

Kokugi Konnections Classic Kaio

by Chris Gould

He keeps doing it again and again! Just when you think Kaio is dead and buried, or at least within a whisker of retirement, the steely veteran goes on a spectacular winning run. In fact, not since 2003 has he posted a negative score over 15 full days. And he appears to be getting stronger with age: six successive 8-7s in 2009 have been followed by a couple of 9-6s and a 12-3 in 2010. This issue's Kokugi Konnections thus focuses on Kaio's finest matches.

We start with May 2000, which saw Kaio's first yusho win at the age of 27. On the 6th day he came up against the great Takanohana, perhaps a little past his prime but nonetheless still a formidable opponent. Matches between these two always had some added spice because of the very narrow difference in age, a mere 19 days (Kaio actually being older!) Although Takanohana retired nearly eight years ago, Kaio is still going strong, and this match shows exactly why, the Tomozuna veteran showing Herculean strength to withstand Takanohana's belt attack and then turn the tables at the last minute. <http://www.banzuke.com/~movies/natsu2000/060500mov.html> Notice his recourse to the arm-pull, a technique that he has mastered more than any other

rikishi currently in the game.

Few people reading this will be able to imagine Kaio looking small, but when the Hawaiians were in town, sumo's conception of "big" was redefined. Thus we have a miniscule-looking Kaio taking on the 220-kilogram bulk of Musashimaru in July 2000 – with Maru certainly at his peak. It is tempting to knock Kaio these days for outstaying his welcome on the dohyo, particularly when seeing what a pale shadow he is of his former self. This match, which ends with a brilliant winning move, is a good case in point. <http://www.banzuke.com/~movies/nagoya2000/140700mov.html>

He really was an expert technician in his day. He still is now, but back in the early 2000s he had agility to back up his know-how. Those in doubt should check out the following match, which sees Kaio paired with Takanohana again, also from July 2000. Kaio marshalled Takanohana expertly in this match, not only defeating him for the second basho in a row but winning so aggressively that Takanohana actually had to withdraw from the tournament. An amazing winning move again – the "arm throw over the knee –" has the commentator nigh leaping out of his seat.

<http://www.banzuke.com/~movies/nagoya2000/070700mov.html>

Now for the party piece: Kaio v Musashimaru in November 2000. The move used to win this one is very rarely seen: ipponzeoi. Quite how anyone manages to practice this (or even thought it up in the first place) is mystery enough, but to actually pull it off against a behemoth is simply incredible. The move is akin to carrying a 220-kilogram sack of potatoes on your back while spinning. Check it out.

<http://www.banzuke.com/~movies/kyushu2000/141100mov.html>

The last of Kaio's five yusho came in September 2004 and was crowned with victory against Asashoryu on the final day. Although Asashoryu was carrying an injury in the latter stage of this tournament, he still provided stiff competition and Kaio had to be on his guard. What followed was a masterclass in belt-fighting against one of the greatest wrestlers ever seen on the dohyo. It is how Kaio would wish to be remembered. Sadly, the longer he soldiers on with a battered body, the more these memories fade away. <http://www.banzuke.com/~movies/aki2004/150904mov.html>