

SPORTING LEGENDS COME FROM NATIONAL TEAMS

An Interview with Aleksandar Djordjevic

by Milos Rastovic

Aleksandar Djordjevic, head coach of the National Basketball Team of Serbia, visited the Serbian NBA players in the USA last fall. Following his meeting with Nikola Jokic of the Denver Nuggets, in Colorado I was able to interview him thanks to the help of SNF member George Grkinich.

Djordjevic, one of the greatest icons of Serbian basketball, is the only person in the history of basketball to participate in the finals of the three biggest world competitions as both a player and coach. He won two silver medals at the Olympic Games: as a player in Atlanta in 1996, and as a coach in Rio de Janeiro in 2016. At the Basketball World Cups, he won the gold medal as a player in Athens in 1998, and silver medal as a coach in Madrid in 2014. He won a silver medal as the coach at the European Basketball Championship in Turkey in 2017 as well as his first gold medal as coach of the team Virtus Bologna in the European Basketball Champions League in 2019.

As we admired his skills and bravura as a player, we equally admire him as head coach of the Serbian National Basketball Team today, a spot he filled in 2013.

MR: As a professional coach, how much does players' experience help?

AD: Personally, it helps me a lot. I think that all the experience and levels on which we played as players are priceless. They are unique. Many things I draw from my player's experiences. However, these experiences are not enough for the coach's work, but they help a lot.

MR: Please compare the quality of players from the time you and your generation played basketball to today's players. Was it more difficult then or now for a coach to choose players based on their quality?



AD: This question is very personal, and I cannot give the right answer. Every generation bears its own rules, requirements, postulates, ways of playing, a choice of selection, and reasons why some players are selected and another is not. We all begin to test players based on general rules. What we need for a certain competition depends on players' injuries, whether players can respond to our invitation and obligations to their professional clubs. Today, the basketball season is different. The basketball game is different and more in-

tensive. The calendar of competition is also different. Everything is different today. I can say neither better nor worse. A person in our position has to adapt to it, and should always select the best: that players are in excellent shape, of good character, and the best players at that moment. That is why I am doing this job.

MR: How difficult is it to stress in young basketball players the importance to play for their own country? How much have times changed since you played basketball?

AD: This is the objective again. First of all, our country has drastically changed in an aggressive and bad way from the country it was when I was born and grew up. It is necessary to pass a certain period of time in order to inculcate a sincere love for their country again. This has been specially related to generations who passed through bombing, suffering, wars, and separations, all of which left a big wound. There were a lot of negative things related to our country. Recently, we finally witnessed a whole arena that sang the Serbian national anthem, which was not the case before. It should be worked on through the education of young people through schools, athletic clubs, and with parents. Positive lectures and messages by positive people should be delivered all the time. They do not necessarily have to be from athletes. They can be people from cultural or public life in general, who are able to deliver messages to young people. That is the process of education of young people. The earlier they begin with this process, it is easier for us. Young players have to realize that only through the national team and its success can they get the title of a sporting legend. Whatever success they have in the basketball clubs on each level, it does not mean that his nation will look at them as a sporting legend, but only if they did something through

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Tesla Nation Screened In New York, LA

At the end of April and into May this year, the 2018 movie *Tesla Nation* by Zeljko Mirkovic was screened in Cinema Village in Manhattan, New York for a week and Laemmle Music Hall Cinema in Beverly Hills, Los Angeles for another week. The screenings were followed by great applause from the people who attended at both cinemas. The North American premiere of the movie took place at the SNF Serbian Movie Festival, University of Pittsburgh in March. Initiated by the Tesla Science Foundation in Philadelphia, the film was produced by Optimistic Film and Radio Television of Serbia and supported by the Serb National Federation.

This movie shows the great importance of building and nurturing the relation-



Delmonico's in Manhattan today

ship between the United States and Serbia as well as Serbian-Americans and their contributions to build the United States and the world. "If I am fortun-



Milos Rastovic, *Tesla Nation* screenwriter, at Delmonico's

nate enough to fulfill at least some of my ideas, that will do good for all of mankind," said Nikola Tesla, the Serbian-American Scientist and Inventor

(1856-1943). Spanning more than 200 years, the film recounts the stories of many Serbian-Americans throughout this time period from George Fisher, the first famous Serb, to Mihajlo I. Pupin and Nikola Tesla, two Serbian-American Scientists and Inventors and World War I and II immigrants, and up to the present time. It stresses overall Serbian-American contributions to progress.

At Cinema Village in New York were Director Zeljko Mirkovic, Screenwriter Milos Rastovic, who also served as emcee, and participants in the movie including Dr. Gordana Vunjak-Novakovic, Professor at the Columbia University, Filip Bajovic, President & CEO at Label

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the national team for their country. This is something that can bring the attention to players if they play for the national basketball team or any other sport in the national team. This thought should be in the heads of young players. On the other hand, a player can easily lose that because other motives are on the table such as money in the professional league and other things that come with it. For this reason, young players forget this world and everything that it can bring to them if they play for the national team. Some players once they accept to play for the national team have to realize that it is a big challenge and will test how good they are as players and if they are good enough to bring a medal home. Not everybody is ready to stand on the front line to play against the best players because they know that they can lose. There is also some personal aspect of courage which players who want to play for the national team have to put on the table and every time they must be ready to be judged through scores.

MR: Because you are in Denver now, what is your impression about the game of Nikola Jokic in the NBA, and how do you see him being of help if he plays for the Serbian national basketball team?

AD: He can play in the national team, and he will be selected to play again from my part as he was selected before like all other players who play in the NBA. I follow their games and behavior. They are assets to our national team. If they want and if they are not injured, the door for these champions will be always open in the national team.

MR: As head coach of the national team of Serbia, what is your proudest achievement to date?

AD: I am proud of the picture our national team presents to our people, the scores, and the medals which we have won. We are the most successful national team in the last four years from the moment I began to coach them. We played all the finals of each competition. I am proud of my colleagues, the way they communicate internally or externally, and how we handle the game and behavior of the team. We succeeded in showing this picture to the world, fans, and people who follow us.

MR: What is your plan for the national team of Serbia in the future and what are goals in the next competitions?

AD: I am the head coach, and my plan is that we pass qualifications for the FIBA Basketball World Cup in China in 2019. I always want for us to win one of the first three places in the world.

The FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019 will take place in China from August 31 to September 15. The Serbian National Basketball Team passed qualifications in February. In the first round of the World Cup, they will play in Group D against Italy, Angola, and Philippines. We wish great success to the Serbian National Basketball Team.

Go Eagles! Напред Орлови!

Translation from Serbian by Milos Rastovic

Aleksandar Djordjevic, Head Coach of the Serbian Basketball National Team, and Arturas Karnisovas, General Manager of the Denver Nuggets in Colorado. They were teammates in Barcelona in 1996 – 1997



Djordjevic with Nikola Jokic of the Denver Nuggest

YOUNG REGION ATHLETES SCORE ON FIELD, IN CLASSROOM

NORTHWEST INDIANA - Two young Region athletes have received national attention in their sports and local attention in the classroom.

ALEKS "ACO" MARIC of Munster has garnered an invitation to the renowned Chris Sailer Kicking Underclassmen Invitational Camp in Los Angeles. The camp, designed for the specialists and their parents, emphasizes work both on the field and in the classroom. Activities include instruction, competition, classroom seminars, and evaluation in the world of kicking and punting, and national rankings, setting participants up for future college success. He is currently ranked 36 in the Class of 2022. The camp also includes video analysis and a YouTube recruiting video.

The camp is by invitation-only to deserving prospects. Aleks, 6' 1" 160 lbs., is described as a good young kicking prospect and an athlete with nice natural ability. The camp is designed to help him continue his work and improvement on technique and consistency, enabling him to shoot up in the rankings. "The tools are there to do so," said Chris Sailer. "Aleks should make big strides with Chris Sailer

Kicking this off-season. He is a pleasure to work with. One to keep a close eye on."

In addition to his work on the football field, Aleks is on the Munster High School varsity golf team and varsity soccer team, and has participated, as has his brother Vuk, in several SNF Golf Tournaments. He was Junior Runner Up in Columbus 2017. He maintains a 3.4 grade point average at MHS where he will enter his sophomore year this fall. He is the son of Mirko and Jana Maric. The family is 100% SNF.

NIKOLA PAIC of Crown Point is headed to North Canton, Ohio, soon and he will be going there twice. First he will participate in the 2019 SNF Basketball Tournament this weekend. His second visit is by invitation to participate in the Ohio U. S. National Team High School Training Camp as a defensive lineman. He was handpicked by the USNT program to advance to the next step of training and evaluation. The program is more than representing your country on the gridiron. It's also about skill development and character growth. Participants will refine their techniques with top NCAA and high school coaches.

The showcase event is comprised of the best athletes from across regional events held nationwide earlier this spring and is limited to only 275.

"This is the next step for him to play in Dallas at the AT&T Stadium where the Dallas Cowboys play," said his father Duro. "Nothing is set in stone that he will be playing in Dallas but I have a good feeling that for his age group he should make it. The 275 players they pick to go to the camp are from all levels 9-12 grade."

Nikola and his brothers Luka and Ilija have all participated in SNF Basketball tournaments. They are the sons of Duro and Irene Paic and another 100% SNF family. In addition to his athletic talent, Nikola maintains a 3.98 GPA and will be a sophomore at Crown Point High School in September.

These two young men have already distinguished themselves as elite in their classes and are likely to give us a lot of great things to write about in the future.

—str.



ALEKS "ACO" MARIC



NIKOLA PAIC