



# NOTES FROM A VETERAN

with *Sasha Vujacic*

Orange County is a proud territory of Laker Nation. We all hail the reigning NBA Champs. On Lakers game day you'd swear you were actually in LA as you roam the various streets of Orange County where purple and gold abound in the form of car flags, jerseys, hats, bumper stickers, and even unwilling children in onesies. The OC Gazette offices are no different. We are still celebrating the National Championship Title almost two months after the fact. In truth, just yesterday I rubbed it in the face of my Orlando loving friend from Bowling Green, Kentucky (home to WKU, the alma mater of the Magic's Courtney Lee). Needless to say we are already ready for next season. Lakers shooting guard Sasha Vujacic took a few minutes out of his busy summer schedule touring Europe with the Slovenian National Basketball Team to talk with The OC Gazette on the upcoming Lakers season, the status on Lamar, and why he loves SoCal.

INTERVIEW BY AMY HOOD

**Amy Hood: First of all congrats on being the NBA Champions!**

Sasha Vujacic: Thank you very much. It was long awaited. We are extremely happy about having won the championship. It's been a long time since the championship was here and it's a great feeling to have the trophy home.

**AH: Can you describe to us the scene in the locker room during the champagne shower celebration?**

SV: It was crazy. As soon as we walked into the locker room the champagne shower started. We were all shedding tears of joy. It was definitely an unforgettable moment in all our lives.

**AH: Did you guys paint the town red that night after all the exit interviews?**

SV: I think our fans did it for us. The next thing on the schedule, after the executive interviews, was the parade. The parade was the real time to celebrate. The parade was with everyone who made the championship possible!! The fans, the Laker organization, and the players.

**AH: Have you taken the scissors to your long flowing locks yet?**

SV: Nope. I did cut an inch or two but that's it.

**AH: Is your hair a part of you now? Like Samson, if you cut it you might lose all your strength?**

SV: I think my hair is definitely a part of me now. I do, however, need to find something for next season to keep my hair from bothering me. So, if anyone has any ideas let me know.

**AH: Kobe Bryant has said of you, "He's the biggest hard worker I've ever seen, that's why I respect him so much." But you've both been joking how you might be working too hard. So how will you be relaxing this summer before you head back to Slovenia?**

SV: He accepted me as his younger brother. Kobe is the hardest worker I've ever seen. We both understand what hard work leads to, and that's a championship. Eventually, your hard work will always pay.

**AH: Are you looking forward to going back to Slovenia to play for the national team later this month?**

SV: Yes, I'm actually here now.

**AH: Pau Gasol is also heading back home to represent Spain this summer. Are you excited about possibly facing up against your Lakers teammate for the EuroBasket Title?**

SV: Yes. I am very excited to have the opportunity to represent my country and to play against Gasol. It should be very interesting.

**AH: What are you looking to change for next season with the Lakers?**

SV: I want to consistently play my best. I want to stop having the ups and downs that I experienced last year. I want to start the season healthy and represent the nick name the fans gave me [The Machine] the right way.

**AH: Are you excited about getting defensive master Ron Artest?**

SV: I am excited. I think he is a great addition for us. I think he is a great defensive player and I look forward to having him on the team.

**AH: Have you gotten him a housewarming present yet to welcome him to LA?**

SV: Not yet. Right now everyone is at home catching up with their families and trying to be healthy. But when we get back I will have to get him a house warming gift and hangout with him more.

**AH: Is it bittersweet getting Artest but losing Ariza?**

SV: Yes. It's tough when your teammates leave the team. It's not easy. I really wish Trevor all the best. Now, however, we have Ron and he is great. I'm sure he will do an amazing job at helping us defend our title.

**AH: Brown is coming back and Odom might come back, are you glad to see Odom and Shannon Brown return?**

SV: Of course. I think that Odom is going to come back and play for a while. But was ultimately happens is not up to us but is up to him and the front office. No matter what we wish him all the best however we would love him to stay a Laker.

**AH: I'm sure being on a team like the Lakers is like being in a family. Can you explain the family dynamic to us? Who's the baby? Who's the rebel? Who's the favorite?**

SV: It's hard to say any one person is one thing. Like any family we are all a little of everything at different times. We are definitely that though, a family. The players, organization, and the fans are one giant family.

**AH: I saw this video a long time ago where Ronny Turiaf accused you of listening to Hannah**

**Montana. Is that true?**

SV: No. Not true at all! Ron was just being funny. My brother and sister listen to her music. I never did. No disrespect but that's not my musical taste.

**AH: What do you listen to?**

SV: I listen to everything. Pink Floyd, The Beatles, Rock, Hip-Hop, etc. However, I'm not a big rave or techno fan. I think I heard too much of it as a kid.

**AH: Seeing as it's summer blockbuster season, are there any movies in the theatres you're excited to see?**

SV: I haven't really had a lot of time for movies this summer. I did, however, see the movie Parlami d'amore on a recent flight. It was very good and really moved me.

**AH: Coming from Slovenia to Southern California, what was the biggest culture shock?**

SV: Well I spent five years in Italy before coming to America. I left Slovenia at 15. When I got to Los Angeles, the biggest shock was just how big everything is. Overall, it took me about a year to adjust. Now LA is home for me and my family. I love it.

**AH: What have you found are the key steps to assimilating into Southern California culture? Are you a regular at In-N-Out? Do you have a pair of Rainbows yet?**

SV: I think that the key to LA culture is acceptance. Los Angeles is such a melting pot. You can really be whatever you want to be here. I love that. And yes I do have a pair of Rainbows. I even have a pair of chucks.

**AH: Who's your favorite player in the NBA, past or present?**

SV: Wow. It's hard to pick just one. I think I would have Pete Maravich. He was an amazing player and I have been compared to him a lot.

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**I WANT TO STOP HAVING THE UPS AND DOWNS THAT I EXPERIENCED LAST YEAR.**