

PRESS RELEASE

for

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

RUTLAND, Vermont — In 1994, the powerful and secretive Sumo Association of Japan emerged from its cocoon to summon David Benjamin, author of *The Joy of Sumo: A Fan's Notes* to a press conference in Tokyo, to answer for his sins against the sumo establishment.

He didn't attend.

"I couldn't go," said Benjamin, who has now updated and revised his 1991 book, now titled *SUMO: A Thinking Fan's Guide to Japan's National Sport*, which will be released by Tuttle Publishing in early 2010.

"I wasn't in Japan any longer. I didn't even know about the press conference 'til it was already over."

The elders of the Sumo Association — regularly referred to in Benjamin's book as "the old farts" — used that media moment to deny the practice in their sport of *yaochozumo*, the equivalent in boxing of "taking a dive." In his book, Benjamin not only documents and describes the art of cheating in sumo, he keeps track of it, using statistical proofs that he developed in 1989.

While living in Japan, Benjamin also wrote about *yaocho* in other publications, including *Tokyo Journal*, *Tokyo Business Today* and *Asahi Graph*. His mastery of sumo's intricacies earned him a position — unprecedented for a "foreign" writer — as the regular sumo columnist for a major Japanese periodical, the newsweekly *Shukan Bunshun*.

Benjamin's research on *yaocho* was so effective that it was replicated, and verified, by the authors of the pop economics bestseller, *Freakonomics*, Stephen Dubner and Steven Levitt.

Benjamin's book, *SUMO: A Thinking Fan's Guide to Japan's National Sport*, is far more than just a *yaocho* exposé. Indeed, Benjamin has written what James Fallows, former Japan correspondent for *The Atlantic Monthly*, has called "the most entertaining guide to sumo" ever written. It is a book that dispels the mysteries of Japan's national sport with incisive analogies to popular Western sports and a refreshing dose of humor.

Early in the book, for instance, the author expresses his own enthusiasm for sumo: "... Sumo is, minute for minute, split-second for split-second, the quintessential spectator sport. It's sudden and violent, with almost no rules. One guy against the other and the ref (most of the time) is just another pretty pair of pajamas. The only guy who'll ever blow a whistle is the drunk in the 53rd row..."

Similar enthusiasm, for Benjamin's book, can be found in reviewers like Kihm Winship, author of "My Sumo Library," who wrote: "More than a great sumo book, more than a great sports book, this is a great book. The world would be a better place if this book had as wide a distribution as the Gideon Bible. But this is not the book for the sumo nerd. It is the book for those who want to laugh all the way to understanding and enjoying the sport without worrying whether the referee is barefoot, wearing socks, or wearing socks and sandals, and what that means. Benjamin loves and knows sumo, and by the end of the book, you will know and love sumo, and Benjamin's writing."