
Track and field as a tool for social inclusion in Brazil¹

O atletismo como ferramenta de inclusão social

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze track and field as a tool for social inclusion. It has a qualitative methodological approach. The data collection instruments were interviews/narratives/biographies conducted with 20 Brazilian Olympic track and field medalists. Based on the athletes' reports, track and field is evidently a great tool for social inclusion because most athletes came from vulnerable social conditions, low income families, which are socially excluded in many aspects. Therefore, they found in track and field an opportunity for upward mobility, which can be maintained to help their families after starting in the sport. Other forms of social inclusion by the sport were also noticed, such as higher education scholarships, knowing new places, peoples, and cultures, as well as support for their families.

Keywords: Biographical narratives; Olympic medalists; Social inclusion;

RESUMO

O estudo teve como objetivo analisar o atletismo como ferramenta de inclusão social. A abordagem metodológica é qualitativa, sendo que o instrumento de coleta de dados foi entrevistas/narrativas/biográficas, realizadas com 20 medalhistas olímpicos do atletismo brasileiro. A partir dos relatos dos atletas fica evidente que o atletismo se constitui como uma grande ferramenta de inclusão social, pois a maioria dos atletas advém de situações sociais vulneráveis, com famílias de origem humilde, sendo excluídos socialmente em diversos aspectos. Portanto, encontraram no atletismo uma oportunidade de ascensão social, podendo se manter e auxiliar sua família após o ingresso no esporte. Nota-se também outras formas de inclusão social pelo esporte, como a oportunidade de cursar o ensino superior com bolsa, conhecimento de novos lugares, pessoas e culturas, bem como a constituição de sua família.

Palavras-chave: Narrativas biográficas; Medalhistas Olímpic; Inclusão social;

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INTRODUÇÃO

Sport is considered one of the most efficient tools to work with children and young people. Besides being "a pleasant activity that has several benefits for the practitioner's physical health, it also develops several values that can be taken to other spheres of the athletes' lives"² (SANCHES; RUBIO, 2011, p. 827-828). These values are highlighted by the athletes, which many times come from low income families and, if it was not by the sport, they would not have upward mobility opportunities. Track and field is especially related to social inclusion through sport. Therefore, it is important to discuss here this "exclusion/inclusion dialectics" (SAWAIA, 1999, p. 8), which is subjective and not only based on economic grounds but also by "different forms of social and individual legitimation" manifested "in the daily life, such as in the identity, sociability, affectivity, conscience, and unconsciousness" (SAWAIA, 1999, p. 9). Such forms of exclusion can be observed in the realities lived by the Brazilian Olympic track and field medalists before starting in the sport because most of them came from low income backgrounds in socially vulnerable zones with restricted access to social and cultural assets, among other factors that will be discussed throughout this study.

It is worth mentioning that "poverty and exclusion cannot be simply taken as synonyms of a same phenomenon; however, they are intertwined" (WANDERLEY, 1999, p. 20). According to Guerra (2012), social exclusion is nothing more than the expansion of the concept of new poverty. "The poor may be discriminated by being poor, but the excluded, by several discriminatory processes, may be understood as one who was abandoned and passes through weakening processes of social bounds" (POZZO; FURINI, 2010, p. 90). The term social exclusion was used to describe process of social disintegration (CLAVEL, 1998). Social exclusion does not refer only to material deprivation, "but to the access or the joint use of services and societal participation" (GUERRA, 2012, p. 92), as we will observe in the realities of this study's participants. The notion of exclusion is connected to what was called the "new social question, related to a poverty that in many aspects is the same; in other aspects, different" (RIBEIRO, 1999, p. 38). "More than a concept, the vocabulary related to social exclusion can be understood as a social construction, i.e., an historical product of social mechanisms" (ZIONI, 2006, p. 27).

An important concept created by Paugam (1999, p. 68) is social disqualification:

which characterizes the movement of gradually casting out of the labor market increasingly large sectors of the population. [...] It values the dynamic and evolutionary multidimensional character of poverty and the social stage of the poor aided by the welfare.

On the other hand, Castel (2008) uses the concept of disaffiliation, a rupture in the belonging to a societal bound. According to Martins (1997, p. 27) “the current discourse on exclusion is basically the product of a mistake, of a fetishism, the conceptual fetishism of exclusion, the exclusion transformed into a magic word that would explain everything”. For the author, there is no exclusion, only contradiction, because there are victims of exclusionary social, political, and economic processes (MARTINS, 1997, p. 14).

Moreover, social inclusion is a process that permits individuals in poverty and social exclusion conditions to access possibilities and resources indispensable to “fully participate in the economic, social, and cultural spheres and to benefit from a standard of living and well-being considered normal in the society they live” (COMUNIDADE, 2005, p. 9). Inclusion is also

an educational movement, [...] social and political that comes to defend the rights of all individuals to consciously and responsibly participate in the society they belong to and of being accepted and respected in that which differentiate them from the others. (FREIRE, 2008, p. 5).

As important forms of social inclusion, Guerra (2012) presents the participation in sports. Sport can be a tool for social inclusion. According to Rossi Júnior, Silva & Almeida (2020, p. 22) “promoting social inclusion may mean to habilitate and capacitate individuals to participate in the society”, enhancing their life opportunities through their social experiences. Individuals in poverty and social exclusion risk, by means of the inclusion, may “acquire the opportunities and the necessary resources to fully participate in the economic, social, and cultural life”, enjoying a life and well-being condition “considered normal in the society they belong to” (ROSSI JÚNIOR; SILVA; ALMEIDA, 2020, p. 22).

By dealing with a relevant but still not much explored theme, this study aims to analyze track and field as a tool for social inclusion for Brazilian Olympic medalists.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach because it seeks to “explain the why of things” by “deepening the understanding of a social group” (GERHARDT; SILVEIRA, 2009, p. 31-32). Narrative interviews were used as data collection instruments, characterized as “non-structured tools, aiming at the deepening of specific subjects from which emerge life stories, both of the interviewee and the crossings in the situational context” (MUYLAERT et al., 2014, p. 194).

Rubio (2016, p. 53) states that “more than universal truths, dealing with narratives suggests partial, individual, or even momentaneous truths, spoken at the intensity of the memories that emerge about the theme in question”. The author also contributes with the idea that “biographical narratives are understood as individual discourses that offer a comprehension of the

subject that narrates, the world, and the very accumulated experiences in the existence trajectory” (RUBIO, 2014b, p. 115).

The network procedure is used, “where a narrator becomes the next source, generating as many contacts as necessary to close a universe” (RUBIO, 2014a, p. 97). 20 track and field Olympic medalists were interviewed, as shows the chart below.

Chart 1 – Research interviewees

Interviewees	Date of the interview	Duration
Joaquim Cruz	25/08/2020	3h06min09s
Robson Caetano	04/08/2020	1h34min29s
Arnaldo Oliveira	06/08/2020	1h12min04s
Édson Luciano	06/08/2020	2h23min06s
André Domingos	04/08/2020	1h24min46s
Vicente Lenilson	03/08/2020	57min50s
Cláudio Roberto	06/08/2020	1h43min11s
Claudinei Quirino	07/08/2020	1h02min09s
Sandro Viana	25/08/2020	3h16min45s
Bruno Lins	26/08/2020	1h05min10s
Codó	26/08/2020	56min49s
Rosemar Coelho Neto	19/06/2020	57min04s
Lucimar Moura	13/07/2020	38min35s
Thaissa Barbosa Presti	03/08/2020	46min46s
Rosângela Santos	25/01/2021	1h03min35s
Vanderlei Cordeiro de Lima	31/03/2021	49min14s
Maurren Maggi	11/03/2021	50min06s
Thiago Braz	12/06/2022	1h14min51s
Alison dos Santos	09/06/2022	45min52s

Source: the author.

Chart 1 – Olympic Medalists of the Brazil

Athlete	Olympic participations	Olympic medals won	Event of the medal
Joaquim Cruz	Los Angeles (1984) Seoul (1988) Atlanta (1996)	Los Angeles (1984) – Gold Seoul (1988) - Silver	800m
Robson Caetano	Los Angeles (1984) Seoul (1988) Barcelona (1992) Atlanta (1996)	Seoul (1988) – Bronze Atlanta (1996) - Bronze	200m 4x100m relay
Arnaldo Oliveira	Los Angeles (1984) Seoul (1988) Barcelona (1992) Atlanta (1996)	Atlanta (1996) - Bronze	4x100m relay
Édson Luciano	Atlanta (1996) Sydney (2000) Athens (2004)	Atlanta (1996) – Bronze Sydney (2000) - Silver	4x100m relay 4x100m relay
André Domingos	Barcelona (1992) Atlanta (1996) Sydney (2000) Athens (2004)	Atlanta (1996) – Bronze Sydney (2000) - Silver	4x100m relay 4x100m relay
Vicente Lenilson	Sydney (2000) Athens (2004) Beijing (2008)	Sydney (2000) - Silver Beijing (2008) – Bronze	4x100m relay 4x100m relay
Cláudio Roberto	Sydney (2000) Athens (2004)	Sydney (2000) – Silver	4x100m relay

Claudinei Quirino	Atlanta (1996) Sydney (2000)	Sydney (2000) – Silver	4x100m relay
Sandro Viana	Beijing (2008) London (2012)	Beijing (2008) – Bronze	4x100m relay
Bruno Lins	Beijing (2008) London (2012) Rio (2016)	Beijing (2008) – Bronze	4x100m relay
Codó	Beijing (2008) London (2012) Rio (2016)	Beijing (2008) – bronze	4x100m relay
Rosemar Coelho	Athens (2004) Beijing (2008)	Beijing (2008)	4x100m relay
Lucimar Moura	Athens (2004) Beijing (2008)	Beijing (2008)	4x100m relay
Thaissa Barbosa Presti	Beijing (2008)	Beijing (2008)	4x100m relay
Rosângela Santos	Beijing (2008) London (2012) Rio (2016) Tokyo (2020)	Beijing (2008)	4x100m relay
Vanderlei Cordeiro de Lima	Atlanta (1996) Sydney (2000) Athens (2004)	Athens (2004) – Bronze	Marathon
Maurren Maggi	Sydney (2000) Beijing (2008) London (2012)	Beijing (2008) – Gold	Long jump
Thiago Braz	Rio (2016) Tokyo (2020)	Rio (2016) - Gold Tokyo (2020) – Bronze	Pole vault Pole vault
Alison dos Santos	Tokyo (2020)	Tokyo (2020) - Bronze	400m hurdles

Source: the author.

This study follows the ethical parameters of the Resolution 510/2016 of the National Health Council, and the researcher understands the ethical obligations of the study, respecting the interviewees. The participants accepted being interviewed and the use of their names in the study by signing a Free and Informed Consent form.

We followed the proposal of Yin (2016) for data analysis: compile, decompose, recompose, interpret, and make conclusions. For the author, the interpretation and the conclusions "challenge researchers to put the results in order, create clear words and concepts and report to the world the meaning of the research" (YIN, 2016, p.184). This approach gives more visibility to the athletes' life trajectories.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Seeking to understand how much track and field is a tool for social inclusion, we present the interviews in chronological order starting with Rosemar Coelho and finishing with Thiago Braz.

Joaquim Cruz came from a low-income family of six children. According to himself, they were not poor, they had a home and enough food. However, he tells he shared the bed with his sister until he was 11 years old, then he slept on the couch. When electricity came into their home,

Joaquim had to sleep in the kitchen. His mother was from Corrente, state of Piauí, in the northeast, and his father went to Brasília to help building the city while his mother remained working in the farm. His mother one day decided to surprise his father and climbed into a truck and travelled 12 days from Corrente to Brasília. Joaquim comments about his relation with the coach Luiz Alberto: "He played the role my father could not, not even had conditions of playing... the education, my father grew in the farm, he did not know how to deal with a child or a teenager that has a lot of questions, who wants to have adventures in life." During Joaquim's teenagerhood, his father worked in the industry, therefore, Joaquim could use the Sesi (Industry Social Service) to start in the sport. When Joaquim started to compete, the amateurship predominated so the athlete could not receive any financial support from the sport but should have an integral dedication to it. The amateurship ended in the beginning of the 1980's (CARDOSO, 1996). When 17 years old, Coca-Cola initiated the national pentathlon program and invited Joaquim to be the model of the program. It was then that Joaquim started earning some money from the sport. "Nevertheless, that aid should go to the family, not to yourself, because you were an amateur". Joaquim went to the United States in 1981, when 18, recruited by a university. At that time, Joaquim already had the world record in the 800m and Nike wanted to sign a contract with him, but he was not able to do it. Joaquim stayed there until 1984 without signing any contract, but receiving some financial support "under-the-table". "When it was permitted, when the amateurship fell, things got better a little bit faster". Joaquim comments he did not have financial gains with his Olympic medals.

Joaquim said he could live off the sport, "but money was short. It was short, but enough to support me for a while, but not forever." Joaquim comments: "I would never enter into a school outside of the country if it was not by the sport, I would never have the opportunity to know the world if it was not by the sport." Finally, he concludes that "so, sport for me was my tool for social inclusion and through the sport I knew the world, my dreams came true. That would never happen if I still lived in Brazil if it was not by sport. So, it is still a vehicle for inclusion."

Robson remember in his speech two scenes: seeing the situation his family lived and the situation of crisis provoked by starvation. "Dude, to starve is not nice and when I remember it, of when I opened the empty pantry, not a pantry, a cabinet, with only a bag of flour with a whole in it, and when I opened the fridge there was a bottle of water and nothing more". Robson worked as a janitor, construction worker, mowed lawns, but his dream was to buy a jeans pants.

Coach and psychologist Sonia Ricette, as soon as she saw Robson, invited him to train in Botafogo's team. He also passed through the transition from the amateur era and sometimes competed receiving nothing. However, by the end of 1983, Robson signed a contract with Adidas. But it was only in 1985 in Bradesco's team that Robson became a professional athlete. In 1989, Robson moved to the United States after winning the first and only sprint medal of Brazil in the 1988 Seoul Olympic games. "In 1989, I went to the United States and there I was sure that we do

not have to go out of Brazil to be an Olympic medalist, we don't." He saved some money and moved, without a contract. Robson comments:

I only regret coming back to Brazil. This is one, if you ask me about a regret, is having left California. I should have stayed there, I should have become an American, an American citizen. Today I would probably live with more tranquility, perhaps even earning more. Not with the value we receive here, we really need that here and things here do not happen this way.

Robson was granted a scholarship by Universidade Gama Filho and studied Physical Education.

André's mother worked in 3 family houses and around 21h30-22h they walked 15 km until Santo André's downtown to clean the notary's office. After finishing her job, they arrived home around 1h-1h30. At 5 a.m., his mother was up again.

From then on, his mother, instead of working in 3 houses, worked in 2 and did not have to clean the notary's office anymore. "Then we started having some life quality, it was wonderful, but before I was very hard, it was 'punk'". André reports he used to run barefoot because he could not afford buying shoes. André, as soon as he was discovered at school, was sent to Santo André's Sesi, where he stayed from 1986 to 1992. Until his first Olympic games participation in Barcelona 1992, he did not receive a salary. In Atlanta 1996, he mentions that everything changed, he received a significant amount from sponsors and his mother did not have to work anymore. Nevertheless, he says that "recognition came after that conquest." He adds "nowadays I see it was in a completely wrong manner, you do not have to wait to get a support, you have to support before, you have to help before, you have to invest in the child before", for him not to go astray.

Arnaldo states he comes from a family with a very low income, very simple. So, during the years, he saved money and the first thing he did with it was buying a house for his mother. "The sport brings many benefits [...] It does not work only the physical part, no, it works the intellectual part also, it works the emotional part, it works with values." Arnaldo comments that his two undergraduate courses, physical educational and physical therapy, were completed due to scholarships.

So, I am very happy because track and field gave me a family, it gave me a house, and nowadays I am one of the commentators of Sport TV, so the sport provided many good things for me and I talk a lot about it with the kids in my project.

Arnaldo understood what being an athlete meant when he started living in the Universidade Gama Filho. "I took some months to adapt, but I adapted and when I got there, I think it took eight months until I started receiving a subsistence allowance from the Universidade Gama Filho", with which he could also help his family. "So, I am very grateful to track and field, because track and field, more than that, gave me a family, gave me a daughter." He comments that one challenge was that he needed to walk 6 km to get the bus to train, and many times he

made that without having a breakfast. After Gama Filho, Arnaldo passed through other teams, where he received a salary. "When I went to Atlântica boa vista, I already started receiving some money, at the time, a long time ago, it were 10 minimum wages, wow, 10 minimum wages was a lot, it was a lot of money, really a lot."

Edson Luciano's mother was a janitor in a city school, and his father was a mechanic. His town in Paraná's countryside did not have many job perspectives or personal growth opportunities, "and I had worked, until then, as a farmworker, what they called "cotton picker"; in gas stations as an attendant, car washer, mechanic, woodworker." His family had a very low income. It was "when this club in Pato Branco show up, paying, remunerating, and I was going to live there and receive something. Then, I left Bandeirantes, also because my parents did not have conditions to support me in Bandeirantes." Then, Edson moved to Foz do Iguaçu in 1993. By the end of that year, he received an offer from the Funilense team, which later changed its name to BM&F Bovespa. In this moment, Edson understood his professionalization in the sport, because in 1995 he participated in his first World Championship in Sweden. In Sidney 2000, he won the silver medal in the 4x100m relay, but a doping case was revealed in the gold medal team, which should transfer the medal to Brazil. However, as the case was discovered after two Olympic cycles, they could not reclaim the medal. He comments that one hardship was to have sponsorship and access to technologies. When questioned about what being an athlete provided him, Edson answers: "It provided me with material goods, yes, it did not make me rich to the point I do not have to work anymore but it provided me a nice condition of living."

Vicente Lenilson comments he was of humble origins and worked as a motorcycle mechanic when first knew about track and field. He comments that, in three months, he earned more than in all the period he worked in the workshop. He was discovered when 17 years old in his hometown Currais Novos, state of Rio Grande do Norte. Then he was invited to join the Clube de Regatas Flamengo, where he signed his first contract. Then, he joined the Vasco da Gama team and, then, a club in Presidente Prudente, where the sprint runners trained. He stayed there for 14 years. Vicente was a silver medalist in the 4x100m relay in Sidney 2000 and a bronze medalist in Beijing 2008. Nevertheless, in Beijing, the Brazilian team finished fourth but eleven months later they received the bronze medal due to a doping case in another team.

But fourth is the worst thing, right? Then, many years later, ten years later, you discover you did not finish fourth, you finished third. But then it is not the same thing, you are not in the Olympic podium in the moment of the Olympic games, the funding you had in personal contracts are not active anymore. For you to have an idea, I had a partnership with a company that would give a million reais for each medal. Until the third place. I finished fourth. Ten years later, this company does not exist anymore, the guy is not concerned about track and field anymore.

Vicente graduated in Business administration and is now studying Physical Education.

Claudinei states that "my history can be confused with that of many Brazilians, especially in the sport; sport, when you start talking, most people, I guess 80 % of the people in sport, especially in track and field, was not born with a silver spoon in their mouths." His mother died and Claudinei lived in an orphanage since he was 2. He stayed there until almost completing 18, when he had to leave the orphanage to enroll in the army.

So, for you to have an idea, the orphanage was not like it is today, I do not know if we, the kids, had human rights, and all that stuff. So, it was a life of much suffering, I was beaten a lot, I fought with the other kids, I was a totally revolted person, but I was a reflex of all that I had lived. So, when I left the orphanage, I was like an animal that had escaped from the cage. [...] Then I knew the sport, until today I will always thank God for having known about the sport, because from the moment I knew it, the sport changed my life. But, in the beginning, I took all this anger, all this ire, all this revolt that I had against the world, and put into it. And I saw in sport an opportunity to win. So, beyond the anger with all I had, I wanted to be very good at the sport and people said "when you were younger in the orphanage, have you ever played any sport?" I never did, the most I did was to play soccer there, but I used to steal mangoes, to jump walls, swim in the river, thus I learned to run from the others. And all those childhood games, running here and there, I think they were part of the training, a basis to start in the sport. For this reason, every time I have an opportunity I thank the sport, because it was like a watershed, mainly for someone who did not have conditions in life, it changes.

Claudinei started training in his hometown, Lençóis Paulista, for a year and a few months then he moved to Araçatuba, where he stayed for three years and was remunerated by the city hall. After that, he received an offer to train in Presidente Prudente, where he understood he was a professional. After the Olympics, Claudinei entered into an Adult Education program, and then he started the physical education course, in which he stayed for two years. He also tried journalism but got disappointed. He is currently finishing the Marketing and Propaganda course.

Claudio comments he came from a humble family, and track and field also helped him a lot in the financial aspect. "From the moment you earn 200 reais you are already helping because I moved from here to São Paulo, it helped, you got some good results and you go with the Brazilian team and start earning 10 times more than before." Then, Claudio managed to help his family, building a house, buying a car, and having a health insurance. Claudio started training in his hometown Teresina, in the state of Piauí, in 1989. Then, he moved to his first club, the Sesi de Santo André (São Paulo), where he started receiving a salary in 1995. He comments that he never had an individual sponsor, but received a physical education scholarship. Claudio was silver medalist in Sydney, but participated only in the qualifier, substituting Claudinei Quirino. By this fact, Claudio, besides being able to, did not receive the medal.

When he got back from the Olympic games, Claudio comments he did not have the courage to go back to his hometown, because he did not have a medal to show; he was frustrated. When interviewed, Claudio was still waiting for his medal and, after more than 20 years, on December 13, 2020, the medal had still not been delivered.

Vanderlei Cordeiro de Lima is not different from the others. "My social situation was also very hard, I am the son of Northeastern parents, and the conditions we had, socially, were minimal. So, the sport was a great tool for the transformation of my life and my family's life." Vanderlei started on track and field at school, when 15 years old, and later he registered in other institutions to participate in official competitions. He comments that before being a registered athlete, he worked in the furniture industry. When he was inscribed in the Associação Atlética Ingá, in the city of Maringá, he was hired as a janitor in a sport center, being able to continue training. Only three years later, after being transferred to São Paulo, Vanderlei started living off the sport.

In Athens 2004, Vanderlei started leading the event in the 22 km but with only 6 km left to finish the contest he was held by a spectator, who almost threw him on the ground. Nonetheless, Vanderlei finished the event and won the bronze medal. "In truth, when the event finished, I did not remember the guy holding me because the happiness of having fulfilled a dream, of having won a medal was much larger." The sportsmanship of his action earned him a Pierre de Coubertin medal; an honor conceded to those who effectively represent the Olympic spirit. Another accomplishment of Vanderlei was lighting the Olympic cauldron in Rio 2016. Vanderlei considers

sport as a great tool for his life and his family's transformation, especially individual sports, and track and field as the sport of higher inclusion especially of those of lower social classes. It is the sport that welcomes everyone without discrimination, it is the sport that I see as the most democratic and, in fact, it only requires the desire and the interest of the child and the teenager to practice it.

Vanderlei studied physical education with a scholarship, but did not conclude it.

Maurren Maggi's family also had a low income.

My family always supported me, my parents always supported me, they were always by my side, not with financial conditions, but with support, telling me I had to fight for my dream, that I was right, that I should keep struggling because life was not easy, and my family always helped me in many ways.

Maurren comments she started having financial return with the sport from 1994 onwards, when she moved to São Paulo. She reminds sending money home. Besides, she remembers some hardships, such as the vacation period that she remained in the lodgings, training and making instant noodles with shower water. She reports a doping episode that occurred due to a depilatory cream, which made her stay three years out of the tracks. In Beijing 2008, she became the first Brazilian woman to win a gold medal in an individual event. About this conquest, she comments "being the first woman was a luxury, after my medal, many others saw that it was possible and went after their dreams, this is very nice, and I am very proud of having won that first medal". She reminds that "in 2016, I had conditions of reaching the index, but then I received an excellent offer of working in Globo [TV Station] as a commentator, then I became a commentator."

Sandro Viana when first knew about track and field was married, father of one daughter, living with his mother and working as a freelancer. He did not earn a minimum wage per month. Sandro comments that his beginnings on track and field were complicated, because, at 24, he was considered too old. After one year of training, he started earning a salary. After some time in the sport, Sandro sold most of his things and moved to São Paulo. He comments: "Then the sport provided me something that socially was very important to me, it provided me to enter into a university [...] I was also selected for an integral scholarship in the faculty." Sandro stayed 11 years without his Olympic medal of Beijing 2008. His team finished fourth and, due to a doping case discovered in 2016, they received the medal only later, in 2019. He comments: "Then I suffered a lot, when I received the medal, I got into a severe depression, I had to go to the doctor, taking pills [...] I went to the doctor and was diagnosed with the double emotion syndrome, you know what I mean, I was happy and sad at the same time, equally."

Bruno's mother was a public servant that worked in the city hall and for the state, "then, besides being a teacher, she had a good salary, but my father divorced her and basically forgot us, right?" Bruno is the younger of three siblings. According to him, his mother had hard times taking care alone of the three children. So, we can say that, in this sense, I passed through many hardships. I did not pass by hunger, necessities, these things I hadn't. But I saw my mother passing through very hard times." Thus, Bruno saw in track and field an opportunity for his life, because he always liked the sport. "So, for me, track and field really was an escape also." Bruno started track and field in 2002 in Maceió (state of Alagoas), but only in 2007, with 20 years, he moved to Presidente Prudente (São Paulo).

Codó states that his family "did not have hardships of saying 'oh, I starved'. Because starving, we did not starve, but we were in need." His parents were always working and so Codó and his siblings. "So, like this, my family was always a very tranquil family, we came from a poor family, but we were workers, everybody worked, everyone had structure, studied, and, thanks God, we are all ok." When Codó was transitioning from the junior to the adult category, he moved to São Paulo, in 2003, when he started earning a salary. In 2004, he was invited to train in Londrina (state of Paraná). As Sandro and Bruno, he won his medal of the Beijing games only 11 years later. "It was a wonderful sensation we had of receiving that medal there in Lausanne (Switzerland) in the Olympic Museum." Codó received a scholarship to study physical education but did not finish the course due to his athletic career.

Rosemar was a child of a very humble family, of divorced parents, who found in track and field something that could change her life. Rosemar is from the Vale do Ribeira, a city of 12 thousand inhabitants,

where I would never have an opportunity in life to do any other thing to be who I am today if it was not by sport. So, the sport was transformative in my life. [...] I am an Olympic medalist, but what I say is that my medal is a

consequence of everything I could enjoy due to the sport. Because when I knew and saw that it could make a difference in my life, I made a pact with the sport: I said I would give my best to it and that I would enjoy everything it would give me and that was my experience with it because I made a physical education course, with a scholarship of 100%, I made my post-graduate course, the courses I did, I never paid a cent for anything, doctors, for anything, sports material, clothes, trips. So, I am what I am and I owe it in first place to the sport, because it was my salvation.

Lucimar lost her mother when 9 years old and has five siblings. She started track and field in her home region, Timóteo (state of Minas Gerais), and finished her career training in São Paulo. About the medal, she comments:

When we received the medal here in Brazil, our desire was to have received this medal inside the stadium, any athlete when wins a medal wants to win it inside the stadium, with that emotion, like I said, feeling that emotion, the same thing I saw with Joaquim in the podium. All Brazilian athletes were on the podium, we did not have this emotion. And we also waited for 8 years, there is a lot of people who do not remember, do not know, does it count? they ask if I consider myself a medalist. Of course, I consider myself, right? I struggled through all my career, it was 25 years of track and field, I consider myself a medalist by the fact I have earned it, struggling all those years dedicated to the sport. But it is not the same thing, right? of receiving a medal in a stadium.

Rosemar, since she was 12 years old, when she started in track and field, received a salary from a team. When 23, in 2002, Rosemar started training in BM&F, where she had a bigger structure for her training and then participated in her first Olympic games in Athens 2004. Rosemar also participated in Beijing 2008 where she was a medalist in the 4x100m relay. As occurred with the male team, the female team finished in fourth but, due to a doping case in the Russian team, they received the bronze medal, but only in 2016. Rosemar comments that “most people use this term: inherit. But I did not inherit, I earned it, it came later, but was still a conquer, I did not inherit, I do not like when people use this term”. She adds “a medal changes the life of a person. You have no idea. Mine changed from a fourth place to a medal, I will say it changed from water to wine”. Moreover, she says it “includes my daughter, I met my husband in a track, and my daughter is the great-granddaughter of a two-time Olympic champion, she is the great-granddaughter of Adhemar Ferreira da Silva”.

Rosangela was born in the United States but came to Brazil when very young, with one year. Her parents stayed in the U.S. but always sent money to support her. “Look, we passed through a lot of hardships, yes [...] my mother, my father, they were always sending money to help me, and I had a lot of help from friends.” Rosangela went to Beijing 2008, where she was a medalist in the 4x100m relay and was until then the younger athlete in Brazil to have an Olympic medal, with 17 years old.

On the other hand, Thaissa comments she never had hardships of the sort. She studied in the best school of her region, her parents had conditions to buy her shoes before having a team and her own salary. “Really, I am an exception, within the sport most people are not like that. I

started in track and field by choice, not for being a life changing option." Thaissa is graduated in physical education with a scholarship due to her track and field achievements.

Thiago tells: "I lived with my grandparents, my parents are practically separated since I was 2 years old, and then I went living with my grandparents on my father side [...] they are professional fishermen." Even though "they did not have the best conditions to give me, they helped me the way they could." He adds "but my grandparents could sustain themselves, sustain their little house there, their little car; they had a stable life, but not rich, so all hardships everyone has, they also had." Regarding the scholarship, Thiago comments that in 2011 he received an offer to study in the United States, after the Pan-American games: "I went there, I won a medal and everything, and they offered me a scholarship, but I preferred continuing with Vitory, otherwise I would not have an opportunity to train with him." Moreover, Thiago met his wife, Ana, in the track and field because she was an athlete in the high jump.

Alison had many reasons to start in track and field:

One of the reasons was financial, at that time, I practiced judo, then we invested a lot of money in judo but we did not have a level to have some return from that, and when they talked about the ease someone could have a return with track and field, we thought: 'why not test it?' And, within a year of practice, I got a scholarship, I got a bronze medal in the Brazilian Championship. From then on, I started receiving a scholarship, then with one year of track and field I had some return, although it was not much, it was already something.

He also comments that, when he arrived in São Paulo, he received an 100% scholarship in UNIP (Universidade Paulista) and started the Physical Therapy course but did not conclude it.

Based on the interviews, we perceived a common discourse of upward mobility made possible by the sport. According to the authors studied, they could be classified as socially disqualified (PAUGAM, 1999) and disaffiliated (CASTEL, 2008). Most track and field Olympic medalists came from humble families and

the sport is a tool for upward mobility for working class people, especially for those living in violent communities, and may represent a way for self-realization and overcoming the lack of full citizenship rights (VIANNA; LOVISOLO, 2011, p. 294).

According to Assumpção et al. (2010, p. 96), sports like track and field and boxing are practiced "mostly by members of lower social classes." Supporting this view, the athlete Alison comments that

track and field is a sport that you do not need much money, you do not need anything to practice it. Then it is very inclusive, and the energy both of the sport and the athletes is incredible, it is a place where you... if you see it in any competition, you will fall in love with it and will want to be a part of this world, for sure, of so inclusive it is.

It can be perceived that "the potentialities of the sport for social inclusion are multiple, namely as a space of values acquisition such as solidarity, cooperation, and recognition of the human person dignity" (ROSSI JÚNIOR; SILVA; ALMEIDA, 2020, p.147). "The professional practice of the sport started representing an opportunity of upward mobility, understood as an accumulation of richness only possible before through family inheritance or by studying in prestigious universities" (RUBIO, 2012, p. 97).

The athletes also mention learning values with the sport, as it "develops several values that can be translated to other spheres of the athletes' lives" (SANCHES; RUBIO, 2011, p. 828). This fact demonstrates the "contribution of sport as tool for an integral education of new generations, helping prepare these young people to face challenges in personal, social, and professional scopes" (SANCHES; RUBIO, 2011, p. 831). The access to cultural and economic capital must also be emphasized. As states Alison: "being an athlete is something magical that gives us the opportunity of travelling, meeting many people, many places, learning new things; I speak both of countries and cities, states."

Social inequality marks indiscriminately several parcels of the population but groups between 15 and 29 years old are particularly affected by exclusionary processes (NOGUEIRA, 2011). This phase is marked by precocious employment, underemployment, precarious education, exile in decadent neighborhoods, etc. Such problems are observed in some athletes' speeches.

According to Castel, the "suburban youth" is an expression that unveils a double reference to class and race. "What discriminates ethnic minorities is the double disadvantage of race and class, which must be attacked simultaneously" (2008, p. 102). "The racial question does not substitute the social question: they accumulate their effects" (2008, p. 104). The social and racial questions are strongly present in the life trajectories of Brazilian track and field Olympic medalists as most of them came from working class backgrounds and many are black. Track and field is "known as a 'black people sport'" (FARIAS, 2011, p. 919). The "suburban youth", as mentions Castel, is characterized by "educational failure, lack of professional future, people with common attributes that generally end up culminating in precariousness or being used as outlaw knowledges, such as informal economy, many times following the path of delinquency" (2008, p. 10). And for the non-white, the difficulty to have a job is higher.

The inequality regarding ethnicity is very present because almost half of the Brazilian population is composed by African descendants. Therefore, "in Brazil, poverty has a color. It is black" (SILVA, 2004, p. 57). These ethnic minorities (FÖLDESI, 2010) are very visible in Brazilian track and field as most Brazilian Olympic medalists are black. "The sport is an important path for socialization by reaching values such as collectivism, friendship, and solidarity, which are relevant to overcome the hardships of poverty" (VIANNA; LOVISOLO, 2011, p. 294).

Another factor commonly mentioned in the interviews was the higher education scholarship. All athletes had a higher education with a scholarship provided by the track and field.

Although not all concluded this level of education, all had this opportunity. "They all value very much the opportunity that was granted to them by the scholarships" (BALZANO et al., 2019, p. 10).

It can be concluded that more important than the external transformations (such as the esthetical, financial advancements or the social inclusion provided by the sport), the most important contributions are related, in all cases investigated, to internal and subjective aspects, such as the reinforcement and development of values such as cooperation, friendship, solidary, and the capacity to share and overcome adversities (resilience). (SANCHES; RUBIO, 2011, p. 838).

When referring to their own journey, the athletes remembered

individuals and professionals that influenced their desire by the sport, by seeking better life opportunities, training or coexisting with other athletes who also competed in the same period or whose careers mingled, pointing to the necessity of contextualizing these situations to understand important life episodes and results (RUBIO, 2014, p. 109).

It was also evident in the athletes' speeches, "the migratory processes especially lived by the athletes coming from the north-northeast", who had to go to the south-southeast to continue their career (RUBIO, 2014b). Joaquim moved abroad, to the United States. He comments: "there, suddenly, 18 years old, I am moving to the United States, where I did not know the country, I did not know the language, I did not know the culture; and I had to reborn in a practically unknown world." Claudio Roberto also mentions that when he moved from Teresina to São Paulo the adaptation was very complicated, taking almost two years to get accustomed to the new routine and city. Vanderlei mentions that leaving Paraná's countryside "was very hard, because, in fact, I went to face what I did not know, a totally different world from where I lived until then." Sandro Viana left Manaus for São Paulo and says "it was very hard in the beginning because it was all different from what I did before. So, instead of going there to evolve, I started to regress because I was deconstructing myself to be rebuilt." Bruno Lins, who changed Maceió for Presidente Prudente, says that "the first year was horrible for me." Codó mentions that his first year in São Paulo was not good because it was a year of adaptation.

Nonetheless, sport, in general, is "constituted as a powerful tool in the process of social inclusion" (BALZANO et al., 2019, p. 1). Moreover, track and field is characterized as one of the sports with higher social inclusion power as it does not require many investments to begin in it. Alison mentions that "I do not know where would I be if it was not by track and field [...] I would not have the opportunities I had in life, both of acquiring knowledge, knowing places, conquering titles and influence. So, track and field is practically everything in my life."

According to Assumpção et al. (2010, p. 95-96), many teenagers of unfavorable social conditions see in the sport "a fast, possible, and viable path for upward mobility."

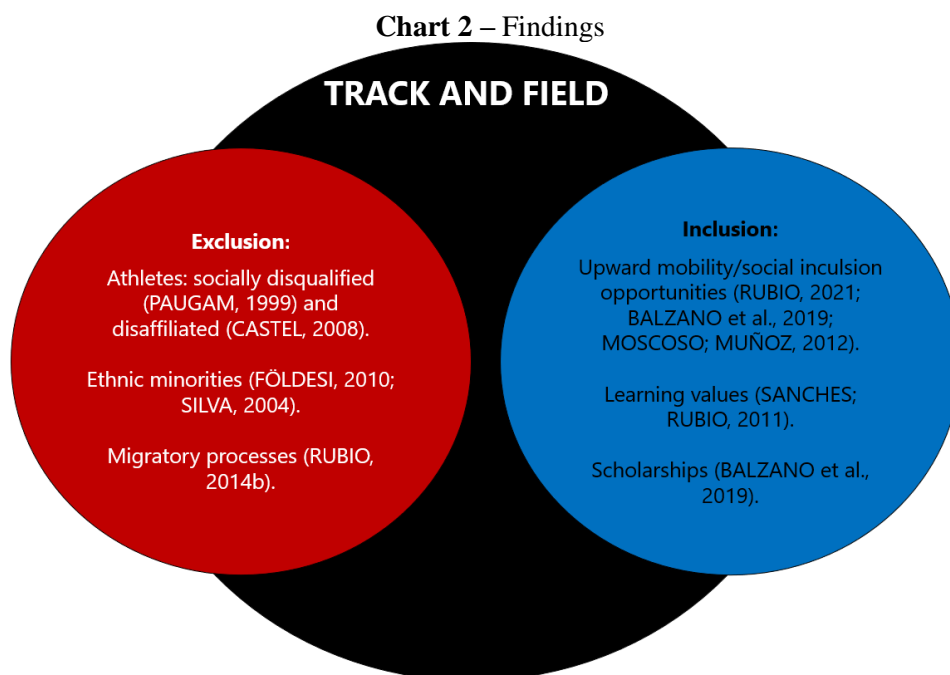
Reflecting about the medalists' journey, it is also very visible in their speeches a certain dissatisfaction with their first participation in Olympic games because they were amazed and could not focus on the competition. As mentions Rosemar:

Maybe it is our biggest mistake as Brazilians, it is our apex, I want to go to an OG, train first to go to an OG. This is our mistake. My mistake. I wanted to go to an OG and when I arrived in Athens I was crazy to see all that structure and everything, and only then to compete. I finished in 22nd in the 100m. We finished in the 9th position in the relay. Then came that emptiness, I said, hey dude, but I came to participate of an OG, but I can do much more than just participating in an OG.

And after conquering, the feeling was like Claudinei Quirino says "I felt like that, I felt like I had accomplished a mission after we received the silver medal, I felt myself fulfilled."

Another interesting point is the building of families through the sport. Some athletes comment that they had the dream of having a family and many of them accomplished it through the sport, where they met their life partners. Thus, we perceive other forms of social inclusion provided by the sport.

The chart below summarizes this study findings.



Source: the author.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the athletes' reports, we conclude that this sport is a great tool for social inclusion because most athletes came from vulnerable social conditions and low-income families. Therefore, they found in track and field an opportunity for upward mobility, which can be

maintained to help their families after starting in the sport. Difficulties found during the childhood and teenagerhood with reports of starvation, precarious jobs, and the necessity to work to provide food for their homes show how potent is sport in fostering social inclusion, especially track and field. Other forms of social inclusion by the sport were also noted, such as higher education scholarships and the formation of their families.

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