

Kim Ha-seong Offensive Evaluation

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Introduction

Kim Ha-seong		
SS/3B	Bats: R	Throws: R
5'10, 172 lbs	10/17/1995	Age: 25

Kim Ha-seong is expected to be the only KBO hitter posted after the 2020 season and represents an intriguing opportunity. At just 25 years old, Kim is one of the best hitters in the KBO and plays both SS and 3B, making his posting a rare opportunity for an MLB club to add a good, young hitter through free agency. After being drafted at 18 years old, Kim has steadily improved during his time with the Kiwoom Heroes, with his plate discipline and power numbers steadily climbing. He has also proven to be an above-average runner on the base paths and makes smart decisions as a runner.

Kim is a patient hitter and displayed excellent bat-to-ball skills with an SwStr% that was better than the KBO average. While he's not an extreme pull hitter, most of his batted balls are to the pull side or up the middle. Most of his HRs went to the pull side this season, but he sprayed the ball to all parts of the outfield. Kim doesn't have the kind of overpowering pop that some hitters display, even in the KBO with hitters like Mel Rojas Jr. and former Minnesota Twin Park Byung-ho in lineups, but he's very consistent in terms of approach and hitting the ball well. His swing catches the ball out in front of the plate, giving him that consistent lift and power to the pull side, recording an Exit Velocity of 105 mph on a HR during the season at a 22.8 degree launch angle.

Kim's swing looks easy at the plate and he does show the ability to adjust to pitches down in the zone or diving away as they approach the plate. He does feature a leg kick as he loads for his swing, but it is not a ridiculously large leg kick like some KBO hitters are so fond of. That may be something that may need to be shortened/altered to get his foot down earlier if he's struggling with MLB velocity.

Given Kim's ability to play both SS and 3B at a respectable level, his floor should be carving out a role as a 400 PA infielder who hits for some power and plays all around the infield (he played some 2B back in 2014 as a rookie). The main concern surrounding Kim is whether he can handle MLB velocity. With his plate discipline and consistent approach at the plate, I think he can be an everyday infielder and an above-average hitter, along the lines of a 115-120 wRC+ hitter in MLB.

Stats & Graphics

Table 2: Stats from FanGraphs

Season	PA	BB%	K%	BB/K	AVG	OBP	SLG	OPS	ISO	BABIP	wOBA	wRC+
2014	59	13.6%	22.0%	0.62	0.188	0.298	0.396	0.694	0.208	0.206	0.310	66
2015	582	9.6%	19.8%	0.49	0.290	0.362	0.489	0.851	0.200	0.337	0.374	113
2016	599	10.0%	13.4%	0.75	0.281	0.358	0.477	0.836	0.196	0.297	0.370	105
2017	601	9.7%	10.8%	0.89	0.302	0.376	0.513	0.889	0.211	0.306	0.386	123
2018	576	9.4%	14.1%	0.67	0.288	0.358	0.474	0.832	0.186	0.306	0.361	106
2019	625	11.2%	12.8%	0.88	0.307	0.389	0.491	0.880	0.183	0.328	0.399	142
2020	622	12.1%	10.9%	1.1	0.306	0.397	0.523	0.921	0.218	0.304	0.411	141

Table 3: Kim Ha-seong Charted Stats

Hitter	Pitches	wOBA	xwOBA	xwOBACON	SwStr%	CS%	Swing%	Contact%
Kim	510	0.473	0.40	0.388	6.3	16.9	43.5	85.6
KBO	28058	0.338	0.34	0.363	10.3	17.2	47.0	78.0

Table 4: Kim Ha-seong Batted Ball Profile

Hitter	BBEs	GB%	FB%	LD%	PU%	Soft%	Medium%	Hard%	Pull%	Straight%	Oppo%
Kim	120	39.2	38.3	12.5	10.0	25.8	38.3	35.8	40.0	43.3	16.7
KBO		51.2	26.4	13.7	8.7	30.3	40.6	29.0	34.3	42.7	23.1

Table 5: Kim Ha-seong Stats by Pitch Type

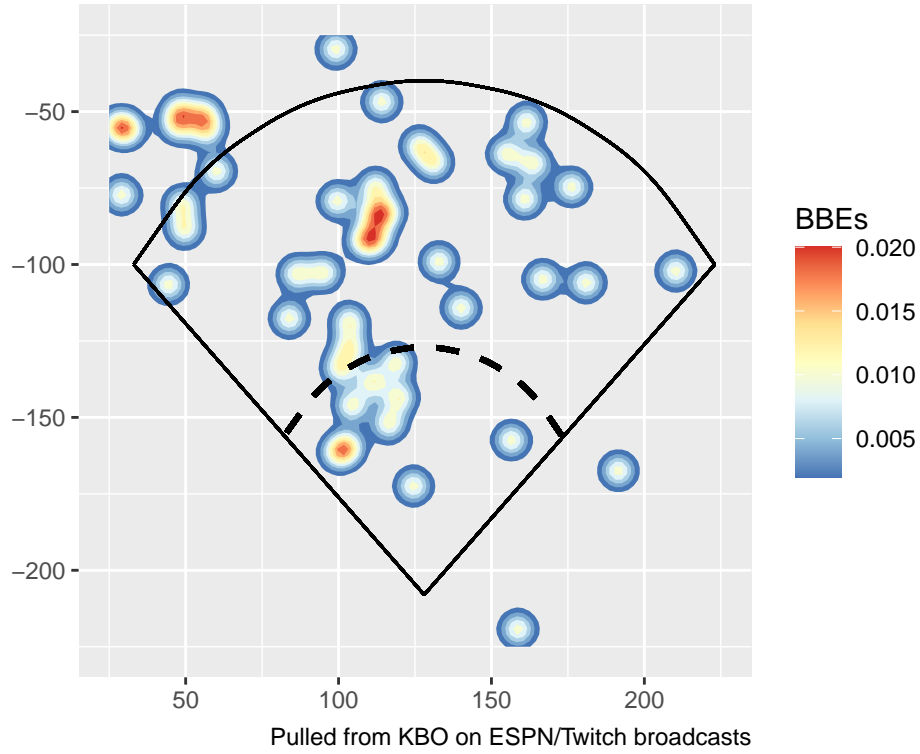
Pitch Type	Pitches	wOBA	xwOBA	xwOBACON	SwStr%	CS%	Swing%	Contact%
Fastball	295	0.494	0.438	0.426	4.7	19.3	41.7	88.6
Breaking	157	0.428	0.383	0.383	10.2	15.3	43.9	76.8
Offspeed	58	0.482	0.292	0.269	3.4	8.6	51.7	93.3

Table 6: Kim Ha-seong Batted Ball Profile by Pitch Type

Pitch	BBEs	GB%	FB%	LD%	PU%	Soft%	Med%	Hard%	Pull%	Strht%	Oppo%
Fastball	65	30.8	41.5	13.8	13.8	23.1	30.8	46.2	27.7	52.3	20.0
Breaking	35	42.9	31.4	17.1	8.6	25.7	45.7	28.6	62.9	20.0	17.1
Offspeed	20	60.0	40.0	0.0	0.0	35.0	50.0	15.0	40.0	55.0	5.0

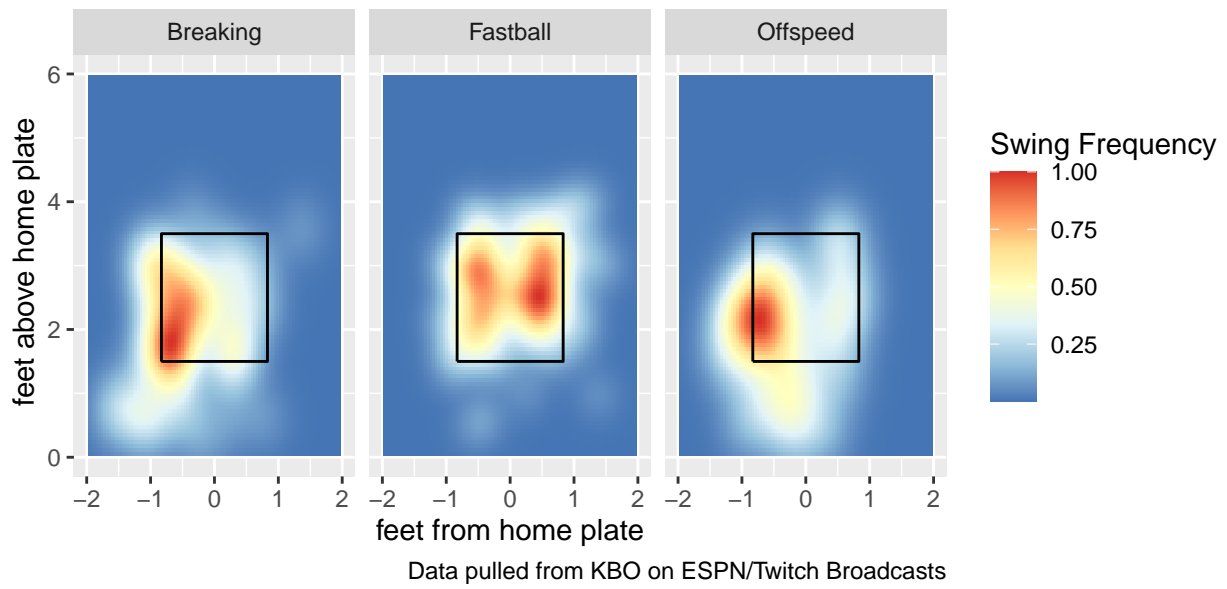
Batted Ball Data for Kim Ha-seong

Data for charted BBEs from ~ 9/03 to Present



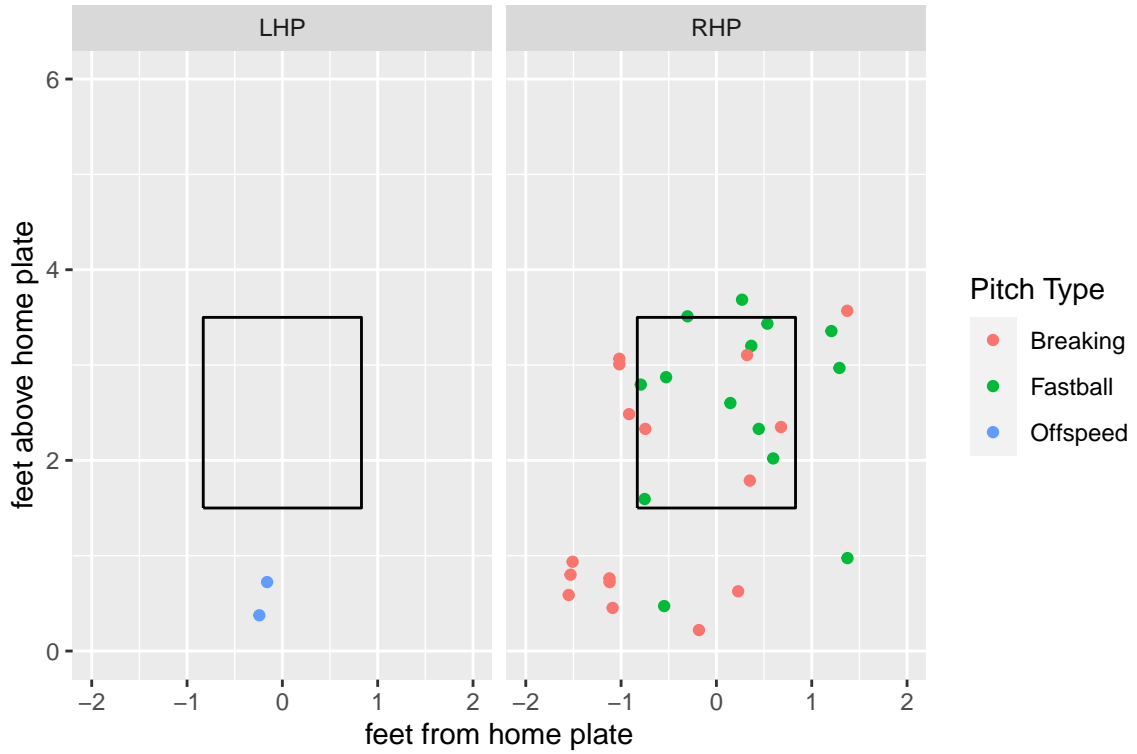
Kim Ha-seong Swing Profile

Pitcher Perspective

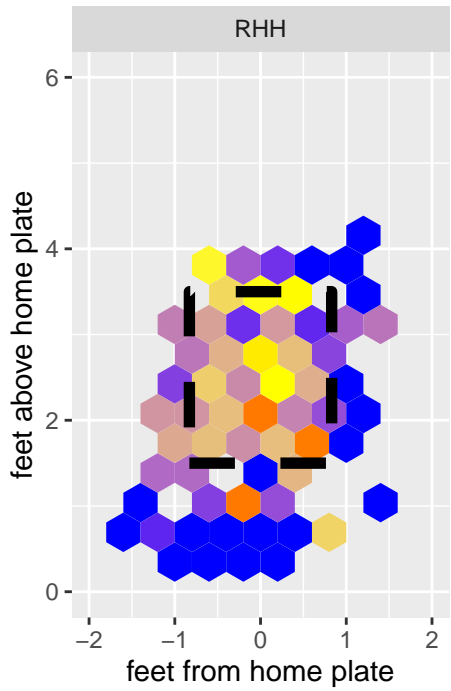


Swinging Strikes

Pitcher Perspective

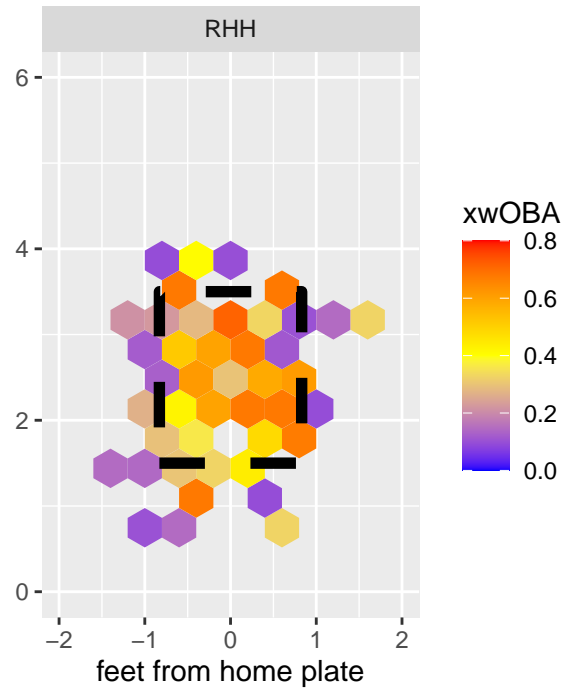


xwOBA on Swings



Includes BIP, Whiffs, foul balls

xwOBA on Balls in Play



LHP and RHP combined to account for lack of LHP

Breakdown

Kim Ha-seong is a 25-year-old infielder (primarily at SS and 3B) who has played for the Heroes (first the Nexen Heroes then the Kiwoom Heroes as ownership changed hands) his entire KBO career. He was drafted out of high school at 18 years old in 2014 and started playing in the KBO that same season, appearing in 60 games and registering 59 plate appearances primarily as a pinch-hitter. Since that season, Kim has been a fixture in the Heroes lineup, averaging 138.5 games played over the last 6 seasons and about 600 plate appearances a season.

Throughout his career, Kim has steadily improved as a hitter. One thing of note is that, before the 2020 season, Kim's career-high power numbers (his 0.513 SLG, 0.889 OPS) and the previous high BB/K of 0.89 were influenced by changes the KBO was making to their juiced baseballs, as well as adjusting the length of the strike zone. Even without taking that context into account, the 2020 season was Kim Ha-seong's best season yet in the KBO.

He posted the highest wOBA of his career in 2020, at 0.411, ranking 10th in the KBO and posting a wRC+ of 141, also 10th. He continued to improve his plate discipline, posting a 12.1% BB% and 10.9% K%, giving him a 1.10 BB/K, which is also the 10th highest mark in the KBO and the 3rd highest among the top 10 KBO hitters in wOBA. The improved walk rate and strikeout rates are the only substantial change in Kim's profile from 2019 to 2020. His SLG and wOBA indicate an uptick in power, but 36% of Kim's 166 hits in 2019 went for extra-bases (38 doubles, 2 triples, and 19 HRs) while 34% of his 163 hits in 2020 went for extra-bases (24 doubles, 1 triple, and 30 HR).

I'm guessing that Kim's true "power" for the KBO lies somewhere between those two numbers (closer to 2020 though) and the variation between the two seasons comes more random variance that impacts his batted ball luck. Kim's 2019 BABIP of 0.328 was significantly higher than his 0.304 BABIP in 2020 or his 0.306 BABIP in both 2017 and 2018, indicating that luck may have played a part in his 2019 doubles numbers.

However, Kim Ha-seong's batted ball numbers that were charted for parts of the 2020 season are interesting. His GB% of 39.2% is lower than the KBO average (7th lowest in the KBO) and his FB% of 38.3% was far above average (and 4th in the KBO behind Mel Rojas Jr. and just ahead of Yang Eui-ji). His LD% of 12.5% and PU% of 10% were about the KBO average. In terms of contact strength, his hard-hit% of 35.8% is above-average, his medium-hit% of 38.3% is a smidge below-average and his soft contact% of 25.8% is lower than the KBO average of 30.3%.

Most of Kim's HRs came to the pull side, but he did display the ability to hit flyballs to all fields for extra-base hits. Kim does a good job of catching the ball out in front of the plate which has been crucial to his consistent fly-ball power to the pull side. Some of the KBO broadcasts display trackman numbers after a HR and the max exit velocity I saw Kim Ha-seong record was 168.9 km/h, which translates to 105 mph off the bat at 22.8 degrees, launching the ball 123.8 meters (406 feet) off of a 91 mph fastball.

Kim isn't near the top or bottom of the KBO in any of those rankings (he's 15th in hard-hit%, right behind Preston Tucker), and he grades out as the 17th best hitter through my xwOBACON model, with a 0.388 mark. After factoring in strikeouts and walks, Kim's xwOBA of 0.400 ranks 13th in the KBO based on charted batted balls and at-bats.

These numbers and what I've seen from Kim reaffirm that Kim lacks high-end raw power. He's not going to lead baseball in peak Exit Velocity or hit gigantic HRs. But these numbers, notably his consistent XBH% and FB% this season, are signs that he's a very consistent hitter who regularly hits the ball in the air.

Kim covers the entire strike zone fairly well. Most of his power and hard-hit batted balls come off of pitches that are on the inner half of the plate while he usually sends ground balls the other way on pitches away. Kim has one of the lower SwStr%'s in the KBO at 6.3%, coming off of breaking balls down and away as well as some fastballs up in the zone.

Table 7: Kim Ha-seong vs Fastballs (90+ MPH vs sub 90-mph)

Velocity	Pitches	wOBA	xwOBA	xwOBACON	SwStr%	CS%	Swing%	Contact%
92.4	123	0.368	0.401	0.407	4.9	22.8	39.8	87.8
87.0	158	0.552	0.476	0.450	5.1	17.1	43.0	88.2

Table 8: Kim Ha-seong vs Fastballs (90+ MPH vs sub 90-mph)

Velocity	BBEs	GB%	FB%	LD%	PU%	Soft%	Medium%	Hard%	Pull%	Straight%	Oppo%
92.4	25	24.0	44.0	12.0	20.0	24.0	32.0	44.0	20.0	48.0	32.0
87.0	37	32.4	40.5	18.9	8.1	21.6	29.7	48.6	35.1	54.1	10.8

Seeing those fastball swings and misses in the strike zone could be a concerning sign for Kim Ha-seong. After all, if he's struggling against lower velocity on fastballs in the KBO, how's he going to fare against MLB pitchers consistently pumping 96+ mph? However, with the games that have been charted, the numbers don't quite bear that assumption out.

The average velocity on those fastball swings and misses was just 89.2 mph, seeming to indicate that velocity was not necessarily the biggest factor in those whiffs. When you break down Kim Ha-seong's stats against fastballs that were thrown at 90+ mph and under 90 mph, his performance against 90+ mph is worse, but not by enough to be worrisome. His swinging strike rates, at 4.9% against 90+ and 5.1% are nearly identical, but he did swing less frequently against 90+ mph fastballs which leads to a slightly higher called strike rate against 90+ mph, at 22.8% versus 17.1% against sub-90.

In terms of batted balls, his xwOBACON is higher against sub-90 at 0.450 versus 0.407 against 90+ mph. But when you break down his batted ball profile, the FB rates are similar, as are his contact strength rates. The velocity is something that Kim will have to adjust to facing regularly, but the numbers indicate that he has the potential and has shown the ability to hit velocity in the KBO.

Breaking balls are the other main concern for Kim although he has faced more MLB-caliber breaking balls than fastballs given pitchers like Dan Straily, Aaron Brooks, and Chris Flexen all through excellent sliders. But he remains fairly patient against breaking pitches, with a 10.2% SwStr%, his highest on an individual pitch type, but still a tick below the KBO average SwStr% on all pitches. His xwOBACON of 0.383 is still fine against breaking balls, but 42.9% of his 35 batted balls off of breaking balls have been ground balls. Some of that is tricky to evaluate because of the small sample that we have to work with, but it's something worth noting, but I believe that his SwStr%, Swing%, and Contact% are more stable. In an even smaller sample, Kim has fared poorly against offspeed pitches, but it remains hard to judge 58 pitches and 20 batted balls.

Kim Ha-seong has proven himself to be one of the best hitters in the KBO and just turned 25. Given what he has done in the KBO and his age, Kim Ha-seong represents a rare opportunity for an MLB team to add a young, talented player through free agency at a priority defensive position. Questions face Kim as he is posted, but there are questions for every young player. Given his situation in the KBO, Kim proved that 90+ mph velocity was not an automatic problem and continued to hit the ball hard. Kim does a good job of adjusting to the wide variety of release points and angles from KBO pitchers and I think that adaptability will translate to MLB velocity. He has earned the right to play in MLB, and I am excited to see how he performs.

Resources

- Check out Kim Ha-seong's player page on the KBO Wizard
- Kim Ha-seong FanGraphs page
- Kim Ha-seong MyKBO page
- Short video of Kim Ha-seong's mechanics from the side
- Article on the KBO's juiced/de-juiced baseballs
- Article on the expanded strikezone