



EUROLEAGUE  
BASKETBALL

## Interview: Robert Archibald, Unicaja

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Frank Lawlor, Euroleague.net



The pride of Scottish basketball swaggers on-court looking as though he'd just as soon eat the basketball as play with it. And true enough, when the bodies start flying, most teams would choose to have big Robert Archibald on their side of the battle. That was certainly the case when Euroleague powerhouse Unicaja went looking for inside help this summer, bringing back Archibald from an MVP season in the Ukraine to reunite him with head coach Aito Reneses Garcia after their two previous seasons together at DKV Joventut. Knowing well how Aito brought out the best in him, Archibald is anxious to see his new teammates learn from the master and lift Unicaja into the realm of Final Four contenders this season. "The guys are trying to learn new concepts that for many of them are different from what they have done in the past,"

Archibald told Euroleague.net. "The good thing is that everyone is trying hard to put those concepts into practice - maybe too hard sometimes, in the sense that they are almost thinking too much on court. When we can play a little more relaxed, but continue to learn and improve, we'll be better. It takes time."

### **After a one-year break, how does it feel to be back in the Euroleague?**

"It feels great, really. It especially feels great to be back in the competition with such a good team as Unicaja. So I am very, very excited now, at the beginning of the season, about what's coming. Hopefully, we'll have a lot of success before it's over."

### **You are also back in Spain and back with a coach you know well, Aito Reneses Garcia. How much of an influence is he on you and perhaps your decision to sign with Unicaja?**

"I think the decision to come to Malaga was easy, just because of the quality of the team, of the city, and of the fans. Everything, really. To choose to be part of a team with this quality, that was easy. Then when you add Aito to that, a coach who I am very comfortable with and who kind of thinks in a similar way as I do about how to play and compete, it made this a very good situation for me all around."

### **What's it like to play under Aito?**

"He's a very good teacher, first of all, and offers a lot of attention to detail. And then he only asks his players to work as hard as they can in the minutes they play. It's just about playing an aggressive and fast brand of basketball. And that philosophy gives everyone a better chance to do well."

### **You've seen it work before at Joventut. How much is this Unicaja team absorbing Aito's philosophy so far?**

"It has been slow in the beginning. The guys are trying to learn new concepts that for many of them are different from what they have done in the past. The good thing is that everyone is trying hard to put those concepts into practice - maybe too hard sometimes, in the sense that they are almost thinking too much on court. When we can play a little more relaxed, but continue to learn and improve, we'll be better. It takes time, but as I said, the good thing is that everyone is really trying to learn and improve."

**After a tight home win, you have maybe Group A's toughest road game, at Olympiacos this week. How does this game look to you?**



"Of course, it's going to be a very tough game. We know that Olympiacos is obviously one of the favorites in the Euroleague this season. They just have a lot of talent on their roster. We're going go and try to do our best. I don't know if we'll win or not, but at this point, we're trying just to improve game to game, because I think we can improve a lot."

**Does the shorter regular season mean more pressure or greater opportunity for a game like this one against Olympiacos?**

"There's a little bit of added pressure with the shorter regular season, yeah, but we're going try to take advantage of opportunities like this one. If we win this game, it's a great step forward because you can put yourself in the best position for the Top 16, both to make it and once it starts. And it's always important to start the season strong."

**With Azovmash Mariupol last season, you became a Ukrainian League champ and MVP. How did last season fit in your career development?**

"I was in a different kind of position within the team in terms of having offense run through me. So I can take bits of that experience and bring it back here to Malaga. If I find myself in the position to be aggressive with the ball, I will be able to take advantage of it more now. But otherwise I just want to do the things I have always done, play defense, run the floor and be a team player first."

**You remain Scotland's top basketball ambassador but does that get you any recognition when you go home? Is basketball awareness growing at all with the Olympics coming to Great Britain?**



"It's improving, for sure, certainly with the GB program getting better and the build-up to the Olympics. The national program is a lot more professional now than what we had in the past, both with the quality of the players involved and how we're trying to build up to 2012. So we continued to try to raise awareness, and while people who follow basketball there realize who I am, the average person still doesn't."

**Finally, back to Unicaja, from your experience in the Euroleague already, what aspirations should your team have as the new season progresses?**

"Obviously it depends on how much we improve between now and March or April, when the Final Four is decided. If we're in any competition, we'll do everything we can to win it, but we also understand, looking at the top Euroleague teams, that we certainly have a ways to go and improve before we can compete with them. With continued steps forward, we will be able to do so. But now we're taking it one week at time, concentrating on every game."