

## **Nicolae Martin, the most successful coach in the history of Cluj women's basketball**

### **Nicolae Martin, cel mai performant antrenor din istoria baschetului feminin clujean**

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#### **Abstract**

This work is part of a series of papers that aim to bring to the attention of sports fans a number of Cluj sports personalities, sportsmen, coaches, managers – with remarkable results at national and international level. The authors illustrate the role that coach Nicolae Martin played in developing women's basketball in Romania, particularly at the "Universitatea" Cluj-Napoca club.

After the introductory part, concerned with the motivation and importance of their approach, the authors present Nicolae Martin's beginnings as a coach, the efforts and results that foreshadowed his later great achievements. Next, they illustrate the period during which, under his leadership, the "Universitatea" Cluj-Napoca women's basketball team achieved the greatest results in its history, ten national champion titles, eight starts at different stages of the European Champions Cup and one start at the Liliana Ronchetti Cup. They also show his results as a coach of various national teams of Romania that he trained and led to the Balkan Championships, European Championships and World University Games.

**Key words:** sports history, personalities, basketball, Cluj-Napoca

#### **Rezumat**

Lucrarea se înscrie în ciclul de articole care urmăresc să readucă în atenția iubitorilor sportului o seamă de personalități ale sportului clujean - sportivi, antrenori, manageri - cu rezultate deosebite pe plan național și internațional. Autorii prezintă rolul avut de antrenorul Nicolae Martin la dezvoltarea baschetului feminin din România, în mod deosebit al celui din cadrul Clubului Sportiv Universitatea Cluj-Napoca.

După partea introductivă, care se referă la motivația demersului și importanța acestuia, autorii prezintă primii ani de activitate ca antrenor a lui Nicolae Martin, eforturile și rezultatele care au prefigurat viitoarele sale mari realizări. În continuare este prezentată perioada în care, sub conducerea sa, echipa feminină de baschet Universitatea Cluj-Napoca a obținut cele mai valoroase performanțe din istoria sa, zece titluri de campioană națională, opt participări în diferite etape ale Cupei Campionilor Europeni și o participare în Cupa Liliana Ronchetti. De asemenea, sunt prezentate rezultatele sale ca antrenor ale echipelor naționale ale României pe care le-a pregătit și condus la Campionatele Balcanice, Campionatele Europene și Jocurile Mondiale Universitare.

**Cuvinte cheie:** istoria sportului, personalități, baschet, Cluj-Napoca.

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#### **Introduction**

In a history of almost seventy years, the achievements of women's basketball made this section the most successful one among all team sports at the "Universitatea" Cluj-Napoca Sports Club. These achievements were possible because Cluj women's basketball enjoyed a succession of generations of remarkable players, who had a major contribution to the team's successes. Also, at that epoch the history of women's basketball at the University's club

was marked by a series of coaches such as Alexandru Șerban, Vasile Geleriu, Nicolae Martin and Horia Pop, who remained in the memory of sports lovers in our city for the manner they carried out their profession, for the way they guided the destinies of many generations of basketball players in and outside the arena and for the results accomplished. Among these coaches with a vocation and with outstanding achievements, a special place belongs to Nicolae Martin, the expert under whose leadership the team won ten champion titles and finished once in the

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second place in the national championship.

We believe that on the eve of celebrating his 80th birthday, at the thirty-fifth anniversary of the conquest of the first national champion title in the series of ten achieved by the “Universitatea” Cluj-Napoca team with Nicholas Martin as a coach, it is a fit occasion to recall the successes accomplished and pay homage to the man who remained in the memory and hearts of the people of Cluj as a great coach, faithful in his love for Cluj university women’s basketball, which he served with passion and dedication for two decades.



Fig. 1 – Coach Nicolae Martin (Merca-Bagiu M, 1982).

### Apprenticeship as a coach

After a spell as a player in Sibiu and Cluj, in 1960, at the age of twenty-three, he started his career as a coach at “Clubul Sportiv Școlar Cluj” (\*\*\*, 2002). The manifest vocation for the profession, the abilities displayed in those two years of work recommended him to take over, in the summer of 1962, the first team of the “Asociația Sportivă Armata” Cluj (Martin, 1972).

The professionalism that Nicolae Martin showed in preparing the team, effectively capitalizing on the potential of his players, the skills that he displayed in leading the team in competitions, helped “Asociația Sportivă Armata” to a first place at the basketball Championship of the Cluj Region and, following the results managed at the four qualifying championships, to a division A promotion (\*\*\*, 1963). In the following years, “Asociația Sportivă Armata” coped honorably with the demands of competition in the second series of women’s A Division, finishing in the 8th place in the 1964/1965 edition (\*\*\*, 1965) and in the 3rd place in the 1965/1966 edition (\*\*\*, 1966). After the reorganization of the competitive system, the team was one of the best in the B Division championship (\*\*\*, 1967).

In 1968 there came another notable achievement in his early career, the promotion of his team in the A division (\*\*\*, 1968). The offered conditions, the provided training led to some good results in the first division, ranking 4th in 1970 (\*\*\*, 1970), 6th in 1971 (\*\*\*, 1971) and 8th in 1972 (\*\*\*, 1972a). All this helped the “Asociația Sportivă Armata” establish itself as the main women’s basketball section in Cluj-Napoca at the beginning of the ‘70s.

### The making of a competitive team

The failed experience of having two women’s teams from Cluj in the A Division, the decline of the university

team at the beginning of the ‘70s determined the ruling bodies of the sports movement in the city and the members of the basketball sections of the “Universitatea” Sports Club and “Asociația Sportivă Armata” to act to rectify the situation. In the autumn of 1972, after long debates and complex analyses, a decision was reached to merge the sections of the two sporting structures, the first division team continuing its activity under the name of “Universitatea”. In the wake of this decision, Nicolae Martin was appointed as the coach of the team resulted after the merge, while Vasile Geleriu, the former coach, took the leadership of the men’s university team (\*\*\*, 1972b). The choice of the club rulers reflected the fact that they acknowledged the merits of Nicolae Martin, his proven professional value and organizational abilities, and rated highly his work and results.

Even though it appeared that the team came out strengthened by the merger, the results of the first half of the 1972/1973 Republican Basketball Championship, the A Division, showed that some of the players in the squad were not up to the standards of the highest level of women’s basketball. Following this conclusion, in the interval between the two halves of the season a reshuffle of the squad was started. In this process, Nicolae Martin knew how to blend the value and experience of players such as Olimpia Păcurar-Neța, Floarea Trandafir-Anca, Agneta Farkas, Enikő Farkas or Ildiko Sipos with the youthful impetus, desire for progress and talent of junior players promoted from the “Clubul Sportiv Școlar” such as Mariana Victoria Merca, Liana Jichișan, Viorica Moraru and Irina Székely.

In the following years, the working climate established by the coach, the exigency that he manifested in training, the players’ desire to improve and distinguish themselves, to achieve better and better results, determined an increase in the training quality, an improvement of the team’s performance and some meritorious rankings in the first division of women’s basketball (Paloșanu, 1995). But even if it was obvious that the team was on a good track, the lack of experience of some players in properly dealing with highly tense limit situations occurring in high-stake games, the inconsistency of their performance from game to game proved that there was still much work to be done in order to properly exploit the potential of each player, to fully distinguish as a team.

### The years of great achievements in national competitions

Year after year Nicolae Martin, a competent, ambitious, consistent professional, homogenized the squad and optimized training to form a team able to win the championship title. At the start of the 1980/1981 championship, although judging by the previous results and transfers the team was not among the favorites, Nicolae Martin knew how to adjust training, to maximize the performance of the essential players, to motivate all the members of the squad to surpass themselves through work, ambition and dedication. Therefore, on March 8, 1981, in Brașov, “Universitatea” Cluj-Napoca, with a squad that included Floarea Trandafir-Anca, Doina Prăzaru-Máthé, Mariana Victoria Merca, Mândica Ciubăncan, Viorica Moraru-Jurcă, Virginia Popa, Adriana Mangu, Hanelore

Schuster-Adăscăliței, Elisabeta Czeglédi, Sibille Lukasz, Adriana Tarnița, Ioana Macavei, Dana Perțache and Claudia Perțache, finished the Women's Basketball Republican Championship, the A Division, in the first place, winning after twenty-seven years a new title of national champions (\*\*\*, 1981a).

In the autumn of 1981, the team was strengthened by the transfer of Magdalena Páll and in the next four years it finished three times in the first place, 1982 (Stănculescu, 1982), 1984 (Stănculescu, 1984a), 1985 (Stănculescu, 1985a) and once in the second place, 1983 (Iovan, 1983a).



**Fig. 2** – The “Universitatea” Cluj-Napoca team, champion for the second time. Nicolae Martin, Haidemarie Schuster, Floarea Trandafir-Anca, Mariana Merca-Bagiu, Annemarie Kirr, Virginia Popa, Elisabeta Czeglédi, Adriana Mangu, Viorica Morar-Jurcă, Sibille Lakas, Doina Prăzaru-Máthé, Magdalena Páll and Gheorghita Bolovan (Merca-Bagiu M, 1982).

Starting with the summer of 1985, the training of the “Universitatea Clubul Sportiv Școlar Viitorul Cluj-Napoca” team was carried out by the couple Nicolae Martin, head coach, and Horia Pop, assistant coach. Although some skeptics feared that the two experts were incompatible, because of different visions regarding some aspects of training and leadership styles, in the period 1985-1991, inspired by achieving their common goals, they successfully overcame the differences and obstacles that stood in their way, complemented each other, forming a tandem known for its value and durability and contributed to winning the national championships six times (Stănculescu & Iovan, 1986; Stănculescu, 1987; Stănculescu, 1988; Iovan, 1989; Stănculescu, 1990; Stănculescu, 1991).

In the autumn of 1991, some health issues forced him to quit the coach job. As chairman of the “Universitatea” Cluj-Napoca Sports Club, he continued to work with Horia Pop and had a well-known contribution to winning the national championships in 1992 and 1993 (Radu, 1994).

### **In official international club competitions**

Starting with the autumn of 1981, the “Universitatea” Cluj-Napoca women's basketball team, under the leadership of Nicolae Martin, entered the circuit of official international club competitions (\*\*\*, 1981b). In the following years, the team from Cluj played forty-eight matches at various stages of the eight editions of the European Champions Cup in which it participated. In these matches, “Universitatea” played against twenty-one teams and achieved thirty-one victories. Also, in the 1982/1983 edition of the Liliana Ronchetti Cup, the Cluj team played four matches, winning two. “Universitatea” won against

renowned teams that had impressive records, such as Minior Pernik (\*\*\*, 1981c), Ceramica Pegnosin Trevisio (Radu, 1982), Unimato Cesena (Iovan, 1983b), Stade Francaise Paris, (Stănculescu, 1984b) Partizan Belgrade (Vasilii, 1986a), Levski Spartak Sofia (Iovan, 1986), Primigi Vicenza (Stănculescu, 1986), Red Star Belgrade (\*\*\*, 1986).



**Fig. 3** – The “Universitatea” Cluj-Napoca team in the European Champions Cup (1986), the match against Lodski KS Lodz from Poland. Magdalena Páll, Ildiko Manasses, Paula Misăilă, Gabriela Mărginean, Tünde Enyedi, Virginia Popa, Carmen Costanașiu, Susana Sándor, Aurora Dragoș (Manasses, 1986).

Also, among the teams defeated by the team led by Nicolae Martin, one can mention the champions of Greece, Sporting of Athens; Great Britain, Southgate Technical College of London; Turkey, Besiktas Istanbul, Maden Technic Ankara, Galatasaray Istanbul; Israel, Elitzur Tel Aviv; Hungary, Tungsram Budapest; Poland, Lodski KS Lodz; Yugoslavia, Aida Jedenstvo Tuzla; Albania, Partizan Tirana; Slovakia, Slavia Banska Bistrica (Bodea et al., 2009).

The highest achievement of the Cluj players in the European competitions was qualifying for the quarter finals of the European Champions Cup in the 1985/1986 and 1986/1987 editions (Stănculescu, 1985b; Vasilii, 1986b).

### **Coach of the national teams**

Nicolae Martin was, on several occasions, coach of the youth or senior national teams. He prepared and led the senior women's national team of Romania at several editions of the Balkan Championships and European Championships. In 1983, together with George Chiraleu, he was the coach of the team that took part in the World University Games, held in Canada, and won the silver medals, achieving the best result of a Romanian team in an official, international competition (\*\*\*, 1984).

In 1991, as a sign of recognition of his professional value and appreciation of his merits in developing basketball in our country, he was awarded the highest national distinction granted to sports experts, that of “antrenor emerit” [Coach Emeritus].

### **Instead of closing remarks**

The coaching profession granted him the chance to come into contact with several generations of players, with

supporters of the teams that he trained, with professional colleagues, parents, sports managers and people in leadership positions at different levels. A man of common sense, accompanied by a solid education received in the family and perfected throughout his life, he gave everyone all due respect and honor, while trying always to live up to expectations.

He was a competent and demanding coach, a good organizer, but was also appreciated for his way of interacting with his collaborators and for the manner of rewarding the players for their work and results. He was admired and appreciated for the manner in which he knew how to blend work with recreation, when other traits of his personality became apparent: kindness, empathy, love of life. He was one of those coaches for whom the exercise of their profession meant an identification with the job and for whom the emotional background of their activity had special importance.

Through the way he lived his life and practiced his profession as a coach, Nicolae Martin blended his destiny with that of Cluj university women's basketball. For more than three decades, the period he served basketball as a coach, he offered us a living example of the meaning of vocation and professional value, and his achievements turned him into a symbol and granted him a special place among the great coaches of Cluj.

## Conclusions

1. The quality of the training process, the results achieved with the teams he coached in the first years of his activity foretold his later great professional accomplishments.

2. In the years that he served as the head coach of the "Universitatea" Cluj-Napoca women's basketball team, the team achieved the greatest results in its history, ten national champion titles and other high rankings in internal competitions.

3. Under his leadership, the Cluj team participated in eight editions of the European Champions Cup and in one edition of the Liliana Ronchetti Cup. In the fifty-two matches played, it achieved thirty-three victories, defeating renowned teams, with impressive records: Minior Pernik, Ceramica Treviso, Unimato Cesena, Stade Francaise Paris, Partizan Belgrade, Levski Spartak Sofia, Primigi Vicenza and Red Star Belgrade.

4. As a coach of the youth and senior national teams, he led them at the Balkan and European Championships. He was a member of the technical staff that provided the training of the student team that won the silver medals at the 1983 World University Games.

5. In 1991, as a sign of recognition of his professional value and appreciation of his merits in developing women's basketball in Romania, the Ministry of Youth and Sports granted him the title of Coach Emeritus following the recommendation of the Romanian Basketball Federation.

6. By his fruitful activity, he gave us a living example of the meaning of vocation and professional value, and due to his achievements Nicolae Martin became a symbol, which granted him a special place among the great coaches of Cluj.

## Conflict of interests

Nothing to report.

## Clarifications

This work is part of a series of articles related to the activity of Cluj sportsmen and coaches with great achievements.

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