

**The Story
of the World
Professional
Wrestling
Champion
Rikidozan**

I AM

A KOREAN

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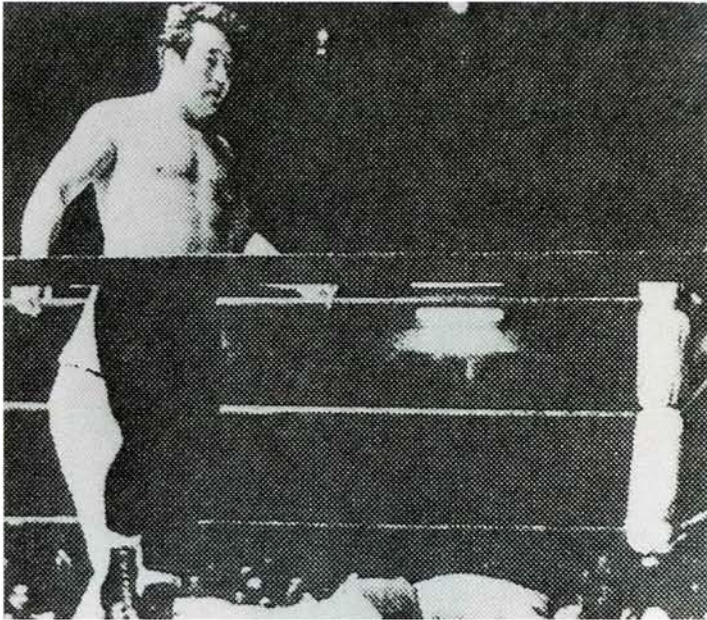
The Story of the World Professional
Wrestling Champion Rikidozan

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1989



Rikidozan, the king of professional wrestling
in the world (His real name is Kim Sin Rak)



Rikidozan knocks down Kimura, Japanese player, in the finals for the Japanese professional wrestling championship



Rikidozan getting a neck hold on an American wrestler in the contest held in Honolulu

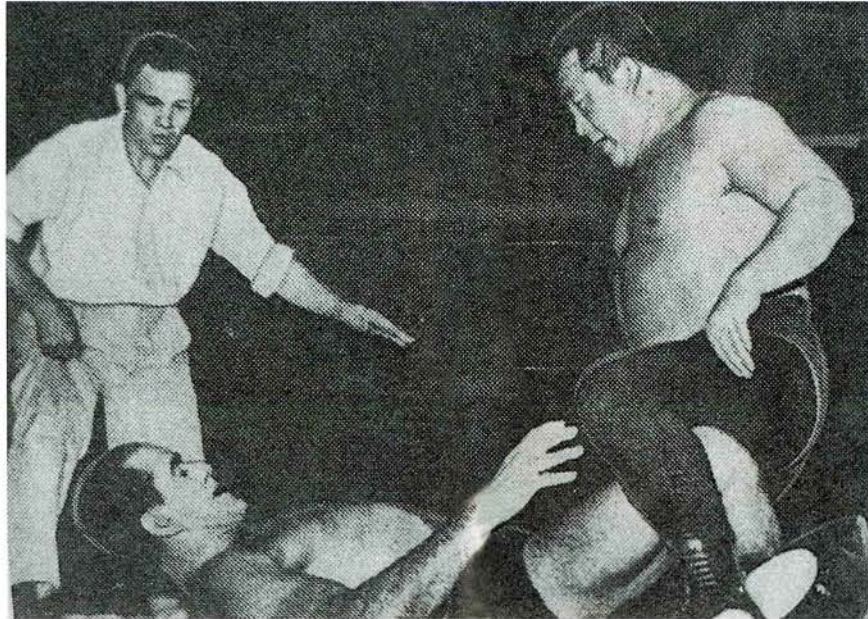


Rikidozan applying a headlock on Rue Thez, American wrestler

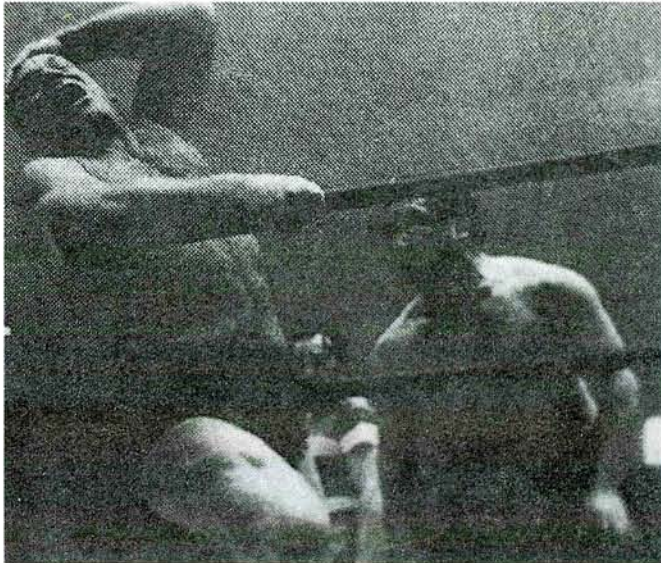


A scene of Asian tag wrestling contest which attracted an unusually large attendance

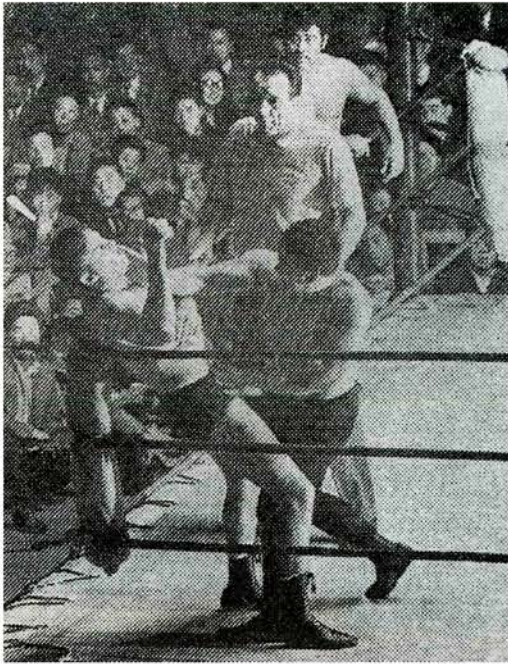
A wrestler is struck down by one blow of Rikidozan's iron fist



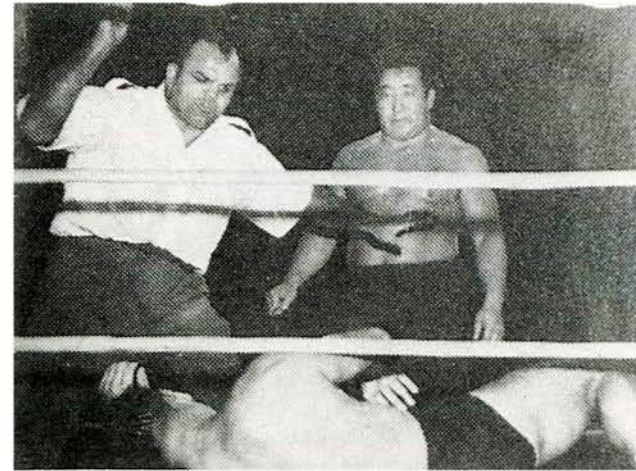
At Los Angeles Rikidozan gains a fall on an American wrestler to win the world professional wrestling championship



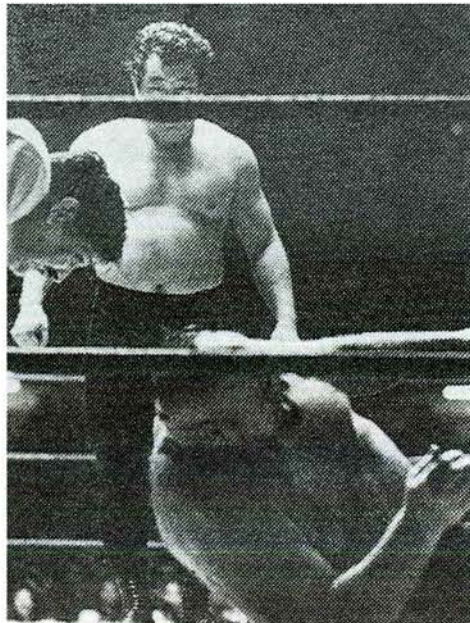
Ortega who has lost the match in the First World Professional Wrestling League Game hands over the trophy cup to Rikidozan



The scene of Rikidozan administering a hard blow with his *karate* chop on the chest of American wrestler Mike



Rikidozan defeats Rue Thez, American wrestler



Rikidozan knocks down Kong to win the Asian professional wrestling championship



Rue Thez congratulates Rikidozan for preserving again the trophy cup in the Fourth World Professional Wrestling League Game

CONTENTS

Preface.....	10
--------------	----

Chapter 1

1. From a Japanese <i>Sumo</i> Wrestler to a Professional Wrestler	12
2. Going to Hawaii Alone	25
3. His Forte <i>Karate</i> Chop.....	34
4. “I Want Korea to Have It”	45

Chapter 2

1. Birth of the “Rikidozan Training School”	61
2. Contest with Rue Thez.....	64
3. A Cowardly Fellow.....	74
4. Niita Shinsaku.....	88

Chapter 3

1. Azumafuji	104
--------------------	-----

2. Money Spent in Advance.....	115
3. The Returned Champion Belt	123
4. The Hand-Sword of Justice.....	126
5. Contest with Rue Thez Again	132
6. His Partner Was a Double-Crosser	148

Chapter 4

1. The Decisive League Game	164
2. The Smashed Decoration	175
3. The Warm Fatherly Bosom.....	187
4. I Am a Korean (1).....	193
5. The Eighth of December	210
6. I Am a Korean (2).....	222

Epilogue	248
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PREFACE

Rikidozan (Kim Sin Rak is his real name), the hero of this story and king of world professional wrestling, lived all his life with the national pride and self-respect of a Korean preserved in the depths of his heart.

I became acquainted with Rikidozan on October 6, 1957. It was a Sunday and a wrestling contest for world championship was to take place at the Korakuen Ball Game Field in Tokyo between Rikidozan and Rue Thez of America. Unfortunately it rained and the contest was put off. On my way home I called at the house of Rikidozan with a few friends of mine.

Rikidozan was delighted beyond measure to see us Korean students in Japan. He said he was also a Korean and told us of the circumstances in which he had found himself taken to Japan in an excited, sometimes furious, tone. It was in the latter part of the 1930s when Japanese imperialism was holding Korea as a colony.

Unusually strong and stout, he was taken to Japan in his teenage and made to discard his Korean name and adopt

a Japanese one. But he was always subjected to national contempt due to his Korean origin. He won Japanese *sumo* wrestling contests many times, but never once his name was made known widely to the public.

So, with resentment against those who despised him because he was a Korean, he changed over to professional wrestling. In the ten-odd years when he was engaged in professional wrestling he defeated many celebrated professional wrestlers of Japan, the United States and other capitalist countries and held the world championship continuously. His name as the “king” of professional wrestling resounded throughout the world.

Indeed, we are proud of this. I met Rikidozan many times and saw the scenes of his contests directly and on television. In this course I was able to get a glimpse of his high national spirit as a Korean. This is why I have made up my mind to write a book to make the story of Rikidozan known to the world.

January 1989

CHAPTER 1

1. From a Japanese *Sumo* Wrestler to a Professional Wrestler

In February 1939 Kim Sin Rak (Rikidozan) entered the Nishonoseki *Sumo* Wrestling Company in Ryogoku, Tokyo.

In face of all descriptions of insults and mistreatments, he made desperate efforts to improve his *sumo* wrestling techniques in this company. Even when others were sleeping in the lodgings, he came out to the training gymnasium and trained himself hard.

As a result, he participated in the regular *sumo* tournament in 1941, two years after he joined the Nishonoseki *Sumo* Wrestling Company. This was a startling event either for the whole *sumo* wrestling community of Japan or for the Nishonoseki company.

Tamanotumi, the head of this company, placed great hopes on Kim Sin Rak. Kim entered the regular tournament for the first time from the west team under

the *sumo* wrestler's name of Rikidozan. This name was conferred on him by the Japan *Sumo* Wrestling Association.

He made good showings in the regular tournaments and his standing rose every year. All other *sumo* wrestlers would ascend the ladder of wrestler's ranks with great difficulty, now rising and now falling. But Kim Sin Rak never once fell but kept rising rung by rung.

Rikidozan was now widely known among the *sumo* fans.

Even in the *sumo* wrestling community he came to be called by the name of Rikidozan rather than by his Japanese name Momota Mitsuhiro. Kim Sin Rak thus became Rikidozan.

Sumo experts predicted, "Rikidozan will soon become a *Yokozuna* (the highest title of the *sumo* wrestler-Tr.), grand champion *sumo* wrestler." The *sumo* fans held the same view.

The spring *sumo* tournament of 1950 offered Rikidozan a decisive opportunity. In the spring tournament the previous year he had suffered a reverse due to his illness from pulmonary distomiasis. But in the subsequent summer and autumn tournaments, he made good records.

Therefore, if he should make a fair showing in this spring tournament of 1950, he could be promoted to the rank of *Ozeki* (second highest rank of the *sumo* wrestler–Tr.) or *Yokozuna*.

He fought splendidly and won the contests. The *sumo* fans believed that he would now be made a *Yokozuna*. The newspapers reported in the same way. Nevertheless, the ranking committee of the *Sumo* Wrestling Association did not take up the question of raising Rikidozan in rank.

The ranking committee refused to confer the well-deserving rank of *Yokozuna* on him for the sole reason that he was a Korean.

Rikidozan was a Korean. He was born at Sinphung-ri, Ryongwon Sub-county, Hongwon County, South Hamgyong Province, on November 4, 1920, as the third son of the farmer Kim Sok Thae.

Momota Inosuke, a Japanese entertainment business manager, who happened to watch Kim’s performance in the Korean wrestling circle was fascinated by his physique and fight and could not keep his eyes off him. He took him to Japan and, changing his nationality into Japanese, sent him into a *sumo* wrestling company. Kim

protested against the wicked attempt to make money through the instrumentality of him by fabricating his name, nationality and place of birth without his own knowledge.

But all he got for this was abuses, intimidation and thrashing.

He now made up his mind, “All right, if I am fated to be a Japanese *sumo* wrestler, I must be the king of *sumo* by all means. I must become a *Yokozuna* and shake up this Japanese *sumo* company who despise and humiliate me because I am a Korean.”

After that, he was engrossed in hard training. And in face of all manner of national discrimination and despise, he climbed up the ladder rung by rung from the bottom until at last he reached the rank of *Sekiwake* (the third rank of the *sumo* wrestler–Tr.). It was indeed the reward for the blood and sweats and tears he had shed for the past ten years.

And now again, he was being treated in this unfair way, and so his anger burnt up in him. He went to Tamanoumi and declared:

“I’m disgusted with the *sumo* community and so I’m leaving my place.”

Tamanoumi was surprised. If Rikidozan gave up, the Nishonoseki company would lose its pillar. This was a grave question affecting the fate of the whole company.

Taking Rikidozan by the hand, Tamanoumi said in a soothing tone:

“Rikidozan, this time they did so, but you’ll be made a *Yokozuna* or an *Ozeki* at the next session of the ranking committee. So, please be prudent. This is a foregone conclusion, and it’s a pity that you should throw away the prize due to you, isn’t it?”

“No, they will do the same next time. I can’t put faith in the Japanese in any case,” said Rikidozan stubbornly. His eyes were blazing with indignations.

“Mr Tamanoumi, I’m Kim Sin Rak. While I’ve been engaged in *sumo* for ten years, I’ve never once thought myself to be Momota. This’ll be the same in future, too. If I had thought myself that way, I would have been the loser in my *sumo* bouts. I think you know this, Mr Tamanoumi. My father is not Momota Inosuke but Kim Sok Thae. I’m not double-tongued. Good-bye.”

Rikidozan came out of the Nishonoseki *Sumo* Wrestling Company.

Back to his lodging, he cut off his topknot which was

the symbol of the Japanese *sumo* wrestler with a kitchen knife.

The history of Japanese *sumo* wrestling knew no case of a Korean being made an *Ozeki* or a *Yokozuna*. It was the opinion of the Japan *Sumo* Wrestling Association and the stand of the *sumo* community that no Korean should be given such a rank. It was therefore impossible for Rikidozan to rise to a higher rank whatever good showings he had made in the *sumo* contests and however outstanding he might have been technically.

After leaving the Nishonoseki *Sumo* Wrestling Company, Rikidozan scampered about in Tokyo to find employment. There was nobody who invited him and nowhere for him to go. In the end, he called at the Niita Building Company. As a *sumo* wrestler he had been personally acquainted with the director of that company. Several times he had been his companion in drinking bouts. Fortunately Director Niita Shinsaku was in his office. Rikidozan told him why he came to see him and begged him to take him into the building company.

Niita listened to him, smoking a cigar.

“Well, if you want to return to *sumo* wrestling, I’ll try my best to help you back,” said he. “It’s unreasonable

to give up *sumo* when you're expected to be a *Yokozuna* quite soon. Aren't you sorry?"

Niita said this not just for formality's sake.

If he used his influence, he could reinstall Rikidozan in his post in spite of the stiff usage of the *sumo* community.

He had a great influence on the *sumo* community.

After the National Game House, the indoor stadium for wrestling, was burnt down in a US bombing in March 1945, the Japan *Sumo* Wrestling Association and *sumo* wrestlers were having a hard time for lack of wrestling facilities.

In this situation, Niita Shinsaku built for them a temporary National Game House with the investment of 30 million *yen* in March 1949. As a result, he became a man of great influence in the *sumo* community of Japan.

"For the life of me I won't be a *sumo* wrestler again," said Rikidozan. "I'll do any kind of work and so please take me on."

With this Rikidozan gazed at Niita.

"I wonder what kind of work I can assign to you," Niita muttered to himself and shut his eyes after stubbing out his cigar in the ashtray.

"If that's your wish, come and work in my company," Niita said, opening his eyes after some thought.

"I'm willing to do whatever work. I don't care if it's building labour."

"You were a renowned *Sekiwake*, and how can I put you to physical labour? Do the work of material supply department chief concurrently serving as field overseer for the engineering works."

Niita needed a strong field overseer to gain control over the rough construction workers. It was not easy to find a man as strong as Rikidozan. So, Kim Sin Rak changed from *sumo* wrestler Rikidozan to the material supply department chief holding an additional post of field overseer in the Niita company.

After work one day Rikidozan went to the cabaret Bimazu in the Ginza. It was crowded, and there was no unoccupied table. In a corner there was a large table, at which a fine-built customer was seated, drinking alone. Rikidozan approached it. He obtained the man's consent and sat down at the table.

"I think I saw you somewhere," the sturdy-built man said to Rikidozan.

"I'm Rikidozan."

“Rikidozan? You mean you’re the *sumo* wrestler Rikidozan?”

“Yes, I’m.”

“Indeed, so you are. No wonder that I thought I had seen you somewhere. I’m Harold Sakada, a wrestler. Let’s make each other’s acquaintance.”

“A wrestler?”

Rikidozan had heard and known about professional wrestling, but this was the first time he saw a professional wrestler.

“I’m a professional wrestler living in Hawaii, and at the same time a professional wrestling show businessman.”

“In Hawaii? You mean Hawaii of the United States?”

“Yes, I came on September 16 with Bobby Branz well-known in the world’s professional wrestling circles. Haven’t you seen newspapers? There will be a professional wrestling match on September 30. If you have time to spare, come and see it. Have you ever seen a professional wrestling match?”

“No, I’ve never seen it. And how is it done?”

“It’s said seeing is believing. In a few days you’ll be seeing the contests for yourself. At that time, I’ll explain you the tricks while watching the matches.”

Harold Sakada offered Rikidozan a cup. Rikidozan asked him many questions about professional wrestling till late that night. Sakada was greatly interested in Rikidozan; he was deeply impressed by his physical build.

Harold Sakada was a second-generation Japanese born in Hawaii. He participated in the London Olympic Games in 1948 as a weight lifter and won a silver medal. Later, he changed over to professional wrestling and won worldwide fame by winning the world tag championship of professional wrestling.

As scheduled, the professional wrestling contest took place at the Memorial Hall on September 30. Rikidozan watched the match from the front row of the seats. Professional *judo* players were also seen among the spectators.

The contest at the end, Rikidozan went to Sakada and told him of his resolve.

“I want to become a professional wrestler,” he said.

“You aren’t saying so under the sway of passing excitement?”

“No, not at all. I’m by nature as good as word.”

“Oh well, but countless people say by the impulse of

the moment that they would like to become a professional wrestler. However, so many of them give up sometime later, that is, in a few months, unable to stand the hard training. But be that as it may, let me believe in you as you say you aren't double-tongued."

Tapping Rikidozan on the shoulder, Harold Sakada told him to take time to think and then come to see him again. After that he returned to his lodging.

At six o'clock the next morning, Rikidozan called at the house of Director Niita.

"I want to have a talk with you, Mr Director."

"I told you to come to my office when you have some business with me whether it's private or official. I'm busy. So, go back."

"I won't go back, even if you tell me to," Rikidozan retorted, and stood in the way of Niita Shinsaku.

"What's the matter? Say it promptly. Are you asking me for a loan of money?"

"If that's my business, I won't surely call at your home. The fact is..."

Rikidozan told him enthusiastically about the professional wrestling contest he had seen the previous night.

"So, you Rikidozan want to go in for it?" Niita asked back after hearing him out.

"Yes, sir. After the match was over, I went to see a wrestler called Harold Sakada and asked him to use his influence in my behalf."

"And did he agree?"

"Yes. He means to stay in Japan for about a month, and he said he would give me elementary training in the meantime."

"Then what are you going to do after that?"

"I intend to go to Hawaii and undergo training in professional wrestling in real earnest."

"And are you sure you'll hold out the show to the last this time? You'll not give it up halfway?"

"I'm prepared to face the music to the end. I don't want to let this chance slip away. I beg you to permit me," Rikidozan said with a bow.

"If there's money in the fighting business called professional wrestling, it deserves trying your hand at."

"Thank you, sir."

With this, Rikidozan stepped aside.

In the running car, Niita Shinsaku wondered which would be more profitable, keeping Rikidozan as a field

overseer or allowing him to become a professional wrestler. If he should become a professional wrestler of worldwide fame, it will be far more profitable to choose the second alternative. But isn't he speaking by the impulse of momentary excitement and transient mood? Niita Shinsaku decided to find out how Rikidozan was spending his time every day, and to take a decision after that.

The finding was that he got up at dawn and did running exercise every day. When it was the hour to report for work, he went to the construction site by motorcycle.

During the lunch break, too, he did the running exercise. A day's work over, he went straight to Harold Sakada for coaching. He did not violate this routine even a single day.

Niita made up his mind at last. He dismissed Rikidozan from his plural posts of material supply department chief and field overseer and raised him to the office of adviser. Rikidozan was nominally an adviser, but he had nothing to do. So, he was able to devote himself to training all day long.

On October 28, there was a ten-minute one-game

match between Bobby Branz and Rikidozan at the Memorial Hall.

Rikidozan thrust the chest of Branz with all his strength.

A *Sekiwake* as *sumo* wrestler before, he was really strong. But he was technically tactless. All his tricks were to push by main force, to lift and throw down his adversary and to strike with his palms. But this was insufficient to beat his opponent.

Meanwhile, Branz was struck with wonder at the unyielding spirit of Rikidozan who would not retreat even a step, countering his kicks with kicks. It was a surprise to him that there was so stubborn a wrestler in Japan.

The match ended in a draw. The professional wrestling experts of Japan call that day the "dawn of Japan's professional wrestling." This was how professional wrestling was started in Japan by Rikidozan.

2. Going to Hawaii Alone

Early in February 1952, Rikidozan left singly for Hawaii. Before departure he sent a telegram to Harold

Sakada. When he received the telegram, Sakada was surprised.

Sakada recalled his first chance meeting with Rikidozan at the cabaret Bimazu in the Ginza of Tokyo a few years before. At that time Rikidozan asked him how to go about professional wrestling and if he could be a professional wrestler. And Sakada kindly explained to him: The professional wrestling contest is held between two professional wrestlers. Its rules are the same with those of free wrestling. But the former are rough and flexible. Most of the fouls are overlooked by the chief umpire. The arena is not a circle as that for amateur wrestlers but the same as the boxing ring. There are doubles and singles matches, and in general a three-game match is held in 61 minutes. But sometimes, a 10-minute one-game match, a 30-minute one-game match or a one-game match in unlimited time is held. But there is no fixed formula. When a contest ends in a tie, the wrestler who played foul will be a loser.

After telling him in detail of the rules of professional wrestling at that time, Sakada said:

“Professional wrestling is by no means an easy job. The professional wrestler must shed more sweat and

blood than any other professional sports players. He may be killed in the ring. Some say that professional wrestlers are shadowed by death. If you insist for all this, I’ll try my best to help you.”

Sakada read the telegram over and over again. It was sent by Rikidozan from Haneda Airport in Tokyo, and no mistake. He picked up the telephone receiver, and said:

“Is that the Sportsmen Club? This is Harold Sakada speaking. I want to speak to the director.”

“I’m Oki.”

“Are you Director Oki? I’m Sakada. I told you once about a young man called Rikidozan. This young man is coming to Hawaii.”

“What are you talking about all of a sudden? Do you think this is Japan? This is Hawaii of the United States.”

Oki would not believe what Sakada was saying. He thought it was a joke.

“It isn’t a joke. I’ve just received a wire from him. He’s coming by plane.”

“A youth who is a failed *ex-sumo* wrestler and knows nothing about the ABC of professional wrestling ...,” said Oki derisively. He spoke in an uninterested tone.

“Do you think this Sakada is introducing to you a

scarecrow? If you aren't interested, I won't bother you any more."

Sakada slammed down the receiver as if he was offended by Oki's disregard for his sincerity. He changed into a suit for street wear and left his home with his wife. After walking some distance, he came to a halt suddenly. Then he looked down the street in expectation of Oki.

"How can you expect Mr Oki to come without appointment? Let's go by ourselves," his wife said, holding his arm.

"Let's wait a little while more. I think he'll come." With this Sakada stroked his close-cropped head. Then he took out his cigarette case and lighted a cigarette, gazing down the street shaded by palm trees.

Oki's original name was Shikina Morio. His Okinawa-born parents had emigrated to Hawaii earlier. Oki was extraordinarily strong from his childhood. He was fond of *judo* and Japanese wrestling in his early years. Even after coming to Hawaii he continued to train himself in *judo* and Japanese wrestling. At the age of 17 he came out top in the Hawaiian wrestling.

In 1932 he made his debut in professional wrestling

and won fame in the United States. Since then he was actively engaged as a professional wrestler with the name of Oki Shikina after his ancestral home Okinawa.

In 1937 and 1938 he competed against the "Golden Greek" Jim for world championship, and when the "Man of Steel" Rue Thez, the title holder for the championship of leading international professional wrestlers, had entered the professional wrestling community, he had coached him in training.

Whenever, newspaper reporters asked him if he was an American or Japanese wrestling player, he would unhesitatingly answer, "I'm an Okinawan player."

"There he's coming," said Sakada raising his hand over his head.

A car which had been coming at a great speed halted suddenly in front of Sakada. Oki wearing coloured glasses opened the door of the car and asked the couple to get in quickly. Sakada and his wife boarded the car. Oki drove the car at full speed.

"What a way to phone! Better not to put in such a call from the first."

"You're turning the tables upon me!" Sakada said scornfully and turned his eyes out of the car window.

When they reached the airport, the plane had already landed on the runway. The door of the airliner was opened and the passengers came down the ladder.

“There he is. The hatless young man with a close-cropped hair. You see the man throwing out his chest.”

Sakada waved his hand to Rikidozan who was walking towards the station building. Seeing Sakada, Rikidozan raised his hands clasped over his head.

“Both his gait and potbelly smack of a *sumo* wrestler,” said Oki giving out long breath.

“Mr Oki, you should wash off his ways of a *sumo* wrestler. He’ll prove worthy of the trouble, I bet. Just wait and see. Some day you’ll be making a bow to me in gratitude.”

“There’s no time. At the most only two weeks are left.”

“You the celebrated Oki Shikina is whimpering. Two weeks are enough, I say. Rikidozan didn’t know even the ABC of professional wrestling, but after 12 days’ training he entered for a match for the first time in his life. And who do you think did he rival? He competed with Bobby Branz known as a leading wrestler in America. He fought a 10-minute one-game match to a draw.”

“With Bobby Branz? It’s incredible without seeing it with my own eyes. Maybe Branz deliberately drew with him to brace him up. But the match this time will be different from that.”

Oki was concerned. From February 17, that is, in two weeks, professional wrestling contests were scheduled to take place in Hawaii. Time was definitely short for coaching Rikidozan, a novice in professional wrestling, for the contests.

“How do you do, Mr Harold Sakada?”

“I’m quite well. I’m so glad to see you come a long way.”

Rikidozan and Sakada were delighted, holding each other’s hand.

“Let me introduce to you Mr Oki Shikina,” said Sakada looking round at Oki who was standing by their side.

Rikidozan greeted him by lowering his head.

“How do you do? I’m Rikidozan. Please do me a favour in future.”

“How do you do? I’ve heard of you from Mr Harold Sakada. And have you come all alone?”

Oki looked around.

“Yes, I’ve come by myself.”

“By yourself?”

Oki measured Rikidozan from top to bottom with his professional eyes. For a professional wrestler Rikidozan was not of a very large build. But he had a rather smart figure as a *sumo* wrestler.

“The contests will start on February 17. Once you have come, you can’t go back doing nothing. See the matches for yourself by way of a start. It’s said seeing is believing. So, you should see them to know what professional wrestling is. Let me hear your decision after that.”

Taking out his cigarette case from his pocket, Oki offered a cigarette to Rikidozan.

“No, thank you. I don’t smoke.”

“Then you don’t drink, too?”

“Yes, I drink a little.”

Oki and Sakada laughed, looking at each other.

“Your brisk character catches my fancy.”

“I haven’t come to Hawaii just to have a look at professional wrestling matches. I’ve come to play a game myself,” said Rikidozan, looking Oki straight in the face. His eyes were as candid as his words. Oki who had been

watching the face of Rikidozan for a while, put a hand on his shoulder.

“If that’s your earnest desire, I’ll put you in the ring. But you must remember Hawaii isn’t Japan but the United States. You may be killed in the ring. Are you willing to fight for all that? Do you know how the whites treat the yellow people? They treat them like the Negroes.”

“I know.”

“You say you know?”

Oki tilted his head.

“In Korea they are waging a war, aren’t they? A war between the Koreans and the Yankees. I, Rikidozan, will not so easily be killed by a white man,” said Rikidozan, clenching his fists. His eyes were blazing.

“He was a *Sekiwake* at one time. So, who knows he won’t make a good showing?” Sakada put in a word in his favour.

“If so, let’s start training tomorrow. I’ll make my decision depending on the results of training,” Oki said, tapping Rikidozan on the shoulder.

“We’ve only two weeks left, and so let’s start it today.”

Oki was really surprised.

“All right. That’s a good idea,” Oki said and stepped towards his car.

With four persons on board, the car sped along the road at a high speed. From that day Rikidozan was coached by Oki Shikina. Training was hard and intense—running 12 kilometres barefoot over the sands, then marking time with running steps, then lying on a plank with his feet tied to it with cord and repeating thousands of times the actions of raising and laying down the upper half of his body with his hands locked behind the back of his head, then performing 500 times the motions of crouching and standing up holding a barbell, and so on.

Oki Shikina thought that Rikidozan would give up in a few days. But the young man endured the burden silently.

3. His Forte *Karate Chop*

Every professional wrestler has his own forte. In particular, a professional wrestler of worldwide fame has his own special trick which is not known to others. And a powerful trick. But Rikidozan had no special trick of his own. He could not expect Oki to initiate him into one. Oki was not teaching him the techniques of professional

wrestling. He was only giving him general and rudimentary training. It was impossible to learn the techniques of professional wrestling in a short period of two weeks.

While going through the training under the guidance of Oki Shikina, Rikidozan kept thinking of it. He weighed 118 kilogrammes and was 176 centimetres in stature. So, he was not large but rather small as a professional wrestler.

After two weeks’ training, he lost 13 kilogrammes and now weighed 105 kilogrammes. To play a match against European or American wrestler who had a large physique, he needed some techniques quite original and unexpected to them. Without such a forte, he would only sustain bitter reverses and could not expect to win. This was an urgent problem for Rikidozan.

He had been thinking of this ever since he had decided to be a professional wrestler. After his contest with Bobby Branz, he thought of this all the more earnestly. Moreover, he was now going to play games with American wrestlers in Hawaii which was not Japan. So, without a special trick, it was fully possible that he might be beaten to death in the ring.

He searched intensely for a way out and, in the end, the thought flashed upon him that he might apply his favorite tricks in *sumo* wrestling to professional wrestling matches. One of his favorite *sumo* wrestling tricks was to throw down his opponent by hooking his leg from the outside and heavily leaning on him. But it was not suitable to be applied to professional wrestling. It might have been good for defensive purposes, but it did not seem to be an effective offensive trick. Another of his specialities was to thrust the opponent out of the ring by using *harite*, or slapping his chest with both palms. It was not merely pushing him out with palms, but thrusting by putting all his weight into his arms. This was very powerful.

While being trained by Oki Shikina, Rikidozan resolved to round up his own striking art by combining his favorite trick in *sumo* wrestling with the *karate* blow. So, he went into training by striking his right hand on the trunk of a palm tree or on the sand. In other words, he started training himself in the art of chop. He struck down on anything he came across—stones, sand, wood and what not, as if to strike off a feeling of solitude. He kept striking with clenched teeth although blood was trickling

from his hand. In later years his right hand was known widely as a “Golden Right Hand” or a “Right Hand of Justice” in the professional wrestling world. Rikidozan himself would call it “my hand sword and my patented article.” This was his *karate* chop. But for the *karate* chop he could not have won the world championship in professional wrestling. He must have met his death in Hawaii.

After winding up the training on the beach, Oki Shikina plunged into the sea with Rikidozan and washed himself clean, and then got into his car.

“Rikidozan, the games will start tomorrow and so let’s call it a day and go home.”

“Mr Oki, you go first, please. I’ll go back after doing some more exercises by myself,” answered Rikidozan making the gesture of a *karate* chop with his right hand.

“If so, I’m going first.”

Oki started his car. The car went out of sight in no time.

Under the moon Rikidozan started to strike down on a palm tree. His blow was formidable. It produced a sound as if an axe’s blow on a tree. Rikidozan who was absorbed in intense training felt hungry and sat down on

the sand. He looked up at the sky. The moon was well down over the horizon. Gazing up at the bright moon, he felt a pang of nostalgia for his native village. He seemed to see vividly before his eyes the field paths and the sands on the east coast which bore his footmarks of boyhood, the tall elm tree on the approach to the village, the stream flowing down before it, and the figure of the mother labouring over her wash before the laundry stone in the yard. He wondered if his parents and brothers and his wife and daughter back at home should be looking up at that moon thinking of him. His eyes grew moistened.

Coming back to himself, he dressed and got on a bus to return to his lodging. He felt hungry and searched in his pocket for money. There was an enough sum for a meal. Getting off the bus, he walked towards a restaurant in the busy quarters of Honolulu.

At this moment six Yankees besieged Rikidozan. They were all of large and solid build.

“We want to drink some more and you buy our drink for us, will you, Your Honour Yellow Man, sir?” said the tallest man and put his hand on the shoulder of Rikidozan.

“I’ve got no money. And even if I have, how should I

buy your drinks for you strangers?” answered Rikidozan checking his rising anger.

“Hey, don’t you know us? I’m sure this is your first visit to Honolulu. None in this Honolulu has ever declined our request. You need a severe lesson to come to your sense, I reckon.”

A punch landed on the face of Rikidozan before he knew.

“How can you behave in this indecent manner?” Rikidozan protested, giving the tall fellow a fierce stare.

“You, an Asian, dare to stare at a white man, an American gentleman at that?”

Rikidozan got another punch and the tail of his eye was rent.

“If you die here, your body’ll be lost. If you want to save your life, treat us to drinks or prostrate yourself and ask for quarter.”

Now one of the villains took out a dagger and brought its point to the chest of Rikidozan. But the latter remained standing calmly.

“The guy has got strong nerves for a Jap.”

“Must be a Chinese fellow.”

“It’s Vietnamese swine.”

Another man put this sharp dagger on the side of Rikidozan.

“I’m a Korean.”

“What? A Korean rascal? Rub him out!”

Rikidozan swiftly sprang back a few steps. One of the rogues dashed in and thrust his dagger at Rikidozan’s side. It was a critical moment. Rikidozan gave a *karate* chop on his arm. The man gave a shriek and collapsed. But the other five attacked him with daggers at one time. Rikidozan countered them with his *karate* chops. The fight did not last long. It ended in a few minutes. When the police arrived on the scene, Rikidozan was nowhere to be seen. The six ruffians notorious for their hooliganism in Honolulu were strewn over the street, smeared with blood. The next day the newspaper *Body* reported that there was a great melee the previous night, in which the professional wrestler Rikidozan knocked down six American roughs. The newspaper report immediately made Rikidozan widely known among the professional wrestling fans of Honolulu. Recalling that day’s incident after many years, Rikidozan said:

“I was highly delighted at that time. The thing that gave me the most kick was that I knocked down Yankees

in the land of America. At the same time, I had an opportunity to test the power of my *karate* chop in actual fight...”

The opponents of Rikidozan in Hawaii were formidable wrestlers who passed by the fearful names of “Wolf Chief,” “Czechoslovakian Tiger,” “Fierce Bull of Texas,” “Ghoul,” and “Russian Woods.”

What would become of Rikidozan who was making his debut on the arena of professional wrestling? The professional wrestling fans and press reporters were unanimous in predicting that he would surely meet with miserable defeats and would fall and be unable to rise again in the ring.

Oki Shikina was also of the same opinion. Sakada, too, thought likewise. Therefore, they told him to withdraw from the contests. They said gently:

“Better give up because they are known as fearful wrestlers in the world’s professional wrestling community.

“Rikidozan, you aren’t yet known as a professional wrestler, so you won’t lose face even if you stand back. I’m afraid you won’t be able to rise again in the ring.”

But Rikidozan was adamant. He answered to them:

“I’m not the type to withdraw my decision once made. My opponents are mostly American wrestlers, so I’ll put their noses out of joints by hook or by crook. Please believe in my *karate* chop.”

With this he raised his right hand.

What will become of Rikidozan after all? As foreseen by the fans and reporters, will he be struck down dead in the ring never to rise again?

Let us study the processes of his matches in detail. His first contest took place at the Shibik Auditorium in Honolulu on February 17. Over 6 000 fans came to see it. His rival was Ulch Zich, a fierce player also known as “Wolf Chief.” He was a veteran with rich experiences.

Sakada was concerned and went to see Rikidozan in the players’ waiting room.

“Rikidozan, you had better give up. Somehow I feel uneasy,” he said.

“Mr Sakada, don’t worry please. It’s my intention to try out my *karate* chop in actual fighting. If that is ineffective, I may be killed. But I’m not sorry. It’s the path of my own choice, isn’t it?”

Rikidozan came into the ring. When the bell rang, Ulch Zich began to frisk all over about the ring raising

queer voices like a wolf’s cries, striking blows at his opponent. Rikidozan dodged about trying to avoid his blows. In other words, Ulch Zich attacked and Rikidozan defended.

Rikidozan did not take the initiative. Being an experienced player, Ulch Zich took advantage of it and skillfully used his fists to inflict blows on his opponent. His unceasing powerful attacks prevented Rikidozan from grasping his rival’s posture. But while being hit, Rikidozan kept his senses and tried hard to take in every movement of “Wolf Chief.”

Eight minutes passed. Ulch Zich saw that Rikidozan was a greenhorn. He made ready to knock him down completely with a decisive blow. His eyes flashed menacingly.

At this very moment Rikidozan struck him in the chest with his right hand. He used his *karate* chop. It was so terrific that “Wolf Chief” tottered, screaming with pain. Seizing this opportunity, Rikidozan flung himself upon him and threw him to the ground. Then he held him down. Uich Zich’s two shoulders touched the floor. Thus Rikidozan won the bout in 8 minutes 40 seconds.

When Rikidozan returned to the waiting room, Oki

Shikina congratulated his victory, patting him on the shoulder.

“Congratulations, Rikidozan! Your *karate* chop is really powerful. To knock down ‘Wolf Chief’ with one blow! You must improve it further.”

“Thank you.”

Rikidozan changed his clothes. He left for his lodging by car with Oki Shikina.

“Rikidozan, to be strong is not everything in professional wrestling. You must remember that you are dealing with the audience.”

Rikidozan caught his meaning. He was giving a hint that professional wrestling was a show business. Namely, it was necessary to entertain the spectators. Therefore, the wrestlers needed some skilful acting. This was essential for the organizers of professional wrestling matches to make money.

“I, this Rikidozan, cannot do so. It is not to make money that I became a professional wrestler. Moreover, I cannot do so since most of the professional wrestlers are Americans. I will play the games regarding them as battles of life or death. I cannot make a concession on this point, even if I am offered a mountain of gold. Mr Oki, I

believe you will understand this feeling of mine.”

Seeing that Rikidozan’s determination was unshakable, Oki Shikina squeezed his hand.

“Rikidozan, you’re a dreadful man. I fully understand your feeling.”

Afterwards, Rikidozan was called a “Cement Player” in the professional wrestling world. It implied that he was an irreconcilable wrestler or a wrestler who fights to the finish.

4. “I Want Korea to Have It”

After his match with “Wolf Chief,” Rikidozan faced Asering in the ring. It was a 30-minute one-game contest. The game was played at the Shibik Auditorium. This match was unfavorable for Rikidozan. He had trained himself so hard to perfect his *karate* chop that his right hand was badly torn and the bone was visible through the open wound. Therefore, he had to play the game with his hand bandaged.

One day before the match, Oki Shikina called at the lodging of Rikidozan. Without the use of the right hand, Rikidozan would be as good as a warrior without a

sword. So, Oki advised him to call off the contest. He said he would take remedial measures for him so that he should put off the contest until his right hand would heal up.

“Mr Oki, you know well my disposition. It’s true I’m handicapped by the loss of my right hand’s use, but I won’t draw back.”

Oki said nothing more.

The next day the match was held on time. Rikidozan entered the ring, followed by Asering. Asering raised his locked hands over his head and waved them in greeting to the audience. The hall resounded with the thunderous applause and cheers of the audience.

“Asering, take revenge for Ulch Zich!”

“Finish off Rikidozan!”

The atmosphere in the hall was menacing. The bell rang. Asering sprang on Rikidozan like a panther. Oki Shikina could not bear to see the scene. Asering was mean. He only aimed at the bandaged hand of Rikidozan. He was trying hard to catch hold of his right hand. Rikidozan played the game passively, shielding his right hand with his left one.

After desperate efforts, Asering succeeded at last

in seizing his opponent’s right hand. Clutching it, he dragged his match round and round in the ring. Rikidozan had no choice but to be dragged about. This was a dirty move running counter to the rules. Oki Shikina jumped onto the ring and protested to the chief referee. But the latter shook his head and demanded Oki to get out of the ring. At this moment Oki Shikina struck a hard blow on the two hands of Asering which were gripping the right hand of Rikidozan. This made the American wrestler let go his hold. Rikidozan’s right hand was freed.

The chief referee gave a warning to Oki. The latter apologized for his slip and got out. Before coming down from the ring, he shouted to Rikidozan:

“Rikidozan, you’ve got no retreat! This is Hawaii! America, I tell you!”

The sordid Asering tried to take hold of Rikidozan’s right hand again. Beads of sweat broke out on the latter’s face. The thought flashed through the mind of Rikidozan that he might be killed if he remained on the defensive. He glanced down at Oki Shikina. Oki read his resolution. He nodded assent to the resolution of Rikidozan.

Asering hurled himself on Rikidozan to grab his bandaged right hand. Rikidozan gave an uppercut strike

to his rival's lower jaw with his head. Then without loss of time he held his neck with his left arm and, kneeling down, applied a belly throw to him. The gigantic figure of Asering described a semicircle in the air and fell down to the floor with a heavy thud. Rikidozan pressed him down with his 105-kilogramme body. Asering closed his eyes with his arms spread out limply on the floor. The bandage on Rikidozan's right hand was soaked with blood. He won the game in 14 minutes 3 seconds when his adversary's both shoulders touched the ground simultaneously. His name became known to the world's professional wrestling circles. Now many professional wrestlers challenged him to a game one after another. He took up all their challenges and won over them every time.

The Hawaiian newspapers gave wide publicity to the spectacular feats of Rikidozan. The *Boxing Magazine* spared three pages to introduce Rikidozan.

Rikidozan worsted every opponent he met in the ring. He won an easy victory over Pilo Pilasen who passed by the name of "California Bear." Karl Devius also known as "Ghoul," too, gave in to Rikidozan. In the 30-minute one-game match with Iwan Kamerov, alias

"Russian Woods," Rikidozan won by knocking him down in 27 minutes 30 seconds.

As Rikidozan kept beating all his rivals, Oki Shikina felt an urge to play a doubles match in a pair with him. He called at Rikidozan's lodging and told him of his desire.

"Rikidozan, how about playing a doubles match in a pair with me? Though old, as I see you cut down Yanks one after another, I feel an irresistible effusion of strength from inside."

"If you want it, let's have a try at it. But I'm afraid we cannot coordinate ourselves well."

Rikidozan readily accepted Oki's request. Thus, they played a doubles match. Their rivals were Tam Rice, Hawaii's championship holder, and Karl Devius known as "Ghoul." Rikidozan beat his opponent, but Oki lost a point. So, they lost the game by a score of zero to one.

"Sorry. We've lost it because of me," said Oki apologetically when they returned to the lodging after the game.

"We were beaten because we failed to coordinate ourselves. Let's have training in coordinating ourselves in future," Rikidozan answered and encouraged Oki.

Before leaving Hawaii for the United States proper, Rikidozan made a challenge to Branz and Simonovich, the Pacific doubles championship holders. In this doubles match, Rikidozan's pair beat their opponents, by a score of 2 to 1 and won the Pacific doubles professional wrestling championship. This was the first championship gained by Rikidozan.

Early in June two big men sat drinking beer in the restaurant at the Hawaii Airport. They were Rikidozan and Oki Shikina,

"Truly, I couldn't have made a name in the professional wrestling world without your help. Probably I might have been crippled or killed here in Hawaii. Please continue your favours towards me," Rikidozan said filling Oki's empty mug with beer.

"Don't be too humble," retorted Oki waving his hand.

"Thank you. Please continue to help me kindly in future, too."

"Rikidozan, I'm ready to do all I can for you. This is not mere lip service."

With this Oki squeezed his hand.

"The airliner leaving Honolulu for San Francisco is

taking off soon. The passengers are requested to go out to the platform," the loudspeaker announced.

The two persons emptied their mugs and rose. Holding a suitcase in his hand, Oki walked side by side with Rikidozan.

They halted before the ladder.

"Rikidozan, I've a few things to speak to you.

"First, I've contacted Markovich, the professional wrestling match organizer. So, he'll take good care of you. But if you put as much faith in him as in me, you'll taste a bitter experience. Bear it in mind always that he's not a black but a white man, an out-and-out Yankee.

"Secondly, you play games with the spirit of a Korean, but had better not reveal your Korean nationality. The professional wrestlers in the United States are mostly white men, and because the Yankees are now having a hard time of it in Korea, they bear ill feelings towards her. I tell you this because you may be subjected to white terrorism.

"Thirdly, I think it preferable you wear long black tights underneath. Frankly, you have short thick legs and so don't appear shapely. Therefore, long black tights

will set you off to advantage. Moreover, it will hide the ugly scar left by operation on the back of your thigh and even protect it.

“Always keep these three points in mind. And should anything happen to you, wire me. Then I’ll go to help you by all means.”

Oki Shikina handed over the suitcase to Rikidozan. Rikidozan received it. He was grateful and filled with a feeling of respect for Oki who was treating him like a blood relation.

“Mr Oki, I’ll always bear your instructions in my mind.”

Then Rikidozan ascended the ladder. The plane took off on time and landed in San Francisco on June 10, 1952. Two days later, that is, on June 12, he had a contest in the Winter Stadium of San Francisco. This was his first game in the United States proper. The game was to his great disadvantage. He had not refreshed himself after the fatiguing journey and had no workout before going into the match at the Winter Stadium. Worse still, he had not the least knowledge about his opponent Ike Agings. But the latter was well informed about Rikidozan. He had read all the newspaper articles about the games played

by Rikidozan in Hawaii and learned his strong points from Markovich, the game sponsor. So, he had elaborated his tricks to cope with him.

In the light of such handicaps, Rikidozan asked Markovich to defer the date of the game for a few days at least.

“Mr Rikidozan, I would be glad if I could comply with your request, but I can’t do so. The date of the match has already been made public and every seat booked,” answered Markovich in his refusal to the request.

Rikidozan knew his craftiness and could not insist further.

Ike Agings was passed by the alias of “Shell of Kentucky.” As his nickname suggested, his body was as hard as a shell. He was a savage wrestler. During World War II he had commanded a US tank unit, and then had been rampant in a notorious band of thugs in the United States. He did not know a passive attitude in the game but always attacked the opponent. When his opponent happened to be a Negro or an Asian, he would rush at him like mad. This was why he was highly popular with the Americans.

As advised by Oki Shikina, Rikidozan went up to the ring in tight black sports trousers, and greeted Ike Agings. At that moment he saw danger in Agings' eyes.

The bell rang. From the beginning Rikidozan rained *karate* chops on Agings. So, Agings was helpless to use his tricks. To avoid the hail of hand chops, he had to move round the fringe of the ring. Then he leaped on Rikidozan giving a cry like a scream. At that moment Rikidozan's right hand went up high and came down hard on his rival's neck in a *karate* chop. Agings lost his balance and reeled. Rikidozan lost no time in lifting his huge body into the air and then hurled it to the ground. Then he held him down. He won the match as his opponent's two shoulders touched the ground.

Ike Agings' ignominious defeat infuriated the professional wrestling fans in San Francisco.

The game sponsor Markovich got hundreds of letters of protest from them every day. Now they called Ike Agings "Spent Shell of Kentucky" instead of "Shell of Kentucky."

Unable to withstand their rage and pressure, Markovich set renowned professional wrestlers against

Rikidozan. But they failed to gratify the fans. They suffered reverses one after another.

The wrestling fans in San Francisco applied pressure to Markovich to bring out Primo Carnera. He was forced in the end to match Carnera against Rikidozan. Called "Moving Alps," Carnera was a giant 2 metres 2 centimetres tall and weighed 128 kilogrammes. He was 26 centimetres taller and 23 kilogrammes heavier than Rikidozan. Originally he was the title holder of world professional boxing championship in the open-weight division.

The Winter Stadium was packed to overflowing. The audience exceeding 6 000 roared wildly for Carnera. They believed Rikidozan would surely be crushed by the iron fists of "Moving Alps." It was a 61-minute 3-game match.

From the beginning the match was a rough-and-tumble fight. Carnera kept striking at Rikidozan with his huge iron fists. Rikidozan, too, gave him hard blows with his *karate* chops. Carnera's iron fist landed hard on the chest of Rikidozan. Simultaneously he gave a kick to his abdomen. Rikidozan felt his breath was cut off and sank down. So, he lost a point first.

Applauses thundered forth with the shouts, “Carnera! Carnera!” The cries of the audience shook the whole stadium. They were sure of his victory and Rikidozan’s defeat.

But the next moment Rikidozan applied a belly throw while standing up. Carnera fell. The score now stood at 1 to 1. Both contestants attacked each other, one with *karate* chops and the other with fist blows. They were stained with blood.

It was a close game. Time was up and the game ended in a draw.

Rikidozan became widely known throughout the American continent. This invited challenges from leading professional wrestlers of America. With Los Angeles as his base, he moved round from place to place—San Francisco, New York, Canada, Mexico and so on—fighting fierce battles.

Sometimes he played seven games in a week and even twice in a single day. He took the field 260 times in a period of nine months. This was a startling figure never known before in the history of professional wrestling. Of the 260 games only three were lost.

On his way home after winning such brilliant

successes, Rikidozan stopped over at Hawaii and called on Oki Shikina. Seeing Rikidozan who came late at night without notice, Oki led him into the drawing room.

“Good for you, Rikidozan! It really is surprising that you played 260 games in nine months,” said Oki in compliment without concealing his joy.

“But I lost three matches,” said Rikidozan scratching the back of his head.

“Oh, three losses in 260 fights are no loss. They are only one per cent, so it’s as good as a clean score. Moreover, you’ve won the Pacific doubles and singles championships. I offer you congratulations.”

“Thank you. And now I have something to show you. Will you see it?”

“What’s that?” asked Oki casting a dubious look on him. Rikidozan stripped himself to the waist and asked, “Mr Oki, what do you say? Am I now fit to be a professional wrestler?”

Oki was amazed at the shape of his upper body. Rikidozan’s abdomen was now withdrawn, and his body was in every respect a professional wrestler’s. It had been transformed in the course of his fierce fights.

“Indeed, your body is perfect!” said Oki with great admiration.

After having a drag on a cigarette which he usually did not smoke, Rikidozan said quietly:

“Mr Oki, in fact, I have a favour to ask of you, and so I stopped at Hawaii.”

“What’s that?”

“Back to Japan, I would like to found a professional wrestling company. But I cannot find young promising professional wrestlers. Of course, I will train young people, and you help me please.”

“That’s a good idea. I’ll help you to the best of my ability.”

Oki realized that Rikidozan was not a mere professional wrestler but was conceiving an ambitious plan.

“Mr Oki, I have another request to make of you.”

“What is it? But how so many requests you’ve got to make?”

“It’s my desire to have a contest with the world champion Rue Thez. So, you persuade him to compete with me by all means.”

“Rue Thez? It’s rather difficult. As it’s your request,

I will have a try for it. But I’m not sure of success. You cannot challenge Rue Thez all of a sudden, although you have made good showings in the United States proper.”

“If it’s an easy thing, why should I beg you to help? Pray help me for a favour,” Rikidozan implored with a bow.

“As you say it’s your earnest desire, I’ll try. But it’s hard to give you a ready answer right now,” said Oki tilting his head.

Rikidozan was not the type who would step back. He importunately asked Oki to use his influence.

“I won’t go away from here before you give a definite answer. I haven’t taken up professional wrestling with an eye to money, have I? If I do it all, I should be the world title winner in it. I mean to snub the Yankees.”

He was firm in his determination and his dream was clear enough.

“You want to take world championship of professional wrestling from the United States to Japan, is that it?”

“No, not to Japan. I want Korea to have it. Is it impossible? If impossible, I will chuck wrestling.”

With this, Rikidozan looked at Oki Shikina straight

in the face. He meant what he said. Oki closed his eyes and sat in deep thought. Rikidozan waited for him to open his eyes. But Oki remained with his eyes shut.

When at last he opened his eyes, they shone with a determination.

“Rikidozan, let’s go at it,” said Oki firmly grasping the hand of Rikidozan.

“Thank you. I’ll be waiting for word from you.”

He rose from his seat. The next day he flew back to Japan.

CHAPTER 2

1. Birth of the “Rikidozan Training School”

The airliner carrying Rikidozan touched down on the runway of Haneda Airport and taxied slowly. Rikidozan looked out of the plane’s window. He doubted his own eyes. He rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand. There was a huge crowd of people in the airport precincts. A wide streamer was fluttering over their heads. It bore inscriptions, “Mr Rikidozan, you have done a fine job!” and “Congratulations to Mr Rikidozan on your victories!” Press reporters thronged towards the plane with cameras slung over their shoulders.

The scene on Haneda Airport was in marked contrast to that in February of the previous year when he had departed for Hawaii. At that time only a few persons such as Niita Shinsaku and Tanaka Beetaro had come to see him off. The airport had left a desolate impression on him.

“They had been calling me *Hantojin* (a contemptuous appellation of Koreans), and now the same Japanese are addressing me as Mr Rikidozan, are they? Well, they are calling me Mr Rikidozan when I’m Kim Sin Rak!” he thought to himself.

He alighted from the airliner last. He went into the airport building surrounded by reporters. The hall in the building was closely packed with people who came to welcome him home. A man of fine presence in gold-rimmed spectacles forced his way through the crowd towards Rikidozan. When he came to stand face to face with Rikidozan, he pressed his right hand.

“How do you do, Mr Director Niita? I’ve come back,” Rikidozan greeted him.

“You have done a fine job,” said Niita Shinsaku, patting him lightly on the back.

Reporters pressed the shutters of their cameras to photograph the scene of their reunion. At the same time they pestered Rikidozan with questions.

“Messrs Reporters, he should have a breathing spell, shouldn’t he? We have engaged a room for press interview, and so let’s go to the room,” Niita Shinsaku said in behalf of Rikidozan. He led the reporters into the room.

From the next day Rikidozan busied himself to found a professional wrestling company. He visited and canvassed prominent persons and, in the meantime, called on Niita Shinsaku every morning and evening to persuade him to give him a helping hand. In this course all his dollars gained at the cost of his blood during his playing tour were gone in less than a month.

Niita Shinsaku drew a conclusion that if he helped Rikidozan, he could make fat money. So, he immediately got down to the preparations for establishing a professional wrestling company. Practical affairs were discussed. It was agreed that the new company would be named Japan Professional Wrestling Business Corporation, and Niita Shinsaku became its president.

Rikidozan aimed at organizing a unique professional wrestling association. It was still early to rest content just because the Professional Wrestling Business Corporation was started. But it was now very advantageous to set up a professional wrestling association.

Rikidozan worked hard to establish this association, canvassing journalists and officials of the television broadcasting stations every day. Accounts of wrestling were carried in the sports newspapers and sport’s

columns of ordinary newspapers day after day. Innumerable young men who read newspapers wanted to become wrestlers and came to see Rikidozan. They had been formerly *judo* players, *sumo* wrestlers, wrestlers or baseball players. Rikidozan accepted them through careful screening. He put them to work on remodelling a wooden storehouse given by Niita Shinsaku into a professional wrestling gymnasium. This was the Rikidozan Training School.

2. Contest with Rue Thez

Oki Shikina made an international telephone call to Rikidozan.

“Rikidozan, it’s been decided to hold matches in Hawaii to select a challenger to Rue Thez.”

“Thank you, Mr Oki.”

His voice trembled with excitement.

“The date of the matches is scheduled for late November. The Shibik Auditorium has been chosen for the matches. The wrestlers who are to contest have been decided on. They are no mean players. Of course, they are aspirants for the championship of games between

strong international professional wrestlers.... Come as soon as possible. You’ll do well to have workouts at the auditorium.”

“Thank you. I’ll leave here at once.” Rikidozan said and put back the receiver.

So, Rikidozan boarded an airliner leaving Haneda Airport for Hawaii. This was his second expedition to Hawaii and the United States.

The matches for selecting Rue Thez’s challenger were opened at the Shibik Auditorium in the evening of November 29, 1953. The participating players were Rikidozan, Bobby Branz, Franc Baroa, Ahre Laborok, veteran Batt Kachis, Thorny Odor, Samy Bac, who were widely known to the professional wrestling circles of the world.

Rikidozan faithfully followed Oki’s advice in playing the matches. He kept raining *karate* chops on his opponents. He used the tactics of dealing blows on the necks, shoulders and, lastly, chests.

The finals was played between Rikidozan and Samy Bac. It was a 30-minute one-game match. Samy Bac was an able wrestler. Emitting loud cries in a queer

voice, he rushed at Rikidozan in face of his *karate* chops. Rikidozan knew that if he was caught hold of by Bac, he would surely lose the bout, and so administered *karate* chops in rapid succession. Samy Bac, however, did not dodge them but went at him like a tank. He succeeded at last in securing waist lock from the rear.

The latter tried hard to break loose from his hold, but in vain.

Samy Bac tightened his hold so strongly that Rikidozan felt as if his waist were being cut. His tightening hold was known as formidable to the professional wrestling circles of the world. In the worst cases, bones would be broken. He had Herculean strength and his arms were so much strong. More than one wrestler caught in his tightening hold had their bones broken.

The umpire and the audience believed that Rikidozan would get his bones broken or crushed or give in.

When 27 minutes passed, Rikidozan broke free from Samy Bac's hold. Taking advantage of the backlash of the ring ropes, he flew back like a gun shell to bump against Bac. Bac was thrown back a good distance and fell to the ground. Other wrestlers would have been unable

to rise knocked down flat on the ground. But Bac made to gain his feet. At this moment Rikidozan dealt *karate* chops to him in succession. Under the blows Bac plopped down. Rikidozan lost no time in hurling himself upon him and started holding him down.

The audience thought that Bac lost the game. But at this moment Samy Bac thrust away Rikidozan and rose to his feet. Now Rikidozan attacked him with *karate* chops. Bac found himself completely on the defensive. Rikidozan's victory was apparent. But regrettably, time was up. So, their match ended in a draw. Should the match be extended for ten minutes or another 30-minute one-game bout be played? The matter was seriously discussed.

The two wrestlers fought three rounds that evening. Any more game would endanger their lives.

"Mr Oki, please ask them in my behalf to extend the time indefinitely for a one-game match, I beg you," Rikidozan entreated Oki who was under the ring. There was no winning by a decision in the professional wrestling event, so the players had to fight it out to the finish.

"Rikidozan, the physical strength of men has its own

limits. If the match is extended, you'll die of exhaustion, I tell you," Oki Shikina turned down his request flatly.

On the other hand, Samy Bac had no strength left to continue the fight. Before long Karasik, the sponsor of the matches, mounted the ring and announced through a microphone:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am going to tell you the conclusion we have reached at a conference. Rikidozan has been named as challenger to Rue Thez. To this Samy Bac agreed."

The Hawaiian newspaper *Body* of December 4, 1953 wrote at the top of the sports column under the headline, "Contest between the World Professional Wrestling Champion Rue Thez and Rikidozan":

"On the evening of the 6th instant (Sunday) Rikidozan will challenge Rue Thez, the world professional wrestling title holder, at the auditorium. This is the first time for a Japanese wrestler to appear on the arena to fight for the world championship. Rikidozan will devote all his power to this contest for championship."

The Shibik Auditorium was nearly bursting with the audience on the evening of December 6. Rikidozan

mounted the ring, followed by Rue Thez. Rue Thez who was called "Man of Steel" was the world championship holder in the open-weight division and had a record of 700 bouts all of which he had won. The history of professional wrestling knew no instance of 700 consecutive victories.

The bell rang and the 61-minute three-game match began. From the start Rikidozan took the initiative. He seized hold of Rue Thez's right arm and twisted it. With one of his arms gripped by Rikidozan, Rue Thez was on the defensive. Time passed, ten minutes, 20 minutes and 30 minutes. Then Rue Thez went over to the offensive. He hit Rikidozan's chin. Hard hit by surprise, Rikidozan fell on his knees. The next moment he got downward blow by left arm. The successive blows were so hard and quick that Rikidozan lost his balance. Without loss of time, Rue Thez lifted Rikidozan and threw him down to the ground. As Rikidozan struggled to rise, he gave him another blow with his left hand. Rikidozan felt dizzy.

"Get away from him for once! Don't stand up against him!"

Rikidozan heard the loud shouting of Oki Shikina.

"I must avoid him for this once," he thought to

himself and crawled away under the ropes. Though less than two metres, the distance seemed to him miles or scores of miles. Rue Thez now kicked him.

“Don’t look back! Don’t resist! Avoid him by all means!” shouted Oki Shikina. Beads of perspirations stood on his forehead.

The audience clapped their hands for joy. Some of them even stood up and applauded. The whole of the audience rooted for Rue Thez. Meanwhile, Rikidozan barely made off under the ropes.

Oki Shikina came round under the feet of Rikidozan and, beating the floor of the ring with his palm, shouted to him:

“Well done! Now go over to attacking.”

Rikidozan got out of danger. Rue Thez made to attack to put him on the defensive again before he could recover himself. Rikidozan set upon his opponent with open arms to hug his waist. But this was a feint. Rue Thez backed a little. At this moment Rikidozan gave a horizontal blow of *karate* chop on the chest of Rue Thez. If it had been other wrestlers, they would have collapsed. But Rue Thez went off his balance and staggered. Nevertheless, he watched for a chance to attack. Seeing

Rue Thez reel and try to recover his balance, Rikidozan felt somewhat relaxed in spite of himself. This passed in the fraction of a second. This moment was seized upon by the crafty Rue Thez. It would be rather correct to say that he sensed it by intuition. He sprang upon Rikidozan. But Rikidozan unconsciously raised his right hand and dealt a horizontal strike to his opponent. Hit by the blow, Rue Thez knelt down. The horizontal blow struck hastily was not so powerful as at any other times. Nevertheless, Rue Thez fell on his knees. Rikidozan felt dubious inside.

Rue Thez’s kneeling was a feigned motion. Rikidozan instantly saw it through, and immediately made to strike a *karate* chop to knock him out. But it was too late. Rue Thez lifted and knocked him down flat on the ground. Rikidozan could not rise. The umpire counted him out. So, he lost a point.

Oki Shikina leapt onto the ring and slapped him lightly on the cheek, shouting:

“Rikidozan! Aren’t you ashamed? Get up!”

Opening his eyes, Rikidozan pushed away Oki and sprang up. He asked:

“What has become of me?”

“You’ve lost a point first. That’s what it is! You’ve forgotten that momentary conceit and momentary relaxation may breed an irretrievable reverse in professional wrestling? What’s more, your opponent is Rue Thez who is considered Zeus in professional wrestling, I tell you! You’ve bungled it when you nearly won the game!”

Oki Shikina was so chagrined that he pounded Rikidozan on the chest with his fist. Rikidozan could say nothing. But he shouted to himself in his mind:

“Pardon me, Mr Oki. I was at fault. Look how I fight from the second round!”

One minute of break passed. As soon as the bell rang for the second round, Rikidozan attacked Rue Thez with his *karate* chops. “Take this! Take this!” Under the hail of *karate* chops, Rue Thez was compelled to retreat towards the ropes. While dodging away, the cunning Rue Thez watched for an opportunity of countercharge. Availing himself of the backlash of the ropes, he boomeranged on Rikidozan like a shot. At this moment Rikidozan struck a *karate* chop at his heart. But it missed the target. Instead, it fell on his neck. Rue Thez sank down holding his neck with both hands. The umpire counted, but he

did not rise. Now the score was one to one.

Another break of one minute passed. Rue Thez who rallied during this short recess swooped down on his adversary. Only three minutes were left from the allotted time, that is, 58 minutes had already passed. Rikidozan dealt *karate* chops in succession. Dodging his blows, Rue Thez moved round and round along the edges of the ring. But soon he went round to the tail of Rikidozan and held him up high overhead.

This was his forte back drop, a killing trick. It had enabled him to win the world championship of professional wrestling and defend it continually. The body of Rikidozan bent like a bow and fell head foremost to the floor of the ring. He fell vertically, at a right angle to the ground. He had concussion of the brain. When he came to, the umpire was holding Rue Thez’s hand high up. Rikidozan lost the game by a score of one to two.

In the waiting room Oki Shikina wiped Rikidozan’s head with a wet towel, consoling him by saying:

“Rikidozan, although you have lost, you have fought well. Today your performance was splendid, since you have been engaged in professional wrestling in earnest

for only two years. You cannot expect too much from the start. I think you learned a great lesson from the game of this evening. Don't lose heart. I believe your opportunity will come."

"I'm beaten today. But I'll surely win the championship," said Rikidozan clenching his fists.

His contest with Rue Thez over, he left for Los Angeles at once. Settling himself in Los Angeles, he played games for four months. He held 70 matches in this time with not a single loss.

When he was going back to Japan, he fixed up an agreement for holding a game with Sharp brothers, the international strong men tag match championship holders, in Japan. He asked Oki Shikina to umpire the game. Oki accepted the request willingly.

3. A Cowardly Fellow

One day in early November 1954, Rikidozan who had hard training as usual in the exercise hall all day long took a steam bath and, feeling refreshed, sank deep into the armchair in the resting room. After drinking two bottles of soda pop brought by a maid, he closed his eyes.

"Sir, Mr Yoshimachi has come to see you," said the maid who came to him.

"Yoshimachi?" Rikidozan opened his eyes and asked back. He wore a puzzled look.

At this moment a man in an overcoat opened the door and entered the room. It was Yoshimachi. He was the secretary of Rikidozan. He would not come except on business. He was a man who faithfully carried out the assignments given by Rikidozan. Rikidozan had not given him any instructions in particular for that day nor had anything he expected him to report about. He sensed by intuition that something undesirable had happened.

"Sir, I had a telephone call just a minute ago," said Yoshimachi abruptly.

"What telephone call do you mean?" asked Rikidozan sitting up straight.

He sat Yoshimachi by his side. The secretary took out and showed him the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper of November 1, 1954.

"Sir, I had a ring from the business department chief of the *Mainichi Shimbun* newspaper Mr Moriguchi. He said that Mr Kimura expressed his intention to

play a contest with you. And ...”

The *Asahi Shimbun* carried the “Talk of Kimura.” It said, “Rikidozan’s professional wrestling game is different from mine, it is a play with many a gesture. If I contest with him by my real power, I shall not be beaten by him.”

“Kimura says so? And, what is the date proposed by him?” mumbled Rikidozan with a stern look.

In the matches with the Sharp brothers the previous February, Kimura played a “defensive role” and Rikidozan an “attacking role.” So, Kimura fell into disfavour with the audience and Rikidozan won sweeping popularity. Resenting this, Kimura broke off with Rikidozan and left the Professional Wrestling Association. Right after that he formed the International Professional Wrestling Association at Kumamoto, Kyushu. He secretly manoeuvred to entice away wrestlers from the Japan Professional Wrestling Association.

Yoshimachi said:

“Sir, I heard that Mr Kimura told the *Asahi Shimbun* that ‘in the contests with the Sharp brothers, I played the part of giving prominence to Rikidozan all the time, but that if I really try conclusions with him, I won’t

lose ground to him on any account. I’m the No. 1 *judo* player in Japan, but that boy Rikidozan was no more than a *Sekiwake*, wasn’t he?”

With this, Yoshimachi studied the face of Rikidozan. It became stern. His eyes shot fire.

“As the saying goes, a young puppy does not fear the tiger. Tell Moriguchi that I have readily taken up the challenge of Kimura.”

Rikidozan rose to his feet with a jerk and strode out of the resting room. He vividly remembered the contest he had played against the Sharp brothers in a tag team with Kimura for the world tag wrestling championship in February last. They were the first match in Japan for the world tag professional wrestling championship. The Sharp brothers were the world championship holders at the time.

There were many brothers among the professional wrestlers. But mostly they were not real brothers although they were so called. However, the Sharp brothers were blood brothers. The elder brother Ben Sharp stood 195 centimetres and weighed 115 kilogrammes and the younger brother Mike Sharp was 197 centimetres tall in stature and tipped the scales at 118 kilogrammes. They

were technically mature and possessed a high fighting spirit. In particular, they tuned excellently with each other in playing matches.

In the match the Rikidozan-Kimura team failed to win over their opponents but drew with them by the score of one to one. So, the Sharp brothers defended their title. This was because Kimura lost the game pressed down by them. Although Rikidozan worsted the two brothers by holding down and by bringing both shoulders to touch the ground, Kimura was defeated. In consequence, they missed the championship. So, it was Rikidozan who should feel resentful.

On November 26, after holding a press interview at the Chiyoda Hotel, Kimura formally issued a challenge to Rikidozan. The latter accepted it. They made a contract for a match formally. Rikidozan gave his assent to the date, time and place of the match proposed by Kimura. It was decided that the contest would take place on the evening of December 22 at the Kuramae National Game House and would be a 61-minute three-game bout in accordance with an international usage. It was no exaggeration that their match would be a contest for the Japanese professional wrestling championship.

On December 23, the *Asahi Shimbun* said in its sports column:

“The contest between the two wrestlers who have brilliant records respectively in *sumo* wrestling and *judo* created a sensation stimulating the public curiosity, ‘Who will win, Kimura of *judo* or Rikidozan of *sumo*?’ By the set time for admission, the audience swelled to more than 13 000. The house was surrounded by police....”

Who will win the Japanese professional wrestling championship? Rikidozan or Kimura was the growing interest of the public. From early morning people besieged the Kuramae National Game House. As the hour of the game approached, the underhand transactions of admission tickets began. The price of the ticket which was booked for 3 000 *yen* jumped up to 10 000, 15 000 and 20 000 *yen*. It was sold at the first price named.

Kimura was president of the International Professional Wrestling Association and a *judo* expert of the seventh grade. The seventh grade means the highest class in *judo*. He had once been a professional *judo* player. He had never lost in the professional *judo* matches. He used various tricks, and in particular, had the forte of throwing down his adversary to the floor once he caught hold of

the latter's hand or arm. When he resorted to this trick he would succeed almost 100 per cent. This was why he was called a "superhuman *judo* man." Further, people would say, "A *judo* player like Kimura did not exist in the past nor will appear in Japan in the future."

Kimura switched from *judo* over to professional wrestling when he went to Hawaii in 1950. After that, he was actively engaged as a professional wrestler in Los Angeles and San Francisco. He entered into professional wrestling circles one year earlier than Rikidozan and won a name in the world's professional wrestling circles.

The *Mainichi Shimbun* of December 23, 1954, featured the contest between Rikidozan and Kimura in its sports column and its chapter titles were, "The First Contest for the Japanese Professional Wrestling Championship," "Rikidozan Knocked Out Kimura," "The Match Ended in 15 Minutes 49 Seconds; Kimura Wounded and Defeated," "Too Great a Disparity between the Two Contesters," ...

These chapter titles were enough to tell how the game proceeded. The 61-minute three-game contest ended in 15 minutes 49 seconds.

Here is a more detailed description of the match.

When the bell rang for the start of the match, the two players grasped each other's hand in greeting and stepped back. Now the match began. The two wrestlers did not make great movements. They only moved the upper halves of their bodies. It appeared that each was trying to know his opponent better. More often than not Kimura pretended to make some moves. Rikidozan cautiously warded off his moves. Then Kimura took hold of Rikidozan's arm. The latter tried hard to free his arm. At this moment, Rikidozan was caught in Kimura's favorite trick. His huge body floated in the air and fell to the floor describing a parabola. Then Kimura tackled his neck and threw him over his shoulder once more. Without loss of time he applied half Nelson on Rikidozan and held him down.

Thunderous cheers and applause shook the hall. With his neck held in Kimura's arm, Rikidozan rose to his feet at last. He barely escaped losing a point first. For a professional wrestling contest, the match proceeded in a gentleman-like manner, it could be said.

"15 minutes has passed!" the announcer's voice resounded through the hall. At this moment Kimura

kicked Rikidozan in the private parts. Rikidozan gave a scream holding the kicked parts in both his hands. He was unable to see anything before his eyes, either Kimura's face or the audience. He squatted down at the spot. He only heard the uproarious shouts of the audience.

"Kimura, fix him!" "Kimura, kick him once more!" "Down with Rikidozan!" ...

"This is not a game! It's mean to kick the private parts. This is a foul play!" Rikidozan protested approaching the umpire who was standing in the middle of the ring.

"Is it not a foul?" he demanded.

The umpire waved his hand and declared it was no foul. Rikidozan realized that it was of no use to protest to the umpire who was partial in refereeing. He looked down at Oki Shikina who was standing just below the ring. Oki shouted, imitating a *karate* chop with his right hand, "Don't draw out time! Teach him a lesson!"

Rikidozan nodded and thought to himself:

"Let's see who will win, the Korean or the Japanese bastard!"

He started striking blows on Kimura with his *karate* chops.

Into the bargain, he gave him hard kickings. Kimura retreated defending himself. But he tried to seize hold of Rikidozan's arm. The latter did not allow him to do so. Unable to fend off the blows of *karate* chops, Kimura flopped down at last. Rikidozan immediately made to hold him down. At this moment the umpire stood in his way. Staring at the umpire who was now undisguised in partial and unfair refereeing, Rikidozan stood upright in the middle of the ring even without offering an objection. Availing himself of this space, Kimura managed to gain his feet. Balancing himself, he attempted to seize Rikidozan's arm. Instantly, Rikidozan's *karate* chop landed on his chest. It was so hard that Kimura sank prostrate to the ground, unconscious. He did not rise again. He was carried out on a stretcher.

The 61-minute three-game match ended in 15 minutes 49 seconds. The band of the Japanese professional wrestling championship was worn around Rikidozan's waist.

When Rikidozan returned to the players' resting room after the commendation ceremony, press reporters besieged him. Answering their question, Rikidozan said:

“Kimura is a sordid player. Before the match this evening he tasked me to wrestle to a draw. Moreover, he even produced a contract document stamped with his seal. Professional wrestling is not a mountebank enterprise but a sport. I was so disgusted that I said nothing in reply. During the game, too, he asked me to play a draw. I was scandalized at him and so shook my head. At this he kicked me in the privates. That was a foul quite unexpected. I was fortunate not to have fallen dead on the spot. I was thinking that he had been my mate in the tag match until yesterday, and I was mistaken there. He is trying to kill me, I thought, so I must be ready to kill him, too. With this thought I proceeded with the game more actively. Kimura was really lucky. It was his good luck that he fell down and was unable to rise up. If he had risen, ... As you journalists saw the game for yourselves, I believe you can fully guess how highly I was strung at the time.”

Then the reporters went straight to the Chiyoda Hotel where Kimura was staying. Kimura was speaking over the telephone. When he hung up, the reporters put a question to him:

“Rikidozan said you proposed for a humbug game,

that is, you asked him to play the match to a draw. Is that true?”

“What? Rikidozan said that? Rikidozan, that swine is lost to all senses of morality and honour. He’s not a Japanese, he’s a Korean. How vexing!” howled Kimura in a fume.

After drinking a cup of liquor, he went on to say:

“I didn’t kick him in the private parts. If I had done so, he wouldn’t have been able to stand up. I kicked him in the thigh, I tell you. It’s a fact that I suffered a disastrous defeat by Rikidozan this evening. But don’t think that my contest with Rikidozan has come to a close....”

After some thought, he resumed:

“I think today’s match has sealed Rikidozan’s fate.”

“What do you mean by that?” questioned the reporters in a puzzle.

They could not catch his meaning although they had a sense and imagination strong enough to forecast and foretell things.

“I just said so and that’s that. Rikidozan has too many enemies, I mean. You know he’s not a Japanese. That’s exactly the question....”

Kimura dwelt on it no longer. But his remarks threw

out a hint that a dark shadow was overhanging the person of Rikidozan.

On January 28, 1955, Rikidozan had a contest with Yamaguchi at the Osaka Prefectural Indoor Stadium. The latter had once been one of his followers as professional wrestler. When Kimura founded the International Professional Wrestling Association, he started the All-Japan Professional Wrestling Association in Osaka and became its president. He was a sixth-grade *judo* champion and close friend of Kimura. When Kimura was defeated ignominiously by Rikidozan, he as a Japanese was enraged more than anyone else. He vowed revenge for Kimura's defeat by all means and challenged Rikidozan. But he was too weak for an opponent of Rikidozan. Rikidozan did not treat him as seriously as he had done Kimura. He never used his *karate* chop against him. Yamaguchi attacked and Rikidozan defended. As the latter did not use *karate* chops, Yamaguchi continued to attack him freely. Rikidozan who had been playing the match passively gained a fall first with the leg hook and three-quarter Nelson. This was done at 43 minutes 59 seconds. Then another fall was

gained by pinning down at 59 minutes. Only two minutes was left, but in this short space of time the third fall was gained very easily. So the 61-minute three-game match ended in Rikidozan's three wins. Yamaguchi's big talk of taking revenge for Kimura's disgrace became an object of ridicule for the audience.

The match over, Rikidozan immediately returned to Tokyo by express. Lying in the compartment of the express train, he thought about the contests he had with Kimura and then with Yamaguchi. However hard he thought, he could not comprehend: "Why did they play the hopeless matches? Why do they regard me as an enemy? Just because I am a Korean? I don't remember I wronged them.... Who will be the next challenger? ..."

Questions arose in his mind one after another. But he could not find answers to them. Now he somehow felt lonely. But he had no one to talk with to disburden himself of the lonely feeling. He drew aside the curtain over the window and looked up at the night sky of the winter. He was seeking for the familiar stars he would look up at lying on the sandy beach on the East Sea in his childhood. He felt a pang of nostalgia and his

eyes became wet in spite of himself.

He lit a cigarette although he was a nonsmoker. He was now thinking of the Korean restaurant in front of Kotanda Station, Tokyo. He was humming the tune of the song “My Home Village” which he had learned from Kang Sung Min, the proprietor of the restaurant.

4. Niita Shinsaku

It was not infrequent that Niita Shinsaku, the managing director of the Japan Professional Wrestling Association, president of the Japan Professional Wrestling Business Corporation and director of the Niita Building Company, came home at dawn. On the day as on the other days he returned home by car at dawn.

Entering his room, he changed into nightclothes and sat at the low desk. He opened his business diary and wrote in it “Rikidozan?” in Chinese ideographs with his fountain pen. His wife Takee came in with beer bottles and sat close to him. Filling a glass with beer for him, she glanced down at the characters “Rikidozan?” Her face turned pale at seeing them. A great fear came into her pretty eyes with a double eyelid. A shudder ran through

her frame. She had often seen her husband jot down the name of a person in his business diary and surround it with a circle. They were all his rivals and enemies. Some of them had been his sworn brothers.

Niita was originally a gambler-gangster, with a merciless samurai’s blood running in his veins. Those who had been blacklisted by him would be either ostracized socially or stabbed to death under his instructions.

“Is Rikidozan marked out for ...?” his wife Takee thought to herself with horror.

Niita Shinsaku muttered to himself, holding out his emptied glass towards her.

“He’s still acting impudently even after losing all the leading wrestlers.... Must be taught a lesson. At this rate, it’s quite possible that he may ruin or usurp the Japan Professional Wrestling Association and the Professional Wrestling Business Corporation, when these organizations can prove bonanza enterprises for me in the future....”

Then, recalling something, he turned his face towards his wife.

“Ring up the *sumo* wrestling guild and tell Azumafuji

to come over. Tell him he's wanted by Niita Shinsaku....
And summon Kasayama too."

"Yes, sir."

Takee rose quietly and went out. Soon the papered sliding door was opened noiselessly and a maid in an apron knelt down and made a bow to him.

"Sir Director, breakfast is ready, please."

"Is it mealtime already?"

Niita Shinsaku crushed out the cigar he was smoking and stood up. Going out of the room, he told the maid:

"Two guests are expected to call. So, get cushions ready for them. And remove the low desk and put a cushion bearing the pattern of a chrysanthemum in its place. Understand?"

When he was through with his breakfast and lit up a cigar, the maid opened the sliding door of the room.

"Mr Kasayama has arrived."

"He's like the soldier of the Imperial Army that he was. Show him into the room."

Rising from his seat, he made a sign with his eyes to Takee. She nodded and took out a *haori* and *hakama* (Japanese full dress) for him from the wardrobe. He put them on. It fit him better than the Western clothes. When

he entered the room, Kasayama who was seated on the cushion rose up politely.

"Good morning, sir."

"Good morning. Sit down."

When Niita took his seat on the cushion with the pattern of chrysanthemum, Kasayama sat down quietly. The moment he saw Niita Shinsaku in *haori* and *hakama*, he at once perceived that he was contriving some new scheme. Whenever he was projecting a new plan, Niita would wear a *haori* and *hakama* and discuss it seriously through the night at his home. At the time of establishing the Japan Professional Wrestling Association and the Japan Professional Wrestling Business Corporation, too, the two of them had worked out the plans, in this very room and the next day called the leading show managers to the office of the director of the Niita Building Company to settle the matter. At that time, too, Niita had sat on the same cushion with the chrysanthemum pattern which was boasted of as an heirloom of his family.

"Kasayama, I have invited you to discuss the question of Rikidozan."

He opened his business diary and looked at Kasayama.

“I thought I was asked to come on account of that question,” Kasayama said.

He was called Director Niita’s right hand or a director in charge of finance and accounting by the clerks of the Niita Building Company and well-known show businessmen. He was a party to whatever venture planned by Niita. Without his assent Niita did not start on a job. So much was he prized by Niita.

Kasayama was as well-built as a *sumo* wrestler. From his childhood he was extraordinarily bright. After finishing a secondary school and the military academy with honours, he served in the army and did duties in the rear. When Japan was defeated, he was a colonel.

“What do you mean by that question?” Niita asked back.

“If I guessed wrong, pardon me please.”

“You may guess wrong, but you needn’t ask for pardon. Now let me hear your guess.”

Niita was anxious to know what he guessed. After taking a pull or two at a cigarette, Kasayama opened his mouth.

“Rikidozan has become the holder of professional wrestling championship in Japan by completely defeating

Kimura and Yamaguchi and won the Pacific tag championship in a team with Endo, which has made him a hero. His spirits are running sky-high. But regrettably, he has no wrestlers, to speak of to go with him. Because Kimura and Yamaguchi lured the able wrestlers away from under him. He is like a bird with broken wings. This is one of the fundamental problems affecting the destiny of the Japan Professional Wrestling Business Corporation. Surely Rikidozan must be aware of this. He is not a wrestler who will shed sweat and blood for the sake of others, that is, in the interests of the show businessmen....”

Kasayama paused and puffed at the cigarette a couple of times. Niita nodded his head and lit up a Cuban cigar.

“Nevertheless, Rikidozan will not act to cause ruin to the Professional Wrestling Association and the Professional Wrestling Business Corporation. He will do his best to save them. He will make playing tours of foreign countries and bring foreign wrestlers to hold international matches in Japan. Meanwhile, he will look for and train new recruits strong enough to compete with foreign wrestlers. This will finally lead to the situation which gives a strong impression to the show business

managers and wrestlers that the wrestling association and the wrestling business corporation can never exist without Rikidozan, so that in the end, he himself will seize control of the association and the corporation. This is as clear as day.”

Niita was amazed to know that the thought of Kasayama tallied wonderfully with his own presumption.

“You really have a keen insight. Well, now my idea is to mate Azumafuji with Rikidozan.”

“But will Azumafuji agree to leave *sumo* for wrestling? Azumafuji, a *Yokozuna*, to be subordinated to Rikidozan, a former *Sekiwake*.”

“He will. But I wonder if Rikidozan will give a willing consent to the idea.”

“If Azumafuji agrees, Rikidozan will accept him gladly.” “If so, that’s O.K. I have summoned Azumafuji, so he’ll come. When he arrives, let’s discuss the matter concretely.”

Niita Shinsaku clapped his hand. The maid opened the sliding screen quietly.

“Bring the checkerboard.”

A checkerboard was fetched by the maid. Playing the Japanese checkers, Niita Shinsaku reflected on

Azumafuji. He reckoned if he put him on the board of directors for the Meijiza Theatre and, at the same time, give him tens of thousands of stock certificates, he would accept his proposal even though he might be a king in the realm of *sumo* wrestling.

On the other hand, Kasayama pondered over Niita’s true motive behind his attempt to make Azumafuji a wrestler of the Japan Professional Wrestling Association. If Rikidozan gets Azumafuji as his mate, he will be delighted and the Professional Wrestling Association will prosper. But that cannot be the real intention of Niita Shinsaku. It must be his idea to build up the association with Azumafuji as its key man, that is, to make him play the leading role in professional wrestling.

Niita did not want to see the Japan Professional Wrestling Association and the Japan Professional Wrestling Business Corporation come under the control of Rikidozan. If Rikidozan was not a Korean but a Japanese, the situation would be different. It was impermissible that a Korean, not a Japanese, should be the builder of Japan’s traditions of professional wrestling.

“Rikidozan should be replaced by Azumafuji, a

Japanese, as the leader of professional wrestling!” Niita said to himself.

By winning over Kimura and Yamaguchi, Rikidozan became the No. 1 man in the professional wrestling of Japan both in name and reality. But almost all leading wrestlers under the Japan Professional Wrestling Association broke away from it. Only Endo and Surugaumi stayed on.

At this juncture, namely, on December 12, 1954, Toyonobori who was a promising *sumo* wrestler in Japan gave up *sumo* and entered the Rikidozan Training School. Following him, Azumafuji left *sumo* circles two days later. In March the next year he visited America in company with Rikidozan. It was given out that he was going there to teach *sumo* at the invitations of the *Sumo* Wrestling Associations of Hawaii and Los Angeles. This was a surface reason, but the real aim was to receive training in professional wrestling.

With Toyonobori and Azumafuji placed under him as his pupils, Rikidozan had nothing to fear. It was no exaggeration to say that he was now the king of the professional wrestling community. Upon arrival at

Hawaii, he called on Oki Shikina and introduced Azumafuji to him. Oki Shikina willingly consented to his request and coached Azumafuji for two months. He gave training under a detailed plan.

While being coached by Oki Shikina, Azumafuji trained himself in professional wrestling through practice. His huge body was 182 centimetres in height and 160 kilogrammes in weight, but became solid with each passing day. At the end of four months’ training, he weighed 125 kilogrammes, namely, minus 35 kilogrammes. And his game showings were fine. He fought well in a tag team with Rikidozan. He was by far a better player than Kimura. They won the Hawaiian and Pacific tag championships. In the United States proper they won the contest with the Sharp brothers. A new recruit in professional wrestling, Azumafuji registered great results. The professional wrestling fans in America praised him as “the second Rikidozan who has made a meteoric appearance in the professional wrestling world.” But Azumafuji was displeased with the words “Second Rikidozan.” He resolved firmly.

“Me, this Azumafuji, the second Rikidozan? This Azumafuji, a Tokyoite whose name is widely known

as a *Yokozuna*, is a pupil of Kim Sin Rak, a Korean who was no more than a *Sekiwake*! Ridiculous! I'll be a *Yokozuna*, that is, the No. 1 man in professional wrestling tool!"

On the surface, however, Azumafuji was good to Rikidozan.

After making a playing tour of America for four months, Rikidozan left for home with Azumafuji. On the way, they stopped at Hawaii and called at the Sportsmen Club. Oki Shikina welcomed them. He took them to a fashionable restaurant in the downtown of Honolulu in congratulation of their successful games. They left the restaurant late at night.

Back to the lodgings, Rikidozan took a bath with Azumafuji and went to bed. Azumafuji fell asleep immediately snoring.

Lying on bed, Rikidozan cut open the letter handed to him by Oki Shikina at the restaurant. It was from Toyonobori.

"I offer my congratulations to you, Mr Rikidozan, on your brilliant successes in America," started the writer.

Then he wrote that taking advantage of the absence of Rikidozan, Surugaumi called an emergency meeting of

wrestlers. The leading wrestlers of the Japan Professional Wrestling Association gathered at the Rikidozan Training School. At the meeting Surugaumi put forward an "urgent proposal." It was to found a new professional wrestling guild with Azumafuji, Endo, Toyonobori and Surugaumi as its backbone. This he said will be the most powerful professional wrestling organization in Japan. It is an undeniable fact. The professional wrestling organization of Rikidozan will vanish like a bubble. Promising new men will hasten to join the newly founded organization. In brief, it was a scheme to carry on professional wrestling under the command of Niita, minus Rikidozan.

When Surugaumi advanced such a bold plan and strongly insisted that it should be carried into effect, it appeared that he was not acting at his own discretion but in conspiracy with Niita.

Tanaka Beetaro and Toyonobori who had been obliged to Rikidozan since the days of *sumo* wrestlers set themselves stubbornly against the proposal. Their reason was that if things were arranged as proposed by Surugaumi, the new organization would be undoubtedly the most powerful body of professional wrestling in

Japan, but it would weaken the position of Japan's professional wrestling relatively from the international viewpoint.

The two divergent opinions did not come to terms.

In conclusion the letter said that since the Japan Professional Wrestling Association was disunited and complicated internally, Rikidozan should return home quickly and save the situation.

"Can it be true?" Rikidozan thought to himself. "Trying to disorganize the Japan Professional Wrestling Association! No, that won't do! To establish another professional wrestling association with Azumafuji as its axis? And Niita Shinsaku supporting the idea? ..."

Rikidozan recalled his visit to Niita Shinsaku before his departure for Hawaii with Azumafuji. Niita was in his office. Patting Rikidozan on the shoulder, he told him to look well after Azumafuji.

"Mr Director, don't worry. I will help him as best as I can," said Rikidozan with a smile. He was sincerely glad that Azumafuji had left *sumo* for professional wrestling.

"That is how it should be!" Niita said, lighting a cigar.

"You must treat him with respect because he was a

Yokozuna and your great superior in your days of *sumo* wrestler.... Really, you, Rikidozan, won't act heartlessly.

"But look here, Rikidozan. I have been thinking for quite a long time to say a word to you."

"What's that?" asked Rikidozan, throwing a dubious look on Niita.

"Rikidozan, you have too many enemies. One must have many friends. It's unhappy to have many enemies."

"You are right, Mr Director. Many people are outwardly polite to me, but sometimes I feel that they are giving me a wide berth. This may be due to my prejudices."

"It's quite plain. Rooted deep in your mind is the thought that 'I am a Korean. Let's see who will win, the Korean or the Japanese, the Korean or the American!' This means you are too small-minded. Rikidozan, you ought to have a higher opinion of yourself and think, 'I am not a Japanese nor a Korean wrestler, but an Eastern wrestler.' Only then will you be like Rikidozan.... Please cast away that perverse nature of yours as a Korean. Or else you won't be able to live as long as you are expected to. Bear my words in your mind."

"I cannot understand well what you mean, Mr Director."

“Don’t pretend not to understand what you know clearly. That won’t do.”

At that time Rikidozan did not know the director’s sinister thought.

Rikidozan cast a glance at Azumafuji who was snoring wrapped in a heavy sleep on the next bed.

“I was a fool that I should have rejoiced more than anyone else at Azumafuji’s conversion from *sumo* to professional wrestling. To be to have thought, unaware of their real motive, that he did come to give support to this Rikidozan, in the interests of the Japan Professional Wrestling Association.

“Seems that they are displeased at me Rikidozan playing the leading role. So, Kimura and Yamaguchi threw me a challenge for the Japanese professional wrestling championship on the instructions of Japanese samurai’s descendants to change the leading star in professional wrestling! I was wrong that I trusted in them as heartily as in myself.”

Rikidozan who was a nonsmoker lit a cigarette. Should I tell this to Oki Shikina and discuss the matter with him? He asked himself, but he shook his head. However, if I sit idle doing nothing, I shall be ruined. I must make the

first move. Who, then, should I join hands with?

Now he visualized the faces of well-known go-getters. But none of them was trustworthy. They were mostly alike. They were all on the side of Niita Shinsaku. Rikidozan heaved a long sigh of despair. He saw dark prospects before him.

Suddenly the thought of Kasayama flashed into his head. “Must move Kasayama!” This was a dangerous adventure. But he had no other recourse. If Kasayama would not listen to him, Rikidozan would die at the hands of Niita Shinsaku.

For Niita Shinsaku it was a child’s play to kill people. “Will Kasayama ever consent?” Rikidozan wondered, and remained wakeful all through the night.

CHAPTER 3

1. Azumafuji

The Japan Professional Wrestling Centre was built in front of the shabby wooden house called “Rikidozan Training School.” It was a five-storey building with a total floor space of 700 *phyong*. Niita Shinsaku built it.

As planned, a ceremony of opening the Japan Professional Wrestling Centre was held directly after the return of Rikidozan and Azumafuji. Niita Shinsaku invited to the ceremony political and social figures and journalists. The organizers of professional wrestling games gave a grand banquet in celebration of the ceremony, which was followed by an exhibition game of Rikidozan and Azumafuji.

At the opening ceremony Rikidozan made a speech, which was reported by newspapers and magazines.

“... In the course of my recent playing tour, I invited foreign professional wrestlers. Probably in the middle of July we shall have games with them in Japan....”

“Who are coming?” asked a pressman.

“The visiting wrestlers won’t disappoint the wrestling fans, I believe.”

And this was not a lie. As Rikidozan had said, foreign professional wrestlers arrived in the middle of July. They were all first-class players widely known to the world’s professional wrestling circles: Primo Carnera called “Walking Alps,” Jes Ortega called “Mexican Elephant,” Batt Kachis and Hadei Kuruscangph. Not only Japan’s professional wrestling circles but also its fans raised shouts of joy.

The Japanese wrestlers who were to compete with them were Rikidozan, Azumafuji, Toyonobori, Endo and Surugaumi.

Azumafuji was determined to take this opportunity of checking Rikidozan, so that he himself would be the leading wrestler of the Japan Professional Wrestling Association as intended by Niita. If things have turned out this way, Rikidozan would drop off the Japan Professional Wrestling Association of his own accord. Then a new professional wrestling association would come into being with Azumafuji, Endo and Surugaumi as its axis under the presidency of Niita Shinsaku.

Azumafuji hastily held a hair-cutting ceremony on July 7 and became a professional wrestler to fulfil his ambition secretly agreed upon with Niita.

On July 15, Azumafuji in a tag team with Rikidozan played the opening game against the Carnera-Kuruscangph team.

Hit by Carnera's iron fists, he fell and lost a fall first as his shoulders touched the ground together. Carnera, however, succumbed twice to the violent attacks of Rikidozan.

In consequence, the Rikidozan-Azumafuji team won the game by score of two to one.

The same pair contested with the Ortega-Kachis team at the Koraku Stadium in Tokyo. This bout was not just an ordinary tag match. It was a match between the Rikidozan-Azumafuji team who held the Hawaiian tag championship and the Ortega-Kachis team that was the tag championship holder for the Central America. The defeated team was to lose their championship, whereas the winner would come to acquire two championships.

An audience of 25 000 gathered to see the match which was expected to be a severe fight. Azumafuji was high-flying from the start. Although the Rikidozan-

Azumafuji team won the tag match with the Carnera-Kuruscangph pair by a score of two to one, it was a lost game for Azumafuji.

His team won because Rikidozan gained two wins. As a result, Azumafuji fell in popularity. To him the match with the Ortega-Kachis team was of importance in regaining his fallen popularity and also in keeping Rikidozan in check. He was eager to take advantage of the rare opportunity. The audience shouted encouragement for him. The cheers of 25 000 persons shook the whole of the stadium. Azumafuji raised his hands high in answer to them.

He was lucky. When he went up to the ring, not Ortega but Kachis came out as his adversary. At that instant, he shouted "Yo!" which thundered through the stadium. It was not a yell to lift up his own heart or to overawe his opponent. It was a cry he gave because he was overjoyed. If Ortega had come out, he could not have done so. The "Mexican Elephant" he thought was more than a match for him. But he was confident of victory over Kachis. Kachis was much smaller and weaker than Azumafuji.

When he saw Azumafuji, Kachis realized his own

physical inferiority to his opponent. He rushed about in the ring like a boxer launching attacks. If he had not been an experienced wrestler, it would have been difficult for him to carry on the match in that fashion. This was possible because he was a ranking player.

When 19 minutes passed, Azumafuji sprang upon Kachis as quick as lightning to seize hold of him. At that moment, Kachis who he thought would dodge flew at him like a shot by using the backlash of the ropes and bumped against his chest. At this unexpected counterthrust, Azumafuji collapsed to the ground. Without loss of time Kachis started holding him down. Azumafuji stretched out his hand towards Rikidozan for help. But it was too far and he could not touch the latter's hand. He made an effort to break loose from the hold of Kachis, but in vain. He lost a fall with his shoulders touching the ground at 19 minutes 12 seconds.

In exaltation Kachis beckoned to Rikidozan. As soon as he jumped up to the ring, Rikidozan showered blows on Kachis with his hand. To be relieved by Ortega to evade the attack of Rikidozan, Kachis moved towards him. Every time he did so, Rikidozan stood in his way to keep him from changing places with Ortega and

rained *karate* chops on him. Kachis who was kept on the defensive lost a fall at 7 minutes 52 seconds. The score stood at one to one.

The match reached its height. An awful fight was waged by Rikidozan and Ortega. It was a showdown between Ortega's iron fist and Rikidozan's *karate* chop. It was indeed a bloody battle. Rikidozan attacked with his "Golden Right Hand" and Ortega resisted to it with his iron fist. But the former realized that he could not defeat the latter with his *karate* chops. He had to change his tactics, and adopted new tactics. After giving successive blows of *karate* chops, he lifted up Ortega by holding his two legs to throw him out of the ring. Then he hurled him outside. But at that moment Ortega locked his arms round Rikidozan's neck. So, the two of them fell outside the ring.

There, outside of the ring, they scuffled desperately with each other. They were smeared with blood all over. Rikidozan held the head of his adversary and bumped it against the iron post. The latter's forehead was broken and blood spurted out. Howling from pain like an elephant, he bounced on Rikidozan frantically.

The umpire called off the match because Ortega

bled badly. But Ortega did not listen to him. Now his mate Kachis tried to hold him back. Ortega hit Kachis, sending him flying away and falling down. Oton rushed out and stopped him together with the umpire. On the other hand, Azumafuji held back Rikidozan from behind. The bell kept ringing to announce a halt to the game by right of the umpire. So, the game ended in a draw by the score of one to one. The wrestling fans had never seen such a terrible scuffle outside the ring before.

Azumafuji made a challenge to Ortega. A certain expert on wrestling said that if Azumafuji should beat Ortega, he would prove himself stronger than Rikidozan and that, therefore, this match was tantamount to a contest with Rikidozan.

When Azumafuji appeared in the ring, the entire audience rose to their feet and cheered him. He raised his hands and waved in answer to them full of self-confidence. Ortega stood leaning against the ropes, watching Azumafuji with dubious eyes. It seemed to him that Azumafuji was just like a young puppy that did not know how to fear the tiger. He was utterly scandalized.

As soon as the match started, Ortega went at Azumafuji. The latter was well prepared. But he had

failed to reckon that his opponent was a first-rate in the world's professional wrestling. Ortega was a fearful monster known as "Mexican Elephant" or "Mad Elephant" in the professional wrestling circles of the world. He was a giant standing 196 centimetres tall and tipping the scales at 140 kilogrammes. His attack was fierce. Striking and kicking and stamping down, he did not give a breathing spell to his adversary. He pounded on Azumafuji with his fists. Blood started from Azumafuji's forehead and cheeks. Seeing blood, the "Mexican Elephant" gave his opponent a shower of blows almost ready to kill him. Azumafuji was smeared with blood all over. Unable even to defend himself, he stood helplessly in a defenseless state.

The umpire stopped the match. But Ortega did not listen. He thrust the umpire out of the ring. Azumafuji was unable to move. He could not defend himself either. The game was now a decisive victory for Ortega. When 9 minutes 17 seconds passed, Rikidozan jumped onto the ring. He dealt a blow at Ortega with his hand and rescued Azumafuji. But for this, Azumafuji might have been beaten to death. Nevertheless, the rescued man did not say a word of thanks to Rikidozan. Rather,

he complained against Rikidozan. His intention had been to defeat Ortega by holding him down after tiring him out completely, but his plan was spoiled by Rikidozan's unwelcome "rescue," he said.

Azumafuji challenged Ortega once more. But Ortega did not accept it. His reason was Azumafuji was no match for him. He proposed a single game with Rikidozan. Rikidozan accepted it willingly.

Before his game with Ortega, Rikidozan had a bout with Carnera, the "Walking Alps." He had contested with Carnera, in San Francisco three years before. The bout had been drawn by the score of one to one. Rikidozan came out to the ring with a resolve to settle accounts with him which had been left open at that time. The bout was a fierce fight between Rikidozan's "Golden Right Hand" and Carnera's "Murderous Fist," which was a great terror to the professional wrestlers of the world. He was a horrible wrestler who had struck dead a pugilist named Shark with his "Iron Fist." The contest between Rikidozan and Carnera was a 61-minute three-game match. Rikidozan defeated Carnera by the score of three to zero. Carnera said in admiration that Rikidozan's *karate* chop was amazingly more powerful than three years before.

At that time, the *karate* chop was mainly a down stroke but now it was primarily a level blow, plus down, slant and upward strokes. Among others, the level blow was terrible.

The match between Rikidozan and Ortega took place at the Tokyo Indoor Stadium in mid-September. Ortega promised that if he lost the game to Rikidozan he would present him with pancho gown and sombrero. He said that nothing of the sort would happen. Their 61-minute three-game match was a close fight. It ended in Rikidozan's victory with the score of two to one. Ortega who lost the game presented sombrero and pancho gown to Rikidozan as he had promised. Rikidozan won sweeping popularity, while Azumafuji became quite unpopular. But Azumafuji driven by ambition kept harbouring an underhand design to outplay Rikidozan.

An Asian professional wrestling title match was scheduled to take place from November 8 to 22, 1955, in Tokyo. Rikidozan was to pair with Azumafuji in a tag team. But Azumafuji suddenly rejected him. Rikidozan had no choice but to pair with Endo. Then Azumafuji begged him so pathetically to let him mate with Endo

that Rikidozan found himself in an awkward position. Rikidozan thought him totally outrageous. He wanted at heart to knock down the fellow, but gave way to him. Niita Shinsaku persuaded him to grant the request of Azumafuji and the foreign wrestlers favoured Azumafuji teaming up with Endo.

Azumafuji had an ulterior motive. He was aware that if he was paired with Rikidozan, he would surely win the championship. This was doubtless. But Rikidozan would win sweeping popularity, while he himself would be eclipsed by Rikidozan. If Rikidozan should be teamed up with Endo, it was clear that they would win the championship. So Azumafuji's secret design was to bar Rikidozan from winning the championship. Now Rikidozan would be compelled to form a team with Harold Sakada, but they would fail even to go on to the semifinals because they would be unable to coordinate well with each other, Azumafuji reckoned. On the other hand, if he himself was paired with Endo, he would be able to move into the finals and, should chance favour him, he would be able to win the championship. Then he could bring disgrace to Rikidozan and, further, could create favourable conditions for founding a new professional

wrestling association with himself as its core. Even if his team failed to go into the finals, he believed his team would make a better showing than Rikidozan's pair. Therefore, it would be a match worth playing.

The teams for the Asian professional wrestling tag championships were formed as desired by Azumafuji. Wrestling fans, to say nothing of the experts, thought that Azumafuji's team would advance to the finals but that Rikidozan's team would lose the first game before moving on to the semifinals.

Did the Azumafuji team go into the final match as expected by them? No, things did not turn out that way. The Rikidozan-Sakada team ran in the finals, but lost the game.

Endo told Azumafuji that he came to grief because he had put trust in him, and said sarcastically, "You aren't a professional wrestler but a humbug."

2. Money Spent in Advance

Rikidozan was calculating something with his memo book laid open before him. Now tilting his head and now lighting a cigarette although he was a nonsmoker, he

would glance at the door occasionally.

Before long the door was opened quietly and Kasayama entered the room. He was regarded as the right-hand man of Niita.

“Mr Rikidozan, do you want to see me?” he asked.

“Mr Kasayama, I have invited you to take counsel with you.”

Kasayama was a man of large build even fit for professional wrestling or *sumo*. As he sat before him, Rikidozan put away his memo book into his pocket.

“Please speak out. I think I must hear your words first, so that I shall decide if I can give you advice or not. Don’t you think so?”

“Do you think I’ll ask you for anything impossible?”

“Is it an affair you must consult exclusively with me about?”

“Yes, it requires your skill,” answered Rikidozan, offering a Cuban cigar to Kasayama.

“I have recently given a deep thought to the Japan Professional Wrestling Corporation. I don’t think it is necessary to explain the matter in detail to you, Mr Kasayama. You know the corporation inside out.... Mr Kasayama, to be frank with you, I, this Rikidozan, get

too insignificant reward for my bloody fights. Mr Niita who has nothing more than a mouth, gets enormous sums of money. The same is the case with Director Hayashi of the Yoshimoto Industrial Company and his brother. I am disgusted at this situation and can stand it no more. I cannot get to sleep these days. So I offer to buy up all the stocks of the Japan Professional Wrestling Business Corporation issued at the time of its inauguration in 1953. Mr Kasayama....”

Kasayama had expected that much from Rikidozan. But he had little thought it would come so soon.

“But the stocks amount to a total sum of 4 500 000 *yen*, you know. Out of it 500 000 *yen* is under your name, Mr Rikidozan, and 4 000 000 *yen* belongs to five persons including Director Niita Shinsaku. It will be a very tough problem to buy up all of them. You cannot deny their influence in bringing about the prosperity of professional wrestling as at present.”

“Mr Kasayama, do you mean to say you have an objection to me?”

“No objection in particular, but”

“Mr Kasayama, I am taking the bull by the horns all alone while the money is flowing into the pockets

of others. I cannot bear this any more. If you are in my shoes, Mr Kasayama, what will you do?"

"Oh, let me think it over."

"Be quick about it, please. Won't it be sufficient to employ a few persons for the control of the accounts and operation of business?"

"We can find any number of people for the work. The question is to get hold of the stocks."

"My idea is to siphon over all of their stocks at good prices. And I want this right away."

"Oh, that's impossible. Registration alone will take some ten days. Let me consult with Director Niita. Sir Niita is the very director of the business corporation, isn't he?"

"I told Director Niita about the thing. Don't hesitate but ..."

"I will discuss the matter with the lawyer tomorrow and push ahead with the preparations for it."

"Why tomorrow? Let's confer with him right now, I tell you."

With this, Rikidozan bowed his head, asking: "Mr Kasayama, I implore you. This is my first and last request. Don't worry about the funds. In case money is

short, ask for more. Please push ahead with the work without regard to the sum needed."

Rikidozan was originally distrustful of the Japanese. Nevertheless, he had regarded Niita Shinsaku as his benefactor and put faith in him at least. But after he had received Toyonobori's letter in Hawaii during his playing tour of the United States with Azumafuji the previous year, his faith in Niita was blasted. In spite of that, he did not reveal his distrust.

He was somehow suspicious of Azumafuji's motives behind his challenge to Ortega and his pairing with Endo instead of himself at the Asian professional wrestling tag championships. These moves betrayed his desire to break free from under the control of Rikidozan and become independent and his intrigue to bring down the latter.

Not only Azumafuji hated to see Rikidozan continue in the ascendant but also his attitude like this was a refracted manifestation of the position of the Japan Professional Wrestling Business Corporation.

At this rate, Rikidozan reckoned he might be thrown overboard from the ship called the Japan Professional Wrestling Business Corporation. He made up his mind

firmly to be its owner and its captain before being thrown out of it. For this purpose money did not matter.

Rikidozan got a telephone call from Kasayama. He immediately discontinued training and drove his sports car Mercedes to the suburbs. The car stopped before a two-storey restaurant by the sea. A young woman in a *kimono* showed him to a room in a corner of the upper storey. Kasayama was waiting for him in the room.

“I am sorry, Mr Rikidozan to have called you out to the suburbs like this.”

“Oh, never mind. You must have done so deliberately to evade the newspapermen. But is anything up?” said Rikidozan, sitting before Kasayama.

“I have called you out to hand this over to you.”

With this Kasayama took out a sheet of typewritten paper from his briefcase and held it out to Rikidozan.

Rikidozan took the paper and ran his eyes over it. Now a dubious look came over his face. The paper stamped with the seal of Niita Shinsaku said that he agreed to the transfer of the stocks of the Japan Professional Wrestling Business Corporation to Rikidozan.

Niita Shinsaku had died suddenly of heart failure a

few days before. Thinking of this, Rikidozan became all the more sceptical.

“Sir Niita had given his consent two days before his death. But other stockholders did not agree, and so I delegated an influential person who bought out all their stocks.”

“So you mean that I, Rikidozan, am now the director of the Professional Wrestling Business Corporation, do you? Mr Kasayama, I really am grateful to you for your trouble.”

Now the doubtful look on his face was gone and a smile of satisfaction beamed over it. He clapped his large hands. Waitresses in *kimono* appeared and placed a small square table before Rikidozan and spread it with a bottle of wine and some relishes. When the waitresses went out and closed the door behind them, Kasayama reached in his briefcase and brought out bundles of bank notes on the table.

“What money is that?” asked Rikidozan with a puzzled look.

“It’s your money, the remainder of the money used to buy the stocks.”

“You may keep it for yourself. If it were not for

you, it would have been impossible to buy out the stocks. The foxy amusement industry managers would not have turned over their stocks so easily, would they? We aren't breaking off with each other this night, and I think I shall have to count on your kind help in the future too. So now, please keep it to yourself," Rikidozan said and tossed off his cup.

"I fear that would be too much trespassing on your ...," Kasayama said straightening himself. "I am struck by your magnanimity. Whenever you need my help in the future, say so. I'll do my best to help you as I did the deceased Sir Niita Shinsaku."

Kasayama put back the bundles of money into his briefcase. He had expected a reward of this kind. His expectation was materialized.

"Thanks. That Director Saito of the Yoshimoto Company and Director Nagata should have given away the stocks! It's nothing short of a miracle indeed."

"The amusement industry managers will part with their stocks no matter how long they have kept them once they become aware that the stocks won't bring profits. This is due to their outlook on life."

Then Kasayama talked in high spirits about how

he had brought round Niita Shinsaku and other show proprietors. He had not resorted to dirty tricks. He told them pointblank and logically that the Professional Wrestling Business Corporation had no future and that the Professional Wrestling Association, too, was doomed to fall in the end. In fact the corporation gained no income without international games. Domestic games would draw but a meager audience.

"From now I must keep inviting celebrated foreign wrestlers," said Rikidozan nodding his head at the talk of Kasayama. Kasayama's account was a fact.

It is essential to invite foreign players by all means, Rikidozan thought to himself. High-grade wrestlers at that. This is what it should be. Failing this, the professional wrestling corporation of this Rikidozan will make a laughing stock of itself and fall through.

3. The Returned Champion Belt

On July 21, 1956, Tam Rice flew to Japan at the invitation of Rikidozan. Rikidozan had lost a game to him in February 1952. At that time, Rikidozan was determined to get even with him some day. Four years

had passed since then, and now he was to contest with him not in Hawaii but in Tokyo. But how the contest might turn out was anybody's guess. Because Rice was a formidable opponent to Rikidozan. He held the Pacific single and tag championships. He had the nickname of "Red Scorpion." When he got angry, his whole body would turn red. Like the scorpion, he was a most brutal wrestler.

On July 23, the bout of Rikidozan and Tam Rice ended in a tie by the score of one to one at the Kuramae National Game House. Before the game, Rice flaunted his champion belt bearing a diamond worth 1 080 000 *yen*, talking boastfully, "Nobody can take away this champion belt from me." As the game was a draw, the belt remained with him.

On September 1, Rikidozan who had returned to Tokyo from 40 days' playing tour contested with Rice for the Pacific open-weight division championship. This game, too, ended in a tie by a score of one to one. In fact, it was a victorious game for Rikidozan, but it was called a draw by the unfair umpire. In the 61-minute three-game match, Tam Rice won a point first by holding down Rikidozan. Then Rikidozan knocked down Rice,

bringing the score to one to one. Now Rice got a slight injury in his right knee. He was still capable of a contest, but, diffident of victory, he said in a pathetic voice, pointing to his right knee, that because of the wound, he could no longer fight, and that there was no help for it but to yield his champion belt. He held out the belt towards Rikidozan.

Rikidozan accepted the champion belt, but did not gird it round his waist.

"I didn't know you Rice were so weak-hearted as to withdraw from the game because of a slight bone injury. I, Rikidozan, am not a man to take the champion belt from such a wrestler who is not worthy of the name of professional wrestler. Shame!"

Rikidozan threw back the diamond-mounted champion belt to the chest of Tam Rice. The umpire announced Rice's withdrawal from the game due to injury. So the game ended by a score of one to one.

"Mr Rikidozan, thank you!" said Rice, holding the belt in his hand.

"Is there any need to thank me? Say thanks to the umpire."

Rikidozan tapped Tam Rice on the shoulder and

descended from the ring. Rice gazed after Rikidozan who was walking away through the audience.

“What a proud and upright wrestler!” he said to himself in admiration.

4. The Hand-Sword of Justice

With the turn of 1957 Rikidozan visited Okinawa and then foreign countries in a playing tour. Meanwhile, he invited foreign wrestlers and energetically carried on international contests.

Early in January he invited Aderian Bairazon of Canada and had a bout with him at the Osaka Prefectural Indoor Stadium. The Canadian player was known to the professional wrestling world as a wrestler with the strongest arms. Whoever was wound round by his arms would have broken bones. This was why many wrestlers feared him and avoided a game with him. He was 198 centimetres tall and weighed 125 kilogrammes. He had five younger brothers and these were all professional wrestlers. His younger sister was also a professional wrestler. So his was a family of professional wrestlers.

The match at the Osaka Prefectural Indoor Stadium ended in a one-to-one draw. Aderian Bairazon said he could not go back to Canada before beating Rikidozan and challenged him to wrest the Asian open-weight division championship from him. Rikidozan readily accepted his challenge. The contest was hard. Bairazon attacked furiously. But he lost the match by a score of one to two.

In the first part of January 1957, that is, as soon as the match with Bairazon ended, Rikidozan left for Okinawa on a playing visit. The games in Okinawa lasted for three days. There was no ring. So a temporary ring was set up outdoors. Okinawa had no professional wrestlers to speak of. Therefore, American soldiers in Okinawa and *karate* players of Okinawa challenged the team of Rikidozan. They were not professional wrestlers, and so he pitted his disciple, a beginner in professional wrestling, against them.

The American soldiers were hooligans totally ignorant of professional wrestling. Some came out to the ring with a knife hidden in the sports trunks and others with military shoes on. Their shoes had sharp, pointed nails fitted on their toes. They gave a challenge to

Rikidozan on the last day of the game. But he refused because it would injure his honour as a professional wrestler to hold a match with the hooligans. Then the scamps demanded that Rikidozan appear before the audience and tell them of his absence. He had participated in contests in many countries by now, but never once had withdrawn from a match. He was now compelled to contest with the American ruffians.

When the umpire appeared in the ring, the American GIs, one in combat boots, and the other in trunks, came up. The innumerable American soldiers in the seats shouted:

“Let him know the taste of America!”

Rikidozan went up to the ring with his pupil Kojima. The Okinawans raised shouts of joy. Some even threw up their clenched hands high overhead, shouting, “Snub the American fellows!” and “Mow down the Yanks!”

The audience numbering more than 10 000 gathered at the place were divided into two groups, American and Okinawan.

Rikidozan raised his hand in greeting to the Okinawans before he turned round to Kojima.

“Kojima, this is not a wrestling match but a fight, you know. If we behave ourselves as in an ordinary wrestling bout, we may be wounded, and this mortally, too. So, Kojima, you don’t fight but get out of their way!”

“Get out of their way? Leaving you alone? No, I can’t do so,” insisted Kojima shaking his head.

“When the match is started, you leap down from the ring. I’ll do the fight alone. I must teach them the taste of my *karate* chop. The bout will end in a few minutes, nay, in a few seconds.”

“Mr Rikidozan!”

Kojima now understood that it was not a wrestling match they were facing. The bell rang for the start of the match.

“Kojima, get out!”

With this, Rikidozan gave a strong thrust to his shoulder. Then he stood like a rock in the middle of the ring. The two American soldiers came forward together in the ring. Kojima shouted to the umpire in protest.

“That’s against the rules. How come two men take the field at the same time?”

The umpire nodded his head to show that he was

aware of it, and demanded the American soldiers that one of them should withdraw. Then they lifted up the umpire and threw him out of the ring. It seemed they were acting on a promise. The next moment one of them kicked at Rikidozan's face with one of the spiked toes of his GI shoes. There was no time to evade it. Rikidozan caught hold of the shoe with his left hand. The sharp spikes pierced through his hand. Blood flowed down. Now the other fellow brought out a knife from within his trunks and stabbed at his side. The Okinawan spectators closed their eyes, thinking that Rikidozan would scream from pain. But Rikidozan seized the man's wrist with his right hand.

The same moment a thunderous shout came from his mouth.

"You scoundrels! Know what the *karate* chop tastes like! The taste of the hand-sword of justice!"

Rikidozan struck them by *karate* chops, a level blow each on their chest, the part of their heart. They fell down to the ground, even unable to utter a scream. They could not rise again. The game was over in only a few seconds. The umpire came up to the ring and tapped the cheeks of the fallen GIs. They rose shaking their heads.

But unable to balance themselves, they collapsed again. The umpire called in the doctor. The doctor came up to the ring and gave them injections, and then beckoned to the stretcher. The two American soldiers were carried out on stretchers. Following Kojima, Rikidozan came out of the ring. The Okinawans applauded and shouted vociferously for joy.

On their way home Kojima asked him in the airplane:

"I really was amazed, Mr Rikidozan. How is it that you are so quick-motioned?"

"Because my opponents were American soldiers, great strength welled up within me in spite of myself. Kojima, I had had furious fights twice with American rogues before I launched out on professional wrestling. In Tokyo and in Hawaii, I mean. At that time I fought against six fellows."

Rikidozan laughed loudly, looking quite pleased.

After his playing trip to Okinawa, he immediately left for America with Toyonobori.

The object of this visit was to invite to Japan Rue Thez, the title holder of the contest of strong international professional wrestlers. Rue Thez had never left the United States for a match. Rikidozan worked energetically and,

at last, succeeded in winning his consent. It was agreed that the match would be played in Tokyo and Osaka in October.

5. Contest with Rue Thez Again

On October 3, 1957, the *Asahi Shimbun* and all other newspapers of Japan reported the arrival on October 2 of Rue Thez, the title-holder of the contest of strong international professional wrestlers, who was called the king of world professional wrestling.

On October 3, a grand banquet was given in his honour at the Tokyo Assembly Hall.

On October 7, a match for the championship of the strong international professional wrestlers was played at the Korakuen Ball Game Field of Tokyo. Originally it was slated for October 6, but was put off for a day due to rain.

The match was played twice as had been agreed in the United States. The first game was held on October 7 and the second at the Osaka Pool on October 13. The two games were all drawn, the first by the score of zero to zero and the second one to one. After all, the long-

cherished ambition of Rikidozan was not fulfilled, and Rue Thez defended his world championship.

The newspaper *Tokyo Sports* carried its sports reporter Yamada's account of the game of October 7:

“How did this match for world supremacy in professional wrestling proceed? The bell rang for its start. The 61-minute three-game match started. At the first moment Rikidozan tried to seize hold of Rue Thez's neck. Rue Thez promptly hit Rikidozan's hand upward with his fist and threw his arm round the neck of Rikidozan and tried to throw him down. Rikidozan thrust him away with all his might. Rue Thez was quick and circumspect in movement. He flew back upon Rikidozan by taking advantage of the ropes' backlash. His body was a 'human shell' which struck Rikidozan. Rikidozan fell. As he fell down, his head hit hard against the ground. Everything went black before his eyes. He barely opened his eyes. He saw the bulldog-like face of the umpire looming large before his eyes. The umpire looked into Rikidozan's eyes for a few seconds before he raised his right hand and started counting 'one, two, three, ...'”

“Rikidozan desperately kicked Rue Thez away, and

then threw his whole body against him in a counteroffensive thrust. Rue Thez fought back his counterattack with his two hands. At the same time he made an attempt to lift him up. Rikidozan shook off Rue Thez's hands for all he was worth. Excited, Rue Thez pushed him with his shoulder. His push was powerful. Rikidozan was sent off his feet and fell to the ground. But he regained his feet. Pushing back the chest of Rue Thez with his left hand, Rikidozan who was furious administered *karate* chops to him with his right hand. Rue Thez sank down...

“He rose and protested to sub-umpire Karasik, ‘It’s a foul.’ Karasik shook his head. Rue Thez got angry. He took hold of Rikidozan’s left arm. His hold was so strong and tight that Rikidozan’s arm became as white as a sheet of paper. Rue Thez tried to press down Rikidozan by applying an armlock for five minutes. When 15 minutes passed, he promptly went round to the rear of Rikidozan and secured a waist lock.

“‘Look out for a back throw!’ shouted Oki Shikina.

“Rikidozan locked Rue Thez’s legs between his two legs and tried to make him fall. This was a dexterous defence against the back throw. He locked the neck of

Rue Thez with his arm and hurled him down. Then he pressed him down, kicked and started strangling his neck.

“The fight continued, watched by 35 000 spectators who sat breathless in their seats.

“A long-awaited contest after an interval of five years.

“25 minutes passed. Rue Thez hurled himself on the ropes and sprang back on Rikidozan attempting to throw him down by holding his lower limbs. Rikidozan dodged swiftly. It was a close call. Turning round Rue Thez attacked furiously before he locked his arms round Rikidozan’s waist and threw him down. Then he got a strangle hold on Rikidozan’s neck and tightened his hold. Now he dragged Rikidozan about. Now was the chance. He put his hand between his legs and lifted him up. He threw him down backward. This was a back throw, his killing trick most dreaded in the world. Rikidozan could not rise, the back of his head hit hard against the floor of the ring. He had cerebral concussion. Oddly enough, however, Rue Thez did not try to hold him down. He himself was also hit hard in the back of his head and was staggering. After a few seconds he

collected himself and pressed down Rikidozan. When the umpire counted, 'one, two,' Rikidozan managed to roll over and barely got out of Rue Thez's hold. He retreated to the ropes. Thus he miraculously got over the greatest danger.

"40 minutes passed. Rikidozan attacked Rue Thez with his *karate* chops. Rue Thez hit back with his fists. The two attacked and defended, now advancing and now retreating. Rue Thez tried again to apply a back drop. But Rikidozan did not allow him to get his waist. When Rue Thez got a waist lock, he hooked his right leg round Rue Thez's leg and twisted it. So Rue Thez's attack was frustrated. The 'duel' was at stalemate. However, Rue Thez watched for a chance.

"Rikidozan frantically struck his opponent with his *karate* chops with a cry, 'You rascal!' Rue Thez defended himself by hitting back with his fists while retreating. At last time was up. Rikidozan sank down on his knees. Rue Thez was panting hard. Rue Thez defended his title of world championship with difficulty.

"The match ended, but the 35 000 spectators sat still without thinking to rise."

The *Professional Wrestling News* made its appraisal

of the contest between Rikidozan and Rue Thez:

"The latter half 30 minutes of this match showed Rikidozan's one-sided dominance. If it was decided according to the ways of professional boxing, Rikidozan would have won by the score of 23 to 21."

Yamada's description of the match showed his partiality to Rue Thez. He was a strongly pro-American journalist. He wrote in detail about the first half of the bout, but his account of the latter half was not concrete.

Yamada only said, "Rue Thez defended himself... While retreating ... time was up. Rikidozan sank down on his knees."

However, The *Professional Wrestling News* was rather correct in its assessment, it could be said. But this news, too, was not fair. Those who watched their match said that Rikidozan had the upper hand and that if the match had been extended, Rue Thez would have surely been defeated. Tens of thousands of spectators did not make to leave the place even after the match ended.

Voices rose from different places of the auditorium: "Extend the match!" and "We want an extended match!"

Now the loud speaker said, "Attention please, professional wrestling fans!"

“After six days, on October 13, the second bout between Rikidozan and Rue Thez will take place at the Osaka Pool.”

The present writer saw the Rikidozan-Rue Thez match, and would like to rewrite at least the parts of Yamada’s account giving a distorted picture of the latter half of the match.

Yamada wrote, “Pushing back the chest of Rue Thez with his left hand, Rikidozan who was furious administered *karate* chops to him with his right hand. Rue Thez sank down.... He rose and protested to sub-umpire Karasik, ‘It’s a foul’ Karasik shook his head. Rue Thez got angry.”

My version of this part is, “Rikidozan who was furious administered level *karate* chops twice to Rue Thez with his right hand while using his left hand to stave off the latter’s right hand. This brought Rue Thez to fall down on his knees. This was an excellent chance for holding him down, and Rikidozan descended on him. At this moment the umpire stood in his way with both arms extended. Barred from attacking, Rikidozan stood in the middle of the ring. He said something to the umpire. It seemed he protested against the umpire’s partial refereeing. This

permitted the passage of a little time, enabling Rue Thez to regain his senses and rise to his feet, shaking his head. Then he made a gesture with his hands to the sub-umpire, protesting against a foul on the part of Rikidozan. The sub-umpire waved his hand in denial of the protest. Now Rue Thez went round along the edge of the ring to appeal to the audience with gestures of chagrin. His gestures with hands and body were so winsome that the audience laughed. As he did so, Rikidozan laughed, too, pointing to Rue Thez. He became lax, if it was for just a moment. This Rue Thez had been watching for. He was cunning. He who had been going round and round suddenly bounced on Rikidozan from behind and seized his left arm.” Yamada also said, “He locked the neck of Rue Thez with his arm and hurled him down. Then he pressed him down, kicked and started strangling his neck.”

Yamada’s report further stated, “Rikidozan frantically struck his opponent with his *karate* chops with a cry... Rue Thez defended himself by hitting back with his fists while retreating. At last time was up. Rikidozan sank down on his knees.”

I would rather rewrite these passages as follows:

“Rikidozan hit out at Rue Thez in succession with

his *karate* chops. The latter defended himself against the attack with both hands. But his defence was ineffective. So he skulked and ran about along the edge of the ring. He looked like a runner.... Now it was time. Rue Thez was leaning against the ropes, panting hard. Rikidozan pounded on the floor with a hand in his mortification. He felt bitter that time was limited. Several minutes more, and he would have defeated Rue Thez for sure. Rue Thez was a jolly fellow. He bowed over and over again to the audience with ‘Thank you! Thank you!’”

On October 13, their second bout took place at the Osaka Pool. Professional wrestling commentator Tazuru wrote in a weekly:

“From the start of the match that evening Rikidozan watched for an opportunity to use his *karate* chop. Rue Thez guarded against it. When he saw danger, he fled beyond the ropes. He played the game, widening the range of his movement. Rue Thez continued to have the upper hand.

“When four minutes passed, Rikidozan tried to change over from an arm spread to pressing down. Rue Thez tactfully slipped out and escaped to the outside of the ropes. He was quick and adroit in slipping away. Seven

minutes passed and Rikidozan succeeded in seizing Rue Thez’s leg. He tried to throw down Rue Thez and bring his shoulders to touch the ground. Rue Thez held the chest of Rikidozan and pushed him down. When 14 minutes passed, Rikidozan attempted to bring down Rue Thez by holding his neck. At this moment he was caught in the latter’s forte back drop. As in the first match, his waist was low but the angle of his falling body was steeper. He lost a fall first at 15 minutes.

“The bell rang again for the start of the game. Rikidozan was not yet quite restored to himself. At this moment Oki Shikina jumped up to the ring and shouted something to Rikidozan. This dazed Rue Thez for a while, preventing him from attacking. So Rikidozan gained time. When 24 minutes passed, Rikidozan slipped out luckily of Rue Thez’s strangle hold on his neck and rushed away over the ropes. Vexed at Rikidozan’s escape, Rue Thez turned on the umpire. Then, rising, he hit Rikidozan with his fist. Now, in an attempt to sweep him off his feet, at a stroke, he flew upon Rikidozan by using the backlash of the ropes. At this moment Rikidozan gave him a blow with a level *karate* chop. The big frame of Rue Thez turned a somersault in the

air before falling to the floor of the ring. He could not rise. So Rikidozan gained a point at 25 minutes, bringing the score to one to one.

“... The two wrestlers were at grips. Rikidozan now applied a headlock on Rue Thez. The latter locked his arms round Rikidozan’s waist. Rikidozan sent his right leg between Rue Thez’s thighs to block his killing trick.... When 31 minutes passed, Rue Thez suddenly leaned against the ropes and lifted Rikidozan overhead. He then turned him round above the head a few times before he hurled him out of the ring. This was an ‘airplane throw.’ But at that moment Rikidozan grasped the rope swiftly, and the next moment the body of Rue Thez was floating in midair. Now two of them fell outside the ring together. The counting ended, but the two wrestlers could not rise.

“The umpire declared a drawn game. Rikidozan fought in Tokyo and Osaka, but, regrettably, failed to wrest the championship.”

So, Rikidozan failed, after all, to carry off the world champion belt. He had bragged that he would get what he wanted to get without fail, but he could not worst Rue Thez. He only added to his weight. Rue Thez, 41,

was worthy of being called a “Man of Steel.” After 61 minutes of match, his breath and pulse were the same as before.

The next year Rikidozan visited the United States again. The object was to take away the world championship, to settle accounts with Rue Thez. On August 28, a match of strong international professional wrestlers for championship took place at the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles. The auditorium was packed to overflowing.

When Rue Thez appeared in the ring, the audience gave him vociferous applause and cheers and threw flower bunches to the ring. He raised both hands high overhead in answer to their applause.

The bell rang. Rikidozan stood face to face with Rue Thez, and he was surprised. The eyes of Rue Thez were gleaming with bloodthirstiness, and menacing. Shouts came incessantly from the auditorium.

“Show him the true worth of Americans!

“Let him come never again to Los Angeles!”

Rikidozan turned his head and cast a glance at the seats of coaches outside the ring. Oki Shikina was seated there with folded arms.

“I will put the haughty American’s nose out of joint!” thought he to himself before going for Rue Thez.

His attack was terrific and reckless. He attacked in a state of excitement. In professional wrestling excitement often lays a wrestler open to attack. While defending himself, Rue Thez watched for a unguarded moment.

“Rikidozan, don’t be excited! Keep cool!” shouted Oki Shikina in vexation.

The agitated Rikidozan failed to hear his shout. Rue Thez flew like a shell at Rikidozan by making use of the ropes’ backlash and hit his chest. Wary of his forte back drop, Rikidozan had hardly expected he would make a frontal attack. Rikidozan fell to the ground. He fell so hard that he could not rise.”

He thus lost a fall.

Oki Shikina came up to the ring. He said:

“Rikidozan, excitement will only lead to failure. Understand? This is your last bout with Rue Thez! If you fail to beat him, you won’t be able to walk down from the ring on your own feet. Where do you think is this? This is Los Angeles! Look at the audience down there. Look at the umpire. Do you expect them to leave you alive? Remember. Strike at him with *karate* chops, hitting

him without letup whenever you see a chance. There’s no other way to win. I mean your level *karate* chop.”

Rikidozan nodded his head. The break ended and the match was resumed. He moved round along the edge of the ring while defending himself. He watched for a chance to attack.

Rue Thez pretended to bounce on him to get hold of his waist. This was a probing action. Each time Rikidozan dodged. Sometimes he backed away outside the ropes. Rue Thez thought he was frightened. He sought to sweep him off his feet by springing back from the ropes. The big frame of Rue Thez flew at the chest of Rikidozan like a shell. At this moment Rikidozan dealt him a blow with his level *karate* chop. It was aimed at his heart, but it went amiss and struck his shoulder. If it had hit his heart, he would have collapsed on the spot. Rikidozan had not yet been cool enough, which proved that he still had been excited. He hit out with his *karate* chops in rapid succession. Rue Thez tottered. Rikidozan pushed him down with all his might. Rue Thez fell to the ground. Rikidozan sprang on him like a tiger and pressed him down. Rue Thez could not break loose from his hold. So, Rikidozan gained one

point. The score now stood at one to one.

Rue Thez rose to his feet, shaking his head.

A stormy applause arose. The game was resumed. This was the last round to try conclusions, a decisive battle for world supremacy in professional wrestling.

Rikidozan continued to strike out by his *karate* chops, putting his opponent completely on the defensive. He did not give him a moment's respite to get out of the defensive position. If this rain of *karate* chops had stopped even for a moment, Rue Thez would have applied his killing trick to beat him. But the attack of *karate* chops did not stop. Rue Thez finally succumbed to the *karate* chops, unable to defend himself against them. Rikidozan won the game by the score of two to one. Rikidozan raised his hands high overhead.

"I have humbled the pride of the haughty Yanks! Korea has won!" shouted Rikidozan inwardly.

So, his dream came true at last. The "Man of Steel" and "Zeus of Professional Wrestling" Rue Thez yielded his crown of world professional wrestling to Rikidozan. But he did not hand over the champion belt.

"Mr Rue Thez, give me the champion belt," said Rikidozan.

"This belt is ...," Rue Thez could not continue.

"You seem averse to part with it. But it can't be helped. It is a rule that the champion belt goes to the victor."

With this, Rikidozan looked at Rue Thez in the face. His face was pallid. Beads of sweat were standing on his forehead.

"Give me 30 000 dollars, and I'll hand it over."

"What? 30 000 dollars?"

Rikidozan was amazed. Little had he thought Rue Thez was such a sordid man. The Yankees will be Yankees.

"You are called a 'Man of Steel' and 'Zeus of Professional Wrestling', and how can you say such a thing? As I see now, you are a mean wrestler. I, this Rikidozan, am not a man to buy the champion belt with money. It's dirty, I say!"

Rikidozan laughed scornfully. He returned to his lodging, where Oki Shikina hugged him.

"Rikidozan, you have done well, done well indeed. You won not only the game but also morally. I am convinced that none will be equal to you!"

Oki Shikina's prophecy came true. Rikidozan did not

yield his world championship of professional wrestling for all his life. Rue Thez challenged him to take it back, but failed.

6. His Partner Was a Double-Crosser

Rikidozan who had defeated Rue Thez known as a “Man of Steel” and “Strongest, Matchless Man” returned to Japan on September 3 as the king of professional wrestling for the world. Confusion arose in the professional wrestling community of America. The wrestling fans yelled that the loss of the world championship was a disgrace to the United States and shattered its prestige. With this they brought pressure to bear upon its professional wrestling circles. They staged demonstrations every day and wrote thousands of threatening letters and gave menacing phone calls. The professional wrestling quarters of the United States were so upset that they dispatched strong men—Skyhigh Lee, Don Leo Jonason, Johnny Barland—to Japan to wrest back the lost championship. This formidable team landed at Haneda Airport on September 4, that is, one day after Rikidozan’s arrival. This alone is enough to show how

flurried the American professional wrestling world was.

Rikidozan had to defend his world title even before taking a rest after his fatiguing journey to America.

The Americans fought desperately, but could not defeat him. They returned home, frustrated. Leaving Japan, Jonason told the reporters, “We contested with Rikidozan for championship. I had received instructions from the American professional wrestling community to return home after defeating Rikidozan without fail. So, I rained fist blows on him as soon as the bell rang. Yet, I failed to knock him down. Any other wrestler would have collapsed. But Rikidozan was not daunted. True, technical gap has to be spoken here, but there was other factor too. It is that he has an extreme unyielding spirit of competition. And he has a strong hatred for the American wrestlers, or rather for the United States itself.”

After defending his title as the champion of the international contest of strong professional wrestlers, Rikidozan wanted to leave for Brazil with Azumafuji. But the latter flatly refused to go, saying, “I won’t go because I fear I may become like Kimura. I don’t want to be a satellite of you, Rikidozan.”

Rikidozan did not try to persuade him. Azumafuji

spoke gently, but his words sounded hostile. It was evident that he wanted to get away from under Rikidozan and become independent. Now Rikidozan went to Toyonobori. He believed that Toyonobori would willingly agree to him, for he had received his special favours. Moreover, most of Japan's professional wrestlers were desirous of a playing tour abroad in his company. He thought if he played in a tag team with Toyonobori, he would not suffer disgrace at least. Furthermore, if he took him along with him, Azumafuji's wings would be clipped and he would be barred from doing what he wanted. He would be like a solitary wild goose without companions.

Toyonobori was really surprised at Rikidozan's call. Rikidozan had never visited his home. When he had anything to discuss with wrestlers, he would meet them at the resting room of the training hall or at his office.

"What has happened?" Toyonobori asked and showed him into the drawing-room.

Seated in the armchair, Rikidozan told him straight out why he came:

"Come with me on a playing tour to Brazil." Toyonobori remained silent, only drawing a long sigh.

"Why? Don't you want to go? For fear you shouldn't be able to go to the races?"

Toyonobori was a turf fan. At one time he even took up his lodgings in the house of the director of the racing newspaper *Keiba Shimbun*. "The playing journey this time won't take a long time. I intend to come back soon."

"Is Azumafuji going together?"

"He refuses to go. That's why I came to you. You won't say no, will you?"

"Mr Rikidozan, I have already bought pari-mutuel tickets, and so...."

Rikidozan stared him in the face. Toyonobori lowered his head, avoiding his keen eyes.

"Azumafuji must have talked him round," Rikidozan thought to himself. "He is trying to win popularity by playing games in pair with Toyonobori while I am away in Brazil. A cunning fellow that he is."

At the back of his mind, Rikidozan wanted to defer his journey to Brazil and challenge Azumafuji to a match so as to discredit him as a wrestler in the eyes of the professional wrestling fans. But he shook his head inwardly. If I do so, I shall be a man as base as Azumafuji, he thought.

Leaving the house of Toyonobori, he drove his car looking up at the star-lit sky. The images of noted professional wrestlers who had gone away from the Japan Professional Wrestling Association floated before his mind's eyes one after another. Kimura who had once been the mate of Rikidozan had defected, taking many wrestlers along with him. Rikidozan had a premonition that like Kimura, Azumafuji might also secede, seducing away wrestlers he valued. Rikidozan was gripped by great melancholy.

"I must pick out and train those who are fit to be good wrestlers," he thought. "Only then will they not betray me."

He regretted that he had so far failed to pay attention to this. Regret was no use now. Though a little too late, he told himself, I must bend efforts on this matter from now on. He pulled up the car before the Korean restaurant in front of Kotanda Station and entered the restaurant. This was his favourite restaurant. Its proprietor Kang Sung Min and Rikidozan were from the same village in Siphung-ri. They had attended the same primary school in the native village. They had been playmates from before going to school. Kang Sung Min went to Japan

in 1941 and worked his way through Chuo University. After graduation he had once been on the all-Japan football team.

It was in 1946 that Rikidozan, now a *sumo* wrestler, met him again.

He went upstairs and stepped into the familiar room in the farthest corner. There was no customer in the room. A long four-cornered low table was in the middle of the room.

"Mr Rikidozan, what shall I bring for you?" asked the waitress who came into the room after him.

"Nothing. Don't let other customers into this room. See? And call the proprietor."

"Yes, sir."

The waitress went out. Rikidozan pushed the table to a corner and lay stretched at full length. Soon the door was opened and a woman in Korean clothes entered.

"Oh, you are brother Sin Rak!" said Madam Ryu, the wife of Kang Sung Min.

Rikidozan sat up quickly.

"Sister, you are in Korean skirt and blouse today!" said Rikidozan looking at her questioningly.

"Today a feast was given at the home of a remote

relative of ours. A wedding feast I mean. So, I have been to it with Mr Kang to offer congratulations.”

Madam Ryu placed a pot on a portable gas stove and stirred the meat in it with a spoon. It was a meat dish, a favourite food of Rikidozan. The pieces of meat were mixed with kimchi pickles seasoned with red-pepper powder and a lot of garlic. The meat amounted to three kilogrammes or so.

“So the big brother has also been to it?”

“Yes, I let him know that you brother Sin Rak is here. So he will not be long to come.”

Madam Ryu unstopped the bottle and poured out liquor.

“Sister, this time I am going to Brazil.”

“When?”

“I leave tomorrow. You will come to see me off, won’t you?”

“Of course, I will, as it is our brother Sin Rak’s request.”

Madam Ryu smiled outwardly, but was somewhat worried inside.

“Sister, the taste of meat here is really wonderful.”

Rikidozan drained the cup three or four times on end

and ate meat. At this moment Kang Sung Min came in.

“He says he is going to Brazil on a playing tour,” said Madam Ryu to her husband.

Kang Sung Min sat by his wife and lit a cigarette.

“Then are you going away leaving no one to look after the Professional Wrestling Association during your absence?”

“Big Brother, why no one to look after it? I am leaving it in the care of my disciples.”

“Who are the disciples?”

“Azumafuji and Toyonobori.”

Rikidozan took up a cigar and lit it, offering one to Kang Sung Min.

“No, thanks. It’s too strong for me. And now, I have seen Azumafuji on TV not once and twice. His face betrays his great perversity. I am not a physiognomist, but I think he is not a man to rely on. The same is Toyonobori.”

Kang Sung Min drew deeply on his cigarette. Eating meat in silence, Rikidozan listened to Kang Sung Min.

“Sin Rak, today I visited the home of a remote relative of mine to attend a wedding ceremony. A large number of our countrymen were assembled. Drinking

exclusively in company with our compatriots for the first time in a long time, I found the liquor especially flavourous. In the thick of the drinking bout, you became the topic of the talk. Some of our fellow countrymen said you were a Japanese and others insisted you were a Korean, so they argued. Seeing that, I cut in. ‘Rikidozan’s real name is not Momota Mitsuhiro but Kim Sin Rak and he was born not at Omura of Kyushu but at Sinphung-ri of South Hamgyong Province,’ I told them. ‘If you watch him carefully when he is playing a game, you will immediately notice that he is a Korean,’ I added. Then they said if not a Korean, how could you be so strong? And the Japanese could not knock down Yanks as you did. Sin Rak, our compatriots expect much from you. Don’t forget that you are a Korean, whether you play a game in Japan, in the United States or in Brazil. I am most sincerely asking you.”

“Big Brother, thank you for the good words you have spoken to me. I will keep them deep in my mind.”

They talked on unaware of the night wearing on.

The next day Rikidozan left for Brazil. Before going up the ladder to the airliner at Haneda Airport, he said to Azumafuji:

“Mr Azumafuji, I leave the Professional Wrestling Association in your care while I am away. I won’t be very long over there.”

“I see. Don’t worry about things here but come back with flying colours from your playing journey to Brazil.”

Azumafuji stood waving his hand until the plane disappeared out of sight. But he said one thing and thought another. He did not want Rikidozan to return home after achieving success in his playing tour of Brazil. He wished him ignominious failures over there, so that when he returned from Brazil he should be ostracized by the professional wrestling fans. It would be still more gratifying if he should be crippled in the games played in Brazil and forced to leave the scene. Then Azumafuji himself would be the king of the professional wrestling community in Japan without any doubt. Returning by taxi from the airport with Toyonobori, he kept thinking of Rikidozan. The absence of Rikidozan will offer me a golden opportunity, he thought. If Rikidozan had taken Toyonobori along with him to Brazil, things would be different. But Toyonobori has not gone. I will play international games at home in pair with him, so that I shall command

overwhelming popularity among the fans. I will display my ability to the full. Then I will break away from the Japan Professional Wrestling Association and found a new association with myself, Azumafuji, as its kingpin, he told himself at the back of his mind.

“Toyonobori, you have done well in not going to Brazil. There must be no wrestler to speak of in Brazil for all I know. Let us invite Tany Mirth and Kovaruski, the holders of the Hawaiian tag championship, and play international games with them here.”

“They are indeed holders of the Hawaiian tag championship, but they aren’t first-class wrestlers, are they?”

Whenever he in company with Rikidozan had played international games either abroad or at home, Toyonobori had contested mostly with well-known first-class wrestlers. So there had been large audiences and he had always preserved his honour. When he had won a match, his fame had risen greatly.

“The question of first-class or second-class depends on mass communication propaganda. I have contacted TV stations and sports newspapers, and so set your mind at ease about the matter. Our matches will have

a full audience. Let’s beat Mirth and Kovaruski with credit. Then we shall be flooded with honour, popularity and money.”

“When are we going to play the game?”

“It is scheduled for the 21st and 25th this month.”

“Where will it be played?”

“The place for the game will be decided upon by its organizer. We need not meddle in it.”

The taxi stopped before a cafe.

“I will give you a treat today. Now let’s get off.”

With this Azumafuji opened the door of the car and got out. Toyonobori got down after him.

“You are welcome!” the doorman of the cafe saluted, taking off his cap and bowing.

Azumafuji answered him with a wave of his right hand and entered.

As Azumafuji had said, on November 21 the tag match between the Azumafuji-Toyonobori team and the Mirth-Kovaruski team took place at the Korakuen Indoor Stadium in Suidobashi, Tokyo. The match ended in a tie of one to one.

On November 25, they played a game for the second time at the same place. This time it was not a tag match

but singles. They played 45-minute one-game matches. Azumafuji contested with Mirth and Toyonobori with Kovaruski. These matches destroyed the popularity of Azumafuji and Toyonobori. They presented sorry figures now, forsaken by the wrestling fans.

In order to regain the lost popularity and prestige, Azumafuji called on Nagata, a bigwig in the entertainment business circles. Nagata showed him into the drawing-room.

“Azumafuji, how is it you have come to see me who broke with Rikidozan?”

Seated in the armchair, Nagata offered him a cigarette.

“Director Nagata, I would like to withdraw from the Professional Wrestling Association of Rikidozan together with Toyonobori and become independent. So I came to you to ask for your help.”

Azumafuji did not speak at length. He thought Nagata would understand him because he was a man quick to understand everything. Nagata nodded and sat in thought for a while before he opened his mouth.

“Your idea is highly recommendable. Naturally, that’s the way a man should follow. You were a noted *Yokozuna*, and how long can you remain discontented

under Rikidozan who was once no more than a *Sekiwake*? The deceased Mr Niita Shinsaku had asked me to help you kindly, and so I would help you if I could, but ...” Nagata paused for a while and lit a cigarette.

“I do not have a finger in a lost cause. If you had come out of the game with flying colours at the Korakuen Indoor Stadium, then things would have been different. Those who saw that game won’t help you. You played the game so clumsily that we could not bear to watch it. There is no need to go into details. The stadium has 1 800 seats. Nevertheless, there was not an audience large enough to fill the seats. The organizer of the game is complaining that the proceeds from the box office do not pay the rent of the stadium.”

Nagata studied the countenance of Azumafuji. The latter sat still, only drawing a sigh. It is useless to entreat Nagata any more, he felt intuitively. There was no need to stay there any longer.

On December 27 Rikidozan who had wound up his playing trip to Brazil successfully returned to Japan. He had played 17 games, with 16 wins and one draw. He had failed to defeat Kostoria, the Brazilian championship holder. He had drawn level with him. So he could not

carry off the Brazilian championship. (Two years later he visited Brazil again and played a game with Kostoria, whom he defeated in only 26 seconds.)

As Rikidozan returned to Japan, Azumafuji tendered his resignation to the Japan Professional Wrestling Association. But Toyonobori did not follow him. He could hardly go back on Rikidozan who had patronized him and brought him up to be a noted player in the world's professional wrestling circles. Rikidozan went to Nagoya with Toyonobori and participated in the "homecoming match."

Pitiably enough, Azumafuji who retired from professional wrestling was employed as a *sumo* commentator of a TV station. He appeared at the microphone as such from January 1959, the next year. On the other hand, he started building an eating house over against the "Rikidozan Club" under construction. The "Rikidozan Training School" which had been standing at the site was pulled down, and work on a Chinese restaurant started in its place. Rikidozan was enraged. But there was nothing he could do about it. Niita Shinsaku had given him the building before his death.

"A mean fellow, that is what he is. Who can be more

snaky than this fellow? It is our shame that a scoundrel like him was once a member of our sporting community."

Whenever his eyes fell on the restaurant, he reproached himself for having believed in Azumafuji to be his reliable mate, not knowing that he was in reality a base double-faced man. Rikidozan pledged in his mind that if he should meet him in the ring at any time in the future, he would break his neck with a blow of his *karate* chop. But the fellow never appeared in the ring again.

CHAPTER 4

1. The Decisive League Game

In May 1959 the First World Professional Wrestling League Game was held in Japan. This was a game on which Rikidozan staked his fate.

The professional wrestling fans were not interested in domestic games, but they were keen on international matches. However, it was not an easy job inviting the best wrestlers of the world. For all this, Rikidozan had to invite at any cost first-class wrestlers well-known to the world and organize international games with them. Because his position had changed. Previously he had been no more than a player, but the situation was different now. He was concurrently a professional wrestler and a man responsible for the destiny of the Professional Wrestling Association.

Rikidozan had been elaborating a plan for “professional wrestling Olympic Games.” But this was infeasible. That was why he planned to hold a

“professional wrestling league game” every year.

He sought to enlist the help of Gred Togo. This man was hated by the world’s professional wrestling circles as a swindler and crook, but his backing was essential to invite leading professional wrestlers of the world. His real name was Okamura Kazuo. He was a second-generation Japanese born in Oregon, US. He had won fame as a professional wrestler in the United States and Canada. Though a man of small build less than 170 centimetres tall, he played games so wildly that he was called a “Ruffian of the Century” and hated by the professional wrestling fans.

Rikidozan had decided to use him as his deputy in drawing professional wrestlers into the league game. He worked for nearly a month and on April 20 concluded a bargain with the players who would take part in the world league match. The First World Professional Wrestling League Game was held from May 21 to June 15. The foreign players were formidable wrestlers known to the world’s professional wrestling circles. They came from the United States, England, Mexico, and so on. In view of their capacities and the number of the participants, this game was really a first-class international game.

The game was held by the method of ten wrestlers playing a league match by which to pick out the four best ones, and these four playing a tournament. It was an 8-minute three-game match (with 2 minutes' break).

The first international league game drew an audience who filled the stadium to overflowing from the first day. As anticipated, Rikidozan, Thores, Ortega and Atomic survived the league match and entered into the tournament. It was decided by lot that the semifinals would be played between Rikidozan and Atomic and between Ortega and Thores. The match between Ortega and Thores drew for three rounds, and so an extension match was played, only to end in a tie. Therefore, lots were drawn and Ortega stayed on for the finals. He would have to have a showdown with the survivor from the Rikidozan-Atomic match.

The semifinal match of Rikidozan and Atomic was literally a bloody fight.

Atomic had originally been a pugilist, and his fists were most powerful in the world's professional wrestling circles. He used to appear in the ring wearing a mask over his face, and so no spectator had ever seen his face. He was therefore called a "monster man with an

unknown face." The professional wrestling expert Tazuru described the contest between Rikidozan and Atomic in this way:

"From the start of the first round Atomic put Rikidozan on a defensive position with a rain of fist blows. He landed this right and left punches exactly and in succession on Rikidozan's chest and belly. From the beginning Rikidozan desperately fought back to get out of the defensive position. Atomic drove Rikidozan into a corner. He attacked Rikidozan by thrusts with his knees and shoulders. It was a critical moment. Rikidozan was saved by the ringing of the bell.

"The second round started. As in the first round Atomic kept striking at Rikidozan with blows of his fists. He hit out with a strong right punch. At this moment Rikidozan dodged promptly. In consequence, the umpire who was standing behind Rikidozan was hit on his chin, and fell to the ground. So, Sretches acted as umpire temporarily.

"In the third round, too, Atomic continued to rain blows of fists on Rikidozan. Rikidozan, who had been watching a chance to hit him with a level *karate* chop. Atomic was stupefied. Seizing on the chance, Rikidozan

lifted him and threw him outside the ring. A scuffle ensued off the ring.

“When Atomic barely came onto the ring, Rikidozan threw him down on the floor of the ring. He sat astride him and, tearing off his mask, struck him hard with his fists. The face of Atomic became blood-smeared all over. Atomic lost courage to fight and staggered to his feet covering his face with both hands. Rikidozan gave him a hail of blows with his fists. The umpire Sretches declared a foul on Rikidozan.”

Rikidozan protested to the umpire. But the umpire did not listen. He declared Rikidozan lost the game on a foul and Atomic won. At the bottom of this lay an ulterior motive to prevent Rikidozan from winning the first championship of the world professional wrestling league game by making Atomic move into the final game with Ortega.

But their underhand plan did not work. Atomic said he could not appear in the contest any longer because of excessive bleeding and withdrew from the contest. As a result, Rikidozan and Ortega advanced to the finals.

In the final match Rikidozan won by getting a

shoulder hold. So, he secured the championship in the First World Professional Wrestling League Game.

The league game was attended by a larger audience than anticipated. When it was over, the Professional Wrestling Association of Rikidozan received many requests from different parts of Japan for holding games. So, selected international games were organized and itinerant games were played by August 8. The number of games was some 60 and that of audience was about 600 000.

Requests for holding games came not only from various parts of Japan but from India and many other Asian countries and from many countries in South America as well.

In the process of the selected international games, Atomic regretted his withdrawal in the First World Professional Wrestling League Game and challenged Rikidozan to a contest. He wanted to wrest away from him his championship of the international contest of strong professional wrestlers. He put a knife in his mask and attacked Rikidozan frantically with head-bumping and fist blows, but he succumbed to the powerful hand sword of Rikidozan. Their bout ended in Rikidozan's

victory by the score of one to zero.

For about a month from April 15 to May 13, 1960, the year after the successful First World Professional Wrestling League Game, the Second World Professional Wrestling League Game was held by making playing tours of principal cities of Japan. The participants in the second league game were Leo Nomeriny known as “Lion,” Honbre Montana called “Human Mountain Range,” Sany Myas known as “Eagle,” Gred Togo with the nickname of “Ruffian of the Century,” Hans Helman known by the alias of “Eagle of Germany” and other foreign wrestlers, ten in all, and Rikidozan, Toyonobori, Endo and Yoshimura of Japan. So, the total number was 14.

From the first day the contests were sharp. The foreign players were all well-known wrestlers of the world, so that the contests were fierce. After a month’s games, Rikidozan with the record of eight wins and one tie and Nomeriny with ten wins and one defeat and two ties moved into the finals. This final match was played at the Tokyo Indoor Stadium on May 13. It was a three-game match with unlimited time.

The Tokyo Indoor Stadium was crowded beyond capacity. The showdown between Rikidozan’s forte *karate* chop and Nomeriny’s strong point “killing tackle” caught the fancy of the professional wrestling fans. Nomeriny’s “killing tackle” was terrific. This “killing tackle” had been the stumbling block for Rue Thez, alias “Zeus of professional wrestling in the world,” who had secured 938 consecutive wins, preventing him from attaining his boasted dream of 1 000 victories.

Nomeriny had once been a rugby footballer, whose forte was to fly in like a shell knocking down his opponent and wrest away the ball from him. This technique had been developed into the “killing tackle,” which was to fly in and bump against his opponent like a shell with his “shoulder of steel” concentrating all the weight of his hardened 128-kilogramme body in it. A victim of this trick, whoever he might be, would be thrown out of the ring, either breaking his head or smashing his ribs. So, professional wrestlers were afraid of contesting with Nomeriny.

In the Second World Professional Wrestling League Game his “killing tackle” displayed its power to the full. The first victim of this trick was Honbre Montana. Called

“Human Mountain Range,” he turned the scale at 158 kilogrammes. He would not be budged by anything, but he was hurled outside the ring by Nomeriny’s “killing tackle.” His ribs cracked and he swooned. The second victim was Yoshimura. He was also thrown out of the ring and fell to the concrete floor so hard that two of his ribs were broken. The third victim was Gred Togo who was called “Ruffian of the Century.” In four minutes he was struck by the “killing tackle” and fell down, vomiting bloods.

Most of the wrestlers who contested with Nomeriny suffered a crushing defeat from his “killing tackle.”

Rikidozan, too, had been defeated by this “killing tackle” eight years before. At that time he vowed to himself that he would take revenge on him some day. The finals of the Second World Professional Wrestling League Game was for him the very return match. This match was sharp from the beginning. With the cry “Ya!” Rikidozan took action first. Nomeriny kicked at him with his right foot and seized his neck. His thick leg pressed the carotid of Rikidozan. Rikidozan clenched his teeth. He tried to slip away by kicking the floor with his two legs. But the head scissors by Nomeriny’s legs tightened still more. He grew dizzy. Then Nomeriny’s

legs were caught in the ropes. The umpire shouted, “Break!” Nomeriny released his legs from Rikidozan’s neck. He then laughed. It was a placid laugh. His laugh seemed to imply, “Come on from any angle!”

Nomeriny hit out at Rikidozan without letup. While dodging his blows, Rikidozan sprang in his breast and struck his neck. Nomeriny fell and rolled over and over holding his neck with both hands. Rikidozan struck him twice with *karate* chops. Nomeriny retreated to the ropes. Rikidozan chased him to deal blows at him. At that moment Nomeriny flew back by availing himself of the ropes’ backlash. He crashed into Rikidozan so hard that the latter felt dizzy. Rikidozan went down on his knees. He wanted to rise, but his legs failed him. He was caught in the “cross leg scissors,” a special trick of Nomeriny. With his teeth firmly set, Rikidozan rose to his feet by desperate efforts to get away towards the ropes. Now Nomeriny flew in again like a cannonball towards Rikidozan. Rikidozan fell to the ground. Thus, he lost a fall first.

The bell sounded for the start of the second round. Rikidozan did not yet come round to himself. He approached Nomeriny with somewhat faltering steps.

Nomeriny seized upon the opportunity and sprang upon Rikidozan. Nearly all spectators closed their eyes. When they opened their eyes the next moment, Rikidozan was showering blows on Nomeriny. Rikidozan's "Right Hand of Justice" crushed Nomeriny's nose. Rikidozan staked his whole life on *karate* chops. He kept striking out *karate* chops on Nomeriny's shoulders and neck with all his might. His eleventh blow sent the huge frame of Nomeriny tottering. But then Nomeriny flew upon Rikidozan by using the ropes' backlash. Rikidozan dealt a strong level blow to him. Nomeriny fell to the ground with a heavy thud like a big tree. Rikidozan held him down and won a fall by shoulder touch. The score stood at one to one.

The third round was a contest of mental and physical strength. Nomeriny caught hold of Rikidozan's "Right Hand of Justice" and drew it near to him, and gave him a violent shove with his huge hardened body. Rikidozan collapsed. But he staggered to his feet with difficulty. At this moment Nomeriny resorted to his forte "killing tackle."

Rikidozan dodged by a hair's breadth. It was a close shave! Nomeriny's massive figure lunged forward

through the ropes. He fell head foremost on the concrete floor outside the ring. He lay prostrate and could not rise. But the moment he was falling out of the ring, Nomeriny kicked hard with his right foot at the side of Rikidozan. This caused Rikidozan to fall forward on his face. Nomeriny was lying outside of the ring and Rikidozan inside. The umpire took the count. Rikidozan came round and regained his feet with difficulty. But Nomeriny could not rise. This was how Rikidozan won the championship of the Second World Professional Wrestling League Game.

The world professional wrestling league games, the second game in particular, projected by Rikidozan, were a great success and were accepted as global games by professional wrestling circles of the world.

So, now Rikidozan's position in the world as the king of professional wrestling was strengthened, and, moreover, he became prominent as an organizer of professional wrestling games.

2. The Smashed Decoration

Towards nightfall, a man called at the Rikidozan's

apartment house. He was Yamada. He pushed the doorbell at the room of Rikidozan. Soon the door was opened and Yoshimachi came out.

“Mr Rikidozan is waiting for you. Please step in.”

There was a round table in the middle of the spacious drawing-room, on which were placed two bottles of napoleon brandy and sausage and other foods. Rikidozan, Yoshimachi and Yamada sat round the table. Rikidozan poured out the brandy.

“Mr Yamada, let us give a banquet tomorrow, on July 30, in celebration of the inauguration of the Rikidozan Sports Palace,” he said. “If it were not for you, Mr Yamada, the Sports Palace could not have been built. You really have had a hard time. I, Rikidozan, offer thanks to you from the bottom of my heart.”

“Oh no, don’t mention it. I wish I could have built it in a shorter time, but ... I am ashamed, for the celebration is to be held before the building is completed,” Yamada said apologetically.

But for Yamada, it would have been impossible to build the Rikidozan Sports Palace. With an investment of 360 million *yen*, Rikidozan had started its construction. An ex-professional wrestler had been appointed the

field overseer. But the man was slow-witted and, worse still, indifferent to the construction project. Under this inefficient field overseer, the construction work had made no progress. To add to this, he would loaf around saloons, puffed up with conceit as the field overseer. In particular, he would go very often to the bar run by Azumafuji. So, Rikidozan had sacked him. At that time, Yamada who had been running a transportation business in a small way had offered to help Rikidozan. He was 36 years old and single. He had a special weakness for professional wrestling. Among others Rikidozan was his favourite. For nearly three years until the completion of the Rikidozan Sports Palace, he had worked hard with devotion, eating and sleeping on the construction site.

It was nearly ten o’clock when Yamada took his leave. Rikidozan came down to the first floor in the lift to see him off. Then he took the lift back to the eighth floor. He lay down on the bed and closed his eyes. Sleep would not come. He felt happy as never before.

Scenes of contests he had played in the Third World Professional Wrestling League Game in June and his match with Gred Antonio in the contests of strong

professional wrestlers of the world floated before his eyes. The Third World Professional Wrestling League Game had been conducted on a very extensive scale. Its popularity was explosive. In the league game Rikidozan had defeated all his formidable opponents and come off victor, so that he had demonstrated his dignity as the king of professional wrestling in the world. In the league game the contest between Rikidozan and Gred Antonio had won great popularity. On arriving at Haneda Airport to participate in the league game, Gred Antonio had held a press conference. He was such a giant as the professional wrestling fans of Japan had never seen before. This giant with side-whiskers had the nickname of a "Man of Thick Forest." He tipped the scales at 240 kilogrammes and stood 193 centimetres high. He was on the alcoholic side and had great physical strength. He would drink 12 bottles of liquor of 50 per cent or more of alcohol content without eating any side dish and yet would not get drunk. He was a great eater managing 4.5 litres of milk and three kilogrammes of fish at a meal. He was the strongest of all professional wrestlers in the world. Upon arrival in Japan, he demonstrated his strength in a popularity-seeking gesture. On the square

in front of the Tokyo Assembly Hall he hauled three eight-ton buses linked together in a string with wire rope with over 50 persons on board the first bus, by a rope slung over his shoulder. He was watched by over 5 000 persons. Nobody had thought he would be capable of it. It had been incredible to pull three large buses with the first one full of people aboard. However, the three buses began to roll on.

The Herculean strength of Gred Antonio played a great part in publicizing the Third World Professional Wrestling League Game. To monopolize popularity, Antonio played an irregular match against three Japanese professional wrestlers, all of whom he threw out of the ring. The three wrestlers lying on the floor outside the ring were counted out and Antonio won the match. This man of marvellous strength, the "Man of Thick Forest," challenged Rikidozan to a match to wring out of him the championship of the world contest of strong professional wrestlers. The audience watched their match in breathless suspense. They were afraid that Rikidozan might be thrown out of ring. But the contest ended in the victory of Rikidozan with the score of two to zero.

The next day, July 30, a banquet was given in a grand

style in celebration of the inauguration of the Rikidozan Sports Palace. This banquet was attended by large numbers of people from all over Japan. They were important personalities from the political, public, journalist, art and sports circles.

At the entrance to the banquet hall, Rikidozan met them personally, shaking hands with them. A cameraman from the Nihon Television photographed the banquet. At the end of the banquet, the Japanese Red Cross Society decorated Rikidozan with an order. It was a Distinguished Service Order in recognition of his service rendered to the Red Cross Society. It was first decoration he received in his life.

After the awarding of the decoration, many guests made congratulatory speeches for him. Past six in the evening, the guests shook hands with Rikidozan and left. The wrestlers belonging to the Japan Professional Wrestling Association who had been on the reception committee took to drinking beer in the hall. Rikidozan thanked them for their trouble and told them to drink their fill. He then asked them to stop drinking for a while at seven and watch television. Towards seven he called out to the wrestlers who were drinking beer.

“Bring the television to the hall! The decoration awarding ceremony is going to be televised during the news hour at seven.”

A young wrestler rose from his seat and went out of the hall. Soon he fetched a television set and put it by the window. Now the wrestlers came and sat before the television together. Rikidozan wearing the decoration on his chest took a seat in the front. He had been awarded letters of appreciation many times before, but this was the first order he had ever received. So, he stealthily looked down at the glittering order with a smile now and then.

At last, the news report began. There appeared the letters “Rikidozan Sports” on the television screen.

Those who were seated before the television let out a shout of joy. An external view of the Rikidozan Sports Palace appeared, followed by its interiors. Then the faces of the guests at the banquet were screened. A general view of the banquet was given and scenes of congratulatory speeches appeared. Then it was the turn of the decoration awarding ceremony. But the ceremony which Rikidozan and others were so anxious to see on the television screen did not appear. Rikidozan who was

watching the television tightened his grip on the glass which he had been holding in his hand. Then he dashed it against the floor.

“Where is the producer of the Nihon Television?” he shouted and looked round the hall.

The people in the hall were scared and skulked away one after another. The Nihon Television’s producer in charge of professional wrestling, too, was backing out to get away.

“Hey, where are you going? Come here!” Rikidozan called out to the producer.

The producer came up to him with a lowered head.

“You rascal! Why have you cut off the decoration awarding ceremony which is the most important scene?”

His right hand was trembling violently.

“Mr Rikidozan, I will inquire the Nihon Television Station about the matter. I failed to notice it because I was talking with the cameraman,” the producer said and made to withdraw with his eyes filled with fright.

“You scoundrel! Did I say the scene was cut off when it was not? It makes no difference if you inquire the television station about the matter or not. It’s the doctor after death! Did you cut it off?”

“No, sir. Why should I ...?” the producer could not finish his words.

“Who then did omit it? Who?”

“I do not know, sir.”

“Who knows then if you producer don’t know? You swindlers!” Rikidozan thundered in a voice which seemed to blow away the hall. No sooner had he shouted than he seized the producer by the neck and lifted him up. Then he hurled the man at the screen of the television. The producer fell down with his head knocking hard against the screen. The telescreen burst with a loud noise and the television set fell asunder.

“Ah, the double-faced Japs, you deceived me!”

He then tore the decoration off his chest and dashed it against the floor of the hall with all his might. The order was smashed to pieces.

Rikidozan raised his head and looked up at the ceiling of the hall. He stood motionless like a rock. Tears rolled down his cheeks. His eyes saw nothing. Tanaka Beetaro entered the hall, but he did not notice it. Tanaka lifted the producer up from his fallen position and went out holding him in his arms.

Rikidozan felt lonely and miserable. The hall which

had been bustling with so many people just before was now deserted. He drew a long sigh. There was a man standing before the door.

“Could that be Yoshimachi?” he wondered. But it was not. Who could he be? “Could it be that he is Tanaka Beetaro?” No, who then is he? “Might he be Toyonobori?” No, he was not. Who then can that be? Am I dreaming? No, he was not dreaming. But the man was standing where he was.

“Sin Rak!” a familiar voice called. It was his dear Korean name, his real name. Now he could clearly see the face of the man. It was the owner of the Korean restaurant Kang Sung Min.

“Big Brother Kang!” Rikidozan called out and buried his face in the chest of Kang Sung Min who walked up to him.

“Big Brother Kang, the Japanese are a clan never to be relied upon. That they should deceive me like this!”

“Well, Sin Rak. Have you found it out only now?” Kang Sung Min said reproachfully.

“I have been aware of it. But I little thought they would play me such a trick. How vexing! How disappointing!”

Kang Sung Min sat him down in a sofa.

“Sin Rak, you are rather fortunate. Fortunate that the scene of the decoration awarding ceremony has not been telecast. What is the use of a Japanese order for our dear Sin Rak? You ought to be decorated with an order of our motherland,” Kang said quietly.

“A man like me decorated by the motherland! I shall be happy if I am not chastised by my country!” Rikidozan said shaking his head.

“Sin Rak, our motherland is not a country which you imagine to be like. It is a country guided by the great leader Marshal Kim Il Sung. So, our motherland must be watching your every move with the mind of a parent.”

Rikidozan wiped off his tears.

“Sin Rak, I think I have once told you. Whatever we may do, we must not forget that we are Koreans. Not even for a moment, I say.”

Kang Sung Min lit a cigarette.

“Sin Rak, a few days ago a friend of mine went to the homeland. I asked him to find out if your family are well, and if he finds them alive and well, to bear the news of you to them without fail. Your elder brother Hang Rak was a Korean wrestling champion. So, I thought if

he is alive, he may be working in the field of sports. I therefore told my friend to address inquiries to this field first of all.”

“Big Brother Kang, I am really grateful to you. But ...”

Rikidozan had come to a deeper realization with the passage of time that Kang Sung Min was humane and broadminded. He felt as if Kang was his real elder brother.

“My guess will prove correct. Your family must be alive and well, your wife and your daughter and ...”

The door was opened and people came into the hall, interrupting Kang Sung Min. They were the famous singer of popular songs Kasuga Hachiro and the renowned professional baseball players Kaneda Shoichi (pitcher) and Harimoto (batter). They were all Korean nationals in Japan.

“Sin Rak, let’s have a celebration party for the Rikidozan Sports Palace exclusively by ourselves, Koreans.”

“All right.”

Rikidozan rose from the armchair. The melancholic look disappeared from his face, he was now beaming as brightly as the sunshine after a rain.

3. The Warm Fatherly Bosom

There was no light in the windows of the apartment house where Rikidozan was living, except those of one room on the eighth floor. It was Rikidozan’s drawing-room. He was alone in the spacious room, seated in an armchair. He was reading a letter. It was from his daughter in the homeland.

“Father, I am calling you like this for the first time after I saw the light of day,” began the letter.

It was like a dream. The last time he had seen his daughter was when she was three. The letter conveyed the sad news that her mother, that is, his wife, had died of a disease. He felt lump in his throat, his heart pricking with remorse.

He now clearly recalled the days when he had walked over the sands by the sea of Ryukdae with a girl, his wife later, and the wedding day, when seated side by side with her at the formal table laden with all kinds of delicacies, he accepted the congratulations of the village folks. Then he remembered the pitiful figure of his young wife who had cried all the way from home to

Ryongmu Station as she had come along with him to see him off when he, 18 years of age, had been taken away to the Nishonoseki *sumo* wrestling company. He felt a sharp pain in his heart.

How bitter she must have felt against me for my heartlessness! He blamed himself. But it was useless now how much he repented or begged her to forgive him.

His eyes were filled with tears. His daughter's letter brought the scene of his wife's last moment before his eyes. Before death his wife said quietly in a whisper to her daughter, holding her hand:

"Your father is in Japan. As long as he is alive, he will come back to the homeland. He said to me as he was dragged away by Japanese rogues, 'Wait for me. I'll come back without fail.' I have waited and waited, believing the words of your father, but ... I am dying before seeing him. When your father comes back, tell him that I had waited anxiously for him before I died...."

She wanted to say something more, but could not continue, and shut her eyes.

Now Rikidozan seemed to see before his eyes the image of his slaughter who was waiting for her father at

the railway station each time the Korean nationals were repatriated by ship. He heaved a long sigh, his eyes riveted on the letter, which went on to say:

"Uncle told me that he had heard from a person named Kang Sung Min the detailed news of you, Father, and that you are spending your days shedding unseen tears of nostalgia. He also told me of your situation which does not permit you to return home like others...."

When he read thus far, Rikidozan thought to himself, "So my elder brother Hang Rak is alive! Big Brother Kang Sung Min was correct in his surmise."

He continued to read the letter. His daughter wrote about the affections shown by the great leader for him, Rikidozan, and his family. The great leader had been very much worried about the unhappy situation of Rikidozan in which he was unable to return home while yearning after the homeland in Japan and to get rid of the humiliating fate of being a Japanese wrestler despite his Korean nationality, and said that not he himself but the Japanese reactionaries were to blame for his fate. Then he had pointed to the need of looking kindly after his family at home and showed great affections for them. The fatherly leader had taken measures for his daughter to be

enrolled in Pyongyang University of Physical Education to be an athlete as competent as her father and for his elder brother Hang Rak to work as a researcher of the Academy of Physical Culture and Sports Sciences.

Rikidozan was deeply moved at the fatherly leader's great affections and shed hot tears. Drops of tears fell and moistened the letter. But for the warm care of the fatherly leader, his daughter must have become a homeless orphan to go wandering the streets as a waif, and must have died of starvation.

Everything seemed like a dream. Rikidozan keenly felt how warm and blessing and precious the bosom of the homeland, the embrace of the leader, was.

The fatherly leader's affections did not end here. He saw the films showing the scenes of matches where Rikidozan defeated formidable wrestlers of capitalist countries and demonstrated his great strength as the king of professional wrestling in the world, and said that it was a good thing that he was living with self-respect as a Korean in the difficult conditions of a foreign country. Then he pointed out that the films could enhance the national pride of those Koreans who watched them. What a great confidence and affection he was conferring

on him! Rikidozan was deeply stirred and his heart beat high.

"Thank you, Leader!" he tearfully shouted inwardly. He could not get to sleep. He drove his car to the Korean restaurant before Kotanda Station. Seeing Rikidozan come to see him late at night, Kang Sung Min, the owner of the restaurant, wondered.

"Big Brother, I, this Rikidozan, nay, Kim Sin Rak, have started my life afresh."

For excitement he could not continue; he held out the letter to Kang Sung Min.

"It has come! Come at last!" Kang exclaimed.

"Big Brother Kang Sung Min, what shall I do to repay this great kindness?"

"You have to repay it by all means."

With this Kang grasped Rikidozan's hands firmly.

"Instead of accusing me, Kim Sin Rak, who has quitted the country, the homeland has embraced me warmly. I don't know how to return the favour granted to me by the great leader," Rikidozan said, looking up to the western sky with wet eyes. "My native country is over there at the end of that sky, isn't it? My homeland where the great leader is!"

“Sin Rak, don’t forget that our homeland is always looking after us. Wherever we may live, we must always live with self-respect and pride that we have the great leader over us,” Kang said and laid his hand on the shoulder of Rikidozan.

Standing side by side, they gazed at the western sky, oblivious of the night gliding on.

Early the next morning Rikidozan called Kasayama and Yoshimachi to his house. He had never once called a person to his house in the early morning.

“I have called you because I want you to look for a passenger car,” Rikidozan said when Kasayama and Yoshimachi entered the drawing-room.

At the unexpected commission, the two persons looked at each other, tilting their heads questioningly.

“You have a sports Mercedes car and a Rolls-Royce car, and why ...?” Yoshimachi asked, eyeing Rikidozan dubiously.

“I badly need it. Not an ordinary car but the highest-class deluxe car, I mean. If you cannot get it in Japan, then find it in West Germany or England, that is, anywhere in the world.”

“And the price ...?”

“Don’t worry about its price. I will give as much as asked for. Get a high-class car. The highest-class deluxe passenger car I mean. Of course, I myself will also try to find one.”

“Yes, we get you,” Kasayama and Yoshimachi answered and went out of the drawing-room.

When they had left, Rikidozan picked up the phone. He gave calls to motorcar manufacturing companies and motorcar research institutions.

He bent all his efforts to get a high-class car.

In April the next year, on the occasion of the 50th birthday of the great leader Marshal Kim Il Sung, Rikidozan presented him with a highest-class deluxe car as a gift, together with a letter pledging his allegiance to him.

4. I Am a Korean (1)

With the turn of 1962, renowned professional wrestlers of the world challenged Rikidozan to contests without a break for the world throne in professional wrestling. They were all wrestlers of no mean strength—Destroyer alias “Satan,” Hured Brush alias

“Vampire,” Rue Thez alias “Man of Steel,” Atomic alias “Red Mask,” Gred Togo alias “Ruffian of the Century,” Mike Sharp, Killer Goarski, Hured Atokings, Deck Hatton, and so on. In particular, Rikidozan’s contests with Destroyer called “Satan” and Hured Brush called “Vampire” were bitter.

Rikidozan left for America to enter the contest for the WWA world championship scheduled to take place at the Olympic Auditorium of Los Angeles on March 28, 1962.

The elimination match for the first WWA world championship holder had been held in 1961. It had been sponsored by the World Professional Wrestling Union. The match had been played by 12 professional wrestlers. Brush had won the match and become the first WWA world championship holder. Rikidozan challenged his WWA world championship.

Upon arrival at Los Angeles, Rikidozan went straight to the Olympic Auditorium to study the place of contest before taking up his lodgings. American newspapermen rushed to the auditorium and put questions to him.

Question: Mr Rikidozan, I think you are filled with deep emotion as you have come and seen the Olympic Auditorium?

Answer: Yes, I am. Precisely in this auditorium I defeated Rue Thez renowned as “Zeus of Professional Wrestling,” “Man of Steel,” and an “Ever-Victorious Hero of the United States” and won the world championship in professional wrestling.

Q: To admit frankly, at that time the citizens of Los Angeles could not get to sleep from vexation. But this time things won’t turn out that way.

A: You may say so because Los Angeles is a place where localism is very strong and because Hured Brush is prominent among the strongest wrestlers. But only a real test will prove who is stronger.

Q: Mr Rikidozan, rumours have it that you are not a Japanese but a Korean.... If you think our question is rude, you may not answer.

A: It is said a rumour has wings, and the rumours about myself are true.

Q: May we give coverage to your answer to our question?

A: Yes, you may. If you do so, I shall be greatly obliged to you.

Prior to the contest between Brush and Rikidozan, American newspapers carried the questions and answers

exchanged by their reporters and Rikidozan.

Parting with the pressmen, Rikidozan went to a hotel. There were advertisements about his match with Brush put up on poster columns in the streets and windows of stores.

Rikidozan went to the Korean quarters of the city by taxi. But he had no particular place in view, nor an acquaintance there. He went there because he was hungry, he did not take an evening meal at the hotel. He walked into a barbecue restaurant at the entrance of the Korean quarters.

Eating barbecue, Rikidozan glanced round the restaurant. The customers' conversation turned to the topic of sports. The people seated at different tables started arguing loudly. Some said Rikidozan would win the match and others insisted Brush would have the better. They were divided into two groups—Americans with yellow hair were for Brush and the Asians with black hair for Rikidozan. But those with yellow hair predominated numerically, and the customers with black hair were talked down.

After eating the barbecue, Rikidozan called for the proprietor. At that moment someone roared, the voice

resounding through the house.

“You, lousy Korean! D’ye think this is Korea? This is Los Angeles of the United States!”

Rikidozan’s eyes turned in the direction of the voice. Three yellow-headed fellows at a table in a corner of the room were giving a drubbing to the proprietor.

The proprietor came towards Rikidozan with a bloody nose.

“I have enjoyed my barbecue very much. How much shall I pay?”

“25 dollars will do,” the proprietor said wiping blood off his nose with a handkerchief.

“What wrong did you do the customers that you have got licked by them?”

Rikidozan brought out his purse from the pocket and paid money for the food.

“It’s nothing uncommon. Things of this sort happen from time to time,” the proprietor said and explained the circumstances.

The fellows would often come and eat without paying. So, that day he had asked them to pay off their scores. Then the ruffians beat him as a thief turns on the master with a club, and shouted at him to bring barbecue.

When he heard the account, Rikidozan became indignant.

“Tell them to come here as I want to see them. I will teach them manners, the yellow-headed rogues.”

“Mister, never mind, please. If you touch them, you may have a bitter experience, I tell you,” said the proprietor shaking his head.

“Hey, Korean swine! Bring meat quickly,” one of the yellow-headed guys bawled.

“Ok, sir.”

With this the proprietor made to hurry away towards the cuisine. Rikidozan swiftly took him by the arm. Then he beckoned to the yellow-headed men. The three fellows came towards him with a look of challenge.

“Is it right to beat the proprietor while you eat without paying? Pay off the money for the foods you have eaten on credit.”

“Look here. We three are ex-soldiers who took part in the Korean war. We shed blood for the sake of Korea, I say. So now, is it wrong for us to eat barbecue for free once or twice? He ought to feast us with a bow. Nevertheless, he is treating us coldly,” the tallest of the three yellow heads said, shifting his eyes from

Rikidozan to the owner of the restaurant. “We’ve told you we’ll pay when we get money, haven’t we? Bring meat quickly!”

The proprietor was frightened and was about to turn and go off to the cuisine, when Rikidozan called him back. Then he stared at the yellow-headed men with a menacing look.

“Did anyone ask you to come to Korea? Did the Koreans beg you to shed blood for them? You went on your own account, and came back beaten black and blue. Then why are you yelling at people? Won’t you pay off your old bills? It appears you haven’t had bitter experiences enough yet,” said he.

Rikidozan gripped the tallest one of the three yellow-headed fellows by the wrist. The man only opened his mouth wide but could not utter a cry. Twisting his body, he sank down on the spot. Rikidozan seized the next fellow by the collar and lifted him high overhead, and then lowered him head foremost onto the laps of the crouched man. The third fellow implored forgiveness with his eyes wide with fright.

“Will you pay money for the unpaid fare or not? Say right now,” Rikidozan roared treading on the shoulder of

the crouched man with one foot.

Now the three guys took money out of their pockets and paid the unpaid bills, before they took to flight.

“By nature the Koreans are proud,” said Rikidozan putting a Havana between his teeth.

“Because this is not Korea but Los Angeles of the United States as the hooligans said.”

“Does it matter where one lives? What is important is his mental attitude. You must not forget even for a moment that you have the motherland, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea I mean, that is guided by the great leader Marshal Kim Il Sung. Then you will feel strength welling up within and come to get rid of a servile spirit.”

The owner of the restaurant closely surveyed Rikidozan. It seemed he had seen him somewhere and he thought his face was familiar to him. After studying him closely for a good while, he nodded his head.

“Professional wrestler, Japanese professional wrestler Mr Rikidozan you are!”

“Yes, I am Rikidozan. On the forthcoming 28th, I contest with the American professional wrestler Brush at the Olympic Auditorium. Come to see it. See how this

Rikidozan fight. Understand?”

Only now the owner of the barbecue restaurant understood the words of Rikidozan.

“Are you Mr customer, nay, Mr Rikidozan a Korean?”

“Yes, I am a Korean guided by the great leader Marshal Kim Il Sung.”

Rikidozan left the restaurant after patting the shoulder of its proprietor.

On March 28 the contest for the WWA championship was played at the Olympic Auditorium of Los Angeles. The auditorium was bursting with spectators. Among them was the proprietor of the barbecue house of the Korean quarters. He had closed the restaurant and came to see the match.

The contest between Brush and Rikidozan was fierce. The backing of Los Angeles did not work. Rikidozan defeated Brush two to zero and carried off the WWA championship. When he threw up his hands high wearing the WWA champion belt round his waist, the owner of the barbecue house rose from his seat and gave a shout of joy, “Long live Korea!” That evening he invited Rikidozan to his house and feasted him with barbecue.

Beaten by Rikidozan, Brush was so chagrined that he

could not drop off to sleep that night. Not only he. The citizens of Los Angeles, too, could not get to sleep.

On April 23, there was another contest between the “Vampire” Hured Brush and Rikidozan in Tokyo. Brush sharpened his teeth before appearing in the ring. His teeth were as sharp and rugged as those of a wolf. He was ready to bite off the flesh of Rikidozan and suck his blood to kill him.

The bell rang for a 61-minute three-game match. Brush with silvery hair bounced on Rikidozan like a wolf in an attempt to bite him. The contest between the biting of Brush and the striking of Rikidozan started. The two wrestlers were smeared with blood all over. The match ended in victory for Rikidozan by a score of two to one. As a result, he won the WWA championship twice.

Although Brush was defeated, his biting proved to be terrible. He had bit the face of Rikidozan and sucked blood. The latter’s face turned as white as a sheet of paper. Rikidozan struck blows on his opponent’s face in succession, so that it was mercilessly torn. It was as though he were striking down a hammer on a wolf’s face.

This was the first time that the professional wrestling fans of Japan saw a professional wrestler sucking blood

as Brush did. The scene was telecast on the spot, and some people who were shocked at Brush’s brutality fell into a swoon and died—one in Nagoya, two in Kyoto, one in Kifu, one in Toyama, and so on. Their number exceeded 20 for the whole of Japan.

When Brush was beaten by Rikidozan and returned to the United States, crestfallen, the professional wrestling fans at home howled with rage. The World Professional Wrestling Union arranged matters for inviting Rikidozan to America and play a match for the WWA championship at Los Angeles on July 26. Due to the umpire’s unfair refereeing and Brush’s foul plays, Rikidozan failed to defend his title. But Brush was not long before he lost it again. He was outplayed by Destroyer and yielded his WWA championship to him.

Rikidozan invited Destroyer. The latter readily accepted the invitation and flew to Japan. If he defeated Rikidozan, he would mount the throne in the world’s professional wrestling. On May 24, 1963, their match for the WWA championship was held at the Tokyo Indoor Stadium. It was a one-game match for an unlimited time. This match became known to the world as a “death match.”

This “death match” or “death contest” started. The “Satan” Destroyer forced Rikidozan into a corner of the ring and attacked him by kicking. Rikidozan countered by kicking rather than using his fists. When five minutes passed, the match was broken because the two players clung to the ropes.

At this moment Destroyer took a lethal weapon out of his trunks and slipped it into his mask. Then he bumped his forehead three times on end against Rikidozan’s face. This made Rikidozan sink down on his knees. Destroyer again hit Rikidozan’s face with his forehead. Rikidozan’s face was torn and blood streamed down. It was now a mass of bleeding flesh. Not only the face but his chest was spattered all over with blood. Seeing blood, Destroyer became like a mad man and sprang on his opponent and bit his face. Barely raising his blood-smeared face, Rikidozan staggered to his feet. Seizing upon the chance, Destroyer dealt him hard blows of fists and kicks. Rikidozan escaped from this furious attack with difficulty and, holding one of the ropes, kicked his opponent. Then he dealt two crushing *karate* chops to Destroyer. The latter fell down outside the ring with a plaintive cry. Destroyer who fell on the

ground could not rise. The umpire took a count. When he counted eleven, Destroyer tried to come up onto the ring. Rikidozan started attacking him furiously. He kicked, struck with fists, dealt level blows, and Destroyer fell outside the ring over and over again. The latter’s white mask was now red with blood. The two scuffled in mortal fight. Rikidozan thrust his opponent out of the ring once more. Grabbing Destroyer’s hair, he bumped his head against the iron post. Then he hit him by *karate* chops without letup. But while being thrashed, Destroyer watched for a chance. He kicked Rikidozan on the vulnerable spot from below. The latter crouched down holding his privates with both hands. Destroyer did not miss this moment; he applied a leg scissors on Rikidozan. The leg scissors was his forte. It was very hard to break free from it. Will Rikidozan’s legs break down? He endured with clenched teeth. Six minutes passed. The legs of the two became as white as a sheet of paper. They remained still. Now the time stood at 28 minutes 10 seconds. The two wrestlers’ consciousness grew dim. Rikidozan’s head dropped backward. It was now over eight minutes after the start of the leg scissors.

The umpire stopped the game. Rikidozan implored the umpire, "I beg you to extend the time by ten minutes, please." The umpire got angry, shouting, "Continue it any longer, and you will die, both of you!"

The match drew. So, Rikidozan failed to take away the WWA championship, and Destroyer barely defended his title. Looking back on this bout afterwards, Destroyer admitted that in reality, Rikidozan had won the game.

When the match was over, the umpire told the press, "I have seen professional wrestling matches for over 30 years, but I have never seen one like that of today, a match of death."

During the game Destroyer had four front teeth broken, and Rikidozan's leg bones cracked.

A few days after this match, Rikidozan gave a news interview. He told the journalists that if Destroyer had not used a weapon, he would have lost the bout and that almost all American wrestlers were scoundrels lost to sportsmanship. Now, a big-bodied reporter who had once been a football player asked him a question:

"Do the leg scissors hurt you so much? Before working as a reporter, I had been a footballer and rugby

player. So, I am not entirely ignorant of sports. You can deceive other spectators, but not me. It seems to me it was a play prearranged with Destroyer."

He said this in a confident tone with a smile on his lips.

"You don't believe my words, so it can't be helped to make you believe me not by word but by deed."

With this Rikidozan swiftly use leg scissors on the reporter. The pressman shrieked in pain. He kept shrieking.

"This much is quite nothing. The real one is harder," Rikidozan said with a laugh and let go of the reporter's leg.

"Messrs journalists, I am not interested in talking with you because the American reporters and wrestlers are not candid," he added and went out of the hall, hoping he would see them again later on a fit opportunity.

The big-bodied reporter was carried to hospital by an ambulance. The bones of his two legs were cracked. If Rikidozan had put a little more strength, his leg bones would have broken.

Half a year later, Destroyer came to Japan again. He aimed to wrest away from Rikidozan his championship of

the international contest of strong professional wrestlers. This was a desire not only of Destroyer himself but also of the professional wrestling fans of America. It was also a desire of the United States' professional wrestling circles and the World Professional Wrestling Union. Ever since the birth of this sport in the world, the world championship of professional wrestling (the championship of the international contest of strong professional wrestlers is so called generally) had remained in the hands of the American wrestlers. But it had passed into the hands of Rikidozan six years before and had not yet returned to the United States. Rikidozan had kept it and would not let go of it.

On December 2, Rikidozan played a match with Destroyer at the Tokyo Indoor Stadium for the championship of the international contest of strong professional wrestlers. He won the game by the score of two to one. Two days later, on December 4, he contested again with Destroyer at the Osaka Prefectural Indoor Stadium and defeated him. Consequently, Rikidozan won the championship of the international contest of strong professional wrestlers 19 times on end.

Destroyer who like other American wrestlers was

now to return home without laurels called at the house of Rikidozan. Rikidozan met him with pleasure.

Destroyer told Rikidozan about himself:

“Mr Rikidozan, I, Destroyer, have the nickname of ‘Satan’ and my real name is Deck Buyer. I was born in New York in 1931 and graduated from Syracuse University. I am a ‘Destroyer’, but you are a ‘Battleship.’ I don’t want to regard you as such, but it can’t be helped because it is a fact.”

“Thank you for your appreciation, the appreciation of ‘Satan’ who is mean about appreciating others.”

“Because it is a fact. Tell me the secret of staying on as the king of world’s professional wrestling.”

“Secret? ... Well, I will introduce myself. I am Rikidozan alias ‘Right Hand of Justice’ and my real name is Kim Sin Rak. Born in South Hamgyong Province of Korea in 1920, Rikidozan is a name I got in the days of *sumo* wrestler.”

Destroyer became popeyed.

“So you aren’t a Japanese?”

“No, I am a Korean.”

“I have found out the secret!” exclaimed Destroyer striking his fist on the table.

The game with the “Satan” Destroyer for the world championship in professional wrestling was Rikidozan’s last match for a title of champion.

5. The Eighth of December

The plan of games was tight from the beginning of the month—a contest with Destroyer for the championship of the international contest of strong professional wrestlers at the Tokyo Indoor Stadium on December 2, the second contest with Destroyer at the Osaka Indoor Stadium on December 4, a match for the Asian tag championship in professional wrestling at the Nagoya Indoor Stadium on December 6, a sextette tag match at the Hamamatsu City Indoor Stadium on December 7, and so on.

The sextette tag match was the last game for 1963, and it was the last match in Rikidozan’s life. The following day, that is, on December 8, 1963, he was stabbed with a dagger by a gangster from a band of thugs and got a serious injury. He died a week later, on December 15.

The newspaper *Asahi Shimbun*, dated December 16, 1963, wrote about the death of Rikidozan:

“On the evening of the last 8th, the professional wrestler Rikidozan was stabbed in the abdomen by Murata Katsushi (25), an employee of the Japan Industrial Company, at a cabaret in Akasaka, Tokyo, at the end of a squabble about one treading on the other’s foot. He was badly wounded and rushed to the Sanno Hospital. His case was complicated by an intestinal obstruction and he died at 9:50 p.m. on the 15th.”

A Japanese magazine wrote, “It was on December 8, 1963, that Rikidozan was knifed by a thug at a nightclub in Akasaka, and it was the evening of the 15th that he breathed his last, complicated by an intestinal obstruction.”

The mass media of Japan reported about the death of Rikidozan, and the contents of their reports were the same as the substances of the aforementioned news items. The news reports said that Rikidozan got injured at the end of a quarrel with Murata and died because he drank soda pop after undergoing operation. The long and short of it was that Rikidozan himself chose the path of death.

This is a sheer lie which cannot fool even three-year old children. It is a frame-up to conceal the crime of the

villains. The fact was that Americans and Japanese had conspired together to murder Rikidozan.

Let us throw a light on the truth of Rikidozan's death which was hushed up by them.

To begin with, let us take a look into the course of events that took place on December 8, 1963. This will enable the readers to judge by themselves without a lengthy explanation and comment. The villains, Rikidozan's enemies, had craftily worked out their plan for the day and trapped him accordingly.

After the game in Hamamatsu, Rikidozan returned to Tokyo by express. He arrived in Tokyo at six o'clock on the morning of the 8th. It was a Sunday. Back home, he took a bath and went to bed. He was about to fall asleep when the telephone rang noisily. He picked up the receiver. He was told that several Japanese residents in Los Angeles had come to pay a visit to him. Each time he had gone to the United States on a playing tour, he had received their kind help. So, he could not afford to refuse an interview with them. He got out of bed and waited for them in the drawing-room. Before long the visitors got off the lift and entered the room. Rikidozan sat face to face with them and had a conversation

drinking strong wine they had brought. They took strong wine bottles out of their travelling bags one after another, dragging out time by talking about different sorts of things. The guests took their leave of him well past 4:00 p.m.

Rikidozan returned to the bedroom and lay down on bed. He immediately fell asleep. Someone aroused him and he awoke. The table clock was pointing to 5:00 p.m. Tanaka Beetaro aroused him. He said that the *sumo* wrestler with the rank of *Yokozuna* Maedayama and the "Masked Prince" Destroyer were waiting for him at the fashionable restaurant Tsiyoshin in Akasaka. Maedayama was to leave for America in a few days as the head of Japanese *sumo* wrestlers' delegation visiting the United States on a playing tour. So, Rikidozan could not refuse his request. Destroyer, too, he could not decline to see because he was going back to the United States now that his games in Japan were over.

Rikidozan rose from bed, grumbling, "They won't give me a time for rest." He drank with Maedayama and Destroyer at the restaurant Tsiyoshin. Maedayama said he would greet the New Year's Day in the United States, and so this was as good as the year-end party for him, and

drained one cup after another. Destroyer, also a tippler, drank as much as Maedayama. They drank until nearly 9:00 p.m.

“Mr Rikidozan, you have a caller,” the waiter whispered in his ear.

“A caller?”

Rikidozan looked over at the man who was standing behind the waiter.

“I am from the TBS Radio Broadcasting Station. You are on the TBS singing programme tonight, from 9:00, aren’t you?” the man behind the waiter said coming forward to Rikidozan. He was a reporter from the broadcasting station.

“Clean forgotten it. Yes, I am supposed to sing over the radio. But I am drunk as you see, entertained with wine from the morning, so I think I can hardly sing,” Rikidozan said with difficulty in articulation.

“Why are you whimpering, the king of the world professional wrestling? Go,” Maedayama said and helped him up.

Rikidozan took a few faltering steps. Yoshimachi and Lieutenant Cappy of the US army supported him as he was leaving the restaurant Tsiyoshin.

Rikidozan barely managed to sing. It did not matter whether he sang well or not. His name and his voice was all that was needed. When his singing was over, Cappy took him to the drawing-room. There were a few bottles of strong wine on the round table of the room.

“Mr Rikidozan, you really sang well. You have a unique voice. Let’s drink in celebration.”

“Mr Cappy, I can’t drink. I must take sleep now. Call a car.”

He declined the cup of wine offered by Cappy. He felt he could not stand any more alcohol physically.

“You are Mr Rikidozan of world fame. So, now take only one cup more,” Rikidozan refused, but Cappy forced him.

“If so, I’ll take only one cup more.”

Rikidozan drained the cup. It was strong wine. Cappy and Yoshimachi seated before him looked blurred in his eyes. When Yoshimachi brought a taxi, it was nearly ten at night.

Getting in the car, Rikidozan said to Cappy:

“Mr Cappy, take me home or else to the Korean restaurant in front of Kotanda Station.”

“Mr Rikidozan, take it easy. The car will go the way as you have ordered.”

Rikidozan leaned his massive body against the back of the seat and closed his eyes. Sleep felt upon him at once. As Cappy was eyeing the sleeping figure of Rikidozan in the rear view mirror, a smile of satisfaction appeared on his lips.

“Here we are, Mr Rikidozan.”

Rikidozan was aroused by Cappy and opened his eyes with great efforts. He looked out of the car windows with eyes dimmed by sleepiness and drunkenness. It was not his home nor the Korean restaurant he saw there. He saw the nightclub New Latin Quarter.

“Mr Cappy, isn’t it the New Latin Quarter? Driver, take me home. No, take me to the Korean restaurant.”

Resting his body against the back of the seat, Rikidozan shut his eyes. The driver started the engine. But the taxi did not move. Cappy had interfered.

“Mr Rikidozan, it is the 8th of December today, isn’t it? A Sunday on top of that. So, let’s drop in for a short while. For you, Mr Rikidozan, black singers have been invited.”

“What is the 8th of December for me? Drive the car

to the Korean restaurant,” Rikidozan ordered, waving his hand and with his eyes shut.

“Should we go to the Korean restaurant, nay, the Korean cookshop which is very shabby in comparison with the New Latin Quarter? That you Mr Rikidozan, the hero of Japan, should visit such a place! ... That will blight your honour,” Cappy said and told the driver to stop the engine and to sound a horn. Tilting his head, the driver switched off the engine and blew a horn.

“Mr Cappy, you must not say impertinent things. Going to a Korean restaurant will blight my honour, do you say?”

Rikidozan opened his eyes and glared sharply at Cappy.

“Mr Rikidozan, you are strange today. Why are you patronizing the Korean restaurant?”

Cappy tilted his head.

“I, this Rikidozan, am not a hero of Japan. I am the king of professional wrestling in the world. And don’t despise the Koreans. Japan was defeated by your country, the United States, but the United States was beaten by my country, Korea, wasn’t it? Is this not a fact? It is known to all, even to Heaven.”

With this Rikidozan raised his right hand high overhead.

“Mr Cappy, Rue Thez who had been bragging of himself as Zeus of professional wrestling in the world yielded to me, this Rikidozan. So, the world championship of professional wrestling passed into my hands. The Americans sent many a wrestler to challenge me in their efforts to take back the world championship. They did so as many as 18 times. But not even a single time did they win. No, they won’t be able to win. As I said just before, the United States had defeated Japan, but was defeated by Korea.”

Cappy’s face turned pale. He could not deny the fact.

“Mr Rikidozan, what on earth is your nationality?”

“Mr Cappy, why do you ask me the question when you know it?”

“I know you as a Japanese wrestler.”

“I am the king of professional wrestling in the world. Zeus of professional wrestling as you call it. And I am not a Japanese, I am a Korean! Now let’s go to the Korean restaurant.”

Rikidozan tapped the driver on the back. The driver trod on the starter. At this moment, the door of the taxi

was opened and ten or so Japanese women dressed in *kimono* clung to Rikidozan’s arms, legs and neck, making up to him. Rikidozan scolded them, but the harlots would not listen. Cappy who had realized that he could not tempt Rikidozan, had called out the women.

The New Latin Quarter was more crowded with customers than usual. Black singers were singing in chorus on the stage. Rikidozan took a seat in a corner. Alcoholic drink was served. Rikidozan declined it. But the women forced him to drink, each bringing a cup to his lips.

“Won’t you dance? Dancing will sober you up,” said Cappy turning his face towards Rikidozan.

“Dance? No, I would like to go to the toilet,” Rikidozan said, rising.

He walked with faltering steps to the toilet.

“I must go with him. Our master is drunken a great deal,” Yoshimachi said, rising.

“Mr Yoshimachi, he is Rikidozan, the Zeus of professional wrestling,” Lieutenant Cappy said, taking Yoshimachi by the sleeve and pulling him back.

“But still ...,” Yoshimachi released himself from Cappy’s grasp.

“Mr Yoshimachi, Rikidozan is Zeus of professional wrestling. Not a man to get blind drunk. Back from the toilet, he will dance and sing. See if I am mistaken.”

Cappy made a sign with his eyes to the women. At this, the hussies threw their arms round the body of Yoshimachi and brought cups to his lips.

Rikidozan went to the toilet with a tottering gait. At the turning of the passage leading to the toilet, a man dressed in a dark suit of clothes was standing. He had been standing there from before the arrival of Rikidozan. From the moment Rikidozan entered the nightclub, he had been watching his every move. The fellow was Murata Katsushi, a “clerk” of the Japan Industrial Company, a gangster organization. He was holding a rusty dagger (13 centimetres long) in his hand. As Rikidozan was leaving the toilet, the rogue plunged the rusty dagger into the left part of his abdomen twice, and ran away. Holding the lower part of his belly with his hand, Rikidozan tried to catch Murata, but his legs failed him. He almost crawled onto the stage and wrested the microphone from the hand of a black singer. Then he spoke into it, “All of you, there is a murderer in the New Latin Quarter. Everybody go home.” With this he sank down.

If Rikidozan had not been drunken, Murata would not have dared attack him. Should he have attacked, he would have been crushed by a *karate* chop, that is, he would have been struck dead.

“At 10:40 on the evening of the 8th, Rikidozan was stabbed with a dagger and seriously wounded,” the midnight radio of December 8 broadcast to the whole of Japan.

It could not be overlooked that Rikidozan was knifed on the 8th of December of all days. It was the 8th of December when the Japanese militarists had attacked the Pearl Harbor of Hawaii by surprise and declared the war in the Pacific.

Rikidozan was carried to the Sanno Hospital and given first aid, before he underwent an operation at half past one on the morning of the 9th. The small intestine had got two injuries from the stabbing with a knife. The operation was performed by a surgeon of authority who was a doctor of medicine.

The operation was a success.

A professional wrestling reporter wrote in a publication: “Rikidozan in hospital broke wind at 9:00 a.m., December 11. This shows that the result of the

operation is fine. There is no need to worry any more....”

The patient recuperated fast. The wounds healed without a hitch. The doctors of the hospital and Rikidozan himself believed that it would not be long before he should leave hospital.

Therefore, he called together the persons concerned with the Combined Rikidozan Company on the afternoon of the 15th. It was a Sunday and so he, a patient, could afford the time. The object of the meeting was to take stock of their activities in 1963 and draw up the plan of work for the coming year.

6. I Am a Korean (2)

The midnight radio broadcasting of December 15, 1963, and morning papers on the 16th reported that Rikidozan died at 21:50 of December 15. He was 43 and in the prime of life.

There are various views on the death of Rikidozan, and these views leave much room for questions. The Japanese authorities that must solve these questions promised to solve them, but until today, 25 years after his death, they have been left open. This is because the

Japanese authorities are averse to disclose the truth with regard to Rikidozan’s death. The reason is, they themselves are the culprits. They, the culprits, intimidated into silence those who spoke about the truth.

Toyonobori who had been Rikidozan’s most favorite pupil and had grown into an international wrestler under his coach shouted before his coffin in tears, “Let’s take revenge for our teacher Rikidozan’s death!” and told the professional wrestling reporters, “Mr Rikidozan should not have undergone the second operation. The first operation was a great success. But for the second operation, he would not have died.”

But after returning from the authorities concerned where he had been hauled, he kept his mouth shut tightly. The same was the case with Giant Baba. He had been on a playing visit to the United States when Rikidozan had been murdered. Upon receiving the tragic news about Rikidozan, he had returned to Japan and said in indignation in an interview with pressmen, raising his clenched hand overhead, “Mr Rikidozan was not so weak a man as would be stabbed to death with a 13-centimetre dagger. I will find out for sure the foe who murdered Mr Rikidozan and finish him off.”

He had reported himself at the authorities concerned in answer to a summons. Back from there, he shut his mouth like Toyonobori.

But the truth will out. Here is the account of Tanaka Beetaro.

December 15, 1963, a week after Rikidozan had been hospitalized, was a Sunday. It had been arranged that in the afternoon of that day the personnel of the Combined Rikidozan Company would assemble at Special Ward No. 601 of the Sanno Hospital where Rikidozan was staying.

In the morning round of the patients, the doctor in ordinary came. Usually the hospital doctor in charge of him used to come, but that day the doctor in ordinary appeared. The nurse took Rikidozan's pulse, temperature and blood pressure. She found them normal.

"All right. You have to undergo the second operation from one o'clock in the afternoon," said the doctor calmly to Rikidozan.

"Undergo another operation?" the patient asked, looking up at the doctor as he was lying on bed. His eyes were filled with misgiving.

The doctor removed his sick gown and examined the

wounds. Then he shook his head.

"Mr Rikidozan, the operation is a must."

"The wounds do not hurt at all. You said the first operation was a success, didn't you? And it was indeed a success. So, let's chuck it. Somehow I don't feel like going onto the operation table."

Rikidozan was loath to undergo an operation again. But he was told that the doctors had discussed the matter seriously. The doctor showed him the X-ray film and said it was a scientific necessity. So, he could not refuse it any longer. But still he could not readily agree to it. Somehow his sixth sense told him there was something ugly about it.

"Then perform the operation tomorrow," he said decisively.

"The sooner the better. If you miss the time, your case may become past remedy even with modern medicine," the doctor in ordinary said coldly.

"I am insisting because a conference of the Combined Rikidozan Company officials has been arranged for this afternoon. Must you do it today?"

"If you insist, I'll discuss the matter with other doctors. You will be informed of our decision at one

o'clock in the afternoon."

At 1:00 p.m. the doctor of medicine known as a surgeon of authority who had performed the first operation came to ward No. 601, Rikidozan's room, with a nurse.

"Mr Rikidozan, you should be operated on from now. It will take less than an hour. Put your faith in me, in this doctor of medicine."

Rikidozan entered the surgery on a hospital cart. Tanaka Beetaro was waiting outside the surgery. The second operation was conducted with local anesthesia. It took somewhat shorter than an hour.

When he was brought back to the ward, Rikidozan's face was pallid. He was staring up at the ceiling with open eyes.

"Mr Rikidozan!" Tanaka Beetaro called, sitting down close to the bed. But Rikidozan did not answer. He had not yet come to.

"Don't worry. The operation is a great success. Mr Tanaka, please take good care of him. He will be able to appear in the ring in the New Year," the doctor of medicine said and went out of ward No. 601.

Tanaka Beetaro watched over Rikidozan with a

young wrestler, a newcomer. The patient who had been staring up at the ceiling closed his eyes and fell asleep.

Tanaka Beetaro heaved a sigh of relief. He sent the young wrestler to a fruit store to buy some fruit. Beads of sweat stood on the forehead of Rikidozan who was lying quietly in slumber. Tanaka cautiously wiped off the sweat with a towel and went out of the room. He went to the toilet to pass water. The toilet attached to ward No. 601 was for ladies.

Rikidozan had asked him before undergoing the operation to keep watch over him without leaving him alone after he returned from the operation. So, Tanaka waited for the return of the young wrestler from the errand. But he was delayed in coming back. Tanaka thought it would not matter much if he left the room for just a few moments, and went off to the toilet, running. He was coming back in haste from the toilet when he saw the back of a man who was slipping out of ward No. 601 and skulking away in a hurry. The plate hanging on the door of the room with the inscription "No visitors allowed" was swinging.

"Who can be that fellow?" Tanaka wondered and dashed into the room.

The moment he entered the room, he gave a start and stood transfixed on the spot.

“Mr Rikidozan had asked me so earnestly to allow nobody to come near to him before he recovered his senses, but I ...”

There were three or four empty pop bottles lying about under the bed. The bedclothes put on by Rikidozan were soaking wet with aerated water. Tanaka picked up the telephone and rang up the personal doctor.

“Doctor, a terrible thing has happened. Come here quickly please. Be quick!”

Putting down the telephone, Tanaka Beetaro took the left hand of Rikidozan and sobbed.

“Mr Rikidozan, please keep up your spirits. Pull yourself together!”

Rikidozan remained still, with his eyes shut. But after a while, he made his last effort and raised his right hand. Opening his eyes, he showed his index finger straightened before Tanaka’s face. Then he closed his eyes, never to open them again.

Footsteps were heard in the passage, someone was rushing on in haste. The door of the room was flung open and the personal doctor to Rikidozan rushed in.

“Who has made him drink it?”

“Doctor ...,” Tanaka Beetaro said and dropped his face.

The doctor felt the pulse of Rikidozan. It was beating very faintly.

“Hurry up. Call people close to him.”

The doctor counted the pulse by applying stethoscope, looking down at the second hand of his watch.

“He’s passed away. The time is 21:50 hours.”

The doctor removed the stethoscope from his ears, and closed his eyes with his hands joined before him.

Rikidozan was killed with carbonated water. He died without a will.

Tanaka Beetaro had attended on Rikidozan from the days when the latter had been a *sumo* wrestler. He had lived with him for nearly 20 years. He was not a man to betray him.

The account of Tanaka Beetaro who was the only person to watch Rikidozan on his death bed left some questions, something odd, that were past understanding.

First of all, the personal doctor to Rikidozan was a riddle. He had long been in Rikidozan’s service as his personal physician. He had been faithful to him and had

never once contradicted his wishes. Rikidozan had also been obedient to him. But the doctor had dared to ignore Rikidozan's reluctance to the second operation. And Rikidozan, too, had not listened meekly to his advice. This fact shows that their relations had not been normal.

The sixth sense of a man is something awesome. Rikidozan had felt somehow his personal doctor was unreliable and so had taken such an attitude towards him. In other words, he did not want to commit himself to the care of the doctor. When Rikidozan breathed his last, the doctor did not show the least sign of bewilderment. His attitude was as cold as if to say that a man doomed to death had passed away. He used to be worried more than anyone else whenever Rikidozan had played a match in case the latter should lose the match and, in consequence, he himself should be deprived of the means of living. Rikidozan's good health had been a vital necessity for him to get a large sum of money, and he had in reality drawn an enormous income from him. With the death of Rikidozan his name as the personal doctor to him would be gone and he would get no more money. In short, his life had depended on Rikidozan's health. And could

he ever be cool and unperturbed before the death of Rikidozan? No, he could not.

The next person in question was the doctor of medicine who was an authority as a surgeon. He had performed the first operation. He had boastfully said that the operation had been very successfully done. He had told people that the patient would recover soon and that they would see Rikidozan on television again before long. So, he had received large numbers of letters of thanks from professional wrestling fans. And why, then, had he performed the second operation in great haste? The professional wrestling fans said that the second operation performed on Rikidozan was an operation of death. This was not for nothing.

The third man in question was the fellow who had slipped into ward No. 601 and let Rikidozan drink soda pop. Tanaka Beetaro was the only person who had seen him. To sneak into ward No. 601 of the Sanno Hospital, he must have had a previous arrangement with some people of the hospital. Without assistance from within, he could not have entered the room. If he had entered it recklessly and had been caught by Tanaka Beetaro, he would have had a hard time of it. Then was it that the

intruder had had a contact with Tanaka Beetaro?

A rumour got about among the professional wrestling fans that the story about the intruder was a concoction of Tanaka Beetaro and that Tanaka Beetaro himself was the very culprit who had given soda pop to Rikidozan.

If these three or four persons had been investigated, the culprit who had murdered Rikidozan could have been caught. But the truth about Rikidozan's death has not been brought to light even now when a quarter of a century has passed since his death. It was not a very complicated case beyond the power of the Japanese police to clear up, the police who are bragging that they are second to none in the world so far as criminal investigation is concerned. This is entirely because the reactionary Japanese authorities were the perpetrators.

After a successful operation, Rikidozan had broken wind and his conditions had been speedily improving. So, from December 13, 1963, he was permitted to meet a limited number of visitors.

The director of the Japan Industrial Company, a

gangster organization, came with Murata Katsushi to apologize. Rikidozan declined to see them. But they lingered about the gate of the hospital all day long, and so Tanaka Beetaro advised Rikidozan to meet him. Tanaka was so insistent that Rikidozan only allowed the director to come in. Murata Katsushi had to wait outside the hospital until the director would come out.

“Mr Rikidozan, I am so sorry for the recent accident. I am to blame for it because I have failed to discipline the young folks strictly enough. Please accept this as a token of my sincerity.”

With this, he put a thick envelope inscribed with the characters “money of apology” on the bed where Rikidozan was lying.

“Is there any need to apologize?” said Rikidozan. “Take the money back. Frankly speaking, you have made less money because I am not dead but alive, haven't you?”

Lying on the bed, Rikidozan stared sharply at the director.

“How can you speak in such a way? You know it's just a slip our youngsters have made. It doesn't become you, Rikidozan, to speak like that.”

“Do you think I don’t know the inside facts of the Japan Industrial Company? How could Murata Katsushi make a slip? That boy is a member of the shock force of your company, isn’t he? It isn’t like you, Director, to try to equivocate. I think there is no need to beat about the bush. Well, how much did you get for assassinating me? Who asked you to do so?”

Rikidozan kept looking the visitor, sharply in the face. The director did not answer the question of Rikidozan but took up the “money of apology” and handed it over to Tanaka Beetaro who was sitting by him.

“Beetaro! Don’t take it!” Rikidozan shouted angrily and gave the director a fierce stare. “If you are prepared to apologize from the bottom of your heart, answer my question!”

The director only gave a long sigh, unable to answer. More correctly, he did not answer.

“Look! You can’t answer. Why? I don’t expect an answer from your mouth at all. Because I know you are a cheap man lacking in the courage to do so. It’s nasty. I’m tired and so must take sleep.”

Rikidozan closed his eyes.

“Take good care of yourself please. I hope you will

get well soon,” the director said before he went out of the ward.

Tanaka Beetaro who was following him pushed the “money of apology” into his pocket.

The day before the director of the Japan Industrial Company called to make an apology, Kaneda Shoichi and Harimoto had come to see Rikidozan. They were the first visitors to be allowed to meet him. They were professional baseball players and stars in this field. Kaneda was a pitcher and Harimoto a batter. They were Korean nationals resident in Japan.

“How do you feel? They say the operation was a success?”

“How come you, the king of professional wrestling in the world, got stabbed by a knife?”

Addressing him in this manner, they sat down by his bedside.

“Beetaro, Kaneda and Harimoto have a special weakness for tomatoes. You have any tomatoes?” Rikidozan asked.

“Tomatoes?” asked back Tanaka Beetaro.

Where on earth can you get tomatoes in the thick of this winter? He thought to himself. Maybe they can be had at a

greenhouse? Why in the name of goodness should he ask for tomatoes of all things?

Tanaka Beetaro was not the only person who was amazed. It was also a surprise to Kaneda and Harimoto. They were not so fond of tomatoes. They did not particularly dislike them, nor did have a great liking for them.

“Yes, tomatoes, I mean. If you don’t have them, go and get them at a greenhouse by all means. I have least expected visitors here, and so hurry up!”

With this, Rikidozan motioned Tanaka Beetaro away.

“If you want them so much ...,” Tanaka said and went out.

When Tanaka Beetaro was outside, Harimoto cast an eye at Rikidozan, tilting his head.

“Mr Rikidozan, I have no special liking for tomatoes,” said he.

Rikidozan laughed.

“I want to chat among ourselves, among us Koreans without any outsider. It’s no good to have a Jap in the room. That Tanaka Beetaro has been attending on me since the days when I was a *sumo* wrestler. So, we have

lived together for more than 15 years. Nevertheless, I cannot trust him. Innately I do not believe in the Japanese,” he said.

He now sat up and brought out liquor and cups from the icebox.

“This is napoleon brandy. It’s about 50 years old.”

“Such a fine drink? Let’s have it together,” Kaneda said, sitting down at the round table by the window.

Rikidozan, Kaneda and Harimoto were seated at the round table.

“I can’t do. I’m a patient. You two take it by yourselves,” Rikidozan said and poured out the brandy.

“I do not know if we have come to inquire after a sick person or to be treated to a drink,” Harimoto said, draining his cup.

“What a thing to say!”

“I think Harimoto is right when he says so. I really don’t know what’s what now,” Kaneda boosted Harimoto’s words.

At this moment the ward nurse entered the room.

“How can you visitors to the patient drink liquor? If this is known to the personal doctor, you will catch it,” she said and shifted her eyes from Kaneda and

Harimoto to Rikidozan. "Mr Rikidozan, you are impossible.... Well, now before the porch of the hospital there are many visitors who have come to see you. They are asking for an interview with you. What shall I do, sir? May I send them in?"

"Miss Nurse, this gentleman here is the pitcher of the National Railways baseball team Mr Kaneda Shoichi, and the other gentleman is also a baseball player of that team. Please don't make a noise. I, this Rikidozan, beg you. You oughtn't to let anybody into this room before these guests have gone back. Understand?" Rikidozan implored the nurse.

"If that's your desire.... But you cannot keep them here for long."

With this the girl left.

"When we fellow countrymen want to have an intimate talk, what a nuisance those callers come to ask after me!"

Rikidozan raised the curtain and looked down. There were a crowd of people in front of the entrance of the hospital.

"What a lot of people! Rikidozan's popularity is stunning. There's no doubt about it!" Harimoto who was

looking down out of the window said in wonder.

Rikidozan drew a long sigh.

"Don't envy. Many people have come to inquire after my condition. But I am not sure how many of the callers are truly worried about me.... Really, no one can tell there is a single person concerned about me...."

"Why are you speaking like that? If those people should hear you, how much offended they will feel!" Kaneda put in, interrupting Rikidozan. He was taken aback by the latter's unexpected words. Harimoto felt the same. So, he chimed in.

"Mr Rikidozan, whatever high popularity you may enjoy, it won't do to be arrogant to them, will it? If you treat them superciliously, you will meet with a misfortune."

Harimoto who was a person of an impetuous disposition winked at Kaneda and rose from his seat.

"Harimoto, sit down please. You're quite hotheaded," Rikidozan said, taking him by the arm and seating him again at the round table. He raised the curtain once more and looked down below the window. "Is it right to behave like that even without hearing me out? There, do you see down there a young fellow wearing

spectacles, coloured spectacles?”

Pointing out the visitors standing in a crowd before the entrance of the hospital, Rikidozan told them who was who one by one. Kaneda and Harimoto listened to his “introduction,” looking down at the visitors pointed out severally by Rikidozan. The young man in coloured spectacles was smoking, looking up at the sky. He was wearing a green jumper over his dark coat. This fellow was Murata Katsushi, a “clerk” of the Japan Industrial Company which was a band of thugs, the perpetrator who had stabbed Rikidozan in the abdomen with a rusted dagger. A man of commanding presence was standing beside him. This was the head of the gangster organization Japan Industrial Company, usually called the “Nocturnal Satan of Tokyo.” Standing behind them was a *sumo* wrestler with a topknot and in wooden clogs. He was none other than *Yokozuna* Maedayama. Three or four *sumo* wrestlers were standing by him as his bodyguards. At their back was a US army man in uniform, who was chewing gum. This was Lieutenant Cappy of the US army.

“Harimoto, those fellows are visitors who have come to inquire after my health. The sight of those scoundrels

makes me mad with anger. Each of those villains had a hand in the attempt on the life of me, this Rikidozan,” Rikidozan said and lowered the curtain. He hated the very sight of those fellows down below.

“Forgive me, Mr Rikidozan. I didn’t know the visitors are such rogues,” apologized Harimoto.

“Harimoto, I have an insistent foreboding that I won’t be able to appear in the ring again.”

“What are you talking about?” said Harimoto.

“You are getting better now. You will be able to play matches from January next year. Your wounds are not very serious,” Kaneda comforted him.

But the two persons eyed Rikidozan dubiously.

“I don’t say so because my wounds are serious, you know. I am getting threatening telephone calls all the time, so....”

The telephone rang noisily, interrupting him. He picked up the receiver.

“What! I am a Korean! Not a Japanese. I cannot become a Japanese even if it should cost me my life! Do as you like!”

Rikidozan slammed down the receiver. But the next moment the telephone rang again. He picked up the

receiver in a huff.

“Who are you? ... A man in the shadow?!”

Then he took the telephone to a corner of the ward and left the receiver on the floor off the rest so that there might be no more ringing.

“A threatening call again?” asked Kaneda.

“That’s right. It’s a threatening call. I get blackmailing calls scores of times a day. They intimidate me with death in case I do not listen to them.”

There appeared a tense look in his face.

“What do they want you to do?” asked Harimoto.

After heaving a long sigh, Rikidozan opened his mouth calmly.

“They are telling me to turn over a new leaf, to declare that I am not a Korean but a Japanese. In other words, they want me to say that I am not Kim Sin Rak but Momota Mitsuhiro....”

Rikidozan was interrupted by the appearance of Kang Sung Min who entered the room.

“You are stars of professional baseball! Thank you for coming,” Kang said and, bringing a chair to the side of Harimoto, sat down.

“Am I in the way of your conversation?”

“No, not at all.”

Rikidozan leaned against the back of the chair. Harimoto filled a cup with napoleon brandy and offered it to Kang Sung Min.

“There is nothing to take with the drink,” Kang said after drinking off the cup and cast a glance at Rikidozan. Then he brought out a pot from his bag. The pot was full of clams.

“Why, they are clams!” Rikidozan exclaimed with joy like a small child.

Harimoto looked at him and the clams in turn with questioning eyes.

“Clams taste very nice. Help yourself to it, Harimoto. And you, too, Kaneda.”

With this Rikidozan picked up one and put it into his mouth and chewed.

Now he recalled his boyhood; he seemed to see vividly before his eyes the sea of his native village, the East Sea, where he would gather clams. It seemed like yesterday that he, together with his elder brother Hang Rak, had gone out to the sea and gathered clams, which they had roasted on the sandy beach and eaten. Over 20 years had passed since then! At that time, his brother had

said. "Sin Rak, a man who has lost sight of his native place is a ruined man. No man is more miserable than he who has no native place to call his own." His voice was still ringing in his ears. He now remembered his ailing father for whom they had gathered a basketful of clams, which they had cooked and offered to him. With all his heart he longed for the coast of the East Sea, the sea of his native village.

"Sin Rak, what are you thinking about?" asked Kang Sung Min.

"Nothing special."

Unable to continue to speak, Rikidozan just looked at Kang Sung Min with a smile.

"Sin Rak, go ahead with your talk," Kang who read his mind said so that he might not digress from his subject.

Rikidozan raised his body from the back of the chair.

"Kaneda and Harimoto, listen to me carefully. I don't think I shall live as long as my natural span of life...."

"How come you are speaking like that? You will come out on the ring from the beginning of next year," Kaneda interrupted him.

"No, I feel I shall not be able to appear in the ring again."

The three, Kaneda, Harimoto and Kang, looked at him in amazement. Their eyes had an inquiring look.

"If I could, I should be so happy," Rikidozan said and then passionately spoke out his mind. He expressed his determination to bear all expenses of the sports delegation of his motherland—the Democratic People's Republic of Korea—that would participate in the 18th Tokyo Olympics the next year. He also talked about his reunion with his daughter who would come as a member of the delegation of the homeland, a reunion which would be so touching.

"The year 1964 is an important year for me. But it seems as if I shall not see the first sunrise of 1964. The American and Japanese scoundrels will not leave me alone. They tell me to become a Japanese if I want to survive, become Momota Mitsuhiro by discarding my original name Kim Sin Rak, and to change my mind which is turning towards my motherland.

"I, Rikidozan, deem it an honour to live and die as a Korean guided by the great leader Marshal Kim Il Sung. Only it is to be regretted that I am dying

in Japan without having an opportunity to meet the great leader.

“Kaneda and Harimoto, my lifelong desire has been to floor mercilessly the impudent American and Japanese wrestlers on the ring in the presence of the great leader. It is a pity I cannot accomplish this desire of mine....”

At this moment the door of the ward was opened and the doctor in charge came in at the heels of the nurse, which prevented Rikidozan winding up his talk. Rikidozan clenched his “Right Hand of Justice.” His lips were trembling. There were hot tears standing in his eyes.

How did Rikidozan die? Who killed him? The answers to these questions are clear for everyone to see from the aforementioned facts.

Rikidozan died even without leaving a will. Moreover, he could not utter a word at his last moment.

What did he mean to say when he raised the index finger of his right hand erect and held it high by a last-spurt effort? That index finger signified his will, so to speak, people interpreted the meaning of the raised index finger in many ways. Some said it meant, “I am the king

of professional wrestling!” others, “I leave the Japan Professional Wrestling Association in your hands!” and yet others, “Give me soda pop!”

Did really the index finger of his “Right Hand of Justice” have such meanings? No. It said emphatically, “I am a Korean!”

The Korean he meant was not a ruined stateless Korean but a Korean living under the guidance of the great leader Marshal Kim Il Sung.

EPILOGUE

Concerning the funeral of Rikidozan, the book *His Story of Japanese Professional Wrestling* had this to say:

“Rikidozan died! At 9:50 p.m. on the 15th of December, Rikidozan went on his last journey. His case was complicated by an intestinal obstruction, and even the second operation was of no avail. An autopsy was held on his body at the Keio Hospital, which revealed that another part of his bowels was also rotting. His funeral by the family alone was held on the 18th and his burial service was performed at the Ikegami Buddhist Temple in Tokyo on the 20th when a cutting wind was blowing.

“When the hearse was leaving his home, the sky was suddenly overcast and a violent gust of wind blew. The funeral procession had an endless train of people.”

It is a fact that Rikidozan breathed his last at 9:50 p.m. on December 15. It is a fact that his funeral by the family alone was held on the 18th and that his burial

service was performed on the 20th at the Ikegami Buddhist Temple. It is also a fact that it was biting cold on the day of his burial service. It is doubtless that huge numbers of people participated in his burial service.

But it is doubtful if these people really lamented Rikidozan’s death when they joined the funeral procession.

Natsuko who had worked for a long period as a typist at the Combined Rikidozan Company and simultaneously as a secretary for Rikidozan himself gave vent to her sentiments:

“Even now, as I think of the burial service for Rikidozan, I cannot raise my head for shame at my being a Japanese. How could they ever behave so infamously?”

How then had they deported themselves to make Natsuko voice such deep indignation?

Let us take a look into the scene enacted on the day of the burial service.

The hall on the eighth floor of the building where Rikidozan had lived was crowded with professional wrestlers, who were lingering about here and there in the hall. None of them looked sad. They looked just like shoppers at a market place, or uninvited guests at a

wedding ceremony whose only concern was to eat delicacies.

Bottles of high-quality alcoholic drinks were standing in lines on the shelves of the cupboard placed along the wall of the hall. They were special foreign brands which the late master of the house had valued so highly as to grudge drinking it himself. They were English whiskeys, French brandies, Brazilian wines, and the like.

It was none other than Azumafuji who was the first shameless swine to take out and uncork and drink them greedily. He had broken off from Rikidozan and left the Japan Professional Wrestling Association with the parting shot, "I don't want to see Rikidozan's face again."

"Let's drink in memory of the departed man," said he. "I wonder how he managed to collect so many high-quality drinks. But I think Rikidozan was a stingy person. Well, it seems that because these drinks were so high-quality he grudged drinking them. Let's drink them in his place, in his memory."

Azumafuji pulled out the stop of a French brandy bottle and drank direct from it. He was a real villain lost to all sense of shame.

As if they had been waiting for this moment, the

wrestlers hastened to follow his example. They took bottles out of the cupboard and began to drink. In a twinkling the cupboard was emptied of all its drinks of noted brands. These had been presented to the deceased as gifts during his foreign playing tours over the past ten-odd years.

Now in a cheerful mood with drink, Toyonobori said to Endo, "The question is what to do with the Japan Professional Wrestling Association of Mr Rikidozan from now."

No sooner had he said this than Endo dashed his glass to the floor of the hall.

"We have been exploited by Rikidozan until now," said he loudly. "Now let's form a new professional wrestling company!"

Here was another brazenfaced swine! If it had not been for Rikidozan, Endo would long have been begging his bread. It had been thanks to Rikidozan's favour that he had been living on barely as a professional wrestler.

That this fellow should nevertheless mouth such an ungrateful thing! He was a wretch without a sense of duty and humanity.

Now Azumafuji chimed in.

“You are right in saying so. You are the masters of everything from now. I will help you, too.”

Endo nodded at his words and said:

“I made my debut in the professional wrestling world at the same time with Rikidozan. But I received my training in Hawaii earlier than he. I underwent training in wrestling together with Kimura and Yamaguchi. Rikidozan made his appearance after me. So, he was my junior and my pupil!”

This mean fellow would not have dared say such a thing in the presence of Rikidozan, if the latter had been alive. He was recklessly speaking anything he liked because the departed would not resurrect. Surely his words were pregnant with hatred for Rikidozan.

On December 22, 1963, two days after Rikidozan’s burial service, the leading wrestlers of the Japan Professional Wrestling Association and interested persons met at the restaurant *Nakaima* in Akasaka and had a conference. The matter discussed at the conference was how to operate Rikidozan’s Professional Wrestling Association and Professional Wrestling Company and Combined Rikidozan Company in the future.

Outwardly this sounded plausible, but in fact, they plotted to seize upon the property of the late Rikidozan. So, this was indeed a nasty and underhand conspiracy only beastly scoundrels would be capable of.

As a consequence of this conspiracy, all the fortune of Rikidozan passed into the hands of Japanese, the fortune he had built up little by little at the cost of his sweat and blood.

Not only that. Rikidozan’s Professional Wrestling Association, the Japan Professional Wrestling Association, crumbled. Seeing this Oki Shikina who had been the consultant and umpire for the Japan Professional Wrestling Association left for Hawaii, saying, “There is no need for me to stay any longer in Japan minus Rikidozan’s Professional Wrestling Association.” Back to Hawaii, he transferred his property to his wife and stayed with his sister, leading a lonely life away from professional wrestling until he died at past 70 years of age.

Rikidozan’s coffin was laid in state in the room just across from the hall. Although there were large numbers of callers for condolence, none of them kept a watch over the dead. They only swilled liquor,

slandering the deceased and plotting to rob property left by him. There were so many visitors of condolence, but none of them sincerely prayed for the repose of the soul of the dead person.

Nevertheless, there were three Koreans who held a wake over the corpse.

In deep grief they did not drink. They were well-known professional baseball players Kaneda and Harimoto and the crooner Kasuga Hachiro.

“They have come but won’t keep vigil over the dead. Oh, my blood boils against those swines!” said Kaneda to Harimoto.

“Sons of bitches! The sight of those beasts makes my heart burn with indignation. I feel like giving a blow to every pate of them with my baseball bat!” exclaimed Harimoto, clenching his trembling fists.

“Harimoto, I remember what Rikidozan said in the Sanno Hospital,” Kaneda said, drawing a deep sigh.

“Kaneda, let us preserve our Korean spirit as Rikidozan did and show them the mettle of the Koreans with the baseball bat!”

Harimoto firmly grasped Kaneda’s hands.

His hands were trembling with rage.

If Rikidozan had not been taken into the care of the great motherland, he would have become an outcast worse than a gutter dog, that is a Japanese not really Japanese or a Korean not to be so called in his own right.

The *Sports Encyclopaedia*, volume 1, says that Rikidozan was the king of professional wrestling in the world who won championships many times in the world professional wrestling league games and the international contests of strong professional wrestlers, and writes, “... he won championships five times on end in the world league games and 19 times in the international contests of strong wrestlers.”

This is easy to speak of, but these figures are so stupendous that it will not be an exaggeration to say they are astronomical figures.

An American expert in professional wrestling said that there had never been in the past and would never be in the future a professional wrestler like Rikidozan. He had good reason to say so.

It is already 25 years since Rikidozan was murdered by the enemies. In this period many master wrestlers won a world championship in professional wrestling. Giant Baba, Hiro Matsuda, Antonio Inoki, Momo Brazil,

Tory Junior and many others could be named. Of them the wrestler with the best records is Giant Baba, who was personally fostered and trained by Rikidozan. Giant Baba won the championship at the international contest of strong professional wrestlers in November 1965, but lost it in Brazil in 1968. He won the championship at the 8th World Professional Wrestling League Game in May 1966, and subsequently defended the title thrice on end. He failed to defend it at the 11th world league game in May 1967.

Rikidozan had held his championship of the international contest of strong professional wrestlers for six consecutive years, and won the championship of the World Professional Wrestling League Game five times without interruption.

Further, he had won the Asian professional wrestling tag championship seven times, and captured the Pacific tag championship, the tag championship of the international contest of strong professional wrestlers and the Hawaiian tag championship. In addition, he had gained the WWA and the Pacific professional wrestling championships.

The international usage in professional wrestling is

to play a three-game match in 61 minutes. Sometimes, the time for a match is unlimited. Therefore, even sturdy wrestlers begin to go downhill when they reach forties. But Rikidozan was an exception; he continued on his way of ever victory.

Commenting on this, a representative of the Japanese professional wrestling circles declared it to be a marvellous fact and said that it was doubtlessly due to the physical fitness of Rikidozan but more to his spiritual strength, or will power, which outdid that of his rivals.

The propaganda media of Japan gave distorted pictures of the truth. The journalists were aware of their falsehood, but kept silence.

In this connection, Sakurai who was the cultural department chief of the sports newspaper *Tokyo Sports* and a TV commentator for professional wrestling said frankly:

“All the professional wrestling reporters knew that Rikidozan was born in Korea before the war and was a Korean. But everyone of them kept silent about this fact. This was because Rikidozan needed to be Rikidozan of Japan.”

Although Sakurai pointed out clearly that Rikidozan was a Korean, Sakurai could not throw light on the truth about his ever-victorious march even in his forties.

Rikidozan's ever-victorious fights in his forties with youthful stamina and a spirit of one being a match for a hundred can be explained by fact that he had the warm care of the great leader and the glorious Party.

Because he had the affection of the great motherland that looked aftering him, he was able to advance straight along the path of patriotism and loyalty with the soul of Korean in spite of the threats and intimidations of the US imperialists and Japanese reactionaries.

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