

Reading: The Americans Meet Japanese Wrestlers

While contemplating these substantial evidences of Japanese generosity, the attention of all was suddenly riveted upon a body of monstrous fellows, who tramped down the beach like so many huge elephants. They were professional wrestlers, and formed part of the retinue of the princes, who kept them for their private amusement and for public entertainment. They were some twenty five in number and were men enormously tall in stature and immense in weight of the flesh. Their scant costume, which was merely a colored cloth about the loins, adorned with fringes and emblazoned with the armorial bearings of the prince to whom each belonged, revealed their gigantic proportions in all the bloated fullness of fat and breadth of muscle. Their proprietors, the princes, seemed proud of them, and were careful to show their points to the greatest advantage before our astonished countrymen. Some two or three of these huge monsters were the most famous wrestlers in Japan... Koyanagi, the reputed bully of the capital, was one of them, and paraded himself with the conscious pride of superior immensity and strength. He was especially brought before the Commodore (Perry), that he might examine his massive form. The commissioners insisted that the monstrous fellow should be minutely inspected, that the hardness of his well-rounded muscles should be felt, and that the fatness of his cushioned frame should be tested by the touch. The Commodore accordingly attempted to grasp his immense arm, which he found as solid as it was huge, and then passed his hand over the monstrous neck, which fell in folds of massive flesh, like the dewlap of a prize ox. As some surprise was naturally expressed at this wondrous exhibition of animal development, the monster himself gave a grunt expressive of his flattered vanity.

They were all so immense in flesh that they appeared to have lost their distinctive features, and seemed to be only twenty-five masses of fat. Their eyes were barely visible... the prominence of their noses was lost in the puffiness of bloated cheeks, and their heads were almost set directly on their bodies, with merely folds of flesh where the neck and chin were usually found. Their great size, however, was more owing to the development of muscle than to the deposition of fat, for, although they were evidently well-fed, they were not less well exercised, and capable of great feats of strength. As a preliminary exhibition of the power of these men, the princes set them to removing the sacks of rice to a convenient place on the shore for shipping. Each of the sacks weighed not less than one hundred and twenty-five pounds, and there were only a couple of the wrestlers who did not carry each two sacks at a time. They bore the sacks on the right shoulder, lifting the first from the ground and adjusting it without help, but obtaining aid for the raising of the second. One man carried a sack suspended by his teeth, and another, taking one in his arms, turned repeated somersaults as he held it, and apparently with as much ease as if his tons of flesh had been only so much gossamer, and his load a feather.

Excerpted from Francis L. Hawks, *Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan*. (New York, D. Appleton and Co., 1856), vol. 1, 430-31.