

Asians in American sports • Asian Americans in world sports

Asian talent aids major-league soccer teams now and in the future

By Mike Street
Special to The Asian Reporter

Unlike some sports, Major League Soccer (MLS) does not have Asian talent in great numbers, but what it lacks in quantity, it makes up with quality. Current Asian players are among the best in the league, and two recent acquisitions should keep their ranks strong in the future.

The most exciting Asian MLS player is the New England Revolution's Lee Nguyen, a dynamic attacking midfielder. Nguyen, a Vietnamese American, played in Holland, Denmark, and Vietnam before coming to New England in 2012.

Nguyen scored five goals and assisted in two more that season, earning the fan MVP award. Nguyen made good on that title in 2013 by helping the team reach the playoffs for the first time since 2009. Then, Nguyen exploded in 2014, scoring 18 goals, a Revolution record and an MLS record for a player who played largely as a midfielder. He scored 12 of those goals in the final 14 games and the Revs again reached the playoffs, only to fall to the L.A. Galaxy in the final.

In 2015, Nguyen scored seven goals and notched a career-best 10 assists, becoming the first New England player to register three assists in a game. For the third straight season, the Revolution reached the playoffs, but they lost in the first round. Nguyen's continuing development will be crucial to the team's success.

Playing alongside Nguyen in the midfield is Japan's Daigo Kobayashi, who has been equally instrumental in the success of the Revs. Known for his slick passing skills, Kobayashi played professionally in Japan, Norway, and Greece then signed with the Vancouver Whitecaps. Kobayashi scored two goals and assisted on four more with the Whitecaps in 2013 before being traded to New England.

Kobayashi appeared in all 34 of the Revolution's games in 2014, the second New England player ever to achieve that feat. Though he tallied just four assists, half of them were on game-winning goals — one of them by Nguyen.

In 2015, Kobayashi missed eight games due to injury, starting in 11 of his 21 appearances. He had an impact nonetheless, assisting on two goals, including another game-winner by Nguyen. Now 33 years old, Kobayashi should see a further decline in playing time, but his veteran presence will be important for a team that has only three players over the age of 30.

Another star Asian player, goalkeeper Luis Robles of the New York Red Bulls, will do his best to shut down the Revolution's scorers. Robles, a Korean American and a



NEW SEASON STARTS. The New England Revolution's Lee Nguyen (left photo, #24) joined the club in March of 2012. Luis Robles of the New York Bulls (right photo, outstretched in air) signed with his squad in August of 2012. Both players have been integral to their team's success in Major League Soccer (MLS). The 2016 MLS season kicked off this past weekend. (AR Photos/Jan Landis)

University of Portland graduate, played in Germany's Bundesliga for five years before the New York Red Bulls signed him.

Since becoming the team's full-time keeper in 2013, Robles has played every minute of New York's matches. He saved 111 shots in 2014 and won 18 games in 2015, both among the top in the league. Last season, Robles was voted MLS Goalkeeper of the Year and was a member of the Best XI squad.

Despite Robles's excellence, New York has yet to win the MLS Cup. They've made the playoffs every season since Robles joined the team, but they haven't been able to escape the conference playoffs. Having the stalwart Robles in the net will make the Red Bulls a favorite to reach the playoffs again — and perhaps reach the top.

Midfielder Paulo Nagamura and Sporting Kansas City also departed the playoffs too soon in 2015, losing in the opening round to eventual champion Portland. Nagamura, who is of Brazilian and Japanese descent,

knows how to advance in the playoffs. He joined the L.A. Galaxy in 2005, the year they won the MLS Cup.

Since then, Nagamura played for Toronto and Chivas USA before joining Kansas City in 2012. One year after he donned their kit, Sporting KC won the MLS Cup, Nagamura's second. Kansas City has signed the 12-year veteran for another season in 2016 and they will look forward to his championship presence as they seek another MLS Cup win.

The most exciting Asian additions in 2016 come to Toronto FC and the Vancouver Whitecaps via the amateur draft and an international signing. Toronto has only reached double digits in wins three times in its nine-year history, peaking last season with 15 wins, when they reached the playoffs for the first time.

Toronto FC did not advance, but the club still secured the ninth overall pick in this year's SuperDraft, which they used to obtain Tsubasa Endoh. Endoh, a Tokyo-born

Continued on page 13

NBA player Jeremy Lin addresses Asian stereotypes at Oscars

By Steve Reed
AP Sports Writer

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Charlotte Hornets guard Jeremy Lin expressed disappointment about the way Asians were stereotyped during an onstage skit at the Oscars and said more racial awareness is needed.

"I just feel like sometimes the way people perceive Asians or Asian Americans today can be disappointing in the way they view them," Lin said after a practice with the Hornets. "Even Asian-American masculinity or whatever you want to talk about, just a lot of the ways that Asians are perceived, I don't always agree with."

Lin was born in California, but his parents immigrated to the U.S. from Taiwan in the mid-1970s.

At the awards show, host Chris Rock introduced three Asian children dressed in tuxedos as PricewaterhouseCoopers accountants and joked: "They sent us their most dedicated, accurate, and hardworking representatives. I want you to please welcome Ming Zhu, Bao Ling, and David Moskowitz."

He later joked, "If anybody's upset about that joke, just tweet about it on your phone that was probably also made by these kids."

Lin took to social media the next day by tweeting: "Seriously though, when is this going to change?!? Tired of it being 'cool' and 'ok' to bash Asians smh #Oscars."

Lin wasn't the only one upset.

Mee Moua, president and executive director of the Washington-based Asian Americans Advancing Justice, called the show a setback for diversity.

The "night's ceremony, and particularly the 'joke' involving Asian children, which played off more than one damaging stereotype of Asians and Asian Americans, exposed one of the failings of how we talk about race in America: race relations are not a black-white binary,"

Moua said. "It is to all of our detriment to look at race narrowly. We need to work together to dismantle the systems that devalue the experiences of minority groups so we can see the tales of the diversity that have shaped our nation reflected accurately."

Lin said he's never met Rock and has "no issues" with the comedian, calling him a "funny guy."

He understands that Rock probably didn't write the skit by himself, but couldn't let the perceived slight slip by without making a stand.

"I thought it was a chance for me to stand up for Asians," Lin said.

Lin, who earned national attention for his scoring prowess while playing for the New York Knicks during the "Linsanity" era, said too often Asians are depicted with certain stereotypes in Hollywood.

"In acting, you look at Asian roles, they always seem to be in similar roles," Lin said. "I feel like we are just so much more broad than that. What you see on TV, that is so influential. Perception is reality and that's the truth in today's day and age — and we're in such a technological and digital age."

"So if we can start branching out a little bit or at least showing that we are different than what other people think we are, maybe we can start to break down some of those walls."

Lin said his comments on Twitter aren't meant to bash Rock.

He said he actually enjoyed Rock's opening monologue when he talked about the lack of diversity in the Oscar award nominations.

"I think the whole push was he talking about opportunities and diversity and things that I totally agree with," Lin said. "I thought his monologue was well done. He walked a fine line and did it pretty well."

AP National writer Hillel Italie in New York contributed to this report.

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Difficulty level: Medium #25951

Instructions: Fill in the grid so that the digits 1 through 9 appear one time each in every row, column, and 3x3 box.

Solution to last week's puzzle

Puzzle #47915 (Easy)

All solutions available at <www.sudoku.com>.

2	8	4	7	3	9	5	1	6
5	9	1	2	4	6	7	8	3
3	7	6	8	5	1	9	4	2
8	3	9	4	2	7	6	5	1
1	4	5	9	6	3	8	2	7
7	6	2	5	1	8	3	9	4
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9	1	3	6	8	4	2	7	5
4	5	7	3	9	2	1	6	8