

Ones to Watch – Haru Basho 2009

*Text by Alexander Herrmann
Photos by Chris Gould*

Last time I promised you would learn why the January birthday boys were featured in that issue. Well, we are talking about birthday boys again, but not really in the way that has been intended.

This time we will focus on rikishi born on March 10th – namely the “March Tennes” of the years 1979, 1981 and 1985.

Last year somebody (1979) had claimed that Kokkai (1981) and Tosayutaka (1985) would meet on the dohyo for the first time before somebody’s 30th birthday. That basho prediction went awry and Tosa simply didn’t advance as it was hoped he would. Even now a “they will meet during somebody’s birthday basho” is likely out of reach now as Tosa is only fifth in the promotion line to make the step to makuuchi (and there are only four demotes we can see). So, it will take at least until May for their Hatsu-kao-awase to occur. Nevertheless they both made it into this issue’s Ones to Watch.



Kokkai

With the dismissal of the three Russians, **Kokkai** has suddenly become head of the second largest foreigner faction in the first division. This “title” may not be the reason behind his jump up to M4, but what has it been – if not a dose of banzuke luck? Looking at him sometimes, one does not know whether to laugh or cry. One day he seems to have learned the lessons of his years in the sport almost overnight but the next he seems to have forgotten it all again – and we are not talking once or twice, but regularly. Let’s hope that he shows us some of his “clever / learnt my lesson” days in March.



Tosayutaka

Tosayutaka did start very fast (going 27-1 in his first four basho and taking three yusho on the way) but juryo has obviously been a really hard test for him. He still isn’t through it, and makuuchi won’t become any easier. Despite those minor setbacks he will be one of the stars of the next decade and could even become the third

Yutakayama.ⁱ He certainly has enough talent but now he has to show that he knows to use it well. On another note, is his hair long enough for an oicho-mage yet?

Hakkaku-beya will send their fourth sekitori onto the dohyo – **Okinoumi**, the former Fukuoka. Some thought that he might slacken after he had been denied promotion with a 5-2 as ms1w last time out but he eventually proved such naysayers wrong. Not only did he get a kachikoshi, but he crowned his journey with a triumphant 7-0 yusho. There’s still a great gap between “getting to juryo” and “staying in juryo” but I’m not worried about him at all. Okinoumi will be a great credit to his sumo-crazy hometown of Okinoshima – and that is an aspect one of the SFM writers is looking at as we speak so look for an article on the sumo traditions of Okinoshima in the near future.



Okinoumi

Now, where has **Jumonji** been of late? It was just a year ago that he

fell out of juryo after a devastating 3-12 record, but it seems like a lifetime ago that he was a regular in lower makuuchi. He has now fought his way back (he has never been that far away anyway) and is once again at the gates of the paid ranks. Hopefully we will take his chance and return to where he belongs as there'd be no better time than now to re-start his career as a late-bloomer.

Admittedly, the twin pair of

Takageppo and **Takatoshi** are (partially) part of this issue because of the “freak show factor” – one boy joining Ozumo is everyday business, a pair of brothers are striking, but twins are exceptional! Nishonoseki Ichimon seems to draw these **rare treats** like moths to a flame. Judging from their maezumo videos they are capable of a great deal so it will be exciting to watch hem as they make their way up the banzuke, but of course, only time will tell if

they are the long awaited sekitori for Takanohana-beya. They surely would deserve it.

Enjoy the Haru Basho!

ⁱ of Tokitsukaze-beya (there has been at least one other Yutakayama – who did end his career under another name, though)