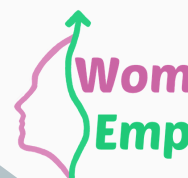




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# Talking about sport with Maria Teodora Popa, Elena Păvălucă and Elena Sima.

**Champions in Taekwon do,  
Jiu-Jitsu and Athletics.**

In the frame of the Erasmus+ project  
"Sport Power: Promoting Sport for Women  
Empowerment", we interviewed 3 young  
sportswomen from Vaslui, talking about  
their experience in the field of sport.



# Maria Teodora Popa

My name is Maria Teodora Popa, I am 20 years old and I am a student at the Faculty of General Medicine at "Transylvania" University of Braşov.

I consider myself to be a sociable, talkative, spontaneous person, but at the same time dedicated and competitive.

At the moment, my plans are mainly aimed at graduating from college (I just finished year 3) and making a decision regarding my future specialization as a doctor.

Sport has been part of my life since I know myself. It is an activity that brought me many joys and contributed to my training as an adult. I practised both rhythmic gymnastics, from the age of 4 to 11, and Taekwon do ITF, from 12 to 18 years.



I will talk about the second sport practised, namely Taekwon do, because I consider that it had a major impact on my development as a person. It must be remembered from the start that Taekwon do is not a simple form of self-defense or a simple style of martial arts where we use kicks and punches; it is a martial art in which, in addition to the physical trainings that help us to strengthen our health and the harmonious development of the body, we must also take into account the mental training and the philosophical study. Since I practised this sport at a relatively high level, sacrifices were part of the game, but I can't say that they were an impediment. Over time, I learned to organize my activities according to training, travel, competitions. This sport taught me, among other things, what respect, courage, modesty, loyalty, perseverance and self-control are.



Since Taekwondo is a sport for both men and women, the fact that I am a girl did not stop me from enjoying all aspects of this martial art. During a week, the trainings took place in the evening, after 7 pm, 3 days out of 7. On the other hand, around a competition, things changed. The trainings became more complex, longer, maybe even on weekends. However, I managed to organise myself in such a way as to cope with school and develop my new passion. I participated in countless competitions, both local and national, and then qualified for the European and world championships. I managed to win the title of World Champion in the women's individual junior strength test in 2015. I am still amazed by my career in this sport that has shown me how competitive I can be. I have confidence in my own strength, physical and mental. My path in this field is over for now, I am studying now to become a doctor. I consider that sport is a very important element, I could even say obligatory, regardless of age or gender. All the more so, perhaps, for the female gender, given the pre-existing conception in people's minds, that the men are more one inclined to practise sports, and that this field "masculinizes" women. Being a practitioner of a contact sport, I can say that I gained a greater confidence in myself and in my abilities, at the same time developing my self-control and self-discipline.



# Elena Păvălucă

My name is Elena Păvălucă, I recently graduated “Emil Racoviță” Theoretical High School. I want to become a military officer for the future and I am intensely preparing for this.

I have been practising jiu-jitsu from the age of 14. I started training after a lost bet, when, in the 7th grade, my classmates offered me a challenge. That's how I got to the dojo and I haven't given up since then.



*Romania Jiu-Jitsu Seminar 2019, held in Vaslui - October 19-20, together with the Polish Sensei Tomasz Guja.*

At first it was hard for me because I was surrounded by boys. Slowly, slowly I began to adapt and develop my passion for this sport. The difficulties came only because of my clumsiness, and the hand-to-hand fight with a boy was just a new challenge that I took at once. The failure of the first fight with a boy was just a dose of ambition to outdo myself. The sacrifices are entirely my parents', because they supported me financially in order to be able to participate in training courses, degree exams and local, national or international competitions, and they still do that today.

As a student, I tried to give time to both learning and training. The advantage was that the trainings took place in the afternoon, and we finished the classes at 2 pm. If there were days when I had papers or examinations, with Sensei's consent, I would allow myself to miss a workout. A daily workout lasts two hours. For national or international competitions we train more intensely, we spent 3-4 hours in the gym.

Also, during the dojo and the competitions, I made friends with other athletes, I learned to be fair-play, to appreciate the effort made to get a good result.



My biggest success is the second place at the World Jiu-Jitsu Sports Championship in Georgia, at the team demonstration event. It took place between November 5-12, 2019. Also, in this competition, we obtained the third place in the individual test Ne-Waza (ground fighting).

The main reason why I continue to practise this sport is the passion I have developed, the strong connection built over the years with the members of the Sports Club "Budokan" Vaslui, but also discipline and teamwork. With the help of our Sensei Maricel Tăbăcaru we learned what respect for other colleagues means and that through work and perseverance you can achieve all your goals.

In order to facilitate the practice of a sport by women, I consider it necessary for them to be exempt from the eternal reply "But you are a girl!". If we were given the confidence from the beginning, without having to prove that you can, even if you are a girl, it would be much easier for us to adjust and progress. I believe that through sports, women have the opportunity to express themselves freely, without any resentment. For example, in my case, there is no greater satisfaction than when I have the opportunity to fight a boy. Many told me that I will not succeed, that this sport is not for me, but I became ambitious and I proved myself and I showed them that I can and that I will continue to advance.



# Elena Sima

My name is Elena Sima, I was a student of the Theoretical High School "Emil Racoviță".

I would like to tell you about my career as a sportswoman. I have to tell you that sport is part of my life, it marked my path and I know that I will always be interested in maintaining my physical condition.

At the moment I have finished the physiotherapy faculty, I am going to become a master student within the same faculty. I chose a somato-functional recovery programme. My future plans include finding a job in physical therapy and continuing my studies.

I practised athletics for 8 years as a resistance or semi-long distance runner. My basic tests were 1500 and 3000 meters, but I also ran 5000 meters. I started practising this sport at the age of 10. My role model was Gabriela Szabo, a multiple medalist at the 2000 Summer Olympics.



Sport has been an important part of my life as a young woman. Thus, I practised volleyball in the high school team and participated in school competitions, qualifying for the zonal stage in 2015. I was part of the girls' high school football team. I never felt discriminated against. Practising the sport gave me great satisfaction, whether I got results or not. It wasn't always easy. A few injuries made me think: I didn't know if I would be able to continue playing sports or not. I got over these problems well because sport was simply my life.

The greatest success is by far the title of multiple national champion in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 - 1st place and 2014-3rd place. It is a great joy that I managed to get the first national place and that showed me that I can do what I set out to do. At the age of 18, because it was an important period of study for my future career and for health reasons, I gave up the intensive practice of this sport.



It was not easy to combine social life with sports. The trainings were demanding and I didn't have time for going out with friends because I had to rest, but the life of an athlete also means sacrifices. During the school year I trained 6 hours a week, and on holidays 10-13 hours a week. As for the school, I managed to do it, also due to the strict schedule and the discipline I learned as an athlete.

Today I am a college graduate and proud of my journey so far. Physical therapy means recovery through movement. Sport is really health. Sport taught me everything I know now, to behave and interact with people, it built my character. Being a performance athlete, the sport shaped my will, the strength to overcome obstacles, endurance, gave me confidence and taught me not to give up. I would like women to be encouraged to practise any sport as a means of personal, social and professional affirmation. Practising a sport contributes to gaining a positive image of oneself. I believe in sports that make women stronger because sports educate you physically and emotionally.

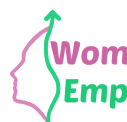


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