

Asians in American sports • Asian Americans in world sports

Strong South Korea loses a squeaker in Little League final

By Mike Street

Special to The Asian Reporter

At a time when South Korean players have made further inroads to Major League Baseball, it seemed like a perfect year for South Korea to also win the Little League World Series. It would hardly have been unexpected, since Asian teams had won the last four straight Little League championships and appeared in nine of the last 10. But South Korea was edged out in the final by a talented squad from Endwell, New York, in the closest game since the last U.S. victory in 2011.

The South Korean team from East Seoul performed well in the first two rounds, outscoring their opponents 13-0. In their opening game against Curacao, South Korea took advantage of the wildness of the starting pitcher. They scored their first two runs on two walks and two hit batsmen, then pitchers Jun-ho Jeong and Sang-heon Park combined for a three-hit, 15-strikeout shutout.

With the win, the team from East Seoul next faced Canada, who had defeated Japan, 10-4, in their first game. South Korea faced even less resistance from the Canadian squad, knocking their starting pitcher out of the game in the second inning. Left fielder Moo-sung Kim started with a single, Won-tae Cho followed with a two-out double, the next batter walked to load the bases, and shortstop Jung-taek Ru singled to drive in two runs.

Canada pulled its starting pitcher, but it didn't matter who faced the boys from East Seoul. South Korea scored four more in the fourth inning and again in the fifth, ending the game due to Little League's 10-run rule. South Korea again dominated on the hill, with three pitchers combining to hold Canada to a single hit.

East Seoul faced its first challenge against Panama in a hard-fought contest in which both teams combined to put just five runners on base in the first three innings. South Korea finally broke through in the fourth inning, pushing two runs across without registering a single hit.

Pitcher Jaek-yeong Kim held Panama to two hits through four innings before walking one in the fifth. Jun-ho Jeong, who had dominated in the first game, came on



in relief — only to walk one batter and deliver a three-run home run to Esmith Pineda. Unable to rally in the sixth, the boys from East Seoul dropped their first game of the tournament, 2-3.

Now in the consolation bracket, South Korea faced Mexico, who didn't give them much competition. Seum Kwon homered in the first and second innings, and Jaek-yeong Kim knocked a three-run homer in the second, while Sang-heon Park and Won-tae Cho split time at pitcher to hold Mexico to a single hit, striking out 13 batters.

Their next game was a rematch against

Panama in the international final, with a much different result from the earlier affair. Instead of a pitching duel, it became a slugfest — at least for South Korea. The teams traded runs in the first inning before South Korea broke the game open in the second inning, scoring five times on a single and two home runs. They added another homer in the third, and Panama managed to score another run in the fifth, but it was not nearly enough, and South Korea advanced to the championship game, 7-2.

Their opponent, Maine-Endwell Little League, had emerged undefeated from

LLWS CHAMPIONSHIP. South Korea's Seum Kwon (top photo, right) is forced out at second base for the second out of the sixth inning by Maine-Endwell Little League's Jude Abbadessa during the Little League World Series (LLWS) championship baseball game in South Williamsport, Pennsylvania. South Korea lost the game, 1-2. In the bottom photo, South Korea's Jun-ho Jeong (right) runs toward home plate as Ryan Harlost scores the go-ahead run on a wild pitch during the fourth inning of the LLWS championship game. (AP Photos/Gene J. Puskar)

their preliminary games, but they were not unscathed. They surrendered 15 runs in four games, the worst of the lot being a 13-10 win over Bowling Green, Kentucky. Their starting pitcher, Ryan Harlost, gave up eight runs in a little over three innings of work in that game.

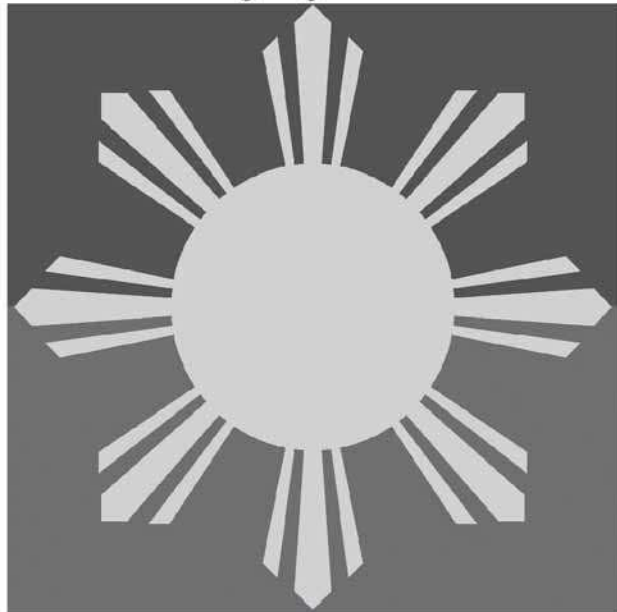
After Maine-Endwell's 4-2 victory over Goodlettsville, Tennessee in the U.S. final, Harlost took the mound against South Korea. Harlost's performance against Bowling Green was deceptive, however, since he had also notched the win in their opening game and a save against Tennessee. He hadn't given up a run in either game, yielding just three hits in nearly six innings of work.

South Korea faced the dominant version of Harlost in the finals, though they had excellent pitching of their own. Starting pitcher Jun-ho Jeong didn't allow a hit for the first three innings, striking out the side in the second and third innings. But Maine-Endwell broke through in the fourth inning, putting together three straight singles to score twice.

In South Korea's half of the fifth, Yoo-min Lee halved the lead with a solo home run, and Seum Kwon led off the sixth with a single, representing the tying run. But the team from East Seoul could not muster another hit to drive him in, and the U.S. squad won for the first time in five years, 2-1.

The success of Asian teams, and South Korea in particular — they won the title in 2014 — echoes a similar trend in the major leagues. Korean players like Jung-ho Kang, Hyun-Jin Ryu, Dae-ho Lee, and Hyun-soo Kim have all made their mark in Major League Baseball over the past three seasons. As South Korean Little Leaguers continue to show such promise, it's only a matter of time before those numbers rise even more.

OREGON
Philippines



HISTORAMA
A Celebration of Filipino Heritage

SATURDAY
OCTOBER 29, 2016
5:00PM - 8:00PM

Historic Elsinore Theatre
170 Hight Street SE
Salem, OR 97301

One time Performance
and must see show !

TICKETS:
www.philippineshistorama.com

