

# SWIM, PEDALS AND RUN: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF MOTIVATIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF SPORTS BY AMATEUR AND PROFESSIONAL TRIATHLETES

*NADA, PEDALA E CORRE: ANÁLISE QUALITATIVA DAS MOTIVAÇÕES PARA A PRÁTICA ESPORTIVA DE TRIATLETAS AMADORES E PROFISSIONAIS* 

*NADAR, PEDALEAR Y CORRER: ANÁLISIS CUALITATIVO DE LAS MOTIVACIONES PARA LA PRÁCTICA DEPORTIVA DE TRIATLETAS AFICIONADOS Y PROFESIONALES* 

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**Abstract:** Triathlon, composed of swimming, cycling and running, has shown an increase in its practice in the last few years. We are currently facing one of the biggest pandemics in the world due to the new coronavirus, which directly affected the training routine and preparation for triathlon competitions. The objective of this investigation, under a qualitative methodology, is to understand what are the motivational factors for the practice of Triathlon by Brazilian athletes. The results show three emerging categories: workout schedules, tests and competitions and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The article concludes that triathletes are motivated by different reasons and trace an intimate relationship between the practice of Triathlon and their respective sports trajectories.

**Keywords:** Triathlon. Athletes. Sporting trajectory. Coronavirus.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Triathlon, a sport consisting of swimming, cycling and running, has shown significant growth in its practice in the last few years. Participation in sporting events increases considerably regardless of the distance practiced by the individual (SOTO-LAGOS; DIAZ ALDAY, 2018). According to data from the Brazilian Triathlon Confederation (CBTri) (2020) it is estimated that more than one million people are involved with it worldwide, the main public being amateur athletes who practice triathlon in order to improve their life quality. Maintaining an optimal physical condition and even as leisure (FRANÇA; CODONHATO; FIORESE, 2020). Thus, the practice of Triathlon can be, intensely, integrated into their everyday life that the individual transforms it into a central part of their social identity (LAMONT; KENNELLY, 2012).

In the current global scenario, we face one of the biggest pandemics in the world due to the new coronavirus (COVID-19). According to the American College of Sports Medicine (2020), amid concerns about the disease pandemic, individuals in communities across the country and around the world are encouraged to stay at home. Several places suffered restrictions, causing measures that made Brazilian society experience difficulties in the practice of physical activity (CRUZ *et al.*, 2021). There is also probable damage to physical fitness resulting from this “transition” period as a consequence of the suspension of competitions and the worsening of isolating factors such as: stress, behavioral changes and motivation to practice sports (GUILHERME *et al.*, 2020).

From this perspective, motivation is considered a key ingredient for understanding patterns, intensity, and direction of behavior. This construct has been studied by sport psychologists, seeking to understand its influence on the performance and well-being of athletes (REINBOTH; DUDA, 2006). In this sense, we understand that the athletes’ perceptions about the reasons for maintaining or interrupting training in a pandemic period influence the way they establish the relationship with Triathlon. Therefore, the need arises to investigate and understand, from listening to the athletes’ reports, how the behavioral patterns are learned from which there is a prerogative of the existence of a reason, a driving force, an instinct, a desire, a need, a will to keep (or not) practicing the modality.

Considering that qualitative research of this type is scarce in Brazil and recognizing the importance of studying the motivations of triathletes, even in a pandemic scenario, a qualitative study was developed to understand Triathlon from the point of view of the practitioners themselves. The focus was on knowledge of the athletes’ sports history, practices that reconciled family life, work and training, and the main motivations for joining and remaining in the sport. Thus, the objective of the present investigation is to understand the motivational factors of Brazilian triathletes in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is part of the master’s thesis by Leticia M. C. da Cruz and is published in the repository of the Federal University of Juiz de Fora. Available at: <https://repositorio.ufjf.br/jspui/handle/ufjf/13518>. Access at: 24 Apr. 2023.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

The design of this research is descriptive and cross-sectional and was approved by the Ethics Committee and Research in Human Beings of the Federal University of Juiz de Fora under opinion 4.561.546. 12 individuals were selected, 6 women and 6 men, aged between 19 and 67 years, amateur and professional athletes, of both sexes, who presented singularities and peculiarities such as: age, presence of some type of disease and/or disability, profession, training time and performance level.

Each participant was selected for the interviews for presenting peculiar personal characteristics, reinforcing the heterogeneity of the subjects, and highlighting their unique, absolutely singular aspects and characteristics. Chart 1 below presents the descriptive analysis of each athlete and their main characteristics.

**Chart 1** – Description of the participants with their respective sports trajectories.

Identification	Competitive level	Sport of origin	Triathlon that practices	Most important competition that participated	Occupation
(A.B., ♂, 21 years)	Professional	Swimming	Sprint/Standard	Brazilian Triathlon Championship – Brasília (Brazil)	Athlete
(C.B., ♀, 37 years)	Amateur	Swimming	Half Ironman and Cross-Triathlon	Ironman 70.3 – Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)	Teacher
(C.C., ♀, 23 years)	Professional	Swimming	Sprint/Standard and Cross-Triathlon	World Youth Triathlon Championship – Cozumel (Mexico)	Athlete and student
(E.B., ♂, 38 years)	Amateur	Running	Half Ironman and Ironman	Ironman 70.3 – Zell am See – (Áustria)	Doctor
(G.B., ♀, 40 years)	Professional	Swimming	Sprint, Standard, Half Ironman, Ironman and Cross-Triathlon	World circuit in search of the Olympic vacancy and the Santos International Triathlon (Brazil)	Athlete and coach
(H.A., ♂, 33 years)	Professional	Swimming	Sprint, Standard, Half Ironman, Ironman and Cross-Triathlon	Three stages of the Ironman World Championship in Hawaii (United States of America)	Athlete, coach and businessman
(L.V., ♂, 21 years)	Professional	Swimming	Sprint	Brazilian Adapted Triathlon Championship – Brasília (Brazil)	Athlete and image promoter (marketing)
(M.K., ♀, 53 years)	Amateur	Swimming	Standard and Half Ironman	Ironman 70.3 - Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)	Psychologist
(N.L., ♀, 19 years)	Professional	Swimming	Sprint	Brazilian Sprint Triathlon Championship – Brasília (Brazil)	Athlete and student
(R.L., ♀, 34 years)	Amateur	Running	Half Ironman and Ironman	Ironman -Florianópolis (Brazil)	Public worker

Chart 1 continues on next page...

Continuation of Chast 1:

(S.C., ♂, 67 years)	Professional	Running	Ultraironman	Decalronman World Championship - Monterrey (Mexico)	Athlete and pedagogue
(T.V., ♂, 37 anos)	Amateur	Swimming	Sprint/Olímpico	Circuit TriDay Series – Belo Horizonte (Brazil)	Commercial analyst

Legend: ♀= female; ♂= male

Source: prepared by the authors (2023)

As a research instrument, a semi-structured interview was used. The script for this interview was prepared by the responsible researchers and applied in a conversation format so that it met the objectives of the study. Thus, the guiding and initial question inquired about the first sports experiences of each subject, which triggered detailed memories about the childhood and adolescence of each participant. The following questions were linked to sports history, motivations for the specific practice of Triathlon, level of performance, presence or absence of diseases and/or comorbidities, training routine, family and social relationships, financial condition and projections within the modality.

The interviews took place smoothly and the subjects showed a lot of interest, availability and enthusiasm when sharing their sports trajectories. It is also noteworthy that, in the subjects' reports, some unpredictable and imponderable factors, often determined by chance, may have played a fundamental role in the process of building a line of reasoning, breaking with deterministic analyzes and exposed without any intention of judgment by part of the researchers.

The athletes were recruited and contacted via Whatsapp or Instagram and informed about their interest in conducting the interview. In this contact, the objectives and conditions of the research were explained and, in case of acceptance, the date and time for the virtual meetings with two duly trained researchers with experience in conducting interviews were individually scheduled. Due to the new coronavirus pandemic, all interviews were conducted via Google Meet in the online format in accordance with the recommendations of the World Health Organization. The conversations held had no duration limit. It should be noted that, although all athletes consented to the disclosure of their names, they were hidden in order to preserve their identity. Instead of names, each participant received an identification code. This code is composed of the initials of the athletes' names; gender identification (♂ for men and ♀ for women); and, finally, the age of the participant. The complete code can be exemplified as: G.M., ♀, 25 years old.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed in full and lasted approximately 33' to 90'. As this is a qualitative research, the goal was, at first, to analyze, as suggested by Alves-Mazzotti and Gewandsznajder (2000), initiating "a great dive into reality" to weave the sports trajectories of the researched subjects. The evaluation of the transcribed data was carried out through Content Analysis, which it is a set of techniques for analyzing communications, that is, the treatment of information contained in different types of messages (BARDIN, 2011). Data analysis went through

the three phases described by Bardin (2011): pre-analysis, material exploration and treatment of results. Thus, the process of verifying the athletes' speeches aimed to understand the propagated discourse; the reason that led the participant to use a certain word or expression; and the meaning given to the investigated sport modality. Data compilation and organization were performed using the Atlas program. You. 9.1.7. from resulting record units aiming at visualization, management and integration of the analysis process, maintaining exploratory contact with research data. Finally, it is important to highlight that the analysis intends to detail one of the several possible interpretations of the data.

### 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As it is also characterized as a resource to understand the construction process of perceptions, attitudes and social representations of human groups (VEIGA; GONDIM, 2001), the process of analyzing this information was subdivided considering three main emerging categories: "Workout Schedule", "Evidence and competitions" and "Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic". Chart 2 brings the categories and subcategories identified in the interviewees' statements and which will be presented and discussed in the following topics.

Chart 2 - Overview of categories and subcategories

Categories	Subcategories	Examples
Workout schedule	Spreadsheet athletes	I'm a spreadsheet and I like it, I like to see my spreadsheet green. The advisor launches several challenges, there are some virtual tests, and then I'm there, not standing still (M.K., ♀, amateur athlete, 53 years old).
Trials and competitions	Difference between short and long tests	Oh, every triathlete who says he doesn't dream of doing a half Ironman and an Ironman is a lie. Most people who enter Triathlon already think: I want to do a half Iron and an Ironman...(A.B., ♂, professional athlete, 21 years old).
	An Ironman's Dream	Doing that test all day is very different. For those who do triathlons, Iron is kind of iconic (E.B., ♂, amateur athlete, 38 years old).
Impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic	Training volume	At the beginning of the pandemic, I only trained at home, and I cycled a lot, I cycled only on the smart trainer, as a consequence the tire on my bicycle is even square (C.B., ♀, amateur athlete, 37 years old).
	Infrastructure difficulty	The structure itself... With this coming and going from Club closes... Club opens... This is very unstable, but we adapt and go with what we can, right? (C.C., ♀, professional athlete, 23 years old).
	Interruption of competitions	Regarding training, I'm a little unmotivated, because I like to compete and it motivates me a lot... (H.A., ♂, professional athlete, 33 years old).

Source: prepared by the authors (2023)

### 3.1 TRAINING SPREADSHEETS

During the Triathlon training process, it is common for athletes to follow specific and planned training according to individual demands and goals. For Miranda and Bara Filho (2008), there are several factors that influence sports performance, such as training loads, financial aspects and relationships. Equating all these factors requires constant motivation from athletes so that they remain in competitive sports for the longest period and so that they can perform all tasks effectively.

In this sense, when performing the analysis of the speeches, it was noticed the existence of the subcategory “Athletes with spreadsheets”, a term frequently used by the participants and that concerns the planning of training sessions through spreadsheets and the condition of fulfilling them periodically as mentioned in the following examples:

I love it, I can't live without my spreadsheet, and I'm crazy for it to come soon so I can program myself. I pack my clothes 2-3 days before, I pack my breakfast 2-3 days before, water, everything nice, bike, light, everything right. Every training for me is important. (R.L., ♀, amateur athlete, 34 years old).

I kept the training planned, I loved it, everything was already planned and until then I had never done any test... (report of the athlete when she started the Triathlon training) (C.B., ♀, amateur athlete, 37 years old).

It is observed that the commitment to training is taken so seriously that athletes are concerned with choosing sports as a priority in life. According to Ryan and Deci (2020), sports and exercise symbolize the motivation of people, being moved to act, looking for activities that require effort, energy, focus and often, a lot of discipline. According to the athletes interviewed, following a training plan is essential for programming their lives, since the high workload spent before, during and after training needs to be meticulously fitted into their routines, especially when it comes to amateur triathletes, who share sporting tasks with personal and professional activities. The athlete needs to adapt his life and this includes dividing his time between swimming, cycling, running and other activities. For this to happen, it is necessary to give up things and also start new habits (EPIPHANIO; AMATUZZI, 1997). Thus, it is common for triathlon athletes to get involved with the modality to the point of always seeking to be “planned”, following a routine, in a methodical way, which can generate a series of consequences.

Sport as a priority differs from uncompromising sports practice. Exaggerated dedication can lead to losses due to the frustration of not reaching the stipulated goals in a certain time. Some reports highlight exacerbated fatigue, lack of purpose with the practice and discipline to execute the worksheets, generating demotivation, and being necessary to rescue senses and meanings attributed to the sport.

There came a time before the pandemic, when I realized that I was prepared for everything, that there was a lot to be done... So the diet was planned, the hours of sleep were planned and personal life was to the detriment of that. And then I was thinking, I'm an amateur triathlete, I do it in the best sense of the word, because I like what I do, I don't do it to compete, I'm not sponsored. So, that tiredness becomes a snowball... (T.V., ♂, amateur athlete, 37 years old.)

There was a phase that I couldn't deal with very well (spreadsheets), due to the dedication. But today if I need to not go to an event to train, I do that, if I

can't go to train, that's fine too. Nowadays I don't stress about it. But I think that naturally physical activity takes you out of some events, they are life choices, and different lifestyles. There's no way I can go to a club and do a triathlon. (E.B., ♂, amateur athlete, 37 years old).

It is possible to observe in the speeches of the participants that the excess and the exacerbated dedication to Triathlon were harming the personal life of some athletes, causing fatigue and worsening the quality of life. Research investigating the addictions that sport can create attribute negative consequences, not only in the physiological aspects (abstinence and tolerance), but also in the psychological (anxiety and depression) or behavioral aspects (reduction of other activities and perfectionist profiles) (HAUSENBLAS; FALLON, 2002; GUCCIARDI; HANTON; MALLETT, 2012; TORNERO-QUIÑONES et al., 2019).

Therefore, the addiction to the excessive practice of sport is manifested by its abuse in everyday life, harming other factors of life to be considered. In this sense, another point to be considered is the relationship established in the preparation of the weekly workouts. How much does the coach influence the athlete's routine? Is this relationship well established with the alignment of goals of both parties? Despite the coach's importance for the athlete's development and sporting success, there is no certainty of the strategic direction, which makes training maintenance and progression difficult. In the reports of triathletes, it is common to notice that athletes that miss trainings, for the most part, lead to anxiety, and physical and mental discomfort. These results alert to the appearance of possible psychological disorders due to the accumulation of activities in this population, which can harm the physical and mental health and the permanence of athletes in the modality.

Considering the interviews, it was possible to notice that many triathletes use the term "worksheet" to confirm their attendance, obedience and dedication to training. However, despite the fact that most of the athletes interviewed showed a liking for this type of commitment, others reported mental and physical fatigue, in addition to the worsening of their quality of life and abdication of their personal life when they remained completely immersed in the analyzed sports context.

Therefore, it is necessary to develop means to dialogue with this population in order to stimulate autonomy, access and the ability to maintain the training routine in a socially, culturally, psychologically and biologically healthy way, warning about the risks involved with the practice. Exaggerated training is mainly for amateur athletes, who often do not have the necessary support and end up having routines similar to those of professional athletes.

### 3.2 TESTS AND COMPETITIONS

In this subcomponent, we tried to identify how the selected triathletes perceived their motivation to participate in tests and competitions. For this, the interviewees were asked about the sporting events in which they compete, their projections of tests, challenges, the relationship with sponsors and the media. In this sense, two subcategories emerged: "Differences between short and long races" which addresses

the attention given by sponsors, media and other people involved with the sport, directed towards the rise of long races (Half Ironman and Ironman) to the detriment of short races (Sprint and Olympic) and “The dream of an Ironman” which reports the great projection of most triathletes, the conclusion of an Ironman and, more specifically, a world championship in Kona - Hawaii.

Regarding the disposition of the interviewees in the first subcategory, statements emerged that emphasize the attention given by sponsors, media and other people involved with the sport to long distance events. These positions are evident in the following statements:

Oh, every triathlete who says he doesn't dream of doing a half Ironman and an Ironman is lying. Most people who start Triathlon already think: I want to do a half Iron and an Ironman. Today, the total media, glamor is in Ironman and the Half-Ironman. Nowadays, Sprint and the Olympics are very low, in my opinion (A.B., ♂, professional athlete, 21 years old).

I think so, it's ingrained in us, no matter how much we try to get out of this pattern... You arrive at your job: “I did a sprint under an hour” Man, that's nice, you're very good, you made it under an hour. Then the guy comes and says “Yeah”. Then you arrive and say to the guy “I did an IRONMAN in 14 hours, and look, it's really bad, it's bad... then the guy says to you: “Wow, you did an Ironman in 14 hours! How fantastic!!!”. Did you get it? I think people have a lot to do with overcoming difficulties (R.L., ♀, amateur athlete, 34 years old).

According to the interviewees, there is a tendency to search for the practice of the modality envisioning participation in long-distance triathlons. The desire to participate in the most challenging Triathlon events tends to steadily increase with experience. Participation patterns follow similar trends for Ironman events (TRIBE GROUP, 2009). To Telhado (2020), there is a natural tendency of most athletes who start in Triathlon to try to advance as quickly as possible in the distances to reach the so-called “queen distances”: the medium distance (Half Ironman) and the long distance (Ironman). When you finish one of these races there is a moment that all triathletes are looking for, when you receive your medal and hear “You are an Ironman!” (You are an iron man). Social recognition, due to the magnitude of the event and the growth of the Ironman brand, seems to have a direct impact on the choice of athletes. These findings suggest that if the triathlete population continues to grow, the demands for long-distance events are likely to show consistent growth as well.

Furthermore, according to Wicker *et al.* (2012), in the last 15 years, Triathlon has also grown in popularity and received greater attention from the media, which is reflected in the speech of participants who even report having modified their training when they opted to participate in long-distance events, attracting greater attention from the media and sponsors.

The Sprint and Olympic Triathlon is not as glamorous as the Ironman. And, unfortunately, sometimes we have to make this transition to get sponsorship and get more support from people, because currently nobody cares about results, they want to know about the media. More or less, the main reason was that, for me to be able to continue with my career, sometimes we need to make some changes. But I always liked the idea of doing an Iron (N.L., ♀, professional athlete, 19 years old).

The guys who have won the Olympics in the past are the current champions at Half Iron and Iron. The guys are experienced. When I get older, yes, I think a lot about focusing on Iron, focusing on the Half distance, but it's a long-term project... You show your results to the people who sponsor you, and to the club that supports you, in the competition. We don't have competition and so they have to show it on social networks, act like a blogger... Being a blogger, it's like that, it's hard, man, it's something I don't like so much, so my girlfriend is helping me in that, to pump up my social network (A.B., ♂, professional athlete, 21 years old).

It is noted that the public relations of athletes, mainly professionals, need to adapt to the digital context and guarantee promising work in front of the brands and products they represent, since the search for sponsorships and supporters is configured as one of the sources of income for these individuals. In this sense, Thomson (2006) defends the concept of the human brand, that is, of a celebrity as a brand by saying that it refers to every individual who presents himself and his name as a brand. Understanding the athlete as a brand means understanding that, when endorsing a product, companies will use the athlete's image to increase the commercialization of their companies (SANTOS; STOROPOLI; FLEURY, 2017). This may explain the motivation of professional athletes to migrate to longer-distance events and, therefore, envision greater visibility and social recognition in the sports market niche. However, it is perceived that there is a need for greater attention from entities and federations linked to the sport so that competitions and athletes in the short distances (Sprint and Olympic) are valued, avoiding early transitions that, for the most part, are linked to external factors and not to intrinsic motivations.

However, it is relevant to understand the arduous training process faced by those who intend to complete an Ironman race, when countless situations of great difficulty and sacrifice are faced before and during the race. In this sense, the second subcategory "The Dream of an Ironman" addresses such projections. In addition, the translation "iron man" itself expresses the challenging character that, in addition to physical effort, compromises the ability to overcome, perseverance and concentration. These characteristics are made explicit in the following passage:

When you sign up, it's awesome. Many of my athletes, when they register, I see that they change their "mindset" right away. He starts training like a madman, not a day is left... But committing to a race is definitely different: the "I want to do it" and the "I'm signed up" (H.A., ♂, professional athlete, 33 years old).

The Ironman race, like other endurance events, starts when you make the decision to participate (SILVA, 2014). As it is one of the most exhaustive endurance tests, it is highly related to physical and psychological exhaustion and the idea of overcoming obstacles, a fact that is noticeable in the interviewees' speeches. According to Silva and Rubio (2003), there are different speeches by athletes about the importance of having persisted, persevered and sought alternative paths to the difficulties imposed throughout their careers in order to build a victorious trajectory. This outcome in problem-solving is called overcoming. What makes an athlete break through barriers, achieving what sometimes seems impossible, is a set of technical, physical, material and psychological factors that, when well worked on, greatly expand

their limits. Added to this are the advertising and history of the event and the Ironman brand, where the world championship held in Hawaii attracts the eyes and desires of most triathletes, as expressed in the following statements:

Until the age of 30, I want to be there. Later on, we try to be champions. I told my coach "I want to do what Fernanda Keller couldn't, I want to be champion of Kona" (N.L., ♀, professional athlete, 19 years old).

If I say that I don't dream of going (to Kona) it's a lie, because every triathlete has the dream of getting a spot. But it's also that thing, getting a place, paying the registration in dollars (very expensive), plus the trip to Hawaii (very expensive), plus the heat, hot, unbearable. If you think rationally, Rafaela thinks "It's hot and very expensive", but Rafaela triathlete thinks "It's my dream". So, if I get a place, I'll do everything to get there, but if I don't, I won't think I'm not an accomplished triathlete. (R.L., ♀, amateur athlete, 34 years old).

It is observed in the interviewee's speech the desire to consider participating in this event. The Ironman Triathlon World Championship is held in Kona, Hawaii. The 1,500 spots are earned by competing in the Ironman qualifying rounds, which are held all over the world. The event consists of a 3,900m swim, 180km cycle and 42km run, and must be completed sequentially in less than 17 hours (SCOTT, 2004). However, because it is an extremely arduous and difficult task, it can arouse feelings of failure and frustration in the athlete, generating unfavorable environments for increasing performance and success in the sporting environment (SAMULSKI; SILVA, 2009).

In this perspective, it is important that professionals involved with Triathlon consider these particularities in the elaboration of their professional conduct, taking into account not only the physical aspects, but also the cultural, social and psychological aspects involved in the choice of competitions by this population. The dialogue between coach-athletes is an important factor for identifying the meanings that triathletes attribute to the competitions in which they participate and the reasons that lead them to engage in a given training cycle.

### 3.3 IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

On February 26, 2020, the Ministry of Health confirmed the first case of the new disease caused by COVID-19 in Brazil. All Brazilian residents, including amateur and professional athletes, were forced to review their lifestyle habits and adapt to the new routine. This disruption of daily life, preventing athletes from training in a suitable environment, may have led to negative emotional, cognitive and behavioral consequences (BARREIRA; TELLES; FILGUEIRAS, 2020). The question arises of how the athletes were able to adapt their training and their pace of life. Thus, three categories were identified: "Volume of training", "Difficulty of infrastructure" and "Interruption of competitions".

In the subcategory "Volume of training", behaviors adopted by respondents to maintain physical fitness and/or development of other physical abilities as a training strategy were identified. Triathletes sought to continue training at home as a method to help deal with situations of home confinement. They tried to perform exercises aimed at maintaining physical fitness, performing activities that helped them to disconnect

from what made them sad, reducing the stress load imposed by the training pace. For athletes, the time of confinement substantially modified their training routine, especially at the beginning of the pandemic, as shown below:

(father's speech) Nowadays, with the pandemic, he (Lucas) is acting calmly. He takes one day and he just swims, another day he just pedals and just runs. (L.V., ♂, professional athlete, 21 years old)

So for me, it changed everything. But I confess that I'm feeling much stronger now, because before I didn't have time to do strengthening work as I do now. The function is helping me a lot (C.B., ♀, amateur athlete, 37 years old).

It is observed in the speech of the participants the reduction in the training load and the need to adapt to the new conditions of life. Another factor that draws attention is the concern with maintaining health, especially with the resumption of specific parts of the training that were previously not so prioritized, such as strengthening. According to the findings of Guérin (2021), when researching 1,536 French amateur triathletes during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a significant decrease in the weekly training volume of the three sports modalities and an increase in muscle strengthening and stretching practices during confinement, with health concerns were linked to not being contaminated by the coronavirus.

It is also noted that, due to the need to reduce the training load, some athletes readjusted to the new routine and managed to have more rest time. For others, despite the training difficulties, the return to activities was only possible gradually. This is evidenced in the following passages:

At the beginning of the pandemic, I was very reclusive, just training indoors. I was cycling and I live in a house and I ran 12km around my house, I can't believe I did that (RL, ♀, amateur athlete, 34 years old).

So, in the beginning, it affected me a lot, I suffered a lot to train alone, and I didn't adapt very well in the beginning, but with time we learn to be self-motivated and to have more discipline with training... And then I think that after months of the pandemic, I had already managed to train alone straight. There are some triathletes, there are few triathletes in Itapetininga... We manage to schedule some training sessions together, depending on each one's worksheet. But we manage (N.L., ♀, professional athlete, 19 years old).

The reduction of the weekly training load brought varied consequences for amateur and professional athletes, such as: training that worked different physical valences, the need for self-motivation and longer rest time. Another factor to be considered, according to the participants' speech, is that the athletes used their equipment for indoor training and domestic facilities as a way to stay active. For Guérin (2021), although triathletes have reduced the volume of training during the COVID-19 pandemic, having training equipment at home and, in particular, closer contact with a coach may have helped to maintain the quality of training. Self-motivation is also characterized as a form of personal stimulation and was cited by one of the athletes as a factor for continuing training, even in adverse conditions. Samulski (2002) proposes the establishment of goals and the mentalization of self-motivation techniques for

the positive control of motivation, which may have influenced the permanence of the modality during this period of home confinement.

Triathletes were also identified who, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrated that their motivation had not diminished or their training volume had changed too much. Incidentally, some participants cite moments when they were able to increase the volume of training in specific modalities, when compared to the pre-pandemic period.

I didn't lose my motivation at all. I didn't stop training, quite the contrary, last year was a record year, a goal year, everything. Last year I cycled almost 15,000km. Even when I was indoors, I never stopped cycling (R.L., ♀, amateur athlete, 34 years old).

I have been living my normal life in the sport of Triathlon, cycling and running which help me (S.C., ♂, professional athlete, 67 years old).

Despite the lack of evidence and the difficulty of finding outdoor spaces for training, some of the athletes interviewed refer to this process as something that was experienced in a positive way, which means that despite having had these problems, they also managed to solve them and continue to practice this modality.

However, it is essential that coaches and other professionals involved with Triathlon are attentive to the return of activities, monitoring the attitudes of athletes during the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to avoid injuries and psychological stress as a result of the resumption of training. Researches that evaluate the availability and use of sports equipment, mental health and lifestyle of other triathletes during the pandemic period are necessary, and the results of this investigation should not be generalized.

In the subcategory "Difficulty with infrastructure", participants reported difficulties in establishing different ways of adapting the training routine, such as maintaining exercises at home, reflecting and thinking about viable solutions to deal with the lack of suitable places to practice exercise. physical exercises. It is evident that the modality most affected by the closure of gyms and clubs was swimming. In addition, the athletes reported that the specific transition training – (T1) where the athlete finishes the route related to swimming and starts the phase in which he picks up the bicycle to pedal, and (T2) where the athlete must leave the bicycle and start cycling race - were delayed and/or interrupted.

I don't train swimming. I didn't come back. I tried doing static training in swimming, even in water, but it didn't work out very well, because it was too difficult. The transitions got very complicated, I have to dismantle the bike, and put it on the car... so, the training structure has completely changed (C.B., ♀, amateur athlete, 37 years old).

The question of the structure itself... With this coming and going from club closes... Club opens... This is a very bad instability, but we adapt and go with what we can, right? (C.C., ♀, professional athlete, 23 years old).

In this context of the closure of gyms, sports centers, public parks and seafont, the relationship of human movement as a health protection factor received great attention, not only from the scientific literature, but from journalism in general

(ARAÚJO JÚNIOR; MENDONÇA; TOSCANO, 2020). It is understood that, by not practicing swimming, there is an intense gap in the training for Triathlon in a global way. These results corroborate the findings of a recent study carried out by Guérin (2021), where the number of hours of practice per week decreased significantly for each of the modalities and this fact was highlighted for swimming, with an average volume of usual training of 2.5 hours, having decreased to 0.2 hours during confinement.

Finally, in the subcategory “Interruption of competitions”, the triathletes reported how they dealt with the lack of sporting events and the postponement of events in which they were already registered. In this sense, the statements are linked to (lack of) motivation and the lack of perspectives for structural planning of the training routine.

Ah, like, saying that it doesn't discourage is a lie, because we train to compete, for a goal, but at the same time I think like this: if I'm not training, surely someone else is. So it will come on time and I'll lose to this guy who's training... then I'll get to the test there, the guy will be walking really well and I'll think: “Wow, what did you do” then he: wow, I just kept training, normal (A.B., ♂, professional athlete, 21 years old).

With the interruption of sporting events, a lack of motivation on the part of some athletes was noted. For Miranda and Bara Filho (2008), the athlete needs a high degree of motivation to support loads of training and the stress generated during competitions, in addition to pressure from sponsors, clubs, family members and coaches. In this way, training and competitions compatible with the athlete's capacity provoke an optimal level of motivation. However, it seems that the training pace itself is a motivational factor for some respondents:

Until this pandemic period, it was a period that even... I saw that I don't need to have a competition to be feeling motivated to train. The training itself... The training process itself... I'm already motivated to comply. I didn't have that much difficulty... I like to train, I always have and... I set short goals... Like... each training session motivates me. But... I don't stress about it either, not having it like this... Evidence (CC, ♀, professional athlete, 23 years old).

This is the big difficulty, right... Because when we have a test, we do everything to get organized and train, because the test is right there... There are months, and weeks to go. And now it doesn't. So now I think (the pandemic) has really shown who likes to train when it's going on. Who didn't like it, who did it for another reason, I think, couldn't keep training (G.B., ♀, professional athlete, 40 years old).

From the narratives, it is understood that for some athletes the training process itself can be configured as a motivational source, since the training sessions offer challenges to be fulfilled, demanding both from the physical and mental point of view. Thus, the fact that the athletes use training as a form of motivation signals a tendency towards behavior aimed at carrying out the activity, not depending exclusively on competitive events to motivate themselves. In this way, athletes who are more task-oriented (training) tend to adopt adaptive behavioral strategies, that is, they make more effort, choose more challenging tasks and are more persistent in the modality (CID et al., 2016).

Through the interviews, it was possible to perceive differences in the volume of weekly training, with the three modalities being impacted, especially swimming. The use of equipment for indoor training and the social relationships maintained with the help of digital tools were considered factors that limited the volume of training and the consequent lack of motivation by the triathletes. Some participants reported a decrease in motivation to practice sports, which may be associated with a greater reduction in training volume and the lack of sporting events and competitions. Therefore, it is necessary for coaches to remain in contact with athletes to assist them in planning their training, present them with objectives and/or organize challenges, in order to reduce the impacts caused by the time of social isolation and the consequent impact on the sports routine of triathletes.

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

Through qualitative research, it was observed that the emerging categories concerned training sheets, participation in competitions and tests, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Triathletes, when sharing their training sheets, expressed the benefits and complaints of maintaining a disciplined life dedicated to the sport. It is noteworthy that this research verified the presence of similarities between personalities and profiles of Brazilian triathletes who, for the most part, dedicate themselves to the modality as one of their priorities in life. Regarding events and competitions, it was noted that there is a social and sporting appreciation of long events (half Ironman and Ironman) to the detriment of short distances (sprint and Olympic). There was also a great appreciation and desire of the athletes to complete an Ironman, in particular, the world championship in Kona. Finally, the condition of home confinement due to the COVID-19 pandemic was intensely reported by all the athletes interviewed, since their training and competition routines were totally affected, generating new motivations and reinforcing some previously felt, pointing to the need for investigations that address this issue.

In view of the results of the present investigation, we concluded that triathletes draw a close relationship between the practice of Triathlon and their respective sports trajectories. They are motivated by different reasons, both intrinsically and extrinsically. As one of the limitations of this research, we emphasize the cross-sectional approach, making comparisons with experiences and future experiences impossible. It is suggested that further studies address motivation related to different variables, with different populations of triathletes, such as children and adolescents, and at different levels of performance. It is also highlighted the suggestion of data triangulation in future research as a way to reflect on the other social actors of the process (coaches, family members, technical team), using methodological diversifications, such as the convenience of conducting focus groups as well as conducting longitudinal studies in order to investigate the impact of motivation over time.

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**Resumo:** O *Triathlon*, composto por natação, ciclismo e corrida, evidenciou um crescimento da sua prática nos últimos anos. Atualmente enfrentamos uma das maiores pandemias mundiais devido ao novo coronavírus, o que afetou diretamente a rotina de treinos e preparação para competições de triatletas. O objetivo desta investigação, sob uma metodologia qualitativa, é compreender quais são os fatores motivacionais para a prática do *Triathlon* por atletas brasileiros. Os resultados mostram três categorias emergentes: planilhas de treinos, provas e competições e impactos da pandemia de COVID-19. O artigo conclui que triatletas são motivados por razões distintas e traçam íntima relação à prática do *Triathlon* com suas respectivas trajetórias esportivas.

**Palavras-chave:** Triathlon. Atletas. Trajetória esportiva. Coronavírus.

**Resumen:** El triatlón, compuesto por natación, ciclismo y carrera a pie, ha mostrado un incremento en su práctica en los últimos años. Actualmente nos enfrentamos a una de las pandemias más grandes del mundo debido al nuevo coronavirus, que afectó directamente a la rutina de entrenamiento y preparación para las competencias de los triatletas. El objetivo de esta investigación, bajo una metodología cualitativa, es comprender cuáles son los factores motivacionales para la práctica del Triatlón por parte de los atletas brasileños. Los resultados muestran tres categorías emergentes: hojas de entrenamiento, pruebas y competencias e impactos de la pandemia de COVID-19. El artículo concluye que los triatletas se motivan por diferentes motivos y trazan una íntima relación entre la práctica del Triatlón y sus respectivas trayectorias deportivas.

**Palabras clave:** Triatlón. Atletas. Trajetória deportiva. Coronavirus.

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### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declared that there is no conflict of interest in this work.

### AUTHORAL CONTRIBUTIONS

**Letícia Maria Cunha da Cruz:** Writing of the original draft.

**Aline Dessupio Chaves:** Writing of the original draft.

**Clara Mockedece Neves:** Writing of the original draft.

**Juliana Fernandes Filgueiras Meireles:** Proofreading and Editing.

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### EDITORIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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