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## Spasić (More Than a Game)

Saša Skenderija

*To Adin*

While the country I was born in was approaching  
its forced landing  
our life and football appetites were soaring high.  
Deaf and blind to the questions  
that'd started exploding  
right in our faces,  
we contemplated a starry future  
for ourselves,  
for posterity,  
for our national football team.

Asked why he kept a player  
in the center of the defense  
who didn't belong there at all  
(with so many better players available)  
the national team manager  
(a man quite charming and wise)  
once replied:  
This way, the other players on the pitch always know  
where the danger's coming from and so  
I get the maximum out of them.

The coach liked to be on top  
of the weak spots of the team  
and would rather create them himself  
than discover them on the pitch  
in the middle of a crucial match:  
Every real championship team has to have its own Spasić.

I'm not sure  
if he said it exactly like that,  
but it's how my friends and I recalled it  
or embellished it,

anyway.

When the country  
I was born in  
was forcibly landing us and dislanding,  
we were cheering each other up  
by contemplating  
the championship strategy -  
creating and cherishing our own Spasićes  
with the belief that this was the best way  
to get the maximum out of ourselves  
for the World Cup  
which was just  
(out of earshot of the guns)  
going on -  
without us.

We completely lost sight  
of our opponents,  
we neglected our own strengths  
squandering them on tedious B-league  
games of survival,  
or taking them for granted  
until we eventually atrophied  
from the endless waiting to take our part  
in the World Cup Finals.

We're still around.

If you take a closer look, you might still spot us  
hunched down on the second-string benches  
of other countries with championship aspirations  
standing by  
with eyes and ears wide open  
for the slightest hint of forced landings  
in a coach's wise and seductive words.

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*Translation by Wayles Browne and Sasha Skenderija - © 2009 Wayles Browne and Sasha Skenderija*

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