

## BSK IN THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN (MITROPA) CUP

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**Abstract.** *As a sport, football has developed a great deal after World War I. We can safely take into account the contribution of the professionalism which was being implemented in Austria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. This professionalism had already been developed by football teams in Italy and in the UK, so the sport was beginning to attract more and more viewers. Austria's Hugo Meisl had the idea to organize an international team championship consisting of teams coming from the aforementioned three Central European countries, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes had also expressed a desire to participate. The Belgrade sports club (BSK) went on to represent the Yugoslav football no less than five times in this prestigious competition, but in this paper, based on sources and literature, we have presented and analyzed the achievements of the club, which are also the biggest achievements of the Yugoslav club football between the two world wars.*

**Key words:** *football, Mitropa Cup, BSK, results.*

### INTRODUCTION

The first document which relates to the game of football describes it as a sport practiced by women in Scotland, as early as the first half of the seventeenth century. This document, among the others, lists the basic characteristics of this sport, such as achieving goals and the concept of a goalkeeper. The first recorded women's match took place in 1795 near Musselburgh (Football history timeline, 2015, pp 1). When it comes to men, for a long time football did not differ from rugby and they did not separate into two different and clearly defined sports until 1863, when football and rugby went their separate ways, specifically after the establishment of the Football Association of England. The first football rules were determined by the clubs themselves, most notably the Sheffield rules from 1867. England is also the location of the first football tournament – the FA Cup, which was held for the first time in 1872. England has also formed the oldest football league, at the behest of the

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Aston Villa club in 1888 (Sijić, 2014, pp 5). The development of football and the need to standardize the rules as well as facilitate the conditions to overcome the state borders and eventually for football to become an Olympic sport all lead to the creation of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) in 1904 (Šiljak, 2007, 133).

The first football in Belgrade was brought by a Jew whose name was Hugo Buli in 1896, after finishing his education in Germany. He gave it to his friends in the Belgrade gymnastics club Soko, which went on to start its own football section by May 12 of the same year (Todić, 2006, pp 25). Three years later, the Serbian Ball Games society was founded. The head of the association was Feti Bey, who was the Turkish ambassador in Belgrade, while the position of the vice-president was held by a lawyer called Mihailo Živadinovic (Todorović, 1996, pp 10). In 1903, Soko was also the first football club that was founded in the Kingdom of Serbia. In the next few years, several football clubs were established, the most notable being the Belgrade sports club (BSK) (Sijić, 2014, pp 6). BSK was established on September 1, 1911. Until 1923, it was the best sports club in Serbia, with the exception of the period between 1914 and 1918, during which no competitions were held. In the interwar period, its goal was to develop and cultivate the sport: football, light athletics, Hazen and winter sports. After the defeat it suffered from Yugoslavia in 1923, it ceased to be among the leading Serbian sports clubs for a number of years, and it had around 300 permanent members by the end of the 1920s (Stanojević, 1929, pp 160).

For Europe, the end of the First World War meant the redrawing of political boundaries, the disappearance of four empires, but also the creation of a number of new countries. As one of the newly-formed ones, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Kingdom of SHS / Kingdom of Yugoslavia after 1929) took part in the first post-war Olympic Games in Antwerp in 1920. The post-war era also dictated the political situation after the greatest conflict in human history at the time, and even sports were severely limited by the interstate relations. After much debate about whether or not athletes should be admitted from those countries held responsible for the Great War, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) excluded delegates from the Central Powers. Spectators witnessed the last tug-of-war, along with a number of other events that were also discontinued (The Sports Book, 2007, pp 14).

Aside from the UK, the finest football in Europe at the time was played in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Austria. In the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, football has quickly gained a large number of fans, and Serbian clubs have played friendly matches against clubs from other countries soon after the war, albeit with major limitations. The permission for every single match had to come from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and that was only after the opinion of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had been received. This is why many matches could not be played, because of poor relations between two of the three aforementioned countries and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes after the war. Hungary was seen as a threat, due to attempts at restoration of the Hapsburgs in 1921, and together with Austria it took part in a number of subversive activities against Yugoslavia. Even with no threat of war in sight, to the Yugoslav national leadership it was clear that these countries wanted for the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes to weaken or even disintegrate. One of their goals was to weaken the economic activity of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as well as Czechoslovakia. In Hungary, money was often forged and entire forging companies have been formed in order to counterfeit the currencies of Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Becić, 2012, pp 370). A large number of high-quality counterfeits appeared in 1923. It had been printed in Graz and Budapest, and was discovered thanks to Rodolfo Archibald Reiss,

head of technical control of banknotes at the National Bank (AJ, 65-1083-2058, Report by R. A. Reiss from 3 August 1923). Closer ties between Italy and Hungary were neutralized by the warming of the Yugoslav-Hungarian relations which occurred after the new "counterfeiting affair" took place in mid-1926, while on the other hand, the Yugoslav-Czechoslovakian relations often faced troubled times, so at one point there was even a ban on sporting events involving athletes from Czechoslovakia.

#### THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN CUP AND THE FIRST ENTRIES

Since 1925, there was a noticeable improvement in the international relations. The post-war "years of ill tempers" were replaced by the optimism which resulted in the signing of Brian-Kellog's Pact on August 27, 1928 which rejected war as a means of politics (Aleksov, 2004, pp 291). Under such circumstances, the idea that every year, chosen teams from certain countries should play an unofficial championship of Europe might come to life. This would popularize football as a sport, attract a large number of fans in the stadiums and even allow clubs to profit, because many of them had been fully professional by that point and they had to provide sufficient funds to pay their players. Under such circumstances, in 1927 The Mitropa Cup was introduced by the Austrian Hugo Meisl. The international football had expanded in the early years of the 20th century with the broadening of participation in the Olympics and the creation of the Copa America, but club competitions remained primarily domestic. The tournament continued until the early 1990s (with an obvious gap for WWII and a varying list of participants), but it was the forerunner of the modern European Cup or Champions League (Football history timeline, 2015, pp 4).

The original idea was that the Mitropa Cup should feature representatives from three countries: Austria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. However, as the desire for participation was strong in teams from the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as well, at a conference in Vienna in mid-January 1927 it was decided that matches should be played in accordance with the principles that have already been adopted in Prague, including the cup system, but because of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, each country was supposed to send two teams instead of one.

National federations have been proposed to organize the qualification of the four best clubs, where the finalists would take part in the Mitropa Cup. The conference also specified terms for matches, so the first round was to be played on August 21 and August 28, the semi-finals on September 16 and 18, and the final matches were to be held on October 2 and 9. Due to the popularity and the importance of this competition, the national alliances of counties in which the final match was to be held were under obligation to postpone all other matches. The players who would take part in the competition had to be signed in at least four weeks before the start of the cup, and only matches where one of the teams won counted. If the match was a draw, there would be another one the next day, and if that one was a draw as well, the third one would have to be played. Clubs that have signed up for the competition had to pay 30 US dollars each, 40% of the revenue would go to the visiting teams, the national federation of each team would get 5%, while the Committee of the Mitropa Cup received 1% (*Politika*, 1927, No. 6736).

Yugoslav clubs expected to be admitted into the Central European Cup and have tried to have as many friendly matches with foreign clubs in the first year of the competition as possible. This is especially true for the BSK which started their foreign tour in Greece on Julian Christmas 1927. In the match against Panathinaikos of Athens, which certainly had

a political significance was well, so it was also attended by several ministers of both countries, BSK won (5-1). The next day they had a draw with Olimtialgeom (2-2) and on January 9, they won a match against Constantinople united (3-1) (*Politika*, 1927, No. 6720). Their game was variously interpreted by the newspapers in Athens and Thessaloniki. In Thessaloniki, the Progres newspaper highly praised the BSK's game by pointing out their technique, ball reception, dribbling and long passes, which was seen as the proof of "visitors' high class" (*Politika*, 1927, 6721).

In Athens, newspapers, especially those close to the government, primarily emphasized the claims of the Athenian clubs that BSK had brought in four new players from Belgrade to reinforce its team. In reality, the government in Athens viewed the match from the standpoint of political relations between Greece and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Although these two countries had no open territorial issues, as is the case with almost all Balkan countries, the relations at the time were not good. The government in Belgrade has often been annoyed by the treatment of the Slavic population in Greece, as well as the Athens government's refusal to fulfill the Yugoslav demands in terms of the Gevgelija-Thessaloniki railway and the port of Thessaloniki. The best confirmation regarding the relations between the two countries can be seen in the fact that the signed agreement of friendship and cooperation from 1926 did not get ratified by the Greek parliament, and relations remained cold and even strained until the beginning of 1929 (Popov, 1995, pp 244).

There was a far more serious test than the Greek clubs awaiting BSK on February 27, 1927 in Belgrade. The Vienna Wacker, state champion and leading Austrian club at the time was on a mini tour. The starting lineup for BSK was: Gligorijević, Mitrović, Rodin, Marinković, Marjanović, Percl, Marjanović, Dragičević, Najdanović, while the guests were represented by: Zelig, Jelinek, Čapek, Bžinek, Rapan, Jestrab, Eigner, Uher, Vajlinger, Riba (Langer) and Palho. The Belgrade club won 3-2 (2-1), which caused much exhilaration in the local press. Goals for BSK were scored by: Jalinek (auto-goal), B. Marjanović and Dragičević, while both goals for the visitors were scored by Eigner. This score was all the more significant if we account for the fact the Viennese had beaten BSK's local rival Yugoslavia FC 2-1 the previous day (*Politika*, 1927, No. 6768).

The Belgrade press was favorable toward the game that the home team displayed stating that the BSK in the first half had several promising opportunities. On the other hand, the Viennese were trying to justify their defeat citing that their team was incomplete as well as the size of the field, although they did admit that there was good football being played in Belgrade. They emphasized the physical and mental abilities of the BSK players, stating that this team was better prepared and considerably more feisty than the Yugoslavia team (*Politika*, 1927, 6769; 6.770).

The sport relations between Hungary and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes ceased in 1925, but were renewed on March 20, 1927 by a match between the football teams from Belgrade and Budapest. The Belgrade team was composed of six players from the BSK and five players from Yugoslavia FC. The Belgrade lineup: Gligorijević (BSK), Mitrović (BSK) Kumanudi (Yugoslavia), Arsenijević (BSK) Petrović (Yugoslavia), Đorđević (BSK), Đurić (Yugoslavia), Jovanović (Yugoslavia), Luburić (Yugoslavia) Dragičević (BSK) and Najdanović (BSK). The guest team won 3-2, and the press believed that the victory was undeserved and based on sheer luck. There was also criticism on the lineup of the home team. The defeat was made even more bitter for Belgrade and the Yugoslav public as the guests did not even bring up their first lineup. They played without any of the players from the U. T. E. Hungaria or the F.T.K. The best players from Budapest stayed home for a championship match, while their reserve lineup played a friendly match in Subotica, so that the players

from "the rear of the national team" had been sent to Belgrade (*Politika*, 1927, No. 6789). The second match, played on the next day, was little more than a rerun of the first game. It was a draw (3-3). The BSK players in that match were: Marjanović, Marjanović, Percl, Marinković and Rodin (*Politika*, 1927, No. 6790).

The spring of 1927 was fraught with international matches for local and national teams alike. Hugo Meisl gave a favorable judgment on the Yugoslav football, counting on the amateur team of Yugoslavia, Poland and Romania to play a role of prominence. (*Politika*, 1927, No. 6736). In the friendly match against Romania, the BSK players were: Arsenijević, Marjanović and Bek in the first lineup, while the reserves were: Ilić (goalkeeper), Percl and Marjanović (*Politika*, 1927, No. 6798). Due to obligations of players in the national team as well as the fatigue from city matches, the BSK team was not able to play every match with their intended lineup. For these reasons, in a friendly match against the Austrian champion BAK on April 10, 1927, which was a draw 1-1, the BSK could not count on Marjanović, Percl and Arsenijević, although the commentaries indicate that the "blues" were worthy opponents (*Politika*, 1927, No. 6811).

A week later, the BSK was defeated by Levski from Sofia (2-0), and the blame was placed at the feet of their goalkeeper Ilić, whose performance was poor, but it was still noted that the BSK was superior during the first half (*Politika*, 1927, No. 6818).

In May 1927, BSK played only local matches, but some players have also made an appearance in the national team. The national team of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes won the game against Romania in Bucharest (3-0). The prominent players of the starting lineup were Arsenijević and Marjanović, while Gligorijević sat on the bench. Percl was also set to play, but could not get the leave (*Politika*, 1927, No. 6833; 6839). A few days later, the national team of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes won a match against Bulgaria in Sofia (2-0). In addition to the aforementioned players, there was also Ivica Bek, and both goals were the handiwork of Blagoje Moša Marjanović (*Politika*, 1927, No. 6843).

In June and July, the final months before the Central European Cup, in Sofia the BSK defeated FK 13 (3-1) and with their B lineup no less, since the A team was busy playing against Hajduk from Split in a match which decided the national champion (*Politika*, 1927 No. 6870). However, the most important test for the BSK happened on July 12, 1927 in Belgrade when the guest team was the famous Hungaria from Budapest. The club from the Hungarian league had already played and won matches against Jedinstvo and Yugoslavia, and these easy victories may have lulled the Hungarian players into a false sense of security early in the game. The home team won 2-0 and this was the breaking news in all the media in the capital which clearly reflected the euphoria of the time.

"Yesterday, the blues won the greatest victory in their club's history"; the BSK has "as a whole, stood as one man, one heart, one mind" (*Politika*, 1927, No. 6898). The away team complained about the inadequate size of the field, as stated by the representatives of the host, but the main cause cited was the fact that they had played the third game in a row (after Jedinstvo and Yugoslavia) and that they started the match much too casually.

For the match against Czechoslovakia, after the Yugoslav National Alliance decided to stop boycotting the Czech Association, the BSK players were Arsenijević and Marinković. Only Arsenijević got to play, though, and the match was a draw (1-1) (*Politika*, 1927, No. 6917). The players from Yugoslav clubs were simply overwhelmed; there had been too many matches: team, championship, and the start of the JNS cup, and before BSK and Hajduk lay the Central European cup. This took its toll on the rhythm of the players who were not physically able to fulfill all of the obligations, and this certainly influenced the form and results.

The start of the Central European Cup has been described as a first-class event and the draw has determined that the opponent for the BSK should be the Hungaria. The Belgrade press was describing the start of the competition as something of great importance for the development of football. "The week ahead is the most popular football event in Central Europe." They warned about the quality of the opponents BSK would have to face and that "one should not forget that during their first encounter the Hungaria team did not give the full measure of their knowledge and that redemption would lie on their heart" (*Politika*, 1927, No. 6927). And yet, there was still hope in the possibility of a victory of the BSK team. That hope can be seen in the fact that BSK fans were signing up to be transported to Budapest via train as early as August 24, 1927 (*Politika*, 1927, No. 6937).

The first match was played on August 14, 1927 in Belgrade and Hungaria won 4-2. There were more than 5000 spectators and the away team showed a clear distinction between their approach towards friendly and competitive matches. It was noted that the "blues" gave less than what was expected of them and that the nervousness and uncertainty in the offense had shifted the entire burden to the defense. The BSK scorers were Sotirović and Marjanović, and both goals were scored from penalty kicks (*Politika*, 1927, No. 6931).

The match was played in Budapest on August 28 in front of 20,000 spectators. Hungaria won 4-0 (2-0). For 34 minutes the BSK played well, better than it had played in Belgrade, and both goals in the first half came from a crowded penalty area. The second half wasn't much different, either. The Belgraders held their own for 35 minutes, and then two more goals came in. There were also additional problems in the second half: 15 minutes into the game, the BSK was left without Mitrović who got injured and had to leave the field, and then for no particular reason and for an "ordinary foul", Sotirović got the red card, so the BSK had to finish the match with only nine players (*Vreme*, 1927, No. 2043). Unlike the referees back in Belgrade, who did their job well, Breslar, the referee on this match, was evaluated as "impossible" (*Politika*, 1927, No. 6945). The other Yugoslav representative in the elite club competition fared no better. Hajduk, who was the Yugoslav champion that year, lost both matches to Viennese Rapid, 8-1 and 1-0 respectively (*Politika*, 1927, No. 6939).

The scoreboard was a perfect reflection of the football conditions in the countries from which these teams came, as well as all the differences between professional and amateur players. The winner of the first SE cup was Sparta FC from Prague, and the overall ranking was as follows: 2. Rapid (Vienna) 3. Hungaria (Budapest) 4. Slavia (Prague) 5. Admira (Vienna) 6. Újpest (Budapest) 7 BSK 8. Hajduk (*Politika*, 1928, No. 7292).

Those who want to know about the opinion on the quality of football in Yugoslavia held by the Hungarian Football Federation, should look no further than the fact that, on September 25, 1927 the Hungarians played three friendly matches, and their weakest team was sent to Belgrade. This team, which is basically as a team consisting of solid players from provincial clubs, was beaten by the Yugoslav national team 5-1, and the players from BSK who played the game were Mitrović, Arsenijević and Marjanović (*Politika*, 1927, No. 6973).

In 1927, the national team played another match on October 29 and got defeated by Czechoslovakia 5-3, with Arsenijević and B. Marjanović on the team. That same day in Athens, BSK defeated Panathinaikos 6-3, and the next day their match against Olimpiados FC ended in a draw, 1-1 (*Politika*, 1927, No. 7007; *Politika*, 1927, No. 7008). By the end of the year, BSK played three matches against Hungarian teams as well as one against a team from Czechoslovakia. The Hungarian teams won all the matches, Újpest 3-1, Ferencvaros 4-2 and Bascse 3-1, while the result of the match against Slavia from Prague was 0-0. The Belgrade football public was well-aware of the quality of the opponents and the

capabilities of their team, as can be seen from the comments that "the blues have done much for the reputation of football in Belgrade yesterday" (*Politika*, 1927, No. 7043; *Politika*, 1927, No. 7045; *Politika*, 1927, No. 7050; *Politika*, 1927, No. 7056).

Every match that BSK hosted, such as the one against Hungaria in the SE Cup were played on the Yugoslavia's stadium, since BSK's was out of commission that year. BSK's stadium was exposed to strong gusts of wind. One such windstorm, which lasted for a week in January 1927 blew the roof right off the stadium. And the year before that something similar had happened, so the management tried to fix the issue by using so-called "blind windows" which would be opened during the windstorm (*Politika*, 1927, No. 6731). This solution turned out to be unsuccessful, so BSK could not play at their own stadium that year.

The first international matches for the BSK players in 1928 were with the national team, specifically the match in Budapest on March 25. Yugoslavia lost to Hungary 2-1, and the BSK players who got to play were Gligorijević, Arsenijević, Marjanović and Bek, whereas Blagoje Moša Marjanović scored the only goal for Yugoslavia on that match (*Politika*, 1928 No. 7152). On May 6, Yugoslavia beat Romania 3-1 and the BSK players on the team were Arsenijević, Marjanović, Najdanović, Đorđević and Dragičević. The Yugoslav team on that match was comprised solely from players coming from Belgrade clubs, whereas the ones from Zagreb comprised the other national team which lost to Austria in Vienna 3-0 (*Politika*, 1928, No. 7190).

Between the two appearances for the national team, BSK players had two more matches, the one against Nemzeti from Hungary which they won 4-2 and the one against Austria FC from Vienna which they lost 2-1. Even though they were exhausted, only the first lineup could perform against Austria as the B lineup was on a tour in Greece (*Politika*, 1928, No. 7159; *Politika*, 1928, No. 7172).

The final test on the international scene before the Mitropa Cup for the BSK players should have been in June 1928, against the Hungarian national team. However, politics once again prevailed over the sport and the match never took place. In 1928, Italy and Hungary grew closer and this terrified the member states of the Little Entente. Gembes, the leader of a racist party in Hungary, who had in the past supported the idea of friendship with Yugoslavia, turned his policy towards Italy (Vinaver, 1985, pp 136). The first direct consequence of the change in the Hungarian policy was the decision of Budapest on May 26, 1928 to ban the football match against Yugoslavia which was supposed to take place on Pentecost day (*Politika*, 1928, No. 7210).

In the Olympics year, the new BSK stadium on Topčider hill was officially opened, although the construction wasn't completed until 1929. The ninth Olympic Games were held in Amsterdam from May 17 to August 12, 1928. The Olympic flame was lit for the first time, and it was housed in a tower at the stadium. Athletes from a record twenty different nationalities won eight gold medals during the games (The Sports Book, 2007, pp 15).

BSK's opponent in the first round of the SE Cup was Ferencvaros from Budapest, which was at that time considered to be the best Hungarian team and they were competing that year instead of Újpest. The Yugoslav sporting public considered this event to be of great importance, and stressed that the fight for this trophy, "represents one of the most popular and one of the most important competitions in a series of many others, organized all over the world." It was emphasized that the competition can even be considered a "prelude to the World Cup" (*Politika*, 1928, No. 7292).

In addition to a Hungarian representative, there had been a change in teams on Yugoslavia's part as well, as in 1928 the team of Građanski from Zagreb played instead of Hajduk. And for Czechoslovakia, Viktoria from Žižkov took the place of Slavia from

Prague. The sports fans from Belgrade were aware of the strength of the BSK's opponents, and pointed out that Ferencvaros was one of the favorites in that competition. BSK players could only rest for a week after grueling matches in the championship, and B. Marjanović was finally able to perform on the field after a long break due to a knee injury. For the match against Ferencvaros, BSK's starting lineup was: Gligorijević, Popović, Mitrović, Arsenijević, Marinković, Đorđević, Marjanović, Vujadinović, Sotirović, Dragičević, Najdanović. As in previous years, there was a special train ride organized from Belgrade to Budapest and back for the rematch, and "the price had been lowered to such an extent that one could take a trip from Belgrade to Budapest and back for a paltry sum" (*Politika*, 1928, No. 7292).

Although they were aware of the difference in strength, the Belgrade audience was left disappointed after BSK lost to Ferencvaros 0-7 (0-4). Objective commentators, however, pointed out that the 4,000 spectators were able to see "the best football ever seen in Belgrade" (*Vreme*, 1928, No. 2391). Defeat was described as "utter in any term, in technique and tactics." Some journalists believed that the difference is more than the match showed and that the BSK deserved to score at least one goal. As for the opponents, it was emphasized that "for a long time Belgraders have not had the opportunity to see such a team, a football class of the highest order, a club that has the most efficient and the most ethnically homogenous team." Ferencvaros football players also left a strong impression in their appearance because "all the players are tall, strong, fast and very lightweight. It is obvious that they trained light athletics in addition to football (...) because, in comparison to them, BSK was barely a good student – a beginner" (*Politika*, 1928, No. 7293).

Despite the catastrophic defeat, the Belgrade public expected a better game from the "blues" in Budapest, as the BSK had added Dušan "Senegalese" Petković to the team, and were counting on the fact that the Hungarians did not care that much about result anymore. Roughly 500 fans traveled to the rematch alongside Gligorijević, Popović, Mitrović, Arsenijević, Marinković, Đorđević, Tirnanić, Marjanović, M. Marjanović, Petković, Najdanović (*Politika*, 1928, No. 7299).

Ferencvaros dominated the rematch as well, before 25,000 spectators and won against BSK 6-1 (4-1) (*Vreme*, 1928, No. 2398). The BSK halfbacks had failed, while the rest of the defense was good. The best attacker was Moša Marjanović, who tied the score 1-1 after a penalty kick, but his attacks smashed fruitlessly against the Hungarian defense. The physical fitness of Ferencvaros players was evident in the second half, because "after the break the Belgraders had been exhausted" (*Politika*, 1928, No. 7300). The other Yugoslav team, Građanski from Zagreb managed to beat Viktoria from Žižkov 3-2 (1-1), but they lost the rematch 6-1 and were eliminated from the tournament. (*Politika*, 1928, No. 7300; *Politika*, 1928, No. 7307). Ferencvaros won that year, in the finals in Budapest against Rapid from Vienna 7-1, while losing the rematch 5-3 (*Politika*, 1928, No. 7363).

At the same time (October 28) when the first final match of the Mitropa Cup in 1928 was played, the Yugoslav national team played a friendly match against Czechoslovakia. They were soundly defeated 7-1, even though the day before they had played against the Czechoslovak amateur team and won 3-1. The BSK players were: Arsenijević, Đorđević, B. Marjanović, Marinković, Najdanović (*Politika*, 1928, No. 7363).

#### CENTRAL EUROPEAN CUP WITHOUT YUGOSLAV TEAMS (1929 – 1936)

Poor results of the Yugoslav clubs from the first two years of the competition resulted in their elimination from the SE Cup and their place as well as status as one of the founders



was taken over by Italy, which joined in 1929 (<http://www.rsssf.com/tablesm/mit29.html>)<sup>1</sup>. Despite their financial strength, no Italian team was able to even make it to the finals for the first three years. In the first year they did not make it past the first round, while in 1930 and 1931 Ambrosiana and Roma only reached the semi-finals (<http://www.rsssf.com/tablesm/mit.html>). Hungarian teams still reigned supreme (Újpest 1929) and so did the Austrian ones (Rapid 1930, Vienna 1931) (<http://www.rsssf.com/tablesm/mit.html>).

Italian football was not fully affirmed until 1932 when Bologna won the Mitropa Cup, although this success is tarnished by the fact that the final matches were never actually played. Bologna managed to beat Vienna, and the other pair was Sparta from Prague and Juventus from Turin. The Czechs won the first match 4-0 and the second one was halted with Juventus in the lead 2-0. Slavia had conceded two quick goals in the match and resorted to obstruction and time wasting, which incensed the spectators to the extent that they started throwing stones; one of those hit Slavia's keeper Planicka, seriously injuring him. Slavia left the field and refused to play, so the players were penned in their dressing rooms for hours while 1,500 soldiers and policemen formed a cordon. The Mitropa Cup committee held both teams equally responsible and disqualified them (<http://www.rsssf.com/tablesm/mit.html>).

Though often fraught with incidents, the Mitropa Cup matches attracted a great deal of attention from the spectators and general public alike so they have effectively contributed to the popularization of football as well as brought the teams lots of money. Therefore, the need to reform the competition was brought up. After an initial discussion to reorganize the competition into a league (an idea eventually rejected due to scheduling problems), participation was extended in 1934 to four entrants of each of the four countries. In 1936 four teams from Switzerland were admitted against the fifth representatives from Austria, Italy, Hungary and Czechoslovakia (all eliminated in the preliminary round). In 1937, two clubs from Switzerland and one from Romania and Yugoslavia each took part (<http://www.rsssf.com/tablesm/mit.html>).

The first Romanian team to take part in the Mitropa Cup was Venus from Bucharest, while the representative of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was the state champion, Građanski from Zagreb. Both clubs got eliminated in the preliminary round, which was to be expected because Austria, Italy, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia were undoubtedly the strongest countries in the European mainland during the late twenties and thirties, and the first to introduce professional football in Europe, apart from the UK (Austria 1924, Czechoslovakia 1925, Hungary 1926). The Cup therefore carried a prestige only comparable with the Champions' Cup of later decades (<http://www.rsssf.com/tablesm/mit.html>). In contrast to the above-mentioned countries, players in Yugoslavia did not receive any formal salary until 1935. Prior to that, the principle of absolute amateurism was in effect (Đorđević, 2014, pp 185).

It was precisely this period of Yugoslav absence that is remembered as the golden age of glory and domination of BSK on the Yugoslav football scene. They were national champions for several seasons in a row: 1930/31, 1932/33, 1934/35, 1935/36, and after a short break in 1938-39 (AJ, 71-20-52, the application of BSK to the Ministry of Physical Education of the nation on 22 July 1940). To make the achievement even greater, the

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<sup>1</sup> On page 58 of the One Hundred Years of Football in Serbia, it says (erroneously) that Italian clubs had taken part in 1932 for the first time. The mistake is most likely the result of the fact that this was the year Bologna had won the cup for the very first time.

1933/34 championship had not even been held (One Hundred Years of Football in Serbia, 1996, pp 49), and BSK also won the Yugoslav Cup in 1934/35 (AJ, 71-20- 52 the application of BSK to the Ministry of People's Physical Education on 22 July 1940).

This period of BSK domination was often compared to the situation in the country and the personal regime lead by King Aleksandar I Karađorđević that came to power on 6 January 1929. Thus, in 1936 a journal from Split commented that the introduction of the Yugoslav Cup "is a great success Hajduk, Građanski, Haški, Concordija, Yugoslavia and Bask against BSK's dictatorship in the football sport" (Jadranski dnevnik, 1936, No. 171).

#### BSK RETURNS TO THE MITROPA CUP

After Swiss clubs decided not to compete in the Mitropa Cup anymore, it became possible for one club from Yugoslavia and one from Romania to compete in their stead. In Belgrade, on January 15, 1938, there was a conference held by the Central European Cup committee, with representatives of football associations from Italy, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania and Austria. The Hungarian representatives suggested that the only changes to the qualifications be to reserve two slots for the finalists from the previous cup. They were overruled nine votes to three, and since the only alternative was the one proposed by Yugoslavia, to allow a team from Yugoslavia and Romania to compete on a regular basis, it was adopted unanimously, even Hungarians were on board. (*Politika*, 1938, No. 10647).

The number of participants from each of the countries (three from Hungary, Italy, Czechoslovakia and Austria and two from Yugoslavia and Romania) was subsequently changed due to political events. In 1938, Austria was annexed by Germany (Anschluss). The decisive events began to line up on March 13, 1938, when it came to the second, successful attempt to annex Austria to the Third Reich (Mitrović, 1974, pp 408). The disappearance of Austria from the political map of Europe was reflected in the Mitropa Cup as well, so the number of participants from Hungary, Italy and Czechoslovakia was increased to four.

Having another Yugoslav club in the competition is considered essential for the development of Yugoslav football, although their financial conditions relative to the clubs from countries already present were far from equal. There were serious issues, such as how to select two clubs that were adequate, as well as the issue of which stadium the matches would be held at. "*Politika*" advocated the opinion that the national champion would be the most logical choice, but even they could not come up with good ideas pertaining to the choice of the other Yugoslav representative. Some believed the honor should belong to the runner-up team of the championship, or whether a second, Yugo Cup should be organized to decide on the other team. Commentators from "*Politika*" were advocating the latter solution, as it would ensure that whichever team wins would be in perfect shape for the Mitropa Cup. As the Cup Committee had decided that Yugoslav matches should only be held in Belgrade and Zagreb, mostly due to financial reasons, in order to ensure there would be enough spectators and that away team could profit as well, there was yet another issue. It concerned the state in which the stadiums in these cities were at the time. Delegates attended the match BSK - Yugoslavia and were unpleasantly surprised by the poor condition of the field. The field in Zagreb also needed some work. (*Politika*, 1938, No. 10652).

BSK players opened up their 1938 season in the national football team, in a re-match against Poland held in Belgrade. Yugoslavia had lost the previous one 4-0, but that match was held in 1937. In any event, it seemed unlikely that the goal margin would be attainable and that Yugoslavia would not be able to qualify for the World Cup. The second match was

held on April 3, and Yugoslavia won 1-0 which was not enough. The players who contributed to this victory of Yugoslavia were: Dubac, Lehner, Knežević, Moša Marjanović and Božović (*Politika*, 1938, No. 10725). In the next four matches the only BSK players were Lehner and Dubac (On May 8, Romania was defeated in Bucharest 1-0, on May 23, Yugoslavia lost to Italy 4-0, the match against Belgium on May 29 was a draw 2-2 and on August 28, they lost to Czechoslovakia 3-1) (*Politika*, 1938, No. 10756; *Politika*, 1938, No. 10770; *Politika*, 1938, No. 10777; *Politika*, 1938, No. 10866).

BSK had its first international match that year on April 17, at the tournament in Budapest. They were eliminated in the semifinals by Újpest 3-2, mostly due to referee Klein's poor decision to award Hungarians a non-existent penalty kick, and Újpest was able to score a goal. The crowd was objective for the most part and even cheered for the BSK team, with one Hungarian fan, depressed by his team's performance, reportedly saying that "Belgrade and Slavia should have qualified for the final matches" (*Politika*, 1938, No. 10739).

In the first round of the Mitropa Cup, BSK played against famed Slavia from Prague. The first match was held on June 26 in Belgrade and BSK lost 3-2<sup>2</sup> in front of roughly 6,000 spectators. BSK players were: Puhar, Stojiljković, Dubac, Manola, Lohner, Knežević, Glišović, Vujadinović, Marjanović, Božović, Podhracki. A commentator from "*Politika*" stated that the home team played a very poor game, that the keeper (Puhar) practically did not exist, since all three goals were blamed on his poor reactions and were scored within the first 20 minutes of the match. (*Politika*, 1938, No. 10803). Another Belgrade newspaper gave its own analysis, but it mirrored that of "*Politika*" for the most part: "One could hardly write about Puhar and leave out the swear words from the fans." Lehner was praised for his game, as pointed out by the opponents, with the Czech footballer Dauchikov comparing him to Kadya in his glory days. As for the second half, when BSK players managed to score two goals, namely Podhracki and Božović, the left-half of the away team called Vitlachin had this to say: "Your offense managed to completely change the entire course of the game in the second half, because after the first half we were convinced that we would increase the result even further, and it was diminished in the end. Your backs, with their system, have neutralized our wing players." Football players from both teams have sharply criticized the state of the field, which was full of bumps and holes (*Vreme*, 1938, No. 5902).

The other Yugoslav representative, the then-reigning champion HAŠK from Zagreb lost to Cladno from Czechoslovakia 3-1 (*Politika*, 1938, No. 10803). They won the second game 2-1 but it was not enough for them to qualify for the semifinals (*Politika*, 1938, No. 10810).

The July 4 match between Sparta Prague and BSK was extensively covered by Czechoslovak media long before it had been officially announced. It had been stressed that there is ample interest for match despite the local festivities being held at the time. "Česko slovo" wrote that the Czechs thought of Yugoslavs as their students for a long time, but the recent results have shown a radical improvement in the quality of their game, while the game of the Czechoslovak team had stagnated. They felt that BSK could count on the support of two thousand "Yugoslav falcons" that will surely attend the match and that the chances of winning were even (*Politika*, 1938, No. 10810).

In front of roughly 25,000 spectators, Slavia managed to win the second match 2-1, with Podhracki scoring the only goal for the Belgrade team. The terrain in Prague was covered with grass, which was a novel experience for BSK players. There were plenty of long passes, and Lehner was considered the best player yet again. Neither the coaching staff nor players from BSK were satisfied with the way referees had handled their

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<sup>2</sup> An article in *Vreme*, 1938, No. 5.902 lists 10,000 spectators.

responsibilities. This was particularly the case with the penalty kick for the home team by referee Boroshkay. In the ensuing argument, Moša Marjanović got the red card, so the BSK team finished the match one player short. This penalty decided on the winner, because had BSK scored a goal instead, a third game would have had to be played. (*Vreme*, 1938, No. 5910). After the game, Marjanović went on record saying: "Even though we played a lot better than Slavia, we had to lose because the judge made up a penalty where there was none. The game was typically what we were used to in the championship, quick and sharp, especially that of the Czechs. Our whole team fought very well, especially in the second half" (*Politika*, 1938, No. 10811).

By the end of another year in which the BSK was eliminated from the CE Cup, in the first round there was yet another major international match. In honor of the fifteenth year of active football career of Moša Marjanović, on September 4 there was a match between BSK and Újpest. It ended in a draw, 1-1, and as many as 10,000 spectators came to pay homage to the popular football player. Comments were full of praise, and "a crowd of this magnitude is the best indicator that Belgrade audience knows how to appreciate Moša's merits in terms of development and success of our football sport" (*Politika*, 1938, No. 10873).

As for the BSK matches in 1939, the first one took place on February 11 against Hungaria and it was a draw 1-1. However, the newspapers stated that the Belgrade team had been better and that they deserved to win. The BSK players were: Puhar, Stojiljković, Dubac, Dragičević, Stevović, Lehner, Manola, Moša Marjanović, Božović, Nikolić, Podharcki (*Politika*, 1939, No. 11030).

Most of the activities surrounding the BSK players until the next Mitropa Cup, to which they had qualified as Yugoslav 1938/39 champions, consisted of friendly matches against foreign teams as well as regular championship matches. But first and foremost were the performances for the national team. The match against Germany was held on February 26, 1939 and Germany won 3-2. BSK players that took part were: Dubac, Stevović, and Lehner (*Politika*, 1939 No. 11045). Yugoslav national team defeated Romania 1-0 in their match for the cup of King Carol II on May 7, where Manola and Lehner got to play – as for the historic triumph over England 2-1 on May 18, it came at the hands of Dubac, Manola, Dragičević and Lehner, among others (*Politika*, 1939, No. 11.111; *Politika*, 1939, No. 11122).

During the spring of 1939, BSK played only one friendly international match against the German Hannover 1896 as a home team, and lost 3-2. This match was not a true indicator of the possibilities of the Belgrade team, since six players were absent, training with the national team, during its preparation for the match against Italy. The Yugoslav national team was defeated in Belgrade 2-1, and the BSK players that got to play were: Dubac, Manola, Dragičević and Lehner (*Politika*, 1939 No. 11132; *Politika*, 1939 No. 11137). All the matches of the national team were held at the BSK stadium, which had been built a decade earlier and was one of the most modern in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

For BSK, the Mitropa Cup was supposed to start on June 18, 1939 in Prague against Slavia, but the match was not allowed to take place. As with any international match, a special permission had to be secured regardless of whether the team was home or away. This is why the BSK team had to file a request with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a collective passport so they could skip the formalities on their way to Prague, as well as the permits for hosting foreign teams along with visas for any Belgrade matches in 1939 and 1940 (AJ, 71-23-60, Applications of the BSK Administration to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, dated May 30, 1939 and June 25, 1940).

Because of this ban, the first match against Sparta played in Belgrade was delayed a full week, but BSK won 3-0 (1-0). Press reviews state that the Yugoslav team earned their

victory, but the result of the match did not accurately reflect the game, as it should have been higher. The BSK team was: Mrkušić, Stojiljković, Dubac, Manola, Dragičević, Lehner, Glišović, Valjarević, Božović, Vujadinović and Podhracki. According to some journalists, there "might never be another such opportunity for a Yugoslav club to beat their opponent like BSK had yesterday for the first match in the Central European Cup" (*Politika*, 1939 No. 11158). The reason for this assessment, in addition to the game displayed by the home team, might lie in the fact that, a week earlier, Slavia had beaten Ferencvaros in Budapest and thus "instilled fear in the ranks of fans in Belgrade". A further observation was that in Belgrade one could immediately see who is dominant force in the field and that the result of the match should have been 6-0. Although the victory was celebrated, journalists critical toward the weak forward players Vujadinović, Valjarević and Božović, who were identified as the main culprits for the "lack of goals". The forward line, together with Podhracki (the winger), "competed to see who could ruin more chances in a single game." Journalists felt that only the second goal was good, whereas the other two fell more like a result of the fortuitous sets of circumstances. Most of the merit for the outcome of the match was awarded to the half-line Lehner - Dragičević - Manola, which effectively kept the game on the Sparta's side of the field. Božović, Valjarević and Glišović each got to score a goal on that match. Slavia's management declared that the victory was well-deserved, and added that it was not in question at any point in the match (*Politika*, 1939, No. 11158).

The second match was held on July 3, 1939 in Prague. Before the match the Czechs stated that they believe they would win, but also that this victory will not be sufficient to qualify for the next round. The Czech public exerted a lot of pressure on Slavia's players, since Sparta had been eliminated by that point, so the elimination of the second Czech team would be seen as a huge disappointment. Out of all the BSK players, Božović alone went ahead and issued a statement to the press on the eve of the match, which illustrates the conviction the team had after their victory in Belgrade: "BSK is a big club today. This is a team that can successfully compete against any team in Europe, which has been proven time and time again. Well, Ferencvaros spent 90 minutes in front of Sparta's goal, but managed to score only two goals" (*Politika*, 1939, No. 11165).

There was huge interest for the match in Prague. In front of the stadium, one could notice hundreds of cars, and in order to enter, one had to break through the crowd. All tickets for the match were sold out on Saturday, although the game was to be held on Monday. The level of interest can be best gauged by the fact that the a ticket for the seat that would normally cost 30 crowns was sold through scalpers for as much as 300 crowns, and this led journalists from Belgrade to conclude that the Yugoslav football was more and more appreciated abroad. The match was attended by about 35,000 spectators who enthusiastically cheered for their team, which won 2-1 (2-1) but this victory was not sufficient for them to qualify. Božović was the one who scored the only goal for the Belgrade team during that match. That the Czech public's pressure on the players of the home team was huge could be seen from the behavior of the players themselves in the field, as they were trying to score a goal by force, with lots of fouls and even deliberate ball handling. One of the two goals for the home team was basically the judge allowing the non-existent goal which brought them in the lead for the final score 2-1. After the onslaught of the Czech players on goalkeeper Mrkušić, which created a commotion in the middle, one Czech player had to leave the field, and so did Valjarević who was not even involved in the incident. The BSK starting lineup was the same as in Belgrade, and Czech journalists blamed the forward players of their home team for the lack of results. (*Politika*, 1939, No. 11165).

The next opponent was the Hungarian Újpest, certainly one of the best European teams, but the passage to the semifinals of the ME Cup encouraged both BSK fans and players alike. The team was standard: Mrkušić, Stojiljković, Dubac, Manola, Dragičević, Lehner, Glišović, Božović, Vujadinović, Matošić, Zečević. BSK won the first match 4-2 (2-1), and one of the goals they received was scored in a penalty kick. Božović scored three goals, and Vujadinović scored the remaining one. According to the commentators, goalkeeper Mrkušić had both good and bad moments. He was blamed for the first received goal due to an inadequate reaction. Dubac was an extraordinarily reliable back, but Stojković was not doing bad either. Lehner's game was masterful as ever, and in combination with Manolo they managed to build a good game, generously helping both the offense and defense (*Vreme*, 1939, No. 6271).

BSK managed to impress everybody at the stadium with their game, and there was a great sense of unity among fans in Belgrade, who were no longer divided into "reds" (Yugoslavia fans) and "blues". They all cheered for BSK. According to the commentary of the game, the home team played as if they were in full form, whereas the away team was on the defensive the whole time. Once again, local journalists believed that the score did not reflect the game itself and that there should have been more goals. This may be interpreted as an accurate assessment or it could be contributed to the desire for a more favorable outcome as well as fear of the second match. The only objection commentators had for the BSK team is that they should have put the emphasis on their right wing, Glišović, in the first half of the match. As for the Hungarians, their assessment of the match was that they put on a good show in spite of the score, and it was noted that they handled headers and mid-level balls. In contrast to the criticism from the previous match, the Czech referee Eiba received high scores for the way he handled the match, and it is said that "it has been a long time since we had the opportunity to see such a fine and energetic referee in Belgrade" (*Politika*, 1939, No. 11172).

Hungarian newspapers wrote that BSK victory was well-deserved, with the support of roughly 16,000 spectators. The BSK game was rated as very good, strong, fast, full of surprises for the visitors, with lots of nice moves and combinations. It was noted that the Yugoslav players were physically much better prepared than before. As for the rematch and the chances of each team, it was pointed out that the home advantage was huge, but also that BSK rarely loses matches by a large margin, so their odds were good (*Politika*, 1939, No. 11173).

The second match was in Budapest on July 15, 1939 and BSK could scarcely have hoped for a better start. Matošić scored the first goal, but the home team managed to even the score by the end of the first halftime. BSK players were amazing and except for wings (Zečević and Glišović) who failed to produce more chances, everything worked like it was supposed to. However, the events from the second half probably made 1,000 BSK fans grizzled, according to "*Politika*". In this part of the game BSK received six goals and Újpest won 7-1. It is obvious that BSK players did their very best in the first half and that they were exhausted in the second. Therefore, they have physically fallen, and the audience cheered the home team on frantically, which proved crucial (*Politika*, 1939 No. 11178). This game made Gyula Engeler famous, for it was he who scored all six goals in the second half and Dragičević could not even keep up (*Vreme*, 1939 No. 6277). Two players did not finish the game since Stojiljković (BSK) and Adam (Újpest) got expelled because of mutual hitting, although it was deemed that the Hungarian should not have been expelled as he had not started the fight; Stojiljković attacked Adam first (*Politika*, 1939, No. 11178).

Hungarian newspapers found the BSK a worthy opponent in the first half, and they have also pointed out that Újpest played well above what was expected as well. The first half seemed to be a hopeless battle for the home team, but the Hungarian commentators have pointed out two mistakes that BSK made. The temperature was 33 degrees Celsius, so BSK players should not have gone on the offensive from the very beginning, as this only made them exhausted. The other mistake was their defensive play in the second half, although this was largely attributed to the exhaustion as well. If one looks solely at the scoreboard, they might be tricked into believing the home team faced no difficulties, but the match was actually described as "one of the largest in recent years," and that even the most fervent Újpest fans could not believe something like that could have possibly happened (*Politika*, 1939, No. 11179).

The humiliating defeat of BSK was seen as "another bitter, but useful experience," the local press would not let this go and wrote about it for four days straight. Hungarians "not only won but also triumphed." It was stressed that the Yugoslav sport-watching public had just started to believe that the time for greater achievements had come, but "the seven goals against BSK surprised the entire world of sports." The loss was especially hard to process because the half-time score was 1-1. Disappointment and doubt about the value of the Yugoslav club football was evident in all the articles: "BSK narrower defense is not on the European international height, and its offense has lost its former efficiency". The physical strength and fitness of the Hungarian team was duly noted, and their players made their BSK counterparts look small and feeble by comparison (*Politika*, 1939 No. 11180). Even the press in Prague was surprised by the result, although some newspapers did take advantage of the situation to point out that the BSK in Prague only showed fighting spirit and enthusiasm, and that, had Slavia's offense not failed, the Czechs would have won (*Politika*, 1939, No. 11180).

Part of the comments in the daily newspaper "*Politika*" comments disagreed with the opinion of leading Yugoslav sports officials, who pointed out that the physique and the ability of players has to be on par with that of an athlete, because skills were seen as useless without the strength to match. "In our country, due to the lack of awareness regarding the physical education of young people, it is permitted to anyone to play football and participate in matches, regardless of their physical fitness" (First Yugoslav Sports Almanac, 1930, pp. 41).

By the end of the year, BSK players had a few matches for the national team, with the number of players who were invited varying on the location of the match. Almost the entire team played the game against Czechoslovakia on August 27, where Yugoslavia lost 7-3: Vujadinović, Lehner, Dragičević, Božović, Dubac, Manola, Stojiljković and Glišović. The only ones who weren't on the team were Perlić, Aca Petrović and Spasić (*Politika*, 1939 No. 11221). The match against Germany was played in Zagreb on October 15 and Yugoslavia was defeated 5-1. The team consisted of Croats for the most part, but there were also BSK players, namely Manola and Lehner (*Politika* 1939, No. 11270). The Hungarians have seen to it that the year ends in defeat for the Yugoslav national team, by beating them in Belgrade 2-0 on November 12. Due to the location, the core of the team consisted of BSK players: Dubac, Manola, Dragičević, Lehner, Glišović, Vujadinović, Božović (*Politika*, 1939, No. 11298).

The reasons for this kind of structure in the national team were political in nature. In an attempt to solve the so-called "Croatian question", there had been an internal reorganization of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The essential differences between Serbs and Croats were prominent even over the name of a future administrative unit, which the government called "The Croatian Banate" and Croats kept referring to it as "The Banate of Croatia" (Dimić, 2001, pp 187). Despite all the disagreements and delays, the agreement was reached on August 26, 1939 (Petranović, 1988, pp 296). Creating this Banate based on the ethnic

principle meant that that Croatian players could participate in matches between their own team and foreign teams, and that they would be included in the Yugoslav national team as well, when the situation called for it or when the match was held in Zagreb. If two matches are too close to each other because of tight schedule, the team for one of those matches would be made of players from Serbian teams and the other team would consist of Croatian players.

The creation of the Croatian Banate changed the name and the essence of the supreme football organization in the country. The Supreme Football Association of Yugoslavia had to be created, and the former supreme authority, the Yugoslav Football Association, joined it as a member. On October 1, 1939 the Yugoslav Football Association officially changed its name to "Serbian Ballgame Association", with headquarters in Belgrade. The color scheme and symbol of the Supreme Football Association was the state flag and coat of arms of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (AJ, 71-20-52, Rules of the Supreme Football Association of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Belgrade), while the Serbian Ballgame Association took the red-blue-white color scheme, and the rule that stated that neither the name nor the colors may be tied to a single ethnicity was struck from the Statute (AJ, 71-20-52 A letter of the Yugoslav Football Association to the Ministry of People's Physical Education, dated October 9, 1939)<sup>3</sup>.

The events related to the specificity of regional associations caused a chain reaction, so the Supreme Football Association from Belgrade soon received a request from "the Montenegrin Football Association" in Podgorica, asking to become a member. The Serbian Ballgame Association, to which the application was forwarded, after due consideration denounced this request as inappropriate and detrimental to the development of Serbian football and Serbian sport in general. The application was deemed to be the action of individuals, because none of the 30+ football teams from Montenegro had contacted the Association and made such a request. Football in the Zeta Banate remained at the level of autonomous sub-federation headquartered in Cetinje (AJ, 71-20-52, A letter from the Serbian Ballgame Association to the Ministry of People's Physical Education, dated February 6, 1940).

BSK ended 1939 in triumph, having defeated Újpest 5-3 in a friendly match in Belgrade (*Politika*, 1939 No. 11340). This victory was important not only as a payback to Újpest for the elimination from the Mitropa Cup, but it was particularly important given the fact that Hungarians had actually won the competition in question.

**Table 1** The Winners of the Mitropa Cup (*Politika*, 1940, No. 11520)

Year	Team	City
1927	Sparta	Prague
1928	Ferencvaros	Budapest
1929	Újpest	Budapest
1930	Rapid	Vienna
1931	Vienna	Vienna
1932	Bologna	Bologna
1933	Austria	Vienna
1934	Bologna	Bologna
1935	Sparta	Prague
1936	Austria	Vienna
1937	Ferencvaros	Budapest
1938	Slavia	Prague
1939	Újpest	Budapest

<sup>3</sup> This constituted a direct violation of the Article 13 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which prohibited any kind of association that was based on ethnic, religious or regional principle, for political purposes as well as those pertaining to physical education. (*The Constitution of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia*, 1931, pp 6).



## A "SMALL CENTRAL EUROPEAN CUP"

The outbreak of the Second World War had an impact on all spheres of life in Europe, although during the first couple of years, the effects were not felt everywhere, regardless of whether it was a neutral country at the time or not. The International Sports Conference, held in Budapest on January 12-13, 1940 was attended by delegates of the football associations of seven countries: Italy, Yugoslavia, Hungary, the Czech-Moravian protectorate, Romania, Switzerland and Germany<sup>4</sup>. The main issue was the fate of the Central European Cup, in which national champions competed against each other. The Italians suggested playing under a new system, which involved an early end of the competition instead of the old one that involved playing in the summer, but Hungarians, Yugoslavs and Romanians insisted that the old system stay in place (*Politika*, 1940, No. 11358).

A new conference of the Central European Cup was held in Zagreb on March 9-10, 1940, and in place of Czechs, the Swiss had sent a delegation with the status of an observer. As founding members, Italy and Hungary had three votes each, whereas Yugoslavia and Romania only got one vote per delegation. The biggest issue was whether the Central European Cup should even be held, and if so, who would get to participate and what kind of reform should be carried out.

The approach to these issues differed vastly, especially between Yugoslavs and Italians on one hand, and Hungarians and Romanians on the other. The Italians wanted to suspend the Cup for a year, while the others wanted it to take place as usual. As for their reasons, Italians cited that their country was at war, so neither Italian nor Czech teams would be in a position to compete. Should the representatives of other football associations insist that the competition be held regardless, Italians wanted it to be renamed the "Small Central European Cup", as well as to allow any Italian and Czech teams to make a late entry at least by June that year, should they find themselves able to do so.

The following decisions were made:

1. "The Central European Cup is an effective instrument of sport as well as sport propagation and should remain as such.
2. For the current season, taking into consideration the above-mentioned motives, further matches of the Cup are to be delayed until further notice. Any willing association may participate in a competition under the provisional name "The Small Central European Cup", which is to be managed by a commission formed by these associations, under the rules of the Central European Cup and the FIFA statute.
3. The trophy for this competition will be awarded by the Committee of the Central European Cup.
4. The members of the Central European Cup Committee, Professor Dr. Pelikan, Coppola, Inyeri and Dr. Juga, the auditor, are to remain in their positions until the next general assembly of the Central European Cup.
5. If there is a change in the general situation, which would require a new examination of the conclusions adopted by the associations in question, the Central European Cup Committee is obliged to convene by the end of May 1940 or possibly the first week of

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<sup>4</sup> In March 1939, Germany occupied Czechoslovakia and divided it into the Czech-Moravian protectorate and the "autonomous" Slovakia. The effect of these events was felt in Yugoslavia as well. August Košutić, one of the champions of the Croatian Peasant Party and the vice-chairman of the CPP has immediately paid a visit to Bratislava, citing the need to visit his relatives. The British, however, believed that he was on a mission to study Slovakian autonomy (Avramovski, 1996, 86).

June the same year, for an emergency annual meeting of delegates from founding and adjoined member states alike." (*Politika*, 1940, No. 11414).

Before the Cup could commence, due to circumstances, the only international matches were held at the level of national teams. Yugoslavia had a match against Romania in Bucharest on March 31, 1940 and the result was 3-3. The BSK players were: Stojiljković, Dubac, Manola, Dragičević, Lehner, Nikolić, Tirnanić, Valjarević and Božović (*Politika*, 1940 No. 11435). For the match against Germany, which Yugoslavia won 2-1, their number would rise to nine (Stojiljković, Dubac, Manola, Dragičević, Lehner, Nikolić, Valjarević, Glišović, Vujadinović) (*Politika*, 1940 No. 11449). The other two team members were from Građanski. The importance of BSK players was such that the Ministry of People's Physical Education issued an immediate response to the article in "*Vreme*" in which it had been announced that Stojiljković, Dubac, Manola, Lehner, Glišović, Valjarević and Nikolić have refused to play for the national team in Vienna. The Ministry launched an issue of whether the match is to be held at all, and the permission was not given until all of the players named in the article personally denied giving any such statement (AJ, 71-23-60, A Letter of the Ministry of People's Physical Education to the Administration of the City of Belgrade).

In the quarterfinals of the Cup, BSK met Venus from Bucharest. The first match was on June 16, 1940 in Belgrade and the home team won 3-0 (1-0). Nikolić, Glišović and Valjarević scored goals for Yugoslavia. Yugoslav commentators believed that the score did not accurately reflect the difference in quality of the game of both teams. They believed the offense players could have demolished Romanians had they not missed so many chances. As for the game that Venus had to show for, the assessment was that this is a team that plays great with their heads, and that they were hampered by player injuries so they ended the match with only nine players. Still, it was decided that BSK was a class above the opponent, but instead of long passes and a more aggressive approach they went for the short ones. There was also criticism directed at certain BSK players, who "dribbled more than usual and kept the ball in their possession" (*Politika*, 1940, No. 11508).

The second match was held in Bucharest on June 23, 1940, and the local press was full of optimism. It was based on the fact that the Romanian national team had participated twice in the qualifying stage for the World Cup, so players from the home team were deemed superior. This sport was considered to be "more than a game" in Romania as well, since the Yugoslav journalists commented how "every time we leave Yugoslavia to attend a match abroad, we can barely believe how the world outside our country takes care of sports and sports results. Everywhere, including here in Bucharest, the sports masses are not the only ones taking care of sports and results, but also the highest state officials and the upper class of the nation" (*Politika*, 1940, No. 11514). There was another factor that fueled the optimism of the local population regarding their chances to reach the semi-finals. The day before, BSK had a match against HASK, so their players were definitely fatigued. Regardless of the optimism and aspirations of the Romanians, BSK's Božović put an end to the whole thing with the only goal on the match. BSK won 1-0 (1-0). The desire of the Romanians to make their way to semifinals was so strong that during the halftime break, each of the players of the home team was offered a reward of 20,000 lei if they manage to even the score. Another interesting trivia is that the players of the second Romanian team in the Cup, Rapid, were given 12,000 lei each for beating Hungaria and making it to the semifinals. This promise of a rich reward has certainly motivated players and made for a very dynamic second half, in stark contrast to the first one. However, BSK players handled it "easily and without strain," with every attractive move of theirs being followed by applause from the spectators (*Politika*, 1940, No. 11514).

The second Yugoslav representative, Građanski from Zagreb, managed to win the two matches against Újpest, 1-0 both times. The success of both Yugoslav clubs in the first round of the competition is accompanied by the commentary that, for the first time since the Central European Cup was formed, the Yugoslav clubs have a role of ever-increasing importance (*Politika*, 1940, No. 11513).

In the second stage, BSK won both matches against two-time champion Ferencvaros. In preparation for the meeting with BSK, the team from Budapest played a friendly match with Slavia from Sarajevo, which the "weak, unhappy and confused" Slavia team lost 11-1 (*Vreme*, 1940, No. 6613). The choice of Slavia could be interpreted as a desire of the Hungarians to play a match against one of the Yugoslav clubs, but the choice fell on a relatively inexperienced team by international standards where only two players had even taken part in international matches, so this might also pass as a scare tactic of sorts, meant to intimidate their next opponent in the CE Cup with a show of force.

The first match was in Belgrade on June 30, 1940 and the only goal was scored by Glišović for a 1-0 (1-0) BSK victory. Still, BSK was the superior team throughout the match and could have scored any number of goals, if only some of the opportunities had been seized, although there are some commentaries that their game was actually poor (*Vreme*, 1940, No. 6620). The only stain on the game was when referee Bažant from Zagreb failed to signal an obvious penalty for the home team, when Nikolić was knocked down from behind. The behavior of the referee from Zagreb sparked a huge revolt among the audience, which had long protested against him, and after the match was over they raced towards the fence with umbrellas and clenched fists. In order to flee the field, the referee had to hide among the Ferencvaros players. In this game, ball possession for BSK players was 80%, but they over-combined in the field and kept the ball, which is especially true for Božović and Valjarević in front of the opponent's goal. Even though they had just beaten a major team, criticism towards BSK came from all sides, stating that they consisted of experienced internationals, not rookies and that no less than three goals should have been scored according to the game they have shown. The best player was the goalkeeper Mrkušić, who had excellent interventions. Hungarian journalists made similar comments, saying that they were used to seeing the BSK team playing simple, fast combinations and this was not the case this time, but they were playing a bit too wide (*Politika*, 1940, No. 11521).

The second match was in Bucharest on July 7 and Ferencvaros won 2-0 (0-0), advancing to the finals. The commentators believed a tie would have been more appropriate given the overall game, because BSK was actually better in the first half. In the second match Hungarians played as if they had been reborn, and to make matters worse Dragičević was injured and forced to move to a position that did not suit him, which disrupted the entire BSK defense. The offensive players were criticized yet again for over combining in front of the goal of their opponent which resulted in far fewer opportunities. (*Politika*, 1940, No. 11528). Glišović gave his own view on the elimination from the Cup, bringing up the question of mentality: "It seems that the Yugoslavs can beat the world in football, but not one of their teams can make it to the finals of the Central European Cup". The BSK Player cited one major drawback of Yugoslav players, and this was the lack of physical condition compared to the Hungarians, but was also critical of the overall approach to the game, in a sense that the action should be as simple as possible (*Vreme*, 1940, No. 6627).

Građanski met with Rapid from Bucharest, and both matches ended in draws 1-1. This meant the third one had to be held, in Subotica on July 10. However, since this was also a draw 0-0, lots were drawn and Romanians made it to the finals. (*Politika*, 1940, No. 11531).

Although Yugoslavia had two teams in the semifinals, none failed to qualify for the final stage, which was not even played in 1940 due to the escalation of the Second World War.

By the end of 1940, BSK players had three matches for the Yugoslav national team. One was a loss against Romania 2-1, in a match of the Danube Cup held on September 22, with Stojiljković, Manola, Dragičević, Lehner and Valjarević on the field. Seven days later, a match against Hungary ended in a draw 0-0, and BSK players were: Lehner, Dubac, Vujadinović and Božović. Finally, Dubac, Lehner, Valjarević, Božović and Vujadinović all had a role in the victory over Germany 2-0 on November 3 in Belgrade. (*Politika*, 1940, No. 11605; *Politika*, 1940, No. 11612; *Politika*, 1940, No. 11647).

The Second World War prevented any further competitions and the Cup was discontinued until 1951 when it got renamed the Zentropa Cup. However, its importance would never again reach such heights, having been eclipsed by the Champions Cup which in turn became the Champions League we know today.

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## **BSK U SREDNJOEVROPSKOM (MITROPA) KUPU**

*Fudbal se kao sport izuzetno razvio posle Prvog svetskog rata. Tome je pogotovo doprineo profesionalizam koji je počeo da se primenjuje u Austriji, Čehoslovačkoj i Mađarskoj, koji je uz već razvijene klubove u Italiji i na Ostrvu, počeo da privlači sve više gledalaca. Austrijanac Hugo Meisl došao je na ideju da organizuje međunarodno klupsko prvenstvo u kojoj bi učešće uzele tri pomenute srednjoevropske zemlje, a želju za učešćem izrazila je i Kraljevina SHS. Beogradski sportski klub (BSK) pet puta je predstavljao jugoslovenski fudbal u ovom prestižnom takmičenju, a u radu su, na osnovu izvora i literature prikazani i analizirani dometi ovog kluba, koji su ujedno i najveći dometi jugoslovenskog klupskog fudbala između dva svetska rata.*

Ključne reči: *fudbal, Mitropa kup, BSK, rezultati.*