



SUMO 101

The national sport of Japan, *sumo*, is rich in history and tradition. Wrestlers adhere to a strict lifestyle, and unlike American sports, there is no off-season.

SUMO TERMS

Chanko-nabe = A rich and filling stew with vegetables such as tofu, cabbage and bean sprouts mixed with seafood, chicken, pork or beef, and seasonings.

Heya = A “sumo stable,” the building where sumo wrestlers eat, sleep and train.

Mawashi = A heavy silk loincloth or belt worn by a sumo wrestler during a bout. Many winning tricks involve maneuvers with a grip on the opponent’s *mawashi*.

Rikishi = Literally, “strong man,” a general term for sumo wrestlers.

Sumotori = Another term for *rikishi*, or sumo wrestlers.

HISTORY

Sumo is a form of wrestling with deep origins in Japanese legend and history. The sport dates back over 1,500 years. Ancient wall paintings suggest sumo was performed in prehistoric times as part of agricultural rituals for the gods to determine the success of farmers’ crops. Several stories exist of sumo matches held in the seventh and eighth centuries as part of Imperial court ceremonies. In 1909, sumo was established as the national sport of Japan. Today it is a widely popular form of professional entertainment.

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Sumo wrestlers must join a sumo stable, or *heya*. This is where they live, eat, sleep and train throughout their career. An average *heya* contains about 15 wrestlers. Life is hierarchical, with lower-ranked wrestlers cooking, serving and doing chores for the higher-ranked wrestlers. The stable master or higher-ranked wrestlers may hit others with bamboo sticks as a form of discipline.

DIET

Sumo wrestlers begin their day with a hard practice, so they do not eat breakfast. Lunch is a communal meal of *chanko-nabe*, a nutritious, high-calorie stew which is served with large portions of rice and many side dishes. Wrestlers eat huge amounts of food and nap immediately following a meal in order to gain weight.

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ATTIRE

Rikishi practice and wrestle in a *mawashi*, a thick belt about 30 feet in length that is wrapped around the body several times and knotted securely in the back. It can weigh around 10 pounds. During practice, wrestlers wear *mawashi* made of canvas; during tournaments, professionally-ranked wrestlers wear *mawashi* made of silk. Depending on their wrestling styles, some sumo wrestlers wear their *mawashi* very tight, so an opponent cannot get a good grip, or somewhat loose, because the slack helps them to avoid being jerked quickly.

Anytime a *rikishi* leaves the sumo stable, he must dress in the traditional Japanese *kimono* or *yukata* (light cotton dressing gown). Whether in practice or outside of the *heya*, a sumo wrestler must wear his hair in a *chonmage*, or topknot. During tournaments or special occasions, a higher-ranked wrestler wears his hair in an elaborate *oichomage*, which resembles a ginkgo leaf.

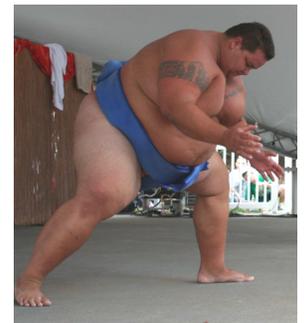
TRAINING

Each day, younger and lower-ranked wrestlers must wake for practice first, around 4 or 5 a.m. Practice consists of many flexibility and strength exercises, followed by challenge matches.



Shiko

Shiko = Stomping in large, sweeping motions, alternating legs. *Shiko* is a form of both exercise and ritual; it is done both to train the lower half of the body and to sweep away evil spirits underfoot.



Suriashi

Suriashi = Leg strengthening exercise done in a crouched position. A wrestler bends his elbows with his hands in front and steps forward with alternating legs, keeping low to the ground.



Matawari

Matawari = Thigh splits. A wrestler must sit in a split position and lean forward until his stomach touches the ground. If he cannot do it alone, another wrestler will hold his legs or push him down.

Sonkyo = Squatting down with a straight back, hands placed on the knees, breathing deeply, *sonkyo* is almost a meditative state.



Sonkyo

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RANKING

Sumo wrestlers are ranked in a pyramidal hierarchy. A winning record allows a wrestler to move to a higher ranking, while a losing record moves him to a lower ranking. Lifestyle and treatment inside and outside of the *heya* is based on this ranking.

The top five rankings are collectively referred to as the *makuuchi* division. The highest ranking is *yokozuna*, or sumo Grand Champion. Only a very small handful of wrestlers have achieved this status. The next highest ranking below the *makuuchi* division is called *juryo*. Only one in ten wrestlers achieves this status. All other rankings below *juryo* are still apprentice stages. A *juryo* wrestler is considered a professional. He begins to receive a monthly salary as well as other bonuses and perks, such as receiving permission to marry, having attendants assigned to take care of his personal needs, and wearing a silk *kimono* and *mawashi*.

TOURNAMENTS

There are six major sumo tournaments (*basho*) a year, held every other month and lasting two weeks each. Various exhibitions are held between tournaments, but they have no affect on the ranking system.

Centered inside a sumo arena is the *dohyo*, an 18-square-foot clay area where the sumo bouts take place. The inner ring is 15 feet in diameter, covered in sand and marked by straw bales. The *dohyo* is blessed by a Shinto priest prior to tournaments. A *gyoji* is a sumo referee.

Wrestlers participate in a variety of pre-bout rituals, including *shiko* leg stomps and throwing salt to drive away evil spirits and purify the ring. Opponents face each other, crouch down and place their knuckles on the ground, staring at each other in a sort of mental battle, called *niramiiai*. The sumo



match begins at the moment of *tachiai*, the initial clash when opponents rush at each other in synchrony with great force. Matches are often determined at this moment.

A bout is lost if a wrestler steps or is forced out of the ring, or touches the ground with anything but the soles of his feet. Punching, eye-poking, and kicking above the knees are among the illegal sumo moves.

After a match, both wrestlers again face each other on opposite sides of the ring and bow.

JAPANESE FESTIVAL *RIKISHI*

Name:	Eric “Fats” Gaspar	William “Tyler” Hopkins	Wayne Vierra
Fighting name:	Koryu	Sunahama	Kamikiiwa
Translates to:	“Rising dragon”	“Sandy beach”	“Stone god”
Height:	6’ 4”	6’2”	6” 1”
Weight:	280 lbs.	550 lbs.	317 lbs.
Hometown:	Waimanalo, Hawaii	Kailua, Hawaii	Hauula, Hawaii
Stable:	Takasago	Takasago	Azumazeki
Highest rank:	Makushita	Juryo	Makushita

All three retired from professional sumo wrestling due to injury.