

Cheer up, sleepy Lee ... it's been a good Korea move for Bolton forward Chung-Yong



By Chris Wheeler

Brought into the Barclays Premier League at short notice and stuck on the bench after a 12-hour flight from South Korea, Chung-Yong Lee did what any jet-lagged young man might do in those tense final moments before making his first appearance in English football. He fell asleep.

Lee can laugh about it now. He can smile as he recalls his first touch as a Bolton player, stumbling over the ball and landing flat on his face after waking up to be told he was going on as a substitute against Sunderland on the first day of the season, less than 48 hours after arriving in England.

'That's the first time I've ever fallen over the ball but I couldn't control my body, to be honest with you,' he says through an interpreter at Bolton's training ground. 'I was really sleepy so I don't know how I played that game. I didn't expect to be selected because of jet lag and I was very surprised to be told I was going on. I'd fallen asleep on the bench.'

'I arrived from Seoul close to midnight on the Thursday and our manager at the time, Gary Megson, was waiting for me at the hotel. I was deeply moved by his actions so I did my best for him.'

Although Lee's best may have not been good enough on that occasion, he has certainly made an impact since then. The latest of seven South Koreans to play in the Premier League, the 21-year-old from Seoul is already proving himself to be one of the best.

He might not look the part; shy by nature and surprisingly lightweight, he does not come across as a professional athlete. But this is the rising star of Korean football, set to land a lucrative deal with Nike that will see him replace Ji-Sung Park as the face of their national team in World Cup year.

The interpreter may be among the minority of Koreans who are still not familiar with the man they call Blue Dragon - a translation of Chung-Yong - but his wife has accompanied him to the interview clutching some fan mail from their daugh-

ter. It is not often Lee upstages Park. Certainly not on the occasions they have got together at the Manchester United winger's home in Cheshire since the youngster joined Bolton on a three-year contract from Seoul FC for £2.2m last summer.

'We have a meal together, talk a lot and play video games together,' says Lee. 'Our favourite game is Pro Evolution Soccer. Ji-Sung Park plays Manchester United and I play Bolton. Up to now, he has won a lot!'

'I always wanted to be like him and play in the Premier League, so it's a privilege to be around him. He gives me bits of advice and has also told me where all the best Korean shops are in Manchester.'

On some days, Lee will sit at home and study DVDs of himself in action. He is not as robust as Park to withstand the rigours of Barclays Premier League football and believes it is the best way of learning to evade the challenges.

'I have to compete somehow because I'm not stronger than them,' he says. 'I play back DVDs and try to study challenges against me to beat them next time.'

'It's a very demanding league and it's necessary to have a good body. But to have a good body does not mean that you can play football well. The most important thing is to have a football brain. That has been proved by the best players around the world. My stamina and body are quite OK.'

It is a philosophical attitude he also took to his move to Bolton. FC Seoul encouraged what was a prestigious transfer for Korean football but there was an element of risk in changing countries and cultures so close to the World Cup. Lee doesn't see it that way.

'I don't worry because I like being challenged,' he says. 'If I succeed, that's good. If I fail, to everyone else it might be a failure in my life, but I don't look at it as a failure. I see it as an experience.'

'Everything seems to be hard when you take a negative attitude as a foreign player. But I take a positive attitude.'

Lee has earned a reputation as a deep thinker at Bolton. Megson summed up what proved to be the last of his signings before making way for Owen Coyle in January by saying: 'He looks like he's 14 and he's got a lot of stature to gain, but he's a really brainy player.'

It was an ironic description considering Lee dropped out of middle school in Korea to pursue his football career and risk accusations of cowardice because it meant he could not carry out his military service.

He said: 'I was young and just wanted to be a footballer. I wasn't interested in anything else.'

'It's often regarded as unmanly behaviour if you do not serve as a soldier. As I grew up, I realised it can be a very serious matter for football players in South Korea because everybody has to serve. There is no escape. But I could focus on a football career.'

Lee admits to feeling lonely at times since he moved to England. His long-term girlfriend has stayed at home to study and his parents can only get enough time away from the family sewing business to visit him every three months.

He has enjoyed some memorable moments in England, not least the sublime back-heel to help set up an equaliser against Tottenham in October. But nothing comes close to matching the first of his five goals, a late winner against Birmingham on only his third top-flight appearance for Bolton, when his parents were sat in the stands.

'That was the happiest moment in my life,' he says. 'It was my first goal in the Premier League and in front of my parents as well, so I was really happy.'

'I don't have any friends visiting me. Because I'm adjusting to the British culture, I've found it very exciting. Sometimes it can be a bit boring but I think it suits my personality because I'm quite shy.'

'Even though I sometimes miss Korea, it's not as though I want to go back there.' - Daily Mail

Capello has made his bed with John Terry - now he must lie in it all the way to the World Cup

By the side of a motorway notorious for its gridlock, England desperately tried to move on yesterday. There was one early misstep. Three questions into the press conference at Arsenal's training ground near the M25, Fabio Capello seemed on the verge of losing his temper.

The inquiries until then had centred on the issue of player discipline and whether England's stars would be punished if they made mistakes in their personal lives.

'But why do we have to speak about this for such a long time?' Capello asked. 'You are interested in the game or the life of the players?'

It was pointed out to Capello, as gently as possible, that he had made the personal lives of the players a topic of legitimate interest the moment he sacked John Terry for an indiscretion that was nothing to do with his performance on the pitch.

The England boss accepted that and answered the next question. He said he had not yet decided whether a player who had, say, an extra-marital affair would be banned from the World Cup squad.

So much for taking each game as it comes. Capello's going to take each affair as it comes.

But the message was still clear: mistakes in players' personal lives are now as likely to get them banished from the squad as a bad run of form.

Capello was open about that. He made no apologies for imposing a moral code. He said England players had to make sacrifices in their lives if they wanted to play in the World Cup.

So at least the ground rules are absolutely clear now. The next time a player ends up on the front pages for the wrong reasons, he can't say he wasn't warned.

The players appear to have signed up to the new deal. The World Cup is so close now they realise how much they have to lose.

Steven Gerrard, Capello's third captain in the last three weeks, emphasised the new mood of austerity when he said his wife, Alex, would not be travelling to South Africa.

'If we get to the semis, then I'd like her to come out,' Gerrard said. 'Is she allowed to come to the semis or the final? Is that okay with you?'

His teasing of his questioner was significant, too. Many of the players feel Capello's decision to sack Terry has only increased the power of the media.

Between now and June, they are aware that if they appear on the front pages, that might be enough to cost them their World Cup place.

Which brings us back to England's attempts to move on. Capello and Gerrard made a decent fist of that yesterday.

Gerrard is always upbeat and honest and Capello, understanding the need to try to draw a line under the scandals that have hit the side, was the same.

The first hurdle is tonight's match against Egypt and the reaction of a notoriously fickle Wembley crowd to Terry.

Then there is the performance, which has taken on more significance than usual for a friendly.

England's back four has been decimated in recent months to the point where tonight it will feature Terry and three stand-ins.

In the case of the left-back, of course, it will be a stand-in for a stand-in.

But tonight's the night where the reserve defenders have to step up and show that they can fill the gap. If they don't, full scale panic is going to set in.

The match is the simple bit, though. The hard part is what happens in the next few months.

What happens if another player finds himself on the front pages? What happens if it's one of England's stars? What does Capello do then?

The answer is that he will have to act and he will have to act ruthlessly. Or else he will risk losing his authority.

He has staked his credibility on England's players heeding his call and sacrificing everything for the World Cup.

If they respond, Capello can claim the credit for an ambitious piece of social engineering.

If they don't, there is trouble ahead.