

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves today in Kadriorg handed over the Order of the White Star to the sumo wrestler Kaido Hõõvelson; the decoration was awarded to him on the eve of this year's Independence Day to acknowledge Hõõvelson's achievements as an athlete and for bringing the people of Estonia and Japan closer together.

"It is quite impossible to underestimate the work that Kaido Hõõvelson has done on introducing Estonia in Japan through his achievements. And vice versa. He has brought Japan much closer to us. This is a job and accomplishment of an ambassador, a cultural and sports ambassador that, apart from victories and prizes, deserves sincere acknowledgement from all of us," told President Ilves.

According to the President, the best athletes are considered heroes in both Japan and Estonia as they represent the essence of the best characteristics of a nation – diligence, dignity, determination, calmness and a professional attitude.

Speeches were also made at the decoration awarding ceremony by Kaido Hõõvelson himself, the Ambassador of Japan, Hideaki Hoshi, and Professor of Asian Cultural History of Tallinn University, Rein Raud. The Chairman of the Estonian Olympic Committee, Mart Siimann, former coaches of Hõõvelson, Riho Rannikmaa and Aavo Põhjala, and Artur Talvik, who made a documentary of Hõõvelson some years ago, also honoured the event with their presence.

Hõõvelson, who originally comes from Laekvere, Lääne-Virumaa and competes under the name Baruto, has worked his way up to the top of sumo hierarchy during his eight year athletic career; he is one of the few wrestlers that will probably be elected to become a yokozuna or the ruler of professional sumo. Baruto won his first big tournament in January of this year.

Office of the President
Public Relations Department
Phone +372 631 6229