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Sports

Japan's Yasuda Looks to Schwarzenegger's Fame



By Paul E. Pratt, Apr 14, 2006

Everywhere Ken Yasuda goes, people notice. Of course, that's easy to do when you have 20-inch biceps, a 52-inch chest and GQ model looks. As Asia's most accomplished professional bodybuilder, Yasuda stands head and muscular shoulders above the competition.

Now Yasuda hopes to parlay his success into mainstream recognition. For inspiration, the former "Mr. Japan" bodybuilding champion looks no farther than Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

"I'm known in the industries of bodybuilding, pro wrestling and mixed martial arts fighting as the Japanese Arnold Schwarzenegger," admits Yasuda from his Los Angeles-area home. "It's not just the bodybuilding, it's all the other things. I'm the only bodybuilder from [Asia] to do movies and a TV commercial. It's something no other Japanese has ever done."

In addition, Yasuda points to coverage provided by *Ironman Japan*. The magazine prominently profiles Yasuda in each issue, including a column written by the muscleman, much like Joe Wieder's American publications showcased Schwarzenegger early in his career.

"When Arnold was a bodybuilding champion, the general public didn't know who he was," Yasuda points out. "When he started to appear in other things like small movie roles, the public began to know who he was. That's where I am."

"If you compare me with Ichiro [Suzuki], I'm not even close!" he adds with a laugh. The Seattle Mariners right-fielder was already a superstar based on the popularity of baseball in Japan. "I trained the guy, and we're friends, but

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his recognition is much greater." Yasuda is known in the sporting community, including among pro baseball players. But his fame is also increasing quickly among Asian fans.

"I get lots of opportunities to appear on TV shows and play roles in movies, requests for interviews with newspapers and magazines," Yasuda says. He even spent three weeks working for World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE). In addition, Yasuda is particularly excited when asked to do motivational speaking engagements.

"I can really use that kind of opportunity to educate people on what bodybuilding is all about," Yasuda says. "Lifting weights, eating healthy, building a good physique and staying fit — and what this means to me." Yasuda is not only the most accomplished bodybuilder from Asia, he is also the largest, and one of a select few Asian heavyweights in the sport.

"In Asia, particularly Japan, they are stuck with a certain way of developing their body," Yasuda explains. "With that way, they cannot build muscle mass. That's what is lacking among Asian bodybuilders."

"In my off-season, I eat as much as possible and increase my strength and muscle mass," he explains. Weighing 265 lbs. in the off-season, Yasuda trims down to 220 lbs. — three percent body fat — during a gradual program. Says Yasuda, "I maintain more muscle mass than other Asian bodybuilders, who tend to stay lean year-round." In addition, Yasuda says he spends limited time in the gym, using a streamlined workout.

"From the first set, I hit really, really heavy," he says, indicating he does less sets as a result. "It's very intense."

Yasuda admits genetics give him an advantage. At 5'10", he is considerably taller than most Asian bodybuilders. For his height, judges are amazed by Yasuda's physical symmetry. He says, "When you get this tall, you often look skinny."

However, since he started competing in the U.S., Yasuda's advantage in size has diminished. While he stands out less for his physique, he is still acknowledged as a first in many ways.

In *MuscleMania*, which broadcasts on ESPN2, Yasuda is the first Japanese competitor in the organization's four-year history. Yasuda also participates in the American Body Building Association (ABBA) 'Mr. World' competition, formerly held by Schwarzenegger. "That's a very prestigious title," he acknowledges. In July, Yasuda will compete in the National Physique Committee-sponsored 'Mr. USA' contest. While he pursues his bodybuilding goals, Yasuda is making other career decisions. He has a business degree from the University of Southern California, and is partnering with a major Japanese company that makes films and television shows in the U.S.

"People think I am just a musclehead, until we start to talk about something," Yasuda says. As always, he points to

Schwarzenegger as an example of his own goals. "He was very intelligent and didn't represent a stereotype of bodybuilders. I admire and would like to be more like that!"

Ironman Japan features Ken Yasuda each issue, including his column.

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