

Friends of Japan

In this report we introduce the life and work of two friends of Japan.



Osuna-arashi Kintaro

Born in Egypt in 1992. Began sumo in his home country at the age of 15.
Came to Japan in 2011 and joined the Otake sumo “stable,”
competing in his first professional tournament in March 2012.
Currently ranked in the top tier of professional sumo (the *makuuchi* division).

Chasing Dreams, Building Bridges



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When Abdelrahman Ahmed Shaalan was a little boy, he admired his father—a football player. Through his father and mother’s support, he developed a love of sports. Living in Egypt, he never imagined he would travel to Japan to find his dream. And yet, the boy from the Egyptian town of Mansoura, has become one of the most recognizable professional sumo wrestlers (*rikishi*) —in Japan.

Shaalan’s love of sports—mainly body building—began when he was 11 years old.

His father had taught him to be ambitious and to work hard. One day, when he was 15 years old, he went to the gym and was surprised—some people were practicing sumo. Fascinated by the sport, he immediately decided to join one of the classes. Soon after, he was challenged to a match against another sumo player. To his surprise, his counterpart who was much smaller, won. On that day, shaalan lost seven straight matches to the same wrestler.

After that experience, shaalan wanted to know the secrets of sumo wrestlers’ strength. He trained hard. He watched videos about sumo. And he read books about Japanese culture. Four years later, when he was 19 years old, he made the decision to follow his dream. He flew to Japan to become a *rikishi*.

Shaalan joined a stable and chose Osuna-arashi as his ring name, which means “the Great Sandstorm.” “Life as a foreign sumo wrestler in Japan is rewarding but challenging,” Osuna-arashi said. First, there is a lot of pressure on him because he is the first *rikishi* from Africa. Second, it took him some time to become used to the hard and competitive life of a *rikishi*. However, thorough determination and support from his trainers and stablemates, Osuna-arashi has matured as a person and as a sumo wrestler.

One of Osuna-arashi’s favorite activities is meeting people and sharing his love of sumo. In Japan, there is a tradition in which men believe they will have good health if they shake the hands of sumo wrestlers, he said. Taking part in this tradition gives him great pride, he added.

He has also learned the virtues of purity, humility and respect. Before a match, for example, sumo wrestlers throw salt on the ring where the match is played (*dohyo*) —as an act of purification. After a match, both the winner and the loser bow to each other in respect and humility. “These are virtues that everyone should learn,” Osuna-arashi said.

Having lived in Japan for three years, Osuna-arashi is also learning more about Japanese culture. Politeness, gentleness, and consideration for others, are some of the traits he likes most about Japanese people. Moreover, sumo has given him a new goal, that of cultural ambassador. “When young people in Africa see me doing sumo in Japan, they’ll know that anything is possible,” Osuna-arashi said with pride.

The man called “the Great Sandstorm” is more focused than ever on his dream. “My dream is to become a *yokozuna*—which is the Grand Champion,” Osuna-arashi said. Along the way, he wants to be a bridge between Africa and Japan.