

Fukushima Dreams – a quarterly publication of Fukushima City — APRIL 2023

Thank you for picking up this quarters' "Fukushima Dreams – a quarterly publication of Fukushima City".

In this issue, we hope that you will learn more about, and be moved by the various charms that Fukushima City has to offer.

With a population of around 280,000 people, Fukushima is surrounded by the beauty of nature. Due to its location, the city has a characteristic basin climate, and is a famous fruit production area: producing many varieties through the seasons, including cherries, peaches, Asian pears, grapes and apples.

We hope that through this edition, you'll come to appreciate even a little of what Fukushima City has to offer.



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①A Whirlwind Is Blowing Through the Sumo World as the Pride of Fukushima City, the Three Onami Brothers, Cheered on by Their Fans, Rise to the Challenge of Believing in Themselves!

Born in Fukushima City, Wakatakamoto (the eldest brother), Wakamotoharu (the middle brother), and Wakatakakage (the youngest brother), known collectively as the three Onami Brothers after their surname, are creating a whirlwind in the sumo ring. Sumo wrestling is a sport in which rikishi (wrestlers) clash with each other physically and mentally. The way they believe in themselves and step boldly forward brings true hope to us all, and especially to the people of Fukushima. In this issue, we take a close look at these three brothers who are striving relentlessly in their pursuit of greater physical and mental strength.

②Rejoice at Their Bravery! Bringing Energy, Courage, and Hope to the Citizens of Fukushima with White Stars!

The three Onami Brothers were raised in a sumo family. Their grandfather was Wakabayama, a former komusubi (the fourth highest rank in sumo's top makuuchi division) who was an expert in footwork, and their father was Wakashinobu, who competed in the third highest makushita division. From when they were pupils at Fukushima Municipal Yoshiida Elementary School, all three brothers participated in children's sumo classes sponsored by the Fukushima Kenpoku Sumo Association, and in 2009, the eldest joined the Arashio stable. He was followed two years later by the middle brother and eight years later by the youngest brother. With the spirit of sumo in their hearts, the three brothers have worked hard to build up their physical strength. They were given their shikona sumo names—Wakatakamoto, Wakamotoharu, and Wakatakakage—after three sons of the well-known Sengoku period daimyo (feudal lord) Mori Motonari, and their dedication to training and tackling new challenges has made them a source of pride for Fukushima. Among the most memorable of these challenges was their rapid progress in 2022. In the March tournament, the youngest brother Wakatakakage became the first newly promoted sekiwake (the rank below ozeki and above komusubi) in 86 years to win a makuuchi division championship. In addition, he was twice selected for the Technique Prize and he also won the prize awarded to the wrestler who had the most wins during the year. The middle brother Wakamotoharu, was promoted to komusubi for the January 2023 tournament, joining the youngest brother Wakatakakage as a sanyaku (the collective name for the three highest ranks). Meanwhile, the eldest brother, Wakatakamoto, who is striving to reach the ranks of sekitori (rikishi in the makuuchi or juryo (junior-grade) divisions), poured his energies into both his own efforts and into following Wakatakakage's lead. In the midst of the gloom of the COVID-19 pandemic, the people of Fukushima have been heartened by the dedication of these three young men, who have given us all so much energy and hope.



Appointed as Fukushima Yell Ambassadors, the Brothers Will Devote the Next Year to Sharpening Their Skills and Taking Great Strides Forward

Last year, Fukushima City organized a public viewing in the public square in front of the West Exit of Fukushima Station as a show of support and appreciation for our local wrestlers, who are bringing courage and hope to their hometown. Wakatakakage was presented with the Fukushima City Sports Award in honor of his achievements. The support extended to the hanging of a banner in the main lobby of Fukushima City Hall to congratulate him on his first championship, along with a banner celebrating the achievement of two active brother wrestlers both holding sanyaku ranks (Wakatakakage as a sekiwake and Wakamotoharu as a komusubi) at the same time, and a panel exhibition.

Furthermore, since each time the three of them step onto the dohyo (the sumo ring), it is announced that they are from Fukushima City, we would like them to support and promote Fukushima City even more than before through their activities, so we have asked them to become "Mi-Waku-Man-Sai Fukushima City Yell Ambassadors."

Now that the long-awaited spring has finally arrived, how are things going to develop from here? In the January 2023 tournament, both Wakatakakage, who is refining his offensive sumo from the bottom up as he strives to become an ozeki (the second highest rank in makuuchi division), and Wakamotoharu, an orthodox wrestler with a preference for hidariyotsu grips, secured 9-6 winning records in the top makuuchi division. Their eldest brother Wakatakamoto has also achieved winning records in his last three tournaments in a row. Promotion to ozeki for Wakatakakage and sekiwake for Wakamotoharu, and the concurrent sekitori status of all three brothers are now all within reach for the three Onami Brothers. Fukushima City will continue to hold public viewings for the rest of this year's Sumo tournaments. For the wrestlers, the cheers of their supporters are a source of strength. Let us all keep sending them our yells of encouragement and best wishes for their further progress.

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①The Father of the Three Onami Brothers Talks About Their Goal of Becoming the First Three Brothers in History to Achieve Sekitori Status Concurrently

The three Onami Brothers are expected to be very active this year. We interviewed their father, Masashi, who commented, "I never thought my children would enter the sumo world," about how the brothers took up sumo, their personalities, and their successes, as well as his thoughts on this year's tournaments.

②Once They Began Attending Sumo Class, the Family Became Obsessed with Sumo

The boys took up sumo when they were invited by an officer of the Kenpoku Sumo Association, who was junior to me when I was active in the sport. When I asked them about it, they said, "We'll do it," so I told them, "Well then, go ahead." They began attending the Wanpaku Sumo Class, which was based at the Fukushima City Sumo Hall. At that time, the eldest was in the fourth grade at Fukushima Municipal Yoshiida Elementary School, the middle son was in the second grade, and the youngest was in the first grade. Even if I say so myself (laughs), up to that point I had been kind and gentle with my children. But once they started sumo, I became more of a mentor than a parent. The family became all about sumo. It was unavoidable.... And the boys really wanted to make the grade and be strong. Their grandfather had been a rikishi who went on to become a sanyaku. So, they were in an environment where they could grow and become stronger.



Because the Boys Were so Persevering, Their Parents Took Care Not to Overlook Injuries

My wife and I treated all of our children the same. However, we were both strict. We had to raise them not only as sumo wrestlers, but also as full-fledged members of society. On top of this, we were running a chanko restaurant, so the boys faced a lot of challenges, such as having to eat dinner by themselves. I used to tell them, "I'll drive you hard for the rest of your life," and "You have to climb over the wall head on." And so, none of the three of them would run away from things. I think they have grown up into adults who can endure even the hardest practice. One thing we were careful to watch out for was injuries. All three of them were very patient; it was normal for them to be in pain, but I never heard them say "ouch." My wife went to watch them practice and made sure she didn't overlook any injuries.

Visiting Hiroshima, Visiting Graves, and Expanding Exchanges Through Shikona

When our youngest son joined the Arashio stable, the three boys were given the shikona Wakatakamoto, Wakamotoharu, and Wakatakakage by stablemaster Arashio, the former komusubi Oyutaka. These were the names of three sons of Sengoku period daimyo Mori Motonari, who is said to have handed each son an arrow and asked him snap it, which they promptly did. Next, Mori produced three arrows and asked them to snap all three at once. They were unable to do so, and he explained that a single arrow could be broken easily, but three arrows held together could not. It seems that Arashio had been preparing to use these names for a long time. He was very happy that all three brothers joined his stable. We were also happy, and soon after the boys were given their shikona, we went to Hiroshima to visit the family temples of each of the three sons of Mori and pay our respects at their graves. Since then, the people of Hiroshima have also been passionately rooting for the three brothers. Our relationship between Fukushima and Hiroshima started when the Hiroshima side began sending us the rice called Takakagemai, and this relationship is continuing. We are very thankful for that.

Strengthened by the Support of Fukushima City, the Kenjinkai, and All of You!

I think last year was truly a year of breakthroughs. I can only thank the entire city of Fukushima for their support. A tour of the Ryogoku Kokugikan National Sumo Arena was organized for us, and people from Fukushima Kenjinkai (the association people from the prefecture) living in Tokyo rallied to support the boys. Without a doubt, everybody's support is helping them. What particularly amazed me when I visited the Kokugikan was the popularity of my eldest son. Even though he does not say so explicitly, As a sumo watcher, I also think he has a great opportunity. He has always had the qualities of a rikishi and people have said that he will become stronger. And I believe he is gradually coming into bloom at last. He is only about sixty or seventy percent into bloom, but he has plenty of room to grow further. My eldest son is also looking towards moving higher up and gaining more white stars. Please give us your support.

Three Brothers, Each Setting Their Own Goals and Aiming High

This year, I believe that my third son will vigorously and stoically pursue what he left undone last year. He seems to have his own ideal image of what a strong ozeki should be. Likewise, my second son has gained a lot of confidence over the past year. Even though he doesn't talk about it, I think he is fully aware that he is in a position where he can aim higher. Given the chance, he can aim to become an ozeki and even become a tournament winner. He is well aware of this, although he does not say so explicitly. As a sumo watcher, I also think he has a great opportunity. He has always had the qualities of a rikishi and people have said that he will become stronger. And I believe he is gradually coming into bloom at last. He is only about sixty or seventy percent into bloom, but he has plenty of room to grow further. My eldest son is also looking towards moving higher up and gaining more white stars. Please give us your support.

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① Large, sweet strawberries, which herald the arrival of spring, are in season now. The Fukushima Berry Boys are a group of young strawberry farmers who share the joy of growing and eating strawberries in an unconventional style, planning events, and sharing information via social media. We interviewed the group's leader Satoshi Katahira and public relations manager Keigo Mizuno to learn about their motivation for forming the group, their activities, the new strawberry variety—the Yuyake Berry—that they have developed, and the appeal of the strawberries produced by the six members.

② Fukushima Berry Boys (Leader)
Satoshi Katahira (left)

③ Fukushima Berry Boys (PR Manager)
Keigo Mizuno (right)

④ "Fun Farming" is Our Motto. A Group of Young Producers Who Bring Their Uniqueness to the Forefront and are Passionate about Fukushima's Ripe Strawberries

⑤ Michi-no-Eki Fukushima Was the Inspiration for the Group's Formation

The Fukushima Berry Boys (the Berry Boys) were founded in April 2022, shortly before the opening of Michi no Eki Fukushima. Satoshi Katahira, the leader of the group, recalls: "Spring is the season for strawberries. When we were asked to supply strawberries for the opening of the roadside station, we decided to form a group of young strawberry growers in Fukushima City to take on the project. When I approached the other growers at a drinking party, they all readily agreed (laughing)."

Original Packaging that Reflects the Passion of Young Producers

The motto underlying their activities is "Fun Farming." They decided that if they were going to do it, they would bring their uniqueness to the forefront. One of these activities is to ship ripe strawberries (the Tochiotome variety) that have turned red all the way around the calyx. "We can harvest them in the morning and bring them to the roadside station on the same day, so they are delivered to customers just as they are ready to eat." They also paid close attention to the packaging. The Berry Boys had a number of meetings with the material company's staff to create a tea box and a one-tiered flat box with ears on the motif of the Azuma snow rabbit, an area of snow that remains on the surface of the mountain during the early spring. The design is not only eye-catching, but also functional. Their first concern was transportability. "Since it is a roadside station, we wanted to make it easy for people to take the strawberries home with them. Both the tea boxes and the rabbit boxes have lids so they can be stacked on top of each other!" Their second concern was to simplify the boxing process for the producers. They are aware of the SDGs, such as the goal of reducing plastic. Mizuno, who drew the rabbit illustration, said, "The rabbit box in particular has been a big hit since it debuted, with everyone saying how cute it is. And the piles of rabbit boxes brighten up the sales floor. When I first posted the rabbit box on social media, a farmer from another prefecture retweeted it, saying, "I think we will adopt the one-tier flat-packed box, too. That made me very happy."

"Strawberry Grabbing" Is a Great Success, Encouraging Interaction with Customers

On January 15, a "Strawberry Fair" was held at Michi-no-Eki Fukushima, and the Berry Boys appeared at the event standing in the marketplace to showcase the appeal of their strawberries. At the fair, the Yuyake Berry tasting to promote this new strawberry variety from Fukushima Prefecture, and the Strawberry Grabbing game in which visitors were given the same number of strawberries as the number of ping pong balls they could grasp with one hand, both proved to be very popular. Mizuno said, "I thought each participant would get five or so strawberries, but instead they ended up with nine or ten. It was amazing. This kind of interaction with customers is what drives us to produce delicious strawberries, so we want to plan other fun events in future."

Check with Social Media for the Availability of Strawberries until Mid-June

We have some great news about the future. Fourteen growers in the prefecture including Katahira and one other grower in Fukushima City grow Yuyake Berries, and the Berry Boys have all decided to start growing them this summer. According to Mizuno, "This is an eco-friendly variety that is resistant to cold and disease and doesn't require electric lighting, so I plan to share my experience with everyone who is interested." They have already begun preparations for the upcoming season, including the installation of a system that incorporates heating and cooling using groundwater into the strawberry cultivation process. You can keep an eye on the Berry Boys' activities and their strawberry sales schedule via social media. Strawberries will continue to be sold at Michi-no-Eki Fukushima until mid-June, when cherries will make their appearance. The Berry Boys are proud of their ripe strawberries, and we hope everyone will enjoy them.



①Congratulations to Yuji Koseki on His Induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame!

Yuji Koseki, a composer from Fukushima City, was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame on January 13, 2023, in recognition of his contributions to the baseball world through the composition of many baseball-related songs, including Eikan wa Kimi ni Kagayaku (The glory shines on you), the theme song for the Japanese National High School Baseball Championship. During his 80-year life, Koseki composed a total of around 5,000 songs, many of which are closely related to baseball, and through his music he brought excitement to the baseball world. He composed many songs for college cheerleading squads, professional baseball teams, and baseball tournaments, many of which are still widely sung to this day.

②Genki Fukushima Furusato Donation (Hometown Tax Payment)

Fukushima City will make good use of your valuable donations to support the city's efforts toward a new stage in its development. We look forward to receiving your support.

Edited and published by:

Fukushima City Office, Public Relations Division

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