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INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER TO THE HISTORY OF FOOTBALL IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Abstract

The present article explores the beginnings of organized football in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The first football was brought to the country from Budapest in 1903 as a gift from Mostar-based banker Bernard Lajhner for his sons Alfred and Oskar. The football story of Sarajevo began in the spring of 1908 when freshmen from the Realna gimnazija Prep School in Sarajevo, incidentally Tuzla natives Emil Najšul, Fedor Lukać and Stevo Jakanović visited Zagreb, where they first came into contact with the game. The beginnings of football in Banja Luka date back to the second decade of the 20th century. University student Gusti Cengrić brought the first football and the first pair of football boots to the city. The football pioneers of Banja Luka were locals who studied at renowned universities throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Zagreb, Leoben, Vienna) where they first learned about the game. Based on available sources, it may be assumed that the first official football match on Bosnian and Herzegovinian soil took place in February 1911, when a team of preparatory school students from Sarajevo representing the Srednješkolski sportski klub Osman (Osman Preparatory School Sports Club) returned from a short tour of Split. During their journey home, they also visited Mostar, where they played two matches against the local Đački športski klub (Students' Sports Club). The most successful Bosnian and Herzegovinian teams of the interwar period were the Serbo-Croatian Saraje-

vo-based city rivals Slavija and SAŠK. With the exception of the 1932 season, both teams interchangeably reached all National Championship playoffs held between 1923 and 1940. At this level, both teams recorded 2nd place finishes as their best respective results.

Key words: Football; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Mostar; Bernard Lajhner; SK Slavija (Slavija Sports Club); SAŠK (Sarajevski amaterski športski klub – Sarajevo Amateur Sports Club).

1. The History of Football in Mostar

The first association football ball was brought to the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina from Budapest in 1903. It was a gift from Mostar-based banker Bernard Lajhner to his sons Alfred and Oskar. The game of football as played by the Lajhner brothers and their coevals was not bound to a specific set of rules. For example, the number of players in each team was not predetermined. Occasionally, one of the teams was represented only by a single player. The size of the 'playing field' was adapted according to the number of players participating in a respective match. The 'players' then proceeded to alternately kick the ball (as hard as possible) to the respective opposing side with the aim to manoeuvre the ball across the line, behind which the other 'team' had been positioned. The 'team' most successful in this particular endeavor was pronounced the winner. Mostar's youth also competed at kicking the ball as hard, efficient and far as possible. Whoever excelled in each of the listed elements of the 'game' was considered a 'skilful' player.¹

Football was usually played on a turf in front of the "Sjeverni logor" army barracks, where vast numbers of Austro-Hungarian troops were stationed during the Bosnian crisis. Some of them keenly observed the game played by Mostar's football pioneers and soon joined in to teach them about the basic rules of football. According to one of Mostar's football pioneers, Oskar Lajhner, their first 'trainers' were two Austro-Hungarian soldiers of Hungarian descent named Nagy and Mano. According to the same source, the first Mostar team – in addition to Lajhner and the aforementioned Hungarian soldiers – also included

1 Cf. MLADEN DELIĆ, *Enciklopedija jugoslavenskog nogometa*, Spektar, Zagreb, 1974., p. 12. –13.; BRANIMIR MARTINAC – FARUK ČAPINA, „Bernard Lajhner stiže sa loptom”, DRAGAN MILADINOVIĆ (ed.) *Mostar – kolijevka sporta*, Mostar, 1996., p. 27. – 28.

preparatory school students Gotfrid, Molnar (both captain and star player), Marcel, Merdžo, Filo, Himlaufer, Mesihović and Nazečić.²

Casual ('informal') football clubs were formed soon after. Because they mainly consisted of students (the popularity of the game spread most rapidly among them), football clubs were active mostly during the summer holidays with matches being played fairly regularly. The first historical example of such a club was the Đački športski klub (Students' Sports Club), founded in 1905 under the guidance of Stjepan. pl. Kuštreb, Physical and Sports Education teacher at the Velika gimnazija University Preparatory School in Mostar and also Mostar's first known football coach. The club was later renamed as Gimnazijski omladinski klub Zrinjski (Zrinjski Preparatory Students' Youth Club). The core of the club was represented by students Rudolf Brozović, brothers Bruno and Edo Novak, Marko Suton, brothers Željko and Ante Merdža, Abid Pehlivanović, Slavko Jukić, Ivan Bošnjak and Karl Šmit. Zrinjski's first real competition, the Hrvatski radnički omladinski klub (Croatian Workers' Youth Club), was founded in 1906 as a branch of the Hrvatska radnička zadruga (Croatian Workers' Initiative) in Mostar. The club's development was headed by Ivo Čorić, Jure Zelenika, Nikola Palandžić, Miroslav Prpić, Mirko Vlaho, Ante Pavković and Kažimir Zubac. Both Zrinjski and the Hrvatski radnički omladinski klub (Croatian Workers' Youth Club) more or less floundered until 1914, when the Austro-Hungarian authorities disbanded them right before the start of World War I.³

Unfortunately, reports about the first-ever official football match played in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina could not be found. Based on available sources, we may assume that the match took place in February of 1911, when a team of preparatory school students from Sarajevo representing the Srednješkolski sportski klub Osman (Osman Preparatory School Sports Club) returned from a short tour of Split, where they played two matches against the local Hajduk Football Club. During their journey home, they also visited Mostar, where they played two matches against the local Đački športski klub (Students' Sports Club). The first match was won by the home team, who clinched a 3–0 victory,

2 Cf. B. MARTINAC – F. ČAPINA, *op. cit.*, p. 27–28.

3 Cf. ARMIN HADŽAJLIĆ, „Okrugle vratnice još 1913”, *Sportske novosti*, Zagreb, no. 3583, 21. 1. 1969, p. 5.

while the second match ended with a score of 2–1 in favor of the visiting side.⁴

After the dissolution of Zrinjski and Hrvatski radnički omladinski klub (The Croatian Workers' Youth Club), Mostar was left without a football club until 1917, when the Hercegovac Football Club was formed. The squad consisted mostly of players who previously played for the former Zrinjski and Hrvatski radnički omladinski klub (The Croatian Workers' Youth Club) respectively. Unfortunately, Hercegovac ceased operations soon after its inception. Still, new changes dawned upon the city along the Neretva River in 1919, when Mostar witnessed the establishment of its first-ever official football club, the Jugoslovenski sport klub – JSK (Yugoslavian Sports Club - YSC). Its founding members were former preparatory school students Oskar Lajhner, Ivo Čorić, Edo Novak, Rudolf Brozović, Rade Aleksić, Uroš Marinović, Dinko Doder, Mladen Kujundžić and Joško Lajnveber. Pišta Harami became the club's first president. The initial board consisted members Smailaga Ćemalović, Joško Kon, Rade Aleksić and Ljubenko Lajnveber. The Mostar-based JSK (YSC) began to attract attention immediately. The club's first official outing ended with a decisive 19–0 (!) victory against Uskok from Čapljina. JSK (YSC) soon established itself as one of the most successful clubs in Herzegovina. Regrettably, both the club's triumphant run and its operations ended in 1941 due to the beginning of World War II.⁵

However, football-crazed Mostar saw many football clubs founded even between the World Wars although they did not last very long. Such 'flashes in the pan', for example, were the Sportski klub Građanski (Citizens' Sports Club) founded in 1919 and the Omladinski sportski klub (Youth Sports Club) founded in 1921. Both clubs ceased operations less than a year later. Football enthusiasts of Mostar, particularly partisans responsible for reviving Zrinjski (renamed as Zrinjski Croatian Sports Club – HŠK Zrinjski) and founders of Radnički sportski klub Velež (Velež Workers' Sports Club), which would later become one of the greatest football-related symbols of Mostar, set new milestones in 1922.⁶

4 Cf. B. MARTINAC – F. ĆAPINA, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

5 Cf. A. HADŽAJLIĆ, *op. cit.*; B. MARTINAC – F. ĆAPINA, *op. cit.*, p. 28. – 29.

6 Cf. A. HADŽAJLIĆ, *op. cit.*

HŠK Zrinjski was officially re-established in 1922. Less than a year later, the club bested all comers to become the most dominant Mostar-based football club. The legendary Zrinjski squad of that era featured the following players: Milivoj Smoljan, Vjekoslav Vrančić, Kazmir Vlaho, Živo Bebek, Rudi Janjušić, Husein Hadžiomerović, Pero Golić, Mijo Miličević, Muhamed Omeragić, Avgust Kučinović and Franjo Štimac. Contrary to other Mostar football teams, Zrinjski continued to run a side during wartime. The period between 1941 and 1945 may be regarded as the most successful in the club's history up to that point. In 1941⁷ and 1942⁸, the club successfully competed in the top tier (Hrvatski državni razred) of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH). In addition, Zrinjski also maintained an impressive record in friendly matches after 1942.⁹ Due to being active during the Occupation era, Communist authorities disbanded the club in 1945. Zrinjski reformed in 1992, almost five decades after its forced dissolution. This probably represents a unique case in the world of football. Between 1941 and 1945, a string of outstanding footballers wore the Zrinjski crest with pride. During that era, spectators were in awe of truly remarkable players such as Mirko Rebac - Đuka, Alija Šestić, Marko Komljenović, Remzija Duranović, Slavko Džeba, Grga Brajković, Haldun "Leo" Hrvić, Bera Komljenović, Anto Rotim and Vice Mijan.¹⁰

In 1922, Mostar gained its first workers' football club, the aptly named Radnički sportski klub Velež (Velež Workers' Sports Club). The main ideologist and driving force behind the club's inception was Gojko Vučković, a well-known Mostar Communist activist and long-time member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Velež thus came to be on 26 June 1922. The club first made a mark on the historic turf in front of the "Sjeverni logor" army barracks, where the football fairytale of Mostar and consequently Bosnia and Herzegovina first began in 1903. The initial board of the club (affectionately referred

⁷ Cf. „U nedjelju počinje trka za bodove”, *Šport: hrvatski športski tjednik*, no. 10., 30. 9. 1941., p. 6.

⁸ Cf. „Početak novog državnog prvenstva”, *Šport: hrvatski športski tjednik*, no. 16., 21. 4. 1942., p. 1.

⁹ Cf. „Sarajevski nogometaši za HCK, Branko Paviša igrao kao gost za mostarski Zrinjski”, *Športske novine*, no. 41., 9. 10. 1944., p. 3.

¹⁰ Cf. B. MARTINAC – F. ČAPINA, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

to by fans as *Rođeni* - The Natives) consisted of chairman Anđelko Vlaho, vice chairman Ranko Slijepčević, first club secretary Borivoje Janjoš, second club secretary Ljubomir Bašta, treasurer Rudolf Beltram, senior club staff Mihajlo Cvetković, Milan Pavić and Bogdan Tepšić, and supervisory committee members Ljubo Zrimšek and Ljubo Pavić.¹¹

The first-ever Velež squad featured Marko Vučijak, Ljubo Zrimšek, Savo Turanjanin, Mile Pavić, Lazar Radić, Milan Rajković, Bogdan Tepšić, Ranko Slijepčević, Branko Turanjanin, Savo Medan and an eleventh member – a Serbian player (whose name remains unknown), who came to Mostar to find work but was unexpectedly included in the Velež 'First XI' instead and played a handful of matches for the club.¹²

Until the mid-1930s, *Rođeni* (The Natives) managed to establish themselves as one of the top clubs in Bosnia in Herzegovina. However, the club was constantly targeted by the authorities due to its leftist, proletarian character and had even been banned from competition on several occasions before the beginning of World War II, although each time only for brief periods of time. When taking a closer look at Velež and its activities before World War II, it becomes clear that the club's political actions had much more impact than the side's exploits on the pitch. Consequently, it was only a question of time before the authorities took measures to facilitate the club's demise. This happened when 3,500 Velež fans staged an anti-fascist rally after a match against Crna Gora from Podgorica (a predecessor of Budućnost Podgorica Football Club) in Mostar on 1 September 1940. The date marked the first anniversary of Hitler's Invasion of Poland. The authorities feared that the Mostar rally would be a precursor to larger protests throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. Per decree, they sealed the club's premises and disbanded it permanently.¹³

Due to Velež's close ties with the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the fact that 77 alumni of the club (9 of which – Mehmed Trbonja,

¹¹ Cf. MIROSLAV REDE, „Kako je nastao Velež u krilu Partije: tajnom u grob”, *Priče o posteru: Velež – uz 60. rođendan mostarskog prvoligaša (posebno izdanje Sportskih novosti)*, Zvone Mornar (ed.) Zagreb, 1982., p. 4.; EKREM IBRULJ, „Rođeni – ponos Mostara”, *MOST: časopis za obrazovanje, nauku i kulturu*, Mostar, no. 188. – 189. (2005) p. 108. – 109.

¹² Cf. *ibid.*

¹³ Cf. MIROSLAV REDE, „Bajonete i zabrana”, *Priče o posteru...*, p. 4.

Mladen Balorda, Karlo Batko, Adem Buć, Jusuf Čevro, Dr. Safet Mujić, Šefik Obad, Ahmed Pintul and Hasan Zahirović - Laca – received the Order of the National Hero (Order of the People's Hero) gallantry medal) fell in battle during World War II, it was of no surprise that the club became the only pre-wartime Mostar-based club to revive its activities immediately after the end of the war. One may even state that, due to its specific characteristics and a distinctly leftist orientation, the club was frequently used for propaganda during the era of Tito's Yugoslavia and portrayed as an exemplary football club, supported by workers of all Yugoslav nations. As such, it was exploited for Communist purposes.¹⁴

During the 1920s, Mostar witnessed the inception of another football club, the SOKO, which was officially founded in 1925. The club changed its name soon after to ŠK Jadran (Jadran Sports Club) and later again to ŠK Vardar (Vardar Sports Club). It remained active under the latter name until 1941. ŠK Vardar were an army club. The side consisted mainly of army personnel (airmen represented the majority of the squad) stationed in Mostar. ŠK Vardar ceased operations during the pivotal year of 1941. Despite campaigning by the Fiskulturni odbor Bosne in Hercegovine (Physical Culture Committee of Bosnia and Herzegovina) after the end of World War II, the club remained defunct.¹⁵

The youngest on the list of Mostar football clubs that cropped up during the interwar period was the Muslimanski omladinski športski klub (Muslim Youth Sports Club – MOŠK) Jedinstvo. Its beginnings date back to 1930, when youth members of the Muslim SOKOL all-age gymnastics organisation decided to found their own football club. MOŠK Jedinstvo did not achieve any notable results during its early days. However, the club's fortunes changed after 1940 when the majority of former Velež players transferred to MOŠK Jedinstvo after the Rođeni (The Natives) side had been disbanded due to political reasons. MOŠK Jedinstvo continued to compete until 1944. After World War II, the club shared in the fate of other counterparts disbanded and ostracised by the Communist regime for activities undertaken during the Occupation era.¹⁶

¹⁴ Cf. MIROSLAV REDE, „Devet narodnih heroja”, *Priče o posteru...*, p. 4.

¹⁵ Cf. BRANIMIR MARTINAC – FARUK ČAPINA, „Šarmeri s Neretve”, D. MILADINOVIĆ, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

2. The History of Football in Sarajevo

The football story of Sarajevo began in the spring of 1908, when freshmen from the Realna gimnazija Prep School in Sarajevo, incidentally Tuzla natives Emil Najšul, Fedor Lukać and Stevo Jokanović, visited Zagreb, where they first came into contact with the game. While there, they watched a practice session of a Zagreb university preparatory school team. The lads were cordial enough to explain their eager peers the rudimentary rules of the game and invited them to join them in a training match. The ‘Tuzla three’ returned to Sarajevo with a ball, which became a real attraction among the local youth, who embraced the ‘new ball sport’ with open arms. Najšul, Lukać and Jokanović soon took the budding euphoria to the next level and founded a students’ sports society, albeit in secrecy as the local school authorities strongly opposed the establishment of any students’ assemblies outside of the institutional educational realm. The ‘clandestine club’ also engaged in mountaineering and athletics. In addition to the three founding members, the core of the ‘covert’ Realna gimnazija Prep School sports society also included fellow students Svetozar Gerovac, Dušan Radović, Mišo Samardžija, Dušan Bugarski, Zdravko Jeftanović, Dževad Sulejmanović, Karaman, Zovko, Matanović and Čović. The football pioneers of Sarajevo initially had no clear understanding of the rules of the game. Consequently, their matches frequently resembled a comedy play. For instance, many encounters mirrored rugby union test matches as the ball often disappeared under a heap of at least a dozen players. It was not before long that the students’ society received a distinguishing name, and became known as the Srednješkolski sport klub (Secondary School Sports Club).¹⁷

An interesting titbit about the beginnings of football in Sarajevo reveals that the students explored the game without any assistance, from neither the school authorities nor their affluent parents, who had the means to fund the proper football equipment. Nevertheless, the students succeeded in establishing a firm base for the progress of football in their home city. Initially, the students practiced on a small grassy field near the current Fiskulturni dom (Sports and Leisure Centre) in central

¹⁷ Cf. DRAGAN MOLDOVAN, „Trener za kriglu piva”, *Sportske novosti*, Zagreb, no. 3559., 27. 12. 1968., p. 5.

Sarajevo. However, they soon moved to Sarajevsko polje (Sarajevo Field), today's location of the borough of Čengić - Vila. Soon after 'setting up camp' at their new training ground, the club acquired its first coach, a future football great and SK Rapid Vienna legend Karl Harmer who was completing his mandatory military service in Sarajevo. The students managed to convince Harmer to train them for a symbolic wage of one mug of beer (!?) per day.¹⁸

Because there were no other clubs in Sarajevo to play against, the students set up two teams from amongst themselves to compete with each other. The first team squad featured Janković, Mališević, Najšul, Petrović, Sulejmanpašić, Bugarski, Gajer, Lukač, Gerovac, Jokanović, Radović and Jeftanović. The second team squad was represented by Varičak, Mišković, Samardžija, Branisavljević, Toukalek, Orlić, Popović, Herman, Vaš, Šteger, Vrinjanin and Blažević.¹⁹

The club's first official match was against a side of Austrian soldiers stationed in Sarajevo during the Bosnian crisis. The Austrians provided an excellent team, which, in addition to Karl Harmer, featured a number of other quality players who were on the books of some of the top Vienna clubs before their deployment. Unfortunately, the final score of the encounter between the 'red-whites' and the 'whites' – as the students had labelled the Austrian side – remains unknown. The members of the Srednješkolski sport klub (Secondary School Sports Club) played football without a proper concept and more or less contingently until 1911, when the club's activities became more distinctly structured, planned, clearly outlined and meticulously organized. During that period, 24 students were registered as full-time members of the club.²⁰

Interestingly enough, the club did not have an official name until 1911. However, the story of how it acquired it is a memorable one. After their debut, the Sarajevo team left for a short tour of Split, where they played two matches against the local Hajduk Football Club. The journey turned out to be strenuous as, according to some accounts, the players allegedly tramped to Split all the way from Travnik. Only a few days before the

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁹ Cf. DRAGAN MOLDOVAN, „Iz Bosne je, mora da je Osman”, *Sportske novosti*, Zagreb, no. 3560, 28. 12. 1968., p. 6.

²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

scheduled first tie, the members of the Split club found themselves in a predicament. They did not know how to promote the upcoming encounter as the visiting club had not had an official name up until that point. According to lore, one of the organizers of the match supposedly addressed the situation with the following words: “The lads come from Bosnia. Why shouldn’t they be called ‘Osman’?” Thus, whether they liked it or not, the Sarajevo team became Osman overnight. The visitors were so fond of the name that they decided to keep it. But the Split tour also remains ingrained in the club’s history due to two impressive showings by the Sarajevo side, who – in spite of a strong outing – suffered a 1–4 defeat in their first match, but managed to clinch a surprising 2–1 victory in the second one.²¹

After the resounding win against the Bili (The Whites) of Split, the Sarajevo boys reached their next monumental milestone in 1912. It was that year that they hosted HAŠK Zagreb, then the most highly acclaimed side in the common geographical area. The Croatian club travelled to Sarajevo to play Osman in two friendly matches, the first of which ended with a shocking 6–4 win for the home team, who, according to sources, probably played the best game ever in their young history up until that “glorious day”. In the second encounter, Osman managed to hold the opposition to a hard-fought and well-deserved 2–2 draw. The win over HAŠK may be hailed as the greatest achievement in the history of Osman for Zagreb’s squad included a number of outstanding players, among them standouts and future Yugoslav football greats Ivo Lipovšćak and Vladimir Šuput.²²

The seemingly idyllic atmosphere among the Osman ranks soon turned a darker shade. The apparent unity was gradually undermined by national tensions that slowly brewed between the Croatian and the Serbian members of the club. These tensions – combined with political pressure exerted by both sides – lead to Osman splitting into two separate nationally-based entities: the Srpski sportski klub (Serbian Sports Club) and the Hrvatski sportski klub (Croatian Sports Club). The first was the predecessor of SK Slavija (Slavija Sports Club), while the latter later became

²¹ Cf. *ibid.*

²² Cf. *ibid.*

known as SAŠK (Sarajevski amaterski športski klub – Sarajevo Amateur Sports Club). Both clubs were considered the crown jewels among Bosnian and Herzegovinian football teams playing in the league system of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia. However, a third club had also been active in Sarajevo before World War I. That club was known as the Radnički sportski klub Hajduk (Hajduk Workes' Sports Club) and was founded in 1912. The distinctively working class club included footballers of all nationalities and played its home matches in the neighborhood of Skenderija. Sarajevo football enthusiasts referred to the team as Momčad crvenih majica (The Redshirts). The club was as a genuine counterpoise to its nationally oriented city rivals. Many future Yugoslav football stars would later credit Hajduk as the club where they first became acquainted with the 'beautiful game'. Among them was Franjo Glaser, one of the best Yugoslav goalkeepers in history who started his career wearing the hallowed red shirt.²³

Sports were mostly cast to the side in Sarajevo during World War I but the 'sporting life' did not suffer a complete halt. Soon after the ceasefire, the antebellum 'football shamrock' of Sarajevo – Slavija, SAŠK and Hajduk – resumed their activities in inspiring fashion. In addition, the city witnessed the inception of a number of new clubs with individual national and religious overtones. Such clubs were, for example, the Jewish Maccabi and the Muslim Đerđelez. New clubs kept emerging regularly until the beginning of World War II. The number of teams that achieved notable results increased immensely. The clubs that attracted the most attention were Slavija, SAŠK, Hajduk, Bar Kokhba, Maccabi, Mata-tija, Željezničar (founded in 1921), Sloboda, Đerđelez, Troja, Hrasnički, Sloga, Petar Kočić, Sparta, Virtus, Igman and Pofalički (founded in 1936 by Rato Dugonjić, who later became one of Josip Broz – Tito's closest collaborators).²⁴

²³ Cf. DRAGAN MOLDOVAN, „Bošnjacima nagrade”, *Sportske novosti*, Zagreb, no. 3563, 26. 12. 1968, p. 5.

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

3. The History of Football in Bosanska Krajina

Football was first played in Banja Luka sometime during the 1910s. University student Gusti Cengrić brought the first football and the first pair of football boots to the city. The football pioneers of Banja Luka were locals who studied at renowned universities throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Zagreb, Leoben, Vienna) where they first took notice of the game. The ‘men of the first hour’ were the aforementioned Gusti Cengrić, Drago Drča, Ljubo Dobraš, Aleksandar Bojko, Hasan Džankić and Branko Petrović. Football in Banja Luka progressed under the influence of one Franz “Franjo” Mantler,²⁵ a skilled Austrian player who completed his military service in the area. After a successful career on the pitch, Mantler later acted as player/manager at Hajduk Split and HAŠK Zagreb.²⁶

The beginnings of organized football in Bosanska Krajina date back to 1910, when the club Sloboda²⁷ (Freedom) was founded in the town of Novi Grad. The club still exists and ranks among the oldest clubs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 1912, the football pioneers of Bosanska Krajina took things further and assembled the first-ever representative side that consisted of preparatory school and university students from Banja Luka and Novi Grad. The select team played its first match that same year in Bihać against the side of Olimpija Karlovac, which also included future Yugoslav football legend Artur “Ture” Dubravčić, who captained the national team at the 1920 Summer Olympics in Antwerp. Unfortunately, records that would reveal the result of the match remain to be found. However, according to Matko Betunac, one of the members of the inaugural Bosanska Krajina XI, the aforementioned Artur “Ture” Dubravčić starred as the Man of the Match and scored one of the goals.²⁸

In 1915, Banja Luka University Preparatory School students founded a club under the name of Viktorija, the city’s first football club. Similarly

²⁵ Cf. DAVID FORSTER et. al., *Die Legionäre: österreichische Fußballer in aller Welt*, LIT Verlag, Wien, 2013., p. 269.

²⁶ Cf. ANTUN RAVLIĆ, „Počelo s džokejskom kapicom” *Sportske novosti*, Zagreb, no. 3570, 6. 1. 1969., p. 4.

²⁷ Cf. Arhiv Jugoslavije, FSJ, Box K-110. (Bosna i Hercegovina), Odgovori na opšti upitnik, Nogometni klub Sloboda Bosanski Novi, p. 1. – 2.

²⁸ Cf. A. RAVLIĆ, *n. dj.*

to Ljubljana-based Hermes, Zagreb-based Concordia or Sarajevo-based Osman, Viktorija represented an exclusive students' club. The main driving forces behind it were Đuro Hazler, Hasan Mahić, Alija Gradašević and Matko Betunac. The first official senior football club of Banja Luka, the Građanski športski klub Krajišnik (Krajišnik Citizens' Sports Club), was founded in 1918. The club essentially represented a reorganized Viktorija. Therefore, it is of no surprise that Viktorija co-founders, former Banja Luka preparatory school and university students Hazler, Mahić, Gradašević and Betunac were in charge of the new club's operations. The first-ever Krajišnik squad featured the following players: Alija Gradašević, Hasan Mahić, brothers Vlado, Zvonko and Božo Jović, brothers Vito and Slavko Lastrić, Joco Stefanović and brothers Mito and Branko Petrović. Due to delays in the processing of the club's registration application, Krajišnik played their first public match in 1919, when two teams consisting of Krajišnik players only met each other in a friendly encounter. That same year, Krajišnik also played two matches against Panonija from Sisak. The first match took place in Sisak and ended with a 4–1 victory for the home team. The return match in Banja Luka ended in a 1–1 draw, a magnificent achievement by Krajišnik.²⁹ The organizers of the home game in Banja Luka took on extraordinary measures to promote the event and turned into a spectacle. They set up tavern tables and chairs around the pitch, enclosed by steel wire, and even hired a band. Several passers-by were convinced that there was a fair taking place rather than a sporting event.³⁰

Krajišnik played the first international match in 1924, when the Austrian Wiener Sportklub (Vienna Sports Club) visited Banja Luka. The narrow 1–2 defeat by the home team was another proof that the Banja Luka side could give teams from established European football countries a run for their money.³¹ The 1935–36 season was the most successful in Krajišnik's history as they reached the quarterfinals of the National Championship, where the team were defeated in both playoff legs

²⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁰ Cf. A. RAVLIĆ, „Počelo je sa džokejskom kapicom”; idem, „Stolovi i muzika oko terena”, *Sportske novosti*, Zagreb, no. 3571, 7. 1. 1969., p. 5.

³¹ Cf. A. RAVLIĆ, „Stolovi i muzika oko terena”.

(1–3 at home³² and 1–4 away³³) by SK Ljubljana (Ljubljana Sports Club). The legendary 1935–36 Krajišnik squad featured Milorad “Mićo” Zakić, Vojislav Davidović, Ranko Kasalović, Mehmed Jakić, Dimitrije Marić, Boža Kačavenda, Vojislav Samardžija, Arsen Ljubibratić, Vladislav Beljanski, Petar Cvetković, Aleksandar Mastela, Zvonimir Kurtović and Mirko Bilić. In 1933, Krajišnik also had the quick-footed Croatian striker Ico Hitrec on their books – a player whom many considered the greatest Yugoslav footballer of the interwar period. He later often recounted his year in Banja Luka and spoke gleefully about the “terrific” season and the spirited football enthusiasts of Banja Luka that worshipped him like a god for his amazing skills.³⁴

Many new clubs emerged in Banja Luka throughout the following years. The first was the Jewish club Maccabi, founded in 1921, followed by Vrbas, Zmaj and SK Balkan (Balkan Sports Club). Vrbas was active only for a short period of time. In 1926, the Radnički sportski klub Borac (Borac Workers’ Sports Club) was established as its successor. In the following years, the club became Krajišnik’s biggest rival. Football spread rapidly along the Vrbas River. In 1941, a total of eight clubs resided in Banja Luka: SK Krajišnik, SK Željezničar, PSK Olimp, JNSK Vitez, SK Viktorija, the BSK (Banja Luka Sports Club, Jugoslavija and SK Hajduk. The rest of Bosanska Krajina was prolific as well. Other noteworthy clubs from that particular geographical region were the Omladinski fudbalski klub Prijedor (Prijedor Youth Football Club; founded in 1919), NK Jedinstvo Bihać (Unity Bihać Football Club; founded in 1919) and SK Elektrobosna Jajce (Elektrobosna Jajce Sports Club; founded in 1921).³⁵

32 Cf. „Ljubljana je pobedila Krajišnik sa 3 : 1 (2 : 1)”, *Politika*, št. 10085., 22. 6. 1936., p. 15.; „Ljubljana - Krajišnik 3 : 1”, *Vreme*, št. 5184., 22. 6. 1936., p. 7.; „Z zmago iz Banjaluke”, *Jutro: ponedeljska izdaja*, št. 142a., 22. 6. 1936., p. 3.; „Nogomet”, *Ponedeljski Slovenec*, št. 25., 22. 6. 1936., p. 3.

33 Cf. „Ljubljana je pobedila Krajišnik sa 4 : 1”, *Politika*, št. 10092., 29. 6. 1936., p. 14.; „S.K. Ljubljana – Krajišnik 4 : 1”, *Vreme*, št. 5191., 29. 6. 1936., p. 7.; „SK Ljubljana v polfinalu”, *Jutro: ponedeljska izdaja*, št. 148a., 29. 6. 1936., p. 3.; „Ljubljana : Krajišnik 4 : 1 (0 : 0)”, *Ponedeljski Slovenec*, št. 26., 30. 6. 1936., p. 7.

34 Cf. FERDO VEDRIŠ, „Opljačkan i slomljen”, *SN revija*, Zagreb, no. 98., 18. 8. 1978., p. 44.

35 Cf. A. RAVLIĆ, „Stolovi i muzika oko terena”; idem, „Rekord: 70 gledalaca 1930!”, *Sportske novosti*, Zagreb, no. 3573., 9. 1. 1969., p. 5.; Arhiv Jugoslavije, FSJ, Box K-110 (Bosna i Hercegovina), Predlog za dodjeljivanje počasnih priznanja Fudbalskog saveza Jugoslavije, p. 1. – 12; Arhiv Jugoslavije, FSJ, Box K-110 (Bosna i Hercegovina), Odgovori na opšti upitnik,

4. Football in Other Parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina

The region of Tuzla saw the game spread throughout its parts after the end of World War I, even though two clubs were founded before or during the military conflict period – the Hrvatski športski klub Zrinjski Tuzla (Croatian Sports Club Zrinjski Tuzla; founded in 1913) and the Serbian SK Obilić (Obilić Sports Club; founded in 1918).³⁶ Hence, clubs founded after 1919 took on the pioneer role. Such clubs were Bosanska Posavina-based Dečko from Derventa (founded in 1919), Semberija-based FK Radnik Bijeljina (Worker Bijeljina Football Club; founded in 1919),³⁷ Central Bosnia-based NK Travnik (Travnik Football Club; founded in 1922),³⁸ and the Podrinje (Drina River basin in Eastern Bosnia) club FK Drina Višegrad (Drina Višegrad Football Club; founded in 1924).³⁹ Some sources imply that another Tuzla-based club, the Radnički sportski klub Maksim Gorki (Maxim Gorky Workers' Sports Club; officially founded in 1919) may have been founded as early as 1911 and Dečko from Derventa as early as 1912. However, there is no credible evidence to support these claims.⁴⁰

The majority of clubs founded in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the interwar period (1918–1941) were nationally oriented. Particular examples include the Sarajevo-based Serbian clubs Slavija, Sloga and Petar Kočić, the Sarajevo-based Croatian clubs SAŠK, HAŠK and Građanski as well as Zrinjski Mostar and Zrinjski Tuzla, the Muslim clubs Đerđelez Sarajevo and Jedinstvo Mostar, and the Sarajevo-based Jewish clubs Bar Kokhba and Maccabi. The most successful Bosnian and Herzegovinian clubs of this era were the Serbo-Croatian Sarajevo-based city rivals

Fudbalski podsavez Banja luka, p. 2. – 3; Arhiv Jugoslavije, FSJ, Box K-110 (Bosna i Hercegovina), Odgovori na opšti upitnik, Fudbalski savez područja Bihać, p. 1.

³⁶ Cf. Arhiv Jugoslavije, FSJ, Box K-110 (Bosna i Hercegovina), Odgovori na opšti upitnik, Fudbalski savez područja Tuzla, p. 1.

³⁷ Cf. Arhiv..., Odgovori na opšti upitnik, Fudbalski savez područja Brčko, p. 4. – 5.

³⁸ Cf. Arhiv..., Odgovori na opšti upitnik, Fudbalski savez područja Zenica, p. 1. – 6.

³⁹ Cf. Arhiv..., Odgovori na opšti upitnik, Fudbalski podsavez Sarajevo, p. 2.; Predlog za dodjeljivanje..., p. 1. – 12.

⁴⁰ Cf. Arhiv..., Odgovori na opšti upitnik, p. 1. – 12.; Predlog za dodjeljivanje..., p. 2. – 4.; M. DELIĆ, *n. dj.*, p. 13.

Slavija and SAŠK. With the exception of the 1932 season,⁴¹ both teams interchangeably qualified for all National Championship playoffs held between 1923 and 1940. Both teams recorded 2nd place finishes as their best respective results. SAŠK reached its top achievement in 1923 after a 1–1 draw⁴² in the first final match against Građanski from Zagreb and a 2–4 defeat⁴³ in the subsequent replay.⁴⁴ SK Slavija shared a fate similar to their arch rivals in 1936 after coming out on the losing end of a two-leg thriller (0–1 and 0–0) against BSK Belgrade.⁴⁵

It should be noted that SAŠK Sarajevo also successfully competed in the league system of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), even

41 Cf. ROMAN GARBER, „1932: Concordia i – strani suci!”, *Sportske novosti*, Zagreb, no. 3592., 31. 1. 1968., p. 5.

42 Cf. „Prvenstvene utakmice”, *Politika*, Beograd, no. 5545., 1. 10. 1923., p. 6.; „Sport: Borba za državno prvenstvo Jugoslavije”, *Jutranji list*, Zagreb, no. 4194., 1. 10. 1923., p. 2.; „Die jugoslawische Meisterschaft. Das Schlußspiel bringt noch eine Entscheidung”, *Sport Tagblatt*, Vienna, no. 269., 1. 10. 1923., p. 6.; „Gradjanski-SAŠK”, *Novosti*, Zagreb, no. 266., 30. 9. 1923., p. 12.; „Gradjanski - SAŠK 1 : 1”, *Novosti*, Zagreb, no. 267., 1. 10. 1923., p. 2.; „Gradjanski : SAŠK”, *Jutro*, Ljubljana, no. 229., 30. 9. 1923., p. 2.; „Nedeljske nogometne tekme”, *Jutro*, Ljubljana, no. 230., 2. 10. 1923., p. 4.

43 Cf. „Gradjanski - SAŠK”, *Politika*, Beograd, no. 5546., 2. 10. 1923., p. 5.; „Sport: 1.Hrvatski gradjanski sportski klub-prvak države”, *Jutranji list*, Zagreb, no. 4195., 2. 10. 1923., p. 4.; „Gradjanski - SAŠK 4 : 2”, *Novosti*, Zagreb, no. 268., 2. 10. 1923., p. 6.; „Gradjanski SK Zagreb – prvak Jugoslavije v nogometu za 1923”, *Slovenec*, Ljubljana, no. 222., 2. 10. 1926., p. 3.; „Die jugoslawische Meisterschaft. Gradjanski schlägt im Schlußspiel S. A. S. K. 4 : 2”, *Sport Tagblatt*, Vienna, no. 271., 3. 10. 1923., p. 1.

44 Cf. ROMAN GARBER, „1923: prvak Građanski”, *Sportske novosti*, Zagreb, no. 3559., 21. 12. 1968., p. 5.

45 Cf. „B. S. Klub je nezasluženo pobedio Slaviju 1 : 0 (0 : 0)”, *Politika*, Beograd, no. 10120., 27. 7. 1936., p. 14.; „BSK – Slavija (Sarajevo) 1 : 0”, *Novosti*, Zagreb, no. 206., 27. 7. 1936., p. 11.; „Včerajšnje nogometne tekme”, *Jutro: Ponedeljska izdaja*, Ljubljana, no. 171a., 27. 7. 1936., p. 3.; „Cup – Spiele in Jugoslawien”, *Sport Tagblatt*, Vienna, no. 25302., 27. 7. 1936., p. 3.; „Državno prvenstvo. BSK – Slavija 1 : 0”, *Vreme*, Beograd, no. 5219., 27. 7. 1936., p. 7.; „Četvrti put uzastopce B. S. Klub je osvojio državno prvenstvo”, *Politika*, Beograd, no. 10127., 3. 8. 1936., p. 15.; „BSK je ponovo prvak države”, *Jutranji list*, Zagreb, no. 8807., 3. 8. 1936., p. 8.; „BSK – prvak Jugoslavije 1936, ma da je sa sarajevskom Slavijom igrao samo 0 : 0”, *Novosti*, Zagreb, no. 213., 3. 8. 1936., p. 11.; „BSK državni prvak. Po zelo nervozni igri je finalna tekma ostala neodložena, lep uspeh sarajevske Slavije”, *Jutro: Ponedeljska izdaja*, Ljubljana, no. 177a., 3. 8. 1936., p. 3.; „Nogometno prvenstvo – BSK prvak”, *Slovenec*, Ljubljana, no. 195., 27. 8. 1935., p. 7.; „I po četvrti put BSK je prvak države. BSK – Slavija 0 : 0”, *Vreme*, no. 5226, 3. 8. 1936, p. 6; „Prekjuče je završeno staro državno prvenstvo, a u nedelju se već rešava o novom koje treba da počne prvog idućeg meseca”, *Vreme*, Beograd, no. 5227., 4. 8. 1936., p. 6.; ROMAN GARBER, „1936: BSK”, *Sportske novosti*, Zagreb, no. 3616., 28. 2. 1969., p. 5.

reaching the State Championship semi-finals during the 1942 season⁴⁶ where they were soundly defeated by HŠK Concordia Zagreb⁴⁷ (1–2⁴⁸ and 1–9⁴⁹). The Sarajevo club was even more successful during the 1944 season,⁵⁰ when Saškovci (The Saškians) – with Kantardžić, Volić, Kotorantin, Marks, Glavočević, Skopovi, Matijašević, Konjevod, Habić, Konjić, Domorodski as the ‘First XI’ and reserve players Šilić, Orlandinović, Jurić, Novo and Makon⁵¹ became the city’s top team,⁵² won the Croatian Province title⁵³ and reached the NDH State Championship finals,⁵⁴ where they were scheduled to face HAŠK Zagreb⁵⁵ in a two-leg tie. Unfortunately, the matches never took place due to military operations on NDH territory that prevented any organized sporting events from taking place.⁵⁶

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46 Cf. „Početak novog državnog prvenstva”, *Šport: hrvatski športski tjednik*, Zagreb, no. 16., 21. 4. 1942., p. 1.

47 Cf. „Gradjanski – Hajduk i Concordia – SAŠK igraju u polufinalnim igrama državnog prvenstva”, *Šport: hrvatski športski tjednik*, Zagreb, no. 29., 21. 7. 1942., p. 3.

48 Cf. „Neočekivan 2 : 3 poraz Purgera i tijesna 2 : 1 pobjeda Concordije”, *Šport: hrvatski športski tjednik*, Zagreb, no. 32., 11. 8. 1942., p. 4.

49 Cf. „Tko će biti nogometni prvak Nezavisne države Hrvatske: Gradjanski ili Concordia?” *Šport: hrvatski športski tjednik*, Zagreb, no. 34., 25. 8. 1942., p. 3.

50 Cf. „U nedjelju počinje borba za najveći nogometski naslov”, *Športske novine*, Zagreb, no. 33., 14. 8. 1944., p. 2.

51 Cf. „Sarajevo čeka Željezničare: SAŠK se ozbiljno sprema za državno prvenstvo”, *Športske novine*, Zagreb, no. 32., 7. 8. 1944., p. 5.

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54 Cf. „HAŠK I SAŠK će odlučiti o ovogodišnjem nogometnom prvenstvu države”, *Športske novine*, Zagreb, no. 51., 24. 12. 1944., p. 1.

55 Cf. „SAŠK bi htio igrati sa HAŠK-om”, *Športske novine*, Zagreb, no. 2., 23. 1. 1945., p. 4.

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