



Brazil's sumo wrestlers attend a practice session in Sao Paulo, Brazil.—AFP photos

In Brazil, sumo looks to break through

Every two weeks, Rui Junior drives eight hours from his hometown of Londrina to Sao Paulo for a training session in sumo, which is trying to get its due in Brazil. Even though the South American country is home to the largest Japanese community outside Japan, the ancient form of wrestling is still a fledgling sport here, and training is not always all that easy. “I’ve been going to Sao Paulo for years to practice,” says Junior, who is 25 years and weighs in at 160 kilograms.

“It’s an eight-hour drive to get there, and another eight hours to get home. It costs me a fair bit of money, but it’s worth it. It makes me really happy,” he tells AFP. Junior is a 10-time Brazil heavyweight champion and a three-time winner in

all of South America. He is the main attraction at weekly training sessions at the Mie Nishi gym in Sao Paulo, which claims it is the only public ring outside Japan solely for sumo wrestling. Inside, about 10 men and women in different weight classes—none of them of Asian descent—train together.

In their mawashis, the sport’s trademark groin-girdling belts, they warm up in a circle around the dohyo, or dirt ring where the fighters battle each other. But these amateur sumos are far from achieving the level of the pros in Japan. With his thick beard and round stomach, Junior stands out from his fellow gym mates, who are mostly rather slim. Without a viable sparring partner in Londrina, Junior started playing American football to stay in shape. “I have to train on my own, because it’s

