**C – Ante Tomic**

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BANKABLE NBA SKILL: high-post passing/decision-making; touch around the basket.

Will this translate to the NBA? Yes, but it may not be enough of a skill to warrant consistent playing time considering weaknesses.

SIZE FOR POSITION:

Height: 7’1” Plays like: 6’11” (Ante doesn’t play up to size, often caught w/ arms down)

DEFENSIVE LIABILITY? Tomic will struggle guarding multiple pick-n-rolls in the NBA. He is disciplined enough to step outside and cut-off the dribbler (when instructed to) but struggles to get back into the play. He rarely makes it back into the lane, let alone back to his own defender who’s usually spacing-out after the screen. His helpside defense may also be too slow versus NBA penetrators.

BEST STYLE/FIT: Traditional, halfcourt offense where he is primarily positioned at the high post. Would be effective in some of Jerry Sloan’s old UCLA sets: screening at elbow, then catching ball and turning to feed cutters. Ante will struggle in an uptempo game, even against other seven-footers downcourt.

POSITIONING GRADE: (does player put himself in *position* to do the following, outside of set plays?)

Scoring – Poor (scores only when he gets the ball in his sweet spot - 3 ft from basket)

Shooting - Mediocre (free-throw line jumper often falls short as game wears on - fatigue)

Passing – Very Good (flashes to high post intuitively)

Help Defense – Poor (late rotation)

On-ball/Post Defense – Mediocre (stands too erect, little flexion in knees)

Rebounding – Mediocre (usually late to ball, footwork poor)

ATTITUDE: Overall, Ante has a good attitude. He will sulk a bit if guards don’t get him the ball inside or on the roll. He doesn’t hold post position inside long so guards must be decisive with entry passes.

DETAILS: Tomic is the traditional European bigman, pretty comfortable inside and out. His feel for the game is above average for size.

POSITIVES: Ante’s hands (other than his size) are his best quality. If you hit him in the hands, he will catch it. He also delivers passes well to cutting guards. Court awareness is not a problem, despite his size.

INSIDER: I’m very familiar with Ante’s generation when he was coming up in Croatia. His local teams did not dominate the competition as a teenager. Tomic more so stumbled onto stardom when he later grew in height. Whereas most prospects are ‘the man’ their entire lives (which gives them unshakeable confidence) Tomic somewhat lacks that. When he steps on the court he’s very unassuming which may lend towards being timid.

CONCERNS: I have concerns about Ante’s feet. Slow and clumsy are the best ways I would describe them. This limits him in numerous ways:

* ability to establish good low-post position: second-rate centers in Europe are able to push him a step or two out of his comfort zone.
* weakside defense: vs NBA guards he may struggle to get to the right spot in time.
* pick-n-roll coverage: shows willingness to step out but is often lost for the entire play. If you decide to keep him back, then at leaves the on-ball defender out on an island.
* Rebounding (especially offensively): he has a decent nose for the ball but not the footwork to get him to it. He will often be late to the ball and then at a disadvantage getting back on defense. Conversely, he doesn’t shoot it well enough from outside to just have him positioned at the free-throw line (not crashing boards, just getting back).

In short, Tomic’s bad feet considerably negate the fact that he has great hands. His mobility may also be exploited in the faster, quicker NBA. Tomic is great around the rim in Europe, when he gets the ball in his ‘wheelhouse’. His soft touch and use of the glass are impressive. However, with his feet, I don’t see him getting the ball in good position consistently. Even in P & R, his rolls to the basket are slow and easy to cover. He gets very little flexion in his knees, so he struggles to catch balls that are between his waist and knees. Ante also falls down quite often in traffic when the ball isn’t placed right in his lap (again flexion). When he does get the ball around the rim, he may struggle against NBA-level rim protectors. Lastly, he won’t draw double teams down low in the NBA. His defender will push him off the block easily (b/c of erect stature) and play him vanilla (position between him and basket, arms straight up on shot), forcing a shot just outside Ante’s comfort zone. The offense may bog down when he catches it inside. The Croatian National Team’s most efficient post player at Eurobasket 2013 was actually swingman Bojan Bogdanovic (Fehnerbahce; Nets).

Video Clips

Opponent: Ukraine, Quarterfinals at Eurobasket 2013 – vs #15 center Slava Kratsov (Suns)

<http://espn.go.com/watchespn/index#type/replay/search/croatia ukraine/> (espn3.com)

1:20:10 – Tomic moves from block to block, still can’t get open against fronting Kratsov down low.

1:38:45 – Tomic sets pick, then pouts after not getting ball on roll. He finishes possession with frustration shot.

1:42:00 – Kratsov easily steps around off-balance Tomic (though misses easy shot). Ante was not in any foul trouble (4th qtr, only had 2 fouls).

Opponent: Italy, second round of Group play at Eurobasket 2013: (the Italians ran a lot of high screen-n-roll, exposing Tomic’s mobility)

<http://espn.go.com/watchespn/index#type/replay/search/croatia italy/days/days-14/> (espn3.com)

13:20 – On defensive possession, Tomic twice involved in pick-n-roll vs active Marco Cusin (#12). Both times is slow to get back into play. Italy did turn ball over but NBA guards likely won’t. They will expose Ante’s slow recovery.

13:46 – Tomic, forced to catch ball slightly outside of comfort zone, is rendered useless in post against Cusin.

16:05 – Tomic stands idle as Marco Belinelli (#10) drives straight to basket for lay-up (off high screen).

20:37 – two consecutive possessions Tomic gets ball on lower left block vs very ‘green’ center Nicolo Melli (#9): 1st poss he doesn’t even look at rim; 2nd poss he makes horrible pass against double-team (turnover).

37:45 – Tomic makes nice turnaround hook over left shoulder against Melli on right block. In early offense, he flashes to low post and makes quick move. The longer Ante holds ball, the worse he is in the post. However, established NBA bigs won’t allow him such good position inside for quick move as Melli did.

42:40 – On defense, Croatia gives up dunk to Melli after Tomic steps out too high on pick-n-roll. Coach Repesa’s gameplan of concealing Ante’s mobility backfires as guard Dontaye Draper miscommunicates w/ Ante up high.

43:00 – Tomic struggles to get ball against the fronting Melli, then shoves him to ground with off-arm elbow (frustration foul). After play, Ante blames teammate Markota for poor spacing (negative attitude). Spacing wasn’t the problem, Ante just struggles to get the ball against pressure because of his slow feet.

Analysis

Opponent: Spain in the 3rd place game at Eurobasket (loss) – vs NBA-level talent in Rubio, Gasol, Calderon, Claver. Spain ran high screen-n-roll against Tomic 6 times in the 1st quarter, scoring 3 times (roughly every other possession). Twice they got (and made) open threes on the wing as Ante’s slow recovery forced his teammates to get sucked into the lane. The third score was a Marc Gasol turnaround in the lane against a smaller rotating guard. One possession they didn’t score on, Gasol actually missed an easy lay-up. Of the two possessions they didn’t score on, SF Victor Claver got an open jumper (but missed) and Ricky Rubio was stripped by Tomic up high (good hands). To sum up, when Ante steps out it’s ‘do or die’ for the defense. If he doesn’t strip the ball or force a bad pass with his length, it’s an eventual open jumper or lay-up for the offense because he has little chance of making it back into the play. Spain also chose on a few occasions to run consecutive P&R with Tomic, where Rubio/Calderon came off one way and then dribbled back the other off same Gasol pick. This took its toll on Ante. By the end of the quarter, Coach Repesa went to a 2-3 zone. Tomic sat the entire 2nd quarter after that.

RECOMMENDATION: My recommendation to the Utah Jazz is to trade Tomic’s draft rights now while teams still covet his potential. Ante can play in the NBA, but I don’t see him developing a niche that out-weighs his liabilities. He could be effective at times in the league but, overall, I think his career will be short and frustrating. He could be an effective player at the high post, especially feeding the PF down low. But that is not enough to warrant consistent playing time when considering his weaknesses on defense and inconsistent rebounding. Tomic would be good role player in the NBA, but doesn’t do nearly enough of the dirty work or have a nose for the ball (on the glass, on defense) to be a consistent support player. A seven-footer with hands is always been an attractive trade commodity. I say, get something for his rights or possibly use him as a sweetener in a future deal.