

Hitachiyama Taniemon (1874 - 1922)

Part #2

by Joe Kuroda

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Their ultimate encounter took place on Day 9 of the 1903 May Basho - Hitachiyama's fifth basho as an ozeki. Ranked East and West ozeki respectively, both went undefeated into the bout. The sell out crowd waited with baited breath and watched the shikiri of the great rivals – a true contrast in style and personality, Umegatani's calm movements versus Hitachiyama's dynamism. The subsequent bout did not disappoint the spectators as each man offered his best moves. However, when the dust had cleared, Hitachiyama had prevailed.

After the basho, while Hitachiyama's yokozuna promotion was assured, there were lingering doubts concerning the promotion of Umegatani to the rank of yokozuna as Ozutsu still active and, until that time, no precedent existed in which three yokozuna ruled the roost at the same time. When Hitachiyama learned of his promotion, he asked that his rival, Umegatani be promoted at the same time; a story that reflects Hitachiyama's character so well, and the deserved respect he garnered from others in his position as the supreme leader in Ozumo. The House of Yoshida Tsukasa concurred and granted Umegatani's yokozuna promotion at the same time.

There was no doubt Hitachiyama deserved the promotion. Despite losing to Araiwa (later an ozeki) on Day 6 of his first basho as a

yokozuna and therefore seeing the end to his winning streak stand at 27, Hitachiyama went on to win the next 32 bouts – excluding bouts ending in draws, holds or kyujo non-appearances.



*Hitachiyama collectible –
Mark Buckton*

Hitachiyama was invincible on the dohyo but the man was also considered a great beyond the confines of the dohyo. He is known to have often said 'rikishi' is written with the character 'shi' meaning 'bushi' (samurai) and 'strength' (chikara or riki) in Japanese. He strived hard to perfect the honor and grace thereby expected of a rikishi; his compassionate treatment of, and dealings with other rikishi earning him the honorary nickname of General / Big Boss / Godfather.

More than anything else

Hitachiyama wanted to see Ozumo held in high regard by Japanese society as a supreme form of culture and art intertwined with uniquely Japanese values, traditions and customs. He spared no efforts in striving to accomplish this goal and was soon a literal visionary, a pioneer and a crusader on behalf of Ozumo as he toured the United States and Europe from August 1907 whilst still an active yokozuna. He even performed his unique Hitachiyama style dohyo-iri in front of then US President Roosevelt at the White House. (the dohyo-iri in question in the Unryu style but with a slight difference, performed by no other yokozuna since).

Had Hitachiyama focused more on his sumo at this time, he could have been a far greater yokozuna with better, numerical accomplishments, but as a result of his world tour he missed regular basho as well as jungyo meaning that by the time he returned to Japan, he was no longer the same formidable yokozuna he once was. He did win seven of 10 bouts at the June, 1909 tournament and, the following January he won the yusho with 7 wins 2 draws and one kyujo, but he never again won more than seven bouts in a basho.

The heya he belonged to - Dewanoumi Beya - was a feeble, second rate heya when he joined Ozumo, but by the time he retired from active sumo after the June, 1914 basho, and when he himself inherited the heya, it had transformed into a major heya capable of attracting many young

recruits wishing to be trained by Hitachiyama.

The great man's retirement ceremony lasted three days with yokozuna Tachiyama (as Tachimochi) and Umegatani (as Tsuyuharai) performing the dohyo-iri honors in what was deemed such a splendid show that it remains a part of the ceremonial make-up of sumo to this day.

As a shisho and oyakata, Hitachiyama / Dewanoumi Taniemon was a strict disciplinarian. He was always seen carrying a bamboo stick on or near the heya dohyo and all recruits knew better than to slack off during training sessions or even to exhibit bad behavior as they were sure to be on the end of a swift beating or two. At the same time they all knew, that behind the stern, external demeanor, Hitachiyama cared for each and every rikishi in his charge and that were they ever in trouble he would be in their corner.

During his tenure as the fifth Dewanoumi Oyakata, Dewanoumi Beya produced three yokozuna - Onishiki, Tochigiyama and Tsunenohana - as well as ozeki, Kyushuzan, Tsushimanada, Onosato and Hitachiwa and over twenty other makuuchi rikishi. Hitachiyama was instrumental in establishing Dewanoumi Beya as Ozumo's supreme force during the Taisho and early Showa eras while his time as a Kyokai executive saw him cement Ozumo in the national psyche and fabric of Japanese society as well as performing as an international ambassador for the sport by successfully staging exhibition tournaments in Hawaii and on the US mainland.

Hitachiyama, through his social networking skills, also established a solid supporter club system for rikishi and heya, thereby stabilizing and helping to maintain ongoing operations in and around

Ozumo. For a long time Ozumo was in need of a permanent indoor facility, but lacked the financial backing required to build such a structure. Outdoor venues at Eko-in Temple (near the present day Kokugikan) or Yasukuni Shrine accommodated several thousand spectators but events were always at the mercy of the weather; Ozumo desperately needed its own home.

It is abundantly clear that without Hitachiyama's presence the first Kokugikan would have never been built. He worked to accumulate resources and establish business connections to lay the ground work required of such a plan, and negotiated with bankers to finance an almost interest free loan to help erect the building. Businessmen, contractors and builders all felt at ease dealing with Hitachiyama. To them Hitachiyama was someone they could trust, and faith in his words was well placed. He was in fact seen as the chairman of the board, representing the whole of Ozumo at the time.

Not all was serious and business like though as there are so many amusing stories associated with Hitachiyama; chanko's appearance on the sumo scene perhaps the most intriguing as the staple of today's rikishi is said to have its own origins somehow related to Hitachiyama. He was also known to be a whisky drinker and went so far as to import a car so he could drive around the streets of Tokyo.

Another story often told of the one time great revolves around him visiting the homes of those whose deaths were announced in newspapers of the time as he believed that anyone famous enough to have his death publicly announced must have contributed something to Ozumo. He was also well known for his love of women and it's been often said that whenever a woman showed up with a child to tell him, he was the father, he used to help them out

financially - without even bothering to check the claim. To this day there are apparently still many families in Japan boasting a lineage connecting them to Hitachiyama.

Hitachiyama passed away suddenly - in his home not too far away from the current Kokugikan, on June 19, 1922. He was only 48 years old. Even at the time of his death he wanted to contribute to others as his last will stated his desire to have his body donated to medical research.

Hitachiyama was loved by all who came in contact with him and was by far the most respected figure in Ozumo. The Sumo Association organized a formal funeral for the former yokozuna - the first time in their history they had done so - and it was reported that the funeral cortege stretched uninterrupted from Tokyo's Ueno Station to Ryogoku Bashi Bridge, a distance of around six kilometers.

His grave at Tenno-ji Temple (pictured in Part 1) in Tokyo's Yanaka Cemetery has an inscription on the gravestone that reads 'Dewanoumi Taniemon's grave' but, according to an historian, just the hair of the legendary Ozumo figure was buried at this location.

Hitachiyama's real grave is located in the community cemetery in Sakado, Mito City, Ibaraki. The gravestone there is inscribed as 'Ichige Taniemon's Grave' and a memorial here was inscribed by historian and professor of literature at the University of Tokyo, the late Katsumi Kuroita.

In 1941, on the twentieth anniversary of his death, a memorial stone was erected in his honor at the Toshogu Shrine in Mito City. On the stone headed by the sixth Dewanoumi Oyakata (Kajinosuke, former komusubi Ryogoku), the names of 24 oyakata, 23 makuuchi rikishi, nine

juryo rikishi and five gyoji can be seen. The memorial was scripted by the ninth Negishi Jiemon (of the House of Negishi - originators of the Negishi style kanji and holders of a Toshiyori Myoseki no longer in use.

The sixth Dewanoumi, Dewanoumi Kajinosuke,

acknowledged the great accomplishments of his shisho, Hitachiyama, by removing the 'no' character from the Dewanoumi name when writing it in kanji. It was 出羽ノ海 – it is now simply 出羽海.

Hitachiyama was, and is a man

without equal in sumo – numerical records achieved by rikishi may be erased by subsequent generations of rikishi; they are fleeting and temporary. But, the legacies left behind by great builders such as Hitachiyama are eternal.

Hitachiyama Taniemon

Born:	January 19 1874
Real name:	Tani (Taniemon) Ichige
Place of birth:	Mito City, Ibaraki Prefecture
Heya:	Irumagawa=>Dewanoumi=>Mitsuminato (Nagoya) =>Nakamura (Osaka) =>Dewanoumi
Shikona:	Onishiyama => Hitachiyama
Dohyo debut:	June 1892
Juryo debut:	May 1898
Makuuchi debut:	January 1899
Ozeki debut:	May 1901
Yokozuna debut:	January 1904
Final basho:	June 1914
Highest rank:	Yokozuna
Height:	174 cm
Weight:	146 kg
Favorite techniques:	Izumigawa, tsuri
Died:	June 19, 1922 (48 years old, died as an active Sumo Association executive)
Toshiyori Myoseki:	Dewanoumi (the fifth Dewanoumi)
Makuuchi basho:	32 - 150 wins, 15 losses, 22 draws, 131 kyujo, 2 holds
Win ratio:	0.909
Yusho:	1 (6 equivalent times)