

# Can Lin have Yao-like following?

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**By Angel Verdejo**

It was a brief exchange, but it turned into a moment of pride for Gordon Quan.

Quan was born in China and served on Houston's city council when Yao Ming joined the Rockets in 2002. He regularly passed an African-American man selling newspapers on a street corner.

"He never talked with me; he had a sour look on his face," Quan said of the newspaper man. "And one day, I came by that intersection and he said something to me. He said, 'Your boy's got game.'

"Suddenly we had a connection. We had a player that he could relate to and relate to me. So I started buying newspapers from him every day after that."

Now, roughly a year after Yao retired after battling injuries, the Rockets are bringing in Jeremy Lin.

The 23-year-old point guard of Taiwanese descent took the NBA by storm in February, coming off the bench to boost the New York Knicks.

During a magical stretch, "Linsanity" was born as the Harvard graduate produced one picture-perfect moment after another.

A knee injury ended Lin's season in March, but the 6-3 sensation did enough to show the Rockets he deserved a second chance.

The team invited Lin to its preseason camp in December, releasing him on Christmas Eve. The Knicks claimed Lin three days later.

That began a journey that saw Lin go from nearly getting cut from a third NBA team to signing a three-year, \$25.1 million offer sheet with the Rockets.

"It's good for business; it's good for the Asian people," said Richard Jue, co-owner of China Garden Restaurant, which is one block from the Toyota Center. "The Chinese already had a good fanfare with Yao Ming. People used to come from all over to see Yao."

It's that wave of excitement that people predict will return and are excited to see.

"I want to see him play, and I hope he produces for the Rockets," said 14-year-old James Yang, a point guard for the AAU team Basketball University and rising freshman at The Woodlands. "A

lot of people, since I'm Asian, they underestimate how I can play. I guess Jeremy Lin felt the same way."

Lin may draw the same fans as Yao, but their stories are different.

Yao was born in China and starred there before ever suiting up for the Rockets. Lin was raised in Palo Alto, Calif.

At 22, Yao was an NBA All-Star. Lin was simply trying to make it.

"His story is a very inspirational story," Quan said of Lin. "I think it's a story that a lot of people in our Asian community can relate to."

There will be skeptics, which Charles Foster said he was at the beginning of Lin's rise. A friend of Yao, Foster is the board chairman of the Asia Society Texas Chapter

The Houston immigration lawyer then started seeing Lin covered by the international media outlets.

"It won't be quite the same, but as a matter of pride and having developed that audience that followed the Houston Rockets because of Yao, Jeremy Lin will be the next best thing," Foster said.

<http://blog.chron.com/ultimaterockets/2012/07/asian-community-responds-to-lin-signing/>