

Searching for memories: narratives about the initiation process of former athletes of the Brazilian futsal national team

Buscando memorias: narrativas acerca de la iniciación deportiva de atletas jubilados del seleccionado brasileño de futsal

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Abstract. Through the Development Model of Sport Participation framework and methodological perspective of oral history, this manuscript aims to narrate some fragments of the history of the sports initiation process of former elite athletes of the Brazilian Futsal Team. To this end, two interviews were conducted with athletes in the Brazilian Futsal Team during the 1980s and 1990s. From the oral history of two former futsal players, we identified evidence about the contribution of deliberate play in their initial stage of sport involvement. First, they highlighted the importance of the street and the family in their first contact with games played with feet, particularly futsal. Afterward, they emphasized the school, promoted diversified sports practices, and mentioned the role of the teacher in encouraging futsal practice in the scholar team. Finally, they evidenced the importance of social clubs and soccer practice during the transition to specialization years in futsal. It certainly contributed to their long-life athlete career.

Key Words: *Athlete development; School; Club; Family; Sport career.*

Resumen. Utilizando de la teoría del Modelo de Desarrollo de Participación Deportiva e de la perspectiva metodológica de la historia oral, fue objetivo narrar algunos fragmentos de la historia de la iniciación deportiva de atletas de elite jubilados del seleccionado brasileño de futsal. Para eso, dos entrevistas fueran realizadas con atletas que participaran del seleccionado brasileño durante los años 1980 e 1990. Los resultados apuntan la importancia de los juegos de calle, de la familia, de la escuela y del profesor y también de la profesionalización en lo futsal en clubs socio deportivos e acerca de la relación con el fútbol. Después, enfatizaron la escuela, promovieron prácticas deportivas diversificadas y mencionaron el papel del maestro en el fomento de la práctica de fútbol sala en el equipo escolar. Finalmente, evidenciaron la importancia de los clubes sociales y la práctica del fútbol durante la transición a los años de especialización en el fútbol sala. Ciertamente contribuyó a su larga carrera como atleta.

Palabras-clave: Desarrollo del atleta; Escuela; Club; Familia; Carrera deportiva.

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Introduction

A sports career is a set of activities that happen in stages or transitions from sport initiation to sport retirement (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2014). From a holistic perspective, it can be interpreted as a life career developed in stages (initiation, specialization, investment years, and maintenance) with positive and negative experiences that modulate the athlete's career during and after sports participation (Wylleman et al., 2004). In this process, the experiences during sport initiation have singular importance because the development of this stage can promote consequences on athletes' life careers as continued engagement in sport (MacPhail et al., 2003; Robertson-Wilson et al., 2003) or drop-out, burnout, and injuries (Côté & Vierimaa, 2014; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Gould, 1987; Gould et al., 1996; Wall & Côté, 2007). During adolescence and childhood, social context and familial socialization are key factors that influence player's access to and accumulation of capital in ball-kicking games (Marques et al., 2021). To understand the characteristics of continued engagement, the studies were conducted in a retrospective perspective, answering former athletes about stages or transitions of their careers (i.e., Lima et al., 2022; Vargas et al., 2021).

During sport initiation, two ways for athletes' development are possible: sampling, defined as engaging in a variety of sports during childhood (Côté et al., 2007), or early specialization, characterized by investing in just one sport from a young age to develop expertise (Ericsson et al., 1993). According to the Developmental Model of Sport Participation (DMSP, Côté & Vierimaa, 2014), the sampling years are characterized by a high amount of deliberate play, a low amount of deliberate practice, and involvement in several sports, while early specialization and investment are characterized by low amount deliberate play, high amount of deliberate practice and focus on a single sport. Evidence about the application of DMSP, especially the benefits of early diversification and its outcomes of performance, participation, and personal development, have been revised (Côté & Vierimaa, 2014).

Although the Brazilian sports initiation process nowadays occurs inside the formal teaching context (i.e., schools of soccer), there is evidence of the importance of deliberate play to athletes' development in different sports (Andrade, 2021; Lima et al., 2022). Street football could be one such example of deliberate play, characterized by playing the 'less structured' game, generally with a smaller number of

players, that provides them the opportunity to explore similar key tactical elements of the 'adult version' of the game (Machado et al., 2019; Renshaw et al., 2010; Scaglia, 2020). Evidence shows street football is one way of initiation into sports or "games played with feet" in Brazil (Andrade, 2021; Scaglia, 1999), representing a playful and liberty to play in different contexts (Machado et al., 2019; Scaglia, 2020; Scaglia et al., 2021).

Futsal is considered one of the most popular sports in Brazil (Voser, 2019), and the national team is the biggest winner in the world championships of the sport's history. Specifically, futsal initiation contributed to Brazilian culture and the development of futsal and soccer players. Many famous soccer players had their sports initiation in futsal or practiced simultaneously in both modalities during their lives (Andrade, 2021). However, because of the cultural importance of futsal in Brazil, studies using the oral history of former athletes' initiation process were scarce. Listening to former athletes about their athlete development process, especially their futsal initiation, can be important to recognize successful elements in this process and indicate highlights to actual and future futsal athletes' career development. Therefore, this study aimed to understand the sports initiation process of former Brazilian Futsal Team elite athletes.

Material & methods

This study is part of the research project entitled "Searching for memories", developed by the staff from the Sports Memory Center of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, and was approved by the University Research Ethics Board (protocol number 2007710). Both participants approve the publication of their names in this research.

Participants

Only two athletes were included because they were living in the Rio Grande do Sul state (according to the criteria of the research project entitled "Searching for memories", previously cited). The interviews took place in 2019 and two former athletes participated in the study. Eduardo Valdez Basso, known as "Morruga", was born in Porto Alegre, on September 5, 1961, and was part of the Brazilian National Futsal Team between 1983 and 1991, playing in the wing position. Luis Fernando Roeser Ortiz, known as "Ortiz", was born in Porto Alegre, on May 8, 1964, and was part of the Brazilian National Futsal Team between 1987 and 1996, playing in the pivot position.

Instrument and procedures

Oral history is a research method (e.g., historical, anthropological, and sociological) that focuses on interviews with people who participated in or witnessed events, conjunctures, and worldviews to approach this object of study. Consequently, the oral history method produces consulta-

tion sources (interviews) for other studies, which researchers can gather in an open collection. It involves studying historical events, institutions, social groups, and professional categories, among others, in the light of testimonials from people who participated or witnessed them (Alberti, 1989). In this way, we emphasize that the memories narrated here, although individual, reveal collective memories and particularized interpretations simultaneously. Therefore, they should not be considered the "absolute truth" about what is narrated: they represent the perception of who narrates or even the meanings attributed to what is narrated. Supported by the theoretical and methodological axis of oral history, this study presents as primary sources the testimonies of people who had and have significant contributions and experience as futsal athletes. In this sense, we interviewed two former athletes who were part of the Brazilian National Futsal Team in the 1980s and 1990s. The interviews lasted between 43 and 112 minutes, resulted in 55 transcription pages, and had questions about initiation, specialization, investing years, maintenance, retirement, and activities after sport activity. Considering the aim of this study, only questions about sport initiation were analyzed. The material was checked for fidelity, copy-edited, researched, and returned to the interviewees for the necessary adjustments.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using content analysis, divided into three stages: pre-analysis, exploration of the material, and treatment of results (Bardin, 2011). In the pre-analysis stage, we realized the floating reading, with the formulation of indicators; in the exploration of material, we realized the categorical analysis that consists of the dismemberment and subsequent grouping or regrouping of the units of registration of the text. Thus, the repetition of terms was adopted in the coding process to create the record units and, subsequently, initial analysis categories; in the third stage, we search for the meaning of messages, to capture the contents contained in all the material collected. Considering the theoretical and methodological assumptions that underlie the research and its empirical material, we identified in total three topics on which we focused our results and discussion:

- a) The importance of the street games and the family;
- b) The school and the role of the teacher;
- c) the professionalization of futsal through social clubs and their relationship with soccer.

Results

Below, we present the best excerpts that represent each category of analysis and our inferences about each category.

The importance of the street and the family

The street was the first place to play our subjects. For example, Morruga's speech stands out "(...) I was born with the pleasure of playing ball. I was born together with a ball. I always played ball. I have two other male brothers in my family. We

lived in a first-floor apartment; we were always on the street. It was a time when you could be on the street playing sports, ball, running, catch, and stickball, which was allowed in my time". In this part, it is evident that the street is a context of deliberate play. Morruga spent much time on the street, practicing different games, among them street football. In the 1970s and 1980s, the street was the principal place for sports initiation in Brazil, and children played freely.

However, not only did the street games have importance in an approximation of subjects of the futsal, but the family was also mentioned by them. Ortiz said when he started his preference for sports: *"(...) In childhood? It happened from the beginning. My father is a former soccer athlete in the countryside of the state, and my brother, too, until going to the academic area, healed and became a professional soccer player. I, too, always following them, since I was a kid and participating in everything"*. Morruga also mentions the family's participation in this process of initiation to sports: *"(...) my father also was always going to soccer matches, he used to take us to soccer, to the game, and we started, of course, soccer. And then I started in the schools of Grêmio (Grêmio Foot-Ball Porto Alegrense), playing soccer, me and my younger brother"*. The support of the mother also is mentioned by Ortiz, when he highlighted: *"My father was not going to bring me, there was no way. Then I spoke to my mother at the time: 'Bah' [local expression] mother, the guys invited me [to play] ...", "Go have fun man..."*. The mother's participation at that moment was important because Ortiz had had a bad experience in the previous training session. The mom tells him the training session can be fun and light. In these extracts, we can observe the influence of fathers and brothers in the first stages of their athletes' careers, sometimes as "examples" or "companions" and other times as "motivators."

The school and the role of the teacher

The school environment and the teacher's role appear in former athletes' statements. Morruga remembers *"(...) is when enrolled at Colégio Rosário to do my high school, at the time, first year, second year, and third year of high school... Rosário also had a powerful philosophy about sports, and the physical education teacher was Alexandre Zilles, known as Barata. So, he already played futsal, and then started the school's futsal team"*.

Ortiz talks about the importance of the experience in various sports that were provided at school. *"(...) Maybe this is one of the reasons why I did well in the sport I chose, which was futsal because I played all sports. In high school, I played volleyball, basketball, soccer, futsal, and athletics since I was a kid. I would not say I liked running long races, but I participated in 100-meter races, jumping, and everything imaginable. I was always on the school team because I liked to compete. So, from the beginning, I remember more in high school. I think it started in high school, and I think that this was what shaped my formation as an athlete in all sports"*. In this discourse, we can observe several times diversified sports activities are promoted in the school context. These activities were developed inside of school physical education classes and contributed to the whole engagement of Ortiz in sport practice during his life. Additionally,

Morruga's speech presented the importance of the teacher also in the sports promotion of the school's futsal team. Although it can be characterized as deliberate practice, in the Brazilian context, traditionally, the school teams spend less time in the training process and commonly play "official" games in school tournaments without adequate preparation. So, children frequently spend more time in deliberate play or physical education classes than deliberate practice at school.

The professionalization of futsal through social clubs and their relationship with soccer

Morruga, in his speech, mentions that he already practiced soccer and that his experience as a federated athlete occurred as a youth, in a social club in the Porto Alegre city. *"(...) before entering Colégio Rosário to go to high school, I played soccer, I played until I was fourteen, fifteen years old, at Grêmio. (...) Teacher Alexandre Zilles took me to the youth team of Clube Gondoleiros (Sociedade Gondoleiros from Porto Alegre). Well, I got into futsal and started to fall in love with futsal. And then I started my career, where I rose quickly"*.

Ortiz says that he used to play soccer and was invited to participate in an "Olympics" between pre-college courses. They went through the classrooms to find out who played futsal. *"(...) they started to go into the classrooms and ask who played futsal. "Who plays futsal?" it was only futsal; there was no soccer. "I play", and so on.*

In the "Olympics," he stood out and received an invitation from the goalkeeper of the team that was already playing federated for the Teresópolis Tennis Club (Porto Alegre) to a tryout. *"(...) at that time it was like that, 1981. [...] Then I arrived at the training session on Thursday; the squad was there; Teresópolis had a good team; they had been champions the year before. However, when I arrived, the guys asked me: "So, in what position do you play?" and I said, "Man, I score goals. I am a guy who likes to be close to the goal, to score goals", "Oh, so you play on the wing, you play upfront". Then I went to the training session, and it was a shame. Because there is a whole strategy, you must attack and mark. I did not know how to mark anyone. I knew how to play ball. I thought... for the next training, I must devise a strategy... I have to play more; I have to play. I may be able to play. So, I came up with a strategy; I remembered a little bit of what the first training session had been like. I will show you my game. However, when I do not have the ball, I pick a guy and go after him. When they put me in, I thought, "Well, this is it," and I focused. The guy played; I ran after him but did not let him play. And then, when I got the ball, things started happening. I know it happened... I do not remember, but I think it must have been about ten or fifteen minutes. They took me out to sign the sheet in the corner, and that was when I joined the futsal federation for the first time. It was 1981. I was at the corner, and the directors were standing there with the form and a piece of paper for me to sign. So, I became a federated futsal player for the first time"*.

The two interviewed had different ways to transition from futsal initiation to specialization years. While Morruga participated in deliberate soccer practice before, Ortiz

joined a futsal team directly. Similarly, both players started deliberately practicing futsal at around fifteen years old in the club context. They effectively concluded the transition by initiation to specialization years at that moment. According to them, the new stage was characterized by the amount of time dispensed in deliberate practice, increasing tactical, technical, and strategy-specific demands in the futsal context. These events marked the beginning of their sports careers as futsal athletes, so the transition from initiation to specialization stage.

Discussion

This study aimed to understand the sports initiation process of former Brazilian Futsal Team elite athletes. Three principal results were found: 1) the importance of the street and the family in the first contact with games played with feet, particularly futsal; 2) the school promoting diversified sports practices, and the role of the teacher, encouraging the futsal practice; and 3) the importance of social clubs and soccer during the transition to specialization years. The interviewees had contact with futsal in a deliberate practice systematically only after fifteen years old. Before, other games with feet, such as soccer and street soccer, and other sports practices in school physical education classes were important in their sport initiation process.

The initiation is an important stage of a sport career, and the positive or negative experiences lived there can modulate the athlete's career and promote continued engagement in sport (Lima et al., et al. 2022; MacPhail et al., 2003; Robertson-Wilson et al., 2003; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2014; Wylleman et al., 2004). In our research, different aspects were mentioned by interviewees, corroborating the DMSP (Côté et al., 2007). The mention of street practices, such as street soccer, confirms the high amount of deliberate play in the first years of practice, characterizing the importance of this type of play in sampling years. Specifically, the childhood of our interviewees occurred around the 1960s to 1970s in Brazil, and according to Freire (2011), in the past, there was no need to talk about soccer schools (with a high amount of deliberate practice), because playing in the streets was a great learning experience. The practice of street football and other games with feet, playing 'less structured' games, generally with a smaller number of players, may provide the interviewees the opportunity to explore important tactical and technical elements (Machado et al., 2019; Renshaw et al., 2010; Scaglia, 2020) in their future professional futsal performance.

Both interviewed mentioned Parental support as essential during the initiation process. Parents' encouragement and constant accompaniment are important to create a favorable environment for their children during sports practice (Latorre et al., 2009), and it also appears in athletes with a successful career (Visscher et al., 2016). Parents' participation at different levels of involvement can contribute to or harm their children's performance in sports (Costa

et al., 2021; Costa et al., 2021; Nunomura & Oliveira, 2014; Zisi et al., 2010). According to Marques et al. (2021), social context and familial socialization are key factors influencing a player's access to and accumulation of capital in ball-kicking games during childhood and youth. Recent research evidenced that young athletes' motivation and sports involvement were related to positive parental support (Santos et al., 2022), and it can be in different manifestations, i. e., such as through transport and in psychological support (Costa et al., 2021) like occurred with our interview.

For both subjects of our research, the school has singular importance during sampling years, both in the diversification of sports practice and in the influence of teachers in future sport practice. Ortiz i.e. mentioned that he played several sports in school physical education classes. Regarding the role of the school, Paes (2001) notes that in this institution, sports culture must be promoted and disseminated, thus configuring itself as an important environment for teaching sports. Voser (2019) describes that the school should be transformative. In Brazil, sports are obligatory in the scholarly curriculum. Recently, a governmental document, "Base Nacional Comum Curricular" (BNCC, Base Nacional Comum Curricular, 2018) proposed an increment of diversification of sports practice in all schools' curricula. Although the BNCC has focused on sports initiation and participation, according to the Côté and Vierimaa (2014)' review, early diversification (sampling) is also a strong recommendation for developing elite athletes, and it will ultimately affect performance outcomes. Other retrospective studies with adult athletes highlighted the diversity before specialization as an important foundational element for talent development in one sport (i.e., Baker et al., 2005; Barreiros et al., 2013; Gulbin et al., 2010; Lidor & Lavyan, 2002; Soberlak & Côté, 2003). Additionally, Morruga's teacher incentivized him to practice futsal, and he highlighted that this teacher was a former futsal player. This incentive and the deliberate practice in the extracurricular program contributed to Morruga confirming the transition from initiation to the specialization practice of futsal. Teachers have an important role in students' motivation for sports practice. A recent study with female Brazilian handball world champions showed that coaches' interest in keeping young athletes engaged in sport is one of the key elements of the early years (Lima et al., 2022). In Brazil, in the scholarly scenario, students like physical education classes, and those teachers motivate them to play different sports inside and outside of physical education lessons (Freitas et al., 2016; Ripari et al., 2018). Despite the differences between physical education and top-level sports (Mountakis, 2001), our results signal teachers' importance in sports practice motivation.

Finally, the last aspects highlighted in the interviews were related to the importance of social clubs and soccer during the transition to specialization years. In Brazil, social clubs offer sports practice from a different perspective,

from leisure to top-level sport (Galatti et al., 2016), depending on club structure and aim. So, social clubs were important locals to sports access and development (Antonelli et al., 2012). Both subjects of this research accede to the specialization stage in the club context. Additionally, they related their experience with soccer before or simultaneously after the futsal practice. Recent retrospective research highlighted that many famous Brazilian soccer and futsal players had their sports initiation in another modality before the transition to the specific sport practice or practiced simultaneously in both modalities during a period of their lives (Andrade, 2021).

What draws attention to the statements of the former athletes is that, before they joined the futsal federation, they had a great experience of the street, soccer, and futsal at school. In this case, it is important to note that soccer and futsal were experienced almost simultaneously. Notwithstanding this relationship in both sports, there was no predominance of teaching methodologies based on the reproduction of futsal and professional soccer but instead on general development based on playfulness, the pleasure of playing, free play, or with rules modified by its practitioners, mainly based on local culture.

The narratives of the two former athletes indicate that, despite having started on the streets and at school, it was in the clubs that they had contact with what we can consider professionalization in the sport, i.e., dedication to training, fulfillment of duties, participation in competitions, and improvement in sports performance. These aspects contributed to them reaching the highest position in the sport: being part of the national team. Therefore, it becomes pertinent to reconsider the path taken by both related to uncertainty, randomness, and variability in the acquisition of technical skills for a professional life in sport, suggesting that there is an expectation that the learning process constitutes a succession of responses jointly and not in rigid methodologies that ignore human mechanisms to build sporting knowledge.

Finally, we have identified a learning path from sport initiation to the professionalization of these athletes that go through the role of the family, the teacher/coach, the school, and the club for long-term athletic development. It is impossible to rank the importance of these factors, as they are considered fundamental for the integral development of the young athlete.

Conclusions and practical implications

The DMSP framework was based on promoting a high amount of deliberate play, with diversified practices, in the initiation of sports. It can promote long-life sports practice, improve sports performance, and contribute to youth's sports participation, performance, and personal development. In this study, we identified evidence about the contribution of deliberate play in their initial stage of sport involvement from the oral history of two former futsal players. First, they highlighted the importance of the

street and the family in their first contact with games played with feet, particularly futsal. Afterward, they emphasized the school, promoted diversified sports practices, and mentioned the role of the teacher in encouraging futsal practice in the scholar team. Finally, they evidenced the importance of social clubs and soccer practice during the transition to specialization years in futsal. Although the facts revealed by subjects occurred between the 1960s and 1970s in Brazil, these results reinforce the evidence about the relevance of a high amount of deliberate play during the initiation process. It contributed to the transition from initiation to specialization years and their long-life athlete career. So, although the number of subjects in this research is limited, we signalize the importance of listening to the oral history of former athletes to understand their experiences and the principal elements that contributed to their life careers. The above information can contribute to modern and future sports programs, not only futsal, based on theoretical frameworks like DMSP, to plan the sports curricula and promote pedagogical practice for young students or players.

Conflicts of interest

The authors do not have any conflicts of interest to declare.

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