

182,013 SUBSCRIBERS



[The National Student](#) > [Sport](#)

Meet the former FIFA World Cup star and two students aiming for ConIFA glory

[Gursimran Hans](#)

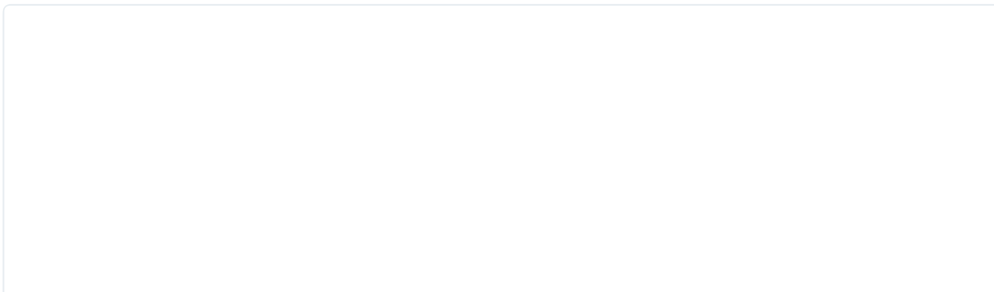
2nd June 2018

RATE THIS ARTICLE

Share This Article:

1

The United Koreans of Japan, as their name suggests, represent the approximately 900,000 Koreans living in Japan. Most of these Koreans are the fourth or the fifth generation of their family to live in Japan, with migration beginning in the early 20th Century. They are referred to as Zainichi Koreans, the same name as the dialect of Korean they speak that is not found in the North or South of their ancestral peninsula.





unitedkoreansinjapan

@UKJ2018

United Koreans in Japan depart from Haneda International Airport this morning. Their flight delayed almost 3 hours but safely took off! Make our dream come true in London

[@CONIFAOfficial](#) [#WFC2018](#)

2:03 AM - May 30, 2018 · Ota-ku, Tokyo

40 23 people are talking about this

<...

The United Koreans of Japan, as their name suggests, represent the approximately 900,000 Koreans living in Japan. Most of these Koreans are the fourth or the fifth generation of their family to live in Japan, with migration beginning in the early 20th Century. They are referred to as Zainichi Koreans, the same name as the dialect of Korean they speak that is not found in the North or South of their ancestral peninsula.



unitedkoreansinjapan

@UKJ2018

United Koreans in Japan depart from Haneda International Airport this morning. Their flight delayed almost 3 hours but safely took off! Make our dream come true in London

[@CONIFAOfficial](#) [#WFC2018](#)

2:03 AM - May 30, 2018 · Ota-ku, Tokyo

40 23 people are talking about this

The National Student caught up with two younger members of their squad, 19-year-old midfielder Tong Sung Lee, who spent last season at Staines Town in their Under 19 squad



and 20-year-old defender Yoo Jun Kang after a day of sightseeing in London and training.

The two seemed in good spirits in the dinner area of the ConIFA hotel and both expressed their excitement at playing in what is their first international tournament.

"It's very nice," stated Yoo who explains: "I got injured before I came here, so I couldn't play the last game," a 0-0 draw with Western Armenia. He added he was working hard in training for selection for today's game against Kabylia in Bracknell.



CONIFA

@CONIFAOfficial

READ: The only 0-0 draw of the first day of the tournament came when @UKJ2018 played Western Armenia. Read more here: conifa.org/en/wfc-2018-re...

1:17 PM - Jun 1, 2018

15

See CONIFA's other Tweets

Tong, who began playing football at age of three, has the unique opportunity to play with his older brother, Jun Lee, who turns 25 this month and plays in the seventh tier of Japanese football with Arawore Hachikita: "I am very happy and passionate, I have never played with him before."

He is, however, fully aware that it is vital for the team to get a result against Kabylia before the final group game against Panjab who impressed in an 8-0 victory over the Kabyles.

He also points out the support his fellow Zainichi Koreans have provided for the team allowing them to travel and compete: "For us, it's very important to get the title. We have to win the title for them."

Both players plan on returning to Japan after the tournament, Yoo will spend just one day there before returning to the United States to play for college side Monroe Mustangs, the college side of New York's Munroe College where he studies English.

Tong, meanwhile will enroll at Loughborough University in September. Vowing to continue training, he tells me his long-term ambition is "to manage a football club."



His teammate Yoo, on the other hand, laughs and admits: "Actually, I don't know about my future," being focused on the upcoming US College soccer league and preparing for that.

The two boys have had a unique opportunity in football but what valuable lessons have they learned in the time within the game so far, Yoo without hesitation says: "How important effort is, how important is to keep continuing."

Tong concurs: "If we can't win a game, we must unite with our teammates," though he jokes how the question is difficult to answer while still playing and that I should ask him again when he retires.

- Article continues below...
- More stories you may like...
- [Tottenham is getting a microbrewery in inside its stadium](#)
- [ConIFA WFC: Ellan Vannin 4-1 Cascadia @ Gander Green Lane, Sutton](#)
- [Why the magic of Le Mans still burns brightly](#)

For him the tournament is a good way for him to get in touch with his roots: "We're Korean, not Japanese, it is difficult to re-write our personality because we live in Japan. But this tournament reminds us of our identity."

The two boys are managed by An Yong-Hak, who represented North Korea at the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa. The 39-year-old who won the top domestic title in both Japan and South Korea with Kashiwa Reysol and Suwon Bluewings is the player-manager of the side.

Both speak highly of their coach.

Yoo, who respectfully refers to him as Mr An, admits this is a "good opportunity" with Tong elaborating further: "I look up to him because he has not only skills, but he has Korean spirit. I really respect him because of this. He's our favourite player, all Zainichi Koreans love him."

An, himself joins the table as Yoo and Tong depart, to speak to us. Last September, United Koreans of Japan qualified for the tournament and ConIFA General Secretary Sascha Duerkop invited him to become an ambassador.





unitedkoreansinjapan
@UKJ2018

Yong Hak An, the Player Manager of UKJ, expressed his and all the players' heartfelt thanks to the supporters at the end of the send-off party. "We will definitely come back to Japan with the CONIFA World Cup, and share the joy with the supporters!"

12:13 PM - May 29, 2018 · Setagaya-ku, Tokyo

9 See unitedkoreansinjapan's other Tweets

FC Korea, the side the United Koreans of Japan is based on, a club side in the Kanto regional league who have 5 players in the UKJ squad, asked An to manage the side. As he did not have any coaching license, he asked to be player-manager and went about organising the team.

"Of course, there's a difference between being a player and doing the coaching", he explains but ultimately he just wants "contribute to the team's victory, so on the pitch and off the pitch, I manage and organise the team."

The team's 0-0 draw with Western Armenia was the only goalless game on the first day of the tournament. An feels optimistic about the result: "Western Armenia is a very strong and tough team, it was a very intensive game, but we got one point," he was clearly pleased with the team's play and sees positive in the performance: "If we continue this way of play, we can get good results."

Like Tong, An hopes to bring home the trophy for UKJ but he wants to do more than just win: "That's the aim. But not only just victory, but to show the Zainichi Korean playing style. For 90 minutes, they never give up, even if they are behind, they don't give up. They run and they kick and always do their best, it's the Korean style. I want to show this style on the pitch."

An started all three North Korean matches in South Africa, playing in midfield against Brazil, Portugal and Ivory Coast. He describes it as "a great experience" and one he can "reflect on" to help his squad. He sees both similarities and differences between the FIFA World Cup and ConIFA World Football Cup: "The difference is in the football standards and the scale. FIFA is on a much bigger scale than ConIFA. But the similarity is the passion to football and the different countries and people, communicating to others through football."

He speaks glowingly of ConIFA which he believes "bridges people all over the world", highlighting that most of the teams are all staying in the same hotel and sharing the same dining area. Indeed, on the table over from us, members of the Matabeleland team are tucking into their dinner.

Smiling, he tells me his plan for the future is quite simply to continue his work and "support the next generation" of young talent coming through and "further bridge people through football."

Special thanks to Motoko Jitsukawa, media manager for the United Koreans of Japan, who provided help with translation.

read more

You might also like...



[ConIFA WFC: The key stories from the first group games](#)

[The main talking points from the launch of the ConIFA World Football Cup](#)

[NBA FINALS: Warriors vs Cavs - Part four](#)

[Why the magic of Le Mans still burns brightly](#)

[ConIFA WFC: Ellan Vannin 4-1 Cascadia @ Gander Green Lane, Sutton](#)

[Tottenham is getting a microbrewery in inside its stadium](#)

[ConIFA WFC: Padania 6-1 Matabeleland @ Gander Green Lane, Sutton](#)

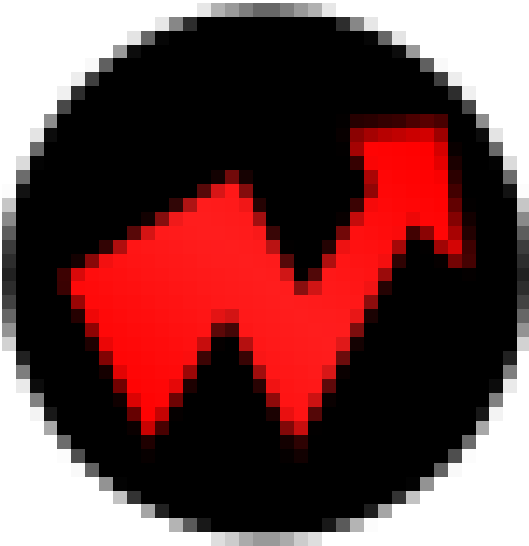
[Monaco GP: Red Bull's Triumph is Formula One's Loss](#)

[Advice: How to train for a marathon](#)

People who read this also read...

[A beach lovers guide to the Gulf Coast](#)

TRENDING



1



[People are revealing which aspects of British culture confuse them most](#)

2



[This photographer's unique way of taking the perfect shot has gone viral](#)





3



[Sundance Film Festival 2018: The Tale review - as clever as it is harrowing](#)

4



[Meet the former FIFA World Cup star and two students aiming for ConIFA glory](#)



5





Beauty Empties: June 2018

[READ MORE TRENDING](#)

TRENDING CHANNELS



IWOOT™



The**National**Student

 **TheBigChoice**
youth career network



 **AuPairWorld**
we connect · we care

CONTRIBUTOR OF THE MONTH

[Sneh Rupra](#)
Ranking:

ALL MEDIA PARTNERS



Articles: 144

Reads: 214434

Top article: [TV Review: Humans \(Series 2, Episode 1\)](#)

CONTRIBUTORS

- [About TNS](#)
- [Legal Terms & Conditions](#)
- [Write for The National Student](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [Advertise](#)

© 2018 TheNationalStudent.com is a website of BigChoice Group Limited | 10-12 The Circle, Queen Elizabeth Street, London, SE1 2JE | registered in England No 6842641 VAT # 971692974

