



SFM Sekitori Interview Juryo 12 - Tochinoshin Tsuyoshi (Aka Levan Gorgadze)



*Interview by Mark Buckton
Photos by Carolyn Todd & Mark Buckton*

On a sunny day in late December, SFM's Editor-in-Chief, Mark Buckton, (MB) was able to meet up with and interview Georgian sekitori, Tochinoshin Tsuyoshi (TT) of Kasugano Beya.

With the first part of the interview done minus a tape (the italics in the following text) while we sat in the street chatting as the new sekitori removed the taping from his feet after a degeiko session at Dewanoumi Beya, I was later offered a zabuton in the oyakata's position during asageiko - just to the side of the other 'live-in' sekitori (Tochiozan and Kimurayama – the three older sekitori living out in apartments nearby) as they attacked their late morning staple of chanko, rice and other assorted tidbits.

Joined soon afterwards by a now showered, bathed, shaved and tapeless Tochinoshin, spending just his second Christmas and New Year away from home, the following transcript is an account of the conversation with the 20 year old from the ancient capital of Mtskheta in the Kartli province of Eastern Georgia:

MB: Just to start, tell our readers how tall you are and how much you weigh right now if you would?

TT: I'm about 142 or 143kg and around 191cm at the moment.

MB: We'll start with the 'standard Qs' then - the food. What do you like and dislike food wise in Japan?

TT: Most food is OK but I don't



like raw oysters. Deep fried or boiled in 'nabe'¹. My favorite food is meat though - 'yaki-niku' (grilled meat) - beef or liver. Pork is OK too.

MB: What about raw liver (a relatively popular Korean dish in Japan).

TT: No problem, I like that *(but) I really like sweet things. That's my favorite type of food.*

MB: How is your Japanese? With everyone around you speaking only Japanese you must pick it up pretty quickly.

TT: Yeah, but I still need another year or two (to be a good speaker)

MB: Does anybody here (Kasugano Beya) speak any Georgian?

TT: No, nobody.

MB: What about English? Did you use any English when you first arrived?

TT: (grins and laughs) No, I don't understand English anyway.

MB: Do you have any particular interest in as far as Japanese culture goes? The arts or sports found in Japan except for sumo, baseball for example?

TT: I like judo, but don't really like baseball. Judo is my favorite sport besides sumo.

MB: Do you have a favorite area of Tokyo?

TT: (laughs and names one, then a second area that draw a laugh from us both - and asks that

neither be named!)



MB: Any places you like to visit throughout Japan?

TT: Tochigi (prefecture - north of Tokyo)- I like the mountains and onsen up in Tochigi but I can't remember the name of the actual place I went (in Tochigi).

MB: What about honbasho - does one location stand out above the others?

TT: Yes, Tokyo.

MB: What about Fukuoka or Nagoya, Osaka?

TT: They (are) far, aren't they? No, Tokyo is the best - I can walk. (and gestures towards the Kokugikan which is only about 300-400m from Kasugano Beya).

MB: Now that you are in juryo, will you still walk?

TT: Yes, everybody here (at Kasugano) walks because it is so close.

MB: What has been the worst experience of your time in Japan to date?

TT: Probably the time I first

joined Ozumo.

MB: How was that - with the language, customs etc?

TT: It was very hard, at first I didn't understand anything (that was going on). I was cleaning, cooking, doing everything.

MB: Why did you end up in Kasugano Beya? Was it connected to your time in amateur sumo?

TT: I spent a month with a university sumo team at first. Some rikishi came to Sakai (for the Sumo World Championships) in (October) 2005. After that finished I came up here but I don't really know why I came here to Kasugano. I don't really know who (told Kasugano about me) but I think it was the head of Nichidai

MB: Ah, Tanaka-san - head of the IFS?

TT: No, not Tanaka. It was the one below him but I can't remember his name now. So, I came here for keiko but still didn't know if I wanted to join so I went home in the December to think about it for a couple of months. I spoke about joining with the people in Georgia.

MB: And your family? What did they say? (with regards to the possibility of you joining Ozumo)?

TT: They listened to me and when I told my mother and father, my mother was not happy but my father told me to think about it (and I spent 2 months at home) then my father told me to do what I wanted to do - and to go (to Japan) so in 2006, February, I came (and joined Ozumo).

MB: What did you get for Christmas?

TT: Nothing - it is hard to send



things from Georgia right now with all the trouble. That's why I haven't been home recently.

MB: (as he was stroking his freshly shaved chin). A few sekitori were moaning about (your fellow Georgian) Kokkai and his stubble being a bit rough. Have you had any complaints?

TT: No, but in Georgia (most boys) start shaving from age 15 or 16.

MB: In around 3 weeks time you

rank and time in sumo) as well as those now junior (in terms of rank). *I need to do a lot of work on my tachiai but everybody is great.*

MB: Do you see yourself as having a rival at present? If so who is he? Kimurayama-zeki?

TT: Yes - Kimura-san. Kimura!

MB: Where do you see yourself in 5 / 10 years?

TT: Hmm, I really don't know yet (bashfully tilting his head to the

amateur level?

TT: Not that many people actually do it but if they have an event like the Sakai (World Championships) in Georgia, a lot more people will see it (and become interested) just like the judo and wrestling (we have). They will see it and think about joining. That said, my brother went to Thailand this year and got a bronze medal which made him happy.

TT: By the way, I saw your homepage (this being the second time in a week TT and MB had met) and was surprised to see all (the interest in sumo in) English and all the pictures of the Russians and Georgians.

MB: There is a lot of international interest in the sport now. Back on the questions though (as the tsukebito were eyeing us then the clock repeatedly - obviously wanting the sekitori to eat so they themselves could wash and sit down for lunch), there are now 3 Georgians in Ozumo. Do you all get on? Are you all friendly?

TT: Mmmm, yeah.

MB: Do you go out drinking together?

TT: Not really. Gagamaru doesn't really have the time (as he is still below the sekitori ranks) and Kokkai lives so far away - in Saitama. (about 40 mins by train from Ryogoku).

MB: How do you pass the time? Any hobbies?

TT: (Grins) I like hunting! (indicates with a gesture, the use of a rifle).

MB: In Japan!? Or Georgia?

TT: In Georgia. We have bears in the mountains as well as rabbits, many birds.

MB: With Hatsu coming and the



will have your first fight as a sekitori. How do you feel right now?

TT: I feel pretty good.

MB: In the heya, who has been helping you the most with training - teaching you the sumo ropes.

TT: Everybody helps me everyday. Those senior to me (in terms of

side).

MB: Do you see yourself staying in sumo for a long time?

TT: No, I can't do it forever as age will catch up with me.

MB: Looking at sumo in Georgia, now you have Tedo (Rtveliashvili)² but do you have anyone else interested in the sport at the

future opportunity to hunt / face some of the top names, Asashoryu, Hakuho and Kokkai as a fellow Georgian, who would you like to go against?

TT: Of course I'd like to go against all of them.

MB: (with the tsukebito looking as though they would soon drop) OK then, last one - any message for the fans out there. Especially the non-Japanese fans reading this.

TT: Message, nah, (looking shy as though he has never been asked

this one before and as if it confused him) but I have had a lot of letters. I can't understand them though (as they are in English). I also get phone calls to the heya from fans wishing me luck including from Georgians but (there are so few of us in Japan that) we know each other anyway and know each other's phone numbers.

MB: Again, the second time in a week, thanks for your time and for answering so many questions. On behalf of many fans who will read this, best of luck during Hatsu -

and from me, for tomorrow (the day of the heya mochi making).

TT: No, no. Thank you. Thank you.

¹ a Japanese all in one form of boiled dish in which meat or fish are joined by vegetables of choice / season.

² a competitor at the 2006 SWC in Sakai near Osaka with no interpreter provided by the IFS so subsequently put in touch with Tochinoshin back in Tokyo by way of the SFM staff present.