

SERBIA - THE COUNTRY OF BASKETBALL

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse descriptive and causal factors of basketball development in Serbia, particularly following the country's independence (2006) to this day. The paper presents the development path of "the game under two elevated hoops", since its arrival to Belgrade in the 1920s, through the challenges and successes in various state communities, since the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (1918-1929), the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929-1945), the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1945-1992), the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1992-2003), the State of Union of Serbia and Montenegro (2003-2006), to the Republic of Serbia. The paper shows the participation in the Yugoslav basketball, as well as the events that marked the period of full independence of the Republic of Serbia. The results of the national teams are shown, including the contribution of the national basketball organization. The analysis has included the condition of senior and age categories, coach and referee organizations. Serbian basketball has shown originality in creating Yugoslav basketball, with continuing to be successful also in the independent country, which gives credibility and justifies the marketing and promotional campaigns of the national basketball federation that Serbia is the country of basketball.

Key words: BASKETBALL / SERBIA / YUGOSLAVIA / DEVELOPEMENT /

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BASKETBALL IN SERBIA FROM WYLAND TO POPOVIĆ, NIKOLIĆ, STANKOVIĆ, ŠAPER, JOVANOVIĆ, ...

In the excellent atmosphere of the Assembly Hall basketball arena in Indiana, in the fall of 1997 the renowned basketball coach Bobby Knight, while wrapping up his basketball coaching seminar, said that basketball is the most dynamic and most beautiful game in the World and that God must love basketball (Jakovljevic, 1997). There is certainly a large number of people in Serbia who share Night's opinion, and not just among basketball adherents (players, coaches, referees, veterans, or parents), but among the ordinary people. Because, Serbia has been and Serbia is a country of basketball! That has been shown and proven countless times, in continuity during almost an entire century, since the advent of basketball in this region (during the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs) to this day. The development path of basketball in Serbia that has brought the country to its present status, has been, at least unusual and somewhat unreal, but again, for many, logical and comprehensible.

Basketball in Serbia was first introduced in 1923 in Belgrade. Shortly after that, in Novi Sad and Niš. The promoter of the "magical game under two hoops" was William Wyland, the professor of folklore and national sports, who, as an emissary of the Red Cross from Oakland, California, USA, stayed in the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (Strahonja, 1975, according to Ištvančić, 2013). His presentation of basketball to the youth of the Union of Sokols of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia fascinated the listeners. The first basketball rules emerged next year, made by two course participants, Vulović and Rančić who, together with Wyland, set up the first poles for hoops in the yard of "Kralj Petar" elementary school in Belgrade. Following Wyland's departure, the hoops were moved to the yard of the Second Male High School (Paunić, 2007). However, it seemed as though everything ended there, i.e. that basketball in Serbia did not gain ground among the youth because "SOKO" was encouraging some other forms of exercise and physical activity. Still, under the patronage of "SOKO", basketball was promoted throughout the Kingdom of Yugoslavia: first rules of the game appeared, while the earlier name "Košakanja" was changed to "Košarka" (Basketball). The game was presented and promoting matches were organized. It was Zdenko Pavić, with his wife Vera, who deserved credit for basketball development in Belgrade at the time. As the head of the competitive games under 'SOKO' leadership he supported basketball through both SOKO and forms of school sport at the time. Within Belgrade's Soko X, he formed a basketball team, and he was also the main organizer of high school basketball tournaments which took place in Belgrade at the end of the 1930s. He translated basketball rules and worked on the construction of basketball courts and hoops (www.kss.rs). The highlight was the basketball championship of the Union of Sokols of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia held in Borovo in 1940. It was a competition held in four categories for both males and females as follows: male members, female members, male generation and female generation (corresponds to today's categories: male seniors, female seniors, male juniors, female juniors). Although the development of basketball was more intense in the western regions of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the finals of three categories featured the team from Belgrade and they even won in the female members category (Paunić, 2007).

At the beginning of the Second World War, basketball in Belgrade continued its surprisingly intense existence as a consequence of the set of political circumstances. The occupier forbade SOKO, but allowed sports activities, basketball included. A large number of refugees arrived in Belgrade, among whom were also several well-known basketball adherents (players, referees, coaches) from Croatia and Slovenia. Tennis club BTK allowed the basketball players, who became more active after the Borovo championship, to use their court. Basketball and volleyball united, so a lot of athletes participated in both sports. Basketball was used as a means to attract the youth by then quisling government through the so called "National services". The communist party of Yugoslavia had the

same aspirations (Paunić,2007). Since it kept its continuity, basketball welcomed liberation relatively ready for further development. There were basketball “fanatics”, enthusiasts who were willing to learn, such as: Nebojša Popović, Aleksandar Nikolić, Bora Stanković, Radimir Šaper, Miodrag Sokolović etc. Professional foundation of the development of basketball was also present in the form of a subject at the Faculty of Sport and Physical Education - DIF (taught by Bora Jovanović). Also, socio-political circumstances contributed to basketball development.

Period following the end of the Second World War until the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1992) known as “the Yugoslav basketball” is characterized by extraordinary performances of the basketball organization, at both national team and club levels, as well as within the organization and development of basketball in general. The leaders of the process were Bora Stanković and Radimir Šaper. However, the formation of Yugoslav basketball would not have happened without the contribution of players, coaches, referees, basketball adherents both in and outside of Serbia.

SERBIA IN YUGOSLAV BASKETBALL

Weighing up the share and the influence of certain countries regarding the sports or other social and economical achievements of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (now independent countries) has always been an awkward and sensitive topic. The same goes for basketball. That is especially difficult, given that in Yugoslavia the mobility of the players and coaches who often came from one of the republics, but acquired their reputation at a club in other republics, or in a national team. In that situation, classification by country was very inconvenient, it was against the party ideology and normative laws, but also for the fact that determining clear criteria for such classification was not possible. However, something happened after the disintegration, when all the constitutional republics started to count their citizens, even those that took part in basketball teams and won medals during the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Therefore, it is highly probable that some readers would not agree with the following statements, however, there is no ill intent in them. In other words, the intention is not to overestimate or underestimate any one of the constituents of Yugoslav basketball. On the contrary, the aim of the authors of this paper is to summarize the values that ensured that the game between hoops is successfully played in the countries of former SFRY even today.

The consensus is that each one of the SFRY republics had an immeasurable share in the development of Yugoslav basketball. Accordingly, it can be said that Serbia's share in the development and success of basketball is also significant. Certain facts speak of that, that is, they speak of the development and quality of basketball in Serbia during that time, and those are:

- Almost half of the championship titles in SFRY in male category (22 out of 46), was won by teams from Serbia (Crvena zvezda 12, Partizan and OKK Beograd 4, Radnicki from Belgrade and Proleter from Zrenjanin 1). In female category 37 out of 46 titles was won by Crvena zvezda, followed by: Radnicki from Belgrade (4), Partizan (3) and two titles were won by Voždovac from Belgrade and Vojvodina from Novi Sad (Radosavljević, 2002, 2002a, 2002b);
- In the success of the Yugoslav national team, Serbia, in all the periods analyzed, participated with a large number of male and female players. Mentioning a few of them is more than enough: Radivoj Korać, Dragan Kićanović, Zoran Slavnić,..., Marija Veger, Zorica Đurković...;
- Relative to the criteria of the success of league basketball it can be concluded that the largest number of coaches with trophies are also from Serbia, taking into account that some of the

coaches from Serbia won trophies with teams from other republics, Božidar Maljković stands out the most. The biggest number of national team managers was from Serbia, that is 16 out of 25 (Radosavljević, 2002a). Great success was achieved by already mentioned Nebojsa Popović and Aleksandar Nikolić, then, Ranko Žeravica and Dušan Ivković. Thus, for example, out of 10 head coaches, half of them were from Serbia (Stanković, 2015);

- A significant number of people from Serbia worked in the Basketball Federation of Yugoslavia. Many of them were directors and secretary generals, and something similar applied to the referee and coaching organizations. Of course, these facts must be taken with reservation since the seat of the Basketball federation was in Belgrade.
- The employment of officials from Serbia in FIBA testifies to the quality and significance, where two of them stand out in particular: Bora Stanković - secretary general of FIBA from 1976 to 2002. and Radomir Šaper - the president of the Technical Committee from 1972 to 1998. In addition, today in FIBA several officials from Serbia carry important functions such as Zoran Radović and Predrag Bogosavljev, former basketball players of Crvena zvezda and the national team of SFR Yugoslavia.
- The organization of big international basketball competitions, ranging from global to continental championships, to Mediterranean and Balkan games, international tournaments... all that marked the period of SFR Yugoslavia, intense and efficient development of basketball organization.

There was a similar tendency even after the disintegration of the SFR Yugoslavia. In, then, FR Yugoslavia, three years after sports and “other” sanctions, the male national team won seven medals at the most important competitions, such as: silver medal at Olympic games in Atlanta, two gold medals at world championships (Athens and Indianapolis), then three gold medals (Athens, Barcelona, Istanbul) and one bronze medal (at the European championship in France). This success should be considered identical to the success of other republics of the former SFR Yugoslavia, and that is the continuity of the athletes and the expert support team who built their basketball careers and reputation in one country, but continued in another.

The original story of Yugoslav school of basketball especially intensified in the period of the FR Yugoslavia. Quite frequently basketball adherents from other newly formed countries of former Yugoslavia emphasized its existence. Was that really a school? To try to answer this question, without deepening analysis and debates, it is worth mentioning some explanations and arguments (frequently underlined by foreigners) of Yugoslav basketball success, such as (Paunić, 2007):

- Extraordinary physical (motor) abilities and psychological characteristics, of then, fraternal Yugoslav nations and nationalities, which were necessary for survival in this region between Europe and Asia, the region with coastal, mountain and plain zones, with the integration of the population (peoples) and considerably burdened with migrations and wars;
- Game, as a phenomenon, was (and hopefully still is today), according to Paunić, a distinctive genesis of the aforementioned abilities but also skills which have existential significance for peoples of this regional; and
- The mentality which developed out of the aforesaid relationship towards the game, frequently highlighted by foreigners, alluding to the unpredictability of our players, their cunningness, twists, risks, collectivism and individualism all together.

In addition to these, otherwise very frequently highlighted explanations, the authors are keen on emphasizing a few additional factors that represent a level above, in addition to what was previously said, such as: enthusiasm, knowledge and thirst for knowledge and advancement (expertise); creativity (adaptability); and ‘hard’ work (diligence). The analysis of these factors would

require much more space on paper, therefore we are briefly pointing out what is deemed to be the most important.

- Nowadays, enthusiasm is usually accepted as zeal, commitment to an idea, which implies selfless sacrifice with an aim to achieve that idea, often without any material expectations. Coaches and players that built basketball in Yugoslavia (Serbia) were all enthusiasts, sometimes to an extent that they neglected their daily duties, families, jobs, etc. That was especially apparent inland, in small cities and towns. To illustrate this, an interesting even from a totally different branch -cinema: at the Film screenplay festival in Vrnjacka Banja in 1986, the screenplay entitled *The Enthusiast (Entuzijast)* won the third prize (<http://www.screenfest.org.rs/1986/index1986.htm>), The film presented work, devotion and dedication of a basketball coach and basketball players in a small provincial town, and what is important is that it was a true story! Unfortunately, that screenplay never became a movie.
- Knowledge, that is, thirst for knowledge and progress was there from the very beginning. The first basketball educators were Hungarians and Bulgarians, then French and Belgians. The students surpassed the teachers fairly quickly. Ultimately, on the one hand logically, but, in the context of political events not so much, the Americans became our direct basketball educators. Thus, in 1951 renowned Harlem Globetrotters were brought to Belgrade. Turning to the Americans was incredibly far-sighted decisions, despite, previously mentioned, relatively unfavourable political events, that resulted in almost two decades of so called school tours to the USA. Both coaches and players were learning.
- Creativity and adaptability was especially apparent during the formative stage of learning from the Americans. It should be kept in mind that other, primarily, western European basketball countries (Italy, France, Spain, etc.) had a much earlier opportunity to learn from the Americans. However, Yugoslav coaches and players learned in a specific, it could be said, accurate but also distinctive way. Learning and acknowledging the facts resulted in adjustment of training sessions to our performances, conditions, our aforementioned mentality and ethos which, in philosophy, describes the attitude towards the world, habits, behaviour, but talent that was established by adaptability, learning and practising¹. Ethos, in the case of Serbian basketball, according to Koprivica (2018) could be described as the practice of training and competing developed on “playing ethos amplified by ethic and aesthetic dimensions”. In other words, our trainers did not blindly follow or copy the American way of training but they evolved our distinctive game philosophy and training methodology which led to the development of basketball. It was never considered or seen as just a drill, but as an intention, an innovative step forward and creative moulding of the being and practice of the game under the hoops. Therefore, we established the game on our ethos, intentions, innovations, creations and constant corrections. In other words, and again through the plane of sports philosophy: “a man, in the endeavour to achieve something, that is to self-realize in some aspect and segment, cannot do that without self-establishment and self-transcendence” (Koprivica 2019). Serbian basketball self established its distinctive ethos and constant process of self-transcendence. It could be said that it is: “an expression of spirit and constant attempt to step outside of it”. (Koprivica, 2019).
- In addition, even from the organizational perspective a few extraordinary decisions were made which instigated the development of society, sport and basketball itself through the pragmatic foundation of sports technology. Namely, the Fir¹st league games of the SFR

¹ Etos. *Hrvatska enciklopedija, mrežno izdanje*. Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2020. Accessed 5. 12. 2020. <<http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=18542>>

Yugoslavia have been played exclusively in sports halls since 1969, and from the beginning of the 1970s the games were broadcast on television.

- “Hard” work represents persistent and long-lasting practice. This approach might have been partially influenced by the so-called “quantitative practice” and apparent practice disciplines which were brought to the territory of Yugoslavia by the unbeatable female volleyball players of the club “Nichibo” from Japan, in the 1950s. The practice was characterized by large scope, large number of repetitions, striving towards motoric perfection, achieving almost ideal technical skills, but again with a dose of ‘jest’ and apparent relaxed atmosphere. Of course, players were not (probably still are not today) always inclined and willing to have a lot of disciplined and hard practice, but once again what stood out was the quality of coaches and their capability, or better said, skills to encourage and “force” athletes to train hard.
- Finally, society’s support rooted in the policies of the governing structures cannot be neglected, (especially regarding the national team), but also from successful economic organizations of that period, which, mainly, aided the clubs financially having seen an opportunity to promote their products nationally and internationally. Perhaps, one could not claim that basketball was a national project, however, in some periods of socio-political development it most certainly was (1970 World championship in Ljubljana). Therefore, by jumping over a few decades and jumping in the current one and search for the answer of “the nationalisation of basketball” or better said, our sports and country’s ethos, then feature films about basketball, as a subgenre of sports movies (e.g. *We’ll be the World Champions* directed by Darko Bajić) and literature ventures (e.g. *Jazz Basket* written by Aleksandar Miletić), through cinematographic and literary records of personal, social, sports...plots, reflect the essence of the game itself, its sport, cultural, philosophical and political dimensions.

Soon after World War 2 (1946) basketball began its academic life as well, at the National Institute for Physical Education - ‘DIF’ (today known as Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, University of Belgrade). Respected basketball professionals, professors and assistant, such as: previously mentioned Bora Jovanović and Aleksandar Nikolić, then Stanislav Paunić, Radivoje Živković, Petronije Zimonić, Laslo Hajnal and Milivoje Karalejić, as well as a large number of part-time associates, and coaches (Mija Stefanović, Svetozar Matić, Gordan Todorović, Zoran Djurković, Vanja Guša, Predrag Krunić...) worked with the students at the basketball department. A large of basketball coaches were once ‘DIF’ students (most often with the diploma of Senior basketball coach), such as: Dušan Ivković, Božidar Maljković, Željko Obradović, Svetislav Pešić², Duško Vujošević, Darko Rusko and many, many others. In addition to educating coaches, previously mentioned professors and assistants at “DIF” (together with this paper’s authors) made a significant contribution to the development of basketball in Serbia by publishing professional and scientific papers, books, course books and monographs on basketball. According to the subject of knowledge based their research can be divided and systemized in the following fields of basketball theory and practice: Science of basketball (biomechanics, analysis, psychology, physiology); Learning and coaching (techniques, methodologies); Strategies and tactics; Player abilities and characteristics (morphological, motor, cognitive, intellectual, conative, affective ..); Health (sports medicine); Management and development, including competitions, rules of the game; Athlete and coach selection; Basketball in educational process (physical education) (Karalejić and Jakovljević, 1997). Just like other fields of knowledge, basketball, as well, requires expansion of upper systemisation to the fields of technology, business, industry, and career... in order to be understood in all its essential aspects. The findings of scientific research have been mostly published in the academic journal *Physical culture (Fizicka kultura)* that is published by the Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, and in which 85 academic and professional papers on basketball have been published since 1947. The

findings of research on basketball have also been published in international journals, and in the last decade the authors of this paper have published 25 academic papers in international journals. As regards books and course books, an anthology *Technique and Individual Basketball Tactics (Техника и индивидуална тактика кошарке)* published in 1963, and written by Aleksandar Nikolić deserves a mention, as well as *Basketball Basics (Основе кошарке)* by Milivoje Karalejić and Saša Jakovljević, published in 2001. ‘DIF’ professors, assistants and students contributed to basketball development, by presenting a large number of papers at scientific conferences and lectures held at professional basketball seminars, but also by directly taking part in basketball practice in Serbia and abroad.

It is necessary to accept unanimously the existence of Yugoslav school of basketball, and professor Aleksandar Nikolic, as one of its most important founders, particularly regarding the professional and scientific parts. A student of Kralj Aleksandar high school, participant in the war, player, DIF graduate, and later a professor of basketball at DIF, and a coach! And what a coach! His success and contributions in the development of the basketball profession and education of coaches in Serbia, Yugoslavia, but also abroad (primarily in Italy), have earned him a title of ‘patriarch of the European basketball coaches’. He had a mission in expanding innovative ideas in basketball practice, and his written work was collected and edited by Bojan Milanović in *Per aspera ad astra*. Yugoslav basketball was also built by a somewhat younger Ranko Žeravica, with similar success and reputation. He had a tendency to combine science and practice, thus he extensively used scientific discoveries in his practice and he frequently published professional papers. Similar to the case of professor Nikolić, Milutin Luta Pavlović, edited written works by Ranko Žeravica in the book *Ranko Žeravica in Yugoslav basketball* in 1992. Nikolic and Žeravica started, and spent the majority of their coaching careers in Serbia. Of course, the great contribution to the development and success of basketball of other coaches in Serbia has not been forgotten, as well as of the coaches that came from and worked in other former Yugoslav republics, or gained their reputation there, such as: Božidar Maljković, Željko Obradović, Mirko Novosel, Bogdan Tanjević, Svetislav Pešić² (who later greatly contributed to basketball in the FR Yugoslavia), Miodrag Vesković, Krešimir Ćosić, Petar Skansi, Lazat Lečić and others. We should also highlight the coaches from Serbia, devoted to ‘creation’ of young basketball players such as: Bora Cenić, Zdravko Kubat, Branislav Rajačić, but also those from other republics, such as Janez Drvarič.

Indisputably, the success of Serbian basketball is also based on postulates of Yugoslav school of basketball, and professional staff of the period. Undoubtedly, the results of Serbia were a part of management and development from the period of its national sovereignty and the factors of global development of basketball. This is supported also by the results of the Serbian national teams in the last decade. In this period, Serbia managed to win four medals in male senior competitions at big international tournaments, three at female competitions, while the other former SFR Yugoslav countries, since their independence have managed to win five medals in total at male senior competitions (Croatia four, and Slovenia one).

SERBIAN BASKETBALL –BASKETBALL TO BASKETBALL PLAYERS

The introduction of the thematic issue ‘Sport in the independent Republic of Serbia’ states that volume 73, volume 1 of the journal *Physical Culture*, should be read and preserved as an academic and professional contribution to Serbian sport of unique context and characteristics. Context is used to present the changes that made the sport system of Serbia more efficient following the period of 2006 until today, while the characteristics are connected to the experience or participation of the authors in the sport system and academic concretization of the accomplished (A word from the editor,

2019). In accordance with such a mission, we, the authors of this article, also contribute with the following chapters:

Competitive results

The results of all Serbian male and female national teams (senior, U20, U18, and U16), prove indisputably the assertion that Serbia is a country of basketball, particularly when several unfavourable factors are taken into account such as: size of the country, population, economic strength, etc. Table 1 shows the results of these national teams from 2007 until 2018 (<http://www.fiba.basketball>; <http://www.fiba.basketball/europe>) at the biggest international competitions. On the other hand, the club results at international competitions are not outstanding, except for the qualification of BC Partizan Belgrade to the semi-finals of Euroleague 2010 and results from the Regional league in which Serbian teams have been dominant in the last decade. However, several trophies were won in the so called junior Euroleague, where BC FMP Belgrade stood out.²

Table 1. Placements of the Serbian national teams at the biggest international competitions in the period of 2007-2009.

Categories	European Championship*			World Championship**			Olympic games***			Σ
	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	
Senior		2			1			1		4
U20 male	3									3
U19 male				1	2					3
U18 male	4	1								4
U17 male						1				1
U16 male	1	1	3							5
Senior	1		1						1	3
U20 female		2	1							2
U19 female										/
U18 female	1	1	2							4
U17 female						1				1
U 16 female										/
Σ	9	6	6	1	3	2	/	1	1	30

*held each year for sub-senior categories U20, U18 and U16

**held every two years for sub-senior categories U17 and U19, and every four years for female seniors

***held every four years, only in senior competition.

Backbone of these successes is the Basketball Federation of Serbia (BFS). BFS is the successor to the Basketball Federation of Yugoslavia (founded in 1948) and represents an umbrella organization in Serbian basketball. Primarily BFS takes care of the Serbian basketball teams of all categories - female and male seniors, and, in Table 1, aforementioned younger age categories. However, BFS also takes special care of the youngest male and female basketball players, thus showing the importance of its primary task - the development of basketball in Serbia.

President manages BFS (currently Predrag Danilović) with the major help from Secretary General (currently Zlatko Bolić) and other bodies of the Federation (Assembly, Managing board, Supervisory board, etc.) engaging a large number of female and male basketball players. It can be said that the motto “basketball to basketball players”, has been attained to a great extent and it was proved as a successful policy since the very beginning of the Federation. BFS is organized by territory in seven regions which enables a good insight in basketball events in all parts of the Country, and vice versa, a good relationship between inland and the “headquarters” in Belgrade.

² Studied in Sarajevo at the Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, but, due to wartime events ended up in Belgrade

Challenges of Amateurism and Problems of Professionalization of Club Basketball

Competitions in senior categories are organized in two branches: territorial and national competitions belong to the first branch, while international (regional and continental) belong to the second branch. The performance of Serbian clubs in regional competitions have been, and still are, the subject of *pro et contra* debates. It is difficult to make judgements regarding this matter without knowing all the factors relating to, primarily, ABA league(s), but also without deep analysis of the importance of sports clubs professionalization which cannot be done through the national system. Therefore, as distinction the large number of basketball industry problems emerges, that unequivocally affects all segments of the national basketball organisation system.

Regional leagues and basketball in Serbia

Certainly, the regional leagues have been established around the interests of basketball development but are also accompanied with business attached to it. Like a competition in which clubs participate from two continents (Europe and Asia) which have many advantages but certainly disadvantages as well. Before all, the fact that the national champions of the countries taking part are eligible to play in Euroleague, i.e. Eurocup, can be considered a disadvantage, but they can enter those competitions from the regional (ABA) league. It's true that Euroleague grants a *wild card* every year, but mostly to wealthy clubs. Additionally, since these are professional teams, a competitive result is immanent, which has a negative impact on the development of clubs through their younger categories. It is difficult to achieve results and ensure a proper development of young players. It is even more difficult to ensure that through international competitions in higher categories. Still, there have been examples where coaches gave a decent playtime to young players. This led to, in all fairness much earlier, to involvement of foreign, mostly, North American players, as a rule, with average qualities in comparison to American and elite European basketball. That is where a dilemma appears: to engage foreign players and try to achieve at least some kind of result, or work patiently and build players and a team? Therefore, economic interests are an aggravating circumstance, on this path, which result from participation in professional leagues and which impede money obtaining needed for financing and survival of basketball teams in all national systems with limited economic strength. Any idea of development and achieving competitiveness at Europe's professional top becomes an impossible mission. Remarkably, the value and success of Serbian basketball can be described as a dialectic unity and transition of value (*arete*) and contest (*agon*) (Koprivica, 2018). The reality of sport is competing with others, i.e. *agon*, but the ultimate goal is proving one's own excellence, that is confirming and evolving one's own *virtue* (*arete*). The reason for mediocre success in our basketball is characterized by the relationship between achieved results and money invested, especially compared to much bigger investments of foreign teams, that, aside from sufficient budget, achieve modest results. And indeed, our teams occasionally refute the good old saying "you get what you pay for", but only occasionally, since a stable economic situation is simply necessary to establish a sustainable work system - of practice and competitions. It is no wonder than that young talented players leave Serbian teams very early, especially if those transfers provide a club with an opportunity to obtain a sufficient amount of money which enables further financing. A large number of our players play for foreign teams, and at all quality levels, from NBA league to leagues in the countries with less quality basketball. Something everyone takes pride in is when our players achieve great results, but of course, they would be even happier, and it would be even better for basketball, if those results were achieved in our clubs. Media headlines such as "Serbian male(or female) players across Europe/planet," evoke pride, but inevitably sorrow as well.

Additionally, there are quite a few dilemmas when it comes to ABA league, especially regarding its operating, management and decision making, so it has happened that "rules of the game"

(for example, advancement to ABA league from national leagues; advancement to European competitions) change “as they go”.

Serbian National League

Senior competitions for male categories in Serbia are organized at five levels (Rules of Competitions BFS, 2018): Serbian First Male League (KLS and Super league), Serbian Second Male League, Serbian First Male Regional League, Serbian Second Male Regional League and Serbian Third Male Regional League (summer league) - with a total of 156 teams, and at four levels in female categories: Serbian First Female League, Serbian Second Female League, Serbian First Female Regional League, and Serbian Second Female Regional League (summer league) - with a total of 55 teams (<http://lige.kss.rs/>). The teams of Serbian First Male League (KLS) are in reality of lower quality than the teams that are in ABA league, even though some teams from KLS (BC Borac Čačak, and BC Zlatibor Čajetina) have shown to be “a hard nut to crack” during quarter-finals of 2018 Radivoje Korać Cup. Some KLS teams have been participating in a newly formed ABA 2 league for 2 years. However, in Super league, these teams do not achieve significant results most times, but the games with the best Serbian teams, provide new experience, stimulation for future hard work and surely positively impact popularisation of basketball in their region.

The quality of our teams will continue to lag behind top European teams, until proper conditions are created for long term systematic work, on a team level and as well as on the BFS level. Naturally, the first and biggest problem involves the lack of funds for designing and implementing long-term, or at least medium-term, development programmes. Without it, the competition with Western and Eastern European teams is completely impossible. Inseparability of sport from society and its development, places BFS, as the umbrella organization that should take care of the basketball development in Serbia, in a very difficult position. On the one hand, there are national teams as the real reflection of Serbian basketball, on the other hand, clubs which, in reality, are the representatives of development and they ‘produce’ players. The data from Table 1 indicate that BFS works efficiently on planning national teams. The overall impression is that it invests a lot of energy in working with the young. On the other hand, it is impossible to find the answers concerning the challenges of professional teams in the international competition segment. Thus, BFS must answer the question asked in sport strategy documents of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, which refer to: (1) defining professional sport - basketball, (2) specifying goals of amateur and professional sport - basketball, (3) legitimization of the questions that will lead to economic stability of clubs, employment status of athletes and coaches. Next step requires finding the answer to the question of coaching staff and their competency as regards the standards of professional club - league, as well as the questions of setting the industry of sport-basketball as regards the market characteristics in which the competitions will be held; media engagement, media rights to broadcast the competitions. In the conditions of the shallow sports market it is difficult to develop a professional sport, especially without the development of media, audience, sport industry, gambling and betting... From the position of longevity and sustainability of the national basketball, an answer to the question is required about the relationship between top amateur and professional sport. Professional sport is distinguished by high income, but before economic welfare, players, coaches, and management must be characterised by extraordinary abilities and skills. From the standpoint of the national federation these issues are important, because amateur competitions, including those at the Olympic Games, are available to professional athletes. This establishes the relationship between top amateur and professional sport as a basis for *conditio sin qua non* of Serbian basketball.

Age Categories

According to data of the Basketball Federation of Serbia, around 17073 male players and 3669 female players (all age categories included) are registered (licenced), totalling 20742 athletes. The young make up the majority of that number. Basketball activity of the young takes place at the clubs (according to BFS's data, 363 clubs are registered) and the so called schools of basketball. Schools of basketball usually include the youngest (age 8 to 14), and even the clubs, within their own organization, have schools of basketball. In the past, the youngest used to learn and practice basketball at extracurricular sports activities in school, but that kind of cooperation of educational and sport systems has died out. The role of a PE and health education teacher to recognize and instruct a child with talent for basketball (or any other sport) has also been neglected. Schools of basketball, as a rule, have been established on the foundations of the sports industry, openness for children and the young, and with regard to parents' willingness to pay for learning sport and practising basketball. On the one hand, this fosters the illusion of massive participation, characteristic to Serbia, but excludes a significant number of children and youth due to a small family budget, and leads towards a domination of the business aspect compared to the strategical one within a club - school. This irrefutably shifts the training process quality towards goals that cannot serve as a foundation of a system that is sustainable for national basketball.

Age category competition system has been developed. It is organized according to a league system, consisting of three levels in male competition (Competition Rule Book BFS, 2018): regional league (juniors, cadets, pioneers and junior pioneers); interregional leagues (juniors, cadets, and pioneers) and quality league (juniors and cadets). In the female competition, there are only quality leagues (female juniors, female cadets, and female pioneers). Most leagues also have final tournaments. Surely, the competitions are important, but special attention is devoted to the development of individual players who should lead Serbian basketball in the future. In that sense, it is often heard, especially among the young, that in competition it is not winning that is a priority but rather player development. Coaches sometimes adhere to this, but sometimes they do not.

A specific phenomenon, which is evident nowadays in the sub-senior category, is concentrating all quality in Belgrade. This is proven by the fact that the highest number of sub-senior national team representatives come from Belgrade clubs, as well as that Belgrade teams win the largest number of medals at sub-senior competitions (almost all). Having disappeared from the 'senior basketball map' some centres (Vršac, Kraljevo, Valjevo, Leskovac, Uzice,... which still have their clubs, but significantly weaker than 15-20 years ago) are now also slowly disappearing from sub-senior basketball. Similar to the senior category, the most common reason is lack of resources (conditions), but the decrease in interest of the youth in any form of physical activity, including basketball, should be considered as well. Talented individuals from inland, still very young, leave their surroundings and come to strong, organized Belgrade teams, frequently instructed by a manager. There are, of course, arguments to support this, on the one hand, the conditions are better, and very often the overall training regimes and treatment outside training are also better offering better opportunities for progress. On the other hand, throughout inland, there is a decrease in interest of children in playing basketball, but also in training and renewing of coaching staff in those areas.

In 1996, BFS boards of experts established (through *AS Project until 2004*) a significant factor in the development of sub-senior basketball - Practise and development centre in Pozarevac (RTC since 2012) that gathers the most gifted young basketball players all across Serbia aged 12 to 14 (Todorović, 2016). This establishes a very important segment of working with the youth, and that is directing and monitoring the development of the most gifted. This model has been established at the initiative of three basketball enthusiasts: Bata Djordjević, Marijan Novović, and Prof. Dr. Milivoj Karalejić. It functions as a development-teaching hub, based on evaluating, monitoring and perfecting young talented basketball players and their coaches. Almost all national team players for the past two

decades have gone through this centre, as well as a large number of, later, high-quality professional basketball players. As a part of that project, agents have been appointed by region, responsible for monitoring development of young players in their regions. Adding to that, control and demonstrative training, tournaments are held on a regular basis which paints an even clearer picture of the situation in the aforementioned age categories. PDC has had a positive influence, not just on player development, but on the coaching staff as well, since, during the centre's activity, a large number of young and promising coaches have been recruited.

Coaching organization and coaching staff in Serbia

Previously mentioned Serbian (Yugoslav) school of basketball was a result of, primarily, the work of coaches and national organization. The creativity and adaptability of our coaches and players by changing the game, its dynamic but also rules, tactical and strategic challenges, has already been highlighted. Since the very beginning, they have acted pragmatically, learned from others, absorbed information, and adapted all of it in a very smart manner, to our conditions for practice and to the mentality of our basketball players. Avoiding copying of work, primarily, of the famous American coaches, they created the essence of our national basketball identity. The basis is simple, first and foremost, training methodology, openness to new ideas, courage to experiment, but at the same time focus on participation, success, and victory.

An important fact is that the coaches are educated, that a large number of them acquired their knowledge through means of formal and informal education. Not an insignificant number of them are educated in other scientific fields and for other professions but have been trained and are successfully working today as coaches. However, the highest number of them acquired their formal basketball knowledge, attending, most often, Vocational College of Coaching, but also academic studies of sport. From prof Aleksandar Nikolic and a myriad of other internationally successful coaches, to today's coaches, they have been educated formally, among them quite a few still active - at the oldest faculty in the country, the one in Belgrade (Juhas, 2018). Undoubtedly, the programs for the professions of the sport coach are the source of equality of formal, non-formal and informal education (Table 2), and accordingly they are a sum of a large number of academic and immediate sports practise topics (Radojevic, Grbovic, Jevtic, 2019).

Table 2. Education types and knowledge sources for professions of sports coach (Radojevic, Grbovic, Jevtic, 2019)

Formal education		Non-formal and informal education		
lectures	courses	reflexion	observation and analysis of competitions	professional travels
practise	professors	conferences	observation of other coaches' work	international coaches
practical lectures	formal and informal mentors	congresses	observation of professional athletes	coach periodicals
seminars (as a type of teaching)	students of other sports	seminars	video analyses	manuals
books and periodicals	information systems	courses	blogs	mentors, older coaches
complementary sciences and areas	other sports technology	clinics	internet presentations and study models	one-on-one practice
Physical education, adapted exercising, sport in institutions...	project and final thesis writing	guiding athletes - teams, sparring partners	information platforms	sport industry
	sports management and leadership	other sports	planning and realizing practices of both individuals and teams	other fields, complementary to the sport, practice and result

thematic workshops	sports education and strategy	athletes' parents and teachers	certified training programs of NSF and ISF	scientist, sports employees (team selectors, program directors, analysts, physiotherapists),
Training programs	tutors and methods of projects and problem-teaching	sports experience	self-coaching	...

Our coaches showed their enthusiasm and will to pass the knowledge to future generations by establishing Serbian Association of Basketball Coaches (SABC, 1972), which later grew into Yugoslav Association of Basketball Coaches (1991). Today it has around one thousand members, and it is one of the biggest of the kind in Europe (proportionately to the size of the country). Apart from issuing official work licenses to coaches, SABC also continues to manage coach development by organizing seminars, coaching days, clinics and publishing *Coach (Trenner)* magazine, a unique professional basketball journal that recently celebrated its 100th issue.

Another important fact is that our coaches are successfully adapting to new conditions, but also skilfully avoiding various 'trends', by properly navigating the sea of information that is available today, primarily over the electronic services i.e. the Internet. They have proved the quality of coaching profession in all basketball meridians: from Europe, through the Middle East, Asia (China, Japan,...) Australia (New Zealand), to the United States of America (NCAA and NBA).

Referee organization

Serbian basketball referees have always followed the level and quality of players and coaches. It is a well-known fact that sport referees (especially in team sports, basketball included) have often been exposed to various outside pressures. Among the most rigorous is the public, which is often furious at them, not realizing the importance of referees for quality and development of basketball.

As regards basketball age category, they, just as much as coaches, educate and discipline young players. In senior, national and international basketball the quality of their work is named and reflected by the quality of the overall national basketball. Serbian referees enjoy an admirable international reputation, and are very often entrusted with refereeing at the biggest European and world championships, including the Olympic Games. Through diligent work of the Referee organization, they take care of the young, and their successors, to be, if not better, at least of the same quality.

INSTEAD OF THE CONCLUSION

What does the future bring? How will the Serbian basketball and the Serbian school of basketball further develop? Surely, it is not easy to answer these and other similar questions regarding the outlook of one of the most noteworthy sports games. But it is also certain that quite a few aforementioned facts raise justified expectations that Serbian basketball has a bright future.

The last decade (and a few years more since the establishment of the independent Republic of Serbia) cannot be viewed outside of the past, but it still represents a special period for Serbian basketball. After two years of failing (in 2007 and 2008), the National basketball team has very quickly set out on the path to success, relying on proven principles of Yugoslav basketball. Basketball personalities have very quickly got along, adapted, re-established the system and rules that lead to the competitive results. They will continue making good moves, overcoming occasional crises (because there were crises and not having them is simply impossible), working in the interest of basketball, and that is, primarily, the army of young athletes - female and male basketball players. The previously mentioned numbers of registered female and male basketball players and clubs are certainly not

satisfactory, but they have stabilized the trend in recent years, which is, it can be said, a success, having in mind the objective socio-economic and professional circumstances. It is certain that all the basketball professionals, and especially BFC, will work on the expansion of this number.

The fact is that there will not always be medals (as there were not always at the time of the SFRY either). For instance, the most important thing is not to repeat or improve certain results from Rio, at the Tokyo Olympic Games, even though our great head coaches in both categories (Igor Kokoškov and Marina Maljković) and female and male players will do everything to make that happen. It is important to retain and once again display the Serbian way of playing and "living" basketball. That includes the aforementioned: enthusiasm and dedication, creativity, diligence, knowledge, impartiality, correctness. Above all, respect for knowledge and skills, thorough education, critical openness towards new, following the latest accomplishments in basketball (and sports in general).

Serbian Basketball Federation will continue to make great efforts to ensure material and other conditions for further development of Serbian basketball. This is not an easy job, because, apart from the constant financial troubles, there are the problems of basketball on the European level, primarily the conflict of FIBA Europe and Euroleague. BFS must make an even greater effort in developing young players, in the equal representation of clubs on the entire country's territory, and that process should include even more sports-science findings. The system established for the work with the young represents a continual activity that has to be valued as the biggest legacy of Serbian basketball.

Serbian basketball has proven worthy of the Yugoslav basketball legacy, it showed that it is worthy of the heritage of the earlier accomplishments, which grants us a justified hope that Serbian basketball, in the following decade, will have, if not better, than at least, the same results. Simply, Serbia will continue to be a country of basketball!

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