

## Asians in American sports • Asian Americans in world sports

## Samoan college football stars overcome adversity in 2016

By Mike Street

Special to The Asian Reporter

Samoans abound in college football, but they're typically linemen or defensive backs; rarer still are Samoans in leadership positions. But this season, two Samoans showed their resilience in unexpected positions. One Samoan quarterback returned from injury to return his team to glory, while a Samoan head coach excelled despite many injuries to key players.

The first Samoan college football head coach, Ken Niumatalolo, has brought the Navy Midshipmen into the national spotlight since taking the helm nine years ago. Already Navy's winningest football coach ever, Niumatalolo added to his accolades and records last season, winning 11 games and their third straight bowl game, both Navy firsts.

This season, the Midshipmen continued that success after losing starting quarterback Tago Smith in the first game of the season. Backup Will Worth stepped into the starting role without missing a beat and Navy won five of their first six games.

Among the many highlights of Navy's season was a 46-40 upset win over sixth-ranked Houston, their first victory against a top-10 team since 1984. They eked out a win against Notre Dame, 28-27, just their fourth win against the Fighting Irish since 1963. Following that victory, they won their next three games, rolling up an astounding 183 points, including a 75-31 shellacking of Southern Methodist University.

Following that game, Worth was voted the American Sports Net 2016 Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) Player of the Year. He had rushed for 1,181 yards, passed 1,363 yards, and placed first in the FBS with 25 rushing touchdowns. He is only the fifth player in Navy history to rush and pass for at least 1,000 yards in a season.

Facing Temple in the American Athletic Conference (AAC) finals, however, the season changed for Niumatalolo, Worth, and the Midshipmen. Worth suffered a season-ending knee injury in the second quarter, then Navy also lost running backs Darryl Bonner and Toneo Gulley in the same game. Navy fell to Temple, 10-34. A week later, they brought their severely depleted offense to face archrival Army, whom they had beaten for 14 straight years.

Despite their personnel challenges, Niumatalolo and Navy put up a valiant fight. Behind by 14 points at halftime, the Midshipmen came roaring back to take the lead by scoring 17 unanswered points. But they couldn't hold back the persistent Black Knights, who scored the go-ahead touchdown with just under seven minutes remaining. Navy could not mount a scoring drive in response and fell 17-21.

The Midshipmen suffered similar heartache in a close game at the Armed Forces Bowl against Louisiana Tech. Missing eight starters on offense and defense, Navy battled back and forth with the Bulldogs, trading the lead



AP Photo/Patrick Semansky

throughout.

The Midshipmen found their offense, but their defense was too porous, committing six penalties — the most since 2006. Navy tied the score at 45 with less than four minutes to play, but they couldn't stop Louisiana Tech from kicking a game-winning field goal as time ran out.

Despite the loss, Niumatalolo's heroics made him a finalist for the Bobby Dodd Coach of the Year Award. He shared the distinction with Mike McIntyre, coach of the Colorado Buffaloes, who had a huge turnaround this season.

In McIntyre's first three years at the helm, the Buffaloes limped to a cumulative 2-27 conference record in the Pac-12. And Colorado's star quarterback, Samoan Sefo Liufau, ended the 2015 season prematurely after sustaining a foot injury that required surgery.

For the Buffs to succeed this season, a healthy Liufau had to play a major role. By the time he finished his sophomore season in 2014, the Samoan standout had already shattered a mind-boggling 51 school records.

As a junior, Liufau set a Colorado season record for lowest interception percentage, including two stretches of more than 100 passes without an interception. But his arm isn't his only weapon, as Liufau was fifth on the team in rushing and second in rushing touchdowns in 2015, despite missing most of the final three games to the foot injury.

In 2016's season opener, Liufau showed he was fully healthy by throwing for 318 yards in Colorado's 44-7 trouncing of Colorado State. Two games later, however, he injured his right ankle against Michigan; redshirt



AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez

**SAMOAN STARS.** Navy head coach Ken Niumatalolo (left photo) reacts while watching a field goal attempt in a National Collegiate Athletic Association football game. In the right photo, Colorado quarterback Sefo Liufau (#13) throws to running back Phillip Lindsay during the Pac-12 Conference championship game against the University of Washington, in Santa Clara, California.

freshman Steven Montez stepped in, but could not rally the Buffs to a win.

Montez led the team to a 2-1 record in the three games Liufau missed. When the starting quarterback returned, Colorado went on a six-game win streak that saw them take down six divisional opponents and rise to ninth in the national rankings.

But Liufau went down again in the Pac-12 championship against fourth-ranked Washington. Leading his team on a first-quarter drive into Washington territory, Liufau reinjured his right ankle and had to leave the game. He returned in the second half, clearly favoring that leg, which not only neutralized his running threat but also affected his renowned passing accuracy. Liufau threw three interceptions — half as many as he'd thrown all last season — and the Huskies rolled to a 41-10 win.

Against the Oklahoma State Cowboys in the Alamo Bowl, the injury bug struck Liufau again. Midway through the second quarter, with the Cowboys up 17-0 and swarming Colorado's offense, Liufau scrambled out of trouble and injured his right ankle again. Though he was not expected to return, he entered the game with Colorado down 0-31 in the third quarter. Gritting his teeth, Liufau led his team to its only scoring drive of the game; it was a courageous effort, but the Buffs still fell, 8-38.

Though Liufau will graduate this year, Asian sports fans can keep watching Navy rise to greatness under Niumatalolo. With these excellent role models to follow, other talented Samoan players will be inspired to show their toughness in unexpected positions on the college gridiron.

## At Pearl Harbor, U.S. and Japan seek absolution from the war

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They started with a formal meeting at another nearby military base, in what the White House said was likely Obama's last meeting with a foreign leader before leaving office in January. It was a bookend of sorts for the president, who nearly eight years ago invited Abe's predecessor to be the first leader he hosted at the White House.

Obama, speaking after he and Abe laid green-and-peach wreaths at the memorial, called the harbor a sacred place and said that "even the deepest wounds of war can give way to friendship and lasting peace." It's a notion Obama tried throughout his presidency to put into practice, as he reached out to former adversaries Iran, Myanmar, and Cuba.

"As we lay a wreath or toss flowers into

waters that still weep, we think of the more than 2,400 American patriots, fathers and husbands, wives and daughters, manning heaven's rails for all eternity," Obama said.

Then the two leaders greeted survivors in the crowd. They shook hands and hugged some of the men who fought in the December 7, 1941 battle that President Franklin D. Roosevelt called a "date which will live in infamy."

Japanese leaders have visited Pearl Harbor before, but Abe was the first to go to the memorial above the sunken *USS Arizona*, where a marbled wall lists the names of U.S. troops killed in the Japanese attack.

For Abe, it was an act of symbolic reciprocity, coming seven months after Obama and Abe visited Hiroshima together and renewed their calls for a nuclear-free future. Still, both governments maintain that the visits were separate and not contingent upon one another.

The visit was not without political risk for Abe, given the Japanese people's long, emotional reckoning with their nation's aggression in the war. Though the history books have largely deemed Pearl Harbor a

surprise attack, Japan's government still insists it had intended to give prior notice that it was declaring war and failed only because of "bureaucratic bungling."

"There's this sense of guilt, if you like, among Japanese, this 'Pearl Harbor syndrome,' that we did something very unfair," said Tamaki Tsukada, a minister in the Embassy of Japan in Washington. He said he believes Abe's visit would "absolve that kind of complex that Japanese people have."

In the years after Pearl Harbor, the U.S. incarcerated roughly 120,000 Japanese Americans in internment camps before dropping atomic bombs in 1945 that killed some 140,000 people in Hiroshima and 70,000 in Nagasaki.

Since the war, the U.S. and Japan have built a powerful alliance that both sides say has grown during Obama's tenure, including strengthened military ties. Yet there are questions about whether the relationship will degenerate under President-elect Donald Trump, a possibility neither Obama nor Abe addressed.

Associated Press writers Brian Skoloff in Kailua, Hawai'i, and Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo contributed to this report.

## Department of Consumer &amp; Business Services



## Last chance to enroll in health insurance and avoid penalty in 2017

The month of January is the last opportunity for Oregonians to enroll in health insurance plans for 2017.

Open enrollment lasts through January 31, 2017. It is the time of year to change plans and, for those who do not have insurance, to buy a plan. If you don't get covered before the deadline, you could go a year without insurance. You could also pay a significant penalty when you file your 2017 taxes.

Oregonians can sign up, renew, or change their health insurance plans at [HealthCare.gov](http://HealthCare.gov). Even if you were already re-enrolled in your current plan, you can change plans through January 31. Financial help is available for many people if they enroll through [HealthCare.gov](http://HealthCare.gov).

Oregon has a network of insurance agents and community organizations ready to help people enroll. You can find an agent or community partner in your area by going to [www.oregonhealthcare.gov/get-help.html](http://www.oregonhealthcare.gov/get-help.html) or calling the Oregon Health Insurance Marketplace at 1-855-268-3767 (toll-free).

To start shopping for plans, visit [HealthCare.gov](http://HealthCare.gov) or call 1-800-318-2596 (toll-free) (TTY: 1-855-889-4325).

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