sumo Reign and the Numbers Fall by the Wayside

by Eric Blair

Sumo is a sport unlike all others.

It is a sport in which form, technique and the manner in which a victory is secured is oftentimes of more importance to its long-term fans than the accompanying shioboshi. Or, rather, it used to be.

Sumo has its faults, its woes but, when the chips are down, when all the cards are laid face-up, sumo is about honor. Methodology is important and the journey is just as important, if not more so than the destination. Or, rather, it used to be.

This is not a sport for men in basements, in white coats with unkempt hair poring over historical records in search of patterns or evidence of 'greatness.' Sumo should never be reduced to binary code to establish strength ratings, the most common kimarite and historical comparisons of career records.

Sumo is about the smell of

bintsuke, the sights and sounds that occur when two men clash, clad only in loincloths – as their predecessors have done for generations, for centuries – as the men following in their footsteps will continue to do.

The Japanese so very rarely use figures to determine the best rikishi. They, sumo fans and even casual observers, bored housewives and the like 'just know' who these men are.

Talent recognition for those actively and even passively watching sumo over a period of several years is a natural side effect of time served. Time served trumps any reference library or magazine collection on the planet but should not be hurried through. Too soon, the earliest memories of the excitement felt when sat near a dohyo or passing by a famous rikishi fade and are lost. Unlike prison, time served as a sumo fan should be a pleasure – not an exercise in memory retention of career stats and mawashi colors.

Reduce sumo to numbers, charts and figures in a database and you remove its character.

Base your passion for a sport on the e-games played during a basho and you'll be more interested in the results you are putting up than the action on the dohyo.

Ignore the games for one basho – or at least cut back. Watch bout after bout after bout after bout and then look at a database of your choosing. See the difference in the meaning of each and every number listed when you truly understand the effort it took to obtain them for although sumo can help produce graphs and the like, the reverse will never be the case.

Get back to basics, get away from your overly eager scientific analyses – and enjoy the sumo for what it is.

Life, as well as sumo, is more enjoyable that way.