

Rikishi of Old

The 16th Yokozuna Nishinoumi Kajiro I (1855~1908)

by Joe Kuroda

November 30th 2008 marked 100 years since the death of the first Nishinoumi Kajiro, the 16th yokozuna. He was the first of three Nishinoumi in the history of ozumo, and the very first rikishi to be identified as a yokozuna on the banzuke. The first two sumotori officially granted the yokozuna license were two sekiwake, Tanikaze Kajinosuke and Onogawa Kisaburo, according to research conducted by the 12th Grand Champion Jinmaku Kyugoro for the Yokozuna Monument to preserve the institution of yokozuna.

In early days of yokozuna licensing, as Tanikaze and Onogawa proved, rikishi did not need to hold ozeki ranks. The eighth yokozuna, Shiranui Gonzaemon, was even demoted to sekiwake two years after he was granted the license, underscoring yokozuna's resemblance to an honorary degree before Nishinoumi I's dramatic intervention. In May 1898, Konishiki Yasokichi became the last 'yokozuna' of the 19th century, and the last to be etched onto the Yokozuna Monument before Jinmaku finally erected it within Tokyo's Tomioka Hachimangu Shrine in 1900.

In the 100 years (1789-1889) separating the yokozuna promotions of Tanikaze and Onogawa, and that of Nishinoumi, there were only 10 yokozuna, an average of only one per decade. This bears stark contrast to the 20th century, which saw 50 grand champions crowned. The figures clearly indicate that the yokozuna

tradition was not yet firmly entrenched in the era of the first Nishinoumi. Thus, in hindsight, can it easily be seen that installation on the banzuke led to wider acceptance of the yokozuna as an integral institution and generated much more interest in sumo.

However, unlike Jinmaku, who was solely intent on preserving the legacy of the a great institution, Nishinoumi had few noble intentions when demanding formal recognition of his yokozuna title. Although never actually demanding a grand champion ranking, had he not expressed his grievance so vociferously, we may never have seen the yokozuna kanji on the banzuke.

Born Kajiro Kozono on February 19th 1855, the first Nishinoumi was the oldest son of a farmer in what is now Satsuma Sendai City in Kagoshima. He grew up strong, helping his family tend to their farm while participating in local sumo tournaments when time permitted. It quickly became apparent that he had no equal in the sumo competitions.

This was a time of swift and radical social change in Japan, as the men from the Satsuma domain, headed by Musashimaru-lookalike Takamori Saigo and Toshimichi Okubo, were liberating Japan from 250 years of control by the Tokugawa Shogunate. As other young men in his neighborhood were leaving their village to fulfill their ambitions, Nishinoumi aspired to challenge the established order by utilizing his god-given strength.

Nishinoumi first headed south to a well-known Osaka Sumo stable, Asahiyama-beya, but unfortunately all rikishi were out of town for jungyo and there was no-one he could talk to about joining. He then approached another sumo group based in Kyoto and, in August 1873, was admitted to Tokinokoe-beya. Debuting with a shikona of Nishinoumi ('Western Ocean'), he progressed to west sandanme by July 1874 and was ranked at Makushita Nidanme – equivalent to today's juryo – by August 1875. He was promoted to makuuchi for September 1876, before achieving a sekiwake ranking at the 1879 September Osaka basho, sponsored jointly by the Osaka and Kyoto Sumo groups.

Two key factors helped to accelerate Nishinoumi's sumo career. The first was a steady deterioration of Kyoto Sumo as it struggled financially. As a result, it held more joint basho with Osaka Sumo, making it possible for Nishinoumi to gain more exposure. Another was the transfer of Uragoro Takasago (1838-1900) to Osaka from Tokyo Sumo, the largest of all sumo groups. The later founder of Takasago-beya, Uragoro was a rebel in his early years, organizing a movement to demand better treatment and fair distribution of revenues for all rikishi. With an ego as huge as a sumotori, Takasago was eventually forced to quit Tokyo Sumo and decided to stage his own tournaments in Osaka. Nishinoumi, admiring Takasago's entrepreneurial skills, soon joined the Takasago Reform

Group and became a fixture in jungyo tours, earning respect from Takasago for his work ethic.

Takasago was subsequently able to rejoin the Tokyo Sumo Association in 1878, thanks to mediation efforts by his supporters, and strived hard to poach talented rikishi such as Nishinoumi from Osaka. In January 1882, Takasago's rejuvenated powers in Tokyo were highlighted as he somehow orchestrated a makuuchi tsukedashi debut ranking for Nishinoumi. The Western Ocean did not disappoint on his Tokyo debut, finishing with six wins, one loss and one draw. In the following June 1882 basho, at the guest rank of makuuchi kyakuseki, he registered four wins, three losses and one draw. Subsequently, Nishinoumi climbed to komusubi in May 1883, sekiwake in January 1884 and finally to ozeki in January 1885 – just seven basho after his dohyo debut. Such progress, amazing for any rikishi, was especially remarkable for a rikishi coming out of Kyoto Sumo, which was considered vastly inferior to its Tokyo counterpart.

Nishinoumi always possessed raw natural power but lacked the techniques to be truly successful until he joined Takasago-beya. His oyakata was a superb teacher of sumo as well as a great manager, telling Nishinoumi to hone the technique for his favorite move, izumigawa. The move, no longer recognized by the Sumo Kyokai, is a form of kimedashi executed by locking an opponent's arm with both hands and pushing him out by using an elbow. It was said to have been originated by the Edo era Sekiwake Izumigawa Sadaemon, also from Kagoshima.

Nishinoumi was blessed with strong training partners at Takasago-beya, which – at the time of his joining – was the hotbed of talented and hungry rikishi, collecting a staggering 17

yusho from the 24 available between May 1883 and January 1895. In addition to yusho-winners Odate, Ichinoya, Konishiki and Asashio, the heya also trained up several sekiwake: Ayanami, Sakahoko, Takamiyama and Hibikimitsu. Heya-mates Odate and Ichinoya became great rivals of Nishinoumi as each vied hard for ozeki status, causing Nishinoumi to drop to sekiwake at the 1886 January Basho despite finishing with kachikoshi at ozeki. At the time, a rikishi could only move up or down one side of the banzuke, and a sekiwake east with a better record than ozeki east would leapfrog the latter regardless of his kachikoshi.

Odate, who won three straight yusho, only held himself back from yokozuna status by exceptionally bad behavior. Upset at not being ranked as a senior ozeki in May 1884, Odate confronted his shisho, Takasago, who told him to remain patient. Dissatisfied with sweet talk, Odate proceeded to beat Takasago rather mercilessly, and should have known better with whom he was dealing. Takasago oyakata – never one to turn down a good fight – bounded back with a samurai sword, causing Odate to literally run for his life into the relatively safe haven of Isenoumi-beya.

At the 1887 January Basho, Ichinoya won his second yusho and Nishinoumi dropped to komusubi. However, he regained sekiwake status quickly after Odate's demotion to komusubi due to an alcohol-induced liver ailment. Then, after winning the yusho of May 1889, Nishinoumi returned to ozeki. Although he finished with a 7-2 record in January 1890 – his only basho at ozeki following re-promotion – Nishinoumi was to be granted a yokozuna license by the House of Yoshida Tsukasa at a special tournament held for the Emperor on February 15th. The decision rather reflected appreciation for

Nishinoumi's long tenure in makuuchi as well as Takasago oyakata's hard work. It was not exactly an objective promotion, but the Kyokai needed a yokozuna to perform the dohyo-iri in front of the Emperor and felt Nishinoumi deserved the honour.

Unfortunately the yokozuna license did not arrive in time and Nishinoumi could not perform the prestigious dohyo-iri. He formally received the Yoshida blessing on February 21st and even received another yokozuna license from the rival House of Gojo from Kyoto on March 1. Nishinoumi thus understandably craved recognition as the top-ranking rikishi in the following 1890 May Basho. Alas, his dreams were dashed as the Kyokai simply followed their standard practice of elevating a sanyaku rikishi with most wins to the top ozeki-ranking – in this case, sekiwake Konishiki, who had stormed to an 8-0 zensho-yusho in the previous basho. On the East side, Komusubi Onaruto's fine record also merited ozeki status, meaning that the total number of ozeki positions would be expanded from two to four for the first time in sumo history. It also meant two ozeki slots were classed as haridashi ('sticking out'), and that these wrestlers' names would be written outside the normal banzuke, on the east and west extremities of the sheet.

Realizing that far from heading the banzuke, his name would be confined to a mere outcropping, Nishinoumi expressed unhappiness to his shisho and Kyokai executives. 'This is a sheer insult,' he allegedly told his oyakata. 'I have been granted a yokozuna license but still placed below a mere ozeki as haridashi.' The 1890 May Basho banzuke initially had Konishiki as the first east ozeki and Nishinoumi at east haridashi. With the Kyokai unwilling to devote overtime to an issue they deemed petty, a quick compromise was drafted. A

crowning note of 'Yokozuna,' rather than 'Ozeki,' was placed next to Nishinoumi's name in the haridashi area. After Nishinoumi somehow bought the idea, the Kyokai failed to realize that a precedent had been set for defining yokozuna as the supreme ranking on the banzuke, and that the perception of yokozuna would be changed forever.

With his 176-centimetre and 126-kilogram frame, Nishinoumi did not overwhelm opponents consistently until sharpening his technique upon becoming a yokozuna. He had an air of the old samurai about him, and was well known for his carefree and rather cavalier attitude toward life. Even right before his most crucial bouts, he was often seen calmly taking a nap in the dressing room. Nishinoumi sat out several days of the 12 tournaments during his seven-year yokozuna stint, winning the 1894 January Basho with a 7-0 (equivalent to the

yusho) when he was 38 years old. Like many in his day, he did not become a yokozuna until over 30 years of age, and thus did not retire with outstanding records on the top rank. However, his contribution to Ozumo was quite significant as he passed the torch admirably from the 15th yokozuna Umegatani Totaro to his heyamate, Konishiki.

At 40 years of age, Nishinoumi decided to retire in January 1896 and immediately inherited the toshiyori myoseki of Izutsu (thus becoming the 7th Izutsu oyakata). Having recruited his own rikishi even while active from his birthplace of Kagoshima, after founding Izutsu Beya, Nishinoumi developed the 25th Yokozuna Nishinoumi II and Ozeki Komagatake. In fact the current Izutsu Beya can trace its roots to the first Nishinoumi Kajiro. Even today it is known as the heyama where "any able boy from Kagoshima may join".

The first Nishinoumi Kajiro passed away on November 30, 1908 as a result of a heart ailment. The heyama was inherited by his beloved recruit from Tanegashima island in Kagoshima. This man was the second Nishinoumi Kajiro, the 25th yokozuna who went on to groom Genjiyama, later renamed as the third Nishinoumi Kajiro, the 30th yokozuna.

The legacy of Nishinoumi still lives on with Izutsu Beya headed by the 14th Izutsu oyakata (former Sekiwake Sakahoko) and Shikoroyama Beya headed by his younger brother ex-Sekiwake Terao. The father of Terao and Sakahoko was former Sekiwake Tsurugamine (the 13th Izutsu oyakata), whose wife was the granddaughter of the second Nishinoumi Kajiro (the 8th Izutsu oyakata). The next yokozuna from either Heyama will, in all likelihood, become the fourth Nishinoumi Kajiro.

Nishinoumi Kajiro I

西ノ海 嘉治郎 初代

Born in:	Satsuma Sendai, Kagoshima Prefecture
Born on:	February 19, 1855
Real name:	Kajiro Kozono
Shikona:	Nishinoumi Kajiro
Heya:	Tokinokoe (Kyoto Sumo), Takasago
Dohyo debut:	January Basho 1882 (makuuchi tsukedashi)
Makuuchi debut:	January 1882
Final basho:	January 1896
Highest rank:	Yokozuna
Number of makuuchi basho:	29
Makuuchi record:	127 wins, 37 losses, 21 draws, 4 holds
Winning percentage:	77.40%
Number of makuuchi yusho:	2 yusho equivalents for most wins in makuuchi
Height:	176 cm
Weight:	126 kg
Favorite techniques:	Izumigawa
Toshiyori name:	Izutsu
Died:	November 30, 1908 (53 years old)