

Ones to Watch – Nagoya 2008

by Alexander Herrmann

After our short visit to Mongolia last time we will return to the motherland of Sumo in this issue. The center of it to be exact, as the featured rikishi all hail from the Chubu region in the middle of Japan's biggest island. On the July banzuke this region has eight sekitori.

Without doubt [Kotomitsuki](#) is the superstar in this group. The Aichi native seemed to have overtaken his junior Kotooshu again after having to look up to him for so long. But, alas, the Bulgarian retaliated after realizing that it was no longer fun to be the only ozeki without a yusho. For Kotomitsuki, year 2008 started with three 8-7 and I fear that he has fallen back into his old pattern of doing just the necessary to keep his rank. To his credit, however, he hasn't fallen kadoban yet, although his physical shape is hardly better than that of the two senior ozeki.



Kotomitsuki - Carolyn Todd

[Tochinonada](#) from Ishikawa prefecture will meet some sanyaku in Nagoya. Obviously he is still fit

enough to keep up with the pace of the lower makuuchi rikishi, and eleven kinboshi is something not many rikishi can boast of, but the last of these lies almost four years back. So his journey to the upper maegashira ranks will end as disastrously as the last three have ended, and he will only be a sparring partner for the higher ranks. A pretty uncomfortable one, and that's why you should watch him!

Also listed from Ishikawa is [Dejima](#), who doesn't seem to be tired at all. Even the 3-12 setback at komusubi at the beginning of the year didn't derail the former very powerful ozeki. He goes on fighting and occasionally throws in some good basho. Even in his condition he should do better than 8-7 at M10, and so I hope the next basho will be one of the good ones again.

Leaving the first division now and entering the second we meet [Ushiomaru](#) who has become a fixture in juryo and lower makuuchi since January 2002. Unfortunately, he is in the same heya as Takamisakari, who will always overshadow him, which is undeserved. Weddings usually boost the performances of rikishi but 2007 has not really been his year on the dohyo. Hopefully he has stopped the downslide now.

The next on my list is the frost bir... I'm sorry, the frost phoenix [Shimotori](#). His first shikona change to the double-O (and a new second kanji meaning not only "bird" but "phoenix") after missing a basho wasn't much of a success as he fought just three basho and had to withdraw from the fourth. And what does he do? He changes

the shikona again. This time he deleted the second O but kept the phoenix kanji. I wish him many more injury-free basho so that this injury/shikona change game won't become a habit.



Dejima - Carolyn Todd

I remember [Katayama](#) as one of the "next great talents", and he did indeed work his way through the ranks in a way that not many others do. But lower makuuchi put a sudden and pretty decisive halt to his march. He could not even benefit from a present made to him by the banzuke committee. After being demoted with a 7-8 from M16e to M16w he finished the next basho with a 6-9 to make sure to go back to juryo. I still don't want to believe that he is overmatched with lower makuuchi and hope that he will go up once again to prove me right. His 9-6 in May was a good start.

The hatsu dohyo of [Sagatsukasa](#) from Shizuoka prefecture was just four years ago, which makes him the junior in this list. The former Isobe started strong from maezumo but slowed down in

lower makushita. A missed basho did its damage and it took him a whole year to get back to the top of makushita. Now he is in juryo but the promise of his early career hasn't been renewed – yet. A kachi-koshi is the minimum, otherwise he will have to do tsukebito duties and I'm not sure if he can return yet once again.

The last of the eight sekitori is [Tamaasuka](#), who also started as a makuuchi hope. After two basho in a row that he could not finish, he tumbled back to makushita, lurked in juryo for one basho and tumbled back. Now he's here again after a 7-0 from ms12. Such a jump has occurred only four times in the last ten years, and the other

three could not exceed the rank of M12. This has been the situation of the young Nagoya native until now, but maybe his home basho will be the foundation block for a more successful career.

And finally the two reasons why I decided to watch Chubu this time – Ozaki and Ozakiumi.ⁱ These two aroused my interest when I saw them on a photo of the shindeshi presentation of Natsu Basho. Ozakiumi, joining the mighty Dewanoumi Beya at the age of 22 years, looked pretty seasoned on that picture, self assured and seemingly totally unimpressed by the attending Kokugikan crowd. Ozaki, six and a half years younger and joining a much younger heya

(Shibatayama), stood in the first row looking fearfully around, probably asking himself how the hell he got himself into that situation. Needless to say that it was Ozakiumi who qualified himself for jonokuchi earlier; in fact, he was the first in this shindeshi batch to do so. But I won't write off Ozaki yet. It is of course way too early to guess what their highest rank on the banzuke might become (but that's not the point here anyway as this column isn't called "Ones to Guess"). Enjoy Nagoya Basho!

ⁱ At the time of writing they weren't added to the SumoDB yet, so there's no link to them.