

Kokugi Konnections

The Nagoya Basho

by Chris Gould

The Nagoya basho has certainly thrown up some intriguing moments over the years, and this issue's Kokugi Konnections spotlights some of them.

Perhaps the most unforgettable Nagoya moment was when a certain burly Hawaiian, fighting under the moniker of Takamiyama, became the first non-Japanese to officially collect the makuuchi yusho in July 1972. Takamiyama claimed he was so nervous he could barely stand during his final-day encounter with technically-gifted Asahikuni, but summoned up enough determination to win the match and register the proudest achievement of his wrestling career.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZX2bJqbGA4>

A year later, Nagoya witnessed a string of entertaining performances from the podgy Daiju, whose thunderous tsuppari betrayed a steely desire to win. His match against fellow tsuppari specialist, and markedly lighter Washuyama, conveys an excitement and air of unpredictability woefully absent from recent basho – perhaps because there are so few genuine

lightweights or tsuppari specialists now.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AiRXBogybfc>

Nineteen-eighty-one, of course, saw another classis sumo moment: the eagerly-awaited yokozuna promotion of feisty wolf-eyed Chiyonofuji. This match, allegedly witnessed by half of Japan's TV audience that day, had all the perfect ingredients for the fairytale script: the beautiful, muscular, fresh-faced Chiyonofuji against the far larger, more experienced and more formidable Kitanoumi. It was a chance for the new generation to shunt the old aside, for beauty to fell the beast, and for Chiyonofuji to attain sumo's highest accolade with his own stablemaster watching tensely from the closest quarters as a ringside judge. The match in question is the second match on this clip.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7-ERVNXcH4>

Eight years later, Chiyonofuji made history in Nagoya again – after originally being tipped to pull out of the tournament following the tragic cot-death of his baby daughter. On the final day, after lamely losing to Hokutenyu, he

found himself on 12 wins and 3 losses, level with stablemate and fellow Yokozuna Hokutoumi. The first playoff between yokozuna from the same stable ensued, and the result... .

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1B6ylQirnpI>

The following year, Chiyonofuji became involved in another great Nagoya moment, when facing Asashifuji on the final day with the latter's yokozuna promotion at stake. Such is the significance of this match, now exactly 20 years old, that it has spawned the full range of historical interpretations. Some have labelled this the greatest match ever; others have doubted whether it was even genuine. Whatever the context, it certainly made for great theatre.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTBD_n2bEf8

The list of great Nagoya moments goes on: Musashimaru's 15-0 in 1994, Dejima's unexpected yusho playoff win in 1999, Takamisakari's only win over Asashoryu in 2003. We hope that this year's Nagoya basho adds to the glittering collection of memories it has thus far created.