

sumo special

Unusual *basho* will test wrestlers' physical, mental strength

July Basho Preview

JOHN GUNNING
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

One of the more unusual tournaments of recent times gets underway in Tokyo on Sunday.

Sumo returns to the capital for the first time since January, with the intervening six months having seen a spectator-less *basho* in Osaka, a canceled tournament in May and a long period of enforced restriction on wrestlers' training and movements.

Add to all that the coronavirus related death of 28-year-old veteran Shobushi, and it's hard to know just what kind of physical or mental condition *rikishi* will be in when things kick off at the Kokugikan on July 19.

In terms of the former, it's almost certain men like Mitakeumi, Onosho and Tamawashi, who train in stables that lack wrestlers of a similar standard, won't be fully match-fit at the start of the July meet.

Degeiko (going to other stables to train with tough opponents) has long been a major part of pre-tournament preparation in sumo, and when it hasn't been possible *rikishi* have suffered.

Those in stables with numerous *sekitori* (wrestlers in the top two divisions) undoubtedly will have a sharpness advantage in the early days of the upcoming tournament.

That's not something that should persist,

however. Most of the top division is made up of people on the right side of 30, so bouncing back quickly and working themselves into shape likely won't be too much of a problem. By the halfway point, everyone should be up to speed.

Of course, while a tournament can't be won in the first week, it most certainly can be lost. Wrestlers who struggle to shut out distractions could find this tournament particularly tough.

The strangeness of a silent arena in Osaka clearly affected performances in the early going there, and it's easy to imagine that a small audience not allowed to shout or cheer will have a similarly discombobulating effect this month.

When it comes to the championship race, veterans with previous experience of long layoffs, and in stables with strong opponents, should have an edge.

The two *yokozuna* obviously spring to mind.

Hakuho of course has history on his side, with the Miyagino stable veteran winning the tournaments that came either side of the canceled March 2011 meet. While he isn't the all-conquering force he was a decade ago, sumo's greatest wrestler has to be considered the favorite heading into the July Basho.

Kakuryu, at the time a *komusubi*, finished runner-up in May 2011. The Ulaanbaatar native narrowly missed out on a ninth



Newly promoted ozeki Asanoyama (right) practices at his Takasago stable on July 9. JSA / VIA KYODO

Emperor's Cup last time out, losing a title-deciding bout to Hakuho on the final day of the March tournament.

Now in the Michinoku stable, Kakuryu has up-and-coming Mongolian stablemate Kiribayama to train with daily. In an uncut training video released by the Japan Sumo Association last week, the *yokozuna* was

in dominant form and could well emerge victorious this time out — even if Hakuho is healthy and remains in the tournament.

Outside of the two *yokozuna*, most of the media attention will likely fall on newly promoted *ozeki* Asanoyama. The Kindai University graduate has kicked things up several notches over the past year and looks set to

inherit sumo's throne in the not too distant future.

Although he lacks top-level training partners and is the only man in the *yokozuna* or *ozeki* ranks who has never experienced a long layoff, Asanoyama has shown an ability to keep a cool head when under pressure, and has continuously improved his

sumo since turning professional. The key for the Takasago stable man this time out is the same one needed to take the final step on the sumo ladder — namely dominance against lower rankers.

To win a second title and put himself on the path to *yokozuna*, Asanoyama has to stop dropping bouts to *rikishi* like Abi and Yutakayama on a regular basis. Losses to Hakuho and Kakuryu will happen, but those need to become title deciding matchups, not fights with nothing at stake for the new *ozeki*.

While the main focus for the July tournament rightly falls on those at the top of the ranking, the lower half of the *makuuchi* division this time out is fascinating. Four former *ozeki* (Terunofuji, Kotoshogiku, Takayasu and Tochinoshin) will be battling it out with rapidly rising Sadogatake stable youngsters Kotonowaka and Kotoshoho. If one of them catches fire we could see a fourth rank and filer lift the Emperor's Cup in the space of two years, after just one in the previous 17.

Terunofuji, back in the top tier after falling all the way down to the second-lowest division seems like the best dark horse candidate for the title. The Mongolian veteran won't fear anyone he could be matched up with over the first ten days. Having already experienced life as an *ozeki*, and with a championship to his name, the pressure won't be a factor either.



Fumidashi: One of the five ways to lose a bout. Accidentally taking a step outside of the ring despite no attack being initiated by the opponent.



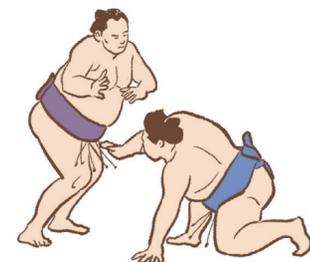
Tokkurinage: Holding the opponent's head or neck with both hands and twisting him down to the ground.

Chart introduction
• Y = *yokozuna*, O = *ozeki*, S = *sekiwake*, K = *komusubi*, M = *maegashira*, J = *juryo*, r = rest days. • Records are shown as previous ranking, won, lost and rest days.

大相撲七月場所番付表

NIKKAN SPORTS PHOTOS

East		West	
<p>Hakuho Miyagino Mongolia (March 11, 1985) Y, 13-2</p> <p>Hakuho extended his title record by winning his 44th Emperor's Cup in the closed-door Spring Grand Sumo Tournament in March. The 35-year-old <i>yokozuna</i> is looking for his first back-to-back championships in three years.</p>	<p>横綱 Yokozuna</p>	<p>Kakuryu Michinoku Mongolia (Aug. 10, 1985) Y, 12-3</p> <p>Kakuryu's 12-3 record in Osaka was his best since winning his last championship with a 14-1 record at the 2019 Nagoya Basho. The Spring Basho marked his first completed 15-day tournament since last July.</p>	
<p>Takakeisho Chiganoura Hyogo (Aug. 5, 1996) O, 7-8</p> <p>Takakeisho enters the July Basho as <i>kadoban ozeki</i> for the second time, meaning a losing record would force him to wrestle as a <i>sekiwake</i> in September.</p>	<p>大関 Ozeki</p>	<p>Asanoyama Takasago Toyama (March 1, 1994) S, 11-4</p> <p>Asanoyama won promotion to <i>ozeki</i> after going 11-4 at the Spring Basho. His only championship came at the 2019 Summer Grand Tournament with a 12-4 record, his best in the <i>makuuchi</i> division.</p>	
<p>Shodai Tokitsukaze Kumamoto (Nov. 5, 1991) S, 8-7</p> <p>Shodai managed to stay at the <i>sekiwake</i> position with an 8-7 record in March. This will be his third tournament as a <i>sekiwake</i>.</p>	<p>関脇 Sekiwake</p>	<p>Mitakeumi Dewanoumi Nagano (Dec. 25, 1992) M3, 10-5</p> <p>Mitakeumi Mitakeumi won promotion back to <i>sekiwake</i> with a 10-5 record in March after fighting two <i>basho</i> at <i>maegashira</i>.</p>	
<p>Daieisho Oitekaze Saitama (Nov 10, 1993) M1, 8-7</p> <p>Daieisho came back to <i>komusubi</i> for the first time since January when he went 7-8 in Osaka.</p>	<p>小結 Komusubi</p>	<p>Okinoumi Hakkaku Shimane (July 29, 1985) M3, 8-7</p> <p>Okinoumi will wrestle as a <i>komusubi</i> for the fifth time this <i>basho</i>, but has failed to maintain the position after finishing with losing records in all four previous attempts.</p>	



Tsukihiza: One of the five ways to lose a bout. Falling down to the knee(s) through one's own mistake, and not being forced down by the opponent.



Okuritsuriotoshi: Stepping behind the opponent and lifting him up by grabbing his *mawashi* before slamming him down to the ground.

Sumo Techniques

The Japan Sumo Association defines 82 *kimarite* (winning techniques) and five non-techniques (way to lose). Here are four techniques you may see during the July Grand Sumo Tournament.

SACHIKO ASUKA ILLUSTRATIONS

東前頭			Maegashira East			West Maegashira			西前頭		
	No. 1 Endo Oitekaze Ishikawa (Oct. 19, 1990) K, 7-8		No. 7 Terutsuyoshi Isegahama Hyogo (Jan. 17, 1995) M11, 9-6		No. 13 Takayasu Tagonoura Ibaraki (Feb. 28, 1990) M1, 0-5, r-10		No. 1 Yutakayama Tokitsukaze Niigata (Sept. 22, 1993) M9, 11-4		No. 7 Tokushoryu Kise Nara (Aug. 22, 1986) M2, 4-11		No. 13 Kotonowaka Sadogatake Chiba (Nov. 19, 1997) M18, 9-6
	No. 2 Takanosho Chiganoura Chiba (Nov. 14, 1994) M9, 12-3		No. 8 Ishiura Miyagino Tottori (Jan. 10, 1990) M12, 9-6		No. 14 Kotoshogiku Sadogatake Fukuoka (Jan. 30, 1984) M13, 7-8		No. 2 Onosho Onomatsu Aomori (July 4, 1996) M7, 9-6		No. 8 Chiyotairyu Kokonoe Tokyo (Nov. 14, 1988) M11, 8-7		No. 14 Wakatakakage Arashio Fukushima (Dec. 6, 1994) J2, 10-5
	No. 3 Takarafuji Isegahama Aomori (Feb. 18, 1987) M7, 9-6		No. 9 Tamawashi Kataonami Mongolia (Nov. 16, 1984) M7, 6-9		No. 15 Kotoshoho Sadogatake Chiba (Aug. 26, 1999) J6, 12-3		No. 3 Kiribayama Michinoku Mongolia (April 24, 1996) M17, 11-4		No. 9 Ikioi Isenoumi Osaka (Oct. 11, 1986) M12, 8-7		No. 15 Chiyomaru Kokonoe Kagoshima (April 17, 1991) M15, 7-6, r-2
	No. 4 Kagayaki Takadagawa Ishikawa (June 1, 1994) M6, 8-7		No. 10 Kaisei Tomozuna Brazil (Dec. 18, 1986) M14, 8-7		No. 16 Nishikigi Isenoumi Iwate (Aug. 25, 1990) M14, 6-9		No. 4 Aoiyama Kasugano Bulgaria (June 19, 1986) M8, 4-11		No. 10 Myogiryu Sakaigawa Hyogo (Oct. 22, 1986) M6, 4-11		No. 16 Kotoeko Sadogatake Mie (Nov. 20, 1991) J5, 11-4
	No. 5 Abi Shikoroyama Saitama (May 4, 1994) M4, 7-8		No. 11 Shimanoumi Kise Mie (July 11, 1989) M10, 6-9		No. 17 Terunofuji Isegahama Mongolia (Nov. 29, 1991) J3, 10-5		No. 5 Hokutofuji Hakkaku Saitama (July 15, 1992) K, 4-11		No. 11 Tochinoshin Kasugano Georgia (Oct. 13, 1987) M9, 6-9		No. 17 Kotoyuki Sadogatake Kagawa (April 2, 1991) J1, 8-7
	No. 6 Enho Miyagino Ishikawa (Oct. 18, 1994) M4, 6-9		No. 12 Sadanoumi Sakaigawa Kumamoto (May 11, 1987) M10, 7-8				No. 6 Ryuden Takadagawa Yamanashi (Nov. 10, 1990) M5, 6-9		No. 12 Shohozan Nishonoseki Fukuoka (Feb. 9, 1984) M8, 4-11		