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Italian Coach Still Shares His Secrets

Sandro Gamba once received a standing ovation at Madison Square Garden, an honor that translates well on a résumé that now includes the Hall of Fame. Gamba, 73, one of Europe's most noted basketball pioneers, coached the Italian national team in four Olympics.

He remembers clearly the ovation at the 1981 National Invitation Tournament. He was announced as the coach who led Italy to an upset of the Soviet Union in the semifinals of the 1980 Olympics in Moscow.

Gamba also led his team to a European championship in 1983 and won five Italian league championships.

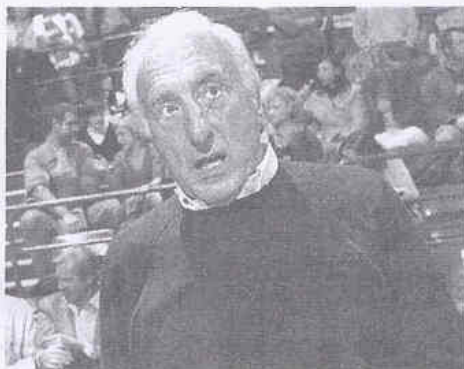
"The best thing I've done was to coach Bill Bradley," he said last week from Milan, where he is recovering from hip replacement surgery. "He won the Rhodes scholarship to Oxford, and he came to Milan to play three days a week from London. He was like a little kid, very coachable. He always told me: 'Correct my moves. How is my shooting?'"

One of Gamba's most famous students is Mike D'Antoni, who played at Olimpia Milan and is now coach and general manager of the Phoenix Suns.

"He's a big brain," Gamba said. "As a point guard, he could read the situation in every part of the game. He asked me for notes on my tactics. It was his dream to be a coach."

Gamba retired 15 years ago and teaches sports psychology at a private institute he founded in Milan.

"I still have the fire inside me to teach," he said. "Communication is at the base of good coaching."



Claudio Scaccini/Associated Press

The Hall of Famer Sandro Gamba.