



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



by Kinichi Suematsu

***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.***

To date we have featured many fans of Japan's national sport born long after all WWII hostilities raged. Many recall first impressions of sumo coming via TV broadcasts.

Fortunately this time out we will get an insight into what made a fan of a man born before most - in the midst of WWI – a time before even radio had made much of an imprint on global, let alone Japanese, sports coverage. His name is Kinichi Suematsu.

Sumo's 31st yokozuna Tsunenohana, (former sekiwake) Dewagatake and, when compared to the 206cm Dewagatake, a relative dwarf, (former ozeki) Onosato at 164cm constitute my own first memories of watching sumo live. Today in my 92nd year, I don't imagine many of your readers will be able to say the same.

To be honest, I don't remember the exact year but it would have been in my early years in elementary school (1922-28) when I lived with my family in a small

mining area of Hokkaido.

At the time – approximately 1924 or 25 – the rikishi from Dewanoumi Beya came to our town on a jungyo and I had never seen such big men. I thought they were living giants and I was so impressed by their size, but remember, I was only a nipper myself – probably still under 10-years-old.

I think I watched the event with my father and while I don't remember who won or anything else really bar the fact that I was in the presence of such large men, sumo, from that day onwards became a part of my own life, and has been a sport I have enjoyed since – through the times of Azumafuji, Futabayama, Taiho and Kashiwado and into the present.

I still recall the day, many years later when I learnt with regret of the death of Onosato over in China – about 1938 or 39 perhaps – far from home and in relative disgrace. At the time I think I was a university student or just

starting work, and that was a sad time, but today seems so long ago. As a boy in pre-war Japan, we were still taught the various martial arts (kendo / judo etc) in school as Japan was a nation strengthening itself militarily. The teachings of Confucius also formed part of our education.

At the time I had no idea that I would be asked to recollect such early events over eight decades later but I can say to anyone reading this that sumo still forms a part of my life as I always watch the tournaments on TV at home and have twice been to the new Ryogoku Kokugikan in recent years – once to see a honbasho with one of my children, the other time to see the retirement ceremony of a local sekitori I supported along with most in my area – (former) Ozeki Tochiazuma.

For the past eleven years, Kinichi Suematsu has been a teacher-cum-living Encyclopedia on things Japanese, 'accessed' almost weekly by SFM's Editor-in-Chief, Mark Buckton.