

Heya Peek – Sadogatake Beya

by Martina Lunau

Sadogatake Beya was the first heya I visited 2½ years ago during my first trip to Japan; a trip which included a bit of sightseeing as well as sumo – those were the times!

At that time I went with a small group of Germans. The tour guide told us how to behave properly in a heya and as it happened, Sadogatake Beya was the perfect choice as I had always been a big fan of Kotonowaka with a wish to see him live on the dohyo once in my life.

So, off we went to Sadogatake and as the stable is located far from Ryogoku – in Chiba – we had to get up very early in the morning.

When we arrived it was still time for the lower divisions to train so we watched the last few minutes of butsukarigeiko a young guy was going through. It was only a few minutes for us but they must have



Kotomitsuki

felt like hours for that young guy. He was thoroughly exhausted and had already started crying. I can't remember now, but I think it was Kotoninsei (former Kotonarita).



Kotooshu, Kotowatanabe

This gave me a shock as I saw just how hard the training could be and that they have to give it their all.

Kotonowaka himself was standing impressively silent all the time – his back to us and not moving an inch. I had no idea at all what the rikishi were doing as they trained but I was somewhat awestruck and didn't dare to take pics.

The next time I was in Japan, I was there alone. Since my last visit I had tried for months to join Sadogatake's Overseas (supporters) Club, never got an answer and I was nearly about to give up. But, finally my attempts were successful. I received an email and they invited me to come again to watch asageiko when I arrived in Japan so this time I went on my own – duly took the wrong train but finally made it there early enough to see the sandanme training.

This time I understood a bit more of what was going on, but had no idea who I was looking at - except

the sekitori of course. The then retired Sadogatake Oyakata was sitting there and watching the training. He came over to me and offered me Kotonowaka's beer crate as a seat to make it a bit



Kotokuni



Sadogatake (moto Kotonowaka), Kotomisen

more comfortable for me. Every time I went to the heya, the former Sadogatake Oyakata, Yokozuna Kotozakura, was extremely nice and welcoming. Unfortunately he died far too early at the age of 66 last year.

This second time I even managed to take some pics. Afterwards I spoke to the new okamisan; Kotonowaka's wife Machiko. I also spoke with the new Sadogatake Oyakata, former Kotonowaka. The okamisan speaks English very well. They asked about my favourite wrestler from the stable and I told them it was Kotoshogiku. They were a bit surprised as everybody came to see Kotooshu at that time. They even called for Kotoshogiku and he



Kotokashiwadani

came, a towel hanging around his hips and said I should take a photo with him. It would honestly have been enough to take a pic of him standing alone - but I had no chance.

Now, during each of my visits to Japan I visit Sadogatake Beya where I have come to know all the rikishi and of course have my favourites; not only Kotoshogiku and the other sekitori, but also some of the younger rikishi such as Kotomisen, Kotootori, Kotokashiwadani, Kotowatanabe and my 'hopeless' Kotoyamaguchi. In January of this year, I visited during the second week of the basho, just a day after Kotoshogiku was injured, so I couldn't see him.

Sadogatake Beya is located in Chiba, in a relatively large two-floored building. Inside it is very warm and comfortable. On the left, along one wall are positioned all kinds of trophies and even a funny, stuffed lion (well not so funny for the lion I guess!). The kitchen is also on the left and every time I'm there I feel hungry as it always smells so good. Behind the dohyo is a door that leads to a little garden; a nice view in summer.

As always I arrived in time to see

the sandanme rikishi doing keiko – including two of my Sadogatake hopes - Kotokashiwadani and Kotowatanabe. The boys are just 16 and 17 years old respectively, and given their limited experience - Kotokashiwadani (one year) and Kotowatanabe (2 years) in professional sumo are doing quite well. Kotokashiwadani is tall for his age, officially 1,75m but he looks taller. Kotowatanabe meanwhile is a bit shorter but weighs more. Another youngster, Kotookuyama, also looks quite promising - to me at least.

Kotokashiwadani and Kotowatanabe were fighting each other with neither dominating and finished training as usual with butsukarigeiko. There will be a new deshi for Sadogatake Beya soon as during training a young boy came in to watch and join in with the training. At 16, Yuki Enomoto from Marugame, Kagawa prefecture has now joined the heya after deciding to do so around the time of the Kyushu Basho. You never know, but judging by my first impressions, he looks quite promising.



Kotowatanabe

The next up were Kotootori and Kotoshimoda. Kotoshimoda always looks a bit hopeless to me, but last time out I could see some development and he put together two consecutive kachikoshi at his highest ranking in sandanme. Kotootori normally trains with Kotomisen as they are closer to each other on the banzuke, but



Kotoshimoda, Kotookuyama

Misen was on duty working for Kotoshogiku as a tsukebito and the other tsukebito, Kotoyamaguchi, had already left for the Kokugikan.

Sekitori-wise, only Kotokasuga was there at the start and this was the first time I had seen him train in all my many visits to the heya. He practiced some tachiai with Kotokuni. Normally he stands around, watches himself in the mirror and teases one of the younger boys a bit. But, since he became a sekitori again he seems to have changed a bit. Perhaps – and here the hobby psychologist is speaking – he is now a little less frustrated and happier fighting in juryo - and doing not bad at all there as he ages.

During training some physiotherapists were visiting to work on Kotoshogiku by applying various treatments. Also, the room was full of journalists.

After a while, the two ozeki, Kotooshu and Kotomitsuki, entered the room. First of all they

offered water to Sadogatake Oyakata and he spoke briefly to each of them. Each and every time I have visited, the next thing the sekitori do is to have a look at the torikumi for the day. They repeat this several times but one would think it is not so difficult to remember the opponent for the day.

Usually this is where the real training for the sekitori starts but this time it was a bit different; perhaps as we were already in the second week or maybe because Kotoshogiku wasn't there. First Kotomitsuki and Kotooshu were standing around, talking a bit, making jokes and watching the training of the juniors. Kotooshu always keeps an eye on his tsukebito and corrects them. I seldom see this from Kotomitsuki and from Kotoshogiku. The ozeki didn't fight each other on this day, but worked at training their tsukebito. Kotooshu practiced some tachiai with Kotowatanabe while Kotomitsuki went at it with Kotoshimoda. The morning's action ended soon after with butsukarigeiko, some shikiri and finally with a little song performed by the younger rikishi.

I packed up, said 'sayonara' to Sadogatake Oyakata and his wife and then they told me that Kotoshogiku wasn't feeling so bad and would return after a few days rest - to fight towards his kachikoshi, which he succeeded in achieving of course. Sadogatake Oyakata had to give an interview to six journalists afterwards; I spoke for a short time to the okamisan and then hurried off to



Kotokasuga + torikumi

the Kokugikan.

As a heya, Sadogatake Beya is a bit far from the majority of the stables but it's definitely a place I wouldn't want to miss visiting when I'm in Tokyo. I like the atmosphere and the rikishi there. I'm still a fan of the oyakata, I like his wife Machiko and Kotoshogiku is one of my favourites. With 20 rikishi

on the books at the moment, two ozeki and Kotoshogiku at sekiwake for the Haru Basho, the stable is one of the most successful in the business and since Kotomitsuki secured promotion to ozeki, some of the "older" rikishi seem to have found a fresh impetus.

Kotokasuga is back in juryo again and he is doing very well there; he

might even make it to makuuchi one day! Kotoyutaka is doing very well too and there is some hope that he will make it to juryo too. Lower down there are Kotokashiwadani, Kotookuyama and Kotowatanabe – all men who practice hard and hopes for the near future - perhaps.