

Asians in American sports • Asian Americans in world sports

Asian MLS players have a Pacific Northwest flavor

By Mike Street
Special to The Asian Reporter

As teams in Major League Soccer (MLS) continue to invest in players from Asia, a clear pattern is emerging, and it's centered right where we live. With a few exceptions, Asian and Asian-American MLS players are mainly found in the Pacific Northwest this season, with several on one squad: the Vancouver Whitecaps.

While the Seattle Sounders and Portland Timbers have had their share of Asian players, the Whitecaps are heavily invested in the east. At least two Asian stars should make the first team this year, and two more could join them soon.

Left back Ali Adnan, the first Iraq-born MLS player, was loaned to Vancouver last season. He joined the club a few months later as a Designated Player, a roster slot reserved for top-flight soccer talent.

Adnan certainly fits that description, having played 68 matches in three seasons with Udinese of Italy's Serie A, among the world's best leagues. Prior to Serie A, he played two years with the Baghdad FC youth team and two seasons in Turkey's top league. Adnan has 50 caps with the Iraqi national team, was a member of the 2019 Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Asian Cup Best XI, and was named the 2013 AFC Asian Young Footballer of the Year.

After joining Vancouver in 2019, Adnan showed his value to the Whitecaps by tying for the team lead with five assists in 28 starts and leading the squad in a wide range of defensive and passing metrics. He was named to the MLS Team of the Week four times, and his lone goal of the season featured him brilliantly splitting two defenders and curling a long-distance shot past a diving keeper.

Adnan has a talented teammate in South Korean midfielder In-beom Hwang. Hwang was named the club's Most Promising Male Player after a solid first season with the Whitecaps. He's still



AR Photo/Jan Landis



AR Photo/Jody Lim

young — just 23 — so the Whitecaps could lose him to a European club if he develops as much as they expect. But for the next several seasons, Whitecaps fans can look forward to plenty of action from Adnan and

In-beom.

Rumors are swirling that Hwang could gain a teammate from his home country, as Vancouver is in talks with attacking midfielder Lee Dong-gyeong. Just 22 years

old, Lee has played for Ulsan Hyundai in South Korea's top league, notching four goals and two assists in his first season. Lee made his debut for the South Korean national team last year after scoring eight goals in nine appearances with the under-20 team. If the Whitecaps can sign him, it's easy to see these three players forming the most formidable Asian trio in MLS history.

Vancouver's fourth player with eastern roots is Ryan Raposo, whose mother is of Chinese descent. Raposo was chosen fourth overall by Vancouver in the MLS SuperDraft, after two excellent years as an attacking midfielder at Syracuse.

As a freshman, Raposo was among the team leaders in points and assists and was named to the ACC All-Freshman team. The following season, he started all 20 games, scored a team-leading 15 goals, and was second on the team in assists with seven.

This led to Raposo's selection to the All-ACC First Team and his decision to jump to MLS, where he hopes to secure a spot on Vancouver's first team. Even if he only makes the second team, we will see him on an MLS pitch sooner rather than later.

Another Pacific Northwest team, our own Portland Timbers, has an Asian-American player also hoping to make the roster of the first team. Japanese-American center midfielder Ken Krolicki played for parts of the last two seasons with the Montreal Impact, starting 23 games in 34 appearances but failing to register a goal or an assist.

Some of his offensive struggles can be

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2021 World Baseball Classic semifinals, final in Miami

MIAMI (AP) — Next year's World Baseball Classic (WBC) will be played in Taiwan, Tokyo, Phoenix, and Miami, with the Marlins hosting the semifinals and final along with half of the quarterfinals.

The fifth edition of the tournament will be played from March 9 to 23, 2021, Major League Baseball and the Major League Baseball Players Association have said.

There will be four groups of five teams: the 16 participants in the 2017 tournament plus four qualifiers to be determined during a 12-nation tournament held this month in Tucson, Arizona.

Group A will be in Taiwan at Taichung and Taoyuan from March 9 to 13, and Group B will be in Tokyo from March 11 to 15. The top two teams in both Group A and B

IOC member casts doubt on postponing or moving Tokyo Games

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with American pro football, college football, European soccer, basketball, baseball, and ice hockey. Other world broadcasters also have jammed schedules.

"It would be tough to get the kind of blanket coverage that people expect around the Olympic Games," Pound said.

He also cast doubt on the possibility of a one-year delay. Japan is officially spending \$12.6 billion to organize the Olympics, although a national audit board says the country is spending twice that much.

"You have to ask if you can hold the bubble together for an extra year," Pound said. "Then, of course, you have to fit all of this into the entire international sports schedule."

Pound said the IOC has been building up an emergency fund, reported to be about

\$1 billion, for unforeseen circumstances to help the IOC and the international sports federations that depend on income from the IOC. About 73% of the IOC's \$5.7 billion income in a four-year Olympic cycle comes from broadcast rights.

"It's not an insurable risk, and it's not one that can be attributed to one or the other of the parties," he said. "So everybody takes their lumps. There would be a lack of revenue on the Olympic movement side."

Pound said the future of the Tokyo Games is largely out of the IOC's hands and depends on the course the virus takes.

"If it gets to be something like the Spanish flu," Pound said, referring to the deadly pandemic early in the 20th century that killed millions, "at that level of lethality, then everybody's got to take their medicine."

will advance to quarterfinals at the Tokyo Dome March 16 and 17.

Group C will be at Chase Field in Phoenix from March 13 to 17 and Group D at Marlins Park from March 14 to 18.

Marlins Park hosts quarterfinals March 19 and 20, and the semifinals and finals from March 21 to 23.

The United States won the tournament for the first time in 2017 following titles by Japan in 2006 and 2009 and the Dominican Republic in 2013. The tournament has been played in the past with pitch limits and other constraints on players.

Other teams with guaranteed places in the WBC are Australia, Canada, China, Colombia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Israel, Italy, Japan, the

Netherlands, Mexico, Puerto Rico, South Korea, Taiwan, and Venezuela. The qualifying tournament includes Brazil, Britain, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Panama, the Philippines, South Africa, and Spain.

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