

Heya Peek - Musashigawa Beya's Kansai HQ (nondescript to say the least)

by Mark Buckton

A hop, skip and a jump from central Osaka lies a nondescript station on a nondescript line surrounded by nondescript buildings lining nondescript streets! Kind of a nondescript area not really worth the visit – were it not for the fact that nestled amongst all the nothingness lies Musashigawa Beya's Kansai home-from-home.

The stable facility; 'building' seeming almost too good a term given the ramshackle collection of prefab type structures housing the dohyo and sleeping facilities, is situated a good ten minutes or so walk from the station, presuming the backstreets of this very quiet, forgotten corner of Japan's second city can be navigated first time. It took me several attempts to nail the location – and only with the help of a kind-hearted local

woman was I guided back to a building I had already passed – twice!!

Talk about nondescript! I hadn't even looked at it!

Marked only by a couple of banners (clinging to their poles and largely unrecognizable thanks to the constant rain), the site stands a good 15 metres back from the small, you guessed it – nondescript – street, across a muddy, potted car park.

A quick right and right again, almost round the back of the main structure leads to a simple sliding door where shoes are removed, a very high step encountered and a wooden floor space leading round, again, to the right, opens out on a keikoba comparable in size to the facility back in Arakawa-ku in

Tokyo.

In terms of training materials it appeared identical to home base – even the granite balls used by Musashigawa rikishi to strengthen lower backs and thighs as they perform suriashi type shuffles had been shipped down to Osaka. They even had an image (or two?) of the oyakata in his tsuna of old!

The pre-requisite teppo pole is set off to one side, and the 10 metre front of the training area is patrolled, as it is back up the eastern end of the Tokaido, by the oyakata; former yokozuna Mienoumi.

With Musashimaru and Musoyama, as were, sitting off to his right – the latter recording the bouts taking place – and the former Wakanoyama off to the left



beside a large mirror, the stage was set for one of the most severe, but effective asageiko sessions the world of pro-sumo will ever see – the Musashigawa preparations for the day ahead. Sadly it failed to materialize.

During a visit with a member of the US media working on a story relating to sumo, we sat alongside a good 15 or 20 locals lining the back wall – young and old alike – some, like the boy in a baseball uniform whose ‘yakyu’ had presumably fallen foul of the incessant rain, yawning thanks to the relatively early hour proceedings had got underway.

Being the morning of Day 12 of the recent Haru Basho, and with the heya’s sekitori failing to impress several kilometers away at the Osaka Prefectural Gymnasium each day, the heat was on, the boss was out – and he was swinging his taped up ‘encouragement-stick’ – at least once making contact with

(then makushita) Bushuyama.

The session itself was several times interrupted by the arrival of the sekitori – Kakizoe, Dejima and Miyabiyama and the cacophony of required greetings up and down the seniority ladder – from sekitori to attending oyakata and from rank-and-file rikishi to the sekitori. As is the norm on such occasions, ladles of water were offered, accepted, and spat out!

Miyabiyama, for some reason was seen donning a huge bandage that looked similar to British military field dressings a la WWII, but didn’t let it put him off leading with his head during the early morning hours or later in the day, during his impressive slap-fest victory over fellow Ibaraki Prefecture man, Kisenosato.

Dejima looked tired as is too often the case nowadays, limited in terms of kimarite open to one of his weight, and appeared a tad

under the weather as did Kakizoe who, despite his ever up and at ‘em bursts of speed at the tachiai seemed to lose more than he won.

Whether or not the overcast and wet early spring day was taking its toll as the basho entered the home straight is something only the rikishi will know – and few will admit to! Come 0930, however, the session was winding down, the sekitori obviously felt like they had done enough for the day and the oyakata had all departed the keikoba.

And so, we were back out on the muddy car park, wondering which nondescript road to take back to the station with the name now forgotten – another slice of the sumo following pie and one to put down to experience!

Just hope next year, Osaka stays dry!

