

The Ozeki Jobsite

by Lon Howard

It's been said that some yokozuna promotions were engineered – a not so obtuse way of saying that certain ozeki performances did not warrant promotion. The Ozeki obsite database won't reveal the authenticity of any torikumi, and will not look inside the minds of the promotion deciders, but it will at least offer some statistical insight.

The chart [here](#) was derived from the Ozeki Database, found [here](#). To interpret the database, it may be helpful to review [An Introduction To The Ozeki Jobsite](#) and the [Ozeki Grade Calculation](#).

The chart shows the names of all 29 yokozuna from Chiyonoyama through Hakuho, with columns of data alongside. These columns show their ozeki grade and number of ozeki basho excluding the final two basho – normally assumed to be their yokozuna 'run'. This will give some idea as to how they were performing before they started their yokozuna run. The last column shows how many yusho they won in those last two basho.

As presented, the chart is sorted by yokozuna order, with the most recent yokozuna at the top. You can re-sort it yourself by any of the other columns.

The first thing that stands out is how strict the promotion standards have become in the last 20 years. The generally accepted standard for promoting an ozeki in the 'modern era' has been that they should win two consecutive yusho. For the 22 yokozuna from Chiyonoyama through Onokuni in 1987, that standard was met only four times. Since then, however,

it's been met every time. This means that if there has been any engineering since 1987, it has been done entirely 'below-board,' and it also makes future promotions ever more delicate, since there is now a 20-year precedent for strictly adhering to that standard, something that has never before existed.

So it's clear that some ozeki were promoted based on a final three basho performance instead of a final two, and some given – in effect – a 'lifetime achievement award' in getting the nod.

A 'Magnificent Seven' group of ozeki was promoted with no yusho in their final two basho. Five of them had at least one kettei-sen though – the exceptions being Onokuni and Asashio – so the yusho these two won in their third-to-last basho was clearly considered. Of the two, Asashio's case is the more puzzling in that he won only 11 bouts in his next-to-last, and there were two strong yokozuna at the time. Moreover, by promoting him, ozumo created three yokozuna and left one ozeki, thereby unbalancing the banzuke.

Even though Tamanoumi did have a kettei-sen just before promotion, he won only ten bouts in the preceding basho, so his was also a hard-core three basho promotion at a time when there were already two yokozuna.

Kashiwado makes a good poster boy for the 'lifetime achievement promotion' since he fails even a three-basho criterion, winning 10-11-12, with only a kettei-sen at the end to recommend him. He and Taiho were promoted together, as you recall; and since the two

reigning yokozuna (Wakanohana I and Asashio) were near their end, it was perhaps thought Kashiwado could be a passable partner for Taiho. They were correct, but he could have been much more if not for a never-ending cycle of injuries.

Some call Mienoumi (current Rijicho Musashigawa) another such poster boy but I question that because of his dismal ozeki record prior to those final two basho. His only yusho had been three-and-a-half years earlier, and his ozeki grade prior to his last two was an awful .158. With that preface and no yusho following – instead of an achievement award, his promotion can only be characterized as gifted. They even had three other yokozuna at the time!

The remaining two members of the Magnificent Seven have their own unique stories. Wakanohana II had won 13-13-14 – none of them yusho – but the last two being kettei-sen. That seems fine since the guidelines were flexible anyway, especially with a splendid ozeki resume to boot. The last – Futahaguro – has become legendary for never winning a makuuchi yusho at any rank, and was promoted with 13-14 only because Chiyonofuji was minus a counterpart at a time when the banzuke bulged with ozeki. He was later expelled from sumo.

Given that the two-yusho standard was an ideal rather than an actual requirement, there is only one other yokozuna promotion that could be called irregular: that of the slender wonder, Chiyonoyama. He was promoted following a 14-1 Y, but that was preceded by only eight wins. This was probably the

most blatant 'we-owe-you-one' case on record, since he began his ozeki career with two consecutive yusho just four basho prior, but was not promoted. His overall ozeki record was otherwise impeccable so another yusho of any kind was probably all he needed, if even that.

Some believe that engineering was present in the case of several ozeki who were promoted with two straight yusho, but – for better or worse – they did meet the accepted standard, and I'm just looking at the records for the here and now, so that's a discussion for a different day.

Looking at the chart, though, it's apparent that almost all of the yokozuna were outstanding ozeki, even before their yokozuna runs. In fact, only five of them had 'pre-run' ozeki grades below the

highest graded ozeki who was never promoted – that being Kotokaze. So, combining the conditions they were promoted under, along with their ozeki grades (overall as well as pre-run) the only promotions I would really shake my head over are Mienoumi and Futahaguro – Mienoumi for the obvious reasons, and Futahaguro because he had such a skinny ozeki resume.

The three-basho and 'lifetime' criteria are also fine with me, since the grades of those who benefited from them support their use, Mienoumi excepted of course.

Looking at all these numbers has revealed – for me – a glaring dichotomy about the rank of yokozuna. In English language publications, a consistent presentation of the aura surrounding yokozuna is that they

are somehow regarded (by the Japanese) as invincible. In other words, published western thought implies that if a rikishi cannot be perceived as invincible, then he isn't yokozuna material.

Since the moving criteria for promoting the ozeki has always been so visible, it would seem impossible for any of them to be perceived as invincible. I question whether even the Japanese themselves have ever coveted this aura, and suspect that a shade of oriental mystique has been manufactured by foreigners for marketing purposes.

I want the numbers to tell me something, and if there is a different opinion out there, I would like to hear it. Thanks for following along, and see you next time.

An Introduction To The Ozeki Jobsite

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.

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 10 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 too 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.

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.

In constructing the Excel database spreadsheet, 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'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.

Ozeki Grade Calculation

Points are awarded to each ozeki every basho, depending on what was accomplished (points in highest category only, of course):

Points	Category
-1	Make Koshi
0	Eight or Nine Wins
1	Ten or More Wins
2	Yusho Challenge
3	Yusho

There are four ways in which to

earn a yusho challenge in a basho:

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

Each ozeki is assigned a grade, but calculated this way: After awarding the ozeki his points for each basho (-1 to 3), just add all the points awarded during his

ozeki career (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.

So far, no ozeki who was never promoted to yokozuna has averaged 1 point per basho; even those who won multiple yusho with many yusho challenges.

The Ozeki

<u>RANK</u>	<u>RIKISHI</u>	<u>GRADE</u>	<u>YAO*</u>	<u># OZEKI BASHO</u>
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	0.51	2000	51
7	Chiyotakai	0.45	1999	60
8	Kotomitsuki	0.444	2007	9
9	Kiyokuni	0.393	1969	28
10	Hokutenyu	0.386	1983	44
11	Yutakayama	0.382	1963	34
12	Takanohana	0.36	1972	50
13	Tochihikari	0.318	1962	22
14	Kitabayama	0.3	1961	30
15	Ouchiyama	0.286	1955	7
16	Dejima	0.25	1999	12
17	Kotooshu	0.263	2006	19
18	Mitsuneyama	0.25	1953	8
19	Tochiazuma	0.241	2002	29
20	Daikirin	0.24	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	Harumafuji	0	2009	1
26	Musoyama	-0.037	2000	27
27	Kaiketsu	-0.111	1975	9
28	Masuiyama II	-0.286	1980	7
29	Maenoyama	-0.3	1970	10
30	Matsunobori	-0.467	1956	15
31	Miyabiyama	-0.5	2000	8
32	Daiju	-0.6	1973	5

* YAO: Year Attained Ozeki

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	Yoshibayama	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

Yokozuna Promotion

YOKOZUNA		OZEKI GRADE	BASHO	YUSHO
<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>RIKISHI</u>	<u>BEFORE "RUN"</u>	<u>BEFORE "RUN"</u>	<u>DURING "RUN"</u>
69	Hakuho	1.000	5	2
68	Asashoryu	1.000	1	2
67	Musashimaru	1.419	31	2
66	Wakanohana III	1.000	27	2
65	Takanohana	1.889	9	2
64	Akebono	-0.500	2	2
63	Asahifuji	1.267	15	2
62	Onokuni	1.091	11	0
61	Hokutoumi	1.333	3	1
60	Futahaguro *	1.000	2	0
59	Takanosato	1.714	7	1
58	Chiyonofuji	2.000	1	1
57	Mienoumi	0.158	19	0
56	Wakanohana II *	1.333	6	0
55	Kitanoumi	1.000	1	1
54	Wajima	1.500	2	1
53	Kotozakura	0.500	30	2
52	Kitanofuji	0.632	19	2
51	Tamanoumi *	1.000	18	0
50	Sadanoyama	0.933	15	1
49	Tochinoumi	0.375	8	1
48	Taiho	1.667	3	2
47	Kashiwado	2.000	5	0
46	Asashio	1.222	9	0
45	Wakanohana I	2.500	8	1
44	Tochinishiki	1.167	6	2
43	Yoshibayama	1.000	8	1
42	Kagamisato	1.500	4	1
41	Chiyonoyama	2.000	4	1

'RUN' defined as final two ozeki basho.