

THE BEGINNING OF RUGBY UNION IN SERBIA

Slaviša Milenković¹

¹Rugby Union of Serbia

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SUMMARY

The first direct contact with rugby was made by young men from Serbia during the First World War, after retreating through Albania, watching matches of French and English soldiers. During 1916, some 3,500 Serbian boys were sent to France and the United Kingdom to study. During their education at lyceums, colleges and universities, they were given the opportunity to play various sports, including rugby union. In keeping with their interest and quality, the Serbian boys quickly became involved in the school teams. Most Serbian boys actively participated in playing rugby in three Scottish cities - Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dundee. Their interest in the sport was so much that in Edinburgh and Glasgow they formed special teams made up only of Serbs who played matches with other school teams. The highlight of dealing with Serb rugby in Scotland was the performance by the boys of the George Heriot School at the Rugby 7 tournament on March 9, 1918 in Edinburgh and a victory over the British Colonies selection. This performance can be considered the first appearance of a sports team under the name of Serbia on the international stage.

After the end of World War I and the return to the homeland, some of the young men who became acquainted with rugby in France and the United Kingdom actively participated in academic and sports life in their homeland and the result was the establishment of two rugby clubs, in Sabac and Belgrade.

Key Words: rugby, Serbs, Scotland, France, The First World War, Edinburgh, Serbian boys

Correspondence author

Slaviša Milenković
slavisa.milenkovic@rugbyserbia.com

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 20th century, rugby was one of the most widespread and most developed sports in the world and was the leader in comparison to other sports and even to its cousin football association, especially in terms of organization and international activities.

The first national rugby union - Rugby Football Union, was founded on January 26, 1871, and just two months later, on March 27, 1871, the first international football match of any kind, between Scotland and England, was played in Edinburgh.

The first international federation, the IRFB (International Rugby Football Board), was founded in 1886 and rugby spread at an incredible pace across the British colonies - Australia, South Africa, New Zealand and countries like Argentina.

New Zealanders first toured Europe in 1905 and were soon followed by Australians and South Africans. There were no obstacles for long trips by boat and the tours lasted several months.

The popularity of rugby has led the sport to be included in the programs of the 1900 Olympic Games in Paris and eight years later in London.



The rugby game of French soldiers in Corfu 1916

THE FIRST RUGBY BALL IN SREMSKA MITROVICA

The first serious clue about playing rugby on the premises of today's Serbia is the testimony of journalist Ozren Popovic, one of the founders of football in Sremska Mitrovica. In the monography "Chronicle of FK Srem", authored by Miomir Filipovic and Zoran Veljkovic, Popovic claims that the rugby ball was hopping on the meadow near the KP home in Sremska Mitrovica as early as 1912.

"It may surprise me to say that Sremska Mitrovica is the only city in this country (Yugoslavia) where Rugby Union preceded football. Where did it come from? Here, therefore, was the fact that a Frenchman from Bordeaux who had previously played rugby in French clubs had resided in Mitrovica. The Frenchman brought a real rugby ball upon his arrival in Mitrovica. He quickly gathered us young around us. However, there was always some strain as to whether we were playing rugby or football. We played both, but more rugby. That Frenchman taught us to play rugby. The rugby pitch was at the Penitentiary (today's KP home), "Ozren Popovic recalled¹.

"The Frenchman, whose name no one remembers, represented a wine company in his country that was buying oak for barrels. He was in Mitrovica for two years. It was from 1912 to 1914", Ozren Popovic, one of the founders of the first football club in Sremska Mitrovica in 1919, said in his testimony². Sremska Mitrovica was part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy before the First World War, and the Frenchman, whose name was unfortunately forgotten, was the first man to bring rugby ball to the territory of present-day Serbia and try to popularize this magic game.

SERBS GET TO KNOW RUGBY

At the beginning of the 20th century, sports, in particular thanks to young people who graduated from universities in European capitals, gained momentum in Serbia. The most popular was football or soccer as it was called then. The military also gave great support to active physical training of the youth, as it was thought that practicing track and field, horseback riding, fencing and archery aided better military training.

Most, albeit rare, sports activities died when Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on July 28, 1914. Great powers, France, Great Britain, Russia stood alongside Serbia, Germany supported Austria-Hungary, and thus began the

¹ Miomir Filipović i Zoran Veljković, "Hronika FK Srem 1919-1994", (Sremska Mitrovica: FK Srem, 1994)

² Miomir Filipović i Zoran Veljković, "Hronika FK Srem 1919-1994", (Sremska Mitrovica: FK Srem, 1994)

bloodiest conflict in human history so far. An estimated 15 million people were killed and 20 million wounded during the four-year conflict.

During the First World War, intensive contacts were established between the Serbs on the one hand and the French and British soldiers on the other. In rare moments of lull, Serbs watched the sports competitions of the English and French with interest, and often joined them to satisfy their curiosity and try something completely new to them.

For many Serb soldiers, especially those who lived from the countryside before the war, matches of Allied soldiers in football, rugby and other disciplines were the first encounter with sports in general.

The famous Serbian novelist Stevan Jakovljević, in his epic work "Serbian Trilogy", describes how Serbian soldiers reacted by watching a rugby match between French and English sailors.

"On the other hand, a relentless noise is coming, because today there is a rugby match between English and French sailors. Opponents are drowning, rattling, tangling, and tossing about a dozen in the crowd as the surrounding mass roars. A group of soldiers looks at the enraged players, and then one will say: - I am their father, drowning who I am with the Bulgarians. - If they had crossed Albania, it would not have occurred to them. - They are angry and tired."³

After the crossing of Albania, some 300,000 Serbian soldiers and civilians came into contact with Allied soldiers, most of them French and English. Regardless of the skeptical attitude towards sports expressed in the "Serbian Trilogy", it is clear that these contacts had a great impact on young Serbs and their activities in the homeland, after the end of World War I.

Serbia lost a large number of population in the two Balkan wars and at the beginning of the Great War. In order to secure the future of the country, on September 9, 1915, the Serbian government signed a special agreement with France under which this allied country was to receive a certain, pre-arranged number of students and teachers.

By mid-February 1916, 1,150 Serbian students arrived in France, and as early as April of the same year, "Srpske novine" reported that there were about 3,000 Serbian students sent from Albania from Corfu and Thessaloniki in this country.

Among the Serbian students who arrived in France in 1916 there were many athletes and one of the most famous was Jovan Ruzić, a pre-war football player of the SK "Velika Srbija". He, with a group of peers, was deployed to Lycee Louis le Grand, in Saint-Etienne, where he met rugby and played it actively.

³ Stevan Jakovljević, "Srpska trilogija", Druga knjiga, (Beograd: Delta 1988), 256.

"... To mention that in France I spent some time playing rugby with my French students while in college in Saint-Etienne. This sport, which is unusually developed in France and which is more popular there than football, and in which the French are very strong and could not attract me in international competition. Although my French comrades thought that because of my height, physical strength and speed, I was "destined" to be a rugby player, so they tried their best to get me for their game, the inevitable rudeness that characterized this sport kept me away from him . I played it during my college vacation so I wouldn't bother with my classmates.

After leaving Saint-Etienne in Nice, I did not have the opportunity to practice this sport. However, in Paris in 1918, since football had not been played in the summer, I was invited on one occasion to play rugby against a team of soldiers on the front in the selection team of Paris. In the team I played left half and in the same team played right half Georges Carpentier, then famous boxer and later world champion in boxing.

Upon returning from France to Belgrade, I occasionally played rugby in the SK Yugoslavia section. This section was founded by students who returned after the war from England. The founders were Steva Popovic, Pera Januusevic, Dr. Dulkanovic and others, "Jovan Ruzic states on page 40 of his autobiography "Memories and Reminiscences"⁴.

Versatile athlete, but above all, passionate footballer Ruzic in the sequel to the book provides another interesting testimony of Serbian students who played rugby in France.

..Especially in the Lyceum among the French was a favorite rugby, less football. It goes without saying that we too are delighted to join these sports games in which a few of us soon become the best competitors ...

When we came to the Lyceum, most of the boarding school students played rugby. Looking at this completely unknown game to us, we quickly realized its essence, and even though it did not delight us with the solidarity of our friends, Mihailo Matic from Obrenovac joined us in that game. My speed and strength, the two basic elements of this game, came to the fore and the captains of our two teams began to "quarrel" on whose team I would play. The issue was resolved in a camaraderie by changing the team on a regular basis. I played today with one tomorrow with another, " recalled his rugby activities Jovan Ruzic, a member of the first Yugoslav national football team⁵.

In addition to Ruzic and Matic, it is certain that rugby in France was played by Marinko Djordjevic from Sabac, founder of the White Eagle Rugby Club.

⁴ Jovan D. Ružić, "Sećanja i uspomene", (Beograd: SOFK, 1973), 40

⁵ Jovan D. Ružić, "Sećanja i uspomene", (Beograd: SOFK, 1973), 238

Active rugby players were Dusan Dimitrijevic, an otherwise excellent athlete, who played for the S.A.B.E.C. student team from Bordeaux⁶ as well as a certain Blagojevic who played for Les Jasmins - Lycee de Agen⁷.

IN THE CRADLE OF RUGBY

On 7 March 1916, the Serbian government and its Minister of Education, Ljubomir Davidovic, decided to send to the United Kingdom those Serb students who were at that time unallocated in Marseille and Corsica.

In order to realize this idea, the Serbian Relief Fund has set up a special Education Subcommittee from the members of its board of directors, headed by Mrs. Gertrude Carrington Wilde. The Serbian Relief Fund funded the largest number of children from Serbia who lived in the UK during the war, 360 of them out of 450, and Dr Pavle Popovic took care of them on behalf of the Serbian authorities.

Most Serbian children were assigned to Oxford and Cambridge upon arrival in the UK, from where they were sent to their final destinations.

Sir Edward Parot, chairman of the Education Committee of the Serbian Relief Fund for Edinburgh, requested in 1916 the George Heriot School to receive 26 Serbian boys for education and placement. This request was accepted and in addition to Edinburgh, Serbian boys were also housed in other Scottish cities: Dundee, Aberdeen and Glasgow.

Aberdeen housed ten Serbian boys who attended Aberdeen Grammar High School. There were 18 boys of different ages in Glasgow who attended high school, university but also trained to work in a power plant. There were 32 boys in Dundee who attended high schools and attended a trade course.

A group of 27 boys from Serbia, ages 12 to 17, arrived at the renowned George Heriot School in Edinburgh, founded in 1659, in August 1916, in two stages⁸.

The publication "Roll of Honor 1914-1919 George Heriot School" states that a total of 25 students from Serbia arrived at the school shortly after the beginning of the 1916-17 school year. year⁹.

Research by historian Louise Miller, however, showed that a total of 27 Serbian boys attended this school: Djordje Aleksic from Vranje, Petar Deretic from

⁶ "S.A.B.E.C bat A.S.M", "L Athlete" Bordeaux, 07.12.1918. 2.

⁷ "Chez lez Potaches", "L Athlete", Bordeaux, 11.01.1919. 2.

⁸ "Serbian Boys in Scotland", "The Educational News", 7th July 1916, 407

⁹ George Heriots School Roll of Honour, 22-24.

Montenegro, Danilo Djokic and Bozidar Molerovic from Kragujevac, Milan Djuric from Svilajnac, Dimitrija Dulkanovic from Cuprija, Stanko Ilic from Smederevo, Zivojin Kovacevic, Aleksandar Savic and Dusan Obradovic from Krusevac, Gavrilo Lazovic from Cacak, Milorad Maletic and Mihailo Radovanovic from Sabac, Svetomir Marjanovic from Kucevo, Miodrag Martic from Paljevo, Petar Milisavljevic from Knjazevac, Djordje Osmanbegov drawbar Stefanovic from Nis, Prokuplje Danilo Pavlović, Konstantin Stankovic Piro, Toma Tomić Leskovac, Miodrag Tutunović from Raska, Nikola Vasic from Ljubovija, Zivko Ilic Djordje Nikolic, Petar Pantelic and Miodrag Pavlovic¹⁰.



The Serbians rugby team of Serbian boys attend George Heriot School in Edinburgh

The Serbian students were initially assigned to one class and then, when they learned English, mixed with their Scottish peers. As they settled down in Edinburgh and began attending classes, curious Serbian boys became accustomed to the many extracurricular activities that were characteristic of British school life, especially for sporting events. Serbs enjoyed athletics, boxing, football and rugby and also participated in the activities of the school scout team.

"It will be interesting for some of our friends from different schools to find out how we first started playing rugby. We didn't like it at first, we thought it was a very

¹⁰ ¹⁰ Louise Miller, "Serbian Herioters", <http://www.george-heriots.com/former-pupils/ww1-commemorations/serbian-herioters>

rough game. We were asked many times to go down to the school football field but we refused. It was not until one of our boys went down and tried the game. When he came back we asked him how he liked it and on our question he replied that he had excellent game. Next time more of us went down to the playground and soon all joined in. We took interest in rugby from the first game played and after this we began to go regularly to the practice.

For all of this we are gratefully to Mr. Hardy, our headmaster, who took interest in us and showed us the different of the game, " testified one of the Serbian boys to "The Scotsman" on March 18, 1919¹¹.

Zivko Ilic confirmed these allegations in the article "We played rugby", published in the "Sport" newspaper on September 28, 1953.

"I was escorted by 24 other boys to the Serbian Relief Fund to Edinburgh, the old George Heriot School. They took us there on the first day to the sports field. Neither of us had touched the ball until then, and we shyly hesitated to join the groups that coached the then most popular sport in Britain, rugby. However, already after the first training sessions, we became the most diligent and accurate. Professor Hardy soon had trouble with us because he couldn't get us off the field."¹²

Toma Tomic - The best Serbian rugby player in Edinburgh
In one of the first games of the 1917-1918 season, George Heriot School against Craigard, three Serbian boys played in the first team of the school - Djordje Nikolic as a winger, Toma Tomic in the front row and Zivko Ilic in the back row¹³.

Toma Tomic from Leskovac was the tallest and most powerful of all Serbian boys with 175 centimetres height and was considered the best player and captain of the team. He arrived at the school in November 1916 at the age of 17 and already had six months of war experience as an infantry soldier.

"Tomic, a Serbian boy, ended his journey by throwing himself across the line," writes a reporter for "The Scotsman" on October 29, 1917 from the George Heriot School - Edinburgh Academy game¹⁴.

"... and Tomic proveded athletic ability of the Serbian race," says a journalist who followed the George Watson College - George Heriot School (8-0) game in mid-February 1918.

¹¹ "The Serbian Boys in Edinburg", "The Scotsman", 18th March 1919, 7.

¹² Živko Ilić, "Igrali smo ragbi", "Sport", 28.09.1953.

¹³ "The Glasgow Herald", 8th October 1917, 11.

¹⁴ "The Scotsman", 29th October 1917, 3.



Toma Tomic with friends on scout camp

A journalist for "The Glasgow Herald" praises Tomic's appearance for the school team in the finals of the tournament played on March 9, 1918.

From 1917 to 1919, Tomic was a permanent member of the first team of the school and later of Heriots FP, a club made up of former students of the George Heriot School. Most often he played as prop, sometimes as flanker or lock. He gathered nearly 30 appearances in two seasons.

At the beginning of the 1918-1919 season. Heriots jersey in one game, against George Watson College, brought as many as four Serbs - Pavlovic, Martic, Marjanovic and Dulkanovic!¹⁵

Danilo Pavlovic and Dimitrije Dulkanovic played first in the Heriots FP first team in the spring of 1919. In a match against Glasgow High School, Dulkanovic scored a try on January 11, 1919, while Pavlovic did so against Dollar Institution in early March of that year. Dulkanovic played as flanker and Pavlovic as wing threequarter¹⁶.

How strong the George Heriot School team was at the time is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that the best player was Daniel Drysdell who, just a few years later, in 1924, would tour the South Africa with the British Lions.

¹⁵ "The Rugby Football", "The Glasgow Herald", 14th October 1918, 8.

¹⁶ "The Rugby Football", "The Glasgow Herald", 3rd March 1919, 13.

"They said that by our temperament we were simply made for rugby and that Serbia would be the champion of Europe in this sport if its youth had the opportunity to play and train rugby," Zivko Ilic recalled in the aforementioned article in "Sport"¹⁷.

"They were naturally talented. They were strong, big, they ran fast, and at school they were thrilled with these fast, strong guys", said historian Louise Miller on RTV show "Oko", January 5, 2012.

"Some Serbian boys were on par with the Scots who later became internationals in Scotland and the UK. It was rugby at the highest level. They were great. Tomic was a huge man, very strong. When running, it was difficult to stop him. Pavlovic was different. He was fast, a runner and difficult to catch. He scored many goals for the team. Dulkanovic was somewhere in between. He was a fighter," analyzed the rugby skill of Serbian boys Fraser Simm, the archivist of the George Heriot School.



GHS rugby team with Dimitrije Dulkanovic and Danilo Pavlovic

FIRST SERBIAN NATIONAL TEAM

Only a few months after arriving in Edinburgh, the Serbian boys, nicknamed "Serbians", weighed in, 4. November 1916, strength with the Royal High School from Edinburgh. The match ended with a draw, 12:12.

"A match was arranged with the Serbians on this date. Both sides played to their backs and the result was a good, open game, with plenty of strong running ...

¹⁷ Živko Ilić, "Igrali smo ragbi", "Sport", 28.09.1953

At one stage the School (RHS) was leading by two tries but the Serbs put in great finish, and succeeded in equalising the scores," reports "Schola Regia" of December 1916¹⁸.

Edinburgh high schools have traditionally had strong teams and the selection of Serbian boys regularly played against them. This is confirmed by a part of a letter sent by the Serbian boys to "The Scotsman", stating that they "*met the students of Royal High School and George Watson College*".

Lazovic, Deretic, Kovacevic, Molerovic, Savic, Osmanbegovic, Marjanovic, Dulkanovic, Pavlovic, Ilic, Milosavljevic, Stankovic, Maletic, Tutunovic, Martic, Nikolic and skipper Tomic performed for the Serbian rugby team. So, of the 27 Serbian boys in Edinburgh, 17 of them have evidence, reports, photos that they have played rugby actively during their three years in Scotland!

As before the First World War Serbian athletes did not participate in collective games at international competitions and after the war they were part of the selections of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, or Yugoslavia, it can be said that the Serbian rugby players in Edinburgh were the first national selection of Serbia!

While their slightly older relatives and friends used rifles, cannons and bayonets to defeat the enemy on the front, in far-off Scotland, on rugby ground, they represented their small, punctured, enslaved but not conquered homeland in the best possible way.

The crowning performance of Serbian rugby players in Edinburgh and Scotland was participation in a charity tournament in Rugby 7s, organized on 9 March 1918 at the famous Inverleith Stadium, owned by the Scotland Rugby Union.

In the break between the semi-finals and the final game of the tournament, a match was played between the Serbian national team and the British Colonies selection, which also consisted of students educated in Scotland.

Zivko Ilic remembered with great emotion and detail this remarkable, historic event for Serbian sport and rugby, although, inadvertently, he is mistaken when it comes to the date of the tournament and some other details.

"The organizers of the Scottish Rugby Championships have entered the match Serbia against Dominion in the program. It took place on April 11, 1918. Games like this were played on the Seven-a-Side system (seven each). That means the top seven of the fifteen first-team players. This type of game requires extreme endurance, strength and speed.

¹⁸ "Royal High School v. Serbian", "Schola Regia", December 1916, 38.

Our coach Hardy told us the news about this game a month before and immediately started training us. Our opponents were players from various schools who came to Edinburgh from the British Dominions. We knew that there were many more of us, that the choice was far greater and that is why we trained hard. We got new jerseys, red shirts, blue shorts and white socks that featured our tricolor again.

There were about 30,000 spectators on the day of the match at the big Edinburgh stadium. Our match was only on the program for the fourth time. We were a little nervous. When the exit sign was given, we left the locker room excited with our coach Hardy. We were approached by Toma Tomic, who was not on our team because he played for the national team and told us: "Remember to play for the homeland today".

On the field we have seen that our opponents are bigger and stronger. Among them were one South African, one Zealander, two Canadians and three Indians. When the game started, it could be seen that the opponent was far better than we thought. However, we played as one. We added without hesitation and were tireless. We won by 8: 3. It was the first game on UK soil in which Serbian youth represented their distant, enslaved homeland and won.¹⁹

Remembering this momentous event after more than 35 years, Zivko Ilic provides some misinformation. Specifically, newspaper reports from the tournament state that two boys from India played for the team of the British Colonies, one guy from East Africa, one from Rhodesia while the rest were South Africans. Three guys each were from George Watson College and Stuart Melville College and one from Dollar Academy²⁰.

Reporters say Serbs played in blue and British colonies in green jerseys.

"The match was played in the morning and, according to newspaper reports from that period, the morning was fresh, with lots of gray clouds, probably with light rain and wind blowing. As the day progressed, it warmed. About 10,000 people stood around the grounds. The bottom line was to raise money for the Scottish Red Cross. Everyone paid entry to watch the Serbian boys. The magazine's report says the Serbs made a great impression. Few wins are well deserved," historian Louise Miller reports.

"It is possible that a major blood infusion has never been seen in a 'week' match in the history of this game," wrote the enthusiastic journalist for "The Edinburgh Evening News" on March 11, 1918²¹.

¹⁹ Živko Ilić, "Igrali smo ragbi", "Sport", 28.09.1953.

²⁰ "The Edinburgh Evening News", "The Scotsman", 11 March 1918.

²¹ "Sport of all Sorts", "The Edinburgh Evening News", 11 March 1918,

The British are fascinated by rugby involving the Serbs

With their skill on the rugby pitch but also with their behavior outside it, the Serbian boys fascinated the Scots. In an article titled *Rugby in Serbia*, published on October 12, 1918 in *The Yorkshire Evening Post*, the author states "*There are at the present time a number of Serbian youths in one of the Edinburgh day school and I read that they are showing a quick appreciation of the Scottish Rugby school game. Three of them are sufficiently advanced in the game to take part in Edinburgh University club football...*"²²

"That in the course of time they will take liking for Rugby back to their own seems a reasonable proposition; and the Rugby Unions of the United Kingdom are likely to send a rugby team to Belgrade very much sooner than to Berlin," concluded the respected journalist.

In a letter dated March 18, 1919, published in "*The Scotsman*", Serbian boys attending George Heriot School thanked their hosts, professors and students for all they had done for them during their three-year stay in Edinburgh²³.

The boy from Cajetina - The best Serbian rugby player

The Edinburgh Serbian rugby team was the most numerous, organized and of the highest quality, but their story ended in June 1919 when they left this city.

Serbian boys also played rugby in other Scottish cities where they were stationed during World War I and the best Serbian rugby player come from Glasgow.

There were 18 boys from Serbia in Glasgow. According to the data in the book "*Refugee in the Classroom*", Hillhead High School was attended by Svetolik Avramovic, Dusan Mitic, Aleksandar Delini, Slavoljub Djordjevic and Aleksandar Savic, while Alan Glens School (Allan Glenns School) went to Krsta Balic, Bozidar Borovic, Branislav Vukovic, Dragoslav Krstic, Dragoslav Ivkovic and Aleksandar Petrovic²⁴. However, in the Hillhead High School Memorial publication, all these guys, except Petrovic, are mentioned as Hillhead High Sschool students. Dragoljub Stojanovic is also on the list²⁵.

The first appearance of one of them at a rugby match was recorded in October 1917 when Krsta Balic played for Alan Glens Sschool. In that first season Slavoljub Djordjevic also made several appearances.

²² "Rugby in Serbia?", "*The Yorkshire Evening Post*", 12 October 1918, 3.

²³ "The Serbian Boys in Edinburgh", "*The Scotsman*", 18 March 1919, 7.

²⁴ Dejan Zec, Filip Baljkas, Miloš Paunović, Milan Igrutinović, "Izbeglištvo u učionici - Srpski studenti i đaci u Velikoj Britaniji za vreme Prvog svetskog rata", (Beograd: Centar za sportsko nasleđe Jugoistočne Evrope, 2016), 206.

²⁵ "Hillhead High School Memorial", 50.

When it comes to Serbian boys in Glasgow, interesting news was published in the Daily Record and Mail on March 18, 1918.

"On Saturday, a team of Serbian boys at present receiving their education in Glasgow a visit to Ayr, where they succeeded a beating Academy team in a rugby match," the article reads "Serbian Boys Visit", recalling that after the game they visited local landmarks and that most speak English very well²⁶.

It is not specified whether the match was played in Rugby 15 or Rugby 7 but it is logical to assume that it was, after all, a 7-a-side match.

Already in the 1918-1919 season, the Serbs became an important factor in the Hillhead High School squad. In November 1918, one game was composed of Djordjevic, Balic and Mitic, and not a month later, on December 14, 1918, the Hillhead HS jersey against Glasgow Academies brought four Serbs - Djordjevic, Balic, Mitic and Delini²⁷!

"An interesting feature of their side (Hillhead) is the presence of several Serbians who have shown wonderful aptitude for the game. Indeed, one of the outstanding personalities of Saturday's game was Djordjevic, Hilhead's fullback," writes the "The Glasgow Herald" reporter.



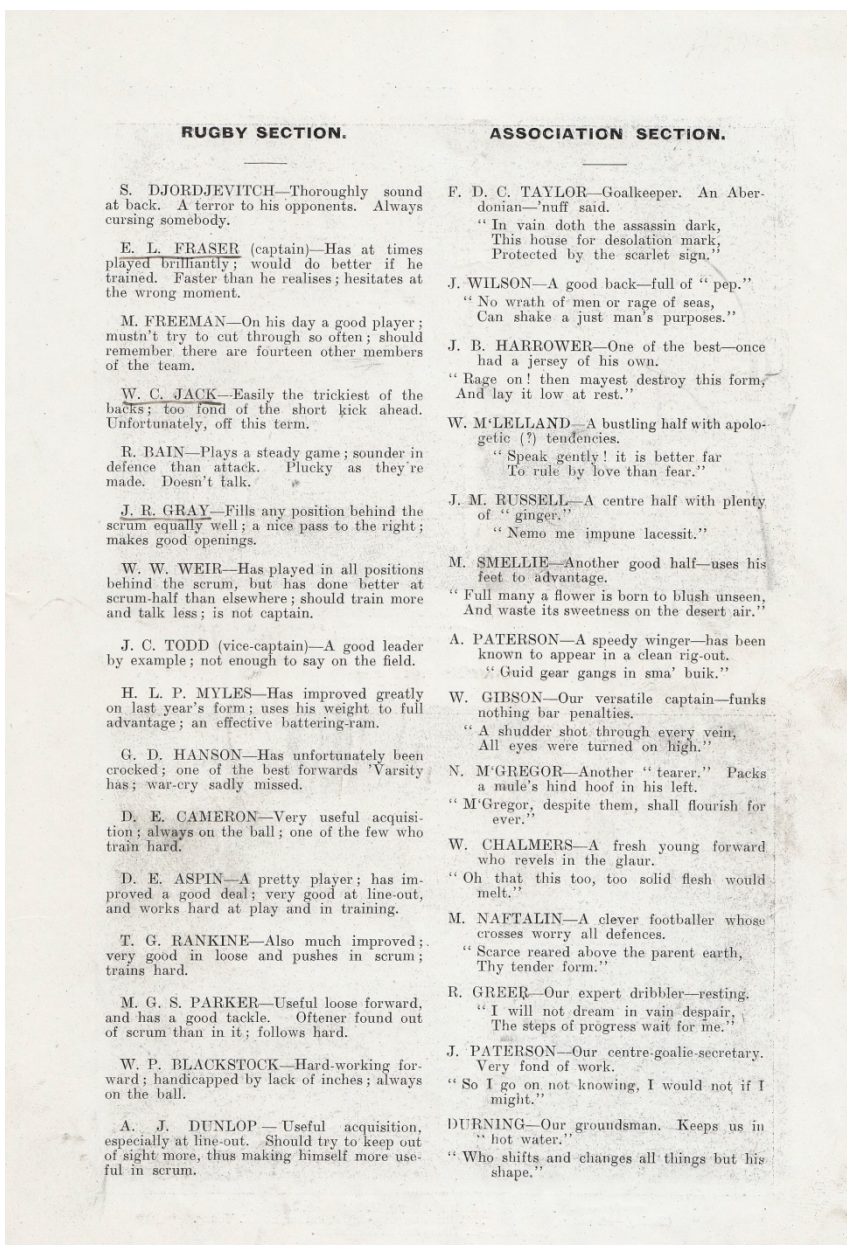
Slavoljub Djordjevic preparing rugby field with teammates

The best rugby career of all Serbs in the UK was achieved by Slavoljub Djordjevic. The son of a Čajetina official, born in 1900, miraculously survived the march across the Albanian mountains and reached Corfu. From there he was sent

²⁶ "News in Brief", "Daily Record and Mail", 4 March 1918, 4.

²⁷ "Rugby Football", "The Glasgow Herald", 16th December 1918, 11.

to Oxford and when he learned English in Glasgow. He attended Hillhead High School and later completed his medical studies at the University of Glasgow.



Notes about Slavoljub Djordjevic from Glasgow University Yearbook 1922

His career lasted a very long time, until the end of 1926, and in almost nine years of rugby he played more than 100 games in the highest quality Scottish

competition. Since 1920 he has performed for Glasgow University Blues to return to Hillhead HS FP in 1924. He played in the position of wing, fullback, sometimes center.

The press wrote with great respect about Djordjevic's abilities.

A report from the Watsonians - Glasgow Universities match of November 28, 1921, in the Scotsmen newspaper, states that "*Djordjevic was equal to the Marysiders.*"

Glasgow Universiti - Edinburgh Universiti match played on November 6, 1923 says "Djordjevic, a Serb, was a successful fullback", while a short report from the Glasgow University - Hillhead FP match of December 17, 1923 states that "*Djordjevic's defense against former schoolmates kept the game fairly even in the first half.*"

"*Hillhead was busy defending but the fine run of S.S. Djordjevic changed the situation,*" explained the reporter of "The Sunday Post", reporting from the match Hillhead FP - Melrose on February 23, 1925, while on November 2 of that year, Dr S.Djordjevic he cites as a player who scored in the game against Kelvinside Academicals.

After completing his sports career, Slavoljub Djordjevic, who earned his doctorate in 1924, married longtime girlfriend Margaret McNeB and changed her name to Steven George. After World War II he became a ship doctor for Counard Line and moved to the Bahamas where he passed away in 1967. A few months before his death he was awarded the OBE - Order of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth.

In addition to Djordjevic, Dragoljub Stojanovic had the longest career. Unlike his countryman, Stojanovic was faithful to Hillhead High School all along. Between 1920 and 1926 he played most often for the second, sometimes first or third team. He has performed in the positions of wing, fullback, center and flanker. He has played more than 60 games in total.

"The guests opened the scoring with an unstoppable lay of Stojanovic ... In the second half, a converted tries to Hillhed was scored by Stojanovic and Akind ..", said a report from the match of other West of Scotland and Hillhead HS FP teams played on March 27, 1926²⁸.

From 1919 to 1921, another Serbian student, Svetolik Avramovic, played for Hillhead. His position was in the second row and, like Stojanovic, he mostly played for the second team.

The Serbs thus made a major contribution to the rugby teams of Hillhead High School. The team jersey was worn by Slavoljub Djordjevic, Dragoljub Stojanovic,

²⁸ "The Glasgow Herald", 29 March 1926, 6.

Svetolik Avramovic, Krsta Balic, Aleksandar Delini and Dusan Mitic. The six Serbs we know for sure carried the rugby ball in Glasgow with success.

Three rugby players from Dundee

And in the third town in Scotland where they were based, Dundee, the Serbs played rugby. The first group of Serbian boys in Dundee arrived on January 20, 2017. Thanks to the kindness of local magnate George Bonner, 32 boys, ages 15 to 18, are housed in Fernbree. There were 14 boys attending High School of Dundee while 18 attended Harris Academy.

D. H. S., 1917-1918.



Back Row (left to right) - M. Dimitrijevic, G. Armit, J. Linton, J. D. W. Buttor, G. W. Menron, W. S. Deemler.
Sitting (left to right) - R. R. Kinison, H. H. A. Elder (Vice-captain), J. B. Thomson (Captain), P. Lawson Esq (President), D. B. Sauter, J. Kerr, K. C. M. Anderson.
In Front - W. B. Philip, C. B. Singer, J. R. Couper

Miodrag Dimitrijevic as member of the first team of
Dundee High School 1917-1918

"Serbian students have left a significant mark on our school playing for rugby teams. Miodrag Dimitrijevic played for the first team of the school in the 1917-1918 season and scored several tries. In a March 1918 school magazine, he was described as "the support of our diagonal. Probably, since the performances of WP Leird and GH Philip, the school has not had such an effective runner. It has great speed and has a tremendous impact. " The player's notes read "65.8 pounds. The most dangerous diagonal player. He feints and runs well and has a good kick. He hangs on the ball for

a long time. It has to add more," reports Dr. John D. Haliday, Rector of High School of Dundee.

Dimitrijevic was born in Kragujevac in 1899 and after completing his education in Scotland, enrolled at Trinity College in Cambridge. Between two wars he worked as a mechanical engineer in Belgrade and passed away in 1945.

Vladimir Orovic also performed for the first HSD team. In club notes, he was described as a *"good speed striker but too feinting to much when running"*.

In addition to Dimitrijevic and Orovic, a third Serb, Dusan Bozjakovic, also played rugby in Dundee.

Alongside to Herioters, Glasgow and Dundee players, there are also reports that rugby was played by Steva Popovic and Petar Janusevic, who attended Wilson School in Wokingham, Berkshire, and Serbians, who were educated in Leeds.

An intriguing article was published in "The Yorkshire Evening Post" on October 19, 1918, one week after the publication of Rugby in Serbia.

*"A propos of the par in the last week notes Serbian players in Edinburgh correspondent reminds me that some young Serbians are playing rugby for Leeds Grammar School team and he say that they have taken to the game" like ducks in the water"*²⁹.

According to data from the book "Refugee in the Classroom", by Dejan Zec, Filip Baljkas and Milos Paunovic, 20 boys from Serbia were staying, while Leeds Gramar Skul was attended by five: Milosav Simonovic, Vladeta Vukicevic, Velibor Stojanovic, Nikola Stevanovic and Milan Andjelkovic³⁰.

Whether all five have played rugby or just some of them is unknown, but it is certain that they made a good impression because their skills were heard outside the school.

There are no written records for other Serbian students that they played rugby but it is assumed that they had some contact with the sport as most attended schools and universities in Midlands, Oxford and Cambridge, and a smaller group in Wales, where rugby was very developed, popular and integral to school activities.

The first contacts of Serbian students with rugby, during the First World War in France and the United Kingdom, will be the fruit of the establishment of the first clubs in their homeland.

²⁹ "En Passant", "The Yorkshire Evening Post", 19 October 1918, 3.

³⁰ Dejan Zec, Filip Baljkas, Miloš Paunović, Milan Igrutinović, "Izbeglištvo u učionici - Srpski studenti i đaci u Velikoj Britaniji za vreme Prvog svetskog rata", (Beograd: Centar za sportsko nasleđe Jugoistočne Evrope, 2016), 206.

CONCLUSION

The contacts of the Serbs with the Allied soldiers during the First World War as well as the long-term stay of the Serbian students and students in France and Great Britain had a huge influence on the development of sports in Serbia after the end of the Great War.

Serbian students, spread across French, English and Scottish schools, lyceums, colleges and universities, gladly engaged in sporting activities, demonstrating the sporting potential of Serbs. Some of them, such as Tome Tomic and Slavoljub Djordjevic, have achieved remarkable sports achievements and have been highly regarded.

The students acquired the knowledge acquired during their stay abroad, upon returning to their homeland, to establish sports clubs. The founders of all three rugby clubs that existed in Serbia between the two world wars were former French and British students.

ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ СОЮЗА РЕГБИ В СЕРБИИ

АННОТАЦИЯ

Первый прямой контакт с регбистами из Сербии был достигнут во время Первой мировой войны, в ходе отступления через Албанию, после просмотра матчей французских и английских солдат. В течение 1916 года около 3500 молодых сербов были направлены на учебу во Францию и Соединенное Королевство. Во время пребывания в лицеях, колледжах и университетах у них была возможность заниматься различными видами спорта, в том числе и регби. Руководствуясь своими интересами и качеством подготовки, сербские мальчики быстро вошли в число игроков школьных команд. Большинство сербских юношей активно занимались регби в трех шотландских городах – Эдинбурге, Глазго и Данди. Их интерес к этому виду спорта был настолько велик, что в Эдинбурге и Глазго были сформированы специальные команды, состоящие только из сербов, которые соревновались с другими школьными командами. Главным достижением сербских игроков в регби стало участие команды школы для мальчиков им. Джорджа Хериота на 7 турнире по регби, в Эдинбурге (Шотландия) 9 марта 1918 года, и победа над сборной командой игроков британских колоний. Это считается первым выступлением спортивной команды под названием Сербия на международной арене.

После окончания первой Мировой Войны, по возвращению на родину, некоторые молодые люди, которые освоили регби во Франции и Великобритании, начали активно участвовать в академической и спортивной жизни своего отечества, и в результате были организованы два регбийных клуба в городах Шабац и Белград.

Ключевые слова: регби, сербы, Шотландия, Франция, Первая Мировая война, Эдинбург, сербские регбисты

ПОЧЕЦИ РАГБИЈА У СРБИЈИ

САЖЕТАК

Први директан контакт са рагбијем младићи из Србије су остварили током Првог светског рата, након повлачења преко Албаније, гледајући утакмице француских и енглеских војника. Током 1916. године око 3.500 српских младића послато је на студије у Француску и Велику Британију. Током школовања на лицејима, колеџима и универзитетима добили су прилику да се баве разним спортовима међу којима је био и рагби. У складу са својим интересовањем и квалитетом српски дечаци су се веома брзо укључили у школске тимове. Највише српских младића активно се укључило у играње рагбија у три шкотска града - Единбургу, Глазгову и Дандију. Њихово интересовање за овај спорт је било толико да су у Единбургу и Глазгову формирали посебне екипе састављене само од Срба које су играле утакмице са другим школским екипама. Врхунац бављења рагбијем Срба у Шкотској био је наступ дечака из школе "Џорџ Хериот" на турниру у Рагбију 7, 9. марта 1918. године, у Единбургу и победа над селекцијом Британских колонија. Тај наступ се може сматрати први наступом једне спортске екипе под именом Србија на међународној сцени.

По завршетку Првог светског рата и повратка у домовину неки од младића који су се упознали са рагбијем у Француској и Великој Британији активно су учествовали у академском и спортском животу у домовини а резултат је био оснивање два рагби клуба, у Шапцу и Београду.

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