



Turkish Airlines EuroLeague Rising Star Trophy winner: Usman Garuba, Real Madrid

After providing strong production and great energy for Real Madrid all season long, Usman Garuba put his game in overdrive in the Turkish Airlines EuroLeague Playoffs. Those performances secured Garuba's case as the deserving winner of the EuroLeague Rising Star Trophy for the 2020-21 season. Voted on by the league's head coaches, the Rising Star Trophy recognizes the best player in each EuroLeague season who was under the age of 22 on July 1 of the previous summer. Garuba, who turned 19 in early March, averaged 3.9 points, 4.0 rebounds, 0.6 steals and 0.7 blocks in 16:17 minutes per game. He led all Rising Star candidates in accumulated PIR (238) and rebounds (157). Garuba also ranked eighth among all EuroLeague players in total blocks (27). He was one of only two players to appear in every game for Real this season. He started 20 games, more than any other Rising Star-eligible player and fourth-most for Los Blancos.

Rokas Jokubaitis of Zalgiris Kaunas followed in second place in the voting by EuroLeague head coaches. Also receiving votes were Leandro Bolmaro of FC Barcelona, Carlos Alocen of Real Madrid, Jonas Mattisseck of ALBA Berlin, Matthew Strazel of LDLC ASVEL Villeurbanne and Sergi Martinez of Barcelona. The Rising Star Trophy is one of several end-of-season honors awarded by EuroLeague Basketball. Alexey Shved of Khimki Moscow Region was formally announced as the Alphonso Ford Top Scorer Trophy winner earlier this week. Garuba's teammate, Walter Tavares, was voted the EuroLeague Best Defender. The All-EuroLeague First and Second Team members will be revealed next week. The winner of the 2020-21 Turkish Airlines EuroLeague MVP will be announced at the Final Four in Cologne, Germany. The Alexander Gomelskiy Coach of the Year Trophy and the EuroLeague Club Executive of the Year are post-season awards.

After playing a limited role for Real during the 2019-20 EuroLeague season, his first season with the club's senior team, Garuba earned a place in head coach Pablo Laso's rotation from the start of this season. He played at least 11 minutes in all of Real's first eight games, including an 11-rebound effort in Round 4 at AX Armani Exchange Milan. He followed that with back-to-back games with 8 points against FC Barcelona and FC Bayern

Munich. Garuba came off the bench in 12 of the team's first 15 games, but after Anthony Randolph was injured in Round 15, Garuba started the next week and went for 15 points on 3-for-3 three-point shooting with 6 rebounds, 3 assists and 2 blocks for a PIR of 25 against ALBA Berlin. All of Garuba's growth from the regular season came together in the playoffs. The big man averaged 10.4 points on 66.7% two-point shooting in a five-game playoff series loss to Anadolu Efes Istanbul. Garuba's 7.2 rebounds per game topped all playoff performers. He dominated in Real's come-from-behind Game 4 win with 24 points, 12 rebounds and a PIR of 30, which all set or tied his career highs. For the season, Garuba led all Rising Star candidates in rebounding, steals, blocks, two-point shooting (62.8%) and true shooting percentage (48.4%), ranking second in PIR (6.1) and minutes, as well as third in scoring.

Born in Spain to parents from Nigeria, Garuba started playing basketball in the Real youth system at age 9. He has long been one of the top players in his age group in Europe. Garuba helped Spain capture gold medals at the U16 European championship in 2016 and the U18 championship in 2019. He also won the Euroleague Basketball Adidas Next Generation Tournament in 2019 after losing in the finals in Belgrade the year before. Garuba was named to the All-Tournament Team at the 2019 ANGT Finals. He also made his debut with Real's senior side that season and was a full-fledged member by the 2019-20 season.

Garuba is the third player from Real to win the EuroLeague Rising Star Trophy after Nikola Mirotic and Luka Doncic, who won it twice each. Mirotic took the trophy home in both 2011 and 2012 and Doncic did so in 2017 and 2018. The inaugural EuroLeague Rising Star award went to Erazem Lorbek of Climamio Bologna in 2005. Andrea Bargnani won it the next season with Benetton Treviso. They were followed by Rudy Fernandez of DKV Joventut Badalona in 2007; Danilo Gallinari of Armani Jeans Milano in 2008; Novica Velickovic of Partizan Belgrade in 2009; Ricky Rubio of FC Barcelona in 2010; Kostas Papanikolaou of Olympiacos Piraeus in 2013; Bogdan Bogdanovic of Partizan Belgrade in 2014 and again with Fenerbahce Istanbul in 2015; Alex Abrines of FC Barcelona Lassa in 2016; and Goga Bitadze of Buducnost VOLI Podgorica in 2019.





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