

# Kokugi Konnections

## Rise of Baruto

by Chris Gould

The rise to prominence of Baruto, Europe's second ozeki, has been filled with dramatic plot-twists. Two years ago, it seemed that a persistent knee problem would render his ascent up the ranks impossible. But the Estonian giant has overcome his setbacks in spectacular fashion, consistently treating his growing army of fans to an entertaining brand of power sumo.

Baruto's drive for ozeki promotion began in earnest in March 2006, when he became the first sumotori in over 40 years to post a 15-0 unbeaten score in juryo. His reward for such a feat was the rare experience of being interviewed by Kitanofuji Katsuaki, the previous person to go 15-0 in juryo, and now a popular NHK announcer. <http://www.banzuke.com/~movies/haru2006/130306mov.html>

Questions were asked as to whether this naturally-strong but raw talent could make the giant leap forward to sumo's top division, but in May 2006, Baruto did just that. In fact, he exceeded all expectations, pummelling the lower-rankers of makuuchi to go 11-2 over 13 days. This time, in addition to interviews, he was rewarded with matches against the two leading title-contenders: then-sekiwake Miyabiyama <http://www.banzuke.com/~movies/natsu2006/140506mov.html> and newly-promoted ozeki Hakuho <http://www.banzuke.com/~movies/natsu2006/150506mov.html>. Baruto lost both matches in three seconds flat, but earned promotion to upper maegashira for July and his first



Baruto

shot against Asashoryu (which he also lost in three seconds flat – the first defeat of a 100% losing record against the disgraced yokozuna).

Baruto continued to compete in mid-makuuchi for the rest of 2006, but disaster struck in on day 2 of the 2007 Hatsu basho when he injured himself trying to spin out the tricky Aminishiki. His long spell of kyujo ensured that he spent the May 2007 basho in mid-juryo, mopping up the opposition with embarrassing ease. Sure enough, May 2007 brought Baruto his second juryo yusho, with a 14-1 record.

Further injury problems in July meant that Baruto returned to juryo for September 2007, again winning the yusho with a 13-2 record. His amazing tally of 42 wins from 45 juryo bouts will surely never be beaten. And yet, despite a strong showing in Kyushu 2007, a knee problem ensured that Baruto again suffered a losing score in January 2008. At the time, claims that he would

become Europe's second ozeki seemed a little comical.

Sumo's perception of Baruto as a lumbering European of the Roho/Hakurozan mould was changed in March 2008 when, fighting at maegashira 7, he posted a scintillating 12-3 and earned his third Fighting Spirit Prize. A tough basho against the big guns in May 2008 followed, but in July he again showed his promise when fighting from mid-maegashira, garnering 10 more victories and earning his first sanyaku berth. September 2008 thus proved to be the major turning point as Baruto actually posted his first winning score (8-7) against the makuuchi elite, amazingly coming from 2-7 down to do so. He thus moved up to sekiwake for Kyushu 2008 and destroyed some of sumo's biggest names in the first ten days, romping to eight victories and establishing himself as a genuine powerhouse. His first victory against fellow European Kotooshu was perhaps the most impressive. <http://www.banzuke.com/~makuuchi/kyushu08/08.html>

Many thus expected 2009 to be the year when Baruto finally clinched his ozeki honours, and he got off to a flying start in the Hatsu basho, catapulting right to the forefront of the yusho race with seven wins from his first eight bouts. His match against Hakuho on Day 9, which went a long way to deciding the title race and wrecking Baruto's confidence, will go down as an all-time classic. <http://www.banzuke.com/~makuuchi/hatsu09/09.html>

Baruto battled on in March, but a spectacular early loss to Goiedo

upset his rhythm.

<http://www.banzuke.com/~makuuchi/haru09/03.html>

Since that day, Baruto has been involved in abundance of exciting matches against the smaller, technically-wily trio of Goeido, Kakuryu and Harumafuji. May 2009 was desperately disappointing as Baruto managed only four wins from 15 bouts – this despite beating up nearly everybody in the pre-tournament practice. (Some fans put this result down to the Estonian’s 262-kilogram stablemate Yamamotoyama, who may have

eaten too much of Baruto’s chanko). Unbowed, Baruto proved his worth in Nagoya 2009, racking up 11 wins. He followed this performance with an outstanding 12-3 in the following tournament, and a 9-6 of consolidation in November. His one-handed tsuridashi of Harumafuji was particularly noteworthy, as was his kotenage on Aminishiki, which showed how far his technique had improved.

<http://www.banzuke.com/~makuuchi/kyushu09/13.html>

January 2010 saw Baruto reach

new heights with his first ever victory over Hakuho, snatching victory from the jaws of defeat with a lightning-quick scoop throw. It was Hakuho’s first defeat in 31 top-division matches, and only his fifth loss in 99. From that moment on, you knew that Europe’s second towering ozeki would soon arrive – and be a great ambassador for the rank at that. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OY4yRZ2KnBU>

[Interview \(2006\)](#)