

The Ozeki Jobsite

by Lon Howard

Bye Bye Banzuke – Hello Ozeki

I always thought that self-evaluation was very wise but I confess that in practice, I've expected it mostly from others. For the subject at hand though, I finally picked up the mirror myself and after a close look, I've decided the time has come to remove all future references to the Eternal Banzuke in the Sumo Odds 'n' Ends section. That's a really soft way to say I'm pulling the plug on it.

You may have noticed that it's been on hiatus while I've worked through some health issues, as it's a highly labor-intensive project. That's because I'm not skilled enough to employ result-grabbers and color templates that can stretch and shrink, etc. Recently I've been disappointed in that I just couldn't get going on it even though the health issues are largely solved. It's pretty clear now that this old dog can't keep the same number of balls in the air as before. It's also my opinion that – unlike Henka Sightings and Elevator Ride – EB has little relevance because it doesn't provide any useful intelligence that the true fan isn't at least vaguely aware of, or can discover by accident. And reconstructing it in banzuke form after each basho is just too much work to be done mostly for its own sake. It's not completely without merit, as it does spotlight some nice tidbits such as the amazing resurgence of Kirishima's career, and also the fact that pluggers like Tamakasuga and Tosanoumi have had far more stellar careers than most new fans realize. But there's just not enough bang for

the time and energy buck, that's the bottom line.

And besides (yes, there had to be more to it...), I got more and more into another idea that was a lot more energizing and – yeah – fun! And when there was a spare minute or two, I couldn't keep my hands off of it. It's not all done yet, but done enough to drag out of the barn and into the front yard. So with no further ado, here it is, and it's called...

The Ozeki Job Site

A portion of the inspiration for this comes from David Shapiro, the occasional color sidekick on NHK's English language sumo telecast. In addition to providing the most voluminous analytical minutiae among the color guys and gals, David never fails to remind us at least twice in each of his appearances that the ozeki's job is to challenge yokozuna for the yusho. Not a novel concept but thanks to his effusive manner (the New York accent helps too), this duty will be burned into my brain for as long as it functions. Another oft-repeated job requirement for ozeki is that he should win at least 10 matches in a basho.

After hearing this for many years I finally began to wonder if ozeki had ever been directly measured and compared in these terms, so I thought I'd give it a go.

In mulling over the criteria, I thought about the ozeki discussions we've had online. When we talk about the job ozeki are doing, we are usually interested in the here and now, and our memories are short. Regardless of how they performed

when they were 'strong,' or when they weren't injured, or when their competition was weaker, we demand that they do the job today; and if they don't we let them hear about it. If they not only fall short of the ozeki mission but also register another kadoban, we make a big fuss over it: "Kadoban... again? Why doesn't he just retire?" With this in mind, I thought it was best to include every ozeki basho and not cherry-pick parts of a career.

I tried to make the measuring as simple as possible, awarding points to each ozeki every basho, depending on what they accomplished. Starting with the minimum 10-win requirement, one point was awarded if they won at least ten matches, which means that if they won eight or nine, zero points were awarded since they didn't really accomplish anything. Simple enough so far. But ten wins doesn't usually challenge for a yusho, so it follows that more than one point should be awarded if one does challenge. But then sometimes ozeki actually win yusho and of course an actual yusho should earn more points than a yusho challenge. So that's what led to awarding one, two and three points respectively for ten wins, a yusho challenge and an actual yusho.

Then there's the difference between kachi koshi and make koshi. That's a huge deal for ozeki since make koshi could lead to a loss of rank and prestige on a far greater scale than for any rikishi ranked below them, and the more kadoban an ozeki compiles, the larger the detraction from his overall body of work. So that led to the step of subtracting a point

for a make koshi.

Not toooo complicated so far. Except for one thing, which I'm sure hasn't escaped your eye. Of course it is this: How does one qualify for the prized two points awarded for a yusho challenge, or to put it more bluntly - how do you tell when an ozeki has challenged for - but not won - a yusho?

The answer of course is similar to the Elevator Rules - with nothing to go on, I had to make something up!

The most obvious way of challenging for a yusho is to lose a kettei sen. That's as close as one can get without actually winning but it doesn't happen very often so there should be other ways to record a challenge. It has always seemed to me that if an ozeki shows up for work on day 14 still in the hunt, he's leaning on the leaders in a serious way, and has 'done his job,' even if he then falls out of contention. I think I've even heard David say so.

So with that, the minimum criteria for an ozeki challenging for a yusho is to not be eliminated from yusho contention when day 14 action begins. That sounds very reasonable, except for one thing. Were this applied exclusively, it's possible that an imposing 12-win ozeki performance would not earn the two points for a challenge. As a practical matter, if this has ever actually happened, it's been infrequent enough to be inconsequential; so I thought it both simple and eminently fair that two points for a challenge be automatically earned when an ozeki records 12 wins.

The thing that still bothered me was the fact that the minimum of 10 wins could earn not only one point, but two; so I decided to raise the bar for a 10-win showing by requiring that the ozeki still be in the yusho race on senshuraku, instead of on day 14.

So with this, the yusho challenge criterion actually shakes out into four categories:

1. Lose a kettei sen
2. At least 12 wins
3. 11 Wins and still in the yusho race on day 14
4. 10 Wins and still in the yusho race on day 15

I'm still a little itchy about awarding the two points for a ten win performance, but in the end I felt that... well, if you're in the hunt you're in the hunt. It's only happened nine times, going back to 1949.

Each ozeki is assigned a grade, calculated this way: After awarding the ozeki his points for each basho (-1 to 3), just add all his numbers (positive and negative) and divide the total by the number of his ozeki basho. The resulting grade is simply the average number of points awarded per ozeki basho, expressed in decimals.

For example, let's take a look at the grades for the top five ozeki (the complete list is found [here](#)).

Rikishi	Grade	YAO*	#Ozeki Basho
Kotokaze	0.818	1981	22
Takanonami	0.784	1994	37
Wakashimazu	0.643	1983	28
Kirishima	0.625	1990	16
Konishiki	0.615	1987	39

* YAO: Year Attained Ozeki

I'm not here to say that Kotokaze was the greatest ozeki of all time, or that Kirishima was the fourth greatest. But I will say that they had significant impact while they were at that rank, although their careers were relatively short when compared to others in the top half of the ranking. Kotokaze's grade was especially enhanced by the fact that he had not a single make koshi except for the two at the end that concluded his ozeki career. At present, Kaio, Kotomitsuki and

Chiyotakai are bunched together in 6th, 7th and 8th place. Actually, in examining the columns for all the ozeki (that didn't make yokozuna), you'll find that few of them below the top 1/3 of the list had any real impact outside of longevity, and for the ones that did, their impact was diminished by excessive make koshi, especially at the end while they were hanging on.

I thought about possibly accounting for longevity in some way but decided to just list the raw grade; and include the number of basho alongside so that each person can write in their own asterisk if they wish. Again, there's no implication that Kotokaze was the best, Takanonami was second best, etc. It's just an attempt to quantify in some general way, who was doing ozeki sumo and who was not.

The ozeki grades for the yokozuna (while they were ozeki) are listed separately [here](#). I won't go into them too much right now. As you might expect, the ones with the highest grades are the dai yokozuna, with the shortest ozeki careers, and the ones at the bottom are the lesser lights, and the ones with the longest ozeki careers. Only the bottom three on the list have grades lower than the highest ozeki grade.

I'll be the first to admit that this isn't a perfect system but without something from the NSK that defines or even suggests what a yusho challenge is, I'm going to go with it. I'm also open to your comments as well, so don't be shy.

In constructing the Excel database spreadsheet, found [here](#), I color coded the cells containing the numeral '2' for the four separate categories of a yusho challenge, as well as the cell containing the numeral '3' for an actual yusho. It's not just for informational purposes, but it also makes it easier to quickly identify which

ozeki most often won or challenged for yusho. In addition, it allows for easy recognition of those era that had a greater or smaller degree of ozeki excellence. The legend for the color codes is near the top, at the very beginning of the spreadsheet.

Since I had to dig out and interpret the data, basho by basho, I won't swear that it's mistake-free, but I will say that the number of errors would not be great enough to move anyone up or down the list more than a couple places. Any errors that do exist would most

likely relate to the lavender-colored numeral '2' cells (11-win challenge), or to the absence of them. I will periodically go back through the spreadsheet to check for any errors and report them when/if I find them.

The grades of the current ozeki will be updated with each future issue, and incorporated into the overall listing(s). Also, I'll go a little farther back in time until reaching a point that makes further comparisons silly due to a limited number of basho and/or number of bouts per basho. I'll

also try to glean a few items of interest from the spreadsheet each time, such as Chiyonoyama being the last (and possibly only?) ozeki to win two consecutive yusho and not be promoted (he eventually was promoted four basho later).

I am interested to know your thoughts on how the study may be improved, either in content, process, or display. Thanks for looking it over. We'll see if any of our current ozeki can get closer to the top five next time.

The Yokozuna

<u>RANK</u>	<u>RIKISHI</u>	<u>GRADE</u>	<u>YAO*</u>	<u># OZEKI</u> <u>BASHO</u>	
1	Asashoryu	2.333	2002	3	
2	Chiyonofuji	2.333	1981	3	
3	Taiho	2.200	1961	5	
4	Takanohana	2.091	1993	11	
5	Kitanoumi	2.000	1974	3	
6	Wajima	2.000	1972	4	
7	Kashiwado	2.000	1960	7	
8	Wakanohana I	2.000	1956	10	
9	Takanosato	1.889	1982	9	
10	Kagamisato	1.833	1951	6	
11	Chiyonoyama	1.833	1949	6	
12	Hokutoumi	1.800	1986	5	
13	Tochinishiki	1.625	1953	8	
14	Hakuho	1.571	2007	7	
15	Musashimaru	1.515	1994	33	
16	Kitao	1.500	1986	4	Y Futahaguro
17	Wakamisugi	1.500	1977	8	Y Wakanohana II
18	Asahifuji	1.471	1987	17	
19	Asashio	1.364	1957	11	
20	Akebono	1.250	1992	4	
21	Onokuni	1.231	1985	13	
22	Yoshiyama	1.200	1951	10	
23	Wakanohana III	1.138	1993	29	
24	Sadanoyama	1.118	1962	17	
25	Tamanoshima	1.050	1966	20	Y Tamanoumi
26	Kitanofuji	0.857	1966	21	
27	Tochinoumi	0.800	1962	10	
28	Kotozakura	0.656	1967	32	
29	Mienoumi	0.333	1976	21	

* YAO: Year Attained Ozeki

The Ozeki

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1	Kotokaze	0.818	1981	22
2	Takanonami	0.784	1994	37
3	Wakashimazu	0.643	1983	28
4	Kirishima	0.625	1990	16
5	Konishiki	0.615	1987	39
6	Kaio	0.563	2000	48
7	Kotomitsuki	0.500	2007	6
8	Chiyotaikai	0.474	1999	57
9	Yutakayama	0.429	1963	35
10	Kiyokuni	0.393	1969	28
11	Hokutenyu	0.386	1983	44
12	Takanohana	0.360	1972	50
13	Kitabayama	0.355	1961	31
14	Tochihikari	0.318	1962	22
15	Ouchiyama	0.286	1955	7
16	Tochiazuma	0.269	2002	26
17	Kotooshu	0.250	2006	16
18	Dejima	0.250	1999	12
19	Mitsuneyama	0.250	1953	8
20	Daikirin	0.240	1970	25
21	Wakahaguro	0.154	1959	13
22	Asashio	0.111	1983	36
23	Asahikuni	0.095	1976	21
24	Kotogahama	0.071	1958	28
25	Musoyama	-0.037	2000	27
26	Kaiketsu	-0.111	1975	9
27	Shionoumi	-0.200	1947	5
28	Masuiyama II	-0.286	1980	7
29	Maenoyama	-0.300	1970	10
30	Matsunobori	-0.467	1956	15
31	Miyabiyama	-0.500	2000	8
32	Daiju	-0.600	1973	5

* YAO: Year Attained Ozeki