

## Everton – The Chinese Links: Part 1

Evertonians who know Liverpool well will be aware of the longstanding historical links between the city and China. They may be less knowledgeable about the numerous players who have worn royal blue but who also played in China at some point in their career and how far the links go back in time. This article will give readers a flavour of the links between Everton and China over the years and show how important some aspects of that relationship were intended to be. This introduction sets the scene and focusses on two players who represented Everton during World War Two.



Li Tie: The most prominent Chinese player to represent Everton. He will feature in part 4 in this series.

Image: Stu Forster/Getty Images

### Introduction

The Liverpool Chinese Business Association website (lcb.net) is a fascinating source of the following information about the links between Liverpool and China. It recounts how Liverpool has one of the oldest established Chinese communities in Europe. The trade links between China and Britain, via the ports of Shanghai and Liverpool, were instrumental in setting up a Chinese community within the city. The goods traded were, as elsewhere, silk and cotton, and the first vessel arrived in Liverpool direct from China in 1834. The China trade opened up to private enterprise when the East India Company revised its charter in 1833.

The first wave of Chinese immigrants arrived in 1866 with the establishment of the Blue Funnel Shipping Line, a branch of the Holt Ocean Steamship Company, which ran a line of steamers directly from Liverpool to China. Chinese sailors settled in an area of the city at Cleveland Square, close to the docks.

The Holt Shipping Company opened boarding houses to accommodate their workers, and the settlers started their businesses there.

During World War Two, thousands of Chinese sailors lost their lives in the Atlantic during attacks from German submarines. Nevertheless, Chinese sailors played a significant role in the Allied war victory as part of the British fleet.

In 1999, in conjunction with the twinning of Liverpool and Shanghai, the city of Shanghai gifted one of the most extensive imperial arches outside of China. At 13.5 metres tall, it was transported to Britain piece by piece. Twenty specially selected craftsmen reconstructed the arch in Berry Street for Liverpool's annual Chinese New Year celebrations around Nelson Street.



**The Imperial Arch gifted to Liverpool by the city of Shanghai in 1999. Image**

<https://lcba.net/index.html>

If the commercial and cultural links between Liverpool and China are visible and relatively well-known, many supporters may be less aware of the interactions and connections between China and Everton Football Club over the years. Most Evertonians would consider Li Tie and Li Weifeng the first and only Chinese nationals to pull on the royal blue jersey. However, as Rob Sawyer explains in his article on Toffeeweb (1), this was not the case. In the edition published 10 September 1942, the Liverpool Evening Express highlighted the news that Everton was on the brink of making history with 'two Chinese footballers playing for them in their derby games with Liverpool.' The two players in question were Jason Scott Lee and Frank Soo.

## Jason Scott Lee

Jason was born in Liverpool in 1921 to a Chinese father and a British-born mother Gwenllian ten years after his father Chan Chin Lee left the Guangdong province of southern China in 1911, Chan Chin joined the SS Kitano Maru which set sail from Hong Kong.



**Image:** <https://www.toffeeweb.com/season/18-19/comment/history/37554.html>

*As Rob Sawyer explains:*

*At the beginning of the 1942/43 wartime association football season in England, the Liverpool Evening Express reported that Everton's secretary-manager Theo Kelly had secured Scott Lee's services on loan from Manchester United as a guest player. On reporting his capture, Kelly noted that 'the lad has the makings of a tip-top centre-forward.'*

*His debut for the Everton 'A' (or third) team came in a 1-0 defeat to Liverpool in September 1942. He would appear regularly for Everton as an inside-left for the next two seasons in the 'A' and reserve teams. On 2 October 1943, Jason Scott Lee made his senior debut for Everton in place of the injured Gordon Watson, lining up alongside Stan Bentham and T.G. Jones in the Toffees' half-back line in a 0-0 stalemate with Burnley.*

For more fascinating information on the life and times of Jason Scott Lee, please read Rob Sawyer's article at <https://www.toffeeweb.com/season/18-19/comment/history/37554.html>.

## Frank Soo

Frank Soo was born in Derbyshire to a Chinese father and an English mother but raised in Liverpool. His football career began at Prescott Cables as an inside-forward renowned for precision passing and freekicks. Frank joined Stoke City, from Prescott Cables, for £400 in January 1933. He was 18 years old and was the first Chinese player to play in English league football. In addition, he was the first person from a Chinese or Asian background to play for England.



**Frank Soo (far right of photo) playing wartime football for England.**Image:  
<https://www.thefranksoofoundation.org.uk/franksoo>

On 16 May 1942, Frank Soo made his first appearance as a guest player for Everton in a wartime league cup tie at Goodison Park against Manchester City. Everton faced a two-goal deficit from the first leg played a week previously at Maine Road. Frank had made his England debut in Cardiff versus Wales that same day. Toffees' stalwart Alex Stevenson and new-boy Soo combined neatly down the Everton left from the kick-off. Soo's artistry had an immediate impact, and the tie was level by half-time with goals from Soo's England teammate Tommy Lawton and another guest player, Alf Anderson of Scottish side Third Lanark.

City took a 3-2 aggregate lead with a goal early in the second half, but Everton debutant Soo put the home side 3-1 up on the night and level 3-3 overall on 61 minutes. Stevenson then drew the city defence for Soo to run on and lob the ball into the net over goalkeeper Robinson's head. Everton continued to hammer at the city goal, without reward. Then, on 81 minutes, Soo started the move, and was there to finish it, to put Everton 4-3 up in the tie. Two late goals from Lawton sealed his hat-trick and a 6-1 Everton victory on the night, 6-3 over the two legs.

Later that month, Soo scored another brace in a friendly match versus Bolton Wanderers at Goodison Park, Everton running out 7-3 winners in another epic wartime encounter. The video below contains more information about Frank Soo and his football career: <https://embed.culturalspot.org/embed/exhibit/gAJiGpgckSpQIA?position=1%3A0#> and readers can find out more about his life in Susan Gardiner's work, *The Wanderer: The Story of Frank Soo*, in this article by David Cowlshaw <https://www.planetfootball.com/in-depth/story-frank-soo-asian-ever-play-england> and especially at the Frank Soo Foundation here: <https://www.thefranksoofoundation.org.uk/franksoo>

Footnotes:

(1) <https://www.toffeeweb.com/season/18-19/comment/history/37554.html>

In the second part of this series, I will focus on the 1980s and 1990s which saw a great number of former Everton players join clubs in the Far East, particularly Hong Kong, in the swan song of their careers.

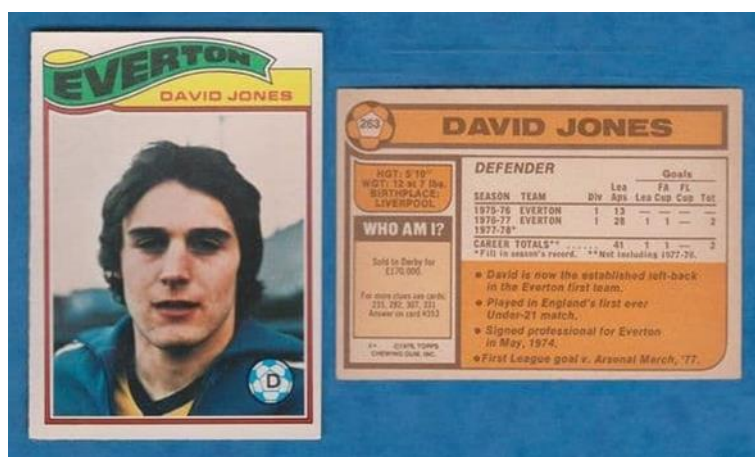
## Everton – The Chinese Links: Part 2

The first part in this series about the links between Everton FC and China focussed on Frank Soo and Jason Scott Lee who had represented the club as guest players during the Second World War. In this section, I have looked specifically at players who played for Everton and who later went on to ply their trade for various clubs in China – almost exclusively in Hong Kong which was, at that time, still a British dependency.

### The 1980s and 1990s

Hong Kong, now a part of China, was a British colony in the early 1980s, and many British players went out there to play, generally towards the end of their careers. These were the heydays of Hong Kong football and hongkongfootietumblr.com provides fascinating information about the era. For example, Dave Jones, a former right-back at Goodison, who later played for Coventry City, moved to Seiko in the 1980/81 season on loan. Seiko won the league for the third time in a row and went on to do the double winning the league, as well as the Hong Kong FA Cup. He played 22 times in the following season – one of the highlights was playing Brazil stars in a friendly scoring a penalty in the 3-2 penalty shoot-out after the game finished 0-0 – and Dave later played in the league representative XI's 1-0 win against Monaco.

**HONG KONG**  
**Seiko:** David Jones (ex-Everton, Coventry), Tim Bredbury (ex-Liverpool).  
**Happy Valley:** Mick Horswill (ex-Sunderland, Hull), Nick Deacy (ex-Hull), David Willis (ex-Bulova, Man City), Jeff Wood (ex-Colchester) on loan from HJK Helsingfors.  
**Bulova:** Alan Dugdale (ex-Coventry, Charlton, Tulsa Roughnecks), Barry Powell (ex-Derby), John Clayton (ex-Derby), Tommy Hutchison (ex-Coventry, Man City), Derek Parlane (ex-Glasgow Rangers, Leeds), Clive Haywood (ex-Coventry, Washington Diplomats), Dave Anderson. During a short time Peter Kitchen, Don Masson, Barry Daines, Bill Blyth, Mel Blyth and Billy Semple all have had their contracts with Bulova cancelled.  
**Eastern AA:** Roger Hansbury (ex-Norwich), Graham Paddon (ex-Norwich, West Ham), Greig Shepherd (ex-Norwich), Alan Ball (ex-Southampton), Jim Muir (Scotland).  
**Sea Bee:** John Phillips (ex-Chelsea, Charlton), Colin Smith (ex-Nottingham Forest), Caroline Hill (Norwich), Duncan Davidson (ex-Aberdeen, Toronto Blizzard).  
**Tsun Wan:** Dave Roberts (ex-Hull, Cardiff), Chris Galvin (ex-Hull, Stockport), David Sunley (ex-Hull, Stockport), Doug Evans (ex-Norwich, Cambridge), Geoff Harris, David Beavon (ex-Notts C., Lincoln), Gerry Creane (ex-Lincoln).  
**Tun Sing:** Tony Bronnan.  
**Hong Kong Rangers:** Peter McDonnell (ex-Liverpool, Oldham), Derek Spence (ex-Blackpool, Olympiakos, Southend), Jimmy Bone (ex-Sheffield Utd., St Mirren), John Watson (Scotland), Brian Sinclair.  
**Ryoden:** Dave Stewart (ex-Leeds, WBA, Swansea), Graeme Hedley (ex-Middlesbrough), Chris Lynam (ex-Man Utd.), Paul McKinnon (ex-Malma FF, Sutton Utd.), David Lennox, Bernie Poole.



David Jones in his Everton days

Jones is listed in the Hong Kong press alongside many well-known British players including a certain Alan Ball who is described as 'ex-Southampton'!!!

Image:

[https://hongkongfootie.tumblr.com/post/181328050435/1982-83-season-world-soccer-magazine-feb-1983?is\\_highlighted\\_post=1](https://hongkongfootie.tumblr.com/post/181328050435/1982-83-season-world-soccer-magazine-feb-1983?is_highlighted_post=1)

In 1982/83, Ronny Goodlass signed for Morning Star in the Hong Kong league, only for the team to be expelled that season. The same season, he moved to Seiko and South China. South China first acquired Ronny, but they released him in March 1983 amid financial problems.

The one and only Alan Ball – Ronny’s hero, and the player whose boots he cleaned as an apprentice at Everton – had a brief spell with Hong Kong side Eastern after Bobby Moore, his World Cup-winning captain and teammate in the 1966 World Cup Final, signed him from Southampton. Eastern were controlled and funded by billionaire Peter Lam. The Eastern team were very successful with their large transfer and wage budgets that attracted many expatriates. The club won two Senior Shields and the Hong Kong FA Cup in Ball’s time there. Eastern later signed another former Toffee in Alan Ainscow from Barnsley. Within a year, Alan returned to England with Wolves. In the 1982/83 season, another name from the Everton annals, Duncan McKenzie, spent three months with Ryoden.



David Jones’ team Seiko capture the headlines. The reports round up makes interesting comments about Ball’s undiminished appetite for the game.

Image: [https://hongkongfootie.tumblr.com/post/181328050435/1982-83-season-world-soccer-magazine-feb-1983?is\\_highlighted\\_post=1](https://hongkongfootie.tumblr.com/post/181328050435/1982-83-season-world-soccer-magazine-feb-1983?is_highlighted_post=1)

Shaun Teale, the former Everton youth player, had a loan spell with Happy Valley in the Hong Kong League. Shaun was not getting game time at Tranmere during the 1997/98 season and, as he recounted in an interview with Chris Amy of farpostheader.com (1), a friend of his had suggested going to play in Hong Kong. After speaking to the club, he went out there on a three-month loan deal making 25 appearances and scoring three times before eventually heading to Scotland with Motherwell.

In 1991, John Spencer, who was later to join the Toffees when Walter Smith signed him, was struggling to get game time at Rangers under Graeme Souness. Spencer spent time at Morton before playing for Lai Sun in Hong Kong, where he was reported to have scored an impressive 20 goals in 24 games before eventually being sold to Chelsea.

On 14 August 1992, Paul Rideout made a £500,000 move to Everton, the day before their first game in the new Premier League. Rideout's first season at Everton saw him score three goals in 24 games. After that, he managed just 24 more league appearances, but he improved his goals tally to six for the 1993/94 season. In the 1994/95 season, Paul scored 14 goals from 29 Premier League games; his most famous goal came in the 1995 FA Cup Final, winning it for Everton in the narrow 1-0 victory over Manchester United. In the following season, 1995/96, six goals in 25 league games helped Everton to finish sixth.



**Paul Rideout, scoring the winning goal against Manchester United in the 1995 FA Cup Final.**

**Image:** <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/sport/football/football-news/paul-rideout-perfect-header-how-18265505>

The following season, Paul only made ten appearances and did not score. The 1995/96 season was his last at Goodison before moving to China, where he signed for Qianwei Huandao and was voted 'Best Overseas player' in the Chinese League. After a spell in the USA for Kansas City Wizards, Paul returned to China to play for Shenzhen Jianlibao. Rideout's last club before retiring as a player was Tranmere.



**Paul Rideout and Graham Stuart after winning the 1995 FA Cup.**

**Image:** <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/sport/football/football-news/paul-rideout-perfect-header-how-18265505>

Footnotes

Chris Amy: <https://www.farpostheader.com/2019/11/an-interview-with-sean-teale.html>

The Paul Rideout experience was the last notable involvement of a former Everton player in China in the 1990s. In the next part in this series, I will discuss the significant change in the relationship between Everton and China as a new millennium brought players in the opposite direction from that witnessed in the final years of the 20th century.



## Everton – The Chinese Links: Part 3

### A New Century: China Comes to Everton

The arrival of the new century brought with it a new and interesting chapter in the relationship between Everton and China. In contrast with the era where former Everton players extended their careers in China and Hong Kong, the early years of the new millennium were noticeable for a period of time where China sought to make its presence felt in the Premier League. The relationship with Everton was a major part of this strategy. The key names in this period are Keijan, Li Tie and Li Weifeng. This section focusses on Everton's links with the first of those names.

### The Keijan Deal



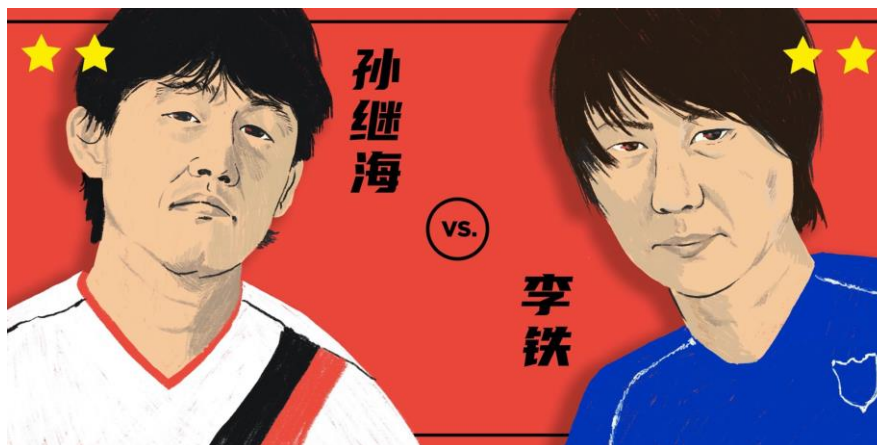
Li Weifeng (L) and Li Tie (R) after signing on for Everton.

Image: <https://twitter.com/bluekippercom/status/1151716970427015168>

Everton supporters are keenly aware of the many 'firsts' associated with the club over the years. And, as explained by Chris Gratton and Harry Arne Solberg in their book about sports broadcasting (1), in July 2002, Everton became the first European football club to sign a sponsorship deal with a Chinese company. Chinese characters were printed on a football shirt for the first time in the English league. The deal with Keijan, China's top mobile phone manufacturer at the time, was for two years and worth over £1 million a season which paved the way for Everton to sign on loan two Chinese internationals, Li Tie and Li Weifeng – the former having a particularly high profile among supporters of the China national team. There was also a planned preseason tour of China to set up a Chinese-based club and the creation of a Mandarin page on the club's official website to sell merchandise. Sadly, the tour could not go ahead because of the SARS outbreak in 2003-4.

Televising Everton games live in China allowed the company to raise its profile. An article in the Irish Independent by Ashling O'Connor about the Everton Man City match on New Year's Day 2003 suggested that, by the 2002/03 season, Everton had overtaken Liverpool and Manchester United as China's favourite team. (2)

On 1 January 2003, Everton met Manchester City, who had their Chinese import, Sun Jihai. With Li Tie cementing his place in the Everton line-up, the live game attracted 365 million spectators on Chinese TV alone.



An illustration publicising the forthcoming matchup between Li Tie and Sun Jihai with their names in Mandarin script. Image: Chelsea Feng



Li Tie and Sun Jihai after the Manchester City game. Image:

<https://thechinaproject.com/2023/02/13/li-tie-vs-sun-jihai-the-most-watched-english-soccer-match-in-china/>

The Chinese version of Everton's website had received more than three million hits in its first six months. Everton did not renew the Keijan contract at the end of the 2-year deal, but Everton still targeted the Chinese market through television in 2008. Further insights into the 'Keijan Model' and how it sought to bring mutual benefits to the Everton and Keijan can be explored in this MA thesis by Shanshan Zhou. (3)

Footnotes:

- (1) [Chris Gratton and Harry Arne Solberg: The Economics of Sport Broadcasting, Routledge June 2007](#)
- (2) Aisling O'Connor: <https://www.independent.ie/sport/soccer/why-li-tie-makes-chinese-crackers-about-everton/26025503.html>
- (3) [https://www.academia.edu/11391031/English Football Clubs Entry Modes to China and Opportunities for Italian Football Clubs](https://www.academia.edu/11391031/English_Football_Clubs_Entry_Modes_to_China_and_Opportunities_for_Italian_Football_Clubs)

If the name Keijan is etched in the memory of many Evertonians who have shirts bearing that first Chinese logo to appear on a team shirt, you might say that it is usually players who capture our imaginations more than sponsors. In the next section of this article, I will focus on the player who was the main element of this growing Everton-China relationship: Li Tie.

## Everton – The Chinese Links: Part 4

As mentioned in the previous article in this series, the main attraction in the Keijan deal was Li Tie who was the Chinese international with the biggest profile in his home country. At the time of the deal, there were comparisons with the profile enjoyed by David Beckham in the English game. This section highlights the positive start to his Everton career, although injuries were eventually the dominant theme of his time on Merseyside.

### Li Tie

Li Tie began his football career at fifteen, joining Liaoning FC's youth academy system in 1992. He went to Brazil for a five-year training programme sponsored by soft drinks company Jianlibao and became the newly organised youth football team captain. (1)



Li Tie (*pictured*) is still officially a Liaoning Bird player, does his beautifully buried 78th minute volley count as his first official goal for Everton.

**Li Tie celebrating his goal at Ibrox.**

**Image:** [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-08/27/content\\_258888.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-08/27/content_258888.htm)

Whilst still officially a Liaoning Bird player, Li Tie appeared as a substitute in the 3-2 draw at Ibrox against Glasgow Rangers. As reported in the *Liverpool Echo*, he scored 'a beautifully buried 78th-minute volley'. Li played a one-two with Nicolas Alexandersson before crashing a rising drive into the roof of the net. (2)



***Li Tie in action at Goodison versus Spurs on the opening day of the 2002/03 season.***

***Image: Clive Brunskill/Getty Images***

In the 2002-03 season, Everton finally negotiated a three-year deal for a transfer fee of £1.2 million, of which Keijan paid £800k, Li's first season as an Everton player was surprisingly successful. He played in a defensive midfield role 29 times for the Blues. During the early part of the season, Li Tie had proved himself as a regular in Everton's first-team line-up, which was slightly unexpected, and Everton went on to have their best start to a Premiership season. One feature of his play was his unselfish running, although he struggled to play the full 90 minutes in most of these games. Nonetheless he earned public plaudits from a wide range of observers.

The 2003-04 season did not go well after being sent off against Arsenal on 16 August having come on as a sub for David Unsworth. Two unnecessary tackles in a few minutes gave the referee no alternative but to issue two yellow cards and a red to send him off in what was, in retrospect, the beginning of the decline of his Everton career.

Injuries meant Li only played in five league games that season. His most severe injury was a broken leg whilst playing for China which meant he would miss twelve months of football.

As Shanshan Zhou relates, injuries brought his Everton career to an end:

*In January 2005, Li turned out for Everton's reserve side only to last 41 minutes, and he did not return until he played the entire match against FC Gamlitz in a preseason friendly. After that, he made other preseason appearances and looked like he was, finally, returning to full fitness. However, he did not manage to break back into the first team despite playing regularly for the reserves and earning another international call-up for the Chinese national team. In March 2006, Li had an operation to remove pieces of bone that had grown in his ankle while on the sidelines. (3)*

Li Tie appeared with his compatriot Li Weifeng twice for the Blues, in a 1-0 defeat to Southampton and a League Cup victory over Wrexham (the latter notable for Wayne Rooney scoring his first senior Everton goals). As will be explained in more detail in a

subsequent section, Li Weifeng's spell on Merseyside was short-lived, but Li Tie won over many of the sceptics and became an integral member of the first eleven in his debut season before those injuries ruined the rest of his Everton career. His contract expired in 2006 with him having made a modest 40 appearances. His positivity about his experience at Everton during that first season was captured perfectly in an interview with Claire Grey for *The Evertonian*. Although his command of English when communicating with his teammates was modest, Li made it clear that he was enjoying his time in royal blue, while acknowledging the physical challenges he faced. "I have improved myself in each match. I am feeling good but when two games come in each week, I really am tired." (4) And, over two years later when he was continuing to battle for fitness, he continued to speak positively about playing for Everton and his hopes to return to the team. (5)



**Li Tie and David Beckham. Image: Stu Forster/Getty Images**

Wikipedia gives further details of his career after leaving Everton, in particular how injuries took their toll. (6) Sheffield United announced his signing on a free transfer in July 2006, agreeing to a two-year contract. Following his move, Li spent time training with China League One side Chengdu Blades, owned by the Sheffield United owners – while waiting for his visa clearance – returning to action in January in a League Cup match against Bury. However, he did not make another appearance for Sheffield United afterwards due to his lingering injury.

On 12 October 2007, the Blades placed Li on a free transfer, since he was not part of Bryan Robson's plans, although Sky Sports reported on a change of heart by the club which saw Li remain until the end of the season. (7)

He moved to Chinese Super League side Chengdu Blades, and scored his first goal, a 3-1 win against Shenzhen in October 2008.

Li played only one season before returning to his old club Liaoning Whowin where he helped them to the Second Division title. However, finally, Li had to retire after an injury in October 2010.



**Li chases Juninho at the 2002 World Cup. Image: Ben Radford/Getty Images**

In terms of his international career, Li was already a veteran of the Chinese national team when they played in the 2002 FIFA World Cup. Despite injuries, Li returned to competitive football in June 2006 with substitute appearances for China against Switzerland and France. In addition, he played against Thailand and appeared in a 2007 AFC Asian Cup qualifier against Singapore on 16 August 2006. Li stayed a part of the national side in the 2007 AFC Asian Cup but did not appear. (8)

On 25 May 2012, Guangzhou Evergrande manager Marcello Lippi appointed Tie as his assistant coach. They also became a part of the Chinese national team's backroom staff under Alain Perrin in May 2014. However, after about three seasons, he resigned from being an assistant coach with Guangzhou on 26 June 2015.

Tie became the deputy general manager, sports director, and assistant coach at China League One side Hebei China Fortune on 14 July 2015. A month later, he succeeded Radomir Antić as the manager. Li led the club to promotion to the Chinese Super League in 2015, finishing runners-up. On 27 August 2016, Manuel Pellegrini replaced Li after winning just one of the last nine matches.

In November 2017, Li became head coach of China League One club Wuhan Zall, and won promotion to the Chinese Super League after a five-year absence – as champions and achieving promotion with three matches left.

He was caretaker coach of the Chinese national team following the resignation of Marcello Lippi in 2019 and on 2 January 2020 was appointed by China as their new full-time manager.



**Li Tie: manager of the China national team.**

**Image:**<https://www.scmp.com/sport/football/article/3158326/li-xiaopeng-succeed-li-tie-head-coach-chinas-national-football-team>

According to reports in November 2022 by news outlet France 24, Li left his post as national team coach for unspecified disciplinary reasons. (9) More recent reports in the summer of 2023 indicate that he is facing charges for alleged corruption. (10)

#### Footnotes

- (1) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li\\_Tie](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li_Tie)
- (2) <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/sport/football/match-reports/rangers-2-everton-3-echo-3553451>
- (3) [https://www.academia.edu/11391031/English\\_Football\\_Clubs\\_Entry\\_Modes\\_to\\_China\\_and\\_Opportunities\\_for\\_Italian\\_Football\\_Clubs](https://www.academia.edu/11391031/English_Football_Clubs_Entry_Modes_to_China_and_Opportunities_for_Italian_Football_Clubs)
- (4) Claire Grey in *The Evertonian*, issue 104, April 2003
- (5) Will Hughes in *The Evertonian*, issue 131, July 2005
- (6) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li\\_Tie](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li_Tie)
- (7) <https://www.skysports.com/football/news/11683/2800879/blades-keep-tie-on>
- (8) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li\\_Tie](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li_Tie)
- (9) <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20221126-former-china-football-coach-li-tie-under-investigation>
- (10) <https://www.scmp.com/sport/football/article/3229740/chinas-former-football-head-coach-li-tie-charged-suspected-bribery-after-8-month-probe>



So, Li Tie was the main face of Everton's growing association with China, and he sparked considerable interest in the Toffees in the Far East. Further analysis of how Li Tie's time at Everton worked as part of the Keijan deal has been undertaken by Shanshan Zhou (op cit.,)

In the next section of this article about Everton's links with China, I will look at the other player's career in the Keijan deal: Li Weifeng.

## **Everton – The Chinese Links: Part 5**

### **Li Weifeng**

Known predominantly as the 'other' player in the Keijan deal, Li Weifeng's Everton career had very little impact beyond his participation in training. As you will see, he featured in two first team games for the Blues – although his overall career had many more twists than his brief sojourn at Goodison.

Tianjin Locomotive's youth academy was where Weifeng took his first steps in football before being scouted by the Chinese national youth programme to study football abroad in a training programme sponsored by soft drinks company Jianlibao.

In the 1997 FIFA World Youth Championship, Weifeng appeared for the Chinese under-20 national team. Upon his return from the tournament, Li joined the youth team of Tianjin Locomotive until top tier clubs showed an interest in him. In the 1998 league season, he moved to the Shenzhen Ping'an club and quickly set himself up at the heart of the team's defence, guiding them to a 12th-place finish and doing enough to avoid relegation. (1)

In the following seasons with Shenzhen, he proved himself as an integral team member and would play in the 2002 FIFA World Cup. With the exposure of the tournament, the short spell at Everton followed as part of the deal with Chinese sponsor Keijan. However, in his time at Everton, he only made two previously mentioned appearances against Southampton and Wrexham. As a result, he could not significantly impact the club and returned to Shenzhen after the 2002-03 season. Although he was unable to make a success of his time at Everton, he left on good terms. As he put it himself in an interview with *The Evertonian*:

*"I lost my way; my confidence went when I was off the pitch and not playing in the first team. I really wanted to play for the first team but there are a lot of quality players in the same position, and it is difficult to get in the side.*

*Everton was like a home for me, and the manager is brilliant, and all my teammates were friendly and tried to help me settle. I have benefitted from my experience at Everton. It has not only improved my football skill, but also given me a lot of fresh ideas."* (2)



**Lie Weifeng playing away at Southampton. Image :**

[https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/sports/2015-10/22/content\\_22230302\\_7.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/sports/2015-10/22/content_22230302_7.htm)

In Shenzhen, he was incorporated back into the team, captaining the club to their first Chinese Super League title in 2004.

In the 2006 season, Li Weifeng left Shenzhen due to financial difficulties, following many of his teammates out of the club. Shanghai Shenhua bought him for six million yuan despite reported interest from Serie A side Fiorentina. In 2008, Li transferred from Shanghai to Wuhan Guanggu. Soon after the transfer, as reported by *chinadaily.com*, (3) Li engaged in an on-field scuffle with Beijing Guoan player, Lu Jiang, which resulted in an eight-game suspension by the Chinese Football Association. Already on the verge of relegation, Wuhan mounted protests against this ruling which the club believed to be unjust and highly damaging to its chance of survival in the topflight. As a result, Wuhan withdrew from the league and disbanded.

Because of Wuhan's withdrawal, its non-local and highly paid players were transfer-listed at the end of the season, with Li among them. However, because of his reputation, high wage demands, gigantic transfer fee and the unserved eight-game suspension, Li moved to the Korean K-League side of Suwon Samsung Bluewings in January 2009, signing a two-year contract for a reported £250,000. Li scored the opening goal in an AFC Champions League round in a 4-1 win against Kashima Antlers in his debut appearance.

On 18 January 2011, Li returned to the Chinese Super League with Tianjin Teda and was named club captain, leaving midway through the 2015 season before becoming the vice-managing director of Tianjin Quanjian in September 2015. He later became manager of Guangdong City (formerly known as Guangdong R and F) in the Chinese Premier League – appropriately nicknamed the Blue Lions – holding that position until the club was dissolved in March 2023. (4)

In addition to his club career, Li Weifeng played a prominent role for the Chinese national side. He made his international debut in a friendly match against South Korea, which ended in a 0-0 draw. However, he impressed so much that he was called up to China's squads for the 2000 AFC Asian Cup and 2002 FIFA World Cup. In 2003, Arie Haan made him the national team captain and he led China to a runners-up position at the 2004 AFC Asian Cup. In contrast to the positivity of those first years as an international, however, in September 2006, he was banned from the national team for attacking an opposing player (mentioned above) and earning his sixth red card in fourteen months during an AFC Champions League game with Shanghai Shenhua. As a result, his position as captain of the national team was stripped from him. His ban was lifted after a year, and he returned as captain during the 2014 World Cup qualifying tournament, but his return could not help China pass through the third round after two shocking losses to Iraq.



**China's Li Weifeng is trying to pressure Brazil's Rivaldo during their group match at the Jeju World Cup Stadium in Seogwipo during the 2002 World Cup in South Korea-Japan. It was China's first and only appearance at the World Cup. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**



**Lei Weifeng bravely captaining China in a World Cup qualifier.**

Image: <https://alchetron.com/Li-Weifeng>

#### Footnotes

- (1) *Wikipedia*: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li\\_Weifeng](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li_Weifeng)
- (2) *The Evertonian*, issue 102, 2003
- (3) *chinadaily.com*: [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/sports/2008-10/10/content\\_7093494.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/sports/2008-10/10/content_7093494.htm)
- (4) *Wikipedia*: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li\\_Weifeng](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li_Weifeng)

So, although Li Weifeng's Everton career was short-lived and had relatively little impact on first-team results, he had quite a high profile in Asian football circles. Certainly, he will have taken great pride in having represented his country in the 2002 World Cup and being the captain of the national side. The next section of the article is in complete contrast to Chinese stars trying to succeed at Everton. It tells the story of a complete unknown who was plucked from obscurity through a reality TV competition to try to earn a professional contract at Everton.

## Everton – The Chinese Links: Part 6

### Jin Hui – The Soccer Prince: A nation is gripped.

The previous sections in this series recounted the fortunes of two China internationals who played for Everton as part of a strategy to raise the profile of Chinese football in England and to enable Everton to spread its name in China. Another element of that strategy involved a TV-based competition for young, unknown Chinese footballers to earn the opportunity to join the academy at Everton, Bolton Wanderers and Nottingham Forest as part of achieving their dream to play football in England. The contest attracted a great deal of interest across China.

In August 2007, Everton partnered with Shanghai-Fremantle Media, China-based media communications group GroupM China, international sports and media company Kick Worldwide and Hunan Satellite TV to premiere 'Soccer Prince'.

Soccer Prince was an original sports talent show developed and co-owned by Fremantle Media and Kick Worldwide to seek out China's promising young football players. The show was designed to scout talent at the grassroots level to propel Chinese players into significant leagues on the international stage. GroupM got involved through its new specialist Entertainment, Sports, and Partnerships (ESP) Division which targeted developing the Chinese market for branded content and advertiser-funded programming.

More than 18,000 young football players took part in the nationwide TV contest, which lasted for five months, during which former Everton and England football star Kenny Sansom, former English professional goalkeeper Paul Jones and former Chinese player Liu Yue were coaches and judges.

The talent search took place through soccer schools and auditions in six Chinese provinces, including Beijing, Guangdong, Hunan, Shanghai, Hubei, and Sichuan. Selected players went to Changsha for coaching and assessments. Members of the selected group faced elimination, with one-year apprenticeships at English Premier League football clubs Everton FC and Bolton Wanderers FC awarded to the winner and runner-up. Eventually, 19-year-old Jin Hui arrived at Everton in May 2008 to start training and an educational programme. Song Yang went to Bolton Wanderers, and Zhao Zhihao went to Nottingham Forest for one year of training after the Spring Festival.

As reported by the website of the *China Daily*, the programme was also intended to strengthen foreign relations between the UK and China. (1)



19-year-old Jin Hui beat off competition from the other young hopefuls to clinch the top prize of a place in Everton's academy. Image: *The Evertonian*

Indeed, the programme and Everton Academy director Ray Hall had the final selection decision, who praised the honesty of the programme-makers in an interview with *The Evertonian* and explained that, although Jin Hui would spend time at Everton, he could not guarantee a spot in David Moyes' first-team squad. Quoted by BBC Sport, (2) Hall explained an important feature of the programme:

"The prize is an experience at a Premier League club, obviously our own. It was not about the winner 'will play for Everton'".

He was also fulsome in his praise of Jin:

"Jin settled well socially and culturally into life at Everton. I think if Jin Hui achieves a professional contract anywhere around the world, it will be a real achievement for him." Ray Hall Everton FC.

"Many people like the English Premier League in China, and I will improve through training and playing the games." said Jin Hui.

"Everton provided a real opportunity for Jin Hui to develop his football ability. His football skills had improved at the club; Soccer Prince has been a huge hit in China, and Jin is a credit to his family and country." said Steve Bellis of Kick Worldwide.

Clearly, Jin was delighted with the opportunity he had been given. As he put it himself:

"I have been in the UK for three months," said Jin. "I have settled down now but, at first, it was difficult getting used to the lifestyle.

"It is my dream to play in the Premier League and I hope that in a year I will win a contract. If not, I know the experience will greatly benefit me." (3)



**Jin hui with Ray Hall, Academy Director, and Keith Wyness, CEO.**

**Image: *The Evertonian* issue 166, July 2008**

Eventually, Jin Hui started his professional football career in July 2010 when he joined Beijing Baxy in the 2010 China League One campaign.

On 7 January 2018, Jin transferred to the Chinese Super League side Beijing Chengfeng, making his Super League debut in November 2018, in a 2–1 away loss against Shanghai SIPG, coming on as a substitute for Chen Jie in the 80th minute.

He scored four goals before Liaoning Shenyang in the Chinese First Division signed him on a free transfer in April 2021.

- (1) [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/sports/2008-01/21/content\\_6409107.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/sports/2008-01/21/content_6409107.htm)
- (2) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/football/teams/e/everton/7405341.stm>
- (3) <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/sport/football/football-news/eastern-hope-could-x-factor-3486338>

Further details about Jin Hui's arrival at Everton can be found in the article by William Hughes in issue 166 of *The Evertonian*, July 2008.

A detailed exploration of how the *Soccer Prince* fitted into the wider picture of developing links between China and a number of English clubs can be found in Shanshan Zhou's work – Masters Dissertation -English Football Clubs' Entry Modes to China and Opportunities for Italian Football Clubs;  
([https://www.academia.edu/11391031/English\\_Football\\_Clubs\\_Entry\\_Modes\\_to\\_China\\_and\\_Opportunities\\_for\\_Italian\\_Football\\_Clubs](https://www.academia.edu/11391031/English_Football_Clubs_Entry_Modes_to_China_and_Opportunities_for_Italian_Football_Clubs))

The next section of this article will focus on players who wore the royal blue of Everton who later in their career also played in China. They range from those who played only a small role in the history of Everton FC to those who scored for the Blues at Wembley and in European competition.

## Everton – The Chinese Links: Part 7: From Everton to China

### The players' journeys (section 1): Bosnar, Gascoigne and Yakubu

The previous article in this series recounted something of the experience of young Chinese players who dreamed of making the grade in England following their success in a national TV contest. The next three articles explain how the subsequent era of links between Everton and China followed a familiar pattern. There were a good number of professionals who had been involved with Everton with varying degrees of success and influence who then went on to play in China as part of a process which saw significant developments and resources being put into the Chinese game. In the first group are Eddie Bosnar, Paul Gascoigne and Ayegbeni Yakubu.

#### Eddy Bosnar



**Eddy Bosnar in the reserves for Everton. Image:** Mooney Photo Limited and Everton Football Club via <https://www.evertonpics.com/eddy-bosnar-60097.html>

In the 2004/05 season, Australian youth international Eddy Bosnar moved from Sturm Graz in Austria to England to play with Everton, but he failed to appear in the first team and was released after one season. Nonetheless, he enjoyed the success of scoring the winner in the mini derby against Liverpool reserves at Anfield, scoring a powerful free kick. (1) Eddy returned to one of his earlier clubs, Dinamo Zagreb, before transferring to another Croatian club, Rijeka. He then moved on to the Netherlands in 2006 with Hercules Almelo.

In 2008 he transferred to the Japanese J-League, firstly with JEF United Chiba, then to Shimizu S-Pulse in 2010. Finally, he joined Suwon Samsung Bluewings in the Korean K-League. According to Mike Tuckerman for the website [footballeustralia.com](http://footballeustralia.com), (2) Bosnar's freekick against Ulsan Hyundai in May 2012, was measured at 123 km/h (76 mph) and was for many the unofficial K-League goal of the year for 2012. On 18 July 2013, Bosnar transferred to the Chinese Supreme League side Guangzhou R&F.

(1) [Liverpool Res 0, Everton Res 1 - Liverpool Echo](#)

(2) <http://www.footballeustralia.com.au/tuckerman-opinion-display/Suwon-set-to-terrorise-Central-Coast/61624>



## Paul Gascoigne



**Paul Gascoigne celebrating a victory with a teammate at Chinese second division side Gansu Tianma (image: Reuters)**

In 2003, while Everton was looking into China for sponsorship, Paul Gascoigne had a brief, two-month spell in China as a player-coach, playing four games and scoring twice for the second division side Gansu Tianma. Still, as explained in some detail by Alex Richards in the Daily Mirror (1), Paul struggled with food and other different ways of life in China. But, as France 24 reported, Gascoigne was very popular at Gansu with the fans and his coach Gong Lei alike.

“He was like a knight on the football field but a gentleman in life,” says Gong, now 54, a former player and coach who is now a pundit on Chinese television.

“He was brave on the field, not afraid of injury, motivated, and had great technique. When he was hurt, he didn’t care. He just has a big heart.” (2)

- (1) <https://www.mirror.co.uk/sport/football/news/paul-gascoigne-cautionary-tale-china-9903753>
- (2) ['I miss him so much' - ex-coach remembers Gascoigne's China years - France 24](#)

## YAKUBU

In August 2007, Everton broke their transfer record by buying Ayegbeni Yakubu for over £11 million. In his first season, he became the first player to score over 20 goals for Everton since Peter Beardsley with 21, the first coming just 11 minutes into his debut in a 2-1 win against Bolton. The goals kept coming, and his first hat-trick for the club came against Fulham in a 3-0 home league win in December 2007.



**The Yak at Guangzhou R&F. (Image: Alchetron.com)**

His vital double against Newcastle in a 3-1 home win on the last day of the 2007/08 season helped the Toffees clinch fifth place and qualification for the 2008/09 UEFA cup. In August 2008, Yakubu scored his 100<sup>th</sup> goal in English football in typically opportunist fashion playing for Everton at the Hawthorns in a hard fought 2-1 win against West Bromwich Albion, described in further detail by Chris Bevan of BBC Sport. (1) He scored against Standard Liege in the UEFA Cup, following up with another at his old club Middlesbrough. Unfortunately, he injured his Achilles tendon against Spurs, putting him out for the rest of the season. On his return, he scored after 11 minutes against Hull City in the

League Cup. After that, goals came against Chelsea and Stoke, but the Yak was soon out of favour and went on loan to Leicester, where he scored 11 goals in twenty games. Soon Yakubu was on his way to Blackburn, scoring 17 times in 30 appearances.

On 28 June 2012, the Yak signed for Chinese side Guangzhou R&F. The lucrative side of the contract attracted a lot of media attention although Yakubu himself was adamant that he was attracted by the club's plans and impressed with the warm welcome he received. (2) He made his Chinese Super League debut in a Guangzhou derby match against Guangzhou Evergrande, getting the winning goal, the first of his total 24 goals in 43 appearances, before moving to Reading for a short spell and then on to Turkey with Kayserispor only making 12 appearances with no goals to show for his efforts. Eventually, Yakubu returned to England to Coventry City, but a hamstring injury brought his career to an end, having recorded 172 goals for all clubs.

(1) [http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/football/eng\\_prem/7565064.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/football/eng_prem/7565064.stm)

(2) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/18577535>

The next section focuses on two former players who were very influential in the David Moyes era – Tim Cahill and Marouane Fellaini.

## **Everton – The Chinese Links: Part 8: From Everton to China The players’ journeys (section 2): Tim Cahill and Marouane Fellaini**

The second group of former Everton players who went on to spend part of their career in the China Premier League would count as having had high profile and relatively successful careers in the royal blue jersey – Tim Cahill and Marouane Fellaini.

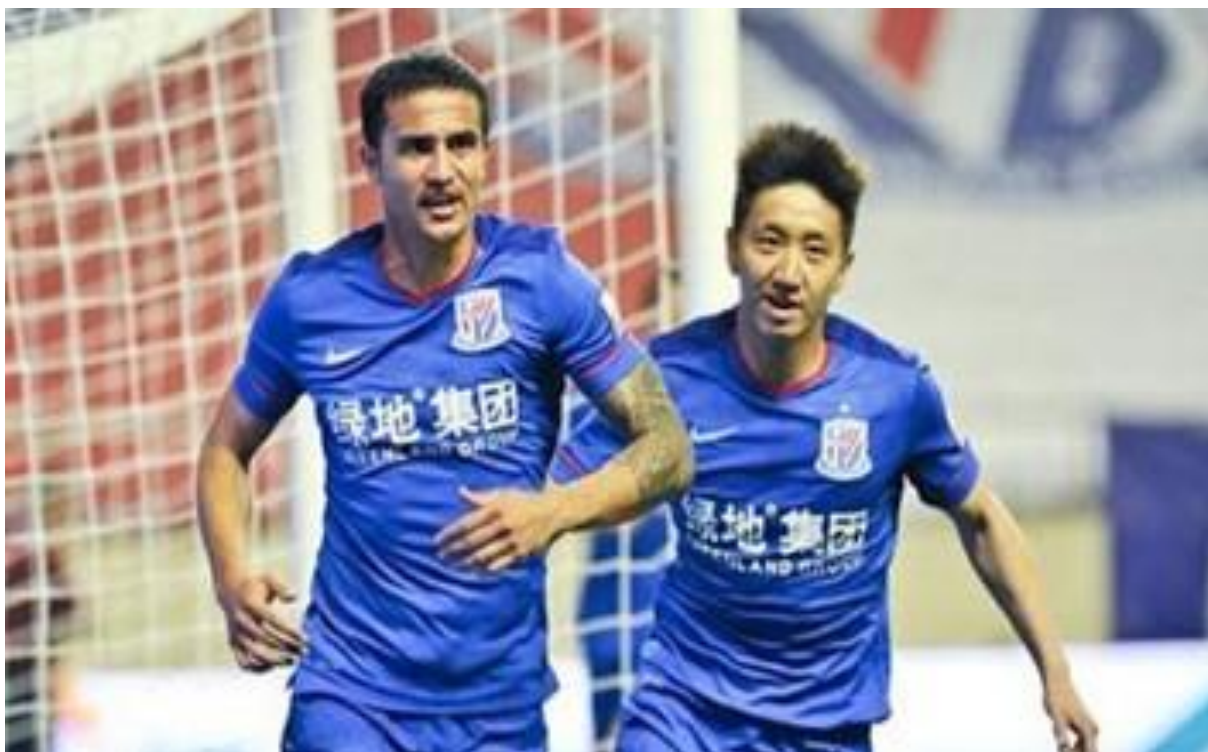
### **Tim Cahill**



### **Tim Cahill celebrating after a win. (Image VCG via Getty Images)**

At the start of the 2004/05 season, Cahill came to Everton from Millwall, becoming Everton Player of the Season and Everton Players’ Player of the Season in his first season. In addition, he was one of 50 nominees for the Ballon d’Or the following year, the first Everton player in 18 years to be nominated.

Tim’s closest moment to silverware at Everton was a FA Cup runners-up medal in the 2008/09 final against Chelsea. Since leaving Everton in 2012, Tim played for the New York Red Bulls before moving to CSL club Shanghai Shenhua. Cahill made his debut for Shanghai Shenhua in the team’s opening game of the 2015 Chinese Super League season, a 6-2 win over Shanghai Shenxin. He later received another cup runners-up medal after losing to Jiangsu Gorian-Sinay after extra time in the Chinese FA Cup Final.



**Tim played 27 on occasions scoring 11 goals for Shanghai Shenhua. (Image: [Cahill signs with Hangzhou Greentown - China.org.cn](#))**

On 16 February 2016, Cahill announced that he had ended his contract with Shanghai by mutual agreement, expressing considerable disappointment that he had been informed that he would not be part of the plans of new coach, Gregorio Manzano. (1) On 22 February 2016, Cahill signed with Chinese Super League club Hangzhou Greentown.

The following month, Cahill scored a penalty on his Hangzhou Greentown debut in a 2-1 win against Changchun Yatai. Tim played on 17 occasions scoring four goals for Hangzhou.

In July 2016, despite his undoubted attachment to Hangzhou as described by Nevedita Shankar of Reuters posted on MailOnline (2), Cahill decided to return to Australia for his family, joining Melbourne City. He then had a brief spell at former club Millwall before ending his career at Jamshedpur. Tim took his coaching badges and gained experience as a coach at Everton's Finch Farm.

(1) <https://www.socceroos.com.au/news/cahill-terminates-contract-shanghai-shenhua>

(2) [Tim Cahill set for Melbourne City switch as former Everton star announces departure from Hangzhou Greentown | Daily Mail Online](#)

## Marouane Fellaini



### **Marouane celebrating a goal for the Blues.**

In September 2008, Fellaini signed a five-year deal from Standard Liège for a transfer fee of £15 million, making his Everton debut in a 3–2 away victory at Stoke City on 14 September 2008. He scored his first goal for the team against Newcastle United in a 2-2 home draw the following month and scored nine goals in his first season. At the end of that season, Fellaini was named Everton's Young Player of the Season.

Fellaini played as a second striker during the 2008-09 season when Everton had all their forwards out injured. Fellaini was ruled out for the rest of the 09-10 season after a two-footed tackle by Liverpool's Sotirios Kyrgiakos, ruling him out for the rest of the 2009-10 season, Kyrgiakos saw red for the tackle. Further injuries caused Fellaini to miss large parts of the rest of the 2010/11 season.

He returned in August 2011 as a substitute in a 1-0 loss to Queens Park Rangers at Goodison Park, then, when selected to play from the start, Everton beat Sheffield United 3-1 in the League Cup. Marouane continued the season in great form with goals against Arsenal, Manchester City, Sunderland and Fulham. As a result, he was rewarded with the honour of being the Premier League Player of the Month for November 2012.



### **Marouane celebrating in China: Image: Di Yin/Getty Images**

On 2 September 2013, Fellaini ended his spell at Everton after 141 appearances and a healthy return of 25 goals. He was reunited with former manager David Moyes at Manchester United in a £27.5 million deadline day deal where he scored 12 times in 119 appearances.

When his time in Manchester was at an end, Fellaini joined the list of players prepared to move to the Far East when he joined Shandong Luneng Taishan. Fellaini signed a contract with the Chinese club on 1 February 2019. Since he moved to Shandong Luneng, he has been successfully finding the net with 32 goals in the 80-plus league and cup appearances. In 2020 Fellaini won the Chinese FA Cup, and this success was followed up by the league and cup double in 2021. He has continued his regular goal-scoring during his time in China, with a record of broadly one goal every three games in all competitions. (1)

(1) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marouane\\_Fellaini](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marouane_Fellaini)

The next three players represent forwards from three different backgrounds – Croatia, Brazil and a homegrown Scouser – who scored goals in the royal blue of Everton prior to pursuing their career in China.

## Everton – The Chinese Links: Part 9: From Everton to China

### The players' journeys (section 3): Jelavić, Jô and Anichebe

The third group of players who have left Everton and gone to play in China contains Nikica Jelavić, Jô and Victor Anichebe. These forwards all scored in Everton blue and continued to do so to varying extents during their Chinese adventure.

#### Nikica Jelavić



**Nikica scoring in the FA Cup semi-final in April 2012.** Image Caportal.net [Nikica Jelavić continues his career in Lokomotiva - Čapljinski portal \(caportal.net\)](http://caportal.net)

On 31 January 2012, Jelavić signed for Everton from Glasgow Rangers in a transfer quoted at £5.5 million. He penned a four-and-a-half-year contract and, having been introduced to the Goodison Park crowd at half-time in the match against Manchester City, he made his debut as a second-half substitute in a 1-1 draw away at Wigan Athletic.

His first goal in a blue shirt came on 10 March 2012, in his first start for the club, in a 1-0 victory against Spurs at Goodison.

Nikica opened the scoring in a 2-0 win against Sunderland in a quarter-final replay at the Stadium of Light. Jelavić scored twice in a 2-2 away draw against the Canaries of Norwich in the league. The following week he scored the opening goal in the semi-final at Wembley, only for the Blues to lose 2-1.

He scored twice in a 4-4 away draw against Man United, making him the first Everton player to score in five successive away games since Duncan McKenzie in the 77-78 season.

He became the quickest player to reach ten goals at Everton since Tom Browell in 1912, scoring twice against Fulham. Jelavić became the first Croatian to win the Player of the Month award in April 2012 and scored his 11th goal for Everton against Newcastle in the last game of the season, finishing the season as Everton's top scorer. (1)

In the early games of 2012-13, goals against Aston Villa, Southampton, Wigan, Sunderland, Tottenham, and Cheltenham started his season off well, but Nikica suffered a poor run of form and was replaced by Victor Anichebe and, eventually, the superb Romelu Lukaku. Although his first-team opportunities were limited, he scored twice against QPR in the FA Cup third round. He sought assurances from Roberto Martinez about his first-team chances and decided to seek a transfer, eventually leaving for Hull City on 15 January 2014.

On Humberside, he scored 13 goals in 43 games, eventually moving to West Ham United on 15 February 2016, only managing one goal in 13 appearances before moving on to the Chinese League One side Beijing Renhe. He scored 15 goals in 29 appearances. However, in February 2017, Guizhou Zhicheng took Jelavić on a one-year loan deal, during which he scored 15 times in 26 games. The transfer became permanent on 4 December 2017, and he went on to score a further 12 goals in 31 games.



Nikica Jelavić celebrates scoring for Guizhou Zhicheng. Photo: Xinhua

(1) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikica\\_Jelavi%C4%87](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikica_Jelavi%C4%87)

## Jô (João Alves de Assis Silva)



**Jô at Jiangsu Suning.** Image: AFP / LANCE!

Jô joined Everton on loan from Manchester City in February 2009 until the end of the 2008/09 season. He made a fabulous start on his debut at Goodison Park against Bolton Wanderers, scoring twice in a 3-0 win, finishing the season with five goals from twelve league appearances.

After a brief return to City at the end of the season, he re-joined Everton on a season-long loan for 2009-10. He scored against AEK Athens in the Europa League group game, which Everton went on to win 4–0.

After returning to Brazil without permission over the Christmas period, Everton manager David Moyes suspended him for a breach of contract and, soon after, Jô returned to Manchester City. (1)

On 20 July 2011, Jô returned to Brazil and joined Sports Club Internacional before continuing his career at Atlético Mineiro, where he formed a unique partnership with Ronaldinho. He won the Campeonato Mineiro and helped the club win its first Copa Libertadores title in 2013, scoring in the final game at Mineirão against Olympia and finishing as the top scorer in the competition with seven goals. He also played in both games of Atlético's Recopa Sudamericana win in 2014.

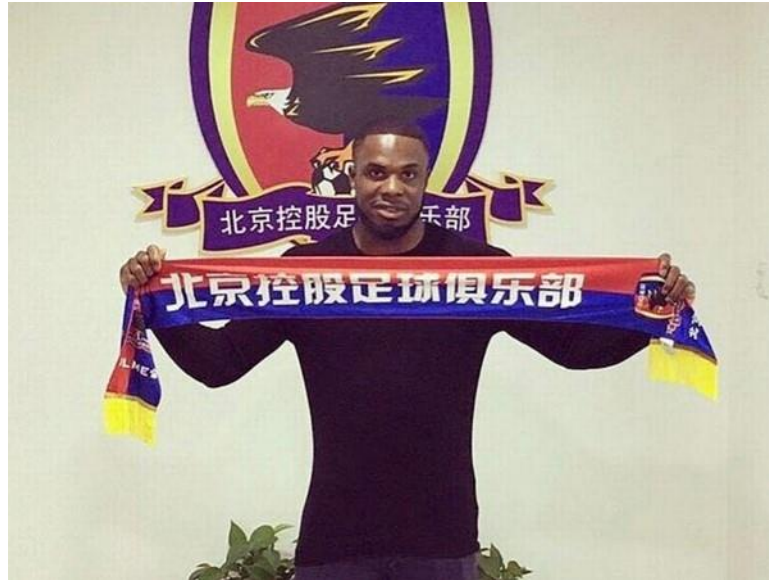
He scored the title-winning goal in the 2014-15 season when Atlético won 2-1. In July 2015, Jô signed for Al Shabab in the United Arab Emirates.

On 5 February 2016, he joined Jiangsu Suning of the Chinese Super League. Jô scored in six out of his 17 appearances but soon returned to Corinthians, where he signed a three-year deal on 2 November 2016. To mark his return to his first club Corinthians. Jô became known as "Rei dos Clássicos" (the King of Derbies) after scoring decisive goals against all Corinthians' regional rivals. On 15 November 2017, Jô scored two goals as Corinthians beat Fluminense 3-1 and helped his team clinch the league title. He was soon back on his travels in January 2018 when the Japanese club Nagoya Grampus announced his signing. He had a tremendous start to his Japanese career by scoring ten goals in five matches. but in June 2020, he could not resist the pull of a third spell at Corinthians.

(1) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J%C3%B4>



## Victor Anichebe



**Anichebe just after signing for Beijing Enterprises. Image: Daily Mail online**

Anichebe made his first-team debut for the Toffees on 27 February 2006 as a substitute in the 89th minute of Everton's FA Cup fourth-round tie against Chelsea. On 7 May 2006, he scored his first Premier League goal against WBA.

He scored his first brace in the Premier League during the 2006/07 campaign in a 3-0 win against Newcastle on 30 December 2006. Anichebe scored four times, in the Europa league against Metalist Kharkiv, AE Larissa, FC Nurnberg and Brann Bergen. At the end of the season, he was voted by Everton fans as their Young Player of the Season.

On 22 February 2009, in a match against Newcastle United, a tackle from Kevin Nolan left Anichebe unable to play for 11 months. However, he returned to first-team action in January 2010 in a 2-0 victory over Sunderland. His first goal on re-joining the squad came two months later in a 2-2 draw with Birmingham City.

In September, a groin injury on international duty with Nigeria kept him out for the rest of 2011, before returning as a second-half substitute on 1 January 2012 against West Bromwich Albion, scoring in the 87th minute to give Everton a 1-0 away win. Following another injury lay-off, he returned by coming off the bench to score the equaliser in a 1-1 draw with Aston Villa on 14 January, then scored his third goal as a substitute in a 1-1 draw with Wigan on 4 February – making him Everton's most used substitute in the club's history, breaking Duncan Ferguson's previous record of eighty-two.

In the 2012/13 season, Victor scored the opening goal in a 3-0 win over Swansea with a left-footed effort from close in. He then missed several games due to a hamstring injury but returned to score a header to level the match at 1-1 against West Ham in December. Everton went on to win 2-1. Victor scored the winner against Newcastle United on 2 January 2013.

In February, Anichebe scored his first goal in the FA Cup against Oldham in a 2-2 draw, and he was used as Everton's central striker due to his impressive displays and the drop in the form of Jelavić. Victor finished with eight goals from 32 matches; the most in a single season in his career.

After 131 appearances in a blue shirt, many as a substitute and scoring 18 goals, Anichebe transferred to West Bromwich Albion in September 2013 in a deal that allowed for rise to £6 million, making 55 appearances for the Albion scoring six goals.

Victor returned to play under manager David Moyes, where he managed only three goals in his short 18-game Sunderland career.

On 23 June 2017, Anichebe joined the Chinese club Beijing Enterprises after Sunderland released him.

"We are delighted with the signing of Victor, who played in the Premier League," club manager Gao Hongbo announced at a press conference. "It is a positive development for our whole club. However, Victor has not trained on the pitch since the Premier League season ended, so it may take a while for him to integrate into our team. Therefore, we have to be patient". (1)

Victor could not settle in China for many reasons and was in serious dispute with his club for a while (2), but he scored twice during his short spell in China in eleven games.



**Victor scoring in Europe.** (Image: Vladimir Pesnya/Epsilon/Getty Images)

- (1) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/40392771>
- (2) <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-6225087/Victor-Anichebe-accuses-club-match-fixing-FIFA.html>

Jelavić, Jô and Anichebe had relatively short stays in China and their experience there reflected something that many professionals will recognise. Opportunities to play first team football come from many different sources and the desire to play leads to them to ply their trade all around the world. The focus of the next article is on a player who began his professional career at Everton, but who has most definitely found his home in Chinese football.

## Everton – The Chinese Links: Part 10

### The Player Formerly Known as Tyias Browning: Jiang Guangtai

One of the most intriguing Everton links to China involves a Liverpool-born player who struggled to break into the Everton first-team despite a strong performance in the youth set-up. His story is of particular contrast with the recent players who have moved from Everton to China because he is of Chinese heritage and has gone on to become a full international in China.

Tyias is an English-born, Chinese professional footballer who plays as a defender for the Chinese Super League club Shanghai Port. His early years in football demonstrated steady progression through the youth set up at Everton. (1)

Born in Liverpool, the youngster joined Everton Academy in 2004 at just ten years of age. He appeared for Everton's under-18s during the 2009-10 season and was also a part of Everton's 2010 FA Youth Cup squad.

England under-17s selected Tyias for the annual Nordic Tournament, alongside Everton Academy teammate John Lundstram. Tyias signed a two-year professional contract in May 2011. In June 2011, he helped Everton to the under-18s national title.

He got a run-out against Bulgarian Champions Ludogorets Razgrad in the 2012 preseason. After that, Tyias progressed to the reserve team, where he became a regular. Tyias also won the Premier League title for the under-18 side in the 2010/11 season, becoming reserve team captain soon after at the end of the 2013/14 season. He also won the under-21 Player of the Season.

On 30 December 2012, Tyias made the first team in the last game of the year as an unused sub as Everton lost 2-1 to Chelsea.



**Tyias at Everton under 23s.** [Tyias Browning - Shanghai SIPG | Player Profile | Sky Sports Football](#)

Browning also received the captain's armband for the club's reserves and, at the end of the 2013/14 season, won the Under-21s Player of the Season.

His first-team debut came as a sub in the Anfield derby in September 2014, coming on as a substitute with his team trailing 1-0 to Liverpool. The game ended 1-1. Browning appeared as a substitute in the next league match against Man Utd, which Everton lost 2-1.

Tyias made his full debut on 11 December 2014, in a 1-0 loss in the Europa League against Russian opposition – Krasnodar – and, at the end of the 2014-15 season, had made three appearances in all competitions. Browning made his first appearance the following season, coming on as a late substitute to replace Brendan Galloway in a 3-0 win over Southampton in August 2015.

He made a handful of first-team appearances that season before his contribution ended abruptly due to a knee injury.

After getting back to full fitness in the under-23s, he was then loaned out to Sunderland for the rest of the 2016/17 season.



**Tyias v Liverpool u23s Image: Liverpool FC via Getty Images**

Browning's next move was a loan to Preston North End, where he made eight appearances before returning to Goodison. Next up was a season-long loan back at Sunderland in 2017/18, where he made 29 appearances in all competitions.



**Tyias in action in the Chinese Premier League. Image: Getty**

Tyias' grandfather is Chinese, and on 20 February 2019, Browning transferred to the Chinese Super League club Guangzhou Evergrande for an undisclosed fee. In March that year, Tyias made his debut in a 2-0 home win in the 2019 AFC Champions League against Japanese side Sanfrecce Hiroshima.



**Tyias training with Guangzhou Evergrande. Image:**

<https://twitter.com/BallStreet/status/1176499793876701184>

Tyias played regularly in the first team after citizenship issues and international clearance had limited his club career at Guangzhou to 25 appearances.

The following is from an interview in the Daily Mirror by David Maddock, the Mirror's Northern football correspondent, in June 2019. The article gives an interesting insight into Browning's challenges in China and his reaction to coming up against familiar faces:

In one game, Tyias said of his new career:

*"It felt like playing Stoke all over again," he said, with a smile, of facing old Everton teammate Marouane Fellaini and former Southampton striker Graziano Pelle in the last sixteen of the Asian Champions League. "I think we play better football than them." (2)*



**Guangzhou Evergrande's Champions League tie against Shandong Luneng reunited former Evertonians Browning, right, and Fellaini (Image: STR/AFP/Getty)**

In terms of international representation, in addition to playing for England at under-17, under-19 and under-21, and, following his successful application for Chinese citizenship he received his first call-up to the Chinese national team in 2020.

In the light of the new restrictions for foreign players, Tyias became a naturalised citizen in 2019 taking the name Jiang Guangtai. He had to wait until 30 May 2021 for his international debut for China in their World Cup qualifying match against Guam, a game which China won 7-0. Since then, Browning has played in the defeats of Australia and Japan. At the time of writing this article, Tyias had been called up to the squad on 16 occasions and he has started in the first eleven 14 times. He has been an unused substitute on two occasions for the Chinese national side. (3) He has, therefore, experienced several wins when wearing the national colours.

His career has gone from strength to strength in China winning the Chinese Super league title with Gunagzhou Evergrande in 2019 and more recently in 2023 with Shanghai who he joined in 2022. As the David Maddock article reveals, (4) he has shown tremendous commitment to his new career in China and has reaped the rewards for his efforts.

- (1) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tyias\\_Browning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tyias_Browning)
- (2) David Maddock: [Everton old boy Tyias Browning on why new life in China is like facing STOKE - Mirror Online](#)
- (3) [https://www.transfermarkt.co.uk/tyias-browning/nationalmannschaft/spieler/156934/verein\\_id/5598](https://www.transfermarkt.co.uk/tyias-browning/nationalmannschaft/spieler/156934/verein_id/5598)
- (4) David Maddock: *ibid*

It is fascinating to see how Tyias' dream of being a professional footballer came to full fruition in China rather than in England. His story is something of an exception. The focus of the next section of this article is how Everton were again involved in helping Chinese footballers live out their dream of trying to earn a professional contract at Everton.

## **Everton – The Chinese Links: Part 11: From 2010 to the present day**

The most recent section in this look at the links between Everton FC and China focussed on the interesting story of a Liverpool-born player Tyias Browning who, having been unable to make himself a permanent member of the first team at Everton, moved to China, gained Chinese citizenship, and eventually represented the China national side. This part of the article demonstrates how the dream of playing professional football was once again used as a way of supporting links between the club and China.

### **Chinese Football Dream**

In 2008, a TV reality programme called *The Soccer Prince* had raised the profile of Everton in China when up to 130 million regular viewers tuned in to watch the progress of young hopefuls compete with each other to achieve the dream of earning a trial with the club. In August 2013, the *Chinese Football Dream* reality TV show came to Finch Farm with Graeme Sharp supporting the show and filmed young players at Everton's training complex. 1.8m viewed the trailer for 'Chinese Football Dream'.



**A group of Chinese teenagers are training at Finch Farm this week as part of a reality TV show; Graeme Sharp keeps an eye on the young players. Photo by Gavin Trafford.**

Backed by the Chinese government, Global Media Productions produced a thirteen-week show designed to help develop 14- to 17-year-olds. In addition, Everton and Ajax hosted week-long training camps for the 34 youngsters selected from hundreds of players across six major Chinese cities.

The Blues worked alongside the organisers from day one, with Marouane Fellaini helping to launch officially the 'sports entertainment show' in Beijing. Phil Kirkbride in the *Liverpool Echo* (1) went into detail about the programme:

*Ambassador Graeme Sharp went to the Chinese capital Beijing and Ray Hall, the Academy Director and former title winner Ian Snodin now an ambassador, to help publicise the programme. Graeme said that with the suitable structures in place, China could become a marketplace for the club to search for players in the future, "You would like to think that with the size of the population, there are players out there," he said.*

*"When we went there in the summer, we talked to them about Li Tie and Li Weifeng. Li Tie was doing well before an injury struck.*

*"But they have some problems with the structure of Football over there. Didier Drogba and Nicolas Anelka have recently gone to play in China, which has not worked out for them.*

*"But lower down is where they need to get the structure right. There are enough kids who want to play Football, so the talent would be nurtured to get them into a proper structure.*

*"Academies have started to be set up, so that is a start. With that, hopefully, these players can come to the forefront. years ago, they had a strong national team, but other countries have overtaken them in Asia."*

*He added: "When we were over there in the summer, they talked about certain Everton players. Fellaini stood out, and they also would mention John Heitinga and Kevin Mirallas. "They watch a lot of English football, so they are well aware of the top teams and their players."*

*The players selected for 'Chinese Football Dream' come from various social and economic backgrounds. "Some of these kids have never been out of their city, never mind being on an aeroplane before, so this is a fantastic opportunity," Sharp said. "The most important thing is that they come to enjoy the experience. They were at the Real Betis game on Sunday and used to how a topflight English football team works.*



*“Now they are at Finch Farm and experiencing the fantastic facilities. Nevertheless, they are experiencing what it is like as a professional footballer. “You can see that some of them have not had that academy coaching path, but they are a disciplined bunch, and you can see that they want to improve.” Robbie Anderson led the training sessions. He was impressed with the Chinese teenagers. Their behaviour on and off the pitch has been exemplary. They are enjoying their experience,” he said.*

*“Wherever I go around the world, if grassroots are organised, the rest takes care of itself. Moreover, with a big population, I am sure there are players. There is a diamond everywhere. They are passionate about football. The enthusiasm is there, and the kids who want to play football are there. It is just about finding them and nurturing them.”*

(1) <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/sport/football/football-news/everton-fc-host-chinese-teenagers-5712118#>

## Everton – The Chinese Links: Part 12: From 2010 to the present day continued.

### Everton's Business Firsts and Social Media Links

In July 2017, reports appeared in the *Liverpool Echo* and the *Daily Mirror*, about how Everton were breaking new ground by agreeing the first deal was between an English Premier League club and China's largest commercial bank. (1)

According to those reports, Everton FC agreed a funding deal worth £60 million (77.5 million US dollars) with Industrial and Commercial Bank of China Ltd (ICBC). The three-year deal was to support Everton in managing its working capital requirements throughout the season and enable it to borrow more funds at a significantly reduced cost.

As the *Mirror* article put it:

*Sasha Ryazantsev, director at Everton, said: "We are pleased to have entered into a partnership with ICBC, which will increase our financial flexibility, reduce refinancing risk, and lower funding costs while adding to the list of Everton's 'firsts'.*

*"The new relationship with ICBC also represents a significant step for us into the Chinese capital market, and we hope to develop further commercial opportunities in China in the future.*

*"Building on the significant shareholder contribution the club has received over the last year, Everton is now well-funded with sustainable long-term capital."*

*Han Ruixiang, general manager of ICBC in London, said: "This transaction is another important milestone for ICBC in London, highlighting our ability to build strong relationships and underlining the growing credibility of Chinese banks.*

*"With the London Branch continuing to grow since its establishment, we intend to continue building on this momentum and establish ourselves as a credible and capable banking partner."*

*ICBC's relationship manager in London, Jonathan Durnall, said:" There are several reasons we are delighted to reach this agreement with Everton. Not only is it our first partnership with a UK football club, but it is exciting for us to partner with such an ambitious club.*

The deal needed the approval of the Premier League before signing off by Everton FC and ICBC and the report states this approval was granted in June 2017.

In 2018, in order to improve its social media links with China, Everton went into partnership with Thread Sports of Liverpool, whose Managing Director is Yolanda Zhao. When Yolanda graduated from the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN) in 2016 with a BA in Sports Journalism, Yolanda and Everton’s representatives met at the Leaders in Sport conference in London, where they started speaking about the Chinese market and how they would like the club to do more to break into it. The *Liverpool Echo* (2) picked up the story:



**Yolanda Zhao founded Thread Sports in 2018**

*“Everton spoke on their willingness to put effort into improving their visibility on social media, and it was something that they felt I could help with. The club had a Weibo account, but it had not been updated for about two years, so there was quite a bit of work to do to try and get the profile built up again.”*

*Social media is a hugely valuable tool in cracking the Chinese marketplace. Football clubs cannot simply run a Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram account and expect their appeal to grow.*

*The Chinese social media landscape is different. Platforms such as WeChat, Sina Weibo, Douyin, and the news and information portal, Toutiao, are huge parts of people’s everyday lives in the East Asian nation. Because China has its own social media channels, it needed someone who knew the marketplace and could offer some insight. We started working together in 2018, and we’ve increased what we do on Weibo (where Everton has 300,000 fans), and we’ve made sure we started a presence on WeChat, Douyin, and Toutiao.”*

- (1) <https://www.mirror.co.uk/sport/football/news/everton-sign-finance-deal-worlds-10745346>
- (2) <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/sport/football/football-news/social-media-guru-beat-depression-19338330>

## Acknowledgements

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- Rob Sawyer (Everton FC Heritage Society)
- Mike Royden (Everton FC Heritage Society)
- Bren Connolly (Everton FC Heritage Society)
- Fran Hickey (Everton FC Heritage Society)
- Yolanda Zhao (Thread Sports)

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