

# May Basho Preview

by Chris Gould

The next tournament is, of course, the first of its kind to be held for two years. Last year did see a May tournament, but it was renamed a “Technical Evaluation”. It was like a real basho, with an Emperor’s Cup awarded, but it did not carry a honbasho name. It was also not shown on TV, and played out in a bizarrely dark arena due to the power-saving measures introduced in Tokyo at that time. The tournament incredibly saw 38-year-old Kaio defeat Hakuho on his last appearance in Tokyo – another happy coincidence in the “great” man’s career.



*Ozeki Baruto*

The May tournament has seen some dramatic upsets in days of yore. In May 1971, the incredibly slender Takanohana unexpectedly triumphed against Taiho, causing the all-time record-holder for makuuchi yusho to retire suddenly. Twenty years later, Takanohana’s son, Takahanada,

served up a stunningly similar shock of his own, defeating Taiho’s main rival for the yusho record, Chiyonofuji, and convincing him that he too should retire. (He actually retired two days later after losing to Taiho’s future son-in-law, Takatoriki – how sumo loves to play happy families!) By some strange twist of May fate, a further twenty years later, Kaio’s victory over Hakuho would see him just one-win short of equalling Chiyonofuji’s all-time career win record, which he would go on to break in Nagoya.

Other significant May feats include Kitanoumi’s final zensho yusho (and indeed yusho) in 1984, Asahifuji’s only yusho win as a yokozuna in 1991, Akebono’s first yusho in 1992, the legendary Takanohana-Musashimaru playoff in 2001, Hakuho’s first yusho in 2006, Hakuho’s yokozuna promotion in 2007, Kotooshu’s first yusho in 2008 and Harumafuji’s first yusho in 2009. It’s pretty clear – May is an exciting time to be around Ryogoku.

And what of this year? At stake this time, of course, is Takanohana’s (yes, that’s Takahanada after his name change) collection of 22 makuuchi yusho, which Hakuho is seeking to overhaul. Baruto enters the tournament knowing that another yusho in Tokyo will make him top contender for yokozuna promotion again, while Harumafuji will be looking to steal the yusho for himself as he did three years ago.



*Takamisakari*

Yusho playoff master Sakumayama will finally make his salaried bow as a juryo rikishi while Takamisakari must call upon every ounce of his guile to continue his career as Japan’s most popular wrestler. Takayasu continues to look stronger with every basho while Goeido put his name back on the sumo map with a magnificent performance in Osaka.

And, as if that’s not enough, we have another new ozeki in Kakuryu – the third new ozeki in four basho – who came within a whisker of the yusho in March and may, with a bit of luck, be able to go one better if he continues his current form.

There’s no excuse not to watch, is there?