



March 2025

Interview for the SheCOACH project

## “Coaching is about knowledge, preparation, and leadership -not gender”: Serbian Coach Marina Maljković on opportunities, bias and the growth of women's basketball

### Marina Maljković

*Marina Maljković is a renowned Serbian basketball coach with an impressive career in both club and international basketball. Born in 1981, she is the daughter of legendary coach Božidar Maljković and has established herself as one of Europe's top coaches.*

*As head coach of the Serbian women's national team, she led them to historic achievements, including two EuroBasket gold medals (2015, 2021) and an Olympic bronze (2016). Her coaching style is known for its strong defensive strategies, discipline, and player development.*



*At the club level, Maljković has coached top European teams such as ŽKK Partizan, Lyon ASVEL Féminin (winning the French championship), Galatasaray, and Fenerbahçe, where she led the team to its first-ever EuroLeague Women title in 2023. She also coached Shanghai Swordfish in China and Denso Iris in Japan, showcasing her adaptability across different basketball cultures.*

*Beyond coaching, she is committed to the growth of women's basketball, founding the Marina Maljković Basketball Academy and the Women's Sports Institute of Serbia to support young female athletes. Her dedication to the sport has earned her numerous accolades, including the Order of Karađorđe's Star and multiple Coach of the Year awards.*

*Maljković continues to be a leading figure in international women's basketball, inspiring the next generation of athletes and coaches worldwide.*



Co-funded by  
the European Union

Co-Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them. Project: 101133095 — SheCOACH — ERASMUS-SPORT-2023. Website: <https://shecoach.eu>.

## **What challenges do women coaches face compared to their male counterparts?**

Women coaches face unique challenges compared to their male counterparts, starting with the lack of opportunities at the highest levels. Even in women's basketball, the majority of head coaching positions are still given to men. There is also the constant need to prove oneself. Qualities that are celebrated in male coaches -such as being demanding, tough, and ambitious- are often viewed differently when displayed by women. Additionally, balancing the intense demands of coaching with societal expectations around family responsibilities remains a challenge that disproportionately affects women in this profession.

## **Have you ever faced discrimination or bias as a female coach? How did you handle it?**

Throughout my career, I have encountered bias and skepticism about whether a woman can lead at the highest level. Early on, I knew I had to work twice as hard to gain the same respect as my male colleagues. People questioned my ability, but I never allowed that to distract me. I focused on my work, knowing that success is the best response to doubt. Winning the FIBA Women's EuroBasket twice and an Olympic bronze with the Serbian national team, the EuroCup Women with Galatasaray, and the EuroLeague Women with Fenerbahçe has proven that coaching is about knowledge, preparation, and leadership -not gender. My results speak for themselves.

## **What steps can be taken to encourage more women to pursue coaching careers?**

To encourage more women to pursue coaching, we need to start with visibility. Young women need to see successful female coaches to believe they can follow the same path. Federations and clubs must actively recruit and support women, providing mentorship and professional development opportunities. Transitioning from playing to coaching should be a clear and supported path, with education and certification programs designed to help women succeed. Most importantly, we need to change the perception that coaching is a male profession -it should simply be a profession for the best, most qualified individuals, regardless of gender.

## **What inspired you to become a basketball coach, and did gender play a role in your journey?**

Basketball has been part of my life from the beginning. Growing up in a basketball family, with my father a coach, I was surrounded by the game at the highest level. His influence was strong, but I was determined to create my own path. My father's mentors were basketball greats Professor Nikolic and Ranko Zeravica, and I was in a way a privileged child being able to listen to their table talks that were always on basketball- of course.

Gender played a role in my journey in the sense that I was always aware of the obstacles women face in this profession. But instead of discouraging me, it motivated me. I wanted to prove that a woman could win at the highest level, and today, with titles across different leagues and with the Serbian national team, I know I have done exactly that.



**Co-funded by  
the European Union**

Co-Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them. Project: 101133095 — SheCOACH — ERASMUS-SPORT-2023. Website: <https://shecoach.eu>.