

# Heya Peek

## Sakaigawa Beya - Fukuoka

by *Martina Lunau*

Sakaigawa Beya is difficult to find in Fukuoka but worth a visit. Always a bit absentminded I had left the location plan, provided by Manfred Deutschländer, and had only the address to go on. I thought this wouldn't be a big problem but ...

Well, the taxi driver did his very best, he had no real clue where we were so asked at least a dozen people for directions until suddenly we saw some flags waving in the wind - Sakaigawa Beya.

We had finally arrived but I was now a bit concerned about getting back later 'cause I hadn't seen a taxi for about 10 minutes. Anyway I decided to worry (about that) later on.

The heya itself is a plain white building, with, on the day I was there, towels seen hanging outside the windows on the second floor. In Fukuoka everything is a little

more spacious than in Tokyo, so there was a lot of unused space around the building. This gave me more of an atmosphere of a large parking area than of a nice place to relax for the rikishi. The ground was covered with small pebbles.

When I arrived, Yoshinokuni was outside doing shiko. Thinking I'd better ask him if I may watch the training, I did but it was no problem at all. Yoshinokuni showed me the way and so I entered a room crowded with a visiting school class although they only stayed a few minutes more.

To the left one could see the open kitchen and watch the cook preparing breakfast. The room itself was very small. To the right, next to me, was a small altar where Satsukiumi was igniting an incense stick. The whole room was very functional with nothing more in it as far as decorations go – just the wooden slats showing shikona of the rikishi on the wall.

The standard rice-straw bales (tawara) formed the edge of the practise dohyo\*, which was swept and recovered with sand regularly. Because it was a very nice and sunny day, after a while two rikishi removed, with a great deal of noise, the two sliding doors which lead to the courtyard to let the sun and air in.



*Fukunaga*

I was just in time to see one of my favourites start his training - Fukunaga, who is sandanme 1 at the moment, but secured a KK in Kyushu and will be promoted to makushita again. He has already been up as far as makushita 16 but fell all the way down again. Fukunaga started his career together with Toyohibiki and Goeido. At the beginning he developed well and seemed to be the best of the three but as we all know, things have changed. Fukunaga was just practising sanbangeiko with Sadanoumi (the sandanme yusho winner at the Kyushu Basho) and unfortunately he lost in all of them. He is a very

\* Ed note: many heya opting for just a 'lip' of raised earth in both Tokyo and while on the road



*Goeido*

short rikishi, only 1.68 m and he tries his luck with his head very, very deep in order to shove his opponents out of the dohyo. I can't imagine that this is so healthy for his neck and after training he seemed to have problems with it.

In the meantime Sakaigawa Oyakata, former komusubi Ryogoku, had come in and started watching the training.

Next in the ring was my second favourite, Mongolian Shironoryu,



*Shironoryu*

who had to fight against Sadanofuji, a higher ranked makushita rikishi (MS 15) who will climb up the ranks come January thanks to his KK at the recent tournament. Sadanofuji looked strong and convincing this basho, Shironoryu couldn't get his own KK but did score a 3-4 record. Shironoryu is quite slim but athletic, and might be too slim and a bit too short to make it up to the top I fear, but I never give up on any of my favourites. He displayed some good moves in keiko against the much bigger and stronger Sadanofuji and pulled off some nice wins. Like Fukunaga and Sadanoumi before, they continued their fights for about 15 minutes.

Sanbangeiko for Fukunaga, Sadanoumi and Shironoryu

finished with butsukari-geiko in which they 'leant their chests' to each other while Sadanofuji practised with Iwakiyama.



*Iwakiyama*

As with the rikishi before, Sadanofuji and Shironoryu were advised by the Oyakata, and when butsukari-geiko was over he spoke to them individually – seeming to be the sort of oyakata who plays a more active role during training.



*Sadanofuji*

The first sekitori had already entered the room by this time, Hochiyama and Iwakiyama, bowing respectfully to the oyakata. They were now followed by Goeido and Toyohibiki. All went through their warm ups during the training of the makushita guys; some shiko and stretching before it was their

turn.

Goeido is the heya gashira, the heya's highest ranked rikishi, and he started fighting against Iwakiyama. They practised moushiai, a series of bouts in which the winner stays on the dohyo and has the right to pick his next opponent – well in our case Goeido stayed all the time even when he lost – although he only lost once to Hochiyama and twice to Iwakiyama. Toyohibiki had no chance against him at all on the day I was there and as is often the case, after each bout all the other rikishi came running to the top dog, surrounded him, shouted loudly and tried to get his attention to win the chance for the next bout. Goeido clearly was the boss in the ring.



*Hochiyama*

As I said, it was a sunny day so the rikishi who weren't on duty as tsukebito performed some more shiko and suriashi outside. The sekitori on the dohyo showed powerful sumo, always attended by their tsukebito, who didn't seem to get tired bringing new water, wiping the sweat off, giving a little massage here and there, mopping the dohyo, handing salt to the sekitori and adjusting the mawashi. Fukunaga acted as Toyohibiki's tsukebito. I can imagine this is a strange feeling for him (given how he started) but he cared a lot and did everything to support his senior.

The moushiai ended and all

sekitori finished with butsukari-geiko – advised while doing so by the oyakata. Goeido explained that he had some problems with his chin so he was allowed to go to his room and care for it. The other three sekitori took a little rest, did some more shiko and stretched. The oyakata turned around and started to speak to his visitors, an elderly man, a Japanese woman and myself. I refused the breakfast cigarette offered and tried my best to make a little conversation in some Japanese / English baffle. He seems to be a nice, friendly man, but is strict in his training methods. Training ended with the remaining rikishi arranging themselves around the dohyo, doing shiko, shinkyaku and matawari at the very end.

I had to go, said 'sayonara' and left the building. Outside they had a little blue tent with some training equipment and a place to rest and eat for the rikishi. And there he sat: Toyohibiki :-). He is one of my favourites too – well who isn't :-). – and I had brought a little present



*Goeido*

for him. Toyohibiki was sitting in the tent together with Sadanoumi and Sadanofuji. I gave him the present and he gave me a big smile and said in his best English "Thank you, thank you, thank you" which made us all laugh. I returned the favour in my best

Japanese, wished him luck and success and said good bye and started with the difficult part of the mission – to find a taxi back home. But I'm always a lucky person, took the right street and didn't have to wait too long for a cab coming along - and this time the driver knew his way.



*Toyohibiki*

Sakaigawa Beya – a heya with a good atmosphere and some rikishi with great potential, who look intense, ambitious and motivated. First of all Goeido and Toyohibiki of course, but also the younger ones such as Sadanofuji, Sadanoumi, Satsukiumi and Yoshinokuni - two other slim and athletic rikishi - who could make their way to sekitorihood – in my humble opinion. Not to forget my favourites: Fukunaga and Shironoryu.

I will cheer for them all and support them as well as I can :-).