

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL SECTION FROM UNIVERSITATEA CLUJ SPORTS CLUB 1955 – 1972

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ABSTRACT. The present paper is part of a larger endeavour by means of which the authors, based on a varied research, are trying to present seventeen years of the women's basketball team's history, given the approaching 100th anniversary of Universitatea Cluj Sports Club. The first part focuses on the accomplishments, as well as on the weak results that followed after the team won the national championships in 1953 and 1954. The body of the paper is dedicated to the period 1960 – 1972, strongly marked by Vasile Geleriu, one of the iconic specialists of the team, who decisively influenced the fate of Cluj-Napoca university basketball.

Keywords: *women's basketball, Universitatea Cluj-Napoca, 1955 – 1972*

REZUMAT. *File din istoria secției de baschet feminin din cadrul Clubului Sportiv Universitatea Cluj-Napoca 1955-1972.* Lucrarea este parte a unor eforturi prin care autorii, în preajma a o sută de ani de la constituirea Societății Sportive a Studenților Universității din Cluj, pe baza unei vaste documentări, prezintă trecutul echipei de baschet feminin. În prima parte, lucrarea se referă la împlinirile și contraperformanțele din anii care au urmat cuceririi titlurilor de campioane din anii 1953 și 1954. Partea cea mai consistentă prezintă perioada 1960 – 1972, care a fost marcată de activitatea unuia dintre specialiștii emblematici, Vasile Geleriu, care a influențat hotărâtor destinele baschetului feminin universitar din Cluj-Napoca.

Cuvinte cheie: *baschet feminin, Universitatea, Cluj-Napoca, 1955 - 1972*

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Introduction

The almost secular history of Universitatea Cluj Sports Club has been marked by the existence of many sport branches. Looking at their evolution, we find sections that have lasted and improved their performances over time, and others that have ceased their activity, leaving only their memory behind. Women's basketball section is among the long lasting branches, an award-winning section that is now at the forefront of the Sports Club.

Our undertaking is to continue the series of articles dedicated to the history of the women's basketball team, its achievements, the memorable results of some of the coaches, and the increasingly better performance of some of the most representative players. Due to their great results, we are the heirs and beneficiaries of a precious treasury of great significance for the city's sports history, and we find it our duty to share it with the generations who have not witnessed the events.

The 1955 – 1960 period

After the great 1953 – 1954 accomplishments, the fans' as well as the team's management staffs' expectations regarding the 6th edition of the women's basketball championship were high. (Albulescu, 1981) For its supporters, Știința Cluj was the favorite to win the 1955 championship. Things turned out differently. The first factor that weakened Știința Cluj was that the players from Bucharest teams such as Știința Institutul de Cultură Fizică, Constructorul and Locomotiva CFR had significantly improved the quality of their game. The second factor was caused by the modifications regarding the team members.

This fact was visible from the very beginning of the championship. At the end of the tournament, the students from Cluj finished on the 5th position, with 5 victories and 4 defeats. (Sportul Popular 30 aprilie 1955). The return matches didn't end too successfully either, despite the efforts of the seven players that have borne the brunt of the game – Suzana Șerban, Elisabeta Cristea, Elza Sebestyén, Éva Papp, Ana Bereczky, Ida Borla and Ileana Winczler. Știința Cluj finished the edition of 1955 on the fourth position, having the same number of points as the teams from the 5th, 6th, and 7th position: Progresul Oradea, Progresul Târgu Mureș and Știința Ministerul Învățământului București (Sportul Popular, 6th December 1955)

Many people have considered that the down-fall was due to the players' loosening, but it was proved from the very first matches that the team had bigger problems. At the end of the first part of the 1956 edition, Știința Cluj was facing retrogradation, occupying the last position in the classification. The classification was as follows: 10. Știința Cluj 9 1 8 337-468 10 (Sportul 17 aprilie 1956).

The progress made in the return matches, where the team defeated Știința Învățământ București, Flamura Roșie Oradea, Locomotiva CFR București and Progresul Oradea, coupled with the withdrawal of Progresul Târgu Mureș from the competition made it possible to save Știința Cluj from retrogradation, in the final lap, to the detriment of Energia Cluj (Fáklya, 4th December 1956).

The structure of the competition changed for the 1957 edition. The ten participant teams were divided into two series. Știința Cluj was assigned to the second series, together with Progresul Finanțe Bănci București, Progresul Ministerul Învățământului Bucharest, Energia Bucharest and Flamura Roșie Oradea. (Fáklya 4 February 1957). Some of the factors that contributed to the weak results of the team were the poor game quality of some players, problems with the number of team players and also organizational issues. Știința Cluj finished the season on the third position in the group, and continued the tournament for the positions V – VIII, which was held on the 17th – 19th of May 1957 in Bucharest, Floreasca Sports Room. The teams that competed in this group were: Știința Cluj, Flamura Roșie Târgu Mureș, Flamura Roșie Oradea and Știința Institutul de Cultură Fizică Bucharest. The team from Cluj lost all the games and finished on the 8th place. (Fáklya, május 21 1957)

The team went through a decline in the following period, caused by the fact that the new players were professionally not as valuable as they ones that they were replacing, and also not as motivated. The management staff of the team insufficiently supported Știința Cluj and these two factors lead to weaker and weaker results. Besides the difficulties in training, not enough support from the management of the team, the transfer of the coach Alexandru Șerban to the men's basketball team was the final drop that sealed the decline of the team. (Bodea și colab., 2009)

During the 1957/1958 edition of the championship, organized for the first time according to the autumn (1957) – spring (1958) formula, the problems of the team got even bigger. The evolution of the players was far from what everybody expected.

Știința Cluj won two victories, against Știința Institutul de Cultură Fizică Bucharest, 39 – 35 in the away match and 39 – 26 in the home match. At the end of the season, the teams on the last two positions, Știința ICF Bucharest, place IX, and Știința Cluj, place X, retrograded from the Qualification Championship. (Anuarul sportiv, 1958)

After gaining first place in the regional competition, under the guidance of Iuliu Mike, the warm-hearted coach, Știința Cluj won the zone phase of the Qualification championship, held between 7 – 9th of August 1959, in Baia-Mare, and was advanced to the Republican Championship, category A. (Sportul Popular, 11th August 1959)

Even though most people were skeptical about the team's chances to compete at such a level, in the 1959/1960 edition, the team managed to fulfill the main objective of remaining in the first line of Romanian female basketball, having six victories, a tie and sixteen defeats. (Crișana 19 July 1960)

The epoch of Vasile Geleriu

The weak results of the previous years, the bad game quality of many players, and the absence of a qualified coach were critical enough reasons for the team's management staff to take immediate action and try to remedy the situation. In the summer of 1960, after the ending of the championship, Magdalena Gödri, Clara Bugár, Rodica Pop and Mihaela Enea were among the remaining players. New, young and promising players were transferred, among whom Virginia Jujescu, Ildikó Horváth and Margareta Szilágyi (Paloșanu și colab., 1995). One of the most important changes which happened in the summer of 1960 was the appointment of Vasile Geleriu as coach. Between 1955 and 1960 he had been training Steagul Roșu, and together with the players Gheorghe Roșu, Ion Bota, Horațiu Chiorean, Nicolae Bârsan, Gheorghe Doca, Cicerone Petrișor Dumitrescu and Ervin Frantz he achieved good results in the men's division B.

His credentials as a professional were more than honorable, winning the final of the Scholar Republican Championship with the High school's No. 2 students and the silver medal at the Junior Republican Championship with the players from the Sporting Pupils (Geleriu, 1955 – 1960).

His new teaching position at the Faculty of Sport Sciences and Physical Education and the coaching position gave him a brand new professional perspective. His objective was to form a competitive team and he started working with enthusiasm and professionalism. The choice of naming him as coach proved to be wise, results started appearing from the training period and continued in the first official games.

In the competition year 1960/1961, Știința Cluj got 13 victories and 9 defeats and finished on the 5th place (Sportul Popular 18 aprilie 1961), a result which made the players confident in themselves, and brought joy and hope to the supporters.

The players that kicked off the 1961/1962 season were Sanda Dumitrescu, Magdalena Gödri, Virginia Jujescu, Rodica Pop, Clara Bugár, Erika Brekner, Ildiko Horváth and Margareta Szilágyi. The team finished on the second place in the second series, after Știința Bucharest. As a result of this encouraging performance, the team from Cluj qualified for the I – VIII competition, which took place between 6 – 13th of May 1962, in Armata room from Cluj.

Summing up 5 victories, against Știința București, Institutul de Cultură Fizică București, Mureșul Târgu Mureș, Voința Brașov and Voința Târgu Mureș, and 2 defeats with Unirea București and Rapid București, Știința Cluj became national vice-champion. (Vasiliu, 1962)



Figure 1. The women's basketball team Știința Cluj in the 1962/1963 competitive year (Source: Vasile Geleriu's family album)

In the years that followed, the results were discrepant, oscillating between the 10th position in the 1962/1963 championship and the 3rd position in the 1966/1967 season. (Paloșanu și colab., 1995)

During this period, as an acknowledgement of the coaches' professional value and results, Vasile Geleriu was appointed assistant coach of the Romanian Senior National team and main coach of the Junior National team. (Buletin informativ, 1967)

Another proof of Vasile Geleriu's worth is that between 1960 and 1969 many of Știința Cluj's players were summoned to play for the national teams: Magdalena Gödri and Doina Rizescu, for juniors and Sanda Dumitrescu, Anca Demetrescu, Maura Popa, Ildiko Horváth, Magdalena Wagner, Olimpia Păcuraru and Magdalena Gödri-Tordai for seniors. (Bodea și colab., 2009)

Starting with 1968, the team was destabilized by the generational change of players and the crisis of not having enough team members. At the end of the 1969/1970 edition, Universitatea Cluj-Napoca finished the championship on the last position and was degraded to division B (Buletin informativ nr. 2, 1970). In the following years, the situation got worse, in 1970 /1971 the team finished on the 5th position, out of ten teams, (Sportul, 3rd June 1971) and on the 4th position, out of five teams in the 1971/1972 edition. (Buletin informativ nr. 2, 1972). Universitatea Cluj-Napoca women's basketball didn't have the support, nor the ability to recover and come back to the first league of Romanian female basketball.

In September 1972, the sports institutions interested in overcoming the women's basketball crisis decided to merge together the sections from Universitatea Sports Club and Sports Association Armata Cluj-Napoca. The team that resulted after the fusion kept the name of Universitatea and was coached by Nicolae Martin. Vasile Geleriu was transferred to the men's team. (Sportul, 20 September 1972)



Figure 2. Vasile Geleriu (Source: Vasile Geleriu's family album)

During his 12 years activity as a coach, Vasile Geleriu proved that besides the quality of the professional training and leading of the players, the value of a coach resides also in his human qualities, and in that respect he was one of the best.

Although he had his ups and downs in his coaching career, Vasile Geleriu remains an emblematic figure in the history of Universitatea Cluj-Napoca. Together with Nicolae Martin, Horia Pop and Alexandru Șerban, he remains one of the memorable specialists who really made an impact on the fate of Cluj female basketball.

Conclusions

The period that followed the glory years, when Știința Cluj was national champion, was characterized by regression, reaching a peak in 1958 when the team faced retrogradation after the Qualification Championship.

The recovery process was fast, and under the guidance of Iuliu Mike, Știința Cluj rejoined the teams in the first league.

After the changes that occurred in 1960, Cluj female basketball stepped into a new era with the help of Vasile Geleriu. The results achieved during his activity as coach were very important as well as the contributions to the senior and junior national teams.

In sign of appreciation for his training qualities, Vasile Geleriu was appointed coach of the Republican junior team between 1961 and 1963. Also, in 1964 he became assistant coach of the Romanian senior team.

1968 marked the beginning of a crisis for Univeritatea Sports Club Cluj-Napoca, a crisis which lead the team to retrogradation to the second league. The team didn't receive enough support and couldn't find the necessary resources to get back on track during the following two years.

Vasile Geleriu remains one of the couches with the greatest influence on the fate of women's basketball from Cluj-Napoca.

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