

Ones to Watch – Aki Basho 2009

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Photos by Chris Gould*

After so many dips into Juryo in the last issues of OTW I decided to devote one whole column to the warriors from the second division. As there have recently been five promotions to sekitori-land, there's lots to write about. There's also the bonus of a juryo first in a very long fighting career.

After more than 90 basho, veteran **Tosanoumi** still has to face career firsts: this time, a make-koshi in the second division. Starting in sumo as tsukedashi, he bulldozed fast through juryo back in 1995, taking two yusho and losing a playoff for a third on the way. In the next 14 years, he achieved a positive record and immediate re-promotion every time he was relegated to the second row. Now, suddenly, everyone asks if he will indeed continue (in a dignified way) until his stablemaster Isenoumi retires and hands over the reins to his most successful deshi in two years' time.

Sotairyu from crisis-shaken Tokitsukaze-beya might be known for many things: taking part in the eight man makushita yusho playoff in July is one of them. But so far it seems he is best known for his shikona and his refusal to change it to something beginning with Toyo or Toki – unlike most other rikishi in his heya. The shikona contains the 'futa' kanji that became a 'bad kanji' after the former stablemaster who fought under the name Futatsuryu was found guilty of beating a deshi to death. Is it right for people to be judged by name only? And if so, couldn't it just be seen as a tribute

to the great Futabayama?

After one basho in makushita, **Sagatsukasa** has returned to juryo. Just like every sekitori from Irumagawa-beya, he seems to be a mouse amid the giant rikishi. (Maybe that is a prerequisite to join that heya?) Being relatively

wins in a row and subsequent promotion. There's definitely a lot in him!

Hoshikaze will be on his highest rank ever and keep the share of Mongolians in the sekitori ranks at exactly twenty per cent. It took him almost seven years to reach



Tosanoumi

small it may be hard for him to stay in juryo for a longer time. But let's not forget his fighting spirit: only half a year ago he started with a fusenpai (loss by default) and some days of absence just to return a week later and clinch four

juryo, longer than any of the other promotees this time. Unlike other rikishi who have needed a long time to reach the paid ranks, I term his slow rise a "quality ascent", meaning that he has learnt a lot in those years and he



Okinoumi

will successfully use that knowledge to advance further. The third shin-juryo is **Tokushinho**, who weighs a whopping 220 kilograms now. It's still a long way to makuuchi but I'm surely not the only one waiting eagerly for his first bout against Yamamotoyama. Kise-beya's second sekitori certainly has a dedicated oyakata who will get him to a higher level. And then it will be time to start a Japanese remake of the battles of behemoths – a Hawaiian domain in former decades.

The fifth promotee is **Okinoumi**. With his first arrival in juryo, he changed from his real surname Fukuoka to that unique shikona.

After being demoted to makushita he immediately changed back to his surname, and after the announcement of juryo promotions some weeks ago he sprang forward to Okinoumi again. He has given us such a great insight into the world of Sumo, although this has not been through his own sumo but through that of his hometown (the Kotenzumo), and one can only hope that he will add some stories of his own as well. I don't want to remember him only as a rikishi yoyo-ing between paid and unpaid ranks with – inevitably – the most shikona changes of all time.

Enjoy the Aki Basho!