

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

## Hawai'i is the best of the three Asian teams atop this year's Little League World Series

By Mike Street

Special to The Asian Reporter

Few sporting events are as thoroughly dominated by Asian and Asian-American teams as the Little League World Series. It's been 10 years since an Asian team didn't win the International Bracket, and 18 years since a Little League World Series (LLWS) championship game featured neither an Asian nor Asian-American team.

So it came as no surprise that a team from Honolulu, Hawai'i, met a team from Seoul, South Korea, in this year's Little League World Series championship game. And while Asian-American sports fans were hoping for an exciting battle, they witnessed instead a victory by a squad from Hawai'i that tore through this year's tournament bracket.

Hawai'i's most exciting tournament game was its first, against a formidable team from Peachtree City, Georgia. The two starting pitchers, Georgia's Jansen Kenty and Hawai'i's Aukai Kea, racked up a total of 22 strikeouts and just six hits between them for nearly six innings.

The teams' relievers kept the game at 0-0 until the bottom of the 11th inning, when Kea (who had shifted to third base) slugged a two-run, game-winning home run. The game was the longest in Little League World Series history, and it was also the closest that any team came to defeating the mighty Hawai'ians.

Hawai'i's next opponent, the team from Grosse Pointe Woods, Michigan, did something no other team did at this year's tournament. They scored, pushing a run across in the first inning to take an early lead. Then Hawai'i exploded in the second inning, scoring six times, and also adding two more runs in the third inning. Michigan rallied for two runs in the sixth, but it wasn't enough, and the Honolulu team won, 8-3.

Staten Island faced Hawai'i next, but they could only muster one hit against the combination of Kea and Ka'olu Holt on the mound. On offense, the players from Honolulu pounded Staten Island for 10 runs, including a grand slam from second baseman Sean Yamaguchi.

In the U.S. Championship game, Kea again took the hill for a rematch against Georgia. This time, both teams went scoreless for the first three frames before Honolulu's John De La Cruz drove home Hunter Nishina on a single to center. Hawai'i added two more in the fifth, but they didn't need them, because Kea was dazzling, whiffing 15 batters in a complete-game shutout, walking one and giving up only three hits, to lead his team to the LLWS championship game.

On the other side of the bracket, South



Korea also needed extra innings against their first opponent, the team from Puerto Rico. South Korea tied the game in the sixth and final inning, scoring two runs on a single and double steal. The two squads stayed scoreless for two more innings before South Korea again scored twice. Ji Hyung Choi was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded, and Gi Jeong Kim singled to bring the second run home. Puerto Rico could not rally in their half of the ninth, so South Korea won 4-2.

Against their next opponent, Mexico, South Korea scored on an error in the first inning and never looked back. They added two more in the fourth inning on a single by catcher Ji Hong Jeon and a bases-loaded walk by second baseman Jae Hyeok Lee. Mexico narrowed the lead with

an RBI (Run Batted In) single in the bottom of the fourth, but pitcher Ji Hyung Choi salted the game away in the sixth with a two-run homer, giving South Korea a 5-1 victory.

South Korea's third and fourth games were against the same opponent, Japan, but the two games couldn't have been more different. South Korea won the first matchup, 10-0, in just four innings due to the Little League 10-run "mercy" rule, with Yeong Hyeon Kim allowing just one hit on the mound.

In the next game, the international championship, South Korea scored twice in the first inning on a solo homer from starting pitcher Ji Hyung Choi and a double from third baseman Shoo Hoo Choi. It looked like they would keep their

dispossessing the ball from an Orlando defender and burying her shot into the corner of the goal.

Kerr played 360 minutes in the four August matches and finished the month with 11 of 26 shots on goal and eight chances created on 209 touches.

The honor is the third time Kerr has been named NWSL Player of the Month.

The Chicago Red Stars return to action on September 4 against Sky Blue FC at Toyota Park in Bridgeview, Illinois.

The NWSL Player of the Month award is given each month of the regular season by the NWSL Media Association, a collection of writers who cover the league on a consistent basis. To learn more about the NWSL, visit <www.NWSLsoccer.com>.

**TOP TEAMS.** Honolulu, Hawai'i pitcher Ka'olu Holt (top photo, right, #14) celebrates with teammate Aukai Kea (#23) after getting the third out in the first inning of the Little League World Series Championship baseball game against South Korea in South Williamsport, Pennsylvania. In the bottom photo, the toss from South Korea catcher Gi Jeong Kim (not seen) gets away from pitcher Yeong Hyeon Kim (#14), who was covering home on a wild pitch, which allowed Honolulu's Zachary Won to score from third base in the third inning. Hawai'i won the final game, 3-0. (AP Photos/Gene J. Puskar)

momentum going from the first game, but that's all they would score.

Japan's starting pitcher, Shisei Fujimoto, gave up just one more hit after that, striking out eight. Ji Hyung Choi was even better, holding Japan scoreless for four innings before Yeong Hyeon Kim relieved him and surrendered an RBI double that was Japan's only tally. Kim held Japan to just one more hit, and South Korea advanced to the championship game to face Hawai'i.

Kim returned to the mound to start the final game for South Korea, while Hawai'i countered with Ka'olu Holt, who hadn't pitched since relieving four days before. In his three previous games, Holt had given up just one run in almost seven innings of work.

He was even better against South Korea.

In the top of the first inning, South Korea's leadoff hitter, Jae Hyeok Lee, reached first base on a beautiful bunt down the third-base line. That bunt single and Jae Woo Myoung's two-out single in the fourth inning were South Korea's only hits of the game. They were baffled by the wicked breaking ball from Holt, who struck out eight and walked only one in a six-inning complete-game gem.

Hawai'i provided offense with their first opportunity, when first baseman Mana Lau Kong hit a home run off Kim's very first pitch. Kim rarely looked comfortable after that, constantly working out of trouble. In the third inning, he allowed two runs on a wild pitch and a throwing error from his catcher, Gi Jeong Kim. Yeong Hyeon Kim settled down in the fourth, and Choi relieved him in the sixth without allowing another run, but the damage had been done, and Hawai'i won 3-0.

An excellent Hawai'i team, led by stellar pitching performances, deservedly won this year's all-Asian Little League World Series championship. And down in the consolation bracket, Japan won third place to make it an Asian sweep of the three top spots. No matter which team wins, Asian-American sports fans are rarely disappointed by the Little League World Series.

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## Tottenham's Son Heung-min avoids military duty with Asian Games gold

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gold, defeating Iran 84-72.

As expected, China swept all five gold medals in table tennis, including the two all-China singles finals.

Fan Zhendong defeated Lin Gaoyuan in the men's final, and for the women, Chen Meng beat Wang Manyu.

China beat Thailand 3-0 in the women's volleyball final, and on the men's side, Iran defeated South Korea 3-0.

Kazakhstan defeated Japan 8-7 to take the men's gold in water polo.

Japan beat China 7-5 to take gold in women's rugby sevens, and Hong Kong won gold in the men's version, beating Japan 14-0.

Japan defeated Malaysia in men's field hockey, winning a shootout 3-1 after the match was tied 6-6.

AP reporter Niniek Karmini contributed to this report.

## Striker Sam Kerr of the Chicago Red Stars voted NWSL Player of the Month

Striker Sam Kerr of the Chicago Red Stars has been voted the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) Player of the Month by the NWSL Media Association for the month of August. Kerr, age 24, is also currently leading the race for the NWSL Golden Boot, having scored 14 goals so far this season. The forward scored five of those 14 goals last month.

The Fremantle, Australia native was the lone goal scorer for the Red Stars in a 1-1 draw against league leader North Carolina on August 10 when she headed in a cross from Vanessa DiBernardo to equalize the game in the 64th minute.

Following a midweek scoreless draw at Seattle Reign FC, Kerr demonstrated her scoring prowess by putting away two goals

— in the 44th and 49th minutes — in a 2-2 draw on August 18 against the Portland Thorns at Providence Park.

Kerr again showcased her talent when she recorded a brace and an assist in Chicago's 3-1 victory on the road against the Orlando Pride on August 25.

In the 44th minute, midfielder Yuki Nagasato flicked on a dangerous pass behind the defense for Kerr, who beat her player then fired a low shot past Pride goalkeeper Ashlyn Harris. Less than a minute later, she turned provider getting to the end line and cutting a pass back to the top of the six-yard box for midfielder Vanessa DiBernardo to fire first time into the back of the net for a 2-0 advantage. The Australia international added an insurance goal in the 59th minute after