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The Career Transition Between Basketball Champions in The Amateurism Phase

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ABSTRACT

The sports professionalism in times of amateurism was once regarded as much immoral as the practice of using doping substances in the contemporary sport. Being amateur was a determining condition for the athlete to be able to enter the Olympic arena and to validate their medals and records. This life style, though, had a high cost for those unable to subsist from the sport practice, but instead dependent on the remunerated professional activity to survive. The objective of this essay was to analyze how the athlete from amateurism times used to manage the athletic career and experienced the transition for the post-athlete life respectively. Collaborating with this survey there are 10 post-athletes, former basketball players who shared successful experiences of great international repercussion, such as the second world championship (1959 and 1963) and the bronze Olympic medals (1960 and 1964). By means of biographical narratives of Rosa Branca, Antônio Sucar, Wlamir Marques, Amaury Pasos, Menon, Boccardo, Vitor, Carlos Massoni (Mosquito) and Jatyr, it was possible to reunite elements to understand the importance of the historical moment of the sport in terms of the adoption of more provident strategies for the management of the sports career. This enabled the athletes to experience the phases of termination and change of roles with coping resources and, consequently, being free of major problems, even if the absence of formal systems to support the transition hindered the process of resources construction.

INTRODUCTION

The way like the amateurism is approached in the literature seems to be reduced to a mere conceptual dimension, institutionally constituted and exempted from the participation of the athlete, the reason for the existence of contemporary sports. Understanding this historic moment of the modern sports in light of the athletic trajectory is considering also its implications on those who had to correspond to the requirements of the regulatory agencies of the sport. The athlete of the amateurism times was someone who longed for social recognition through the competitive practice, but the activity was anchored to an anti-professional speech resulting from the aristocratic sport culture that influenced the representations about the sport and their protagonists. This dogmatic amateurism conception that was initiated even before the re-edition of the Olympic games and the creation of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), installed not only a professional athlete marginalization process, but also contributed when the sporting culture followed, in an unbalanced way, the changes of thought that the society and culture experienced (HALL, 2002; SOARES, 2002; RUBIO, 2004a; GIGLIO, 2013).

To follow the athletic career in times of amateurism was to live a major dilemma. Besides of being formally prohibited to receive any kind of gratification for the activity, the athlete had to deal with the social stigmas that either conceived him as an eccentric being, if belonging to aristocracy, or as a vagabond, if belonging to the working class (CARDOSO, 1994, RUBIO,

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2004a). This situation had a significant impact on the way how this athlete approached the sports practice and the moment to end it. The career transition was a possibility and not a fatality, since a voluntary and free athletic career did not result in benefits of any order, but in losses. Hence the development of activities, interests and resources disconnected from the sport, which gave to these athletes other victorious careers in the condition of post-athletes (RUBIO, 2011).

The post-athletes that collaborated to this research developed and ended their athletic careers within this historical moment and professional perspective. Without financial support, they had to conduct the sports practice in parallel to the remunerated professional career. Just like them, other athletes from the amateurism times had to sustain the Olympic dream through the practice of a profession, adopting a kind of "career management" classified by Price, Morrison & Arnold as Life Out, in which other interests, social functions and activities, either professional or not, composed the athletic trajectory. According to the authors, this kind of practice is responsible for mitigating negative implications of abrupt endings with strongly established identities, such as the athletic identity, offering internal and external resources to the athlete, that when in the career change process, can have a better view of the post-athletic career, and can also make more positive projections concerning the new functions to assume (TORREGROSA et al., 2004; PRICE, MORRISON & ARNOLD, 2010).

In light of the elements brought by the biographical narratives of the world basketball two-time champions, this article aims to analyze how the athlete of the amateurism times experienced the transition to the post-athlete life.

The context of the athletic career in the times of amateurism

Eric Hobsbawm (1994) presents modern sport as an important element of human culture, which used to reflect the social changes and at the same time had influence. The rupture of the paradigms that until the mid-nineteenth century limited the sports practice to the aristocracy, marked the beginning of a switch over process of approaches about sports, articulated in accordance to the interests of the already mentioned aristocracy, and also of the working class, the States, and the spectacle culture of the second half of the twentieth century (GONZALEZ, 1993; DEBORD, 1997; RUBIO, 2001; 2010).

The historical moment in which the world basketball two-time champions of 1959 and 1963 conducted their careers coincides with what Rubio (2010) defined as conflict phase, a moment in which sports events were affected by the World War II and the Cold War. For many countries, the Olympic Games were the opportunity for a demonstration of power and national identities. Confrontations in the sports field used to reflect other interest, and the victories in the competitions were a way to legitimate the belief in a strong nation (TABORDA, 2012).

The conceptions of "athletic career" could have been born in the period in which the States in conflict started to take possession of sports as a political tool, sponsoring athletes to use their performances as evidences of power, thus transgressing the amateur ideal (ALFERMANN, STAMBULOVA & ZEMAITYTE, 2004; STAMBULOVA & ALFERMANN, 2009). Other circumstances also influenced this transformation process of the amateur project of sports practice as, for example, the development and democratization of the means of communication, as well as the consumption of cultural goods, such as the sport shaped as entertainment (GONZALEZ, 1993; HOBSBAWM, 1994).

Distinct configurations of athletic career emerged from the United States in the years 1900s, gaining power after the Great Depression and, mainly, after the 1950s, with the good phase of

economy after the wars and the emerging of the consumption culture. According to Goudsouzian (2010), while the National Leagues became increasingly attractive to the public, they also came to be conceived as profitable commercial enterprises for the athletes. However, popular sports modalities such as baseball, football and basketball were consolidated as professional events only in their territory. Similarly, popular sports modalities of British origin such as cricket, tennis and rugby, were consolidated only where there was the British flag (HOBSBAWM, 1994; 2006).

The Era of the two-time champions was marked by a rupture moment in which old structures and reference systems were fragmenting, at the same time in which new conceptions of the world were emerging. In several countries, social movements were questioning the culture and the pre-established order for the relations of gender, religion, ethnicity, politics and labor, thus frustrating the modern ideals of civilization and launching a state of uncertainty (HALL, 2002). The amateurism is questioned right when its universal assumption became displaced and fragmented by the multiple interpretations of regional "amateurism" that were putting down from inside out the foundations built by the IOC and by the sports aristocracy (SALLAES & SOARES, 2002; RUBIO, 2004a; 2010).

According to Pitchford (2013) the amateurism became a regulatory philosophy of the sports practice by the end of the nineteenth century, but its principles date back to a moral from the times of the Ancient Greece (RUBIO, 2002), when it was understood that the presence of money in the sports arena would maculate the sports agonistic ritual, subjecting the motivation of the athlete to only the search for an external objective at the expense of the "elevation of the spirit", which could only be reached by means of an intrinsically motivated practice. Pitchford (2013) mentions also that the amateurism-professionalism dichotomy was seen in a much more rigorous way when distinct classes of athletes began to appear and stand out in the sports scene, forcing the regulatory institutions of sports, still in the nineteenth century, to conceive an amateurism that could separate the less skilled ones (said amateurs) from the more skilled ones (said professionals), reserving to the first ones the international level (Olympic) and to the latter, the national and regional levels (marginal).

However, the violation of these regulations was as current as inevitable, when the national representations started to be placed in the same space to have their abilities compared. Therefore, if the Olympic medals reinforced the assumptions of superiority of one country over the other, the approach of the States on the sports protagonists could not be amateur anymore. At that moment, the athlete changed from being a disinterested lover of sports practice to be the main target of financial investments in order to victoriously represent his country in the competitions (GUTTMANN, 1988; MURRAY, 1992). This demonstrates that the amateurism was not the only paradigm to influence the athletic career. The ever-changing cultural, political, geographical and economic panoramas also determined new directions to the sport (RUBIO, 2004a). Hence the use of the term "amateurisms" in the plural as a way to emphasize the diversity with which the code was designed by athletes, clubs, federations and their respective countries throughout the twentieth century. As described initially, the transformations that the society was facing during the entire century shook the structures of the IOC, which unsuccessfully tried to clarify to the sports community the meaning of being an amateur (DOHERTY, 1960; GIGLIO, 2013).

The transition of athletic career in Brazil

In Brazil, the transition of career gained repercussion only in the last ten years, through the sports journalism, which started to present the situation of post-athletes that, despite of the recognition in the past, bemoan a present status marked by the social neglect, financial

problems and poor health conditions. During the most productive period of their lives, those athletes attended Brazilian clubs and teams' calls and represented their badges through the world in a voluntary and free manner. However, their sports careers were developed at a time in which to be an athlete was not synonymous of financial ascension, nor was it considered a professional career (RUBIO & FERREIRA JUNIOR, 2012).

Before the advent of professionalism, the athletic career was the privilege of few self-sacrificing ones that could count on family support or some kind of gratification that could ensure meeting the routine and sports needs (RUBIO, 2006). While the amateurism was relativized in the world, the Brazilian athletes seemed to live under constant surveillance and restrictions. They refused opportunities to make money, in fear of losing conquered honors and medals if considered as professionals (RUBIO, 2004b). This tension led them to seek for various options in order to maintain the Olympic dream, such as the establishment of agreements with the academic institutions in which they studied and with the companies in which they worked in order to be able to take part of the concentration periods and competitions while representing the Brazilian teams. However, these agreements almost never exempted them from losing academic periods, or having discounts in their wages or from being suited due to the need to be out (RUBIO & FERREIRA JUNIOR, 2012). For them, the institutional and social support hardly existed during the athletic career, and neither did it happen at the moment of the career ending. The "retirement" implied a preparation under full responsibility of the athlete, who could not distance himself from the academic formation and professional practice if he wanted to go through a transition of career (OGILVIE & TAYLOR, 1993; DRAHOTA & EITZEN, 1998; RUBIO, 2004b; RUBIO & FERREIRA JUNIOR, 2012).

In a more risky way, some athletes together with their clubs adopted semi professionalization and the so-called "off-the-record agreements", or they disguised themselves as employees of the clubs to be able to receive salaries while "working" in another function. In any case, the adoption of double shift of activities was almost an inevitable condition. Even though being reportedly professionals, the athletes of the amateurism did not earn enough to be able to live or retire through the sport activity. For them, the end of the athletic career was something announced since the engagement into the sport, requiring them to be prepared and, in most of the times, to prioritize the work to the detriment of the sport (RUBIO & FERREIRA JUNIOR, 2012). This characteristic of leaving the athlete's role is identified also in other searches with athletes of the same period (OGILVIE & TAYLOR, 1993; DRAHOTA & EITZEN, 1998; RUBIO, 2001; PRICE, MORRISON & ARNOLD, 2010; RUBIO & FERREIRA JUNIOR, 2012).

METHOD

This research is based on the biographical narratives of 10 Olympic athletes and basketball world champions. Understood by Rubio (2014) as individual speech, the narratives offer an understanding not only about the narrator, but also about his social group, his living universe and the experiences accumulated through life. Conceived as qualitative method par excellence, the biographical narrative allows the comprehension of socio-cultural phenomena, bringing the individual/narrator to the center of the interpretation process of the facts and events experienced (RUBIO, 2001; 2004a; 2014).

On the biographical narratives it was applied the human adaptation analysis model to the transition of Schlossberg (1981), a conceptual structure by which the transition processes can be viewed. According to the author, a process of transition constitutes an event, or non-event, which alters the personal assumptions and world visions, thus requiring proportional changes in the social relations and behavior. The transition can be classified in three distinct ways: anticipated, when common social experiences prepare the individual to the expected change

phases and processes, such as joining the university or entering the labor market, getting married or having the first child. Non-anticipated transitions correspond to unexpected or abrupt situations, to which the person or group is not prepared, as well as moving to another city, an accident or death of a relative. Finally, the non-events, related to expected transition processes that do not occur or, when occurring, do not correspond to the expectations of change to which the individual was prepared. A career promotion that becomes an accumulation of functions, or a retirement that does not reflect the well-being as the reward for a life dedicated to the work, are some examples of this kind of transition. The kind of transition constitutes one of the first elements for description of the phenomenon (abruptly, forcefully or voluntarily experienced). Then, the situation, the context in which occurs the transition (historical moment, the group). In third place are the conditions (the presence or not of internal and external resources to face the transition). And in the last place are the existing types of support that have influence in the transition process (formal and informal systems of support) (SCHLOSSBERG, 1981).

The collaborators selected for this research were all Olympic athletes and they took part in at least one of the achievements that included the world championships of 1959 and 1963 and the bronze medals in the Olympic Games of Rome in 1960 and Tokyo in 1964.

The World Champions	Age of first Olympic participation	Age of last Olympic participation	Age of the definitive career end
Wlamir	19	31	38
Amaury	21	29	38
Rosa Branca	20	28	31
Sucar	21	29	34
Menon	24	28	30
Jatyr	22	26	28
Mosquito	21	33	40
Boccardo	24	24	37
Fritz	23	23	40
Vitor	23	23	40

Representation, by age, of the phases of the athletic career of the world champions

What is the meaning of the transition of the athletic career?

The narratives selected here show that on behalf of the "pure" amateurism, the athletes suffered pressure from family members that, concerned about the uncertain lifestyle of their children, stressed the importance of the remunerated job and the guarantee of a better future. Being an athlete had the meaning of being a different citizen from the average in a society that had the job as a primary value. In life outside the sport, the amateur athlete had no privileged status, because while spending his time with training and competitions, a situation that was considered by most as the activity of vagabonds, people of the same age were dedicated only to the education or the remunerated job. That condition led many athletes to share training with professional activities recognized as such.

By the time when I was young, there was no professional sport, then, every athlete had to have a double life [Vitor Mirshawka].

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When remembering his own experience, Mirshawka states that by being involved with activities beyond the sport, he found no major difficulties when he decided to leave the role of athlete, for he had other roles constituted and in constant action. In times of high-level athletes, the sport had a certain "romanticism", allowing space for the practitioners to dedicate themselves to other interests in life.

Receiving wages that were similar to those paid to non-athlete workers, the two-time champions experienced the end of the sports career as a natural step of the life trajectory. This moment can be named as an inherent phase to the continuity of a trajectory based on the remunerated job (OGILVIE & TAYLOR, 1993; DRAHOTA & EITZEN, 1998). This understanding took many of the athletes of this generation to study and build a post-athlete professional career.

Wlamir was a physical education teacher; Sucar was a lawyer; Vitor, teacher; Radvilas, engineer; I was an industrial chemist. Then, there was a preparation for the future, which is something that people do not do currently, with rare exceptions [Fritz].

This statement expresses the understanding of the importance of the education for the continuity of the future personal trajectory. Hence the understanding that the end of the athletic career is a possibility, enunciated by a transition whose process did not occur only at the end, but all over the athletic career in the preparation processes for the adult life, such as the academic formation and the professional practice. The sports context presented to the two-time champions required a more thoughtful approach and a conception of athletic career as something that is not more preponderant than the job (RUBIO & FERREIRA JUNIOR, 2012).

This characteristic of transition considers what Schlossberg (1981) will classify as anticipated event, when the confrontation of the changing process occurs based on preparation, testing and in the case of the two-time champions, performance of functions that are inherent to the post-athlete life.

Another way of thinking the transition of the two-time champions, according to the concepts of Schlossberg (1981) is through the meanings and representations assigned to the age group. The university phase (age from 18 to 24 years) would represent a period for visualization of the professional future, which for not being tangible yet, opened space so that the engagement of the high-level athletes of the amateurism of sport could be greater. This condition, in the specific case of the two-time champions, coincided with the first opportunities to participate in the Olympic Games. The insertion and consolidation phase of the professional career, post-academic, on the other hand, will coincide with a gradual process of disengagement of the athletic career, in which the role of the athlete is, a priori, shifted to a lower preponderance level, which in the case of the two-time champions resulted in leaving the international competitions and in the continuity of the career in clubs until the final exit. This ending is labelled by several factors. Jatyr recalled that he did not play for long time:

> *...because there was no professionalism at the time, and so we had to work. I had to support the family. (I was) Already married, my son came, and then, there was no way. I stopped playing basketball at the age of 28 years [Jatyr].*

It is worth noting also that the experience of the ending of Jatyr's athletic career occurred at the age of 28 years is interpreted as a phase to prioritize interests constituted as natural events of life such as forming a family, a determinant factor to take the decision of leaving the role of athlete. According to Schlossberg (1981) to be in time means to correspond to the

requirements of a social calendar that regulates the phases and events inherent to each age group. To be out of time, on the other hand, means to be subject to the social stigmas, to be late. In these biographical narratives, we observe that the experiences of transition do not represent definitive ruptures with the sport, but a gradual process and elaborated disengagement, initiated since the high-level phase of the athletic career, when demands and professional goals were established in concurrent transition processes.

Final considerations

What the biographical narratives of the world two-time champions present about the ending experience and transition of career is that the confronting strategies of these processes reflected the social representations about the sport and the athletes of the time. These considerations indicate that the athlete conceived the sport career in a more thoughtful way and as an activity as important as the others.

The idea of searching in the athletes of amateurism times the understanding about the experience of ending and transition of career came from the concern about the life conditions of post-athletes that, though highly renowned in the past, are now bemoaning a present that is marked by the social obscurity, financial problems and critical health conditions.

The biographical narratives studied here indicated that beyond a hard and potentially traumatic experience, the ending and transition of the athletic career implied broader and more complex processes of resignification of roles, as well as long-term experiences of rebirth. By the time when the professionalism in sports was prohibited, the two-time champions had to work and as anybody else, they had to use the free time to other activities. They were away from the professional activities and everyday responsibilities only when representing the country in competitions and despite of conquering titles of great international recognition, they did not have the glamour and the idolatry that we see nowadays.

This closer relation of the two-time champions with the everyday universe contributed to make them become less vulnerable to the negative effects of the leaving process from a significant role, such as feeling of identity loss and ostracism. The narratives show that certain phases of the adult life were the main causes for the early termination of their sport career, especially in the Brazilian team. The professional responsibilities, functions of the family core, as well as the desire of personal achievement in these same spheres, competed with the dedication to the sport. This situation led the athletes to perform processes of priority reorganization in which the sports practice was gradually placed in less preponderant scales, until being finally left. This kind of disengagement was characterized specifically in two ways: a) ceasing of international sports commitments and continuity of the athletic career in clubs; b) definitive ceasing of the athletic career in the club, followed by the continuity of the professional career, either inside or outside the sporting context.

It is also observed that the career transition does not necessarily occur while leaving the athlete role, but it is built along the entire athletic trajectory, when besides of the possibility of achievements in the sport, challenges and possibilities of achievement outside the sports are being presented to the athletes. In other words, when the athlete expands his network of relations and develops interests beyond the sport, the chances to face the transition in a more positive way are greater. When the two-time champions ended their athletic careers driven by the affluence of the everyday life activities, they demonstrated one of the reflections generated by this transit between sports life and everyday life: the affluence of activities not as a negative aspect, but a positive one in what concerns the multiplicity of paths before the doubts that the post-athlete life can bring.

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In conclusion, the biographical narratives reveal the significant role that the amateurism had concerning the type of career management practiced at the time, as well as the characteristics, meanings and consequences of this attitude in their lives as post athletes. They show also that the amateurism was not the only factor to determine the transition, but one among many forces that constituted social representations about the sport and its protagonist.

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