



## ARTS & CULTURE

# Japanese Wrestler Learns Ancient Martial Art in Senegal

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In a dirty street passage in the Senegalese city of Thies, Japanese **wrestler** Shogo Uozumi lay face-down in the sand.

He had just been thrown into the air by a larger opponent.

Uozumi then rose to his feet, cleaned himself off and rejoined the group of wrestlers.

Uozumi competed in Greco-Roman wrestling in Japan at a national level. Last year, he left Tokyo for Thies to master a Senegalese wrestling form known as Laamb. Now he is sharing his knowledge of the Olympic form of the sport with local wrestlers.

"Every time I train, I feel myself getting stronger," he said. "I feel a lot of joy and growth within me."

Laamb has its beginnings in ancient war ceremonies. It has gone from a traditional activity that takes place after crops are harvested to become Senegal's national sport. Laamb mixes physical combat and **acrobatics**. Victory is marked when an opponent's back touches the ground.

Uozumi discovered the style of wrestling during a trip to Senegal with Japan's aid agency in 2017. He was interested by the country's cultural similarities to Japan such as the importance of **hospitality**.

Since moving to Senegal in 2022, Uozumi has lived with a community of wrestlers in Thies, Senegal's third largest city. He has also set up a school with about 36 students. He is helping them prepare for the 2026 Youth Olympics.

Cheikh Badiane is a Laamb wrestler and one of Uozumi's closest friends.

"He showed me what it means to **commit** oneself, to leave one's country without being well-paid, knowing that he would only have enough to live on, to develop our sport," Badiane said.

"I would help him whatever it cost me."

Uozumi and Badiane coached wrestlers at a national competition last month in Saint-Louis, Senegal's colonial capital. Hundreds of people came to watch.

One of Uozumi and Badiane's students went home with the silver medal in her weight class.

"Senegalese people live together, with their families, their friends, and they all support each other in this way," Uozumi said on returning to Thies. "That's my kind of culture."

I'm Dan Novak.

*Dan Novak adapted this story for VOA Learning English based on reporting by Reuters.*

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## Words in This Story

**wrestler** -n. a sport in which two competitors try to force each other to the ground

**acrobatics** — *n.* a kind of performance that involves skilled movements, jumping and swinging in the air on ropes, bars or rings

**hospitality** — *n.* kind and friendly treatment of visitors and guests

**commit (oneself)** — *v.* to give time, energy and attention to something or someone