



# **NIK DRAGICEVIC MEMORIAL TOURNAMENT**

**WHITE EAGLES BASKETBALL**

**June 4. 2014**

## **RECAP OF THE NDMT WEEKEND**

### **Pledge Winner**

We had a special fundraiser for our teams. The White Eagles Basketball players got involved and collected pledges to contribute to raising funds to create a basketball court in behind the Serbian Centre and to help the White Eagles organization out. The children's effort was amazing and really overwhelmed us. We had one exceptional pledge collector who raised \$332. A big thank you and way to go to Gianni Ventrella!

### **Scholarship Winners**

The White Eagles were able to award two White Eagle Basketball players with a \$1000 – scholarship in the honour of Nikola Dragicevic. This year's scholarships were generously donated by Lazo and Milica Dragicevic and by the Batanjski, Dobrich, Dukic, and Vizirakis Families.

The scholarships went to a one male and one female who best encompassed the following attributes:



- The player shows dedication, determination, respect, and loyalty to the White Eagles Basketball organization
- They are an outstanding individual both on and off the court, during games and practices, and while cheering for their fellow teammates and clubmates
- They gives 100% effort in games and during practice
- They are a positive role model to their team and the White Eagles Organization
- They have exemplary sportsmanship
- They have achieved tenure with the White Eagles Basketball Association

The male recipient has been with the White Eagles before he new what a travel meant. He has gone from wanting to just drive to the net and shoot and never pass the ball, to being the play starter, the point guard. He would show up to every practice and even if his teammates said they were taking a night off, he was still there shooting. He is a standout individual on the court and off and his team won the Junior Boy division in the NDMT. Congratulations to Stefan Spiric!



The female recipient has also played White Eagles Basketball since before she could even throw the ball high enough to reach the nets. She, without fail would be at every practice, excited, motivated, and ready to roll. She is ALWAYS positive. She has become a force on defence and although her stature is tiny, she will out rebound anyone. She has recently helped in coaching when the club needed her help most and we hope that she will be a player and coach for the White Eagles for many years to come. Congratulations to Andjela Bajic!

### **Braveheart Award**

The Braveheart award was presented to Milan Dukic for his excellent sportsmanship and his wonderful attitude while playing throughout the tournament. Milan is a positive contributor to his team and puts his heart into every aspect of the game. Congratulations to Milan!

### **Sportmanship Award**

This award was nominated by the coaches of the tournament. Kristofer Manasses of the Chicago based team, Palos Papaflesses was nominated for his positive attitude on the court toward his teammates, opponents, and the officials. He showed respect for the fans and coaches and for the game. Congratulations!



### **THANK YOU**

The NDMT Committee, White Eagles Basketball Organization and The Dragicevic Family would like to extend a sincere thank you to everyone that supported the tournament this year. Whether you played, cheered, volunteered, sponsored or enjoyed the weekend, we appreciate the support. For the white eagles the season is winding down with only the Serb National Federation (SNF) Tournament left. If you can make it to Ohio the weekend of June 6-8, we would certainly appreciate your support and would definitely love to celebrate with you.

DIVISION	WINNER	RUNNER-UP	CONSOLATION CHAMP
<b>Biddy B</b>	St. Lazarus (21) DETROIT	White Eagles (13) WINDSOR	Palos Papaflessas CHICAGO
<b>Biddy A</b>	Hamilton Serbs HAMILTON	White Eagles (54) WINDSOR	Palos Papaflessas CHICAGO
<b>Junior Boys</b>	Riverside Rebels (43) WINDSOR	St. John Armenian (41) DETROIT	N/A
<b>Intermediate Boys</b>	St. Lazarus (73) DETROIT	Windsor Pinoys (40) WINDSOR	Motor City Elite DETROIT
<b>Women</b>	Hamilton Serbs (35) HAMILTON	Brave Hearts (25) WINDSOR/DETROIT	St. Lazarus DETROIT
<b>Men</b>	Tecumseh Pizza (44) WINDSOR	Team Nik (30)	St. George Serbs NIAGARA

## WHO SAID THAT?

### Fr. Milan said....

*"Christ is Risen! As a parish priest, it was heartwarming to see the community come together in such a beautiful, loving way to honour Nikola Dragicevic. Both on the basketball courts and off, it was clear everyone was having a wonderful time, making new friendships and celebrating old ones. It is very obvious how much Nikola touched everyone's lives, I was happy to be a part of it. Memory eternal!"*

### Tina Dukic said.....

"There are not many people that could illicit a response such as we had this past weekend. As a community, I felt it was a good lesson to see how something so negative can be turned into something beautiful. We cannot change how we lost Nik, but we can change how we remember him, and how we honour him. We can all learn from Nik to be the best people we can be."

### Michelle Morasso said.....

"This weekend was bittersweet. I miss Nik every day, but seeing everyone at the tournament was a great reminder what an amazing guy Nik was."

### Daniel Dobrich said.....

"I think knowing that this tournament was for a cause so close to the Windsor's Serbian community set it above other tournaments."

### Lily Ciganovic said....

"I thought it was a great weekend. I thought the young people in our community contributed and everything went well. As far as highlights for me, it was the speaker from Montreal, the scholarship winners and the games on Sunday. The memorial book was excellent. It's a treasure!"

### Aleks Stevanov said....

"First class memorial tournament weekend! There may have been bumps and hiccups along the way due to strong emotions. If there were, they were unnoticeable. I look forward to next year!"



**Aleks Stulic said....**

"I was honored to be part of this committee. I know with the group of people that we had and even the obstacles that were in the way, we could not fail. We conquered this tournament and made him proud. Nik's memories will not be forgotten by the people who knew him. If this tournament continues, his legacy will live on to the younger generation that have never met him."

**Milica Sarapa said....**

"I'm so glad we came to the presentation...I would have been upset to have missed it, knowing now how beautiful it was."

**Dusan Pribojan said....**

"This weekend has been the busiest I have seen at the bar since I've started working at the Centre, and definitely one of the busiest I can ever remember. More importantly than just the number of people that were there, it was a great crowd who were having a great time. It's always good to see a Serbian event at our hall have such an amazing turnout."

**Andy Adzic said....**

"When it comes to the party at the hall, it felt like old times when people partied and didn't need to go downtown."

**Mimi Dobrich said....**

"Most memorable hall moment was Nik's video presentation. Most memorable on court moment was when Miso Batanjski was telling his daughter to play ball and stop posing on the court with her friend."

**Tina Dukic said again....**

"The tournament response was overwhelmingly positive. They loved the organization, passion and memorial part. People thought it was great to be involved in something that had a real purpose. They look forward to this being an annual event."

## ON THE COURT WITH NOVICA



*Championship Sunday has officially started. The Gracanica Church school children have just completed the Serbian national anthem and Very Reverend Milan Jovanovic said a prayer for all players. The stands are filling up so I hurried to sit next to the President of the White Eagles, Milan Celic and his wife Mara (both committee members).*

**I asked Milan what type of feedback he had received so far from out of town guests?**

"It's been very positive. People enjoyed the food, music and hospitality. They always enjoy coming to Windsor."

**What were your thoughts about the turnout at the hall last night and what was your most memorable moment?**

"I was touched by the presentation for Nik. I thought it was well done. The crowd after the last call Saturday night/Sunday morning was also impressive."





*As the women's game comes to an end, I was thinking about who to talk to and I remembered reading about a female player in the 80's in the commemorative book. Her name was Millicent Vorkapich Hill. She's the most experienced player on the court. She's the one I need to talk to. So as the horn blows, I patiently wait for her so I can get her attention.*



### **I asked her how it felt making the finals?**

Making it to the championship game... I think we were shocked. Considering our starting lineup consisted of two players that gave birth about 7 months ago; one player with a badly sprained ankle from Friday's game; me - who is just older than everyone on the floor, and rounded out with another younger mom, our expectations weren't high. There is something to be said about the toughness of moms - especially Serbian ones! A few of us still play pickup games but not with the physical intensity like we experienced on the weekend. It was a little shock to the system.



### **What was your favourite part of the weekend?**

My favourite part of the weekend was listening to my dad coaching me from the stands. (with a little laugh) Honestly, the best part though was the camaraderie of our team, "Brave Hearts" that Seja Vizirakis put together. It was great to see each other after many years and share that team bonding once again through basketball. Our cheer in the huddle was "for Nik!" - that is what gave us our energy on the floor.

### **Now being a player and a mother of kids in the tournament did your competitive edge take a back seat to watching your kids play or did it reach new heights?**

As a player and a mom watching my two sons play, the competitive edge definitely did take a back seat. As much as I still love the game and I'm thankful I can still play, nothing beats watching children compete. I love watching them play tough, think on the court and keep a positive attitude. Sportsmanship is really important - and it was very evident among the teams in the tournament.



After we won our semi-final game and our team was "high-fiving and hugging", a ref walked over and said, "Doesn't this feel like the Seinfeld episode where Kramer beats all the little kids in karate, then celebrates?" While I got a good laugh, I think we were celebrating the fact that we were still standing and didn't have to play again in an hour, more than the victory itself. Our intentions were to have fun. We weren't there to take anything away from the kids. Moms always put their kids before themselves!



**I take a seat next to Nik's youngest sister Milena Jovanovic and ask her about her thoughts about last night's awards ceremony and presentations. (The Biddy A's are playing their hearts out on the court during our conversation.)**

Our family was honoured to have Joe Galli (from Loeys Dietz Foundation) join us for this special weekend. We were lucky to have him share his story and knowledge of the disease with our community. The committee did a phenomenal job making sure this tournament was flawless. They worked endless hours to ensure everything was perfect. There's no doubt in my mind that Nik was looking down from heaven, smiling ear to ear, sharing this memorable weekend with us.

**We both get side tracked when a 6 foot 4 man in a skin tight jersey steps on the court after a time out and the announcer tells the crowd that Windsor's coach Nada has a secret weapon to get Windsor back in the game. The crowd laughs. Committee member Aleks Stulic graciously left the court but to see the bewildered look on some of the Hamilton players faces, was priceless. Milena continues,**

The tribute video was simply beautiful. As I looked around the room that night, everyone had tears streaming down their cheeks. The entire hall filled with hundreds of people who knew and loved him, made my heart happy. Happy to know he was so special to so many, and that his spirit will never be forgotten. Well, the game ends and Hamilton is 2 for 2 in Sunday's game. After Coachica Nada is done taking pictures with the runner ups, I ask her for a few minutes and she graciously accepts.

**Coachica, tough game out there.**

It sure was, but the kids had a blast and they learned a valuable lesson today. You need to play hard at practice and during the games. I'm proud of them.

**Did you think the overall tournament was better than most anticipated?**

I do. It's so hard to predict a first year event, regardless of how well you plan. I knew it would be a success because of the teams that were coming, but I did have some locals say that they were surprised by the turnout and the number of teams and from where they all came.





### **Did you make any new friends?**

Of course! When you're wearing a bright teal shirt that screams committee, it is hard not to attract a little attention. Many would speak to me to help find answers to their questions or some needed directions, or others just wanted to know what was happening in other gyms and that led to great conversations and plans to meet at other events, like SNF, or carrousel in Windsor, or 3-day in Pittsburgh.

### **What was your most memorable hall moment and was there a moment this past weekend that separated this tournament from others in your opinion?**

The hall moment was definitely the tribute to Nik. It is very difficult to ask a rowdy crowd filled with Greeks, Serbs, Armenians and everyone else to please listen, but that was not needed. The beautiful tribute was enough to silence the hall, so much so that a pin could be heard dropping. Like no joke. It was amazing.

Yes, Saturday night at the hall. It was very welcoming. I saw teal shirts mingling all throughout the hall. The event rolled on into the wee hours of the night. The crowd was happy. When teams were leaving, they would stop me and say thank you for an event well done. Parents of players were also pleased...all generations felt the inclusive atmosphere. I've travelled the United States, Canada, and Europe playing tournaments, and not too often do people go out of their way to say thank you unless they really felt welcomed. I saw many friends of players or volunteers socializing in the crowd. This tournament reached out to many.

### **You seem to wear many hats within the organization and committee. From what perspective did you enjoy the tournament the most?**

I saw the tournament in many different perspectives, from planning, coaching, playing, watching, and enjoying. I felt a sense of relief at the first tip-off on Friday night, but I really enjoyed seeing the gyms packed on Saturday with lots of young athletes and I also had an overwhelming joy watching the faces in the crowd of parents, coaches, and friends as they watched their athletes receive medals as well as watching the tribute to Nikola.







*The national anthem starts to be played and thus ends our conversation. I look for my next interviewee as the music plays. (For the record, the two men's teams are complete opposites.) Should be an interesting game especially with a 7 footer and a younger team that seems to be in good shape. (But you never know.) I cross the court and catch up with Nik's other sister Natasa. (We exchange a few pleasantries.), but she has to go to centre court for the ceremonial toss. (She returns all smiles.) "Nice toss" I say. She laughs and says "Thanks, I was kind of nervous about that. I didn't even practice" (laughing).*

**Are you happy with the way today is going?**

I am really happy with today so far and can't wait until the game starts. It should be a good one.

**Do you think the tournament was better than most anticipated?**

Absolutely! I thought it would be a good turn out and good time, but it turned out to be a fantastic turn out and an amazing time.

**I know you were busy this entire weekend, did you have a chance to talk to people and make any new friends?**

Yes, I met a friend of Nik's that met my brother one summer at the Oakland basketball camp. He made it out all the way from Chicago to come to the tournament to support Nik's memory. That was really special to me because in that little time he spent with him more than 10 years ago, Nik's magic touched him.

***One cannot even begin to imagine all the emotions you and your family must have gone through not only this weekend but leading up to the tournament. Was there one point where emotion just took over?***

*Yes, the tribute to Nik. I lost it like so many others. I had no idea it would be that powerful. Dayun and Pete did a great job on it and keeping it from me too (smiling). I saw it for the first time like everyone else. The night was special too. Just looking around the hall to see all of Nik's friends come together, new and old, laughing, smiling, telling stories and looking around the hall at 2am to realize how many people were still there singing, dancing and laughing, all having a great time.*

***Half time is here and both teams are giving it their best. Although, "Team Nik" looks tired. I approach another committee member that is doubling up as the courtside announcer, Dayun Marjanovic.***

***What are your thoughts looking back now that there is only 16 minutes left in the tournament?***

*My thoughts? Watching the first game tip off and getting all the messages from the other conveners and committee members that it started without any problems to me playing in the games with all my old friends. I was happy with the turnout. I felt we worked hard promoting it and that we deserved the 44 teams that played. If I could change anything, it would have been to have more teams. Watching all of the kids receive their awards was great. The countless smiles I saw made every second I spent working on the tournament worth it. I've played in many tournaments, but I think this one was different because of the connection people had with Nik. That's what separated this tournament from the others for me.*



*The second half is about to start. I think I will just sit here in the corner stands and take it in. (I've been in the gyms for so many games but haven't really watched any in detail.) The game seems to be slipping from Team Nik. Tecumseh Pizza is just younger and faster. I can't help but appreciate the talents all these players have. (I wasn't much into sports but if there was an all-star team for the audio video club.*

*As the game winds down, I think about Nik playing on this very court. I picture him looking down on all of us or even running down the court with his teammates. The ball goes inside to the seven footer Jordan and with a nice move scores what seems to be the last basket of the game and the tournament. Thus, bringing a great weekend to a bittersweet end. The White Eagles and the NDMT committee should be proud of what was accomplished.*

*I was lucky enough to catch up with and talk to Jordan Sabourin who was the leading scorer for "team Nik". The game seemed closer than the score shows, and it seemed like you couldn't miss a shot inside. Can you tell us how you felt playing in the championship game?*

It was great to have a lot of the community out to support both teams. Both teams play their hearts out. Both teams wanted to win but ultimately Team Nik ran out of gas. The other team was much younger and athletic for us. Not having Ryan Hoover, our outside shooter, for the game really hurt us. Still it was a great ending to a great weekend.

**Being a former teammate of Nik's at Oakland, did you have mixed emotions playing in a tournament with his name on it?**

It was a great honour to be a part of the tournament and an even better honor to play on his team. Although he wasn't physically playing with us, I truly felt that he was still with us and helping us win. There is no better way to honour him than to do something that he was so passionate about, and how befitting to play the championship games on a court that Nik himself played on. I can speak for "Team Nik" and say that it was one of the best weekends of our lives. I couldn't have organized a better event to get everyone who knew Nik together and honour him as well as contribute to the future cure of LDS

**Before I let you get back to your teammates, is there anything else you would like to say about Nik?**

*Nik was my best friend, my brother, my main guy. We did everything together. He brought a smile to everyone's face when he walked in the door. Everyone loved that guy. He had no enemies in this world. I definitely lost a part of me; my other "twin tower". He will forever be missed. Although he is no longer with us, it has been an amazing thing to see how close we've all become. His friends have become closer to his family and that is a special thing that will only continue to grow stronger. He has to be looking down upon us with his big smile and loving the fact that we have grown to be a part of his family. The closeness truly helped with the grieving process.*





***As in the previous interview at the coffee shop, I thought it was only fitting to end with a few questions from the Chairperson, Petar Chuk. He was busy cleaning up the gym but graciously stopped and talked with me. Well an exciting day and a great weekend.***

***How are you feeling right now?***

*To borrow a saying from my dad " Like an old man." Nah, I feel pretty good, tired, but good. It was a long week for the committee and I think we pulled it off. The White Eagles had a successful tournament and we honoured a great guy.*

***From the people I talked to, it seemed everyone had a great time and saw some really good basketball. What were your personal highlights from the weekend?***

*Where do I even start. (a short pause) In no particular order, I would say, seeing the hall filled both Friday and Saturday nights. It's been a long time since people partied like that at the Serb Centre in this community. I was really impressed with the volunteers. So many people offered their help and did double and triple shifts. Normally, you need to call people but maybe we are now changing the way we think, and are going to continue to offer our help for community events? And I would have to say being at St. Joe's on Saturday, watching all of the kids and their parents take part in a great tournament.*

***I spoke with your wife earlier and she said your son played in his first game?***

*Yes, Natasa and I signed him to a one hour contract with the white eagles. He's only 2 years old but I thought it would be great for him to play in his first tournament especially because its local and it bears his uncle's name.*

***So looking forward, to future tournaments, what would or will you do differently?***

*Well, I think for any organization or committee, it is imperative that new people take over, giving the event new life. I'm really pleased with what our committee did in three short months. The sponsors and volunteers really stepped up. I can't say enough about everyone that donated their money and or time to this tournament. I really think we had a strong team, that was full of heart and determination, but to answer your question, I would recommend adding 3-4 people to the committee. Having another dozen teams in the junior age range would help create a good nucleus for the next 5 – 10 years. Other than that, just imagine what this tournament would have been like if we had our own gym. (a pause) Was that to soon?*

***"You're right, it's probably the only way to have made this tournament better". So as championship Sunday came to a close, I'd like to thank the committee for allowing me to cover the tournament before and during the event. It was a great time had by all that attended and for the ones that couldn't make it, check online for pictures, stories and highlights. I had a blast!***

***Sincerely, Novica Novinarovic***