

Women Leading, Knowledge Growing: Maria Loredana Lascău on WISH and Intergenerational Judo

Some leaders shape judo through results – others shape it through people. **Ms. Maria Loredana Lascău** belongs to the rare group who manage both; yet her heart always leads long before her titles do. At [Judo Club Liberty Oradea](#), a club proudly led by women, she has built a space where women take charge with confidence, grow with support, and lift one another across generations. We spoke with her during European gender equality week, at a moment when conversations about visibility, opportunity, and women's leadership in judo feel more important than ever. Through her new role within the [WISH Programme](#), her influence stretches far beyond the tatami, opening pathways for women who are ready to step forward, learn, and lead.

The WISH programme is a key initiative for women in sport. Can you tell us what it is, who's involved, and how it helps women discover their talent and grow as leaders in judo?

WISH – Women in Sport High-Performance Pathway is an international leadership and coaching programme designed to support elite female coaches who aspire to reach the highest levels in performance sport. It brings together leading universities, sports institutions, and gender-equality experts, and in judo, it is delivered in partnership with the IJF through the IJF Gender Equality Commission and the IJF Academy.

For women in judo, the programme offers something we rarely had before:

- a structured pathway,
- high-level training in coaching, communication, leadership, and decision-making,
- a community of women who share similar challenges and ambitions.

Through WISH, women discover their own voice, learn to trust their expertise, and acquire the tools to step confidently into leadership roles, whether as coaches, technical directors, or programme managers.

What inspires you most about leading this programme and supporting talented women on their path to becoming coaches and leaders?

What inspires me most is witnessing transformation. When women arrive, they often carry doubts, about their knowledge, their place, or their potential. Through the programme, these same women begin to stand differently, speak differently, and trust their judgement. Watching talent unfold and confidence rise is incredibly powerful. It reminds me that leadership is not about hierarchy – it is about lifting others, opening doors, and leaving the path easier for those who follow.

How does WISH create a space where girls and women feel safe, accepted, and encouraged to grow – and how does that connect to the environment you’ve fostered at your women-led club, Liberty Oradea?

WISH creates safety through knowledge, representation, and community. When women see female instructors, facilitators, and experts leading the sessions, they realise that leadership is accessible to them too. The programme also encourages open dialogue, reflection, and shared problem-solving, which builds trust and psychological safety. At Judo Club Liberty Oradea, we follow the same principles.

We promote a culture where:

- girls feel seen and valued,
- their emotions and needs are understood,
- they can try, fail, try again, and grow,
- they see women in leadership every day.

Having a women-led club sends a strong signal: *“Power and gentleness can coexist, and **women belong at every level of judo.**”*

Intergenerational exchange is at the heart of the JOY project. How important is knowledge transfer in developing young women’s talent and leadership? Could you share an example of how these exchanges inspire and empower young judoka?

Intergenerational exchange is one of the most powerful tools we have. Young girls need role models. Older women need to pass on their wisdom, experience, and mistakes. Together, they create continuity and identity. One of the most inspiring experiences comes from a session where several senior participants became emotional, some even cried. As they said: “For the first time in many years, we felt young again. We felt playful, curious, and alive!” Their joy was contagious. The children also felt empowered and proud. They were teaching adults basic judo skills: ukemi, balance, movement coordination, and for them, it was a profound moment of responsibility and leadership. They realised that judo is not only about strength; it is about connection, empathy, and lifting each other across generations. If we can replicate this spirit at every level of judo, then the talent of women and girls will not only flourish, it will transform our entire community.

How do you see WISH connecting to wider efforts to promote gender equality and nurture talent beyond the judo mat – in sport, education, or community life?

WISH goes far beyond sport. By equipping women with leadership skills, including communication, emotional intelligence, planning, negotiation, and conflict resolution, we are preparing them not only for the tatami, but also for education, business, community leadership, and social impact work. Gender equality in sport becomes a catalyst for gender equality in society. When young girls see confident, knowledgeable women leading on the mat, they understand that they can lead in any field. WISH becomes a bridge between sport and society, linking athletic talent with lifelong leadership.

From your perspective, what more could the wider judo community do to support women and girls at every level and help their talent truly flourish?

There are several practical and meaningful steps the judo world can take to ensure that women and girls feel supported, valued, and able to grow to their full potential:

1. **Increase female visibility:** More women in front-facing roles as coaches, referees, mentors, technical officials, and speakers at events. When girls see women leading, they understand that leadership is possible for them too.
2. **Create safe, supportive learning environments:** Girls stay in judo when they feel respected, listened to, and encouraged. Psychological safety is essential, not just physical safety, so they can take risks, make mistakes, and grow.
3. **Provide equal access to education and coaching pathways:** Women must have the same opportunities to attend courses, apply for scholarships, join leadership programmes, and develop professionally.
4. **Support mothers and women with family responsibilities:** Flexible training schedules, family-friendly environments, and understanding around different life phases can make the difference between continuing or quitting the sport.
5. **Encourage mixed-gender leadership teams:** Diverse teams bring better decisions, healthier cultures, and a wider range of perspectives that benefit every judoka.
6. **Celebrate the achievements of women – not quietly, but publicly.** Recognition builds confidence and shows the next generation that their dreams are valid.

Ultimately, if we want more girls in judo, we must show them a future they can imagine themselves in.

EQUALITY IS NOT A SEPARATE PATH

“For me, gender equality in judo is not about creating a separate path for women, it is about opening the same path for everyone. Women don’t need special treatment, they need fair access, equal support, and the belief of the community behind them. When we give women the space to grow, judo becomes richer, stronger, and more human.”

Interview conducted by
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