

Tochinishiki Kiyotaka (1925 – 1990) the 44th yokozuna (Part 2 of 2)

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Photos by Mark Buckton*

With the feeling that a fellow Tokyo-born rikishi should not be denied his rightful place, prior to the end of the September 1954 basho, yokozuna Azumafuji announced his retirement. Tochinishiki is said to have sent a messenger to Azumafuji to ask him not to retire because of him, but Azumafuji's mind was made up. Although pictures of the five yokozuna together exist from this era, in Ozumo there is still no single basho with five yokozuna on the banzuke. After his retirement, Azumafuji became Toshiyori Nishikido; however, he left Ozumo several months later to escape from an internal feud between Takasago and Tatsunami oyakata.

In this same September basho, his fourth sekiwake basho, despite beating three yokozuna and finishing with an 11 win-4 loss record, Wakanohana did not get promoted to ozeki, which he desperately wanted to keep up with Tochinishiki. Seeing his rival Tochinishiki promoted to yokozuna, Wakanohana was more determined than ever to beat Tochinishiki as Wakanohana viewed his single loss to Tochinishiki to be the crucial difference that denied him the ozeki promotion.

Even though both Wakanohana and Tochinishiki were dominant and very popular in their Tochi-Waka years from 1955 to 1960, they had to constantly battle through such physically larger and formidable opponents as yokozuna Kagamisato, Chiyonoyama, Yoshibayama and Asashio. Even little nagging injuries could test their mettle as they needed to have



*Memorial commemorating the 60th anniversary of the opening of
Shimo Koiwa Elementary School*

unmatched mental fortitude to maintain their yokozuna-like record one basho after another. Wakanohana was promoted to yokozuna after the 1958 January basho.

In this time, Tochinishiki won six yusho, and one equivalent yusho after losing to Wakanohana in the

yusho deciding bout at the 1959 May basho. He also had seven basho where he had the next best record to the yusho winner. Other than kyujo basho, Tochinishiki only had three basho in which he failed to win 11 or more. Considering his size and the strong opponents he had to face, the records are nothing short of



extraordinary.

One of the most dramatic basho Tochinishiki had was the 1959 July basho, in which he won 14 straight bouts from day 1 and won the yusho on day 14. On his way to the yusho celebration, Tochinishiki's father was killed in a traffic accident. Hearing about the death of his father on senshuraku, Tochinishiki prepared for the day's bout against his opponent Wakanohana by participating in a rigorous training session. Conducting himself as if nothing unusual had occurred, he went up on the dohyo fully focused on his opponent and quickly pushed Wakanohana out of the dohyo. It was the finest triumph for Tochinishiki. As he held the yusho cup high, there were tears in his eyes.

Their last bout came on senshuraku at the 1960 March basho and like every one of their previous bouts, it turned out to be memorable. It was a dramatic finish to the basho - two yokozuna, both with a 14-0 record, facing each other on senshuraku. The basho yusho was on the line. For all Ozumo fans it could not get better than this. After going after one another by otsuke, both

settled into a yotsu position in the middle of the dohyo. Nearly two minutes passed, Wakanohana moved to push Tochinishiki out of

the dohyo when Tochinishiki attempted a climactic utchari. But on this day Wakanohana overpowered Tochinishiki as Tochinishiki had to step back and ended up with his foot out of the dohyo.

As the public expectation of the first two 14-0 yokozuna bout in Ozumo history was approaching a feverish pitch, Wakanohana later recalled the heightened atmosphere the night before their bout, "The night before senshuraku, I decided to go and see a movie to calm myself. After my eyes got used to being inside the darkened theatre, I noticed a rikishi sitting in front of me. I rubbed my eyes to see well. It was Tochinishiki-zeki. I thought that Tochinishiki-zeki had also had to get away from all the tensions and pressures at his heya. As soon as the movie was over, I ran out of



the theatre without being recognized. Anyway, I woke up in the middle of the night and couldn't get back to sleep. When I got up on the dohyo, the only thing I was thinking about was to have a good quality bout. That's what I kept telling myself."

In the next basho, at the 1960 May basho, after losing to Tokitsuyama on Day 1 and Annenyama on Day 2, Tochinishiki suddenly announced his retirement on Day 3. All sumo fans expressed their deep regret at seeing a great yokozuna retire. There were calls for him to reconsider but Tochinishiki was remembering his late shisho, former yokozuna Tochigiyama's lesson on what it meant to be a yokozuna.

"A yokozuna should not be retiring because he has no other recourse but to do so. You know yourself the best so don't ever misjudge when it's time to go. When it's time to leave, leave gracefully like a beautiful cherry flower falls and

flies away. Unless you work three times harder than anyone else, you cannot maintain the dignity of a yokozuna."

The golden age of Tochi-Waka came to an end this basho. In their era, Tochinishiki had 19 wins and 15 losses against Wakanohana. Even though Wakanohana persisted for two more years after Tochinishiki retired, it was obvious that a new wind was about to blow in and a new generation was knocking on the door. Two new stars, Taiho and Kashiwado, were about to build their own golden era in Ozumo.

After retiring from active sumo and becoming Kasugano oyakata, Tochinishiki developed yokozuna Tochinoumi and ozeki Tochihihikari. He served 14 years as the chairman of the Kyokai, and most notably he helped to build the Ryogoku Kokugikan without incurring any debt. Along with Futagoyama oyakata, his rival

Wakanohana during his active years, he also worked tirelessly to reform tradition-bound Ozumo. Ironically, one of the things he worked hard for was to have a proper tachiai. During his active years he was well known for never having his hands touching the ground at the shikiri.

At the just-completed Ryogoku Kokugikan in 1985, former yokozuna Tochinishiki performed his ceremonial Kanreki dohyo-iri accompanied by former yokozuna and later Kyokai chairmen Sadanoyama and Wakanohana. In his later years, Tochinishiki suffered from diabetes and in 1988 he finally made way for Futagoyama oyakata to take over the chairman's post. Just prior to the November basho in 1989, he suffered a stroke and on January 10 1990, he passed away in a Fukuoka hospital. He was only one month away from his formal retirement from the Kyokai.

Tochinishiki Kiyotaka

Born:	February 20, 1925
Real name:	Kiyoshi Otsuka (later Kiyoshi Nakata, adopted by yokozuna Tochigiyama)
Place of birth:	Edogawa-ward Tokyo (formerly Minami Katsushika-gun, Tokyo)
Heya:	Kasugano
Shikona:	Otsuka - Tochinishiki
Dohyo debut:	January 1939
Juryo debut:	May 1944
Makuuchi debut:	June 1947
Ozeki debut:	January 1953
Yokozuna debut:	January 1955
Final basho:	May 1960
Highest rank:	Yokozuna
Height:	177 cm
Weight:	132 kg
Favorite techniques:	Hidari-yotsu, yori, oshi, shitate-dashi-nage
Died:	January 10, 1990 (64 years old)
Toshiyori:	Kasugano (9th)
Makuuchi basho:	52 basho, 513 win, 203 loss, 1 draw, 32 kyujo
Win ratio:	0.716
Yusho:	10
Sansho award:	Shukun-sho (1), Gino-sho (9), Kin-boshi (1)