

Kimarite Focus

by Mikko Mattila

In this series of kimarite articles, most of the common kimarite have been covered as have quite a few of the rarer ones. There remain plenty of interesting kimarite to educate the general public about, but in this final kimarite article before I take a sabbatical, I will look at some of the methods and facts surrounding 'belt sumo' techniques while touching on several other styles.

In sumo there are roughly speaking two types of rikishi: 'pushers' and traditional 'belt sumo' rikishi. Of course, there are quite a few rikishi able to work well in both forms but more often than not a rikishi can be classified either as a 'pusher' or 'belt sumo' man.

The most common position obtained in a bout where both rikishi favour yotsu-zumo (belt sumo) is either migi-yotsu or hidari-yotsu. Migi-yotsu refers to a rikishi with his right hand inside (migi=right in Japanese) and left hand outside while hidari-yotsu is the exact reverse. A full-on migi-yotsu position occurs when both rikishi have both hands on the mawashi with their left hands having secured overarm grips. Differences in the skill, reach and speed of individual rikishi often result in a partial migi-yotsu whereby one rikishi may only have his right hand inside whereas his opponent has secured that all important left-hand outside grip.

When both rikishi have secured their favoured yotsu stance, the bout is termed "ai-yotsu". Classic examples in recent times are those bouts seen between newly promoted yokozuna Hakuho and ozeki Kotooshu. Both are famous for their powerful left-hand outside grips so that the prime

factor in their bouts is to be able to reach this position without letting the opponent reach (his) own belt. One of Hakuho's main weapons is the speed with which he obtains his own grip in the battle towards the 'first grip'. Of course, some epics do occur after two strong rikishi lock-up in their favorite positions with a true contest of power and skill the outcome.

NB - losing bouts in which you have secured your own favoured grip doesn't offer much in the way of 'explanations / excuses'!

Sometimes ai-yotsu works in different ways. A very good example is sometimes seen in the Futeno vs Tochinonada match-up. Futeno is one of the strongest hidari-yotsu rikishi around while Tochinonada is himself known for his very dangerous left-hand inside grip. What makes this match-up different from the Hakuho vs Kotooshu bouts is that Tochinonada doesn't need his right hand on the belt but is content with only his left hand inside. Hence it is very rare to see Tochinonada in full hidari-yotsu but it is quite common to see him against a fellow hidari-yotsu expert in a massive duel for the left hand inside. When Tochinonada was younger and physically stronger, from this position, he was able to defeat even ozeki Kaio at times. Kaio has long been the master of power sumo from a hidari-yotsu stance and even yokozuna Takanohana in his prime couldn't fully counter Kaio's hidari-yotsu prowess.

While ai-yotsu certainly has many interesting details surrounding it, the same can be said about the so-called "kenka-yotsu", which means

a situation where rikishi have different favoured yotsu stances and only one of the two can get into their favoured position in their bout (kenka = fight). In these bouts, the main focus is on getting one's own grip as soon as possible for when that happens the foe is likely out of his (favoured) position – a good (recent) example of a kenka-yotsu bout was seen in the Natsu 2007 tournament when Hakuho and Kaio both stated prior to the tussle that their main goal was to prevent the other one from getting their favoured grip. Another example of a fine kenka-yotsu match-up is Kisenosato vs Roho. If the bout goes to belt sumo it is almost always, without exception, Kisenosato's hidari-yotsu that prevails – a point that shows in their face-to-face statistics.

In belt sumo - or yotsu-zumo - the most dominant position is morozashi, a situation in which the attacker gets both hands inside the defender's arms and on the mawashi while simultaneously using his stomach to jerk the defender's centre of gravity upwards and outwards - backwards. It is very difficult for the defender to obtain any decent leverage in such a position. Sadogatake's Kotomitsuki and Kotoshogiku are both excellent at getting into morozashi positions - Kotomitsuki especially so against young rikishi. His primary victim over recent months seems to have been Kisenosato, and Tochiozan (Natsu 2007) also went down to the Aichi native. There haven't been many rikishi capable of responding to an opponent's morozashi, with only Takanonami being able to reverse the advantage by utilizing his favoured

kimarite - kimedashi.

Relatively small rikishi are often less enthusiastic in engaging in full mihi/hidari-yotsu positions while larger rikishi use their girth better in these situations. Indeed, some of the smaller technicians opt to attack the front of the opponent's mawashi, with Satoyama a great example of such a rikishi, as was

the former Hamanoshima.

As all the more experienced fans will be doing, when watching sekitori-level sumo it may be of interest to note ahead of time the favoured grips of certain rikishi – a few examples of which follow:

Migi-yotsu specialists:

Hakuho, Kotooshu, Kotomitsuki,

Roho, Tokitenku, Tochiozan, Takamisakari, Kasugao, Hochiyama, Kitazakura, Shimotori, Goeido, Hakurozan

Hidari-yotsu specialists:

Kaio, Tamanoshima, Futeno, Kisenosato, Kotoshogiku, Wakanosato