



I was there, I remember! The 1960s



by SA

Like most Japanese over the age of 60, SA, as he wants to be referred to, recalls with great clarity the decade in sumo that saw Taiho reign supreme, Kashiwado play an important and effective supporting role, and the other yokozuna and ozeki of the time sit, for the most part on the sidelines as sumo history was created.

The following is a translated version of the comments made by SA, former fishmonger turned sushi-chef, in his north Tokyo home in early 2008; the conversation a repeat of many similar conversations in SA's tucked away restaurant shared with SFM's MB over the decade they have known each other. Sadly, SA has now given in to the calendar and retired although he and MB remain close.

The 1960s belonged to Taiho. We didn't know it at the time but one of his parents was foreign (Ed: Taiho's father was Ukrainian). It wouldn't have made any difference though – he was a yokozuna, he was a gentleman, and he was the idol of millions.

With Taiho around, sumo took on new meaning. I felt sorry for Kashiwado as he was often ignored – Sadanoyama too. They were both good fighters but Taiho was better than anyone – everyone.

At the time, a popular term did the

rounds – Taiho, tamagoyaki (fried egg), Kyojin (popular nickname of the Yomiuri Giants baseball team) but sometimes the order was mixed up. It sounds odd now, especially the tamagoyaki part, but each of these things were immensely popular during the 60s - before you were even born he says laughing at the relative youth of the SFM man.

Eggs had always been hard to get in the years after the war so they were always seen as a healthy thing that only a few could enjoy, and Kyojin were winning everything with the partnership of (Sadaharu) Oh and (Shigeo) Nagashimaⁱ - and of course Taiho was the best yokozuna we had ever seen in sumo. I think he is the best there has ever been.

I do remember the Tochi-Waka-era (Tochinishiki / Wakanohana) quite well in the late 1950s as I was working in a fish shop around that time, (SA being in his mid-seventies was born in the early to mid-1930s) and I have a vague recollection of Futabayama from the war years, but the Hakuho-jidai (nickname given to the Taiho / Kashiwado-era based on one reading of the kanji used in their names) was something special. Sumo was always exciting in the 1960s.

Taiho was handsome, carried himself properly – not like this yokozuna we have today

(Asashoryu) and never seemed to put a foot wrong. Women liked him, men liked him, kids liked him – everyone liked Taiho. Kashiwado wasn't that good-looking but had a lot of fans too.

I do remember that there was a bit of a problem towards the end of the decade as Taiho won so much, and had no real competition, that some people switched off. I have always watched sumo though. Never stopped.

Today, I guess competition is a good thing in sport and in sumo, so today's (two) yokozuna are becoming more interesting. I like Hakuho now – he seems the perfect gent, the perfect yokozuna. Hopefully he will get stronger and beat Asashoryu more, but none of them will ever approach Taiho in terms of ability. It is a different game now, with all the Mongolian forms of wrestling that we see, but that cannot be helped. I look forward to the day we have a Japanese yokozuna but everybody is so weak! Who will it be? Hmmm. (as he bimbles off into a world of memories long since stored away)

ⁱ both Giants players of lore – the former a Taiwanese national and holder of the world record for career home runs, the latter a Japanese national icon-cum-quasi-god like figure simply referred to as 'Mister' in Japan.