

Open letter to Kisenosato

by Chris Gould

On November 27th 2011, the day on which Kisenosato's ozeki promotion was confirmed by NHK television, SFM's Editor released an open letter to Kisenosato on Twitter and Facebook. For those of you who missed it the first time, and to the French, German and Spanish readers who would like to see it in their own language, here it is!

Kisenosato-zeki.

First and foremost: congratulations on your promotion to ozeki. The sumo world has been talking about this event for at least the last four years, and the neutral fans especially are thrilled that you have finally hurdled "the Great Barrier."

The defining feature of your sumo, until now, has been the one that you should be most proud of: fighting every match honestly, with a fierce determination and with the heart of a lion. Your integrity in the ring is unimpeachable. As this year has so sadly proved, whereas other wrestlers resorted to yaocho and others blatantly profited from "deliberately underpowered sumo," you stayed true to your basic fighting principles and earned tremendous respect from

your peers. It is a respect that you deserve more than ever today. You overcame not only the toughest apprenticeship imaginable (doing keiko with a younger, healthier Wakanosato inside the heya, and regularly tussling Asashoryu, Hakuho, Kotooshu and Baruto on matchdays) but also overcoming the sudden death of your stablemaster to record double-digit figures in a make-or-break tournament.

But as you seem to understand better than others who have fought at ozeki, with the respect you currently hold, and the success you so brilliantly earned, comes responsibilities. Ozeki was formerly the highest official rank in sumo. The reason why sumo fans still refer to the top-four ranks as the "sanyaku" (top-three ranks) is because a yokozuna is merely an extension of an ozeki. Your performance level does not need to be the same as Hakuho's, but your dignity needs to be. Your trophies may not be as numerous as the Mongolian maestro's, but your dignity is more than match for his.

The conferral of ozeki status should not be interpreted as entry into a cosy club which sets a communal goal of keeping each

member comfortable and automatically helping friends in need. Too many promising fighters have fallen into this mode of thinking, sometimes through no fault of their own, and the credibility of sumo has suffered greatly as a result. You are stronger than that. You have proved this point every step of the way until now. Embrace this ozeki status as your golden chance to shine, to out-compete the other ozeki from day one, to make the giant steps needed to inject some much needed national pride into Japan's national sport.

Kise – you are among the most honest wrestlers this sport has ever known, an honour that you share with the current chairman of the sumo association. If you choose to honestly put your personal gain over convention, he should support you to the hilt. This is your golden chance. And the whole of the sumo world is with you. Breathe some life back into ozeki, Champion Kise!!

For the Japanese version, kindly translated by blogger Junko Asami, click:
<http://blog.goo.ne.jp/tabby222/e/9d0cd5a1942e95319bc670dba33f9046>