



Young-Pyo

Lee Young-Pyo is not the most high-profile player at Tottenham Hotspur. With cart-wheeling-pistol-shooting Irishman Robbie Keane, in-demand prolific Bulgarian striker Dimitar Berbatov, and five (or more) England internationals all in the squad, Lee's name or face rarely surfaces in the headlines or highlights. It doesn't help that he is not much of a goal-scorer or a flashy personality. However, it seems that he wouldn't have it any other way.

The South Korean international has quietly contributed to Tottenham's cause ever since arriving in the summer of 2006 from PSV Eindhoven, and helped the north London-side reach two fifth place finishes in the Premier League, for two straight seasons, the club's highest for 15 years.

Lee has been pegged as the default left-back for most of this season due to injuries to Gareth Bale and Benoit Essou-Ekotto, but it's evident that his dedication and tirelessness on the pitch is still unmatched, as he is often seen chasing loose balls or throwing his body in harm's way. It says something about his character, especially with the club's early struggles this season, and a number of transfer rumors regarding Lee. ESPNsoccer.net caught up with Lee Young-Pyo, to discuss everything from the state of play at Tottenham to his personal life and religion.

ESPNsoccer.net: Prior to the season's start, there were a lot of expectations set for Tottenham with big signings, such as Darren Bent, Kevin Prince Boateng and Gareth Bale, while keeping Berbatov at Whitehart Lane. And many experts predicted that this was going to be the year that the club would finally break into the top four. What was the mood/spirit of the camp during pre-season?

The mood was very good, and we even won all our pre-season matches. We came in with a lot of confidence, but for whatever reason, we didn't do so well at the start of the season.

Speaking of having under-performed, do you think Tottenham are finally back on the right track?

We started winning little by little in early November, and the atmosphere got better as we regained our old form.

From songs like 'I Love Martin Jol, Martin Jol Loves Me', it was clear that the fans loved the former manager despite the club's poor start, and wanted him to stay. Do you think he should have been given more time?

Personally, when a team doesn't perform up to par, I believe not only the manager, but every single player should be held responsible as well. But in football, the manager usually takes the blame at the end of the day. One thing we know for certain is that many people loved Mr Jol. As a manager, he was brilliant, but even from a human standpoint, he possessed great characteristics that made him special.

What has changed since Juande Ramos took over?

Mr Ramos arrived at our lowest point, and planted excitement in us again. Also, with his vast experience, he was

able to assess the players and turn around the mentality of the club surprisingly fast.

Center-back and captain Ledley King returned for the 5-1 victory over Fulham on December 26. Do you think his presence will bring to much needed stability to Tottenham's defence?

Yes, it's very true that King's return helps the squad greatly, as he has very unique strengths for a defender. It's a shame that the injuries have prevented us from reaching our full capacity.

At age 18, Gareth Bale has shown amazing abilities and great potential, with some fantastic goals and free kicks. Do you see a bright future ahead for your fellow left-back?

As the price tag indicates, Bale is one of the most highly anticipated prospects in the world. His skills and understanding of the game makes you wonder if he really is 18. With all the things he does so well already, it's only a matter of time before he becomes a world class player. I believe his name will be widely known around the world within two, three years.

You spent almost three years at PSV Eindhoven in Holland before coming to England. Did that help your transition into English football, rather than coming straight from the K-League?

The time I spent in the Netherlands helped me tremendously. There I learned what European football was all about, and gained a priceless education in studying a new type of football from scratch.

You were once heralded as 'the best left-back in Holland' and helped PSV lift the Supercup, KNVB Cup and league trophies. When you chose Tottenham over other interested parties, did you think they could achieve similar things?

While I was playing in Holland, I took an interest in English football, and something about Tottenham appealed to me. But I didn't expect the same kind of results with Hotspurs, as PSV had such unbeatable achievements.

Will Tottenham lift the UEFA Cup trophy this year?

I'll just say that we are one of the top candidates to win the cup.

PSV is a club with rich traditions, and many stars got their break there, including Ruud Gullit, Ronald Koeman, Romário, Ronaldo, Jaap Stam, Ruud van Nistelrooy, and Arjen Robben. It must feel good to be included in the same group as those footballers...

Lee Young-Pyo:

A Quiet Presence

By Daniel Cho

PSV is a prestigious football club in Holland and in Europe. But what I remember the most is that it was a very comfortable club, like family. I will always be proud of the fact that I once belonged to PSV.

Manchester United's Park Ji-Sung was your teammate at PSV. Did having a fellow countryman at the same club help you adjust being in a foreign land?

Of course. Ji-sung's presence definitely helped. Especially my first 6 months in Holland, I would go to his home to eat. I wasn't married at the time, so eating right was on the back of my mind. Fortunately, his mother, who was staying with him would invite me for meals every day. I guess you could say that I owe a lot to Ji-Sung's mum as well.

Some people, including its own fans, often consider Tottenham a cursed or very unlucky - especially after the West Ham food poisoning incident - do you acknowledge the existence of such a thing?

I don't think there's such thing as a curse. I think this kind of talk comes out when we have every reason to win, but don't. The way I see it, it's a sign that people see strong potential in us.

There have been a number of transfer rumors involving you looming for over a year now. Does any of that get in the way of football, or does it make you work harder?

Transfers are all part of the football business. It applies to everyone. However, when it comes to transfer rumors, more than often, they tend to be false. Especially the 'reports' generated by the Korean media are almost 100% lies. It saddens me that reporters lack the integrity and sense of responsibility to deliver news with hard facts. All it takes is a little time for the truth to come out. Of course, I can't really judge anyone since I've never been in their shoes.

Can we talk about AS Roma? You almost ended up at the prestigious Italian club, but rejected the move at the last minute. There were rumors/speculations for your reasons, including religion (which is silly), racism, and concern for your family's safety. However, you never revealed the true reason behind your decision despite pressure from the media. Would you like to share anything today?

Yes, I've never shared any of my reasons once with anyone. I think there will be an appropriate time in the future for me to speak regarding this matter.

You are not shy about your religious beliefs. Is it hard to be a man of faith and values in a world of athletes where nice can be seen as weak? And do you find it hard to be in the public spotlight?

It's not hard that I'm a footballer and trying to live by this faith, but it's hard for any human being to live by this faith, period. There are lots of things that we do not see eye to eye when it comes to the values of this world. It's not easy for a Christian to differentiate those things and act accordingly, but I always try to try.

Korea recently named Huh Jung-Moo as the national team manager, after failing to offer a deal to Gerard Houllier and Mick McCarthy. What are your thoughts on the future of Korean football?

Mr Huh is one of the leading educators that represent Korean football well today. Everyone seems to agree on the choice, and I also have big expectations



of him. I think this will be an opportunity to showcase to the world something great that is all-Korean football.

A number of Korean footballers (Cho Jae-Jin and Choi Sung-Kuk) have been linked with a number of Premier League. Any words of advice?

I believe there are plenty of Korean footballers who can perform well in Europe. At the same time, opinions and criticism are strong in Europe, and they must understand that they will first be seen as Asian persons, then good footballers. If the players are confident in overcoming the skepticism, then I think anyone has a chance to succeed in Europe.

In Korea, some refer you as 'Cho-Rong-Yi'. For the Non-Korean readers, could you explain what that means? In Europe, many call you 'Bruce Lee'. That must be flattering. Or is it offensive?

'Cho-rong, Cho-rong' is an expression describing twinkly eyes, and I guess I have twinkly eyes... 'Bruce Lee' came from friends who called me that for fun.

...Sure why not, it feels good to be compared to him.

As someone who has defended against many of the world's most talented footballers, who in your opinion is the best or the most underrated player in the Premiership?

I think Cristiano Ronaldo is the best footballer in the league today. But every Premier League player, I believe is entitled to being called the world's best, as they had to be noticed significantly to get here.

Any last words to the Tottenham fans?

When I see Tottenham fans, I really think that they hand-picked only the most passionate people. It makes me happy when I meet fans, who remind me of the rich history and everything great about the club, and those who always want to learn more. I would like to simply say 'Thank you.'