

Miodrag Belodedici-liberoul fugar care a cucerit de două ori Europa.

Modestul român a cucerit Cupa Campionilor cu Steaua și Steaua Rosie fiind condamnat la 10 ani de închisoare între aceste două performanțe.

Doar doi fotbaliști au jucat și au cucerit CCE pentru o echipă din Estul Europei, Belo fiind unul dintre aceștia. Liberoul român cunoscut ca și Caprioara datorită eleganței stilului său de joc a fost primul jucător care a câștigat trofeul cu două echipe diferite (jucând în ambele meciuri), dar ceea ce face povestea sa mult mai remarcabilă este faptul că între aceste două finale Belo a fost condamnat la 10 ani de închisoare pentru trădare.

În aceste zile se împlinesc 25 de ani de la prima sa finală de CCE și 20 de la doua, acum Belo este la București unde lucrează la lotul național de tineret. Este o figură foarte modestă, când mi-a propus să ne întâlnim într-un bar de sport înaintea unui meci din Champions League cu o seară înainte credeam suporterii ne vor asedia, dar, venit în blugi și cu o cămașă neagră simplă nu a arătat nimic care să indice prezența unei celebrități, în toată seara nu am fost deranjați de nimeni.

Totuși, în spatele unei banalități aparente se află un om extraordinar care și-a asumat un mare risc. Belodedici s-a născut la Socol, un sat aproape de frontiera iugoslavă într-o familie cu origini sârbe. La 17 ani a arătat destul talent pentru a se transfera la Lucașfăruș, echipă care aduna jucătorii cei mai talentați din țară iar în anul următor a semnat cu echipa Steaua unde avea să cucerească 6 titluri de campion.

”Echipa era destul de îmbătrânită când am ajuns” spune Belo, ”se luptau atât pentru titlu cât și în Europa, echipa avea aspartii mari în Europa dar nu puteau face față pentru că erau destul de bătrâni. Echipa a trimis în țară scouteri așa am avut noroc să mă vadă. Oficialii echipei doreau o echipă puternică și tânără. În 1982 a fost schimbul de generații.”

Putem totuși să spunem că sosirea cea mai importantă a fost a lui Valentin Ceaușescu care a avut un rol administrativ la echipă din 1983.

”El a fost de un mare ajutor” spune Belodedici, ”a iubit mult fotbalul, a fost un exemplu pentru jucători, era foarte politicoș și vorbea frumos cu toată lumea. Nu se implica în tactici sau lecții cu jucătorii sau cum să jucăm, ori să ne spună că jucăm bine sau prost. A fost între echipă și generali, el era legătura între noi. Tot lui îi spuneam despre banii pe care îi dorim de la armată ca bonusuri. Când Valentin era în tribună, eram siguri ca arbitrul nu ne va dezavantaja în special când jucam contra lui Dinamo care avea o proastă reputație în țară fiind echipa Ministerului de Interne.”

Echipa s-a dezvoltat repede, dar s-a întâmplat ca Jenei, popularul nostru antrenor să fie schimbat la începutul sezonului 1984-85 cu Florin Halagian, un antrenor cunoscut pentru disciplina de fier, de altfel un antrenor cu anumite succese în anii 70 obținute cu FC Argeș.

”Echipa mergea prost în campionat, nu am avut noroc, Jenei a fost înlocuit cu Halagian. Dar Halagian nu se potriveau echipei, a adus câțiva jucători noi, eu și cu Balint nu eram în prima echipă din cauza concepției despre fotbal a lui Halagian, el nu era un manager de top, era bun pentru echipele din

provincie. Mentalitatea lui si stilul sau de joc erau foarte severe, el vroia ca mingea să fie cât mai departe de poartă, nu era adeptul paselor scurte și al mobilității, era foarte britanic ca stil cu pase lungi în special. Eu eraș fundaș, era un jucător foarte creativ nu imi plăcea să lovesc șingea cât pot de tare.

Noi trebuia să luptăm, el era încordat tot timpul transmițân starea sa și echipei. Eram o dată după un meci de Cupa Uefa în Italia iar eu vroiam o prăjitură dar el a spus că voi avea doar o bană. Altădată nu ne-a lăsat să avem fructe a trebuit să bem ceai. Jenei avea un alt stil, el era mult mai înțelegător cu jucătorii, ne vorbea frumos, ne explica totul. Stilul său era bazat pe atac era foarte frumos pentru public.”

Halagian a fost la echipă doar două luni înainte ca Jenei să revină. În acel sezon Jenei a câștigat cu Steaua primul titlu după 7 ani și obținând locul de Cupa Cașpionilor pentru ediția 85-86. ”Nu ne gândeam că o să câștigăm cupa din prima” spune Belodedici. ”Noi nu știam valoarea noastră. În comunism era totul era inchis, noi nu cunosteam Milan sau Liverpool, nu puteam urmari aceste echipe jucand la televizor, dar am avut un mare avantaj deoarece echipele engleze nu aveau drept de joc din cauza incidentului de la Heysel.”

Steaua a batut pe Vejile din Danemarca, a spupravietuit pe mocirla de la Honved Budapesta si pe gheata de la Lahti. Doar cand am batut pe Anderlecht in semifinale, castigand acasa cu 3-0 dupa ce am pierdut la Brussel cu 1-0, Steaua a inceput sa realizeze cat de buni eram. Dupa aceia, pentru ca aveau de jucat finala contra Barcelonei in finala de la Sevilla facea misiunea noastra aproape imposibila.

"Nu ne-am gandit niciodata ca putem sa castigam contra Barcelonei, eram o echipa tanara plina de energie, poate acesta a fost lucru care a lipsit spaniolilor. Toata lumea a mers la Sveilia in acea noapte gandind ca nu avem nicio sansa. Barcelona gandea probabil ca vor castiga cu usurinta impotriva Stelei, si-au pierdut din concentrare probabil.

Din aceasta privinta, dificultatea meciului a facut Stelei o sarcina mai usoara pentru ca noi nu aveam obligatia sa atacam, era sarcina lor. "Am avut in minte un scenariu cum vroiam ca meciul sa decurga, stiam ce am de facut asa ca am lasat de-o parte orice emotie. Nu ma gandeam decat cum sa fac, cum sa joc un meci perfect. De cum am inceput (sa transpir) emotiile s-au risipit. "

traducere Le reseau pansat

Am ramas la acest paragraf:

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Miodrag Belodedici: the fugitive libero who conquered Europe twice

The unassuming Romanian won the European Cup with Steaua Bucharest and Red Star Belgrade and was sentenced to 10 years in jail in between

Only 25 men have ever played in and won a European Cup final for an eastern European team. Miodrag Belodedici is two of them. The Romanian libero, known as the Deer because of the elegance of his play, became the first player to win the trophy with two different clubs (while playing in both finals, it should be clarified before [Jimmy Rimmer's](#) name is brought up), which would make his story significant enough; what makes it remarkable is that between his two finals he was sentenced to 10 years in jail for treason.

These days, 25 years after his first European Cup and 20 years after his second, Belodedici is back in Bucharest, working with the national youth set-up. He is an oddly modest figure; when he suggested meeting in a sports bar before the [Champions League](#) ties one evening I was worried we might be besieged by fans, but in his simple black shirt and jeans and quiet manner there is nothing to suggest a celebrity, and we weren't bothered by anybody at all. Yet behind the apparent ordinariness there is an iron resolve that led him to take an extraordinary risk.

Belodedici (the final "i" is silent, softening the "c" into a "ch" sound) was born in Socol, a village near the Yugoslav border, to a family of Serb ethnicity. At 17 he had shown enough talent to be transferred to Luceafarul, the side set up specifically to showcase the best young players in the country and, the following year, in 1982, he was signed by Steaua, who had not won the league for six years.

"The team was old when I arrived," Belodedici says. "They were struggling both domestically and in Europe. They had great aspirations in Europe, but they couldn't cope because they were too old. They were sending their scouts around the nation and I was lucky enough that they saw me. The officials wanted a young, powerful side. There was a change of generations between 1982 and 1984."

Arguably the most significant arrival, though, was Valentin Ceausescu, son of Nicolae, who took up an administrative role in 1983. "It was a big help," says Belodedici. "He loved football very much. He was an example to the players. He was very polite and spoke pleasantly to everybody. He wasn't involved in the tactics or teaching the players how to play or telling us we played good or bad. He was between the team and the generals. He was the bond between us. We told him about the money we wanted from the army for bonuses. When Valentin was in the stand, we felt sure that the referee wouldn't cheat on Steaua, especially when we played against Dinamo who had a bad reputation in the country because they were involved with the Securitate."

The team slowly developed, but there was one blip as Emerich Jenei, the popular coach, was replaced at the beginning of the 1984-85 season by Florian Halagian, a notorious martinet who had enjoyed some success with Arges Pitesti in the 70s. "The team did badly in the championship – they had bad luck – and Jenei was fired and Halagian brought in as a coach," Belodedici says. "Halagian didn't fit in. He brought some new players and I wasn't in the first team any more. [Gavril] Balint was also in the reserves because of Halagian's conception of football. He wasn't a top-level manager; he was a

manager for a team in the provinces. His mentality and his style of play was very severe – he wanted the ball very far away from the goal; it wasn't about short passes and moving – it was very British, long-ball style. Although I was in the back line I was a very creative player; I didn't like to kick the ball away as hard as I could.

"He would fight, he was tense all the time and he gave that to the team also. He would pick fights. There was once after a Uefa Cup game in Italy I wanted a cake, but he said I had to have a banana. Another time he wouldn't let us have fruit, we had to drink tea. Jenei had another style; he was very understanding with the players. He spoke nicely to us, explained everything. His style was based on attack; it was nice to watch for the public."

Halagian was in charge only two months before Jenei returned. That season, he led Steaua to their first league title in seven years, securing their place in the European Cup for the 1985-86 campaign. "We didn't think about winning it at first," Belodedici said. "We didn't know our value. In the communist era everything was closed. We didn't know Milan or Liverpool; we couldn't watch these teams play on television, but we had a big chance because English teams weren't allowed into the competition because of Heysel."

Steaua beat Vejle of Denmark, survived a muddy pitch away to Honved and a frozen surface against Kuusysi Lahti. It was only when they beat Anderlecht in the semi-final, winning the home leg 3-0 after a 1-0 defeat in Brussels, that Steaua began to realise how good they were. Even then, though, the fact that they would have to face Barcelona in the final in Seville made their task seem impossible. "We never thought we could win against Barcelona," Belodedici says. "We were a young side and we had energy and that was maybe the thing lacking from Barcelona. Everybody going to Seville that night thought we had no chance. Barcelona probably thought they would win easily against Steaua; they lost concentration maybe."

In a sense, though, the difficulty made Steaua's task easier. There was no obligation to attack; their job was all about containment. "I had in my head a film of how I wanted the game to go," Belodedici says. "I knew what I had to do. I left aside all emotion. It was just about how to do this. I was just thinking in the warm-up about playing the perfect game. As soon as I began to sweat all the emotions would go. **Before it's very very hard, but when you go out and sample the atmosphere it's much easier. In the second half I was looking at them and they were gone. They looked yellow, all dead. We didn't have any problems. We had more courage to perform at that time. I was very surprised at their lack of energy.**"

And when there was a wobble, Jenei pulled his masterstroke. The forward Anghel Iordanescu, by then 36, hadn't played all season but had worked as an assistant to Jenei. With 17 minutes to go, he was brought on in midfield. "He calmed everything down," Belodedici says. "We wanted to win it for him. We loved him; he was a role model for us."

Steaua held out for penalties. They missed their first two, but all four kicks Barça took were saved by Helmut Ducadam. "Ducadam was very good at penalties," says Belodedici. "In training he would make bets with the guys in the team. He was big and strong and had long arms – ideal for penalties."

At first, the reaction was muted. Only 200 Romanians had been allowed to travel to Spain. All were vetted by the Securitate, but 40 still defected. "We got the trophy," Belodedici says, "and after all the Spaniards had left we saw maybe 50 Romanian fans were left. But when we got to the airport in Bucharest and we saw the crowds we were all shocked. Not even in the revolution were there that many people out in the streets. They walked from Bucharest out to the airport to greet the players. We were very, very impressed at that moment."

Generally, though, Belodedici was less happy. "I didn't like the regime," he says. "I didn't like the way the players were treated after the European Cup victory. Old players weren't treated as well as they had been before. They weren't allowed to go abroad. I decided to go to the team I loved most – Red Star; I could have gone to Italy, but something told me to go to Belgrade. I didn't have a clue that there would be a revolution after a year."

He resolved to flee, but that required significant planning. "When the players left for international games they were given passports in the airport and when we came back they were taken from us again," he explains. "I asked Valentin Ceausescu and the president of Steaua, Ion Alecsandrescu – he was the general who ran the club – for a passport. They asked why I wanted it and I told them that my mother had a permit to cross into Yugoslavia to visit her family and I wanted to go for a week to take her and then come back. I drove across the border. On the other side of the river, we waited for my sister. It was a foggy morning and at that time of year the river is low, so the soldiers patrolled there. But we knew when they patrolled and with the help of a friend my sister got across."

That was the first step, but Belodedici still had to be accepted in Yugoslavia. "The Yugoslavs told me there would be no problem giving me political asylum," he says. "I was afraid because I had a military rank – every player from Steaua was in the army." Technically that made Belodedici a deserter, and it was for that reason that he received a 10-year jail sentence – a verdict rescinded after the revolution of 1989.

He went to watch a Red Star match, paying particular attention to Bosko Gurovski, who was by then playing as libero. He was a legend of the club, but was probably past his peak by then. "I knew how he played; I wasn't worried," Belodedici said. "I knew the team. I'd watched them from childhood and they always had problems at libero. I came to Belgrade with a military discipline – they always commented on my discipline."

Afterwards, Belodedici went to the office of the club's sporting director. "I knocked at the door and asked if they wanted a player," he says. "I explained who I was and where I'd come from. I had to explain six times. He looked at me and he couldn't understand. But then he suddenly realised who I was." An equivalent today is hard to imagine – this was one of the best players in the world turning up and saying "Any chance of a game?"

At first there wasn't, as Fifa banned Belodedici for a year for breaking his contract with Steaua (quite how legally binding that contract was remains unclear). He helped Red Star to the title in 1989-90, and the following year to the European Cup. His composure as a defender was clearly seen in the buildup to Red Star's equaliser in the first leg of the semi-final in Munich, his short pass out of defence feeding Robert Prosinecki, whose pass down the line released Dragisa Binic, whose cross was turned in by Darko Pancev.

His clearest memory of the second leg was of marking Klaus Augenthaler at a corner. "We were battling and suddenly I had the chain from round his neck in my hand," he says. "He had to run back to defence, and I was left wondering what to do with it. So I waited and next time he came forward I gave it back to him. And he looked at me like he didn't know whether to thank me or hit me."

Red Star eventually won a remarkable tie 4-3 on aggregate, setting up a final with Marseille. It was a desperately cagey game, won eventually on penalties, Belodedici converting his kick and Stevan Stojanovic saving from Manuel Amoros. As war descended on Yugoslavia the team broke up, and never fulfilled its potential. "We could have gone on winning for years," Belodedici says. "Some players would have left but we had very good young players." No eastern European side has reached the final since.

Which leaves just one issue. If the Steaua of 86 played the Red Star of 91, who would win? "Which team am I playing on?" asks Belodedici.