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NWSL final featured stalwart Asian fullbacks

By Mike Street

Special to The Asian Reporter

This year's National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) season culminated in an exciting final that featured two of its Asian stars, Abby Erceg of the Western New York Flash and Caprice Dydasco of the Washington Spirit. The stalwart defense provided by these two fullbacks anchored the rise of their teams, which can expect Erceg and Dydasco to provide leadership well into the future.

The Spirit finished in second place during the regular season, just two points behind the league-leading Portland Thorns, who won the NWSL Shield, which is awarded to the club with the best regular-season record. Washington featured a balanced scoring attack, as Estefi Banini led the team with five goals, and three other players tied for second place with four.

One of those three players, Crystal Dunn, led the Spirit in assists with five, a year after leading the team in goals. Team Most Valuable Player Christine Nairn was second with three assists, and Dydasco was third with two. Dydasco started 12 games in 2016, building off six appearances in her rookie season.

A Hawai'i native, Dydasco played for the UCLA Bruins from 2011 to 2014, winning the 2013 national championship and amassing five goals and 23 assists in her career. Those assists tied Dydasco for eighth in Bruins history, and she led a defense that tied a record in 2014, by logging 19 shutouts in 24 games.

This season, Dydasco helped the Spirit improve on its fourth-place finish in 2015, when the club fell in the first round of the playoffs. In the 2016 playoffs, Washington's semifinal opponent was the Chicago Red Stars, who had defeated them 3-1 in the regular season's final game. In the playoffs, however, the Spirit battled Chicago to a 1-1 draw in regulation before



FLASH FULLBACK. Abby Erceg (#6, right) of the Western New York Flash runs alongside Allie Long (#10, left) of the Portland Thorns during a regular-season National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) match held at Providence Park. Erceg and the Flash defeated the Thorns in a NWSL playoff match, then went on to win the NWSL championship by beating the Washington Spirit. (AR Photo/Jan Landis)

Francisca Ordega scored the game-winner in extra time to send Washington to the NWSL championship match.

There, they faced the Western New York Flash, who fell to the Portland Thorns in the final of the NWSL's inaugural season. The Flash missed the playoffs in 2014 and 2015, so they overhauled their roster. Among other moves, the team traded for Erceg, the New Zealand National Team captain who led Chicago to the 2015 playoffs for the first time in franchise history.

Erceg helped improve the Flash following the 2015 season's seventh-place finish. Western New York led league play in scoring this season with 40 goals, becoming the third team in NWSL history to average at least two goals per game. Despite this, the Flash nearly missed the playoffs after struggling throughout the month of September.

Goals from Jessica McDonald and Lynn Williams, Western New York's scoring leaders, gave the Flash a decisive 4-0 win over the Boston Breakers, stamping their post-season ticket. Their semifinal opponent was the first-place Portland

Thorns, who had the league's stingiest defense during league play (only allowing 19 goals) and best home record (8-1-1).

In a classic matchup of an irresistible offense and an immovable defense, the Flash's offense prevailed. The hometown Thorns scrapped back from a two-goal deficit to send the match into extra time, during which Williams scored twice in the space of six minutes. Erceg and the Flash defense held the Thorns to a single late goal and advanced to the finals.

Western New York's opponent in the championship match, Washington, had played the Flash twice during the regular season. The Spirit won 3-0 in the Flash's home opener, while Western New York came back from a 0-1 deficit in their second matchup to earn a 1-1 draw. As the underdog, the Flash would also be without their coach, Paul Riley, who was ejected during the Portland playoff game and therefore was suspended from coaching in the final.

The Flash began the match with a flurry of failed scoring chances, but Washington got on the board first. Fullback Megan Oyster delivered a long ball over the West-

ern New York defense, drawing goalkeeper Sabrina D'Angelo off her line. Dunn sprinted past two Spirit defenders, beat D'Angelo to the ball, and slotted it behind all three players for the game's first goal.

In a familiar trailing position, the Flash struck back just five minutes later. Williams took the ball down the wing, drawing defenders, while McDonald occupied the defenders on the opposite side of the penalty box. This opened up the middle for Samantha Mewis, who took the pass from Williams, deftly switched feet, and drove the ball past goalkeeper Kelsey Wys to even the score.

Two minutes later, the Spirit suffered another setback when Dydasco went down with an injury and was replaced by Ali Krieger. Dydasco tore a ligament in her knee, a serious injury that requires surgery and extensive rehabilitation in the offseason. Despite losing Dydasco, the Spirit defense didn't yield another goal in regulation, but Washington couldn't score, either, so the game went into extra time.

The Spirit scored in the first minute of extra time after Krieger took the ball down the right side of the pitch, just outside the Western New York penalty area. A Flash defender took her down, but not before she delivered the ball to an unmarked Dunn, who placed the ball into the top right corner of the goal.

Washington locked down Western New York for more than 30 minutes, but with just seconds remaining in their season, the Flash finally struck. McDonald crossed the ball to the middle of the box, Wys leapt into a crowd of players to make a play on the

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THRILLING PLAYOFF. Alison Lee of the United States watches her tee shot on the ninth hole during the third round of the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) KEB HanaBank Championship at Sky72 Golf Club in Incheon, South Korea. (AP Photo/Lee Jin-man)

Ciganda beats Lee in LPGA Tour playoff in South Korea

INCHEON, South Korea (AP) — Carlota Ciganda beat Alison Lee with a birdie on the first hole of a playoff in the rainy Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) KEB HanaBank Championship after each player lost big leads.

The 26-year-old Spaniard won with a six-foot putt after Lee's birdie chip from the rough off the back edge of the green missed a half-inch to the right.

Ciganda overcame a five-stroke deficit to Lee on the front nine, then blew a five-stroke lead on the final five holes — getting into the playoff when Lee bogeyed the par-5 18th after hitting into the water.

Ciganda played the final five holes in 4 over — making a double bogey on 14 and bogeys on 16 and 18 — for a 2-over 70 to match Lee at 10-under 278 at Sky72 Golf Club.

Lee had a 75 after taking a three-stroke lead into the round. The 21-year-old American is a student at UCLA.

Ciganda won her first LPGA Tour title and became the third European winner this year, joining Sweden's Anna Nordqvist and Germany's Caroline Masson. Lee is winless in two full seasons on the tour.

China's two-child policy won't lead to population boom

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They are also increasingly postponing or foregoing marriage and childbearing, he said.

"While no one has a crystal ball to see the future, we have ample empirical evidence to suggest that China's fertility will stay low after a small bump in the first few years of introducing [the] one-child policy," Cai wrote in an e-mail.

The *Lancet* paper's researchers in Britain and China say the effects of the new policy on China's shrinking workforce and aging population won't be seen for two decades.

They recommend that the government increase "the exceptionally low compulsory retirement age" of 50 or 55 for women and 60 for men, increasing pension coverage, and encouraging the traditional practice of three generations living under the same roof.

While authorities credit the one-child policy with preventing 400 million extra births, many demographers argue that the fertility rate would have fallen anyway as China's economy developed and education levels rose.

Over its 36 years of existence, the policy vastly inflated the ratio of boys to girls as female fetuses were selectively aborted in line with a preference for male offspring. China is predicted to have around 30 million more men than women by the end of the decade.

The policy also compelled many women to have forced abortions or give up their second children for adoption, leading to deep emotional scarring.

Comedian Pikotaro astonished by viral success of "PPAP" song

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added, to laughs. "I feel all these themes are well understood by the people who imitate me."

He said he came up with the song at the house of his producer, Daimao Kosaka, which is actually his stage name as a comedian.

With the tune playing, he picked up a pen to begin writing, and thought about Kosaka, who comes from apple country. An open can of pineapples was sitting on the table, and "pen-pineapple-apple-pen" was born.

Asked whether Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has called him since his success, he responded that he doesn't answer numbers he does not recognize on his phone, but would check his messages later to see.

He also teased the topic of his next release: "The hint is, citrus fruits."

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Artwork due:

Thursday, November 17 at 1:00pm

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Space reservations due:

Wednesday, November 30 at 1:00pm

Artwork due:

Thursday, December 1 at 1:00pm

Rehabilitated orangutans freed in Borneo as species dwindles

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an orphaned two-year-old suffering from dehydration and severe diarrhea in 1999, when he was rescued from a field.

He spent several years in forest school and graduated to a halfway house, where the apes are less dependent on humans, in preparation for release into the wild, which happened in 2014. But injuries from fights with another male meant he needed another stint in Samboja Lestari.

"We don't have a choice," said Sihite. "We have to do this to save the orangutan."

AP writer Stephen Wright in Jakarta, Indonesia, contributed to this report.

TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA



■ Polo

Polo's "Talking Story" column will return soon.