

REFEREE'S CALL:

My Pride Adventure

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My life took a detour on April 14, 1974, when I began formal training in the martial arts. The "Do" for me began with judo and Hawaiian kenpo. Since both of the arts and my instructor, Sensei Bill Ryusaki, are of Japanese origin, it seemed only natural to immerse myself in all things Japanese.

I acquired a taste for sushi, udon soup, and Kirin beer. A Sony Walkman accompanied all of my workouts. I recorded and watched every hour of the "Shogun" series. I made a point to see any film directed by the internationally acclaimed director, Akira Kurosawa. Such films as: Rashoman, Seven Samurai, and Ran remain all time classics and an integral part of my psyche.

Included amongst the books I read was "Karate-Do," the autobiography of the "Father of Karate," Gichin Funakoshi. I have studied the precepts of Zen Buddhism, and was thoroughly captivated when reading the book of the Samurai, "Hagakure." The 970 pages comprising "Musashi", Japans greatest swordsman, became my friend and constant companion for many weeks. The journeys of Morihei Ueshiba, founder of aikido, and, Jigoro Kano, founder of judo, became almost as familiar to me as my own. I have to admit that I became an unabashed, unapologetic, died-in-the-wool, Nipponphile!

Now then, you can well imagine my surprise and delight when, out of the blue, I receive a call from Dream Stage Entertainment (DSE). They want to know, am interested in going to Japan to judge the finals of the 2003 Pride Gran Prix Finals? Are you kidding me? Needless to say, it was one of those rare instances when I knew that all of the planets in the universe were perfectly aligned.

In a brief meeting, we work out the details and I accept the assignment. My flight from Los Angeles International Airport leaves on 11/05/03 at 12:05 pm. After eleven and one-half hours flight time, three mediocre movies, two bad meals, and a 17-hour time differential from L.A., I land at Narita Airport at 5:10 pm on 11/06/03. After clearing Customs and Passport Control, I am met by two very pleasant young men holding a Pride sign. They inform me that we will leave for Tokyo just as soon as the flight of the noted trainer, competitor, and ring official, Matt Hume, arrives from Seattle, Washington.

Approximately one hour later we board the bus for Tokyo. The distance from the airport to Tokyo is approximately 43 miles. However, during the 6:30 pm rush-hour traffic, it seems to be 143 miles, as it takes more than two hours to reach our hotel. The traffic is about as bad as any I've ever seen!

At about 8:30 pm Matt and I finally arrive at our stay, the Rihga Royal Hotel Tokyo. Upon entering the lobby we are directed to the Pride table where we sign-in, are given our room keys and the schedule for the next couple of days.

We decide to drop the luggage in our rooms and go eat. However, before we get to the elevator we run into some of the studs from Team Quest: Dan Henderson, Randy Couture, Nate Quarry, and Heath Simms. They are going to workout and urge us to join them. The six of us jump into two cabs, give the driver an address and head into the night. About 20 minutes later we arrive at a non-descript building housing a number of empty rooms, except for the wrestling matted floors. Since he's fighting, Hondo Henderson goes round robin for the next couple of hours with his crew and Matt. Since someone had to keep time, I volunteered.

After a spirited workout, we walk to a pasta and salad restaurant known to Hondo. We are all famished and eat like there is no tomorrow. The camaraderie is great! We decide to walk back to the hotel to burn off some of the meal. After a good 45-minute walk we are in the hotel. It is 2:00am local time and I have been awake for over 24 hours. As soon as I unpack I'll be in bed, tomorrow is another day and I can hardly wait.

To Be Continued...