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**Wrestling with Globalisation:
Amateur sumo as a nascent global sport**

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ABSTRACT

In the past century, amateur sumo has grown from being a Japanese sport to one which aspires to be recognised on the global sporting landscape.

Amateur sumo began in the early 20th century, building upon the sumo performed in local communities throughout Japan and on the model that professional sumo provided. Sumo was also performed by Japanese immigrants in parts of North and South America as one of their cultural links to the Japanese homeland. However, it was not until the 1980s that amateur sumo emerged as an international sport. Buoyed by a general wave of internationalisation (*kokusaika*) in Japanese society, foreign sumo teams were invited to train and compete in Japan in the mid-1980s. Although invited mainly from the Japanese diaspora, increasingly participants came from countries with no ethnic links to Japan. This practice ultimately led to the first Sumo World Championships being held in 1992. The International Sumo Federation (IFS) was inaugurated at the same time, guided and controlled by Japanese sumo administrators.

As IFS membership grew, the administrative model of international sumo expanded. In 1995 continental sumo unions were formed to relieve pressure from the IFS having to run the sport from the centre. These continental unions were given relative autonomy to develop the sport within their regions, and this allowed the national sumo federations a degree of flexibility as well. The sport began to be reterritorialised in different locations, where each added their own meaning and practices to amateur sumo. At the same time, the IFS sought recognition from the International Olympic Committee so that it might become an official Olympic sport. This alignment put the onus on amateur sumo to transform itself to adhere to Olympic ideals. The resultant changes, most notably the inclusion of women into the sport, have aligned amateur sumo with global standards adhered to by other Olympic sports. Furthermore, the developments and interactions within the amateur sumo community demonstrate aspects of a “complex connectivity” that suggests the emergence of a nascent global sport. It is this contemporary face of amateur sumo that is explored here.

Through participant observation and a series of interviews with key amateur sumo participants in Europe and Oceania, this thesis argues that the transformation within amateur sumo from internationalisation to its current global aspirations can be traced through understanding the history and practice of the sport both in Japan and overseas, and it demonstrates how globalisation processes are contingent on the agency of individuals and small groups.

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However, the greatest toll has been on my fantastic wife, Philippa, who met me when I had “about a year to go” on my thesis. Several years and deadlines later, she has shouldered the burden of an often ‘absent’ husband when it came to weekends and evenings spent writing, not to mention her being the primary provider during the final year of writing. My gratitude to her is immense and her fortitude has been the backbone behind my efforts. Our young daughter, Isabel, has inspired me everyday, even if she isn't yet conscious of her impact upon me.

I hope that this thesis can, in some way, bring amateur sumo to a wider audience as a thank you to those within the sport who have assisted me. Many are named within the text, with their approval, but there are countless others who have contributed to this finished product who remain unacknowledged. I hope I have faithfully represented their ideas about our sport.

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INTRODUCTION

Hanah steps up about half a metre onto a square clay platform in the middle of an events hall. A 75 kilogram primary school teacher from the Netherlands, she is 170cm tall and has short, spiky platinum-blond hair. The platform has slightly angled sides, and on its top a circle is marked by small rice-straw bundles laid end-to-end and partially buried into the clay surface. Standing barefoot at the ring's edge, Hanah wears a short-sleeved lycra bodysuit that reaches her ankles. Around her middle is a broad off-white canvas belt which has been passed between her legs before being wound several times tightly around her waist and secured at the back. Across the ring, her opponent is similarly attired, except her black leotard bears a small German crest on the chest. Nicole, an office clerk, is a kilogram or two heavier and perhaps five centimetres taller than Hanah.

The two athletes face one another from their respective sides of the ring (the *dohyō*), lower their heads, and bow from the waist. They squat just inside the marked ring, clasp their hands together, then separate them about a shoulders' width apart and loudly clap. The athletes next arc their arms upwards until splayed at a 45-degree angle above their shoulders to symbolically signify they have no concealed weapons. From their squatting positions, both rise, walk forward and meet in the centre of the ring. It is from this point that they begin to stare at each other, perhaps trying to steel their mind and unsettle their opponent, before squatting once again in the centre, each behind a short white line. For all these slow, deliberate preparations, the match may be over in a matter of seconds. This is sumo.

Pre-bout rituals such as these are carried out whenever a sumo bout is fought. The movements allow the opponents to engage in psychological warfare of a sort and prepare for the actual beginning of the bout, the *tachiai*. Starting from a crouched position in the centre of the *dohyō* with their fists placed on the ground behind their white lines, the sumo athletes will charge forward at one another. Tactically, they are looking to move their opponent with the force of their charge or to gain an advantageous hold on the canvas belt (the *mawashi*). The aim is to throw or push an opponent out of the ring or to make them touch the surface of the *dohyō* with anything other than the soles of their feet.

The key to success is speed, determination, technique, and quick reactions, not necessarily size or bulk.

Although often thought of solely as a Japanese sport, this sumo match is being held in Duisburg, a former steel-making town in western Germany. Hanah and Nicole are competing for the bronze medal in the women's middleweight sumo competition at the 2005 World Games. Held every four years, the World Games brings together sports that have been provisionally recognised as part of the Olympic Movement by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) but which are not in the current programme of the Olympic Games. Sumo, along with sports as diverse as rugby sevens, body-building and squash, is using the exposure provided by the World Games as a springboard to its eventual aim of being included in the Olympic Games.

Atop the *dohyō*, the match is about to start. Overhead, a video screen shows a picture and brief profile of each athlete. Hanah, as the third-ranked middleweight in the world, is perhaps the slight favourite but Nicole has the home crowd advantage and plenty of experience from her eight years in sumo. The stadium announcers fall silent, the sprinkling of television cameras in attendance focus on the *dohyō*, and the invited guests seated in a VIP area close to the action cut short their conversations. The focus is on the three figures gathered under the blazing lights in the centre of the small arena. The referee motions the competitors to initiate the position for the *tachiai*:

“*Kamaete!*” Get ready!

Both athletes drop to their haunches and fix their eyes on their opponent. They are preparing themselves mentally and trying to remain calm and focussed. The crowd is quiet as they wait for the start of the bout.

“*Te o tsuite, Matta nashi!*” Place both hands behind the line – no false starts! Hanah touches her fists to the clay and is ready to begin. She is followed shortly by Nicole, who is now also poised to start.

“*Hakkeyoi!*” Begin!

From the *tachiai* Nicole starts quickly, gains an early advantage and moves Hanah backwards to the edge of the ring. Both have a grasp of the other's *mawashi*, looking to execute a throw. With one last push forward, Nicole breaks Hanah's resistance and the two topple over the edge of the circle onto the hard clay. The winning technique is *yoritaoshi*, a Japanese term meaning 'frontal crush out' and one of 82 possible ways to win in sumo. The referee indicates Nicole is the victor by raising his arm to the east side of the *dohyō*, the side from which she began the bout. The parochial crowd cheers as the announcement is made, first in English and then in German, that the host country has won a bronze medal.

The Japanese sumo terms interspersed in the conversations of the predominantly German audience indicate that some understand the intricacies of what has just happened, most probably from watching delayed satellite television broadcasts or live internet streaming of professional sumo from Japan.¹ Nevertheless, most of the crowd are attending the tournament out of sheer curiosity. For even an uninitiated audience, the sumo contest is relatively easy to comprehend, and the speed of the bouts makes the sport an appealing spectacle. Furthermore, the small competition area is easily viewed from vantage points around the ring, and the objective of the contest, to push an opponent out of the ring or to throw them to its surface, is easily understood. The audience's lack of sumo knowledge has not harmed the ticket sales at all, as almost all the seats are full and tickets for the final day tomorrow had already sold out weeks beforehand.² Throughout the course of this sumo competition the crowd has also been well informed by the stadium announcers about the basics of sumo, what is to happen next, and the significance of the particular rituals the athletes undertake. The events at the World Games seem as much about audience enlightenment as the competition itself.

As Hanah and Nicole return to their respective sides, bow to each other and leave the ring, the referee remains on the *dohyō* awaiting the next competitors. His attire is almost

¹ I was aware that several German fans from an internet sumo forum planned to attend on this day.

² I could not buy a ticket to the second day but was grateful that one of my German contacts arranged to have me work for my entry. In return for positioning advertising signs around the arena for the event logistics manager prior to the competition I was able to loiter for the rest of the day's activities.

identical to a boxing referee: a white long sleeved shirt, white pants, a small black bow-tie, and on his feet are white canvas slip-on shoes. It is his job to bring the athletes together in the centre of the ring, begin the bout with his commands, and to adjudicate the winner of the contest. He is assisted by five judges, seated around the *dohyō*, who look for infractions of the rules and indicate when one of the competitors steps out of the ring or illegally touches the clay surface. The judges also have the right to question the initial decision made by the referee over who has won.³ The group of five judges and the referee work the bouts as a unit. From time to time, perhaps every 15 bouts, they are substituted *en masse* and a new crew takes over for their stint. The officiating team for the medal matches is entirely Japanese, as are almost all the referees and judges in Duisburg. They have flown in as part of a contingent of at least 30 Japanese officials and administrators to run the tournament and officiate the bouts.⁴ Although this tournament is hosted in Germany, only two European officials, a Finnish judge and a Polish referee, are working.⁵

Sitting in the stands behind the action, I take a moment to reflect on the scene before me. Here, the supposedly Japanese sport of sumo is being performed in the heart of the German industrial belt. The matches are controlled by a group of Japanese officials, but the nearly 50 competitors are from around the globe. Hanah, Nicole and the others compete in weight divisions to provide equality of competition,⁶ but here each division

³ To do this, they mount the *dohyō* and hold a short discussion to decide whether to uphold the original decision, to overturn it, or to order a rematch if a winner is not clear.

⁴ In this study ‘officials’ refers to the judges and referees, while ‘administrators’ refers to those running and coaching teams and national sumo federations. All, together with the sumo athletes, are grouped under the term ‘participants’.

⁵ There are European sumo administrators on the sidelines, seated amongst the various dignitaries occupying prime positions close to the action. The dignitaries include top-ranking sumo administrators from Japan, the coaches of the competing athletes, and invited guests from inside and outside the sport. As the competition wears on, there is also a particular sumo researcher who invites himself into these seats to chat with some of these dignitaries.

⁶ Different competitions for men and women were held during the first day in lightweight (males under 85kg; women under 65kg), middleweight (under 115kg; under 80kg) and heavyweight (over 115kg; over 80 kg) divisions. On the second day all competitors, regardless of weight, were scheduled to compete for the fourth weight class, the men’s and women’s openweight divisions. This made the World Games unusual for an international sumo event because athletes are usually only permitted to compete in one of the four weight classes (as happens at the annual Sumo World Championships). This method of allowing a competitor to compete in more than one weight class usually only occurs in some national and continental competitions.

has only eight competitors, with at least one from each continent, in a symbolic move befitting the *World Games*.⁷ Strikingly, at least half of the bouts that I'm witnessing are for women, and the entire competition is part of a sports event that is part of the Olympic Movement. Each of these aspects by itself presents a somewhat unconventional picture of sumo, and in combination they demonstrate the transformed global nature of *amateur* sumo.

I am also struck with the question of why this scene should seem so unconventional. Partly it is because of the presence of women in the competition, something that sets amateur sumo apart from professional sumo. However, more than that, it is perhaps the sheer anonymity under which amateur sumo seems to operate. Although the competitors at the tournament come from 14 countries, the sport is largely unknown beyond the participants involved. How then has amateur sumo become part of the World Games and acquired the necessary kudos and importance to become part of the Olympic Movement, which "is seen as the most coveted sign of recognition" for most sports?⁸ Furthermore, while it is part of this global sporting landscape, amateur sumo seems caught between the worldly exposure this provides and the 'Japanese-ness' of its origins. Maarten Van Bottenburg has suggested that "[s]ports confined to countries with a nondescript international image are gradually coming to be seen as elements of national folklore. They can still arouse plenty of enthusiasm within their national frontiers, but elsewhere they lack the global allure without which people of other countries will not respond to their charms."⁹ Japan has the necessary international recognition and image, and other Japanese martial arts, such as judo and karate, have been able to make the leap from being 'elements of national folklore' to recognised international sports (and an Olympic sport in the case of judo). Nevertheless, amateur sumo remains unrecognised as a

⁷ A Sumo World Championships usually has a number of representatives in each weight division, but at the World Games the criteria was to have representatives from each continent. The eight athletes in each division comprised one representative each from Europe, North America, South America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. In addition, Russia as a particularly strong sumo nation, and the host nation, Germany, were given representation in each division. There were no female athletes representing Oceania as there were no athletes competing in that region at the time. Their places were taken by Japanese, Bulgarian and Russian athletes respectively. However, there were still only seven athletes in both the women's lightweight and the women's middleweight competitions because an athlete in each did not make the correct weight.

⁸ Maarten Van Bottenburg, *Global Games* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 205.

participation sport, perhaps lost in the shadow of professional sumo as a cultural spectacle.

Amateur Sumo: from *kokugi* to *kokusaika* to globalisation

Amateur sumo is a participatory sport, open to men and women of all ages and nationalities and with competitions at local, national, regional and international levels. In contrast to the *rikishi*¹⁰ of professional sumo, who subsume themselves to a lifestyle of sumo training, the involvement of amateur sumo participants may be for recreation as much as for competition.¹¹ Amateur sumo has been governed internationally since 1992 by the International Sumo Federation (IFS),¹² an organisation that oversees the administration of the sport worldwide and is responsible for major international tournaments such as the annual Sumo World Championships and the sumo competition at the quadrennial World Games. The IFS currently has 86 members, each of which is a national federation responsible for the administration and performance of sumo within its borders.¹³ The national federations also belong to their respective continental sumo unions, the intra-regional administrative bodies created to promote mutual assistance between members and to help develop amateur sumo in new countries. While technically just another national federation, the *Nihon Sumō Renmei*,¹⁴ Japan's governing body for amateur sumo, has played an important role in developing the sport worldwide, inaugurating the International Sumo Federation, and supporting it thereafter. This is primarily because of the lengthy existence of the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* as an

¹⁰ Literally meaning 'strong man', this is one of the Japanese terms used to describe a professional sumo athlete, or what in English would be termed a 'sumo wrestler'.

¹¹ There are many participants in Japan and those seeking competition are catered for by club competitions, high school tournaments, university competitions, and corporate leagues at local, regional and national levels. Outside Japan, due to the small number of participants and that there are often only a handful of clubs in each country (sometimes only one), most participants become involved competitively.

¹² The International Sumo Federation is abbreviated to IFS, most probably to avoid a clash with the International Softball Federation (ISF). Nevertheless, some amateur sumo participants still erroneously refer to the ISF. In Japanese, the organisation is referred to by its literal translation, *Kokusai Sumō Renmei*.

¹³ It must be noted that many of the member nations recognised by the International Sumo Federation have not been seen at major international tournaments in recent years, if ever.

¹⁴ The *Nihon Sumō Renmei* (Japan Sumo Federation) is not to be confused with the *Nihon Sumō Kyōkai* (Japan Sumo Association), which is the governing body of professional sumo.

administrative body, the large number of participants in Japan, and the Japanese origins of sumo.¹⁵

Amateur sumo began in Japan in the early 20th century as an extra-curricular activity for young men from the elite urban schools. This activity later developed into organised competitions for university students. Although it was a new, modern sport, amateur sumo was built upon a foundation that acknowledged the popularity and pre-eminence of professional sumo (*ōzumō*) and drew on a history of informal sumo performances such as matches at local festivals, as part of shrine dedications, and as agrarian rites. Developing in the shadow of *ōzumō* meant that amateur sumo was influenced by the developments of the professional sport, even though the two were separate. In 1909, *ōzumō* moved into a modern indoor facility in Tokyo, which was named the Kokugikan. Translating to ‘the hall of national skill,’ the name of this new building influenced the perception of sumo as a national skill (*kokugi*).¹⁶ In this light, amateur sumo became not only a competitive leisure activity but also a national sport. Furthermore, the historical marginalisation of women in *ōzumō* also meant that amateur sumo was a male-only sport from the outset. The foothold in the university sports system gradually developed into amateur competitions being held at levels from school children right through to adults. Prior to World War II these different levels were administered independently but, with creation of the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* in 1946, amateur sumo became more thoroughly organised throughout Japan after the war.

Japanese migration for better economic opportunities began as early as 1868, and many thousands of Japanese left the home islands to set up lives abroad. By the Taishō period (1912-1926) Japanese communities were firmly established in Hawai’i, along the Pacific

¹⁵ This will be considered further in Chapter Two and at other points in this thesis.

¹⁶ Meaning ‘national skill’, but perhaps best approximated in English as ‘national sport’. The use of *kokugi* to refer to sumo and to the new venue for sumo came from a piece written by novelist Emi Suiin for the opening of the new, as yet unnamed, building in June 1909. In this piece he wrote that sumo is the *kokugi* of Japan, and the name was suggested by sumo elder Oguruma to the naming committee. Wakamori Tarō, *Sumo Ima Mukashi* (Tokyo: Sumidagawa Bunko, 2003), 82.

coast of North America, and in parts of South America.¹⁷ Sumo tournaments were held within these communities as part of festivals and other cultural celebrations, and served not only as recreation and competition but as a cultural link back to the Japanese homeland. To enhance these cultural connections, Japanese sumo teams and officials sometimes travelled to these competitions to give exhibitions, compete against locals, and conduct sumo clinics. For example, teams of university student athletes travelled to Hawai'i and the United States before World War II, and such trips continued after the war as well.¹⁸ When travel to South America later became easier, Japanese teams also began visiting Brazilian competitions. From the mid-1970s onwards the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* reciprocated by inviting teams from Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Hawai'i to train and compete in Japan.¹⁹ In this way, amateur sumo became a nascent international sport, although only within the setting of the Japanese diaspora.

Gradually, amateur sumo was spread beyond Japan's diasporic sphere. From the mid-1980s, invitations were extended at different times to foreign nationals resident in Japan and teams from Great Britain, Germany, India and up to a dozen different countries to compete at what became the International Sumo Championships in Tokyo.²⁰ Many of the countries represented at this tournament had only trade ties with Japan rather than a history of lengthy cultural links or a large number of Japanese immigrants. Although they were overwhelmed by Japanese prefectural teams both in skill and in number, the presence of foreign teams demonstrated that amateur sumo had begun to spread beyond Japan's borders and ethnic connections. At the same time, an outward flow of sumo

¹⁷ James Stanlaw, "Japanese emigration and immigration: From Meiji to the modern," in *Japanese Diasporas: Unsung pasts, conflicting presents, and uncertain futures*, ed. Nobuko Adachi (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 47; Jeffrey Lesser, "Japanese, Brazilians, Nikkei: A Short History of Identity Building and Homemaking," in *Searching for Home Abroad: Japanese Brazilians and Transnationalism*, ed. Jeffrey Lesser (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 6.

¹⁸ *Chikara*, "Amachua sumō monogatari 23," November 1974, 15; Kanazashi Motoi, *Sumō Dai-jiten* (Tokyo: Gendai Shokan, 2002), 53. Before World War II the *Nihon Sumō Kyōkai* took professional tours to North America as well. Their activities focused on the Japanese diaspora in Hawaii and California, but of course their activities were undertaken to entertain and make a profit, not solely to foster the development of the sumo communities in these places.

¹⁹ *Chikara*, "Yōkoso! Nichi-Bei shinzen sumō Hawai senshudan rainichi," September 1974, 4; Fujikawa Seikatsu, "Nihon Sumō Renmei 35-nen no ayumi," in *Sumō: Dai 30-kai Zen Nihon Sumō Senshu-ken taikai Kinen-shi*, ed. Nihon Sumō Renmei (Tokyo: Nihon Sumō Renmei, 1982), 62-63.

²⁰ Maarten Van Bottenburg has shown that this model of a sport spreading out from a core country to peripheral areas holds for many sports. Van Bottenburg, *Global Games*, 166.

consciousness was occurring as well. The *Nihon Sumō Renmei* organised goodwill trips of Japanese athletes and officials to visit various cultural and sporting festivals around the world. At each, the Japanese athletes would conduct displays and training sessions, showcasing sumo to new audiences.

These efforts by the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* to internationalise amateur sumo came while Japan was reflecting on its growing international status as a nation due to the sheer power of its export-led economy. Gavan McCormack notes that internationalisation (*kokusaika*) became a key concept in Japan, signifying the country's economic success.²¹ The term became popular in the 1970s and 1980s,²² at the peak of Japan's economic might, and also encompassed Japan's growing superpower status in political and cultural spheres. International awareness of Japanese language, society and culture increased, and much literature, both scholarly and popular, about Japan was produced.²³ Maarten Van Bottenburg argues that the popularisation of sport at any particular time mirrors the international balance of power, and so an increased interest in Japan also extended to its sporting landscape.²⁴

However, internationalisation, at least as it was understood in Japan, “did not necessarily imply the internal transformation of Japanese society; rather, it was accompanied by a continued, perhaps growing Japanese insistence that economic success demonstrated the unique qualities of the Japanese way.”²⁵ Increasing internationalisation did not necessarily mean a broadening of Japanese perspectives on the world, because “the dominant direction in the spread of cultural goods mirrors the power relations between

²¹ McCormack also asserts that *kokusaika* denoted the interdependence of Japan, North America and Europe, primarily in an economic sense but also in the resultant effects on politics, legal matters, culture and the like. See Gavan McCormack, “Kokusaika: Impediments in Japan's Deep Structure,” in *Multicultural Japan: Palaeolithic to Postmodern*, ed. Donald Denoon, Mark Hudson, Gavan McCormack and Tessa Morris-Suzuki (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 274.

²² Harumi Befu, “The Global Context of Japan Outside Japan,” in *Globalizing Japan: Ethnography of the Japanese Presence in Asia, Europe, and America*, ed. Harumi Befu and Sylvie Guichard-Auguis (New York: Routledge, 2001), 3.

²³ These works are almost too numerous to mention. Examples of works written by scholars of Japan as introductions to Japan's history, society and culture for a general audience might include: Edwin Reischauer, *The Japanese* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1977); Donald Richie, *Introducing Japan* (Tokyo and New York: Kodansha International, 1978).

²⁴ Van Bottenburg, *Global Games*, 150.

²⁵ McCormack, “Kokusaika,” 274.

states.”²⁶ Japan’s economic position meant it wielded much power in its international relations. Thus, *kokusaika* might be seen as a one-way process of demonstrating or revealing ‘Japan’ to the world in various forms, thereby essentialising views about Japan and its cultural products. These views helped maintain stereotypes that Japanese economic success was predicated upon deeply rooted elements of Japanese thought and culture.

The early actions in spreading amateur sumo to the rest of the world embodied this notion of *kokusaika*. Japan was the focal point for amateur sumo, and assisted outposts of the sport in diasporic communities by providing technical support and resources. Later, the net was cast more widely to include other nations, where displays of sumo as part of sporting or cultural demonstrations showcased it as a cultural icon representative of Japan. Added to this, amateur sumo slowly became a sport that could be tried by selected non-Japanese, albeit with Japan’s assistance. Tournaments like the International Sumo Championships from the mid-1980s onwards gave non-Japanese competitors the opportunity to try their hand at amateur sumo and compete in Japan, as well as perhaps emulating the increasingly visible foreign athletes in professional sumo at the time.²⁷ However, perhaps more importantly, the amateur sumo community in Japan was interested in having these foreign athletes compete in limited ways because it allowed amateur sumo to be recognised as ‘international’ and part of the *kokusaika* wave in Japan. Concerns had even been expressed within the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* that without providing an international environment in amateur sumo, young Japanese athletes would be less inclined to choose sumo over other sports.²⁸

The inauguration of the Sumo World Championships and the creation of the International Sumo Federation in 1992 was a continuation of this process. Japanese amateur sumo

²⁶ Van Bottenburg, *Global Games*, 197.

²⁷ This increased international exposure in amateur sumo coincided with an already small but growing presence of foreign athletes in professional sumo. The presence of foreign-born athletes (usually Polynesians from Hawai’i and Japanese diaspora from South America) in the highest echelons of *ōzumō* perhaps influenced and encouraged an air of wider internationalisation in amateur sumo. My study is particularly interested in how and why ethnically non-Japanese participated in amateur sumo overseas, and this will be considered later in the thesis in Chapters Two and Five.

²⁸ *Chikara*, “Kaigai to no kōryū,” June 1974, 4.

administrators conceived and implemented an organisation to administer international sumo and also engineered a change to the existing international tournament by making it a competition where each nation was represented by only one team. The number of member nations grew rapidly in following years, but Japan remained at the heart of the organisation and tournament: Tokyo was the host, Japanese companies were the sponsors, and the IFS was primarily run by administrators co-opted from the *Nihon Sumō Renmei*. Japanese sumo groups, at the behest of the newly formed IFS, continued to take amateur sumo overseas audiences. However, now the aim was to show sumo as a participatory sport and to attract participants to amateur sumo from other combat sports such as judo, wrestling and boxing. The efforts of these Japanese “missionaries” or “ambassadors”²⁹ of the sport bore fruit, with numbers for the Sumo World Championships growing annually, from 25 countries at the inaugural championships to 43 countries by 1995.³⁰

With a growing membership, the International Sumo Federation made key decisions that shaped the international administration of the sport. In 1995, the establishment of continental sumo unions channelled parts of the sport’s administration into the regions, lessening the reliance on the IFS at the centre. The IFS also sought to lighten its financial load, and to place a greater burden of self-sufficiency on the national sumo federations, by phasing out funding to attend the Sumo World Championships.³¹ Also, from 1996 the IFS shifted its focus toward inclusion in the Olympic Games, which precipitated changes in the sport to adhere to Olympic ideals. This Olympic goal had been one of the initial aims of the Japanese members of the IFS Executive when the sport was established internationally,³² but it could not be pursued wholeheartedly until the Sumo World Championships were successfully underway and the sport had gained momentum. These moves signalled a desire to develop the sport beyond the recruitment and support of new

²⁹ Van Bottenburg, *Global Games*, 9.

³⁰ Thereafter numbers dropped slightly, but with a still healthy plateau of at least 30 countries for the next three years. A large part of this initial growth was attributable to financial support that the IFS and its sponsors provided to the national teams to attend the tournament.

³¹ It is no coincidence that numbers declined when this funding was withdrawn. The IFS initially funded all team members for the first three years, but for the next two years covered only the athletes’ fares (not the coaches’) before removing the subsidy altogether. Martin Stirling, interview by author, June 29, 2008.

³² *Yomiuri Shimbun*, “Sumō ga ‘Gorin dohyō’ e,” November 7, 1992.

national federations (with which the newly formed continental sumo unions were supposed to assist) and aim for increasing the standing of amateur sumo.³³

These initiatives represent a second phase in the development of amateur sumo, one which broadens the previous *kokusaika* approach. Although Japan had once been the centre of almost all activities within amateur sumo, the many bi-lateral relations between the International Sumo Federation and its member nations were now replaced by a series of multi-lateral relations facilitated by each continental sumo union. The IFS, heavily influenced by its Japanese-run Executive, remained as the central administrative unit, issuing directives and organisational information. However, the extra tier of administration that the continental sumo unions represented, and the relative autonomy each was given in the administration of the sport in their area, meant that Japan was no longer the *only* centre of amateur sumo activity. Furthermore, this was not just an expansion of a centre-periphery model. Although there were now several centres of administration and activity, there were also increased interactions across the globe between outposts of amateur sumo, aided by media and electronic communication. Most often these connections came from personal relationships formed between like-minded individuals who met at the Sumo World Championships and other international competitions. Sometimes, however, communication technology allowed amateur sumo participants to meet and interact virtually, without ever being in the same place at the same time.

The initial phase of Japanese-led internationalisation had been partially replaced by new structures and relationships within the sport that created inward and outward flows of ideas. Increasingly, member nations began to operate regionally, using the resources and expertise from within rather than with constant referral to, and validation from, Japanese amateur sumo circles. This caused the expansion of amateur sumo to occur less evenly and predictably than before, dependent upon the organisational strength and vision of each continental sumo union and its collective membership. The result has been regional

³³ In addition to these administrative developments, there was an accompanying shift away from Japan's hosting of the Sumo World Championships. In 1999 Riesa, Germany became the first international host.

variations in the growth of the sport and the emergence of directions that sometimes contradict Japanese practices, or even sometimes the desires of the International Sumo Federation. Whether or not the IFS had intended such dramatic change when it broadened its administrative structure is unknown, but the results can be considered with terms such as ‘dislocation’ or ‘deterritorialisation’, ‘interconnectedness’ and ‘hybridity’, all frequently associated with globalisation.

Globalisation theory and amateur sumo

Globalisation is often conceived and conceptualised as being indicative of great size and importance, and there is often strong connection to political and economic interactions. In particular, studies of globalisation and sport often consider the scale, technology, audience, revenue and geo-political aspects of global sport, too often confining sport to a place as a commodity in the global marketplace. While professional sports certainly have roles as products or experiences to be consumed, and sport has historically had a strong geo-political element to its enactment, it is limiting to consider sport and globalisation in this way. Instead, it is important to consider globalisation as a process of connections, interactions and intents, and for these processes to be explored in relation to sport on the global landscape(s). This thesis argues that the transformation that has taken place within amateur sumo from internationalisation to the current global situation can be traced through understanding the history and practice of the sport both in Japan and overseas, and that it demonstrates how globalisation processes are contingent on the agency of individuals and small groups. Despite the small scale of the sport in terms of numbers and worldwide popular recognition, amateur sumo provides an example of globalisation in practice, maintained by a relatively ‘close’ community of dedicated administrators and athletes spread across the globe. It is this group of people, those that shape and propagate amateur sumo, with which my research is particularly interested.

Although there has been criticism that globalisation theory has become too heavily a loaded term for it to be useful,³⁴ there has been a general agreement that globalisation refers to a process that brings the world closer together irrespective of geographical distance.³⁵ Early theories of globalisation suggested that the shrinking of space and time through the use of modern technology not only brought the world closer together but also tended towards the homogenisation of cultures. Martin Albrow, for example, contends that “[g]lobalization refers to all those processes by which the peoples of the world are incorporated into a single world society, global society.”³⁶ The idea that the world might move toward a single society, or a ‘global village’, led to fears that parts of the world would be dominated by Western modernity, transnational capitalism and, predominantly, American popular culture. However, such thinking overstates the unifying forces of globalisation, suggesting instead that they are universalising forces. More recent scholarship on cultural globalisation has rejected the idea that globalisation causes uniformity, instead acknowledging that “[t] here may be some synchronization brought about by technological, economic, and cultural flows, but the effect is hybridized.”³⁷

While globalisation is often spoken about in terms of the financial and geo-political ramifications that affect business and international relations, there is recognition of the impact of globalisation on culture and everyday life as well.³⁸ Malcolm Waters, for example, considers globalisation as “a social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware they are receding.”³⁹ Roland Robertson echoes this idea, noting that

³⁴ Toby Miller et al., *Globalization and Sport: Playing the World* (London: Sage, 2001), 6-7; Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: a critical introduction*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 14.

³⁵ Martin Albrow, “Introduction,” in *Globalization, Knowledge and Society*, ed. Martin Albrow and Elizabeth King (London: Sage, 1990), 9; Malcolm Waters, *Globalization* (London: Routledge, 1995), 3; Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992), 9.

³⁶ Albrow, “Introduction,” 9; Waters, *Globalization*, 9.

³⁷ Miller et al., *Globalization and Sport*, 28

³⁸ This is not to say that matters relating to the economy and international relations do not affect everyday life, only that the impact of globalisation may also be considered in the socio-cultural sphere.

³⁹ Waters, *Globalization*, 3.

globalisation refers “both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole.”⁴⁰ Anthony Giddens has defined globalisation as:

the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. This is a dialectical process because such local happenings may move in an obverse direction from the very distanced relations that shape them. *Local transformation* is as much a part of globalisation as the lateral extension of social connections across time and space.⁴¹

His recognition of the interrelation of the global and local is important, although often the reality is more complex than this binary relationship.

Jan Aart Scholte emphasises not only the geographical connections but the temporal ones as well, noting that “global connections often also have qualities of *transworld simultaneity* (that is, they extend anywhere across the planet at the same time) and *transworld instantaneity* (that is, they move anywhere on the planet in no time).”⁴²

Similarly, John Tomlinson has suggested globalisation produces a “complex connectivity”, by which he means that it is not just that the connections of our global world are both more rapid and more complicated than at any other time but that they form global interconnections or interdependencies which are not easily unravelled.⁴³

Importantly, none of these definitions specifies a particular size or scope pertaining to globalization. Instead, all talk of a consciousness of global compression and connection. What is also lacking is that none of these definitions considers how globalisation occurs, its driving forces, or the power relations apparent in globalisation. This study highlights that it is the methods and intentions within the amateur sumo community worldwide that demonstrate the forces of globalisation at work, not the size of the organisation(s) or the number of people involved or affected. By focussing on the worldwide amateur sumo

⁴⁰ Robertson, *Globalization*, 9.

⁴¹ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 64. Italics in the original.

⁴² Scholte, *Globalization*, 61.

⁴³ John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 2.

community in action, the nature of the power relations at work, and those enacting power within and against the system, are also revealed.

As a workable definition of globalisation, then, a more appropriate and all-encompassing view might be that “[c]ontemporary globalization is the increasing flow of trade, finance, culture, ideas, and people brought about by the sophisticated technology of communications and travel and by the worldwide spread of neoliberal capitalism, and it is the local and regional adaptations to and resistances against these flows.”⁴⁴ This definition raises several points, not least of which is that these flows, creating the interconnectedness and mutual dependence of different societies and people, are uneven and unequal. Globalisation is not a one-size-fits-all condition that touches everyone, everywhere in the same ways. *How* we live our global lives is partly dictated by *where* we live them because these global flows do not affect everyone in the same way, nor has globalisation influenced the planet in the same way. In the amateur sumo context, although there are over 80 countries that profess to being part of the International Sumo Federation, the disparities between (and even within) these countries is apparent. Who competes, how, when, how often and in what ways, as will be shown later, all reflect the unevenness of globalisation.

Thus, although different cultures and localities may be more aware of each other because of the processes of globalisation, the effect is not that they are becoming more alike but rather they are taking their own interpretations of one another in new and hybridised ways. The spread of amateur sumo from Japan to other countries has not resulted in a ‘Japanisation’ of the sporting landscape or even in a ‘Westernisation’ of amateur sumo. Instead, amateur sumo has become another possibility for athletes, and there are multiple localised hybrid approaches to amateur sumo which serve to situate the sport in local athletic cultures in ways that might be quite different from neighbouring countries. Thus, if we recall the opening scene in Duisburg, the two women have not been ‘Japanised’ by their involvement in amateur sumo, nor have they ‘Westernised’ the sport. Rather, an

⁴⁴ Ted C. Lewellen, *The Anthropology of Globalization: Cultural Anthropology enters the 21st Century* (Westport, Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey, 2002), 7-8.

athlete like Hanah inscribes personal meaning onto her participation in amateur sumo and fits into the schedule of her Dutch national federation, which has indigenised and hybridised amateur sumo in both conscious and unconscious ways.⁴⁵ Her experiences, however, might be quite different from those of Nicole, due to different methods and ideas in Germany and the personal inscriptions made by Nicole herself. Likewise, the IFS itself has adapted the competition at the World Games to fully showcase the sport to a new audience and to project a powerful image of sumo within the Olympic Movement. Case in point are the composition of the group of competitors, where the athletes assembled seem more for demonstrating global spread than being the absolute best, and the change to a free-for-all in the open weight divisions on the second day, seemingly to match the smaller competitors against the larger ones for the entertainment of the audience.

The localisation of amateur sumo, the adaptations that take place, and the resulting cultural hybrids that form in many different locations might be understood using Michael Kearney's explanation of deterritorialisation as a process where "production, consumption, communities, politics, and identities become detached from local places".⁴⁶ This suggests that cultural products become 'free-floating', possibly with the original context somehow scrubbed away. They become attached again to a new context in a hybridised way. Arjun Appadurai speaks of entire cultures of deterritorialisation where displaced people live their lives betwixt and between different cultures, attempt to keep in touch with their homelands, and even 'invent' their homelands in their new location.⁴⁷ However, John Tomlinson's explanation of 'deterritorialisation' as a notable aspect of cultural globalisation is more nuanced. He identifies the term as having many aspects, including those already mentioned, and acknowledges that it "implies a movement away from a prior state in which cultural experience was linked more closely to place."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ This will be considered further in Chapter Five.

⁴⁶ Michael Kearney, "The Local and the Global: The Anthropology of Globalization and Transnationalism," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 552.

⁴⁷ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 37-9.

⁴⁸ Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, 129.

However, Tomlinson goes further in acknowledging its mundane nature and explains that:

a central defining characteristic of deterritorialization is the weakening or dissolution of the connection between everyday lived culture and territorial location. However, this is not typically experienced as simply cultural loss or estrangement but as a complex and ambiguous blend: of familiarity and difference, expansion of cultural horizons and increased perceptions of vulnerability, access to the ‘world out there’ accompanied by penetration of our own private worlds, new opportunities and new risks.⁴⁹

Deterritorialisation, therefore, might suggest that amateur sumo could lose its ‘Japanese-ness’ as it spreads across the globe and is incorporated into the Olympic Movement. However, Tomlinson’s definition suggests that, although detachment of culture from place occurs, there may be residual or lingering elements as the break is not sudden or abrupt. What is retained and remains residually might be what Koichi Iwabuchi calls ‘cultural odour’, which he takes to mean:

the way in which cultural features of a country of origin and images or ideas of its national, in most cases stereotyped, way of life are associated *positively* with a particular product in the consumption process. Any product may have various kinds of cultural association with the country of its invention. Such images are often related to exoticism, such as the image of the Japanese samurai or the geisha girl.⁵⁰

Given that sumo so readily evokes stereotypes of large Japanese male athletes, even with detachment from the original location, there may not be a complete removal of this stereotype and national connection. Thus, it could be said that amateur sumo is ‘culturally odorous’, retaining links to Japan even when accepted in new locations with local

⁴⁹ Ibid., 128.

⁵⁰ Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalisation: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 27. The sumo wrestler could also easily be added to the examples of such exoticism. Furthermore, the existing stereotypes from professional sumo of corpulent Japanese male bodies are heavily inscribed in the popular imagination, such that they even pervade laypeople’s views of amateur sumo.

meanings attached. The same can be said of other Japanese martial arts but in varying degrees. Judo and karate have existed internationally, outside of a Japanese cultural framework for far longer than amateur sumo. Through their philosophical aspects and their technical terms there is still a link to their Japanese origins, but the two martial arts are also readily accepted around the world for what they are, not where they have come from. Part of this is probably due to their functional, rather than sporting, roles as methods of self-defense. This, and the longer period of acceptance in ‘foreign’ locations, has allowed the two to slip into the everyday lived culture that Tomlinson identifies as a medium for deterritorialisation. Amateur sumo, on the other hand, remains a sport, not easily identified as mainstream culture, and will constantly have the spectre of professional sumo linking it to Japanese exoticism and impeding the process of deterritorialisation. At the present, it is perhaps more accurate to speak of a reterritorialisation of amateur sumo, where the sport is associated with new environments and contexts, but where it retains the culture odour of Japan.

The individual amidst the global

With the reterritorialisation of cultural products (and people) and the transcendence of physical boundaries influencing our lives, we must realise that the individual choices about what we do, think and consume become paramount in the reception of any global influence. Individual behaviour is never completely independent of its environment as there is always some constraint from social structures. However, if we consider globalisation as pertaining to methods and types of (inter-)connection, and consciousness of these connections, rather than absolute size or scope, then the individual is central to its production and reception. It could be argued that the importance of the individual is heightened in amateur sumo because of the small number of participants and because, outside of Japan, national federations are often a collection of just a few people. Thus, while the leading Japanese figures of the International Sumo Federation dictate amateur sumo’s direction and delegate the guidelines for the sport’s administration globally, it is the administrators and athletes in different regions who are playing important roles in the development of the sport locally. Each location, through the combination of individuals organising the sport, injects amateur sumo with its own cultural sensitivities,

interpretations and influences, and each individual searches for their capacity to act at different levels according to their own motivations and desires.

Too often the individual has been ignored in theories of globalisation in favour of the macro-level shifts of global change and development. However, Arjun Appadurai has taken a lead in considering people, the individual actor and agency within globalisation theory. In an effort to understand the complexity of globalisation, Appadurai proposes a framework with five dimensions of cultural flows to explore the “disjunctures between economy, culture and politics that we have only begun to theorize.”⁵¹ Among these, ‘ethnoscape’ refers to the role of people in globalisation processes, specifically the movements we undertake as tourists, transnational or migrant workers, refugees and immigrants, among others. Although much of the world may remain ‘stable’ and rooted in a particular place, we are influenced or exposed to the increased movement of others and what that brings to our existence.⁵² Appadurai notes that these five scapes that he proposes are “deeply perspectival constructs” dependent upon the positions of different actors, of which the individual, “is the last locus of this perspectival set of landscapes, for these landscapes are eventually navigated by agents who both experience and constitute larger formations, in part from their own sense of what these landscapes offer.”⁵³ Lastly, Appadurai describes these scapes as “the building blocks of what (extending Benedict Anderson) I would like to call *imagined worlds*, that is, the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe.”⁵⁴

If we apply the ideas of Appadurai to analysing the globalising process apparent in amateur sumo, the ethnoscape might start with Japanese diaspora and their continued practice of amateur sumo in Hawai’i, the west coast of the mainland US, and parts of South America. The initial spread of amateur sumo was dependent on the migrating ethnoscape taking sumo with them as part of the culture they continued to enact in their

⁵¹ Appadurai’s framework utilises five conceptual landscapes, namely the ethnoscape, mediascape, technoscape, financescape and ideoscape. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 33.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

new environments. However, particularly in the last two decades, this ethnoscape of Japanese individuals has played less of a role in spreading the ideals of amateur sumo. Instead, with the assistance of the IFS at times, what has developed is a body of sumo-literate non-Japanese.⁵⁵ It is among this group that the small subset of charismatic individuals leading the sport of amateur sumo around the world exists. These leaders do not necessarily make the institutional decisions that the IFS mandates for the administration of the sport.⁵⁶ Instead, they are the ones who develop the sport within their own countries and continent, and contribute to amateur sumo being the sum of the activities and choices of people overseas rather than the institutionalism of the sport emanating from Japan. Thus, beyond the ethnoscape, we can see an ‘imagined community’ of expertise and interest that keeps amateur sumo afloat.

Even though participants in amateur sumo are spread across a number of countries and they perform the sport for different reasons and in different ways, there is a community consciousness within amateur sumo. The small number of athletes and administrators, particularly those outside of Japan, feel a sense of affinity with others around the world, finding solace and understanding in others who share the struggle of being in a minor sport that is frequently misunderstood.⁵⁷ These connections between amateur sumo participants in different countries are most often facilitated by email and internet contact, but many participants have the opportunity to also interact face-to-face at the annual Sumo World Championships and other large tournaments. Thus, although there are national differences and divisions among the athletes, built on the basis that they represent their nations in most international competitions, there is also a communal sense

⁵⁵ These individuals of various ethnicities and from various locations consist of those who have had contact with the sport of sumo, either as spectators, administrators, or athletes. Many have connections with Japan, but this may be as a consequence of the sport not as a prerequisite to their involvement. With amateur sumo now performed on each continent, and ready access to visual archives of both professional and amateur sumo, there is less need to have an actual connection with Japan. Although many who have an interest in amateur sumo have been drawn to it through exposure to professional sumo, this need not be the case.

⁵⁶ Indeed, as Chapter Five shows, even if they do have a role in the process of the IFS Executive, that body is so heavily Japanese-controlled that the viewpoint of the ‘charismatic individual’ may take a long time to realise change

⁵⁷ For example, a number of participants in this study, myself included, have had to justify their presence in the sport because they do not fit stereotypes of being large, male and Japanese. While the last attribute is most easily explained away by amateur sumo having an international presence, it is harder to convince people about the other two stereotypical attributes.

of integration and consciousness that the participants are bound by their involvement within the sport and their mutual pursuit of acceptance and understanding.⁵⁸

Individuals play an important role in propagating the sport in each location, acting to shape and alter the outcome of the sport's future for both their own ends and that of amateur sumo itself. Failing to consider their individual and local agency risks ignoring important factors in shaping the concrete expression and experience of globalisation. What kind of input do they have into their own sport? Do their actions support or resist the structures within amateur sumo, and is either a product of a conscious decision to follow or oppose? Indeed, is their input magnified by the relatively recent international development of amateur sumo and the advantages brought by greater access and opportunity in newer and smaller organisations, before scale and organisational culture or 'tradition' might work to suppress agent influence?

Questions can also be asked about specific developments in the sport such as the inclusion of women when previously there had been such reluctance in sumo circles to acknowledge women in all but limited capacities. Who led this move to integrate women into amateur sumo and why, and how was it achieved? This touches on the wider issues of how and why athletes of different nationalities and sexes join amateur sumo, how they perceive the sport, and what they want to get out of the sport. Furthermore, how are these athletes and administrators connected with the changes occurring in the sport? In short, how do those involved in amateur sumo demonstrate agency in their involvement in the sport?

However, concern for agency in this study is not just confined to the individual. An individual or group can exercise agency, and they can even choose to have another act on their behalf. Thus agency can be singular or collective, and can exist as both, perhaps on different levels, at the same time. Looking at the different levels within amateur sumo's

⁵⁸ Although possible in many sports, this sense of global consciousness is especially acute in amateur sumo given the small numbers of competitors in most countries. This shared consciousness of participation, it can be argued, is perhaps as strong as national affiliations because there is often a paucity of compatriots who are involved in amateur sumo.

hierarchy, the International Sumo Federation demonstrates agency in the way it chooses to progress the sport and propel it toward greater recognition. The IFS sets the immediate framework in which individuals and small groups act in amateur sumo, but its precise hold on this system is challenged by the desire to fit within the Olympic Movement. The continental sumo federations play their role in developing the sport within their member nations, but do so in a variety of ways according to the relative strength of the members and the continental federation itself. With autonomy over their region, the continental sumo unions are also able to administer and organise amateur sumo as they see fit as long as they stay within the broader rules of the IFS. The national federations provide a framework and vehicle for their athletes, but also have their own agendas and act accordingly. The athletes themselves fit within these various levels but function in pursuit of their personal desires and goals within the sport.

In considering the agency of the participants in amateur sumo, we must also consider when they act in ways that challenge existing knowledge, norms and rules. From time to time actors will seek to improve the sport, and perhaps themselves, as best they see fit. This may be done within the frameworks already in place, but equally may be done in opposition to the wishes of others. The IFS has had to come to terms with the influences from the different regional and national federations and how it incorporates (or not) the wishes of its member nations. Additionally, the decisions made from above by the International Sumo Federation are not always greeted with the intent that the IFS might hope for, and the acceptance is not the same in each location.⁵⁹ At times resistance is a fruitful way in which the sport can be developed, but at other times it is seen as divisive and problematic. The agency of individuals and groups outside of Japan contrasts with the institutionalism of the sport that the IFS represents.

Researching amateur sumo

In 2003, two years before the World Games in Duisburg, I had begun my research to find out how and why amateur sumo had spread from Japan to so many disparate countries and how the sport might have changed as a consequence. However, little information

⁵⁹ Or even, the reception of an IFS directive might not be accepted universally within the same location.

about international amateur sumo was available to explain how, since 1992, the sport had grown to having an annual Sumo World Championships held in different countries and where amateur sumo had become part of the Olympic Movement, as played out on the *dohyō* in Duisburg.

Sources from inside the sport of amateur sumo seemed the most appropriate starting point. The website of the International Sumo Federation provides only a thumbnail sketch of the sport, its international spread and the current state of amateur sumo. Unhelpfully, the information on the website stagnated sometime in 2002 and remained without updates until deep into 2004, well after this study began. Since then there have only been sporadic updates, making the site an inconsistent source of information at best.⁶⁰ *Chikara*, the quarterly magazine of the *Nihon Sumō Renmei*, was more informative.⁶¹ It has a number of useful articles that give tournament summaries, highlight important developments in the sport, and provide editorial commentary from inside an organisation that played a large role in establishing the IFS and international amateur sumo. In places this thesis draws heavily on this historical information to demonstrate the development of amateur sumo over time. The third important inside source is the autobiography of Tanaka Hidetoshi, currently the President of the International Sumo Federation.⁶²

Notwithstanding the potential pitfalls of hyperbole, inaccurate recall, and self-aggrandisement that might slant an autobiography, this account from a leading figure in Japanese amateur sumo administration offers an ‘inside’ view of some of the major international and global developments of amateur sumo in the last decade. In particular, Tanaka’s explanations of the motives for seeking Olympic recognition and the inclusion of women in amateur sumo are enlightening and are drawn upon later in this thesis.

⁶⁰ When challenged about the validity of some of the information on this site at an IFS Congress meeting, a representative of the IFS sought to disown the website as being privately run by a European amateur sumo administrator (the IFS’s one-time webmaster) with only tacit approval from the IFS. However, the website has subsequently been updated with official IFS information and seems very much to be run by the IFS. There has been talk within the IFS of beginning a new, updated website but nothing has yet materialised. IFS Congress, Osaka, personal observation, October 14, 2006.

⁶¹ The *Nihon Sumō Renmei*’s website was only developed in 2006. Since then it has provided results from Japanese tournaments but little else in the way of background about the sport. See <http://www.nihonsumorenmei.jp> (accessed January 14, 2007).

⁶² Tanaka Hidetoshi, *Dohyō wa En, Jinsei wa En* (Tokyo: Waseda Shuppan, 2002).

Several sources from outside the sport touch on amateur sumo. The popular press in many countries carries articles from time to time focusing on local performances of amateur sumo. However these provide only a very general and poorly articulated sense of how these actions fit within a wider international context. These accounts usually link the local athletes competing in a ‘Japanese’ sport to popular stereotypes of sumo being for overweight male athletes based in Japan. Their participation is marked as anomalous and amateur sumo is tacitly considered as strange and unusual because not only is it new to that country but it also does not entirely fit the image of sumo propagated by *ōzumō*.⁶³ Elsewhere, a small number of training guides for athletes have been published in Japanese, sometimes with English notes accompanying Japanese text, but they are mostly diagrammatical with small amounts of explanatory text and have little to say about the history of amateur sumo or other aspects of the development of the sport.⁶⁴

There is little academic consideration given to amateur sumo. Some Japanese sources relay aspects of the sport’s history and other works focus on technique and instructional methods for training amateur sumo athletes.⁶⁵ Elite amateur sumo athletes have been the subject of medical and sports science studies in Japan, but that is hardly germane to a greater understanding of the sport, especially in an international sense. Perhaps most promising is the handful of journal articles on the emerging presence of women as a new and interesting factor in the sport.⁶⁶ These are an important step into the wider consideration of amateur sumo as a subject of critical appraisal. In English, Kenji

⁶³ Nevertheless, because this study is attempting to build a picture of the global nature of amateur sumo through consideration of its localised practices, taken as a whole, these articles in the popular press help to build a mosaic of amateur sumo around the world.

⁶⁴ Nihon Taiiku Daigaku Budō-gaku Sumō Kenkyū-shitsu et al., *Miru Manabu Oshieru Irasuto Sumō*, new ed. (Tokyo: Gogatsu Shobō, 2003); Shimokawa Takashi et al., *Sumō: eibun kaisetsu-tsuki* (Tokyo: Aki Shobō, 2002). The latter has a short section, with several pages in Japanese but only one in English, which focuses on a history from sumo’s mythical origins to the present, with only a brief consideration of amateur sumo.

⁶⁵ Shimokawa Takashi et al., “Supōtsu no tayōka ni okeru sumō no arikata,” *Kokushikan Daigaku Taiiku Supōtsu Kagaku Kenkyū* 6 (2006): 51-58; Nihon Budō Gakkai (Sumō Senmon Bunka-kai Symposium), “Ima ‘sumō’ to wa nani ka? Amachua sumō to no kakawari ni oite,” *Budō-gaku Kenkyū* 34, no. 3 (2002): 53-58.

⁶⁶ Shimokawa Takashi et al., “Shinsumō no hassoku to kongo no kadai - onnazumō no rekishi o fumaete,” *The Annual Reports of Health, Physical Education and Sport Science* 18 (1999): 75-92; Shimokawa Takashi et al., “Shinsumō no kaisai to sono ryūsei – Hokkaidō no futatsu no onna-zumō taikai o mite,” *Kokushikan Daigaku Taiiku Kenkyū-jo Hō* 19 (2000): 61-70; Shimokawa Takashi et al., “Shinsumō no genjō to kongo no kadai,” *Kokushikan Daigaku Taiiku Supōtsu Kagaku Kenkyū* 4 (2004): 33-39.

Tierney's doctoral thesis on sumo as Japan's 'national sport' (*kokugi*) is perhaps the best academic source on amateur sumo to date, even though it focuses predominantly on professional sumo.⁶⁷ Tierney considers the nationalisation of sumo, and, in the process, explains how sumo became established as a festival-like practice among the Japanese diaspora in North America and Hawai'i. In his final chapter, Tierney compares two contemporary amateur sumo tournaments in North America and highlights the contrasting roles amateur sumo can play: showcasing a sport that is attached culturally to Japan, and existing as a competitive sport within a hierarchy of competitions locally, regionally and internationally. Tierney's account, while valuable, is predominantly focused on *ōzumō* and unfortunately all too brief in addressing amateur sumo. His contribution only serves to underline the need for more comprehensive studies to consider the nature of amateur sumo across the globe.

With so little written about amateur sumo, and particularly its international presence, the participants themselves emerged as the best sources of information for this study. Interviewees were selected from sumo athletes and administrators from Japan, Australia, New Zealand, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands, as well as other officials and administrators attached to the European Sumo Union, using particular targeting of key individuals and then snowballing accumulation of other perspectives from within these organisations.⁶⁸ Information was gathered through semi-structured interviews, which employed a mixture of set questions that all interviewees were asked, additional questions for particular groups of interviewees, and specific questions pertinent to the viewpoint of the individual being interviewed.⁶⁹ Also, rather than using these questions as a script, I endeavoured to engage with each interviewee in a conversation about their participation in amateur sumo and about the sport itself. This conversational approach meant that many of my interviews went over the 30 minutes that I had estimated to be sufficient to gain the necessary information, and yet it also enabled me to explore the interviewee's participation in amateur sumo in different and unexpected ways, based on what they were

⁶⁷ R. Kenji Tierney, "Wrestling with Tradition: Sumo, National Identity and Trans/national Popular Culture" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2002).

⁶⁸ For a list of interviewees and relevant demographic information, see Appendix I.

⁶⁹ For a list of the questions asked, see Appendix II.

willing to offer up to the conversation outside of the responses to my intended questions. There were also a number of informal, unrecorded conversations with other sumo participants that added greater clarity and detail to many of the points raised in interviews, or which allowed new lines of inquiry to emerge. By asking the participants about their sport, this study adds to the sparse amount of information on amateur sumo, and provides the first academic study on international amateur sumo in English. Importantly, this bottom-up approach of gathering information from participants also helps to situate individuals, their actions and their desires amidst changes and development in the sport of amateur sumo.

I had not intended to become part of my research or to participate in amateur sumo lest it obscure my observations.⁷⁰ However, in July 2003 I was persuaded by the Australian group I was observing to come out from behind my video camera and notepad to boost the numbers training. Although this experience allowed me to get a ‘feel’ for the sport, I still remained an observer and gatherer of information.⁷¹ In late 2004 I spent three months in Japan observing various amateur sumo competitions and training sessions at different levels, establishing contacts at a Japanese university sumo club in Kyoto, and meeting with a handful of non-Japanese competitors in Tokyo. Through these Tokyo contacts I was again able to train with one of the groups I observed and in whose company I would not be too out of my depth. Still, despite participating in limited ways, I remained content to conduct interviews and observe as much as I could, particularly through three months of fieldwork in the European summer of 2005 which culminated in the World Games in Duisburg.

⁷⁰ Nor did I intend to write parts of this thesis in the first person.

⁷¹ Most of the Australian group were similar in size to me, and I took later opportunities to train with them when I stopped in Sydney en route to other fieldwork sites.

The closer I got to the sport by gathering information and meeting participants, the more I became accepted and involved in various ways.⁷² The World Games coincidentally marked the beginning of my transition to a fuller role as participant-observer. Because of my knowledge of how the International Sumo Federation operated and the nature of amateur sumo in Europe, Japan and Australia, and probably because I was also often around the group in New Zealand, I was asked to become involved in the national administration of the sport. Less than six months later, beginning in December 2005, I was part of the re-inauguration of the national federation, Sumo New Zealand, and became the Secretary. Within the next year, I also accepted a position as Secretary General of the Oceania Sumo Union, the continental organisation. This first hand interaction with the sport and a dearth of adult competitors later led to my competing officially in the middleweight and open weight divisions at the 2007, 2008 and 2009 Oceania Sumo Championships. Coming full circle, ironically, I was also chosen as an Oceania representative in the middleweight division of the sumo competition at the 2009 World Games in Kaohsiung, Taiwan.

I had, therefore, become a subject of my own study, as an administrator and some-time athlete within the sport of amateur sumo. My study is the first to investigate the nascent global spread of amateur sumo and the contribution of participants in the processes that shape the sport. It is also the largest study to use participant observation in amateur sumo.⁷³ Coupled with this, my observation and analysis of the sport went not only into this study but also into the pieces I was writing for both an online forum and for an online

⁷² From the information gathered during my fieldwork, I was able to share my perspectives on amateur sumo with others, both in person and online. I had been contributing to an internet discussion forum for sumo fans since early 2004 and had posted information and opinions on both professional and amateur sumo. As I had a particular interest in amateur sumo discussions and contributed to many such threads, I was invited to become a moderator on the forum. I had now shifted from being just an observer to one sharing my observations and perspectives. I was aware that I was not an 'expert' in amateur sumo because I remained on the sidelines. However, I was considered by others to be suitably informed to guide amateur sumo discussions. Later, in 2006, this was taken further when I was invited to write a column about amateur sumo every two months for an online sumo magazine.

⁷³ There has been little in the way of participant observation in amateur sumo. One Dutch student used his participation in amateur sumo and his connections with a leading Japanese university sumo club to write a graduate project on hierarchy in the club and the acceptance of a foreign athlete into that hierarchy. Another amateur sumo athlete in New Zealand used his experiences in amateur sumo as experiential material for reflecting on his social work practice in both his occupation and his study towards further qualifications in his field. Both are participants in my study, sought my advice on certain matters and appropriate literature, and later shared aspects of their findings with me.

magazine.⁷⁴ This process of becoming an insider (of sorts) helped my understanding of the importance of individuals in shaping amateur sumo at all levels. Although becoming entwined with the sport, I have endeavoured to use the information from my interviews and from the textual sources mentioned above rather than relying heavily on my own experiences.⁷⁵

Thesis Structure

This thesis has two sections of three chapters each. The first section picks up the historical development of amateur sumo introduced earlier and focuses on the transformation of amateur sumo from a national sport to its development internationally and, most recently, to where it now sits on the global stage as part of the Olympic Movement. This progression also shows the growing complexity of amateur sumo's association with its birthplace. Although still greatly influenced by a Japanese-led International Sumo Federation, devolution of some administrative power and the increasing influence of Olympic ideals serve to problematise amateur sumo remaining as a Japanese sport for much longer.

Chapter One considers the origins of amateur sumo in the last years of the Meiji Period (1868-1912) and the resulting nationalisation and masculinisation of the sport. In the context of Japan's modernisation, sumo was first seen as unsuitably feudal and backward before later being viewed as a native form of disciplining and training the body. Sumo became more 'modern' and, in the process, was nationalised and identified as a male-only sport. The organised participation sport of amateur sumo emerged in the country's universities and high schools, stemming from the desires of social elites and educators to turn out men with both robust intellect and physical frames. This student sumo (*gakusei sumō*) took professional sumo as its template was prominently infused with elements of

⁷⁴ I am grateful for the opportunity to present some of the ideas in this thesis in preliminary form via both media. The interactive nature of the online forum also allowed me to engage in a dialogue about my ideas with others keen on amateur sumo, including some of the participants in this thesis.

⁷⁵ This is mainly because my participation is limited and quite recent and many of my informants have been involved for far longer and in more varied and complex ways. Also, it must also be noted that almost all of the interviews in this study were conducted before I became involved as an administrator (Dec 2005) and athlete (March 2007). For details of the dates of the different interviews conducted, see Appendix I.

the nationalism and masculinity derived from sumo's past and thus inherited a strong cultural odour of 'Japanese-ness'.

Chapter Two explores the development of amateur sumo internationally. Initially sumo was established as a cultural performance within communities of the Japanese diaspora in North and South America. Groups in Japan helped to foster amateur sumo in these overseas outposts by taking teams abroad and, later, hosting teams from the Americas. In the mid-1980s an annual 'international' tournament was held in Japan with prefectural teams competing against invited teams from these outposts. Later this tournament also attracted foreign teams from beyond Japan's ethnic and cultural influence. In 1992 a re-organisation saw the start of the Sumo World Championships, and the International Sumo Federation was established to administer amateur sumo internationally. The IFS was influenced predominantly by Japanese administrators, but its focus was to expand the sport internationally, to promote amateur sumo in new countries, and to try and boost the number of countries and participants involved in the sport. In 1995 the world governing structure was expanded with the creation of the continental sumo unions. This was partly a cost-cutting exercise and partly a move to create greater self-sufficiency within the sport. It afforded the various regions the chance to run their own affairs, and to develop the sport with relative freedom. These developments established sumo as a bona fide international sport but one which still relied heavily on the presence of Japan at the centre.

The third chapter considers the efforts of the IFS to position amateur sumo as an Olympic sport. Its aspirations have meant changes to align with the global ideals of the Olympic Movement. Part of the IFS's approach has been to hitch its aims to Japanese cities bidding to host the Olympic Games, even though, as the chapter argues, this is misguided because of current selection procedures for Olympic sports. However, in some ways it does not matter whether or not amateur sumo becomes an Olympic sport but rather that it is striving to become one. The possibility that amateur sumo might make the Olympics one day shows that the amateur sumo community, beyond national and international considerations of boundaries and place, has banded together in pursuit of this common

goal. Therefore, IOC recognition has potentially reinforced and strengthened the IFS's position in leading the sport. Of interest here is the motivation of the IFS in seeking International Olympic Committee recognition, and the ways in which the IFS is attempting to realise this ambition. However, as the following chapters show, the desire to become an Olympic/global sport has equally created change and innovation in amateur sumo and provided a site for the agency of individuals and groups within the sport.

The second section considers the various impacts that provisional recognition from the IOC and the global connections within the sport have had upon amateur sumo. The integration of women into the sport, regional and local adaptations to the sport, differences in local administration of amateur sumo, and the emergence of alternate visions for the future have all left their mark in recent years. In particular, the issue of individual and group agency within the organisational and administrative structure of amateur sumo and the International Sumo Federation is explored in these contexts.

A key consideration in gaining Olympic acceptance is having gender equality in the sport. As Chapter Four shows, aligning with the Olympic Movement has accelerated the integration of women into amateur sumo where once sumo was seen as a male-only domain. However, this should not be seen as women enacting agency but rather as a conscious, calculated reaction by the IFS to IOC criteria for equality. Japanese administrators saw the necessity of having women in the sport and planned the establishment of *shinsumō* (literally 'new sumo'), organised a national competition and invited women to partake in 'their' new sport. Modifications were made to remove certain 'masculine' aspects of sumo and to make the fledgling sport seem more appealing to (Japanese) women. The uptake of the sport in Europe was less problematic and the region's acceptance of women's competition played a major role in the establishment of *shinsumō* worldwide. This in turn assisted in overcoming some of the discrimination, marginalisation and stigma attached to women competing in Japanese sumo. Gradually, also, the modifications to make *shinsumō* less like male sumo were removed. Once again, however, this is not necessarily an indicator of female agency because much of what was

done came from pragmatic considerations of cost and availability of resources across each continent.

In Chapter Five, the case studies of amateur sumo's presence in Europe, specifically the Netherlands and the Czech Republic, and Oceania, specifically New Zealand and Australia, provide an understanding of the localised nature of amateur sumo around the globe. This chapter explores the agency of groups and individuals within the regions and national federations examined and, in turn, what this says about the structure and control of the International Sumo Federation. These four examples, along with wider consideration of amateur sumo in each region, demonstrate local appropriations of amateur sumo, the more spontaneous spread of the sport since the inception of the continental sumo federations in 1995, and the role that 'charismatic individuals' play in the development of the sport. Europe has developed strong regional variations in the sport, such as the junior and cadets system, the inclusion of women in these age groups, the use of the double repechage, and, as well as the differing approaches countries have taken in terms of training and creation of facilities. In Oceania, partly due to the distance between the different island nations, the national federations have struggled to obtain regular international competition. Moreover, the Oceania Sumo Union lacks cohesion because it is hampered by the distance between its members and by the general lack of resources and money in current or prospective member federations. The examples given also highlight amateur sumo's uneven dispersal and enactment across the planet, as well as giving specific grassroots accounts of a sport shaped by global influences.

Chapter Six looks at the divisive nature of agency and regional autonomy by considering resistance to power structures within amateur sumo. In early 2006, the World Sumo League (WSL) presented an alternative vision for amateur sumo by staging a series of professional performances in major cities across North America with a troupe of heavyweight male amateur athletes. In the process, athletes were able to compete outside the framework of the IFS and were shown opportunities to forge a career beyond the Sumo World Championships and to make a living from their sport. The financial potential of the WSL and dissatisfaction with the power monopoly of the IFS Executive

prompted some European nations to resist the IFS and its goals, even in the face of warnings from the governing body, and put their support behind this new league. In response, the International Sumo Federation banned WSL participants from IFS-run competitions in order to maintain its control of amateur sumo and keep its vision of an Olympic future alive. Although unsuccessful beyond the first handful of performances and unsustainable in the long term, the WSL created a brief schism within the sport, which highlighted resistance within amateur sumo and the agency of the different groups and individuals involved. The divisions that emerged were only reconciled upon the collapse of the WSL in mid-2006, leaving the lingering issues of lack of representation in the decision making process unresolved until the present.

It should be noted that, while the two sections of this thesis deal with the chronology of amateur sumo's development (chapters 1-3) and the major thematic issues since 1995 (chapters 4-6), the theme in each chapter of the second section can also be read as developing the theme in its corresponding partner in the first section. Thus, the masculinisation and nationalism embedded within sumo in Chapter One contrasts with the establishment of *shinsumō* in Chapter Four. Likewise, the internationalism in Chapter Two is developed further in Chapter Five with concrete examples of sumo localised abroad. Lastly, the Olympic vision of the IFS in Chapter Three is contrasted in Chapter Six with a competing idea for amateur sumo's future, represented by the World Sumo League.

1. Positioning Amateur Sumo

The sumo competition at the World Games described in the Introduction presents a striking contrast to the way that sumo is commonly conceived. The picture of female athletes gathered from around the world competing in different weight classes at an international tournament held under the umbrella of the Olympic Movement clashes with the stereotypical image of sumo as for men with elaborate hairstyles and large bellies who live together, train every day and compete for prize money in tournaments held every couple of months in Japan. The former is amateur sumo, a participatory and inclusive sport, while the latter is professional sumo (*ōzumō*), primarily a spectator sport. Nevertheless, while the two are easily distinguishable when juxtaposed in this way, amateur sumo remains constrained by the ‘*ōzumō*-represents-all-sumo’ trope when people consider the sport.

Sumo has been cast as a national sport of Japan due to its connections with Japan’s history and mythology. The precursors of today’s sumo took many forms, though it is debatable whether they are still applicable to the practice of amateur sumo (or even *ōzumō*) today. However, these forms are symbolically important because it is from them that both modern-day amateur sumo and *ōzumō* claim their heritage. However, much of the identification of sumo with Japan’s traditional culture comes from the position professional sumo holds as the most recognisable form of the sport. This can be attributed largely to the current dominance of *ōzumō* in the media and the efforts of the *Nihon Sumō Kyōkai*⁷⁶ to represent professional sumo as the legitimate bastion of everything sumo.

Ōzumō claims an ancient history, associations with the imperial family, religious connections to *Shintō*, and a place as part of the martial training of samurai. However, the origins of the professional sumo that we see today are arguably as recent as 1791, and the social contextualisation of sumo has varied through the ages.⁷⁷ When Japan began modernising from the mid-19th century, global discourses of athleticism and modern sport left their mark. Where sumo had once flourished, it was treated with disdain due to the

⁷⁶ The Japan Sumo Association, which is professional sumo’s governing body.

⁷⁷ Harold Bolitho, “Sumō and popular culture,” in *The Japanese trajectory: modernization and beyond*, ed. Gavan McCormack and Yoshio Sugimoto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 24.

body shapes of its athletes and the feudal accoutrements around the contest. Although under fire, *ōzumō* survived on the support of important patrons until the modernisation-as-Westernisation fervour abated and sumo was once again recast. The sporting element within professional sumo was emphasised to fit the new age, and a renewed appreciation of Japanese history and culture in society tempered some of the reformist voices. Sumo was re-cast as a native way of training an athletic, masculine body that was relevant to modern Japan. In the process, professional sumo was not only modernised but also firmly nationalised and masculinised.

The influence of a modern discourse on athleticism, the rise of amateur sport in Japan, and the repositioning of (professional) sumo as an athletic contest all helped in the creation of amateur sumo as a competitive sport. It became strongly embedded in the schools of the nation as a masculine sport which drew upon Japanese history and values and that could cultivate athletic bodies. However, owing to close connections with professional sumo from its inception, amateur sumo also absorbed the nationalistic and masculine underpinnings of *ōzumō*. For amateur sumo the consequences are that it has become entwined in the traditional/cultural lens by which *ōzumō* is viewed and has struggled to be seen as a sport in its own right.⁷⁸ Thus, amateur sumo becomes entangled in the hegemonic representation of sumo as a sport for hefty Japanese men.

However, this hegemonic representation has slowly been challenged since the 1990s. Recent developments in amateur sumo such as regular international competition, the drive for global recognition and the acceptance of women into the sport, all of which are the material for this thesis, position amateur sumo as a sport diverging from its professional counterpart. In seeking greater worldwide acceptance, amateur sumo is having to battle the hegemonic images associated with the *ōzumō* – a ‘big man’s sport’,

⁷⁸ Furthermore, amateur sumo has long been in the shadow of the media exposure and historical legacy of *ōzumō*. However, it must be noted that amateur sumo in Japan has long accepted its symbiotic relationship with *ōzumō*, thus perhaps causing some of the difficulty in separating the two.

with an emphasis on Japanese history and tradition.⁷⁹ While still retaining a strong cultural odour of ‘Japanese-ness’ due to its origins, amateur sumo is increasingly forging a new identity as a participant sport with an international and global outlook more varied than the reified cultural entity of *ōzumō*.

Sumo: from feudal to modern

By the late 18th century, *ōzumō* had emerged as popular entertainment “reflect[ing] both the urban culture of the Edo Period (1603-1867) as well as being seen to spring from a deep stratum of rural culture.”⁸⁰ Although various types of sumo performance for different purposes had existed for many centuries prior,⁸¹ most were becoming enveloped in some way by the public entertainment that we now know as *ōzumō*:

bands of professional wrestlers toured the land, converging on the main cities for larger tournament [sic]. On the more entrepreneurial level, some street corners featured strong men who took on all challengers, while in other parts of the city, solitary men shadow wrestled imagined opponents for the delight and tips of the audience. Sumo was also not exclusively male. Huge crowds came to see female wrestlers – some troupes travelled the country featuring feats of strength and wrestling (providing a similar program to the men’s groups), while other groups showcased topless wrestlers engaged in various erotic displays...As a result of unruly crowds and various sumptuary laws, sumo was banned numerous times throughout this period.⁸²

It was these repeated troubles with the law that saw sumo elders trying to improve their standing so that their tournaments could be performed more regularly for profit. These elders worked to make sumo palatable to the government by distancing their

⁷⁹ In particular, the default masculine gendering in sumo is particularly important to understand because of the differing attitudes held in amateur sumo and *ōzumō* towards women’s participation in sumo since the mid-1990s. This issue, raised here, will be considered in greater detail in Chapter Four where the creation of *shinsumō* (women’s amateur sumo) will be considered.

⁸⁰ Yamaguchi Masao, “Sumo in the Popular Culture of Contemporary Japan,” in *The Worlds of Japanese Popular Culture*, ed. D. P. Martinez (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 19.

⁸¹ These different forms and their roles in creating the cultural legacy of professional sumo will be considered further later in this chapter.

⁸² R. Kenji Tierney, “From Popular Performance to National Sport: The ‘Nationalization’ of Sumo,” in *This Sporting Life: Sports and Body Culture in Modern Japan*, ed. William W. Kelly and Sugimoto Atsuo (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University, 2007), 68-9.

performances from other forms of sumo not considered suitable by the authorities for public display. This marginalised the street-corner performances and the involvement of women, moving them outside of the sphere of what became professional sumo as it exists today.

Ultimately, it was the performance of sumo before the *shōgun*, Tokugawa Ienari, in 1791 that cemented *ōzumō*'s position in society. Gaining this audience gave sumo the “vener of gentility” and it profited from the attention of wealthy patrons, approval from government officials, and increasing interest from intellectuals in the cities.⁸³ However, for all this attention, sumo's place was as part of the popular culture that grew in the cities of Tokugawa Japan, particularly in Edo. Sumo was “at the cusp of fashion”⁸⁴ and its popularity attracted crowds to the ‘floating world’ entertainment districts in which it was performed, drawing “money from among the common people of the three major cities, who could not have cared less about gentility, noble patrons, or intellectual aficionados.”⁸⁵ Nevertheless, for all its popularity, the fame of the wrestlers themselves, and the place sumo had in popular culture, “it was neither explicitly ‘traditional’ nor ‘national.’ The displays were extremely varied and did not tend to fall within the modern concepts of ‘athletics’ or ‘sport.’ These concepts of tradition, nation and athletics/sports were introduced in the succeeding period.”⁸⁶

The identification of sumo as a ‘national sport’, one steeped in Japanese culture and history but also fitting the modern concept of sports and athletics, would come in the period of modernisation that Japan undertook from the middle of the 19th century. However, this was not before the very existence of sumo had been threatened. As Japan modernised in the Meiji Period, ideas adopted from Europe and the United States regarding appropriate roles of the body in society came to prominence. Kenji Tierney has shown how the acceptance of Western discourses regarding the body, civilisation and

⁸³ Bolitho, “Sumō and popular culture,” 30.

⁸⁴ Tierney, “From Popular Performance to National Sport,” 83.

⁸⁵ Bolitho, “Sumō and popular culture,” 30.

⁸⁶ Tierney, “From Popular Performance to National Sport,” 70. Arguably, the position of sumo in society at this time – caught between popular and high culture, and having a history of various types of sumo performances but also being at the cutting edge of Tokugawa popularity and fashion – echoed the liminal space that was the ‘floating world’ in which it was often performed.

evolution from the middle of the 19th century and beyond influenced the way sumo was viewed and promoted.⁸⁷ For example, the development of the individual body became a concern for the national good, and this thinking was enhanced by the introduction of physical education and sport into the lives of the nation's youth. With a new emphasis on athleticism, trained bodies and modern sport in Japanese society, *ōzumō* was seen as undesirably un-athletic, traditional and feudal.

The extraordinary size of the sumo athletes had once created a spectacle of entertainment and had effectively been sumo's draw card.⁸⁸ Tierney notes that sumo involved "celebrations of the extraordinary – part performance and part peep show".⁸⁹ Harold Bolitho adds that the performances were held in common entertainment areas or at fairgrounds and the public went "with precisely that blend of fear and amazement with which they would, at other times, have visited the freaks in their booths on the same site".⁹⁰ Whereas sumo had once been entertaining and impressive to the public, its popularity now began to wane and it faced criticism from social commentators in the press.⁹¹ However, now the corpulence of the participants was at odds with Western ideas about the body, its athletic role, and the place of sport in society. This, added to a hypersensitivity to the way that Japan was viewed by those from abroad, meant that "[t]he wrestlers and their nakedness came to stand for Japan's backwardness."⁹² Indeed, such was the threat posed by these new ideas about the body and modesty, a prohibition on public nudity threatened the very future of sumo.⁹³

⁸⁷ Ibid., 68-9; R. Kenji Tierney, "Wrestling with Tradition: Sumo, National Identity and Trans/national Popular Culture" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2002), 67-93.

⁸⁸ See Harold Bolitho, "Frolicking Dragons: Mythic terror and the sumo tradition," in *Sport: Nationalism and Internationalism*, ed. Australian Society for Sports History (Bedford Park, South Australia: Australian Society for Sports History, 1987), 12, and Tierney, "Wrestling with Tradition," 20-66. In addition to the sumo contests, there were also ring-entering displays by those with unusual physiques, for example unusually tall or large people and huge children, which added to the extraordinary physical display of the sumo tournament.

⁸⁹ Tierney, "Wrestling with Tradition", 22.

⁹⁰ Bolitho, "Frolicking Dragons," 19.

⁹¹ Kazami Akira, *Sumō, Kokugi to Naru* (Tokyo: Taishūkan Shoten, 2002), 7-8.

⁹² Tierney, "Wrestling with Tradition", 18.

⁹³ Kazami, *Sumō, Kokugi to Naru*, 3-5.

Ōzumō tried as best it could to weather this opposition. One way it did this was to have the *rikishi*⁹⁴ and the organisation perform social duties, such as creating an auxiliary fire fighting unit in 1876.⁹⁵ Another key factor was support from leading political figures such as Saigō Takamori, Itō Hirobumi, and Itagaki Taisuke.⁹⁶ However, perhaps the most significant boost to *ōzumō* came from a performance before the emperor in 1884, where sumo's traditional association with the imperial family dating back over a thousand years was invoked.⁹⁷ For this performance, aspects of *sechie-zumō*, sumo performed as an agrarian rite before the emperor from the 8th to the 12th century, were reintroduced or re-invented.⁹⁸ This event, and particularly its coverage by the national newspapers, did much to revive the popularity of *ōzumō*.⁹⁹ Furthermore, a change in attitude and thought at this time boosted the social status of sumo once again. From the mid-1880s onwards “the frantic pursuit of Western things began to abate and a more critical, discriminating look at Western culture and institutions came to be taken.”¹⁰⁰ This reappraisal was led by leading intellectuals, some of whom previously had fervently supported the initial wave of Westernisation, and it renewed interest in Japanese traditions and culture, particularly in Confucian thought and morals.¹⁰¹

⁹⁴ Literally ‘powerful man’ in meaning, this is the most common Japanese term for an *ōzumō* wrestler.

⁹⁵ The lower ranked *rikishi* were given duties such as creating firebreaks downwind of major fires. Kazami, *Sumō, Kokugi to Naru*, 12-4; Kanazashi Motoi, *Sumō Dai-jiten* (Tokyo: Gendai Shokan, 2002), 152.

⁹⁶ Kanazashi, *Sumō Dai-jiten*, 152.

⁹⁷ Tierney, “Wrestling with Tradition”, 91-3.

⁹⁸ *Sechie-zumō* and its role in linking sumo with the imperial line will be considered later in this chapter.

⁹⁹ Kanazashi, *Sumō Dai-jiten*, 24.

¹⁰⁰ Mikiso Hane, *Modern Japan: A Historical Survey* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1986), 132.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 132; W.G. Beasley, *The Rise of Modern Japan*, 2nd ed. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995), 99.

Martial arts (*budō*)¹⁰² in particular provided a vision of strength that was linked to spiritual and psychological qualities seen as unique to Japan. Their blend of bodily techniques with mental and philosophical training, encapsulated in the code of *bushidō* (way of the warrior), was seen to be particularly beneficial. Notable in his exposition of Japan's martial spirit was Meiji era intellectual Nitobe Inazō, whose book on the subject and assertion that *bushidō* stood at the heart of Japanese morality gained international acceptance.¹⁰³ Kanō Jigorō, who founded judo as a modern martial art, was also prominent.¹⁰⁴ Combining elements from different schools of *jūjutsu* and placing an emphasis on “the most economical use of body and mind energy,”¹⁰⁵ Kanō took a modern, rationalistic approach to creating a practice based on the philosophical, physical and moral aspects of earlier martial arts. In this way, qualities of national pride and morality intersected with athleticism at a time when there was a wide promotion of modern sport in Japanese society.¹⁰⁶ In particular, Kanō's success with judo came in the way that

¹⁰² Japanese martial arts such as judo, kendo and karate were referred to as *budō*, with the implication that they possessed a philosophical ‘way’ (*dō*) that should be followed in addition to performance of the skills. Sumo is also often attributed with having a philosophical and moral element, or ‘way of sumo’ (called *sumōdō*) although sumo is most often described by the term ‘*kokugi*’, translating approximately to ‘national skill’ or ‘national technique’. Even though other martial arts can be, and are, referred to as *kokugi*, by using this term predominantly for sumo privileges sumo and implicitly nationalises and differentiates it in comparison to other sports. Introduced Western sports were marked as different in a lexical sense by the use of the English loanword *supōtsu* (sport/sports) to describe them. While using *kokugi* to describe sumo, and perhaps consider it as a martial art rather than as a mere ‘sport’, is undoubtedly attractive, contemporary sumo does in fact fit most of Guttman's seven criteria for modern sport: secularism, equality of opportunity and competition, specialization, rationalization, bureaucratic organization, quantification, and the quest for records. See Allen Guttman, *From Ritual to Record: the nature of modern sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

¹⁰³ Nitobe's book has been through several printings, revisions, and with forwards written by various contributors since it was first written in 1899. See, for example, Inazo Nitobe, *Bushido: the soul of Japan, an exposition of Japanese thought*, revised and enlarged edition (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1969).

¹⁰⁴ For an account of the creation of judo as a modern sport, see Inoue Shun, “The Invention of the Martial Arts: Kanō Jigorō and Kōdōkan Judo,” in *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan*, ed. Stephen Vlastos (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 163-73.

¹⁰⁵ Yoshinobu Hamaguchi, “Innovation in martial arts,” in *Japan, Sport and Society: tradition and change in a globalizing world*, ed. Joseph Maguire and Masayoshi Nakayama (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 12.

¹⁰⁶ Indeed, this was happening across the world, for, as Barry Smart has noted, “[t]he period from the 1870s to the 1920s represented a ‘take-off’ phase, an important period in which international competitions, tournaments and tours began to occur with increasing frequency.” Barry Smart, “Not playing around: global capitalism, modern sport and consumer culture,” *Global Networks* 7, no. 2 (2007), 115.

he managed to arrange judo along the developmental axis of life-long improvement and within the structural framework of modern Western sport. In terms of integration, the new cultural space that Kano had opened found appropriate niches in Japan as well as in the Western world.¹⁰⁷

While many Western sports were popular, enthusiastically undertaken, and even ‘nationalised’ with particular Japanese approaches,¹⁰⁸ *budō* stood out as a ‘native’ counterpoint to the elements of Westernisation in late nineteenth century Japan. This was in spite of the fact that judo had been designed along rationalist lines, to be a modern Japanese sport, and that its successful development “exerted tremendous influence on the codification and interpretation of other major martial arts during the twentieth century.”¹⁰⁹ Rather, it was the prominence of the Japanese ideas and values apparent in *budō* that meshed neatly with this changing view of Japanese culture, and that also soon coincided with a strengthening, militaristic Japan and with the uptake of sport and physical fitness across the school system. Martial arts were used “as an educational tool for the cultivation of morals and strength of character”,¹¹⁰ which was particularly important around the turn of the 20th century when Japan twice became embroiled in war in Northeast Asia. In this context, sumo, with its connections to samurai training during Japan’s feudal era, was “reinterpreted as a native form of physical culture.”¹¹¹ Sumo became an acceptable pursuit once again due to its “changing cultural role from a performance or display of bodies, into a serious form of body culture”.¹¹² We might consider this as the ‘sportification’ of sumo, where it is not just viewed as a form of entertainment but can also be appreciated for its sporting qualities. This ‘sportification’

¹⁰⁷ Sabine Frühstück and Wolfram Manzenreiter, “Neverland Lost: Judo cultures in Austria, Japan, and elsewhere struggling for cultural hegemony,” in *Globalizing Japan: ethnography of the Japanese presence in Asia, Europe, and America*, ed. Harumi Befu and Sylvie Guichard-Anguis (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 70.

¹⁰⁸ Yuko Kusaka, “The emergence and development of Japanese school sport,” in *Japan, Sport and Society: tradition and change in a globalizing world*, ed. Joseph Maguire and Masayoshi Nakayama (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 19-34.

¹⁰⁹ Frühstück and Manzenreiter, “Neverland Lost,” 69.

¹¹⁰ Hamaguchi, “Innovation in martial arts,” 9.

¹¹¹ Tierney, “Wrestling with Tradition,” 95.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 122. Tierney argues that the changing ideas in Japan at this time regarding the masculine body shifted sumo back and forth between the poles of traditional and modern, anachronistic and contemporary, corpulent and athletic, and unsuitable and suitable.

continued further with the uptake of sumo by ordinary people as a form of exercise and competition.

The Origins of Amateur Sumo

With the revival of sumo's social status, and a foundation of modern sport in the Japanese school system, sumo developed into a participant sport as well. Although *ōzumō* as public entertainment and spectacle had become the most prominent form of sumo in Tokugawa Japan, sumo also continued to be performed, as it long had been, in various contexts at local shrines and in local festivals. Community tournaments such as these occurred perhaps seasonally or annually but there were also symbolic sumo performances at other times, such as ring-entering ceremonies, the wearing of ceremonial aprons (*keshō-mawashi*) hung from the *mawashi*, performance of *shiko* (the ceremonial foot stamping of sumo), or other links to the rituals associated with performing sumo. This was known as *kusa-zumō*, among other names, and was performed by, and for, local communities, and usually with some cultural purpose attached.¹¹³ Another name given to sumo performed outside of professional sumo was *shirōto sumō*, literally 'amateur' or 'novice' sumo, contrasting these participants with the specialists who performed *ōzumō*.

In the late 19th century, educators, literati and other elites who were fans of sumo worked to establish sumo as an organised participant sport. They aimed at creating sumo as a modern, amateur sport that fitted somewhere between the vulgarity and *ad hoc* nature of provincial *kusa-zumō* and the spectator sport of *ōzumō*. They drew inspiration and a set of rules from professional sumo, seen as the highest echelon and paragon of the sport.¹¹⁴ As had happened with the introduction of other modern sports in Japan, amateur sumo began with educated elites in society, and in the school system from which they came.¹¹⁵ The

¹¹³ *Kusa-zumō*, literally "grass sumo" referred to rural/community sumo contests. The name implied a loose structure in its organisation if indeed there was one. Kanazashi, *Sumō Dai-jiten*, 33.

¹¹⁴ Shimokawa Takashi et al., *Sumō: eibun kaisetsu-tsuki* (Tokyo: Aki Shobō, 2002), 13.

¹¹⁵ The introduction of modern sports such as baseball, gymnastics, rowing and rugby came primarily from European and American teachers employed in Japanese universities. This in turn sparked a top-down dissemination of such sports when graduates of these elite schools took up teaching positions elsewhere and took their interest in sport with them. Machiko Kimura, "Gender relations in Japanese sports organisation and sport involvement," in *Sport and Women: Social Issues in International Perspective*, ed. Ilse Hartmann-Tews and Gertrud Pfister (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 240.

so-called ‘gentlemen’s sumo’ or ‘literati sumo’¹¹⁶ was established in the urban areas of Japan, based around the educated and privileged young men from elite schools.¹¹⁷

As the principal of the Tokyo Higher Normal School (*Tōkyō Kōtō Shihan Gakkō*), Kanō Jigorō advocated sumo as a necessary part of the physical education curriculum in 1900. By the next year his college began extracurricular sumo practice.¹¹⁸ Following this lead, sumo grew as an extracurricular activity in more schools around the country, and became incorporated into sports days and commemorative ceremonies at schools as well.¹¹⁹

Because of its stronghold in the schools, this new sport became known as student sumo, or *gakusei sumō*,¹²⁰ and is the beginning of what we now consider amateur sumo. What is also important to consider is the emergence of amateur sumo as a sport in its own right, and the acknowledged close associations yet operational distinctions made between amateur sumo (sumo as a sport), other non-professional sumo (sumo as cultural performance at festivals and shrine ceremonies, etc), and *ōzumō* (where sumo existed as both sporting practice and cultural artefact).¹²¹

Amateur sumo was still very much in its infancy for the first decade of the 20th century. In schools, student-athletes from other sports, such as the more established school sport of baseball, were often co-opted into school sumo teams when needed.¹²² The lack of solely sumo-dedicated athletes at this time suggests the relative infancy of amateur sumo within the sporting landscape and perhaps indicates the place of sumo as just another of the sports on offer for students within the curriculum. The first official student sumo competition was held in Osaka in 1909.¹²³ It was followed the next year by two further tournaments in Osaka, and similar ones in Tokyo, where there were also Waseda-Keio

¹¹⁶ *Shinshi sumō* or *Bunshi sumō*, respectively.

¹¹⁷ Imamura Yoshio, cited in Fujikawa Seikatsu, “Nihon Sumō Renmei 35-nen no ayumi,” in *Sumō: Dai 30-kai Zen Nihon Sumō Senshu-ken Taikai Kinen-shi*, ed. Nihon Sumō Renmei (Tokyo: Nihon Sumō Renmei, 1982), 28.

¹¹⁸ As mentioned earlier, Kanō was a strong advocate for modern sport, being the founder of judo and a leader in amateur sports organization in Japan. Fujikawa, “Nihon Sumō Renmei 35-nen,” 28; Shimokawa et al., *Sumō: eibun kaisetsu-tsuki*, 13.

¹¹⁹ Fujikawa, “Nihon Sumō Renmei 35-nen,” 28.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Performances of sumo as sport and culture could overlap, as the next chapter will briefly show.

¹²² Fujikawa, “Nihon Sumō Renmei 35-nen,” 29.

¹²³ *Chikara*, “Amachua sumō monogatari 22,” September 1974, 16.

intercollegiate events.¹²⁴ Although the sumo bout is an individual contest, the emergence of intercollegiate competition gave rise to one of the peculiarities of amateur sumo, the team competition.¹²⁵ Its development is perhaps not surprising given the competitive inter-school rivalries that were prevalent at this time in sports such as rugby, rowing and baseball.¹²⁶

Such tournaments began a flurry of activity within collegiate amateur sumo, necessitating the establishment of organisations to administer the sport. In 1912, the Tokyo Student Sumo Group (*Tōkyō Gakusei Sumō-dan*) was created to restart the Tokyo Student Sumo Championships after an interruption of a couple of years.¹²⁷ The resulting inaugural East-West Student Sumo Tournament, held at Tokyo's Yasukuni Shrine in November 1913, was between two invitational teams comprised of athletes from the different schools in that region.¹²⁸ This was the first combined activity of the two geographical spheres of student sumo in Japan and it helped to integrate the progress and development of amateur sumo throughout the country. By 1919 there was a truly national student sumo tournament (*Zenkoku Gakusei Sumō Taikai*) in place.¹²⁹ Until this time the efforts in organising student sumo had been in planning and running the student sumo tournaments each year. However in 1920 the *Kantō Gakusei Sumō Renmei* (East Japan Student Sumo Federation) was formed, giving the sport the beginnings of greater long-range planning. In 1925 the *Kansai Gakusei Sumō Renmei*, the West Japan equivalent, was founded and the two bodies, their respective tournaments and administration remain today.¹³⁰ In 1934 this hierarchy was enlarged when a national organization (*Nihon Gakusei Sumō Renmei*) was formed to take an over-arching role for student sumo throughout Japan.

¹²⁴ Fujikawa, "Nihon Sumō Renmei 35-nen," 30.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 29. Actually, at the time, there was no individual championship winner in *ōzumō* either. The championship flag was contested for by two teams, east and west, determined by the ranking sheet for the athletes and competed for by the accumulated results across all days of the tournament. The individual championship did not come into being until 1926. See Lee A. Thompson, "The Invention of the Yokozuna and the Championship System, or, Futahaguro's Revenge," in *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan*, ed. Stephen Vlastos (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 180.

¹²⁶ Ikuo Abe, Yasuharu Kiyohara and Ken Nakajima, "Fascism, Sport and Society in Japan," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 9, no. 1 (1992): 9; Kusaka, "The emergence and development," 27-8.

¹²⁷ *Chikara*, "Amachua sumō monogatari 22," September 1974, 16.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*; Fujikawa, "Nihon Sumō Renmei 35-nen," 31.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*; *Ibid.*, 34.

¹³⁰ Shimokawa et al., *Sumō: eibun kaisetsu-tsuki*, 13.

Despite its growth, amateur sumo remained fractured according to the region and strata of Japanese society in which it was performed. The sport was controlled separately through the student sumo organisations, local and regional associations (eg. in districts, towns and cities), and the sumo clubs of companies and the military. Despite this, there was still interaction across these different spheres of amateur sumo through regular tournaments. Annual invitational tournaments, for example, were held throughout the early Shōwa period between representatives of the combined armed forces and the national student sumo federation.¹³¹ Furthermore, the most prominent tournament was the sumo competition at the Meiji Shrine Athletic Meet (*Meiji Jingū Kyōgi Taikai*), which began in the autumn of 1924.¹³² It brought together the best exponents from among the student, corporate and community sumo clubs in the country in what was the first truly national amateur sumo tournament. This tournament also arguably promoted the establishment of regional organisations to oversee amateur sumo in their areas.¹³³ Nevertheless, despite all of these developments, it was not until September 1946, when amateur sumo's organisations were being re-formed and restarted after the war, that the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* (Japan Sumo Federation) was formed to oversee all forms of amateur sumo in Japan.¹³⁴ Today, under the umbrella of the *Nihon Sumō Renmei*, the divisions between

¹³¹ The tournaments were held annually at Yasukuni Shrine in April from c.1926 until c.1940. *Chikara*, "Amachua sumō monogatari 22," September 1974, 16.

¹³² Fujikawa, "Nihon Sumō Renmei 35-nen," 48; Shimokawa et al., *Sumō: eibun kaisetsu-tsuki*, 13.

¹³³ It also promoted the formation of other organisations that were not based solely in geography, as can be seen in the establishment of the workplace sumo organization, covering West Japan, in 1936. Shimokawa et al., *Sumō: eibun kaisetsu-tsuki*, 13.

¹³⁴ The existence of the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* has meant central organisation for amateur sumo in Japan across the divides that existed before the war. Today the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* represents a latticework of organisational relationships because the sport remains, to a degree, "divided organizationally into Young Sumo for pupils from primary and junior high schools, Student Sumo for students from senior high schools, colleges and universities, and Adult Sumo, embracing teachers, young people, clubs from industrial and commercial enterprises, and sumo fans from among the general public." Jun'ichi Tabuchi and Kazuaki Sugiura, "Sumō Today," in *Sumō* (Tokyo: Nihon Sumō Renmei, 1982), <http://www.amateursumo.com/nsrsumobook/chapter3.htm> (accessed March 16, 2004).

student and corporate amateur sumo still exist, but there are also geographical divisions to negotiate, moving down through ‘block’, prefectural, and city sumo federations.¹³⁵

Considering the masculine sumo body

Amateur sumo can be seen as a result of the period of increasing formalisation and uptake of modern sport in which it was developed. It grew from the desire to bring sumo into line with other sports and allow structured competitions for amateur athletes, most notably within the framework of intercollegiate sporting competition. Amateur sumo carried with it most of the attributes of professional sumo, including the rules, the *dohyō*, and the underlying principles of trying to combine mind, body and technique (*shin-gi-tai*) in the performance of sumo. Amateur sumo also accepted unquestioningly the gendering of sumo as a male-only pursuit that occurred in *ōzumō*.

The masculinisation of sumo had taken place upon the backdrop of seeking legitimacy for public performances of professional sumo, the overt connection of professional sumo to *Shintō* rituals, and existing gender norms in both the feudal and modern periods of Japanese history. Prior to the advent of amateur sumo, women *had* performed sumo for a variety of purposes. The most conspicuous of these was for public entertainment during the Edo period, just as men’s sumo had entertained paying crowds, with a mixture of feats of strength, displays of extraordinary bodies, and actual matches between competitors. However, the need to make *ōzumō* palatable to officials of the Tokugawa government meant that sumo was ‘tidied up’ to create a respectable showpiece for public consumption.

¹³⁵ Geographically, a ‘block’ usually refers to one of eight Japanese regional groupings (Hokkaidō, Tōhoku, Kantō, Chūbu, Kinki, Chūgoku, Shikoku, and Kyūshū). In amateur sumo, these regional “blocks” are joined by the Japan Student Sumo Federation (and its East Japan and West Japan sub-groups), the Japan Corporate Sumo Federation, and the Japan *Shinsumō* Federation. These different groupings intersect in terms of personnel and jurisdiction. Most commonly this would be seen in officials holding concurrent positions in different organisations: an official might hold concurrent positions in a prefectural federation and a block federation, or perhaps in the local student sumo federation. Prominent prefectural sumo officials also hold positions in the *Nihon Sumō Renmei*. When a major tournament is held, it is usually done with the assistance of the different levels and federations in that area.

It was with the formation of *ōzumō* that different elements of sumo were fused together and the less acceptable facets, such as women's performance, were discarded or marginalised and such performances stigmatised. Male participation in sumo, through *ōzumō*, became a process largely geared towards lifestyle and remuneration, whereby money was made from a paying public, licenses to train sumo were issued, and competitors could make a living from performing sumo. Women's performance of sumo, meanwhile, was relegated to a fringe activity, had lewd connotations attached, and was labelled as an 'other' with the name *onna-zumō* (women's sumo). Women were not explicitly removed from the performance of sumo, as their participation remained in agrarian rituals, feats of strength, and in the travelling entertainment troupes that toured parts of the country well into the early 20th century.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, professional sumo was legitimised as being a male domain, while female sumo for entertainment purposes was marginalised as a circus show.

This strategic decision to exclude women from performing sumo was later reinforced and rationalised by *ōzumō*'s links to *shintō*, Japan's animist religion. *Ōzumō* prohibited women from stepping on the *dohyō* due to *shintō* beliefs, specifically the idea that menstruation makes women impure and a source of defilement. The *dohyō* is purified as a sacred site before each tournament, and the exclusion of women is to keep the ring pure.¹³⁷ As professional sumo prohibited performances by women, this idea was carried over from *ōzumō* to amateur sumo as part of the tradition of sumo. Ironically, women had in fact performed sumo for the purposes of agrarian rites or to connect with *shintō* gods

¹³⁶ *Onna-zumō* involved spectacles for entertainment purposes and involved two women competing against each other, or sometimes women wrestling blind men. Some of these aspects still remain in regional festivals in Japan, where women sometimes perform sumo or parade in sumo attire. *Onna-zumō* was, at its most extreme, an erotic, vaudeville display of female wrestling where competitors mimicked male sumo by grappling bare-breasted and wearing only a *mawashi*. However, there was a spectrum of performances, from serious through to circus-like or lewd sumo. Although sumo performed as entertainment for the masses was conducted by men and women alike, it is this lewd image of women's participation in sumo that has largely stuck while male sumo has escaped associations with anything other than 'serious' sumo competition. See Kaneda Eiko, "Kōgyō tōshite no onnazumō ni kansuru kenkyū," *Nihon Taiiku Daigaku Kiyō* 22, no. 2 (1993): 97-102; Eiko Kaneda, "Trends in Traditional Women's Sumo in Japan," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 16, no. 3 (1999): 113-19.

¹³⁷ The defilement of the sacred ring is guarded against in other ways as well. The general public is asked to avoid the area around the ring during the period of the 15 day tournament. No outdoor footwear is to be worn on the *dohyō*, and the ring is swept by attendants to keep it free from debris and the build up of dirt. Should any blood be spilt the affected area needs to be hacked out of the surface and purified with salt before other matches can continue.

but their participation had been marginalised as *ōzumō* became the dominant form of sumo.¹³⁸

However, in addition to marginalising women's performance of sumo on religious grounds and as part of the tradition of *ōzumō*, social gender norms in the Meiji period also played an important role in the continued marginalisation of women within sumo. In the Edo period, Japan was influenced by Neo-Confucian thought which privileged and promoted social hierarchy and order, part of which was based on a subordinate role for women. The gender norms encouraged by modernisation, those that promoted the male body as the epitome of athleticism and the female body as the nurturer, meshed with the Confucian gender divisions that were already apparent in the feudal order. The ideal feminine role was that of *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) who was to be dutiful to her husband and his work while raising the children and making a good home.¹³⁹ This ideology was promoted in the Meiji period through the compulsory national education system,¹⁴⁰ but had its beginnings in samurai familial roles and Neo-Confucian ethics. Arguably, such ideas still remain to an extent in present day Japan.¹⁴¹ It was these ideas of a woman's 'proper place' that further kept them from participating in sumo (or sport in general), relegating women to peripheral roles of spectator, helper, and mother figure.¹⁴² Ironically, then, the same modern ideas about the athletic (male) body that promoted the beginnings of amateur sumo as a participation sport also further entrenched the separation of the sexes and removed women from athletic participation in sumo. By the start of the 20th century, when amateur sumo was emerging, women had been historically removed from the sumo ring in all but localised spectacles.

¹³⁸ Women sometimes performed sumo as a way to invoke the gods. There are regional differences in this practice but, either by making the gods angry or by pleasing them with their sumo, women were thought to have the power to bring rain. See Kaneda, "Trends in Traditional Women's Sumo"; Shimokawa et al., *Sumō: eibun kaisetsu-tsuki*, 7; Chie Ikkai, "Women's Sumo Wrestling in Japan," *International Journal of Sport and Health Science* 1, no. 1 (2003): 180.

¹³⁹ Kathleen Uno, "The Death of "Good Wife, Wise Mother"?" in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 297.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 298.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 321.

¹⁴² This role can be seen in the activities of the most prominent female figures in *ōzumō*, the *okamisan* who are the wives of the *oyakata* (stable masters). It is the *okamisan* who runs the day-to-day affairs and finances of the *heya*, and who acts as surrogate mother figures to the young sumo aspirants, many of whom are only teenagers when they join the sport.

Amateur sumo, the influences of *ōzumō*, and sumo history

The gendering of the contest as a male-only domain was not the only connection between amateur sumo and its professional counterpart. From its inception, amateur sumo has been influenced by *ōzumō*, the most established, best recognised and financially strongest form of sumo. Even today there remains an intimate relationship between the two, such that the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* notes “close cooperation between amateur sumo, participated in by people from every walk of life, and the spectator sport of professional sumo.”¹⁴³ Despite this, amateur sumo has had to live in the shadow of the professional world, receiving only limited media exposure while *ōzumō* is televised across Japan by the state broadcaster NHK and covered widely in the general press, sports tabloids and in dedicated publications. However, despite the disparity in media coverage, the popularity of *ōzumō* has a flow-on effect in promoting amateur sumo.

Amateur sumo has long been seen as the breeding ground for future professional hopefuls, and it serves the interests of *ōzumō* to have the sport as strong as possible at its grassroots.¹⁴⁴ Japanese amateur sumo tournaments help to identify the best young sumo athletes at local, high school and university levels, and provide a stage from where they might be recruited into the lower ranks of the professional sumo world.¹⁴⁵ There is a symbiotic relationship between professional and amateur sumo, whereby the popularity of *ōzumō* as a spectator sport can help the participant sport of amateur sumo, which in turn might help strengthen and enlarge the future stocks of professional *rikishi*.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Tabuchi and Sugiura, “Sumō Today.” This suggests quite clearly that for the ordinary public, amateur sumo is a participatory event – a sport – while *ōzumō* remains a form of entertainment for spectators.

¹⁴⁴ The *Nihon Sumō Kyōkai* has been generous in its support for Japanese amateur sumo through the provision of prizes for amateur competitions and allowing the use of the Kokugikan for amateur sumo at little or no cost.

¹⁴⁵ In fact, the *Nihon Sumō Kyōkai* recognises the achievements of national amateur champions by giving them the opportunity to enter at a higher professional rank if they have won one of four designated national amateur competitions. These four important tournaments cover the spectrum of elite amateur sumo in Japan: the collegiate championship, the corporate championship, the sumo championship of the National Athletic Meet, and the overall National Amateur Sumo Championship. The athletes must be still young enough (under 23) to enter the profession, and this special exemption must be taken up within a year of the championship victory. If two of the designated championships are won in the same year, then the exemption is into a slightly higher place in the professional rankings.

¹⁴⁶ Recruits into *ōzumō* are scouted and accepted from their mid-teens to early twenties, and it remains relatively rare for more than a handful of them to have no amateur sumo experience whatsoever.

However, for most amateur sumo competitors a career in *ōzumō* is simply not an option. Ability aside, aspirations of professional glory are almost impossible without the *ōzumō* stereotype of weight and bulk.¹⁴⁷ Amateur sumo, on the other hand, allows more equal competition for those of smaller stature and size because of its different weight divisions and provides niches for different shapes and sizes.

Despite obvious differences in their purposes and future pathways, the close connection between the two sports means that amateur sumo has often been viewed in the same light as *ōzumō*. This has been perpetuated in certain ways by the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* entangling its existence with that of *ōzumō*. For example, the history of professional sumo set out by the *Nihon Sumō Kyōkai* suggests modern day *ōzumō* developed in a broadly linear fashion from the sumo performed in mythological times, through performances for the emperor in the 8th century to the development of sumo from a military art to a spectator event under the patronage of warlords in the Edo Period.¹⁴⁸ The *Nihon Sumō Renmei* identifies these selfsame types of sumo as the roots of amateur sumo,¹⁴⁹ implicitly acknowledging *ōzumō* as its predecessor but ignoring the role Japan's modernisation played in its inception.

Histories of sumo, including those by the *Nihon Sumō Kyōkai* and the *Nihon Sumō Renmei*, almost always refer to the sport's ancient origins, perhaps as far back as the mythical foundations of Japan itself. They also link sumo to the *shintō* pantheon via this creation myth. For example, control of the land of Japan was supposedly determined by a sumo match between two deities, Takemikazuchi and Takeminakata, at Izumo in western Japan. The former was the victor, and his descendants (who became the imperial family line) took possession of the country.¹⁵⁰ This myth is found in the first documented

¹⁴⁷ While some lighter professionals have been successful, it is difficult to compete at the highest (salaried) levels without weighing at least over 100 kilograms.

¹⁴⁸ *Nihon Sumō Kyōkai*, "Origin of Sumo," http://sumo.goo.ne.jp/eng/ozumo_joho_kyoku/shiru/kiso_chishiki/beginners_guide/origin.html (accessed December 12, 2008).

¹⁴⁹ Jun'ichi Tabuchi and Kazuaki Sugiura, "The History of Sumō," in *Sumō* (Tokyo: Nihon Sumō Renmei, 1982), <http://www.amateursumo.com/nsrsumobook/chapter2.htm> (accessed March 16, 2004).

¹⁵⁰ Clyde Newton, *Dynamic Sumo* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2000), 48.

account of Japan's origins, the *Kojiki*,¹⁵¹ and has been called the first page of sumo's history.¹⁵² Another early historical work, the *Nihon Shoki*,¹⁵³ carries the tale of another sumo contest between two strongmen at the behest of Emperor Suinin in 23 BC.¹⁵⁴ The winner, Nominosukune, was a potter from Izumo who killed his opponent, Taimanokehaya, by delivering several kicks to the stomach and solar plexus. As a reward, Nominosukune was awarded his opponent's lands in Nara by the emperor.¹⁵⁵ As a more lasting tribute, Nominosukune is regarded as the father of sumo,¹⁵⁶ even though, if this story is to be believed, sumo in this time was obviously quite different to what has since evolved.¹⁵⁷

As an extension of using sumo as a test of strength between two people, as mentioned above, sumo began to be used in a religious context. *Shinji-zumō* was used to pray for protection from the elements, agricultural bounty, or to thank the gods for success or divine intervention.¹⁵⁸ When performed in this way, “[s]umo bouts were arranged as a means of determining the will of the gods, and it was generally believed that the victor and his supporters would be rewarded with a good harvest.”¹⁵⁹ By invoking the gods to ask for agricultural provision, sumo had an important place in rural lifestyle and was also

¹⁵¹ Record of Ancient Matters, compiled in 712 AD.

¹⁵² Wakamori Tarō, *Sumo Ima Mukashi* (Tokyo: Sumidagawa Bunko, 2003), 16.

¹⁵³ The Chronicles of Japan, compiled in 720 AD.

¹⁵⁴ Newton, *Dynamic Sumo*, 8.

¹⁵⁵ Kanazashi, *Sumō Dai-jiten*, 264-5.

¹⁵⁶ Newton, *Dynamic Sumo*, 48.

¹⁵⁷ Given that these accounts were compiled from oral tradition, Bolitho believes that this only shows there was a history of some kind of wrestling in Japan from before 720 AD. He does not accept that there is “any putative link between wrestling of this kind and sumō wrestling, whether the sumō wrestling we know today, or any of its historically verifiable ancestors.” He bases these claims on the sheer violence of the contest described, kicking and killing an opponent, as being anathema to the nature of sumo contests which have historically been “curiously gentle, aimed not at hurting, much less killing, an opponent”. The *Nihon Sumō Kyōkai* makes note of the contest between Takemikazuchi and Takeminakata, and acknowledges that early sumo “was a rough-and-tumble affair combining elements of boxing and wrestling with few or no holds barred” but it stops short of detailing Nominosukune's victory. See, respectively: Bolitho, “Sumō and popular culture,” 18; *Nihon Sumō Kyōkai*, “Origin of Sumo.”

¹⁵⁸ Kanazashi, *Sumō Dai-jiten*, 157; Shimokawa et al., *Sumō: eibun kaisetsu-tsuki*, 6-7.

¹⁵⁹ Richard Light and Louise Kinnaird, “Appeasing the Gods: Shinto, Sumo and ‘True’ Japanese Spirit,” in *With God on their Side: Sport in the service of religion*, ed. Tara Magdalinski and Timothy J L Chandler (London: Routledge, 2002), 145.

further linked to *Shintō* religious ritual. Over time, the religious aspects of *shinji-zumō* inspired the performance of sumo as part of ritual dedication at shrines (*hōnō-zumō*).¹⁶⁰

Sumo also began to be used as an agrarian rite at the Imperial court. Most likely based on a Chinese model, performances which drew together a large number of wrestlers for matches with a heavy religious significance were held annually from the mid 8th century.¹⁶¹ This form of sumo, known as *sumai no sechie* (or more simply as *sechie-zumō*), was performed in the inner area of the imperial palace on the day of the *tanabata* festival where it was watched by the emperor and members of his court.¹⁶² Strong men sourced from around the country were brought in for the event, with many performing year after year.¹⁶³ The performances continued as an annual imperial rite for over 400 years, finally ending in the late 12th century.¹⁶⁴ In essence *sechie-zumō* was a ritual similar to *shinji-zumō*, in that it asked for a successful harvest and divine protection on a national scale.¹⁶⁵ In reality, it had no specified or delineated area for the actual contest, thereby excluding the sumo techniques that are used today to force opponents out of the ring for victory.¹⁶⁶ Even though these performances were quite different to modern *ōzumō*, most histories of sumo usually highlight this practice of performing sumo at the Imperial court as an important point in the sport's development.¹⁶⁷

Putting sumo on a pedestal

Emphasising the performances of *sechie-zumō* as part of the history of *ōzumō* provides a legacy of imperial patronage and religious links. The former gave the sport great kudos, especially in the Meiji period when the imperial institution had once again been restored. The more lasting influence upon sumo has perhaps been the connection to *shintō*

¹⁶⁰ Kanazashi, *Sumō Dai-jiten*, 298; Shimokawa et al., *Sumō: eibun kaisetsu-tsuki*, 7.

¹⁶¹ Newton, *Dynamic Sumo*, 48; Kanazashi, *Sumō Dai-jiten*, 164.

¹⁶² Bolitho, "Sumō and popular culture," 19.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 20; Shimokawa et al., *Sumō: eibun kaisetsu-tsuki*, 8.

¹⁶⁴ Shimokawa et al., *Sumō: eibun kaisetsu-tsuki*, 8. *Sechie-zumō* was re-invoked in the Meiji period as a way to tie sumo to the imperial tradition and to outlast social opposition to sumo.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ See Thompson, "The Invention of the Yokozuna," 175; Nihon Sumō Kyōkai, "Origin of Sumo.," Shimokawa et al., *Sumō: eibun kaisetsu-tsuki*, 8.

¹⁶⁷ For example: Newton, *Dynamic Sumo*, 48; J.A. Sargeant, *Sumo: the sport and the tradition* (Tokyo and Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1959), 8; Wakamori, *Sumo Ima Mukashi*, 19.

religiosity. Richard Light and Louise Kinnaird, for example, identify “that sumo’s affiliation with Shinto ritual has been central to the development of its cultural and social significance.”¹⁶⁸ These attachments of sumo performances to the imperial line and *shintō* religious celebration, as well as in other ways to the military past of the country, create an air of cultural and nationalistic significance. As Tierney suggests, the efforts of the *Nihon Sumō Kyōkai* have been to help establish a suitable past for *ōzumō* as “a way of achieving respectability, [which] has long been a matter of crucial concern in the world of sumō wrestling.”¹⁶⁹ The need for *ōzumō* to remain socially relevant and keep on-side with authorities to secure its existence was key, as has already been shown. An identification with the history of *ōzumō* ties amateur sumo closely to the reification of sumo as a Japanese cultural entity.

As sumo appears to have retained many traditional elements from centuries earlier, it remains in the national consciousness not only as a ‘national’ sport or a professional spectacle, but also as a cultural icon. Its long history, as promoted by the *Nihon Sumō Kyōkai* and others, reinforces the idea that “[t]ogether with being a sport, sumo is an art. If calling it an art is an exaggeration then perhaps calling it a craft is better.”¹⁷⁰ Sumo is also readily recognised from abroad as an element of traditional Japanese culture, based primarily on television or internet broadcasts of *ōzumō*.¹⁷¹ English-language publications, such as Clyde Newton’s widely read introduction to sumo, suggest that sumo’s appeal lies in it having remained unchanged through time and perhaps representing something of Japanese culture from centuries ago: “Sumo’s solemn, ritualized beauty gives it an unusual appeal. Without its colourful ceremonies, sumo would be just another sport, and might not have survived intact for so many centuries.”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Light and Kinnaird, “Appeasing the Gods,” 140.

¹⁶⁹ Bolitho, “Sumō and popular culture,” 19.

¹⁷⁰ Wakamori, *Sumo Ima Mukashi*, 6.

¹⁷¹ For example, professional sumo has 90 tournament days every year, with at least two hours live streaming coverage on each of these days available from the website of the *Nihon Sumō Kyōkai* at no cost. This helps to propagate images of *ōzumō* as representative of all types of sumo. Comparatively there is a dearth of material about amateur sumo, with almost no television coverage of major tournaments and only snippets of video footage available when posted on internet sites by enthusiasts and athletes.

¹⁷² Newton, *Dynamic Sumo*, 42.

In this way, (professional) sumo has been reified as Japanese tradition and culture *par excellence* by both national and international observers, marked with what Iwabuchi would term a strong cultural odour of Japan.¹⁷³ This is not only an issue for considering sumo but other Japanese sports as well. Elise Edwards suggests that much of the non-Japanese literature on sport in Japan has emphasised martial arts and tradition, and fails to interrogate their position and what this tradition might mean:

the writers frequently treat martial arts in a reified manner, as embodiments and proof of the persistence of a unique and trans-historical Japanese identity. Rather than exploring the ways in which martial arts have been constructed and appropriated in various processes of social and national identification, scholars have frequently held them up as a mirror and a timeless and treasured cultural vessel that simultaneously reflects and continues to hold indomitable truths of “Japan” and “Japaneseness.”¹⁷⁴

That being said, unlike sumo and perhaps some other martial arts, judo has been able to extricate itself from being seen as a quaint traditional activity and is considered as a ‘serious’ sport. This comes from several inter-related factors, most notably judo’s ready acceptance in foreign countries from the outset and its codification of practices into a model similar to modern Western sport. These factors placed judo in a strong position to be considered as an Olympic sport in the 1960s, from where it has blossomed further. This has led one article claiming that “judo finally had reached the stage of deterritorialization; it was no longer the judo of Japan, but rather the judo of the International Federation of Judo, which was practiced worldwide.”¹⁷⁵ Although amateur sumo has had a similar period of international presence, this has been in far fewer countries than judo, and sumo performance remained for a long time as a cultural performance within communities of Japanese diaspora (as the next chapter will show). A far wider international presence for amateur sumo has only occurred in the past two

¹⁷³ See Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalisation: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002).

¹⁷⁴ Elise Edwards, “Theorizing the Cultural Importance of Play: Anthropological approaches to sports and the recreation of Japan,” in *A Companion to the Anthropology of Japan*, ed. J. Robertson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 288-9.

¹⁷⁵ Frühstück and Manzenreiter, “Neverland Lost,” 81.

decades, and so its practice is only now starting to become deterritorialised from Japan. Added to this is a further factor which judo does not have to negotiate, namely amateur sumo's comparison to professional sumo. This anchors the concept of sumo to the Japanese homeland and Japanese culture, almost in spite of what happens internationally.

Through celebrating sumo as an element of Japanese culture, it has been placed "in a category akin to flower arranging and calligraphy; we Japanese can show it to foreigners, but this is so deeply an outgrowth of the native Japanese spirit that we would never expect a foreigner to do it well. We could certainly not export the activity in ways that would allow it to become popular in foreign countries".¹⁷⁶ For example, Tierney argues that nationalising sumo has been a key element in the portrayal of *ōzumō*, both for the domestic and international audiences:

[t]he history of sumo reveals continuous efforts to essentialize the ring and the bodies within it, and oversignify it as Japanese – defined with nationality, language and race as coterminous – and gender it as male. This has taken place by suppressing other forms of sumo that existed throughout history and either insisting on the presence of foreigners as an anomaly or reconfiguring them as native.¹⁷⁷

Such views have tended to obfuscate critical analysis of sumo's position with respect to tradition, nationalism, gender, cultural meaning and internationalism. Recently important works by Lee Thompson, Richard Light and Louise Kinnaird, and Kenji Tierney have shown that, despite this aura of tradition, aspects of professional sumo performance are in fact inventions, adaptations or augmentations that are less than a century old.¹⁷⁸ Tierney, for example, believes "professional sumo constantly attempts to maintain sumo as "tradition" with all the accoutrements, and history serves as the base for that discourse."¹⁷⁹ While *ōzumō* now seemingly represents the tradition and history of sumo

¹⁷⁶ T.J. Pempel, "Contemporary Japanese Athletics: Window on the Cultural Roots of Nationalism-Internationalism," in *The Culture of Japan as Seen through Its Leisure*, ed. Sepp Linhart and Sabine Fruhstuck (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 120.

¹⁷⁷ Tierney, "Wrestling with Tradition", 9.

¹⁷⁸ Thompson, "The Invention of the Yokozuna"; Light and Kinnaird, "Appeasing the Gods"; Tierney, "Wrestling with Tradition".

¹⁷⁹ Tierney, "Wrestling with Tradition", 15.

through the ages, Thompson describes this tradition as “not totally continuing from an ancient past” and acknowledges that “sumo has changed its form in each period.”¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, the historical existence of different types of sumo, and in particular the current existence of amateur sumo alongside *ōzumō*, demonstrates that sumo is not, nor has it ever been, a single entity.

The historical connections between amateur sumo and *ōzumō* remain, but the influence of the latter over the former has slowly unravelled over time. While the two could comfortably co-exist in a symbiotic relationship as long as amateur sumo remained a Japanese-based sport, as the international dimension of amateur sumo has grown a reappraisal has had to take place. One aspect is the increasing popularity of amateur sumo as an end in itself. Increasingly, many of the better amateur athletes still want to compete or train without necessarily seeking a career in the sport.¹⁸¹ As amateur sumo becomes a better recognised sport in its own right, elite adult athletes can pursue sumo as a (competitive) pastime without having to subsume themselves to the lifestyle of *ōzumō*.¹⁸² Another aspect is the ramifications of internationalisation of sumo. While *ōzumō* has accepted foreign-born athletes into its ranks, albeit with a quota system put in place as a reaction to the success and conspicuousness of these foreign faces, amateur sumo has

¹⁸⁰ Lee Thompson, quoted in *Mainichi Shimbun*, “Ōta-chiji ‘dohyō-iri’ mondai,” March 8, 2001, <http://www.mainichi.co.jp/life/women/cross-talk/14/kiji/03.html> (accessed January 3, 2004).

¹⁸¹ The reasons for this are many and varied. Entering *ōzumō* requires accepting both a lifestyle and a career notoriously difficult and demanding, fraught with injury and pain. The competitive career of professional sumo athletes is relatively short, and the financial rewards in the sport come for the group of 70 athletes who make the top two salaried divisions (from the total pool of about 700 athletes). Money, power and privilege in the professional sumo world come according to your rank and life can be difficult unless you are earning a salary. All of this means that making a career in sumo can be risky and there is no promise of future security. Raised economic standards and higher levels of living in Japan, even for those from rural areas, now make professional sumo less attractive a career option than it might have been three or more decades ago. The same reasons also attract many sumo athletes to remain in school and then consider turning professional after graduating high school or even university.

¹⁸² In fact, for some of the above reasons, the flow of sumo athletes is not only from amateur sumo into *ōzumō*; the opposite movement is also occurring. Some lower-ranking professional athletes who have retired continue competing in amateur sumo events. In Japan former professional athletes in the lower divisions can apply to the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* for reinstatement to amateur competition. Non-Japanese athletes who have retired from *ōzumō* can also return to amateur competition with the consent of their national federation. Former *makushita* level athletes from *ōzumō* have competed at the Sumo World Championships: in 1992 John Collins competed for the United States; in 1993 the Tongan team was led by Tevita Falevai; and, in 1994 Taylor Wily competed for the United States. The most successful former *ōzumō* athlete in international amateur sumo is Mongolian Byambajav Ulambayar who won the heavyweight titles at the Sumo World Championships in 2006 and 2007. He came third in the same category in 2008 and has won medals in the teams competitions as well.

looked to establish the sport in a variety of countries. This has necessitated actual change in the composition of amateur sumo, more of which will be discussed in the following chapters, but has also sparked a growing reconsideration of the nationalistic and masculine elements from *ōzumō* that became etched on amateur sumo from its inception. Of late, for example, the most obvious difference between professional and amateur sumo has been their different stances regarding the participation of women. While amateur sumo long followed *ōzumō* in not permitting women to climb on the *dohyō*, nowadays women are an integral part of amateur sumo.¹⁸³ Furthermore, with Japanese athletes now being beaten in competition, in both professional and amateur sumo, the realisation that others can, and do, perform sumo with the same abilities as Japanese-born athletes is one that dents both Japanese pride and interrogates the notion that sumo remains a ‘national’ sport of Japan.

* * *

Amateur sumo, regardless of size, nationality, and sex demonstrates that the practice of sumo spans far wider than stereotypical visions of the ‘big man’s sport’ of *ōzumō*. Beginning as amateur competitions for males in elite Japanese schools, amateur sumo has been embraced as the participant form of sumo for ordinary people. Nevertheless, the presence of *ōzumō* has loomed large and long influenced the way amateur sumo is perceived and received. For many years amateur sumo accepted a role in the shadow of *ōzumō* acting as the grassroots of the sport and a feeder to the professional ranks. The dominant and hegemonic image of sumo was that of the sport’s most visible form, *ōzumō*, even though sumo (had) existed in several different forms beyond this, ranging from associations with *Shintō* shrine rituals or ceremonial appearances in local festivals right through to the organised competitions of the sport of amateur sumo. Atop this, sumo had been inscribed with national sentiment, encompassing the creation myth of Japan, religious ceremonies and cultural enactment, periods of Imperial patronage, connections with Japan’s warrior past, and centuries of *ōzumō* as entertainment and competition itself.

¹⁸³ This will be considered further in Chapter Four.

Increasingly, however, the concept of 'sumo' has become broader than just being the Japanese professional contest steeped in tradition that *ōzumō* represents, even if parts of this tradition are a fallacy. Sumo has started to be recognised as a spectrum of contexts that challenge the stereotypes of professionalism, corpulent masculine bodies, and 'Japanese-ness' surrounding the sport. While some of this comes from recognising marginalised historical aspects of sumo such as *onna-zumō*, it is the burgeoning growth of amateur sumo that shows sumo in a broader light. Amateur ranks are no longer just for aspiring professionals, nor does sumo remain a male-only sport. Added to this is the presence of amateur sumo groups on all continents of the globe, and the establishment for over a decade of international tournaments. Amateur sumo, though originating in Japan, is now a worldwide sport, and the origins of this internationalisation are considered in the next chapter.

2. Taking Amateur Sumo to the World

The extent of both pre-war and contemporary “foreign” participation shows that sumo has never been the hermetically sealed Japanese tradition *sui generis* but has continuously had ambivalent and shifting relationship with outsiders, as expressed in the current globalization of sumo as a participation sport.¹⁸⁴

Tierney’s passage above identifies two streams of foreign participation in professional sumo over the last century. The first is the presence of *nikkeijin*¹⁸⁵ who learnt their sumo in the Japanese immigrant communities, while the second is the arrival of non-Japanese athletes, those with no ethnic or cultural connections to Japan, which has occurred in the last twenty to thirty years. Tierney’s final comment, where he speaks of “the current globalization of sumo as a participation sport,” specifically refers to the increasing popularity and spread of amateur sumo as a competitive sport outside of Japan. This chapter looks at how amateur sumo spread beyond Japan’s shores and demonstrates that the establishment of amateur sumo overseas mirrors the phases of foreign presence in professional sumo in Japan. Amateur sumo’s international presence began in Japanese immigrant communities, where the sport’s development was aided over several decades by interaction with amateur sumo groups from Japan. Thereafter, the sport spread into new areas with little connection to Japan, mainly due to “a top-down style of promulgation”¹⁸⁶ from Japanese administrators who were trying to encourage the further international growth of amateur sumo.

This broadening internationalisation of amateur sumo, particularly to countries beyond Japan’s cultural sphere, took place during a wave of *kokusaika* (internationalisation) in Japan. In the 1970s and 1980s, by virtue of its strong economy and increasing international connections, Japan became an influential international entity. There was a concomitant international interest in Japan, particularly its culture, and a reciprocal awareness that Japan itself should increasingly interact with the rest of the world. The

¹⁸⁴ R. Kenji Tierney, “Wrestling with Tradition: Sumo, National Identity and Trans/national Popular Culture” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2002), [Abstract] 2.

¹⁸⁵ Ethnically Japanese emigrants and their descendants.

¹⁸⁶ Tierney, “Wrestling with Tradition,” 327.

kokusaika wave was highlighted by the promotion of Japanese cultural elements overseas to new audiences. Sumo, both professional and amateur, was one of these cultural elements that caught the eye. Amateur sumo began to encourage the participation of outsiders in the national sport of Japan, and this internationalisation was reflected by the presence of foreign teams in an international sumo tournament that Japan hosted. The stage was set for what would later become the Sumo World Championships.

Underpinning the internationalisation of amateur sumo has been the presence of the International Sumo Federation, the sport's governing body. This chapter also explores the roles that the IFS and the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* played in the spread of amateur sumo over the past three to four decades, with particular emphasis on the period immediately prior to and after the inauguration of the Sumo World Championships in 1992.¹⁸⁷ Important also have been the continental sumo federations that were established in 1995 to consolidate the growth in amateur sumo achieved in the early years of the Sumo World Championships. The efforts of these bodies have promoted sumo outside of Japan but, by having multiple other places now cast as sites for sumo, this process has begun to challenge the notion of sumo as an entirely Japanese sport. This reterritorialisation sees sumo becoming less synonymous with Japan, and Japan no longer being considered the sole place of, or for, sumo. A global community of amateur sumo athletes and officials has grown, and the preconditions have been laid for the “globalization of sumo as a participation sport” of which Tierney speaks.

Japanese diaspora and the cultural performance of sumo

As the previous chapter showed, while amateur sumo emerged in schools, workplaces and sumo clubs and led to organised competitions, other non-professional sumo was also performed outside of structured amateur competitions as the *cultural* enactment of sumo. Sumo (as culture) was performed at regional and local festivals and celebrations throughout Japan. As the cultural position of sumo was strongly rooted in local

¹⁸⁷ To illustrate the worldwide presence of amateur sumo, four case studies of national federations in Europe and Oceania will be considered in Chapter 5 to show how the sport has developed, the input and assistance from the IFS, and the local efforts needed to establish the sport.

performance, particularly in rural areas, it was unsurprising that Japanese emigrants continued to perform sumo in their new locations.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, large numbers of Japanese emigrated from the Japanese homeland to seek new opportunities abroad. The main reason for emigration was economic, precipitated by rural poverty and the need for better prospects and earning potential. In particular, high rural taxation had caused increased sales of land by indebted farmers, which led to increased land tenancy in rural areas in the late 19th century. Furthermore, compulsory military service for adult males also affected the rural population as it removed many able-bodied workers from the countryside.¹⁸⁸ Such hardship for farmers, as well as the squeeze of a growing national population, made emigration appealing to many: “Rural areas were especially hard-hit, forcing many Japanese farmers to seek work overseas, particularly in Guam, Hawaii, mainland North America, and Latin America.”¹⁸⁹

Initially many immigrants went to Hawaii to work in agriculture. Labourers left from as early as 1868,¹⁹⁰ and work available on sugar plantations enticed over 180,000 Japanese workers there between the 1890s and 1920s, making them the largest ethnic grouping in the fledgling territory.¹⁹¹ Additionally, many more Japanese went to the US mainland, or ended up on the mainland after a stint working in Hawai’i.¹⁹² However, fears of the growing Asian population, or the ‘Yellow Peril,’ caused a change in US immigration policy. After a sudden influx of Japanese immigrants into California between 1902 and 1907, the Gentlemen’s Agreement between the US and Japan limited new Japanese

¹⁸⁸ James Stanlaw, “Japanese emigration and immigration: From Meiji to the modern,” in *Japanese Diasporas: Unsung pasts, conflicting presents, and uncertain futures*, ed. Nobuko Adachi (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 38-9.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁹⁰ Harumi Befu, “Globalization as Human Dispersal: From the Perspective of Japan,” in *Globalization and Social Change in Contemporary Japan*, ed. J.S. Eades, Tom Gill and Harumi Befu (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2000), 21.

¹⁹¹ James Stanlaw, “Japanese emigration and immigration,” 47.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

arrivals to California.¹⁹³ Later, the Immigration Exclusion Act of 1924 would place restrictions on anyone of Japanese ancestry owing land, meaning that *Nikkei* could only ever be tenant farmers, a situation that had precipitated the move from Japan in the first place.¹⁹⁴ These actions increasingly made destinations in Latin America more attractive.

Emigration to Brazil by Japanese began in 1908 and saw tens of thousands of workers seeking a new life enter the country before World War II. While the earliest prewar migrants were wage labourers for Brazilian planters, this was quickly followed by colonies of Japanese settlers farming their own plots in areas that had yet to be developed agriculturally.¹⁹⁵ These settlements gave the migrants a sense of community because they were working for themselves and the betterment of their new settlement. In fact, “in the early days of Japanese immigration, associations and business relationships were often based on former locale, and people from the same prefecture often settled in the same areas”,¹⁹⁶ meaning that the new settlements were already cohesive units not just because of the shared experience of migration but because of the geographical and social links that had their origins in the Japanese homeland. So, while creating new niches for themselves in a distant land, these migrants found themselves replicating and clinging to many of the social, cultural and regional connections they had had previously while adapting to their new surroundings where necessary: “The colonies were a success, helping to encourage a nascent Japanese Brazilian culture with constant cultural reinforcement from the homeland.”¹⁹⁷

Emigrants to Hawai’i and Brazil were only a part of what may have been as many as one million people who left Japan before World War II.¹⁹⁸ During this time, Tierney argues

¹⁹³ These were a series of diplomatic agreements in 1907 and 1908 in which the Japanese government agreed to stop issuing passports to those wishing to work on the American mainland. Izumi Hirobe, *Japanese Pride, American Prejudice: Modifying the Exclusion Clause of the 1924 Immigration Act* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 4.

¹⁹⁴ James Stanlaw, “Japanese emigration and immigration,” 47.

¹⁹⁵ Jeffrey Lesser, “Japanese, Brazilians, Nikkei: A Short History of Identity Building and Homemaking,” in *Searching for Home Abroad: Japanese Brazilians and Transnationalism*, ed. Jeffrey Lesser (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 6.

¹⁹⁶ James Stanlaw, “Japanese emigration and immigration,” 43.

¹⁹⁷ Jeffrey Lesser, “Japanese, Brazilians, Nikkei,” 6.

¹⁹⁸ James Stanlaw, “Japanese emigration and immigration,” 35.

“the constructions of the national race [were] not localized to the Japanese archipelago.”¹⁹⁹ The conceptualisation of Japan as a nation, both internally and externally, was being broadened by emigration to distant lands by these migrant workers and by the empire-building that was taking place in East Asia and the South Pacific from the late nineteenth century onwards. Hence, the sense of ‘Japanese-ness’ and belonging was cast fluidly because a large number of Japanese now resided outside of the empire’s boundaries.²⁰⁰ By association, therefore, Japanese culture, including sumo, was not bounded by the limits of the Japanese homeland either: “Sumo was discursively constructed as a “Japanese” activity, but the participating “Japanese” were differently defined and located throughout the world.”²⁰¹

Sumo competitions were performed regularly by *Nikkeijin* in South America (particularly Brazil) and in North America (Hawai’i and the west coast).²⁰² The performance of sumo was one way of enacting Japanese cultural practices in a new, and sometimes hostile, environment and therefore, was also one element that kept alive the links between areas of Japanese settlement and the home country and its culture. Sumo tournaments in the new locale also had meaning as a physical contest, just as they had as *kusa-zumō* in the countryside of Japan: “Sumo served both as a sport and also as a way of comparing the skills and strengths of the participants and, by extension, the community. Thus, that sumo was a popular activity within the hard laboring emigrant communities is not a surprise.”²⁰³ While in Japan the performance of sumo for cultural reasons was usually held outside of formal amateur sumo competitions and organizations, most usually with performances in local shrines or as part of a local festival, in the overseas Japanese communities the organised amateur sumo tournaments themselves *were* the cultural performances.

¹⁹⁹ Tierney, “Wrestling with Tradition,” 314.

²⁰⁰ This also meant that millions of non-Japanese were included within the empire’s scope.

²⁰¹ Tierney, “Wrestling with Tradition,” 314.

²⁰² For a thumbnail sketch of sumo in Hawai’i, see Dan Cisco, *Hawai’i Sports: History, Facts, and Statistics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999), 271-275.

²⁰³ Tierney, “Wrestling with Tradition,” 315.

Internationalising amateur sumo

As custodians of sumo, Japanese amateur and professional sumo groups acted to help nourish the sport as a Japanese cultural phenomenon among *nikkeijin* groups. In the prewar period, groups of *ōzumō* athletes toured Hawai'i or the US mainland, and sometimes talented *nikkei* athletes were recruited into *ōzumō*.²⁰⁴ For instance, in 1914 a group went to Hawai'i on a *jungyō* (regional tour), followed by a visit the next year to the American mainland. In 1921 a group travelled to both Hawai'i and continental United States.²⁰⁵ The purpose of *jungyō* is to expose the public to professional sumo in areas that do not host official tournaments (*hon-basho*). That they were held at times in Hawai'i and the US, just as they were in regional centres throughout Japan and in parts of Japan's formal empire, such as Korea, demonstrates the fluidity of 'Japanese-ness' at this time and the discursive nature of nationality, belonging, and the 'national' sport of sumo (as was mentioned above). Furthermore, it shows that there was sufficient interest within overseas Japanese diaspora to warrant incurring the costs of such trips. Amateur sumo athletes also conducted overseas goodwill tours. The All-Japan Student Sumo Federation (*Zen-Nihon Gakusei Sumō Renmei*) sent groups of its representatives to the United States in July 1925, June 1926 and July 1927.²⁰⁶ They also sent a group to Hawai'i in 1930 and a follow-up tour was taken in 1937, but thereafter war between Japan and the US halted such expeditions.²⁰⁷

In the postwar period, there was also significant support to foreign sumo groups from amateur sumo organisations within Japan. The *Nihon Sumō Renmei* resumed its goodwill visits to Hawai'i in 1951, and visited again in 1956, 1959 and 1973. The All Japan Student Sumo Federation (*Zen-Nihon Gakusei Sumō Renmei*) took groups in 1960 and 1977,²⁰⁸ and the Ishikawa Sumo Federation sent members in May 1956 and then in May 1976. Whereas prewar connections had focussed on demonstrating sumo to *nikkeijin* communities and providing moral support to them through the appearance of Japanese

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 316.

²⁰⁵ Kanazashi Motoi, *Sumō Dai-jiten* (Tokyo: Gendai Shokan, 2002), 53.

²⁰⁶ *Chikara*, "Amachūa sumō monogatari 23," November 1974, 15.

²⁰⁷ *Chikara*, "Yōkoso! Nichi-Bei shinzen sumō Hawai senshudan rainichi," September 1974, 4.

²⁰⁸ *Chikara*, "Nichi-Bei shinzen sumō Hawai taikai," June 1977, 12.

sumo groups, after the war the connections focussed more on sporting interaction and flows in both directions. While invitations were still extended to Japanese athletes and officials to participate in these diasporic community tournaments, contact was reciprocated and foreign teams began to visit Japan to improve and extend their sumo experience.

Hawai'i sent its first team to Japan in 1961 and followed with another in 1974.²⁰⁹ During this second trip, the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* and its prefectural sumo organizations hosted the team for two weeks of Japan-America goodwill sumo tournaments around Japan in July and August.²¹⁰ This kind of intense competition schedule helped improve the Hawai'ian athletes, and also demonstrated the support Japan was willing to extend to overseas outposts of sumo. Indeed, the message in one tournament programme from Hawai'i's Acting Governor George Ariyoshi (himself a *nikkeijin*) acknowledged the role that Japan's amateur sumo community had in fostering the sport abroad:

In Hawaii, where sumo has drawn the interest of our people for a good many years, we are indebted to the sumo organization of Japan which has been of much assistance in the past in the development of sumo in Hawaii.... We are grateful to the All-Japan Amateur Sumo Association for cooperation with the Hawaii Sumo Renmei, for without that cooperation, sumo in Hawaii would not be what it is today.²¹¹

With increased ease and availability of air travel across the Pacific Ocean, Japanese groups began to directly assist Brazilian sumo as well. Although sumo had long been performed in the immigrant colonies in Brazil, it was not until 1962 that the Brazil Sumo Federation was formed,²¹² and so centralised and orchestrated contact with Japanese

²⁰⁹ *Chikara*, "Yōkoso! Nichi-Bei shinzen sumō Hawai senshudan rainichi," September 1974, 4.

²¹⁰ *Chikara*, "Nichi-Bei shinzen sumō senshudan nitei," June 1974, 14. Their tour schedule had the Hawai'ian team competing seven times in head-to-head competitions against teams representing Ibaraki, Shizuoka, Gifu, and Mie (twice) prefectures, as well as an Eastern Japan high school selection and an All-Japan high school selection. For details of the Shizuoka tournament see "Nichi-Bei shinzen sumō kyōgi Shizuoka Taikai," <http://amasumo.run.buttopi.net/friend/hawaii/hawaii1.htm> (accessed May 3, 2009).

²¹¹ "Nichi-Bei shinzen sumō kyōgi Shizuoka Taikai"

²¹² *Chikara*, "Burajiru no sumō," September 1976, 15.

amateur sumo administrators had been lacking prior to this. The Ishikawa Sumo Federation was prominent in its assistance to Brazil, visiting seven times in nearly thirty years from 1978 onwards,²¹³ and they invited a group of athletes to Ishikawa in May 1983 and groups of Brazilian children in August 1986 and July 1994.²¹⁴ The *Nihon Sumō Renmei* also sent teams to Brazil at intervals, just as it had done for Hawai'i.²¹⁵

As the above examples show, the support given by the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* and its member federations to amateur sumo in Hawai'i and Brazil was strong through the 1970s and was further strengthened by the increased number of goodwill trips and the hosting of foreign athletes in Japan during the 1980s.²¹⁶ One indication of the benefit of exchanges with Japan in developing amateur sumo within these foreign lands might be the increase of non-*nikkeijin* in the foreign teams. For example, the Hawai'ian team that visited Japan in 1974 had only seven *nikkeijin* among the party of six administrators and 18 athletes.²¹⁷ Another indication can be seen in the success that foreign teams had. In 1980, a team of Brazilian high school students was specially invited to participate in the 29th National Towada High School Invitational in Aomori. They competed against 40 high school teams from around Japan and excelled by taking third place.²¹⁸

While these bilateral exchanges were vitally important in establishing and developing amateur sumo abroad, perhaps more important for the long term development of the sport was the beginning of regular international competition among these regions (Japan, North and South America) through invitations to attend amateur tournaments in Japan. The

²¹³ Teams went to Brazil in 1978, 1983, 1986, 1993, 1996, 2001, and 2006, each time in the month of May.

²¹⁴ See Ishikawa Sumō Renmei, "Renmei enkaku," <http://www.sumo-ishikawa.or.jp/enkaku.html> (accessed June 1, 2009).

²¹⁵ For example, Tanaka recounts his trip to Brazil in 1983 to attend a tournament commemorating the 75th anniversary of Japanese emigration to that country. Tanaka Hidetoshi, *Dohyō wa En, Jinsei wa En* (Tokyo: Waseda Shuppan, 2002), 182-4.

²¹⁶ This outreach to foreign amateur sumo groups paralleled the increasing participation of international competitors in *ōzumō* at the time, particularly those recruited in Hawai'i. However, while various *Nikkeijin* had competed before in professional sumo, particularly prior to World War II, in the 1980s it was non-Japanese participants who were entering *ōzumō*, even though *Nikkeijin* still had a hand in amateur sumo in North and South America.

²¹⁷ *Chikara*, "Yōkoso! Nichi-Bei shinzen sumō Hawai senshudan rainichi," September 1974, 4.

²¹⁸ Fujikawa Seikatsu, "Nihon Sumō Renmei 35-nen no ayumi," in *Sumō: Dai 30-kai Zen Nihon Sumō Senshu-ken Taikai Kinen-shi*, ed. Nihon Sumō Renmei (Tokyo: Nihon Sumō Renmei, 1982), 62-3.

beginnings of this took place in August 1980 in Kanazawa city, Ishikawa Prefecture.²¹⁹ There a tournament was held between Japanese teams, a Hawai’ian group (two teams) touring Japan at the time, and the Brazilian high school selection mentioned above.²²⁰ This was the first time that the three countries had fought each other in amateur sumo, and it laid the platform for regular contact over the next decade.

***Shirōto* Sumo Championships**

The Japanese amateur sumo tournament to which international athletes were invited was the idea of a Japanese television sports producer. Ishio Eiji had been a college sumo athlete at Waseda University before moving into the world of sports broadcasting at Nihon Television (NTV). He worked for many years on his company’s broadcasts of the most popular baseball team in Japan, the Yomiuri Giants, and later would be one of the people responsible for bringing Mike Tyson to Japan to defend his World Heavyweight boxing title at the Tokyo Dome.²²¹ Ishio looked to use his position in the broadcasting world to benefit amateur sumo: “Sumo was always in my heart. Of course there is *ōzumō* but I wanted to make a programme that showcased amateur sumo. Sumo raised and trained me. I always felt that I wanted to repay my debt to amateur sumo by doing what I could at my company.”²²²

With this idea in mind, Ishio planned (and broadcast) the annual All-Japan Novice Sumo Championships (*Zen-Nihon Shirōto Sumō Senshukun Taikai*). The tournament began in 1980 and was held at the Kuramae Kokugikan, the home of *ōzumō*. The chosen venue was important because the tournament sought to give real novices, those without a recognised pedigree in amateur sumo, an opportunity to perform in the same way as they could watch professional sumo on the television. In Ishio’s words, “I wanted to allow people who lived in the provinces and really loved sumo the opportunity to step on the *dohyō* in the Kokugikan, not just those who had spent time as a sumo athlete in college. Doing this would unearth those from the heartland of sumo, and I expect there to also be

²¹⁹ Ibid., 63.

²²⁰ *Chikara*, “Nichi, Hawai, Burajiru shinzen sumō hokuriku taikai,” September 1980, 2.

²²¹ Kyōsu Toshiharu, “Sumō Jinsei,” *Chikara*, March 1994, 1.

²²² Ishio Eiji, quoted in Kyōsu Toshiharu, “Sumō Jinsei,” *Chikara*, March 1994, 1.

a connection with increasing the number of young people doing sumo.”²²³ The concept worked well for the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* because it helped increase athlete numbers, and provided another tournament outside of the established university tournaments, the All-Japan Sumo Championships and the sumo tournament at the National Athletic Meet.²²⁴ This new tournament was to be competed for by teams of three, where the first athlete was to be under 30 years old, the second athlete under-40, and the third over-40.²²⁵

The use of *shirōto* (meaning novice, amateur or unskilled) in the name of the tournament indicated two things. Firstly, it implied the inexperience of the athletes for whom the tournament had been designed and, secondly, it linked this type of tournament to *shirōto sumō* which had been a popular term for amateur sumo in the early 20th century.²²⁶ *Shirōto sumō* might be used, for example, to describe the types of tournaments that took place in towns and districts in large cities prior to World War II (as opposed to the *gakusei sumō* competitions for university students). Such urban tournaments were usually supported and financed by the local business association and other community groups, and they drew local competitors that fancied themselves as strong and skilful in addition to those with judo and sumo backgrounds.²²⁷

In the spirit of exposing novices to amateur sumo, this competition included invited teams of foreigners alongside Japanese teams. For the first few tournaments many of the foreign competitors were resident in Japan, drawn from the expatriate community and from American army or naval bases. For example, in 1980 there were teams that represented the American Army and Navy stationed in Japan, the United States embassy, and Hawai’i.²²⁸ They joined teams representing Japanese prefectures to compete in both team and open weight individual competitions. As the tournament grew other

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Fujikawa Seikatsu, “Nihon Sumō Renmei 35-nen no ayumi,” 64.

²²⁵ Ibid. The age restrictions were not enforced for the foreign teams. Over time, also, allowances were made to include athletes who had competed at high levels earlier in their careers. *Chikara*, “Dai ikkai Zen-Nihon Shirōto Sumō Senshūken Taikai,” November 1980, 12.

²²⁶ The exact timing of when the term amateur sumo (*amachua sumō*, often abbreviated to *amasumō*) began to be used is unclear. *Shirōto sumō* seems less commonly used after the war, so it might be at this point.

²²⁷ *Chikara*, “Amachūa sumō monogatari 20,” January 1974, 12.

²²⁸ Fujikawa Seikatsu, “Nihon Sumō Renmei 35-nen,” 64.

international teams were invited, mainly from countries in North and South America where amateur sumo was already established among the Japanese diaspora.²²⁹

The tournament was under the control of the *Nihon Sumō Renmei*, as the hosts, and the International Sumo Council (*Kokusai Sumō Kyōgi-kai*), a prototypical world governing body. This council was set up by sumo administrators in Japan and Brazil in 1983, upon a visit by a Japanese team to the Brazilian Sumo Championships to mark the 75th anniversary of Japanese settlement in the country. The *Nihon Sumō Renmei*, as the organising body of the tournaments, had a strong influence over this council but, because of its international membership, the council is acknowledged as “the forerunner of the present-day International Sumō Federation (IFS).”²³⁰ The council was established to “plan for the promotion of the international spread of sumo, and to aim for friendship among its members through sumo.”²³¹ In July 1985, Argentina and Paraguay joined the council to increase its membership to four countries.²³² Its statutes were later translated into English, and Hawai’i, the United States and South Korea were invited to be involved.²³³

In 1985, *ōzumō* left Kuramae and moved to a new Kokugikan across the Sumida River in Ryōgoku. This tournament followed to the new building and also took on a new name. To reflect the increasingly international nature of the tournament, the title was changed to the International Sumo Championships (*Kokusai Sumō Senshūken Taikai*).²³⁴ Importantly, while there were still strong links to Japan’s diaspora, teams from beyond the Americas began to compete as well. The international invitees in 1985 comprised six teams representing five countries, namely Brazil, West Germany, Paraguay and Argentina (combined), Hawai’i, the Misawa military base, and the American Club in Japan. In

²²⁹ Ibid. For example, Brazil joined the other teams for the second tournament in 1981.

²³⁰ International Sumo Federation, “IFS and sumō,”

<http://www.amateursumo.com/sumo/introductiontoifsandsumo.htm> (accessed April 26, 2008).

²³¹ *Chikara*, “Kokusai Sumō Kyōgikai ga hassoku,” September 1983, 13.

²³² *Chikara*, “Kaigai ensei hana-zakari,” September 1985, 3.

²³³ *Chikara*, “Kokusai Kyōgikai hassoku, wanpaku kōshūkai de zenshin,” June 1984, 3. South Korea would have participated for the first time in 1985 but there were complications with getting visas into Japan.

Chikara, “Dai rokkai Kokusai Sumō Senshūken Taikai,” February 1986, 9

²³⁴ Hashimoto Shun’ichi, “Dai ni-kai Sekai Sumō Senshūken Taikai,” *Chikara*, March 1994, 13.

subsequent years the numbers of international teams increased steadily, both in terms of countries represented and teams attending. In 1989, to celebrate the tournament's tenth year, the venue moved to Sao Paulo, Brazil. There were five Brazilian teams, one each from Hawai'i, Paraguay and Argentina, and nine Japanese teams that made the journey.²³⁵ To send such a large party abroad, the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* received support from Nihon Television, *Nippon Senbaku Shinkō-kai*,²³⁶ and the *Nihon Sumō Kyōkai* (who sent two of their *oyakata* on the trip as well).²³⁷ The change of venue represented an increasing international scope for the *Shirōto*/International Sumo Championships, even though the tournament was still held within the context of staging sumo as part of Japanese culture and diaspora.

However, the staging of the tournament in Brazil was a one-off event, as the 11th tournament once again returned to Tokyo in December 1990. Of the 24 teams, five international teams represented Brazil, Argentina, England (for the first time), Hawai'i and Paraguay.²³⁸ In November 1991 the 12th International Sumo Championships attracted ten teams from eight countries, marking the greatest number of countries to date. The new entrants came from the US state of Rhode Island, India, South Korea, and two Mongolian teams. The inclusion of two of Japan's closest neighbours, each with their own distinct wrestling styles, hinted at the possibility that some sumo administrators saw of attracting more countries to Japan to compete: "The world has various combat sports that are like the sumo of Japan. In neighbouring Korea there is Korean wrestling, in

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 13-4.

²³⁶ The Japan Shipbuilding Industry Foundation, more commonly known as the Nippon Foundation, is a foundation based on the earnings from speed-boat racing (*kyōtei* – one of the legally sanctioned forms of gambling in Japan) which mainly concerns itself with welfare and philanthropy, overseas assistance, and shipping and marine industry development. The Nippon Foundation, "A Brief Overview of The Nippon Foundation," <http://www.nippon-foundation.or.jp/eng/who/overview.html> (accessed July 25, 2007). The foundation was set up in 1962 by Japanese businessman Sasakawa Ryōichi, the prewar right-wing activist and Diet member, a postwar Class A war criminal suspect who was interred in Sugamo Prison by occupying American forces, and, for the last third of his life, a leading philanthropist. The Nippon Foundation, "Our Founder, Ryoichi Sasakawa," <http://www.nippon-foundation.or.jp/eng/20080624OurFounder.html> (accessed July 25, 2007)

²³⁷ *Chikara*, "Dai jukkai Kokusai Sumō Senshūken Taikai," September 1989, 5-6.

²³⁸ Hashimoto Shun'ichi, "Dai ni-kai Sekai," 13.

Mongolia there is Mongolian wrestling, and in Turkey, and in Africa there are contests like sumo which are broadly related in each style and rules.”²³⁹

The transformation of this tournament into the International Sumo Championships, and the enlargement of its scope beyond mainly Japan-based teams, involved increased transportation, accommodation and meal costs which Japanese sumo administrators felt should not be passed on to overseas teams who were already taking time off work and travelling a great distance.²⁴⁰ This was also in line with a 1982 article in *Chikara*, in which a *Nihon Sumō Renmei* administrator urged people to remember that foreign competitors who came to Japan were guests. As guests, the needs of the athletes should be taken care of, they should have some exposure to sightseeing so they could get a better understanding of Japan (or just Tokyo), they should be accompanied by a local to assist them if they had difficulties, and the costs of their stay should be largely taken care of by the hosts.²⁴¹ Such costs might have proved prohibitive for the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* except that Nihon Television was still backing the tournament financially as the major sponsor. The Japanese economy was booming and “it was a time when running [these tournaments] was easy because throughout Japan wads of money were flying around wildly. The timing was excellent.”²⁴² Thus, Japan’s strong economic conditions helped to provide a platform for the international growth of amateur sumo.²⁴³

However, just as Japan’s economic boom made sponsorship easy to come by, the collapse of the ‘bubble economy’ left many companies over-extended and unable to keep up peripheral activities. After 11 years of backing the *Shirōto*/International Sumo Championships, Nihon Television pulled its sponsorship in 1991 and the tournament lost its financial lifeline.²⁴⁴ In what would be the final instalment of the International Sumo

²³⁹ Tanaka, *Dohyō wa En*, 187-8. See also, for example, Tabuchi Jun’ichi, “Kokusai kyōgi toshite no sumō no fukyū ni tsuite no teigen,” *Chikara*, February 1982, 15.

²⁴⁰ Tanaka, *Dohyō wa En*, 185.

²⁴¹ The same official felt that it was also up to Japanese athletes and federations to bear their own costs when they went to other countries because of Japan’s favourable economic circumstances. Tabuchi Jun’ichi, “Kokusai kyōgi,” 15.

²⁴² Tanaka, *Dohyō wa En*, 185.

²⁴³ Japan’s economic strength at this time helped nurture internationalisation, as will be shown below.

²⁴⁴ Tanaka, *Dohyō wa En*, 185.

Championships, the sponsorship void was filled with financial assistance from three other sponsors: JSB Japan Satellite Broadcasting, *Nippon Senbaku Shinkō-kai*, and the Sports Promotion Endowment Assistance Enterprise.²⁴⁵ Despite being able to cover the hole left for the 1991 tournament, the loss of the major sponsor required the tournament to be rethought, and this provided the catalyst for making amateur sumo more international from 1992 onwards.

Amateur sumo as international cultural performance

In its desire to promote amateur sumo internationally, the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* did more than just settle for hosting the International Sumo Championships and playing a major role in the International Sumo Council. During the late 1980s and early 1990s it also put effort into promoting the sport to international audiences through goodwill visits and sumo demonstrations overseas. Such displays of amateur sumo were often staged in conjunction with festivals of Japanese culture or as stand alone displays to promote and improve bilateral relations between Japan and the host country.

One example was the dispatch of a team to attend the ‘Black Ships Festival’ in Newport, Rhode Island. The festival was held in the birthplace of Commodore Matthew Perry, the commander of US Navy ships which had been instrumental in the dismantling of Japanese seclusion in 1853. The city already had a relationship with Shimoda, the first port opened to the Americans in 1854, and looked to regularly commemorate the links between the two ports. Such a commemoration recognised not only the maritime history of Newport but especially the establishment of US-Japanese diplomatic and commercial relations. In particular, Newport was interested in holding such a festival to also promote

²⁴⁵ *Chikara*, “Dai jūni-kai Kokusai Sumō Senshūken Taikai,” March 1992, 17. Japan Satellite Broadcasting (*Nihon Eisei Hōsō*) was established as a commercial broadcast satellite network in 1984. It is more commonly known as WOWOW, and began its test broadcast in late 1990, followed by a full service in April 1991. WOWOW Inc., “Corporate Profile,” http://www.wowow.co.jp/info_e/history.html (accessed January 13, 2009); Sports Promotion Endowment Assistance Enterprise (*Supōtsu shinkō kikin josei jigyō*) is an assistance fund that is part of the National Agency for the Advancement of Sports and Health. See National Agency for the Advancement of Sports and Health, “Supōtsu shinkō josei,” <http://www.naash.go.jp/sinko/index.html> (accessed January 13, 2009).

tourism and its local economy, which had been suffering since the 1970s.²⁴⁶ Given Japan's buoyant economy, "[e]xpanding on the sister-city relationship seemed an excellent way of fostering economic growth and cultural awareness while increasing tourism."²⁴⁷ The festival involved the annual display of different aspects of Japanese culture, as well as exposure to more readily available signifiers of Japan, such as food and language.²⁴⁸ The *Nihon Sumō Renmei* was invited to send its first team to the 6th Black Ships Festival in 1989, and honoured the request as a way of displaying sumo to a wide audience in New England and to the expected crowd drawn from New York as well. To have the display of sumo as the main event to such a tournament certainly aided the *Renmei*'s aims to popularise sumo abroad, as well as serving to strengthen Japanese-American goodwill.²⁴⁹ From Newport's point of view, it was hoped the inclusion of a sumo tournament "would serve as a magnet to attract people to come to the festival and persuade sponsors to assist with funding."²⁵⁰

A team of eight athletes, one referee and two administrators was sent to Newport to perform for the two day festival, demonstrating for up to two hours the basic exercises, contact drills and winning techniques that make up sumo training. There were then also practice matches with local American football players in which the smaller Japanese athletes won time and again. Even these results helped to demonstrate the nature of sumo, where a strong lower body is instrumental in winning rather than sheer size and bulk. The defeat of the local athletes also served to reinforce the mental, technical and physical (*shin-gi-tai*) principles upon which sumo is founded and to display these to the audience.²⁵¹ In this festival, performance of sumo by an amateur team from Japan, both in an exhibition and in competition with American teams, was a way of representing Japanese culture in a recognisable and crowd-friendly, yet exotic, form. The sumo display was a great crowd pleaser and draw card, and so the organising board "decided to place

²⁴⁶ Linda Andreoni, "The History and Objectives of the Japan-America Society of R.I.," (Japan American Society History Report, 2005), 7, available online at <http://www.newportevents.com/Blackships/JAS-Report.pdf> (accessed December 3, 2007).

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Kobayashi Tetsuo, "Nyūpōto-shi kurobune matsuri ni sankā shite," *Chikara*, November 1989, 12-13.

²⁵⁰ Linda Andreoni, "The History and Objectives," 7.

²⁵¹ Kobayashi Tetsuo, "Nyūpōto-shi kurobune," *Chikara*, November 1989, 13.

additional emphasis on marketing it for 1990.”²⁵² Japanese teams continued to attend this festival annually, celebrating the links between the two countries. This connection through sumo also prompted Rhode Island, as mentioned earlier, to send a team to the last International Sumo Championships in 1991.²⁵³

In a similar vein, Japanese sumo athletes were sent to another festival in America celebrating the blooming of cherry blossoms in San Francisco. The Northern California Cherry Blossom festival, run by the *nikkeijin* community in San Francisco, had begun in the late 1960s. The inclusion of sumo as a form of Japanese culture sat well with the Japanese theme of the event, and in 1987 a team of Japanese college sumo athletes first attended the festival for its 20th anniversary. Four years later a team of 12 athletes and 5 officials returned for another appearance and spent close to three hours demonstrating sumo exercises and having a tournament amongst the twelve athletes.²⁵⁴

The presence of Japanese sumo groups at these types of festivals added legitimacy to the event in different ways. In terms of the sumo, these groups were ‘authentic’ because they came from the ‘homeland,’ were regular athletes in the sport, and they very much fitted the sumo stereotypes of large Japanese male competitors. Whereas once sumo performed at *nikkeijin* festivals might have been performed by local *nikkeijin* who had some sumo training, now the performance was left to ‘experts’ from Japan. That these athletes/performers came from Japan added another dimension of authenticity to the festivals at which they performed. The presence of the sumo athletes (or any other Japanese performers) endorsed the festival’s cultural links to Japan. However, in the process, the Japanese diaspora ran the risk of becoming further detached from the performance of sumo, which itself was already deterritorialised.

Not all the international goodwill trips made by Japanese groups were to festivals or sumo tournaments in the Americas or other places with connections to Japanese diaspora. Demonstrations to display (amateur) sumo were held in Europe and other countries

Linda Andreoni, “The History and Objectives,” 7.

²⁵³ *Chikara*, “Dai jūni-kai Kokusai Sumō Senshūken Taikai,” March 1992, 17.

²⁵⁴ *Chikara*, “Dai nijūyon-kai San Furanshisuko Sakura Matsuri kinen,” June 1991, 9.

whose cultural connections with Japan came only through modern trade and bilateral relations. For example, in October 1986 a small group of sumo athletes was sent with a contingent of martial artists to Lyon, France and London to give displays of Japanese martial arts.²⁵⁵ A team went again the following year to give displays in six French cities.²⁵⁶ Another group of martial artists visited Australia in mid-1988 as part of the Bicentennial celebrations.²⁵⁷ The *Nihon Sumō Renmei* sent six athletes and an administrator as part of this group, and they had seven minutes to display their techniques as part of the entire performance. Although the venue was packed with spectators and the sumo was greatly enjoyed, the administrator lamented that the time “was insufficient to have the core of sumo fully understood.”²⁵⁸ Nevertheless, these athletes and their martial arts were thus deemed to be suitably ‘Japanese’ to represent Japan, an important trading partner with Australia, during the celebrations of 200 years of European colonial settlement. Displays such as this cast sumo as a medium whereby ‘Japan’ could be represented to a foreign audience through its performance as a cultural icon.

Through the 1980s and early 1990s, tournaments and demonstrations like those described above created a nascent international presence for amateur sumo. This increasing international interaction within amateur sumo reflected a growing internationalisation that was becoming apparent in many spheres of Japanese life.²⁵⁹ The interaction between sumo groups in North and South America and amateur sumo organisations from the Japanese homeland involved the delivery of knowledge, expertise and resources: athletes from abroad were invited to attend tournaments in Japan to improve their abilities and Japanese athletes and officials added their presence to selected tournaments and demonstrations to help sustain the sport overseas. These actions by the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* and its member federations sought to link more closely the various areas worldwide where amateur sumo was established and to improve the quality and breadth of the sport. Later, their efforts went from improving and supporting overseas athletes to

²⁵⁵ Fujikawa Seikatsu, “Nihon budō hō’ō enbu-kai ni sankā shite,” *Chikara*, November 1986, 2-3.

²⁵⁶ Tabuchi Jun’ichi, “Furansu, Nihon budō taikai ni sankā shite,” *Chikara*, 28 February 1987, 15-6.

²⁵⁷ *Chikara*, “Kokusai Senshūken, hajimete kaigai (Burajiru) de kaisai,” June 1989, 3.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ It also echoed the beginning of the internationalisation of *ōzumō* that was occurring at this time with the influx of athletes from Hawai’i and some from South America.

displaying and explaining amateur sumo as performances of Japanese culture to overseas audiences. Both types of activity, cultivating the sport among overseas sumo athletes and displaying it as a cultural phenomenon, can be seen as helping to internationalise amateur sumo during this period.

Contextualising the internationalisation of amateur sumo

The internationalisation of amateur sumo came at a time when Japan was pursuing greater interaction with the rest of the world. Domestically, “this discourse of *kokusaika* (internationalization) became prominent as Japan expanded its economic power in the 1980s”²⁶⁰ while, abroad, the world was becoming more aware of Japan through its rise as an economic superpower from the ashes of defeat. *Kokusaika* became a buzzword in this period, and can be seen as Japan coming to terms with the world, and vice versa, after several decades of caution after World War II.

Internationalisation has been described as “the process whereby each country recognizes the mutual existence and independence of others, attempting to establish connections with those other states.”²⁶¹ It has also been suggested that “*kokusaika* aims to understand people and cultures in the international communities through various social, cultural and educational opportunities. It also aims to transform social and institutional conventions to adapt to the international demands.”²⁶² However, these rather generic definitions overlook certain key points relating to Japan’s internationalisation at this time. Firstly, the states that Japan was attempting to increase contact with were predominantly Western. Secondly, *kokusaika* was a signifier of the Japan’s economic success – it was because of Japan’s economic position that international interaction was desirable and available. Having achieved parity with, or surpassed, the economic power of other major nations,

²⁶⁰ Ryuko Kubota, “The impact of globalization on language teaching in Japan,” in *Globalization and Language Teaching*, ed. David Block and Deborah Cameron (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 16.

²⁶¹ Nobutaka Inoue, “Globalization’s Challenge to Indigenous Culture,” in *Globalization and Indigenous Culture*, ed. Nobutaka Inoue (Tokyo: Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, Kokugakuin University, 1997), 11.

²⁶² Kubota, “The impact of globalization,” 16.

Japan now was in a relationship of interdependence with North America and Europe.²⁶³ This achievement in such a short time gave Japan's international presence a decidedly nationalistic and parochial tone: "with Japan's global economic work already in full blossom, Japan needed to tell the world and, more important [sic], itself a story about its newly achieved worldwide influence."²⁶⁴

With a focus towards economic powers in North America and Europe, Japan's internationalisation showed signs of justifying its presence among the powerful nations of the world. With Japan being feted abroad for its economic success, and due to the power it held over other nations due to its economic might, this internationalisation was largely an imbalanced interaction with the rest of the world. The strong nationalising tone that internationalisation in Japan took meant that "[k]okusaika essentially blend[ed] Westernization with nationalism, failing to promote cosmopolitan pluralism."²⁶⁵ *Kokusaika* could be seen as the promotion of Japan and its qualities to the rest of the world by virtue of its economic success and the newly acquired status of international superpower while limiting the return influences upon Japan. In a cultural sense this might suggest relations whereby Japanese culture was revealed to the world in controlled ways, but with little or no accompanying acknowledgement that the world might interact with, and act upon, the 'Japanese-ness' being exported. Furthermore, such interactions would also take place with specific notions of state(s), nation(s) or culture(s) involved in the interaction or transfer.

Sumo was one Japanese cultural item that was propagated abroad during this wave of *kokusaika*. As explained above, the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* encouraged the growth and development of amateur sumo outside of Japan, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, in areas of Japanese diasporic communities in North and South America. Input and support from Japan to *nikkei* groups promoted and reinforced amateur sumo as a uniquely

²⁶³ Gavan McCormack, "Kokusaika: Impediments in Japan's Deep Structure," in *Multicultural Japan: Palaeolithic to Postmodern*, ed. Donald Denoon, Mark Hudson, Gavan McCormack and Tessa Morris-Suzuki (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 274.

²⁶⁴ Mitchell Sedgwick, "Positioning "globalization" at overseas subsidiaries of Japanese multinational corporations," in *Globalizing Japan: Ethnography of the Japanese presence in Asia, Europe and America*, ed. Harumi Befu and Sylvie Guichard-Anguis (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 44.

²⁶⁵ Kubota, "The impact of globalization," 14.

Japanese cultural product: sumo was performed by Japanese diaspora, with support from both the diasporic community and from Japan itself, as a way of maintaining and re-enacting Japanese culture despite the physical separation and dislocation from Japan. So, in some ways, the performance of sumo by ethnically Japanese groups and individuals was a chance and a way to reaffirm ‘Japanese-ness’ in a foreign land. Gradually, at the fringes of these performances the local, non-Japanese community began to be incorporated, but the sense was that they were performing a ‘Japanese’ sport and partaking in a slice of Japanese culture.

Furthermore, efforts to promote amateur sumo went beyond just helping organisations in foreign countries. The sport was performed on a number of occasions at demonstrations and festivals abroad, to be consumed by the foreign audience as a uniquely Japanese phenomenon and an enactment of traditional Japanese culture. Sumo, therefore, was not only enacted as a competitive sport but reified as a cultural performance, one that was easily identifiable with Japan and to the point that its performance could represent the country and its culture in various parts of the world. Much of the justification for this came from the privileged position it holds as a ‘national sport’ (*kokugi*) and its presence in Japanese history and mythology, as was considered in the previous chapter. Part of the popularity of sumo in overseas festivals related to its simplicity for audiences and the exoticness that was transposed upon amateur sumo, largely through audience members’ prior knowledge of sumo through the rituals and pageantry of *ōzumō*.²⁶⁶ In Iwabuchi’s terms, we could argue that these displays of sumo retained a strong Japanese cultural odour because, although not performed within Japan, they were performed within a Japanese-influenced cultural setting. Amateur sumo was consumed as a cultural product, and the nature of the performance, although slightly different to *ōzumō*, was representative of a stereotypical conceptualisation of ‘sumo.’

²⁶⁶ Other reasons for the popularity of sumo abroad during the period of *kokusaika* could include the visible foreign presence of Hawai’ian athletes in *ōzumō* and the increased media coverage of *ōzumō* outside of Japan (also largely due to the Hawai’ian presence in professional sumo).

However, these events only partially explain the current existence of amateur sumo in more than 80 countries across all continents.²⁶⁷ The International Sumo Championships held during the 1980s had only attracted interest from close to a dozen countries during its entire existence. The prime catalysts for the expansion of amateur sumo further afield were the foundation of the International Sumo Federation (IFS) and the inauguration of the Sumo World Championships in 1992.

Establishment of the IFS and the Sumo World Championships

The withdrawal of the major sponsor for the International Sumo Championships left Japanese administrators with the dilemma of whether or not to continue the tournament. Running it without sponsorship would have been too difficult financially,²⁶⁸ but to let go of twelve years of momentum would have seriously set back the internationalisation of amateur sumo. They forged ahead, re-established the tournament as the Sumo World Championships (*Sekai Sumō Senshu-ken Taikai*) and were able to find three substantial supporters to aid their cause. The first was the *Nihon Sumō Kyōkai*, which assisted by allowing free use of the Kokugikan for the tournament and by providing the *mawashi* for the competitors. Through connections at the *Nihon Sumō Kyōkai*, a new broadcaster, TV Asahi, came on board to provide television coverage. This in turn brought in broadcasting rights as a source of income.²⁶⁹ The final partner, *Nippon Senbaku Shinkō-kai*, had

²⁶⁷ The International Sumo Federation now claims to have at least 86 member countries and territories, although its website states only 84. However, the site is only sporadically updated so the data is frequently out-dated. International Sumo Federation, “IFS and sumō,” <http://www.amateursumo.com/sumo/introductiontoifsandsumo.htm> (accessed April 26, 2008). Meanwhile, the International Olympic Committee website, lists the number of affiliated national federations as 87. International Olympic Committee, “International Sumo Federation,” http://www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/if/fi_uk.asp?Id_federation=69 (accessed April 26, 2008). Although this many countries are counted as members of the IFS, the number that actually participate at Sumo World Championships, Junior Sumo World Championships or the various continental sumo championships is perhaps only half the official number.

²⁶⁸ The only source of income on which they could rely was selling advertisements in the tournament programme. Tanaka, *Dohyō wa En*, 186.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 187.

already stepped in to help finance the final International Sumo Championships in 1991, and was already an annual contributor to the *Nihon Sumō Renmei*.²⁷⁰

Having a stable home for the Sumo World Championships at the Kokugikan and strong institutional support from the *Nihon Sumō Renmei*, the Ministries of Education and Foreign Affairs in Japan, the *Nihon Sumō Kyōkai*, and the Japan Olympic Committee was significant to successfully hosting and organising the tournament. However, it was the monetary contribution from the *Nippon Senbaku Shinkō-kai* that really allowed the Sumo World Championships to get off the ground. As the tournament was now a ‘world’ tournament, there needed to be competitors from right around the globe. This involved heavy costs to provide for them while attending the tournament, not to mention the costs of promoting the tournament and the sport of amateur sumo in general. The *Nippon Senbaku Shinkō-kai* promised to bankroll this tournament and the International Sumo Federation for an initial five year period, contributing annually ¥10 million to develop the sport and ¥30 million to run the Sumo World Championships.²⁷¹

The involvement of the *Nippon Senbaku Shinkō-kai* can also be considered in light of the *kokusaika* discourse present in Japan. The group, also commonly called the Nippon Foundation, is active in philanthropic works both in Japan and abroad. It used its strong financial position in an already strong Japanese economy to provide funds for domestic welfare provision, various charitable works, maritime industry development, and cultural interaction. It has branched out to set up partner organisations that support education, arts and culture, and sport, among others.²⁷² In providing funds to support the creation of the Sumo World Championships and thereafter the activities of the International Sumo Federation, the Nippon Foundation used its money to help internationalise an aspect of Japanese culture for the consumption of the rest of the world.

²⁷⁰ From 1974 until this point the amount donated to the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* by the *Nippon Senbaku Shinkō-kai* was over ¥300 million. At present (mid-2008) the amount that the *Nippon Senbaku Shinkō-kai* has contributed to amateur sumo through the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* and the International Sumo Federation is close to ¥1 billion. The Nippon Foundation Library, “Nihon Sumō Renmei,” http://nippon.zaidan.info/dantai/007047/dantai_info.htm (accessed April 28, 2008).

²⁷¹ Tanaka, *Dohyō wa En*, 187.

²⁷² The Nippon Foundation, “A Brief Overview of The Nippon Foundation,” <http://www.nippon-foundation.or.jp/eng/who/overview.html> (accessed July 25, 2007).

The inaugural Sumo World Championships was held in Tokyo in December 1992. From our vantage point well over a decade and a half later, this tournament is now viewed as the first truly worldwide international tournament, and the start of what became an annual fixture.²⁷³ However, in 1992, the Sumo World Championships was closely tied to its predecessor. As the new Sumo World Championships was held at approximately the same time of year and in the same venue, the parallels with the previous twelve International Sumo Championships were acute.²⁷⁴ The *Nihon Sumō Renmei* stated as much in *Chikara*: “The tournament was a re-titled and enlarged version of the International Sumo Championships, which until last year was held 12 times, and 15 countries, including Russia, Colombia and Poland, took part for the first time.”²⁷⁵ This reinforces that the ‘new’ worldwide tournament was seen in Japanese amateur sumo circles as a continuation of the previous sequence of annual international tournaments held in Japan, albeit with a new name.²⁷⁶ In a later issue of *Chikara*, the magazine further reinforced the links with the past by listing which countries had competed in how many of the tournaments since 1985.²⁷⁷

The International Sumo Federation (IFS) was formally established to administer and promote amateur sumo worldwide at the same time. According to its general statutes, “[t]he objectives of the Federation, as an international organization for amateur sumō competition, shall be the international promotion and advancement of the traditional Japanese sport of sumō, and friendship among its member organizations.”²⁷⁸ This seems to echo the rhetoric of *kokusaika*, while quite clearly privileging the retention of Japanese

²⁷³ In 2003, several regional sumo tournaments were not held due to disruption caused by the SARS outbreak. The Sumo World Championships, scheduled for Moscow, were cancelled part way through the year due to ongoing concern about movement of people internationally and potential difficulties resulting from the outbreak.

²⁷⁴ Indeed, the International Sumo Championships had itself previously been a continuation of the *Shirōto* Sumō Championships.

²⁷⁵ *Chikara*, “Dai ikkai Sekai Sumō Senshuken Taikai,” March 1993, 33.

²⁷⁶ The same sentiment is echoed in another article a year later, Kyōsu Toshiharu, “Sumo Jinsei,” *Chikara*, March 1994, 1. While the expansion to include 15 new countries in amateur sumo for the 1992 tournament was significant, if the Sumo World Championships was really to be considered a different tournament then technically all 25 countries present should have been considered as participating for the first time.

²⁷⁷ *Chikara*, “Dai ni-kai Sekai Sumō Senshuken Taikai,” March 1994, 14.

²⁷⁸ See Article 5, International Sumo Federation, “General Statutes of the International Sumo Federation,” <http://www.amateursumo.com/ifs/generalstatutes.htm> (accessed March 3, 2008).

elements in the sport as it is promoted overseas (as a Japanese sport). The statement also suggests that changes to the sport or the incorporation of new ideas, particularly those from outside Japan, could be problematic because this would presumably threaten the ‘traditional Japanese’ nature of sumo. Unsurprisingly, Japanese administrators continued to play a large part in the organisation of international amateur sumo, as they had done in the days of the old International Sumo Council. The composition of the IFS meant that each country which appeared at the tournament became a member of the IFS, and now only one team could represent a nation.²⁷⁹ Nevertheless, in the boardroom there were many Japanese administrators represented on the Executive Committee, effectively giving the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* control of the sport. In the early years of the Sumo World Championships, and as the IFS developed, this approach was unproblematic because teams were coming to Japan primarily to learn about amateur sumo and often to compete for the first time.²⁸⁰ Furthermore, Japan was the host and was putting in all the effort and money to stage the event so it was logical to have them making most of the decisions.

The majority of countries that appeared at the inaugural Sumo World Championships had few ethnic or cultural links to Japan. While links with Japanese diaspora had been important in getting international competitions underway in the 1970s and 1980s, countries such as Poland, Kenya, Syria, and New Zealand had no links to Japanese immigrant communities and varying degrees of cultural and economic interaction with Japan. Instead, the International Sumo Federation invited countries, usually through local judo or wrestling federations, to assemble teams of male athletes and attend the tournament.²⁸¹ Although sumo differed from other combat sports such as judo, wrestling, boxing and karate, it was felt that the foreign athletes would have sufficient athleticism and experience with contact sports to adapt to sumo.²⁸² Some had already dabbled in

²⁷⁹ So, for example, Hawai’i was now absorbed into the United States’ team, and Japan was represented by a national team for the first time.

²⁸⁰ However, such an attitude has certain repercussions in terms of representation, a democratic process being followed within the IFS, and proper consideration given to new ideas and initiatives that originate outside of Japan. I will discuss these matters later in Chapters Five and Six.

²⁸¹ Tanaka, *Dohyō wa En*, 187-8; Gunther Romenath, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 18, 2005. In particular, judo clubs proved fruitful contact points partly because of some technical similarities between the two sports and also because some members might already have had contact with Japan and sumo.

²⁸² Tanaka, *Dohyō wa En*, 187-8.

sumo prior to the approach by the IFS. Martin Stirling, for example, experienced sumo for the first time when he joined a karate club in New Zealand back in 1972 and they were doing sumo to improve leg strength.²⁸³ In Germany, Gunther Romenath had used sumo as a warm-up exercise for judo as well:

before the training, I told my athletes now we do sumo. Instead of warming up...asking them ‘take off your judo jacket and take off your belt, you make a *dohyō*’. You know, put them together, make a *dohyō*, and then we are made strong because it’s a good exercise.²⁸⁴

In this way, sumo instruction was ‘fast-tracked’ by inviting athletes and making them into sumo athletes rather than the slower process of developing the athletes in their own countries and then inviting them to attend the tournament. Despite the qualities these athletes might bring from their respective combat sports to amateur sumo, a key element in the success of the tournament was to have the athletes properly prepared after they arrived in Japan.²⁸⁵ The foreign athletes were given plenty of instruction and training in sumo once they had arrived in Tokyo, developing their sumo skills and techniques while also being taught about the rules, what was expected of them in and around the ring, and pre- and post-bout rituals. Such sessions were designed to improve the athletes’ skills *and* the necessary etiquette both so that the tournament would run more smoothly and so the athletes became better exponents of sumo, not just athletes of another sport ‘having a go’ at sumo.

Turning wrestlers and *judōka* into sumo athletes proved successful, at least in numerical terms. The final International Sumo Championships in 1991 had attracted ten international teams from eight countries to match the ten prefectural teams from Japan. The first World Sumo Championships, just a year later, was significantly larger in scope, attracting 25 countries and a total of 73 athletes to compete in lightweight, heavyweight

²⁸³ Martin Stirling, interview by author, Lower Hutt, New Zealand, April 2, 2006.

²⁸⁴ Gunther Romenath, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 18, 2005.

²⁸⁵ Thorough instruction in Japan gave the athletes an incentive to return each year to participate, and to improve regardless of their results in the competition. It also would likely have a spin-off effect when these athletes returned to their own countries and took these skills with them into their own training, or when they began training other athletes.

and open weight individual competitions.²⁸⁶ Furthermore, all but one of the countries competed in the three-man team competition. For the first five years, amateur sumo saw growth in the number of countries attending the Sumo World Championships and increased numbers of countries affiliated to the International Sumo Federation. For the second championships (1993) 29 countries sent athletes, while for the third tournament (1994) there were 35 countries present. Even more impressive were the numbers at the fourth tournament in 1995, when 43 countries were represented, including a whopping 40 in the team competition. Numbers in 1996 dropped slightly, but remained at a healthy 39 countries, with 36 in the team competition. This rapid increase in the numbers and the worldwide spread of these nations, were the fruits of labours that the IFS undertook at this time to promote the sport of amateur sumo outside Japan. Ongoing financial support by sponsors helped the IFS to reach out to new areas, spread the idea of amateur sumo as an international sport, and provide logistical support in demonstrating the sport widely outside of Japan.

Challenges in spreading amateur sumo

The money that sponsors provided for the tournament allowed the IFS to cover travel and accommodation expenses for the athletes, attracting teams to the tournament from all around the globe. This funding allowed amateur sumo to quickly gain small footholds in many countries. The opportunity to travel annually to compete in Japan, either *gratis* or with heavy subsidy, was an attractive incentive for athletes. It also enabled the fledgling national sumo federations to grow in these various countries without the burden of finding money for attendance at the tournament.

However, having the funds to attract teams to the Sumo World Championships each year and to spread the sport so rapidly was only one aspect. Part of the difficulty of spreading amateur sumo was the input necessary from the IFS to keep the sport afloat. It was not just a case of creating a Sumo World Championships for countries and athletes to aspire to, but rather of establishing the sport in enough countries in a robust enough way that it

²⁸⁶ For the first Sumo World Championships there was no middleweight division, with lightweight being for everybody under the cut off weight for the heavyweight division.

would take hold and continue to exist and run by itself in years to come. There needed to be solid promotion of amateur sumo to these new areas to raise interest and awareness, from which it would be easier to attract people into the sport and to support the infrastructure of a national sumo federation. This most often required Japanese athletes and administrators to travel abroad and demonstrate the sport to new audiences.

Efforts to promote amateur sumo abroad were far from new, as for several years the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* had been active in sending goodwill visits to a number of countries, as was mentioned earlier. However, with amateur sumo now an international competitive sport, there was a strong drive to promote it as a participation sport and to attract potential athletes rather than to appeal to local spectators by showing sumo in an entertaining aesthetic and cultural sense. In addition to visiting areas where the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* had previously taken sumo tours, the International Sumo Federation also had to branch out into new areas. Tanaka Hidetoshi, the general manager of college sumo powerhouse Nihon University and later head of the International Sumo Federation, took three of his student athletes on one such trip to Africa in mid-1995 “on a one-month trip to spread sumo across the African continent, starting in Egypt and visiting Senegal, Kenya and South Africa.”²⁸⁷ One method that the IFS used to assist them was making good contacts in each country in the hope that these locals would then carry on and augment the efforts of the IFS. Tanaka explains the assistance his group received:

Getting a crowd together was difficult. We made great use of the groups and federations of sports such as wrestling and judo, which are similar types to sumo. In the matter of developing internationally, these two sports are great predecessors of sumo. We would make requests to these groups or federations and gather together ordinary people interested in combat sports and, for example, judo athletes, and would then perform sumo in front of them.²⁸⁸

However, interaction with groups of judo or wrestling athletes in different countries was really only part of what was needed to spread the sport. Such input came with the

²⁸⁷ Tanaka, *Dohyō wa En*, 188-9.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 189.

expectation that the groups of athletes or the subsequent national federation would be able to support itself and to provide the ongoing provision of amateur sumo in the country.²⁸⁹ However, the sumo federations of many countries existed through the personal finances of its members, and in some parts of the world the economic situation meant that promoting sumo there would prove more difficult than in other places:

Currently, a *mawashi* costs about ¥7000. In Africa it is known people have to travel around on foot, and a recent college graduate's starting salary is about ¥4000. A live-in maid receives ¥3000. For people in these countries, a ¥7000 *mawashi* cannot be bought just like that. We felt that an amount of only ¥7000 was a vast sum for people over there.

So, we thought should we then send them *mawashi* from Japan? However the cost of shipping adds ¥15000 to the cost. So one *mawashi* then costs at least ¥22000.

Moreover, it is not just a case of sending one. If you send ten *mawashi* the cost is then ¥220000. If it was only one country, this might not be a particularly great amount. However, in the [International Sumo] Federation, we receive SOS calls from over 30 countries around the globe asking “Could you possibly send *mawashi*?” This is common.

The resources of the Federation at the time were largely from the ¥10 million annual support we received from the *Nippon Senbaku Shinkō-kai*. Because that support was only for a limited period of five years, it was brought to an end in 1997. Try spending six or seven million yen from this very limited income on *mawashi*. You would immediately be scraping the bottom of the federation's wallet and the essentials like the Sumo World Championships wouldn't be held.²⁹⁰

In Africa, Tanaka and his charges encountered further difficulties in trying to spread the sport. Foremost among these was getting the information across in a variety of different languages. Although the group took along an English interpreter, they also encountered

²⁸⁹ The regional support of these newly emerging national sumo federations is considered below.

²⁹⁰ Tanaka, *Dohyō wa En*, 194-5.

areas where only French or Portuguese were spoken. In these cases they tried to keep things simple, get in the ring and let their actions do the talking:

The rules of sumo are extremely simple. When demonstrating with the athletes, I'd use gestures which explained 'Look, this one has won' or 'If you do this, you'll win', and even without explaining the rules in detail, people understood naturally. I think this is the really good part about sumo.²⁹¹

However, these occurrences highlight the difficulty of trying to establish sumo beyond the linguistic barriers of Japan, and perhaps something of the rudimentary nature of English language among Japan's amateur sumo community.

The two official languages of the International Sumo Federation are Japanese and English. Both languages are to be used in general communication but all technical terms are to use the original Japanese terms.²⁹² Because internationally Japanese is not as widely spoken as English, it has meant that English has become the main language of communication between the International Sumo Federation and the rest of the world. However, as Japanese administrators dominate the decision making in the IFS Executive, the language used by this important body is predominantly Japanese. Thus, the handful of IFS office staff who speak and correspond in English act as a narrow conduit for most of the official communication within the amateur sumo world.²⁹³ For those nations whose administrators are not proficient in English this unstable line of communication between the heads of the IFS and themselves is handled through at least one group of intermediaries (the office staff in the IFS) if not two (someone in their own country who speaks English). With such manoeuvring through different languages it is inevitable that concepts, input and communication become 'lost in translation' on occasions. However,

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 189.

²⁹² Article 4, International Sumo Federation, "General Statutes of the International Sumo Federation," <http://www.amateursumo.com/ifs/generalstatutes.htm> (accessed March 3, 2008).

²⁹³ This group represents a handful of female office employees who send information in English by fax, letter or email on behalf of the IFS Executive sending word. They also serve as interpreters when there is a Sumo World Championships held in Japan. When a Sumo World Championships is held in Japan there needs to be a large number of volunteers who can communicate with the participants, and this most often occurs in English. If the tournament is held in a place where the lingua franca is neither Japanese nor English, locals are co-opted to act either as translators from the local language into English or into Japanese.

for those countries who do not have a strong base of English, or who do not have people who can communicate in Japanese, there is the further difficulty in even getting their basic message across.²⁹⁴

The IFS has not looked to find a suitable way around such problems. Instead, by adhering to English and Japanese as the only languages of communication, it relies upon *ad hoc* solutions to help those that do not understand.²⁹⁵ In a way, this divides the members of the IFS into regional groupings not just by geography but by linguistic capabilities. There is a powerful Japanese-speaking bloc, a much larger English-speaking bloc (within which expertise and proficiency varies), and a marginalised group that must make do the best ways that it can. The failure to accommodate non-English speakers can also be considered under the discourse of *kokusaika*, in that internationalisation in Japan has been notable for “its preoccupation with Western nations, particularly the USA”.²⁹⁶ This has had a flow-on effect in terms of privileging English as *the* international language.²⁹⁷ It perhaps indicates another pitfall of *kokusaika* thinking, in that the ready dissemination of ‘Japan’ to the rest of the world was not met with a similar acknowledgement that the world might interact with and act upon the ‘Japaneseness’ being exported. That is, by promoting sumo overseas, how might these foreign countries and athletes impact upon sumo, its meanings, and how the sport is performed thereafter? These matters will be considered particularly in Chapter Five.

²⁹⁴ This language difficulty has been encountered particularly when dealing with nations from Central Asia or those that are part of the former Soviet Union. Although some of these nations have representatives who speak English, at any tournament there is usually a little difficulty in getting information across to them from the IFS or vice versa. Part of the solution has been to co-opt Russian speakers from other teams to explain as best they can in a language that is at least more easily understood, or to have occasional announcements at Sumo World Championships made in Russian when there is a difficulty.

²⁹⁵ For example, Katrina Watts, an Australian who acts as one of the interpreters for the IFS at Sumo World Championships, and who is usually given the task of making announcements in English, has taken it upon herself to learn some Russian so that she is able to communicate with these members more widely at tournaments: “I started learning Russian because the Russian coach came over to me after, I think it was the juniors, and he said to me, ‘I told you three times how to say this name and you did not say it correctly.’ Ok, Russian names are difficult and then I thought perhaps if I learn a little bit of Russian I might get the intonation a bit better, because generally I go around and try to ask all the coaches how to pronounce the names – I think it’s only good etiquette to try to pronounce the names correctly.” Katrina Watts, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 29, 2004.

²⁹⁶ Kubota, “The impact of globalization,” 16.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

The Rise of Regionalism: the establishment of continental sumo federations

Although amateur sumo was promoted to different corners of the globe and ever-growing numbers of teams arrived in Tokyo each year to compete, sumo remained largely a once-a-year proposition in the early years of the Sumo World Championships. Because at this time the majority of athletes for the tournament were recruited from other sports, they tended to return to their regular sport(s) and focus on sumo only when the next Sumo World Championships was drawing near. Part of the problem was also that there were almost no other sumo tournaments to attend. Japan had become the centre of the amateur sumo world and it drew in the other nations for competition only once a year. Beyond that, to gain more sumo experience countries would have to stage their own tournaments or training camps, or perhaps combine with a neighbouring country for greater variety.

In 1995, three years after the creation of the International Sumo Federation, continental sumo unions were formed with the responsibility of overseeing and integrating amateur sumo within their specific regions of the world. The continental unions were to help with the administration of amateur sumo around the globe and to decentralise some of the day-to-day organisation of the sport. It became their job to disseminate information from the IFS to member countries, and to represent the interests of the national federations *en masse* so that the IFS did not need to engage in many unilateral lines of communication. The role of the continental sumo unions sought to utilise regional cooperation between neighbours or near neighbours who were in a better position to assist with guidance, encouragement, and organisation than the IFS could provide centrally from Japan.²⁹⁸ The formation of continental sumo unions also precipitated the formation of national sumo federations, which saw the consolidation of the previously *ad hoc* sumo activities in many of the member countries into more organised arrangements to effectively administer the sport.

The continental unions had an important influence in cementing the sport outside of Japan. Part of the role of each continental federation was to establish regional

²⁹⁸ But one example is the use of common languages other than Japanese and English, thus alleviating the problems mentioned in the previous section.

tournaments to provide more high-level competition for sumo athletes and to spur growth and development in the sport beyond just appearing annually in Tokyo. This meant that sumo became a more regular occurrence in these countries and athletes could begin to dedicate themselves to the sport. The greater interaction that this brought about also meant that information was pooled and shared, and equipment could be lent and borrowed. Cooperation of this nature allowed for greater growth and aided more judicious allocation of resources by the International Sumo Federation.

The establishment of the continental unions not only started the devolution of administrative power, it also signalled the beginning of a withdrawal of financial support to the national federations by the International Sumo Federation. This forced national and regional federations to take responsibility for their own affairs and some of their costs. With the financial support to the IFS from the *Nippon Senbaku Shinkō-kai* limited to five years, and many examples of nations asking for equipment and resources from the IFS, the model under which the IFS began (with Japan as the centre distributing information and money) was not sustainable. The decentralisation of everyday administration led to an increase in regional determination and sparked new multi-lateral relationships throughout the continental organisation and across the globe instead of the previous series of bilateral connections. This change was a positive move for the growth of the regions and nations within amateur sumo, but it was offset by greater financial instability in the sport. Certain national federations that had existed only on the support provided by the International Sumo Federation no longer attended tournaments, effectively leaving the sport. Others, however, continued to promote and practise sumo, even though the costs borne by them were now higher.

Within the continental federations leaders have emerged based on their willingness to do the organisational work for little or no reward. They are almost certainly members of developed countries, or at least wealthier citizens in developing countries, due to the need to take time to organise affairs and contact other members, the technological necessities of phone and fax, initially, and now a computer and email contact, as well as often the ability to travel to tournaments to maintain contacts and be aware of the developments in

the worldwide sumo community. Certainly the prominence of South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and the United States in their respective regions gives examples of developed countries acting as the nodes of growth of amateur sumo around the world.

In Europe the case was a slightly different due its large number of member federations, close proximity to one another, and the large proportion of developed nations. Since the start of the continental sumo federations, Europe has consistently been the largest continental federation in terms of regularly active countries, both in regional events and the Sumo World Championships. Interestingly, however, whereas amateur sumo took off initially in the developed countries of Western Europe, the strength in the sport since the late 1990s has been in the developing Eastern European countries. So, while France and Sweden, for example, appeared at early World Championships they have not appeared even at European tournaments for a number of years. Instead, countries such as Bulgaria, Hungary and the Ukraine have emerged as increasingly powerful and growing centres of amateur sumo, both in Europe and on the world scene. A large part of this has to do with the existing sporting frameworks that are in place in many Eastern European countries which provide substantial state funding to elite athletes. While amateur sumo may not be vaulted to elite status, in some of these countries it is at least attracting attention and funding from authorities, as well as luring elite athletes from other sports such as Olympic wrestling or judo to compete in amateur sumo. So, while personal means might not be as abundant as in Western Europe, these Eastern European powerhouses have money and resources already in place for athletes in sports similar to sumo, and this is having a flow on effect to amateur sumo. Regional variations will be considered further in Chapter Five.

* * *

While Japan's national sport was changing and developing in the late 19th century so too was the concept of the Japanese nation. Seeking better economic opportunities, many Japanese farmers left the countryside to work overseas as rural labourers in North and South America. They formed a substantial diaspora and built communities in which they enacted elements of their culture, including sumo. The broadening of Japan's cultural

reach and a changing understanding of the nation had its effects on sumo (both professional and amateur). The national sport was no longer just performed in the Japanese homeland, and an international presence began to emerge in sumo. In the beginning, however, this international presence was ‘foreign’ per se, and sumo was still enacted in the context of Japanese ethnicity and culture.

This continued for several decades either side of World War II, and amateur sumo remained a ‘Japanese’ sport. However, with a growing international outlook within Japan and worldwide interest in Japan and its culture, all thanks to the burgeoning economy, amateur sumo began to internationalise as well. In the late 1980s and early 1990s amateur sumo began to shift from being situated among Japanese diaspora in North and South America to being an international sport in its own right. Athletes who had little connection to Japan, except perhaps through the performance of other martial arts, were invited to attend the newly created Sumo World Championships. As the newly formed International Sumo Federation poured its efforts into expanding the sport rapidly throughout the world within the next five years, new countries and athletes were brought into the fold.

This can be seen as the beginning of the reterritorialisation of amateur sumo, whereby slowly the sport has spread to different regions – Europe, Oceania and Africa – which have no history of Japanese settlement.²⁹⁹ This spread has precipitated a growing complexity in the relations of the worldwide amateur sumo community. The existing framework with Japan at the centre still remains, but, with each continent beginning to look after its own affairs, the lines of communication and power are developing with more spontaneity. The partial devolution of power has allowed the IFS to concentrate on other matters, such as the long range future of international amateur sumo in the form of inclusion in the Olympic Games. Consideration of this goal and the global consequences for amateur sumo begins in the next chapter.

²⁹⁹ This will be discussed more fully in Chapter Five.

3. Olympic Dreams: The quest for 2008 and beyond

Having established a growing international amateur sumo network in the early 1990s, amateur sumo administrators in Japan now sought to consolidate for the future. Part of the concern was that the IFS had to prop up the sport financially from the centre, while also trying to expand its reach. The IFS realised that to promote its sport more widely and to gain greater acceptance it had to move from just having international competitions to being a sport that was better known and recognised. In essence it wanted to become acknowledged as belonging among other major international sports, and so a larger stage on which to showcase amateur sumo was needed. The IFS set its sights on inclusion in the Olympic Games. Tanaka Hidetoshi, the current president of the International Sumo Federation, was well aware of the positive difference this might make for amateur sumo. In his role as a member of the Japan Olympic Committee (JOC), Tanaka could see the difference in recognition that Olympic sports gained, how most other amateur sports struggled for recognition, and thought “[i]f it became an Olympic sport, the view of sumo would change completely and its impressiveness and appeal would be recognised internationally.”³⁰⁰

Since the mid-1990s the IFS has made the promotion of amateur sumo as a future Olympic sport its main goal, and has encouraged its member federations to pull together to achieve this aim. Inclusion in the Olympic Games would place amateur sumo on a completely different level in terms of media exposure and revenue, as “[t]he Summer Olympics ranks alongside the FIFA World Cup as one of the world’s most popular sporting festivals. Both are truly global sporting events that attract substantial interest from the public, broadcasting organizations and commercial corporations alike.”³⁰¹ Such a leap in status would also mean institutional support provided to amateur sumo by the

³⁰⁰ Tanaka Hidetoshi, *Dohyō wa En, Jinsei wa En* (Tokyo: Waseda Shuppan, 2002), 204. Ultimately it was hoped that amateur sumo would become more recognised internationally as a sport in its own right. However, we must remember that most of the power in the IFS was still held by Japanese administrators, all of whom also held prominent roles in Japanese amateur sumo administration. For them a potential spin off from any move to further internationalise and promote amateur sumo was that it could also then be held in higher regard in Japan.

³⁰¹ Barry Smart, “Not playing around: global capitalism, modern sport and consumer culture,” *Global Networks* 7, no. 2 (2007): 118.

National Olympic Committees (NOCs) in each member country, which would further help to solidify the efforts already made by the IFS in the early 1990s.

In aiming for the Olympics, amateur sumo has made a major shift from establishing an international position to globalising the sport, both consciously and unconsciously. Steps towards acceptance as an Olympic sport were taken from the mid-1990s³⁰² and they bore initial success in 1998 when amateur sumo was provisionally recognised by the International Olympic Committee. By adhering to the directives of the Olympic Charter, the International Sumo Federation aligned amateur sumo with global sporting principles, thus broadening the influences upon it. Although run and controlled by the IFS, amateur sumo now absorbed Olympic ideals of equality, participation and fair play that approximately 60 other international sports also followed.³⁰³

Although gaining provisional IOC recognition was an important first step, since this time there has been little further progress that suggests a greater possibility for inclusion in the Olympic Games in the near future. Despite this, externally the IFS strives for full IOC recognition while inwardly rallying its member federations to do everything they can to help achieve this. However, in light of the way the International Olympic Committee operates, both actions by the IFS seem to be carried out with misguided optimism. Inclusion in the Olympic Games will require consolidation and strengthening of amateur sumo so that it can hold its own in competition with larger, higher profile sports, and this will need more than the optimism emanating from within. Nevertheless, despite little tangible outcome so far, the entire process of striving for the Olympic Games is having a major impact on amateur sumo as the sport aligns with key elements of the Olympic Charter and begins to adhere to global standards of the Olympic Movement.

³⁰² These steps have been many and varied and have shaped the way that amateur sport has developed ever since (as various chapters of this thesis detail). In particular, the next chapter will show how aiming for the Olympics necessitated the inclusion of women into amateur sumo.

³⁰³ This is not to say that these ideas were not present in amateur sumo before alignment with the IOC, only that the ways in which these principles were observed now met with standards of the Olympic Movement.

Making the grade as an Olympic sport

As the then Secretary-General of the International Sumo Federation, Tanaka was granted a meeting with International Olympic Committee president Juan Antonio Samaranch at IOC headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland on April 2, 1996. Tanaka took the opportunity to push amateur sumo's case for inclusion into future Olympic Games and to be an IOC recognised international sports federation.³⁰⁴ He specifically asked about the procedure for IOC recognition and was told that the IOC would "come and observe this year's 5th Sumo World Championships. After that, we'll undertake an inspection and at the beginning of next year release the findings of whether or not you can be added as a Recognized International Federation."³⁰⁵ During the meeting Samaranch, in turn, took the opportunity to ask questions about amateur sumo, most notably the number of countries currently involved, some specifics about the weight classes and the programme for including women in the sport. He noted that Osaka was currently bidding for the 2008 Olympics and, if successful, "the IOC will cooperate as much as it can to include sumo in the Olympic events."³⁰⁶

Samaranch's tone makes the path to becoming an Olympic sport sound relatively easy. However, the IFS first had to be recognised by the International Olympic Committee, a process which involves two tiers, provisional and full recognition. Provisional recognition is the first step and "is decided by the IOC Executive Board for a specific or an indefinite period. The IOC Executive Board may determine the conditions according to which provisional recognition may lapse."³⁰⁷ There are a number of criteria which need to be met to gain provisional recognition, foremost of which is satisfying the directives of the Olympic Charter. This Charter outlines the basic goals and policies of the Olympic Movement, and member sports must follow IOC guidelines of equality, opportunity, fair play and Olympic spirit. If met, the IOC Executive is able to admit a

³⁰⁴ *Chikara*, "Sumō o Gorin kamoku ni!!" June 1996, 28.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 'Recognized International Federation' was in English in the original. As a result of this meeting, Sports Director of the IOC, Gilbert Felli, attended the 5th World Sumo Championships in Tokyo in December 1996; *Chikara*, "Dai go-kai sekai sumō senshūken taikai," March 1997, 9.

³⁰⁶ *Chikara*, "Sumō o Gorin kamoku ni!!" 29.

³⁰⁷ See Rule 3, paragraph 6. International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter*, 2007, http://multimedia.olympic.org/pdf/en_report_122.pdf (accessed August 6, 2008).

sport, where it will join the other 30 or so other recognised sports in the Olympic Movement awaiting full recognition.

Full recognition is far harder to gain because the decision is made by the Session of the IOC, a general meeting of the entire body of IOC members numbering as many as 115 people.³⁰⁸ At a Session selected sports with provisional recognition may be put to a vote of the members,³⁰⁹ where they are reviewed and compared against one another to consider any contenders for full recognition. Any sport hoping to make it this far must adhere to the World Anti-Doping Code,³¹⁰ and must be “widely practised by men in at least seventy-five countries and on four continents, and by women in at least forty countries and on three continents.”³¹¹ There are also further criteria on which the sports are judged, such as the opportunities the sport provides for equality in participation and administration, the amount of revenue they generate independently, and the current press coverage for regular events, competitions or championships.³¹² These additional conditions are set partly to assess the level of popularity and breadth of support that a prospective Olympic sport has, and they demonstrate the expectation that each sport should have a relatively high level of popularity and self-sufficiency, so that each would add to the environment and atmosphere of the Olympic Games rather than only benefit from such exposure.

The provisionally recognised sports that meet all these criteria and then gain a two-thirds majority in the vote of an IOC Session become fully recognised.³¹³ However, even full recognition does not automatically mean inclusion into the Olympics, as the programme

³⁰⁸ Ibid. For details on the composition of the IOC members see Rule 16. International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter*, 2007.

³⁰⁹ For example, at the 117th IOC Session in Singapore in July 2005, five provisionally recognised sports (Roller Sports, Golf, Rugby Sevens, Karate and Squash) were considered for full recognition status.

³¹⁰ Rule 47, paragraph 1.3. International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter*, 2007.

³¹¹ Rule 47, paragraph 1.1. International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter*, 2007. Such numerical requirements mean that the sport must have active participants, not merely be established with figurehead federations or inactive organisations. Part of this activity is measured through participation at tournaments and the interest these tournaments generate, rather than just the on-paper numbers of devotees.

³¹² See International Olympic Committee, “Olympic Programme Commission: Evaluation Criteria for Sports and Disciplines,” http://multimedia.olympic.org/pdf/en_report_813.pdf (accessed July 12, 2006); and International Olympic Committee, “Olympic Programme Commission: Report to the 117th Session,” http://multimedia.olympic.org/pdf/en_report_953.pdf (accessed July 12, 2006).

³¹³ Incidentally, none of the five sports considered at the 2005 Session in Singapore succeeded in the vote.

for each Games must also be voted upon. Each fully recognised sport is considered for inclusion in the Olympic programme in competition with the others. A vote by the members is taken on each, in turn, with a simple majority needed for inclusion into the programme for the next Games. Furthermore, the Olympic programme has recently been limited in the number of sports and events at each Games to cap the size of the event,³¹⁴ effectively meaning that any new sport must unseat another already in the programme.³¹⁵ These decisions are made at the IOC Session seven years prior to the actual event, in parallel with deciding the host city of an Olympic Games. This means that when a host is confirmed, the sports programme is decided upon shortly thereafter.³¹⁶ Using the 2005 Session in Singapore as an example, once London was decided upon as the host for 2012 the sports were then voted upon: no provisional sports were upgraded and two fully recognised sports, baseball and softball, failed to gather a majority from the IOC members.³¹⁷

³¹⁴ A maximum of 28 sports, approximately 301 events and an athlete population of no more than 10500 was decided upon at an extraordinary Session of the IOC in 2002. See details at International Olympic Committee, "Olympic Programme Commission," http://www.olympic.org/uk/news/events/117_session/full_story_uk.asp?id=1309 (accessed 19 May 2008). Without a limit on the size of the Olympics the fear is that the event will become too large. This would mean running beyond the two-week period it now occupies, that bidding cities would promise more and more to attract attention to their bids, and the Games would be increasingly difficult to hold in smaller countries or the developing world.

³¹⁵ Replacing an established Olympic sport is difficult because, by virtue of being in the Olympic Games, they have comparatively greater access to the media, to resources and capital, and become more and more ingrained within the Olympic Games with each cycle of four years.

³¹⁶ On the timeline for selecting new sports, see Rule 47, paragraph 1.4. International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter*, 2007. For the timeline of selecting an Olympic venue, see Rule 34, paragraph 2. International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter*, 2007.

³¹⁷ Baseball and softball had been in the recent 2004 Athens Olympics, and had already been included in the schedule for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. However, because too few members voted for their inclusion, both were dropped from the 2012 Olympic programme. Even though baseball had been an official sport since 1992 and softball since 1996, this decision sent a message that Olympic sports must exhibit a constant standard of quality, and the Olympic Games needs to be a manageable two-week event and there are already enough sports, events and athletes at each Games to ensure this. There were many reasons for this decision, not least of which was the fact that both sports only represented one sex (baseball – men; softball – women). There were also concerns about the quality of the competition baseball provided at the Olympics, largely tied to the fact that only a handful of top professional players from Major League Baseball in the United States were present. Furthermore, professional baseball had been under the cloud of several performance-enhancing drug scandals in recent years, tainting the sport in general and putting it at odds with the Olympic Charter and WADA.

Aligning amateur sumo with Olympic ideals

The International Sumo Federation submitted its application for provisional recognition to the IOC Executive in November 1997.³¹⁸ In late January 1998, at an International Olympic Committee Executive Board meeting held in conjunction with the Nagano Winter Olympics, the IFS was granted provisional recognition in accordance with Article 26 of the Olympic Charter, the first step in becoming an official Olympic sport.³¹⁹ The speed of this recognition perhaps demonstrates that gaining provisional recognition was as achievable as Samaranch had suggested. However, plenty of further work was needed for amateur sumo to align to the ideals of the Olympic Charter, although the IFS had already implemented several steps prior to applying for provisional recognition. The changes to align more closely to Olympic ideals demonstrate examples of the global discourse of Olympism shaping the composition and governance of amateur sumo, adding to its increasing reterritorialisation outside of Japan.

Prior to applying for provisional recognition, the IFS had already partly satisfied the Olympic principle of “encourag[ing] and support[ing] the development of sport for all”³²⁰ by having weight class competitions in all IFS-run competitions. Since the inception of the Sumo World Championships in 1992, amateur sumo allowed male athletes to challenge others who were in the same weight range, thus evening out the competition to an extent. The practice of using weight divisions went against the norm in most Japanese competitions until that time, which operated with no weight limits. Whether the IFS had specifically implemented these weight divisions with an eye to Olympic criteria is debatable. A European official involved with the IFS from the start believes that “when the ISF [sic] was founded or started...at the very beginning, it was their aim to say that

³¹⁸ *Chikara*, “IOC rijikai Kokusai Sumō Renmei o shōnin,” March 1998, 2

³¹⁹ Rule 26. International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter*, 2007; International Sumo Federation, “The Amateur Game – Global and Going Places,” *Sumo Fan Magazine*, April 2006, http://www.sumofanmag.com/content/Issue_6/Amateur.htm (accessed 1 June, 2006); Yoshida Seiji, “Kokugi sumō ni roman o motase naigai fukyū mezasu,” *Chikara*, September 1998, 40; *Chikara*, “IOC rijikai Kokusai Sumō Renmei o shōnin,” March 1998, 2; Yoshida Seiji, “Kaichō aisatsu,” *Chikara*, March 1998, 1. Interestingly, Yoshida writes that the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* was the organisation given provisional recognition as an international sports federation. This is erroneous as only international, not national, organisations can be recognised.

³²⁰ Rule 2, paragraph 12. International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter*, 2007.

sumo becomes an Olympic sport.”³²¹ Whether or not this had bearing upon the adoption of weight classes, when the International Sumo Federation sought IOC recognition, dividing competitors into weight classes for competition had become the standard in international amateur sumo.³²²

Although the presence of weight classes in international competitions allowed for different shapes and sizes of competitors, amateur sumo remained a male-only sport. In pushing for IOC recognition, the IFS had to consider opening the sport to women because a 1994 amendment to the Olympic Charter outlined one of the IOC’s goals as “encourag[ing] and support[ing] the promotion of women in sport at all levels and in all structures with a view to implementing the principle of equality of men and women.”³²³ A statement such as this from the IOC made it clear that any new sport could only be admitted if it ensured equality of participation. Amateur sumo administrators took this to heart, as Tanaka explains:

In order to have [sumo] promoted into the Olympics, there are various obstacles and barriers that must be passed, and one of these is the ‘women problem’. Allowing women to also participate is the biggest precondition for Olympic events, because this is also a worldwide trend.

Because this requirement exists, we created ‘*shinsumō*’ for women where they compete on a mat and wear a uniform.³²⁴

Tanaka’s “we” specifies the male Japanese sumo administrators who created *shinsumō* (literally, ‘new sumo’). Their decision was made to satisfy their Olympic aims but the

³²¹ Gunther Romenath, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 19, 2005. This view is corroborated by a newspaper article of the time which cites an aim of the IFS to be inclusion in the Olympics. *Yomiuri Shimbun*, “Sumō ga ‘Gorin dohyō’ e,” November 7, 1992.

³²² This happens even though regional and national federations technically are able to hold tournaments under almost any administrative practices that they themselves set. For example, in Japan, most adult competitions are held in the openweight class, where all-comers compete against one another. There is only one major national competition each year where the athletes compete in divisions appropriate to their weight and meet only opponents of a similar size. This approach of having mainly open weight tournaments comes from the influence of *ōzumō* where sumo is about an ultimate test of strength, power, skill, execution and tactics regardless of the size of the two opponents. Thus the major amateur sumo tournaments in Japan mirror this approach.

³²³ Rule 2, paragraph 7. International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter*, 2007.

³²⁴ Tanaka, *Dohyō wa En*, 204-5.

process excluded the women for whom the sport was intended. Once competitions for women were decided upon and the administrative framework was organised, only then were women invited to take part.³²⁵ This lack of female agency in creating ‘their’ sport will be considered in the next chapter. Nevertheless, the inclusion of women meant a major shift for amateur sumo, and highlights the way that the ideals of the Olympic Movement had power to bring change to the sport. In particular, in seeking new opportunities for amateur sumo, the IFS went against the tradition of excluding women in Japanese sumo, both professional and amateur. *Ōzumō* maintains a strict ban on women entering the *dohyō* owing to its sacred position as an anointed Shinto site³²⁶ and, until this time, amateur sumo had followed suit by excluding women as well.

The participation of women was not the only necessary change made by the IFS to gain IOC recognition. Important changes in practice were made “to lead the fight against doping in sport”³²⁷ by implementing drug testing of athletes and promoting a drug-free sport. Although the early Sumo World Championships and other important tournaments were held without testing athletes, “[i]n 2001, IFS introduced the World Anti-Doping Code and, since then, there have been anti-doping tests at all major international sumo championships.”³²⁸ The costs involved currently limit anti-doping activities to random tests of medal winners rather than those selected from the entire field. These take place at IFS-run tournaments, which are currently only the Sumo World Championships (men and women) and the Junior Sumo World Championships, and there is no out of competition drug tests for athletes as happens in other sports. Additionally, testing amateur sumo

³²⁵ This method of supplying a framework and then trying to create a demand to fill it has distinct parallels to the way that international amateur sumo had been established. Just as Japan invited other countries to participate in the Sumo World Championships to kick-start the sport internationally, women were invited to compete in the sport that had been created for them.

³²⁶ This means that women participate in the professional sumo world in only the restricted capacities of surrogate mother in the *sumō-beya* (sumo stable), members of supporters’ groups, and as spectators and fans.

³²⁷ Rule 2, paragraph 8. International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter*, 2007.

³²⁸ International Sumo Federation, “The Amateur Game.”

athletes for drugs distances the sport from the uncertainty and ambiguity that surrounds the use of performance enhancing drugs in *ōzumō*.³²⁹

As stated earlier, striving for Olympic inclusion was done specifically to gain recognition for amateur sumo and to help lift its profile above other sports competing for spectators, potential athletes, corporate sponsorship and media exposure. While this was a conscious move by the IFS towards further growth and security for the sport, the changes necessary for Olympic recognition unconsciously helped amateur sumo to differentiate itself further from *ōzumō*. Although the changes made were necessary for achieving a higher station for amateur sumo by becoming part of the Olympics, they also helped further establish amateur sumo as a sport distinguishable in its own right. While this helps remove amateur sumo from association with the stereotypes of professional sumo and reinforces amateur sumo as a modern, participatory sport, ultimately the spectre of professional sumo may hinder amateur sumo's Olympic chances, as will be explained later.

Being within the Olympic Movement

As amateur sumo began aligning itself to the Olympic ideals above, the sport was also accepted into parts of the Olympic Movement. Amateur sumo became a member of three wider sporting organisations: the General Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF), the Association of IOC Recognized International Sports Federations (ARISF), and the International World Games Association (IWGA).³³⁰ Thus, for amateur sumo, becoming part of the Olympic Movement has meant not just altering itself to 'fit in,' but also receiving added status, outside support and being part of a wider forum in which to

³²⁹ There has long been speculation that performance enhancing drugs that offer help in gaining strength, building body mass, easing pain, and aiding recovery from training and injury are used in *ōzumō*. The *Nihon Sumō Kyōkai* has not tested its athletes publicly but in 2008 it began an initiative to educate its athletes about drugs in anticipation of implementing drug tests in 2009. In the meantime, the sport was rocked by scandals that saw four *rikishi* expelled for possession or use of marijuana. One *rikishi*, originally from Russia, was caught in possession and two more Russian *rikishi* tested positive in hastily arranged urine tests for all top level athletes to cover both performance enhancing and recreational drugs. A Japanese *rikishi* was caught in possession during a police drug raid of a music production company several months later. After these expulsions, the *Nihon Sumō Kyōkai* felt compelled to initiate testing to restore confidence in *ōzumō*. See, for example, Danielle Demetriou, "Ancient sport of sumo to drug test wrestlers," *Telegraph.co.uk*, February 4, 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/japan/4484613/Ancient-sport-of-sumo-to-drug-test-wrestlers.html> (accessed February 26, 2009).

³³⁰ International Sumo Federation, "The Amateur Game."

develop the sport. These organisations help promote amateur sumo, both within and outside the Olympic Movement, and assist the IFS with what it now considers one of its main activities, “lobbying the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in our goal to make sumo an Olympic sport.”³³¹

The International Sumo Federation was recognised in 1999 by the GAISF and became one of around 100 international sports federations that meet annually “to exchange viewpoints on themes of common interest.”³³² The GAISF sports are so diverse and have very different agendas (some are Olympic, some are not; some are professional while others are amateur) that this organisation seems to offer the IFS only a networking opportunity. The ARISF, on the other hand, represents only the international sports federations that are recognised by the IOC but which are not yet part of the Summer or Winter Olympics.³³³ It provides its members with a forum to contribute to the Olympic Movement and assistance with their aim to be included in the Olympic Games.³³⁴ To this end, the ARISF puts across the views of its members on IOC committees and provides an arena for the second tier of sports federations to learn from one another, even though they are ultimately competing for the same goal – full Olympic status.³³⁵ A major objective of the ARISF is to have each sport recognised by the National Olympic Committees of each country in which they are present. The organisation aims to gain recognition for the member sport and thereby strengthen the sport’s presence, enhance public awareness and solidify it at grassroots level.³³⁶

Perhaps the most tangible result of IOC provisional recognition has been membership of the International World Games Association. Founded in 1980, the primary function of the IWGA is the administration of “a quadrennial and multidisciplinary sports event, The

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Association of Recognized IOC International Sports Federations, “Welcome to the ARISF,” <http://www.arisf.org/index.php> (accessed December 13, 2008).

³³⁴ Association of Recognized IOC International Sports Federations, “Mission Statement,” <http://www.arisf.org/mission.php> (accessed December 13, 2008).

³³⁵ Although each international sports federation is effectively a competitor to every other ARISF member, the collective approach gives these fringe sports a greater voice and more opportunities to state their respective claims.

³³⁶ Association of Recognized IOC International Sports Federations, “Mission Statement.”

World Games, which aspires to equal and exceed the importance of world championships organized by each federation individually.”³³⁷ In essence, the IWGA is trying to give exposure to its members by staging its own multi-sport event which helps to increase knowledge and recognition of these sports. Hopefully from this the sports’ popularity will increase and there are possibilities for the World Games “to generate financial means to enable Member Federations to accelerate their development.”³³⁸ There is a delicate balance between exposure, positive promotion of less recognised and understood sports, and the desire to better establish each of the members financially.

In 2001, the northern Japanese city of Akita hosted the World Games, where amateur sumo was included as an invitational sport. Although the IFS would not become a full member of the IWGA until 2002, the World Games allows hosts to include invitational sports of interest to locals. Amateur sumo was later included as an official sport for the first time at the 2005 Duisburg World Games, part of which was described in the Introduction of this thesis. In the estimation of the International Sumo Federation, “the sumo event in Duisburg was a great success”³³⁹ and the participants themselves viewed it favourably. For Satoyama Miki, a Japanese female heavyweight competitor, participation in the event whetted her appetite: “It really made me think how great it would be to compete in the Olympics.”³⁴⁰ For Katrina Watts the excitement of being part of the World Games was akin to attending the Olympics:

The World Games is a lot of fun because it’s actually like being at the Olympics...it was interesting because it was a very different atmosphere because there were so many different sports and there was a lot of ‘What sport are you? Oh, sumo, that’s interesting’, ‘What are you?’, ‘Oh we’re ten pin bowling’ or ‘We’re tug-of-war’, and there’s some really off the wall sports...So it was exciting for the

³³⁷ International World Games Association, “Organization,” <http://www.worldgames-iwga.org/vsite/vcontent/page/custom/0,8510,1044-114776-116043-12239-35950-custom-item,00.html> (accessed June 8, 2006)

³³⁸ See Section 2. International World Games Association, “IWGA Constitution,” <http://www.worldgames-iwga.org/vsite/vfile/page/fileurl/0,11040,1044-163487-180702-85072-0-file,00.pdf> (accessed 8 June 2006).

³³⁹ International Sumo Federation, “The Amateur Game.”

³⁴⁰ Satoyama Miki, interview by author, Amagasaki, Japan, October 21, 2006.

athletes to meet other people and to be able to go to watch other people's sports, which is like a whole Olympic feel.³⁴¹

Riding Osaka's coat-tails

Once the International Olympic Committee confirmed amateur sumo's provisional recognition, amateur sumo had taken the first step to becoming an Olympic sport. This was the culmination of work by the International Sumo Federation for the two years since Tanaka Hidetoshi met with Juan Antonio Samaranch, if not for several years before that as well. At the time of the meeting in April 1996, it was also widely known that Osaka was applying to host the 2008 Olympic Games and amateur sumo administrators felt success for Osaka could mean subsequent inclusion into the Olympic programme for their sport.³⁴² Although the decisions on the host city for 2008 and amateur sumo's IOC recognition would be quite separate processes, the IFS hoped that a Japanese host city would strengthen and support its claim for full recognition and Olympic inclusion.

Yoshida Seiji, the then-president of the *Nihon Sumō Renmei*, felt that the announcement about amateur sumo's provisional IOC recognition was an important step in becoming an official sport at the 2008 Olympics: "I think the day is not far away when sumo, proud of its ancient history and tradition, impresses the people of the world at the Olympics, the forum of international sports."³⁴³ Sasai Akira, the then-President of the International Sumo Federation, voiced similar hopes that sumo would soon become an Olympic sport when addressing athletes at the inaugural Junior Sumo World Championships in 1999:

There is the possibility that Sumō will be admitted to the 2008 Olympic Games. To all of you, the athletes assembled here today at the Kokugikan, you have an

³⁴¹ Katrina Watts, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 29, 2004.

³⁴² Although Osaka had signalled as early as 1996 that it wanted to be the Japanese candidate to host the Games, it had first to beat rival Yokohama to receive the Japan Olympic Committee (JOC) nomination. This was confirmed in August 1997 and the Japanese Cabinet approved of the Osaka's nomination in late 1998. From here Osaka officials and the JOC began putting their bid together for the final decision to be made in mid-2001 at the general meeting of the IOC. *Kippo News*, "Japanese Government approves Osaka city's bid for 2008 Olympics," December 16, 1998, http://www.kippo.or.jp/KansaiWindowHtml/News/1998-e/19981216_NEWS.HTML (accessed June 9, 2006).

³⁴³ Yoshida, "Kaichō aisatsu," 1.

excellent chance to be able to compete in these Games. Though there are many famous athletes currently competing in several international championships, you now have the opportunity to refine your skills, body and spirit to ensure that the 2008 Games will be a success to all the sumō fans around the world who will be watching. Your entitlement as an Olympic-caliber athlete will draw nearer as you continue to improve your skills with each successive tournament.³⁴⁴

Both were hoping that Osaka would precipitate sumo's inclusion, just as the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo had done for judo.³⁴⁵ Osaka had become the home of organised amateur sumo in the early twentieth century and it seemed somehow fitting that the same city might also see the entry of sumo into the Olympic Games.

However, the optimism that a successful bid by a Japanese city would assist amateur sumo, as a 'Japanese' sport, into the Olympics was built on an erroneous assumption. While this method had allowed for the inclusion of judo in 1964, and despite IOC president Samaranch making encouraging comments in 1996, the very process of selecting Olympic sports precluded this. Prior to the two-stage process of granting IOC recognition, host nations had had far greater say in the sports that were in 'their' Olympics. In the past certain sports had been directly included precisely because they were supported by the host city. Judo was one of these sports, included in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics after heavy lobbying by Tokyo and the International Judo Federation.³⁴⁶ Later, hosts were able to choose demonstration sports³⁴⁷ as a way of recognising the sporting landscape of the host nation or city.³⁴⁸ A handful of these sports were later included in the

³⁴⁴ Akira Sasai, "Greeting Speech at the 1st Junior Sumō World Championships," August 21, 1999, <http://amateursumo.com/tourneys/1999/1stjwsc/sasai.htm> (accessed February 20, 2007). This is the official English translation of his speech, prepared by the IFS itself.

³⁴⁵ Kyōsu Toshiharu, "Sumō no kokusaika ni tsuite," *Chikara*, June 1999, 29; Yoshida, "Kaichō aisatsu," 1.

³⁴⁶ Andreas Niehaus, "'If you want to cry, cry on the green mats of Kōdōkan': Expressions of Japanese cultural and national identity in the movement to include judo into the Olympic programme," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 23, no. 7 (2006): 1175.

³⁴⁷ These demonstration sports were usually popular in the host country or were ones in which the host was proficient. Often there were local or national sports which received some exposure by being included in the Olympic fortnight, even though they were not full medal sports.

³⁴⁸ This presumably also meant that the local population had some sort of greater buy-in to the event as well. Traditionally, the Olympic Games have had a local cultural programme that sits alongside the sporting programme and showcases cultural elements of each host city or nation.

full Olympic programme.³⁴⁹ However, eventually the IOC decided having demonstration sports as well as the full medal events crowded the programme of the Olympic Games and discontinued the practice after the 1992 Barcelona Olympics.³⁵⁰ They reverted instead to the two levels of IOC recognition described previously.

Despite these changes, the International Sumo Federation still laboured under the illusion that should Osaka become the host of the 2008 Olympics amateur sumo would have a strong chance of being included in the programme. This belief became widespread within the amateur sumo community. Tsuihiji Rie, a Japanese athlete who entered the sport around this time, commented, “Well at that time, according to the story I’ve heard, with Osaka aiming for the 2008 Olympics, which eventually went to Beijing, if it had been granted to Osaka then sumo would’ve been an Olympic sport.”³⁵¹ Likewise, Peter Armstrong, an Australian administrator, believed that “had the last Olympics gone to Osaka instead of Beijing, it would have meant that sumo would have become a demonstration sport for the first time.”³⁵² It is difficult to ascertain exactly why the IFS was convinced that it could be helped by Osaka’s bid. A possibility is that the IFS was unfamiliar with the Olympic Movement and its processes, particularly as when the IFS applied for recognition this whole structure was a relatively recent addition by the IOC. It may also have been that the IFS was unaware of this decision by the IOC and was working with the acceptance of judo into the Tokyo Olympics as its blueprint for how to have amateur sumo included in the Olympics. Certainly comments like those from Juan Antonio Samaranch in 1996 that the IOC would do as much as it could “to include sumo in the Olympic events”³⁵³ could have been misread or have provided undue optimism on the part of amateur sumo officials in Japan. Nevertheless, most within the sport, like Rie and Peter, accepted the word of the IFS that there was a good chance in 2008. Ultimately,

³⁴⁹ For example, baseball was a demonstration sport at the 1988 Seoul Olympics and was a full medal sport for the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. Taekwondo was a demonstration sport at both the 1988 and 1992 Olympics before becoming a full medal sport at the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

³⁵⁰ John Lucas, “Taekwondo, Pelote Basque/Jai-Alai, and Roller Hockey – Three Unusual Olympic Demonstration Sports,” *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance* 63, no. 4 (1992): 82. Another reason that counted against demonstration sports was that their presence arguably gave the hosts of an Olympic Games a disproportionate influence on the sports that might be included in future Games.

³⁵¹ Tsuihiji Rie, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 17, 2006.

³⁵² Peter Armstrong, interview by author, Sydney, Australia, February 5, 2006.

³⁵³ *Chikara*, “Sumō o Gorin kamoku ni!!” 29.

the issue of whether a Japanese host city would boost amateur sumo's Olympic hopes or not proved moot because Osaka lost out as host to Beijing.³⁵⁴

Post-Osaka realities

Amateur sumo's recognition by the International Olympic Committee created an energy and excitement about the possibilities that lay ahead. Tanaka Hidetoshi wrote: "Sumo into the Olympics' is the common wish of people connected with amateur sumo."³⁵⁵ As one leading European official noted,

the big push was that we thought, we hoped, that Osaka would get the bid in 2008, as did a lot of other countries and that's why from '96 to before the bid was made a lot of countries were pushing because everyone was trying to have their own country join in the sumo because once it's Olympic everyone can get involved. That's why a lot of countries tried to join [the IFS], to try and get the sumo franchise tied up for their country so that if it was an Olympic sport then obviously they'd have a head start, but sadly [the Games] went to Beijing.³⁵⁶

The failure of Osaka to secure the 2008 Olympics stifled some of the fervour that had built up. With the harsh reality that amateur sumo would not soon be an Olympic sport, some national federations reappraised their commitment to the sport. One Czech athlete/administrator sees the repercussions as damaging the sport in many countries:

I definitely think amateur sumo is in a crisis now in Europe, and I think worldwide, because the Olympic dream evaporated, and I think there's gonna be a shake out now in a couple of years – two or three years...I can't predict what's gonna be after

³⁵⁴ The Summer Olympics had last been held in Asia in 1988 and, given that Europe, North America and Oceania had hosted the Games since, it was widely predicted that they would return to Asia in 2008. With this in mind, Osaka was short-listed with Beijing, Istanbul, Toronto and Paris. Beijing was the favourite due to having narrowly missed out to Sydney on the hosting of the 2000 Olympics. Paris was also highly favoured having learnt much from the experience of being beaten in previous bids. Japan had shown it was capable of hosting large sporting mega-events like the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics and the 2002 FIFA World Cup (joint host). However, Osaka seemed to be a long shot to win the bid given the IOC's track record of sharing Olympic Games around different continents and countries and that Nagano had only recently hosted the Winter Olympics.

³⁵⁵ Tanaka, *Dohyō wa En*, 204.

³⁵⁶ Stephen Gadd, interview by author, Rotterdam, Netherlands, May 13, 2005.

that, but in a sense I think there's a crisis because many national federations saw that there's probably no money to be made on amateur sumo in the short term, which I think many individuals and many federations banked on, and they were counting on it, so I think...many are gonna lose interest – that's already happening, I think, this year.³⁵⁷

Other participants also found themselves questioning the Olympic potential of their sport though perhaps not in such fatalistic ways. For Hanah, there are doubts about how robust amateur sumo is: “Well I really hope, but...if I'm honest I don't think it's big enough...If you look at all our Olympic sports [sumo]'s just really amateur.”³⁵⁸ In a similar vein, Dennis has reservations about sumo's ability to stand out from other sports it is competing with: “They want to try to make it Olympic sport, but I don't know if that's going to happen. Because there are lots of sports who want to be Olympic, so why they gonna choose sumo?”³⁵⁹

Nevertheless, almost everyone I spoke with would *like* amateur sumo to be included in the Olympics, even if for selfish reasons. One Japanese athlete seemed to sum up the thoughts of amateur sumo athletes in general, regardless of nationality or sex: “Obviously because it is a sport in which I'm competing, I'd love sumo to be an Olympic event.”³⁶⁰ Similarly, Claudia echoes the desires of many who feel that their sport is tantalisingly close to the Olympics but remains frustratingly distant from selection: “I thought it would be Olympic in 2012 in London. It would be nice to go there. For athletes it's an event to have been to, it's something to tell the grandchildren. It would be an accomplishment to enter the Olympics.”³⁶¹ However, the active athletes see their Olympic dreams slipping away with each passing year, while administrators, many of whom have been involved in amateur sumo for more than a decade, have a longer range perspective on the whole process. While the athletes' comments above express a touch of concern at the pace of change, many of the sumo administrators interviewed had confidence that amateur

³⁵⁷ Jaroslav Poriz, interview by author, Jilemnice, Czech Republic, June 26, 2005.

³⁵⁸ Hanah Weerkamp, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 18, 2005.

³⁵⁹ Dennis Oversluiizen, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 20, 2005.

³⁶⁰ Tsuihiji Rie, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 17, 2006.

³⁶¹ Claudia de Graauw, interview by author, Rotterdam, Netherlands, July 16, 2005.

sumo's admission would only be a matter of time.³⁶² Katrina's optimism is shown in her choice of 'when' and 'once' rather than 'if': "When sumo does get to the Olympics that's going to be a big boost for it, because sports like judo are in the Olympics so people want to do it....So once it gets into the Olympics, I think there will be a big sumo boom."³⁶³

Martin is confident that amateur sumo will become an Olympic sport because of the influence that Japan has on the International Sumo Federation:

I've seen the way Japanese do things – they're so well organised when they run tournaments – and I think that Japan, they have long-term plans, eh. So I think that if *they* think it could be an Olympic sport, then yes, I would agree it could be. If Fiji was running it, I would have my doubts, or if Tonga was running it, but a country like Japan that seems to have long-term plans for most things, I believe it would be an Olympic sport and I'd love to see it as an Olympic sport.³⁶⁴

Despite thinking that in time amateur sumo will become a full Olympic sport, all the administrators interviewed identified that much more work has to be done.

However, their perspectives on who should be responsible and why the sport is not yet ready to enter the Olympics differed. Katrina, perhaps because of her close connections with the IFS and the workings of Japanese amateur sumo, focused on *her* role: "I want to see it become an Olympic sport and will do anything I can to help them along there."³⁶⁵ Martin felt that there needed to be some soul-searching from the nations within the amateur sumo community. He felt national federations needed to contribute to a strong annual presence at the Sumo World Championships, and focus on

why some countries are not so consistent – like, we haven't been terribly consistent either, quite frankly – so what's the reason for that? If we can address that reason, if each country can address that reason and if there's enough people in that country

³⁶² Of course, their confidence in this outcome and the faith they have in the IFS to make this happen perhaps stem from not having the same time constraints on their careers as the current athletes.

³⁶³ Katrina Watts, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 29, 2004.

³⁶⁴ Martin Stirling, interview by author, Lower Hutt, New Zealand, April 2, 2006.

³⁶⁵ Katrina Watts, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 29, 2004.

that are in it for the long haul, then I think it would be wonderful to have it at the Olympics.³⁶⁶

Administrators and officials in Europe, where many national federations are strong and athletes compete regularly, see that more integration is needed if amateur sumo is to move forward. They place this responsibility squarely at the feet of the International Sumo Federation. Christoph, a German referee, thinks

if it is possible to cooperate – all *sumōtori*, all officials, all referees, the Japanese, Germans, Dutch, the Norwegians and the Russians, Ukrainians – to have one lobby for sumo sport. Then it may be that we will have, or it will happen, that sumo sport will be Olympic. But now everybody cooks his own soup, and so I think it's very, very difficult to become Olympic for sumo sport.³⁶⁷

Gunther Romenath, the then-European Sumo Union president felt that Europe was outstripping the rest of the world and the IFS has a responsibility to assist struggling regions:

So I think if other continents are as successful as we are in Europe, then the door is open for the Olympic Games... I think the ISF must do more on other continents, because America, Oceania, Africa, is not so much...developed. In my opinion, it's not satisfactory I think.³⁶⁸

Undeterred by Osaka's missing out on the 2008 Olympics, the IFS is still pinning its hopes on a Japanese city being the host. Upon the announcement in October 2005 that Tokyo was interested in bidding for the 2016 Summer Olympics,³⁶⁹ the Congress of the International Sumo Federation was told that amateur sumo would be part of the Olympic

³⁶⁶ Martin Stirling, interview by author, Lower Hutt, New Zealand, April 2, 2006.

³⁶⁷ Christoph Ducho, interview by author, Brandenburg an der Havel, Germany, July 10, 2005. *Sumōtori* is another Japanese word, like *rikishi*, to describe a sumo athlete. It usually describes a professional in *ōzumō*, with *senshu* (athlete) being the more common term in Japanese for an amateur sumo competitor.

³⁶⁸ Gunther Romenath, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 19, 2005.

³⁶⁹ Fukuoka had also expressed its interest in being the Japan Olympic Committee nominee to bid for hosting the 2016 Olympics. On 30 August, 2006, the JOC announced Tokyo as the Japanese nominee for 2016. See Japan Olympic Committee, "Rikkōho toshi wa Tōkyō ni kettei!" <http://www.joc.or.jp/news/newsmain.asp?ID=0000001050&yyyy=2006> (accessed February 2, 2007).

programme if Tokyo's bid was successful.³⁷⁰ Despite the realities that suggest otherwise, this message has been seized upon by the amateur sumo community in Japan, almost as a mantra, in much the same way as the initial optimism toward the Osaka bid. Although perhaps still wary of believing too strongly so soon after the Osaka disappointment, one athlete suggests that the road ahead will be difficult but that a Japanese city hosting the Games could make all the difference: "it will be difficult. At the moment the IOC are shaving the number of sports in the Olympics and they are trying to make it a little smaller. It seems really difficult for any new sports to become Olympic events. If Tokyo manages to win the rights to host the 2016 Olympics then I think the chances will increase."³⁷¹ Another Japanese athlete also has her sights set on the prospect of Tokyo hosting in 2016 and having sumo as a part of the programme:

Well, for me, I'm waiting for it, so I hope it happens quickly. I'd really like to make it to the Olympics. But I'd be 33 already by then so I don't really know if I'd be able... True, some of the Europeans are mid-30s... Yeah, I'd really love to enter. It's been my dream since I began in high school and I thought if sumo ever got into the Olympics I'd like to compete, and so that is what I've been striving for.³⁷²

Nevertheless, the Olympic future for amateur sumo is uncertain. Attaining provisional recognition from the International Olympic Committee will do only so much, as this status is open to review indefinitely³⁷³ and the criteria for getting into the Olympic programme seem exponentially harder than being provisionally recognised by the IOC. The IOC has also made clear indications that any new Olympic sport must guarantee a suitable spectacle for the audience. In 2005 softball was dropped from the Olympic

³⁷⁰ Personal observation, IFS Congress, October 15, 2005.

³⁷¹ Tsuihiji Rie, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 17, 2006.

³⁷² Satoyama Miki, interview by author, Amagasaki, Japan, October 21, 2006.

³⁷³ Amateur sumo's provisional status continued to be rolled over from 1998 until 2003. At that time (as the International Sumo Federation explains it), due to an unspecified change in IOC criteria, the IFS had to reapply for provisional recognition. The loss of provisional status was for only around a year, because in May 2004 the IFS emailed its members informing them that once again sumo was granted two-year provisional recognition. International Sumo Federation, "The Amateur Game."; International Sumo Federation, personal communication, May 24, 2004.

programme because it was deemed that the sport did not have “universal appeal”³⁷⁴ to the audience of the Olympic Games. This standard is adhered to more strictly for new sports or potential additions to the Olympic programme,³⁷⁵ and the worldwide spread of a sport and the numbers that participate give indications as to its potential appeal, primarily through the audience it can draw.

Gunther Romenath believes “as a sport for the Olympic Games...sumo is very, very attractive, for sponsors...no doubt about that.”³⁷⁶ Amateur sumo could appeal to an audience because its rules are simple to understand and the matches are short, but its ‘universal appeal’ and the quality of the sport are in question. While meeting the IOC criteria of at least 75 countries on four continents on paper, the active federations within the IFS are mainly European and Asian, with only pockets of activity elsewhere. The highest attendance ever at a Sumo World Championships was 40 federations (around half the number of listed members), and roughly a third of all national federations have never attended a Sumo World Championships. Outside of Japan, the most active countries probably only have a couple of hundred athletes each, spanning from young children through to adults. Most countries have far fewer athletes, often just a handful in a group that is the ‘national’ federation.

Another important factor is not just the number of spectators or viewers a sport might deliver but also the quality of the spectacle, which stems from offering a high standard of competition and having the best athletes attend.³⁷⁷ For sumo the difficulty is the divide between amateur and professional worlds, and the way that amateur sumo is viewed

³⁷⁴ International Olympic Committee, “Singapore 2005: IOC President Reflects On A Successful 117th Session,” http://www.olympic.org/uk/news/events/117_session/full_story_uk.asp?id=1426 (accessed 2 February 2007).

³⁷⁵ More established Olympic sports with potentially limited appeal, such as Modern Pentathlon, remain due to their legacy of many decades in the Games.

³⁷⁶ Gunther Romenath, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 19, 2005.

³⁷⁷ International Olympic Committee, “Singapore 2005.” For example, one of the concerns expressed when baseball was dropped from the Olympic programme for 2012 was that the competition had lacked many of the best players, those contracted to professional teams in Major League Baseball.

because of this.³⁷⁸ While *amateur* sumo is the sport recognised by the International Olympic Committee, the best exponents of sumo are the elite athletes in *ōzumō*. This creates a divide between the IOC desire to have the best athletes in any sport available in the Olympic Games and what amateur sumo can offer. Ultimately, amateur sumo cannot help but be compared to *ōzumō* and its standard of competition.³⁷⁹

To be in contention for the Olympics, a worldwide increase in numbers of athletes and countries competing, not to mention a lift in awareness and popularity, seem necessary. The evolving programme of the Olympic Games, and particularly any new sports added to it, essentially reflects the current global sporting landscape. New sports force their way to IOC recognition through sheer weight of numbers, through popularity and the impact the sport has. The Olympic Games does not vault a sport to popularity but uses the already established support and success of the sport to add to the spectacle of the Olympics. So, in requiring a sport to be ‘popular’ before entering the Olympics, rather than the other way around, the way the IOC operates is in opposition to the original plan of the IFS to popularise sumo by getting it into the Olympic Games and then showcasing it to the world. It now appears that, hamstrung by its size and lack of universal appeal, amateur sumo has reached an *impasse* with its Olympic dream.

* * *

The IFS began their campaign to become an Olympic sport at a time when member numbers were high and the future looked bright. They sought Olympic recognition as the next logical step in raising the profile of amateur sumo, and hoped that the process and, ultimately, inclusion in the Olympic Games would raise the profile of the sport globally.

³⁷⁸ The international governing body of each Olympic sport decides on its own eligibility criteria, including the presence of professional athletes. Currently the only Olympic sport that excludes professional athletes is boxing. Specific information about the sport dropping the “Amateur” description from its name, although controlling amateur boxing within the Olympic Games, can be found at International Boxing Association, “About history,” <http://www.aiba.org/default.aspx?pId=375#> (accessed 2 February 2007).

³⁷⁹ This of course is not insurmountable because, as mentioned, boxing does not include professionals. Also soccer does not have all the international stars playing because it limits Olympic competitions to athletes under 23 years of age (but with three over-age athletes permitted on each team). These rules are outlined at International Olympic Committee, “Football,” http://www.olympic.org/uk/sports/programme/index_uk.asp?SportCode=FB. However, sumo may be held to a different standard because it is not currently in the Olympic programme and the other two sports also have far greater global reach.

The relative ease with which the sport gained provisional IOC recognition augured well for higher status, particularly given that Osaka was bidding to host the Olympic Games in 2008. However, the IFS had pinned its hopes on an erroneous assumption. The sports in the Olympic programme no longer are influenced by the nationality of the host city. So, unlike the boost judo received in 1964, amateur sumo will still have to work its way through the ranks of the provisionally recognised sports to emerge as a candidate for full recognition in the future, irrespective of where the Olympics are to be held.

Despite the lack of success in becoming part of the Olympic programme by 2008 (or perhaps in 2016, should Tokyo be successful), the process of pursuing the Olympic goal has proved beneficial for amateur sumo. The acceptance of the IFS within the Olympic Movement has resulted in the integration of women into the sport, increasing the number and breadth of competitors. Provisional recognition by the International Olympic Committee has raised amateur sumo's profile, and given the national sumo federations opportunities to align with their National Olympic Committees. Additionally, the sport has begun to incorporate anti-doping policies to adhere to WADA guidelines as one of the philosophies of the Olympic Movement. These actions have demonstrated a certain willingness by the IFS to conform to global standards in sport, even if the purpose is not entirely altruistic. Thus, despite a 'failure' to be included in the Olympic programme to date, amateur sumo has succeeded in globalising in a different way and, arguably, is further deterritorialised from Japan and reterritorialised in a global space.

There has been a further outcome of the IFS pursuing its Olympic goal. By banding together in pursuit of Olympic status as a common target, a unifying force within amateur sumo has emerged. Pursuit of this Olympic goal by the International Sumo Federation has also served to legitimate the continued control and existence of the IFS itself. By asking everyone within the sport to pull in the same direction, the IFS has created a direction for itself and its members, and raised the promise of future growth and exposure in the sport. There has been an underlying 'Olympic solidarity' forged within amateur sumo where, for different reasons, everyone hopes that one day their sport will make it into the Olympic programme.

However, in reality this is a double-edged sword. Although this common aim might draw the amateur sumo community together under the guidance of the IFS to achieve that goal, it also provides a measure by which the IFS is judged. As long as the goal of Olympic inclusion is unsatisfied, the potential for discontent and challenge to the IFS's authority remains.³⁸⁰ Despite other successes it might have, the IFS has set a benchmark for achievement in the future, namely becoming an Olympic sport. As one administrator has remarked, even though he supports the push for the Olympics and recognises the potential this would have for amateur sumo's future,

[i]n terms of amateur sumo, the Olympics is going to be the key to what happens with amateur. Once sumo becomes an Olympic sport, and the money starts to flow, you will find that sumo is going to become a major sport...the problem for me and for you and for everyone in amateur at the moment is that [the IFS is] trying to hold things together at an adequate level to span the time between where we are now, and the time when it gets adopted as an Olympic sport.³⁸¹

The following chapters explore developments within amateur sumo since IOC recognition was first sought in 1996, and investigates how participants in different regions and strata of the sport act while they await some tangible outcome of the Olympic dream. These developments demonstrate the reflexivity of global flows, the unevenness of development in a newly globalising sport, and power struggles that result from the juxtaposition of multi-lateral inward-outward flows with a centre-periphery relationship in the different levels of amateur sumo administration.

³⁸⁰ Resistance to the International Sumo Federation will be considered in Chapter Six.

³⁸¹ Peter Armstrong, interview by author, Sydney, Australia, February 5, 2006.

4. Including Women: The creation of *shinsumō*

The International Sumo Federation's desire to have amateur sumo included in the programme of the Olympic Games has become one of the central and defining issues for the sport. To facilitate this Olympic goal the IFS has had to adapt the sport to meet International Olympic Committee criteria, most significantly by including women's competition in amateur sumo. In this chapter I describe the International Sumo Federation as the agent of change in introducing women's amateur sumo. In reality there was a fusion of the IFS and the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* in this matter, caused by the fact that the top administrators of the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* hold the positions of power in the IFS and the IFS is a primarily Japan-based, Japanese-run organisation. Therefore, even though *shinsumō* was initiated and introduced first in Japan under the auspices of the *Nihon Sumō Renmei*, we can consider this as having been done by the same power block that runs the IFS and for the benefit of the entire international sumo community, not just Japan.

The inclusion of women into the sport meant that the Japanese-led International Sumo Federation had to initially overcome the negative attitudes in Japan toward women performing sumo. As Chapter One showed, these attitudes were established within professional sumo and had been accepted unquestioningly into amateur sumo. With no organised competitions for women, there had only been limited opportunities for them to perform sumo, mainly in scattered regional festivals.³⁸² When female amateur sumo was established in 1996, it was given the name *shinsumō*³⁸³ (literally 'new sumo') to dissociate it from this marginalised past. There were also modifications to the *mawashi* and *dohyō* to remove potentially overly-masculine elements from the sport. Because *shinsumō* had been created by male administrators, a concerted effort was needed to recruit female participants, usually from other sports. There was also a concerted campaign to educate the general public about this development in the national sport, and

³⁸² In most cases women's sumo was included specifically because of the impact of transgressing social norms.

³⁸³ The correct reading of the term, as used by the International Sumo Federation, is *shinsumō*. However, it is also sometimes referred to as *shinsumō* as this is another legitimate reading of the characters. Outside of Japanese circles women's and men's competition is seldom differentiated in name, most usually being referred to as just 'sumo' or perhaps 'amateur sumo'.

to remove (or ignore) the stigma of the past, and showcase the new ‘legitimate’ enactment of female sumo that *shinsumō* provided.

In Europe, where *shinsumō* has been embraced most strongly and widely, there was no strong stigma attached to women’s participation in sumo. Instead, various countries had called for the IFS to allow women’s competitions, just as there were in other sports like judo. Amateur sumo as a whole was in its infancy in Europe anyway, and so in many countries the recruitment of women was bound up in the wider search for any competitors for the emerging sport. Nevertheless, perhaps influenced by what could be seen in professional sumo on television, there remained some thought that sumo should only be a sport for males. Overall, however, a long history of sports having gender equality, as well as the existence of gender equality laws in much of Europe, meant that there was little resistance to including women in the sport. However, just as had happened in Japan, women were not included in *shinsumō* specifically at their request. It was certain national federations, and in particular the European Sumo Union, who lobbied for the inclusion of women, rather than a strong movement by women demanding to be let into the sport. In this sense, we see regional agency being exerted to the benefit of (prospective) female athletes rather than specifically the enactment of female agency.

Furthermore, this regional, rather than female, agency can be seen in the way that non-Japanese approached *shinsumō*. While Japan had made changes to amateur sumo to reduce the masculine elements and make the sport more inclusive for women, the new name, the separate *dohyō* and the *mawashi* substitute were not adopted abroad. These were pragmatic decisions made by national federations rather than coming from the female competitors themselves, and usually arose from concerns about cost. Because the rest of the world did not attach the same stigma as Japan did to women performing sumo, adopting ‘less masculine’ elements was not necessary and, especially given the increased cost, undesirable. These decisions in turn had reflexive influences upon the way *shinsumō* developed in Japan: the proper *mawashi* became standard attire, and women accepted,

and were accepted onto, the clay *dohyō*, as was described in the opening scene in Duisburg.³⁸⁴

Amateur sumo is currently developing across the board, although unevenly within and between each region, to the benefit of female athletes. However, this chapter argues that there is still much to improve in the integration of women into the workings of the International Sumo Federation. There is only limited agency enacted by women in deciding amateur sumo's future, and particularly their future within amateur sumo. This is because female numbers within the sport are small, women's participation still varies according to the size and strength of different national and regional federations, women's competition is still viewed differently to male sumo, and women do not yet hold many positions of power within the administrative hierarchy. However, with women's participation being a key component of criteria laid down by the International Olympic Committee, and with inclusion in the Olympic Games being amateur sumo's current goal, this should at least be some guarantee that the IFS will seek to maintain and strengthen women's amateur sumo in coming years.

***Shinsumō* and the Olympic Dream**

The origins of *shinsumō* stem from a conscious decision by Japanese amateur sumo administrators to create women's competitions as part of a drive to further internationalise amateur sumo. Its creation allowed amateur sumo to satisfy conditions for equality of participation laid down in the Olympic Charter, namely "to encourage and support the promotion of women in sport at all levels and in all structures with a view to implementing the principle of equality of men and women."³⁸⁵ As was explained in the previous chapter, these IOC criteria must be met by every sport which aspires to become part of future Olympic Games. With the existence of *shinsumō* inextricably linked to the quest for Olympic status (and vice versa), the participation of women in amateur sumo has become a necessity for the IFS to achieve this goal.

³⁸⁴ Even the name *shinsumō* was given an overhaul, belatedly. Refer to footnote 20.

³⁸⁵ See Rule 2, Paragraph 7. International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter*, 2007, http://multimedia.olympic.org/pdf/en_report_122.pdf (accessed August 6, 2008).

As Chapter One introduced, women had been removed from legitimate performances of sumo in the Edo period and pushed into the fringe performances of *onna-zumō* (women's sumo). The stigma of eroticism still generally hangs over the term *onna-zumō*, even though the displays often were just sumo competitions or displays of strength by women.³⁸⁶ Despite this stigma, there are still regional festivals today in which women perform sumo and which are often, though not always, given the name *onna-zumō*. Typically these festivals involve sumo bouts by women or invoke sumo imagery by having women perform ring-entering ceremonies or wear *keshō-mawashi*.³⁸⁷ The festival performances are quite respectable, and it is likely the practice has been sanitised over time. Wakamori Tarō believes that the revival of pre-modern *onna-zumō* in modern Japan is centred on the performance by women as a 'curiosity'³⁸⁸ rather than the continuation of a legitimate tradition. Often such activities have been consciously (re-)created in order to evoke nostalgia or attract people to the particular festival.³⁸⁹ These performances are localised, and many are almost forgotten or overlooked unless actively promoted by local groups, often with links to the tourism industry.³⁹⁰

Apart from the inclusion of women in ceremonial and symbolic roles in festival performances, legitimate competition for females was almost non-existent prior to 1996. Although amateur sumo was a male-only sport, pre-pubescent girls were allowed in the

³⁸⁶ Although the erotic exhibitions of the Edo period have died out, there remains a niche market in the red-light districts and adult video shops of Japan even today.

³⁸⁷ *Keshō-mawashi* are embroidered aprons that hang from the *mawashi*, covering the wearer from their waist to their ankles.

³⁸⁸ The phrase used is '*kōki-teki na mono*.' Wakamori Tarō, *Sumō Ima Mukash* (Tokyo: Sumidagawa Bunko, 2003), 24.

³⁸⁹ Exactly when some of these festivals started or included women is unclear as records are seldom kept. However, it is questionable whether the performances of sumo by women at many of these festivals trace their lineage back to the activities of yesteryear. Certainly it is plausible that many have a link to earlier practice in a certain region, but whether it has continued consistently or whether there has been a revival in some desire to recapture the past is also a valid query. Additionally, some of these festivals included women well after the formation of *ōzumō* began, including after World War II. For example, Kaneda cites the case of blindfolded women competing in bouts as part of a crop fertility ritual in Fukuoka prefecture which began after World War II. Eiko Kaneda, "Trends in Traditional Women's Sumo in Japan," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 16, no. 3 (1999): 113-9.

³⁹⁰ Certainly two tournaments in Hokkaidō have been created with no direct connection to historical performances of *onna-zumō* in the region. Kawayu Onsen held an annual tournament from 1972 to 2003, and Fukushima began their annual tournament in 1991 in a bid to harness the appeal and the rarity of women performing sumo to attract visitors. Shimokawa Takashi et al., "Shinsumō no kaisai to sono ryūsei – Hokkaidō no futatsu no onna-zumō taikai o mite," *Kokushikan Daigaku Taiiku Kenkyū-jo Hō* 19 (2000): 61-70.

local and regional qualifying tournaments of the national junior sumo championships, also known as *wanpaku sumō*.³⁹¹ However, because girls could not advance to the national finals held at the Kokugikan, many were not interested in partaking in the regional qualifying tournaments:

it used to be that girls could do sumo at elementary school and junior high school in Japan, and many schools had sumo as part of their sports programme, because it is Japan's national sport, but it didn't ever go anywhere because they always held the finals of the elementary or junior high or high school tournaments in the Kokugikan which is a dedicated *dohyō* where women couldn't participate. So, if you weren't going to be able to get to the final there wasn't much point in putting any effort into it.³⁹²

However, unlike *ōzumō*, amateur sumo is a secular sport and women had only been excluded due to the habit or convention adopted from the professional sport. There was little to stop tournaments being organised and held at venues other than the Kokugikan, other than that sumo had been gendered as a masculine sport and females were historically marginalised because of this. Furthermore, because of the stigma attached to women competing in sumo, there was little, if any, external pressure for change and the beginning of female competitions.

Thus the start of *shinsumō* in 1996 was a radical departure from norms in the sumo world, either amateur or professional. This also calls into question the motives of including women in amateur sumo: was there a desire to expand the sport and to foster it amongst women, or did the inclusion of women eventuate as a necessity for amateur sumo's Olympic dreams? Kitada Nobuo, who became the first president of the *Nihon Shinsumō Renmei* (Japan *Shinsumō* Federation) upon its inception in 1996, claims that the idea to include women in amateur sumo began as early as 1990.³⁹³ However, even if the concept of developing amateur sumo for women in Japan was considered as early as 1990, it was

³⁹¹ *Wanpaku sumō* is the common term given to sumo at the primary school age level. It allows boys and girls to compete against one another in age groups, irrespective of size, weight or gender.

³⁹² Katrina Watts, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 29, 2004.

³⁹³ Kitada Nobuo, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, November 4, 2004.

quickly shelved in favour of putting initial efforts into internationalising male competition, beginning the Sumo World Championships and inaugurating the IFS.

Inviting women into the sport at precisely the time that the International Sumo Federation was making overtures to the International Olympic Committee is too coincidental for the genesis of *shinsumō* to be anything other than a convenient development to help ‘Olympicise’ amateur sumo. Tanaka Hidetoshi’s statement (from the previous chapter) suggests that the Olympics were foremost in the minds of administrators when it came to organising *shinsumō*:

In order to have [amateur sumo] promoted into the Olympics, there are various obstacles and barriers that must be passed, and one of these is the ‘women problem’. Allowing women is the biggest precondition for Olympic events, and this is a worldwide trend. This was the reason we created ‘*shinsumō*’ for women where they wear a uniform and perform on a mat.³⁹⁴

In reality, the *shinsumō* initiative probably took root sometime in 1994 or 1995, once the IOC had brought in their amendment to promote the inclusion of women in Olympic sport and around the time the IFS was considering making an appeal for recognition of amateur sumo as a provisionally recognised sport. Furthermore, it is impossible to know the reaction that occurred in Japanese amateur sumo circles when this matter was first raised behind closed doors. What is apparent is that the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* and IFS put their collective (and simultaneously intersecting) weight behind the initiative and were active in promoting *shinsumō* in its developmental stages inside and outside of Japan respectively.

Whatever the actual impetus, the result has been of greatest importance. Katrina Watts believes “it’s true to say that *shinsumō* is really a product of the fact that amateur sumo wants to be an Olympic sport and you can no longer have a single sex sport, so ten years ago they started to build up the *Shinsumō* Federation.”³⁹⁵ She sees little problem in the convenient timing of *shinsumō*’s beginnings, instead focusing on the outcome: “from my

³⁹⁴ Tanaka Hidetoshi, *Dohyō wa En, Jinsei wa En* (Tokyo: Waseda Shuppan, 2002), 204-5.

³⁹⁵ Katrina Watts, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 29, 2004.

point of view I think it's really good, but perhaps some of the traditionalists might see it as...just a step down from men's amateur sumo."³⁹⁶ Similarly, Japanese female athlete Tsuihiji Rie notes "[t]o become an Olympic event, sports must have equality of the sexes according to the IOC. It wasn't good that sumo only had men competing so sumo for women was hurriedly created."³⁹⁷ Her comment, however, was matter of fact and not a suggestion that the IFS or the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* acted suspiciously. Peter Armstrong, however, is also under no illusion that the inclusion of women was specifically to benefit the IFS and its dealings with the International Olympic Committee. He sees it in more cynical terms than other respondents, declaring that, "it's nominalism at its highest – it's only there because of the move to conform to Olympic standards. I have no doubt whatsoever that that's the only reason *shinsumō* is there."³⁹⁸

Irrespective of exactly what hastened *shinsumō*'s creation, women were excluded from the decision-making process. Male members of the *Nihon Sumō Renmei*, most of whom also held positions in the nascent International Sumo Federation, decided that women's competition would begin and female athletes would be invited to compete. That males made this decision highlights two things: the inclusion of females was needed to further amateur sumo's aims (as mentioned above), and there was a lack of women who were demanding their own position in amateur sumo. Because there was little agency exercised by women in the creation of *shinsumō*, the path to get women into the sport and for *shinsumō* to be accepted within Japan would be challenging.

The emergence of women in amateur sumo

Part of the time taken in introducing women's competitions came from deliberations by the sumo administrators behind *shinsumō*'s creation. They were pondering how to remove what they felt would be obstacles to women's participation or aspects that might perpetuate a stigma against women's performance of sumo. It was hoped that making women's amateur sumo different from the common masculine images associated with sumo would make the sport more accessible to women, would remove the negative

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Tsuihiji Rie, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 17, 2006.

³⁹⁸ Peter Armstrong, interview by author, Sydney, Australia, February 5, 2006.

stereotype of *onna-zumō*, and would show that this was in fact a new sport. The creators of *shinsumō* looked to alter aspects of its performance and make it less ‘sumo-like’ by adopting a new name, and by altering the attire and the arena used by the women.³⁹⁹

The novelty of women’s participation in competitive sumo necessitated a name to differentiate this ‘new’ and unusual version from enduring concepts of sumo as a male-only sport. The adoption of the name *shinsumō* was seen as the clearest way to distinguish this sport from the stigma of the past. As Tsuihiji Rie explains, the novelty of the name matched the novelty of the sport: “When the first All-Japan *Shinsumō* Championships was held, it was with *shinsumō* as a new sport, promoting it as a new sport, that of sumo for women. And so because of that they didn’t call it women’s sumo (*joshi sumō*) but rather *shinsumō* with the meaning that it was literally ‘new sumo.’”⁴⁰⁰ The use of ‘new’ marks the sport as different but does not immediately supply a gendering of the name that might have occurred had *josei* (female) or *joshi* (girl/woman) been used as a prefix. Such prefixes could have related the sport too closely at this time to the stigma of nudity, frivolity and lewdness that is associated with *onna-zumō*. By removing the negative stereotype of previous female participation in sumo, the ‘newness’ of the name also attempted to remove the implicit association between sumo and male athletes. As sumo hitherto had explicitly excluded women from the *dohyō*, a sense of updating or revalidating is provided in using the name *shinsumō*. This change was seen to be beneficial in breaking down stereotypes that might prevent female athletes from entering the sport, and also in gaining public acceptance of the sport within Japan.⁴⁰¹

Additionally, a change was made to the *dohyō* to differentiate those used by women from those used in male amateur sumo. The hardness of the clay *dohyō* and the unavailability

³⁹⁹ Kitada Nobuo, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, November 4, 2004.

⁴⁰⁰ Tsuihiji Rie, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 17, 2006.

⁴⁰¹ In late 2007 the IFS and *Nihon Sumō Renmei* changed the name of women’s amateur sumo from *shinsumō* to *joshi sumō* to align the Japanese name to the term used most commonly in English. I believe this move has been made for ease of comprehension for an international audience, who would better understand that *joshi sumō* was the Japanese term for ‘women’s sumo’ but not why it was called ‘new sumo’. It suggests that the sport is well enough entrenched, particularly in Japan, that a name change and association with females will not be detrimental to the sport or potential athletes. Once again, however, the move was made to promote the acceptance of the sport externally not to appease or recognise women in the sport. For the purposes of consistency in this chapter I will continue to use *shinsumō*.

of some arenas to women competitors were seen as stumbling blocks to both attracting women to the sport and holding tournaments for them. The Kokugikan, the home of professional sumo, could not host women on its consecrated *dohyō*, and so only men's tournaments are held there.⁴⁰² Yasukuni Shrine, another venue in Tokyo often used for amateur sumo tournaments, does not exclude women for reasons related to *shintō*, but nor does it hold *shinsumō* tournaments. One informant told me that the reason women's tournaments could not be held at the shrine is that there is no appropriate changing facility, and that having men changing outside does not present the same problem as expecting women to do so.⁴⁰³ The inability to use certain venues, such as the two mentioned above, has meant that *shinsumō* must be performed in gymnasiums or on *dohyō* located in public sports complexes, where there exists both an open attitude to women athletes and suitable changing facilities for them. Consequently, Osaka has largely become the centre of *shinsumō*, for in Sakai city there is a quality venue used for national and international competitions with facilities suitable for use by women.

Using gymnasiums and other facilities not specifically set aside for sumo was not solely because of the 'women-on-the-*dohyō* problem' in sumo. Rather, the initial policy of *shinsumō*'s founders was to remove the sport from the clay *dohyō* entirely. This was partly related to convenience, suitability and availability when choosing venues for tournaments. By taking sumo indoors and performing it on a vinyl sheet placed over judo mats, with circular foam edging attached to the mat to form the ring, a convenient and portable surface was available. This idea was originally taken from equipment used in children's sumo, where convenience and safety were paramount. It was also thought that this softer vinyl surface would appeal to women competitors more than the hard clay *dohyō* with its 'masculine' connotations might. Administrators also expected that this

⁴⁰² The *dohyō* is (re-)consecrated in a *shintō* ceremony before each professional tournament. With women being considered a source of defilement to the *dohyō* because of menstruation, the ban on women that exists in *ōzumō* means that the venue cannot host women's tournaments. Although the Kokugikan was the venue for the first seven Sumo World Championships, which were all only for male competitors, such events can no longer be held there because both sexes cannot participate. R. Kenji Tierney, "Wrestling with Tradition: Sumo, National Identity and Trans/national Popular Culture" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2002), 330-1.

⁴⁰³ Kitada Nobuo, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, November 4, 2004.

softer landing area would reduce the risk of injury for the less-experienced athletes entering the sport.⁴⁰⁴

Modifications were also made to the *mawashi* in order to reduce perceived barriers to women entering *shinsumō*. Although the modifications made to the *dohyō* had a great deal of convenience incorporated, the change to the *mawashi* was based mainly on aesthetics and to remove negative connotations of nudity or wearing a jockstrap. The *mawashi* used in male amateur sumo is identical in shape and form to that used in *ōzumō*, and consists of a long piece of thick folded canvas being wound from the groin, between the legs and then around the waist several times.⁴⁰⁵ It creates a jockstrap-like pouch in front, a thinner strip that passes up between the buttocks, and finally creates a thick belt around the waist that is vital for executing throws or gaining leverage during a bout. The *mawashi* is therefore an integral part of sumo, without which many of the techniques of sumo would be negated.

However, to promote the sport to women, the *mawashi* was regarded as too much like a jockstrap, or was seen as overbearingly ‘male’. Tsuihiji Rie’s explanation sums up the attitude at the time:

Well, the concept is held pretty rigidly by Japanese people that sumo is Japanese culture and only is for males. Obviously, at first, the idea of women competing in sumo was certainly seen by some as, how should I put it, ‘barbarous’, and there was also the thought that it was shameful. So putting on the *mawashi* was embarrassing [for the athletes].⁴⁰⁶

After much thought and consultation about the practical production of an alternative, a set of all-in-one shorts with a *mawashi* attached was designed and manufactured to alleviate this problem for women. These were known as ‘grappling wear’ or more colloquially as

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ The top two divisions of salaried athletes in *ōzumō* wear a silk *mawashi* in competition but a white canvas one for daily practice. Athletes in the other four divisions wear a black canvas *mawashi* for both competition and practice.

⁴⁰⁶ Tsuihiji Rie, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 17, 2006.

‘sumo pants’⁴⁰⁷ or ‘grappling pants’.⁴⁰⁸ The idea was to have an easily worn item for women that provided the same function as the *mawashi*, without being uncomfortable or unsightly.⁴⁰⁹ As Rie further explains, “*shinsumō* was a new sport that had just been created, and so within Japan there was the idea that wearing the *mawashi* might be embarrassing or shouldn’t be part of the sport. So, the grappling pants were developed so that you couldn’t see a *mawashi*.”⁴¹⁰ The new *mawashi*-like belt on the pants was much thinner and only sat around the waist, not between the legs. It was tightened by drawstrings which were then tucked away at the back and covered by a flap. This new belt could be grasped and used for throws, although it was less rigid and did not provide as much leverage as the standard *mawashi*. The outfit was completed with a knee to shoulder leotard that was worn under the grappling wear.

Putting *shinsumō* into practice

With the modifications to encourage female athletes finalised, and manufacturers found to produce the grappling wear and the mat *dohyō*, *shinsumō* was ready for its official launch.⁴¹¹ In late April 1996 the *Nihon Shinsumō Renmei* was established in Osaka to run women’s amateur sumo in the country, and becoming one of the ‘block’ federations under the umbrella of the *Nihon Sumō Renmei*.⁴¹² However, because the sport had not been created at the behest of women, there were almost no athletes ready to compete,

⁴⁰⁷ Takeda Hazuki, “Sekai ni hirogaru josei sumō,” *Aera* 13, no. 4 (2000): 36-8.

⁴⁰⁸ Tsuihiji Rie, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 17, 2006.

⁴⁰⁹ Takeda, “Sekai ni hirogaru josei sumō,” 36-8.

⁴¹⁰ Tsuihiji Rie, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 17, 2006.

⁴¹¹ Kitada Nobuo, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, November 4, 2004. Other subtle changes were introduced as well, but these were not based on the attempted removal of overtly masculine elements. The start of each bout (the *tachiai*) was notably different. Male sumo had used a *tachiai* that started once both competitors placed both fists on the clay behind the white starting lines on their respective sides of the *dohyō*. Once all four fists were down, the competitors would charge at each other. This requires a synchronisation between the placement of the last fist and the beginning movement by the two competitors. If all fists are not placed down and the match begins then the referee can call a false start and order the *tachiai* to begin again. To simplify this process for *shinsumō* both competitors would place their hands on the *dohyō* in a ready position and then would be instructed to begin the bout by the referee’s call of “*hakkeyoi!*” This was seen as the fairest way of starting and lessened false starts by inexperienced competitors. This *tachiai* method proved so successful that it was adopted by the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* in 2000 as the appropriate way to start amateur bouts. This was soon also adopted by the IFS and used in all international amateur sumo competitions to rectify the difficulties in getting bouts started properly without false starts. Again, the inexperience of most competitors (male *and* female) was the main reason this policy was put in place.

⁴¹² As such, most officials for tournaments are seconded from the existing amateur sumo structure.

apart from a couple of female athletes selected to demonstrate the sport at its official opening. The novelty of *shinsumō*, both in its recent arrival and its departure from sumo norms, meant that the major initial hurdle to overcome was convincing women to take part. The negative connotations of women competing in sumo had to be overcome, and women themselves had to be introduced to this new sport that they supposedly ‘owned’. While the first part of the solution might have been to alter the name, the *dohyō* and the *mawashi* to remove male connotations, the second phase was to promote the sport and recruit interested athletes.

The first goal was to secure enough athletes to make the first All-Japan *Shinsumō* Championships, scheduled for January 1997, a success. Just as had happened when amateur sumo was established in many countries outside of Japan, *shinsumō* looked to recruit its athletes from combat sports such as judo and wrestling.⁴¹³ Tsuihiji Rie, who has since gone on to dominate her weight class for over a decade, was one of these athletes invited into the sport at its inception:

In my first year at university; it was 1996 that I started...because there was the first All-Japan *Shinsumō* Championships. Until that time I had been doing judo since I was three years old. I was also doing it at university and I was encouraged by one of the coaches in the *judō-bu* to also try sumo...before that I didn't think that women would do sumo, until then I thought that it was a sport only for males.⁴¹⁴

Her experience is representative of the around 50 competitors at the first *shinsumō* event in Japan.⁴¹⁵ Many were invited to take part by their coaches in other sports, or by contacts made between the *shinsumō* federation and their universities or clubs:

there were girls from Kokushikan University who were in the wrestling club and they came to do sumo. Some of them find they really love sumo and so they stick with that, and others do both. But at first it was definitely let's find people who are

⁴¹³ See the examples in Chapter Two of how male amateur sumo was promoted abroad after 1992.

⁴¹⁴ Tsuihiji Rie, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 17, 2006.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

willing to do sumo rather than there are women who want to do sumo, let's make a women's sumo federation.⁴¹⁶

In the early years of the tournament, and before *shinsumō* was more widely known, many athletes were invited to participate through word of mouth. For example, Satoyama Miki was invited to compete at the fourth All-Japan *Shinsumō* Championships in the following way: “My dad was involved in the Osaka Sumo Federation and I was asked by one of the federation administrators who knew I had competed in *wanpaku* sumo if I would compete in the *shinsumō* tournament. That was the first time that I knew there were such tournaments.”⁴¹⁷ Word of mouth and a snowballing effect in recruiting female athletes was necessary because the sport remained little known to potential participants. This was still the case when Joyce Chou, an exchange student from New Zealand, took up *shinsumō* during her year abroad at Hiroshima University in 2002:

At that time I was exchange student and I thought about doing some traditional Japanese sports. And in my memory I knew that women cannot really do sumo wrestling so at the beginning I thought I only want to become a manager of the [club], just want to have a look at the sumo wrestling. Then I went to the sumo club and they welcomed me and the *sempai* told me that actually you can do sumo wrestling if you want; I said ‘Oh, OK, I thought women cannot really do sumo wrestling’ so that’s how I started. I thought OK, I’ll give this a go.⁴¹⁸

At times, due to a lack of athletes, participants have been persuaded to join in competitions just to make up numbers. Joyce heard from her colleagues that when “they didn’t have enough female members to fight; they would just ask the [female] managers... ‘OK just come, just have a play’, you know, so probably they have experimented before, just come to play.”⁴¹⁹ Part of the reason may be because there are only a handful of tournaments each year. With perhaps only the regional championships

⁴¹⁶ Katrina Watts, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 29, 2004.

⁴¹⁷ Satoyama Miki, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 21, 2006.

⁴¹⁸ Joyce Chou, interview by author, Hiroshima, Japan, October 10, 2005.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

and then the national championships, Japan's female athletes might have only a couple of tournaments a year in which to compete.⁴²⁰ Even the elite athletes that represent their country will only have the World Championships added to their schedule.⁴²¹ For the rest of the time the athletes continue to train, often with male counterparts, or pursue other sports such as judo. This makes maintaining a sizeable number of active athletes difficult and so instead some athletes compete on an *ad hoc* basis. Furthermore, it is difficult to build a profile for the sport when the athletes are not on display or when there are limited opportunities to see what competition is like.

Nevertheless, the difficulties in attracting female athletes to the sport may be more attitudinal. In Katrina's experience from working at a Japanese women's university there has been resistance from the students when she has raised the idea of starting a sumo club. She thinks that this is "[b]ecause, in Japan, sumo has the image of fat people, and so the students don't want to be in a sumo team and they imagine, I suppose, saying to their boyfriend, 'Oh, I'm doing sumo,' and everybody would laugh."⁴²² So, in the popular imagination, stereotypical beliefs about sumo still interfere with a broader understanding of amateur sumo incorporating different sizes and sexes. While such thoughts are not peculiar to Japan, perhaps when layered upon the history of female exclusion from sumo, this has created a difficult environment in which to develop *shinsumō*.

***Shinsumō* on the international stage**

In Europe, however, *shinsumō* was more readily accepted from the outset than it had been in Japan, probably because it came hard on the heels of the introduction of male amateur sumo. European countries such as Great Britain, Germany and Russia had been invited to send male representatives to Sumo World Championships since 1992, and other countries such as Switzerland (1993), Bulgaria (1994), Hungary and Norway (both 1995) had joined their ranks. With increasing participation by European countries and the IFS directive to form continental unions, the European Sumo Union was formed in 1995 and

⁴²⁰ Depending on the prefecture, there might be prefectural qualification tournaments before entry into the All-Japan tournament. Tsuihiji Rie, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 17, 2006.

⁴²¹ The Asian Sumo Championships have only been held sporadically in recent years. Satoyama Miki, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 21, 2006.

⁴²² Katrina Watts, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 29, 2004.

the first European Sumo Championships was held in the same year. Because male amateur sumo was still in its infancy in Europe, *shinsumō* benefited from the still-evolving structures. Additionally, for countries such as the Netherlands, Estonia, Georgia and the Ukraine, where amateur sumo was introduced after 1996, men and women could be integrated into the sport together, thus making pragmatic use of materials and resources such as provision of *mawashi* or training camps involving Japanese coaches and athletes.

By not needing to make sumo ‘new’ for women outside of Japan, particularly in Europe, because amateur sumo was already new for both men and women alike, there was a different approach to *shinsumō* by prospective athletes as well. For Katrina, “the interesting thing about the *shinsumō* is that the European teams are so strong – the European competitors – and I think it has a popularity in Europe that it probably lacks in Japan.”⁴²³ She adds,

in Europe [*shinsumō* is] seen as a new combative sport, the likes of judo and wrestling and so forth...they don’t have the prejudice against sumo as being either a man’s sport or a fat person’s sport, so I think that’s an advantage for the European side. They probably attract more athletic people than in Japan, where we’re trying to build it up starting at elementary school.⁴²⁴

Certainly it helped gender equality in amateur sumo that in many European nations the sumo federation began under the wing of the national judo federation or, at least, a number of the athletes came from a judo background. Because judo was already a sport that embraced both sexes, the concept of women competing in another combat sport like sumo was not unusual. Additionally, when male judo athletes were approached to join sumo in the early 1990s, there were also some women who wondered if they could compete as well.⁴²⁵

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Gunther Romenath, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 19, 2005.

The relatively small size of national sumo federations in Europe means that both men and women fall under the same administration structure in their country, unlike in Japan where the *shinsumō* federation was an appendage added later. While this does not necessarily create differences in the way that *shinsumō* is treated in substantive terms between the two regions, it certainly makes women a more integral part of the national federation. They also perhaps have a greater voice in decision making due to the small size of European federations. Tanaka sees the differences as due to a more egalitarian European attitude: “I suppose abroad they have a developed sense of male–female equality, and [consider] events that men and women can’t participate in together are not sports.”⁴²⁶ Indeed, a number of European countries have legislation and policy that specifically targets the inclusion of women and gender equality in sport. In a wider European sense, also, “[t]he European Sport for All Charter, ratified in 1975, relates to a comprehensive sports policy, which attempts to extend the beneficial effects of sport on health, social, educational and cultural development to all sections of the community.”⁴²⁷

More favourable attitudes toward women competing in sport in general meant that when *shinsumō* was officially begun in April 1996 it took off quickly. In fact, administrators had been impatiently awaiting the official announcement in Japan of the launch of *shinsumō*: “I knew also regulations of...the Olympic Committee, and I told the Japanese we should have women as early as possible, but they were designing...they were making the things different, the outfit would be different.”⁴²⁸ Europe was in a position to hold their first women’s competition as early as September 1996, even before Japan, as part of the second European Sumo Championships in Geneva.⁴²⁹ This has led some in Europe to feel that they had taken the lead in including women in amateur sumo:

Yes, we were the forerunners, because the old General Secretary of the ESU, Francois Wahl, he was trying to push that and the Japanese were oh, no, don’t want

⁴²⁶ Tanaka, *Dohyō wa En*, 195-6. Indeed, in Europe, the term *shinsumō* is hardly used. Part of the reason is undoubtedly linguistic, but it also indicates that there may be less of a division placed upon men and women competing in amateur sumo.

⁴²⁷ Ilse Hartmann-Tews and Gertrud Pfister, “Women’s inclusion in sport: International and comparative findings,” in *Sport and Women: Social Issues in International Perspective*, ed. Ilse Hartmann-Tews and Gertrud Pfister (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 276.

⁴²⁸ Francois Wahl, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 19, 2005.

⁴²⁹ Gunther Romenath, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 19, 2005.

to think about it, but of course because of the push from Samaranch and the IOC, saying we had to have weight categories for women, the Japanese had to start developing.⁴³⁰

The athletes were sourced in similar ways to Japan, through existing sports such as judo and wrestling, and through personal invitation. Stephen Gadd in the Netherlands, convinced his wife to take part in the tournament:

In 1996, funnily enough, my wife had said to me – she saw sumo – ‘I’d really like to try that’ and at the time there was no women’s sumo at all. Then about a week later I got a fax in from the ESU saying they were trying to organise the first women’s sumo championships. So I really pushed my wife for about three weeks, saying ‘would you really like to do it, what a shame you can’t’, knowing all the time it was on. Then, when I got her so far, I said ‘right, here’s the fax, this date, give it a go’.⁴³¹

Elsewhere, in Germany, Gunther Romenath used his judo connections to source athletes: “in my function of sports director I was also in charge of women’s judo and men’s judo, so I approached some athletes who were in the national team and they were even much more serious about sumo compared to the men.”⁴³²

However, while women were incorporated smoothly into European amateur sumo, in the Oceania region integrating women was not as successful.⁴³³ Although similar attitudes to women competing in contact sports exist in Oceania as they do in Europe, as Peter Armstrong explains, in Australia it has been more difficult to attract female athletes:

effectively any women we get are just brought along for the day. The other thing is, there are women wrestling in the freestyle...I was actually trying to chase

⁴³⁰ Stephen Gadd, interview by author, Rotterdam, Netherlands, May 13, 2005.

⁴³¹ Ibid. Stephen’s wife had done judo when she was younger, and so was not totally unfamiliar with a contact sport similar in ways to sumo. These personal connections that Stephen has with judo and *ju-jitsu* in the Netherlands have also brought other female athletes into the sport. Manuela van der Brink, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 18, 2005.

⁴³² Gunther Romenath, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 19, 2005.

⁴³³ Although there have been women’s competitions held at the Oceania Sumo Championships, they have only ever been contested by a small number of athletes and with varying regularity.

members...but the few that I have met also see sumo as being a man's preserve...I meet a lot of Australian girls who have been experienced in Japan – they go there as teachers and so on – interview a lot of them, and there's been no interest. It's still perceived... women's sumo is regarded down the track almost as men's sumo was ten years ago when I first became involved...I think it's seen as brutally male, I suppose, but as you know there are so many women who want to compete in all aspects of what are traditionally male preserves, I'm sure that will change, but probably in your time rather than mine... We have tried, we've tried to get women involved and they've come along and occasionally they'll put on a belt and give it a roll, but it's just a sort of 'give it a try and see what it's like' but no serious conception of what *shinsumō* might be.⁴³⁴

This difference in experience between Europe and Oceania demonstrates the uneven development of amateur sumo and *shinsumō* across the globe. This will be considered in greater detail in the next chapter, but the unevenness has manifested itself more obviously when *shinsumō* is considered. In general terms it has been argued that when a sports club or organisation struggles it is usually the female athletes who miss out at the expense of the men.⁴³⁵ Simply put, if a national sumo federation is robust and organised, like many in Europe are, it usually represents a better opportunity for the inclusion of women into amateur sumo, while a federation that is struggling to develop male athletes, such as Australia or New Zealand, will also struggle to develop *shinsumō*.

Furthermore, the introduction of women's competitions and the inclusion of female athletes do not necessarily lead to gender *equality*.⁴³⁶ Although women's competitions were introduced, it was still necessary for attitudes within the sport's structures, still often male-dominated, to accept the position of women. For example, Stephen Gadd, president and coach of the Netherlands Sumo Federation, now oversees one of the stronger women's teams in Europe but initially he was not convinced:

⁴³⁴ Peter Armstrong, interview by author, Sydney, Australia, February 5, 2006.

⁴³⁵ Ilse Hartmann-Tews and Gertrud Pfister, "Women's inclusion in sport," 274.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 276.

I thought there was no future in this women's sumo. We used to train at Erasmus University, a *dohyō* there and one day this girl, about 65 (*kilos*), quite attractive, came up and said 'can I wrestle?' and I said 'no, it's not for you girlie, go away' but she said 'no, I want to wrestle'. I said 'stop wasting my time' – it was quite a session with a lot of heavy guys – 'go and play with your Barbie dolls'. I was trying to insult her to make her go away, but she insisted so I told her to put a *mawashi* on and we'd see what she could do. So she put the *mawashi* on, I stood in the middle and just said to Natasha 'just practise coming to me' and she kept going, five minutes, ten minutes, and I really tried to tire her out and do everything; she kept at it, an hour and a half, she didn't crack, so I thought, well, something went 'ding-dong' and I thought maybe there is some mileage in this.

That was about the beginning of 1997. She got involved and then, because I own several other sports clubs in Rotterdam, I then spoke to several other women athletes and we organised a little tournament, about eight women, and said, 'OK, the top three go to the European championships, I'll pay for it'. So they had to do a round robin, three times, kicked the shit out of each other, then I got the three strongest ones and we went to the European championships and we got one silver and four bronze medals. So I thought, ok, this is a start and it started going up from then, and Manuela, one of the star heavyweights...she got in 1999 our first medal at a world championship, a bronze. Then she had a neck injury and stopped for a couple of years. But her girlfriend, Hanah, she got involved in about 2001 and she's been steadily progressing and last year in the European Championships got a third and a third in the Worlds. We've got another couple of strong wrestlers in the women but they've all got injured recently. The women all train just as hard as the guys, with their own weight training programmes, and they want to succeed just as well.⁴³⁷

In this way, it took an acceptance by males such as Stephen, the European Sumo Union bosses, and even administrators in the International Sumo Federation, each for their own purposes, to realise that the fostering of female talent within amateur sumo was

⁴³⁷ Stephen Gadd, interview by author, Rotterdam, Netherlands, May 13, 2005.

important. This serves to highlight that the agency of women in the development of ‘their’ sport has been limited, even in Europe which has been the most progressive region in terms of *shinsumō*. Instead, many of the developments that have emerged in *shinsumō* have developed out of the group or individual agency of men rather than of women.

Agency on behalf of women

Shinsumō was created with modifications to make it different from male amateur sumo in Japan. In particular, changes were made to eradicate seemingly masculine elements such as the clay *dohyō* and the *mawashi*. However, in Europe these were not adopted, and so there is little difference between male and female forms of amateur sumo. However, this equality has come about because of pragmatic reasons, such as the unavailability and high cost of the new grappling pants, rather than from a strong collective voice of women athletes demanding change. Rather, it has often been the male administrators who have made these decisions on behalf of the women. Ironically, many of the decisions have removed the altered elements introduced by the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* and the International Sumo Federation. These themselves had originally been designed for, not by, women. Therefore, decisions made by men in Europe have removed differences and conscious gender divisions put in place by men in Japan, with both sides believing they were working in the best interests of women in their jurisdictions.

The major change made in Europe was the use by women of the conventional *mawashi* over leotards instead of the special grappling pants with built-in belt that had been designed in Japan. This change was pragmatic and led by administrators with an eye on the cost of such an initiative: “simply, we couldn’t pay for what they were designing, so we put...we designed a new outfit which was a top of a singlet with a normal *mawashi*, and that’s how we started. Then Japan was a little bit upset with me because I started before them, I think.”⁴³⁸ Quite apart from the time delay in having to order and wait for Japanese-made grappling pants, spending money on buying an extra outfit specifically for *shinsumō* was unrealistic when some federations, particularly those from Eastern Europe had small budgets: “It was too expensive for Russia, and Bulgaria. Bulgaria was coming

⁴³⁸ Francois Wahl, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 19, 2005.

in Geneva, and they were living in an atomic shelter at four euros a night. We couldn't afford [the grappling pants] at all."⁴³⁹ Using the regular *mawashi* that the men already had meant reduced costs for national federations and the female athletes, especially as many *mawashi* had already been made available to different federations by the IFS or Japanese sumo clubs.

The clay *dohyō* had also been designated as too 'masculine' and replaced with a more appropriate mat *dohyō*. However, in Europe's case, because initially there were no clay *dohyō*, men too had performed on a mat inside a gymnasium. Therefore, it was usual for women to use the same mat *dohyō* as the men. This equality was then carried across to when clay *dohyō* began to be used for major tournaments like the European Sumo Championships. Again, for cost reasons, it was more appropriate to have the men and women compete on the same *dohyō*, even though it was hard clay. As Francois Wahl notes, Europe went its own way because of cost and the ease of media covering its showcase events: "About 1997...we were faced with also [Japan] wanting the *shinsumō* to be on soft surfaces because of safety, which was very nice. But, basically, to pay two times, to pay the television to go from one side to the other, we couldn't afford it."⁴⁴⁰

The changes detailed were primarily made for pragmatic reasons of cost and availability. However, tied into this is also a desire for authenticity in the way that sumo is performed.⁴⁴¹ Being asked to perform essentially the same sport as the men but using different equipment does not seem 'normal' or 'authentic', quite apart from what it says about equality. In striving for this authenticity there is an underlying claim to not be bound by certain rules or restrictions regarding attire or venue simply because of gender. With both the *dohyō* and the *mawashi*, factors of availability come into play far more strongly than what was once associated with 'masculinity'. The Japanese designation that clay was for men and the mat for women, and likewise the *mawashi* for men and the

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ The 'authenticity' of practising sumo in the same way as the male athletes need not be seen as a desire to emulate (male) sumo as performed in Japan, although the influence from *ōzumō* seen on television cannot be discounted. Most European athletes, for example, would have little sense of 'Japanese-ness' in sumo because what they have been exposed to has been handed down from coaches and athletes from their own country.

sumo pants for women, made little sense when European men were competing on the mat *dohyō* and all that was available, and affordable, was a canvas *mawashi*.

The differences between Europe and Japan over the enactment of *shinsumō* came not only in procedural or performative matters, over authenticity or cost effectiveness, but also in a future vision for the sport. The European Sumo Union was soon advocating not only for having regional competitions but also for the inclusion of *shinsumō* in the Sumo World Championships. While Tanaka Hidetoshi thought this was a fine idea, budget constraints meant that the IFS focus was firmly set on establishing male amateur sumo internationally by having robust numbers of competitors at the Sumo World Championships before including women. This would also allow time for the nascent sport of *shinsumō* to attract more countries and athletes as well. However, Tanaka felt the pressure this inability caused as “whenever I met with the administrators from the European federation I always had to hang my head.”⁴⁴²

However, in 1999 it was finally decided that *shinsumō* was strong enough to have its own World Championships. This also coincided with the Sumo World Championships moving away from Tokyo for the first time in its seven year history, with the tournament to be held in Riesa in eastern Germany.⁴⁴³ Unfortunately the event attracted only a few female athletes in each weight division from a small number of countries. The IFS was unwilling to ratify the competition as a full *Shinsumō* World Championships and “on the day the Japanese decided it was only an ‘international tournament’.”⁴⁴⁴ This did not sit well with the organisers and the European Sumo Union, who wanted to showcase both men and women in their tournament:

the IFS...said from each country – I don’t know exactly any more, but there was each continent must be represented with...at least two or three countries, I forget.

⁴⁴² Tanaka, *Dohyō wa En*, 196.

⁴⁴³ This venue suited the introduction of women for the first time because there was no difficulty in how to incorporate women’s events with a Sumo World Championships that might be held on the sacred clay *dohyō* of the Kokugikan, and Germany had been prominent in promoting *shinsumō* in Europe. Hosting the first *Shinsumō* World Championships abroad can be seen as symbolic of the impact foreign federations had on the development of *shinsumō*.

⁴⁴⁴ Stephen Gadd, interview by author, Rotterdam, Netherlands, May 13, 2005.

Anyway it was...to my opinion, it was too tough, because why if there are 20 countries, even if it is only from three or four continents? It should be enough. And now...if you look now at the participation at the World Championships you realise that some continents are not represented, but still it's a World Championship. Why not, why not?⁴⁴⁵

The numbers did not improve at the next year in Sao Paolo, Brazil, where there was also a drop in the overall number of countries attending and male athletes competing. Once again an 'international tournament' for women was held in conjunction with Sumo World Championships, to the displeasure of the athletes and administrators. Gunther Romenath, advocating less rigidity, explains there

was a big problem where Mr Tanaka and the IFS had problems with me because they were thinking I was against them, but that is not the case, I wanted to help. I said, because the people they come by their own money, and why don't you allow them to come to an official world championships because then they get funds from the government, otherwise they have to pay by themselves? But anyway, the rules, they said no, no, no, but now everything is OK and we are very happy with the position of the IFS and *shinsumō* is officially recognised, even if one continent is not represented.⁴⁴⁶

When the Sumo World Championships returned to Japan in 2001, this time to Aomori, *shinsumō* had enough numbers to stage its first legitimate world championships. The numbers have remained high enough to sustain a *Shinsumō* World Championships every year since, but the IFS has required a minimum number of nations to compete in the tournament, a regulation which is not specified for the men's competition.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁵ Gunther Romenath, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 19, 2005.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Personal observation from the registration forms of the 2005 to 2007 Sumo World Championships and *Shinsumō* World Championships. Incidentally, the provision was absent from the draft forms circulated for the 2008 *Shinsumō* World Championships.

Japan changes due to ‘global’ developments

The ready acceptance of *shinsumō* abroad and the establishment of international tournaments have, in turn, reflexively helped legitimise the sport within Japan itself. This has occurred in two ways. Firstly, *shinsumō* gained greater acceptance as a legitimate part of amateur sumo: “I think the idea that women also do sumo, and that they *can* do sumo, has spread widely.”⁴⁴⁸ Secondly, the realisation that *shinsumō* is readily accepted in other countries and that there is little stigma attached to women taking part in sumo has helped the female sumo athletes themselves:

As a judo athlete, doing sumo made me feel a little embarrassed. But when I entered the World Championships in Germany in 1999 and saw all the athletes from the other countries treating *shinsumō* as normal and not being shy about it, I had this ‘culture shock’ of realising to the contrary that it was not something to be embarrassed about at all. So since then I’ve done sumo more confidently. It has also been picked up by the media, and gradually people have gotten to know that sumo is a sport for women. So when I say ‘I do sumo’, the reaction I get from people is usually just ‘Oh, really?’⁴⁴⁹

Substantively, there have been changes to Japanese *shinsumō* based on the influence of Europe. The grappling pants designed especially for women in Japan were used for about four years before most athletes in Japan moved to using the *mawashi* in *shinsumō*.⁴⁵⁰ Although the grappling pants are sometimes still seen and used in Japanese competitions, the *mawashi* has become standard attire because the rest of the world is using it, and because it allows for better execution of sumo techniques. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, the female athletes have no problem with wearing the *mawashi*:

At the start there was the idea that *shinsumō* would be done using those grappling pants, but they cost a lot of money, they were difficult to wear, they were baggy, the people doing sumo found them difficult to use, and looking at the rest of the world, there were places, poor countries, where they couldn’t afford to buy those grappling

⁴⁴⁸ Tsuihiji Rie, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 17, 2006.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

pants, and the *mawashi* ended up being more convenient. However, in (Japanese) national tournaments you can still wear the grappling pants. It doesn't matter whether you use the pants or a *mawashi*, either is fine. But for international competitions it is always the *mawashi* we use, and any resistance towards using it has disappeared. Using the *mawashi* feels normal.⁴⁵¹

Likewise, after about three years on the mat *dohyō*, women began to compete more regularly on the same clay *dohyō* as the men: “Until the third national tournament we used the mat *dohyō* but since the women usually have no choice but to train alongside the men we are mainly using the clay *dohyō* in practice anyway so it made more sense to compete on the clay as well.”⁴⁵² This coincided with the appearance of Japanese women at the *Shinsumō* World Championships, where the clay *dohyō* has become almost standard.

These changes effectively erased the initial modifications made to make sumo more attractive to Japanese women. The ‘feminising’ or less overtly masculine elements that had been introduced in Japan were superseded by the European way of performing *shinsumō*, which effectively mirrored male amateur sumo. This meant that women were now performing amateur sumo in the same way that men were. While Japanese male administrators had initially seen sumo as being essentially ‘male’ and thought this would potentially put off women from competing, in actuality the female athletes had ended up occupying the previously male space of amateur sumo, to which they ascribed ideas of ‘authenticity’ and ‘normality’ where Japanese male administrators had originally ascribed ‘masculinity’.⁴⁵³

Tanaka credits these developments in *shinsumō* to female agency:

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ This ‘authenticity’ ties back into a model of how sumo is performed in Japan. The equality of women and men in Europe meant that they performed amateur sumo in almost the same ways, which in turn was fashioned on Japanese male amateur sumo. This in turn altered Japanese *shinsumō* so that it was more like its Japanese male counterpart. Indeed, when Joyce began *shinsumō* training in Hiroshima in 2002, she was struck by how ‘Japanese’ and like the sumo she had seen on television it was: “I thought it’s still very traditional because of the *dohyō*, because of the *mawashi*, the ritual we have to do before the competition. It’s still very Japanese.” Joyce Chou, interview by author, Hiroshima, Japan, October 10, 2005.

Because this is sumo for women, we considered very hard how to make it easy to be accepted by women and devised the fashionable uniform and the mat *dohyō* but this gave rise to the women athletes saying ‘Why are men and women separate? We want to wear the *mawashi* just like the men and perform on the same *dohyō*.’ We were surprised by this unexpected response. But it’s natural if you think about it, isn’t it?⁴⁵⁴

However, the way in which changes have taken place in Europe and then in Japan suggests that pragmatism and regional or group agency has initiated such developments rather than the female athletes themselves. Certainly women have voices within these regional and national federations, but even the way that the female respondents recall the events suggests that they were often bystanders rather than agents of change.

What future agency for women?

If women were limited in their capacity to create ‘their’ *shinsumō*, then their prospects for the future in terms of guiding the development of the sport look only marginally brighter. As long as amateur sumo remains a small-scale sport, then *shinsumō* is likely to be only a part of that structure, and an unequal part at that. *Shinsumō* is still treated differently to men’s amateur sumo within most national and regional federations and it is the relative strength of the organisation in which they train and compete that determines the opportunities and participation rates for female athletes. Furthermore, women do not yet hold the positions of administrative power that will enable them to easily enact change in their sport, should they so desire.

Although these issues are multifariously interconnected, it is perhaps the issue of equality that sits at the apex of the problems for women within amateur sumo.⁴⁵⁵ At present equality between *shinsumō* and male amateur sumo does not exist. Both men and women perceive a difference between the two in terms of quality, exposure, opportunity and

⁴⁵⁴ Tanaka, *Dohyō wa En*, 216-7.

⁴⁵⁵ For example, it is difficult to attract more athletes without regular competition, and without more athletes then the ‘voice’ of women will remain relatively muted. A small, silent group of women will not be able to raise better awareness of *shinsumō*, give control of their affairs to women administrators, or increase the number of competitors and competitions.

respect. Without improvement in these areas the position of women in terms of decision making, numbers of tournaments and participants, and quality of performance will not improve.

For all the advancement of *shinsumō* that has taken place since 1996, it is still telling that some female participants feel like they are treated differently in the sport. Claudia feels “there is a lot of difference. The men are...I think the men are found more important than the women. They get more...in training they get more attention from the coach, they get more competitions than the women do – yeah, they’re treated more serious than we get to be treated.”⁴⁵⁶ She has many years in the sport and has travelled extensively to compete and so presumably draws her conclusions from those experiences rather than specifically from her national federation in the Netherlands. Her compatriot Hanah has a positive view of the opportunities she has been given but can see a difference in Japan from time spent training there:

I think in the Netherlands it’s just the same – men’s sumo and women’s sumo, but when you look at Japan the girls really have fewer rights than men. They always have to wait until the men finish their training and stuff like that, so there you see they are really lower in rank than men. But in Holland it’s just the same, also by development. I don’t think the Dutch boys are further in their development than the women are.⁴⁵⁷

Nevertheless, Hanah does not believe everything is rosy in Europe when it comes to being treated equally: “in some tournaments you can earn some money and then the men’s prizes are definitely higher than the girls’ prizes.”⁴⁵⁸ Her partner, Manuela, concurs: “it was last European championship I think, that first the men did sumo because the television was available at that time. So, first the men had sumo and after that the women did, because the television was going away. So I think there is a ranking.”⁴⁵⁹ Considering that Europe has been the most liberal and accepting of women competing in

⁴⁵⁶ Claudia de Graauw, interview by author, Rotterdam, Netherlands, July 16, 2005.

⁴⁵⁷ Hanah Weerkamp, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 18, 2005.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Manuela van der Brink, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 18, 2005.

the sumo ring, then there can only be further struggles for women in other regions and nations.

Of course, it is not only important how the women within the sport feel but also how their male counterparts react to *shinsumō*. The earlier example of Stephen Gadd changing his thinking about the potential of *shinsumō* is telling in terms of how the approach of administrators can shape the development of the sport for females. The result of his actions has been the training of a strong women's team that has consistently won medals at European and World Championships. The main members of the team, mentioned above, are also relatively happy with their treatment in the Netherlands. However, Stephen's approach is not followed by others elsewhere, many of whom feel that *shinsumō* is an appendage to male sumo, and perhaps an inferior one at that:

I think you have to take my feelings in this matter in view of my age and my long exposure to Japanese traditions. I must say that last year, I thought that women did get much better, especially the lightweight women. They wrestled well, they wrestled within the tradition quite well and it was pretty good, but once you got into the heavyweights, technically and in terms of the general standard, it was much less impressive and much less pleasant to look at... I guess the reality is that we do have to accept that because it's going to be an Olympic sport women will have to learn it. I tend to have the traditional Japanese reservations, too, that it is a man's preserve and it ought to stay a man's preserve.⁴⁶⁰

It is true that the quality of *shinsumō*, and the way that it is perceived by males, is hindering acceptance of women in the sport. It has been noted that in general, "worldwide, women's sport is not seen as having the same competitive depth as men's and, therefore, elite women athletes are considered to have a better chance of ranking well internationally."⁴⁶¹ Jesse, a Dutch male athlete, is supportive of women's competition and of his team-mates Hanah, Claudia and Manuela but can still see the difficulties they and *shinsumō* have in being better recognised:

⁴⁶⁰ Peter Armstrong, interview by author, Sydney, Australia, February 5, 2006.

⁴⁶¹ Ilse Hartmann-Tews and Gertrud Pfister, "Women's inclusion in sport," 275.

I think it is a good thing because it is just yet another sport and women should be competing. You see that the level with the women's sumo is a lot lower than the male sumo... The level of competition at the Europeans when you compare it between men's and women's there is a big difference. In the male competition there are, in every weight category, at least fifteen guys fighting for the prizes. With the women there are three.⁴⁶²

With these kinds of comparisons being made between men's and women's sumo, it is easy to dismiss *shinsumō* as second rate or 'easy':

I think it must be very easy for a girl to become famous from sumo now because I guess there is very little competition there. Still, in sumo, for me, even though the male sumo must be much more widespread than female sumo, it was quite easy for me to get some of this kind of little success in the local matches and stuff like that. If I started like in 24 or 23 – if I started to play football – it would take me many years to be able to win, even on a very local scale, so in this aspect the female sumo must be even easier to get through.⁴⁶³

Until the issue of depth in *shinsumō* is remedied by increasing the number of female competitors across the sport, the perception by men of *shinsumō* as inferior to male amateur sumo will probably remain.

The quality is likely to improve if more athletes are enticed to the sport, and if the female athletes have more opportunities to compete. As was mentioned earlier, Japanese female athletes probably only have three competitions per year. Katrina believes the next step to increase the popularity and numbers of athletes in *shinsumō* is to have them competing more often, "because the more tournaments they have the more opportunity people have to compete and win, and if they win then they become more enamoured of the sport. You

⁴⁶² Jesse Moerkerk, interview by author, Haarlem, Netherlands, July 15, 2005.

⁴⁶³ Petr Matous, interview by author, Tokyo, Japan, October 28, 2004. Although Czech, Petr began sumo while a university student in Japan. He has only experienced the sport in Japan and at World Championships that were twice held in Osaka, meaning that his viewpoint is a hybrid of his Czech background and his Japanese exposure to the sport. He acknowledges that the 'ease' in becoming famous with sumo might actually work to improve *shinsumō*: "So for some girls who would start it, they might be champions very soon, so it might be attractive and therefore it might get widespread."

can see then how it popular it is.”⁴⁶⁴ In Japan there is a major discrepancy in the men’s and women’s schedules, but increasing the number of women’s tournaments requires “finding the time...the Saturday or the Sunday to fit it in, and there’s a limited number of referees and judges and officials of all kinds, so they’re usually busy with some tournament or another, so it’s actually a bit of a logistical problem to have so many tournaments.”⁴⁶⁵ This is currently partially overcome by having some women’s tournaments in the morning as a precursor to the men’s event. In this way “they can use the same place, the same stadium, the same sumo *dohyō* or whatever and they can use the same pool of referees and judges, and so that makes it easier to put the thing on.”⁴⁶⁶ Conversely, European athletes usually have more tournaments because different European federations host tournaments for both men *and* women throughout the year. However, even these numbers are small, with perhaps no more than half a dozen tournaments a year. In other regions the competitors probably only compete at a national and/or regional championships each year, and the *Shinsumō* World Championships if they are lucky.⁴⁶⁷

Ironically, though, despite the small number of tournaments, one of the consistent themes from the female respondents in this study was how *shinsumō* has improved and the quality of athletes has risen in the time they have been involved. Tsuihiji Rie, who has competed in Japan right from the start of *shinsumō*, finds “the biggest change is that the number of people doing sumo as their specialty has increased greatly. In the past there have been a lot of athletes who came from judo and entered the sumo tournaments, but the now the number of people only doing sumo has grown a lot.”⁴⁶⁸ Likewise, Claudia, who competes in the lightweight class (and sometimes in the open weight class) has found a change in her opponents:

Yes, [the level of women’s competition] is getting better. A few years ago it was easier for me to win in the open class – now it’s really hard to accomplish anything

⁴⁶⁴ Katrina Watts, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 29, 2004.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Although, arguably, their male counterparts are similarly hamstrung by the lack of tournaments available.

⁴⁶⁸ Tsuihiji Rie, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 17, 2006.

there, so that's gotten a lot harder and also in lightweight class it's gotten harder – the girls are stronger. Eight years ago when I started out there was a lot of small girls with fat arses, sorry to say. It was just...was the little fatties. Sumo is a big person's sport. I'm sorry, not allowed to say this...And it used to be the little-big people and now it's more athletic people. I don't stick out as much any more because I'm tall and muscled, it happens more often now.⁴⁶⁹

Not only is the quality improving, there is also a growing and strengthening base of athletes emerging. In Japan, *shinsumō* tournaments were initially held only for women at senior high school age (around 16 years) and above. However, national competitions for elementary school girls were started, and followed by catering to junior high school students as well. This has brought girls into the sport and Katrina feels that it perhaps heralds the beginning of change in Japanese *shinsumō*: “now there are quite a lot of women participating, girls taking part in elementary school and junior high and senior high; the number is increasing year by year, whereas the number for the men's sumo is decreasing, so we might see the balance tipping in the future.”⁴⁷⁰ Her assessment is supported by Tsuihiji Rie who believes Japan is on the verge of having girls beginning to compete throughout the grades in *shinsumō*, just as many of the boys do:

At the moment the athletes in the adult division to some extent are only those who have taken up sumo when they grew old enough. So it's about getting the athletes to come through from junior high school age into the adult competition, and if we could widen the sport at this junior high age group then I think *shinsumō* would really develop. In some ways it is difficult because at the moment *shinsumō* is not an event in the *Kokutai* [National Athletic Meet] and so we are limited in some ways....At the moment they are in the midst of planning it. We hear there are a few things to iron out, but in a few years' time I think it is definitely going to be a *Kokutai* event.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁹ Claudia de Graauw, interview by author, Rotterdam, Netherlands, July 16, 2005.

⁴⁷⁰ Katrina Watts, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 29, 2004.

⁴⁷¹ Tsuihiji Rie, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 17, 2006.

In Europe, as well, there is a growing athlete base emerging from the implementation of three levels of youth divisions. Europe has implemented an under-16 division (cadets),⁴⁷² under-18 division (juniors)⁴⁷³ and an under-21 division (youths) to allow for a stair-casing into senior competition. These divisions have been introduced for safety reasons as well, so that the younger athletes are not exposed too soon to the older, stronger and more experienced competitors in their weight class. This has made sumo an attractive martial art for youths,⁴⁷⁴ and proved successful in increasing and retaining numbers of young male and female athletes alike, but it has been particularly valuable in bolstering the smaller numbers of senior women competitors over time: “you get more people to fight now and...there are also juniors coming up more and more, which is a promising thing for the future because they will be seniors.”⁴⁷⁵

Perhaps the most important long-term transition needed to strengthen *shinsumō* is an increase in the numbers of female administrators and officials. Given the recent introduction of *shinsumō*, there has been only a short period of time for women to work their way through the hierarchy of officialdom in different countries. Furthermore, there is a pattern in most international sports of “a markedly low level of representation of women in decision-making positions in organised sport in the public and voluntary sectors. Women are grossly under-represented in the management of sport, as paid executive officers, as board members and elected chairs, and as referees and coaches.”⁴⁷⁶ For many European and other national sumo federations, the organisation is so new that women have yet to join the administration. Some federations have women in positions of

⁴⁷² The under-16 competition was implemented in late 2008 to join the previous two divisions.

⁴⁷³ The IFS only holds an international under-18 competition, the Junior Sumo World Championships. It was established in 1999 for boys under this age but, in 2008, after much lobbying by European countries and the European Sumo Union, the Junior *Shinsumō* World Championships were also held for girls under 18 years. Gunther Romenath notes that it was the young female athletes themselves who wanted the opportunity to compete in their own world championships: “our European *shinsumō* athletes, they demand – please, push the IFS that they include in the junior world championships also...the women juniors.” Gunther Romenath, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 19, 2005.

⁴⁷⁴ Francois Wahl, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 19, 2005.

⁴⁷⁵ Claudia de Graauw, interview by author, Rotterdam, Netherlands, July 16, 2005.

⁴⁷⁶ Ilse Hartmann-Tews and Gertrud Pfister, “Women’s inclusion in sport,” 275.

power,⁴⁷⁷ but the number is still small. Furthermore, in terms of the global administration of the sport, what matters is the organisation of the IFS and of Japanese amateur sumo.

In Japan, there is a dearth of female administrators and officials. In the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* there are but a handful of women judges and perhaps only three referees: “I think most have gotten into refereeing through their husbands being amateur sumo referees or officials and following them into the sport and getting their refereeing licences. There are also those who really love sumo and got into it in that way.”⁴⁷⁸ This influences the International Sumo Federation as well because both organisations share a number of people. There are only two females who have been prominent in the upper echelons of amateur sumo in Japan. Tanaka Yūko, the wife of IFS president Tanaka Hidetoshi, is a director of the IFS and Katrina Watts, the Australian woman who was based in Japan for many years, held a position with the *Nihon Shinsumō Renmei* before she returned to Australia and still works as an interpreter and translator for the IFS at major tournaments. Katrina, however, is clear that her role is not really about making decisions:

It’s really nice for me when I go to the *shinsumō* championships, like the all Japan championships where the kids come from the country, because they often run over to me, those little girls that have been coming every year and they run over and they want to practise their English and they say, look how big I’ve become, look how...it’s kind of like a mother thing...I’d like to say big sister, but I think I’m past that now. And they see me as sort of...not exactly a role model, but I think it is like an international thing – oh, if we do sumo we can meet foreigners and we can get

⁴⁷⁷ Bulgaria is headed by Liliana Kaneva, who in the middle of 2008 became the joint vice-president of the European Sumo Union. Katrina Watts has returned to her native Australia and has taken the reins of the national federation. In many other nations women play important roles in terms of correspondence and translation but often without formal recognition.

⁴⁷⁸ Tsuihiji Rie, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 17, 2006. Katrina Watts puts the number of women referees at “two or three”. Katrina Watts, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 29, 2004.

into the international realm. Sometimes I think I have a decorative function rather than an administrative function in the *shinsumō*.⁴⁷⁹

This gender imbalance in amateur sumo is not uncommon for Japanese sports organisations. Machiko Kimura has identified that in Japanese sports “generally the number of women officials is extremely low and decision making for sports organisations, in most cases, is conducted by men.”⁴⁸⁰ Kimura suggests that one reason why women are under-represented in the officialdom of Japanese sports organisation is because of social norms with respect to family life and the division of household labour between the sexes:

As a reason why so few women take leadership and are involved in decision making in organisational sport, it is considered that many leave sports organisation because of marriage and childcare. How long the person stays active in the organisation is more important than the actual ability to obtain status...in the case of selection of officials, the term during which the person has established human relationships within the organisation tends to be more important than ability or personality as an officer. So it is disadvantageous to women.⁴⁸¹

However, the real reason that there are so few women administrators may be because *shinsumō* is so new and there has not been time for women to move through the ranks. This is expected to change slowly as the first generation of *shinsumō* athletes retires and moves into coaching and administration. In particular, Tsuihiji Rie hopes to become involved once she retires, and hopes that her colleagues such as Ishigaya Satomi follow her lead:

⁴⁷⁹ Katrina Watts, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 29, 2004. The idea of doing sumo so as to meet foreigners and be actively international harks back to the ideas when amateur sumo began having regular small-scale international competitions in the 1980s. At that time it was hoped that international competition and a providing a future pathway in the sport (apart from joining *ōzumō*) would allow sumo to seem as attractive as other sports like baseball and soccer.

⁴⁸⁰ Machiko Kimura, “Gender relations in Japanese sports organisation and sport involvement,” in *Sport and Women: Social Issues in International Perspective*, ed. Ilse Hartmann-Tews and Gertrud Pfister (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 246.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 248.

I'd like to contribute to the development of sumo by becoming an instructor...Ishigaya has remained at Nihon University as an employee and has begun instructing there while still competing. I think she is probably the first...I think it would be good if that kind of system broadened from here on...There are female referees at the moment, but there are no female judges or referees who themselves have been athletes. I think it would be good if athletes like myself and Ishigaya went on and became referees and judges.⁴⁸²

Given her pedigree and long standing in the sport, this may prove a step towards greater say for women in the administration of their sport.

* * *

As the earlier chapters showed, the presence of women has not always sat comfortably with sumo, professional and amateur alike. Women have been excluded from the sumo ring, initially because of religious belief that they were impure, and thereafter because their exclusion had also become part of sumo tradition. However, from a history of marginalisation in Japan, or relegation to regional or festival oddity, the participation of women in amateur sumo competition suddenly became a necessity in the mid-1990s.

While amateur sumo was taken up by male athletes in different countries, there were also enquiries from abroad as to whether women could compete. This came in conjunction with moves by the IFS to be accepted as an Olympic sport. What emerged was a 'new' sumo that had been designed by Japanese amateur sumo administrators to fill the void of female competition, a prerequisite for Olympic acceptance. It was called 'new' and had major adaptations to remove overtly masculine associations with sumo. The clay *dohyō* had been replaced by a polyurethane mat and the *mawashi*, which was deemed too off-putting and masculine, was replaced by leotard and attached waist belt. However, although the sport was now formulated and ready for competition, women had to be invited to participate in *shinsumō* because they were either unaware that they were now able to compete after years of exclusion in Japan or because amateur sumo as a whole was still something new and unknown in the rest of the world.

⁴⁸² Tsuihiji Rie, interview by author, Osaka, Japan, October 17, 2006.

The lack of agency for women in the creation of ‘their’ sumo is revealed in the ways that the IFS virtually manufactured *shinsumō* and then supported regional bodies to promote the sport. Much in the same way that Japan kick-started international competition by inviting various countries to the inaugural Sumo World Championships, Japan played the major role in filling a void by introducing women into amateur sumo. However, in the process, women were not consulted, nor were they afforded the chance to administer *shinsumō*. The sport has grown in delayed parallel to the men’s sport, all under the same international, regional and national federations as the men.⁴⁸³ This has proved a double-edged sword, whereby there has been benefit in integrating *shinsumō* into the structures of the IFS while at the same time the welfare of women’s sumo has been subsumed to the longer-established male form of amateur sumo. Women’s competition has been treated as inferior, as a curiosity, and ultimately as a necessity, all the while suffering from a lack of female ‘voice’ in the administration.

Nevertheless, the sport has not remained static. Over time the emphasis on making *shinsumō* appealing to women has been largely replaced by an equalising of men and women’s amateur sumo. This has come partly in response to the questions by female athletes as to why their sport is ‘different’, but the changes have mainly been pragmatic and in response to the way that amateur sumo has developed worldwide. Women abroad, and then also increasingly in Japan, used the conventional *mawashi* because of cost and convenience. Due to the failure of the grappling pants to catch on outside of Japan, the *mawashi* has become the standard for international competition. In addition, with many major international tournaments now being held on clay *dohyō*, women and men appear on the same surface at competitions, mirroring the fact that most women worldwide train alongside and with male competitors because of convenience and lack of other facilities. While both pragmatic and ‘authentic’, cost and necessity have driven these changes rather than female agency.

⁴⁸³ Although outside the scope of this study, a useful cross-cultural comparison could be made with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 in the United States, given the implications it has for the participation of both males and females in high school and collegiate sports.

These changes will continue to be made on behalf of women until there is a groundswell of numbers of female athletes and administrators. Greater female engagement with *shinsumō* will create better opportunities for women to take active roles in shaping amateur sumo in general. Currently there are indications the sport is gaining in numbers from a younger age and that there are structures to feed these girls into the adult ranks. This should coincide with retired female athletes taking up coaching and lower-level administration in various sumo federations. Promising also is the increasing alignment of the IFS to ideals set forth by the IOC, precisely because they stipulate the need to include women throughout a sporting organisation. The regulations that prompted the creation of *shinsumō* might also provide pathways within the IFS for women's voices to be heard and to make a difference.

Amateur sumo for women has become iconic of the new direction in amateur sumo and the shift in values associated with the sport. Admittedly, *shinsumō* began as a necessity to further the IFS's aims, but, in the process, it has become an integral part in the future direction and goals of the sport. Furthermore, embracing the participation of women in the sport separates amateur sumo further from the shadow of professional sumo, and identifies and publicises amateur sumo as an increasingly visible international sport which is adhering to the global guidelines of the Olympic Charter.

5. Localisation and Authenticity in Amateur Sumo

In 1995 the International Sumo Federation expanded its administrative structure by founding the continental sumo unions, and in doing so set in place the mechanisms for regional control of amateur sumo. Initially headed by IFS-appointed directors in charge of each region, the job of the continental sumo unions was to support the development of the sport in their region by assisting the already established national federations and to recruit new countries into the fold. Their work primarily consisted of linking the different countries within their region, establishing regular regional competitions, and liaising with the Japan-based IFS on behalf of the region and its members. The presence of the continental sumo unions gave each region a focal point for sumo administration and development. They also precipitated the creation of formalised national sumo federations within each region, so there could at least be interaction with the continental union, rather than some of the piecemeal approaches that existed before.

The relative autonomy that the IFS has given each continental union means each has strong control over the regional production of amateur sumo, and in turn the national federations below them have also been given freedom to administer the sport as they see fit. Whilst the IFS remains at the centre, issuing directives regarding the direction the sport takes and the rules that should be followed, differing national and regional approaches have emerged wherever amateur sumo has taken root. As illustrated in the previous chapter, the approaches taken towards *shinsumō* in different regions suggest local diversity in the way that women have been accepted and accommodated in amateur sumo. However, the treatment of females in the sport is but one aspect of the localisation of amateur sumo.

This chapter considers the ways in which amateur sumo has been accepted in Europe and Oceania by looking at the specific examples of the sumo federations in the Netherlands, Czech Republic, New Zealand and Australia. All four countries have come to amateur sumo with no prior cultural enactment of the sport within their borders, meaning they have therefore adopted and developed amateur sumo unfettered by cultural ties to Japan. Although supported in their early years by the IFS, the continental sumo union and/or

neighbouring countries, these four national federations are emblematic of the leadership of an individual (or a series of individuals over time) with the dedication and charisma to carry the federation on their shoulders to keep it afloat. Almost invariably, these types of people play a part in the administration of the continental sumo union as well, showing that the spread of the sport is as dependent on the activities of committed individuals in the field as it is on the institutionalism and rules that the IFS provides.

Kenji Tierney has asked “what does it mean when sumo is not wrestled in Japan, and when Japanese are not the wrestlers?”⁴⁸⁴ He answers his own question by acknowledging that “[a]s amateur participants embrace it in various countries, sumo is changing. The new participants, learning the “sport” second or third hand, are discarding the “tradition” and all that that implies.”⁴⁸⁵ However, whether this endangers sumo, whether amateur sumo causes us to rethink ‘sumo’, and whether these changes are to the detriment of the sport is entirely subjective. Whereas some of Tierney’s respondents see these actions creating a problem in keeping sumo ‘pure’, ‘traditional’ and ‘Japanese’, this chapter sees the performance of amateur sumo throughout the world as representing multiple localisations of sumo in different settings.

The examples of four national federations considered here demonstrate how amateur sumo has been localised and adapted in different environments to fit local contexts. The Netherlands has recognition and funding from its National Olympic Committee, allowing it to employ specialist sports trainers or travel overseas to compete or train, while Australia struggles along relying on the finances of its members and utilises the skills and knowledge of the local people to hand. The Czech Republic has put its energies into creating ‘authentic’ training facilities akin to the clay *dohyō* of Japan while groups in New Zealand train outside on grass, inside on judo mats or in a boxing ring, or wherever the athletes can practise their skills. Some athletes are competing for glory or prestige, others seek some inner enlightenment from performing sumo, and still others are using

⁴⁸⁴ R. Kenji Tierney, “Wrestling with Tradition: Sumo, National Identity and Trans/national Popular Culture” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2002), 334.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

their size, which would hamper them in other sports, to compete in the heavier weight divisions.

It is unrealistic of Tierney's respondents to believe that amateur sumo could be merely imitated and reproduced as if all activities were taking place in Japan. Indeed, it is problematic to think that anywhere in Japan could lend both authenticity and reproduction to the practice of amateur sumo. Hybridisation and mixing is apparent in almost every cultural interaction, and the idea that sumo is somehow immune from this is absurd. In all sports there are stylistic elements peculiar to the athlete, the coach, and the team based on abilities, strategy, philosophy and many other factors. This occurs in Japan, and most certainly occurs abroad (as Tierney's respondents fear). Nevertheless, while changes have been made in each location, they have almost always occurred pragmatically and are not designed to radically alter the concept of (amateur) sumo per se. In each location the participants are performing sumo in different ways but each, by their own admission, is trying to keep close to an ideal of sumo embodied in what can be seen in Japan, both in amateur sumo and *ōzumō*. These non-Japanese international sumo athletes and administrators are attempting to remain authentic to a Japanese model of sumo, but are doing so in their own way. Consequently, they are creating their own styles of sumo in the process, often unconsciously, through "a process of indigenization – [...] appropriating the foreign objects and practices by recontextualising them into local matrices of meaning and value."⁴⁸⁶

Sumo administration in the regions

With the relative autonomy that the creation of the continental sumo unions allowed, amateur sumo has developed in local and regional ways. The expectations put upon a continental sumo union are to organise an annual sumo championships and to administer the sport by assisting and interlinking the nations in the area. With this also comes the requirement to act as a go-between for the IFS and the nations in that continent. However, the continental unions are not usually cast in the role of watchdog to scrutinise their

⁴⁸⁶ William W. Kelly, "Is Baseball a Global Sport? America's 'national pastime' as global field and international sport," *Global Networks* 7, no. 2 (2007), 188.

members. As a collection of administrators, usually in charge of their own national federations as well, the continental sumo union will generally act in the interests of its collective membership, adding its own ideas or taking the lead for intra-continental matters when appropriate. In turn, the national federations have been given autonomy within their own borders.⁴⁸⁷

In principle, the duties of the different continental sumo unions are the same but they have very different manifestations depending upon the continent. In Asia and South America, the continental unions have remained as guardians of ‘proper’ sumo and keeping the status quo, perhaps showing their close links to the IFS and the *Nihon Sumō Renmei*. In North America the situation is similar, although at times allowances have been made to promote sumo as an entertainment package to try and raise its profile and gain greater exposure.⁴⁸⁸ Africa has struggled with its size, the logistical issues of bringing its members together, and the difficult financial status of many of its members. Oceania has had the same issues to a lesser extent. It is in Europe that real dynamism can be seen, often in ways that challenge the status quo (and the IFS) but with a genuine belief that these developments are for the good of the sport in the future. The structure of the decision making processes in the IFS, as will be discussed later, means that this numerical advantage does not benefit Europe greatly at the annual Congress, but it does make the collective European an important player in the power relations (and struggles) within the IFS.

Amateur sumo began in Europe through countries with strong judo connections to Japan, namely Great Britain, Germany, Russia, Poland and France. Over time the number of competing countries increased, most notably from 1995 onwards, due in no small part to

⁴⁸⁷ In essence, the national sumo federations can control the sport in their country as they see fit as long as they remain financial members of their continental sumo union and the International Sumo Federation. If they do not stay financial or are inoperative there are provisions for other parties to petition to be given control of amateur sumo in that nation. Apart from that, a country is largely given free rein. The continental sumo union or the IFS will only step in to assist if there is a conflict internally, if there is a concern over how the sport is run or the way it is presented, or on some other matter that might affect amateur sumo in a wider sense. For example, the European Sumo Union stepped in when it discovered one of its member federations had allowed competitive matches between men and women. Stephen Gadd, interview by author, Rotterdam, Netherlands, May 20, 2005.

⁴⁸⁸ This is considered further in Chapter Six.

regular tournaments in Europe and the establishment of the European Sumo Union (ESU). The ESU incorporates member federations from 27 countries, and is the continental sumo union with the largest membership in the IFS. Furthermore, most of these member federations are consistently active, sending teams each year to the European Sumo Championships if not also to the Sumo World Championships. The proximity of all the member federations, available either by road or short-haul flights, means that competition in Europe is regular and can be arranged at minimal cost.

With this core of activity, and partly because of the large number of member federations, Europe is the most active and dynamic continent in the development and growth of amateur sumo.⁴⁸⁹ One of the most notable developments that the ESU has made is the creation of two new age divisions, under-16 and under-21 years of age, for use in tournaments in Europe. Their inclusion, in addition to the IFS initiative of the under-18 division, helps the transition for athletes from junior to senior divisions. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this allows greater opportunities for athletes to enter the sport at a younger age and provides another step in their move from competing as teenagers to competing against adults. The ESU president, Gunther Romenath explains how this new grouping came about:

I said if we had the IFS weight and age categories, then we have a problem, because we want to develop sumo because in Japan there are many, many, many players – athletes – but in Europe not so many young athletes and we have to develop them...If, after they reach the age of 18 years, they must fight strong players like Scheibler, like Paczkow...they lose and they will stop sumo.⁴⁹⁰

Furthermore, the ESU implemented both under-18 and under-21 competitions for women as well, at a time when the rest of the world only had adult competitions for women.

⁴⁸⁹ As one example of this activity, from 1995 onwards Europe has consistently contributed the most countries at each annual Sumo World Championships.

⁴⁹⁰ Gunther Romenath, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 19, 2005. Torsten Scheibler (GER) and Robert Paczkow (POL) are two former World Champions and multiple European Champions in their weight classes.

By virtue of having so many member federations, the ESU administration needs to be organised, democratic and transparent so that all members are satisfied. The administration and planning is in the hands of a small executive elected for a four year cycle.⁴⁹¹ This executive is able to maintain fairly regular contact with one another, including arranging meetings to discuss or work on urgent matters, but most of the work is done by the Secretary General, Stephen Gadd, and the president, Gunther Romenath. Stephen explains the work of the duo as trying “to develop new things and we exchange a lot of ideas and then when we decide on something we present that to the Board of Directors for their opinion and then normally, if it’s a majority decision, it’s then passed and we go ahead.”⁴⁹² Because of the democratic principles of the ESU, the members have to vote on the major issues that affect them, which is “always done at an Annual General Congress and that’s always the night before the European Championships. Normally the day before the World Championships there’s a small continental meeting where all the federations from Europe come together to exchange ideas.”⁴⁹³ In this way members of the ESU, and particularly the directors of the ESU executive, meet face-to-face at least twice a year and are able to discuss matters of importance to the ESU and their own national federations.

The activities of a continental sumo union like the ESU are dependent on the drive and vision of the members of the executive. In most cases the administrators that marshal the sport through the continental sumo union also have responsibilities within their own national federations. This provides the potential for conflict or factional rivalries to gain control, particularly when deciding who is to host tournaments or whose particular viewpoints should be heard. Within the ESU, if there happen to be any concerns with the way a matter is handled there are also avenues to make this known: “it’s a democracy and if someone’s got a grievance or they don’t agree with something, then between the

⁴⁹¹ The four-year election cycle for ESU directors coincides with the Olympic cycle. Therefore, the executive members I interviewed in 2005 had been (re-)elected in 2004 during the European Sumo Championships. Stephen Gadd, interview by author, Rotterdam, Netherlands, May 20, 2005. See also, Article 10.2 of the ESU statutes. Statutes of the European Sumo Union, “Statutes of the European Sumo Union,” <http://www.eurosumo.com/statutes> (accessed May 3, 2006).

⁴⁹² Stephen Gadd, interview by author, Rotterdam, Netherlands, May 20, 2005.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

Annual General Congress then the directing committee takes that on board, discusses it, throws it around and then goes back to the federation with a decision on the point.⁴⁹⁴

Nevertheless, this still does not mean that all the members view the actions of the ESU in the same way, or even a positive way. Stephen Gadd, as a current member of the ESU executive was quick to speak favourably about his work and that of his colleagues.

However, Jaroslav Poriz of the Czech Republic, a former member of the ESU executive, has quite a different view and feels the IFS has been of more assistance:

European Sumo Union hasn't been really active in promoting sumo locally in Europe. It hasn't helped us in any way, and I don't think it's helped any other country, so it's been sort of static. They just organise the European Championships, that's it, every year. But the only concrete help that I think – that definitely we got, and I think it's been the same in all the other countries, was from the IFS. That was in the initial stages...when they sent us the *dohyō*, which was really expensive, and...for example, they paid for half the team to go through World Championships...but that was the only concrete help from an international organisation that we got. But ESU, I don't think they have done anything to promote sumo locally, in a sense that they would support anybody – well, that's the case with us ... and I would think that is the case with all the other countries too.⁴⁹⁵

Certainly the seed funding for tournament travel and supplies of equipment from the IFS to help national federations establish themselves, played a positive part in the development of several federations. However, that assistance has not been available lately, except in circumstances of extreme need, and is no longer an integral part of the duties of the IFS.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ Jaroslav Poriz, interview by author, Jilemnice, Czech Republic, June 26, 2005.

In stark contrast to its European counterpart, the Oceania Sumo Union (OSU) is loosely organised and is potentially the smallest continental sumo union within the IFS.⁴⁹⁶ The Oceania region encompasses the nations of the southern Pacific Ocean, including Australia and New Zealand and many developing island nations. It is spread across a wide area only functionally accessible by air travel. The amateur sumo community is small, with only a handful of competitors in each active country and a handful of administrators willing to volunteer their time. Travel is a necessity to compete in tournaments, making amateur sumo a relatively expensive sport in which to compete. Therefore, the Oceania Sumo Union is faced with the difficulty of trying to promote sumo in a region of predominantly tiny, spread out nations with few resources and varying levels of individual wealth. Thus, the more mobile and resource-rich nations of Australia and New Zealand play a guiding role, almost by default.

The Oceania Sumo Union began in 1995 with an Australian at its head. Ivor Endicott-Davies had lived and worked in Japan and was heavily involved in judo before being asked to be the IFS Director for Oceania. He served as the dual head of the Australian Sumo Federation and the Oceania Sumo Union before relinquishing both roles to Peter Armstrong in 2002. The tale of how Peter got the job shows something of the loose workings of the OSU and how it operates as a consensus of its small membership:

Ivor wanted to retire and asked me to take over and I sort of discussed with the others and Fred [Craig from New Zealand] didn't want to do it – at least, didn't appear to want to do it – Tonga said we can't do that because the King has to have the position...and so in the end it became a sort of default thing, and I took it on because no-one was doing it, and it sort of became official.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁶ It is difficult to ascertain the exact numbers and the sizes of continental sumo unions because the IFS does not make its membership known. Ostensibly there are 86 member nations as at January 1, 2009, but many of these members do not attend Sumo World Championships or their regional championships, and may not have any athletes! Oceania has only three members who have been active in the last five years, which is one fewer than the members in Africa who have been active over the same time span.

⁴⁹⁷ Peter Armstrong, interview by author, Sydney, Australia, February 5, 2006.

The torch is passed from one willing volunteer to the next and there is no set time period for a term or for election.⁴⁹⁸ The members of the Oceania Sumo Union meet when they are able, usually at the Oceania Sumo Championships or the Sumo World Championships, but, because the OSU is so small, email communication usually suffices for matters of importance.

The actual composition of the OSU actually means that little needs to be administered. Although the Oceania region ostensibly includes Western Samoa and Kiribati, both of which are members of the International Sumo Federation according to the IFS website, neither nation has ever appeared at a Sumo World Championships or an Oceania Sumo Championships. In reality the region has only ever seen activity at major tournaments from four countries. Australia and New Zealand began participating at the Sumo World Championships from 1992, while Tonga began the next year and Fiji participated from 1994. All four were regular attendees in the early years of the Oceania Sumo Championships, the first of which began in 1996. However, since 1999, only Australia and New Zealand have been consistent performers in major tournaments and able to field full teams of at least three competitors (that is, enough to compete in the teams competition as well as most of the individual weight classes). Fiji began to struggle and started to send only one competitor to the Sumo World Championships in 1998 and 1999. When the IFS began to withdraw its financial support to send athletes to the Sumo World Championships, as was outlined in Chapter Two, interest in sumo began to wane in Fiji. Similarly, the country has been absent from Oceania tournaments for most of the past decade. Tonga also largely disappeared from the Sumo World Championships from 1999, deciding instead to send its junior athletes to the Junior Sumo World Championships in Tokyo that started in the same year. It appears that Tonga decided to pool its resources and spent its limited resources on developing junior athletes. A large part of this decision seems to have been that it is cheaper to send junior athletes to Japan for annual

⁴⁹⁸ When Peter stepped aside in October 2006, Martin Stirling was the most senior person for the role and was elected unopposed at a continental meeting during the Sumo World Championships in Osaka. Tonga felt unable to nominate the head of their organization, their king, for the position nor could any other Tongan supersede the king and be put forward. Australian Sumo Federation president-elect, Katrina Watts, felt it was best not to stand as she had only recently returned to living in Australia after a long period in Japan. By virtue of her position as an IFS Director already, Martin's election nominally gave Oceania an extra voice in the IFS. There was no timeframe put in place for when elections might next be held.

competitions rather than sending senior athletes to Sumo World Championships held around the world. An added bonus of this policy is that the junior athletes sent may have the chance to be scouted into *ōzumō*.

This paucity of activity from only a handful of countries has meant that running the OSU in the 21st century involves liaison between Australia and New Zealand, and keeping Tonga abreast of the decisions. While the OSU has control for whatever happens in the Oceania region, Peter Armstrong's take on his position indicates that he had little meaningful work to do in a region that appears to be stagnating:

really the executive power is centralised in Tokyo, so there's not very much delegation. Obviously you are the 'post box' between Tokyo and the regions. The main thing is to try and maintain the continuity of the Oceania tournaments because they are important, but even there, you see, money is a problem, because when it actually comes to the point, for example in Tonga, the Tongans would much rather send their young guys to Tokyo for the junior championships...Coming to Australia or New Zealand is expensive and the benefit is perceived to be less than going to Tokyo. As far as Fiji is concerned, when the money stopped, Fiji stopped. Fiji has not participated effectively and so it's very hard...Western Samoa are on the books, and Kiribati, and I write to them from time to time, send e-mails and so on, but nothing ever happens, so effectively, really it's Australia, New Zealand and Tonga...The role is essentially that of trying to co-ordinate and maintain the support...But, you know, it's like any job which actually has no money to disperse, it's really figurative and promotional, which is unfortunate.⁴⁹⁹

The issue of money seems to be the key in what is holding back the Oceania region. Because of the costs in assembling teams for an Oceania Sumo Championships, and the costs to send teams halfway around the world to the Sumo World Championships, the nations in the region are often financially unable to compete and the sport is losing any hold that it once had. Australia and New Zealand have had to step into the breach to keep

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

the Oceania Sumo Championships alive and to nurture amateur sumo in the region. They do this by continuously hosting the tournament⁵⁰⁰ and by feeling the compulsion to attend the Sumo World Championships as representatives of Oceania, not only their nation.

Peter explains how a money injection from Japan might improve the situation:

If we had a budget, what would be ideal would be to go back to the original Japanese-funded model of actually getting money for each country, to have enough money to pay for, effectively, a team to go every year to the Worlds. For a team from each country to go to Oceania, so that you could hold the thing, you could bring down a Japanese referee – we're talking about five thousand bucks to each region and that would allow you to hold a good national tournament, which would then allow you to offer a trip to wherever the Oceania tournament was going to be and following that, the possibility of a trip to Tokyo.⁵⁰¹

However, Martin Stirling, who became president of the OSU in 2006, has a different view. While he would welcome a subsidy from Japan or another source, he believes that because of past support, the amateur sumo community owes a debt to the IFS:

Japan has been very generous and we should all realise that... I believe that when people offer carrots, you shouldn't just take the carrot and run. You should be grateful for what you get and return the favour by looking for good competitors and helping them to get to these tournaments overseas. That, to me, is how we should pay Japan back – not just take the free airfares, use them up and run... I think we should be grateful that they offered it to the rest of the world, because look, I love sumo... I think the world should be grateful to Japan, do their bit along the way, don't just rely on Japan to organise everything.⁵⁰²

The Oceania Sumo Union's primary piece of business each year is the organisation of the Oceania Sumo Championships. Beyond this the OSU might respond where necessary to queries or requests from the IFS, but little else is done. The innovation and over-arching

⁵⁰⁰ Ironically, by having New Zealand and Australia host the tournament, the attendance by Tonga or other nations is made more expensive because of higher travel and accommodation costs.

⁵⁰¹ Peter Armstrong, interview by author, Sydney, Australia, February 5, 2006.

⁵⁰² Martin Stirling, interview by author, Lower Hutt, New Zealand, April 2, 2006.

guidance that the ESU demonstrates in Europe is lacking in the Oceania region. This demonstrates that it is partly the organisational qualities and strength of the members, the national sumo federations, that help determine the potential of any continental sumo union. As long as New Zealand and Australia, in particular, struggle to keep their federations afloat, the state of the Oceania Sumo Union is unlikely to greatly improve.

Ultimately, the examples of the ESU and the OSU serve to demonstrate the contrasting fortunes and the unevenness in amateur sumo worldwide. Furthermore, they indicate the disparity that exists between the regions in terms of knowledge, resources, equipment and money. While both Europe and Oceania are trying to promote amateur sumo and doing their best to help it prosper, their efforts depend on what is available to each organisation. The different sizes, both in member numbers and geographical spread, of the two continental unions mean that different styles and processes of administration have developed as appropriate.

However, the operations of the continental sumo unions show only part of the localisation of amateur sumo. Each national federation acts in different ways as well, depending on its size and resources, and with influences from the local sports culture. This affects the localised practice of sumo, for we see not only different methods and approaches to administration but also the influence that individuals and differing contexts have had on the development of amateur sumo. The relatively small size of these federations gives individuals agency in the way that the sport is accepted, the values that are attached to sumo in each context, and the way amateur sumo is practiced in that environment. The coaches and athletes bring their own personal sporting histories and physiques to the sport: while the athletes adapt their bodies to sumo during their training sessions, they are also adapting the ways they do sumo to fit their bodies and sporting backgrounds.

Sumo in the Netherlands

Sumo was started in the Netherlands in 1996 by Stephen Gadd, an Englishman married to a Dutch woman:

I was watching a broadcast on Eurosport and I noticed there were some European wrestlers wrestling; I found it quite intriguing and then I noticed one of the judges was an old judo teacher of mine, from my youth. I thought it was quite strange. I called him up – he came from London – and said ‘what’s the situation with Europeans in sumo, I didn’t even know it existed’ and he explained everything. At that time he was the sport director of the European Sumo Union and he said to me at that moment there was no federation registered to the Netherlands, so he said if you’re quick you can try and get registered to the ESU and once you’ve got that you can try and develop sumo, so I wrote off a letter to the General Secretary of the ESU and registered the Dutch Federation and it really started rolling from there.⁵⁰³

Gadd used his experience as a judo athlete and coach and the television broadcasts he had seen of sumo as a starting point to begin training himself and others for competition.

The Dutch organisation initially struggled to attract numbers and those that joined either lacked size or athletic prowess:

In the beginning there was a lot of media publicity but sadly the only people who called up and wanted to wrestle were guys that were 200, 250, 260 and one of 275 kilos guys, who really had never done any sport in their life. It’s not for nothing that you’re 260 kilos. They thought, okay we’re big, and we can come along to the sumo and we had that sort of crowd for about two years or something, but the problem is it attracts a lot of media and it’s a bit of a circus act, because you’ve only these fat guys who can’t do very much – two or three bouts and you’ve got to try and reanimate them. We were constantly trying to get wrestlers involved and judo clubs, but people in the beginning saw it as a strange club where these guys wanted to take all their clothes off and run around in a nappy, I think was the thought.⁵⁰⁴

Efforts to gain a strong foothold for amateur sumo foundered until the federation was able to gain recognition from the Netherlands Olympic Committee and Dutch Sports Federation (NOC*NSF).

⁵⁰³ Stephen Gadd, interview by author, Rotterdam, Netherlands, May 13, 2005.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

However, gaining this status from the NOC*NSF did not automatically come from the IOC provisionally recognising amateur sumo and the International Sumo Federation. Instead, the Netherlands Sumo Federation had to satisfy Dutch criteria which required that “to be recognised by the Olympic Committee you have to have a minimum of 2500 members and obviously sumo didn’t have that but we joined forces with the weightlifters, freestyle wrestlers, Greco-Roman wrestlers, powerlifters, tug-of-war and bodybuilders.”⁵⁰⁵ Sumo became a member of the Royal Dutch Strength Sports and Fitness Federation (KNKF) in a strategic move to qualify for recognition from the Netherlands Olympic Committee and, with it, gain the benefits of institutional support from the NOC and funding for the country’s top sumo athletes.

The money available to the Netherlands Sumo Federation has meant that it has become one of the better organised within European sumo. The Dutch federation has “a national yearly budget and from that we have to compete at the European and World Championships and then the funds over, we can use that for doing several international tournaments or, we’ll be using it this year, to go and train in Japan, so it’s paid a lot of benefits.”⁵⁰⁶ While Stephen is more than happy with having the money to spend on the organisation and planning events for the year, he acknowledges that it is not the only benefit:

you’ve got the financial capacity to send out these athletes which is great, but the biggest over winning for me is that it’s recognised as a top sport same as judo. In the past when people used to laugh, now you can say it has the same recognition as judo and now people look at you much more seriously in the media.⁵⁰⁷

Recognition from the Netherlands Olympic Committee helped to raise the sporting profile of sumo in the Netherlands and it allowed Stephen to “approach top judo clubs

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

and ask their athletes to join us, because they had the same recognition from the Olympic Federation – that meant a lot.”⁵⁰⁸

However, perhaps the greatest benefit of this funding is to the individual athletes because they have many of their training costs covered and they have access to services that they might not usually have. Claudia explains that:

through the Sumo Union, I get help from the government and they support me in financial ways – so they pay for my, the costs I make, the costs to go to training, the costs I have for a wrestling coach and things like that... I have A funding - that means I'm in the top 8 of the world and that's why I get a lot of funding from the government to pay my nutritionist, my mental coach, my masseur, my clothes, my travelling, my food [when away] on travel... Yeah, it's a hobby which doesn't cost anything, which is a big help.⁵⁰⁹

Jesse adds that “the Olympic Committee ranks athletes A or B...B is usually when you are selected for European or World Championships, so you are really the strongest of your country, and you can get an A grade by scoring...top five at the Europeans and top eight at the Worlds. And in sumo they decided also the individual team members can get an A or B grade when the team performs well. We came in 7th of the world with the team so we got an A grade from the Olympic Committee.”⁵¹⁰ What the funding means is that the athletes can focus on training and, while still not professional athletes, they can utilise the extra money to enable them to train more often or in better ways. For Jesse, a student, it means that the pressure between working to pay his rent and the time needed to train is eased.⁵¹¹ For others, like Hanah and Manuela, it allows them to defray the costs of travelling from the countryside into Rotterdam twice a week to attend training sessions.⁵¹²

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ Claudia de Graauw, interview by author, Rotterdam, Netherlands, July 16, 2005.

⁵¹⁰ Jesse Moerkerk, interview by author, Haarlem, Netherlands, July 15, 2005.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² Hanah Weerkamp, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 18, 2005. Most of the Dutch athletes travel up to an hour or more twice a week from cities such as Amsterdam, Haarlem and Ede. Centralising the national organisation in Rotterdam is rationalised by the fact that the Netherlands is small enough to allow commuting to training, and the standard of sumo, as well as the athletes' training patterns, can be kept in check by basing activities in one place. Stephen himself must emulate the same commitment in travelling to training as he resides in Antwerp, Belgium, a couple of hours drive to the south.

The Dutch training sessions inject local modifications into a broad model that would be recognisable in Japan, the Czech Republic, Australia or New Zealand. As part of the obligatory warm ups and stretches, the squad performs *shiko*, the sumo technique of raising one leg out to the side of the body, balancing on the remaining leg, stamping the raised leg down and then sinking into a leg squat before repeating this movement with the other leg. As a group, they will complete at least twenty *shiko* for each athlete training, meaning that the group might complete nearly 200 *shiko* in one session. The movement is a staple of Japanese sumo training regimes but here the counting is in Dutch, from one to twenty and then repeated by the next athlete around the circle. Another staple sumo exercise is the *suriashi*, or sliding of the feet across the *dohyō*, to ensure that the athletes move forward without lifting their feet from the floor which would put them off balance.

After these movements are performed, however, much of the practice session shows signs of local adaptation rather than ‘traditional’ sumo exercises, making use instead of Stephen’s background in judo and his assistant Dennis’ experience in jujutsu. Their backgrounds, and the fact that many of the Dutch athletes have also come from judo themselves, mean that the Dutch are largely exponents of *yotsu-sumō*, where athletes focus on gaining a hold on the *mawashi* rather than battling their opponents with forceful arm pushes:

the Dutch girls, the three of us, have mainly the same style. Well, it just happened that way and we’re pretty much, all three, straightforward so we do the *tachi-ai*, try to get *mawashi*, then we try to walk straight. No fancy tricks or anything. We just like to push the other one straight out. In other countries they, well maybe because of they have more judo background, they practice more throwing and things like that. I guess they do more fancy tricks and we are more direct. Okay, get *mawashi*, walk straight...keep it simple. Go for the certain. If you do tricks and everything you take a certain risk, I guess, and we...think it works to be conservative and take

the secure side. So maybe take a few seconds extra but you're sure you're going to win than do a fancy trick and maybe lose. I mean, you just get one chance.⁵¹³

To become more proficient at *yotsu-sumō* the twice weekly Dutch training sessions focus on learning new skills, practising them repeatedly and then allowing the athletes opportunities to put the learnt skills into practice during training bouts. At each training session the Dutch athletes learn how to make particular throws and trips and how to break the holds of their opponents. Each movement is first demonstrated to the group slowly and with detailed explanations before the athletes pair up to practise the move. The execution of the move is also done slowly at first, and as the athletes become more familiar with the technique the speed increases. Stephen and Dennis move around the group watching their charges, correcting any faults if necessary and answering any questions or concerns that arise. The athletes themselves will then practise this new technique a number of times with opponents of similar size until they feel comfortable with this movement.

Often only a couple of techniques will be shown at each training session, but because the athletes get to practise it many times they soon become familiar with it. This style of training is not common in Japan, where learning is done through practice bouts and, in most cases, only repeated failures to execute a particular move will produce corrective instruction.⁵¹⁴ The style of practice used in the Netherlands perhaps could be likened to teaching only a particular set-piece in other sports (as in soccer or rugby) or only certain steps in a dance routine. However, once learnt, the technique is available to be incorporated by the individual athletes into the practice bouts that take place. During the practice bouts there is no particular instruction by Stephen or Dennis to use the newly learnt technique. Rather, the athletes are given the tools to perform sumo and are then given the opportunity to use them as they see fit. The athletes are quite open in asking for help from Stephen, Dennis or from their fellow competitors when they feel they have reached an impasse, are having some difficulty in executing a move, or when they

⁵¹³ Claudia de Graauw, interview by author, Rotterdam, Netherlands, July 16, 2005.

⁵¹⁴ This trial-and-error method used in Japan perhaps works because elite Japanese amateur sumo athletes are most often training several times a week, not just twice.

continue to lose in a particular way. The attitude is one of sharing and there is some leeway for athletes to peel away from the group to work on a specific matter in one's own training regime. There is also no compulsion for the athletes to use the skill(s) demonstrated on a particular evening except at the time when everyone is learning the skill together. Whether they choose to utilise this skill in their matches thereafter depends on how comfortable they are with the technique, and whether it matches their style of sumo.

With an organisational approach that allows the athletes to improve themselves, rather than stressing a 'proper' approach to sumo training, they have a degree of agency in the way they can acquire skills and put them into action. The athletes can choose what to incorporate to fit their desired fighting style, and there is no prescribed way of fighting, or even a completely prescribed way of training. Support mechanisms are there to help the athletes, and they can freely ask for assistance from others in the organisation. This agency is further exemplified in the other ways that the athletes try to improve themselves to become better at sumo. Claudia, for example, has tried to have more skills at her disposal: "I got pushed out a few times and I got tired of that one, so I trained a little bit harder, just start mixing some ways, doing some freestyle wrestling, and after a while you get fanatic, you want to be the best."⁵¹⁵ She has done this to be more competitive in European competitions, where many of the athletes come from different sporting backgrounds such as wrestling. However, Claudia's preparation goes beyond just acquiring other wrestling skills:

The last half year I've gotten better because I got some mental coaching, which really helped me. I don't watch any sumo wrestler in particular. I don't watch any on television because it's hardly ever on. I don't have any idol...on sumo things I ask my coach and I also ask my training partner Hanah. Most of the time the two of us we figure things out and, yeah, I guess discussing with her about techniques gets me there.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁵ Claudia de Graauw, interview by author, Rotterdam, Netherlands, July 16, 2005.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

Sumo in the Czech Republic

Several hundred kilometres across the continent, amateur sumo began in the Czech Republic similarly to the way it did in the Netherlands. Jaroslav Poriz was introduced to sumo by a Japanese friend while attending college in the United States. He was a powerlifter and only really developed an interest in sumo after returning to his native Czech Republic. After watching sumo broadcasts, and then finding out that amateur sumo existed in Europe, he founded the Czech federation in around 1997.⁵¹⁷ From small beginnings the Czech Republic can now count many sumo athletes of all ages in a number of clubs throughout the country:

well, first there was just me and two other guys that I found. Currently we have 12 clubs now, all across, all over the country. We've got 560 registered members... which doesn't mean that it's 500 people doing sumo, because anybody can be a member at a club, and you have much less active wrestlers. But the national team I train is about 20 people.⁵¹⁸

The Czech Sumo Union is a member of national sporting bodies such as the Czech Union of Martial Arts, the Czech Federation of Sports and the Czech Olympic Committee. However, unlike the Dutch, the Czech Sumo Union receives only nominal financial support, which it uses to offset the rent for a training facility deep in the bowels of Prague's Strahov Stadium, an old Communist-era football stadium:

basically, what happens is that the Czech Martial Arts Federation supports us in a sense that they pay for our rent – there is no real money involved, but accounting wise we're charged, and they pay and everything, but it's basically based on goodwill. We get those premises that we can train at, which is really valuable to us.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁷ Jaroslav Poriz, interview by author, Jilemnice, Czech Republic, June 26, 2005.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid. Even this estimate seems to inflate the number of elite athletes in the Czech Republic – when I visited in the summer of 2005, admittedly during the summer holidays, only Jaroslav and one junior athlete were training. The Czech team at Sumo World Championships has never numbered more than four or five, and a team of around the same number has been to Junior Sumo World Championships sporadically.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

In effect, the organisation gets a free facility in which to house their training centre but must come up with the money they need for operations themselves.⁵²⁰ Much of that money comes from the efforts of the Poriz family; Jaroslav is the founder, president and open weight athlete, his brother Pavel is the middleweight competitor and their father, Jaroslav senior, is the team manager. This family really *is* the Czech Sumo Union.

In running the Czech Sumo Union, the Poriz family has been innovative in trying to improve sumo in their own country and in Europe. In particular they have developed sumo training facilities for elite athletes to use, both in Prague and in the north-east of the country. The family converted a room inside the Strahov Stadium into a training arena for elite Czech sumo athletes. The room comes complete with a clay *dohyō* set into the floor, and it resembles a university or community sumo club facility in Japan.⁵²¹ The family also purchased a small hotel in the north-eastern Czech tourist town of Jilemnice, and developed another small practice facility within it. Currently the Sumo Hotel, as the facility is called, is managed by Jaroslav senior. The hotel was established as the first European Training Centre and opened with much fanfare by the ESU and the Czech Sumo Union in 1998. The event attracted local political and sporting dignitaries and IFS representatives (including IFS president Tanaka Hidetoshi) to the ceremony. With its proximity to the Polish and German borders and being within comfortable driving distance of other Central European countries such as Austria, Hungary and Slovakia, this centre was designed as a central meeting place and training arena for the European Sumo Union.

In 2003, the European Training Centre in Jilemnice played host to another Poriz initiative, the newly formed Sumoliga, a series of sumo tournaments held monthly throughout the year that attracted clubs from the Czech Republic as well as teams from Hungary and Poland. The brainchild of Jaroslav, the idea was to have different venues or clubs within neighbouring countries host a tournament as part of a league. Each host would reciprocate with accommodation and facilities, so that athletes of all standards (not

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

⁵²¹ Around the sides of the room are full length mirrors, which betray the previous incarnation this room had as a ballet studio.

just the elite) from central Europe could gain regular competition for only the cost of their transportation. A host town had to guarantee two nights of accommodation, although it did not need to be hotel quality, for up to four visiting athletes per registered team in the league. The results from each month's competition would score points and these would accumulate over the year. The registration fees would be split as prize money at the end of the year between the top three teams and top three competitors in each individual weight class competition. As Jaroslav explains:

my thinking was...because all the other tournaments you've got to pay starting fees and everything, and you've got to pay for accommodation which is usually expensive, and so it happens so that only top guys go...but second tier guys, they won't go because they know they'll lose, and they'll lose in the first round. And there is no circuit for them...because, usually these countries, they don't have regional championships and local championships in sumo, so there's no way for them to get experience. So I was thinking that, if there's another like this, which could be in many countries, which doesn't have to be here – it's just that if the organiser would be able to guarantee everybody that they could stay there. And not in a hotel, maybe sleep in a hall, or whatever. It's just that they would be able to be there for free, then it's gonna help a lot of these countries.⁵²²

While this was an innovative and cost effective idea to expose more athletes to increased competition, the Sumoliga foundered on the reluctance of other centres, both Czech and elsewhere, to host the monthly tournaments. The idea eventually ended at the beginning of 2004, after only a handful of monthly tournaments had been held and increasingly athletes failed to give their commitment to attending tournaments in the second year. The event's venue, the European Training Centre, has also faded after initial promise. While the facilities are authentic, in as much as they replicate the facilities available in Japan, ultimately the space is too small to be the primary centre for European athletes, even the elite ones, to train. The quality of the experience notwithstanding, this venue cannot handle more than about 10 athletes. Not to be deterred, the Poriz family is planning with

⁵²² Jaroslav Poriz, interview by author, Jilemnice, Czech Republic, June 26, 2005.

local government officials to develop the gutted shell of a small power station in Jilemnice into a sports centre with a dedicated sumo arena complete with spectator seating.

Jaroslav's efforts have aimed to advance sumo in his country and to benefit surrounding countries as well. He does this through his love for sumo and because it assists in his desire to become the best sumo athlete he can be. His method of training closely fits 'traditional' Japanese patterns, which is not surprising as the Czech team, and Jaroslav in particular, have often travelled to Japan to train. This contact began firstly with university-level amateur athletes but then later evolved into entering professional sumo *heya* as guests to train and live for periods of time with the professional athletes.⁵²³ This became more common after a Czech junior athlete was recruited into *ōzumō* in 2001 by the *Naruto-beya* in Chiba prefecture. Jaroslav and the Czechs have since visited *Naruto-beya* on several occasions to train and to give their countryman support. Jaroslav carries on this Japanese-style training regime almost daily in Prague, often by himself. To compensate for having no other adult training partners, he has made one innovative concession to help him with *butsukari-geiko*, where one athlete slides another across the ring to build up leg muscles and technique. He has designed a training aid that consists of a metal barrel mounted with springs behind it and attached to a sled. The barrel is at a height that approximates a human torso, the springs allow some give when he makes contact, and the sled allows the whole device to be pushed along the clay. By adding weights to the sled and inside the barrel, Jaroslav can pick the resistance that he wishes to train against. This is a practical and necessary adaptation by an athlete who, beyond just performing amateur sumo, aspires to the ideals of sumo he finds in *ōzumō*. Jaroslav's desire for authenticity will be considered later in this chapter.

Sumo in New Zealand

New Zealand was one of the countries to attend the inaugural Sumo World Championships, and it has attended most tournaments since 1992. As happened in many

⁵²³ A *heya* is what is commonly referred to as a sumo stable, where athletes are collected under the guidance of a sumo elder (*oyakata*) to live and train.

other countries during the early stages of international amateur sumo, the national judo organisation became an incubator for the fledgling sumo movement. Although judo itself is not a particularly prominent sport in New Zealand, certainly at adult level, pockets of sumo activity sprang up in judo clubs around the country, in centres such as Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Wanganui. Basically, wherever there were interested athletes and someone willing to train, or train with them, a sumo club was formed. As with many other countries, however, the judo organisations kept sumo largely to themselves because of the benefits of subsidised overseas travel:

I gotta say that I'm disappointed with the judo people...Japan was very generous in offering all these airfares to go to Japan to fight, initially they kept it within their judo federations so that they could use those airfares to go to Japan. That would have been good if they'd hung in there, but none of them are in it now...and that's a pity 'cos they could've developed it a lot better than they did.⁵²⁴

Over time, the sport soon drew from a wider pool of athletes who came from sports as diverse as karate, boxing, rugby union and rugby league.

Part of the initial interest in sumo might have been to do with an English television package of sumo highlights shown on national television in the late 1980s. The programme showed highlights of ozumo tournaments from Japan interspersed with snippets of information about the prominent *rikishi*. It captured the public imagination at a time before amateur sumo was formally established in New Zealand. Following this interest, fight promoters began incorporating sumo into their shows along with more usual activities such as boxing and wrestling. Martin Stirling, who has since become the president of Sumo New Zealand, was one of these promoters who became involved, later existed at the fringes of the fledgling amateur sumo community, and who finally became involved in the official federation:

When sumo started to come out on TV on a regular basis, like with Saleva'a, Salé the Dump Truck ...I started taking an interest in sumo...around about 1990 or so. So we started training in sumo. I had a group of pro wrestlers and I said to them,

⁵²⁴ Martin Stirling, interview by author, Lower Hutt, New Zealand, April 2, 2006.

“Let’s try...let’s do this sumo stuff!” We actually tried to make contact with Japan and to see whether we could make an international connection for it. But we couldn’t make that connection. Around about the same time Terry Hill was running sumo up north, and ...around about that same time Japan, I think, decided to open sumo up to the rest of the world. So they made contact with countries through the judo federations. So, unbeknown to me, the judo federation had started picking up on sumo as well. We were still on the outer because we weren’t judo players...at least for the first probably couple of years that they were doing it. And then around about ’93 I was approached by Wayne Watson in Wanganui to get involved in the New Zealand Championships to go to Japan.⁵²⁵

While New Zealand was a regular attendee at the Sumo World Championships through the 1990s, the country’s administration began to wane around the turn of the 21st century. The sport had moved away from the influence of the judo organisation and, due to the retirements of athletes and a lack of a new generation of competitors emerging, the sport lost much of the impetus it had gained. There were fewer old hands to help guide the sport behind the scenes and soon there were only athletes in Wellington and Auckland. The interest in these cities continued due to the efforts of a handful of people who have committed themselves to the sport, but the infrastructure of the sport suffered:

I think for such a small organisation, there were a lot of politics involved. There were too many suspicions from one quarter to another, and some of the main players opted out. I didn’t really understand what effect it was going to have – I thought that the rest who were still in were going to keep going. And, it didn’t happen...We probably, because we were so small, lacked the ability to market it...keep it going. The administration side probably was the let down. But like any other sport, if it’s very amateur and there are only a few players, it may stagger...stagnate for a little while.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁵ Ibid. Many of the athletes involved were later folded into the New Zealand Sumo Federation.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

The cancellation by the IFS of the 2003 Sumo World Championships due to the SARS pandemic coincided with the last efforts of the New Zealand Sumo Federation. Although New Zealand had managed to send at least a few athletes to almost every Sumo World Championships before this, afterwards the country struggled as its administration slipped. Meetings had not been held and accounts had not been maintained, meaning continued incorporation under the name of the New Zealand Sumo Federation was impossible. Furthermore, being a viable organisation under New Zealand's sporting framework relied upon this status as an incorporated society to access whatever community funds were available. The old organisation could not be saved so after an initiative in 2005 by Martin and the current athletes to re-establish an amateur sumo body a new federation was incorporated under the name Sumo New Zealand. Unlike its European counterparts, Sumo New Zealand does not benefit from larger sporting agencies like the New Zealand Olympic Committee, and amateur sumo remains a tiny minority sport. The new organisation still has not resolved issues of athlete numbers, training facilities, creating greater awareness of the sport, and revenue flows, but its creation has signalled a commitment to try to start afresh.

Training sessions in New Zealand are localised and adapted to the participants' desires and the amenities available. Most notably, because the federation is split geographically, the training methods vary according to the instructor and the athletes present in each centre. In Wellington, Martin trains athletes at his gym in a selection of styles of martial arts, exposing his charges to sumo as well as kick-boxing, karate and boxing. In this way sumo has become part of a rounded martial arts education and the most promising sumo athletes are then earmarked for more training and competition in the sport. This style means that the Wellington athletes are not always completely sumo trained but they are strong and athletic from their other sports as well. In Auckland, brothers Andrew and Bill Perenara began training in 2003 in an Auckland gym complex under the guidance of recently retired Fred Craig, New Zealand's most experienced sumo athlete. Training with Fred allowed the brothers to pick up the requisite skills for sumo from someone who had competed for over a decade. However, the gym was a barely adequate venue in which to train for sumo because the matting they used was thin and did not allow them to fully

execute moves to completion: the training bout would be halted as an athlete was about to be thrown to the ground. The training sessions would end with Fred having the brothers do resistance training in the pool next door.⁵²⁷ After about a year of training with Fred, the brothers decided to train together by themselves. In part the decision was made to reduce their travelling time and costs but was also because it allowed them greater flexibility to choose a training schedule not reliant on Fred's availability. A further matter was that the brothers felt Fred's style of pushing and thrusting (*oshi zumō*) did not fit with their desire to grab their opponent's *mawashi* and use *yotsu zumō* to win the match.⁵²⁸

However, while the previous facility had not been ideal, there were fewer options for the brothers in training closer to home. Andrew's solution was to make a *dohyō* of sorts in his garden by cutting a circle in the grass, packing down the earth and covering it with sand. Despite the space limitations, this provided a venue at which to train, and allowed the athletes to execute throws with little danger of injury. It also approximated the clay surface of the *dohyō* and allowed easier sliding of the feet in *suriashi* and *butsukari-geiko* than trying the same on an indoor mat.⁵²⁹

Andrew's back garden became the unofficial headquarters for sumo training in Auckland during 2006 and 2007, and other aspiring athletes journeyed there to train. The training sessions were conducted in daylight and when the weather was good, and were held under the guidance of those considered senior enough to impart knowledge.⁵³⁰

Consequently, the exercises and sequence of training drills depended on who was conducting the training, what they valued, or the particular skills they wished to exercise. It also meant that each training session varied from others and there was only a loose

⁵²⁷ This training style was peculiar to Fred and one which he had developed during his time as an athlete. Weighing well over 200 kilograms meant that training in the pool was an effective way for Fred to work with less resistance and strain on his body. The Perenara brothers, though slightly smaller, are still very large sumo athletes and this style of training had benefits for them as well.

⁵²⁸ Andrew Perenara, personal communication, 14 April 2005.

⁵²⁹ *Suriashi*, literally 'sliding feet,' is a training drill to practise sliding rather than lifting the feet while moving on the *dohyō*. By keeping the feet on the surface of the *dohyō* rather than lifting them the athlete retains balance and stability while moving. It should be noted that at training sessions in New Zealand most of these moves, except perhaps *shiko*, are hardly ever referred to by their Japanese names (and most of the participants do not know the names anyway). Counting is usually done in English.

⁵³⁰ In most cases this was Andrew, who began training a group of local teenagers for a year, but at other times included input or guidance from others such as Bill or even me.

structure adhered to. When the training group was predominantly adults, peer-guidance during training was also strong. The athletes would give suggestions or advice to others based on their own experiences or observations, or at other times participants would ask questions about how to execute or counter a particular move. As an acknowledgement of the Perenara brothers' Māori heritage, they began and ended training sessions not with the traditional Japanese *sonkyo*, where the athletes squat on their haunches, empty their minds and concentrate on breathing, but with a Māori prayer, a *karakia*, instead. In this, the assembled members prayed for protection for their activities in the ring.

Sumo in Australia

Amateur sumo in Australia began in 1992, as it did in New Zealand, with approaches made by the IFS to judo clubs. In the early years athletes were selected from judo backgrounds and the administration of the sport was on an *ad hoc* basis to provide a team annually for Sumo World Championships. Australia has attended most Sumo World Championships to date and has sent a team to all the Oceania Sumo Championships so far, even if sometimes the team is small in number. Despite a much bigger population than New Zealand can boast, the Australian federation has also struggled to draw attention to itself and attract competitors to the sport:

I can go on until the cows come home about the Australian Sumo Federation, and not actually tell anybody that we have no actual training members at the moment, and if I have to produce information, I can show photographs of two dozen wrestlers at the height, we've had some major time, but it's the waves that are the problem and somehow between now and then holding it together... Tokyo wants to hear that we're doing wonderfully and we've got an organisation in each state and there are 200 people doing sumo, but the reality is different.⁵³¹

Australian amateur sumo is based primarily within one club in Sydney. The team has trained in a variety of locations, searching for both a home and ready accessibility for

⁵³¹ Peter Armstrong, interview by author, Sydney, Australia, February 5, 2006.

prospective members. For a number of years the Australian sumo organisation, Ozsumo, was housed in the Kodokan Judo Club founded by Ivor Endicott-Davies in the far northern suburbs of Sydney: “When they started out, judo and sumo were pretty much running hand-in-hand and Ivor bankrolled that, but as the years have gone by, and there’s been less financial incentive in terms of goodies, people have not been so interested in sumo and have gone to judo.”⁵³² However, during the course of my research the organisation considered moving away from this club due to accessibility problems, finding the lengthy car trip just too difficult for attracting new members and maintaining the ones they already had. In an effort to make the club more accessible, two members began an extra Saturday session at a community recreation centre much closer to the centre of the city. This had only limited success because the facilities were not as good for setting up sumo bouts and often only those two members turned up. In 2006 a more permanent relocation to a sports hall on the site of the main venues for the 2000 Sydney Olympics took place. The area is now home to a number of sports, and the sumo club is using a hall that is also used by Judo New South Wales. It is hoped that a more easily accessible central position will help with the promotion of the sport and will begin to address the slide in membership numbers in the past five years, even though the cost of using the new facility is much higher.⁵³³

In Australia, amateur sumo is mostly driven by athletes and administrators who have strong personal and professional connections to Japan. Rowan Klein began after an interest in *ōzumō* was sparked by a stint working in Japan. He found that *amateur* sumo provided a niche for his tall and slender frame and allowed him to fulfil his desire to compete in sumo. Likewise, John Traill became involved in amateur sumo after watching it on television in Japan and he returned to Australia keen to put his newfound interest into practice. As president Peter Armstrong explains:

⁵³² Peter Armstrong, interview by author, Sydney, Australia, February 5, 2006.

⁵³³ Athletes from other cities have shown sporadic interest, even travelling to Sydney for training. In the last months of this study amateur sumo gain a presence on the Gold Coast, serving the border region of northern New South Wales and southern Queensland. The athletes are predominantly freestyle wrestlers and *judōka* who train under the guidance of a Japanese wrestling coach with an interest in sumo. Ironically, as numbers rise on the Gold Coast, there is a decrease in numbers in Sydney.

the people who are interested in it tend to be the ones who've got some prior experience and some appreciation of its cultural elements. Otherwise it's just another martial art – you can go to anything and exercise, but people who have some appreciation of what sumo means in terms of its long history and its traditions, are likely to stay, unless they're put off for other reasons. So they have been the mainstays over the years. So we've still got people like John and Rowan... The ones who have some sort of appreciation of all the meaning are the ones who stay.⁵³⁴

Australian training sessions follow a structure reminiscent of Japanese sessions, undoubtedly because of the early influence of the first openweight World Champion, Saitō Kazuo. While still a university student, Saitō spent a year in Australia and helped develop the athletes there. Now the sumo coach at his alma mater, Nihon Taiiku University, Saitō maintains contact with the Australian Sumo Federation by bringing groups of his athletes on visits to Sydney.⁵³⁵ In this way, the Australian athletes have been drilled in a Japanese style of training and have continued to pass this on to new athletes who join the sport.⁵³⁶ Moreover, the occasional reconnection with the visiting university students and their coach unintentionally helps to reinforce what was originally taught and maintains the Australian group's adherence to the original blueprint. Nevertheless, the Australian group still has periods during its training sessions where there is significant peer-guidance to help hone fighting strategy and improve technique, aspects which are not apparent in Japanese training sessions where it is usually only the coach who instructs and directs. John or Peter tends to instruct the Australian group during the *shiko*, *suriashi* and other exercises. However, when the training session moves on to *butsukari-geiko* and *moshi-ai*, the practice bouts against the other athletes where the winner remains in the ring until defeated, the senior athletes assembled will impart knowledge on how to cope with a particular move or on strategies to defeat an opponent.

⁵³⁴ Peter Armstrong, interview by author, Sydney, Australia, February 5, 2006.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ One example of this Japanese influence is perhaps that the counting during the exercises is done in Japanese and the moves are described using their proper Japanese names.

Styling and authenticity

The above examples demonstrate that, in effect, hybridisation is apparent wherever amateur sumo is performed. Each national federation operates in its own way due to a combination of circumstances and conscious decisions. Their enactments of amateur sumo are, therefore, all different as a result of these factors. The changes to amateur sumo in each location are natural and necessary adaptations that suit the environment in which the sport is conducted. Although sumo is administered and practised differently across Europe and Oceania, the athletes and administrators are seldom consciously trying to subvert amateur sumo and its fundamental form and content. The subtle changes that might be enacted can be rationalised through the belief that amateur sumo retains the cultural odour of its Japanese origins and the participants still feel they are being true to the (Japanese) spirit of the sport.

What occurs is a series of localised enactments of amateur sumo, but done in the spirit or approximate style of what the participants feel is proper and appropriate to the sport. In many ways they aspire to some sort of largely non-existent global standard so that their sumo will be effective, in terms of results, and accepted, in terms of form and etiquette, in international competitions. While training in their own ways, no national federation or athlete wants to be seen by their peers or the IFS as harming the sport of amateur sumo. Allowing for localised changes without changing the sport itself might seem contradictory but, as William Kelly explains, it can be seen as a matter of style:

One cultural idiom for expressing relations of affinity and opposition is that of sporting ‘style’, generally taken to be a distinctive albeit elusive configuration of coaching philosophy, game strategy, player attitudes, and team social relations. Individual players and coaches have styles; teams have style, but the notion is used most broadly (and most problematically) as national styles of sports...Sports styling is in effect, a core grammatical construction of sports globalization.⁵³⁷

⁵³⁷ Kelly, “Is Baseball a Global Sport?” 193. There has been much academic discussion on the term globalisation, which I do not intend to enter into here. Globalisation can most easily be defined as the localisation of global ideas, movements, products and entities.

Kelly uses this notion of style to specifically explain the global manifestations of baseball, where “styling has become a response to American claims of authenticity and authority.”⁵³⁸ I am suggesting that the same idea can be applied to amateur sumo because, like baseball, the sport can be seen as “a sportscape of plural manifestations across a global playing field but with a single centre that continues to claim the aura and authority of authenticity.”⁵³⁹ In this case, of course, the centre of authenticity is Japan, and it retains that position despite there being other centres important to sumo development, including some considered in this chapter.

That non-Japanese athletes might aspire to replicate Japanese sumo is not surprising. In the past, the International Sumo Federation arranged for national federations to use training facilities in Japan, and the expertise of the sumo instructors therein, in order to improve the sport internationally. The facilities are often better than in other countries and, for a non-Japanese athlete coming from a small pool of sumo knowledge, Japan presents something of an oasis of information, money and opportunities to improve their sumo training and skills.⁵⁴⁰ Above all, however, it is the broad sumo experience of Japanese coaches and athletes that impresses, as Claudia explains,

you look up to [the Japanese competitors]. You know they have a coach who has been taught from his father, from his father, from his father – so there’s a big tradition in the way they train and in how they train, and I must say up until I went to Nichidai myself, well it’s the image I had from them is right so they are training like I thought they were training, they’re training as hard and as often as I thought they would.⁵⁴¹

Beyond the amateur sumo instruction available in Japan or from Japanese groups visiting various countries, the availability of *ōzumō* broadcasts via the internet and satellite

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 194.

⁵⁴⁰ Japanese sumo is often used as a model throughout the world in amateur sumo training sessions, with the sessions in Europe and Oceania described above all taking this basis and localising them as appropriate.

⁵⁴¹ Claudia de Graauw, interview by author, Rotterdam, Netherlands, July 16, 2005. Nichidai is the Japanese language contraction for Nihon University, a private university in Tokyo whose strong sumo club is headed by IFS President Tanaka Hidetoshi.

television provides another source of sumo from which to learn and to which international amateur athletes might aspire. That it is a professional sport and displays athletes who dedicate their daily lives to sumo training, means that it produces the best exponents of sumo across the board. It exists as a paragon of the sport in terms of technical aptitude, as well as the added factor that *ōzumō* is often seen as the ‘true’ repository of sumo tradition and orthodoxy.

Kenji Tierney raises the issue of authenticity in amateur sumo in the final chapter of his thesis. In looking at the practice of amateur sumo in Los Angeles through two tournaments on the same weekend, he comments that:

As sumo has travelled to the United States, much has been lost in the translation or, more accurately, sumo has been distilled. Just as the “simplicity” of sumo has great importance and meaning in Japan, that simplicity has allowed for numerous substitutions to occur...As amateur sumo does not allow for the elaborate hairstyles, nor the silk *mawashi*, and the like; the wrestlers, themselves, are left to their own devices. While most of the belts are ordered from Japan, some take the opportunity to fashion their own. Similarly, the impossibility, or rather impracticality of building a “real” *dohyō* has made international sumo contest largely take place on gym mats.⁵⁴²

Silk *mawashi* and elaborate hairstyles aside, the implication is that sumo outside of Japan is not meeting the same standards of sumo within Japan. Here, however, Tierney is muddying the waters by assuming the standard to be that of professional sumo. One of Tierney’s respondents, a Japanese-American sumo judge involved in an amateur sumo tournament in Los Angeles, bemoaned the loss of ‘real’ sumo practice, which he felt began with correct adherence to the hand gestures before a bout. His comments to Tierney imply that knowing the gestures is but one of the skills necessary to participate in sumo and that it is an indictment on the coaches for not properly teaching this, presumably just as it would be for them not to teach their athletes how to tie the *mawashi*

⁵⁴² Tierney, “Wrestling with Tradition,” 342.

or how to execute a particular throw or grip. As Tierney explains: “For him, the professionals, with the “proper” rituals, were the role models. To him, understanding the rituals and meanings behind them was the start. The wrestlers he saw that day did not understand the basics, the essence of sumo.”⁵⁴³

However, considering the ‘essence’ of sumo, or even its ‘basics’ is a discursive minefield that comes from amateur sumo being different to other martial arts/sports such as judo, karate and aikido. Unlike judo and aikido, for example, the teaching of amateur sumo does not include a philosophical element. The concept of *sumōdō*, a philosophical ‘way’ that underpins the performance of sumo, does exist and it is ‘applied’ to professional sumo by athletes and observers alike. However, it is a sense of stoicism and reserved masculinity as much as an articulated philosophical theory. Furthermore, there are no specific basic techniques of amateur sumo that are tested and approved, as happens with *kata* (forms) in karate. Additionally, there is no pathway of advancement in amateur sumo beyond results in tournaments because the *dan* and *kyū* rankings in amateur sumo do not demonstrate a particular level of ability that has been reached. Rather, the rankings used acknowledge accomplishments in the sport, such as victories in major tournaments and length of service combined with significant contribution. Hence, each exponent of amateur sumo is not judged upon an understanding and ability to perform the basics of sumo, or its ‘essence.’ Instead, the ‘basics’ of the sport are considered to be the fundamental movements and exercises needed to develop the body for sumo, although there is no set pattern to follow (except perhaps what is done in practice in Japan at either amateur or professional levels). Success in amateur sumo is largely determined through results as the sport is designed around competition and practice bouts (which would be the equivalent of *randori* sparring in other martial arts). The gestures before a bout have become ritualistic, as they have even in professional sumo, and they are perfunctorily enacted when time at a tournament is not available. Thus, where is the benchmark by which the athletes should be judged on their authenticity in the performance of amateur sumo?

⁵⁴³ Ibid., 341-2.

While *ōzumō* is the most identifiable enactment of sumo, it is far-fetched to suggest that an amateur sumo tournament anywhere in the world, even in Japan, would and should approximate professional sumo. Certainly, a comparison between *ōzumō* as the bastion of ‘real’ sumo and the amateur sumo performed in the United States, as Tierney seems to be doing, shows the two to be poles apart. However, rather than the American athletes or the sumo they perform being “lost in translation”, what Tierney has observed in the United States is the localised practice of sumo, which in itself is not that far removed from the way *amateur* sumo would be enacted in many other locations, including Japan.

Nevertheless, there are those who hold their personal standards to those not just of Japanese amateur sumo but to those of *ōzumō* itself. Instead of ignoring these rituals and other aspects that are sometimes glossed over in amateur sumo, they, like Tierney and some of his respondents, seek to enhance the authenticity of their sport by adhering (in their own ways) to Japanese practices or overlaying aspects of *ōzumō* onto their performance of amateur sumo.⁵⁴⁴ Yet, to use Kelly’s ideas further, what develops could be seen as ‘uncanny mimicry’, a combination of the Freudian sense of “the unnerving sensation of encountering something both familiar and foreign at the same time” with a product that “is both the pale copy destined to fall short of an original and an aggressive appropriation that imaginatively exceeds the model.”⁵⁴⁵

One such example is Jaroslav Poriz who aspires to ideals that he sees in professional sumo and observes in the paragons of sumo athletes - professional *rikishi*. In trying to become a better athlete and to explore more deeply the ideas that underpin sumo, he began a personal journey of both physical and mental development. This has taken him and his Czech team-mates to Japan to train in professional sumo stables, where Jaroslav has sought to develop the mental and spiritual approaches underpinning the sport while also improving physically. This passage of personal enlightenment through sumo has made Jaroslav something of a disciple of *sumōdō*, the ‘way of sumo’ or the spiritual and

⁵⁴⁴ This was a particularly contentious issue in the short-lived World Sumo League, which will be considered in Chapter Six, and became a source of conflict between Big Boy Productions and the IFS.

⁵⁴⁵ Kelly, “Is Baseball a Global Sport?” 194

philosophical elements that are attributed to its performance. He explains the inter-relationship of sumo and *sumōdō* thus:

Sumō is the other side of Sumōdō. It encompasses Sumōdō, including Keiko [training], and the competitive side Shōbu [competition].

Sumōdō is the philosophical, ethical foundation, a teaching about the Way of Life, how you should live, Sumō is the practical means, how this noble end is accomplished, via Keiko and fighting in contests - the sports side of the philosophical idea – Sumō.⁵⁴⁶

His exploration of *sumōdō* has been chronicled on a personal website that also acts as something of an encyclopaedia of sumo terms (using his definitions). He expresses his views on sumo and *sumōdō*, and his personal philosophy in terms of his own presence in amateur sumo, in the following terms:

Sumōdō is the realization of the underlying principles of Sumō...It is the understanding that Value is derived from Fighting for attaining your Goals. The Goals of Sumō are to Prove Yourself, to demonstrate that you possess Superior Power via which you demolish your Opponent. It's very simple. Yet this simple objective is very hard to achieve, since it is very hard to Fight on Power against an Enemy whom you recognize to be stronger...Sumō is Chikarakurabe [a test of strength] and nothing else. That's why in Sumō Value comes only from Power Sumō and nothing else. If your Opponent falls because you jumped aside rather than Fight him, you have achieved nothing. You Win but you fail in what you should do – Prove Yourself.

Because Sumōdō is so simple yet hard, it leads to Enlightenment.⁵⁴⁷

This philosophical ideal, or 'way', is the sumo equivalent of the philosophical elements seen to typify other martial arts such as karate and judo. For Jaroslav:

⁵⁴⁶ Jaroslav Poriz, "Sumou," <http://www.shiroikuma.com/index.php?cmd=Sumou> (accessed 1 February, 2007).

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

sumo is more than a sport. I think a sport is a tool to discovering what you can be as a man...I think sumo is in effect...a way you can take towards working on yourself and improving yourself as a man, and I think that's what Czech Sumo Union's goal is. Not to promote sumo as a sport in a sense as a way to win trophies, but I think our goal is to promote sumo as a way of you personally overcoming yourself in every instance, in every *rikishi* that you can cultivate yourself as a man and fulfil the responsibility, which I think every man has to himself – and that is to excel; to overcome your own weakness. And I think sumo is the greatest tool for that.⁵⁴⁸

Jaroslav uses sumo as a personal journey and test of his strength, commitment and power. He is driven by his daily practice routines, and the physical and mental focus these give him. He is striving to achieve a sort of purity and consistency of spirit and demeanour through daily practise of sumo training. Furthermore, he tries to emulate professional *rikishi* in his engagement with the sport, his relationships with others and the manner in which he conducts himself both inside and outside the *dohyō*. Jaroslav is placing *ōzumō* as the philosophical and physical paragon of sumo and judging his performance, and that of others, against that ideal:

I don't think [amateur sumo] has a deeper message. I don't look down upon amateur sumo, because I do it, and I'm grateful that I can do that, because if there wasn't amateur sumo I couldn't do sumo, so I couldn't try to do what I try to do. So I think it's also a vehicle, but I don't think it has any inherent...any other idea that's driving it. I think it's a sports contest which can bring you towards the ideas that sumo professes, but for that I think only in Japan. Because in Japan I think there's an overflow of the *sumōdō* ideas that have shaped *ōzumō*. They're actually quite alike in amateur sumo in Japan too. Because I think most of the coaches and many athletes they worship the same thing. They worship not being weak, being stronger – even if your opponent is stronger. Trying to dominate or come in...attack all the

⁵⁴⁸ Jaroslav Poriz, interview by author, Jilemnice, Czech Republic, June 26, 2005.

time. That'll overflow into amateur sumo I think it's real only in Japan. I don't think it's like that any other place – definitely not in Europe.⁵⁴⁹

Jaroslav judges himself on the quality of his sumo, even if he loses, rather than on a win-at-all-costs mentality. However, competition does play its part in Jaroslav's goals within sumo: by his own admission he is hoping that success in competition, ultimately as World Champion, will allow him to publish his ideas on sumo and *sumōdō*. He believes any results achieved will only give credence to what he writes, perhaps by showing that his philosophy and attitude can bear fruit in competition.

In a wider sense, Jaroslav appears to be seeking some form of 'Japaneseness' or 'authenticity' within amateur sumo which (he believes) he can enact. His attitude towards sumo, and the almost unattainable purity that he attaches to the sport, echoes the types of English language writing on Japanese martial arts and culture that Elise Edwards criticised as representing

Japanese esthetic culture and its institutions... as repositories of a timeless and unique Japanese essence. The martial arts and "samurai ethos" they cultivate, like other aspects of esthetic culture, are imagined as a realm free from the influence of social and political forces and redolent of "the" true Japanese spirit.⁵⁵⁰

Part of seeking this Japanese spirit could be seen in Jaroslav's adoption of a Japanese name since beginning amateur sumo. During his time in Japan he was given the moniker ShiroiKuma (White Bear) by the great Hawaiian *rikishi* Konishiki. It loosely resembles a *shikona*⁵⁵¹ that professional athletes have during their active days in *ōzumō*. Jaroslav uses this name openly in amateur sumo circles, including putting it in place of his name in the results on the IFS website when he was the webmaster.⁵⁵² Although the nickname was given to him by a senior *rikishi*, it is doubtful that he is referred to as ShiroiKuma when

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ Elise Edwards, "Theorizing the Cultural Importance of Play: Anthropological approaches to sports and the recreation of Japan," in *A Companion to the Anthropology of Japan*, ed. J. Robertson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 289.

⁵⁵¹ A *shikona* is the stage name of a professional competitor and is usually granted by the athlete's master. It is to have an auspicious feel or meaning to it, often quite poetically, and is to grant luck to the athlete. *Shikona* can be, and are, changed during the course of a career, usually to mark a promotion or another worthy feat. They can also be changed to change a string of bad luck or upon demotion to a lesser rank.

⁵⁵² However, in official records he remains Jaroslav Poriz.

he visits the professional sumo stables. The name itself is not generally poetic enough to be a real *shikona* and the use of it by actual *rikishi* would be odd as Jaroslav still remains an ‘outsider’, even though he is well-connected in the professional sumo world. In a sense, his use of this name perhaps is a prime example of William Kelly’s uncanny mimicry.

* * *

With the IFS’s decision to establish the continental sumo unions in 1995, amateur sumo began to develop in different ways across the globe. As was explained in Chapter Two, the founding of the continental sumo unions meant the IFS need not have to micro-manage the sport’s development by dealing with each national federation in turn, as had happened since 1992. This freed up the resources and time of the IFS so that they could pursue other avenues, such as lobbying to have sumo recognised as an Olympic sport.

Meanwhile, the different continental regions were given relative autonomy in their development, and this has led to subsequent national variations in the way the sport has been administered and practiced. Amateur sumo is being reterritorialised through multiple localisations and the inscription of new meanings upon the sport in different contexts. The concrete examples of how the sport is run in New Zealand, Australia, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic all show that amateur sumo has developed according to local influences and due to the efforts of enthusiasts in each location. The unevenness in how the sport is funded, where the money comes from and how much time and effort it takes to sustain the sport all have an impact on the administration of amateur sumo and the subsequent participation of athletes and administrators alike.

These factors, and the individuals involved, also have an influence on the way that amateur sumo is practiced in each area. Certain national federations have been able to train with their neighbours or to travel to compete and train abroad, often in Japan. Poorer federations have to make do with their own pool of talent and the resources they have at hand, which might include broadcasts of professional sumo. In this way, each country develops a slightly different approach to the sport and the execution of its techniques, and

what emerges in each location is best described as a local style. However, none of these national federations would acknowledge that they are drastically altering the sport of amateur sumo. The respondents in this study feel they are not taking sumo away from its Japanese roots. Rather, each is trying to emulate Japanese sumo in the best way they can. Certain athletes, such as Jaroslav Poriz, are also trying to reproduce the ‘proper’ and ‘authentic’ sumo they observe in *ōzumō*.

Nevertheless, while the prominence of Japanese sumo is acknowledged by the sport’s participants, and the cultural odour of sumo is clearly recognised as Japanese, the emergence of autonomy in continental administration is starting to have an effect on the development of the sport as a whole. Indeed, while the continents are in charge of their own affairs and charismatic leaders have emerged with their own ideas on how to take the sport forward, amateur sumo has not lost its ties to Japan, and the International Sumo Federation remains heavily Japanese controlled. How this central decision making sits with the increasing power the continents have will be considered in the following chapter.

6. Beyond the IFS: Resistance, agency and control in amateur sumo

In 1995, the IFS moved to an organisational structure which placed much of the day-to-day power in the hands of the continental sumo unions. This in turn made the national federations more responsible for themselves and the activities within their continent and freed up IFS resources for pursuing its Olympic goal.⁵⁵³ Despite the continental unions having regional autonomy, this has not translated into having power within the decision-making processes of the IFS. The heavily Japanese-controlled IFS Executive⁵⁵⁴ holds power in terms of policy and direction for amateur sumo, which has led to frustration in some quarters because administrators outside of Japan feel that they have little or no input into the future of their sport. In particular, the brains trust of the European Sumo Union, which has been particularly active and progressive in developing amateur sumo, has felt that its ideas to improve the sport's administration have been ignored by the IFS.

Added to the concern that the IFS Executive makes decisions with little input from outside is the lack of transparency in their actions. Much of the administration of amateur sumo happens without the national federations having a clear understanding of why the IFS is making certain decisions. There is also no information released on the finances of the IFS or the resources it has available. The opaque procedures of the IFS Executive have made non-Japanese administrators with experience in other international sports unhappy. They feel that the IFS is not operating to standards that they would expect of an international sporting body or, in the case of the European officials, to standards by which they are administering amateur sumo at a continental level.

However, this frustration has most often manifested itself in only minor ways, in line with what James Scott has called 'everyday resistance'. There has been little alternative to the IFS's framework for the discontented members and so they have had to make do with running their own affairs largely unmolested but having to acquiesce to the IFS's

⁵⁵³ Put simply, the International Sumo Federation runs the Sumo World Championships, the *Shinsumō* World Championships, and the Junior Sumo World Championships directly, while it empowers the continental unions and national federations to run tournaments in their own jurisdiction under the same rules (but with regional and national variations as and where appropriate).

⁵⁵⁴ Internally, it is also sometimes referred to as the Board of Directors or the IFS Executive Board.

decisions without being able to contribute to the decision-making process. Gripping to trusted confidantes, feigned ignorance of or reluctant compliance with IFS directives, and foot dragging in administrative matters have been demonstrable signs of discontent rather than there being any overt resistance or conflict.⁵⁵⁵

Against this backdrop of dissatisfaction with the IFS, a series of tournaments for elite male athletes in 2006 presented an alternative for certain administrators and athletes to profit from amateur sumo and to have a greater say in how the sport operated. The International Sumo Federation agreed to an approach from an American promoter to stage an amateur sumo tournament in New York in late 2005. The IFS was keen to have amateur sumo seen by a wider audience in a televised event, and the European Sumo Union saw the potential to have some of its best athletes on display and for them to earn prize money for their efforts. This tournament proved successful enough for the promoter to plan a World Sumo League (WSL) tour of North America in 2006 using a number of American and European athletes. The potential to earn a living from sumo, to channel money to the national federations involved, and ultimately to have some input on how this tour would develop excited both the athletes and the European administrators who had assisted with the original tournament. However, the IFS, later stating they had been unhappy with the way the New York event had been handled, withdrew its support and threatened sanctions against those involved in the WSL. Ostensibly, the IFS was concerned with the way the WSL was presenting amateur sumo, as a pseudo-professional blend of amateur sumo and Asian mysticism that sought to emulate and exceed *ōzumō*. However, its opposition can also be seen as an effort to maintain IFS control over the sport. Despite threats of retribution, many athletes (and some administrators) continued their support of the World Sumo League, in direct conflict with the IFS.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁵ Points of particular concern have been raised in conversation with IFS administrators or in polite emails to the IFS office asking if any solution can be found. From the attitude apparent at IFS Executive and IFS Congress meetings, there is an expectation that little will be said in response to the matters brought forward. There is certainly little time set aside for discussion of particular matters. Personal observation, IFS Executive meeting, Osaka, October 15, 2006.

⁵⁵⁶ Others in amateur sumo gave tacit approval to such a venture, even though they were not involved. Still others sat on the fence to see what would transpire before they committed to either side.

This chapter investigates the building tensions within amateur sumo between the autonomy of the regions and the Japanese-controlled International Sumo Federation. In particular, the conflict centred around the World Sumo League shows how an alternative vision for promoting amateur sumo threatened the ‘Olympic Dream’ and challenged the IFS’s continued hold on international amateur sumo. The existence of two competing pathways for amateur sumo created a power struggle within the sport. The International Sumo Federation represented the ‘legitimate’ power in the sport, but one which had made a segment of its membership disillusioned. The World Sumo League stood as the ‘illegitimate’ rival that promised potential riches for athletes and their national federations, seemingly without the strictures apparent in the IFS. This opportunity provided a flashpoint where the hitherto ‘everyday resistance’ to, and lingering discontent with, the way the IFS operates gave way to open defiance and individual agency on the part of the participants.

Power, control, ‘everyday resistance’ and discontent with the IFS

James Scott identifies that resistance need not be seen only in orchestrated instances of large scale uprising or collective defiance. Instead, he highlights the resistance apparent in “the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on.”⁵⁵⁷ Specifically, Scott was interested in class struggle and the responses of the peasantry towards the landed classes. However, his perspectives are useful to apply to those who are without obvious (ruling) power within a particular framework because, although those in power:

may write the basic script for the play... within its confines, truculent or disaffected actors find sufficient room for maneuver to suggest subtly their disdain for the proceedings. The necessary lines may be spoken, the gesture made, but it is clear that many of the actors are just going through the motions and do not have their hearts in the performance.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁷ James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), xvi.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

By using the above methods of resistance, or others at their disposal, these seemingly ‘powerless’ groups and individuals are able to resist the prevailing power structure. Such methods are effective because “[t]hey require little or no coordination or planning; they make use of implicit understandings and informal networks; they often represent a form of individual self-help; they typically avoid any direct, symbolic confrontation with authority.”⁵⁵⁹

Within an amateur sumo context, everyday resistance might be employed by individuals, small groups, national federations, and continental unions against any locus of power that seems to ‘oppress’ them or with which they do not agree. Although resistance to a continental sumo union like the European Sumo Union, to a national federation or even to a smaller sub-national group, such as a particular training group or a coach, are possible,⁵⁶⁰ here I specifically focus on the negative responses to the International Sumo Federation and its administration of amateur sumo worldwide. In the course of my research I was introduced to this ‘everyday resistance’ a number of times in interviews and casual conversations with sumo participants, as well as in some of the actions I observed. The negative reactions from disaffected sumo participants to the IFS and its aims might be as wide-ranging as non-compliance with directives, foot dragging in administrative matters, non-attendance at meetings or tournaments, acting duplicitously, asking ‘awkward’ questions, griping privately to those in or out of the sport, or even airing concerns to researchers during interviews!⁵⁶¹ Most often, everyday resistance took the form of complaining to others, including myself, about issues of contention.⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, xvi.

⁵⁶⁰ What is more, these types of everyday resistance are probably happening in many different centres of amateur sumo practice. However, the focus of this study is on the broader picture of international sumo and the nature of my research did not allow for prolonged periods within specific groups so I am not able to comment on the rifts and the methods of resistance employed at various local levels.

⁵⁶¹ While other actions, such as withholding affiliation fees until specifically asked for them at the annual Sumo World Championships, tardy completion of the necessary administration for registering teams prior to deadlines, and responding to communication in their own time could be considered as elements of resistance, they may also result from the vagaries of volunteer administration and being pressed for time.

⁵⁶² In the course of explaining their grievances, participants would also sometimes allude to other forms of everyday resistance such as feigning ignorance or false compliance.

When conducting interviews, my specific interest was in gaining a clearer picture of the relationships between the regions/nations and the IFS, not ‘digging for dirt’ or looking for conflict. However, several interview participants were happy to explain to me their grievances with the International Sumo Federation or the way that the sport is run.⁵⁶³ In particular, the causes of friction are twofold: the IFS decision-making hierarchy is too controlled by Japan to effectively represent the interests of others; and, there is a lack of transparency and democracy in the way the IFS operates and the way decisions are made.

In the first instance, as the previous chapter showed, the continental sumo unions have autonomy over aspects of the sport’s development in their region. However, when decisions are made by the International Sumo Federation, the regions are given little regard. Peter Armstrong highlights the problem that most dissatisfied participants have: “[that the] IFS is very controlling and very centralised...the process, the power of the regions is totally nominal.”⁵⁶⁴ This happens because the policy decisions are made by the IFS Executive, not the caucus of national member federations that make up the wider IFS community. This Executive is heavily Japanese-controlled with only two representatives from each continental sumo union within a group of close to thirty officials.⁵⁶⁵ Despite the dozen representatives from the different continental sumo unions, such a large Japanese voting bloc presents an impenetrable wall at the top of the International Sumo Federation, much to the frustration of Peter Armstrong:

⁵⁶³ During the span of my research I also became involved with Sumo New Zealand and the Oceania Sumo Union in administrative capacities. Because of this, I have been able to empathise with their positions, have found myself sharing some of their concerns, and have even resisted the IFS in my own ways.

⁵⁶⁴ Peter Armstrong, interview by author, Sydney, Australia, February 5, 2006.

⁵⁶⁵ The number of IFS Executive members is not fixed because the president has the discretion to appoint IFS vice-presidents. In theory the composition is: a president, six vice-presidents representing each continental sumo union, an unspecified number of appointed vice presidents (almost always Japanese), a secretary general, one director for each continental sumo union, and seven Japanese directors. This means there are at most twelve representatives who are not part of the *Nihon Sumō Renmei*, while there is technically an infinite number of Japanese representatives. Furthermore, the strength of the ‘Japanese’ voting block is increased by some of the continental representatives from Asia, North America and South America being Japanese expatriates or having Japanese ancestry. They generally have maintained strong personal ties with the *Nihon Sumō Renmei*. Additionally, due to cost, the non-attendance of at least some of the continental sumo union representatives at each annual meeting (held in conjunction with the Sumo World Championships) weakens the non-Japanese vote. See Article 14, International Sumo Federation, “Rules,” <http://www.amateursumo.com/ifs/rules.htm> (accessed December 1, 2008).

it really annoys me to go into meetings and find that everything is, in fact – there’s barely an agenda, the agenda hasn’t been circulated beforehand, the conclusions and discussions are then announced and then they’re rubber-stamped and so the policies are basically decided by the Japanese executive who then give it to the continental presidents who then go down to all the national representatives and it all happens in one day and the whole thing is really no more than a charade, if you want to call it.⁵⁶⁶

Stephen Gadd bemoans the fact that “the IFS really do what the IFS want to do.”⁵⁶⁷ He is unimpressed that a large entity within the sport like the European Sumo Union is not listened to when it presents ideas to the IFS Executive:

you would think that [Europe] had a bit of clout with the IFS, but really, if the IFS don’t want to take on board what you’re saying then that’s it. You can protest as much as you want but you’re not going to change it – they say, “we’ve decided” and that’s it.⁵⁶⁸

This is particularly concerning for members of the executive from outside of Japan, for many have experience in the upper echelons of other international sporting bodies such as for wrestling and judo.⁵⁶⁹

Even with their numerical advantage on the Executive (or perhaps because of it), there is an expectation from the Japanese hierarchy of the IFS that there should be little discussion and minimal conflict within the confines of the Executive meeting.

Furthermore, once decisions are made at the Executive meeting and relayed to all the federations at the IFS Congress (which takes place immediately afterwards), they are understood to be set in stone and questions should be limited and really only for clarification. Stephen Gadd has experienced this first hand:

⁵⁶⁶ Peter Armstrong, interview by author, Sydney, Australia, February 5, 2006.

⁵⁶⁷ Stephen Gadd, interview by author, Rotterdam, Netherlands, May 20, 2005.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁹ Gunther Romenath, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 19, 2005. Mark Buckton, “Interview with Baglan Idrissov,” *Sumo Fan Magazine* 15 (October 2007), http://www.sumofanmag.com/content/Issue_15/Interview2.pdf (accessed November 12, 2007).

if you ever go to an IFS international meeting, you'll see everyone sitting on a big table there and they'll say we've decided we want to do this, all in favour, everyone puts their hand up, no one questions. A couple of times at international IFS meetings I've stood up and asked one or two questions and it all goes very, very still. As [with] the Japanese system, you don't swim against the current.⁵⁷⁰

This inequality and the expected acquiescence of the national federations to the ideas of the Executive, strengthens the perception that the IFS is sometimes little more than an old-boys' club of power-holders linked to the *Nihon Sumō Renmei*. Their decisions are made behind closed doors, ratified at IFS Executive meetings by the lop-sided nature of Japanese control, and then passed on to the national federations via the IFS Congress without enough information being disclosed or discussion being held. The collected members of the Congress are used to running their own federations, often almost single-handedly, and so they tend to be decisive opinionated leaders. Yet, the expectation is that they are to acknowledge the directives of the IFS, rubber-stamp them at the Congress meeting and then turn their attention to the following meeting – which is the draw for the next day's Sumo world Championships.

The Japanese dominance of the IFS at the expense of its other members is also felt beyond the IFS Executive meeting. There are concerns about the opportunities given to non-Japanese referees and judges, for example. A case in point was the heavy reliance on Japanese officials in the 2005 World Games, as described in the Introduction of this thesis. Because this event was used by the IFS to showcase amateur sumo, there was a reluctance to use European officials, even though the event was held in Germany, because their ability was not as 'trusted' as that of Japanese officials. For the European judges, the chance to officiate at the World Games, the Sumo World Championships or other major events is already dependent on them raising the funds to participate. To be denied a decent chance to officiate when attending the event is an even further blow.

⁵⁷⁰ Stephen Gadd, interview by author, Rotterdam, Netherlands, May 20, 2005.

Christoph Ducho, the head of the German referees' association, explains the problem of the IFS's viewpoint:

I think they [find it] not possible to accept that there are good referees in the world, good athletes in the world, and they all have fun with the sumo sport. It's difficult. I like the Japanese very well and I am very interested in the Japanese history and I try to learn the language, but in sumo sport I think in general they must be a little bit more cooperative.⁵⁷¹

Keeping non-Japanese officials away from officiating important bouts provides another example of the divisions created by the attitude of the Japanese hierarchy in the IFS towards the other members. While acknowledging the quality and experience of Japanese referees on the whole, Stephen Gadd believes that the divide between Japanese and non-Japanese officials will continue to exist with prevailing attitudes:

we've got a couple of good referees in Europe. But, if you've got the referees in Europe, if you want them to develop, you've got to give them a chance to get on the stage. At the World Cup football, you see a chap from Papua New Guinea refereeing a match – he makes mistakes, but he's learning from his mistakes. But we had a tournament, the world championships in Poland in 2001, there were five European *gyōji* and not one European got on the *dohyō* at the world championships. Every *gyōji* was Japanese, the whole tournament, and also five from the judges – Japanese judges. And they say the standard's not good enough.⁵⁷²

With the predominance of Japanese referees, there is also a perception amongst the athletes that Japanese athletes are favoured at the *tachi-ai*. The referee is supposed to initiate each bout with the call of "*hakkeyoi*" but in Japanese amateur sumo the athletes generally start when all four hands are on the ground and the competitors are in sync with each other, sometimes before the referee's call. In international competitions the Japanese referees have tended to allow athletes to start before their call, which favours the

⁵⁷¹ Christoph Ducho, interview by author, Brandenburg an der Havel, Germany, July 10, 2005.

⁵⁷² Stephen Gadd, interview by author, Rotterdam, Netherlands, May 20, 2005.

Japanese athletes and leaves the non-Japanese a step behind. This was evident at the World Games in Duisburg, when some of the Japanese male athletes were advantaged on occasion by the referee calling “*hakkeyoi*” well after the athlete had made their initial surge at the *tachiai*. As the matches progressed more athletes were jumping the gun, afraid of being caught napping by the vagaries of the officiating. This was most obvious in the symbolic protest by the Brazilian heavyweight, who started while his Japanese opponent was still standing. Although called as a false start, his point had been made and it drew some wry laughter from the crowd.⁵⁷³ Perhaps the worst example came in the heavyweight semi-final when the German athlete was given little chance to compete as he was faced with an already charging Japanese athlete when “*hakkeyoi*” was called, much to the displeasure of the crowd.⁵⁷⁴

The second major concern about the International Sumo Federation’s control of amateur sumo is the lack of transparency in its actions. This is linked strongly to the previous concern about Japanese control of the decision-making processes because, with the majority of the IFS Executive being based in Japan and all of the office staff located there, the IFS makes many unilateral decisions. Baglan Idrissov, an IFS vice-president from Kazakhstan representing the Asian Sumo Union, has concerns that echo those of many non-Japanese administrators who come to sumo with experience in other international sports:

“All these decisions are made in Japan; and I have never been invited. If we compare the work of other (sporting) international federations, there is a calendar of events, of all the executive board meetings, of all the commissions. The work of the Executive Board of (the) IFS is more chaotic, than periodic and systematic.”⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷³ Other athletes have done something similar in the past, as Stephen Gadd explains: “We had one wrestler, was it the German heavyweight, Czerwinski, he went on purpose, I think he went about four or five times in a team match, because he only came out for the team match, it was against Japan. He came up three or four times ridiculously quick, even before the other wrestler was ready, but I think that was more trying to intimidate him or something.” Stephen Gadd, interview by author, Rotterdam, Netherlands, May 20, 2005.

⁵⁷⁴ When the Japanese judges were asked later in the evening about the non-calls by a European official, after lengthy discussion it was determined that the Japanese have better hearing than other athletes, and are able to hear the “ha” of the word and synchronise with that. Arguably, some of the referees were synchronised with the moves of the athletes instead.

⁵⁷⁵ Buckton, “Interview with Baglan Idrissov.” Additions in parentheses as in the original.

Idrissov has many ideas on how to improve the sport, most of which stem from restructuring and improving the performance of the sport's administration, bringing amateur sumo into line with other international sporting bodies. His ideas include limiting the size of the Executive, having a Secretary General from a country other than Japan to balance having a President from Japan, and forming various committees to focus on the rules and execution of the sport, press and public relations, medical matters, and sponsorship.⁵⁷⁶ Not having these initiatives in place already might not seem particularly grave, especially considering how new amateur sumo is as an international sport and that it is staffed by volunteers. However, given that the IFS wants amateur sumo to sit alongside other sports within the Olympic Movement, the IFS should be held accountable to the standards that other sports meet. Gunther Romenath, with an extensive background in international judo, often finds himself at odds with the IFS because of his suggestions on how to improve amateur sumo:

I compare to judo, they always complain, 'Why do you compare sumo? Sumo is not judo.' But, still, we can learn, we must learn from Olympic sports. It's not only judo, but...let's say we can learn. If we are vice-president, normally in judo I can compare the vice-president is paid, even the travel expenses are paid by the international federation because they have money, they have sponsors and so on.⁵⁷⁷

Thus, it is members from within the IFS, rather than the parent body itself, which is trying to bring amateur sumo and its administration up to the standards of other Olympic sports. This suggests that amateur sumo not only needs a lift in profile to enter the Olympics, as was suggested in Chapter Four, but that administrative and organisational matters need to be addressed as well.

The issue of funding that Romenath touches upon is also a key element in the regions' discontent with the International Sumo Federation. Simply put, most regions believe that the IFS should provide funds to the continental sumo unions for a variety of matters

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Gunther Romenath, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 19, 2005.

ranging from the expenses of continental presidents to attend meetings (in their roles as IFS vice presidents) through to funds for the development of the sport in areas that are struggling. Peter Armstrong believes that the provision of money from the centre is essential: “[i]f we really want an international sumo federation, there really will have to be greater delegation to the regions and, I think, a larger amount of money. As you know, you don’t have power and the ability to make things happen without money.”⁵⁷⁸ This attitude recalls the first five years of the IFS’s existence when money was provided to teams so that they could travel to Japan annually.⁵⁷⁹

This in turn raises a much graver question about the IFS and its finances. Most members of the IFS Executive, and certainly the national federations, have little idea where the money in the organisation comes from and how much is actually available. This information is not disclosed at meetings, either of the Executive or the Congress, and there is no clear understanding of how much it costs to operate the IFS annually.⁵⁸⁰ Idrissov’s concern is that members are left in the dark because they “have never been told about the auditing of the expenses of (the) IFS, and how many sponsors we have. I say ‘we’, but bear in mind that the sponsors are unknown to us. I don’t know how (the) IFS is searching for sponsors.”⁵⁸¹ All that is known is that “some Executive Board members are contributing their own money as donations to (the) IFS and this has never been covered at the Congress.”⁵⁸² Here Idrissov refers to the practice of IFS office holders paying annual fees according to their position, but which are in the range of several thousand US dollars.⁵⁸³ Continental presidents are appointed as IFS vice-presidents and, in recognition

⁵⁷⁸ Peter Armstrong, interview by author, Sydney, Australia, February 5, 2006.

⁵⁷⁹ As Chapter Two explained, this money came from the Nippon Senbaku Shinkō-kai as seed funding for the IFS to establish amateur sumo in many countries abroad and to support the Sumo World Championships for five years. However, the withdrawal of this money was arguably one of the reasons the continental sumo unions had been given such autonomy in their regions in the first place.

⁵⁸⁰ It is assumed that some financial support comes from the *Nihon Sumō Renmei*, especially when IFS tournaments are held in Japan. However, it is difficult to know how much annually the contribution might be, and where exactly other contributions to the IFS come from.

⁵⁸¹ Buckton, “Interview with Baglan Idrissov.” Additions in parentheses as in the original.

⁵⁸² Ibid.

⁵⁸³ Although no information is available as to who specifically pays, how many contributions are paid, and the revenue taken from these membership fees., the IFS rules put the membership fees at the following levels: President US\$25,000; Vice-President US\$15,000; Secretary General US\$8,000; Director US\$4,000; Auditor US\$2,000. See Supplementary Provisions of the IFS rules. International Sumo Federation, “Rules,” <http://www.amateursumo.com/ifs/rules.htm> (accessed December 1, 2008).

of the administrative work they do in their regions, they do not have to pay vice-president membership fees. However, additional vice-presidents can be appointed by the IFS president and so several affluent Japanese members are appointed as vice-presidents of the IFS, almost in an honorary capacity, and pay for the privilege. Gunther Romenath explains that “the Japanese vice-presidents, they pay – I don’t know – quite a lot of money, that’s why they become more or less honorary vice-president or something like this, and of course we cannot pay.”⁵⁸⁴ This generates revenue for the IFS, although how much is unknown, but perpetuates the Japanese imbalance in the IFS Executive.

Yet, despite the grumbling and dissatisfaction from some quarters about the above issues, the lack of an alternative to the International Sumo Federation meant that those who are discontented had two choices: either persevere within the organisation, perhaps trying to change it from within, or leave. Until 2006 there had been no overt protest, uprising or resistance within international amateur sumo. However, in that year, a challenge to the authority of the IFS and its vision for amateur sumo came in the shape of a semi-professional tour for amateur sumo athletes across North America, with plans to later expand worldwide. Called the World Sumo League (WSL), this tour threatened to undermine the importance of the annual Sumo World Championships, challenge the IFS’s control of the sport and its athletes, and undermine the long-term IFS goal of Olympic inclusion. Ironically, however, the entire problem stemmed from a one-off event in late 2005 in New York that the International Sumo Federation had happily supported because they hoped it would give amateur sumo greater exposure worldwide.

Amateur sumo goes professional - A competing vision for amateur sumo

The World S.U.M.O.⁵⁸⁵ Challenge, held at Madison Square Garden in New York in October 2005, was the initiative of American promoter Noah Goldman and his company, Big Boy Productions. It pitted 24 male competitors against each other in an open weight contest for a US\$10 000 prize. Goldman and his event received the support of the

⁵⁸⁴ Gunther Romenath, interview by author, Duisburg, Germany, July 19, 2005.

⁵⁸⁵ Sumo Ultimate Masters Organisation.

International Sumo Federation after the initial introductions had been made through the President of the North American Sumo Union, Yoshisada Yonezuka. Much of the networking for the event happened at the World Games in Duisburg in July 2005, where Goldman was the guest of the IFS and met its hierarchy for the first time.⁵⁸⁶ It was here that Goldman was also introduced to Gunther Romenath and Stephen Gadd, both of whom were able to provide information and contacts on the best European athletes.

The idea of holding amateur sumo tournaments as a sporting spectacle for a North American television audience had been tried before. The first such tournament, ‘Night of the Giants,’ was held in 1998 at the Trump Taj Mahal Hotel in Atlantic City, New Jersey and broadcast on sports TV network ESPN. It brought together the best (and largest) competitors in the world for an event billed as the ‘super heavyweight world championship’, a weight-class that was designated nominally as for athletes 150 kilograms (330 pounds) and above.⁵⁸⁷ One commentator’s view of ‘Night of the Giants’ placed it firmly as an Americanised spectacle of sumo:

regardless of the promotional hype, this event has little to do with *o-zumo* as is practiced and revered in its place of origin. This is Sumo, American Style: louder, brasher, and stripped of refinement and ritual. What is missing in decorum is made up for by democracy – virtually anyone of a certain size can come and compete.⁵⁸⁸

The initial success of this tournament was followed by ‘Night of the Giants 2000’ two years later at Caesar’s Hotel Tahoe, Nevada. At this second event, once again only larger competitors from different countries were invited to compete.⁵⁸⁹ On both occasions the sumo event was primarily designed for a television audience, indicated by the small numbers of spectators able to attend. By choosing casinos as the hosts, sumo was staged

⁵⁸⁶ He even presented medals to competitors at one of the sumo medal ceremonies. Personal observation, World Games sumo competition, July 19, 2005.

⁵⁸⁷ Once again Yoshisada Yonezuka played an important part in getting such a spectacle on to television and to the North American market. This definition of super heavyweight is attributed to Yonezuka; see *Sumo Shimo*, “Vierra Takes Night of Giants 2000,” June, 2000, www.sumoshimo.com/2000/jun_00.html (accessed June 8, 2007).

⁵⁸⁸ Jeff Yang, “Size Matters,” *The Village Voice*, December 16-22, 1998, <http://www.villagevoice.com/1998-12-22/news/size-matters/> (accessed July 3, 2007).

⁵⁸⁹ However, the quality of the competitors was not as high, and the draw card of the first event, American former world champion Emmanuel Yarborough, was missing.

as one of the shows on offer to the guests, almost as an amusing aside to the other entertainment and the gambling on offer.

The World S.U.M.O. Challenge was a similar endeavour, although using the iconic Madison Square Garden signalled that the new event was aimed at a larger and more cosmopolitan live audience than previous events. Initially the International Sumo Federation, the European Sumo Union and others were supportive of Goldman's efforts with the World S.U.M.O. Challenge.⁵⁹⁰ He wanted to promote amateur sumo and had grand plans for media exposure, particularly pay television possibilities, which suited the IFS's desire to give wider coverage to the sport. The ESU was keen to back the venture because it would give prominent European male athletes a chance to earn some money from the sport and see some reward for their years of dedicated training.⁵⁹¹ Tournaments for prize money had been held before in Europe, but the money on offer and the expected crowd in New York far exceeded anything European athletes had ever encountered.⁵⁹²

Doubtless dictated by the general public's expectations of sumo as being a big man's sport, the event was sold to the public by playing to the stereotype of sumo. The promotional material also emphasised the size of the athletes on display. Among the 24 competitors were some of the very best amateur athletes in the male heavyweight and open weight classes who had flown to New York directly from the Sumo World Championships in Osaka. However, because of the tournament's emphasis on large male bodies, not all of those who appeared were regular amateur sumo competitors but rather had been chosen for their size.⁵⁹³ However, there was one notable exception that placed this event apart from the 'Night of the Giants' tournaments. The inclusion of a

⁵⁹⁰ For all three events, the two 'Night of the Giants' tournaments and the World S.U.M.O. Challenge, the backing of the International Sumo Federation added legitimacy to the contest.

⁵⁹¹ The ESU probably also saw the potential to increase knowledge of the sport in their area of the world, which would lead to greater strength in the sport, and myriad future possibilities if the venture was successful.

⁵⁹² Stephen Gadd, interview by author, Rotterdam, Netherlands, May 20, 2005.

⁵⁹³ For example, there was one US athlete who had been a world junior champion before slipping off the radar, another was an ex-professional from Hawai'i, and a couple more American 'athletes' appeared to have been selected based on size rather than experience. Nationality was a fluid concept as well, as one of the Georgian competitors had emigrated to New York and described himself as "half-American". James Barron, "4,468 Pounds of Wrestlers, and That Was Before Lunch," *New York Times*, October 19, 2005, available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/19/nyregion/19sumo.html?_r=1.

lightweight competitor, Bulgarian Stiliyan Georgiev, whose quick, feisty fighting style was in contrast to his bigger opponents, emphasised the different sizes of athletes that (amateur) sumo could boast: “the most notable feature of the sport is the size of the athletes, ranging from 200 to 600 pounds.”⁵⁹⁴ Still, this was a minor concession to the variety presented by amateur sumo and was undermined by the recruitment of other athletes for their size rather than their sumo pedigree.

However, a male-only tournament bringing together the heaviest amateur athletes to battle for supremacy provided a stark contrast to the IFS’s usual promotion of amateur sumo. The World S.U.M.O. Challenge presented amateur sumo in a way that echoed professional sumo, or at least what the audience would expect from *ōzumō*. Interestingly, as it and its two predecessors all took place after amateur sumo had aligned with the Olympic Movement, it is even more striking that the IFS should wish to support tournaments specifically for male ‘giants’ or ‘super-heavyweight’ athletes. By emphasising the exclusivity of the large male form competing for prize money, the IFS moved away from the image of amateur sumo as an inclusive, mixed-gender sport held across a number of weight divisions. These tournaments also blurred comprehension of two of the major differences that separate amateur sumo from its professional counterpart – the different sizes of the athletes and the inclusion of female weight divisions.

Nevertheless, this type of event, the third in less than a decade, was almost certainly given support by the International Sumo Federation because of the opportunities it presented in North America. By opening up amateur sumo to new audiences the potential to raise the sport’s profile loomed large, particularly in a large commercial market such as the United States where knowledge of Japan and its culture is already strong and there are also expatriate Japanese and a number of Japanese Americans. Furthermore, with the large television audiences possible via networks such as ESPN, this was a tantalising way to increase the profile of amateur sumo and thus take another step toward full Olympic

⁵⁹⁴ These weights are roughly equivalent to 90 to 270 kilograms. “World Sumo League press release,” April 21, 2006, reproduced online at <http://nhbnews.blogspot.com/2006/04/world-sumo-league-2006-tour-set-may-19.html>.

recognition.⁵⁹⁵ Thus, a short term abrogation in promoting the all-inclusive nature of amateur sumo might result in a far stronger and healthier future for the sport, benefiting all levels of the sport inside and outside of Japan.

Big Boy Productions also invoked the image of professional sumo to sell the event to its audience. The World S.U.M.O. Challenge was not specifically promoted as ‘amateur sumo’ and a conscious effort to provide the audience with something that would be considered suitably ‘Japanese’ and authentic. This was even though the sumo was performed on an artificial *dohyō*, in a major sports arena in North America, and almost exclusively by non-Japanese athletes. There was also the need to reconcile the competing interests of providing sumo that would fit the audience’s expectations of authentic and legitimate, making the event palatable and comprehensible for them, and yet somehow keeping the event spectacular and contemporary as well. The World S.U.M.O. Challenge

began with a re-enactment of the Shinto legend of sumo. Acrobats flew through the air on harnesses, playing the parts of mountain gods who battled each other, accompanied by traditional Japanese music and dramatic narration. The announcer then cued the crowd, “Let’s launch this sport into the 21st century!”⁵⁹⁶

In trying to anchor this event with authenticity (through a link to Japanese sumo), Big Boy Productions made spurious comments or connections regarding the mythology of Japan, this mythology’s connection to sumo, and the connection of both to the World S.U.M.O. Challenge. If the various national sumo federations of the IFS have altered amateur sumo and hybridised it in unconscious ways, as I argued in the previous chapter, then the World S.U.M.O. Challenge was a deliberate alteration of amateur sumo in an attempt to construct the sport as analogous to Japanese *ōzumō*. Furthermore, Orientalising

⁵⁹⁵ Since gaining provisional recognition from the International Olympic Committee, the IFS has sought greater exposure for amateur sumo through both the Olympic channels and their own efforts at promoting the sport. As mentioned in Chapter Three, because part of the assessment criteria for a new sport to be admitted to the Olympic programme is based on popularity and media exposure, the IFS is keen to popularise amateur sumo to gain greater recognition, media coverage and to assist with its claims for wider acceptance as an international sport.

⁵⁹⁶ *Mainichi Daily News*, ‘Sumo wrestlers in New York: strangers in a strange land,’ October 25, 2005, <http://mdn.mainichi-msn.co.jp/features/archive/news/2005/10/20051025p2g00m0fe016000c.html> (accessed March 29, 2007).

peripheral narratives that had no connection to sumo's history were fabricated to provide a greater sense of mysticism and, presumably, entertainment. Foremost among these was the separation of athletes into 'clans'. Given names such as *Shadow Jin*, *Black Tiger*, *Wrath of Heaven* and *Iron Mountain*, these clans tested their members against one another to provide the strongest members, who then were pitted against the champions of the other clans. Their existence allowed the audience to engage with a particular group, rather than being reluctant to back a particular athlete about whom they knew little.⁵⁹⁷ The names, however, had no specific link to sumo or even to Japan, and were presumably only used to add a sense of Asian mysticism to the activities for the benefit of the audience. The IFS admitted a year later that they were unhappy with the image of amateur sumo presented by this tournament and that they would not support future endeavours should they eventuate. For their part, Big Boy Productions saw enough from this first foray to suggest that they had a marketable product that could be turned into a larger series of events.

World Sumo League

Buoyed by the success of the New York event, Big Boy Productions launched the World Sumo League (WSL) in early 2006.⁵⁹⁸ This was to be a series of tournaments held in convention centres or sporting arenas in North American cities, bringing sumo to local audiences in a smaller format of the World S.U.M.O Challenge. Although these events would not independently have the same pulling power or concentrated media saturation that the original New York event enjoyed, collectively they provided an opportunity to take the sumo show on the road to a greater number of fans. In turn, it was planned, this would provide ongoing income for the athletes, generate revenue and sponsorship for the event organisers, and would incrementally build to the yearly finale, once again to be held in Madison Square Garden in October. Importantly, also, once the North American tour had been completed, the World Sumo League was to live up to its name and take the

⁵⁹⁷ The potential for using these clans as a merchandising and marketing tool in the future to add another level of support to the evening's events should be noted. However, the clans added a bizarre narrative of 'teams' that then fought amongst themselves for supremacy to what were effectively just round-robin groups to determine the participants for a later knock-out phase of the tournament.

⁵⁹⁸ Launching the World Sumo League might have been their intention all along. Big Boy Productions had billed the 2005 World S.U.M.O. Challenge in New York as the first event of a North American tour, apparently hinting at their plans to take their show on the road to other cities in 2006.

‘Mega Tour’ to other cities around the globe. Each event would see athletes compete for US\$10,000 with over US\$1 million in total prize money on offer.⁵⁹⁹

The World Sumo League was launched as “a worldwide sports organization that will promote professional Sumo matches at first-class venues in countries all over the world.”⁶⁰⁰ No clear dissociation was made between the World Sumo League and the International Sumo Federation or the *Nihon Sumō Kyōkai* – in fact, the other two organisations were not mentioned at all. Rather, sumo was treated as a single entity within the press release, where Noah Goldman was quoted as saying:

“Sumo has been the fastest growing sport in countries worldwide over the past decade... World-class International sumo is a global phenomenon and there are professional Sumo organizations in more than 80 countries. Because of this growing international appeal, the sport may be added to the Olympics, possibly as early as the 2012 Summer Games.”⁶⁰¹

Although much of this information is erroneous and overstated, it nevertheless makes note of the developments in amateur sumo that had occurred thanks to the International Sumo Federation. However, no mention was made of the IFS as the governing body of amateur sumo, presumably because of the stand-off between WSL and the IFS. Big Boy Productions was represented as “a New York-based sports and entertainment company that is dedicated to developing world-class Sumo wrestling in the United States and around the globe as a professional sport, and to present professional Sumo competitions in first-class venues worldwide.”⁶⁰² This promotion of the World Sumo League also failed to make any distinction between this semi-professional amateur sumo tour and *ōzumō*.

The World Sumo League planned that the Mega Tour would proceed through North America from May to June 2006 and would then “resume in August in Australia and New

⁵⁹⁹ “World Sumo League press release,” April 21, 2006, reproduced online at <http://nhbnews.blogspot.com/2006/04/world-sumo-league-2006-tour-set-may-19.html>.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² Ibid.

Zealand; early September in South America; mid to late September in Ireland and the United Kingdom; and conclude late September – mid-October in Europe.’⁶⁰³ According to the press release, over 60 events were planned and the Mega Tour planned to visit major European capitals, South America, and Australasia.⁶⁰⁴ This Mega Tour was to present sumo to a predominantly ‘Western’ audience, tapping the perceived latent markets for sumo entertainment in the regions mentioned. The finale would see the 24 athletes who had the highest rankings invited to compete once again in the Madison Square Garden for the 2006 WSL World Championship title.⁶⁰⁵ Thus, the ‘world’ tour would specifically stay away from East Asia, and particularly Japan. This was perhaps partly due to the difficulty in trying to sell this type of sumo to audiences familiar with *ōzumō* and, in Japan’s case, amateur sumo.

The spectacle that Big Boy Productions created at the New York event and the way that it positioned amateur sumo sat uneasily with the International Sumo Federation. The explanation that the IFS gave, almost a year after the fact, was that there had been little contact from Goldman after the meetings in Duisburg and, consequently, the IFS was not aware of the content of the event until they arrived in New York. They found matters to be unsatisfactory in that the staging was more like a version of *ōzumō* and this does not fit the IFS vision of the sport.⁶⁰⁶ Simply put, Big Boy Productions had not followed IFS guidelines and the IFS decided future events would not receive official sanction.⁶⁰⁷ However, the IFS did not issue a statement to its member federations about its opposition to the World Sumo League, preferring instead to contact those suspected of being involved and warning that participation in the WSL would not be tolerated. Owing to the lack of official information from the IFS to its members, rumours abounded including

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁶ Personal observation, IFS Executive meeting, Osaka, October 15, 2006.

⁶⁰⁷ Whether or not the IFS made their displeasure known to Big Boy Productions immediately, or at all, is uncertain. The veracity of these comments by the IFS should also be considered in light of this version of events emerging almost a year later, during which time the rebel World Sumo League had emerged, certain athletes and administrators had ‘defected’ to it, and then the whole venture had collapsed, putting the IFS back into a position of power.

those that the athletes involved could face possible suspension or other censure. National federations suspected of aiding and abetting the WSL might also face similar penalties.

The reluctance of the International Sumo Federation to make a public statement to all of its members left the matter in limbo. Rumours circulated via personal contacts between different national federations, and most of the amateur sumo world waited to see what might happen on either side. Despite the threat that the IFS *might* ban those who took part, it is easy to see why those who took a 'rebel' stance did. The lure of performing for large crowds and the promise of expenses being taken care of as well as prize money on offer could make the threat from the IFS pale in comparison. The money on offer for a few tournaments' effort was more than most athletes had seen before from the sport, and the net was cast widely in Europe to provide the necessary numbers for the WSL tournaments.⁶⁰⁸ Administrators heading national federations were also keen to see some of the money trickle down to their organisation, particularly as there were promises of financial assistance for those federations that hosted tournaments and provided athletes.⁶⁰⁹ Furthermore, the opportunity to get in at the start of the venture and have a say in how it might progress was attractive for administrators hitherto ignored by the IFS. However, these promises from Big Boy Productions were little more than rumours passed along by those already involved in the WSL North American tour. Just as the IFS was trying to dissuade national federations through individual contact and informal

⁶⁰⁸ From the national federations willing to be involved or to recruit athletes, even athletes who were on the fringe of their national team were offered contracts for short stints on the WSL. The money on offer, while not vast compared to most professional sports, was attractive for a relatively short 'season' and for the opportunities it gave the athletes to experience being a semi-professional athlete. Participant name withheld, personal communication, May 21, 2006.

⁶⁰⁹ Federations were lured by rumours that local athletes would be recruited as the tour moved to Europe, Australasia and South America as planned. These local athletes would help spell some of the athletes for other commitments and for periods of rest. For their assistance, national federations would receive a fee for activities held in their jurisdiction, money for the number of (experienced) athletes they provided, and funds for the development and maintenance of sumo in their country. Including local athletes along the way was also designed as a promotional activity to get the crowds interested in their hometown competitors and the event as a whole. Plans to keep the WSL running included selecting suitable athletes from around the world, training them in sumo 'crash courses' (most probably in the United States), and feeding them into the tour as it progressed, thus keeping athletes fresh and broadening the athlete base. Participant name withheld, personal communication, April 30, 2006.

statements, so too was Big Boy Productions spreading the word through their connections within amateur sumo in an attempt to garner support for the venture.⁶¹⁰

With the World Sumo League preparing to begin, a new issue had emerged for the International Sumo Federation. Where originally the IFS had opposed the approach of Big Boy Productions on aesthetics and the way amateur sumo was represented, now the issue was of legitimacy and control in producing and enacting amateur sumo. Once the athletes and administrators of different national federations and continental unions decided to ignore the requests of the IFS and its threat of sanctions, in whatever form these took, the participants had moved from everyday resistance to outright defiance. Furthermore, the IFS now had a rival organisation that was staging amateur sumo events and ignoring the world governing body of the sport. This threatened not only the continued legitimacy of the IFS as the ruling body for all of amateur sumo, but also put its Olympic dreams under threat. Other international sports such as taekwondo and karate have struggled with schisms and rival organisations, and the claims of the international bodies (World Taekwondo Federation and World Karate Federation, respectively) have been weakened as a result.

Given the stand-off between the IFS, seeking to maintain its power, and the resistance of prominent athletes, there was a fear that amateur sumo might be torn asunder. Certainly, had the Mega Tour taken off and amateur sumo had become a viable commercial spectacle across the world, this might have been the case. However, once the World Sumo League tour got underway in North America, almost immediately the picture looked bleaker than expected. The first two scheduled events were cancelled due to slow ticket sales and the WSL was forced to begin a week later than expected.⁶¹¹ When it did get under way, the initial shows were greeted with enthusiasm by spectators and were given suitable local media coverage. However, the WSL continued to struggle with

⁶¹⁰ Those not already involved in the WSL tour adopted a wait-and-see attitude to gauge whether the North American tour would travel further. Athletes and administrators in New Zealand and Australia, for example, spoke shared whatever information they were getting from friends and acquaintances abroad and discussed the ramifications of the WSL and what it might mean if the Mega Tour actually went ahead.

⁶¹¹ Howard Gilbert, "Amateur Angles," *Sumo Fan Magazine*, 8 (2006), available at http://www.sumofanmag.com/content/Issue_8/Amateur-Angles.htm.

advance ticket sales, and a pay television contract, which would help offset the costs of the North American tour, failed to materialise. Within a month and after only a handful of events, the World Sumo League ground to halt due to poor sales and an unviable future.

The response from the International Sumo Federation

In the aftermath of the World Sumo League's failure, the IFS closed ranks on those involved. The threat to IFS control had dissipated and, from this newly restored position of strength, the IFS sought to make an example of the WSL 'rebels' by banning the athletes involved from IFS events, including the 2006 Sumo World Championships.⁶¹² The entire international amateur sumo community was made aware of this by email from the IFS president:

I would like to remind you that wrestlers or officials that participate in sumo events not recognised by the International Sumo Federation, including the World Sumo League events held from this year, will be unable to participate in the 7th Junior Sumo World Championships and the 14th Sumo World Championships and 5th Shinsumo World Championships.⁶¹³

Further to the ban on athletes, there was more serious action taken against two European Sumo Union administrators, Gunther Romenath and Stephen Gadd. The two had been instrumental in the ESU and European national federations opposing the IFS on the matter of the World Sumo League. In campaigning for the rights of their members to compete in the WSL, the two men had become the focal point for IFS displeasure. Furthermore, they were seen to be actively involved in the World Sumo League because they had been observed on video officiating at one of the WSL events.⁶¹⁴

⁶¹² At the time the length of the ban was unspecified, but it lasted a year as the WSL athletes were allowed to compete again at the Sumo World Championships in 2007. This was the only punishment meted out to the European athletes because the ESU and the various European national federations still allowed their athletes to compete in national and regional tournaments. The United States Sumo Federation, however, stopped WSL athletes competing in the US Nationals as this is the tournament from which the team to attend the Sumo World Championships is selected.

⁶¹³ International Sumo Federation, "Reminder: Sumo events not recognized by IFS," email communication to all IFS members, July 31, 2006.

⁶¹⁴ Their claim was that the event was short-handed and so they stepped in to provide the full complement of judges so that it could proceed.

The IFS treatment of Romenath and Gadd indicated a desire to punish those who had threatened the unity of the amateur sumo community and the legitimacy of the IFS. The men travelled to the 2006 Sumo World Championships in Osaka in their roles as ESU representatives but were ignored by Japanese administrators in the International Sumo Federation. Ordinarily they would have represented the ESU at the IFS Executive meeting held before the tournament. However, they were excluded from the meeting, and it was here that the matter of their punishment was discussed. In their defence, Baglan Idrissov acknowledged the contributions of the two men, particularly Gunther Romenath's long service as president of the ESU. He challenged any proposed punishment by asking whether any sumo rules had actually been broken at the WSL tournaments. The IFS reply was that the sumo was performed in accordance with the rules of amateur sumo, but the events themselves did not fit the image of amateur sumo that the International Sumo Federation wanted to project. The IFS believed that the two officials had deliberately gone against the organisation's wishes, had damaged its reputation and operations, and had acted in a way that allowed for their dismissal according to IFS statutes. The Executive meeting was asked to vote on the matter and concluded that the men had broken the rules of the organisation, and consequently that they should be punished.⁶¹⁵ They were expelled from the IFS and no time limit was specified for this ban.⁶¹⁶

However, the matter did not end here because there was a backlash at the IFS Congress immediately following the IFS Executive meeting. At Congress meetings a representative of each country takes their place at allotted tables, assigned usually in continental order. At the front of the room, facing the delegates, the Japanese officials hold audience,

⁶¹⁵ The whole process was hap-hazard. Having had the vote on whether Romenath and Gadd had broken the rules, the IFS was prepared to let Tanaka Hidetoshi decide their fate. It took a suggestion from a non-Japanese member to put the matter to a vote of whether there should actually be a punishment. Once it was decided that the two men should be punished, a further vote was taken (at the behest of the Japanese members) to decide whether the meeting should decide the nature of the punishment or whether this should rest in the hands of Mr Tanaka (the meeting decided upon the latter). Democracy and proper procedure were almost afterthoughts in this process. Personal observation, IFS Executive meeting, Osaka, October 15, 2006.

⁶¹⁶ Romenath has since retired from his role as ESU president and so has no official contact with the IFS. Gadd was re-elected Secretary-General of the ESU in 2008 and remains the head of the Netherlands Sumo Federation and is still within the amateur sumo fold. His relationship with the IFS remains strained.

representing both Japan as one of the countries present *and* the hierarchy of the IFS.⁶¹⁷ Decisions made at the Executive meeting, such as the results of elections and the venues of future tournaments, are relayed to the national members to keep everyone informed and there is a limited opportunity to ask questions for clarification. Matters of concern may also be put to the meeting, usually to bring them to the attention of the IFS Executive so that that body may consider the matter over time (or reject it outright at the meeting). At the 2006 Congress, fuelled by the decision to expel Romenath and Gadd (both of whom were not informed of the decision directly by the IFS), many of the European representatives turned their simmering discontent into an act of defiance by interjecting and disrupting the progress of the meeting. In particular, the German representative challenged the procedure of appointing IFS officers. His point was that there was a discrepancy between the IFS Rules, which allowed for the appointment of the presidents and vice-presidents at the Executive meeting, and the IFS General Statutes, which called for their election at a general meeting.⁶¹⁸ When his objection was met with a feeble response that the information on the IFS website was not up-to-date,⁶¹⁹ other European delegates jumped to their feet and tried to block the meeting from proceeding until the matter was resolved.

In this protest, discontent that had been simmering came to a head in full view of the assembled member federations. Discontent with the control exerted by the IFS Executive was expressed through challenging the organisation's own procedural guidelines. The contradiction in the two guiding documents served to highlight the lax nature of procedure and democracy within the IFS, where matters are largely decided upon and enacted by Japanese administrators. The catalyst for the event had been the punishment

⁶¹⁷ They are joined by those IFS vice presidents who are not appearing as delegates for a particular country.

⁶¹⁸ Personal observation, IFS Congress, Osaka, October 15, 2006. See the differences between Article 15 of the IFS rules and Article 13 of the IFS statutes. International Sumo Federation, "Rules," available at <http://www.amateursumo.com/ifs/rules.htm> (accessed December 1, 2008); International Sumo Federation, "General Statutes," <http://www.amateursumo.com/ifs/generalstatutes.htm> (accessed March 3, 2008).

⁶¹⁹ The head of the IFS office staff, who was also translating for the meeting, claimed that the IFS website was incorrect and was not even the official website of the organisation. She claimed that it had been a private project by one of the (foreign) members and given tacit approval by the IFS, but the content was not the responsibility of the IFS. This is difficult to believe as the IFS is routinely credited with operating www.amateursumo.com by many sources, including the IOC, where the IFS would have provided the information themselves. Personal observation, IFS Congress, Osaka, October 15, 2006.

and treatment of the highest ranking officials of the European Sumo Union, the largest continental union, who had opposed in the IFS in part because they did not feel that their federations and athletes were getting the best possible treatment from the sport's governing body.

These signs of deliberate protest did not sit well with the Japanese officials of the IFS who tried to keep the meeting moving forward and to cover all of the business on the agenda. In a compromise of sorts the head table agreed to deal with the matter the Europeans had raised at the conclusion of the meeting, once the rest of the business had been conducted. However, by the time the Congress came to the end of its other business, the representatives at the head table followed the lead of IFS president Tanaka, who walked out of the meeting, ignoring the protestations of the members. Many were appalled with these actions and the IFS thumbing their noses at proper processes according to its own rules:

“I think that IFS should turn to the world of sumo, not oppose it. We are all one ‘sumo family’ and should discuss all matters together, not leave the (annual) Congress room without apologizing and without saying farewell. Last year’s Congress was the worst I have seen in eleven years in the sumo family, and that congress disappointed me.”⁶²⁰

Symbolically, and almost literally, Japan had turned its back on the rest of the sumo world. By ignoring the other members, Japan had shown that it was still in charge of the IFS and would tolerate no interference or opposing points of view. Ironically, however, the actions of the Japanese in the IFS reinforced the very concerns that had driven a wedge between the Japan-based IFS hierarchy and the rest of the amateur sumo world. It also showed that reform of the IFS would take more than the actions of an unsuccessful splinter group (the WSL) and the personal dissatisfaction of some of the IFS member nations.

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⁶²⁰ Buckton, “Interview with Baglan Idrissov.” Additions in parentheses as in the original.

The continental sumo unions are charged with the responsibility of overseeing sumo within their regions on behalf of the International Sumo Federation, and they delegate responsibilities in some measure to their member national federations. However, in the decision-making processes of the IFS the continental unions' power is marginalised because decisions are made by a Japanese-dominated IFS Executive. Furthermore, this Executive does not have to answer to its member federations, who remain unclear on the organisation's finances and long-range planning. This is indicative of the opaque way that the IFS runs its day-to-day affairs, a cause of ongoing discontent. This uneven power distribution created an environment in which disaffected parties chose to challenge the IFS when an alternative presented itself. These people sought to act on their own to achieve the satisfaction that they could not find under the rule of the IFS.

The World Sumo League was attractive in what it offered: opportunities not currently available for male athletes to earn prize money from amateur sumo; and income for the national federations that assisted and supported the WSL. For ESU administrators and member federations, in particular, the WSL provided more competition and exposure for some of its athletes, and the resulting revenues to the national federations could also provide better support for male lightweight and middleweight athletes and all divisions of women's amateur sumo.⁶²¹ As a region with a number of successful male athletes in demand for the WSL tournaments, the opportunity was too alluring for those who chose to participate. Additionally, some who felt particularly aggrieved by the lack of opportunities within the IFS framework saw opportunities to contribute to a new structure that provided amateur sumo competitions, revenue streams and a chance to build from the ground up. They no longer had to complain about the IFS when they could do something about rectifying the problems they had.

The battle between the International Sumo Federation and the World Sumo League raised issues about the future direction of amateur sumo. For a brief period in mid-2006, the sport seemed destined to be split over the promotion of amateur sumo, on the issue of an athlete's ability to profit from their performances, and, ultimately, issues of control and

⁶²¹ That is, the parts of amateur sumo that the World Sumo League was not interested in promoting.

agency. In one corner, the IFS and its system of continental and national sumo federations under the IFS umbrella represented the status quo, the official IOC-recognised federation, and the 'legitimate' powerbase that had raised and inaugurated international amateur sumo. In the other corner stood Big Boy Productions and their attempts at staging and popularising the sport for commercial profit beginning in North America but with plans to visit major cities throughout Europe, Oceania and South America as well. In becoming more than just a one-off event, and particularly with the potential to be held worldwide, the World Sumo League posed a threat to the legitimacy of the IFS to direct amateur sumo and maintain control over the sport's image, media exposure, and (by association) the actions and careers of the athletes.

What Big Boy Productions envisaged used male amateur sumo athletes, almost exclusively from the heavyweight and openweight divisions, in an international professional sports and entertainment package which resembled *ōzumō*. The differing approaches of the IFS and WSL begged the question: where is amateur sumo heading? The rise of the WSL revealed that the legitimacy of the International Sumo Federation to control amateur sumo relied mainly on the athletes and officials subsuming themselves to the IFS framework. Until provided with an alternative, the athletes and administrators within amateur sumo had adhered to the IFS rules even if they had issues with some of the elements of that framework. However, once the World Sumo League was established, an alternative emerged and the position of the IFS as the sole authority for amateur sumo was challenged.

In response to this threat, and in an attempt to retain (or perhaps regain) control over amateur sumo, the International Sumo Federation punished those who supported the WSL. The athletes involved were banned from the Sumo World Championships in 2006, signalling that the IFS would not tolerate their defection. That they were reinstated a year later indicates that the IFS chose not to permanently remove many of the quality athletes in the men's heavyweight and open weight classes. Two European administrators were dealt with more harshly, being expelled indefinitely from the IFS for betraying the organisation. Although such penalties were designed to halt any factional in-fighting or

rival administration like those that have plagued other international sports such as karate and taekwondo, the root of the problem lies far deeper than just two men. Cohesion in amateur sumo is important for the IFS to realise Olympic inclusion and any potential split threatens this goal. However, the preconditions for a future split within amateur sumo remain in place as long as power when it comes to decision-making on a larger scale is given to the continental sumo unions with one hand yet taken away by the IFS with the other.

CONCLUSION

In the course of a century, amateur sumo has grown from being a Japanese sport, performed almost exclusively within the homeland and in immigrant Japanese communities in North and South America, to one which now aspires to be recognised on the global sporting landscape. The match between Hanah and Nicole at the World Games represents the contemporary face of amateur sumo and shows how amateur sumo has developed from an “element of national folklore”⁶²² to a sport sufficiently developed to be provisionally recognised by the International Olympic Committee. Here is a sport that has changed dramatically in the past two decades, demonstrates criss-crossing personal networks of interconnectedness, and is aligned to the global sporting movement administered by the International Olympic Committee.

Amateur sumo began as a modern sport in the early 20th century and was rooted in the collegiate sporting framework. It built upon a history of sumo performed in local communities for myriad purposes. The basic sporting component of these performances – the physical contest to determine the stronger and more skilful competitor – was harnessed in the codification of sumo as a modern amateur sport. It followed the lead of professional sumo, which had modernised its practices in the late 19th century when under scrutiny for being too traditional and anachronistic for a modernising Japan. Developing against this backdrop of professional sumo, which was held up as a template for the highest level of sumo competition, amateur sumo absorbed the masculine norms and designation as a ‘national sport’ (*kokugi*) that went with *ōzumō*.

Sumo travelled with Japanese immigrants to new communities in Hawai’i, on the Pacific coast of North America, and in parts of South America. These mainly rural immigrants enacted sumo within the new territories as one of many cultural links to their former lives in the Japanese homeland. Links between these new settlements and Japan were also maintained through sumo tours by both professional and amateur groups from Japan to Hawai’i and California in the prewar period. These connections were continued exclusively by amateur sumo groups after the war, and later encompassed trips to Brazil

⁶²² Maarten Van Bottenburg, *Global Games* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 205.

as air travel became more affordable. The internationalisation of amateur sumo had begun, even if it was still amidst the cultural and diasporic connections of Japan.

It was not until the 1980s that amateur sumo began to take on a truly international quality. Buoyed by a wave of internationalisation within Japanese society in general (*kokusaika*), which acknowledged and celebrated Japan's position as a major economic and geopolitical powerhouse, the *Nihon Sumō Renmei* invited teams from abroad to train and compete in Japan. Invitations were naturally extended to sumo groups in the Americas but, increasingly, they were also extended to other countries that had no ethnic links to Japan. Although these were small steps, amateur sumo had become a nascent international sport. The continued success of such moves, and the gradual expansion of the countries invited, led ultimately to the formation of the first Sumo World Championships in 1992 and the inauguration of the International Sumo Federation at the same time. Although ostensibly both 'international' entities for the performance and administration of international amateur sumo, respectively, they were guided and controlled by Japanese sumo administrators who held dual roles in the IFS and the *Nihon Sumō Renmei*.

However, the resources required to both initiate and sustain amateur sumo from Japan alone proved too great to last indefinitely. While the IFS, through generous funding from Japanese sponsors, was able to pay substantial costs to bring teams from a number of countries to Japan annually for the Sumo World Championships, it also faced the costs of sending small groups of Japanese athletes abroad to spark interest in amateur sumo as a competitive sport. There were further costs in supplying equipment to newly formed federations so that they might develop and grow. As a way to lessen the reliance of the amateur sumo world upon the finances and resources of the IFS, there was a gradual removal of the travel subsidies for countries to attend the Sumo World Championships. At the same time, continental sumo unions were established as an administrative layer in the IFS hierarchy, specifically designed to assist with regional administration and to foster intra-continental support and assistance to new and established national sumo federations. This move freed up time and money to allow the IFS to concentrate on

pushing for recognition from the International Olympic Committee in its ultimate goal of becoming an Olympic sport.

These decisions in the mid-1990s developed important future pathways within amateur sumo. The national federations were left to become more self-sufficient, the continental sumo unions were inaugurated to enhance connections between neighbouring federations, the day-to-day administration was filtered through the continental unions to allow the IFS to extricate itself from a series of bi-lateral relations with the national federations, and the IFS began to look to the future development of the sport by trying to align with the IOC. These all, in their own ways and collectively, contributed to a repositioning of amateur sumo with respect to its point of origin, Japan, and the power relationships that held prior to 1995. Principally, Japan remained at the centre of international amateur sumo as the home of the International Sumo Federation, the country with the most athletes, coaches and administrators, and as the country with the longest established history of sumo. It also stood out as the centre of authenticity and legitimacy in terms of sumo practice and pedigree. However, the continental unions and several key nodes of power emerged in amateur sumo internationally. The role of the continental sumo unions, and the relative autonomy given them by the IFS, meant that these entities and the people behind them became important in the development of amateur sumo for most national federations, more often. This power and the intra-continental, and even inter-continental, connections that have developed have seen amateur sumo disengage from connections to Japan. Indeed, there have even been reverse influences upon Japan, as Chapter Four noted, with the way Europe embraced the participation of women and how this affected acceptance of *shinsumō* in Japan.

While the internal connections of the international amateur sumo community were changing, the IFS pursued its goal of being recognised by the International Olympic Committee. It sought to have amateur sumo positioned to one day become an Olympic sport, which it thought would help with a better worldwide recognition of the sport. While undoubtedly inclusion in the Olympic Games exposes any sport to a global audience, most of the sports that are within the Olympic programme already have

sufficient exposure and their very inclusion reflects their worldwide popularity.⁶²³ Nevertheless, the IFS pursued the requirements of the IOC in a bid to elevate amateur sumo to a new, global echelon of sporting recognition that only the Olympic Games could provide. To gain IOC recognition, amateur sumo needed to meet a minimum number of 75 countries as member federations. It also needed to apply the guidelines in the Olympic Charter and to come into line with the global standards of the Olympic Movement. This necessitated certain changes in the sport, most notably the inclusion of women into the sport. The IFS fast tracked the start of women's competitions, making certain changes to remove overtly masculine elements that it thought would deter potential female athletes. It also continued recruiting new national federations, regardless of whether they actually ever competed at continental sumo championships or the Sumo World Championships.

These actions placed amateur sumo in a state of flux from 1995 to 1998. Several new federations were joining the IFS family as a result of IFS endeavours to promote the sport widely abroad. Meanwhile, the established federations were being forced to fend for themselves more and more. The continental sumo unions were founded to administer the burgeoning amateur sumo community, and their presence changed the way that the IFS worked thereafter. Thus, these developments represent a new approach in the composition of the international amateur sumo community, and demonstrate the inward-outward flows and complexity of global relations whereby members were brought together in ways that transcended geographical position and proximity, local transformation reflected wider-held ideas and actions, and there was increasing interconnection and consciousness between hitherto disparate segments of the worldwide amateur sumo community. Importantly, the connections and transformations were often, though not always, bypassing Japan as a necessary component in these interactions. On top of this, at the same time the IFS was embarking on changes to the sport to enact the principles of the Olympic Charter so that amateur sumo might satisfy the conditions of being an Olympic sport. This alignment with the Olympic Movement has positioned

⁶²³ There are certain sports that remain minor in terms of their worldwide spread (eg. Modern pentathlon), but they have been in the Olympic programme for decades and are included because of their Olympic heritage.

amateur sumo in a global slipstream which has carried it along, rubbing shoulders with other sports of different sizes that adhere to the same principles.

The above developments show that amateur sumo began to exhibit elements of globalisation in the way it functioned. However, perhaps more than how it demonstrates globalisation, amateur sumo provides a window on the implications of globalisation. For example, as a nascent global sport, amateur sumo is only beginning to move out of the shadow of *ōzumō* and gain greater recognition in its own right. Much of this has been achieved not through weight of numbers and growth in the foundations of the sport, but instead has been achieved through an alignment with the Olympic Movement and the kudos that provides. In real terms, aligning with the IOC has resulted in significant change for amateur sumo, most notably the inclusion of females in their own competitions since 1996. Ensuring that competition is fair and equal, and that there is equality of participation, has led amateur sumo to embrace weight divisions in competition, the inclusion of women in the sport, and the adoption of anti-doping policies. All of these developments are foreign to professional sumo.⁶²⁴ Indeed, except in a handful of competitions where there are weight divisions, these concepts are also foreign to Japanese *amateur* sumo.⁶²⁵

Through IOC recognition, the processes and positioning of amateur sumo demonstrate a global standpoint, even if the sport remains a ‘minor’ sport in uptake and participation. This calls into question the ‘size’ and ‘scope’ of globalisation. This thesis has sought to be an amplification of existing theories, such as those of Giddens, Robertson and Tomlinson mentioned in the Introduction, that emphasise the importance of processes and consciousness, not size, in globalisation theory. Furthermore, in reality, there can never

⁶²⁴ The *Nihon Sumō Kyōkai* has recently implemented drug testing for athletes, although the main concern seems to be recreational rather than performance enhancing drugs.

⁶²⁵ The weight classes used in the three annual Japanese competitions (two regional competitions and a national final, all for university students) are different to the ranges used in international competition, most notably because of the greater total number of competitors in these Japanese competitions.

be some sort of threshold or critical mass for considering globalisation in action, as it is a near impossible 'value' to quantify.⁶²⁶

Another implication has been the local, parochial enactments of amateur sumo in a number of different locations. However, as amateur sumo began to imbed itself in different countries and regions, and the continental unions themselves began to promote the sport and develop infrastructures of their own, the result has been multiple localised performances, with some synergies but many subtle differences. The examples used in this thesis show the reterritorialisation of amateur sumo, where there is a growing complexity in the conceptualisation of location with respect to amateur sumo. Thus, Australia or the Netherlands can be a site for amateur sumo, not solely Japan. New Zealand or the Czech Republic may become a powerful centre for the sport, alongside Japan or another country. Each will approach the sport in their own ways, localising it according to their environment and the resources available, but none is less important than another. Indeed, even though it has an acknowledged history, the greatest depth and the quality of amateur sumo performed there is high, the Japanese amateur sumo scene has arguably become just one of many localised and parochial enactments of sumo around the globe.

The third implication is the role of people and their enactment of agency within the development of amateur sumo as a nascent global sport. The key component of amateur sumo's global alignment, and indeed all the developments in amateur sumo since 1995, has been the role played by individuals within the various federations and unions. With the continents having to look after themselves, and with the federations underneath them having to survive without central funding, there were no longer any 'free rides' within amateur sumo. This has meant that dedicated individuals with the capacity to lead their federations have had to emerge. As mentioned in the Introduction, the degree of agency may be a result of the under-developed organisational structure and size of the amateur sumo community, at least compared to other sports. Nevertheless, even though the

⁶²⁶ Asking questions of how we can measure globalisation, at what point something becomes 'global' and the progression from 'non-global', or 'pre-global', to global, and possibly measuring degrees of 'globality' would be questions for an altogether different study.

organisational structure is still emerging, and may present opportunities until such a point that agent influence is suppressed by scale, the activities thus far of individuals within amateur sumo should not be disregarded.

The individuals mentioned in this study, as well as many others in other federations and in different parts of the world, play a key part in the development of the sport and its ongoing global development. Each approaches the task in different ways, dependent upon their personal thoughts about the sport, the role they see for their federation, the resources they have at their disposal, and the opportunities and capacities in which they feel they can act. How they choose to proceed, furthermore, has had a large impact on the way each nation has approached amateur sumo (and, in part, how the localisations have evolved).⁶²⁷ The agency of the individuals, both personally and on behalf of their organisations is what propels the sport forward at the grassroots. The initiatives of someone like Jaroslav Poriz has provided quality, ‘authentic’ training facilities for Czech athletes and those from surrounding countries to use. Such moves benefited him as an athlete, but also provided a niche that was not being met and which he felt he could fill. Likewise, Stephen Gadd has worked hard to align his federation with the Netherlands Olympic Committee so that they can work through official channels of government support to strengthen the federation and have sufficient resources to develop amateur sumo. It comes with a responsibility to produce results and meet targets to ensure that funding will continue. Martin Stirling has channelled athletes from his martial arts training scheme into the sport of amateur sumo, hoping both that they will benefit from the experience and that the numbers of sumo athletes in New Zealand will be bolstered. He has also committed funds from his training scheme, as far as that organisation’s constitution allows, to support these athletes in tournaments in New Zealand and overseas. Elsewhere, Peter Armstrong, and after him, Katrina Watts, have used their contacts in Japan and in the Japanese expatriate community to assist Australian sumo wherever possible.

⁶²⁷ There is, of course, also an important part played by the social and governmental frameworks in each country with respect to their views on sport in general and their support of particular sports.

Thus, the sport is no longer in the hands of Japanese actors, or even being run centrally by administrators within the IFS or the *Nihon Sumō Renmei*. While both of these groups have been important in the initial internationalisation of amateur sumo, with continuing global influence amateur sumo can no longer be jealously guarded by Japanese gatekeepers. Without the ‘buy in’ of these individuals across the globe amateur sumo would wither and die. Despite this, the IFS Executive has continued to direct the sport as it sees fit and expects the continental unions and national federations to fall into line. With such a reliance on the abilities and goodwill of the charismatic individuals mentioned above, this heavy handed approach will likely soon wear thin. Although they do not yet hold the power to control the sport of amateur sumo themselves, it is the sum of the contributions of these people that embodies the sport, and the global influences upon amateur sumo, rather than the institutionalism that the International Sumo Federation currently exhibits.

APPENDIX I – Demographic information of interviewees

The following table of interviewees provides data on their age, nationality, location, role and experience within amateur sumo.

One interviewee was not prepared to have his name used, and so I have used a pseudonym and withheld his age so as not to identify him (this has been indicated by using a * symbol and placing the name in italics). The demographic and temporal data is correct at the time of the interview. The indicated position that each interviewee holds represents their main contribution(s) at the time of the interview. However, as many interviewees hold, or have held, multiple roles as athletes, administrators and officials, etc. and also may hold concurrent roles across different organisations, it cannot be considered comprehensive of their entire experience in amateur sumo (indicated in the next column to the right).

The general questions on which the interviews were conducted are listed in Appendix II, but it must be noted that, in addition to these formalised interviews, further informal conversations with some of the above respondents and with other amateur sumo participants (from a variety of countries, including Ireland, the United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, the United States and New Zealand) contributed useful insights into my research and provided further information to contextualise the responses of my interviewees and my own research observations.

Name	Age	Gender	Nationality	Position(s)	Sumo experience	Date	Location	Minutes
Rowan Klein	33	M	Australian	Athlete	since 2002	30 August 2004	Sydney, Australia	35
John Traill	37	M	Australian	Athlete	since 1996	30 August 2004	Sydney, Australia	30
<i>Suzuki Taro*</i>	<i>withheld*</i>	M	Japanese	University sumo club coach	since childhood	11 September 2004	Kyoto, Japan	25
Petr Matous	24	M	Czech	Athlete	since 2003	28 October 2004	Tokyo, Japan	46
Katrina Watts	52	F	Australian	IFS director; later President of Australian Sumo Federation	since 1998	29 October 2004	Osaka, Japan	56
Ono Takahiro	early-50s	M	Japanese	IFS Secretary-General	since childhood	2 November 2004	Tokyo, Japan	51
Kitada Nobuo	late-60s	M	Japanese	President of <i>Nihon Shinsumō Renmei</i>	since childhood	4 November 2004	Osaka, Japan	105
Stephen Gadd (i)	mid-40s	M	Netherlands	President of Netherland Sumo Federation; Secretary-General of European Sumo Union	since 1996	13 May 2005	Rotterdam, Netherlands	31
Stephen Gadd (ii)	"	"	"	" " "	" "	20 May 2005	Rotterdam, Netherlands	43
Jaroslav Poriz jr	32	M	Czech	President of Czech Sumo Union	since 1997	26 June 2005	Jilemnice, Czech Rep.	42
Christoph Ducho	early-40s	M	German	German Sumo Federation referee	since 1998	10 July 2005	Brandenburg an der Havel, Germany	28
Karl-Heinz Merz	late-40s	M	German	German Sumo Federation referee	since 1999	12 July 2005	Fürstenwalde, Germany	40
Jesse Moerkerk	24	M	Dutch	Athlete	since 2003	15 July 2005	Haarlem, Netherlands	46
Claudia de Graauw	late-20s	F	Dutch	Athlete	since 1997	16 July 2005	Rotterdam, Netherlands	48
Manuela van der Brink	late-20s	F	Dutch	Athlete	since 1998	18 July 2005	Duisburg, Germany	35
Hanah Weerkamp	26	F	Dutch	Athlete	since 1999	18 July 2005	Duisburg, Germany	42
Gunter Romenath	64	M	German	President of European Sumo Union	since 1992	19 July 2005	Duisburg, Germany	75

Name	Age	Gender	Nationality	Position(s)	Sumo experience	Date	Location	Minutes
Francois Wahl	early-50s	M	Swiss	President of Swiss Sumo Society; Treasurer of European Sumo Union	since 1993	19 July 2005	Duisburg, Germany	25
Dennis Oversluizen	26	M	Dutch	Netherlands Sumo Federation technical adviser	since 2004	20 July 2005	Duisburg, Germany	20
Joyce Chou	early-20s	F	New Zealander	Athlete	2002	10 October 2005	Hiroshima, Japan	21
Peter Armstrong	60	M	Australian	President of Australian Sumo Federation; President of Oceania Sumo Union	since 1996	5 February 2006	Sydney, Australia	54
Martin Stirling	57	M	New Zealander	President of Sumo New Zealand; later President of Oceania Sumo Union	since 1990	2 April 2006	Lower Hutt, New Zealand	44
Douglas Milligan	early-50s	M	New Zealander	Wellington Japanese cultural festival organiser	2004 festival involved sumo	6 April 2006	Wellington, New Zealand	15
Tsuihiji Rie	28	F	Japanese	Athlete	since 1996	17 October 2006	Osaka, Japan	31
Satoyama Miki	23	F	Japanese	Athlete	since 1999	21 October 2006	Osaka, Japan	55
Ishigaya Satomi	25	F	Japanese	Athlete	since 1998	24 October 2006	Tokyo, Japan	58

NB. I conducted two interviews with Stephen Gadd, focusing on different subject matter. On 13 May 2005, I interviewed him about amateur sumo in the Netherlands and his personal involvement with the sport, while on 20 May 2005, I asked him questions about the European Sumo Union and its operations (including his role in the organisation)

APPENDIX II – Questions guiding the interviews in this study

The interviewees in this study represent a variety of perspectives on amateur sumo worldwide. For this reason, the interviews were semi-structured, employing a mixture of questions that all other interviewees were asked and specific questions pertinent to the viewpoint of that individual. This enabled me to explore the interviewee's participation in amateur sumo, and the perspective each could provide to this study, in a way that was not as restricted as a questionnaire or a set of pre-arranged questions might have been. Additionally, rather than simply asking the questions outlined below or using them as a script, I endeavoured to engage with each interviewee in a conversation about their participation in amateur sumo and about the sport itself, using the questions as a guide. Each interview took shape around the questions below, but, equally, was built around the responses the interviewees provided, the additional information they wished to provide and the resulting queries that their responses triggered.

All interview participants were asked the basic following questions:

- *What is your name and position?*
- *How long have you been involved in amateur sumo?*
- *What interested you about amateur sumo?*
- *What are your views on amateur sumo as a sport?*
- *What sort of influence do you see that Japan has on the sport?*
- *Do you think amateur sumo is a Japanese sport or is it an international sport?*
- *How has the sport changed in the time that you've been involved?*
- *What are your thoughts on the presence of women in amateur sumo?*
- *What are your thoughts on amateur sumo becoming an Olympic sport in the future?*
- *How do you see the sport developing in the future?*
- *What are your personal goals for your involvement in amateur Sumo?*
- *How do you think it is viewed by the public, by ordinary people?*
- *What would you like people to know about amateur sumo?*
- *Is there anything else you want to add or any sort of comment you want to make?*

Based on the interviewee's position in the sport, other general questions were asked to different groups as below.

Administrators and officials were asked:

- *What does your role entail?*
- *What kind of role does your organisation have in developing the sport?*
- *What kind of role does your organization have in the regional and international administration of amateur sumo?*
- *How does your organization fund its activities?*
- *Do you receive support from any national sporting body or Olympic committee?*
- *What kind of assistance has your organization received from the IFS?*
- *How does your organisation recruit new athletes and members?*
- *When and how did women become involved in your organisation?*

Athletes were asked additional questions:

- *Which other sports have you done previously?*
- *Is sumo now your main sport?*
- *Do you bring in the techniques from the other sports that you've done?*
- *In training and competition, do you notice different styles of sumo?*
- *Are there any influences in amateur sumo developing from other combat sports?*
- *What kind of tournaments do you go to in a usual year?*
- *In your organisation, do men and women train with/against each other?*
- *Do you get much in the way of media attention?*
- *What kind of reaction have you had from your peers and family?*
- *How long do you see yourself remaining involved in amateur sumo?*

Respondents living outside of Japan were asked:

- *How did amateur sumo begin in your country?*
- *What kind of contact had you had with Japan or Japanese culture prior to beginning amateur sumo?*

Women were asked:

- *Are men and women treated equally in amateur sumo?*
- *Is women's amateur sumo given the same recognition as amateur sumo for men?*

All interviewees were asked follow-up and additional questions based upon their responses to some of the above questions and the specific information they were able to provide from their standpoint. For example, this included interviewees being asked to explain aspects of their competition or practice, about the nature of amateur sumo in their country, about their personal experiences in the sport, and about differences they perceived between different countries and different athletes.

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