

THE KOREAN ZOMBIE: WHY WE WON'T STOP FIGHTING

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In April of 2022, [Chan-Sung Jung](#), also known as “The Korean Zombie,” became the first Korean to compete in an Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) [main-event fight](#). After over a decade of trying to reach this point in his career, Jung finally got the chance to fight for a championship belt that he could proudly bring home to South Korea. Filled with pride and excitement, I had a live watch party on Zoom with seven of my Korean friends spread out across the world.

He lost. However, Jung survived a grueling four rounds against the best pound-for-pound fighter in the UFC, Australian [Alexander Volkanovski](#), until he was forcefully stopped by the referee in a technical knockout (TKO). This was far better than expected. Looking at the [betting odds](#) before the fight, you would’ve wanted to bet on Jung being knocked out in the first round.

In other words, Jung was seen as an easy opponent, an easy target, even though he had proved himself a great fighter over a decade of wins. Although Jung may have lost the fight, it is the way he fought that makes him a winner to me and many other Koreans. While most fights end with the opponent on the floor via knockout or submission, the fight was stopped by the referee while Jung was still standing. He had taken many critical blows to the head but refused to go down, so the referee had to make a decision to end the fight to prevent long-term damage.

As a young Korean athlete myself, I have always looked up to Jung as someone who has met adversity with unwavering determination to prove his doubters wrong. In a combat sport that [Asians aren’t “supposed” to be good at](#), he fought his way up simply through working harder than everybody else. I can relate to him because, at age 15, I started competing in rowing, a predominantly white sport, in a New England boarding school.

A particularly privileged and pompous teammate would outright tell me that I had no potential in the sport and should “join the soccer club team like everybody else.” Of course, the “everybody” he was referring to was other Asians that were small and frail like me. This lit a fire in me that still burns deep and has helped me to meet challenges and overcome obstacles in every aspect of my life. Just like Jung, I told myself that I would be the hardest worker in the room and never let anyone or anything stop me.

With the [recent rise in violent hate crimes](#) against Asian people, Jung defeating his opponents in a sanctioned fight is a form of defiance for not only Koreans, but also Asian people as a whole. Although Jung has never publicly expressed his opinion on the violent hate crimes against Asians in America, he breaks the stereotype of Asians being weak and docile through his fights. To me, he represents the fighting spirit of

Koreans that has been [passed down for generations](#). He shows that Asians shouldn't be the targets of unprovoked and cowardly attacks just because people think that we won't fight back.

Of course, [the people these thugs often target are Asian women and seniors](#). It uncovers the pathetic and shameless nature of these attacks against the seemingly defenseless. As a college student in New York City, [where Asian hate crimes are highly prevalent](#), I've learned that nowhere is truly safe for the most vulnerable Asians. On top of the countless videos I've seen of Asians being brutally attacked on streets and subways in broad daylight, I encounter Asians being targeted and mistreated on a nearly daily basis. The fact that I feel the need to walk my female Asian friends, who [carry pepper spray in their bags](#), home at night enrages me and sheds light on the disheartening reality.

Win or lose, Jung gives everything he has in his mind and body to show the world that we won't go down without a fight. In return, the Korean people give everything we have in our support for him. On the night of his fights, people gather in sports bars or in front of living room TVs with their families. Watching his fights as a community, we are unified in the feeling of representation and pride when he wraps the Korean flag around his body as he heads toward the ring.

His nickname "The Korean Zombie" perfectly sums up the spirit of Jung and the Korean people. No matter how bloodied up his face or how many times he is knocked out cold on the cage floor, he always finds a way to get back up and continue fighting. No matter how many cowardly and despicable hate crimes are committed against innocent Asians, we, too, will get back up and keep fighting.

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