

# Fiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiinally, Eric has come back to SFM!!!

*by Eric Blair*

Every sport has its groupies. Some are men, some women, some young, some old – in sumo circles, some much closer to the grave than the womb, but in most cases, whatever the sport, the attention they heap on their chosen idols is usually a case of one-way adoration; more often than not unrequited – oftentimes ignored.

Did that sting? Sound like someone you know? Then stop reading now!

Think about groupies for a moment, of those reading this piece in nations the globe over, how many can, hand on beating heart, say, “Nope, I know no sports groupies” – and do so with a straight face, or at least without one eyebrow raised in suspicion? If you are that man or woman – look down at your nose – ‘tis growing and you’ll soon end up like Gerard Depardieu!

Perhaps sumo groupie is too strong a term with which to label the recent appearance of over-eager fans attracted to the sport. Perhaps it just isn’t specific enough. Let’s narrow it down then: imagine someone at a heya early on. It’s taken them hours / days to get there! Time off work a prerequisite (if they work at all!), hols from work, family left ignored. They have seen the junior rikishi put through their paces as they wait impatiently for a sekitori to arrive. Any sekitori will generally do. He does, the groupie tries to make eye contact and get some sort of visual acknowledgement of their existence – anything, a scrap from that sekitori table recognizing the groupie as being in his presence

would more than make their day! An hour or two later, a session of gruelling, oftentimes gut wrenching butsumaki follows and has ended for the day. The lads are in need of a shower, a drink and some food but it is now that the rikishi – the sekitori in particular – face their greatest challenge of the day. What is the last thing these lads want to see as they try to coax their heaving innards back into their proper place in time to accept food again?

- answer – NOT wide-eyed first timers / second timers gaping like goldfish and bent on reporting everything uttered by a rikishi of any rank as gospel, irrespective of either side’s degree of comprehension of languages used; ‘conversations’ that often appear online in the form of “I was chatting to so-and-so yesterday, and he said....”

Don’t get me wrong – being a fan of sumo is cool! Great stuff! Love it myself and hopefully always will. I am in my second decade of stable attendance – but know when to speak, when to walk away, and that each of the lads needs his own space, whatever his rank.

What pisses me off now though, and reduces others with less vocal venom than the Great EB to smirks, are the idiots out there passing off chance conversations and coincidental street meetings with sekitori A or rikishi B, as regular contact with ‘friends’. Heaven forbid if one of those rikishi casts a friendly smile the way of the buffoon in question. He’d have less in the way of unwarranted and unwanted ‘payback’ were he to head down to

the riverbanks of an African river to slap a sleeping croc square across the chops!

Alternately, there are the types who come face to face with a rikishi they know – perhaps now in service as an oyakata – and then they go all quivery as their knees pack in, they lose the ability to speak and consider themselves in the presence of semi-deities.

Which are worse? The blushers or the blaggers?

Groupies – listen to me, please please. The rikishi, from the yokozuna pair to the lowest-ranked jonokuchi rikishi we don’t even recognize don’t need this. They certainly don’t deserve it!

I am close to several lads and lasses in and around sumo out there – fans and ‘insiders’ alike. Many have their own contacts inside the sport. Few of these contacts of the rikishi, however, ever relate their private conversations with the big guys to the masses on online chat sites / forums and lists for the simple reason that these chats are private. Gimme a P, an R an I.... get the pic?

The rikishi need their private time too – we all do. Even you – yes you, groupie!

I do know that only a select few are now, or ever will be, aware of the bits left out of SFM interviews because even then, with the tape recorder rolling, respect for the individual takes over. Our own need to be noticed – and SFM does need to be noticed to exist – ranks a distant second to the wish of an

interviewee to retain a degree of normalcy and privacy in his life.

Think about it – someone turns up outside your home very one early morning after your daily workout. You haven't even had your 'constitutional' yet! They hang about, jump up and down when you walk out or into their view. Some chuck unwanted prezies your way.

Others ask for pics – stand strangely, say “peace” mumble and mutter something that only resembles Japanese – a well-timed ‘masu’ at the end of some gibberish to sound at least a bit sumoish – just a little bit like Nihongo. Most speak in an

incomprehensible tongue as far as the rikishi go; the lads are forced to autograph things they suspect will later appear for sale – or as avatars, cough!

And then, worthy of its own paragraph this one – there are the invites – invites to places you don't want to go, with people you don't even know.

What do you do as a rikishi targeted such, in the sights of someone close to double, triple, quadruple your age? Play dumb like EB here when the office obatarian invites him to lunch again, smile, suck in air? Nope, a rikishi will more often than not sign something in a way they won't

be able to read anyway, and hope they'll walk away – backwards best, keeping one eye on your every rikishi move – perhaps, fingers crossed now – into a busy bus lane? Hopefully with oncoming!

Personally, were I a rikishi faced with such groupies, I'd run back indoors, shake my head, think WTF several hundred times over, wash the groupie-crushed hand, spray something to get rid of the excess perfume left in the air – most groupies of course being perfume junkies – and head to my local shrine for purification rites. Oh, and give the prezies to a jonokuchi nobody – make myself look all warm and caring.