



JAPANESE WRESTLERS

E-ASIA
university of oregon libraries

JAPANESE WRESTLERS

THE JAPAN MAGAZINE		
A REPRESENTATIVE MONTHLY OF THINGS JAPANESE		
Contents for April, 1912		
THEIR IMPERIAL MAJESTIES EMPEROR AND EMPRESS OF JAPAN	Frontispiece	
THE IMPERIAL CHERRY BLOSSOM PARTY	Araki 674	
THE AMERICAN EMBASSY IN TOKYO	A. 676	
"THE WAY OF THE GODS"	Araki 683	
IBUCYOSHI II	S. Yamazaki 689	
FLORIST-GARDENS IN JAPAN 692	
THE JAPANESE GIRL (Poem) 697	
JAPANESE SCHOOLS OF PAINTING II 698	
THE GENJI HONDAIYARI	Dr. J. Ingram Bryan 705	
JAPANESE WRESTLERS 707	
JAPANESE PLAYS 713	
AN OLD SHINE	Engene Francis 716	
AROUND THE IBRACHI :		
(a) A Trial of Arms 717	
(b) The Robe of Feathers 718	
SPRING WILL COME (Poem)	Flora Best Harris 720	
THE FLAG OF THE RISING SUN 723	
CURRENT JAPANESE THOUGHT	The Editor 725	
PROPRIETOR Isidoro Hayakawa	MANAGER V. Eryon Yamashita	EDITOR Dr. J. Ingram Bryan
Subscription:		
In the Japanese Empire, per year in advance The 1.00		
In Foreign Countries, (post paid) per year in advance The 1.50		
Single Copy, 45 cents, 1/2 25c		
Foreign subscriptions should remit in P.O. or express money orders, to The Japan Magazine Co.		
The Japanese rate is equivalent to fifty cents U.S. currency, or two shillings English currency		
Published by The Japan Magazine Co., 3, Yushima, Utsunomiya-cho, Kagurazaki, Tokyo		
Agents:		
Brunton's, New York	- El Nippon, City of Mexico	
E. L. Mackay, London, W. C.	Koyama & Co., J. Wharfedale St., London	
Stewart & Kidd Co., Chelmsford	The International Book Store, Bangkok	
S. P. Morgan & Co., Ltd., Tokyo	Kyo-Bun-Kwan, Tokyo	
Kawanishi-Shoin, Ltd., Kyoto	Koga & Walsh Co., Yokohama	

VOLUME TWO APRIL, 1912 NUMBER TWELVE

PAGES 707 - 710

JAPANESE WRESTLERS

[p. 707]

WRESTLING is, *par excellence*, the national sport of Japan, occupying a status similar to cricket in Great Britain and baseball in America. In the wrestling seasons, which occur every January and May, crowds of all classes in Japan flock to the enormous amphitheatres to witness the feats of physical strength performed by their favourite wrestlers, and to patronize the national sport.

Japanese wrestling is so indigenous as to be unlike that of any other country. Western wrestling is more like what the Japanese call *judo*, in which the contestants may fall and struggle on the ground for the mastery, the victor coming out of the match on top; but in wrestling neither of the contestants may fall nor in any way come in contact with the ground without thereby suffering defeat. If there be any class status, *judo* may be regarded as being to the upper classes what the old lyrical drama was to the lovers of the histrionic, a high class sport never given as a public exhibition: while wrestling is patronized by all classes and held in a large arena, with tickets sold for admission. The experts in *judo* were usually great *samurai*, but wrestlers come from any class able to produce heavy physique.

There are few phases of Japanese life that do not seek a religious sanction, and wrestling, or *sumo*, appears to be no exception to the rule. Consequently the origin of the sport is ascribed to two deities of the mythic age, *Take-mikadzuchino-mikoto* and *Takeminakata-nomikoto*, who decided their strength by the first wrestling match ever performed. Tradition further relates that in the reign of the Emperor Sujin (556 A. D.) one Nomino-Sukune, a man of Izumo, entered into a wrestling match with a man named Tama-no-Kehaya, of Yamato, in which the latter was not only worsted but killed by a kick. The fatality no doubt did something to humanize the sport, for kicking is now not permitted. In the days of the Emperor Mommu (797 A. D.) holidays were set apart for wrestling, the Emperor honouring the occasion with his presence. These wrestling meets drew contestants from all parts of the Empire, and were somewhat on a par with the Olympic games of Greece. As a result of these contests champions naturally arose, called *hote*, the second in honour being termed *wakite*. These Imperial wrestlers, unlike those of to-day, wore a kind of hunting jacket called *karigiru*, with short pants and a high cap. It is said that the Emperor enjoyed the sport sufficiently to witness some fifteen matches in a single day. Wrestling from this time was all the rage as a sport down to the year 897, after which the Imperial house ceased to be so much attracted by it, when it began to decline, not being revived again until the time of the Emperor Gotoba in 1185. As an evidence of the degree to which the sport had gone out of fashion, it may be mentioned that when the latter Emperor wished to have a wrestling contest, umpires could not be found in Kyoto, the capital, and the only one left in the Empire, one Yoshida Iyetsuzu of Echi-

[p. 708]

zen, had to be sent for; and from that time the right of conducting the ceremonial pertaining to wrestling matches was conferred on the family of Yoshida by Imperial favour, under the title of

Oikaze. The next great wrestling match recorded in Japanese history is placed in the year 1791, when the Tokugawa Shogun, Iyenari, gave a wrestling entertainment to his friends in Edo castle, from which time the Tokugawa shoguns became patrons of the sport and sent it forth on a more prosperous career.

Wrestling as a profession had its origin in a peculiar manner. Whether it was a purely religious inception must be left to individual judgment. The priests of the great temple of *Kaneij* were at a loss how to smooth and harden the ground in front of the sacred structure: so they gave a wrestling match, knowing that the thousands it would attract, would in a short time tramp the ground into the smoothness and firmness of a long trodden floor of earth. This was in the year 1624 when the Shogun, Iyemitsu, built a new temple at Uyeno. In the year 1630 the government issued a license for public exhibitions of wrestling at Yotsuya, Edo, at which place contests went on for five or six days. These matches had to be held on fine days; for the sport went on under the blue sky in a vast enclosure.

The increasing number of wrestlers now formed themselves into a corporation, with branches, or guilds, all over the Empire, those in Osaka and Tokyo being always the more prominent. Of course at present the Tokyo wrestlers are regarded as superior in the art to all others in Japan. The wrestlers' guild divides its members into two *camp*s, called the eastern and western camps; and out of those some 30 or 40 of superior dexterity are selected for the public contests, and given a position above the less skilful. These first-class wrestlers are known as *Maku-no-uchi*, or men within the curtain, and the champion among them is called the *Ozeki*, with the *Sekiwaki* as second. The champion wrestlers of both the eastern and western camps, after some ten years of steady achievement, are raised to the position of *Yokozuna*, or champion-belted men, this honour being conferred by the house of Yoshida, already referred to as holding Imperial permission to umpire the wrestling ceremonies. These wrestlers of the eastern and western camps meet every January and May in the largest amphitheatre in Japan, the *Koku-gikan* in Tokyo, and test their muscles for ten consecutive days. The *gyoji*, or umpires, decide the contests, and in case of doubt, there is a court of appeal consisting of *toshiyori* or elders, made up from superannuated wrestlers of belted status. Wrestlers who gain successive victories are in time accorded the honour of *ozeki*, while those who repeatedly fail are turned down and put without the curtain.

The great amphitheatre at Ryogoku, Tokyo, capable of accommodating 13,000 spectators, is open in the season from 5 a.m. until five in the afternoon. Thither thousands crowd, and during the tournaments the applause of so enormous a multitude is something not to be heard in any other country. The more enthusiastic become almost frantic over the exploits of their favourite wrestlers; while those who see their heroes suffering defeat, pray for a return of luck.

[p. 709]

Usually the best of the game is on about nine in the morning. In the center of the vast arena is a booth, canopied by a tent-like structure on four pillars, under which is a ring, inside of which the wrestlers meet to try their strength. Around this arena circle four big galleries thronged with the excited multitude. Within a square of 28 feet is described the wrestling ring, all covered with soft sand. From the eastern and western sides contestants appear at the call of the umpire. The latter, holding aloft his war-fan, *karauchiwa*, takes his position in a somewhat dramatic manner. By the side of the four pillars supporting the canopy, are seated four elder wrestlers as tribunes. A speiler now announces

the names of the two men about to close upon each other. Then the huge bodies of the veterans appear moving slowly toward the ring. Their great muscles stand out on their heavy limbs like mountain ranges; and their bodies are naked with the exception of the loin-cloth and the wrestling belt. They enter the *dohyo*, or ring, and the umpire in his green *kimono* and *eboshi*, lifts on high the fan, and orders them to 'eye each other.' As they prepare to do so they place their hands on their legs just above the knees and stamp from one foot to the other in a dramatic way, stooping and facing each other for a moment, when one, or both, is seized with the passion for attack; but if one seizes without the other being ready, they must begin over again. It often takes what seems a long time for both to have the spirit of attack at the same time. Before assuming position the combatants stretch out their arms horizontally and bring their hands together with a loud clap. This is to show that the hands contain no weapon. The practice is suggestive of what may have happened in the days when wrestling was not always decided by strength. Every move of the struggle is now watched carefully by the umpire, and all fouling is prevented. The contestants strive to take hold of the belt. One of them succeeds and then tries to prevent the other from succeeding. When both get the belt firmly in the hands, there is a terrific trial of physical strength to see which can lift or push the other outside the ring. As soon as either of them touch the ground with any part of the body except the feet, or is put outside the ring, the umpire declares the decision. If their strength appear equal, he calls a 'draw.' If both should fall together, so that the result seems doubtful, the umpire calls *azukari*, decision reserved. The aid of the four tribunes beside the pillars is now called in.

The tricks of the art are many and interesting. Of the forty-eight dodges admitted in the sport, four are regarded as fundamental to the art of wrestling: *nage*, to throw; *kake*, to trip; *hineri*, to twist; and *sori*, to lift up. In practice, however, it is said that no less than 200 different tricks have been noticed among wrestlers. One of the most peculiar tricks witnessed by the writer at a great contest when the Imperial Crown Prince was present, was that of a very fat wrestler in jumping up like a goat and butting his opponent on the breast with his head, and then, having started him going backwards, to push him outside the ring with his hands. Another wrestler put his hand under the chin of a giant and hurled him outside the ring. The champion Hitachiyama, appeared to take the match he entered into, in a

[p. 710]

calm and indifferent manner. He allowed his opponent to seize him and was simply content to lean his heavy body against him and keep him struggling till he began to *blow*, when the champion embraced him and lifted him outside the ring in a manner so quick and simple that one could hardly see how it was done.



INTERIOR OF THE KOKUGI-KAN (WRESTLING HALL).

The wrestling goes on till about two o'clock when there is an intermission. At this time all the first-class wrestlers perform a peculiar ceremony by marching into the arena with their professional aprons on, turning to the north and clapping their hands, stamping their feet and bowing to the guests of honour. Last of all comes the champion with a wrestler before him and one behind, as attendants, the one behind holding an upright sword. After the *yokozuna* wrestlers have gone through this ceremony, all the others come in wearing their ornamental aprons, and do likewise. These ornamental aprons are gorgeous in the extreme, embroidered in heavy silk and costing some hundreds of *yen*, even for the cheapest. Some of the wrestlers have to buy them, but favourites have them presented by patrons and friends.



A WRESTLING MATCH AT THE KOKUGI-KAN.

The umpires appear to be almost as important a class as the wrestlers, their manner of conducting the matches is followed with interest by all the spectators, as a mistake is unpardonable. The standing of

the umpire is known by the colour of the cord on his war-fan, the highest grade of umpire carrying a purple cord and being ranked equal to a champion wrestler. At present only two are entitled to this rank, Kimura Shonosuke and Kimura Shozaburo. This rank is permitted to appear in the *tabi* and sandals, and a sword in the belt. Umpires of the second rank sport a red cord in the war-fan, and are allowed to wear sandals in the arena, there being two of this rank at present. The third grade has a cord twisted white and red in the fan and must appear barefooted in the arena, the number of these umpires now being ten. The fourth rank of umpire has a cord of green and green white and appears in bare feet.

All professional wrestlers are known under assumed names, those selected usually having reference to place of birth or some favourite scene in nature. For example the greatest wrestler in Japan is called Hitachiyama, mountain of Hitachi; another is called Komaga-take, after one of the great mountain peaks of the Empire; another has taken the name of Tachiyama, or sword mountain, while the champion of the eastern camp, Umegatani, is Plum Valley. The income of a wrestler is not large, as he seldom receives more than 20 *yen* for a tournament, and has to pick up what he can by making tours in the provinces between seasons. They are also allowed a share from the wrestlers' association and sometimes they receive presents from patrons. Their simplicity and apparent disinterestedness as compared with men of the world have made them pets of society from ancient times, so that on the whole they do not come off so badly. To become a wrestler a man must have a big frame to begin with, and then he has to undergo severe training under a professional wrestler till he is judged fit to come into the ring. Those not tall, try to make themselves heavy and stout by dieting, an attempt in which no one that has seen them, can say they have failed.