

## NFL quarterback star **Kyler Murray** ‘I’m proud to have Korean blood in my veins’ ‘My maternal grandmother is Korean. I grew up learning Korean at home and eating Korean food’



Kyler Murray is known to wear a jersey with the U.S. and Korean flags on it even during ordinary training (above). Murray, who also loves soccer, often wears a South Korean national team jersey to practice.

“This is my first time on a 14-hour flight,” Kyler Murray (27, Arizona Cardinals), a third-generation Korean American quarterback in the National Football League (NFL), recently told Yonhap News Agency and Yonhap News TV at the Yonhap News Agency headquarters in Jongno-gu, Seoul. “When I came out of the airport to collect my luggage, I was greeted by so many fans. It’s a blessing and a meaningful thing to be welcomed like this just because I’m Korean,” he said, smiling broadly.

“I’m proud to have Korean blood in my veins. There are not many examples of athletes of Korean descent playing at the highest level in American professional sports. I’m proud to be able to play at the highest level with my Korean identity,” he added.

Murray is a third-generation American of Korean descent whose maternal grandmother is Korean.

“I didn’t get to spend a lot of time with my grandmother, so I don’t have a lot of memories, but my mom raised me and always taught me Korean and exposed me to as much of Korea as possible, whether it was through food or children’s TV shows,” he said.

### ‘Blessed to be welcomed just because I’m Korean’

Murray became the first player in history to be drafted in the first round by both the NFL and Major League Baseball (MLB). He was selected by the Oakland Athletics with the ninth overall pick in the first round of the 2019 MLB First-Year Player Draft and then the NFL’s Arizona Cardinals selected him as the first overall pick of the first round in the draft.

At 178 cm, Murray is a rare “short quarterback” in the NFL, a league full of large statures. The downside of being a shorter quarterback is that it is harder to see where your teammates are when you are buried among larger players. In addition, the impact of a collision with an opposing defender, which is said to be comparable to a “car accident,” is more severe for smaller players.

Murray has overcome such physical disadvantages to become one of the NFL’s most dominant quarterbacks with his agility and strong shoulders.





Kyler Murray, a star quarterback of Korean descent in the U.S. National Football League who is visiting South Korea for the first time since he was born, talks to Yonhap News Agency and Yonhap News TV at the headquarters of Yonhap News Agency in Jongno-gu, Seoul, on March 11.

After earning a four-year, \$45.16 million contract when he entered the league, Murray's performance earned him a five-year \$230.5 million max contract with Arizona ahead of the 2022 season, which kicked in starting in 2024.

### Identity as 'Korean athlete' is key factor

Murray feels that being a Korean athlete is a key part of how he describes himself. He wears a Korean flag on his helmet during NFL games and even has "green light" written in Korean (초록불) in his Instagram bio.

"When I was younger, my nose was flat and my eyes were squinty, but that didn't affect me. I wore my Korean heritage with pride," he said.

The 2028 Olympic Games in Los Angeles will feature a new sport, flag football, a slight variation on American football.

When asked if he would like to play for South Korea, Murray, who appeared in the interview wearing an outfit with both the

Korean flag and the U.S. flag, said: "Of course I would like to play if I get the chance. Of course my biggest goal in life is to win the Super Bowl, but I don't think I would just be satisfied with winning the Super Bowl or being the best player in the league," he said.

### 'If I get the chance, I would play for Korea'

After playing as a baseball infielder in high school, Murray focused on American football at Texas A&M University before transferring to the University of Oklahoma, where he picked up baseball again.

As an outfielder, he hit .296 with 10 home runs, 47 runs and 10 stolen bases in 51 games in college, earning him the ninth overall pick in the first round of the Major League Baseball (MLB) draft by the Oakland Athletics.

But Murray went on to win the Heisman Trophy as the University of Oklahoma's starting quarterback in 2018, which is the trophy awarded to the college's top player, and was selected by Arizona with the No. 1 pick in the first round of the NFL Draft.

"Giving up baseball was the hardest decision of my life," Murray reflected in the interview. "The Oakland team allowed me to go back to college and play football."

Murray has always shown his love for baseball at every opportunity. The most famous example of a player who played both NFL and MLB is Bo Jackson.

Jackson was a running back for the Los Angeles Raiders in the NFL and an outfielder in MLB in the late 1980s. He didn't take time off from one sport to play the other but instead used the off-seasons to showcase his superhuman athleticism in both sports.

While Jackson became an all-star in both the NFL and MLB, Deion Sanders has been to both the Super Bowl (NFL) and World Series (MLB). Sanders has also left a huge footprint on the game of American football, having been inducted into the NFL Hall of Fame.

When asked if he would ever play baseball, Murray replied: "I would love to, and I think I could. The hardest thing I've ever done is hit a baseball. I think I can do both."

Recognizing that American football is not popular in Korea, he said: "It has everything: sacrifice, camaraderie, hard work and discipline to win. I've played baseball and basketball, but these are the things that make American football the best game in the world." 