

LJL 2021 SPRING SPLIT Power Ranking by Joushi

Long time no see! I'm back again here to talk about what's going on in the LJL, and as we've seen a huge number of roster changes, I wanted to take some time to look at how these teams are likely to stack up going into 2021.

A couple of things are particularly exciting this year! Firstly, there are a lot of names that are brand new that I haven't seen before, meaning that teams are looking to build up more local talent and start playing Japanese gacha instead of the Korean gacha. Something you should know about me though, is that until a player or team can show that they're good, I tend to assume they're bad.

Secondly, higher profile players from Korea are starting to come to Japan! Instead of solo queue stars, we're instead seeing players who have made it onto teams. It makes me wonder if there is more money available to teams to offer players and attract them to come to the country, but also is likely to elevate the level of play in the LJL.

With that, let's look at how I'm expecting these teams to stack up.

8. AXIZ

Pros: ???

Cons: ???

Summary: Honestly, I know very little about these players. I know a bunch of them participated in Scouting Grounds, and Hoglet and Honey played last year, but neither of them had particularly impressive performances. When I don't know much, I assume they're bad until they prove otherwise.

That said, this roster has a ton of developmental potential and Ino, Megumiin, and Nemoh have extensive experience in amateur tournaments, so this team could find a number of wins if other teams underestimate them.

7. Rascal Jester

Pros: VicaL

Cons: Rookie top

Summary: I don't think there's a ton to say about this team. In a year in which many of the other teams are starting to look a lot stronger, Rascal Jester looks like it hasn't leveled up very much. However, I think this team has the biggest opportunity to surprise everyone by actually being strong. If hachamecha can prove to be more active on the map than he has been in previous years, this team might be able to find some upsets.

Coach VicaL has also had a lot of success in other regions, so if he can get these players to coordinate well, it could be very exciting.

6. Burning Core

Pros: Experience as a team, Mid lane upgrade

Cons: Weren't super strong to start with

Summary: Burning Core is interesting because they have had some of the fewest changes to their roster from 2020 to 2021. The only change they've made has been to their mid lane, where Gariaru has replaced Eugeo. I do like this change. Gariaru has the opportunity to be more aggressive and allows them to play towards the top half of the map, but this team got 6th last year, and again, reiterating that other teams look to be significantly stronger, I don't think the mid lane upgrade is enough to push them into the top half.

5. Crest Gaming Act

Pros: Naehyun

Cons: Unclear identity

Summary: Two players stand out on this squad to me.

Naehyun is the biggest name to join the LJL this year, coming over from Griffin and formerly Kingzone in Korea. At his peak, Naehyun made it to the regional finals and helped KZ take Damwon to five games. After that though, on GRF, they got last in LCK Spring and 5th in Challengers Summer. While he has still looked good throughout that period, he has a lot riding on his shoulders now as he joins CGA and is one of the main avenues for them to look very good.

Milan is young. Second youngest in the league behind only RJ Kinatu. He played at Scouting Grounds and got first in the Under-19 tournament though, so that's cool. He's the biggest question mark for me on this team though, and considering he's playing with a roster likely to play towards the top half of the map, he needs to be able to play without much support or resources.

4. V3 Esports

Pros: Worlds experience

Cons: Top lane downgrade

Summary: This team looks good. Individually they should be just fine and that ought to be enough to thrust them into the top half of the season. They also have multiple members that just came back from worlds, just won the previous split, and should have the confidence to keep playing at a high level.

Moojin looked very good with the Flash Wolves a few years ago, even making it to 2018 Worlds, and Hollow has an opportunity to surprise everyone, but they are also filling pretty big shoes as Bugi and Archer played last year well. Thus, the deciding factor for me is really the fact that Paz is stronger than Cogcog.

3. SoftBank Hawks

Pros: Strong in every role, tons of experience

Cons: Motivation?

Summary: This is my roster choice that I might be overly biased towards. For one, it's not really a secret that Dasher is one of my favorite players in the league. I think he's really good. Also adorable. I have a soft spot for Tussle as well, as when I started watching LJJ more consistently back in 2017, he was THE aggressive jungler and was a major reason for his team's success at the time.

Corporal might be the weakest individual member of the team in my eyes, but that's not because I think he's weak, and is more of a testament to how strong I think the rest of the roster is. Top, Jungle, and Mid have all made it to LJJ Finals. Together even, when they were playing under USG, and there's little doubt in my mind that Zenit and Corporal are a stronger bot duo than Keymaker and Enty.

2. Sengoku Gaming

Pros: They're good

Cons: Ramune hasn't really played on stage much in awhile

Summary: Yo this roster is sick. Three of their players have gone to Worlds, and Gango and Enty also were two games away from making it as a duo in 2018. They have a perfect roster suited to playing towards the bottom lane, as Paz is the best top laner in the league at playing without resources, and Gango is insane when you give him resources. Crash is pretty darn aggressive and paired with Enty's playmaking ability, this team should be really good.

The biggest question I have, and what will determine whether these guys are contesting for first or trying to stay in the top half, is how good is Ramune? He used to be really good in the LJJ, but the field has become stronger. Back when Ramune went to worlds, he wasn't competing with Dasher, Aria, and Naehyun. He also spent a year as a sub behind Ceros, and his return for 2020 Spring was meh. At his best, this team could go to worlds. At his worst this team is still top 4.

1. DetonatioN FM

Pros: Arguably best player in every role, experience as a team

Cons: Competing over limited resources?

Summary: Remember how last year I wrote about how I would put together a team in Japan? And the whole crucial argument was about how they were going to divvy up resources? <Link> Well other people like @Nymaera, who does an English cast for LJJ from the UK, were saying that the only way the LJJ does well internationally was replacing Ceros with Aria. And what do you know?

Off of raw talent, this team is a bit of a shoe-in to make playoffs. There's no way that this team doesn't crush every bottom half team on account of just being better individual players. However, the question remains, how are they going to divvy up the gold and experience, and jungler attention, on the map? Evi and Yutapon have been playing with decent resources for a very long time, and Steal isn't used playing around midlane in the way that would be expected with Aria.

With their breadth of experience playing the same way for so long it'll be exciting to see if they can adjust to the new star they're bringing on in the mid lane.

Overall Thoughts

Realistically I think we have a pretty clear delineation of where teams will end up in terms of top half vs bottom half, with DFM, Sengoku, and the Hawks all realistically competing for first place in Spring. V3 and Crest Gaming Act can probably take games off of the top teams, but seem unlikely to win the split, and AXIZ, Burning Core, and Rascal Jester are lagging behind.

As a region, I think LJJ is looking stronger than last year, and I'm excited to see how our top 3 end up shaking out.

Author: [@Joushi_TV](#)

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