

# Ones to Watch – Hatsu Basho 2009

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Photos by Chris Gould*

This time's Ones to Watch simply focuses on the five sekitori who celebrate their birthday in January. The reason for this will only make sense (at least to some extent) when you read the next issue's Ones to Watch for Haru 2009. Hence, stay tuned!

Four of these five are born after the 25th, and will already know their *kachi/* make-koshi when they blow out their birthday candles. The fifth one will celebrate on day 7.



*Kotoshogiku*

**Kotoshogiku** was born on January 30th 1984. He will most likely be M1 on the Hatsu banzuke and meet all the big guys again. He has already proven that he is capable of being a minor sanyaku – and more. He might beef up the ozeki ranks in three years, and thus ensure that a third heya within 15 years will have three simultaneous ozeki. (Enough of all the threes now!) Until then it will be hard work, and it will be delightful to watch him walking that path. Come his birthday, there will be another *kachi-koshi* in his books and maybe a promotion to sanyaku.



*Aran*

Exactly one day younger is **Aran**, the only remaining Russian in the sekitori ranks. He may easily fill the *henka* gap that the other three have left, but can he equal and outshine the other ex-Warsaw Pact rikishi by becoming komusubi or even ozeki? It is hard to say yet after just twelve basho. Many others have had a fast start, too. Hatsu 2009 will definitely be a first big test for him, and I fear he will not be too happy when turning 25.

Two years older (again exactly) is Mongolian **Shotenro**, the juryo-yusho winner in the last basho. He will have the rare chance to become a consecutive juryo-yusho winner in January as he will most likely be promoted to J1 only. Not a bad thing: out of the seven rikishi who also did this since Shotenro's birth, two became ozeki, and three reached sekiwake. He definitely has what is needed to make an impact in makuuchi and will be a happy birthday boy this time.

**Tamaasuka** will be 26 on the Monday after the basho. However, I do not feel that his birthday celebrations will be tied in with yusho celebrations - at least, not this time, as he still seems hamstrung on the dohyo. No one should write him off yet, but I'll eat my hat if he plays a role in the January yusho race.

A *kachi-koshi* in his current shape would itself be a huge success.

The final birthday boy is [Asofuji](#), who turns 33 on the first Saturday of the basho. He is the oldest on this issue's list and also the hardest to predict. For the past year, he has alternated between juryo and makushita, but he seems

to be a completely different wrestler in each of the two divisions. These ups and downs do not reflect his true abilities, which are suited to at least mid-juryo. Let's see whether the promotions of his two heya elders

will give an expected boost to his performance and make him extra happy on his birthday and eight days later.

Enjoy the Hatsu Basho!