

Wearing the Green and Gold

Perth resident Tando Yuji Velaphi is an Australian football goalkeeper who plays for Perth Glory in the A-League. Born in 1987, Velaphi grew up in Perth and is of Zimbabwean and Japanese heritage.

— **In the 2009-2010 season, you played 25 out of 27 games as a starting member of Perth Glory. How was that experience for you?**

Well, obviously I enjoyed being No.1 jersey. In some games I probably didn't do so well, but in others I was happy with my performance. I think it's important because, of course, if the goalkeeper doesn't do a good job, the team won't win. That's why I always try to do my best. Of course I hope I can play in most games, so I just work hard, train hard. I'm trying to focus on one game at a time.

— **Are you happy with the season's result?**

Yes, I was kind of up and down, but at the end of that I was quite a bit better as a player. I'm 23 years old, so I'm still a young goalkeeper. I've had a year to get some more experience, and now I think I'm a bit stronger as well.

— **How did you feel when you represented Australia at the 2008 Beijing Olympics?**

It was a fantastic experience. Even though I didn't have a chance to play, it was great to be a part of the Olympics. You know, when you're a kid, no matter what sport you're playing, you think "Oh, the Olympics!" when you watch them on TV. So, being a part of the Olympics was just amazing.

— **After the Beijing Olympics you grabbed the No.1 jersey in Perth Glory. How did you feel at that time?**

I wasn't a player in the first game in the 2008-2009 season, which was a bit frustrating. I'd had a great experience in Beijing, and I really wanted to play. But we had very experienced players. I was stuck on the bench, and the team wasn't doing so well. When I got the opportunity to play, we won the game, which was lucky for me. I tried to keep my position, and thanks to the coaching staff, they kept me in. I really enjoyed it. The team started to do better as well, both in that and in the following season, which was fantastic.

— **You wear the Green and Gold uniform and have an Australian passport. You have a tri-cultural background; your father is Zimbabwean, your mother is Japanese, and you grew up in Australia. How do you feel about your identity? Do you feel your heritage gives you any advantages?**

Australia is a very multicultural country. There are a lot of African and Japanese people in Perth. So I fit in pretty well. Obviously I got my physical attributes from my parents. I'm quite quick. I think it comes from my genetics. My style is little bit different to Australian players. Usually Australian goalkeepers are taller, and bigger. Hopefully I can use my advantages. I love that I was born Australian. All my mates are here and they play for Australia. At the moment, I'm happy to play for Australia.

— **Did you feel like you suffered any disadvantages? For example, when you were a kid, at school?**

Not really. I think I was growing up in very normal communities. So I found it was all right. It helps when you're born here, and speaking two languages made things a bit easier. When I was growing up, I didn't have too many problems. Maybe I was lucky, maybe other kids do. But I think Australia is changing; the culture is more multicultural these days, so everyone is accepted for who they are.

— **In your house, does your mother talk to you in English or Japanese?**

A little bit of both. When I was young, I went to a Japanese school in Perth for few years, in Scarborough. My mum tried to speak Japanese at home, and I would answer any questions, which is why I can understand Japanese, so speaking is OK. About writing, I can write Hiragana, and bit of Katakana, but not so much Kanji.

— **How often do you visit Japan? What are your favourite things in Japan?**

I have been there five or six times. I went to Japan last April 2010, by myself, without my parents. It was just a holiday. I went to Europe, and then I went to Japan on the way back. It was a good trip. I spent two and half weeks in Japan. I was in Urawa city in Saitama prefecture. And I visited Sendai city for five days, which was mum's hometown, so that's where my uncle lives. We had a great time. About my favourite things... I like shopping! Clothes and food, they are a very good price and quality. I got these nice sneakers which I have on. Food as well, I love Japanese food.

— **What about your father's country? How often do you visit Zimbabwe?**

I have been to Africa once, when I was seven years old. I really would like to go back again, but it's just a tough order. And Zimbabwe has ongoing problems, which makes it difficult too - problems related to political, economic and public health matters. It takes time, and a lot of organizing to visit Zimbabwe. So, for me it's much easier to go to Japan. But I would like to go to Zimbabwe, and I probably will in the next off-season.

— **You played in the Perth Soccer Club. What did inspire you to start playing football?**

When I was a kid, actually I played every sport, not only football, but also tennis, baseball, basketball, cricket, golf and Footy. As a kid I loved sport, I always wanted to be a sportsperson, whatever it was. Football was just one of the possibilities. I started to play Footy and football as a

goalkeeper at the same time. When I was fourteen years old, I used to play Footy on Saturday, and play football on Sunday. But one time both games were on a Sunday, so I had to choose one. My dad was an administrator in football, so I had some motivation to choose football. That's when I started to play football seriously. I joined Perth Youth Soccer Club as a junior after I passed the trials. When I was seventeen years old, I went to the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra. I did my best there, and I came back to Perth at nineteen years old. Being at the Institute was a great experience.

— **What do you usually do on your day off?**

Usually I play golf with my friends. We try to get out once a week. Also I love playing games on my Playstation! And I love reading books and listening to music too. Because our team travels a lot by plane, reading and listening to music is always good to fill up the time.

— **If you had a different career, something other than being a football player, what would you want to be?**

I don't think it would really happen, but I would be a famous rock star or musician! In reality, I studied physiotherapy for a year at university, so I'd probably become a physiotherapist. Keeping up with my study while playing football was difficult, so I had to defer my study.

— **In closing, please tell us about your future ambitions.**

I love playing for Australia. In the future, my target will be Europe, but I've got a way to go here first. Right now I'm concentrating on this season, trying to make sure we do well. And then I will try to get overseas, maybe move to Europe. And of course I want to be successful in that as well. 🎯



Tando Velaphi saves a goal during the football match between the Perth Glory and the Brisbane Roar at nib Stadium in Perth.

Photo: © AP



Profile

Tando Yuji Velaphi trained at the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra on a football scholarship. He previously played for Perth Soccer Club, Newcastle Jets and Queensland Roar, currently plays for Perth Glory in the A-League. Velaphi played for the Young Socceroos (The Australian Under 20's football team) in the 2006 AFC Youth Championship and was a member of the Olyroos (The Australian Under 23 football team) in 2008. Velaphi was a back-up keeper at the 2008 Olympics Men's tournament, but made no appearances for the Olyroos.