



Titel: Basketball in Lithuania
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Content:

In Lithuania basketball is celebrated and when "Zalgiris", the most famous club of the country is playing, this will be a nationwide event. This club in the city of Kaunas has its place in the world-class of basketball with many stars, playing now in the Russian or American pro-league. Supported by their financial engagement, "Zalgiris" in Kaunas is able to build up new stars and to give many children beside sports a school-education and new chances.

Text:



Karolis Babkauskas has the same dream as all Lithuanian boys: he wants to become a famous basketball player. When he is not in school he does nothing else but playing basketball. His father drives the 10-year old boy to the training session in Kaunas, Lithuania's former capital. Kaunas is the centre for the sport in which Lithuania is top of the world.

Sabonis, one of the most famous players created the Sabonis Club, a basketball centre for young people.

Arvydas Sabonis, here No. 12, has played international basketball for years. He is like Franz Beckenbauer in Germany, whatever he does, the media will comment on it.

During the training session famous Sabonis is not present, for he is earning his fortune playing for the American NBA team, Portland Blazers. His name, however is incentive enough for the boys. More than 700 young people get the finishing touches in Sabonis' school from professional coaches. Karolis is totally committed.

Quote: Karolis Babkauskas

"I want to become as famous as Sabonis. I want to be able to play as well as him. And I want to have what he has."

Despite its rich sponsor, the head of Sabonis' school is forever struggling with financial problems. The state is poor and there are next to no subsidies for social work, which they also offer at the school.

Quote: Virginijus Jankauskas, headmaster of Sabonis Club

"It is an open secret that drug addicts here are getting younger and younger. But the young people are Lithuania's future. "

For the time being it remains up to the initiatives of international basketball players to keep children and young people in times of social and economical upheaval in Lithuania away from drugs and criminality. That is also why the sport club offers other opportunities besides sports.

Quotes: school

Sports, computer and foreign languages, for the NBA star, Sarunas Marciulionis, a patriotic duty.

Quote: Sarunas Marciulionis



“When I was small, I had to ask my grandmother to darn my socks. We did not have shirts and no sports hall to play basketball. We used to play basketball outside all day long. On top of a real hall and good coaches we are able to provide the children with a good educational program.”

In the club room of Sabonis’ school you can watch NBA clips non-stop, everybody’s ultimate objective. Basketball is no longer necessary to escape the USSR’s anonymity. Sabonis’ Lithuanian national shirt his Soviet and, of course, his shirt von Zalgiris are as precious as national relics.

Quote: Tadas Stockus, coach of the Sabonis Club

“It is like this: Basketball is like a religion for us, it is the first thing you think of when you wake up in the morning and the last thing you think of when you go to sleep. You can’t imagine another future for yourself than playing professional basketball. There is nothing at which the people here are better. During the Olympic Games and the European Cup the streets are deserted. Basketball for Lithuanians is like soccer for Italians and Germans, or American Football for Americans. We believe in basketball and worship it.”

Indeed, Zalgiris is playing and the pubs are crowded, the streets are deserted and we suspect so might be parliament. Mediterranean lunacy in the Baltic states. A people unites behind its idols, who give much of their fellow citizens’ enthusiasm and trust back to them, especially to the young people. Hopefully they will continue playing that way for a