



Maki Ueda and Jackie Sato. Each of them earned more than \$100,000 last year grappling and kicking opponents in rings around Japan. Left, Maki delivers a patented flying kick to an opponent.



And in this corner: The 'Beauty Pair'

By ALAN MILLER AND SHIGEHICO TOGO
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Imagine a Bionic woman who sings and dances like Olivia Newton John. Multiply by two and you have one of Japan's hottest entertainment acts, "Beauty Pair."

"Beauty Pair" is the somewhat tongue-in-cheek title given to 20-year-old Naoko "Jackie" Sato and 18-year-old Makiko "Maki" Ueda, the two solidly built woman wrestlers whose singing talent and prowess in the ring have made them the idols of thousands of young Japanese girls.

Each of them earned more than \$100,000 last year grappling and kicking opponents in rings around Japan.

Each day the powerful pair receives 300 fan letters. Their fan club has 12,000 members and is growing. Tickets, ranging from \$9 to \$22, are sold out for nearly every appearance.

They've been on television talent and game shows over 50 times. Their three records have sold a total of one million copies.

Why have they attained such enormous popularity in a country where the ideal of feminine beauty and domesticity is still prevalent?

"Beauty Pair's" manager, Kenichi Aizawa, has one explanation. "Many women are attracted by the sight of women who can fight this way," he says.

"Many young male stars are effeminate and so young girls are turning to strong women.

"We often hear girls saying that boys are too weak. This is why they love 'Beauty Pair.'"

In a sold-out bout at Chiba, east of Tokyo, 14-year-old Miyuki Hashimo-

to sat in a \$12 front row seat, for which she had saved her money for two months.

"I love 'Beauty Pair' because they are stylish" she said. "They're strong, like men."

Aizawa claims that "the most attractive point about women's wrestling is not muscle, vulgarity or brutality, but speed and physical beauty."

However, he concedes that all of those characteristics are part of the appeal of "Beauty Pair" contests.

"Beauty Pair" is matched against "Black Pair," notoriously wicked opponents who scowl at the audience, beat up the referee and bite, scratch and poke eyes in a no-holds-barred effort to defeat and seemingly maim the dynamic duo.

For the young fans who alternately yell encouragement, cover their eyes in horror and cheer wildly, each confrontation is a match between the forces of good and evil.

At times, with four combatants and their corner helpers belting each other up and down the aisles in the audience, it resembles nothing more than a bar room brawl.

Isawa admits the action is partly a show designed to entertain the audience. He still asserts that Jackie and Maki are clearly the strongest and most skillful women wrestlers he's ever seen.

They have each won 80 per cent of their bouts, individually and in tandem.

Women's wrestling first came to Japan in 1948 as a mixture of combat and strip-tease, but did not catch on.

However, 10 years ago the All Japan Women's Pro-Wrestling Corporation was started and soon developed a sizable following.

There are now 250 women's

matches annually compared to 150 men's contests.

"It's now a sport the whole family can watch and applaud," according to Aizawa. The future looks strong for women's wrestling in Japan as well.

"The corporation received more than 3,000 replies to an ad for eight openings this February. They expect a total of 5,000 girls to try out, compared to 600 last year.

The rise of "Beauty Pair" is most responsible for popularizing the sport. The corporation got the idea of pairing the two from a successful all-women's operetta.

Since they felt both girls were attractive as well as strong, they sought to cast them in the image of superwomen.

The overnight stardom stunned everyone, especially the unassuming teen-agers themselves, who were initially afraid of the slightly hysterical crowds of young admirers.

In December 1976 they recorded their pop song, "Beauty Pair," and

were suddenly performing before auditoriums packed with 3,000 or more adoring fans.

The superwomen both enjoyed sports more than books, with Jackie excelling in basketball and Maki in volleyball. They dropped out of high school and turned to wrestling.

Jackie recalled this decision in an interview. "I did not want to lead an ordinary life but wanted to do something special," she said. "I wanted to use my healthy body to realize this ambition."

Despite the rough and punishing action in the ring, both girls are reserved personally, even shy.

Maki is soft-spoken with neatly styled, tinted brown hair and a pretty smile while Jackie has a somewhat deeper voice and black hair and is also attractive.

Both spoke hardly above a whisper in their dressing room before a match while dozens of young girls clamored for their grappling heroines outside the door.

Jackie weighs in at 5'7" and 150

pounds while Maki is 5'6" and 139

pounds. Both have solid but shapely figures although they are clearly more at home on the canvas as wrestlers where they are fast and sure, then as dancers, where they appear wooden and tense.

Each plans to wrestle for several more years after which they hope to

own boutiques. Aizawa says, "Many women wrestlers later become traditional Japanese housewives who treat their husbands like kings when they quit."

Will "Beauty Pair" also revert from superwomen to obedient housewives? "I don't know," replied Jackie. "I've never thought about that problem."

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