

# Confident Daieisho wraps up first Emperor's Cup on final day

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Completing a tournament of firsts, No. 1 *maegashira* Daieisho clinched his maiden top-division championship Sunday at the New Year Grand Sumo Tournament with a victory over fellow rank-and-file grappler Okinoumi.

Daieisho finished the 15-day tournament at Ryogoku Kokugikan — the first to be held under a state of emergency — with a 13-2 record after coming into the final day with a one-win lead over *ozeki* Shodai.

Knowing a win against No. 5 Okinoumi (7-8) would deliver him the championship, Daieisho got it done against another former *sekiwake*. Daieisho seized the advantage from the jump, hitting home first and propelling Okinoumi back and out with a series of blows to the throat.

“It’s a sheer joy. I’m so pleased,” Daieisho said after receiving the Emperor’s Cup. “I didn’t know it was that heavy so I was shocked, but I’m really happy.”

“I knew the only way forward was to wrestle in my style so I went into the match without hesitation, determined to have no regrets afterward.”

Okinoumi, 35, entered the bout with a 10-8 career record against Daieisho but has now dropped five straight bouts to his younger rival.

The 27-year-old Daieisho, who completed a clean sweep against the elite *sanyaku* ranks below grand champion *yokozuna* in the first week of the tournament, is the first Emperor’s Cup winner from Oitekaze stable and Saitama Prefecture.

After setting the pace early in the tournament, he gave up a share of the lead to Shodai by losing against No. 3 Onosho on Day 11. But his title bid received a boost on the penultimate day when *sekiwake* Terunofuji handed Shodai his third loss.

Daieisho fell to a 5-10 record last September in his sole tournament at *sekiwake* but this time became the first rank-and-filer to start a tournament 7-0 against wrestlers from the top four ranks since the 15-day grand tournament format began in 1949.

The new champion earned his third career Outstanding Performance Prize and his first career Technique Prize, one of three handed out for the first time in history.

“My intention was always to push and drive the opponent out, which I could keep in my mind for the final bout,” Daieisho said. “There were lots of bouts I could take confidence from too (during the meet) and I hope to keep wrestling the same way.”

For the sixth straight year, the sport’s New Year champion was a newcomer to the post-tournament victory ceremony.

In the tournament's final bout, Shodai (11-4) lost to fellow ozeki Asanoyama (11-4). Both wrestlers entered the tourney needing a minimum of eight wins to avoid demotion to sekiwake in March.

Terunofuji (11-4) joined Daieisho as a Technique Prize winner, overwhelming No. 7 Meisei (8-7), boosting his chance of a return to ozeki after the next meet.

The Mongolian lost a belt hold with his right hand against the dogged Meisei but used his strong left arm to force the rank-and-filer off balance and floor him with a beltless throw.

Makuuchi debutant No. 14 Midorifuji (9-6) secured the other Technique Prize by beating No. 7 Tobizaru (6-9). In a battle between two of the upper division's smallest wrestlers, Midorifuji stood his ground and timed his trademark under-shoulder swing down to perfection to wrap up the memorable meet.

No. 16 Akiseyama missed out on the Fighting Spirit Prize with a loss to No. 6 Kagayaki (6-9) and finished his second tourney in the top flight with a 9-6 record. The 35-year-old was returning for the first time since going 4-11 in March 2016.

Japan Sumo Association Chairman Hakkaku thanked the fans and staff after no one at the meet tested positive for the coronavirus during the entire 15 days. The JSA ordered tests on around 900 association members before the tournament, while a total of 65 wrestlers, stablemasters and referees missed the entire tournament for virus-related reasons.

Yokozuna Hakuho, the all-time championship record-holder, withdrew in the lead-up to the meet after testing positive for the virus, while the other Mongolian-born yokozuna, Kakuryu, pulled out ahead of his first scheduled bout due to a lower-back injury.

Ozeki Takakeisho, who came in with a shot at promotion to yokozuna, withdrew with an ankle injury on Day 10 of the meet, which saw a postwar-record 19 wrestlers withdraw from the top two divisions, 15 due to the coronavirus.