

Silence – and absence - speak volumes! Where is the blue one?

by Eric Blair

As with the rest of the sumo followers around the world I have taken great heart in the fact that we are now back in an era of two yokozuna.

Both are hugely talented – one has already proved himself a dai-Y, the other, some years younger, looking to do so in the months and years ahead.

Of course comparisons are being made and questions asked in just how deep is the Hakuho talent pool in such rarified air and where exactly will his yusho count end-up when viewed side-by-side with those of his sempai – Asashoryu.

By opting for the Shiranui form of ring entering ceremony he has traditionalists predicting doom and destruction in the not too distant future and by being associated with the ongoing 'issues' surrounding his oyakata, Miyagino; former juryo man Kanechika, there would appear to be more than enough to keep sumo fans entertained for the blank weeks in the diary leading up to July 8th and the start of the Nagoya Basho.

One name though, perhaps only in EB's peripherals for the time being, noticeably absent in all the talk of promotion, celebrations and iri-warm-ups is that of current yokozuna – and Mongolian counterpart of Hakuho - Asashoryu Akinori.

If memory serves me correctly, the blue one has not trained with the white one for quite some time now. Not a single get together on a single stable keikoba although they did meet for a lone bout – again presuming the memory banks to be up to speed – at the May 5th YDC Yokozuna Souken at the

Kokugikan.

The 'Ryogoku grape vine' has the father-in-law of sumo's newest yokozuna as none other than the head of the Takasago Beya Supporter's Club and the very fact that these two – Asa and Haku - were once, openly, good buddies is slightly bemusing given the lack of contact in recent weeks, months even.

Has Hakuho's rise to the top irked the lone champ / caretaker of the eastern shitaku-beya these past three years? Are we going to see the kind of rivalry Hakuho's shikona is associated with by older – much older – sumo fans; the Hakuho-Jidai a name used during the Taiho/Kashiwado rivalry of the 1960s when a different reading of their names, according to several insiders – much older – from the era, was pronounced 'Hakuho'. Do we have bad blood boiling beneath the surface due to some slight or transgression of which the majority is unaware?

One thing we DO have – (or haven't as the case may be) - is a complete lack of mention of Asashoryu's name in any of the many many reports covering the promotion process,

I for one (but am I truly alone?) was hoping to see Asashoryu congratulate Hakuho in the shitaku-beya on senshuraku – the then yokozuna-elect being escorted to have his hair done in the 'higher' ranked eastern changing rooms prior to receiving the Emperor's Cup and with it the guarantee of promotion several days later. It didn't happen that I saw – Asashoryu was nowhere to be seen.

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was looking for mention of Asashoryu at the tsuna preparation in Miyagino Beya in the days ahead of the obligatory appearance at Meiji Jingu in Tokyo – training his understudy to date on feet movements or, if nothing else as a casual visit and slap on the back from a supportive friend from 'back home'. It didn't happen that I saw – Asashoryu was nowhere to be seen.

I, for one (but am I truly alone?) spent the last few days prior to the June 1st appearance before the gods looking for anything in the media or even online in which I could take heart – an indication that the current IS welcoming of the man he must now call an equal. Again – it didn't happen – Asashoryu was nowhere to be seen.

Asashoryu is a great yokozuna, statistically, but is a man lacking in terms of sportsmanship in but one guy's opinion (but am I truly alone I ask again?) .Did the dai-Y contribute in some way or other to the period of celebration the sport has just passed through? Did I alone miss it?

Are we now in an era of Asashoryu opting to trample on feelings for what he doesn't do when he really should – Ozumo precedents notwithstanding – as opposed to what he does / did?

If so - at least the wing mirrors on Tokyo's millions of motor cars can breathe a sigh of relief.

Ed. Note: The opinions expressed in this article are solely those of Mr. Blair and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Sumo Fan Magazine or other staff.