



Interview ▶ We analyze the world of today's entrepreneurship with the ex-basketball player

FERRAN MARTINEZ

Ferran Martinez

Former professional basketball player and CEO Dekaland

«I am very lucky to have enjoyed two lives»



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We remember with Ferran Martínez his past as a basketball player, and talk about his present as a businessman. He played for more than 10 years in Barcelona, before moving on to Joventut of Badalona and Panathinaikos in Athens. On 156 occasions he was international with the Spanish National Team, and his record includes seven ACB leagues and two Club Basketball World Cups. Unfortunately, when he got injured, he was forced to retire, but far from sinking, he retrained himself by jumping into the world of finance and technology, realizing that his passion for achieving success goes far beyond the court. He currently combines projects of entrepreneurship, he researches quantum physics and writes books, where basketball, investment and coaching are involved. Despite his brilliant professional career, he affirms with great pride that his most important triumph is his family, whom he has moved all over the world; however, thanks to this their children speak English perfectly and have received a global education, and knowing many realities. For him, this is the real victory.

–What did it mean for you to leave basketball?

–When I started playing basketball, at no point did I think that it would end up being a profession. I always explain that elite athletes are very lucky, because we enjoy two lives, in my case as a professional player, which is like being in a bubble, and real life, which starts when you retire. It is at this point that you break with a dynamic of morning and afternoon training, of traveling everywhere and with very intense routines, when you discover that you treasure something that you never had during this stage of playing at a high level, which is time and the possibility of doing other things. It is here that after leaving basketball, with a rather long career, winning many titles and obtaining many good results, I faced a new life

trying to apply the values I had acquired in the field of sports and being clear that I needed to get more knowledge and train me in other matters that interested me, but that I had not the opportunity to do due to the hectic pace of the competition.

–Do you miss your time as a professional player?

–Of course, many times when I'm sleeping I wake up thinking that I have to get up early to go to training, or I dream that I'm playing or that I have an important match; it's something you carry inside and that's part of you, but it's a longing in a positive way, it's not nostalgia, nor are it negative thoughts, it's a nice retrospective, because it's a look at the past in which you review everything you have accomplished and achieved, mind-blowing the amount of incredible experiences you have accumulated in a very short time and in a very accelerated way.

–You were part of the Barça, La Peña and Panathinaikos squads. What team were you feel more comfortable?

–In all of them. I have been very comfortable in all three formations. At the age of 12 I signed for Barça and from there everything went fast; as a child I scored 63 points in a final of the Spanish Championship, so that same year the coach, Antonio Serra, took me to do the pre-season with the first team. I suddenly went from asking my idols for autographs to playing with them without even realizing it. We won three consecutive Spanish championships for children, youth and juniors, which led me to make my debut in the first team at just 16 years old, and in the Spanish National Team at 17. At Barça we won all the titles except the Euroleague, a trophy that if I managed in my time as a player for La Peña, in more than two leagues, and with Panathinaikos we were world and league champions, so they were three sets designed to conquer all the titles at that time. In each cycle of my career I have had the fortune of being among the most powerful teams in Europe. I personally focused my career with two very definite goals: first,

to be in a strong club to win as many competitions as possible, and second, in an environment where I could improve and stand out. Moving from Barça to La Peña was a risky bet, because I had just won three consecutive leagues as a Blaugrana player and had a lot of prominence, but I had concerns, I wanted to see if I was able to help a club like la Peña to achieve victories, and it turned out well; with Obradovich we won two leagues and the European Cup. I remember that final with special affection because it was one of the best matches I've ever played. Then, outside of Spain, the only possible team where I could grow



«I am excited to collaborate to attract talent and develop technology companies»

was Panathinaikos, because it was made up of NBA players, and therefore there was a spectacular level.

–Do you keep friendships from that time?

–Yes, we also coincide and see each other in Copa del Rey or play-off finals, so when an event of this type is held, I meet many players such as: Solozábal, Epi, Villacampa, Rafa and Tomàs Jofresa among others. I have a very good relationship with the colleagues of my generation. In addition, I play with the veterans of Barça, and this allows me to stay in contact with many of my peers.

–When did you decide to come and live in Andorra?

–When I was 18 years old I already bought an apartment in Canillo, so I have had a relationship with the country since I was very young, because I really liked the environment and I had always thought that what I couldn't do while I was a professional player, such as skiing, since we were prohibited by contract from any activity that involved risk, in the future, when I retired I could practice it. It hasn't been quite like that, because after injuring my knee I haven't been able to ski in the end, but the initial idea was this.

Later on, when my children became independent and now that they are independent, specifically Sergi lives in London and Marta in Madrid, the circumstances accompanied me and I really wanted to move here, because the Principality has everything to do, many projects can be launched. Initially, I introduced myself by collaborating with ACTUA, which is now called Andorra Business, with whom I currently have a strong relationship, specifically with the country's innovation and research department. I am excited to collaborate to attract talent and develop technology companies. Andorra is a small microstate where this type of action can be adequately tested.

–How do you see Mora Banc at LEB OR?

–I see them very well, I think that the assimilation process when you are demoted is quite difficult, therefore it is essential to adapt immediately, you cannot waste even three months acclimating to the news situation, because it is a very tough division and it does not mean that because you have been in the ACB automatically next year you have options to be there again. I think it's a very competitive team, that what they have to try is to finish first no matter what. At the moment they are having a good season, but it is complicated to return to the ACB, so it would be desirable to try to get promoted through the direct route.

–How does it feel to make the leap from the world of sport to that of business, and what differences have you encountered?

–During my period as a player I already had an entrepreneurial mentality, because I always wanted to do more, to evolve. For example, if the pivots didn't shoot three points or didn't bounce, I wanted to do it or change positions; a bit of anxiety to try out creative ideas and see if they work. Already while I was playing, I set up a financial system as a kind of economic planning, so that when I withdrew everything I had earned, I wouldn't lose it by making bad investments or wasting it. I thought of myself as a company or personal brand. On the other hand, I never stopped studying, since I was a child I loved computers, programming and computing. In the mid-80s there were practically no computers, the first Spectrum arrived at the end of the 90s, which is when I started programming, and my own programs, mainly basketball statistics and later financial planning. So in my head at that time I was already thinking about how I would set up companies. This helped me a lot, because when you retire it's not such a big loss, and you quickly have the ability to get used to the new reality.

–What does your company Global Sports Advisors do?

–This was the first company I founded with other partners. It was a company representing football and basketball players where my role consisted of handling the issue of managing the image of athletes and the contracts derived from these matters. It is at this stage that I also start to incorporate the part of financial and marketing advice. At the same time, in my last years as a player, the .com bubble burst and a bank made me lose a lot of money because of this situation. That's when I decided, exactly one year after leaving basketball, to study financial analysis and variable income for two years to negotiate with this entity and recover the money. Thanks to this maneuver, I don't know if it was luck or chance that I was able to recover everything I had lost. This bank, which was small, was absorbed by

another very large one called UBS and this signed me to create a sports & entertainment department, and that's how I entered the private banking sector.

-So, your career in private banking started because of an unfortunate event?

-Yes, as I explained thanks to a complicated context that made me lose a lot of money. This fact became something positive, an opportunity, because it forced me to train in financial matters, which allowed me to recover the capital and opened the doors for me to debut in a new work environment. Therefore, in the first years off the courts, I combined my work at the UBS bank with that of Global Sports Advisors and also gave lectures on leadership and high-performance teams. It is precisely as a result of one of these talks that I carried out with Banco Sabadell a very good operation that we did with Global Sports Advisors: I carried out the entire negotiation of Leo Messi as the image of Banco Sabadell, when the entity decides to hire me to set up the sports & entertainment department where I was from 2007 to 2011.

- You're a partner and founder of technological startups. Why do you think they are a good investment for the future?

-When I left Banco Sabadell I decided with three other partners to found a company called Lánzame Capital. It is an organization dedicated to investing in startups. This is where I start to learn how to do valuations of startups, first, with an investor mentality, but then my entrepreneurial side also awakens; that is, to create them by myself. The sphere of startups involves investment in venture capital, that is to say, they are very high-risk investments in which you know that out of 10 initiatives to which you can allocate money, 8 will disappear, one will remain the same and another will be the one that it can go very well, and that you will have to compensate for the rest of the failed investments. As a person who provides the capital for these projects, what you are looking for is to surround yourself with the best team of entrepreneurs, to be very clear if their product is good, if there is a competitive advantage, and a whole series of scales that must take into account when analyzing which projects to bet on. In this sense, Andorra is a perfect place to be able to test this type of company. It's like a testing lab, and that's why I'm here.

I have always tried to anticipate and have a global view of things. When there was no internet I used to connect to Telnet to download data.

People still didn't even know what it was; when cryptocurrencies appeared in 2012, nobody knew anything, but the interesting thing is to move forward, learn about the subject and be in the most developed places in the world such as the United States, Asia, or where society has an open and entrepreneurial mentality to carry out different proposals.

Currently, in the Principality I am advising the Government through ARI (Andorra Research and Innovation), where I am helping to carry out innovation projects in the territory as the business development director of this unit. I also collaborate with Andorra Business, which is a Government area designed to attract talent to the country, which is very good, because it allows me to stay in touch with all the people who are arriving and support them in everything we can, for them to integrate and stay. Finally, I have my own company, which is called Dekaland (deka means ten in Greek) and and (the land of Andorra). It is a business consultancy, which I also use as a vehicle or satellite for investing in startups.

-What are these companies?

-I always try to ensure that the companies I am advising are related to sport,



«I want to contribute to making Andorra an attractive place where everyone who wants to start a business should consider coming here»

«I try to ensure that the companies I am advising are related to sport, health, technology and finance»

health, technology and finance. Having said that, I am currently involved in projects such as Miobio, which uses logarithms to create personalized diets for elite athletes with the help of their nutritionists and doctors, in such a way that we automate what they have to eat throughout the season; and we are already working with many first division football clubs in Spain, for example. Dewocracy is a SAAS company that helps organizations in their transition or move to hybrid work between face-to-face and remote work. It is a software that manages how to get maximum profitability from the offices when they are not 100% occupied during the day, and elements of this type. We were already developing this idea before Covid, and what the pandemic did was speed up the process and improve the situation for its implementation. Movn is of the move to earn profile, which means move to earn, and therefore rewards you the more you exercise. It's like a mega app or like an Apple Store of sports apps. The most effective way to help a startup is for you to be inside and involved, because I discovered that as an investor you put money into an initiative and pray that it will go well, but if I get involved, at least I know that it won't be left for me work and move on. On the other hand, there are others in which I only invest, because I trust them, I love the equipment they have, such as MediQuo.

I get a lot of proposals and I try to give advice and support to most of them, because I empathize with the enthusiasm and desire of the entrepreneur, but I only get involved in those projects that I consider could be super good.

-You are a member of several associations and institutions related to this sector. What are they and what is your role in them?

-I am a member of the AndBlockchain association; I am also part of Startup Grind, Google for Startups (community of entrepreneurs based in Silicon Valley) and vice president of the Panathlon. International (organization that promotes the values of Olympism).

-You have written several books on self-help, coaching, digital marketing and finance. Which one would you recommend the most and why?

-Yes, I have written The Field of Life, Leadership and Reputation, Zen 305, Practical Economics to be Happy, The Alchemy of Prosperity and 13 Baskets to Win in Digital Business. Perhaps the first is the one I have the most affection for, because it is the one I started with, but the best seller is The Alchemy of Prosperity. In

any case, it depends on the interest that each person has, they may like one or the other more. Either way, writing is an activity that I am passionate about, as it is therapeutic for me. I always observe a lot and take notes during my travels, and in the different moments I have, I then make a collection, organize the ideas and eventually the books come out.

-Do you have any special projects planned for this 2023?

-That all the companies in which I am involved grow and improve. On the other hand, that my involvement with the country can contribute as much as possible to make Andorra a very attractive place, so that everyone who wants to start a business will consider coming here. You can breathe clean air, there is a lot of security, there is no tension among the population, so you can live very calmly, taxation is very competitive compared to other states. Personally, I have many acquaintances there, it is close to Barcelona, which is close to me due to family ties, and I, who have had the opportunity to travel to many countries, can say that the Principality is a good place to live.

-General elections are held in the Principality on April 2nd. Can you vote?

-The truth is that I hear a lot of comments. Here, as everywhere, there are aspects to improve, such as the problem of housing. My opinion is that whoever is there, some continuity is supposed to be maintained. What Andorra must be very clear about is what its future model as a country is; I consider that some good foundations are being established from those that are there now, but it is only a perception as a spectator that I am, since I am obviously a resident, but I cannot vote. I'm not at all involved in politics, in fact I'm not enthusiastic, but from the department I'm in we're trying to get the state to do this chip change and make it a source of pride for Andorrans and attractive for those who might be interested in installing stay here.

-In its most intimate or personal aspect, what has the family meant to you and being a father?

-Everything, it has been absolutely everything, in the end the goal in life is to be happy and the main pillar to achieve it is the family. I got married super young, at 22; my first child was born when I was 25, when we became European Champions with La Penya, and at 27 I had my daughter. A lot of people told me I was going very fast, but I never had that feeling, it was the pace I played, because at 35 I retired. Now I am a young father, enjoying a second life. I can't ask for more. ≡



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