

Asian NWSL players lead their teams to the playoffs — and beyond

Continued from page 10

them in the semifinal match against the Courage, a team featuring two formidable Asian fullbacks, Maori Abby Erceg and Japan's Yuri Kawamura. Erceg added to her legacy this year, but Kawamura's story in the NWSL so far has been one of hard knocks to her knees.

A veteran of the Japanese league and international play, Kawamura joined the Courage in 2017 but played only eight games before suffering a season-ending knee injury that also kept her out for the start of 2018. When she was finally able to start, Kawamura played in two Courage games before starting in the first-ever women's International Champions Cup. Though North Carolina won, Kawamura again ended her season on a knee injury, this time to her right knee.

In contrast, Erceg's NWSL story has been one of durability and defensive domination. She started and played every minute in 2018, the only North Carolina player this season to do so. But Erceg does more than just show up; she helps the Courage shred opposing offenses. Carolina allowed a record-low 17 goals this season, and Erceg earned NWSL Defensive Player of the Year honors for those accomplishments.

And she's no brute, either. Erceg committed just eight fouls this season, drawing a single yellow card. Her mentorship of the Courage's defensive unit also earned her the team's Leadership Award, which is only appropriate for the team captain.

In the Courage semifinal against the Red Stars, Chicago could not crack that defense, but their Asian stars made some noise. Both Nagasato and Kerr had excellent early scoring opportunities that rang off the hardware instead of tickling the twine. Erceg said after the game that marking Kerr is always a challenge



AR Photo: Leah Lipp

because "she's so dynamic in the way that she plays and she's not predictable."

The outcome of the game was more predictable, however. Carolina rode an early goal from Jessica McDonald and a late backbreaker from Sam Mewis to a 2-0 victory. The win carried them into a championship game that was a rematch of the 2017 final: Portland against Carolina.

This time around, the Courage continued its season of excellence and dominated the Thorns for a 3-0 win that gave the Courage its first NWSL championship. It was, however, the franchise's second championship, as the Courage were previously the Western New York Flash, who won the championship in 2016.

That means only three franchises have been NWSL champions in the league's six-year history: Portland in 2013 and 2017, North Carolina/Western New York in 2018 and 2016, and now-defunct Kansas



AR Photo: Leah Lipp

INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE. The North Carolina Courage played both of their National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) playoff matches at Providence Park in Portland. The Courage defeated the Chicago Red Stars 2-0 in its semifinal match on September 18, then beat the Portland Thorns 3-0 in the championship match on September 22, capping off a stellar season in which the club broke several team and league records along the way. North Carolina's Abby Erceg (#6, right photo), who started and played every minute in 2018, helped lead her team to victory. She and the Courage shredded opposing offenses, allowing a record-low 17 goals this season. Erceg earned NWSL 2018 Defensive Player of the Year honors for her efforts. In the left photo, forward Yuki Nagasato (#12) of the Chicago Red Stars dribbles in the NWSL semifinal against the Courage. Nagasato ended the regular season ranked second in the league and first on the Red Stars with seven assists.

City FC, who won in 2014 and 2015. If this year's playoffs are any indication, achieving greater parity in the league might come from greater diversity on the

field — especially talent from the east.

To learn more about the NWSL, visit <www.nwslsoccer.com> or <www.thornsfc.com>.

Indonesian soccer league suspended after fan killed

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — The Indonesian soccer league has been suspended following the killing of a fan by rival supporters.

The chairman of the Indonesian Soccer Association, Edy Rahmayadi, said the suspension will last until the completion of an investigation into the death of Haringga Sirila, a supporter of Jakarta-based club Persija.

The 23-year-old Sirila was beaten to death by supporters of Persib outside a stadium in Bandung just before a match between the clubs.

Police in Bandung have named eight people as suspects in the killing of Sirila.

Persib, which currently leads the league, won the match 3-2.

Dozens of people have been killed in violence

between soccer fans in league is plagued by Indonesia since the 1990s. problems, including corruption and inept management.

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

Difficulty level: Easy #39524

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 #17269 (Hard)

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

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

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