

Menko Corner

Yokozuna Debut Menko

by Ryan Laughton

From American baseball's 1914 Baltimore News Babe Ruth rookie card, to the 1951 Topps Mickey Mantle rookie card, nothing attracts more attention from card collectors than a famous player's rookie card. Both of these cards fetch well over \$100,000 dollars every time they show up on the auction block. Time and time again, baseball card collectors will spend tens, if not hundreds of thousands of dollars on the card that first marked an American Hall of Famer's career.

On the other hand, the pre-1980 Japanese sports card market, especially baseball and sumo, are some of the most undervalued genres of cards in the world. For example, today almost any Japanese baseball card collector can pick up a 1950s Gem Mint Sadaharu Oh or Shigeo Nagashima rookie card for around \$1000. Both of these players are the

epitome of true Japanese baseball legends - just like Ruth and Mantle in the United States.

Nothing is different in the world of sumo menko, except that the prices are significantly lower and the sets are much less defined. Until I expanded my own hobby of sumo menko collecting to include set identification and cataloging, there was no way for a sumo menko collector to tell what truly defined a "debut menko." "Debut menko," with the same meaning as rookie card, is a term I have specifically coined for the sumo menko world, since all rikishi will have spent at least 2-3 years in sumo before they make it to the Juryo or Makuuchi Divisions. Only in these divisions, when rikishi "debuted," would they start getting salaries, special privileges and sekitori status - and only then would sumo menko companies start printing menko of the rikishi.

I value debut menko by two factors: rank on the menko and the rikishi. A low ranking menko of Futabayama is as of yet unfound. If any menko of him do come to market with a displayed rank of juryo or even maegashira, it would be well worth its weight in gold! To this day, only an ozeki ranked menko of the great yokozuna exists.

Until more research is done, actual debut menko are hard to identify. To whet your appetite, however, I've scanned what I believe are the debut menko for the 19 yokozuna that dominated the sumo menko era between the 1930s and the 1960s. Listed below are those 19 yokozuna and their rank on their debut menko.

Enjoy and until the next time, cheers...



Ozeki Tamanishiki, Yokozuna Musashiyama, Komusubi Minanogawa, Ozeki Futabayama, Maegashira Haguroyama, Sekiwake Akinoumi, Sekiwake Terukuni



Ozeki Maedayama, Ozeki Azumafuji, Maegashira Chiyonoyama, Sekiwake Kagamisato, Sekiwake Yoshibayama, Sekiwake Tochinishiki



Komusubi Wakanohana, Sekiwake Asashio, Maegashira Togashi (Kashiwado), Ozeki Taiho, Ozeki Tochinoumi, Ozeki Sadanoyama