

Lower Division Focus

by Martina Lunau

Sekitori they are not – yet – but are just as much a part of the sumo scene as the best of the makunouchi bunch

My own special interest in sumo – besides individual support for Kakuryu and Kotoshogiku of course – centers on the many hundreds of lower division rikishi. I truly think it is one of the most worthwhile experiences you can have in sumo when you see a guy you have watched for a long time climbing up the ranks, or you watch others, more or less hopeless cases, never giving up and trying to climb to the next division. I think they all deserve our attention.

During Hatsu Basho, as I always do now, I tried to watch as many bouts in the lower divisions as possible, looking out for my own favourites and crossing my fingers for them even though my ability to spot rikishi with 'talent' may be wrong 95% of the time.



Ogata

Jonokuchi this time bore no great surprise as everybody expected the winner to be 23-year-old **Ogata**,

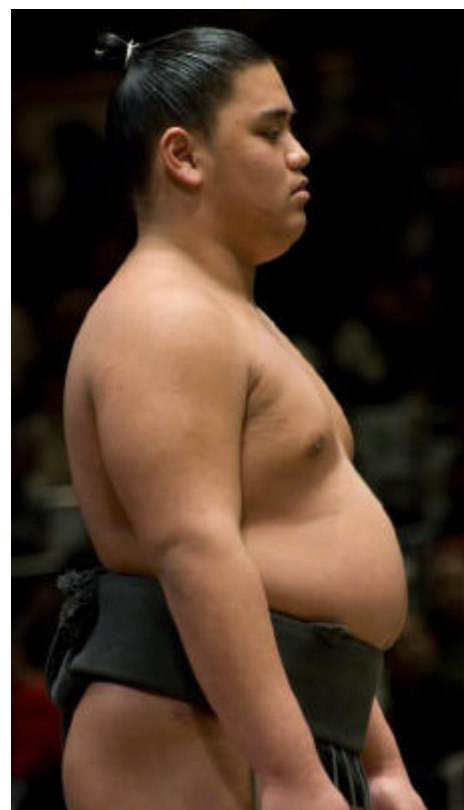


Arawashi

the university grad from Nittaidai fighting out of Kise Beya – and he duly was. No problems this time out then, and there will be none at the Haru Basho, but the challenges will start thereafter. I think he is a bit too short for a big career but let's see.

In jonidan I expected (and hoped) for **Arawashi** from Araisoyama Beya to take the yusho. The young Mongolian has been injured for the last 3 tournaments; in Hatsu, 2006 at makushita 20, he hurt his left shoulder and had to sit out the Haru Basho. He came back, was injured again – or the injury wasn't healed at all – and had to miss 3 basho in a row, subsequently falling from ms22 to jd22. During Hatsu his shoulder was still heavily bandaged, but he had a good basho and after 6 perfect bouts was leading the pack before losing to Terashita, the eventual sandanme yusho winner. It's really a tragedy with the young Mongolian and I'm not sure he will ever be completely healed.

The jonidan yusho went to **Wakaryoma**, one of quite a few talents in Onomatsu Beya. The teen had a good start in Ozumo



Wakaryoma



Terashita

when he joined at the Haru Basho, had winning records until Fukuoka, and has now claimed the jonidan yusho. He is definitely one to watch. He may be a bit limited in his techniques at the moment as he prefers oshidashi to other kimarite but I'm sure he is able to learn a lot more.

Terashita at 23, standing 187cm and weighing 140kg was himself recruited by Onomatsu Oyakata, is another college rikishi (Toyo University) and entered Ozumo during Haru 07 along with Wakaryoma. In University he was

the captain of the sumo club. He has looked promising over the last few basho and he has a good trainer and instructor in Onomatsu (former sekiwake Masurao). He won the jonokuchi yusho, had back-to-back kachikoshi but was then injured during the Kyushu tournament last year. He is obviously back again and in good form so will likely make a big jump up the rankings in time for the Haru Basho.

I'm a bit unsure about the makushita yusho winner,



Yamamotoyama

Yamamotoyama. He doesn't have the kind of body I like to see on a rikishi, and I'm not confident he won't end up as another Orora. That said, he impressed me again at Hatsu with a display of speed and agility I hadn't expected. Ryuichi Yamamoto as he was born is yet another university graduate – this time from Nihon University and joined Onoe Beya at 220kg, making him the heaviest rikishi to debut in the sport from maezumo. I still think he is much too big to last long and it will be hard for in Osaka in the upper makushita rankings.



Hokazan

In addition to the names above, and staying away from the 'obvious' talents of Aran, Kyokushuho and Tosayutaka, there are several others I have been keeping an eye on – first of all the 18-year-old, **Hokazan** from Miyagino Beya. He first drew my attention at the Kyushu Basho with a brilliant 6 -1 record that included nice kakenage and uwatenage victories in the second

week. Not bad at all and I made a note of this youngster on my torikumi - and of course took some pics.

Later, when I arrived home, I realized that I had already photographed him – during Aki, 07 - so he had already impressed. Again, during Hatsu, I had another look as he had jumped to sandanme 93 which might have been too much too soon as he



Kairyu

ended with a slight makekoshi. No problem at all, he is young, and I'd prefer him to climb up slowly. He is one of the most focused rikishi in the lower divisions, looks ambitious and I love his preparations for the bout, and to see his shiko; one of the best in the non-salaried ranks. He is tall at 183cm, should gain some weight and then I think he has a big future ahead of him. Another one to watch is the 16-year-old jonidan man **Watanabe**.



Aozora

I first saw him when I visited morning practice at Kokonoe Beya during Natsu Basho 07. Chiyotakai was in the perfect mood that day and took real good care of Watanabe, told him what to do and corrected him all the time. I hope he grows a bit more but he is only 16 so still has time. During this past basho, I looked a bit closer and I liked what I saw. He has had 3 kachikoshi so far and just one losing record - in Kyushu where he went 3-4 - but nothing is lost yet. At Hatsu he bounced back

again with a good 5-2. He reminds me a bit of Kotoshogiku as he has very good footwork, is a compact rikishi, ambitious and every time I visit Kokonoe Beya, he is the hardest working guy on the dohyo. I stopped counting his teppo-oshi last time and his push-ups after his "official training" of one on one bouts as well as butsukarigeiko. If I understood properly, when he was just three he had already decided he wanted to become a sumo wrestler - and often visited Kokonoe Beya. He really is an



Watanabe



Fujimoto

amazing boy and I can only cross

my fingers for him and wish that his dreams come true.

Kairyu from Taganoura Beya also caught my attention last year in Fukuoka. I saw a decent trio of wins and could clearly see how happy he was to win and that someone in the near empty hall had clapped for him. In the Hatsu Basho he again got a winning record - 4-3 - and will now be promoted to the sandanme division. I am not so sure if he can make it to juryo or makunouchi, but he is a talented lad and so, along with his heya mate makushita **Aozora**, I will hope he does well. Aozora started sumo training in high school and won the Western Japan 115kg and below class. He joined professional sumo just 2 years ago at the Haru Basho and has already reached

makushita. He managed another winning record in Kyushu so I was curious how he will do at Hatsu Basho - and he was pretty good, won more than 50% and is slowly making his way up the ranks.

Fujimoto is another slow climber from Onomatsu and I like to watch him on the dohyo. He is also very concentrated and ambitious, has a variety of techniques but is a bit of an up and downer so I hope he can get a bit stronger and consolidate himself.

Let's see how they all do at the coming Haru Basho. I will certainly put Watanabe on my growing adoptee list and I'm sure I have seen the first steps of some future sekitori herein.