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Montevideo - Dream of Soccer in the Balkans

By Sophie Braccini



Photo provided

Wars of 1912-13 where the relatively new kingdom of Serbia and Bulgaria were enemies. During World War I Serbia was invaded by Austria and Germany and was allied to France. Croatia and Slovenia were joined to Serbia after the war to form the Kingdom of Yugoslavia with a centralized authority in Belgrade that was not always well accepted.

Throughout the movie, tensions with the Bulgarian team and the Croats - who refuse to join the Yugoslav national team, thus removing the King's support - serve as a backdrop to magnify the Serbian nationalism over an illusive Yugoslav identity.

Although Croats and Bulgarians are not presented in the best light in this Serbian movie, this is not a geopolitical lesson and American viewers will feel very familiar with the story of a poor young man who wants to live his dream as a soccer player, and carries the war metal of his dead father sewn to the inside of his jersey. There is a little bit of Field of Dreams in the movie, even if the game is soccer and not baseball. "Play well and they will come... if they come, you will go to Montevideo."

No need to be a soccer fan to enjoy Montevideo, either. The sports segments of the film are short enough, and dramatic, so even Steven Colbert would not fall asleep. There is also the requisite amount of love affair and mild amorous imbroglio to satisfy all audiences. The love stories are totally predictable, but the actors are young and give a fresh performance that makes it almost believable.

The backdrop of the roaring '20s is just sketched, but it is obviously not the main purpose of the movie to depict that era. Soccer enthusiasts will probably enjoy witnessing the birth of the popularity of their sport of choice. In the movie, the Belgrade national stadium is no bigger than a middle school field, and becoming a soccer player is certainly not viewed as an option for a young man.

It is interesting to note that the film, which is being shown in Orinda for one week as part of the International Film Showcase, is based on a true story; the Yugoslav team finished third place in Montevideo. For more information about the Showcase, visit lamorindatheatres.com.

No need to be a Balkans historian to appreciate the movie that opens September 14 at the Orinda Theatre, Montevideo. The story set between World War I and World War II Yugoslavia is more about sports and what passion and dreams can achieve than why Croats would not join the Yugoslav national team.

Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay, is where the first soccer World Cup is to be held. In the relatively newly formed kingdom of Yugoslavia, will a soccer team emerge and will it find the funding it needs to go there?

Montevideo is a classic story of coming of age and redemption through sports and friendship, saved from 'dejavu' by its unusual historical and geographical setting. Also, the film's optimism will warm many hearts. As one character says in the movie, "People are all the same, only their shoes are different."

At the beginning of the movie, the Yugoslav team is opposed to the Belgrade team, an antagonism that's hard to understand without the historical perspective.

It's the late 1920s in Belgrade. The final dismantlement of the Ottoman Empire led to the Balkan

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