

Ones to Watch – Hatsu Basho 2008

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Before we proceed to Hatsu Basho, let's look at the whole of 2008. More and more young hopes – both Japanese and foreigners – are claiming their places in the paid ranks. The 20th year of Heisei will definitely be a turning point. The table below compares the ages of the sekitori on every Hatsu banzuke of the last twenty years. The reference date is always shonichi.

Let's call the sekitori in the respective age brackets the "young guns" (<25 years), the "seasoned men" (25-30 years) and the "old stagers" (>30 years). So, what can we learn from this table? The earliest years, 1992 and 1993, had many young guns and only a few old stagers, and so they had a pretty low average age. On the other hand, the later years of 2003 and 2004 involved old stagers and seasoned men, and a subsequently rather high average age.

Next year will be different. The midfield will be the smallest in the whole Heisei era, only every fourth rikishi will be seasoned. And despite every third sekitori being a young gun, the average age is only... well, average. What's the answer? There are still many old stagers, too. In the second half of

2008, four oyakata will reach mandatory retirement age and thus free up their toshiyori kabu. This might encourage some of the old stagers to retire and to snatch one of these rare jewels. Result – the average age drops further.

Despite all the hopes to come, the Ones To Watch in Hatsu 2008 will be the five juryo debutants.

Tochinoshin

Kokkai's countryman will be in only his 12th basho (maezumo included). He has never fallen



Tochinoshin

below five wins, even when he pulled out of Nagoya Basho injured in 2006. Unfortunately, he has never won a yusho yet, either. The closest he came was a playoff loss in jonidan. He is the youngest by far of the debutants but he will still be a force to be reckoned with, maybe he will be the hardest of these five nuts for his juryo foes to crack. Let's keep our fingers crossed for him.

Kimurayama

If you go to a heya and introduce yourself as "Kimura Mamoru" you might well end up as a gyoji.



Kimurayama

	<u>sekitori av. age</u>	<u>sekitori <25y</u>	<u>sekitori 25-30y</u>	<u>sekitori >30y</u>
1	1993 (26.10y)	1993 (.424)	2003 (.621)	2007 (.386)
2	1992 (26.30y)	1992 (.394)	2004 (.586)	2008 (.343)
3	1994 (27.08y)	2008 (.371)	1989 (.563)	2004/5 (.314)
...				
9	2008 (27.81y)			
...				
18	2002 (28.41y)	1989 (.156)	1996 (.409)	1994 (.197)
19	2004 (28.45y)	2004 (.100)	2007 (.343)	1992 (.167)
20	2003 (28.47y)	2003 (.091)	2008 (.286)	1993 (.152)

Luckily, Kasugano Oyakata didn't make this mistake and accepted the boy as a rikishi. Tochinoshin's heyamate already has twice as many basho under his mawashi but can still be considered a young talent. He hit his wall in makushita and had to adjust to this division before advancing. After being lead makushita and with an injury in 2006, he came back quickly and presented his case with a 6-1 in November. Good luck, Kimura Mountain!

Tamawashi

The Mongolian rikishi entered maezumo exactly four years ago. He has never been known for outstanding records but has advanced step by step. In September he won the makushita yusho and was lifted all the way up to ms2w, from where a 4-3 was enough to jump into the paid



Tamawashi

ranks. It will be interesting to see whether he will continue his journey through the ranks. He certainly has the physique. He and Tamaasuka might become the new

sekitori duo of Kataonami-beya in a few years.

Wakakoyu

Former Yakigaya got part of his shisho's shikona as a promotion present, which will undoubtedly put some pressure on him, and it remains to be seen whether it will be too much. He has been around for a while and his rank chart doesn't predict a good sekitori debut basho. However, he has won a lower division yusho (unlike three of the five debutants), and he might be extra motivated as his heyamate Katayama is only a few ranks ahead of him. Wakakoyu could become the heyagashira of Onomatsu-beya with a good result in January.



Wakakoyu

Kirinowaka

One year ago it looked like he and his heyamate Hakuba would enter juryo side by side. In the end only

Hakuba advanced to become a sekitori. Finally, Kirinowaka has recovered and followed him into the second division. His Michinoku-beya will still have three rikishi there, but will not be beefed up, though, as Jumonji drifts downwards (towards makushita). Kirinowaka is the lightest of the five debutants and must probably rely on Ama-like tricks to stay up there.

Some of the matchups between these five might become "eternal feuds" in the future. Kimurayama and Kirinowaka have met five times already, Tamawashi and Wakakoyu four times. Every possible pairing but one has been fought. Here are their full head-to-heads.



Kirinowaka

The numbers read like so:

Bouts won - Bouts lost (result in Kyushu 2007: O won, X lost, N not met).

	vs. TO	vs. KY	vs. TA	vs. WA	vs. KW
TO	-	same heya	2-1 (O)	1-0 (N)	1-0 (O)
KY	same heya	-	0-1 (X)	0-0 (N)	3-2 (O)
TA	1-2 (X)	1-0 (O)	-	2-2 (O)	0-1 (X)
WA	0-1 (N)	0-0 (N)	2-2 (X)	-	0-2 (N)
KW	0-1 (X)	2-3 (X)	1-0 (O)	2-0 (N)	-