

One To Watch Hatsu 2011

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photos by Chris Gould*

The rikishi in this issue's column have all produced some kind of "What the heck!?" moment" during Kyushu Basho 2010. Two of them will be mentioned for their unexpectedly good performances. Four of them will be mentioned because they have sort of been forgotten after their recent decline and their seemingly hopeless struggles for a return to higher banzuke regions – and the sudden awareness of that very fact.



Ozeki Kaio

We will start with the plus side and **Kaio**. Whenever you heard the words "Kaio", "record" and "twelve" in one sentence during the last few years, you'd immediately guess a 0-3-12 early withdrawal from the Fukuoka man. His 12-3 came as quite a surprise. It's his first since Kyushu 2004 (how fittingly...) and only his sixth double-digit kachi-koshi since then. What do we have to

expect from him in 2011? After his showing in the last basho I don't even want to guess. But since his toshiyori-kabu has recently been rented out again we can assume that he is not ready yet to quit. And quite frankly, why should he do so?

The second plus is **Toyonoshima**, who won the Jun-yusho, a Gino-sho and a Kanto-sho in Kyushu. Yes, he has been one of Mainoumi's "Seven Samurai" (Japanese hopefuls who may make it big) but he assumed more of a walk-on role, not a leading role in this play. At the time of writing of these lines it is not yet clear where exactly on the banzuke he will be in January. (Sekiwake? Komusubi? Or just M1?) We only know that he will face some more high quality opponents than in Kyushu this time, but we also can be sure that he is able to cope with them.

We will jump over juryo now and right into the 3rd division where our next four rikishi to watch are competing today (and maybe will do so for their remaining time in sumo?) Three of them hail from the same heya, so let's hope that this is just coincidence and not a jinx on Onoe.

Satoyama's recent 3-4 fits into the pattern that he goes make-koshi whenever he gets close enough to the promotion zone. He has seemingly fought since at least 2008 with a chronic neck injury that prevents him from getting any

higher. (It is always sad to see talent wasted by injury.) He will turn 30 years old in May and with just 13 sekitori basho he has no visible future as an oyakata, too, so we might soon see his last outing.



Futeno

Dewanoumi-beya's **Futeno** tumbled down the ranks after a forced full basho absence because of the betting scandal in July – now he has an even lower rank than the one at which he began Ozumo in 2003! Granted, his 5-2 at the end of the makushita division was expectable from the All Japan Sumo Championship winner 2000, but it may also be a hint that he has recuperated from the setback and is on track back into the paid ranks again.

The legs of **Shirononami** have been something to worry about in the last two years. First a fracture of the right foot in July 2009, then a hamstring strain in March 2010.



Yamamotoyama

No wonder that he has fallen down the ranks. Just like Futeno he got a 5-2 in Kyushu and is (hopefully) on the way up again. But unlike Satoyama his age of 29 years doesn't seem too high at all for a return to juryo – where he belongs.

Last but not least:

[Yamamotoyama](#). He is huge. HUGE. This has always been seen as his weak spot. How often have

we read, "... barring any injuries" whenever his career prospects have been discussed. And here they are! The knee ligament injury in Aki seems to be the straw that has finally broken the camel's back. If he can't cut down very much weight in the very near future he will, for his health's sake, probably have to retire soon – maybe even before Kaio.

Enjoy the Hatsu Basho!