

Taiwanese-American Basketball Hero Creates 'Linsanity'

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Miami Heat guard Mario Chalmers pressures Jeremy Lin of the Knicks during a recent game in Miami, Florida



FAITH LAPIDUS:
Welcome to THIS IS AMERICA in VOA Special English. I'm Faith Lapidus.

BOB DOUGHTY: And I'm Bob Doughty. This week on our program: "Linsanity" -- why people in Taiwan are going crazy for a basketball player in New York. Also, we hear about a Cambodian-American singer and her first album. And we visit the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute in Alabama.

(MUSIC)

FAITH LAPIDUS: In recent weeks, Jeremy Lin has gotten a lot of attention for his performance as a point guard in the National Basketball Association.

Fans in the United States are not the only ones who have cheered his surprising success. Jeremy Lin was born in the United States but his parents came from Taiwan.

(SOUND)

BOB DOUGHTY: On a recent day, people at a Taipei sports bar cheered as they watched Jeremy Lin make a three-point shot. It won the game for the New York Knicks.

The Knicks added him to their starting lineup earlier this month. He began averaging more than twenty points a game and leading the team to a rare series of wins.

Jeremy Lin is twenty-three years old and 1.9 meters tall. A Christian, he says his belief in God has been a big part of his success.

But he had to work hard to find that success.

He went to Harvard University after playing at Palo Alto High School in California. He played on the Harvard team but failed to get an athletic scholarship.

He graduated in twenty ten but no NBA team chose him. Late that year he signed with the Golden State Warriors in California. He became the first American of Taiwanese or Chinese origin to play for an NBA team.



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But he rarely played, and was moved to the NBA's minor league. Then in early February the New York Knicks gave him a chance to prove himself. He did that by helping launch the team on a winning streak.

FAITH LAPIDUS: His unlikely path has made him even more likeable to Taiwanese fans in search of more sports heroes. Major League Baseball pitcher Wang Chien-ming from the Washington Nationals and number-one ranked female golfer Yani Tseng

are both from Taiwan.

The island has a population of twenty-three million people and a well-developed economy. Taiwanese college students usually work toward careers in business and technology. Most countries in the world do not recognize Taiwan diplomatically. China considers Taiwan part of its territory.

Monica Wang is a thirty-year-old interior designer in Taipei. She took a day off from work to cheer for Jeremy Lin.

(SOUND)

She feels extremely proud of him, she says. He had once underperformed, but suddenly he showed what he was worth and a coach gave him a chance.

The excitement among Jeremy Lin fans is known on both sides of the Pacific as "Linsanity."

BOB DOUGHTY: George Hou teaches communication studies at I-Shou University in Taiwan.

GEORGE HOU: "Basketball usually is a sport for American people, European people or African people, because Asian people are not as tall as people from other continents. Through his working hard, he gets the recognition of the fans of basketball, so the Asian people like to feel this story because it kind of compensates their inability to win."

Jeremy Lin's popularity is likely to give basketball another chance at becoming a major sport in Taiwan. Baseball is the most popular sport locally, both on the field and on television. But a local professional basketball league has been growing since two thousand three.

That league had started to change local opinions about basketball even before Jeremy Lin became popular. The Chinese Taipei Basketball Association says one in four Taiwanese already follow basketball.

NBA games are broadcast in Taiwan during the off-season in baseball. The NBA has even held marketing events in Taipei to increase its fan base.

Today young players can be found shooting hoops on any Taiwanese school ground with a basketball court. Chen Sheng-hong, a former basketball reporter and editor-in-chief of Esquire Taiwan, says some of them hope to be the next Jeremy Lin.

CHEN SHENG-HONG: "Why he's so popular in Taiwan, as a Taiwan basketball journalist for many years I think Jeremy Lin is a dream come true for anyone, because we can see he is not very tall or very strong or very quick. Actually he is just of a mediocre basketball player build, but he still can earn a place in the NBA. That's why people here are so crazy about him."

(MUSIC)

FAITH LAPIDUS: Cambodian-American singer and songwriter Bochan Huy grew up in Oakland, California. She has just released her first album, called "Full Monday Moon."

(MUSIC)

For this song, Bochan Huy began with a Cambodian classic, "I Am 16." The original song came from the Cambodian rock music of the nineteen sixties and seventies. That was before the communist Khmer Rouge took control of the country.

Her version of the song is something completely new, she says.

BOCHAN HUY: "I kind of describe 'Chnam Oun Dop Pram Mouy' as sort of like a new culture. It's a melting pot of everything that I've absorbed: from living in Oakland, from being Cambodian, and from being American. It's Cambodian-American."



The song is included on "Full Monday Moon." Bochan Huy says she wrote the album after the death of her father. He had been a refugee and a musician who loved classic Cambodian songs.

BOCHAN HUY: "The only way that I felt that he was still around was to do music. That was something the Khmer Rouge did not take away from him. He was able to bring that from Cambodia to here."

BOB DOUGHTY: She produced the album in a New York studio for an independent record label. She says much of Cambodia's own music industry favors new recordings of classic songs and avoids experimentation.

BOCHAN HUY: "I think it's because so many Cambodians have held on to that generation, you know. That's when things were good. It was before the Khmer Rouge war. And so it's going to be a challenge to kind of get people to let go of that and go, 'OK, you know, I think we're ready to move on.'"

She says ideas about Cambodian identity have changed and evolved as Cambodians have settled in different countries.

BOCHAN HUY: "We've landed in all parts of the world, we've been able to kind of adapt, adjust and recreate, and we're forming something new for ourselves. And that's to me what it means to be Cambodian."

Bochan Huy just went to Cambodia for the first time since nineteen ninety-nine. She went to promote her album and to get ideas for new material.

You can watch a video about Bochan Huy and her new album at voaspecialenglish.com.

(MUSIC)

FAITH LAPIDUS: February is Black History Month, a time to honor people and events that have shaped the African-American experience.

Some of those events took place in Birmingham, Alabama, during the civil rights movement of the nineteen fifties and sixties.

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Martin Luther King Jr. leads a march to Alabama's capital, Montgomery, to protest unfair voting laws



Martin Luther King Junior and others led peaceful demonstrations there as part of the struggle for equality. But some marches turned violent when police used fire hoses and dogs against the demonstrators. Many people were injured and thousands were arrested.

Images from Birmingham only strengthened support for efforts to end laws in the South that allowed racial discrimination.

Nearly fifty years later, people come to the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute to learn about the events of that time. William Revill recently traveled several hours to see the museum.

WILLIAM REVILL: "Black people need to know the price that our people paid for us to be where we are today. It came with a price. Unfortunately what that price meant was that a lot of our people died."

BOB DOUGHTY: Lawrence Pijaux is president of the museum. He points to the jail cell door that once kept Martin Luther King behind bars.

LAWRENCE PIJEAUX: "This is an extremely important artifact at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute."

Mr. Pijaux says Dr. King wrote his famous "Letter From Birmingham Jail" locked behind that door.

LAWRENCE PIJEAUX: "It's important that we have this institution here so that people not only in this country but people come from around the world to learn about what happened in Birmingham."

Multimedia presentations, photographs and artifacts are used to document the civil rights struggle. Ann Marie Wilson visited the museum from London.

ANN MARIE WILSON: "We have heard Alabama has been very significant in the integration process but also had a lot pain along its journey. I wanted to see what I could learn from that to see how peaceful demonstrations can enable a diverse population to live side by side in harmony."

Vernon Roberts from New Jersey says the museum brings back powerful memories.

VERNON ROBERTS: "It kind of got emotional for me, and it gave me the opportunity to want to bring more of my family especially to have my children here so they can see the struggle that took place here."

You can watch a video about the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute at voaspecialenglish.com.

(MUSIC)

FAITH LAPIDUS: Our program was produced by Brianna Blake with reporting by Ralph Jennings, Chris Simkins and Brian Calvert. I'm Faith Lapidus.

BOB DOUGHTY: And I'm Bob Doughty. Read, listen and learn English with this and other programs and activities at voaspecialenglish.com. And join us again next week for THIS IS AMERICA in VOA Special English.