

Ones to Watch – Haru Basho 2010

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Photos by Chris Gould*

Within just a few weeks, two high-profile rikishi retired and left a power vacuum at the top of the banzuke that needs to be filled again soon. Granted, Chiyotakai wasn't much of a force any more and instead needed help from his fellow sanyaku to keep his rank – thus taking a win away from many sanyaku. On the other hand, a missing Asashoryu gives virtually everyone in the sanyaku ranks an easy (easier) bout. Those two "free" wins can indeed make the difference between sekiwake and ozeki – or between ozeki and yokozuna... Let's check who might take advantage of this situation.



Ozeki Harumafuji

The "acting number 2" in Haru will undoubtedly be **Harumafuji**, then starting as east ozeki 1 and thus having the honour to step together with Hakuho into the last bout of the tournament. But does he fit into the role of (constantly) second best rikishi? Some doubt that, but he's still only 25 years old

– and not everybody can be a quickstart like his fellow Mongolians Asashoryu or Hakuho. Barring some break-out basho of another rikishi he will probably become the 70th yokozuna sooner or later.



Ozeki Kotooshu

Bulgaria's most famous citizen, **Kotooshu**, now married to a beautiful Ms. Ando (as of February 14th 2010), promised to aim higher at his wedding party. Aiming is good, but achieving is better, isn't it? Somehow, though, I can't see him advancing any higher. His performance has improved a lot and stabilized again during 2009 but still doesn't suggest he can make the last step to yokozuna. Anyway, he's an ozeki who enriches Ozumo and who will entertain us for a few more years, no matter what his rank is.

The time Ozeki **Kaio** has left to entertain us has been discussed ad

nauseam, and hardly anyone has predicted it at more than 12 months – and that being for some years already. He will certainly not be able to fill Asashoryu's gap, and will soon open up another spot to be filled. Let's simply prepare to watch him over the few months left until that day! (Oh my, how often has that been written already...?)

The fourth current ozeki and potential candidate for filling the yokozuna gap is **Kotomitsuki**, who will have to (yet again) fight against demotion in March. His shisho and possible role model, the former yokozuna Kotozakura, was a late bloomer as well, being promoted to yokozuna at the age of 32. Kotomitsuki is already 33 years old and has lost much of the burning vigour that he had at the beginning of his career. Becoming yokozuna is too much to ask, methinks.

A red hot candidate for the ozeki rank is **Baruto**. He has had two good basho (unfortunately for him, not consecutive) of 12-3 and is knocking on the doors to the upper echelons now. Or is he? He certainly has the physique, and he has also improved his technical abilities a lot, but one swallow does not make a summer. Unfortunately too many people are calling his a "certain promotion" already, which increases the pressure on him by more than necessary. Torn between a fast rise and finishing fine-tuning his sumo, one can only hope that Baruto finds the happy medium.

Speaking of "certain promotions":



Kisenosato

Kisenosato has been in the upper maegashira or lower sanyaku ranks since the beginning of 2006, but he hasn't made the big step to ozeki since then. He seemingly can't string together the mere two basho that might remotely indicate that all those promises of his early Ozumo days will be fulfilled. Now is his best ever chance to post some good results and become Naruto-beya's first ozeki. If he blows it, he will just copy heyamate Wakanosato's career model of being a perennial sekiwake, always just a few wins short of "certain promotion".

I wouldn't have added **Goeido** to

the list of special mentions if he hadn't won the 34th Japan Ozumo (One-Day) Tournament some weeks ago. Quite frankly, everything outside honbashi is more or less just an exhibition (even though he reportedly took it rather seriously) and no indication of any honbashi trend. But with so many winners' of one-day tournaments being sanyaku regulars, we can rightfully hope that Goeido's name will be a sanyaku constant, too. Osaka is the perfect place to start, in front of his home crowd.

Enjoy the Haru Basho!



Baruto vs Ozeki Kotomitsuki