
“IT WAS COMPETITIVE, IT WAS VERY COMPETITIVE!”: MEMORIES OF PERFORMANCE SPORTS IN CURITIBA’S PRIVATE SCHOOLS (1980-1990)**“ERA COMPETITIVO, ERA MUITO COMPETITIVO!”: MEMÓRIAS DO ESPORTE ESCOLAR DE RENDIMENTO EM ESCOLAS PARTICULARES DE CURITIBA (1980-1990)**Pauline Iglesias Vargas¹ and André Mendes Capraro²¹Positivo University, Curitiba-PR, Brazil.²Federal University of Paraná, Curitiba-PR, Brazil.

RESUMO

O presente estudo investigou a prática do esporte escolar de rendimento em escolas particulares de Curitiba-PR, entre os anos de 1980 e 1990, por meio de entrevistas com técnicos, atletas e gestores esportivos que vivenciaram o fenômeno no período. A pesquisa é de caráter qualitativo e o método de investigação utilizado foi a História Oral temática pura. A partir das análises percebeu-se que boa parte das escolas curitubanas da época mantinham equipes esportivas de rendimento; o contexto do esporte escolar curitubano era uma espécie de metáfora do esporte profissional; havia uma hegemonia dos esportes coletivos; o esporte feminino sedimentado na memória dos entrevistados foi a ginástica; as equipes eram muito valorizadas dentro dos colégios; os times escolares participavam de campeonatos nacionais e internacionais; apesar do caráter de rendimento, já existia diferença do esporte praticado em clubes; algumas instituições de ensino faziam parcerias com clubes esportivos.

Palavras-chave: História. Memória. Esportes. Escolas.

ABSTRACT

The present study investigated performance school sports practiced in private schools of Curitiba-PR, between 1980 and 1990, through interviews with coaches, athletes and sports managers who experienced the phenomenon in that period. The research is qualitative, and the investigation method used was pure Thematic Oral History. The analyses allowed observing that a good portion of Curitiba's schools back then had performance sports teams; the context of Curitiba's school sports was a sort of metaphor for professional sports; there was a hegemony of team sports; the women's sport sedimented on the interviewees' memory was gymnastics; teams were highly valued in schools; school teams participated in national and international championships; despite the performance character, there was already a difference from the sports played at clubs; some education institutions partnered with sports clubs.

Keywords: History. Memory. Sports. Schools.

Introduction

This is recurrent when it comes to the history of physical education: the 1980s and 1990s were stage to many discussions around the presence of sports in educational institutions. However, sports were and still are practiced in schools; obviously, their formats and objectives have also undergone transformations over the years, and sports are approached as a curricular physical education content or outside school hours¹. However, the study object of this investigation is the second alternative, that is, sports practiced out of the scope of curricular physical education classes.

School sports used to be provided by most private schools, especially in Curitiba, in the 1980s and 1990s, free of charge and for performance purposes. After all, the colleges of that time organized teams of different modalities to represent educational institutions in school, state, national and, sometimes, international competitions. That said, the main goal of this research was to investigate, through the memories of those who experienced them, performance school sports in Curitiba's private educational institutions between the 1980s and 1990s. Thus, this is not about verifying the veracity of the facts that occurred, but rather the ways in which they were learned and interpreted by the protagonists².

Methods

The methodological choice to answer the aforementioned question is pure Thematic Oral History. This method uses interviews that include the participant's version³. In the case herein, they are coaches, managers and former athletes involved with Curitiba's school sports in the 1980s and 1990s.

Considering the silence on the part of the scientific community in the field about the performance school sports phenomenon (especially after the re-democratization process), Oral History stands as the appropriate methodology for the theme of this research, precisely for shedding light on the perspective of those who experienced it⁴.

The selection of participants was determined based on the following inclusion criteria: 1) each interviewee should have experienced performance sports in at least one private school in Curitiba between the 1980s and 1990s; 2) having been a coach, manager or athlete; 3) having worked at any of the schools mentioned in the first interview; 4) having experience with a sport or school different from those of the other interviewees. Among possible collaborators, the chosen ones were those who were really willing to narrate their memories and provide meaningful information, thus being, as described by Alberti^{2,43}, “the good interviewees”.

Consequently, in total, six interviewees were selected to compose the group of collaborators in this study, namely:

Mauro Marturelli Júnior – Started his career as a football coach at a public school in the early 1980s and, due to his good results, was hired as a coach by Positivo School [*Colégio Positivo*], where he remained until the early 2000s. He currently manages the careers of Brazilian football players.

Marcos Mathias Lamers – Worked for about fifteen years with sports at Santa Maria Marist School [*Escola Marista de Santa Maria*]. At the time of the interview, he was managing the base football of Paraná Club.

Nádia Dalla Barba – Experienced extracurricular sports in the late 1980s as a handball athlete and, later, worked as a coach with the same modality at Barddal School [*Colégio Barddal*]. Unintentionally, Nádia represented the feminine view of the object, making up a 1:6 ratio, that is, she was the only woman among six interviewees. Possibly, this proportionality, though not intentional, reflects the context of that time. After all, the reports evidenced a supremacy of memories about the participation of male coaches and managers.

Roberley Leonardo – Best known in sports as “Rubinho”, started playing volleyball in elementary school. In 2016, when interviewed, he had just returned from the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, in which he worked as coach assistant to the team that won gold in men's volleyball. His reports are spanned by his involvement with sports and his protagonism in the current sports field.

Newton Zanon – Played football in his childhood, being stimulated initially at school and later at his club. He pursued academic training in physical education and, in a few years, went from coach to sports coordinator at an extracurricular institution until 1996. At the time of the interview, he was holding the position of director of Curitiba's Municipal Secretariat of Sports and Youth.

Nelson Rodrigues – Known as “Nelsinho”, he, like the other interviewees, had his first contact with sports at school. The former athlete had his life story linked to sport, went from athlete to sports coach, and became involved with public policy for sports. He proudly narrated that, during the period he was Positivo School's principal, the school's handball coach was Edgar Hubner. At the time of the interview, Nelson was managing the sporting career of a Brazilian Olympic swimming athlete – Henrique Rodrigues (his son).

It is worth noting that this study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of University of Brasília's Institute of Human Sciences – CEP/IH, under substantiated opinion

number 1.469.110, CONEP registration number: 51225615.5.0000.5540. Moreover, all interviewees signed the Informed Consent Form and allowed the disclosure of their identities.

Oral sources were analyzed with documentary autonomy. Therefore, the interviews became sources of research, especially considering the importance of analyzing them from the concepts of memory, bearing in mind that the collaborator, while being interviewed, organizes their narratives based on the evocation of their own memory, not disregarding the fact that it is a memory of an event from the past in a moment of the present⁵.

Finally, the choice was for using the transcription procedures suggested by Alberti² for composing the written document. Thus, initially, the interview was transcribed verbatim. After the first stage, some adaptations were made to the text in order to make the interview readable². Nevertheless, the final transcribed document was returned to the interviewee so that they could evaluate it and hand it back to the authors.

Results and Discussion

Centered on performance sports (though at embryonic stage) practiced in schools, the research purposely spotlighted some private schools that played a leading role in Curitiba's sports scene. Thus, school sports, from the perspective of performance, was present, according to reports, in the following institutions: Positivo School [*Colégio Positivo*], Santa Maria School [*Colégio Santa Maria*], Paraná Marist School [*Colégio Marista Paranaense*], Expoente School [*Colégio Expoente*], Dom Bosco School [*Colégio Dom Bosco*], Medianeira School [*Colégio Medianeira*], in addition to the extinct Camões School [*Colégio Camões*] and Barddal School [*Colégio Barddal*]. Although not all interviewees recalled exactly the same schools participating in this phenomenon, a collective memory⁶ related to the protagonism of Positivo School, Paraná Marist School and Santa Maria School was made explicit.

Certainly, other educational institutions in Curitiba encouraged sports in that period, but those that stayed on the interviewees' memory were the abovementioned ones. Teacher Mauro relativized when recalling:

[...] Sometimes this or that private school happened to, all of a sudden, in that year or that moment, invest in a certain modality [...] There was investment because the teacher working at that school was an important professional in the modality, which naturally strengthened said modality in the school. (MAURO MARTURELLI JR.).

In this sense, Pollak⁷, with respect to the possibility of understanding memory as a collective construction, clarifies that there are milestones in one's personal and collective life that repeat and solidify in the memory. In this case, individual memories converge when determining the main schools and can be understood as a solidified memory.

Teacher Nelson Rodrigues went beyond the borders of Paraná's capital city and made sure to emphasize the presence of schools within the state in performance sports of that time. In view of the theoretical framework of Oral History, this fact is understood, even if, a priori, outside the scope of the research, as something relevant to data treatment, based on Costa's statement^{8:57}.

Thus, it is possible to see that, in the report, information that escapes the research should not be deemed by the researcher as ornaments, as a simple accessory, but as the world itself, the context, the living picture where the narratives were generated.

Now, the fact that teacher Rodrigues remembers schools in Paraná state when questioned about the reality of the capital may be related to his identity, after all, the interlocutor was born in Nova Esperança, a city in Paraná state, exactly where he started his sports career. Identity and memory are, therefore, inseparable. Pollak^{7:204} explains: “[...]”

memory is a constituent element of the feeling of identity, both the individual and collective ones”.

Despite being a regional research, focused on the city of Curitiba, the possibility of this school sport format was found in researches conducted in other states. When recalling the memories of the first teachers of rhythmic gymnastics in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Muhlen, Natividade and Goellner also reported the practice of training teams at Anchieta School, in their words:

[...] with the beginning of the modality in the children's schools of Anchieta School, they felt the need to provide a more specific training for students more interested and skilled in that sport. That is how a competitive team tied to Anchieta School emerged [...] ^{9:109}.

Anyway, it is known that, back then, the presence of sports was almost hegemonic in educational institutions, in Curitiba, in Paraná, and in Brazil, largely meant for performance. After all, schools participated in competitions and organized teams based on technical criteria. Teacher Lamers recalled that Santa Maria Marist School had the so-called “sports schools” to serve students who had less technical condition, while sports teams were intended for more skilled students. Physical education teachers themselves would appoint students/athletes to compose the teams; training sessions used to be held outside school hours, with a workload equivalent to that of club teams, as Marturelli Júnior narrated:

For example, classes (curricular) started in March, and in January I was already [...] training the team, because I was paid overtime for that. I was given conditions; the students were motivated. They returned from break before classes started because we wanted to prepare ourselves to be able to face the teams we played against, such as Bank of Brazil's Athletic Association [*Associação Atlética do Banco do Brasil*] (AABB), Paraná's Military Circle, Curitiba Club, and Paraná Club. Our intention was to beat those clubs that did not follow the academic calendar. [...]. (MAURO MARTURELLI JR.).

The performance of the teams, that is, their results in competitions was the bottom line of sports professionals, so the training workload was adapted to the reality of the modalities. The interviewee was in charge of indoor football teams and explained that, depending on the category, training varied from two to five times a week. Once again pointing to the performance-oriented profile of sports played in schools in that period.

This allows understanding that the nostalgic tone of the teacher's narrative can also be related to the favorable conditions gathered in the power relations established in the period, in addition to financial relations, logically. As a point for reflection: Would this same nostalgic tone be found in the narratives of professionals who worked at smaller public or private schools (at least in the sports scenario)? This is worth asking because, probably, the conditions for training and access to competitions were rarer in other places and, most likely, the laurels of victory would be scarcer in other narratives.

The presence of a sports department within the school, with a different coordination from that of physical education, also symbolized the differentiation that was given to sports played outside the curriculum. Such segregation was recalled with enthusiasm by teacher Zanon:

[...] Also, Positivo School, during that sports season, I think it was an example of management in school sports. Positivo School separated things well. It provided curricular classes, usually within school hours, with an independent coordination, more linked to the pedagogical part of the school. And there was the sports department, which covered all sports modalities outside school hours, with sports

initiation, with teams, pre-teams, and with participation in sports competitions. [...] (NEWTON ZANON).

However, sports did not present themselves in the same way in the researched educational institutions. Listening to the interviewees, it was possible to notice that each institution adopted an organization model according to their available possibilities as to space and human resources. Santa Maria Marist School, for instance, adopted a model in which teachers worked in curricular physical education in the morning, and as sports coaches in the afternoon. This occurred so that there would be no conflict between match schedules and curricular classes, since matches used to happen in the afternoon (MATHIAS LAMERS). At Barddal School, in its turn, most physical education teachers were also coaches of school teams, “[...] few were just coaches” (NÁDIA DALLA BARBA).

The composition of the teams also, in a way, depended on the number of students in the school. Larger institutions ended up having a greater number of players of different modalities, so they had better chances of discovering talents. In the words of Zanon:

[...] because the demand (for sports) was very high, and the school did not charge an additional fee for sports initiation, all students wanted to take part, evidently. [...] Because of this massification, because we had all classes full at that time, we were able to capture the athletes, the talents, and then do a work more directed at them, with pre-team, until they made it to the official team [...]. (NEWTON ZANON).

At Barddal School, there were about three classes of each school year (level), but there was a variety of modalities. On that note, teacher Nádia Dalla Barba commented that there was some difficulty in forming teams by categories, because she split the students of the school into other modalities.

As for the diversity of sports offered by schools back then, there was clearly a supremacy of team sports. Football and indoor football were remembered by all interviewees. However, not all of them were played by women, as teacher Lamers comments:

[...] I remember very well, the modalities with ball were men's and women's basketball, men's and women's volleyball, basketball, handball. All these! Indoor football was men's only, then women's indoor football began. Track and field was very popular, also Olympic gymnastics, chess. Whenever new modalities offered at competition level appeared, mainly official competitions, they were implemented in the school. Soon after came dance, capoeira, but I remember that back then the modalities were more traditional. (MATHIAS LAMERS).

The presence of women in sports, especially in Brazil, has been historically marked by resistance and impediments, including by legal imposition. The ban on women participating in sports that could compromise their natural feminine condition lasted up until 1979¹⁰. For this reason, evidently, the sports, in the early 1980s, available for girls in schools were only those allowed, that is, of little physical contact, such as women's outdoor and indoor football, as well as judo, gradually included in the following years.

On the other hand, gymnastics was remembered as belonging to sports practiced in schools almost exclusively by women. However, their presence was not hegemonic in schools. Marist School and Positivo School offered the so-called Olympic gymnastics (now artistic gymnastics) and had in their headquarters a fixed gymnastics area with equipment deemed modern at that time. Rhythmic gymnastics was taught at Positivo School and Expoente School (MATHIAS LAMERS; NEWTON ZANON).

Another sport mentioned in the interviews was track and field. The performance character of school track and field in that period was elucidated in the words of Mathias

Lamers: “[...] I remember very well that track and field was very popular! Some track and field athletes from Santa Maria Marist School were even Olympic athletes! High school sports were really strong! [...]”.

Regarding the relationships inside and outside the field, the individual memory of the interviewees announced some tension. Despite some teachers highlighting the friendship they had outside the field, they did not fail to address the competitiveness and search for results within the court, as illustrated in the memory of Marist School's indoor football coach:

[...] There was a competition among teachers as they all tried try to excel [...] because the teams were technically very similar. The big difference sometimes was the tactical part, because all schools invested heavily, had scholarship holders, participated in Federations. (MATHIAS LAMERS).

Curitiba's Sports Secretariat would summon the coach of the best ranked team in the municipality to compose the technical delegation at Paraná's Youth Games. This fact was commented on by the interviewees as being one of the reasons for rivalry, since the schools' coaches aimed to represent the city of Curitiba in this competition (NEWTON ZANON).

The coaches' vanity was reported. Teacher Nádia Dalla Barba stated that she made a point of training good athletes at Barddal School, because she knew that she was working in structural conditions inferior to those of the other schools. “[...] because I didn't have as many resources as the other schools had, you wanted to prove you were better than the other despite not having as many resources, so we killed ourselves working to make good athletes [...]”.

At this point in the teacher's narrative, one can analyze the use of personal pronouns. When talking about the need to prove a good athlete-shaping work, Nádia uses the pronoun "you", attributing a sense of distance. However, when she communicates the coaches' efforts, she uses the pronoun “I”, emphasizing her participation in this group⁷. However, almost paradoxically, when it comes to granting scholarships to students, she added: “[...] At Barddal School, I remember that when I was hired as a coach, we invested hard in scholarships, we had a really strong power of negotiation! [...]”.

The scholarships granted by some schools to the most skilled athletes was a cause for tension among the teams, since coaches were free to offer discounts on the monthly fee to students from other institutions, which meant, in a way, that there was no "fair play". This included even students from public schools who were given the opportunity to study at a better school, with more chances of passing college entrance exams, as teacher Lamers states:

[...] For you to have an idea of how strong sports were, those boys who stood out in these public schools were often invited to enroll in private schools, even as a form of scholarship. Proving how schools invested in sports at that time, something that is completely different from nowadays. (MATHIAS LAMERS).

On the same note, “Rubinho” commented: “So there was a very strong fight to get athletes, we would offer incentive grants and things like that. [...] It was a very strong movement at that time [...]” (ROBERLEY LEONALDO). Santa Maria School's former coach gave details when recalling: “[...] There were schools that tried to make a strong team and also get one or two players from other schools so that they could not be at risk! It was competitive, it was very competitive!”, and later he added: “[...] it was quite a competition among students, but also among the coaches themselves.” (MATHIAS LAMERS).

Teacher Nádia Dalla Barba angrily weighed in on the matter because, according to her, smaller schools ended up training athletes to be taken away to other schools. That is, she, a teacher from a smaller school, does not comment on the case of scholarships with the same nostalgic tone as that of the teachers who had the economic power at the time. Here it is

possible to notice that the same fact can be told differently, depending on the position of the narrator on the occasion, it is the same story with different meanings^{11,12}.

The memory of this rivalry also shone with regard to comparisons among modalities within the same institution. Nevertheless, some interviewees were careful to highlight the friendship outside competitions among coaches, such as teacher Mauro Marturelli Júnior, who recalled: “[...] there was a rivalry on the court. But there is also a friendship that lasts up until today among the teachers, a great respect among us [...]”.

When dealing with oral sources, the mutability of memory stands out. In a climate of rivalry, in which coaches offered benefits for athletes to join their team, how could there be friendship and respect among the former? Portell^{13:72} clarifies:

This derives, above all, from the fact that memory is not an immediate and binary act of recollecting information already formed, but a multiple process of gradual production of meanings, influenced by the development of the subject, by the interlocutor, by the conditions of the environment.

In view of the panorama presented so far, it is easy to observe the large financial investment in the phenomenon. When asked whether the sports of that time brought any financial returns to educational institutions, teacher Newton Zanon answered in a heated tone: “[...] quite the opposite! While I was there, at the height of sports at Positivo School, the expenses we had with the sports department reached over 1 million reals per year.”

Investments in technical staff, equipment for training, scholarships, federation and confederation fees, expenses with sports events, uniforms, etc., were remarkable then, as Marturelli Júnior remembered “[...] There was no concern at the time about this matter (financial). They (the school's heads) carefully evaluated the performance of teachers, of the team, and performance is logically related to results [...]”. Teacher Nadia Dalla Barba added: “[...] We had the bus, the registration, the athletes' meals, the school paid for everything. They (the students) did not pay a thing [...]”.

Listening to the interviewees, the participation of school athletes, especially in championships organized by federations and confederations, is highlighted. This helps indicate, once again, the performance character of school sports in the 1980s and 1990s, as described in this series of statements:

[...] the school's team, for example, in handball [...] we played two “Taça Brasil” [*Brazil Cup*]. [...] one of them was in Santa Maria (RS), the other one was there in Caxias do Sul (RS). Fighting with the clubs from the state of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, those investment powers! [...]. (NELSON RODRIGUES).

[...] We went to Poços de Caldas twice to play the National Youth Olympics. [...] We had to win the regional phase, then the final phase. The best ranked team won a trip paid for by the Sports Secretariat to represent the state in that school competition. [...] It was the greatest thing that could happen in the school's sporting life! [...]. (MATHIAS LAMERS).

[...] Back then we had the International Handball Cup [...], the “Handball Cup”. It was everyone's dream to participate and play. It was an exchange, because teams came from abroad, it was not restricted only to Curitiba. So, there were athletes from Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul, Mato Grosso, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and older teams came from Germany [...]. (NÁDIA DALLA BARBA).

[...] Those modalities that had strong federations, with strong championships, participated in both school and federation games. Also, because, at some point, in some specific modalities, the level of the School Games was low for the level of the

school's team. So, we had to look for stronger competitions, and then came the federations and confederations [...]. (NEWTON ZANON).

[...] Positivo School participated in competitions at national and international level. The basketball team traveled to the United States of America. Olympic gymnastics had athletes from the Brazilian national team. [...] At the time, track and field was also always participating in competitions at state and national level, with good results. [...]. (MAURO MARTURELLI JR.).

Despite large investments in school sports in the period, there was already a difference between school sports and club sports. Simon et al.¹⁴ elucidates that the former did not reach the same level as the latter, which actually represent high-performance sports. However, the cited research does not refer to Curitiba's context, and can be interpreted as a hint to a national school sports model, obviously with its particularities.

“Rubinho” himself declared having chosen not to receive a scholarship at Barddal School in order not to be forced to represent the educational institution where he studied at the Federation's championships, but opted instead to play for Duque de Caxias Club [*Clube Duque de Caxias*] during his training period, implying that the sports training at that club was superior to that of the school.

This fact suggests a pyramidal athlete training model, that is, the student was introduced to sports in curricular physical education, and those who showed more skills for certain sports were assigned to school teams and, later, to clubs¹⁵.

From participation in school competitions, those who stood out would represent a sports club or, later, universities, and, in some cases, these athletes would happen to compose the national teams of the modality. This was the case for collaborator “Rubinho”.

Clubs sometimes partnered with educational institutions. In this sense, Santa Maria School's indoor football team represented Thalia Society [*Sociedade Thalia*], Paraná Athletic Club [*Clube Atlético Paranaense*] and Curitiba Football Club. Other partnerships mentioned in the interviews were those made with the Bank of Brazil's Athletic Association, and Paraná's Military Circle. Such partnerships, according to the interviewees, were beneficial for both entities involved. The Club, on the one hand, was well represented in that particular sport; for the school, on the other hand, it was a way to allow athletes to play bigger championships at no cost.

Conclusions

From the data collected in the interviews with the sources, it was possible to investigate other stories about school sports in Curitiba, opening a dialogue on the magnitude of sports. In this sense, it is worth highlighting some results of this research: a good portion of Curitiba's private schools at that time had performance sports teams; the context of school sports in Curitiba at that time was a sort of metaphor for professional sports; there was a hegemony of team sports; the women's sports sedimented on the interviewees' memory was gymnastics; the teams were highly valued in the schools and, in some cases, professionals were exclusively hired to train athletes; school teams participated in national and international championships; despite the performance character, there was already a difference from the sports practiced at clubs; some educational institutions partnered with sports clubs.

Dealing with oral sources based on the memories of those who experienced them elicited new versions of a phenomenon that was highly criticized at the time, especially in the 1990s, and apparently forgotten by researchers in the field. In a way, making the link with what Pollak⁷ calls “calm periods”, when memory and identity walk together.

Thus, as the interlocutor agreed with the initially subtle criticisms of the denial of school sports and, at the same time, proved to share a school sports identity, the interviewees were gradually breaking with the barrier, weakening it, which brought about narratives loaded with emotion and nostalgia.

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