

# Asian MLS players have a Pacific Northwest flavor

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explained by his dislocated right elbow, which knocked Krolicki out for the first few months of last season, and then he struggled to regain his form. Montreal did not renew his contract, so Portland signed him to T2 in January.

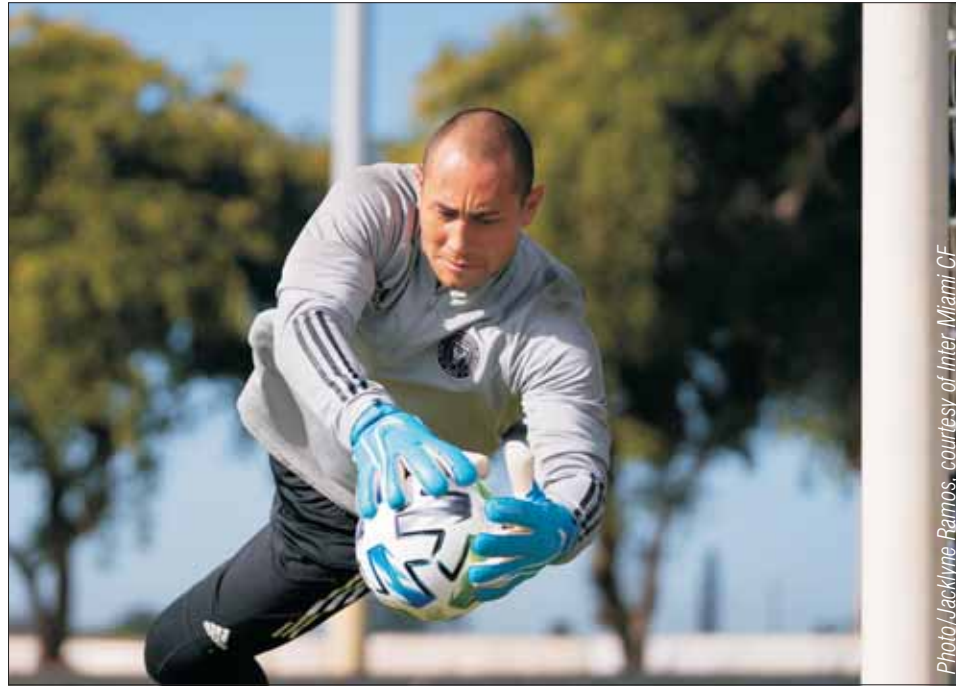
Krolicki already made his mark during the preseason. As a second-half substitute with the first team against Minnesota United, Krolicki pounced on a loose ball just outside the penalty area and drilled it into the net, showing both his quick feet and his shot-making power. Portland's first team is crowded, but we can expect to see Krolicki with them at some point this season when they inevitably need some midfield help.

When he does, Krolicki should join Bill Tuiloma, the defensive stalwart with Samoan heritage who worked his way into a full-time role with the Timbers in 2018. Last season, he logged a career-best 25 appearances (21 of them starts), a reliable constant in a fluctuating Timbers back line. The club recognized his importance by signing him to a multiple-year deal in December. Unfortunately, Tuiloma will start this season late, as a calf strain will likely sideline him until April.

Some Asian talent looms outside of the Pacific Northwest with two excellent players. In December, I discussed the rebound of Japanese forward/midfielder Tsubasa Endoh from Toronto's second club to the first team. Toronto reached the MLS Cup Final last season, only to fall to the Seattle Sounders, but they will welcome Endoh's continued development to help them return to the final for a chance at redemption.

Inter Miami CF will play its inaugural season this year, and they chose Lee Nguyen from Los Angeles FC with their third overall pick in the expansion draft. Nguyen, a Vietnamese American, has emerged as a potent attacking force for New England and Los Angeles.

In 2014, his breakthrough season for the Revolution, Nguyen scored 18 goals and gave five assists. That total was the most ever goals by a midfielder, most by a



Photo/Jacklyne Ramos, courtesy of Inter Miami CF



Photo/Shelden Rogers, courtesy of the Vancouver Whitecaps

U.S.-born player, and it helped to earn him third in MVP voting.

Since then, he hasn't matched that prolific production, but has still scored 27

more goals and assisted on 44 more, including a career-best 15 assists in 2017.

Although the 33-year-old's best years may be behind him — last year marked his first

**SEASON OPENERS.** Goalkeeper Luis Robles (top photo), a graduate of the University of Portland, signed as a free agent with Inter Miami CF on December 2, 2019. Robles, who was recently announced as Miami's team captain, currently ranks sixth in Major League Soccer (MLS) history for goalkeeper wins and owns the league's Ironman streak with 183 consecutive complete games. Midfielder Ryan Raposo (bottom photo), who has Chinese heritage, was selected fourth overall in the MLS SuperDraft by the Vancouver Whitecaps after two years at Syracuse University.

season without a goal in his career — Nguyen will still bring leadership, playoff experience, and steady production to Miami.

Also joining Nguyen in Miami is veteran goalkeeper Luis Robles, a graduate of the University of Portland, who signed as a free agent on December 2, 2019. In eight seasons with the New York Red Bulls, from 2012 to 2019, Robles earned 72 shutouts, had a 1.29 goals-against average, helped his squad win three Supporters' Shields, and held a record of 114 wins, 71 losses, and 53 draws.

Robles ranks sixth in MLS history for goalkeeper wins and owns the league's Ironman streak with 183 consecutive complete games. In 2018, he also set the single-season Red Bulls franchise record for clean sheets (14) and wins (21). His experience will be invaluable for his new club, as witnessed by the recent announcement that he will serve as Miami's team captain this season.

Too often, we forget how blessed we are to live in the Pacific Northwest, where we have so many chances to see excellent Asian and Asian-American talent on the soccer pitch. And the concentration of players in Vancouver will give Asian-American sports fans another reason to make the trip north — or to Providence Park — to see the Whitecaps play.

*Editor's note: MLS kicked off its 25th season over the weekend. The Portland Timbers lost their home opener to Minnesota United FC, 1-3, the Vancouver Whitecaps lost to Sporting Kansas City, 1-3, and Inter Miami CF were edged out by Los Angeles FC, 0-1. The Timbers and Whitecaps compete in Portland on April 25 at 7:00pm and in Vancouver on October 4 at 1:30pm. For learn more, or to view the full 2020 schedules, visit <[www.timbers.com/schedule](http://www.timbers.com/schedule)> and <[www.whitecapsfc.com/schedule](http://www.whitecapsfc.com/schedule)>.*

## Kenta Maeda joins Twins rotation after week in limbo

FORT MYERS, Fla. (AP) — The acquisition of Kenta Maeda took the Minnesota Twins longer than they anticipated.

The trade that was made to get him, the team believes, will be well worth the wait and the price.

"We made a lot of decisions this offseason to invest in the now," Twins president of baseball operations Derek Falvey said. "Now we also get a pitcher here who we think is going to impact us now and beyond."

Maeda joined the AL Central champions three days after the Twins finalized the deal with the Los Angeles Dodgers and more than a week after the initial agreement on the three-team trade that also involved the Boston Red Sox was first struck.

The move was the latest by the Twins in demonstration of their desire to play deeper into October. Earlier this year, they signed third baseman Josh Donaldson to the biggest free agent contract in club history, a four-year deal worth \$92 million. They've also added free agent pitchers Homer Bailey, Rich Hill, and Tyler Clippard, catcher Alex Avila, and re-signed pitchers Jake Odorizzi, Michael Pineda, and Sergio Romo.

The Twins have already declared Maeda will be a starter for them in their attempt to repeat as division champions. Maeda, who went 10-8 with a 4.04 ERA in 153 2/3 innings in 2019, spent the past few seasons in Los Angeles shuffling back and forth between the rotation and the bullpen. His addition will be especially helpful during the first half of the season, with Pineda completing a suspension until mid-May and Hill rehabilitating from elbow surgery until sometime in June or July.

"Adding Maeda to our group is huge," Twins manager Rocco Baldelli said. "It's something we're very excited about to have a guy that has this type of ability, that has this type of experience. To be able to plug him in to a situation where he seems to be excited about what's going on and our plans for him and the opportunity, we're



extremely happy to have him."

Though moving spring training sites from Arizona to Florida on short notice was a short-term hassle, Maeda said, he was pleased to be with his new team. The

**FULL-TIME STARTER.** Starting pitcher Kenta Maeda of the Minnesota Twins warms up before pitching against the Boston Red Sox in a spring training baseball game on February 24, 2020, in Fort Myers, Florida. The acquisition of Maeda took Minnesota longer than anticipated. (AP Photo/John Bazemore)

opportunity to be a full-time starter was what he sought.

"Practice wise, it's the same routine, just as you would for any other year," he said through an interpreter.

Maeda was acquired with minor league catcher Jair Camargo for right-hander Brusdar Graterol, minor league outfielder Luke Raley, and Minnesota's competitive balance round B pick in this year's amateur draft, the 67th overall choice. Graterol was the organization's top pitching prospect, but the opportunity to add a proven starter at a below-market-value cost was too good to pass up.

The Dodgers also agreed to pay the Twins \$3 million to cover part of Maeda's salary and reimburse them for up to \$7 million of his earned bonuses, according to salary information obtained by The Associated Press.

Maeda has a unique contract that has four seasons remaining on it, an eight-year deal with \$25 million guaranteed he signed with the Dodgers upon arriving from Japan.

The discounted yet heavily incentivized contract, designed because of elbow irregularities discovered during his initial medical review, carried a maximum value of \$106.2 million had he logged at least 32 starts and 200 innings per year. The Dodgers had a deep enough rotation to use Maeda out of the bullpen sometimes and the pitcher spent some time on the injured list, so Maeda only earned 65% of the maximum value of his deal over four seasons with Los Angeles.

Maeda's maximum cost to the Twins would be \$3,713,500 this year if he earns \$13.15 million, his total if he reaches all his roster and performance and bonus levels.