



THIS IS THE INCREDIBLE STORY OF ALEKSANDAR DURIC

Born in Bosnia in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Aleksandar Duric overcame a difficult childhood to become a junior canoeing champion. Against all odds, he made an unlikely appearance at the 1992 Olympic Games whilst the fires of the Bosnian War raged in his homeland, a war that had tragic consequences for the Duric family.

A nomadic career in football followed, before Duric finally found his feet — and his home — in Singapore. It was in this Southeast Asian nation that Duric truly made his name, becoming an all-conquering force in Singapore's top domestic league and going on to represent the Singapore national team more than 50 times.

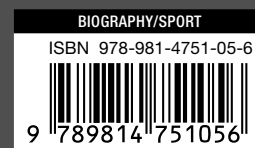
Told in a refreshingly frank and honest manner, *Beyond Borders* is far more than a footballer's memoir. Duric's tale of tragedy and triumph, adversity and adventure, is as surprising as it is inspiring.

“A gripping account of hardship, heart and hustle with almost no connection to the glamour and glory that fans associate with the modern-day game.”

Steve Dawson, *presenter, Fox Sports Asia*

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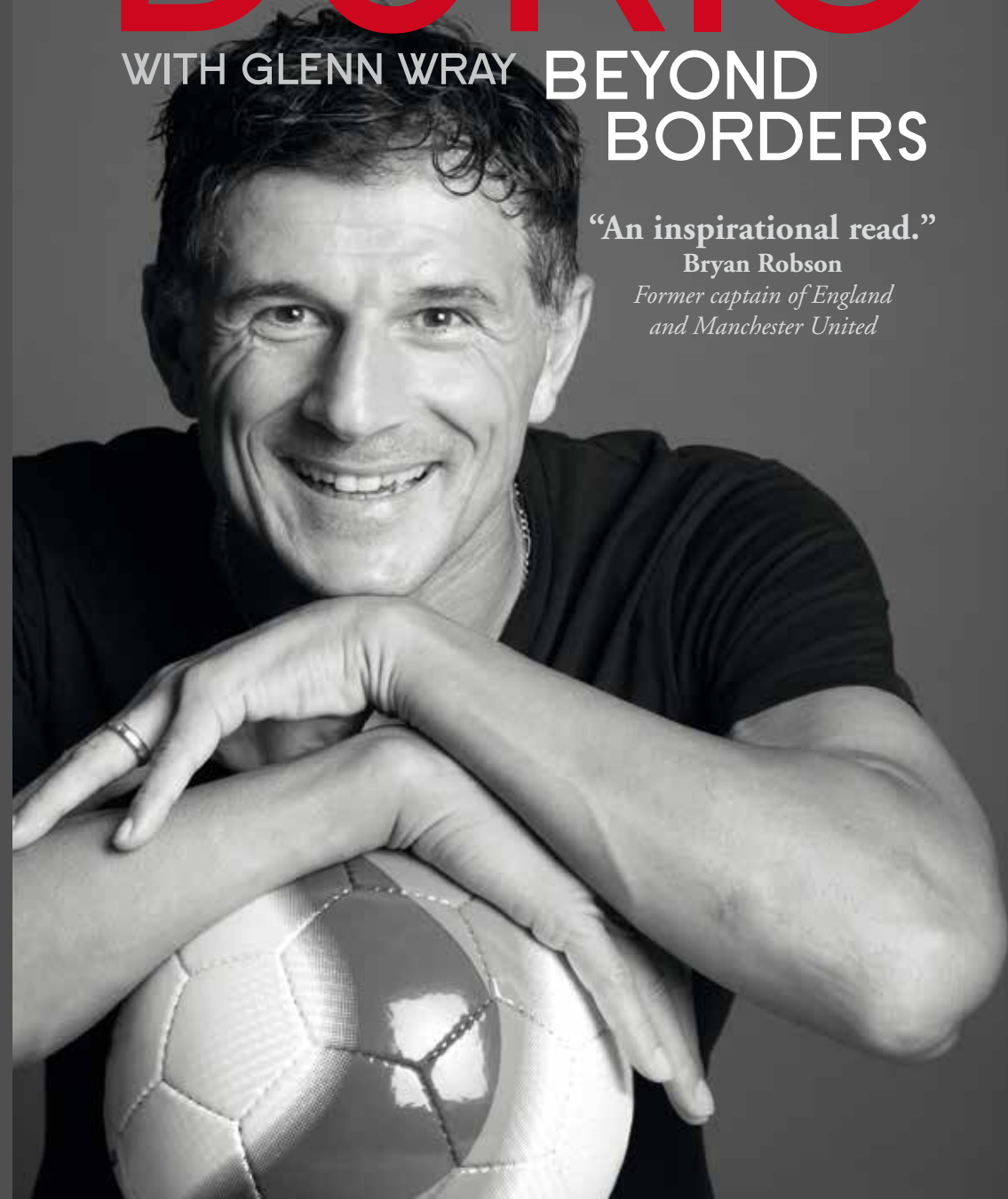
ALEKSANDAR
DURIC

BEYOND BORDERS

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ALEKSANDAR DURIC

WITH GLENN WRAY BEYOND
BORDERS



“An inspirational read.”

Bryan Robson

*Former captain of England
and Manchester United*

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“Aleks has been a superb ambassador for Singaporean football. His professionalism is exemplary and to this day he remains a role model to all professional footballers for his discipline and dedication. Anyone with even a passing interest in Asian football must read this book.”

Fandi Ahmad, icon of Singaporean football

“A lovely guy and a true legend of Singaporean football. It was an honour to play in his testimonial match.”

Robbie Fowler, Liverpool FC legend

“Being the most modest of men, Aleksandar Duric will probably not appreciate me saying this. But his story is not a football story, or even a sporting story, it is a testament to the unbreakable human spirit.

Time and again, he faced the horrors of the inhumane and somehow clung to his humanity. Death and despair were a way of life growing up in a war-savaged country, but Aleks found the courage to carry a new nation’s hopes on a borrowed canoe at the Olympics.

I defy anyone to read his harrowing tale without feeling a lump in the throat. Honest, poignant and even laugh-out-loud funny at times, *Beyond Borders* is one of the most uplifting autobiographies you’ll ever read. And he’s still fitter than most footballers half his age. Really. He’s practically a saint with a six-pack. Alex is the real deal, a man of steel with a heart of gold. I’ve never come across a more inspirational life story and nor will you.”

Neil Humphreys, bestselling author and football writer

“Twenty-four goals in 53 international appearances is some record for a man who didn’t make his debut until he was 37. Aleks is a good guy and it was a pleasure to appear in his testimonial game.”

Steve McManaman, former Liverpool FC and Real Madrid great

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“Duric did Singapore proud with his goalscoring feats on the football field. His industry and determination know no bounds and he was a perfect example for the younger players. Aleks is a man with a big heart. He has volunteered his services in many ways for the less fortunate. This book serves as a remarkable insight into the wonderful world of Aleksandar Duric.”

Brian Richmond, veteran radio & television personality

“I met Aleks a few times during his playing days for the Singapore national team. I came to know a little bit of his colourful life story. However, it wasn't until I read his book that I realised what an incredible journey he's been through. An inspirational read for any sportsman or woman. Dedication and hard work took him to the top and kept him there for a long time.”

Bryan Robson, former captain of England and Manchester United FC

“Aleks Duric is a complete footballer. Crucial goals from him cost us at Tampines Rovers time and again, so I learned that if you want to win a football match, you have a much better chance with Duric in your team! I always wanted him at Tampines Rovers so despite his age when he left SAFFC (he was 39 then), I had no hesitation offering him a contract. He carried on playing for us as a true professional. He had tremendous leadership qualities to mould the team together, and he inspired the younger players through his style of play, commitment and determination to win. Aleks has served not only the S-League but all of Singaporean football. His professionalism over the years has been a big contribution to our national game.”

Teo Hock Seng, Chairman, Tampines Rovers FC (2000-2015)

“I have known Aleksandar since he moved to Singapore 16 years ago. Since day one he has never hesitated to give of himself to anyone in need, whether it's a friend, a charity, or even a stranger. Aleks is a great footballer, of course, but, more importantly, he's a caring human being.”

Russel Wong, celebrity photographer

ALEKSANDAR DURIC WITH GLENN WRAY BEYOND BORDERS

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In memory of my parents

For Review only

CONTENTS

PROLOGUE 09

1. Boy From Bosnia 11
2. Finding My Feet 26
3. Canoe Champion 43
4. Army Days 56
5. Storms Of War 73
6. An Olympic Journey 92
7. Back To Reality 114
8. Tragedy Unfolds 130
9. Life Down Under 145
10. A New Home 162
11. A Painful Goodbye And New Arrivals 177
12. We, The Citizens Of Singapore 193
13. The End Draws Nigh 211
14. The State Of Singaporean Football 219
15. My Home Team 231
16. New Horizons 241

ABOUT THE AUTHOR 247

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS 248

For Review only

PROLOGUE

SATURDAY 15th NOVEMBER 2014, Jalan Besar Stadium, Singapore. I hear the inimitable sound of 7,500 excited football fans rumbling through the walls, the anticipation of the kick-off to a big game growing. I'm going through my familiar pre-game routine — adjusting my shin pads, tying my bootlaces. I turn and, for the very last time, lift my jersey from its hook and put it on. The nerves and emotions flood through my body. My last ever game, my goodbye.

There has been a lot written about me in the newspapers over the past couple of weeks, ever since I played my last game in Singapore's top professional league, the S-League, my home for 16 years. Boy from Bosnia. War refugee. Olympic canoeist. Record S-League goalscorer. National team hero. Adopted son of Singapore. My story has been everywhere. Tonight, in my testimonial game for the Singapore Legends versus Liverpool Legends, that story comes to an end.

It's nearly time to go out. The atmosphere in the dressing room is vibrant, positive. Our team consists of the greatest legends in Singapore's football history, and many old friends are playing together again for the first time in years. I try and absorb every last moment of the pre-match feeling, something I'll never have again. Tonight

For Review only

we play against a team of legends from Liverpool Football Club, one of the most famous teams on the planet. I'll be lining up against Ian Rush, Robbie Fowler, Dietmar Hamann, Jerzy Dudek, Steve McManaman. Players who have played in World Cups, who have won Champions League trophies. *How did I get here?*

We step into the tunnel. Everyone is smiling and laughing, looking forward to the friendly game against their heroes. Not me, not yet. My heart is beating a million miles per minute, I feel my eyes starting to water. This is it. I think of my three young children in the crowd, my wife, Natasha. I think of my brother Milan, who has flown from Bosnia to see me play football for the first time. I think of my parents, and wonder how they would feel if they were alive to see this.

I step on to the pitch for the last time. I look around, I see the stands full of Singaporean fans, the same fans who have supported me through my career here, the same people who welcomed me to their country and gave me a home. I close my eyes and take a deep breath. The fans break into a rendition of the fabled Liverpool anthem. The words feel apt: *Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart, and you'll never walk alone.*

My name is Aleksandar Duric. This is my story.

CHAPTER ONE

BOY FROM BOSNIA

I WAS BORN on 12th August 1970 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, then part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. We were a traditional Yugoslavian family. I was the second of two boys, my elder brother, Milan, arrived 18 months before me.

My father, Mladjen, was a rugged, simple man, with little education. He had a tough upbringing. I never met my grandparents on my father's side — his mother abandoned him when he was a young boy and his father died fighting in World War II.

My mother, Nada, was born in a town called Visoko near the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo. Her background was markedly different to my father's. Her family were kinder, more gentle people. They were also relatively wealthy for the time. They had a nice house, with a big farm and lots of livestock. I have vague memories of my grandfather on mum's side being a warm and generous person. He would put me on his knee and read me stories when I was a very small boy. My mum was smart too — she graduated from high school, which at the time was a big deal. Not many girls finished school in those days.

We grew up in a tiny village called Lipac, near a larger town called Dobož, in a region surrounded by mountains and hills. There is a

long river that flows all the way from Bosnia's capital city, Sarajevo, to Doboj, called the Bosna, which is where Bosnia takes its name from. This river was to play a big role in my early life.

My parents met in a supermarket where my mother worked, near her home town. My father worked as a train driver and this supermarket happened to be on his route from Sarajevo to Doboj. My mother caught his eye when he stopped off to buy some food one day and over time he made stops there more frequently so he could talk to her more. After a short courtship, they got married in 1968. My mum was nine years younger than my dad; he was 28 when they married, she was only 19. At the time such age differences were not uncommon and it was normal to marry young.

My parents must have married only for love, and not for anything else. Well, apart from my mum's dowry, which consisted of some gold ducats. My mum later told me that they sold them and used the money to build our second house.

As soon as my parents were married my mother immediately stopped working, moved to Lipac and settled in to village life. There was no alternative. Back then it was out of the question for a married woman to keep working. So overnight this young, talented and intelligent woman became shackled to a tough, house-bound life. I often wonder whether or not she ever regretted this since she could have achieved so much more. But her life was so short that I didn't have the chance to talk to her about these kind of things.

An elderly woman lived with us throughout my childhood and for a long time Milan and I thought she was our actual grandmother. It turns out that she found my father abandoned as a little boy, took him and his siblings in, and raised them like they were her own kids, despite already having a boy of her own. Who knows what would have happened to my father had she not taken him in.

*

My earliest memories are from when I was about four years old. I have vague images of many of us all crammed inside a tiny house, which my father built with his own hands. He finished it in 1968, just before Milan was born. It was quite a squeeze in that house, with my parents, me and my brother, our 'grandmother' and her son (my dad's half-brother, who Milan and I called uncle). We had one kitchen, one living room, one bedroom and one small outdoor bathroom. There wasn't much privacy, that's for sure.

In fact, Milan was born in the house — my mother went into labour before she could get to the hospital. Some neighbours helped my mother deliver him on the living room floor. I still joke with my brother because when I was born in 1970, I at least had enough class to arrive in the hospital in Doboj! Our little house still stands proudly in Lipac to this very day, with only very few minor renovations from when it was first built nearly 50 years ago.

We lived in that first house until I was about five years old, at which point my father handed it over to my grandmother and uncle. We moved a hundred metres down the street into another house my parents had built themselves, with occasional help from the neighbours. It took them years to finish it. They saved up for months at a time until they had enough to buy some supplies — timber, cement, nails. They built until they ran out of money and then started saving again. Bit by bit the house came together. Of course, when winter came work needed to be postponed again. It was impossible to build in -10 degree temperatures and metres of snow. As my brother and I got older we used to look longingly at our half-built house, knowing we were powerless to speed up the process and destined to spend more months cramped in that single bedroom. But we knew better than to complain to our father.

The new house was surrounded by a fair amount of land, cornered at the end of the street, so we had a reasonable amount of space and

privacy. We had a small farm, with wild dogs, cats, ducks, chickens, cows, pigs and a few sheep. We were just a traditional, village family. It was hard work for all of us, but this was the only way to survive in Yugoslavia at the time. Like many other families we were reliant upon the animals for milk, eggs, cheese and meat.

Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s, when I was growing up, will be a mystery to most people. It certainly wasn't a wealthy nation at the time, it was under a communist regime after all. But you could live a simple, comfortable life as long as you were willing to work very hard for what you got, which normally didn't extend further than a roof over your head and a little food to eat. Very few families had luxuries such as toys, bicycles, electronics or cars.

We were simple folk really. As ethnic Serbs, we were Orthodox Christians, and we went to church occasionally. I wouldn't say we grew up in the church or anything like that, but there was faith in our household and we celebrated the Christian holidays.

Our area was quite ethnically mixed, with Serb Orthodox families living side by side with Bosniak Muslims and Croatian Catholics. But this was not something I was conscious of or cared about as a child. Our community was a tightly-knit one. All the neighbours were courteous and friendly to one another. Most of my friends growing up were Muslim. I only bring this up now because of the devastation that ethnic differences were to later have on my country. For those of us living in Lipac in the 1970s, we did not see these differences.

I started school when I was six. My brother, being older than me, was already a year ahead. We made the 30-minute walk to school together every morning. It was a small schoolhouse, with only a couple of classrooms. The total staff amounted to two teachers: a husband and wife. There was no kindergarten before primary school, just my mother or grandparents who tried to teach me the basics. They did

their best but I didn't start school already reading books for fun, let's put it that way. I was terrified when I was told there was an entrance exam to get into school. A test to be allowed into the village primary school — can you believe that? I thought I would fail for sure because I could barely tell black from white, one from two — I couldn't write a word. I wasn't a bright kid. In the end I got in, but don't ask me how. Luckily for me the other kids must have been no better!

Yugoslavia was a communist country, so upon entering state education, you started your journey in the communist world. This meant you had to give yourselves up to Yugoslavia. We recited a pledge and had to wear a uniform comprising a red neckerchief and a blue hat with a red star on it. This was the uniform of the Partisans, Tito's army. (A brief history lesson: Josip Broz Tito was leader of the guerrilla resistance army, the Partisans in World War II. He became the first President of Yugoslavia and ruled the country from the 1950s until 1980.) I remember being very proud of my uniform, it was great. I wore that hat everywhere.

School was tough at the beginning and many of us struggled. It was interesting though. Tito was in every book and his picture was on every wall. In history all we ever learned about was Tito's great military victories and how he had defeated the Germans in World War II. But we genuinely did learn a lot in that little schoolhouse, we were pushed hard. If you fell behind, you had a problem. You would be called to the front of the class, forced to hold out your hands with the palms up to be smacked with a metal ruler. God help you if the teacher had woken up in a bad mood that day. Sometimes the strokes were so hard that by the time I got back to my desk my eyes would be watering and I couldn't hold my pencil because of the numbness and pain in my hands. That was a lesson learned. At least until the next time.

It was nothing like it is today. You couldn't go running to your parents to help you out. When my parents bumped into the teachers

around the village they'd say, "If Aleks or Milan ever act up in school, just whack them to teach them a lesson!" It was a different world, a different time.

Despite the discipline in school and the frequent canings, the teachers were well-loved by the kids, and well-respected in the community. It was a highly regarded job in those days. Teachers back then were controlled by the communist party and had no choice in where they ended up teaching. The party decided where they got posted and sent them to all manner of far-flung areas around Yugoslavia. I often wonder what our teachers thought about getting sent to our backwater village. In any case, they were well looked after by the villagers; my mum often brought them bread, milk or fresh eggs. (Maybe that's how I passed the entrance test.)

The school had only two rooms and two classes for the whole village of kids. The husband would take one class, the wife the other. Milan was lucky enough to get the wife, I got the husband. We would be there all day, from 8am to 4pm with a short lunch break in between. My teacher liked to hunt so every so often he would capture a wild pig and that would be lunch for the next day. Mostly though it was some bread, beans and vegetables, and the odd bit of fish if we were lucky. Every weekend we would take over the school kitchen and turn it into a makeshift cinema. There was an old TV set in there and us kids sneaked in to watch all the old Wild West movies — John Wayne and Kirk Douglas were my favourite actors. Many people are surprised when they hear that we had access to these old Hollywood movies in a communist country, but this is why Tito was such a smart guy. Yugoslavia was one of the more open communist states, as we were squeezed right between west and east. Tito played his politics very well, straddling the neutral line with both sides. Tito knew that to keep his people on his side he needed to give them some pleasure in life. So that's how we got to know Kirk Douglas.

Of course, the TV shows were still heavily censored and many things were kept from us. We also had our fair share of crap locally-produced shows, as well as countless propaganda movies. I lost count of the times I watched movies about a single Partisan hero defeating entire armies single-handedly. Indoctrination, I guess, and it must have worked because when we set up teams for our games of goodies vs baddies, everyone wanted to be a Partisan and nobody wanted to be a German.

We didn't get much football on TV though, but that wasn't a problem as we listened to the matches on the radio. Everyone tuned in. Needless to say, we were obsessed with the national team, but people were more interested in their local club teams. Maybe I am biased but in the 1970s and 1980s when I was growing up, Yugoslavia had one of the best domestic leagues in the world. This was before the country split and we had a big population. Also, under the communist regime it was difficult to move abroad, so all of the best players had little choice but to stay put. Short of entertainment, listening to the games on the radio was a national obsession. Come Sunday afternoons at 3pm, everyone in Lipac was glued to their radio.

I was lucky. My dad took me to see some games in Sarajevo as a kid. Red Star Belgrade was my team and every time they came to play any of the clubs in Sarajevo I begged my father to take me, which he sometimes did. The stadiums were packed, 60,000 people all crammed inside to watch. It was incredible. All of us kids dreamed of being footballers; nobody wanted to be a doctor or engineer or anything like that. The standard of play was amazing, even until today I don't think I have seen anything better.

I liked Sundays. Aside from the football on the radio, Sundays also meant Sunday lunch, which we had every week together without fail. In Bosnia one of our national dishes is a meat and cheese pie, or else some fried chicken. So every Sunday one of our chickens met its

demise. Often, my father sent me and my brother behind the house to do the deed with a hatchet. After lunch off we'd go to listen to the football and play afterwards. We didn't come home again until late at night.

My brother was different to me. He was more studious, quiet and thoughtful. He must have taken after my mother because he was a very clever guy and he eventually went on to finish college. For school we had to memorise long speeches of Tito's, or communist pledges and such. They were always long and boring. I would sit for hours trying to memorise these bloody things and never be able to recall more than a sentence or two. My brother would read it through once or twice and recite the whole thing word for word. The little show off would ask me, "What's wrong, Aleks? It's easy."

I wasn't completely useless at school, just average. I wasn't too bad at history or geography but school to me was just somewhere I had to go to. I sat at my desk looking out of the window and longing for the day to be over so I could go explore or play football.

With hindsight, I was lucky to get through school at all. The Yugoslav system was unforgiving. You could fail one year, OK — you repeat. But if you fail the second time round then that's it, you're out. You were given no more chances and you would just have to go be a cleaner or something.

School and homework weren't my only worries though. By the time I was seven years old I already had a long list of chores to do at home. Throughout winter much of my free time was taken up feeding and looking after the cows, which were housed in the barn during the freezing winter months. In summer, it was even worse. The land surrounding our house didn't have much fencing, so the cows kind of just wandered and grazed wherever they liked. Every summer morning I was woken up by my father to go and herd them up to get

them fed. I carried a stick and ran around like a crazy man trying to keep the herd together and bring them to more grassy areas to ensure they were eating enough.

I had to stay with the cows whilst they grazed before they could be let loose again. This took all morning, at least until 11am. When I got a little bit older I discovered a trick. For some reason, cows really like the taste of salt. Sometimes I brought some salt with me and spread it out on the grass, which the cows happily licked up. This in turn made them thirsty, so they then gorged themselves on water, making their stomachs temporarily swell up. This meant I could bring the cows back early, maybe 10am, and I would smugly shout to my mum, "I am going to play now, mum! The cows are all fat already, see?"

But whether I finished at 10am or 11am in summer, I was free to spend the rest of the day swimming. Up in the mountains there was a little lake, about a two-hour walk away from my house. Me and my friends spent our summer days there splashing around and swimming. I just had to make sure I reached home again by 6pm for my evening shift when the cows needed to be grazed again.

We had a busy farm. We had a plot of land where we grew corn, and another for growing maize to make bread. Another field was for growing grass, which was cut in summer and then stored to feed the cows in winter. During harvest time we had to collect all of the dry grass to make bales of hay. That was damn hard work. The men toiled in the hot sun all day, cutting and gathering the grass. Then it was piled into huge stacks, about three metres high. The hay needed to be compressed and this is where the kids came in. Being lightest we would be thrown up to the very top of the stack and told to jump around until the grass was suitably compacted. That part was fun — especially sliding down on my backside at the end!

So even as young kids there was always plenty for us to do. Milan and I didn't have an easy time of it, that's for sure. That was the way

For Review only

of life. Children were expected to help out in households and on the farms.

Some of my most pleasant memories from my early childhood are of the winter months, particularly in the lead-up to St Nicholas' Day, which we celebrated every year on 19th December. This was a big day of celebration for Orthodox Christians in eastern Europe, much more so than even Christmas Day on 25th December. This was the only time of the year when I saw all of my cousins and extended family, who came from all over Yugoslavia to visit. My mum ensured that the house was absolutely spotless for all of our visitors, and Milan and I spent the days beforehand on our hands and knees scrubbing like crazy. We didn't begrudge this chore though because we knew it meant that our family were visiting soon. Looking back, this holiday reminds me in many ways of the Chinese New Year and Hari Raya celebrations that I have become accustomed to during my time in Singapore.

Of course, St Nicholas' Day was in the middle of winter, so it was very cold, with thick snow all around us. All of us young cousins would have snowball fights for hours outside and we'd also set off fireworks — it was a lot of fun. New Year's Day was another cause for celebration. For us, it was all about 19th December and 1st January. By this time of the year you could forget about the electricity supply, which the heavy snowfall knocked off every year without fail. Lipac was in the middle of nowhere so it would be weeks before the supply was fixed. We didn't mind it too much, it was part of the fun. Or at least it was until you woke up in the middle of the night needing to use the toilet.

Every New Year's Day me and my friends from the village would climb to the top of a nearby hill near my house and look down at the sprawl of Doboj in the valley below. Amidst the pitch darkness

of where we stood, the glistening lights of the city and the exploding fireworks from the celebrations were a sight to behold.

Every New Year's Day the railway company my father worked for hosted an event for their employees' children. They had a guy dressed up as Santa Claus giving out little gifts. The gifts weren't much, maybe some candy or a crayon — but it was a lot to us. I'm telling you, I loved that time of year!

Winter, which lasted from November through to March, had some other benefits besides the holidays. School was often cancelled when the temperature dropped to as low as -10 degrees and there could be up to two metres of snow when the big snow storms arrived. We spent more time at home during the winter months, which meant a lot of TV movies. I can still remember the crappy old TV set we used to obsessively watch. The model was one of the first sets ever built in our country; we called it the 'Rudy Cajavec'. It is bizarre really. Rudy Cajavec was a Partisan war hero in Yugoslavia, but I have no idea why our TV sets came to be named after him!

Parents were relieved when springtime came along so they could kick us kids out of the house, leaving us to find ways to entertain ourselves. Children were expected to survive by themselves back in those days. Yugoslavian parents didn't mollycoddle their children. It is crazy to think of the independence we were given as young kids because our surroundings were pretty dangerous. There were creeks, cliffs, rivers and quarries. A gang of us would find a random creek and someone would say, "Well, it looks deep enough," and we'd just dive in. None of us knew how to swim properly, of course, but you couldn't back down.

Inevitably, these kinds of stupid stunts eventually led to trouble. There was a cliff nearby with some trees overhanging from the side. We often fooled around there, climbing the branches and swinging

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from tree to tree. One day a friend of Milan's was swinging across when the tree came loose and he fell into the ravine below. He died instantly. My brother and I weren't there when it happened, but I remember the commotion in the village when the news spread. My mum was cradling the boy's hysterical mother. I later heard that she turned into an alcoholic and died at a young age.

That tragic incident kept us away from the cliffs for a while and we set out to find safer pursuits. There was a lot of mining work in our area, so the landscape was dotted with abandoned rock quarries — big scars in the sides of hills where explosions had blown them open. There was one crater-like quarry that somehow had a perfectly flat rectangle at the ground level surrounded on all sides by 10-metre high rock faces. This was perfect for football. We marked out lines for the pitch and bolted together some wood to form the goal frames and, hey presto, we had our very own football stadium. We called it the 'Maracana', named after the iconic Brazilian football arena.

Our Maracana became the venue for epic football battles. We created tournaments, inviting kids from all the surrounding towns and villages to take part. These competitions were huge, with dozens of teams being formed and hundreds of kids and parents coming together to watch the games from the top of the curved rock cliffs above the pitch. It was the coolest thing ever. You really felt like a king when you scored the winning goal in one of those games. We spent all week in school discussing the games just past, and dreaming of the heroics we would perform at the Maracana the following weekend.

Much later, even when I was 17 or 18 and had become quite well-known as a national sportsman, I still made sure I was available to take part in the Maracana tournaments. Afterwards, the older lads and the parents shared some food and drinks as the sun went down. Those were good days.

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Regrettably, I have plenty of dark memories from my childhood too; my father made sure of that. He was a hard, bitter alcoholic. When he was drunk he was scary. He was abusive to all of us, verbally and physically. The earliest instances of this I can remember were when I was six or seven. I remember nights when he would punch and kick my mum, screaming at her as he did, the stench of alcohol heavy in the air. If Milan or myself tried to protect her he would fling us out of the way. These fights went on for what seemed like forever, stopping only when our grandmother overheard from the end of the street and showed up to beg him to stop.

My father's drinking made things financially difficult, for he made sure he spent whatever spare cash we had on alcohol. When Friday night came all bets were off and precious little of his weekly pay would be left by the time he stumbled home drunk and angry in the early hours of every Saturday morning. Things got rough if he returned in one of his particularly bad moods. If I was lucky enough to sleep through it I would wake up to find the kitchen all smashed up. And my mother sporting fresh bruises.

The whole village knew my father had a drinking problem. But in those days nobody said anything. There was no social service and nobody meddled in another family's business. After we moved to the new house, my grandmother's frantic runs up the street to the sounds of screaming in the middle of the night were a common occurrence.

It was strange because when he was sober my father was a good man, not the sensitive or talkative type, but honest and unselfish — he would give you his own blood if you needed it. But drinking changed him; it turned him into an animal. He was a heavy smoker too. My father was far from the only alcoholic in our village. Those were the times. Yugoslavia was a cold, hard place and it bred cold, hard men.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ALEKSANDAR DURIC, a native Bosnian turned Singaporean citizen, has lived a whirlwind life that led to him becoming a legend of Singaporean sports. He holds the record for most goals ever scored in Singapore's top division, the S-League, and made more than 50 appearances for the Singapore national football team, despite only making his international debut at the age of 37.

After retiring from playing professional football in 2014, Aleksandar worked as an assistant coach at Tampines Rovers during the 2015 season and in early 2016 was appointed Principal of the Active SG Football Academy. When he's not working, Aleksandar can be found volunteering his time to the many charities he is privileged to represent, especially causes dedicated to the welfare of underprivileged children.

A committed family man, Aleksandar lives with his wife, Natasha, and three children: Isabella, Alessandro and Massimo.

GLENN WRAY helped Aleksandar bring his story to the page. Glenn is a Northern Irishman who works in the publishing industry in Singapore.