Asians in American sports • Asian Americans in world sports

Sounders rely on Kim Kee-hee sooner than expected

By Mike Street
Special to The Asian Reporter

The Seattle Sounders have been a force in Major League Soccer (MLS) since joining the league in 2009. They have never missed an MLS playoff, and they reached the MLS Cup final in both of the past two seasons, winning the championship in 2016 and falling to Toronto, 2-0, in 2017.

Before the start of the 2018 season, Seattle recognized that their defensive core was aging, so they looked east for young talent, signing South Korean fullback Kim Kee-hee. Initially considered as depth, Kim has instead stepped into the starting lineup, anchoring a defense that has been one of the stingiest in the league in 2018.

Kim arrived in Seattle with an excellent pedigree. Internationally, he has distinguished himself with the South Korean national team. Eight of his 23 appearances with the squad came during the team's qualification for the 2018 World Cup in Russia. Playing with the under-23 national squad, Kim helped his team win a bronze medal at the 2012 London Olympics, marking the first Olympic medal won by any South Korean soccer team.

Domestically, Kim was drafted by Daegu FC in Korea's top-flight K League, but the team struggled to be competitive during his time there. After a one-season loan to Qatari team Al-Sailiya SC, Kim signed with Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors, a far more formidable K League side.

In his three seasons with Jeonbuk, Kim increased his playing time, and the team rose from third place in his first season to win the K League title in 2014 and 2015. In 2016 and 2017, Kim played with Shanghai Shenhua of the Chinese Super League, a league that has brought in higher levels of international talent in recent years, dramatically increasing the level of play. Shenhua obtained Kim with a $6 million transfer fee that was one of the largest in league history.

INTERNATIONAL TALENT. *Before the start of the 2018 Major League Soccer season, the Seattle Sounders recognized that their defensive core was aging, so they looked east for young talent, signing South Korean fullback Kim Kee-hee (right, #20). Initially considered as depth, Kim has instead stepped into the starting lineup for the squad. (AR Photo/Jan Landis)*

With Shenhua, Kim scored twice in 45 starts over two seasons, when the club finished fourth and 11th in the league. More important for Seattle, however, Kim connected with former Sounder Obafemi Martins, who left Seattle to join Shanghai Shenhua in 2016. Martins often praised his time in Seattle, and when Kim was looking for a club to play with in 2018, he chose the Sounders.

When the Sounders announced Kim's signing in February of this year, they said "he brings solid experience from some top-flight leagues and international tournaments and gives us more depth at a vital position."

Seattle head coach Brian Schmetzer added, "He is a strong, experienced player that we believe will be a good addition to our defense … His signing gives us very good options at center back going forward, and I'm excited to see how he integrates to the squad."

Seattle already had an excellent defense that includes center fullbacks Chad Marshall, who has won MLS Defender of the Year three times, and Román Torres, who will be playing for Panama in the World Cup, which begins June 14. Kim was expected to rotate with both players this season and perhaps one day take over the demanding center fullback role, being several years younger than both Torres and Marshall.

However, circumstances dictated a different outcome this season. Kim had appeared in just one game before a calf strain knocked him out for a month. When he returned, both Torres and Marshall were injured, and Kim made his first start of the season April 29 against Los Angeles FC, an MLS expansion team this season.

The decision to sit Torres and start Kim happened on game day, increasing the pressure on Kim, but he acquitted himself well. In his 69 minutes as the primary center back, Los Angeles did not score.

After the match, Seattle goalkeeper Stefan Frei said of Kim, "[He] reads the game well, he moves well, he's got a good soccer IQ."

Seattle midfielder Cristian Roldan said, "Kim was awesome. He was confident in his playing ability. … He's a very aggressive player and I see very positive things about him."

At press time, Kim had started four of five games since his first start, four games in which Seattle yielded just three goals. He has helped Seattle achieve nearly the stingiest defense in the Western Conference, allowing just 12 goals in 10 matches. And he has continued to impress Schmetzer, who says Kim is aggressive, but in the right way. "He'll get his body

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Malaysia sets up fund for donations to ease national debt

Continued from page 3

expressed pride on social media about being part of a new Malaysia that is free from graft and race politics.

In her fundraising campaign, Nik Shazarina Bakti, 27, said Malaysians in the past had given jewelry, money, and valuables to help raise funds in seeking independence from Britain. "This time, we are doing it. We can tell our children and grandchildren of this initiative that we all took part in to save Negaraku (my country) Malaysia," she said.

The government has said it will axe a multi-billion-dollar high-speed railway project to Singapore and review other large-scale infrastructure projects, mainly Chinese investment, to cut costs. It has also reopened an investigation into a massive corruption scandal at the 1MDB state investment fund set up by Najib when he took power in 2009 but partly blamed for the rising debt.

The 1MDB fund accumulated billions in debts and is being investigated in the U.S. and several other countries. U.S. investigators say Najib's associates stole and laundered at least $4.5 billion from the fund. Najib, who denies any wrongdoing, and his wife, have been barred from leaving the country pending the investigation.

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

Difficulty level: Medium *#63758*

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 #53949 (Easy)

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

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

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TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA

■ *Polo*

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