

Kokugi Konnections Mainoumi Mayhem

by Chris Gould

On Wednesday January 25th 2012, a popular comedy night-time discussion show aired its weekly “Top Three Ranking” slot – knowing full well that the watching masses love anything with a ranking. Not for nothing are the top three ranks in sumo, and indeed every organisation, known as the “sanyaku” and given such significance! On this particular day, the special feature was the “Top Three matches of Mainoumi,” currently a popular ringside summariser on NHK Sumo Broadcasts – and also offering culture reports for Fuji News Network.

Mainoumi has often been described as “a fairly dubious 5 foot 7,” having only managed to match sumo’s minimum height requirements by virtue of having a prosthetic chip inserted into his head! He claimed that his incredible determination to enter sumo was born from the death of his closest judo friend in college. Continuing the fighting career they started together in sumo was Mainoumi’s way of keeping his friend’s memory alive.

Weighing around 87 kilograms, Mainoumi was easily the lightest rikishi in the top two divisions for the best part of a decade, only briefly enjoying competition from the sumo stick-insect-like figure of Ishinriki, who retired well before he did. He was the easiest rikishi to defeat by lift-out... if you could catch him. And many larger wrestlers simply couldn’t. In fact, Mainoumi’s judo background and incredible physical strength made him one of the most dangerous

maegashira on the circuit in his heyday. His agility was such that he could win in all manner of compromising situations, earning him the nickname: “Waza no depaato – department store of techniques.” Ozeki Wakanohana, ex-ozeki Konishiki, future-ozeki Musoyama and future-ozeki Kaio were frequently among his victims,



while even the giant future yokozuna Akebono was memorably felled by an inner leg-trip in the 1991 Kyushu basho. For the record, a similar leg-trip also did for giant salt-shaking Mitoizumi in the 1991 practice tournament in London.

The TV show picked the victory over Akebono as his third-best match, and it can be seen here. Note how Mainoumi deliberately holds back and feints at the tachiai, and then dives as low as he can without touching the ground, latching onto Akebono’s huge limb with vice-like intensity. It was a truly incredible sumo moment and the crowd went hysterical.



Akebono was wised up to such tomfoolery the next time round however, spotting Mainoumi’s feint very quickly, latching onto his belt and lifting him out by tsuridashi.

The second-best match was determined to be his epic tussle with Musoyama in 1994, when Mainoumi somehow spun out of a move at the ropes, and recovered

to win despite having his back to a feared thrusting powerhouse. Even the judges at ringside are seen to be visibly shocked at his amazing skill in pulling off a victory.



My goodness, sumo was exciting in those good old days, and NHK’s commentators continue to remind us of that, wishing that more present-day rikishi were like Mainoumi.

The diminutive rikishi’s best match was judged to be his encounter with fellow lightweight – and future politician – Kyokudozan, a phenomenally strong and agile wrestler himself. Here, Mainoumi again feints at the tachiai, gives Kyokudozan the run around, before diving in and finishing off the job. (No video available at present).

It was the constant need to think ahead, to improvise, and to overcome huge physical disadvantages that made Mainoumi so entertaining, and so inspiring, to watch. Surviving in the top division on his brand of sumo for several years was perhaps one of sumo’s greater feats. At his most agile, he was scintillating, as evidenced by his amazing jump-up against Kitakachidoki, known as Hassotobi, named after a sea captain who escaped by jumping over various boats.



My best match, however, concerns the occasion on which Mainoumi was himself Hassotobi'd – beaten at his own game by the most unlikely of sources. On the final day of the January 1992 tournament, barely an hour before Takahanada made history by winning his first ever tournament title, Mainoumi found himself faced with the balding, weakening frame of Ozutsu, the most

successful rikishi to emerge from the great yokozuna Taiho's training stable (which wasn't saying too much). Enduring a torrid tournament and facing his last ever match at the highest level, Ozutsu decided to go for broke and please the crowd simultaneously, leaping into action like Batman. The commentator's cry says it all: "Ozutsu ga tobiagatta!!" (The balding veteran's just jumped

him!!) Ozutsu went on to win the match, forcing more than a smile or two from Mainoumi as he walks back to dressing room, admiring both the gall and the surprise return to youth of a washed up journeyman.

