



technically rather difficult. Even if I know the right techniques, I need someone to train me, show me what I'm doing wrong," he says.

#### Strength and agility

Several of the men and women who practice sumo in Sao Paulo, including Junior, are getting ready for the World Sumo Championships, which will take place later this month in Osaka. Among the women, the best known is 40-year-old Fernanda Rojas, who will represent Brazil for the "sixth or seventh" time at worlds. Rojas says sumo among women got more popular in Brazil "when sumo was battling to be recognized as an Olympic sport."

"Nowadays, there are a fair number of female sumos in the country, and that number is growing every day, as there are school programs in place," she explains. Mixed-gender training sessions help the women be more competitive, she adds. "Sumo is not just a question of strength; it's also about agility," Rojas says. To help spread sumo across Brazil, the Japanese government sent a coach under the auspices of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

#### 'Some think it's weird'

Guilherme Vaz, a 17-year-old who will head to the world championships for the first time in the middleweight division, is a promising prospect. "I'm very motivated. I could come back with a medal. My main rivals come from Japan and Mongolia," says Vaz, who says his passion for sumo is part of a family tradition. Vaz also trains at Mie Nishi in Sao Paulo as he has no viable training partners in his hometown in the suburbs of the Brazilian mega-city.

The teen explains that he tried to convince his friends to do sumo, but that he couldn't because "it's a sport that falls victim to a lot of preconceived notions." "Some think it's weird to fight bare-chested, to grapple with another man... I try to tell them that it's not like that, to change their view of things, but it's complicated," Vaz admits.—AFP

