

Menko Corner

1975 Osato Mini Card Set

by Ryan Laughton

1965 to 1973 was a rough time to be a trading card collector in Japan because production was almost zero. Menko cards had made a valiant production run from the 1930s until 1964 where millions of cards were mass produced with thousands of different themes. Then in almost a blink of an eye menko production stopped in 1964 except for a couple of dozen sets that were sporadically printed over the course of the next 8 years. TV was thought to be the major contributor to the death of the menko era, but in reality it was probably a combination of increased economic prosperity in Japan, better and more sophisticated toys, more focus on education and attention on making Japan a world leader again and the lack of a card collector base. In the US, kids and adults alike were collecting and trading baseball, football and basketball cards and they carried the demand with them to spur production. However, in Japan, children were almost solely the collecting base and when their attention turned to other forms of entertainment the demand dried up.

Then, as almost quickly as television had killed menko, television brought about the birth of the mini card era in Japan in 1973. By the early 1970s, color TVs were the standard and by 1975 almost 32 million color TVs were in Japanese households. Color TV allowed for some visual graphic and exciting shows. Television stations started broadcasting in color a variety of diverse programs including popular dramas, anime,

sumo, baseball and music. TV had turned into the norm for daily life for people in Japan in the early 1970s. What this meant was that kids and adults alike wanted to now collect cards of their favorite TV personality, anime series, movie actor and sports hero. Hence the mini card era was born in 1973.

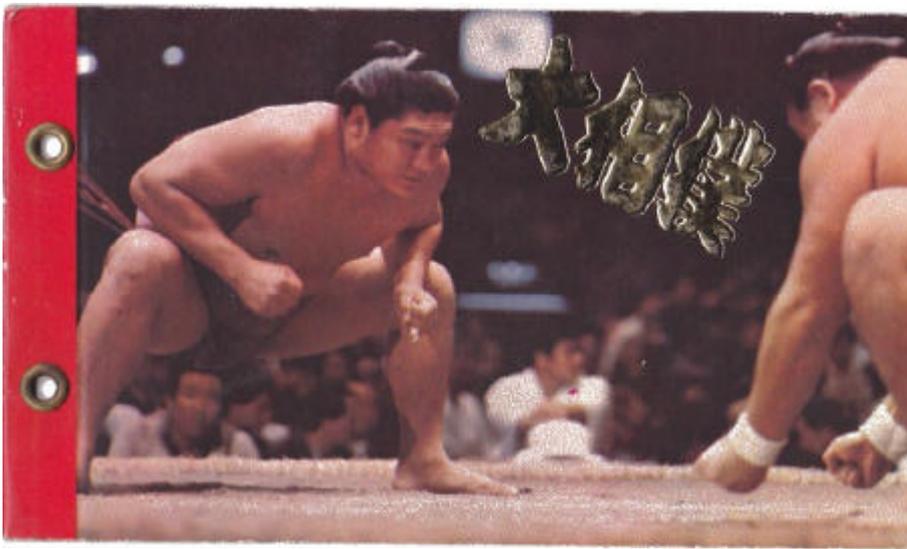
No less than 6 companies jumped on board and started printing mini cards including Yamakatsu (who had made menko a decade earlier), Osato, Calbee and Amada. The size was standardized at approximately 2" x 3" for most mini cards. Unfortunately, only a handful of sumo card sets were printed in the 1970s. However, one of these sets was by Osato in 1975 and printed to represent the 1975 Haru Banzuke. Like most mini card sets it has 32 cards in it because the card sheets were

printed at the factory with 16 cards on them (4 cards x 4 cards). Some of the larger mini card sets had 48 and 64 total cards. These Osato sumo cards were issued in boxes of 50 packs (1 card per pack) that cost 10 yen a pack (See Picture 1). These packs were made of brown paper and were stapled across the top with two staples.

Also included in the box were 3 "winner" cards that had a special gold stamp on the back that allowed the lucky winner to get one of the 3 card albums included in the box for free. These lucky winner cards were packed separately in the box so the store owner knew which ones were the lucky cards and could presumably control who/when each of the albums was given away. These albums are made of thin cardboard and have a sumo photo on the front with a picture or two



Picture 1: 1975 Osato Mini Card Box



Picture 2: Front and Back view of a 1975 Osato mini card album

of some of the cards from the set on the back (See Picture 2). Inside the album are 7 plastic, 2-pocket pages to hold the cards. There are currently 5 known different album designs.

The cards themselves are fairly standard. Of the 32 cards, 27 have a single color background which is yellow, orange, pink, green, red or blue. The other 5 have a photographic background which includes the audience at the Kokugikan. The backs are printed in blue ink and indicate the rikishi's shikona (with furigana above it), heya, birthplace, height, weight and favorite technique. On the bottom of the cards is a picture of a kimarite with the "white" rikishi as the winning rikishi and the "black" rikishi as the losing rikishi. The name of the kimarite is written next to the picture. See

Picture 3 for some sample pictures of the cards and Picture 4 for a close-up of Maegashira Takamiyama with a "winner" stamp.

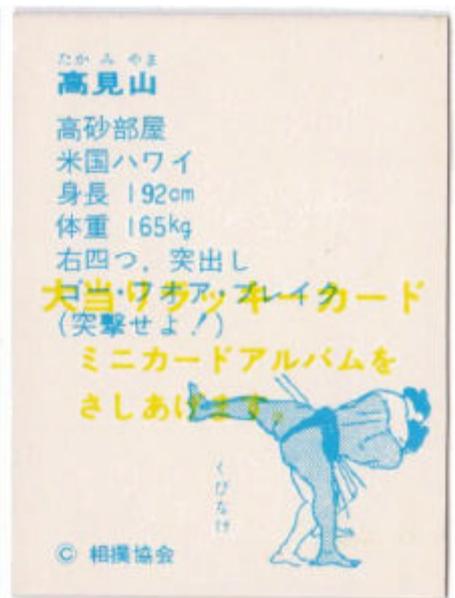


Picture 4: Maegashira Takamiyama with "winner" stamp on back

This set does have some important rikishi in it. First, the two reigning yokozuna of the 1970s: Kitanoumi and Wajima. It also has up-and-coming Yokozuna Mienoumi (in 1975 he was a maegashira). Most importantly for the Western collector and Hawaiian rikishi collector it has a card of Takamiyama when he was ranked as a maegashira and 3 years after his Makuuchi yusho in 1972. Surprisingly, it doesn't have Wakamisugi (Yokozuna Wakanohana) even though he was ranked as a sekiwake when this set was printed.

This set is fairly easy to collect because of the amount of cards on the market. The base cards are fairly easy to find in auctions and usually show up once every several months. More difficult to find are "winner" cards and extremely difficult to find are uncanceled "winner" cards, meaning that the store owner didn't mark out or cross out the winner stamp on the back when a kid turned it in. Albums are very hard to find and unopened boxes of this set are nearly impossible to come across.

I hope you have enjoyed this little peek into the 1970s world of sumo card collecting and we'll see you again in a few months! Cheers!





Picture 3: 1975 Osato mini cards, front and back