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Spasić (More Than a Game)

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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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