

An emerging rivalry – the first half Kokonoe Beya's Chiyoarashi

by Mark Buckton

At a few recent keiko sessions, two of SFM's Tokyo based staff came up with the same pairing worth keeping an eye on, as much as for their obvious rivalry as their dohyo technique. Both are young, both, in our eyes are going far, and both will be covered here – as long as the rivalry exists and is relevant.

When Yoshinobu Watanabe joined Ozumo in the spring of 2007, he was not offered a shikona by the man who recruited him – Kokonoe Oyakata, former yokozuna Chiyonofuji.

Instead, the then 126kg, 173 cm youngster from the port city of Kisarazu on the western coast of the Boso Peninsula was to take his first dohyo steps in the de-facto national sport using his surname – Watanabe.

He didn't fare too badly – winning 2 and losing one of his first bouts in mae-zumo at that cold March tourney.

Eight weeks later, back home in Tokyo, Yoshinobu moved up a gear, clearly benefiting from the advice handed down by one of the best mentors in the game – his oyakata. Ranked as a jonokuchi 17 man, Watanabe put together a decent 5-2 showing that included four straight wins. Promoted to the foot of jonidan, he repeated the score and the streak, followed up his second 5-2 with a 4-3 performance at the Aki Basho when the eyes of the sumo following world were on Asashoryu and his woes, finally coming a cropper fifth time out – at the upper end of jonidan – posting a disappointing 3-4 record.

Sent back down the table a full twenty four ranks, he returned to his 5-2 winning ways in this year's Hatsu Basho before scoring a career high, to date, 6-1 in his first return to Osaka since joining the sport – losing only to Oguruma Beya's former makushita man, Terukaze.

For his trouble he moved into proper shikona territory and is now, a fair bit heavier, and few centimetres taller, the proud wearer of the Chiyoarashi name; the fourth in forty years to hold the same shikona although others were similarly named in the late Edo (1603-1867) and early Meiji-

eras (1868-1912).

Ironically he suffered his second make-koshi losing record during the sandanme debut basho his name was supposed to help him through – a close 3-4 the best he could against four older, more experienced foes – as most are, Chiyoarashi himself still just 16! (he will turn 17 two days before the Nagoya basho starts)

Un-noticed by many, however, or at least those outside the heya he calls home, the last few months have seen Watanabe as was, Chiyoarashi as is, pick up a rival; another rising star in the Kokonoe



make-up of tomorrow forever
making just that little bit more
effort than his peers, forever
looking to improve, forever
looking to be improved.

Eyes meet regularly in asageiko,
the 'look' many of those in the
stable of the Wolf pick up is
already there. The scent of hunger
is in the air. Boys becoming men
are just starting to find their feet,
just starting to mark their

territory. No slackers here – and
particularly not in this pairing.

Whether the ability – in both –
will follow suit as they climbs the
ranks remains to be seen but the
spark is there, that certain *je ne
sais quois* our French brothers
might refer to.

Whether either makes the sekitori
ranks in the years ahead is a call
few can make at this juncture, but

for now, Chiyoarashi and his rival
– the proverbial other half we will
cover in Issue 20, are still at it,
albeit with the 'it' now down in
Nagoya.

With Nagoya just around the
corner, and seven bouts each
ahead of them, 'tis now time to let
them get on with it. 'Tis time for
sumo.