



Tweet chat by Chris Gould



On senshuraku of the March 2012 tournament, sumo's Twitter community was consumed with remarks made by the Chairman of Sumo's archaic Yokozuna Deliberation Council, the body responsible for deciding who should make yokozuna and criticizing ozeki performance. The remarks appeared to strongly suggest that Mongolian Yokozuna Hakuho was "past his peak". It is safe to say that sumo's Twitter community was not impressed.

The conclusion from the several-hour-long Twitter debate was that the Yokozuna Deliberation Council were simply looking for anything on which to pull Hakuho up. One member saliently noted that the committee were simply demanding higher and higher standards from him, and unreasonably so. This member also pointed out that other great yokozuna such as Chiyonofuji had indeed recovered from mid-career slumps to collect yusho regularly. Another member from Hiroshima humorously turned the comments back on the Chairman himself by saying that the Yokozuna Deliberation Council was "past its peak."



Certainly, it is overstepping the mark to say that Hakuho's form is bad. He is still collecting the yusho and he is still posting at least 12 wins every tournament, usually 13, and sometimes 14. True, he hasn't collected a zensho yusho (perfect score) since his magnificent run of 2010, but that is of little significance in the broader picture. You only need to look at the ease with which he handles Baruto to know who is truly top dog.

Hakuho turned 27 on the opening day of the March basho, and is now just two years younger than Asashoryu was at the time of his

retirement. Interestingly, Asa and Hakuho's yusho tally at the age of 27 is exactly the same: 22. But compare the physical – and dare we say mental – condition of the two men at this stage in their careers, and it is clear Hakuho is far better off. Asa completely crumbled around his 27th birthday, collecting only 3 yusho from a possible 15 after it (two of which saw him suspended). Hakuho, meanwhile, is naturally bigger, stronger and more mentally stable. And, crucially, most of his rivals – including Baruto – are older than him. He is enjoying a position of luxury that Asashoryu never had.

Sumo fans clearly view Hakuho's peak as the 63-match unbeaten run he enjoyed after Asashoryu's retirement in 2010. But maybe it was not so much a peak as an astonishing run of good luck, with all his challengers too old, too inexperienced and too in awe of him at that time. Make no mistake: Hakuho, apart from a minor toe problem, is in fine fettle, and has his eyes firmly set on overhauling Asashoryu's trophy total within a year.