

Ones to Watch – Haru 2008

by Alexander Herrmann

At first I was tempted to go with the yokozuna and ozeki this time. Asashoryu and Hakuho both seem to be healthy and 2008 will be the first year of a (hopefully) long and intense rivalry. Both Kaio and Chiyotakai are wrecks, have collected uncountable kadoban and only their fighting spirit (or maybe that of their oyakata) has kept them on the dohyo. Kotomitsuki and Kotooshu will probably forever be stuck at ozeki and transform into the likes of Kaio and Chiyo. It's a long time since they've been considered yokozuna material.

My dear readers – yes, you two! – can easily see that none of these six can go further up; two of them because of their rank, two because



Toyonoshima - Carolyn Todd



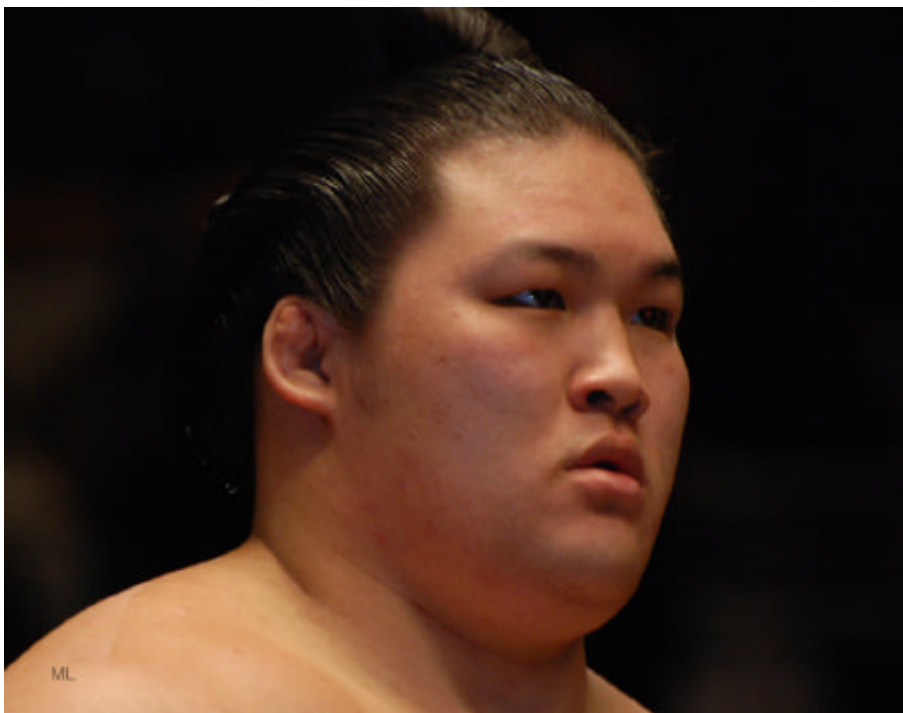
Kotoshogiku - Martina Lunau

of their body and two because of...well, because of whatever. Instead I have chosen to watch former komusubi and now NHK commentator Mainoumi's "Seven Samurai" and two others who might join their forces. I have added their real last names in brackets. It is really funny to read old results, analyses or amateur notes and find some of the names in them.

Kotoshogiku (Kikutsugi) turned 24 some weeks ago and will clearly be the third force of Sadogatake Beya after the ozeki duo. The two-times gino-sho winner is a firm sanyaku constant now, and if anyone will be able to break Kotomitsuki's record of consecutive sekiwake appearances, it's him. Unfortunately, I can't see him going on to ozeki. Not yet. And not in the next three years. In March he has the chance to start this sekiwake record run. But as he sat out injured some days in January it may just be worth watching to check whether he has recuperated.

The next on the list is **Kisenosato** (Hagiwara) – one basho but nearly 30 real-life months younger than Shogi. I have said so much about him already, and the last few basho promise even more. Two nice kachi-koshi in the joi-jin ranks, one shukun-sho and one kinboshi. He is a real danger to the yokozuna now (maybe the biggest) and he has adjusted fairly well to the thin sanyaku air. In contrast to Shogi I can see him advance to the second highest rank in two or three years. I think that he will fulfil the expectations that were put onto his heya mate Wakanosato.

Third in the group is **Toyonoshima** (Kajiwara). He had "the basho of his career" one year ago, and this isn't his limit; there will be another one. Many others. Some months – even some weeks – ago I would have stated the exact opposite but despite his 6-9 in January he has convinced me now. His size (or better: non-size, he is 170 cm) doesn't seem to be too big a disadvantage for him



Goeido - Martina Lunau

any more. Down at around M5 he will be able to collect some more experience and maybe even his second kinboshi. He somehow reminds me of Akinoshima...

The fourth man is **Goeido** (Sawai), another one about whom I have written many lines already. He hit the wall in January, but there's no need to be afraid at all. In his just 19-basho career he has had three make-koshi. Two were a 3-4 at the top of makushita and one was a 6-9 at the top of juryo. Do you get the message? He has always stopped at the gates to a higher rank. January's 5-10 is only another result that fits this pattern. If this pattern continues, he will be komusubi in May. If not, it will be in July or September.

The next in line is **Homasho** (Yamamoto). Terao's best pupil had some nice basho a year ago but his wall seems to have moved a bit. At the moment he can't live up to the high expectations of a M1 or M2 rank. In March he will be at the bottom of the makuuchi ranks and hopefully show a good performance again. Anything below ten wins will be a disappointment. With his 26 years

he is the most senior "Samurai". (God, I'm really getting old...)

On we go with the second "Toyo", albeit from another heya.

Toyohibiki (Kadomoto) shares his latchkey with Goeido. Once I read that no "hibiki" has ever been an outstanding rikishi. Well, you

might think that Toyohibiki fits into this scheme quite well but I don't want to write him off yet. After his 11-4 kanto-sho in Nagoya 2007 he has been trapped in mid-makuuchi, but it is not the end yet. Give him some basho to season (and some extra motivation by a komusubi Goeido) and he will soon make his mark in the sanyaku and joi-jin ranks.

The last of the "Seven Samurai" is **Tochiozan** (Kageyama). He entered makuuchi with a kanto-sho, too. Currently he is stuck at the bottom of the makuuchi division as an injury threw him back. After a 4-6-5 in Nagoya he was hardly able to hold his rank down there. Let's hope that he will be able to come back in 2008 and become Kasugano's stalwart in the top ranks. His physique will surely support this task. Little side note: On shonichi he will celebrate his 21st birthday.

I would like to add two other rikishi that were not mentioned by Mainoumi. Maybe because they are too low on the banzuke, maybe because both have less than ten



Toyohibiki - Martina Lunau

basho under their mawashi. But I don't want to withhold them from you.

The first is my favourite turbodiesel [Ichihara](#), the only one who hasn't gotten a real shikona yet. "Higonohaya" might be one, and well deserved after his fast one-basho stint in juryo. He did not enter makuuchi with a big bang but only with an 8-7, which is a bit below his ability. It won't give him much of a rise in the March banzuke but he is probably just lulling his opponents into a false sense of security. Komusubi by the

end of the year. New shikona, too.

And last but not least:

[Tosayutaka](#) (Morishita). Now, what's up with this guy? He almost overtook Ichihara in the "fastest rise to sekitori" race, and he started from the very bottom! Only three losses so far (two of them against other talents, one against a rikishi who desperately needed wins to keep his white mawashi) and barring serious injuries I expect him to set more fastest rise records soon. Maybe he will post the same 11-4 as his heyagashira Toyonoshima did four years ago.

Another little side note: He will celebrate his 23rd birthday on the second day of Haru Basho.

If you ask me to sort them in terms of probability to make it to yokozuna or ozeki, I'd put Kisenosato on top of the stack. Next would be Tosayutaka, Ichihara and Kotoshogiku. "Piggy-in-the-middle" is Tochiozan. At the end of the queue and with the least chance of making it beyond sekiwake are Homasho, Goeido, Toyonoshima and Toyohibiki.

Enjoy Haru Basho!