



# ***Football Legal***

*The international journal dedicated to football law*

# 8 – December 2017



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## Interview with Despina MAVROMATI

Despina MAVROMATI  
Lawyer, SportLegis  
Co-founder of Women In Sports Law (WISLaw)  
Lausanne - Switzerland

### → Women In Sports Law (WISLaw)

Women In Sports Law (WISLaw, [www.wislaw.co](http://www.wislaw.co)) is an international association based in Lausanne uniting more than 200 women from 50 countries specializing in sports law. Exactly one year since the creation of WISLaw and after a series of smaller networking and educational events around the world, WISLaw hold its 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference & General Assembly at the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) Headquarters in Madrid, one day prior to the 7<sup>th</sup> RFEF Congress on football law. Dr Despina MAVROMATI, WISLaw Founder and Board Member, explains the success of the organization as well as the realization of the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference.

### **Could you tell us about your background, and how WISLaw started?**

I am a sports lawyer and arbitrator based in Switzerland and I also teach sports arbitration at the University of Lausanne. Prior to this, I served as a Managing Counsel at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) for 9 years. Throughout my career, I had the chance to meet various highly accomplished women from different parts of the world, and I saw first-hand the lack of diversity in the sports law sector - not only in Switzerland but at an international level.

After a sports law conference in 2014, I met with my friends and colleagues from Zurich *Melanie SCHÄRER*, a Swiss sports lawyer and former Group Leader at the FIFA Players Status Committee, and *Marisa DOMINGUEZ RUBIO*, an Argentinean lawyer working for FIFA, who would later become the other two founders and board members. We commented on the fact that I was the only female speaker at a two-day conference and expressed our determination to create our own association and events. After two years of planning, and with the kind support from our Honorary President *Dodd MOYA*, we launched *Women In Sports Law* in November of 2016 to create a truly international network of women active in the sports law sector.

*WISLaw* fills an important gap and one cannot emphasize enough the importance of building an international network of women in this field.

It is very gratifying to see that in just one year more than 200 members from almost 50 countries have come together in support of our movement. We also have many men from the sector and numerous sports-law institutions, conference organizers and arbitral institutions actively support our initiative.

There is a tremendous amount of momentum behind us.

### **You held the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference & General Assembly in Madrid on 16 November 2017. Could you tell us more about this event?**

Our 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference was a success thanks to the support of the Spanish Football Federation and young - male and female - sports lawyers who kindly helped us with the organization of the event. We had 70 participants from 25 countries and three roundtables where knowledgeable and prominent speakers discussed interesting and fresh topics related to football: 1) women's football 2) legal hurdles facing professional players and 3) commercial trends in football. The 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference took place just one week after a smaller, half-day *WISLaw* seminar hosted by the Canadian Olympic Committee in Montreal for our North-American members and friends.

### **In your opinion, what are the greatest difficulties that women lawyers face in the sports sector?**

Women used to be invisible in this sector. I was surprised to see how many extraordinary female lawyers specialized in international sports law but whose existence was largely ignored until we founded *WISLaw*. *WISLaw* created this much-needed platform to increase visibility.

Another difficulty is that European football (soccer) is traditionally considered to be a "male-dominated" sport, despite the fact that there are so many great female football teams around the world. The same misperception applies to sports lawyers!

## PERSPECTIVES

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Last, I think that there is a huge number of women lawyers working as in-house counsel and as sports administrators. I am sadly convinced that there is a glass ceiling for many of those women, and our *WISLaw* annual report on the participation of women in those positions attempts to target their issues and shed more light into this specific problem.

#### ***Do you think the concept of a “women's quota” should be applied for panels and board members?***

I think that women are so underrepresented particularly in the high levels of sports administration that this could at least set the ball rolling - the ICAS took this initiative some years ago when it appointed 10 female members on its board. Also, half of the CAS *ad hoc* arbitrators present at the Rio Olympic Games were women. Even when some people make detrimental comments that this selection is because of gender and not based on merit, I don't believe that is true. According to an article published at the New York Times in July 2017, women are 50.3% of current law school graduates, yet they still make up just under 35% of lawyers at law firms and 20% of equity partnerships.<sup>1</sup> I therefore think that, in certain cases, quotas for women are necessary towards achieving more diversity.

#### ***What are WISLaw's strategies to achieve more diversity in the sports law sector?***

We are in the process of establishing a comprehensive and international members' directory showcasing our colleagues' expertise on our website and thus making women sports lawyers more visible. We also want to achieve more diversity and active participation of female sports lawyers as speakers at conferences and fora around the world. We organize regular educational and networking events in different parts of the world, that are kindly hosted by major arbitral institutions like CAS, FIFA, Sport Resolutions UK or the Sport Disputes Resolution Centre of Canada, WADA, RFEF, UEFA and major law firms. These small-scale events give the opportunity to include everyone in the discussion and enhance our members' network. We also systematically encourage our members to host or organize events and promote themselves and *WISLaw* in a mutually beneficial way.

Our next project is the organization of a leadership seminar for female sports lawyers. The idea came from Ms. *Tricia SMITH*, an exceptional woman who is a *WISLaw* honorary member, President of the Canadian Olympic Committee, IOC Member, ICAS Member and a 4-time Olympian (she won a silver medal at the Los Angeles OG).

We are currently examining many other initiatives based on ideas that our members, friends and sponsors have suggested, although we will always believe that the path to substantial and continued growth of a network is to be inclusive, cooperative, and encourage face-to-face contact wherever and whenever possible.

#### ***What is your vision for WISLaw five years from today?***

*WISLaw* will be, in our view, a game-changer in terms of women's involvement in sports law. What is really inspiring is to see so many young, talented women turning to *WISLaw* as a vehicle to build their business, boost their legal expertise and get to know successful women in the field. Mentoring through *WISLaw* is priceless. *WISLaw* will continue to be optimistic and ambitious so that five years from today we see a totally different landscape in the sports law business.



Women In Sports Law  
<https://www.wislaw.co>

<sup>1</sup> [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)