

LETTER OF SUPPORT

From:

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A story that might end being fairytale

Not so long ago, if I'm correct with my memories, somewhere around 2001-2002, Macedonian National Team was going on to doubleheader with Croatia and Germany as the powerhouses in the group stage. No, it wasn't for any football games. Outside it was cold, one of the games was rescheduled on TV due to clash with several other sports competitions, so I turn on the radio and didn't care for the rest of the games. We were facing Croatia, game that nowadays means a lot for the professional career of one of the Croatian vets, Roko Leni Ukic. It was his debut with the National Team, in the sports hall right across the beautiful Lake of Ohrid. Unfortunately, we were not good enough. We lost. Earlier that year, playing in the same sold out arena Femerling stepped in for the first and only time in my country. Deeper in my memories, I found myself at some family gathering celebrating an orthodox holiday when I ran in front of the TV to watch the away game against Croatia. We lost again, but yet I was hoping that one day we're going to repeat the 1999 EuroBasket participation, then first since we declare the independence.

A lot before this, I witnessed almost-a-dunk by our legend Vrbica Stefanov as a somewhat buzzer-beater against the Belgian Lions. It was November and National Teams were playing qualifications. Some other memories took me in the mid of the 90s when in our local, now former, 'holly' basketball hall Jane Sandanski, Russians and Slovenians were taking the wins in nearly narrow games winning only by single-digit margins but we could've for at least one and a half hour be witnesses of some of the best Euro-based players.

Some decisive games against Hungary, Ukraine, Estonia or Great Britain came in the period when everything was changed due to the new clubs competitions that were the main actors during the season. Passionate fans were waiting for days these National Team games to come, and temperature in the arena was raising as if the summer temperatures were not hot enough. Streets were melting outside while our local heroes were preparing for the big games. That's how the EuroBasket 2011 and MKD's 4th spot at the end of the competition happened.

This year November won't bring Germany, new Roko Leni Ukic or one of our players trying to dunk against Belgium. We missed out our chance in the pre-qualifiers and there's no come back. Instead we'll play again pre-qualifiers, but this time for the EuroBasket 2021 Qualifying Rounds. At the same time the best 32 National Teams in Europe will face each other in the FIBAWCQs for China 2019.

I have to admit one thing. I've become a basketball-National Teams junky thanks to the football qualifiers. Kids dream of watching big Euro stars coming to play in their country. People gather several hours before the games to get 'prepared' for the match of their National Team. But yes, we have to admit one thing, basketball is not and will never be football. And we're all good with that. Yet, there's a time for something new - bring back home the National Team games. Bring back the chance for most of us to watch some of the best Euro-based players. Only dozen countries during the season have a chance to be part of the European club competitions. "Thanks" to the closed league system that was introduced couple of years ago, most of the clubs cannot even dream of being part of the best competitions. Thanks to almost-newly promoted Basketball Champions League, club can use the sport merits for the first time after so many years, decision I support a lot. FIBA World Cup Qualifiers can bring the basketball magic back during the season. It will be superb to watch Iceland, Belgium, Great Britain or Belarus putting everything on the ground to be tough opponents against one of the best in the world, not only in Europe. We might miss the NBA players during the winter windows, that's an issue but I believe all these games will be a step forward for some of the best youngsters to show what they can do for their country. So far, taking into consideration every single aspect of the games, media, internet, forums, ticket sales and social media, we can expect good start. Maybe not the best, but even the most skeptical basketball addicts will accept the new system.

Fans. It's all about them. With all due respect to few European and South American countries where National Teams draw huge interest, there's no real tie between the local people and the National Teams right now. Summer competitions are great, but it's impossible to attract a lot of people to watch the National Team when these events take part only once a year. Now they will have the opportunity to support the country's best from the first row during the cold winter months. That's how they do in other sports. Basketball should not be an exception.

At the time of my writing, there's an ongoing discussion among the key parties in Europe's basketball 'battle'. Hope everything goes well for the basketball fans in Europe. There's a chance to be grabbed by the both parties. Who knows, maybe these games will save the game in Europe and rest of the world. We saw eager basketball fans in Africa and South America this summer.

***Edit November 6.** Unfortunately, some clubs decided to go against these windows by not making compromise with their schedule. I might agree with them on some issues, but these Qualifiers can only bring benefits to them. Not to forget the recently finished EuroBasket. Many players, including Luka Doncic, still player showing its magic on European soil, spread its talent across the world thanks to the National Team games. Facundo Campazzo, Klemen Prepelic and many more got their glory thanks to the Continental Cups. Now it's our time to enjoy their plays again on the road to those Cups.

I'm Nenad Krajcinovic from Skopje and I support FIBA World Cup and Continental Cups qualifiers.

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