

Ones To Watch – Haru 2012

by Alexander Herrmann

"In the name is the youth" might be a good sub-headline for this column. You have read it correctly there: not "of" but "is". We will not speak for the young ones – they rather speak for themselves with their performances – but we will watch some of the rikishi who have a "waka" (young) in their name and sometimes even are not-so-young anymore.

The highest ranking "waka" in Haru will be **Tochinowaka**. It seems that he will be outmarched by three other rikishi in the race for the open sanyaku slots but even as M1 he will reach a new career high rank, something he is quite familiar with by now (three of his last five basho have been on a career high rank). And his way up doesn't seem to be over yet. He will be 24 years old in April and what could be a better birthday present than being promoted to komusubi? He definitely has the ability to do so.

With his rank in January **Wakakoyu** has earned the post-nominals of "former komusubi" to his name. And I'm afraid to say that, but he will probably stay like that for the rest of his career as I can't see him anywhere near a

sanyaku rank again. He is too much of an example of the "lucky one time bloomers," but I'd be very happy if he proves me wrong and does indeed return to the four highest ranks for some more basho.

Wakanosato will enter the 21st year of his sumo career in Osaka. And he is far away from being an old warhorse. At 35 years some might even still call him "young." He still has lots of power left in him, and whenever he has fallen back to juryo (always because of injury, never because of bad results) he has returned within one or two basho: in 2000, in 2006, in 2009 and now in 2012. Quite frankly, one might not have expected it in the last case but he did it. And we might well see another kinboshi or sansho for him this year.

Hanaregoma-beya's **Wakanoshima** has slowly moved his comfort zone up into the highest makushita ranks. Just two years ago he was a commuter between the fourth and third divisions, and now he is knocking on the doors of the second one. It remains to be seen whether he can adjust to that level. In his twelve-

year career he has always been a bit too light with his rather small frame and so we can only wait and watch the upper makushita in March.

His stablemate **Wakaryusei** is a lightweight, too, at just around 130kg. After a 4-3 as Ms46 he will move up a bit again. He definitely needs to put on some more weight to return to his highest career rank to date (Ms10) and beyond, as otherwise he will stay a perennial makushita. On the other hand he is in the younger half of this issue's rikishi, so he might have some time left to reach sekitori-hood.

The youngest man in the list, **Wakamisho**, needs to compete in another 100+ basho to reach the numbers of the oldest man in the list. He is entering only his second year in ozumo, and after an overall haul of 23-5 he is in mid-makushita already now. At 20 years of age and 161kg of bulk he has a long upward path ahead of him. It will be steep (as for everyone else) but he will surely cope with it masterfully.

Enjoy the Haru Basho!