

Through Her Eyes: Stories of Women Who Shaped Basketball

Oral History Interview transcript: Maria Paula Goncalves da Silva (BRA)

Setting the Scene:

1. **(Circumstances)** Help us set the scene and describe how you first came to the sport of basketball: we always start by asking how and why did you first pick up a ball, and what made it special for you? Who did you play with in your early years? But in your case, it seems you were predestined to play basketball: the doctor at your birth was a huge basketball fan!

It's a coincidence, because when my mother went to give birth, at the health center, the doctor who was going to deliver me was a big basketball fan. He had a small basketball hoop in the backyard of his clinic, because it was a private health facility, and he liked to play. It was really a big coincidence. Later on, I became passionate about basketball. It's an interesting story because we don't have a crystal ball to predict the future, right? Our passions for basketball came together at that moment.

2. **(Environment).** How was the basketball structure you had at school? Was it a popular sport?

I was always a child who loved sports. In the afternoons after school, I would go to the club where my family was a member. We had the means to go, and in Brazil, many athletes start in clubs, because our school sports system isn't very strong. So, many of us begin in clubs. I would go to school in the morning, and in the afternoon, I was at the club, trying out various skills and activities – volleyball, swimming, everything available. I was there, trying to do something. When my parents worked away from home, on weekends, I would be at the club with my sisters. We are four women in the family, and I would be swimming or involved in some sports school at the club. I became passionate about sports during physical education classes in school.

3. You started practicing and playing at club level. How were those early steps and was there a big difference with boys? You were a self and fast learner... with a lot of pride and character.

That was the first step towards liking sports. There was a very strong men's basketball team in my town. I was born in a very small town in the interior of São Paulo, called Osvaldo Cruz. They started with a men's basketball team, and when I was at the club, I would sit and watch the boys train. When I got home, I'd grab a ball, any ball I could find, and I would start trying to do what I had seen the boys doing.

One day, they talked about forming a women's basketball team, and my sister, who is six years older than me, started training and playing. They wouldn't let me train; they said I was too little, just 11 or 12 years old.

But when I went to the club, I'd practice alone with the ball. Every day, my sister had practice – she and the other girls were 16 or 17, and I was 10 or 11 – I was there, by the court, wanting to practice. But the coach didn't want me to. He'd say I was too skinny, too small, that I wouldn't be able to handle it. And I would tell him, and my sister: "Let me in, let me in". One day, the coach finally said, "Come". And when I joined, he said, "You already know how to do this, you already know how to do that." And I said, "Yes." He asked, "where did you learn?" I said, "by watching." I learned by watching.

4. Who was your first idol as a young girl playing basketball, a popular sport amongst boys, in the promise land of soccer?

Basketball in the interior of São Paulo was very popular for men. Then, women's basketball started to become something new, and it was very different, because there were a lot of spectators for women's basketball as well. My first idol was Francisco Carlos Benite, the father of Benite, who plays today. I watched him and wanted to emulate.

5. (Environment) We're curious to learn what basketball was like at that time in Brazil, and particularly in São Paulo in the 1960s and 1970s? What were the facilities like for you as a young female athlete?

In the first game the team played, I was a starter, one of the five main players. That's when people started saying I had talent and that I could become a good player. But let's go back 50 years, right? Fifty years ago, basketball and sports were not professional or as strong as they are now. But when my parents realized I had potential and could become a player, they told me, "Do you like playing basketball?" I said, "Yes, a lot." They said, "Well, you're going to have to study. You can't neglect your studies because, when kids start playing, they forget about school, right? If you want to play, you'll have to study". That was very important – this pact we made – because I always balanced

basketball with school.

6. **Were you able to train and play regularly? Was there a structure for young players to develop? Were there camps/leagues/competitions? Where did you learn from? How much of your early career was playing with and against boys/young men?**

My parents thought I had the talent to grow as a basketball player and in order to become better, I couldn't do it at home anymore, since we didn't play national competitions. They thought I was talented, and I wouldn't be able to develop it there. But imagine, 50 years ago! Some parents sending a girl to another city to play!

The men's basketball coach from my town moved to play in Assis, about 100 kilometers away, and said: "There's a very talented girl here." They invited me to train there, and my parents took me when I was 12.

We played a match against boys, who were also 12-14 years old. In that game, I scored 34 points. So, the coach said, "We want this girl here". I went to live in that town, close to home, with the coach and his family – his wife, who was also a Physical Education teacher, and their two daughters, who also played basketball.

7. **That sure was a tough decision at a very young age: leave home, family, friends... This is the ultimate 'taking someone out of the comfort zone'...**

It was hard for me, because I didn't fully understand why I was away from home. Basketball, for me, was playing on the street with friends. I didn't see it as something professional. It didn't make sense to me to be away from home and my friends.

But I moved there, went to school, trained, and lived away from home, even though I longed to be with my family at night. Everything happened very early for me: I started basketball at 10, I left home at 12.

The club was doing an amazing job with youth categories but eventually, the team folded, and I began receiving invitations to play elsewhere. My parents wanted me to continue studying and playing, so I moved to another city, Jundiaí, which had a good training program, and I went to a religious school. I was playing in four categories at the same time. My two sisters came with me, and we went with my grandmother since my mother was about to retire from work. It was 300km

away from home.

Everything was happening too fast and at the age of 14, I was invited to join the Brazilian national team. With just 14 years!

- 8. You made the national team being only 14 years old. How did you manage the situation, the expectations, and how did the veteran players receive you? Was it a warm welcome or were there any jealousy?**

Well, at that moment, Brazilian Basketball Federation had decided to start a new cycle. All the older players, the veterans, left. So, for me, looking back now, it seems crazy, because it was like arriving at a company and saying: "Everyone leave, and we're going to bring in all the young kids to start fresh".

I was 14, Hortensia was 16. So, we all started very young, but I was so young and didn't fully understand what I was doing there. I just wanted to play, but many times after practice, I would tell my mother "I don't want to go anymore", because there were also players who were 19 or 20 years old, much older.

So, it was also a time of adaptation for me. Then, at 15, we started playing in the South American Championship in Peru. I was on the bench, and towards the end of the competition, the coach told me: "There are 15 minutes left, we're losing". And after that game, I became a starter, playing among the top five players. So, at 15 years old, I was already starting games. But I started in a position that wasn't mine.

I was a wing player, but I started as a point guard for the national team. So, in my club, I played as a wing, but as a point guard on the national team. I think it was a bit easier, because I didn't really feel the pressure of wearing the Brazil jersey due to my age. For me, it was all new, like playing outside with my friends.

I don't think it was that difficult. I was very impressed to be wearing the Brazil jersey, playing in the South American Championship, the Pan American Games. And my first Pan American was when I was 15, and we played in the School Valley in the United States.

So, everything in my life as a player happened very early.

Diving Deeper

- 9. Thinking back, who were the most significant influences on your basketball career?**
- a. You were part of the first 'Golden Generation' of Brazilian Women's Basketball alongside the likes of Roseli Gustavo, 'Queen' Hortencia Marcari, and Janeth Arcain; what did it mean to**

you to play alongside these teammates? What did you and your teammates have together?

I think it's important to go back a bit in history and mention that after that team's renewal, we spent almost 15 years playing. We struggled a lot because we didn't have anyone experienced to guide us, to say "no, don't go that way, come this way, that path isn't good"... So, we had to learn from our mistakes, from the difficulties we faced, like not having money for international exchanges, for playing abroad, for evolving, for growing on the international stage.

Internally, there was a strong rivalry between the teams. It was always my team and Hortensia's team in the finals, and there was a big rivalry and competition over who was better. I believe we were very different players, with distinct profiles, but we complemented each other.

But we only started winning games once Janeth, Alessandra, Cintia, and other players joined us. They helped sharing some of the responsibility that we had on the international stage. However, we were very disciplined; we loved training, and we knew that, at some point, we could make a difference internationally. But it was always with a lot of difficulty, because we would go into tournaments like the World Cup or international competitions without knowing who we were playing against or how the other teams were performing.

It's different for European teams that are always together, playing and observing each other. We were very isolated, not doing the necessary work to play against or understand other teams. So, we'd always go in, as I say, "with our chests open," entering a battle without knowing what we were up against. So much so that we finished at the 10th place of the World Cup four years before the one we won..

Then, later, we reached the World Cup Final. I think it was thanks to our willpower and discipline, and the desire to define what we wanted for Brazilian basketball. We didn't know if that day would ever come, but we were always working towards it. I'm fortunate to have lived through this period and to have been part of such a brilliant, special team as this generation was.

- b. **There was a big rivalry between Magic Paula and Hortensia as you say. Did each one of you try to show who was the leader? For sure, all the focus would be on you and Hortensia. How**

complicated was it to deal with this situation, which was surely also fuelled from the outside.

It was a rivalry that, as I say, transcended the court. The media created and stirred the debate: who is better, Paula or Hortensia? They did it to sell newspapers. The city where Hortensia played hated me. In the city where I played, people hated Hortensia. Families were divided, some liked Hortensia, others liked Paula. So, a rivalry was created, and it wasn't just on the court, right? It permeated more people, the city. And I believe — I don't know if Hortensia feels the same — that rivalry drove us.

I think Hortensia also went through this on the national team. Because when we arrived at the national team, what we had to do was leave behind the club dynamics and focus on the national team, right? The club stuff was in the past, now it was about the national team. I also think that this was due to growing up, as we were both very young. We understood this process much better later on.

So, I think it took us some time to achieve something on an international level. The first title was the Pan-American in Havana in 1991, and I think it took so long partly because of that. It was important, individually, because each of us wanted to be better than the other. When we trained, I thought, "I want to play against Hortensia's team to be better" but for the national team, that wasn't good, especially for such a long time, because having to wait 12 years to win the first international title was a long time.

- c. When did you realize the importance of setting aside your rivalry and working together towards a common goal? Was it an initiative of the players, where you spoke among yourselves, or did the coach had to take part?**

We are intelligent women. We knew that the way we were doing things was not good for women's basketball. So, as good players and smart individuals, we realized we had to change, because it was better for everyone. It was good for Brazilian women's basketball. What was happening might have been good for me individually, but it wasn't good for the country.

We could have been a great generation that didn't win anything. So, changing our approach in a smart way was essential. This rivalry wasn't helping our game, our team, or the atmosphere on the national team. I think it was also a matter of getting older and realizing

that we needed to continue competing against each other at the club level, but at the national level, we had to play together. We were on the same side – we weren't opponents or from a different team. We were together, working towards the best outcome. I think it was a mentality we all understood was important – we couldn't just have two players. There were a lot of talks. We needed a strong team. We needed players to come together to help the team.

What was happening was that we would go to world tournaments, and we had the top scorer, who was always on the competition starting five, but we would rank at the tenth, eleventh, or thirteenth place. That wasn't good for Brazil. It wasn't just about individual success, but about the success of the whole team.

d. Some players in basketball, and other sports, have felt the pressure of a weighty nickname: how did you address your 'Magic' nickname to make it work for you?

I think in life, , not just in the fourth quarter of the game, there are always moments when we inspire and moments when we are inspired. I think that's part of life. One day, you look up to someone and want to be like them, and another day, someone else looks up to you and sees you as a reference.

But I'm very at peace with this nickname, because it wasn't me who gave myself the name "Magic Paula". It was a Brazilian journalist who was studying in Brazil, and one day while watching a game where Brazil was competing, he was next to a coach who said, "that girl plays a lot like Magic Johnson". And this journalist picked up on that, and he started writing it in the newspaper, calling me "Magic Paula". So, since it wasn't me who gave myself the nickname "Magic Paula," I feel very at ease.

I'd be happy to be even a quarter or half of what Magic Johnson was. I loved watching him play, because he was always pulling a rabbit out of a hat – you never knew what he was going to do. He had the ball, and it was like, "Okay now, what is he going to do?". I always watched him, and to me, the way he played wasn't something that started when he got the ball; it began before. He was thinking ahead about what he was going to do before he received it. When I had the ball, things just came naturally. I think it was something I had from a young age.

I always liked to pass the ball behind my back, look one way and play the other way. This was something that was just part of me from the start – it wasn't something I forced myself to do.

- e. **There is one saying that states that if you love the voice coming in the radio, never go to the station... because you might be deceived. Did you ever have the chance to meet your idol?**

One day, Magic Johnson came to play in São Paulo with his team, a group of his friends, against a team of Oscar's friends. I was watching the game courtside, and when halftime ended, someone asked me, "Do you want to meet Magic Johnson?". And I said, "Of course! Who wouldn't?". So, I went to the locker room door and waited there. In my mind, I thought: "He's going to walk by, look at me, and ask, 'Who is this player? Who is this person?'". So, I stood there, but when he came out, he greeted me, gave me a kiss, and took a picture with me. He was very kind.

At that moment, I realized something important: you always need to be attentive to the people who admire you. When athletes refuse to sign an autograph or take a picture, that's a negative experience for the fans. In that moment, I felt what the fans who followed me might feel, and it made me realize how important it is to give back to them. Since then, I've always tried to be there for my fans. I always aim to be a good example – not just as a player, but as a person. Especially to the younger players, I wanted to be someone they looked up to – not just as a player but also as a woman and as a human being.

- f. **Paula, did your playing style reflect your personality off the court? Did you play as the person you are, or did you transform on the court?**

I think I had leadership skills, right? As a point guard, you have to be a bit of a leader, observing what's going on and figuring out what to do in the moment. It was very important, because we had two very strong leaders – Hortensia and me. And it's possible to have two leaders on one team, each with their own way of leading and handling things. But the key is to be a positive leader, one who sees things and tries to solve problems, one who looks at situations and tries to find ways to make things better.

What we cannot accept is someone with a negative leadership style, someone who creates

turmoil. We have a saying: don't be fake, don't be insincere, don't cause disruption. As a leader, you have to lead by example. Saying things is not enough, you have to do, to show. For instance, I couldn't afford to train less than the other players – I had to train more.

10. You were a legendary player and made the transition to management within the Brazilian Confederation. How was that transition, and did you apply any valuable lesson you learned on the court?

Well, I always say that it doesn't matter if you were a great player. You need to be prepared to be in a different role. You need to study, you need to know what you're going to do, right? I can't say, "I was a good player, so now I'll manage the Confederation". So, in 2000, when I retired from playing, I didn't want to do anything. For many years, the life of a player takes a lot out of your personal life, right? So, when you retire, you think, "Well, I don't want to do anything anymore". But I lasted only six months like that, not wanting to do anything.

Since I had studied physical education, I was very critical of the Brazilian administrators, because every day we were personalizing shoes, courts, the game, everything, but we didn't have professionals off the court. It was all about a narrative of "I do this for love", "I do this because I was a player" or "I do this because I loved basketball". Well, you need to prepare yourself to do what you want, right? So, I started taking courses, studying sports management, and I also had an institution, an NGO, where we worked for 16 years with boys and girls, using basketball as a tool for education. So, I had a little experience in the non-profit sector. I needed to prepare myself to say, "Well, why don't they do things better? Why don't they do things more professionally?". When you're no longer a player, especially in the challenging period when I was in the Confederation, when we didn't know if the top teams could compete because there was no money, it was very difficult. I didn't quit because of the lack of money, because I knew when I joined that things were tough.

It was hard to make people understand what I believed basketball meant in my life. So, I decided to return home, and now I live in the south of Bahia, where I already had a house. I live in a village of 800 people. There are mothers, kids, and I ride my bike around. I chose a quieter life because I think I've prepared myself my whole life to live a fair, hardworking life. But I also had the mindset to think about my future and have a peaceful life once all of this ended.

I've been able to leave it all behind and live in a quieter place. I'm now 62 years old, and I always think that we work hard when we're young, but we take too long to enjoy it. We usually start enjoying life after we retire, but by then we may not have good health or mobility. Now is the time to live a bit more and focus on mental and physical health. That's why I chose this stage of my life to take better care of myself.

- 11. In some recent statements, you criticized Brazil's sports system, stating that it didn't focus on what really mattered. Do you think basketball or sports in general are positive forces for society? Can sports help build a better society, more united and driven by values?**

Well, I don't know if they were criticisms, but I was saying that Brazil's sports system doesn't work. It doesn't work because, in my experience, sports skills should be nurtured in schools. Here in Brazil, schools don't believe that sports also help shape individuals and bring values to people. I say this because I am living proof that sports can transform someone. Since I was a child, sports helped me understand that I had to work in teams, that I needed discipline, boundaries, rules, and hierarchy. I think that in a natural way, I was learning valuable life lessons through play.

- 12. It's an amazing philosophy and the core values of your NGO Instituto Passe de Mágica: integrating sports values and education for a better society.**

When I started working at the NGO, which was called Instituto Passe de Mágica, I never thought about producing professional athletes. The kids could become great players, but the goal was always to provide opportunities, because very few end up in the World Cup or the Olympics wearing their country's jersey.

We always worked on integrating education and sports. The methodology of the institute was based on a UN resolution on education, not on sports. I firmly believe in that.

In Brazil, the sports system is strong in clubs. Clubs have resources, funding, and government programs to strengthen them. But this system, when it reaches the confederation and moves from the confederation to the state federations across Brazil, it doesn't work. Nothing happens. We are a big country, but few boys and girls actually play sports.

When I talk about sports, I'm not referring to the sports we see on TV. I mean sports at school and practicing different activities, not just making it to the volleyball or basketball teams. Everyone should be able to try out physical activities.

Today, we have a generation more connected to cell phones and computers than to their own bodies. We are in a serious struggle with the digital age. It's very difficult to get kids to do something physical, to move their bodies.

Where can we address this? In schools. In Brazil, we have many kids who love sports but don't like or want to study. I believe sports are as important as physics, chemistry, or biology. It needs to be part of the school curriculum, part of education.

I think we need a government initiative to bring change, because life is about change, about evolution. And Brazil's sports system is outdated. We need to change it. We aren't getting good

results. Let's change it and do something different. Why insist on a system that isn't working? My criticism was in that context.

Going Global

13. Throughout your career, you had the opportunity to travel widely thanks to basketball. What was your most memorable moment during your playing career and why? Was it the 1994 World Cup?

Well, I always remember my first competitions, even if I reached the World Cup, which for me was the main competition, in 1994... I think that it didn't start there. No, it started much earlier, when I left my house and played in youth tournaments, in the smaller team tournaments. To get there, I had to go through many paths. But of course, if I have to choose only one, it was the World Cup itself, due to the situation.

I think the Olympic medal has a certain glamour. If you ask a boy or a girl what they dream of, they might say, "I want to win an Olympic medal". That's usually the way it goes. But in the situation we were in for the World Cup, the way we got to that World Cup in Australia, competing, as I mentioned earlier, without playing internationally, only playing in Brazil... When we trained with the national team, since we wouldn't have the budget to play overseas and practice, we would play matches against boys, because they were stronger and faster. That made us realize we didn't need to be stronger or faster to play.

So, when we arrived at the World Cup in Australia, we hadn't played against any international teams. We started really poorly. I don't know how we made it to the second round of the competition, because we had such a bad start. Along the way, we suffered a defeat to China, who we played again in the Final, and we almost lost to Spain after trailing behind the entire game, only taking the lead in the last minute of the game. Without that win against Spain, we wouldn't have qualified for the Semifinals.

So, for me, considering the whole journey and everything we experienced in previous World Cups, that was the most important title of my career. That game against the United States, 110-107, was a historic game for basketball, because up until recently, we haven't had a showdown like that. So, for me, it was the World Cup in 1994.

14. What does it mean to wear the national team jersey? Is it more special than to play in a club-league competition?

To wear Brazil's jersey, you have to do a good job at your club, right? Because if you don't perform well at your club, you won't make it to the national team. So, playing on the national team has

always been a great source of pride for me, especially during the period we lived through, when we didn't get paid to be on the national team. We played for the love of Brazil. But it was always very important to be there, because the recognition of the players came from the national team, and international recognition came from the national team.

15. Did you ever dream of playing in the WNBA?

About the WNBA – yes, I always dreamed of playing in the American league. I kept thinking it would start soon, but then it didn't, and I kept waiting. By the time the league finally started, I was already 35 years old. When I first got an invitation to play, I was 35, and I ended up playing until I was 38. At 35, you start to weigh a lot of things – what will be good, what won't... At that point, I couldn't afford to be out there proving that I was a good player. I needed to be confident that I'd play well and earn a good salary, but the financial offer wasn't good, not at all.

So why would I leave my country, where I was earning four times what they were offering in the WNBA, just to say I played in the WNBA? No, I was at a point in my career where I was reaping the rewards of everything I had worked for. Maybe if the opportunity had come earlier, it would have been important to me to play in the WNBA. But at that moment, when I weighed everything – moving to the United States and playing at a high level – I knew it wasn't worth it. I know Jeanette played there for five years as a point guard, even though she wasn't a point guard.

So, the opportunity came too late in my career. I always wanted to play in the league where the best basketball was played.

Change Over Time: basketball, gender and society

16. Looking back to when you first started playing basketball, there was limited support for women's basketball, with most opportunities in youth categories focused on men. You even prepared for the 1994 World Cup playing against men. While things have evolved, there is still room for improvement. From your perspective, what positive impact can basketball have on women, particularly young girls, and how can it help foster a more equal society?

This is an old topic, especially for us in Brazil. How can we bring back the great moments we experienced in Brazilian basketball? Generations change, things evolve differently, and it's a topic we could spend days discussing. The fact is, we don't have role models. If we don't have people to look

up to, who will inspire the girls to play basketball? We need more qualified people, like coaches, working with the girls. We're a very large country. The role of the state federations should be to strengthen basketball in Brazil, but this movement is very weak. Today, we have a women's basketball league in Brazil that lasts three or four months, and the girls have to go abroad for the rest of the year to be able to live and play. So, we don't see the girls playing on TV, and it's always in venues where people must pay to watch.

17. There's much discussion about basketball as a tool to impact lives across various issues. From your perspective, what does women's basketball need to do to garner the next generation of players, coaches and fans?

I think there's a lot of work left to do. Many people need to be practicing basketball, especially young girls throughout Brazil. We have a lot of people playing volleyball in Brazil, and later we will also have a lot of people playing basketball. We need to do work that encourages the people who love basketball to practice it. But every year, fewer and fewer people are doing this work. Therefore, the training of professionals is essential. We have a professional league for senior teams, but the senior teams are not required to have youth categories. So, for me, that's complicated too, because if you have role models, you need to have younger girls watching them play in the league. Someone they can look up to.

There are many points we need to work on. We also need charismatic players who represent basketball in Brazil, not just playing for three months and then going abroad to play elsewhere, with no further mention of them here.

18. Thinking of the larger FIBA Family today, what do you think constitutes progress in women's basketball? And for women in basketball? How do you envisage progress and success? What does basketball still have to do to be more inclusive and supportive of women? What challenges lie ahead?

It's a very difficult topic, one that we can't discuss in just 15 minutes. But the people who love basketball and work with kids need to come together, because right now, everyone is doing their own thing. We need to come together and ask ourselves, "What do we need to do?" When we were world champions, the clubs came together, and we started preparing all the clubs with the same physical conditioning under the national team coach, so that when we joined the national team, all

the girls were at the same level. I think there needs to be more unity among the people who care about basketball and kids in Brazil.

19. You decided to lead by example by creating the 'Instituto Pase de Magia'.

When I was already thinking of retiring from the court, I thought, "How can I give back to basketball? How can I give back what basketball has given me?". And that's when I started thinking, "I'm not going to do coaching for boys or girls, am I?". I began asking myself certain questions. Basketball has given me more than just titles. What does it mean to be a world champion? Basketball has instilled values in me, about how to live with others, how to recognize limits, how to walk through life with a ball in my hands, how to dream. How to live with winning and losing. Life teaches us we need to hold all of that very strongly within us. So, that's when I decided to work with kids and focus more on the values of sport.

I believe that when you start doing work that's more playful, like a game, and a boy or girl shows talent, the kid has the potential to be a player. Then we send that kid somewhere else to develop its skills, right? But we need to provide opportunities for boys and girls to experience the power of sport as people. Many children have gone through the institute in these 16 years – 11,000 boys and girls. We worked in 7 units, on projects in 3 cities. Then, these boys and girls went on to university or other paths, and they would come back and tell us how important those years spent at the institute were. The game goes on, right? The game of life continues. So, when I started thinking and doing this work, it was largely about giving boys and girls opportunities to experience the power of sport. If someone showed potential to be a player, they would go on to other places to pursue that.

20. Reflecting on your career, are you aware of the legacy you're leaving behind, not just on the court, but off the court too? You had a great impact – and still have – on many players and women who didn't even play, but admire you.

My father would always tell me "daughter, wherever you go, always leave the doors open". That's what's going to stay. The stats, the titles... all that can be found in Google. But to me, what I leave behind as a person has always been more important.

I have friends who have been there for and with me all my life. I'm a person who values people a lot, the persons who I worked with... I'm very close. I still speak with my first coach, with my teammates from when I was a kid.

I cherish the simple things in life. I think we have to be humble. I always wanted to do the things the correct way, I am a very ethical and honest person, that's my character and I take it as an obligation.

21. You were elected to the FIBA Hall of Fame as a recognition to an outstanding career. What does it mean to you?

Often, we don't believe who we are, what we can do, what we do, what we say... And having this recognition from FIBA was very gratifying, very important. It was a recognition to the effort of doing things the correct way. Not many belong there. I never seek or expect any recognition, but when it comes, it's very gratifying.