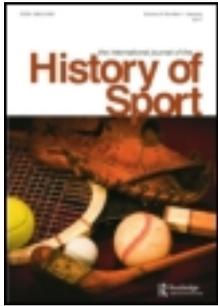


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### 'It All Ended in an Unsporting Way': Serbian Football and the Disintegration of Yugoslavia, 1989-2006

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# 'It All Ended in an Unsporting Way': Serbian Football and the Disintegration of Yugoslavia, 1989–2006

Richard Mills

*Part of a wider examination into football during the collapse of Eastern European Communism between 1989 and 1991, this article studies the interplay between Serbian football and politics during the period of Yugoslavia's demise. Research utilizing interviews with individuals directly involved in the Serbian game, in conjunction with contemporary Yugoslav media sources, indicates that football played an important proactive role in the revival of Serbian nationalism. At the same time the Yugoslav conflict, twinned with a complex transition to a market economy, had disastrous consequences for football throughout the territories of the former Yugoslavia. In the years following the hostilities the Serbian game has suffered decline, major financial hardship and continuing terrace violence, resulting in widespread nostalgia for the pre-conflict era.*

On the final day of a 2007 research trip across a number of the former Communist states of Eastern Europe, I stopped off in Vukovar, a small Danubian town in Croatia which was made famous in 1991 when the Yugoslav People's Army combined with Serb paramilitaries to destroy it in a vicious three-month siege. [1] Among the numerous shattered buildings that still litter the town 16 years after the event, I discovered the name 'Delije' scrawled in red graffiti across an interior wall brutally exposed to the elements (see Figure 1). [2] The Delije were the Red Star Belgrade supporters' group who formed the nucleus of Arkan's feared Tigers paramilitary organization, infamous for having 'distinguished themselves in the liberation of Vukovar', [3] and responsible for widespread ethnic cleansing and some of the worst atrocities in the entire Yugoslav conflict. [4] Further up the main street, on the road

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**Figure 1** “Delije” written in a Vukovar shell

out of town, stand the ruined remains of Vukovar’s water tower (Figure 2), which has since become a symbol of the suffering endured by the town’s inhabitants. At the base of this fragile structure, just above the piles of debris that have fallen from it, one can read the initials ‘B.B.B.’ stained in blue across the weathered concrete. This acronym is short for Bad Blue Boys, the Dinamo Zagreb supporters’ group whose members were among the first to join the incipient Croatian Army in the early 1990s, taking their Dinamo emblems and flags off to the front with them. [5]

These two unanticipated calling cards daubed upon the rubble of Vukovar are a chilling indication of the level of interaction between football, politics and war during the turbulent period of Yugoslavia’s collapse. The extent of this complicity was brazenly flaunted in an event that took place shortly after the Vukovar siege, when Arkan – officially known as Željko Ražnatović – and his Tigers performed a carefully orchestrated act during a Belgrade derby game, the most eagerly anticipated Serbian match of the football calendar. Utilizing the football stadium as the perfect venue to brandish the spoils of war, a group of Tigers in full uniform held aloft consecutive road signs pillaged from war-torn Eastern Slavonia: ‘20 miles to Vukovar’, ‘10 miles to Vukovar’, ‘Welcome to Vukovar’. [6] Arkan then emerged to rapturous applause;



**Figure 2** Vukovar's symbolic water tower

a man accused of unspeakable war crimes was hailed as a hero by many of Belgrade's football supporters. Wilson fittingly describes this type of ritual: 'In that act, redolent both of a general displaying the standard of a vanquished enemy and of a hooligan showing off the colours of a rival fan he has beaten, football's pact in the Balkan horrors is laid bare.' [7]

The activities of football hooligan paramilitaries during the Yugoslav Civil War are an extreme and disturbing example of the extent to which football and nationalist politics can interact, a phenomenon well documented by academics such as Ivan Čolović, Srđan Vrcan and Drazen Lalić. [8] But almost as striking as the destruction symbolized by these two Vukovar images is the level of damage, neglect and decline that football has experienced in the Balkan region as a direct result of Yugoslavia's demise and the unravelling of what Sugden and Tomlinson describe as the sports benevolent Communist state – a theme which this essay will discuss at a later stage. [9] It is also likely that war exacerbated problems associated with the transition from Communist to Capitalist systems – along with exposure to globalization – which were being experienced across Eastern European football during this period. However,

before examining football in any detail it is important to consider the political make-up of Yugoslavia prior to its collapse.

### **The Fragile Federation**

The complex nature of the former multinational Yugoslav Federation is embodied in the country's constitution of 1974. The document, which became the world's longest constitution, with 406 articles, explains that Yugoslavia was to be governed through an elaborate balance between the federal parliament, six republican parliaments and two provincial parliaments – each with its own Communist party. The Yugoslav presidency would operate on a rotating basis. [10] The provision of one republic for each of the country's constituent 'nations' dates back to the formation of the state during the Second World War. Hence, the Serb, Croat, Slovene, Macedonian and Montenegrin 'nations' were awarded their own states, while the Muslims of Bosnia were also recognized 'in the sense of a nation' from the 1971 census onwards. The Hungarian and Albanian 'nationalities' were also awarded broad autonomy within the Republic of Serbia – in the autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo (See Figure 3 for a map of Yugoslavia and its constituent republics). [11]

The nature of these constitutional arrangements meant that with the death of Marshal Tito in 1980 – a man who had led socialist Yugoslavia since the time of its inception during the Second World War, and who had always zealously suppressed the separatist nationalisms that had plagued the initial inter-war Yugoslav state – there was very little holding the country together, with the notable exception of the Yugoslav People's Army. [12] By the beginning of the 1990s, the country's national football team, which had also acted as a unifying force throughout the Communist period, had lost a significant proportion of Croat support, with this aspiring nation state fielding its own international side – unrecognized by both FIFA and UEFA – against the United States in 1990. [13] However, although each nation theoretically enjoyed both its own state and the right to secede, the ethnic borders of Yugoslavia seldom corresponded with the borders of the constituent republics and provinces – making any act of secession extremely difficult. The complexities of the federation were mirrored by its football leagues. Table 1 provides a list of football clubs that participated during the final two seasons of the Yugoslav top flight, broken down into their respective republics, while Figure 3 shows the locations of these clubs within Yugoslavia.

This fleeting and decidedly simplified outline of the Yugoslav state – along with table 1 – partially demonstrates the substantial complications involved in a study of football across the former Yugoslavia. Hence, while acknowledging that football was both heavily involved in the civil war, and affected by it, in most of the other successor states, this study is predominantly concerned with the situation in the former Yugoslavia's largest republic, Serbia. Serbia had been the dominant power in the initial inter-war Yugoslav state, while it is also home to Belgrade, the former capital of Yugoslavia. The final Yugoslav census, which was conducted in 1991,

**Table 1** Table of clubs which participated in the Yugoslav First Federal League during the 1990–91 and/or 1991–92 seasons, divided into their respective republics

Bosnia and Herzegovina	Borac Banja Luka, Velež Mostar, FK Sarajevo, Sloboda Tuzla, Željezničar Sarajevo
Croatia	NK Osijek, NK Rijeka, Hajduk Split, Dinamo Zagreb
Macedonia	Pelister Bitola, Vardar Skopje
Montenegro	Sutjeska Nikšić, Budućnost Titograd
Serbia	OFK Belgrade, Partizan Belgrade, Rad Belgrade, Red Star Belgrade, Radnički Niš, FK Zemun (Belgrade)
Serbia Province of Vojvodina	Spartak Subotica, Proleter Zrenjanin, FK Vojvodina (Novi Sad)
Slovenia	Olimpija Ljubljana



**Figure 3** Yugoslavia-Cities with Football Clubs that participated in the First Federal League during the 1990–91 or 1991–92 Seasons

*Note:* The pre-conflict republican boundaries shown here, along with the Kosovan provincial boundary, have all now become internationally recognised borders between independent states (Not to scale)

clearly demonstrated both the relative significance of the Serbian nation to Yugoslavia, and the difficulties that Tito's Communist regime was faced with in its attempts to ensure that all national groups were treated equally. This census found that Serbs accounted for 36.2 per cent of the Yugoslav population, or 8,526,000 people – almost double the figure for the next largest constituent group, the Croats. The census also highlighted a significant obstacle to any potential dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation in 1991, showing that Serbs made up 12.2 per cent of the population in the Croatian republic and 31.3 per cent in the republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. [14] Thus, with Serbia providing the principal focus, this article will proceed with an examination of football's involvement in fermenting ethnic nationalism, along with the deteriorating political situation that led to war and the devastating consequences of the subsequent conflict upon the game itself.

### **Research Methods**

With the exception of occasional journal articles and book chapters, there is a relatively small amount of academic literature in the English language concerned with football in the former Yugoslavia. Consequently, it was decided to travel to Serbia in order to carry out interviews with people who were directly involved in the game, both during this period and in subsequent years. The decision to utilize methods of 'oral history' – a technique that is often viewed with scepticism by historical professionals – was taken after a careful consideration of the many advantages and disadvantages inherent in this approach. [15] Seldon and Pappworth highlight significant problems arising from 'oral history' concerning the potential shortcomings of the interviewee, for example the unreliability of memory and problems with determining chronological sequence, while the conscious and unconscious editing of memories must also be noted as a significant weakness in any research of this nature. [16] It is beyond doubt that these are both the most acute drawbacks of the interview process and the hardest to alleviate through diligent methodology. The retrospective nature of oral reminiscence introduces notable pitfalls such as hindsight and nostalgia, which can have detrimental consequences, like the back-projection of present emotions onto past events. [17] Thompson notes also that there is the possibility of 'distortions influenced by subsequent changes in values and norms, which may perhaps quite unconsciously alter perceptions'. [18] The necessity to be aware of these potential hazards is emphasized all the more in this study, which examines sporting events against the backdrop of a violent conflict and severe political upheaval – an often charged and emotional atmosphere.

Yet in spite of these obvious disadvantages, the careful harnessing of oral reminiscence has much to offer a study of this nature. Thompson notes that for the social historian, the distinct lack of documentary evidence in many fields of interest is 'such that the use of oral sources' can introduce 'an entirely new dimension to the

subject'. [19] Interviews can highlight those events and occurrences that are deemed to be of the greatest significance by those who were involved, while also helping to establish why events unfolded as they did – giving 'non-élite' groups an opportunity to explain their version of events. [20] It must also be noted that the events in question in this study occurred in the relatively recent past, and that interviews can assist in supplementing our knowledge of a turbulent period during which it must have been extremely difficult both to keep documentary material up to date, and for the media to deliver comprehensive sports coverage. Perhaps the most valuable advantage to a study such as this is explained by James, who states that 'foremost among the benefits' of interviewing is 'capturing the flavour of a personality or an occasion' – the importance of gauging the atmosphere of the period in question must not be underestimated. [21] The aforementioned disadvantages must be approached in the same way as one would any primary document – with an awareness of its origin, critical evaluation and careful use in conjunction with other available sources. [22]

The task of consulting a representative sample of individuals is a challenging one, not least because of the difficulties associated with organizing interviews in another country and in another language. [23] Nevertheless, it was possible to interview a broad range of people who were involved in Serbian football in various capacities during the period in question, ranging from club directors to secretaries; museum curators to supporters. Yet, it is important to note that the opinions and recollections are those of individuals and are not necessarily representative of all those who experienced the events in question. Any small study of this nature is potentially unrepresentative, not least because it consists only of those who are prepared to be interviewed. [24] In an attempt to gain a broad insight, interviews were carried out at various levels of the game, ranging from Red Star Belgrade – Serbia's largest and most prestigious club – down to modest third-division side FK Novi Sad. Interviews were either conducted in English or with the assistance of a translator, and this means that certain individuals are unable to express themselves as eloquently as they could have in their own language. Although great care has been taken so as not to misinterpret the meaning or emphasis of anything which was said, it is important to consider the potential limitations of undertaking research through translation.

Alongside the interview process, research for this study also included a period of time at Matica Srpska – the Serbian National Library – in Novi Sad. The library's comprehensive collection of contemporary Serbian newspapers, such as the sports daily *Sportski Žurnal* proved to be an invaluable source of primary material, although it must once again be pointed out that these were examined with the assistance of a translator. This study also utilizes contemporary British newspaper and periodical articles, alongside BBC television footage, while the collection at the Red Star Belgrade Museum – which documents carefully the club's history with the aid of historic photographs, statistical data and numerous trophies and pennants – was an extremely useful source of information on this particular club. Seldon and Pappworth highlight the significance of 'visiting physical locations' as a way of

understanding historical events, and this approach – which involved visiting a number of stadiums, memorials and football matches in Serbia and Croatia – has undoubtedly contributed significantly to my comprehension of the recent history of the game in this region. [25] This article thus calls upon a wide range of contemporary sources, and uses them in conjunction with oral reminiscences, strengthening the evidence gained from the interviews in the process.

### **The Yugoslav League**

A display in Red Star Belgrade's museum dedicated to the former Yugoslav League provides a painful reminder of what has been lost. Among the black-and-white photographs of full stadiums and glorious achievements are the pennants of Red Star's principal opponents (Figure 4). However, the emblem of Velež Mostar, which proudly displays the city's iconic bridge, is a harsh reminder that the league has been permanently condemned to a place in the museum's display cabinet. The bridge 'came to symbolize the very idea of Bosnia-Herzegovina, a place where Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim peoples lived distinctively, but together in mutual tolerance. ... But on November 9, 1993 ... its beautiful arch collapsed into the deep-blue river pool below.' [26]

Jelena Vuković, who works in the legal department at the Serbian premier division club FK Vojvodina, recalls that before the war

people liked football, they were very fond of it, and we had many supporters in our stadium. It was hard to find a ticket for a match with, for example, Red Star or FC Hajduk from Split, for FC Dinamo from Zagreb, FC Maribor, FC Olimpija, FC Željezničar, FC Sarajevo. ... We had a very huge and very positive league in the former Yugoslavia. [27]

According to many involved in the game during the Communist period, Yugoslav sport was both encouraged and heavily subsidized by the ruling Communist regime. Cvetko Riđošić, the director of FK Vojvodina from 1989 to 1994 and from 2002 until the time of writing, recalls that 'we were sponsored by our government' and 'we were involved in the budget of the local community and municipality'. [28] The party poured money into all levels of the game, maintaining 'all of the sporting facilities of the city' according to Miodrag Morača, who has been involved at lower-league FK Novi Sad – initially as a player and subsequently as the director – for over 30 years. [29]

However, it must be noted that the extent of political involvement in football during this period went significantly beyond mere financial support. Indeed, from the very beginning of Communist Yugoslavia, politics had never been far away from the stadium. The degree of political interference in the post-Second World War Yugoslav game can be clearly demonstrated by a brief consideration of the names and foundation years of a number of the country's top clubs. It is no coincidence that 1945, 1946 and 1947 witnessed both the initial phase of the Communist restructuring



**Figure 4** The pennants of Hajduk Split, Dinamo Zagreb, Partizan Belgrade, Velež Mostar, Olimpija Ljubljana, FK Vojvodina, Željezničar Sarajevo, FK Sarajevo, NK Rijeka, Sloboda Tuzla, and FC Vardar. Representatives of Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Slovenia, and Macedonia

of Yugoslavia and the inauguration of a number of the country's most successful teams, including: Red Star Belgrade, Partizan Belgrade, Dinamo Zagreb, FK Sarajevo, Proleter Zrenjanin and Spartak Subotica. [30] Meanwhile, the meanings behind these names reveal the extent to which Communism and football became entwined. With the exception of FK Sarajevo, all of the above names can be interpreted along ideologically Communist lines. The Communist origins of Crvena Zvezda (Red Star) and Proleter (Proletarian) are obvious, while Partizan (the name of Tito's victorious Communist liberation force), Spartak (which is named after a legendary local Partizan fighter) and Dinamo (a name with a long association with football across Communist Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union) are also highly symbolic. Moreover, at the same time as these Communist-endorsed clubs were being founded, others, with historic links to ethnic nationalism, were being forcibly disbanded by Tito's incipient regime. For example, the traditionally Croat nationalist club Zrinjski Mostar and the ethnically Serbian Slavija Sarajevo were both condemned to

extinction in 1945, while the founding of Dinamo Zagreb coincided with the prohibition of both HAŠK, founded in 1903, and Građanski, which dated back to 1911. [31] Yet it is important to state that a small number of teams, such as Hajduk Split and FK Vojvodina – formed in 1911 and 1914 respectively – not only survived this intensive period of political upheaval, but subsequently also enjoyed considerable success during the Communist period.

Despite the fact that Belgrade's two principal clubs, Red Star and Partizan, were both products of this Communist revolution in sport, they have traditionally been seen as representatives of two differing national identities. Predrag 'Pedja' Trkulja, lifelong Red Star supporter and currently curator at the club's museum, explained: 'Who supports Red Star supports Serbia. Who supports Partizan supports the [Yugoslav] state, because they had people from the government, and because from the beginning Partizan had the national name – "The Yugoslavian Sports Company". We had only "Sports Company".' [32]

Pedja also emphasized that Partizan play at 'The Yugoslavian Army Stadium' and that while Red Star 'were the public team', Partizan were 'only for the government'. [33] Opinions such as this are common among people connected with Red Star, and in 1992 the club's general manager stated that 'the star is not a symbol of Communism ... we were never a club that was closely connected to the government'. [34] However, Čolović, prior to proving that the symbolism behind the star was implicitly Communist from the day of the club's foundation, points out that a 1986 monograph on the team gave details of the 15 political and military leaders who had been club presidents since 1948. [35] It is perhaps this finding more than any other – as it clearly demonstrates the continuous presence of a substantial political influence throughout the Communist era – that underlines the highly politicized nature of Yugoslavian football throughout this period.

Unlike Red Star, rivals Partizan have struggled to distance themselves from associations with the former Communist regime, and especially from one of the most troublesome episodes in their history – the period when subsequent Croatian president Franjo Tuđman was the club's president. Partizan supporter Srđan Tikvić mourns this fact, admitting that 'I am not proud of that ... because Tuđman led the Croatians in war, and I didn't like that war. I would be happier if that war had never happened.' [36] Partizan supporters went to great lengths in an attempt to distance themselves from a past that was rapidly becoming unacceptable, with chants such as: 'Partizan, Partizan, that's a Serbian team, Slobodan Milošević is proud of them'. [37] But while Partizan struggled to assert its Serbian identity, it was Red Star – whose anti-Communist and anti-Yugoslav characteristics were highly questionable for much of the Yugoslav period – that was 'consecrated' as 'one of the most important symbols of "Serbdom"' [38] during the relentless resurrection of Serbian nationalism during the 1980s.

Čolović has documented the considerable increase in nationalism among Red Star's fans from the mid-1980s, when 'the supporters' folklore in Serbia ... was dominated by the theme of ethnic identity, until then sporadic and proscribed'. [39]

This was largely a reflection of Yugoslavia's unsettled society as a whole during this period, as ethnic nationalist fervour swept across the country. In Serbia specifically, the nationalist trend that had re-emerged in the writing of prominent academics during the mid-1980s was reaching its climax in the form of president Slobodan Milošević's demagogic mass rallies across the republic. This movement had grown out of a conviction that, because of its size, the Serbian nation was being deliberately discriminated against in an attempt to weaken its status within the Yugoslav Federation. A principal grievance centred around the fact that the widely dispersed Serbian nation had the most to lose in the process of 'disintegration' which had begun with the publication of the aforementioned 1974 constitution. [40] Pedja, curator at the Red Star Museum, explains that although Serbian nationalist songs were present around Red Star's stadium before this, they were not sung in public that much. However, he remembers that Yugoslavia's collapse was accompanied with a very popular slogan:

'Red Star Serbia, never Yugoslavia' ... after the start of the war, because we still kept the name Yugoslavia, they sang ... that slogan more. Always they sang that slogan – at every game, they mentioned it always, always, always ... we didn't have anything against Montenegro – they are our brothers, similar people to us. But it was ridiculous to call it Yugoslavia when other states like Croatia and Macedonia called themselves what they are – Macedonia and Croatia. ... We whistled to the national song because of that. In the old national song were all the names of Croatia and Macedonia and other parts of Yugoslavia – but it didn't exist – it was very ridiculous. [41]

Yet it was in the period before this, while Yugoslavia was still attempting to hold on to a fragile unity, that the Red Star supporters showed the world where the club's loyalties lay.

### **Serbia Conquers Europe**

On 29 March 1991, just months before the country's disintegration, Red Star Belgrade became the first Yugoslav club to win the European Cup, the biggest prize in European club football. The game – played in the Italian city of Bari – was broadcast live in the UK and prior to the kick-off pundit Jimmy Hill attempted to explain why, in his opinion, the Yugoslavs had been unsuccessful in the past: 'They have ... outstanding skill, they also have strength and athleticism as a nation. Where they've fallen down I suppose, is mentally ... somehow collectively they can't achieve the results that the rest of their ability perhaps merits.' [42]

Although a failure of teams to work 'collectively' is common in football, it appears likely that Hill had contemporary political disturbances in mind when he uttered these words. In response to this Desmond Lynam replied: 'Yes, they're a natural footballing nation, it seems.' While the subsequent two hours went some way to affirming Lynam's comment, the coming years would highlight that the Yugoslavs

were not however a ‘natural’ nation. Jimmy Hill’s analysis of the Yugoslav failure to work ‘collectively’ – whether he evoked this metaphor consciously or not – would prove a very astute one indeed. It must be noted that the commentators were well aware of the difficulties facing the country at this time, with Barry Davies stating:

In these days of problems for Yugoslavia, its worth noting that the leading team from the capital of Serbia has four Serbs; two from Montenegro; two from Macedonia; one born in Serbia but brought up in Romania; one born in Germany of mixed Serb and Croat parentage; and one Moslem from the border of Montenegro and Bosnia. [43]

While such multinational teams are now something of a commonplace across Europe, it must be remembered that the phenomenon of player migration was much less routine in 1991, and – crucially – that all of these ‘nationalities’ that Davies listed were still contained within a single European country at this time. Yet despite this obvious political awareness, this was the only mention of politics throughout the entire commentary, with the Red Star players referred to as Yugoslavs throughout. However, Red Star’s supporters were transmitting a very different image across Europe.

Just before the beginning of the second half, the cameras panned around Bari’s St Nicholas Stadium to show an enormous Serbian flag covering a large percentage of Red Star’s section of the stadium, with the four Cyrillic ‘S’s clear for all to see (Figure 5). Pointing to a photograph of this impressive image in the club’s museum, Pedja explains that 20,000 Red Star fans travelled to Italy for the match and ‘they took with them the biggest flag – about 60 metres’. [44]

Whether the millions of viewers watching the match around Europe realized that it was a Serbian flag is questionable, with the BBC’s commentators allowing the footage to speak for itself, but in Yugoslavia such a spectacle cannot have gone unnoticed. Pedja was keen to play down the significance of this nationalist display, stressing that ‘at that time it didn’t matter to the fans, they supported only one state in that time, at that moment, that state was Red Star. No Yugoslavia, no Serbia, nothing – they supported only Red Star. For us there were 11 presidents on the field who played a great match.’ [45] But the flag was a Serbian one, and as a Serbian newspaper would later report – ‘The arsenal of supporters’ props is expanding: at the present time the club sign is inadequate.’ [46]

There was a notable absence of Yugoslav flags in the stadium, while a number of other Serbian flags are clearly visible in the aforementioned BBC footage. Moreover, seconds after Red Star’s Pancev scored the winning penalty, the camera pans across Red Star’s delirious fans to reveal a large banner depicting the Serbian Orthodox two-fingers-and-a-thumb salute. This gesture, signifying the trinity, and of great importance to Serb nationalism, was also replicated by a number of the celebrating players after the game. [47] Pedja recalls that post-match celebrations took place not only in Belgrade, but also ‘in Zagreb, in Skopje, because we had supporters ... in



**Figure 5** A photo of the giant Serbian flag in the Red Star Museum

Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia. ... They celebrated the victory of Red Star; it was not only the victory of Red Star but of the whole state, the whole of Yugoslavia.’ [48] Indeed, the television footage clearly displays banners of non-Serbian cities visible inside the stadium [49] – and it is true that there were many Red Star fans living outside Serbian territory – but it is likely that most of these people were Serbs. A Serbian newspaper in Croatia suggested that ‘For Serbs from Croatia, Red Star is practically a part of their national identity! Until recently they did not dare to say aloud what they were by nationality, but they could say who they supported – always!’ [50] Even if non-Serbian parts of Yugoslavia did revel in the victory, the majority of Red Star’s fans in Italy that night were undoubtedly eager to assert their own Serbian identity in front of the rest of Europe: it was clear to them at least that ‘who supports Red Star supports Serbia’. [51] In Belgrade itself, the victory was also presented as a triumph for the Serbian nation, with the international edition of *Politika* printing a large article under the revealing heading: ‘Red Star as “Serbian Star”’. This article utilizes the fact that the stadium that hosted the final was called the St Nicholas Stadium – a saint who is also significant in Serbian Orthodox iconography – to forcefully emphasize the importance of both Red Star and the Orthodox faith to Serbian nationalism, stating that the club is ‘of exceptional significance and value to ... Yugoslavia, but above all for Serbia’. [52]

## Disintegration

Similar nationalist displays were taking place with the approval of President Tudjman and his new government in Croatia. [53] Yet tension in Yugoslavia's football stadiums had been building for a number of seasons before this, even if outbursts of violence had been 'strictly on a toytown level' prior to 1989. [54] While in many respects socialist Yugoslavia often had a more relaxed attitude towards dissent than many other Communist states, it must be noted that criticisms of the ruling party, or dissentient attitudes regarding the unity of Yugoslavia's nations, were usually dealt with harshly until the relaxing of such policies in the late 1980s. [55] Partizan supporter Srđan Tikvić recalls that football supporters took advantage of this eased political atmosphere, with the most severe period of trouble coinciding with the resurgence of nationalist politics in the two or three years before the war. He remembers 'one game between Hajduk Split and Partizan where the Hajduk fans burnt the national flag. They went to the stadium and Partizan players had to run from the fans to the changing room.' [56] On the significance of this act Srđan comments that 'people in Croatia wanted to be independent and that was that. They tried to express their opinions in football games and in every way they could.' Football, with its significant levels of television coverage, thus provided an ideal vehicle for drawing attention to emerging political causes throughout Yugoslavia. In a contemporary article, Bousfield notes that 'with a newly vociferous Serbian leadership increasingly at loggerheads with their Slovenian and Croatian counterparts, it was only a matter of time before football fans began to respond to the verbal hooliganism of their elders and betters'. [57]

Museum curator Pedja explains that the decisive event in the break-up of Yugoslavia 'was on the field of Zagreb when Boban, a player for Dinamo in those days, kicked a policeman. This was the crucial moment and after that it was the part of history.' Pedja is referring to the riot which broke out at the Maksimir Stadium in Zagreb on 13 May 1990. [58] This riot, surrounding an end-of-season match between Dinamo Zagreb and Red Star Belgrade, is seen by many Croat and Serb football supporters as the beginning of the Yugoslav conflict, while a number of the standard texts concerning Yugoslavia's disintegration also attribute symbolic significance to the match, seeing it as a further escalation of hostilities in the tense period prior to all-out war. [59] Boban's assault upon the policeman – in frustration at the heavy-handed way in which the police were dealing with Dinamo 'supporters' – was just one headline-grabbing action in a day of violence, but it was mercilessly exploited by anti-Croat sentiment. One article in the Belgrade-based *Sportski Zurnal* was headlined with a quote from Red Star's captain, Dragan Stojković – 'Zvonimir Boban's place is in jail!' [60] The same newspaper refers to the behaviour of Dinamo's fans as 'cannibalistic', stating that they are 'remembered for evil in Novi Sad, Banja Luka, Sarajevo. ... Even Ljubljana has not remembered anything good from them.' [61] Perhaps of more significance to subsequent events,

*Sportski Žurnal* also carried a quote from Dinamo's president just four days after the incident: 'The war of Dinamo and Red Star supporters was a serious warning to politicians; it will be a prologue to a possible apocalypse, if reason does not win over stupidity and spiritual breadth over the chauvinists' narrow-mindedness.' [62] Such foreboding was present in the aforementioned interview with Dragan Stojković, who mourned after the riot that 'politics are so arrogantly interfering in football. All the things I believed in have crashed down – there is no more Yugoslavian football or even Yugoslavia.' [63] Indeed, also in 1990, before the opening shots rang out, the writer Mihailović declared that 'the scale of violence in and around football signalled that the Balkan madness was arriving'. [64] A monument has been erected at Dinamo's stadium to commemorate the place where the war supposedly began, and it has since become a shrine dedicated to all of Dinamo's Bad Blue Boys who died during the conflict (see Figure 6). [65] Bousfield noted at the time that 'this end of season clash between the major clubs of Yugoslavia's biggest and most volatile republics ... put the finishing touches to a season of unprecedented ugliness.' [66]

The following 1990–1 season was a very difficult time for those who had to travel to the other republics during what turned out to be the final season of the full Yugoslav League. Cvetko Riđošić, director of FK Vojvodina, remembers that 'you could feel tension in the air, especially in Split and Zagreb, and also in Sarajevo'. Although he says that he and his team felt safe on these occasions, he admits that 'in the stadium it was horrible because they [the crowd] didn't come to support their club, but to provoke the other team'. [67] While elements of retrospection may be



**Figure 6** Monument commemorating 13 May 1990 as the beginning of war

present here, a contemporary newspaper commented upon the behaviour of supporters in very similar terms:

For a long time our football games have just been stage scenery for nationalist passions. Most of the 'supporters' are only slightly interested in the football match. They are turned to their rivals and their rivals' nation, and this is a chance to say, shout and scream all that they think about each other. [68]

Yet in a sense, Cvetko and his team were lucky, because he notes that as a top-flight club they were able to fly to the potentially dangerous matches in Croatia and Bosnia. For Yugoslavia's smaller teams, who had to travel around the disintegrating nation by bus, the escalation of violence really was a nightmare scenario. Miodrag Morača, who was then the director of second-division FK Novi Sad, recalls:

There were some dramatic situations. It was in this time, when Croatia was about to separate, that we travelled to play a football game in Croatia and it was a matter of life and death. . . . The war was just starting and in certain places the gunshots were beginning, but the politicians insisted that the football club must go as if nothing was happening. So it was a critical situation, very nasty – lots of nasty things might have happened, but they didn't, except fear and everything – there was nothing serious. We were stopped by armed civilians who were threatening and all that. [69]

Unlike the top flight, where the 1990–1 season just managed to complete its schedule, in this lower division the season had to finish several matches early when 'security was impossible to guarantee'. Miodrag explains that although the team would want to travel to Croatia 'nobody would drive you there because people were afraid – the driver was afraid for his bus. Week after week after week it was worse and worse, because Serbia wanted to preserve the country.' [70]

Thus, in the summer of 1991, the five Croatian teams, along with a Slovenian club, resigned from the top Yugoslav League, and just as a number of former Soviet teams had done in recent years, they went on to join their own national leagues. [71] But contrary to the findings of previous research, [72] football continued in Yugoslavia throughout the war, with an ever-diminishing league – a phenomenon that continued right up until 2006, when the Montenegrins left the championship upon achieving independence. [73] The secession of Bosnia's clubs was a particularly painful and complicated process, which occurred during the 1991–2 season. Željezničar Sarajevo were forced to abandon the league when their Grbavica stadium was literally consumed by the fighting, [74] with all of their matches in the second half of the season declared void. A number of other matches involving Bosnian teams were also written off as invalid. Bosnian teams Sarajevo, Sloboda and Velež all had their last six matches awarded as 3–0 victories to their opponents, and at the end of the season Bosnian and Macedonian clubs left the championship. [75] Cvetko Ridošić notes that the exception to this rule was the Bosnian club Borac Banja Luka

of the Republika Srpska, which continued to play in the rump Yugoslav League for another season. However, the club had to relocate to Belgrade so that it could compete in 1992–3. [76] Thus the league disintegrated, and Jelena Vuković mourns that ‘we had a very . . . positive league in the former Yugoslavia, but when war came in Yugoslavia most criteria crashed, most moral standards crashed. We didn’t have a regular championship.’ [77]

### Sanctions and Decline

For many Serbs involved with football, the most damaging aspect of the civil war was the implementation of sanctions on Serbia’s teams, a penalty which began in August 1991. [78] These sanctions initially prevented any European competitions from being played on Yugoslav territory, but were subsequently increased in severity in June 1992, becoming a strict ban on any participation whatsoever. This latter measure was implemented by both UEFA and FIFA following UN Security Council Resolution 757, which demanded the severance of all political, economic and cultural links with the rump Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). These Security Council sanctions, which included the breaking off of all sports connections, had the objective of forcing the rump Yugoslavia and its army to comply with UN demands concerning their involvement in the raging Bosnian war. [79] In December 1991, during the period of the initial territorial ban, the international edition of the Belgrade newspaper *Politika* voiced Serbian grievance over this issue with an article entitled ‘Sports Beat War and Blockades’. Having reminded the reader that Red Star had achieved the title of European and World champion – the latter a reference to the club’s 1991 triumph in the Intercontinental Cup – the article states that ‘this accomplishment is all the greater since Red Star has been banned from Belgrade, Serbia and Yugoslavia’. It goes on to mourn: ‘The European Football Association, UEFA, showed no mercy to its champion, punishing it for something Red Star has nothing to do with – there is still peace in Serbia, and Belgrade lays claim to being one of Europe’s safest cities.’ [80] Serb disappointment over the treatment of the club was also registered by the foreign press, with Louise Branson of the London *Sunday Times* using the issue of sports sanctions to underline the desperate situation which ordinary Serbs were being forced to endure:

It is the one sanction that really hurts. Stoics in the face of petrol shortages, hyperinflation and international opprobrium, football-mad Serbs are in despair at the damage wrought to the once-glorious Red Star Belgrade. . . . For the man in the street, Red Star’s disintegration has been more devastating than any other effect of UN sanctions. [81]

Museum curator Pedja recalls this period with painful memories, stating that ‘these were very long years, we played only in the domestic championship and the domestic cup, and there was only the rivalry against Partizan’. [82] Partizan were equally devastated by the situation, as they missed out on three lucrative opportunities to

participate in the Champions League. [83] As early as the winter of 1991, in the period before the outright ban on participation in Europe, *Politika* was stating that Red Star alone had ‘lost at least five million dollars in the second-half of 1991 because of UEFA’s decision’ to prevent the club from playing on Yugoslav soil. [84]

In the following years the Serbian press would angrily emphasize that the sanctions were ‘a Serb-hater and football-hater’s whim’, with some journalists attributing the decision to the eternal enemy – ‘UEFA, obviously German-led, is doing all it can to destroy Yugoslav football’. [85] This last accusation is based on historical bitterness towards Germany; both because of Nazi actions in the Second World War – when Hitler’s regime supported the brutal Ustaše puppet state in Croatia – and more recently for the influential and often unilateral role that Germany played in securing recognition for independent Croat and Slovene states in the 1990s. [86]

FK Vojvodina director Cvetko Riđošić blames the decline of Serbian sport on these ‘embargoes and political sanctions which Europe and the USA established on Serbia’, stating that they had ‘enormous negative consequences upon our sport’:

We cared a lot about football in Serbia. We were world champions in basketball, but now we aren’t; in basketball, in handball, and we always had a good national football team. We had the best players. If there weren’t sanctions during the 1990s we would be some kind of world miracle in sport because we don’t have many people – our population is up to eight million – but we won everything that we could; in volleyball also, in tennis, in swimming. We are a very sporty nation. [87]

This largely rational opinion was taken to extreme lengths by some Serbian journalists at the time, with one, in an article entitled ‘Europe’s Petty Spite’, declaring ‘they want to spite us because we are the best’. [88] The Serbs were being victimized by the rest of Europe according to Red Star’s general director, who stated at the time that ‘I am convinced that many of the pretentious sporting nations could not tolerate our increasingly obvious domination in sports ... it is a matter exclusively of the desire to deliver a blow to Serbian sport where it has attained the highest international achievements. That is an appalling strategy.’ [89] While this is an extreme opinion, it is impossible to deny that sanctions undoubtedly had a devastating affect on Serbian football.

Serb disappointment and perceived victimization was exacerbated further when the incipient Croatian national team achieved considerable success in the 1996 European Championships – reaching the quarter-finals in their debut appearance as an independent nation – while sanctions prevented the rump Yugoslavia from even qualifying for the competition. Although Yugoslavia did qualify subsequently for the 1998 World Cup – reaching the second round of the tournament – even this achievement was dwarfed when its Croatian rivals secured a remarkable third-place finish. [90]

### **Domestic Decay**

Domestically, the Yugoslav League, which subsequently became the Serbian League, has been in a state of decline since the beginning of the 1990s. While gesturing towards a large photograph of the victorious Red Star players of 1991, museum curator Pedja notes that ‘after the sanctions and war came they went to Italy, Spain and other European countries’. [91] This opinion is corroborated by Dobson and Goddard, who note that ‘apart from the “pull” factor of higher earnings available in Western Europe’, which had negative consequences for nearly all Eastern European leagues following the collapse of Communism, ‘significant “push” factors include the ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslav territories’. They continue by citing the results of a 1993 study which found that while 47.3 per cent of all non-EU players plying their trade in the EU originated from Eastern Europe, ‘players from Croatia and the rump Yugoslav Federation formed the biggest groups’ among them. [92] Museum curator Pedja acknowledges that while this exodus would probably have happened anyway – as all of post-Communist Eastern Europe was exposed to the forces of globalization – in Yugoslavia it was rapidly accelerated by war, a drastically weakened league, the country’s financial crisis and the lack of European football. [93]

Club directors are also keen to stress the considerable affects that have been experienced due to the loss of government support, with FK Novi Sad’s Miodrag Morača explaining that his club have had neither running water nor electricity for a number of years, and that the facilities are ‘large but the club doesn’t have the funds to maintain’ them (see Figure 7). He was of the opinion that the ‘old communist system was actually better for sport than this one.’ [94]

FK Vojvodina’s Cvetko Riđošić also thinks that a lack of government support is currently damaging the game. While it is undoubtedly true that the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe heavily subsidized what Collins refers to as the ‘elite sport system’, providing both facilities and funding as a means of enhancing their external image, research has demonstrated that in terms of sporting success football clubs usually fared less well under Communism than their Western counterparts. [95] The sudden decline in investment which all Yugoslav football clubs suffered following the demise of Communism must thus be viewed in relative terms, and in the context of how the Yugoslav game – the fate of which, as we have seen, was inextricably linked to the Communist regime which had restructured football in its own image – was organized at that time. Stadiums and other facilities were, and largely still are, owned by municipal governments, and as a result of this – as Collins notes – when Communism collapsed across Eastern Europe, ‘municipal subsidies were slashed and facility maintenance suffered’. [96]

The slow transition to a Capitalist model has been very painful for all clubs – even those with access to lucrative European competitions such as Red Star and Partizan – and the aforementioned detrimental affects of globalization have made it difficult to attract significant sponsorship. A further problem, which was emphasized by all interviewees, is the detrimental affect of current Serbian laws which prevent sports



**Figure 7** The FK Novi Sad director is concerned about his club's crumbling infrastructure

clubs from owning assets – a negative hangover from the former Communist regime – although attempts to rectify this situation have been on going for a number of years. As a consequence of these antiquated laws, which still remain unaltered at the time of writing, clubs have found it virtually impossible to attract outside investment.

The drop in spectator numbers has been comparable with that experienced across Eastern Europe, and many clubs are now granting spectators free admission. [97] Vojvodina director Cvetko Riđošić links the drop in attendance figures to the massive drop in quality, noting that 'our Serbian league is like the [former] Yugoslav second league, excluding Red Star and Partizan'. But he also points to the difficult financial situation in Serbia and the availability of 'quality' football on the television, as contributory factors in this decline:

Our financial situation is very bad for supporting teams in the way that you can buy tickets, buy a shirt. We are now in transition and people care about their means of existence instead of teams. On our television stations you can watch every game of the English championship – the Premiership, of Spanish, Italian, even German now. Instead of watching FK Vojvodina you stay at home and supporters like to watch more quality games instead of low-quality football. [98]

During the 2002–3 season the league's average attendance sunk to a low of just 1,767, with even the mighty Red Star only averaging gates of 3,629. [99] These figures are minuscule in comparison with the 82,000 that Red Star attracted for its European

Cup semi-final in 1991, and while such a high figure was not typical, it serves to demonstrate the drastic extent to which support declined in subsequent years. [100] While in Serbia I attended FK Vojvodina's top-flight match at the crumbling stadium of FK Zemun, a game which was televised live, only to discover a crowd of about 1,000 (see Figure 8):

Miodrag Morača, who has watched crowds drop from a couple of thousand to just a couple of hundred at his beloved lower league side FK Novi Sad, blames the continuing presence of hooliganism and organized crime for the low attendances. [101] Of course, as Dunning, Murphy and Waddington note, far from being unique to individual countries, 'hooliganism' has 'historically been a near-universal addendum' to world football and in Serbia this phenomenon continues to be a major issue. [102] At the aforementioned FK Zemun match, police guarding the tiny away enclosure almost outnumbered supporters, as is shown by Figure 8. Following the war, a Croatian politician, and president of the Croatian Olympic Committee, declared 'that there would be no more fan violence and rioting ... because there are no more ethnically heterogeneous crowds'. [103] This comment – reminiscent of similar statements by East German politicians who thought that hooliganism was not supposed to exist in a Marxist-Leninist state that 'claimed to have eliminated its preconditions', apparently 'rooted in exploitative capitalism' [104] – was of course to



**Figure 8** Away supporters on the sparsely populated terraces of FK Zemun

be proved inaccurate. Pedja recalls an incident just three years ago ‘when a young man died’ because ‘some of the supporters of Partizan shot a rocket into the side where the Delije were’. [105] But this is one of many violent incidents that have plagued post-Yugoslav football, and this worrying trend of hooliganism in the post-conflict Balkans has not improved, with Partizan Belgrade serving a ban from European competition during the 2007–8 season as a result of severe crowd violence in a UEFA Cup match against an ethnic Croatian team from Bosnia. [106]

Meanwhile, old hostilities between supporters from the former Yugoslavia’s constituent republics are now also vented on the world stage, with the regular domestic matches of the former Yugoslavia’s First Federal League having been replaced by rare international encounters in the post-conflict era. Thus independent Croatia and Bosnia have both been pitted against the Serbian national team in World Cup and European Championship qualifying games, resulting in hostile and often violent atmospheres, despite the fact that away supporters were banned from attending these high-risk matches. [107]

The persistence of hooliganism across the former Yugoslavia can perhaps in part be explained by Dunning, Murphy and Waddington’s hypothesis that the phenomenon can be ‘contoured and fuelled’ by the ‘major ‘fault-lines’ of particular countries’, such as regional differences and inequalities, sectarianism, language-based sub-nationalisms and city-based particularism. [108] In fact the continuation of violence in Serbian football does indeed draw attention to a recurrent theme in the nation’s troubled history – internal conflict. Throughout the football world the greatest of rivalries are reserved for the closest of neighbours. This point is perhaps best illustrated by considering the intensity of the historic Anglo-Scottish rivalry in international football, or the passion of ‘Old Firm’ derbies between Glasgow Rangers and Glasgow Celtic in the domestic game. In this respect the Balkans are certainly not an exception to the rule. Since the war ended, rioting between fans of Partizan and Red Star has been among the worst football violence in Europe. Misha Glenny’s thoughts on the famous Serbian phrase ‘Samo Sloga Srbina Spašava’ (‘Only unity can save the Serb’) may provide a context for this intensified violence:

This is a deeply irrational assumption and one which Serbs, more than many nations, unwittingly expose – Serbian society is so deeply riven by provincial rivalry and indeed suspicion, that if the Serbs ever were to succeed in creating a state which encompassed them all, they would be tearing one another to shreds within minutes. [109]

The football supporter needs a rival, the hooligan an enemy, and with the break-up of the old Yugoslav Championship it was no longer possible to encounter teams from other republics on a regular basis. Thus the rivalries had to come from within. During the conflict, hostilities between Partizan and Red Star were merely put on hold temporarily, with each set of supporters eager to assert its Serbian credentials. This phenomenon was taken to extremes by the writer Brana Crnčević, who declared himself ‘a Partizan fan, who supported Red Star’ [110] – a statement that in other

circumstances would be football heresy – in order to assert his Serbian identity, such was the importance of Red Star Belgrade.

## Conclusion

The relentless drift towards decline, ever decreasing quality and continuing violence inspires nostalgic reminiscence for what has been lost in the memories of many Serbs involved in football. Their recollections often drift seamlessly from happy memories of past football exploits to memories of a generally happier life. Partizan supporter Srđan Tikvić thought that Eastern European teams had been better during Communist times because

we and the Soviet Union in that period had a better league and better players. We lived very well in the 1970s and 1980s, I think maybe better than some Western countries in that period, because we had everything. It was a really good life ... and we had strong teams and a strong country – everything was strong. [111]

Srđan also admits that he ‘would like Yugoslavia to be whole, but it is OK how it is now, because if others don’t want to live in one country it is OK. I am proud because I am a Serb and Serbia is my country now’. [112] These comments reveal that Srđan ironically fits the stereotype of the pro-Yugoslav Partizan supporter, but in fact, fans of ‘Serbian’ Red Star also mourn the passing of their old way of life. Pedja, a lifelong Red Star fan, fondly remembers how important football used to be to the general public:

They enjoyed watching the games between Partizan and Red Star -they interrupted their lunch – the whole family visited the matches. It was the main thing in their lives. It is not like today where we have TV, we have other things to do, a lot of jobs to do. ... Before that it was on the top – the first thing. ... Now it is a very hard time for us, we don’t have so much free time to go and watch the game ... working time and everything is so full ... these were happy times, and happy moments; we didn’t care for anything except football and travelling. Now ... we have less free time to think about those things. We must think about money, jobs – some irrelevant things for me. [113]

This nostalgia for a happier period in the history of the region, which can often manifest itself as a somewhat rose-tinted view of the past, is accompanied by an even greater sense of frustration with the effects of war upon their beloved game. All of the individuals who were interviewed were negative about the interplay between sport and politics, with Red Star museum curator Pedja declaring that because politics became involved in sport in 1991, the former Yugoslav republics have ‘ceased to exist’ in the sporting world. [114] However, this commonly held anti-political stance, and the strong desire demonstrated by people such as FK Vojvodina director Cvetko Riđošić to separate football from the political situation, is principally due to the devastating affect of sanctions, while aspects such as Red Star’s undeniable

importance to Serbian nationalism are rarely placed in the same negative ‘political’ bracket.

Čolović notes that in 1989 Serbian literary critic Petar Džadžić stated that during the 1970s he and his friends ‘identified only four important institutions in the current social life of the Serbs: the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the daily paper *Politika*, the publisher Prosveta and Red Star’. [115] While it is true to some extent that the growth of nationalism among football supporters in Serbia closely mirrored events in wider Serbian society, it is undeniable that Red Star quickly consolidated its position as one of the most prominent (and successful) symbols of ‘Serbdom’. The club’s supporters used the 1991 European Cup Final as a stage upon which to display their Serb nationalism to the rest of Europe, while Serbs living outside Serbia’s borders used Red Star as a prominent symbol of their Serbian identity. It is thus possible to state with some certainty that in Yugoslavia, at least, there is evidence to support Sugden and Tomlinson’s assertion that ‘rather than being a passive follower of political trends association football’ did indeed play a ‘proactive role in the ... redrawing of Eastern Europe’s boundaries’. [116]

By far the most striking phenomenon that I encountered was the level of decline and deterioration that football has endured since Yugoslavia’s demise. A significant factor in this decline has been the dismantling of ‘the sports-benevolent central bureaucracy’ [117] or, in other words, the sudden vacuum that was created during the transition from the state-sponsored Communist structure to a Capitalist system, which resulted in an almost complete cessation in investment for the majority of Serbia’s clubs. The negative consequences of globalization, such as the loss of quality players to more lucrative foreign markets and the loss of supporters due to the high-quality Western European football which is regularly shown on the television, meant that the interviewees were – perhaps mistakenly – unanimous in attributing the former Yugoslavia’s strong league to the benefits of the then Communist regime’s commitment to sport.

Many of the reasons given for football’s deterioration in Serbia, such as the devastating affect of sanctions, were linked to the case-specific nature of the Yugoslav civil war, but on closer inspection it is likely that – as in much of the rest of Eastern Europe – football would have suffered regardless of the conflict. This is to say that the war merely exacerbated and accelerated trends that were present across Eastern European football at this time. Similar financial difficulties and external factors such as those experienced across the former Yugoslavia were a significant contributory factor in the decline of both the Soviet Football League and its Russian successor. [118]

In the final analysis Yugoslav football has been catastrophically affected by both the chaotic political transition and the civil war – a conflict that the game itself must shoulder some blame for provoking. Thus it is ironic that while talking about the disintegration of his country’s football leagues, FK Novi Sad director Miodrag Morača concludes that the transition was not conducted in the true spirit of the game: ‘It all ended in an unsporting way – not in a football way.’ [119]

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## Notes

- [1] Silber and Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, 173–87.
- [2] Photographs included in this article were taken by the author over the course of 2006 and 2007.
- [3] *Zvezdina Revija*, 1991, cited in Čolović, *Politics of Identity in Serbia*, 277. The 'liberation' to which the Serbian newspaper *Zvezdina Revija* refers resulted in the death of hundreds of Vukovar's inhabitants, along with the total destruction of the town by the lethal combination of heavy artillery bombardment and a final street-by-street cleansing. At the beginning of the siege the Croat politician Stipe Mesić had declared that Vukovar would be 'Croatia's Stalingrad': Silber and Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, 176.
- [4] Foer, *How Football Explains the World*, 23.
- [5] Vrcan and Lalić, 'From Ends to Trenches', 177.
- [6] D. Fowler, *The Observer*, 18 Jan. 2004, available online at <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/osm/story/0,6903,1123137,00.html>, accessed Nov. 2006.
- [7] Wilson, *Behind the Curtain*, 109.
- [8] Čolović, *Politics of Identity in Serbia*: Vrcan and Lalić, 'From Ends to Trenches'.
- [9] Sugden and Tomlinson, 'Football, Resentment and Resistance', 104. In this article the term is used to describe the collapse of the Soviet Union.
- [10] Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 311–14. See also Silber and Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, 29. India currently has the world's longest operational constitution, which contains 395 articles.
- [11] This was ostensibly because of the belief that 'nationalities' should not have two separate states – and independent Hungarian and Albanian states already existed outside of Yugoslavia – but in reality anxieties over wounded Serb nationalism in the event of a truncated Serbia, along with fears that these divided 'nationalities' would aspire to unity within one nation, played a significant part in the formulation of this provincial autonomy policy. On 'nations' and 'nationalities' see; Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 327–9; on Bosnian Muslims being awarded nation status see Malcolm, *Bosnia*, 199–200.
- [12] For Tito and his attempts to solve Yugoslavia's nationality problem see; Crnobrnja, *The Yugoslav Drama*, 69–70. For the initial, inter-war Yugoslavia see Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 110–200.
- [13] For an example of the Yugoslavian national team as an integrative force, see Sack and Suster, 'Soccer and Croatian Nationalism', 309. For the internationally unrecognized Croatian team's 1990 match against the USA see *ibid.*, 313–19.

- [14] Croats numbered 4,636,000 in 1991. It must be noted that the majority of Yugoslavia's Albanian population, almost two million people according to the 1981 count, boycotted this census: Pavković, *The Fragmentation of Yugoslavia*, 50; Judah, *The Serbs*, 340–5.
- [15] Tosh and Lang, *The Pursuit of History*, 311. For a detailed analysis of the positive and negative attributes of oral history, see Seldon and Pappworth, 'Élite' *Oral History*, 16–52; see also Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*.
- [16] Seldon and Pappworth, 'Élite' *Oral History*, 16.
- [17] G.W. Jones, cited in *ibid.*, 25.
- [18] Thompson, *The Voice of the Past* 100.
- [19] *Ibid.*, 88.
- [20] Seldon and Pappworth, 'Élite' *Oral History*, 42–50.
- [21] R.R. James, cited in *ibid.*, 47.
- [22] Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 321.
- [23] On the complexities of trying to achieve a broad and representative sample see *ibid.*, 123–30.
- [24] Seldon and Pappworth, 'Élite' *Oral History*, 34–5.
- [25] *Ibid.*, 12–13.
- [26] Silber and Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, 291.
- [27] Jelena Vuković, interview with author, Novi Sad, Serbia, 30 March 2007. All subsequent Jelena Vuković quotations are taken from this interview.
- [28] Cvetko Ridošić, interview with author, Novi Sad, Serbia, 30 March 2007. All subsequent Cvetko Ridošić quotations are taken from this interview.
- [29] Miodrag Morača, interview with author, Novi Sad, Serbia, 29 March 2007. All subsequent Miodrag Morača quotations are taken from this interview.
- [30] Foundation years are as follows: Crvena Zvezda (Red Star Belgrade), 1945 (Crvena Zvezda official website, available at <http://www.crvenazvezdafk.com/en/istorija1.htm>, accessed March 2008); Partizan (Belgrade), 1945 (Partizan official website, available at <http://www.partizan.rs/istorija.php?Jezik=en&sec=6&sec1=1>, accessed March 2008); Dinamo Zagreb, 1945 (Dinamo Zagreb official website, available at <http://www.nk-dinamo.hr/en/klubpovijest/Default.aspx>, accessed March 2008); Spartak Subotica, 1945 (Blue Marines, Spartak Subotica supporters club, official history, available online at [http://www.bluemarines.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=15&Itemid=4](http://www.bluemarines.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15&Itemid=4), accessed March 2008); FK Sarajevo, 1946 (FK Sarajevo official website, available at <http://www.fcsarajevo.ba/klub.php>, accessed March 2008); Proleter Zrenjanin, 1947 (Proleter supporters history, available online at <http://members.tripod.com/~YUSport/istorija.html>, accessed March 2008)
- [31] For a history of Slavija see Slavija Sarajevo official website, available at <http://www.fkslavija.com/page.php?2>, accessed March 2008. For Communist prohibition of Zrinjski Mostar see Rolland, 'Le football dans la Bosnie-Herzégovine d'après-guerre', 197; and 'HŠK Zrinjski History', Zrinjski Mostar official website, available at [http://www.hskzrinjski.ba/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=12&Itemid=35](http://www.hskzrinjski.ba/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12&Itemid=35), accessed March 2008. For prohibition of HAŠK and Građanski see Dinamo Zagreb official website, available at <http://www.nk-dinamo.hr/en/klub-povijest/Default.aspx>, accessed March 2008.
- [32] Predrag 'Pedja' Trkulja, interview with author, Belgrade, Serbia, 31 March 2007. All subsequent Predrag 'Pedja' Trkulja quotations are taken from this interview.
- [33] *Ibid.* For a more detailed discussion of Red Star and Partizan allegiances see Čolović, *Politics of Identity in Serbia*, 269–79.
- [34] V. Cvetković, cited in Čolović, *Politics of Identity in Serbia*, 268.
- [35] Čolović, *Politics of Identity in Serbia*, 268.
- [36] Srđan Tikvić, interview with author, Novi Sad, Serbia, 30 March 2007. All subsequent Srđan Tikvić quotations are taken from this interview.

- [37] Cited in Čolović, *Politics of Identity in Serbia*, 273.
- [38] Čolović, *Politics of Identity in Serbia*, 259.
- [39] *Ibid.*, 272.
- [40] Serbian academics initially voiced their grievances in the now infamous ‘Memorandum’ of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, which caused uproar when it was leaked to the press in 1986: Judah, *The Serbs*, 158–60. For a full English translation of this document see ‘1986 Memorandum of The Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, (SANU)’ (1986), available online at [http://www.trepca.net/english/2006/serbian\\_memorandum\\_1986/serbia\\_memorandum\\_1986.html](http://www.trepca.net/english/2006/serbian_memorandum_1986/serbia_memorandum_1986.html), accessed March 2008. For the rise of Slobodan Milošević see; Cohen, *Serpent in the Bosom*, 43–94.
- [41] ‘Pedja’ Trkulja interview.
- [42] European Cup Final: Red Star Belgrade v Olympique Marseille, live broadcast, BBC1, 29 May 1991.
- [43] *Ibid.*
- [44] ‘Pedja’ Trkulja interview.
- [45] *Ibid.*
- [46] *Slobodna Dalmacija*, cited in Čolović, *Politics of Identity in Serbia*, 268.
- [47] Wilson, *Behind the Curtain*, 107.
- [48] ‘Pedja’ Trkulja interview.
- [49] Such as Sarajevo.
- [50] *Naša Riječ*, cited in Čolović, *Politics of Identity in Serbia*, 267.
- [51] ‘Pedja’ Trkulja interview.
- [52] M. Simeunović, ‘Red Star As “Serbian Star” – First Football Champion From Yugoslavia is Something Special’, *Politika: The International Weekly*, 8–14 June 1991.
- [53] Sack and Suster, ‘Soccer and Croatian Nationalism’, 315. See this article along with Vrcan, ‘The Curious Drama’ for more on Croatian nationalism in football.
- [54] Bousfield, ‘An Uneasy Alliance’.
- [55] For an analysis of the complex issue of dissent in Communist Yugoslavia see Dragović-Soso, *Saviours of the Nation*, 13–17; Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia*, 271–6.
- [56] Tikvić interview. See also Missiroli, ‘European Football Cultures’, 15.
- [57] Bousfield, ‘An Uneasy Alliance’.
- [58] ‘Pedja’ Trkulja interview. See also D. Trevisan, ‘65 Hurt as Zagreb Fans Riot; Yugoslavia’, *The Times* (London), 14 May 1990.
- [59] For an example of supporters viewing the riot as the beginning of the Yugoslav Civil War see Dinamo Zagreb official website, available at <http://www.nk-dinamo.hr/eng/bbb.asp>, accessed Nov. 2006. Examples of standard texts describing the riot as a significant escalation in ethnic tensions include Silber and Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, 90; Tanner, *Croatia*, 228.
- [60] ‘Zvonimiru Bobanu je Mesto u Zatvoru!’, *Sportski Žurnal*, 17 May 1990.
- [61] M. Kos, ‘Gnev Gubitnika’, *Sportski Žurnal*, 17 May 1990.
- [62] Dinamo Zagreb president, cited in Kos, ‘Gnev Gubitnika’.
- [63] ‘Zvonimiru Bobanu je Mesto u Zatvoru!’, *Sportski Žurnal*, 17 May 1990.
- [64] Cited in Vrcan and Lalić, ‘From Ends to Trenches’, 178.
- [65] Both the riot and the monument have also been discussed in Kuper, *Football Against the Enemy*, 227–35 and Sack and Suster, ‘Soccer and Croatian Nationalism’.
- [66] Bousfield, ‘An Uneasy Alliance’.
- [67] Ridošić interview.
- [68] Kos, ‘Gnev Gubitnika’.
- [69] Morača onterview.
- [70] *Ibid.*

- [71] A. Mihajlović, 'They Don't Want Yugoslavia – They Want Europe: Croats and Slovenes Leave the First Football Division', *Politika: The International Weekly*, 3–16 Aug. 1991, 18. See also Yugoslavia 1990–1, Rec Sport Soccer Statistics Foundation (RSSSF), available online at <http://www.rsssf.com>, accessed March 2007.
- [72] Missiroli, 'European Football Cultures', 15.
- [73] Morača interview. For league tables of all Yugoslav seasons, along with those of the seceding states, see RSSSF website.
- [74] For much of the Sarajevo siege the Grbavica stadium formed part of the front line. The occupying Serb forces burned large parts of it, while people were allegedly forced to dig trenches for the Bosnian Army on the training field alongside it: 'Galić (IT-98-29) "Sarajevo" Transcript', International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, 1 Feb. 2002, available online at <http://www.un.org/icty/transe29/020201ED.htm>, 2900–2901, accessed Aug. 2007.
- [75] Yugoslavia 1991–2, RSSSF.
- [76] Ridošić interview. See also Yugoslavia 1991–2, RSSSF.
- [77] Vuković interview.
- [78] Čolović, *Politics of Identity in Serbia*, 264.
- [79] M. Simeunović, 'Yugoslav Athletes in a Ghetto', *Politika: The International Weekly*, 6–12 June 1992. For the full text of Resolution 757 see 'UN Security Council Resolution 757', University of Minnesota Peace Resource Center, available online at <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/peace/docs/scres757.html>, accessed May 2008.
- [80] M. Simeunović, 'Sports Beat War and Blockades', *Politika: The International Weekly*, 28 Dec. 1991–10 Jan. 1992.
- [81] L. Branson, 'Death of a Football Legend Causes the Greatest Pain; The Balkans', *Sunday Times* (London), 25 April 1993.
- [82] 'Pedja' Trkulja interview.
- [83] Tikvić interview.
- [84] Simeunović, 'Sports Beat War and Blockades'.
- [85] *Sport*, cited in; Čolović, *Politics of Identity in Serbia*, 265.
- [86] Silber and Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, 197–201, 216. Milošević actually attempted to explain German policy towards Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s by evoking the Second World War: 'It all began with the unification of Germany. As soon as that happened Germany began punishing the victors of the Second World War.' Cohen, *Serpent in the Bosom*, 144.
- [87] Ridošić interview.
- [88] Čolović, *Politics of Identity in Serbia*, 265.
- [89] M. Tomić, cited in *ibid.*, 265–6.
- [90] A full list of results for Euro '96 can be found on the official UEFA website, available at <http://en.euro2008.uefa.com/history/season=1996/matches/index.html>, accessed July 2008. For World Cup '98 see the official FIFA website available at <http://www.fifa.com/worldcup/archive/edition=1013/results/index.html>, accessed July 2008.
- [91] 'Pedja' Trkulja interview.
- [92] Dobson and Goddard, *The Economics of Football*, 203–5. A detailed list of other 'push' and 'pull' factors can also be found here.
- [93] 'Pedja' Trkulja interview.
- [94] Morača interview.
- [95] Collins, 'Epilogue: Eastern European Sport', 834–7. This article contains both a brief analysis of the advantages and disadvantages for sport under Eastern European Communism, as well as an examination of the consequences of its collapse at the end of the 1980s. Eastern European clubs only succeeded in winning two European Cups during the Communist period

(Steaua Bucharest in 1986 and Red Star Belgrade in 1991), while no Eastern European side won the UEFA Cup prior to Communism's collapse. In international football, Europe's Communist nations never won a World Cup, but both the USSR and Czechoslovakia did enjoy limited success by winning the European Championship, in 1960 and 1976 respectively.

- [96] *Ibid.*, 836–7.
- [97] During this research period in Serbia I attended two top-flight matches, with free admission at both.
- [98] Ridošić interview.
- [99] 'Serbia and Montenegro historical attendances 1999–2006', European Football Statistics, available online at <http://www.european-football-statistics.co.uk/attn/archive/aveser.htm>, accessed March 2007.
- [100] Average attendance figures for the 1980s were unavailable, but all interviewees were keen to stress that crowd numbers had previously been drastically higher.
- [101] Miodrag Morača noted that match-fixing and bribery have been rife in Serbian football since the collapse of Yugoslavia, with a number of club presidents being murdered as a result of mafia involvement in the game: Morača interview. For a detailed account of the interaction between Serbian football and organized crime see Simić, *Fudbalska Mafija u Srbiji*, and Wilson, *Behind the Curtain*, 120–2.
- [102] Dunning *et al.*, 'Towards a Sociological Understanding of Football Hooliganism', 1.
- [103] Vrcan and Lalić, 'From Ends to Trenches', 183.
- [104] Denis, 'Soccer Hooliganism in the GDR'.
- [105] 'Pedja' Trkulja interview. See also Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round*, 708–9.
- [106] The violence occurred during a UEFA Cup tie against Bosnian side NK Zrinjski Mostar: see 'Partizan Disqualified From UEFA Cup', 26 July 2007, official UEFA website, available at <http://www.uefa.com/uefa/keytopics/kind=512/newsid=564584.html>, accessed Aug. 2007. For more examples of post-Yugoslav hooliganism see Vrcan and Lalić, 'From Ends to Trenches', 176–85.
- [107] Croatia's first matches against the then Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) were two European Championship qualifiers held at the end of 1999. For a report of the hostility surrounding these games see Wilson, *Behind the Curtain*, 156–8 and 'Football: Yugoslavia Pitch Battle has Croatia "in Tears"', *The Independent* (London), 12 Oct. 1999. The first competitive match between Bosnia and Serbia and Montenegro was a World Cup qualifier in 2004, although the two countries had played a 'friendly' – blighted by ethnic abuse between Bosnia's Serbs and Muslims – prior to this in 2002. See Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 'Report on the State of Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Analysis for January–December 2002 period', available online at <http://www.bh-hchr.org/Reports/reportHR2002.htm>, accessed June 2008, and I. Traynor, 'Sarajevo Set for New Siege', *The Guardian*, 7 Oct. 2004.
- [108] Dunning *et al.*, 'Towards a Sociological Understanding of Football Hooliganism', 22.
- [109] Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia*, 15–16.
- [110] B. Crnčević, cited by Čolović, *Politics of Identity in Serbia*, 269.
- [111] Tikvić interview.
- [112] *Ibid.*
- [113] 'Pedja' Trkulja interview.
- [114] *Ibid.*
- [115] Čolović, *Politics of Identity in Serbia*, 268.
- [116] Sugden and Tomlinson, 'Football, Ressentiment and Resistance', 89.
- [117] *Ibid.*, 104.
- [118] Edelman and Riordan, 'USSR/Russia and the World Cup'.
- [119] Morača interview.

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