

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR PARALYMPIC ATHLETES IN BRAZIL

O SUPORTE FINANCEIRO PARA ATLETAS PARALÍMPICOS NO BRASIL

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ABSTRACT

Brazilian Paralympic sport is growing rapidly due to its results and to more people with disabilities desiring to join it. The purpose of this study is to describe the importance of financial support for Brazilian Paralympic athletes' careers. It is characterized as a descriptive study with a qualitative approach. Information was collected through a semi-structured interview. Twenty Paralympians, from both Athletics and Swimming modalities, participated of this research, all of them contemplated by Ministry of Sports grant programs – Bolsa Atleta and Bolsa Atleta Pódio. Results show financial support being indicated as fundamental by all interviewed participants (n = 20, 100%). Many are the funding actions, especially from Brazilian Paralympic Committee and Brazilian Ministry of Sports, which provide better conditions for athlete development and can also guarantee the advent of new generations of Paralympic competitors in Brazil.

Key-words: Paralympic sport. Paralympic athlete. Financial support.

RESUMO

O esporte paralímpico brasileiro cresce aceleradamente em razão de seus resultados e mais pessoas com deficiência buscam ingressar no esporte. O objetivo do estudo é descrever a importância do suporte financeiro para a carreira esportiva dos atletas paralímpicos brasileiros. Caracteriza-se como descritivo e abordagem qualitativa. A coleta de informações foi realizada através de entrevista semiestruturada. Participaram 20 atletas paralímpicos das modalidades Atletismo e Natação, contemplados pela Bolsa-Pódio do Programa Bolsa-Atleta do Ministério do Esporte - Brasil. Os resultados demonstram que o Suporte Financeiro é apontado como fundamental por todos os atletas investigados (n=20; 100%). Muitas são as ações de suporte financeiro que têm favorecido os atletas brasileiros, partindo principalmente do Comitê Paralímpico Brasileiro e Ministério do Esporte, essas ações proporcionam melhores condições para o desenvolvimento dos atletas e também podem garantir o surgimento de novas gerações de atletas paralímpicos no país.

Palavras-chave: Esporte paraolímpico. Atleta paraolímpico. Suporte financeiro.

Introduction

Brazilian Paralympic sport is experiencing great results due to its recent achievements: eighth place at the Rio de Janeiro Paralympic Games 2016 and winner nation for three consecutive editions of the Para-Panamerican Games (2007, 2011, 2015), the main competition of Americas. This continuous progression in rankings turns Brazil into an emerging Paralympic force.

These results confirm the national Paralympic sport's evolution. It is evident the crescent number of athletes with disabilities entering the modality. Encouraged by various factors, these athletes wish to improve their performance and leverage their sports career. An example of this is the increase in the number of Brazilian athletes who participated in the past Paralympic Games (Sydney 2000 – 64 athletes; Atenas 2004 - 98 athletes; Pequim 2008 – 188 athletes; London 2012 -182 athletes) until Paralympic Games of Rio de Janeiro in 2016, when Brazil have the largest delegation in an edition of the Games: 278 athletes¹.

Is possible that financial support for high performance Paralympic athletes can make a difference in athlete career development. The different forms of financial support (federal, state and municipal scholarships, awards for achievements, private sponsorship, among

others) can provide conditions for this athlete dedicate exclusively to training and have possibility to improve their performance in your modality.

Marques et al.² points out that one of the pillars for the Brazilian Paralympic sport growth is the possibility of greater financial autonomy made possible by funding and state sponsorship and the private sector. Whether it comes from public or private resources, this support can be considered a differential for a Paralympic career.³ Teodoro⁴ points out the shortage of financial assistance as the main difficulty faced by athletes in their sports career. The author also reports their concerns to achieve positive results and also, the uncertainty of continuing in the sports modality due to the absence of this support.

In Brazil, law n^o. 10.264, Agnelo/Piva law, is considered a landmark for national sport. This law grants financial autonomy through funds from Federal Lotteries from Caixa Econômica Federal (CEF) bank. Through this law, 2% of the gross collection of all the federal lotteries of the country are transferred to the Brazilian Olympic Committee (COB) and Brazilian Paralympic Committee (CPB). From the total resources were initially transferred, 85% to the COB and 15% to the CPB to be applied in high performance sports, school and university sports⁵.

Recently the Agnelo/Piva Law suffered a change in its passing total percentage (2% to 2.7%). As well as the distribution to COB (85% to 62.96%) and to CPB (15% to 37.04%) . This change occurred with the approval of the Brazilian Law on the Inclusion of Person with Disabilities n^o 13.146/2015 (Statute of the Person with Disabilities)⁶.

In 2004, one of the main financial aid programs for athletes was implemented in Brazil: the Bolsa Atleta program. The program from Ministry of Sports seeks to guarantee minimum conditions for Olympic and Paralympic athletes to dedicate exclusively to training and competitions at different levels (Base, Student, National, International and Olympic/Paralympic athletes)⁷.

Planning in Paralympic Games 2016, in the year of 2011 was introduced a new category from this program: established by Law n^o. 12,395, the Bolsa Pódio is to support athletes with a chance to compete in Olympic and Paralympic medals, with grants ranging from R\$5.000 to R\$15.000 brazilian reals⁸. In the previous Olympic cycle of the Rio 2016 Games, CPB had a disposition of R\$ 337 million, much lower than that allocated to the COB: R\$700 million. Almost all of these R\$375 million that CPB received between early 2013 and July 2016 came from federal funds⁹.

As Paralympic sports grow, as well as the number of athletes in this modality, it becomes important to comprehend the relevance of financial support for the practice. Thus, the study intents to describe the importance of financial support for the career of Brazilian Paralympic athletes.

Methods

Participants

Twenty Paralympians, from both Athletics and Swimming modalities, participated of this research, all of them contemplated by Ministry of Sports grant programs – Bolsa Atleta and Bolsa Atleta Pódio. The characterization of the sample is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Caracterização da amostra

Modality	Quantity of athletes		Age of athletes (a± sd)	Time* of sport practice (a± sd)
	Man	Woman		
Athletics	07	03	28 ± 7.95	10 ± 2.99
Swimming	08	02	22.50 ± 4.54	8 ± 4.14

Note: *In years

Source: Authors

The sample was non-probabilistic purposive, since it was characterized by the use of pre-defined criteria to obtain a representative group by people capable of providing the necessary information for research¹⁰.

Procedures

The study is characterized as a descriptive study with a qualitative approach. Information was collected through a semi-structured interview. Subjects were interviewed in the cities of: São Caetano do Sul-SP, Itajaí-SC, Brusque-SC and Porto Alegre-RS, with time and place defined by common agreement between researcher and athletes, and with the coaches of Athletics and Swimming Paralympic Team knowledge. The study was approved by the Committee of Ethics in Research with Human Beings of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, under the No. 922.077.

To collect information, a semi-structured interview was used, which allowed the subjects to freely discuss about the proposed theme. This technique enables a flexibility in matters according to the objectives proposed by the study¹¹. The interview script was composed of the following questions:

1. *What do you consider important for the beginning of your sports life?*
2. *Can you tell me if there were any situations that made it difficult for you to enter the Paralympic sport?*
3. *What are the actions that contribute to your keeping as a high-performance Paralympic athlete?*

To register the information, a Stereo MP3 Recording Panasonic RR-US551 audio recorder was used, and for data evaluation Content Analysis was used¹². After the interviews were carried out, the essential elements in the speech of each interviewee (unit of analysis) were identified, after which, the grouping and categorization of key points according to the study objectives (thematic categories) were executed for results discussion. Two other thematic categories were observed in research: Structural support (n = 20, 100%) and Human resources support (n = 19; 95%) which are also assigned as essential for almost all of the investigated athletes, however, that study only discuss the Financial support category.

Results and Discussion

Financial support is indicated as fundamental by all participants of this research (n = 20; 100%). Funding high-performance athletes enables exclusive dedication to training and performance improvement in national and international competitions.

We can see this in some of the athletes' speeches:

That I can keep the job ... then there are these companies that make the difference so that I have ... that I have training conditions, that I have a better training, so that I be able to perform my function. (Athlete 1)

Today, there is the Ministry of Sport, the Caixa Lotteries, the federal government through the Ministry of Sports ... and they are the ones who give me this tranquility to train the sponsorship is to give you peace of mind so you can work better, not to worry, get more focused. (Athlete 6)

Today the actions that I have in fact are the sponsorship from Caixa Lotteries, which gives me a better condition ... the Bolsa Atleta Pódio, which gives me full condition to keep in the sport ... they end up passing me some safety to continuing training in high performance. (Athlete 8)

I think the first great action was the Law Agnelo Piva from 2001, the law was also very important in my life ... a financial aid to keep me in the sport ... that money was fundamental, so after I could have the tranquility to prepare for ParaPan 2003 and then to the 2004 Paralympics When in 2004 with the Caixa Lotteries began to support the Paralympic Games and the Brazilian Paralympic Committee with more force. (Athlete 11)

I have these sponsorships and Caixa Lotteries, so today, thank God, I have everything I need to stay in the high-performance sport ... thanks to my sponsorship and the encouragement of the government, I can live well, personally and in sports, the investment I make in myself is high, but with the help of the government and my sponsors, I can keep well. (Athlete 12)

The government has always helped with the grant question, right, with Bolsa Atleta always ... I, for example, have never had sponsorship... After 2013, I had my first sponsorship from Caixa, but before I had the athlete grant that was the first incentive that I had financially in the sport and I know that nowadays it is an incentive for many people not to leave it and for many people to start in the sport. (Athlete 14)

When analyzing the athletes' speeches, the importance of financial assistance for their sports performance success is perceptible. Whether it comes from public or private resources, this support is considered a differential for a Paralympic career.

This finding is also evidenced by other authors. Teodoro⁴ points out the shortage of financial assistance as the main difficulty faced by athletes in their sports career. Florence¹, when investigating 20 Brazilian Paralympic athletes from judo, five-a-side soccer, swimming and athletics, states that this support is considered one of the main endorsements for Paralympians in Brazil.

Also, authors such as Tasiemski et al.¹³, Scelza et al.¹⁴, Kars et al.¹⁵ identify high financial costs as key impediments for disabled athletes (with amputations and spinal cord injury) to remain within their modality. The absence of this incentive can hinder the entry, continuity and success of Paralympic athletes.

De Bosscher et al.¹⁶ emphasize financial support as gateway to build a sports career. Currently, high competitiveness associated with expressive results are decisive when choosing who are or are not going to be benefit from financial aid programs and better training conditions.

On this matter, Florence³ states that only after achieving positive results at a national level, the Paralympic athletes whom he investigated began receiving financial assistance for their training expenses.

The achievement of established objectives for granting a financial assistance is a reality within the Brazilian sport. This situation seems clear and fair. It is necessary to obtain expressive initial results in order to obtain financial support. It would not make sense a wide release of financial resources without control and or goals set by the responsible managers.

Thus, sponsorships to Brazilian Paralympic athletes are only destined for those who can reach these results.

It is comprehensive the need of results to benefit from financial support or sponsorship, although it is also necessary to offer better structure conditions to early-career athletes so that they achieve expressive results enabling them to qualify for such grants.

On this, Melo and Fumes¹⁷ emphasize the essentiality of offering basic structure for athletes in basic training process. Since it is necessary the minimum structure and support (places for training, materials, accessibility and transportation, events, dissemination, etc.) to obtain good results.

In this study, it is possible to perceive in the athletes' discourse the need to expand the initial endorsements (including financial) so athletes can achieve better results in sports modalities.

The athletes who train and work have to split in two to do this and be good athletes, high level, but as they work they can not get these indexes and can not even get grants because of the results, it lacks help from the city government to make a State athlete grant to help the athlete only to do sport. (Athlete 3)

I think each state should have a ranking, the difference... the difference today to be a great athlete is to have the structure in your city, it is not the structure within a Brazilian team. Because when you get to the Brazilian team, when you are already at the peak you have to keep what you have done but to get you on that path is where the athlete wears out. (Athlete 5)

Today in Brazil we have a very good support for those who already have results, only those who are getting close, those who are running behind do not have, so they need results to have support and you can have good results without a support, it's kind of complicated. (Athlete 14)

This is a challenge for the Brazilian Paralympic sport, the high competitiveness associated with expressive results are decisive for choosing those who will advance or not for better training conditions and also who will be granted with public and private financial incentive programs.

In fact, Paralympic sport has received a considerable amount of resources to promote high-performance athletes. Over the years, some government actions and private initiatives have emerged to expand offering within the national scenario.

Initially considered a landmark for the national sport, in July 2001, Law n^o. 10.264, Agnelo/Piva law, was sanctioned granting financial autonomy through Federal Lotteries of CEF bank funds. After Agnelo/Piva Law sanctioning, Brazil went from an average of 13.37 medals to 41 medals per edition in three Paralympic Games. It is possible to emphasize that the average of medals per edition tripled after Law approval¹⁸. Thus, it is possible to conclude that investments from the Agnelo Piva Law are actually beneficial to the improvement of Brazilian Paralympic team results.

With the recently change on percentage of this law, the transferred money to CPB (15% to 37.04%), allows CPB an investment in order of R\$ 130 million¹⁹. That revision occurred with the ratification of Brazilian Law on Inclusion of Person with Disabilities⁶. The amount of money raised by the Agnelo/Piva Law grows every year. In 2001, the first year of Law 10.264, R\$ 3.082,634.86 was transferred to CPB. In 2015, it reached R\$ 30 million, and in 2016 the transfer was of R\$ 34 million²⁰.

One of the most important sports funding action in Brazil is the Bolsa Atleta Program. Implemented in 2004, it is the main financial aid program for Brazilian athletes and the largest individual sponsorship program for athletes in the world.⁷

Bolsa Atleta program aspires to stimulate personal maintenance of high-performance athletes, guaranteeing minimum conditions for Olympic and Paralympic competitors to dedicate themselves exclusively to the local, South American, Pan-American, World, Olympic and Paralympic Games.

In the 2015 Parapan American Games in Toronto, Canada, the reflection of Brazilian investment policy in athletes and in Paralympic Committee was notorious. Of the 257 medals won, 254 (98%) were awarded to Bolsa Atleta or to Bolsa Atleta Pódio holders. Individually, since there were athletes who won more than one medal, 181 took the podium. Of these, 112 receive the Bolsa Atleta and 69, the Bolsa Atleta Pódio⁸.

At Rio 2016 Paralympic Games, Brazil had the largest delegation in history, with 286 competitors, 90.9% of which were beneficiaries of grants. There were 72 medals won in 13 different sports: 14 gold, 29 silver and 29 bronzes. All medals won by athletes who received financial support from the Ministry of Sport²¹.

Sports Incentive Law (Law No. 11.438 of December 29, 2006) has also contributed to Paralympic sport. Known as the Fiscal Incentive Law, it allows tax deductions for investments in the promotion of sports activities, through sponsorship or donations. Tax deductions may be up to 1% for legal entities and up to 6% for individuals²².

Reis²³ when investigating the Sports Incentive Law projects, high performance sports approved between the years of 2011-2013, found that of all 371 approved projects, only 7% (n = 29) of them worked with Paralympic sport. Despite this, no project was able to collect the stipulated value until that moment (2014). Some entities have managed to collect an amount closer to what was stipulated, others have not gained any money. In a country with 204 million people²⁴, the contribution of individuals and corporations to the Brazilian sport is still very low. Only 0.00130% of individuals and 0.00126% of legal entities²².

Parallel to this, in attempt to increase fundraising by entities, in 2010 CPB created the Resource Mobilization Course for sports projects to provide entities the possibility of raising financial support from alternative sources, to build adequate planning and to guide how these resources should be applied¹.

As a result of this initiative in a near future, it will be possible for entities and organizations linked to Paralympic sport to raise funds for their projects, favoring the development and the careers of new athletes in the country.

We can also observe in the athletes' speech another governmental action longing to financially support Brazilian Paralympic sport - Paralympic Rio Team and São Paulo Paralympic Team. These are projects from the states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo assisting high-performance Paralympians. According to the speeches, we can perceive this situation:

Look, today one of the great milestones that the Paralympic sport had was the creation of Team São Paulo ... this project really brings the best athletes of Brazil here to São Paulo to represent the state, in counterpart the state give us enough support to train. (Athlete 4)

Team São Paulo, one of my sponsors today, helped a lot ... each one of them is a very important part you know, so today I would not want to give up any, they are really important, I would not trade it for anything. (Athlete 15)

I am part of a very good project here of the state government, along with the CPB, that is Team São Paulo too, which gives a very great support, especially for the people here. (Athlete 19)

Team São Paulo is composed by 44 elite athletes of athletics, bocce, wheelchair tennis, table tennis, judo, swimming, rowing and sailing. The group is constituted through an

agreement between the Secretary of State for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and CPB. The agreement provides financial aid for athletes and coaches, and support in acquisition of sports materials and travel expenses for competitions until the Rio 2016 Games²⁵.

Team Rio Paralympic is a project from the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro, through the Municipal Secretariat of the Person with Disabilities - MSPD, in partnership with CPB. It intends to provide the necessary infrastructure for training a group of elite athletes representing the city of Rio de Janeiro until the Paralympics of Rio 2016.

The initiative aims the good performance of high level athletes and the development of Paralympic modalities in Rio de Janeiro, home of the Games 2016. The partnership adds efforts to gather technical knowledge, experience, organization and financial resources, with the objective of developing planned actions²⁶. The group is formed by athletes of athletics, swimming, judo and Canoeing.

In fact, Team Rio and Team São Paulo seem to be promising initiatives by state governments. Expanding these initiatives to other units of the federation could foster sports development of new Paralympic athletes, as they would not need to move from their home states to improve their training.

Another initiative is the Brazil Medals Plan, its goal is to place Brazil among the top 10 countries in the Olympic Games and among the top five in the Paralympics of Rio de Janeiro in 2016. This goal was not achieved, but investments were also intended to form future generations of athletes and structure training centers to serve from the main high-performance teams to the basic categories.

Additionally to the existing funding for high-performance sports, Brazil Medal Plan has secured another R\$ 1 billion for Olympic and Paralympic sports preparation for Rio 2016. A portion of this amount, R\$ 328 million, was destined to support national teams, through various actions, among them the Bolsa Atleta Pódio (created by Law 12,395 of 2011), hiring of multidisciplinary teams and coaches, purchase of equipment and materials and trips for training and competing. The other R\$ 452.2 million were and are used in construction, renovation and equipping of training centers of various modalities and multisport complexes²⁷.

With Brazil Medal Plan, state companies increased the amount of resources devoted for sponsorship of the modalities contemplated. In addition, existing grants for Olympic and Paralympic modalities that are not part of the Plan will be maintained.

Caixa has been sponsoring CPB since 2004, using resources from the Lotto Development Fund (FDL) to encourage the growth of the national Paralympic sport. In 2010, Soccer of Five became a modalities sponsored by Caixa. The other modalities are: Weightlifting, Swimming, Athletics, Wheelchair Fencing, Shooting, Boccia, Sailing, Football 7-a-side, Goalball, Wheelchair Rugby and Sitting Volleyball¹⁸.

Braskem, the largest petrochemical company of the Americas, sponsors the Paralympic Brazilian Athletics Team. Investment values are not disclosed, but are intended for the development and technical preparation of athletes for national and international competitions.

Also private initiative investments have favored Paralympians. Companies such as Nissan, Mackenzie University, Deloitte, among others, are some of these investors. Thus, the investments of state and private companies also contribute Brazilian Paralympic athlete's career development and for Paralympic sport growth².

Still, it is possible to consider the prize offered from CPB to the medalists of Rio 2016 Paralympic Games, where the gold medalist in individual competitions receives R\$ 60 thousand per medal, while the silver yields R\$ 30 thousand each and the bronze, R\$ 20 thousand. Paralympic title in collective modalities, by teams and relays, was worth a prize of

R\$ 30 thousand per athlete. Silver, in this case, is subsidized with R\$ 15 thousand and bronze, with R\$ 10 thousand. Guiding athletes received a third of the value of the medal won by their representatives. The appeal for the payment of these prizes will come from the increase in the percentage received by the CPB of the Agnelo/Piva Law²⁸.

Conclusion

Brazilian Paralympic sport grows faster every day. New ranks, new marks, make the success more and more a result of hard work and great planning from athletes, coaches and managers. The level of performance of Paralympic athletes surprises at every new competition.

Financial support is extremely relevant to the development of an athlete's career²⁹. Besides providing conditions for the athlete's exclusive dedication to training, it also offers conditions for their results improvement.

Many financial support actions favor Brazilian athletes. The investments being carried out by the CPB and the Ministry of Sports: Bolsa Atleta Program, Brasil Medal Plan, Sports Incentive Law and also the Agnelo/Piva Law (already with the expansion of the resources destined by the Brazilian Law of Inclusion of Person with Disabilities), are actually beneficial the athlete's performance development and guarantees the emergence of new generations of athletes. It is up to sports managers, to maintain and expand this financial support beyond Rio 2016 Paralympic Games, in order to reach more and more athletes from all regions of the country. Additionally, there is an increase of financial support from the private sector.

Thus, Brazil is considered an emerging force in the Paralympic sport worldwide and actions for the development of the sport grow every year and can consolidate Brazil's position in the world scenario and also, transform the country into a large developer of new Paralympic athletes.

This study presents a description of the importance of the financial support for the career of the Brazilian Paralympian athletes, holders of the Bolsa Pódio, specifically from Athletics and Swimming. We try to present, through the athletes' vision, a brief scenario on the subject. However, we considered some limitations in our study, the number of athletes investigated, the number of modalities investigated and also the absence of athletes with other grants from Bolsa Atleta program. We also consider the necessity for a complete investigation related to the origin of the financial resources to the Brazilian Paralympic Sport.

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