

## PRESS RELEASE

for

### ***SUMO: A Thinking Fan's Guide to Japan's National Sport*** by David Benjamin

RUTLAND, Vermont — Deftly balancing insight with irreverence, David Benjamin, in *SUMO: A Thinking Fan's Guide to Japan's National Sport*, dispels the mysteries of sumo and illuminates, for everyone from aficionados to novices, the world's biggest, fattest, nakedest sport.

*SUMO*, released in early 2010 by Tuttle Publishing, is an expanded version of Benjamin's earlier guide, *The Joy of Sumo*, the most popular English-language book on sumo ever published. *SUMO: A Thinking Fan's Guide*, is the first new book on sumo for Western readers in some 15 years, bringing the sport — its changes, its politics, its problems and its timeless appeal — up to the moment.

In *SUMO*, Benjamin walks the reader through every phase of sumo's daily battle, from the opening flourish (“the sumo stomp”) to the often ludicrous post-match “interview,” with all the dance steps in between (“the sumotori rag”). He does so in a lighthearted style both personal and pedagogic, often comparing sumo to sports such as football, baseball and hoops.

*SUMO* includes innovations in spectatorship little contemplated by the sport's purists. For example, to help fans identify individual *rikishi* (wrestlers), Benjamin augments their polysyllabic Japanese names (Kitakachidoki, Takamisakari) with memorable nicknames that range from the sacred (“The Temporal Universe”) to the profane (“Mad Dog” and “Sweathog”).

Benjamin also eases the sumo experience by classifying *rikishi* in four distinct body types: Athletes, Butterballs, Cabdrivers and (the biggest of all) Hippos.

To remedy sumo's lack of a scoring system, Benjamin simply invented one — a method for any fan to score matches and keep track of each athlete's “stats.”

In *SUMO*, Benjamin also offers convincing statistical proof of sumo's worst-kept dirty secret, the system of cheating, or match-trading, known as *yaochozumo*. So effective is Benjamin's method, developed some 20 years ago, that his research was repeated in 2002 by *Freakonomics* authors Steven Levitt and Mark Duggan.

Also in *SUMO: A Thinking Fan's Guide to Japan's National Sport*:

- Benjamin's expert insight into sumo's “Mongol invasion” and its implications for the future of sumo
- A vivid description of one of the great matches of all time, “The Ripsnorter in Nagoya” between Asahufuji and Chiyonofuji
- The revelation of sumo's coolest move
- A tongue-in-cheek blueprint for sumo reform that could solve most of the sport's problems

James Fallows, former Japan correspondent for *The Atlantic Monthly*, described *The Joy of Sumo* as “the most entertaining” book ever written on the subject. In that spirit, Benjamin notes: “There is more laughter in a day of sumo than a whole season in the National Football League. You don’t need to know it all to get the joke. But the more you understand, the more fun sumo is.”

Indeed, Benjamin laces his explanation of sumo with lines that one reader characterized as “laugh-out-loud funny.” In refuting, for example, the claim by TV commentators that many Hippos are “fast for their size,” Benjamin writes about one of them: “... Yamamotoyama... in terms of sheer mass [565 pounds], is four people, and he’s only got two legs. Try getting four people with eight legs to move together in a hurry and you have a sense of your average Hippo’s mobility. There are escalators that are shiftier...”

Benjamin is the author also of the memoir, *The Life and Times of the Last Kid Picked* (Random House, 2002), praised by the *Hartford Courant*’s Carole Goldberg as “pungent with vivid writing” and by the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* as “richly hilarious.” He lived in Tokyo, absorbing sumo on television, from 1987-1993.

*SUMO: A Thinking Fan's Guide to Japan's National Sport* retains most of the keenly humorous illustrations by artist Greg Holfeld that enlivened *The Joy of Sumo*.