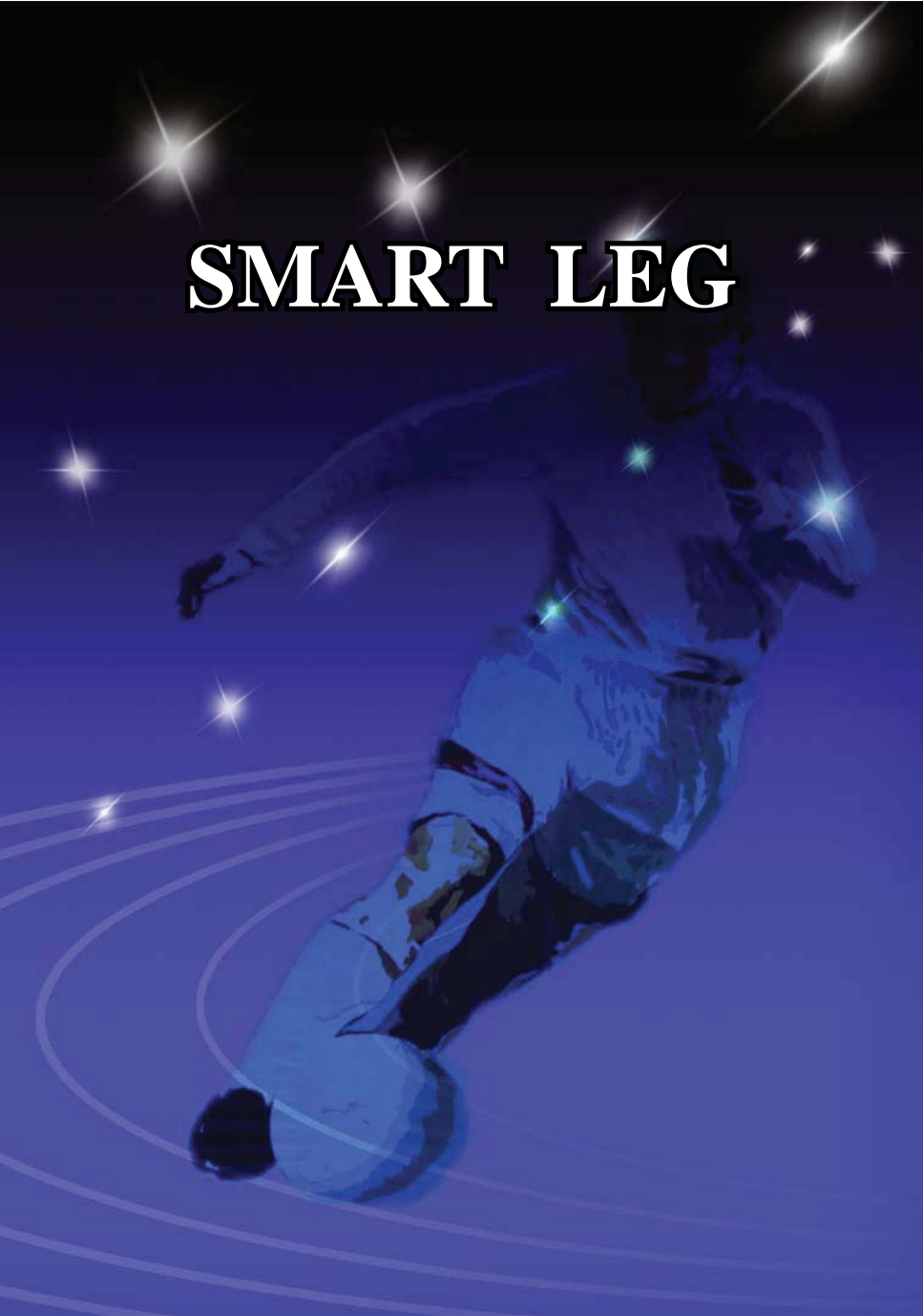


SMART LEG



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Ho Juk San who went by the nickname of “smart leg”

His movements were as swift and precise as a machine. In particular, his smart and neat forte of powerful left-foot turn-around kick with his back to the goal brought him a monopoly of the Koreans’ favour before causing a great sensation at the 2nd World Festival of Youth and Students in August 1949.



At the 2nd World Festival of Youth and Students: Ho makes a dash towards the goal single-handedly fooling a Hungarian.

“Where are your shoes?”

Feeling his mother’s voice turning sharp the boy, with knitted eyebrows, muttered something under his breath.

“Speak it out,” his mother ordered.

“I say I’ve got them,” the boy grumbled. He was being disobedient, just stroking his bulging belly—there must be something in it.

His mother, judging there must be a reason, took him by the shoulder all of a sudden and took out straw sandals out of his jacket.

“Oh, my God!” she let out a groan bitterly, for she saw a bundle of worn-out straw sandals instead of the new pair she had put on him that morning. “You’ve made a ball again with your shoes,” she cried. “You are really crazy—incorrigible.”

The boy was Ho Juk San, who later earned the nickname of “smart leg” from the Korean people. His name still lives in their minds.

Ho’s family came from Kilju, Korea. In the early 1920s they left their home town and emigrated to Yanji County, Jilin Province, China. Like all other Koreans in Japan-occupied Jiandao, China, before the liberation (August 15, 1945) of Korea from the Japanese imperialists’ military occupation, the Hos were subjected to humiliation, insult and toil everywhere they went. While wandering about, Ho’s parents had Juk San in Suinan village, Longjing in 1924 and settled down there.

Though they tilled land to the bone, they were always poverty-stricken. Hoping to send Juk San to school, which they had been unable to do for their first three sons, the parents toiled and moiled. Thanks to their effort, Juk San could go to primary school. But apparently the boy was just mad about football, never minding his parents' intention.

Actually, Ho was counted as one of top students in his class, but as he was such a character that was reluctant to boast himself, his parents misunderstood that he was obsessed with football, not studies. Juk San was always superior in studies to Japanese children and those from rich families as he was exceptionally clever, but he couldn't join in playing football as he did not have a ball. So, when he saw a roll of straw ropes on his way to Longjing to sell firewood, he conceived the idea of straw ball. *You empty-headed guys proud of your balls? Now I will outdo you with my straw ball*, Ho decided.

He stretched straw ropes in two lines in the yard of his house and hung straw balls at an interval of one metre at different heights on them. Then, he kicked the balls on his way from home and back. The yard just looked like a straw-ball stand. It was his daily routine and individual conscious training to kick the swinging balls or trap them in the air. The main task of his training was to kick the ball in the air. He hung the ball from a tree and practised turn-around kicking strenuously. As a result, nine of his ten kicks sent the ball to

the direction he wanted and, in particular, the success rate of kicking in the air was very high.

Now he decided that not only he but also all other children in the village had to learn football hard to display the mettle of the Koreans. After school he led the boys to the riverside and had them train on the sandbank. Gradually Ho Juk San was determined to demonstrate with football what kind of people the Koreans are, and his mother encouraged him, saying, "You must win. You must surely beat off those rogues at any cost who have taken our hometown and are killing innocent people mercilessly. From now on I'll never trouble you."

All the family and all the villagers turned out to offer help. When they had special dishes they brought them first to the football players, instead of their own children, though they were short of provisions. Some mothers prepared at least thin gruel for them and waited until they finished the day's exercise to serve the food. All of the players eagerly learned football skills, but they could not be a match for Ho who was the captain of the team and left-footed player. His left-footed skill was magical. Especially, the skill of managing the ball in the air was unimaginable. In shooting the ball to the goal, other players succeeded in shooting it to the corner only eight of ten times, but Ho always sent the ball to where he wanted. Though people praised him for his ever-improving technique,

he was not content with it, but ceaselessly honed the skill of turn-around kick in the air and jump heading—both of his forte.

The story of the Korean pupils' assiduous training spread across the town of Longjing, and even grown-ups had heated argument about the would-be winner of a coming match. Before the game a strict lookout on the Koreans was enforced in the town and its vicinity, and the scheme of merciless crackdown was announced. In the school, too, groups of Japanese students attacked and insulted individual Korean students at random.

At that time, there was a coalminer staying at the home of Sang Jin, Ho's friend. Named Choe Sung Hwan, he used to tell plainly the Korean people's culture and tradition and the current situation. Now he said, "If we yielded to the Japs and sat idle, their outrages would get worse. You know wolves recede when they are faced with stronger opponents. But if the opponents show any sign of uneasiness, the wolves make a fiercer attack. Join your hands, and remember that only courageous counterattack will bring you victory." Hearing the words, Ho and his teammates made up a firm determination to win victory by fighting with concerted efforts even if there were unexpected threats.

At last, the day of competition came. It was worth seeing. The ground of the school was crowded with the people of all

walks of life.

First, the Japanese players in white uniforms printed with red stamps on the back and expensive sports shoes entered the ground. The Japanese spectators raised wild cheers, flying their flag. Morioka, the captain, and all other players wore a white band—printed with a red spot—across their forehead. They looked like samurais in a decisive battle.

Now the Korean players appeared. Amidst the playing of cheering music played by Kim Ryong-led brass band of the Longjing Middle School, the team whose captain was Juk San walked into the ground full of courage. All the Korean spectators rose up as one, cheering and giving them a big hand. Though the Korean players were not in as good uniforms and shoes as the Japanese—they were wearing simple uniforms and straw sandals—their faces were filled with beaming smiles.

The two teams stood in a line in the middle of the ground and made bows to all directions. Then the game started with the Japanese kick off.

It was a seesaw match. Tatashi Morioka and Nida Aizawa of the Japanese team, who were side forwards, tried sharp penetrations on the right and left sides, and sometimes Isokichi Okada, centre-forward, created a danger with his threatening assault. In the Korean team Ho Juk San, Kim Sang Jin and the tall boy Pak Chun Ung, as three-pronged

spear, sought a chance attacking in different directions.

Towards the end of the first half when a Japanese defender, who was in charge of man-to-man defence against Ho, came up, Ho skilfully kicked the ball forward over his opponent's head and dashed toward the goal. As Ho was no more than 20 metres away from the goal, the Japanese defenders rushed up to check him, giving up their task of man-to-man defence.

Narrowly kicking the ball up to his knee in quick succession, Ho pierced between the defenders. Then he made a cross pass to Sang Jin who was dashing forward to the goal area. Now Ho ran forward swiftly. Sang Jin, in his running posture, kicked the ball from Ho with his right foot. But the Japanese goalkeeper with narrow eyes fisted the ball, which flew toward Ho. The moment the ball was passing his side after a bump on the ground, Ho made a turn-around kick with his left foot. It happened in an instant, and the goalkeeper was confused only to see the ball go straight into the right corner of the goal.

"Goal!" the Korean spectators, who had been watching the game with breathless attention, raised a storm of cheers, springing up from their seats in excitement. The people, who had left their hometown owing to the Japanese imperialists' military occupation of Korea and suffered so much troubles and humiliation, were shedding tears of joy looking up to the sky. They felt as if they sustained their lives just to see this

scene.

In the second half the Japanese team launched an all-out attack as had been expected. When their desperate attempts failed time and again because of the resolute efforts of the Korean team's defenders including To Myong, Morioka lost his temper and openly cried to his teammates, "Listen, guys. Break the ankles of the opponents."

When Juk San took the ball, the Japanese players on both sides threw themselves at the same time to kick his legs.

Passing the ball to Sang Jin, Ho Juk San jumped into the air in an instant, drawing in his legs, so the Japanese players ran against themselves and screamed, rolling down on the ground. Though the Japanese defenders chased Ho with set teeth, they were unable to catch up.

Ho ran straight forward with his fists clenched. Now he could see the goalposts and the goalkeeper with his arms spread in bewilderment. Running like wind, Ho felt his vision blurred, making it unable to see, but he did not slow down. Losing his temper, the Japanese goalkeeper yelled, "You son of a bitch, shoot it now." But, Ho kept dribbling the ball towards the goal line. As the goalkeeper came forward in haste, unable to endure any longer, Ho kicked the ball to the right upper corner of the goal with all his might.

"Goal!" All the Korean spectators cheered with their arms raised high, throwing up their caps and kerchiefs. "We've won,

Korea has won,” they declared. Ho leaped into the air, raising his fist. So, that day’s game ended with the Korean students’ team winning the match by 2:0. However, the joy of victory did not last long. On the false charge of defiling the spirit of the “great imperial Japan,” the school announced Ho Juk San’s expulsion from the school. Leaving the school amidst the jeering of Japanese students, he shed tears endlessly. No other schools would accept him. But at last, he was enrolled in the Longjing Middle School by the help of the conscientious Chinese headmaster.

Then, in the school’s football team he distinguished himself by playing the leading role in winning all matches for the school. As he scored 2-3 goals in every game, he was awarded a prize as a top scorer. As a result, he earned the nickname of “smart leg.” All of his movements were precise just like a machine, but he kept on training himself out of the desire to improve his football skills further. He would repeat one movement more than 10 000 times a day. But he had no motherland to look after him, and so had to leave the school before long under the false charge of match-fixing. But he was aglow with zeal for football.

He changed his arena of activity from Longjing to Seoul and from Seoul to Longjing, and led his team from victory to victory in matches. But owing to the crafty tricks of the Japanese imperialists, who were afraid of the high spirits of

the Koreans because of Ho, he was pressed into labour service in the end. He now regretted his own folly that he had believed he could enhance the national spirit of the people and revenge the enemy by means of football. Further, he keenly realized that without a protector who would take one under his wing, one would only be victimized by the enemy in spite of one's great technical proficiency. Escaping from the labour drafting, Ho Juk San took shelter in a deep mountain, where he met national liberation from the Japanese imperialists' military occupation on August 15, 1945. After liberation, he could give full scope to his talent.

In 1947, Ho received surprising news. Though everything was in short supply, the leader Kim Il Sung formed a youth delegation to the 1st World Festival of Youth, and before its departure, called a send-off athletic meet. At the meet, he delivered the historic speech ***Korea of the Future Belongs to the Youth***. In an article about it, the newspaper *Jongno* wrote, "A basket of flowers was presented to the representative athletes. Holding it, they silently made a firm determination to play well at the festival of the world democratic youth."

At the international arena the young sportspeople of Korea who had trained themselves earnestly under the care of the people's power for the two years after liberation displayed their skills to the full. Especially, the Korean footballers defeated all their opponents and won the final match with the

team of Czechoslovakia by a score of 6 to 1. Ho was greatly excited to hear the news. He recalled the past days he had spent in the sorrow of a boy of a ruined nation: the straw ball he had used as a substitute for a football, the day he was expelled from the school for the reason of his team winning a match against the Japanese, and his detention in a Japanese police cell after a bloody match in Seoul. *I'll be the best player adding to the honour of new Korea*, he resolved and put heart and soul into training.

At every match, he distinguished himself as a superb player with smart legs, winning the highest popularity among all the Koreans, and his team emerged as the best team. Ho, a member of the football team of the National Defence Ministry, was designated to the national football team that was to take part in the 2nd World Festival of Youth and Students to be held in Hungary in August 1949. In answer to the trust placed in him, Ho ran in the stadium of Budapest, bringing victory to his team and raising the honour of the motherland.

His smart and neat forte of powerful left-foot turn-around kick with his back against the goal line caused a great sensation among the world's football circles and fans. A foreign coach frankly said that he would like to have Ho, a back-seeing player, in exchange for his three able players, and coaches of other countries, too, cast wistful eyes on him. After that, Ho was known to the world as a football player with machine-

like legs. When a sports delegation of Korea visited France in 1969, a person of the French sports circles who had seen the football match during the festival asked them about Ho Juk San, football player No. 10 of Korea who had astonished the world with his superb football skills, in the hope of finding out what he was doing.

Well aware of the worth of his life which depended on his motherland that placed trust in him and valued him, he volunteered for military service when the Korean war (1950–1953) broke out. As an officer in charge of naval transportation, he courageously went through war flames and died a heroic death after fulfilling an important transport mission. A football player with legs like a machine, Ho added to the glory of the motherland with his unique football skills in time of peace and sacrificed his youthful life for the country and people in the grim days of war. He now lies at rest in the Cemetery of the Fallen Soldiers of the Korean People’s Army in Mt. Naphal, Wonsan, Kangwon Province.

One day in August 1995 Chairman Kim Jong Il told an official of the sports sector to improve the country’s sports techniques to the world standard, and said that there was a football ace in the past called “smart leg.” In February 1996 the Chairman saw Ho’s photo in naval uniform and watched the video showing his single breakthrough while dribbling past Hungarian players during the 2nd World Festival of

Youth and Students. Then, he gave instructions to launch a dynamic campaign to train sports stars like Ho Juk San, setting him up as a model of sportspersons having special forte. Then, highly praising Sub-Lieutenant Ho for the self-sacrificing spirit he had displayed in the war, the Chairman saw to it that a certificate of Patriotic Martyr was conferred on his offspring.

Today Ho Juk San is enshrined in the hearts of the Korean people as a 26-year-old eternal youth.

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