

# Lee Jung-hoo Offensive Evaluation

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# Introduction

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Lee Jung-hoo		
CF/RF	Bats: L	Throws: R
6'1", 172 lbs	8/20/1998	Age: 22

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At 22 years old, Lee Jung-hoo is already one of the best hitters in the Korean Baseball Organization (KBO) and looks like a potential MLB-caliber player once he's eligible to be posted after the 2023 season. His teammate with the Kiwoom Heroes, Kim Ha-seong, a 25-year-old SS/3B, has been posted this offseason (2020) and is drawing significant MLB interest. By the time Lee is posted, I expect him to be a better hitter than Kim Ha-seong is, and I think that his MLB impact could rival that of Shohei Ohtani's with the Los Angeles Angels (offensively, at least).

Lee Jung-hoo was drafted at 18-years-old by the Kiwoom Heroes, winning Rookie of the Year, and has steadily improved as a hitter throughout his time in the KBO. He displays excellent bat-to-ball skills and plate discipline, with a BB/K ratio above 1.00 and one of the lowest Swinging Strike% (SwStr%) in the KBO. He's incredibly patient at the plate, with one of the lowest Swing% in the KBO, and is comfortable taking until he sees a pitch that he likes. Lee hits the ball to all parts of the field, and his power potential is only growing. In 2020, his HR total spiked, as did his XBH% and overall fly-ball% (FB%). Reportedly, that was a focus of his and Kiwoom's staff after the 2019 season, and he worked on catching the ball out in front of the plate to lift it in the air more. That adjustment worked, and it helps that Lee still has room to fill in his 6'1" frame with some more muscle.

At the plate, Lee Jung-hoo stands with an open stance, holding his bat high over his head. When the pitcher delivers, Lee closes up, coiling his upper body away from the pitcher, producing a smooth and explosive swing. He maintains a high-level of bat control and shows the ability to adjust to a multitude of different pitches and elevations. Unlike his teammate Kim Ha-seong, Lee does not feature a leg kick as his load takes place before the pitch is delivered. A concern for Kim has been adjusting to MLB velocity, with that leg kick partially why; I don't think that the same concerns will exist with Lee.

Lee has also demonstrated the ability to play all three outfield positions, although he only played CF and RF in 2020. He has a strong arm from right field with excellent athleticism that should enable him to remain in center or right (unlike Na Sung-bum, who is best suited for a DH role in MLB). One item of note from the 2020 season: Lee struggled mightily down the stretch. He played his last regular-season game on October 30th, but he hit his last HR on the season on September 3rd (he played close to every day, only missing four games on the season). His BABIP and batting average dropped as well, though his plate discipline numbers remained steady. He fouled a pitch off of his foot in late August and missed about four games (the only ones he missed this season). After returning, he never looked quite right and the timing of his end-of-season slump lined up with that foul.

Kim Ha-seong has been a star for the Kiwoom Heroes and is looking to be one of the youngest KBO players posted and playing in MLB. His teammate, Lee Jung-hoo, looks to follow in those footsteps, and I believe that Lee will be the better prospect once eligible to be posted. He's already one of the best hitters in the KBO, and his ability to hit for power has grown every single year. After three more KBO seasons, Lee may be one of the best MLB prospects in KBO history and from Asia as a whole.

# Stats & Graphics

Table 2: Stats from FanGraphs

Season	PA	BB%	K%	BB/K	AVG	OBP	SLG	OPS	ISO	BABIP	wOBA	wRC+
2017	622	9.6	10.8	0.9	0.324	0.395	0.417	0.812	0.092	0.365	0.369	112
2018	520	8.1	11.2	0.72	0.355	0.412	0.477	0.889	0.122	0.390	0.391	126
2019	630	7.1	6.3	1.13	0.336	0.386	0.456	0.842	0.120	0.352	0.387	134
2020	617	9.6	7.6	1.26	0.333	0.397	0.524	0.921	0.191	0.339	0.407	139

Table 3: Lee Jung-hoo Charted Stats

Hitter	Pitches	wOBA	ExwOBA	ExwOBACON	SwStr%	CS%	Swing%	Contact%
Lee	529	0.487	0.501	0.502	2.3	20.6	39.5	94.3
KBO	29734	0.337	0.338	0.361	10.4	17.2	47.1	77.8

Table 4: Lee Jung-hoo Batted Ball Profile

Hitter	BBEs	GB%	FB%	LD%	PU%	Soft%	Medium%	Hard%	Pull%	Straight%	Oppo%
Lee	130	25.4	32.3	34.6	7.7	13.8	32.3	53.8	30.8	46.2	23.1
KBO		51.2	26.0	14.0	8.7	30.4	40.8	28.7	34.1	42.8	23.1

Table 5: Lee Jung-hoo Stats by Pitch Type

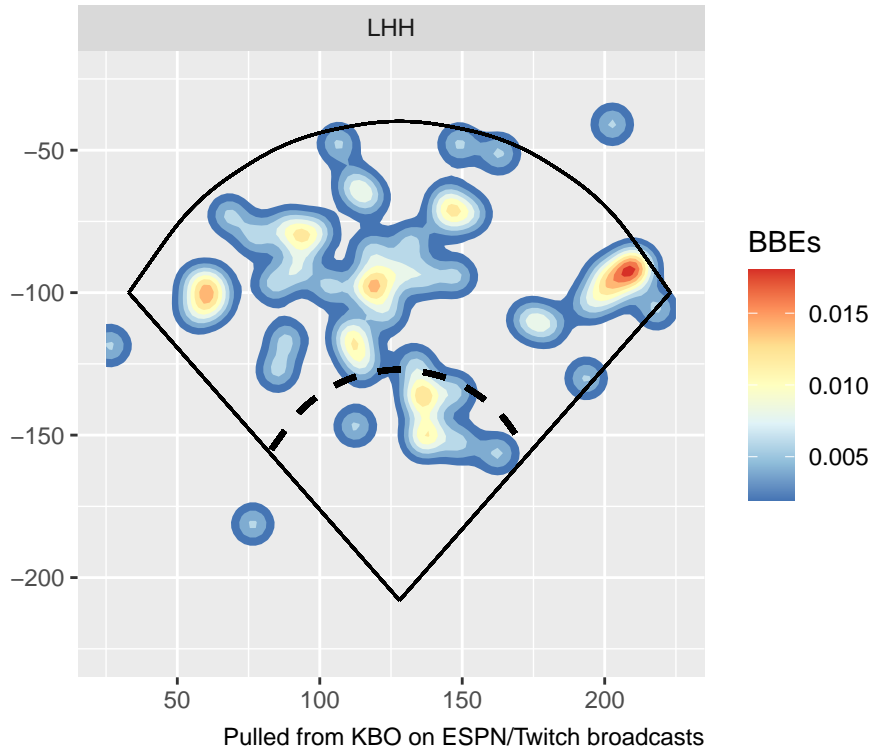
Pitch Type	Pitches	wOBA	ExwOBA	ExwOBACON	SwStr%	CS%	Swing%	Contact%
Fastball	292	0.521	0.487	0.493	1.7	25.0	37.0	95.4
Breaking	120	0.491	0.497	0.475	2.5	17.5	40.0	93.8
Offspeed	117	0.415	0.530	0.543	3.4	12.8	45.3	92.5

Table 6: Lee Jung-hoo Batted Ball Profile by Pitch Type

Pitch	BBEs	GB%	FB%	LD%	PU%	Soft%	Med%	Hard%	Pull%	Strht%	Oppo%
Fastball	70	24.3	31.4	34.3	10.0	12.9	32.9	54.3	30.0	44.3	25.7
Offspeed	34	29.4	26.5	41.2	2.9	14.7	29.4	55.9	35.3	44.1	20.6
Breaking	26	23.1	42.3	26.9	7.7	15.4	34.6	50.0	26.9	53.8	19.2

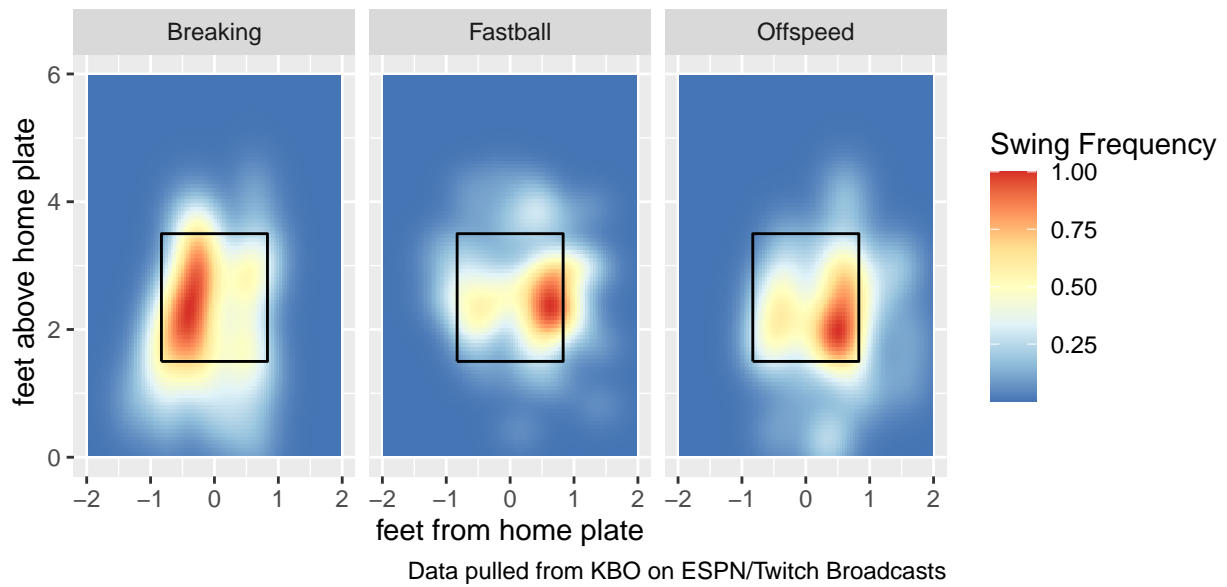
### Batted Ball Data for Lee Jung-hoo

Data for charted BBEs from ~ 9/03 to Present



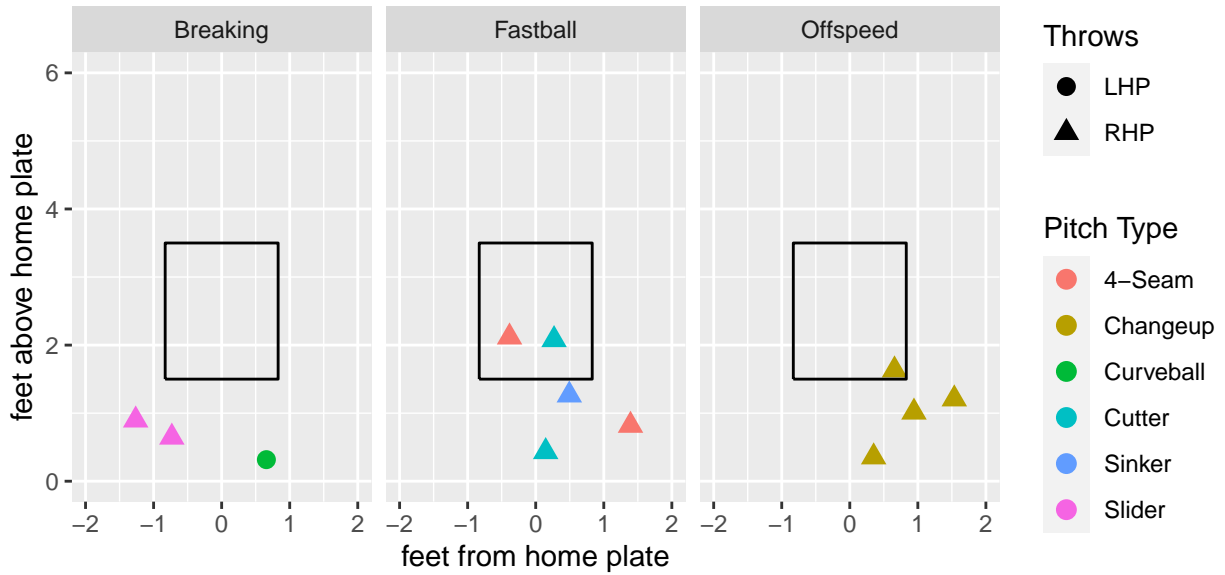
### Lee Jung-hoo Swing Profile

Pitcher Perspective



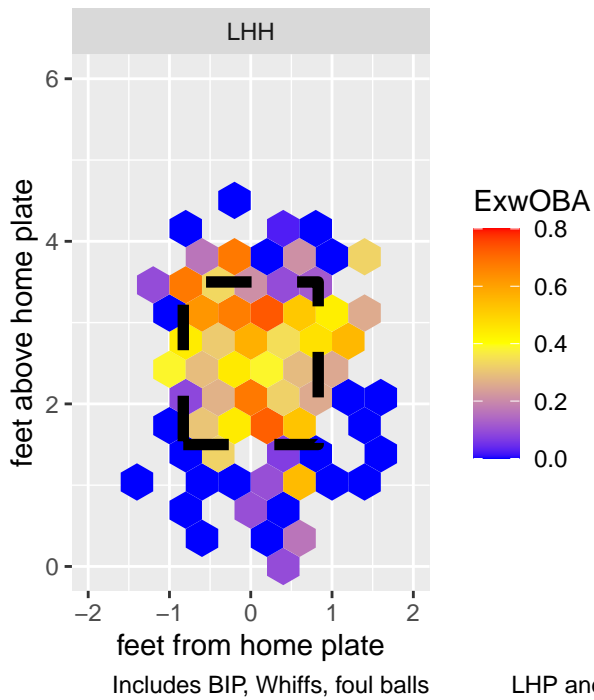
# Lee Jung-hoo Swinging Strikes

Pitcher Perspective



# ExwOBA on Swings

Pitcher Perspective



# ExwOBA on Balls in Play

Pitcher Perspective

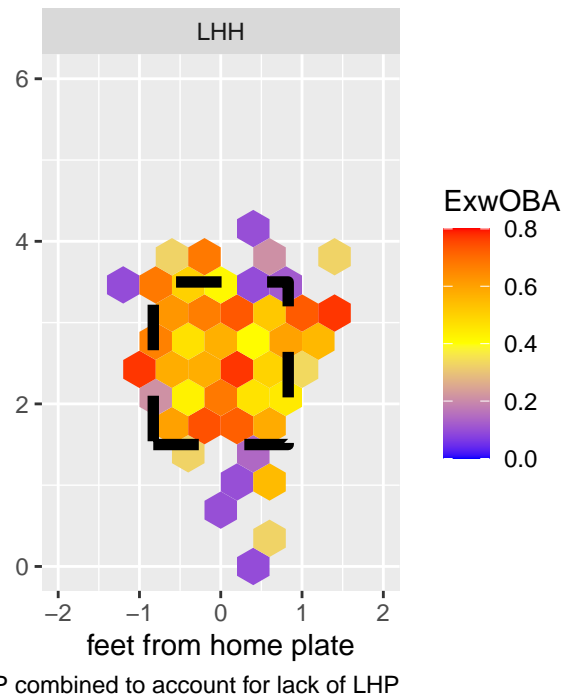


Table 7: Lee Jung-hoo Plate Discipline Stats

Region	Pitches	Swing%	Contact%	KBO Swing%	KBO Contact%
Shadow	224	47.3	98.1	57.0	83.3
Chase	183	20.8	78.9	29.0	54.5
Heart	91	70.3	96.9	72.2	87.4
Waste	30	3.3	100.0	4.4	25.9

Table 8: Lee Jung-hoo Baserunning Stats

Season	Team	G	PA	SB	CS	Spd	wSB
2017	Heroes	144	622	12	4	6.5	1.0
2018	Heroes	109	520	11	4	4.8	0.4
2019	Heroes	140	630	13	7	6.0	-0.6
2020	Heroes	140	617	12	2	5.1	1.4

## Breakdown

Lee Jung-hoo is a 22-year-old outfielder (primarily CF and RF in 2020) for the Kiwoom Heroes in the Korean Baseball Organization (KBO). He was drafted at 18-years-old out of high school in 2017 and will be eligible to be posted following the 2023 season. He made an immediate impact with the Heroes, slashing 0.324/0.395/0.417 with a 112 wRC+ on his way to Rookie of the Year honors. From then on, Lee's power has gone from potential to making a strong impact with a 0.524 SLG and a 0.191 ISO in 2020.

Lee stands above most of the KBO in two respects. First, he's an incredible hitter, hitting 0.333 in 2020 and 0.336 over his career, the third-best mark in the league since 2017 (minimum 1000 PA). That is impressive! Perhaps more impressive is the incredible plate discipline that Lee possesses at just 22-year-old. Lee posted a 1.26 BB/K ratio in 2020, the fourth-highest rate in the KBO. He also posted the second-lowest SwStr% in the KBO in 2020 at 2.3%. His Swing% of 39.5% was the third-lowest, and his first-pitch swing% of 13.6% was the sixth-lowest in the KBO. All this to say: Lee is incredibly patient and knows exactly what he's looking for at the plate.

Lee consistently swung at pitches over the plate; while his swings against fastballs/offspeed pitches are on the outer half of the plate and breaking pitch swings are on the inner half, I believe that's due more to where pitchers chose to locate against him, rather than a conscious choice. When he made contact (which was most swings), Lee destroyed the ball over the plate, even faring well on pitches up and away.

The consistency of Lee's swings over the middle of the plate makes his Expected xwOBA (ExwOBA) on Swings look worse than it is. The smatterings of blue below the zone are so dark because they only happened a few times. Over the 529 pitches that I saw thrown against Lee, he whiffed on 12 of them, mostly on pitches down and away. Maybe you could view that as a 'weak spot', but it's hard for me to do so when we can see that almost all his swings are concentrated in the strike zone. Since he swings at pitches out of the zone rarely, it makes sense that poor outcomes will appear to have a greater weight. The pitch category that he had the highest SwStr% against? Offspeed pitches, with a 3.4% SwStr%. That's not a big, exploitable weakness, especially since he had a 0.530 ExwOBA against offspeed pitches.

Overall, Lee posted the highest ExwOBA and ExwOBACON in the KBO through my models, with a 0.501 and a 0.502 mark. Lee's power went to another level in 2020, building off of the momentum that he created the past few seasons; pair the power growth with his continued plate discipline, and we could be looking at a star. Before the 2020 season, Lee reportedly worked on catching the ball earlier before it crossed the

plate to create more lift and produce more power. That mechanical change paid dividends this season (of course, he's bulked up a little and still has room to grow into his 6'1" frame).

Lee posted career highs in nearly every power category, posting a 0.524 SLG, a 0.191 ISO, a 0.407 wOBA, and a 139 wRC+. He did all of this despite a career-low BABIP of 0.339. According to Statiz, his FO/GO ratio increased from 1.04 in 2019 to 1.55 in 2020. He also posted the highest XBH% (extra-base hit%) of his career, with a 38% mark that is a drastic increase over his 26% XBH% in 2018 and 24% in 2019. He hit 15 HRs (previous high was 6) and 49 2Bs (the most in the KBO; previous high was 34). It was an incredible display of consistent hitting, and I don't think it will stop any time soon.

As noted earlier, Lee's batted ball profile performed the best in my models, leading the KBO with an ExwOBA of 0.501 and an ExwOBACON (Estimated xwOBA on Contact) of 0.502. One of the reasons why is Lee's consistency, part of which I believe comes from his selective approach at the plate. Lee had the second-lowest soft-contact% in the KBO at 13.8% and the highest hard-contact% at 53.8%, beating out Na Sung-bum (51.9%) and Mel Rojas Jr. (48.9%). Now, that power manifests more in line drives for Lee, rather than the titanic home runs that Rojas Jr. and Na tend to hit. Lee's 34.6% LD% was the highest in the KBO (by about six percentage points), and his 32.3% FB%, while still very good, was the 13th-highest mark in the KBO. He also posted the lowest GB% in the KBO at 25.4% (about nine percentage points lower than second), another testament to his consistency.

Unlike some hitters, Lee performed well against every single category of pitch type, maintaining his patient approach and consistent batted ball profile. It's a remarkable achievement and part of the reason that I think he can handle velocity as well as MLB-caliber breaking pitches.

An interesting factor in Lee's batted ball profile is his tendency to hit the ball straight with a 46.2% Straight%. That's great because it means that teams can't really shift against him and take away part of the field, but I have to wonder if that's part of why his doubles total is so high, but his HR total is low, as well as why his FanGraphs wOBA of 0.407 doesn't match his ExwOBA of 0.501 (which is higher than I expect it's true value for the entire season is). Glancing at Lee's spray chart would seem to corroborate that with a few balls that were hit to deep center field. A potential avenue for improvement would be increasing that pull power from Lee to turn doubles into HRs. However, with how hard Lee is hitting the ball at 22-years-old, those power results will come as he ages.

Lee may already be the best pure hitter in the KBO, and it looks like his power is catching up. Combine that with his excellent plate discipline, and Lee could be one of the best prospects out of Asia ever, rivaling Shohei Ohtani and his impact as a hitter. Lee plays strong outfield defense and should be above-average in the field for an MLB club. I expect that Lee Jung-hoo will be a better hitter at 25-years-old than Kim Ha-seong currently is at 25 and that Lee's services will be very much in demand with MLB teams after the 2023 season.

## Resources

- Check out Lee Jung-hoo's player page on the KBO Wizard
- Lee Jung-hoo FanGraphs page
- Lee Jung-hoo MyKBO page