

The Year-End Events of Nakamura Beya

by Michiko Kodama

One of the 54 sumo stables, Nakamura Beya, located in Eastern part of Tokyo, hosts a pair of events at the end of each year – 'Chanko Day' and 'Omochi-tsuki.' Every year the date of Omochi-tsuki is fixed on the 28th of December while the Chanko day, a kind of a year-end party in which gallons of chanko is consumed is scheduled for a 'Sunday late in the month' to enable as many folk as possible to participate. In 2009, the party was given on December 20th, and luckily I was invited to attend.



exercises were performed as they always are - including the 'sanban geiko,' 'moushiai' and 'butuskari geiko' forms that form the backbone of asageiko. Many of the spectators could thus understand

and enjoy the way of asageiko - especially the small children from a local kindergarten to which the rikishi of the stable often make a visits as they sat excitedly in the front row. That day though, with

'Chanko Day' was a happy gathering. From about 9:30 a.m. participants could see a version of the regular morning practice with an explanation given by Nakamura Oyakata himself, but because the starting time was scheduled to start later than usual, the training program itself was rather more compact than on other days. Nevertheless, most of the routine





as many as 150 people visiting, the training was actually broadcast live via video relay to another room to enable those who could not find a space to sit in the training area proper.

When the practice had finished the Chanko party started with greetings issued to all from the Oyakata. To my own surprise, and joy, tables on which a range of food items (Chinese, Western and Japanese) were laid out on the dohyo – of course tarpaulins were carefully spread out to cover and protect this sacred battlefield, and this served as the first time in my own life to be able to step onto the dohyo proper - even with the tarps in place. Some stables have their year-end parties in hotels, but Nakamura Beya prefers to hold it in its own stable to make the most of the 'at-home' atmosphere even with all the time and effort required in making the arrangements. As a result, the venue was filled with a very friendly air as kids in particular found pleasure in pounding rice

cakes with a heavy mallet (aided by the rikishi).



Another point of interest on the day was the chance to meet the the so-called OBs of Nakamura Beya. Ex-sekitori, Saigo and Sumanofuji both attended as did Ouka (retired following the Aki Basho last year) - now studying to enter a university.

The day itself ended with a lottery-cum-draw of sorts which saw Nakamura Oyakata drawing lots and giving out prizes such as Japanese sake, beer, whisky, sweets and snacks, a carpet, and even electrical appliances. Those who won nothing were presented with an Ozumo calendar!

Another big event on the Nakamura Beya calendar is the annual Omochii-tsuki - conducted as usual on December 28th. As was mentioned above, this date never changes as Nakamura Oyakata conforms to a tradition he grew up with when he entered sumo in Takasago Beya; holding this event, regardless of the day of the week, on the 28th of December. In 2009, the 28th was

a Monday meaning that not so many people could visit. According to the Oyakata and Okamisan, omochi-tsuki is a celebration to drive away ill fortune built up over the year and also to welcome in a New Year - the reason the rikishi wear a red and white headband as they do during 'tsunauchi,' the belt-making ceremony for yokozuna.

The omochi-tsuki preparations begin before 5:00 am as it takes about 2 hours to steam every 2kg of glutinous rice. The total weight of rice used at the heya is 60 kg in order to make plenty of mochi to give away to neighbours. The first



steamed rice is traditionally pounded by the Oyakata and made into a mirror-shaped rice cake which should be offered in a holy place such as the stable shrine - again following the customs laid down in Takasago Beya.

On chanko day each rikishi faithfully devotes himself to entertaining any guests, but on the day the omochi-tsuki event is held, their merry feelings were expressed as they would be in all young boys of a similar age; they jokingly caked their faces in white powder or threw flour at each other.

In any field, to maintain a traditional way needs enormous effort and a strong mind as a human beings we so often opt for the convenient or 'easy' way. In the world of Ozumo too, I am afraid the meaning and values it has long tried to maintain may soon be lost. Sometimes, to match the changing of the world, drastic reformation is inevitable but as regards the observance of sumo based traditions, I fully respect and thoroughly enjoy each and every chance I get to experience the inner-workings of this world.



[Chanko day picture bonanza](#)
[Omochi-tsuki picture bonanza](#)