

Farewell to an Era

by Eduardo de Paz

I was looking forward to the beginning of the Nagoya Basho, the fourth official sumo tournament of the year. This time, though, it had effectively become the second tournament, after the historic cancellation of Haru Basho and the semi-official tournament in May. Fortunately things have begun to return to normal and although there will be many people who continue to cast suspicion upon what happens in the world of sumo, it seems that the yaocho scandal is no longer cause for concern.

Although the headlines at the end of the tournament centred upon Ozeki Harumafuji's yusho and the possibility that a further triumph in September could see him promoted to Yokozuna, the beginning of the tournament was dominated by the exploits of 38-year-old warhorse Kaio. We watched with bated breath as he tried valiantly to get two victories and surpass the 1045 victories of the great Yokozuna Chiyonofuji. After a slightly erratic start with three straight losses, Kaio got his first victory on the fourth day to equalize the record, and the next day he got another victory to become the wrestler with the most wins ever. Two days later he even got another victory to bring the record to 1047.

At almost 39 years old (his birthday was on July 24th), Kaio seemed to have no more goals to accomplish. Not only had he surpassed Chiyonofuji but he had equalized the record of Chiyotaikei as the wrestler with most tournaments at the rank of Ozeki – 66. Perhaps for this reason and after losing three-in-a-row on two occasions, the brave veteran



Ozeki Kaio with Eduardo

rikishi from Fukuoka said “that’s enough” and announced his withdrawal from the world of active sumo.

His retirement not only creates an

emotional hole for me personally, but also marks the disappearance of seemingly the last living link to one of the most glorious ages of sumo – the late 1990s. I began to follow sumo in the mid-90s, when



Kaishin and Kaisei with Eduardo

Kaio was still a young wrestler who was trying to find a place between the big names of Akebono, Musashimaru, the Hanada brothers, and a whole bunch of great rikishi from the Futagoyama beya such as Takanonami, Takatoriki and Akinoshima. I have followed and encouraged him since then and when I was in Japan I was lucky enough to be invited to attend the tournament's final-day party organized by Tomozuna beya (to which Kaio belongs), where I could speak to him a bit, wishing him all the best

in his sumo and getting a picture with him. It was without a doubt one of the best memories I have of a fascinating trip that I hope to repeat soon.

It is curious that just at that time (September 2006) there came to sumo a young Brazilian named Ricardo Sugano, who fights under the name of Kaisei. From the same heya as Kaio, he has spent the last five years climbing from mae-zumo to makuuchi, the top division. Back then, I could offer him my full support (talking in

“portuñol”, mixing spanish and portuguese) and I've been following him since then, as I did Kaio. And I'm also going to support him from now on. Moreover, the withdrawal of Kaio leaves the young Brazilian as the top-ranked wrestler from his heya and a role model for his training partners. Maybe that's why I have the feeling that a fantastic era in sumo has ended, and a new one probably opened up. I hope this new dawn can be just as fascinating as the era just finished.