

SFM Oyakata Interview

Nakamura Oyakata

by Mark Buckton / Michiko Kodama

Q: What is your first memory of sumo? Did you have any sumo heroes as a boy?

A: I remember watching TV during the Tochi/Waka era (referring to Wakanohana / Tochinishiki period of dominance) in the late 1950s.

Q: How did you enter professional sumo?

A: At school, as a boy in in Yamanashi Prefecture, one of my school seniors was Fujinishiki of Takasago Beya. He was about 10 years my senior and he himself helped me.

Q: What did your family think at the time?

A: They were dead against it (grins) and when those I was communicating with to enter Ozumo said that they would visit my home and meet my parents, my parents said, "no, they don't have to come". However, my decision was so firm that my parents could not change my mind, although I actually made the decision less than a month after seeing a real dohyo which had, at its centre, a sacred Shinto staff with pendant strips of cut paper. When I saw that I really thought I wanted to have a bout on a real dohyo!

Q: Do you recall your first bout in maezumo?

A: Yes I do, clearly, but today I do not remember who the opponent was.

Q: When introduced to the fans as part of the ceremony entering

sumo, whose kesho mawashi did you borrow?

A: I used the kesho mawashi of my school senior Fujinishiki.

Q: How did you feel when you won the 1969, Hatsu Basho, makushita yusho 7-0?

A: I was very glad, of course. Before the Hatsu Basho, I was able to gain 25 kilograms in a single year and to thus improve the size of my body. Also, I succeeded in creating my own 'kata'so I think that's why I could win so many.

Q: Which of your nine kinboshi would you say is the most memorable?

A: (ponders for a while) I don't know, they were all great. Beating a yokozuna is special. They were all memorable. None really stand out above the others

Q: You were able to compete in the current Kokugikan near the end of your career. How did that compare to competing in the old Kuramae Kokugikan?

A: Actually, I didn't compete in the new Kokugikan. In the Kyushu Basho the year before the Kokugikan opened (in Jan. 1985) I dislocated my elbow and I was going to retire in March (Haru) anyway. (Earlier that year, at the Hatsu Basho in 1984, Nakamura Oyakata tore an Achilles tendon. In the May basho of the same year, he returned, and suffered the elbow problem at the Kyushu Basho)

Q: Looking back, what would you call the highlight of your own

active career?

A: When I had the honour of being viewed by the Emperor - in the Summer Grand Sumo Tournament in 1975, when I had a bout with Kirinji. Later I heard that the Emperor (Hirohito) was pleased with this match.

Q: And what about as an oyakata?

A: Raising a sekitori. That was about ten years after I became an oyakata. My first sekitori, Saigo, was promoted to Juryo in 1995, after Nakamura Beya opened in 1986.

Q: Any regrets in your sumo life?

A: No, there is nothing that I regret because I have nothing that I feel I should have or would have done differently.

Q: Was it an easy decision to open your own heya?

A: It wasn't an easy decision, but, in those days, physical training like running, or muscle training using machines were not popular in the world of sumo at all. However, I thought that those training methods were important and a necessary (form of exercise for) rikishi. I thought that to apply the training methods which I believed to be good, it was better to organise my own heya.

Q: How has sumo changed in the time since your own retirement from the ring?

A: The obvious change is that there are more foreign rikishi now. Also as I had spent a long time with Takamiyama during my

active career as rikishi, to be honest, I, myself, do not feel anything strange about having foreign rikishi (in the sport).

Q: What do you think about the obvious increased interest in sumo by non-Japanese fans over the past decade?

A: It makes me happy. Of course sumo is an easy sport to understand as it is easy to see who (has) won a bout and of course it has the links to the past so is an all round experience for anyone visiting to watch.

Q: You are known for making sure your own rikishi complete their education even after entering the

heya. Why did you decide on this course of action?

A: These days a lot of people take it as a given that children will graduate from high school, but most of the rikishi in my stable become my disciples just after graduating junior high school. So, I thought that if rikishi get their high school diploma(s), it would ultimately make them concentrate on sumo more without worrying about life after their retirement. Also, I thought the system I make them go through would help to alleviate the anxiety of their parents.

Q: Have you thought about life after retirement yet? Any return to

Yamanashi Prefecture to open a fruit farm?¹

A: (laughs) Not yet. No, I'm not going back to live in Yamanashi

Q: Last one then - and one we like to ask all rikishi and oyakata we are lucky enough to interview - were you able to go against any individual in the history of sumo, who would that be?

A: (after much thought) Futabayama! He was a real 'dai-yokozuna'.

¹ Yamanashi Prefecture, to the west of Tokyo is known for its fruit production - peaches, grapes etc a staple produce of the area.