

Tatsumi Fujinami

Tatsumi Fujinami is a Japanese professional wrestler who is famous for his nickname as "*The Dragon*". He is credited for inventing the dragon sleeper and the dragon suplex. He is also the owner and founder of the Dradition wrestling promotion. In 2015, Fujinami was inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame, while also signing on as an ambassador for the company. Fujinami started in the old Japanese Wrestling Association (JWA) under Antonio Inoki's wing at the age of 17. When Inoki was fired from JWA in 1971, Fujinami and a few others followed him in forming a new promotion, New Japan Pro Wrestling. Inoki, Fujinami, Osamu Kido and Kotetsu Yamamoto are recognized as NJPW's founding fathers. Fujiwara, Hamada and three other rookies competed in the 1974 *Karl Gotch Cup* (a tournament for rookies, forerunner to the later *Young Lions Cup*).

In the late 1970s, Fujinami was sent abroad, to Mexico's Universal Wrestling Association and to Jim Crockett Promotions in the U.S. In the late 1970s he went to the World Wide Wrestling Federation (WWWF) where he first made a name for himself. He won the WWWF Junior Heavyweight Championship on January 23, 1978, and brought it to Japan, establishing it as the premier junior heavyweight title in Japan. In October 1981, he graduated to the heavyweight division. Fujinami would be the first wrestler to be successful in both the junior heavyweight and heavyweight divisions.

1988 proved to be Fujinami's banner year. On May 8, he defeated Big Van Vader by disqualification, to win the title vacated by Antonio Inoki. However, within days, the title was held up after he fought Riki Choshu to a no contest; he would win the title back a month later in the rematch. In October, he won the NWA Pacific Northwest Heavyweight Championship, and he ended the year by winning the WCWA World Heavyweight Championship in December.

1989 proved to be a heartbreaking year for Fujinami. In April, he vacated the title to be determined in a tournament at New Japan's first Tokyo Dome show; he would lose to eventual winner Big Van Vader in the semi-finals. In June, during a match with Vader, Fujinami suffered a severe back injury and pulled a hernia. He wouldn't wrestle at all until he returned in September 1990, changing his kanji from "辰巳" to "辰爾" (both are pronounced Tatsumi).

In recent years Fujinami has decreased his work load upon being named President of NJPW in 1999 (he was nevertheless ousted in 2004). His last title reign in NJPW was an IWGP Tag Team Championship with disciple Osamu Nishimura in October 2001, and his last title shot ever was a Triple Crown Heavyweight Championship bout against Keiji Mutoh in December of the same year (Mutoh had not affiliated himself exclusively with AJPW at the time).

Recently he and Nishimura began running their Muga promotion again, focusing on pure catch wrestling which seems to have been relegated by NJPW. In a tag team dream match, Fujinami, along with his close friend Nishimura beat Mitsuharu Misawa and Go Shiozaki in the main event of the first "Muga World" show. The name of Fujinami's new promotion has since been changed to Dradition, after the departure of Nishimura. On August 18, 2012, Fujinami won his first title in eleven years, when he took part in DDT Pro-Wrestling's 15th anniversary event in Nippon Budokan, during which he and Mikami defeated Kudo and Makoto Oishi for the KO-D Tag Team Championship. Fujinami remains an active competitor even at the age of 60 and shows little sign of slowing down.

On March 19, 2015, it was announced that Fujinami would be inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame as part of the class of 2015.[6] Fujinami was inducted by Ric Flair at the ceremony, which took place on March 28 in San Jose, California. On July 12, it was announced that Fujinami had signed a "Legends" deal with WWE. The contract effectively made him an ambassador for WWE, but did not restrict his Japanese bookings.

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