

SFM Interview - Miyabiyama Tetsushi

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One of the longest serving makunouchi sekitori is Miyabiyama (Tetsushi) (MT) – former ozeki and Musashigawa stalwart.

In her first interview as an SFM staffer, Enatsu Watanabe (EW) – like Miyabiyama–zeki, of Ibaraki Prefecture to the north east of Tokyo – sat down with the big man in the Musashigawa Beya keikoba on a rainy April day to chew the proverbial fat over his 10-years to date in Ozumo. Also present was Mark Buckton (MB) of SFM.

EW: You are now 10-years into your career in sumo – how much longer do you see yourself going?

MT: Hmm, I don't know. I like sumo so I want to keep going as long as possible, but new, younger, strong foreign people are coming in so I don't really know.

EW: Over the past decade, you have reached ozeki, had three jun-yusho and won both makushita and juryo titles twice. Does anything stand out as a single, stand alone highlight?

MT: I won the makushita division twice and went to juryo and really enjoyed that time. At that time I could enjoy the sumo for the sumo.

EW: And any lowlights?

MT: When I got a little higher, in the joi-jin and as an ozeki, I had to think about winning and each win took on more importance (which was less enjoyable). Also the injuries were hard to cope with (and more a part of the game). At



ozeki, you are expected to win every fight too so there were many things that made that time harder and sumo became scary for me.

EW: What about in the past year - have you had one particularly memorable victory?

MT: Hmm, (thinking) not really, but I was on a few TV shows. As an ozeki, I couldn't do that. From now, I am looking forward to doing more of that.

EW: In the heya, would you pick one other sekitori as trickier to beat than the others? Now or in the past?

MT: Of course Musashimaru-san, and my seniors in the heya were

hard to beat. Nowadays, Dejima-zeki I think.

EW: How did you feel about the heya when you first entered?

MT: I couldn't believe I was actually doing sumo, and practicing against people I saw on TV.

EW: Did you feel different to many others entering sumo, given that you entered at the makushita division?

MT: Well, I entered at the foot of makushita (and that is different now as they enter much higher) so nothing really different, but I did feel I had to show the sumo I could do and that I deserved to be in at



that image in mind.

EW: A little more on yourself now. What do you like to do in your free time?

MT: I like pachinko, and being alone. I like to think which pachinko parlor and seat in the place is best / better. Then I go out.

EW: Before you started in sumo, did you enjoy participating in any other sports?

MT: In elementary school I liked basketball and little league baseball. In junior high I liked judo and sumo as well as ball games.

EW: What about now – do you like watching other sports? Baseball / soccer etc?

MT: I like watching any sport nowadays as sport is a kind of drama so I like watching this 'drama' as much as I can when I have the time.

EW: You grew up in Ibaraki – Mito – an area famous for its natto and umeboshi. These are foods the majority of foreign visitors don't take to at first – are you a fan or foe of these items?

that level.

EW: How do you prepare for bouts after learning who you will go against the next day?

MT: I learn who I will go against but usually forget about it until after dinner when I start to get an image of my foe. Then I use DVDs of us fighting before – fights in which I lost as well as those I won, then I get an image of how to win in my head and go to sleep thinking about winning – only with the image of me winning in my head.

The next morning I prepare with



MT: I like them both. I make natto tempura and eat it in many forms, and, if I have no snacks, I go to the refrigerator and eat natto. I love natto. Umeboshi too.

EW: Do you have a favorite food and drink not involving natto or umeboshi?

MT: I love yakiniku and a while ago I used to eat it around four or five times a week, but recently I like fish. Sashimi, but white meat fish, non-oily fish.

EW: When you go home, what do you like to do?

MT: I go to my family grave and pray there. I also meet some friends from my school days if I have time.

EW: When you get together with old school friends, what did they think of your joining Ozumo?

MT: At first they thought it was great and really supported me. They still do. They often thought how far I would get. Nowadays, hey are all around 30-years-old and have their own hard lives so I think of them too and wish them well.

EW: At the recent hanazumo

event at Yasukuni you wore a red mawashi – a sign of things to come? Will you wear it during honbasho?

MT: I really like green. That's my favorite but the red mawashi was a gift from the Osaka supporters club so I try to use that. I used it a few years ago. I also received a purple one from my family.

I did use the red one in a honbasho before, but a family member died so I (switched) to using the purple one and I will use that one until I 'intai'. Now I use the red mawashi on jungyo and tours to show my appreciation for the Osaka fans. At the Natsu Basho I think I will use the purple one.

EW: Back to sumo, on Day 12, you had a tough bout with Kisenosato – another Ibaraki man Mark was fortunate enough to interview a year or so ago, do you feel any competition with him given your both being Ibaraki men?

MT: A lot of sports people from Ibaraki go out together – baseball, sumo athletes etc. and we often go drinking. At first, I beat Kisenosato-zeki three times, then lost five straight so I didn't want to

lose again. Off the dohyo and on the dohyo are very different, and this time I won by going very hard, changing my usual technique with him, so I was very happy.

EW: Do you have any plans post sumo / after you leave?

MT: I want to stay in sumo, in the Kyokai, and become an oyakata, but as I have only done sumo, I might start a new career. I don't really know.

EW: At present, awareness and enjoyment of sumo is growing around the world. Do you know you have a nickname in English? (Do you want to know?)

MT: Really? I have a nickname (blushes). I know in America (Vegas) Konishiki was doing the introductions for the crowd and said I like pachinko so all the fans were shouting 'pachinko, pachinko.' Is that it? (MB answers 'no') (sheepishly Miyabiyama-zeki asks) What is it?

MB: Miyabi-babe!

MT: Miyabi-babe? After Babe Ruth? (laughter all round) I'm shocked. I thought it would have been based on my (love for) pachinko.



EW: Do you yourself have a (heya) nickname you can share?

MT: Really just Miyabi. Seniors and juniors alike.

EW: On your blog, you mentioned that a friend had just got married and that you would like to marry ASAP – does this mean there is anyone special or just a wish?

MT: (laughing and blushing) says – ‘ten, ten, ten’ (meaning in Japaneseno comment)

EW: Given the chance to meet anyone – from any time period – who would you like to meet and what would you say to them?

MT: No-one I can think of, (and does for a while).

EW: I understand from your blog

that you like soft toys. Why?

MT: I really liked the actual winning of the toys in a machine called UFO Catcher. This started in high school when I became hooked. I wanted to win a really big one and finally got one, and was very happy when everyone else saw me with it. I went after [Ampanman](#), Totoro, Stitch and all the other characters. I have many of them.

(The interview now descends into talk of [Crayon Shin-chan](#) and [Chibi Maruko](#) as MT and MB discuss MB’s somewhat odd telephone straps – Chibi Maruko and her father, Hiroshi)

EW: One fan, often with a (toy) monkey around his neck is known to shout your name a lot at jungyo and honbasho. Do you know him?

MT: Hmmm, (then recalling the monkey comment). Ah, yeah, I know him. He is a Hanshin Tigers fan and always wears a Hanshin (Igawa – former player from Ibaraki) shirt with a Miyabiyama headband. Yeah, I know him and am really happy when I hear him supporting me. Actually, I often win when I hear him as I can hear him from the dohyo.

EW: Last one, as this will go out to fans around the world in English, French, German and Spanish – any message you’d like to send to those fans?

MT: I am really happy to learn of my ‘English’ nickname of Miyabi-babe, so from now, I will really keep trying my best. Thank you very much.