

Zhou Qi's potential could lead to much NBA draft intrigue

By **Tim Reynolds**
AP Basketball Writer

MIAMI — Zhou Qi needs someone to help him communicate at workouts with National Basketball Association (NBA) teams, simply because he does not speak English well enough to understand most instructions.

His game, however, translates just fine.

In an NBA draft class that will likely have Louisiana State University's Ben Simmons and Duke's Brandon Ingram as the first two picks and then much uncertainty with the remaining 58, Zhou may draw plenty of intrigue. He stands just over 7'2" in sneakers, has a wingspan just shy of eight feet, and can nearly touch the rim while standing flat-footed.

He is a big man with shooting-guard skills, China's next NBA hope, a 20-year-old who's already a pro at home and now wants to get on the game's biggest stage.

"I am ready," Zhou said at the NBA draft combine held in May.

Time will tell if NBA teams agree.

Some draftniks say he could be a late-first-round pick. The Boston Celtics — who have eight draft picks, including three first-rounders and the No. 3 selection — brought him in for a workout, as did the Memphis Grizzlies. He'll audition for more NBA teams in the coming weeks, as everyone figures out their plans for the June 23 draft.

"I think his basketball English was good enough that it didn't impede us from doing anything on the court," Grizzlies vice president of basketball operations John Hollinger said after their workout. "I mean, obviously, we weren't having detailed discussions about politics and economics or anything. ... Very skilled for his size, very long frame, knows how to play."

Executives seem to like what they're seeing. Miami assistant general manager Adam Simon said Zhou made an impression even going back to last year at the Nike Hoop Summit — which annually brings together the best international players age 19 and younger.

"He held his own against the top high school players in the country," Simon said. "For him, here's what you base it on: Big guy that can catch, has good hands, and can run, especially for someone over seven feet tall."

Rumi Utsugi signs with the NWSL's Seattle Reign FC

Japan National Team midfielder Rumi Utsugi has signed with Seattle Reign FC of the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL), pending receipt of her International Transfer Certificate (ITC). Utsugi is scheduled to arrive in Seattle upon completion of her current contract with French side Montpellier HSC. She is expected to be available to play as early as July 9.



INTERNATIONAL STAR. Rumi Utsugi (#13, right) of Japan challenges for the ball in a match against Switzerland at BC Place stadium in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, during the 2015 Women's World Cup. The Nadeshiko defeated Switzerland 1-0 in the contest. Midfielder Utsugi has signed with Seattle Reign FC of the National Women's Soccer League. (AR Photo/Jan Landis)

Utsugi, 27, was a member Team Japan for the 2007, 2011, and 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup tournaments and has amassed 87 caps representing her country. Her professional career started in Japan in 2004, when she played six seasons for NTV Belezza. In 2010, she signed with Montpellier HSC of Division 1 Féminine, becoming the first Japanese player to play in the French top division. During her six seasons with Montpellier, she recorded 19 goals over 101 appearances in league play and helped lead Montpellier to four league cup finals in 2012, 2014, 2015, and 2016.

"It is a dream to play in a country ranked No. 1 in the world in women's soccer," said Utsugi. "I have decided to challenge myself to play in this country."

Seattle is scheduled to play the Portland Thorns at Portland's Providence Park on Saturday, July 30

at 7:30pm. To buy tickets, call (503) 553-5555 or visit <www.portlandthorns.com>.

Nepal honors nine Sherpas who paved way for Everest climbers

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est's unpredictable slopes, including at least four in May.

The nine Sherpas who were honored were the first to reach the summit this season, reaching the peak on May 11. Since they fixed the ropes and dug the route, more than 400 people climbed the mountain.

The Sherpas first fixed aluminum ladders and tied ropes over the dreaded Khumbu Icefall, just above base camp. They then fixed ropes for climbers to hold onto for much of the route.

The busy climbing season follows two years of disasters on the 29,035-foot-high

mountain. Last year's season was scrapped after 19 climbers were killed and 61 injured by an avalanche at base camp triggered by a massive earthquake. In 2014, an avalanche at the Khumbu Icefall killed 16 Sherpa guides.

Prime Minister Oli offered bouquets at the statues of Hillary and Tenzing in Kathmandu. People attending the function observed a minute of silence in memory of those killed on Everest this season.

Two Indians, an Australian, and a Dutchman died on the mountain last month, while another Indian is missing and believed to have died near the summit.



Zhou is one of many intriguing overseas options in this draft class.

Forward Dragan Bender should be a lottery pick from Croatia, and countrymen Ivica Zubac and Ante Zizic are likely to get snagged in the first round by teams looking for centers. There's also Turkish shooting guard Furkan Korkmaz, Serbian swingman Timothe Luwawu, and Spanish forward Juan Hernangomez as strong first-round hopefuls. (And that doesn't even include Oklahoma star Buddy Hield, a soon-to-be lottery pick who

NBA DRAFT COMBINE. Zhou Qi of China participates in the National Basketball Association draft combine in Chicago. Zhou stands just over 7'2" in sneakers, has a wingspan just shy of eight feet, and can nearly touch the rim while standing flat-footed. (AP Photo/Charles Rex Arbogast)

hails from the Bahamas.)

Fairly or not, each of the European and Asian draft entrants will be compared with Kristaps Porzingis, the 7'3" Latvian forward drafted last year by the New York Knicks who was the NBA's second-best rookie.

"I think the international portion of this draft has got a lot of potentially good players," ESPN basketball analyst and former college coach Fran Fraschilla said. "But certainly nobody ready to make an impact, let's say, like Porzingis did a year ago."

Zhou will face another automatic comparison, that being to 2016 Basketball Hall of Fame enshrinee Yao Ming. Zhou said China's most successful NBA player is already a resource for him.

"We have been in touch," Zhou said at the combine, speaking in Mandarin. "He shared a lot of his experience with me, mainly about training. I observed (what he did) when he came here back then, he told me of what he went through when he came, such as things to which to pay attention, and that the competition here can be tough."

The drawback for Zhou is his build. He's tall, but not big. At the draft combine, Zhou weighed only 218 pounds, which means he would get overpowered in the post by even average-sized NBA forwards.

"I am growing all the time," Zhou said, pointing out he'd gained 10 pounds in recent weeks.

The list of pluses Zhou brings is far longer. His wingspan and agility help give him a strong defensive presence, and he moves well. But his biggest asset is his shooting ability — 18-footers often seem like layups to him, and he's working on extending his consistent range out to the NBA 3-point line.

His favorite player is Kevin Durant, but Zhou bristles at any comparison.

"I think I have my own style of play," Zhou said. "Who am I like? I'm not like anyone. I'm like myself."

Associated Press writer Christopher Bodeen in Beijing, AP sports writers Teresa Walker in Nashville, Tennessee and Chris Lehourites in London; and AP freelance writer Clay Bailey in Memphis, Tennessee contributed to this report.

Ex-South Korean soccer referees indicted over payments

By **Kim Tong-Hyung**
The Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korean prosecutors have indicted two former soccer referees over allegations that they received money from a club official — also formally charged — in return for favorable decisions in five K-League matches in 2013.

An official from the K-League said the two former referees, who allegedly received 5 million Korean won (\$4,200) from a Jeonbuk Hyundai scout over five matches between March and October 2013, were permanently expelled from the league in December after the investigation began.

Jeonbuk, which late last

month advanced to the quarterfinals of the Asian Champions League, says it suspended the scout and that he acted alone. The Busan District Prosecu-

tors' Office refused to reveal the games involved.

The K-League vowed reforms after being rocked by a massive match-fixing scandal in 2011.

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

Difficulty level: Medium #51451

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 issue's puzzle

Puzzle #31945 (Easy)

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

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