

# Tochinishiki Kiyotaka (1925 – 1990) the 44th yokozuna

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Photos by Mark Buckton*

The 44th yokozuna Tochinishiki was part of one of the golden ages of Ozumo with his hard-fought battles against rival yokozuna Wakanohana. Just after the end of World War II, their exploits on the dohyo provided a sense of relief from the daily grind to a Japanese society on the look out for renewed hope and prosperity.

As part of this period, Tochinishiki's years spent in competition with Wakanohana were labeled the Tochi-Waka age and their bouts are still remembered fondly by old time sumo fans.

Though his later years saw him go up to 140 kg, Tochinishiki started out as a slim, light-weight rikishi barely pushing the scales past 80 kg. To compete against his much bigger opponents, he initially needed to work really hard to learn a range of strategies as well as to develop a variety of sumo skills. In time he became the ultimate virtuoso and literal master technician of sumo.

Born Kiyotaka Otsuka, in what is now known as Koiwa, Edogawa



*Shimo-Koiwa - a la 2007 - three quarters of a century after Tochinishiki enrolled*

Ward in Tokyo, Tochinishiki's statue remains standing at the JR Koiwa Station to this day and has become a popular meeting spot in the area.

Kiyotaka attended Shimo-Koiwa Elementary School near the station and during his days there was an all around athlete. His father made a living by making umbrellas and so had no connection to sumo, but seeing Kiyotaka's athletic ability, a nearby vegetable shop owner introduced Kiyotaka to Kasugano Oyakata – the former yokozuna Tochigiyama.

Kiyotaka did not at first meet the weight requirement to join Ozumo so to pass the physical he had to drink several liters of water - but even then he was forced to jump quickly on and off the scale to give it a false high reading. That said,

with his superb physical ability he had no trouble in ascending the banzuke after his jonokuchi debut at the 1940 January tournament. His shikona of 'Tochinishiki' was selected by his shisho by combining his own shikona of Tochigiyama with that of yokozuna Onishiki of Dewanoumi Beya.

Tochinishiki's greatest influence was his shisho, the 27th yokozuna Tochigiyama (founder of Kasugano Beya and the man behind all subsequent Kasugano rikishi bearing the 'Tochi' part of their shikona).

During Tochinishiki's non-sekitori days, he served as a tsukebito to his shisho. The oyakata loved to sip sake after his evening meal and Tochinishiki had to stay with him all evening serving the sake and listening to his sumo philosophy.

Being young and full of energy, Tochinishiki often envied other recruits going out every night while he was forced to stay with his shisho. However, these years of learning the way of sumo directly from his shisho helped him build and maintain a mental discipline and approach to sumo life far beyond his years.

Tochinishiki made his Juryo debut at the 1944 September basho; exceptionally quick progress to sekitorihood in those days. He had no trouble obtaining his kachikoshi winning record at the basho but immediately thereafter was called up to serve in a naval unit based in Yokosuka as part of the Japanese war effort.

When Japan lost the war in August, 1945, he was based at Lake Hamana in Shizuoka Prefecture. Upon his return to Ozumo - at the rank of juryo 4 in the November tournament of 1945, he secured a 6 win, 4 loss record after which, despite finishing with a 6 win, 6 loss and 1 draw record at the 1946 November event - as a juryo 1 ranked man - was promoted to makuuchi for the 1947 June basho. He was simply in the right place at the right time as Ozumo had lost so many rikishi in the war that they needed to re-stock their ranks as quickly as possible.

With his unparalleled intensity and technical wizardry in the top flight, Tochinishiki soon became a regular recipient of the Gino-sho. It was even said that the Gino-sho was created solely for his benefit. In particular, using the left side of his body, he was unshakable and while quickly moving around behind his opponents, could down them by using a powerful leg kick.

His technical expertise can be compared favorably with Mainoumi in modern sumo as he was seen to win by such rare techniques as "harima-nage" (against Saganohana at the 1951 May basho), "tasukikaeri" (over



the 213 cm tall Fudoiwai) and, (throwing the 198 cm Ouchiyaama) (by) "kubi-nage" (in the 1955 May basho). "I used every technique in the book," Tochinishiki was reported to have said although he was recorded as using a total of 48 different kimarite during his makuuchi years.

More than anyone else Tochinishiki felt how difficult it was to compete against bigger men so, after retiring from active sumo, as the chairman of the Sumo Kyokai, he steadfastly refused to abolish the entry requirements for new recruits. "This world isn't easy for small men to survive," Tochinishiki used to say.

Tochinishiki could have intimidated his opponents with such a terrorizing stare as to freeze them on the spot. It was rather understandable then for this stare and his unbreakable grip, when secured, which saw him receive the nickname of "Viper".

Away from the dohyo, however, he was a warm and charming man which may have been down to him

remembering his shisho's words: "In Japanese rikishi is made up of two words. Riki meaning power or strength and Shi meaning a gentleman. A rikishi should be more than being merely a sumo competitor."

Perhaps the turning point of his sumo career came at the 1951 January basho. Tochinishiki was ranked at maegashira 2 for this basho and from Day 1 everything he did turned out badly. Every throw and every move he attempted helped his opponent to beat him. He was disillusioned and he was clearly losing his fighting spirit after losing seven straight from shonichi.

Tochinishiki felt a makekoshi losing record was inevitable the next day when he received a letter from one of his supporters. "My little boy is a big fan of yours. Right now he is suffering from a fever. Every time you lose, his temperature goes up. Please do your best and win one for him," an anonymous father wrote to him. Then as if it were all a bad dream, Tochinishiki started winning with

a renewed sense of spirit. He went on to win his next seven bouts and learned the child in question recovered soon after he started winning. Tochinishiki was then arranged to face Futaseyama on senshuraku. He knew he needed to have more determination than ever to secure kachikoshi as Futaseyama was one of the most aggressive rikishi in the sport at the time.

Futaseyama's was known for his no-holds barred brand of sumo; his favorite methods including harite slaps to the opponent's face. Indeed, he once downed then ozeki (later yokozuna) [Kagamisato](#) with his harite. In his bout against yokozuna Haguroyama, Futaseyama bit the yokozuna's thumb, breaking the bone and as a result losing the bout.

So, standing at 7-7, Tochinishiki went in with as much intensity as Futaseyama and both combatants displayed their best moves as they unleashed a series of throws and

pushes before they settled in the middle of dohyo in a yotsu position. As the minutes passed the gyoji eventually had to call for a mizu-iri break.

Perhaps befitting the occasion, something bizarre then took place. A drunken spectator got up onto the dohyo and started hitting the shoulders of both rikishi.

As yobidashi sped up to stop him and tried to restrain him, the whole arena went into turmoil but the event, as odd as it was had no effect on Tochinishiki who, after the break, did not hesitate and went at his foe as aggressively as he could making one throwing attempt after another until Futaseyama was overwhelmed by Tochinishiki's non-stop offense and he could not keep up; succumbing to an uwate-dashinage kimarite. Tochinishiki finished this memorable basho 8-7.

Tochinishiki's first encounter against Wakanohana was at the

1951 May tournament. Both were relatively small rikishi showing their true potential by downing much larger rikishi with their rapid and interchangeable demonstrations of technique.

In 1953 a momentous chapter in Ozumo arrived as live TV coverage of the basho started. The speedy and well executed sumo of Tochinishiki and Wakanohana immediately caught the imagination of the nation despite their lack of stature and they became instant crowd favorites.

At the May, 1954 basho Tochinishiki beat Wakanohana to finish with a 14-1 record and then secured his second straight yusho at the September basho to guarantee promotion to yokozuna. That night, he believed he would be congratulated by his shisho for making it to the ultimate rank in Ozumo. Instead what he heard from former yokozuna Tochigiya, the then Kasugano Oyakata was totally unexpected: "From this day on, you should spend every day of your yokozuna life by thinking about the day you retire."

At the time there was a widely accepted view that Tochinishiki would not get the promotion as much as he deserved it as there were already four yokozuna on the banzuke, Kagamisato, Yoshibayama, Chiyonoyama and Azumafuji. Never before had Ozumo seen five active yokozuna listed on the banzuke.

*Were times going to change? Would five yokozuna be present come the next banzuke or would Tochinishiki be denied his deserved promotion? The enthralling story of one of sumo's most determined yokozuna in living memory will be concluded in the next issue of SFM*

