

Involvement in physical and sports activities: what characteristics lead athletes to be selected for basketball teams in Brazil?

Participación en Actividades Físicas y Deportivas: ¿qué características llevan a los atletas a ser convocados a los equipos de baloncesto en Brasil?

Envolvimento em Atividades Físicas e Esportivas: quais características levam os atletas serem convocados para seleções de basquetebol no Brasil?

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Abstract

This study investigated the relations between athletes' personal engagement and selection for state and national basketball teams, specifically motivation, interest and engagement in physical and sports activities in the school environment and in other modalities. A mixed method study with explanatory sequential design and pragmatic orientation was conducted with 141 male and female basketball players aged 18 and 19 years. Data were collected using the Instrument for Evaluation of Sports Training in Basketball (IAFEB). Differences between the age groups were analyzed by Kruskal-Wallis's test in the SPSS Statistics software. In the qualitative phase, in-depth retrospective interviews were conducted with 24 athletes using a semi-structured script. Data management and thematic organization during analysis used the NVivo software package. Results showed that most athletes started practicing basketball at 11 years old, but only 10% were selected for the state team and 5% to the national team. Athletes who did not participate in Physical Education classes were less likely to be selected for the state team. Likewise, athletes who played basketball with an interest in training from 11 to 14 years old were less likely to be called up for the state (83%) and national (81%) teams.

Keywords: basketball; youth sports; engagement.

Resumen

Este estudio tuvo como objetivo identificar la relación entre el compromiso personal de los deportistas y la convocatoria a las selecciones estatales y nacionales de baloncesto, específicamente motivación, interés e implicación en actividades físicas y deportivas en el ámbito escolar y en otras modalidades. Se utilizó el método mixto con diseño explicativo secuencial y orientación pragmática. Participaron 141 deportistas de baloncesto, de 18 y 19 años, ambos los sexos. Se utilizó el Instrumento de Evaluación del Entrenamiento Deportivo de Baloncesto (IAFEB). Diferencias entre grupos de edad se analizaron mediante la prueba de Kruskal-Wallis (SPSS). En la fase cualitativa se realizaron entrevistas retrospectivas en profundidad a 24 deportistas mediante un guión semiestructurado. Manejo de datos y organización de temas en la etapa de análisis se realizó mediante el software NVivo. Los resultados mostraron que la mayoría de los deportistas comenzaron a jugar baloncesto a partir de 11 años, sólo 10% fueron convocados para la selección estatal y 5% para la selección nacional. Los deportistas que no participaron en clases de Educación Física tuvieron menos probabilidades de ser convocados para selección estatal. Asimismo, los deportistas que jugaron baloncesto con interés en entrenar entre 11 y 14 años tuvieron menos probabilidades de ser convocados para las selecciones estatal (83%) y nacional (81%).

Palabras clave: baloncesto; deportes juveniles; compromiso.

Resumo

Este estudo objetivou identificar a relação entre engajamento pessoal dos atletas e convocação para seleções estaduais e nacionais de basquetebol, especificamente motivação, interesse e envolvimento em atividades físicas e esportivas no ambiente escolar e em outras modalidades. Utilizou-se o método misto com desenho explanatório sequencial, com orientação pragmática. Participaram 141 atletas de basquetebol, de 18 e 19 anos, ambos os sexos. Foi utilizado o Instrumento de Avaliação da Formação Esportiva no Basquetebol (IAFEB). Diferenças entre as faixas etárias foram analisadas por meio do teste de *Kruskal-Wallis*, no pacote estatístico SPSS *Statistics*. Realizaram-se na fase qualitativa, entrevistas retrospectivas em profundidade com 24 atletas, utilizando roteiro semiestruturado. Gerenciamento dos dados e organização dos temas para análise deu-se por meio do *software* NVivo. Os resultados mostraram que a maioria dos atletas começou no basquete a partir dos 11 anos, somente 10% foram convocados para seleção estadual e 5% para seleção nacional. Atletas que não participavam das aulas de Educação Física tinham menos chances de convocação para seleção estadual. Similarmente, atletas que praticavam o basquetebol com interesse em treinamento dos 11 aos 14 anos, tinham menos chances de convocações para seleção estadual (83%) e nacional (81%).

Palavras-chave: basquete; esporte juvenil; engajamento.

Introduction

To achieve higher levels of sport practice and performance, to be selected to represent the state or country in national and international competitions, athletes need dedication and opportunities as well as the availability of environments and activities that enable their integral training and result in achieving this goal (Galatti et al., 2021; Fernández-Cortés et al., 2021). Brazil has 27 federations responsible for managing basketball at the state level, affiliated to the Brazilian Confederation of Basketball – CBB (Leonardi et al., 2021).

Despite this number, the country's territorial extension combined with the different characteristics of cities, regions and the culture established by immigrants from different parts of the world, interfere in the plurality of practice opportunities and options. Hence, although broad territorially Brazil has a restricted number of vacancies available to compose professional teams and, consequently, national teams, which limits the chances of competing at a high level, even for youth who invest in the sport from an early age.

Although high performance is related to physical, technical, tactical and contextual factors, and the physical and sports practices experienced over the years in the modality and in Physical Education classes are key for this development, the factors that influence athlete selection for the Brazilian state or national teams are still unknown. On the one hand, a growing body of evidence suggests that dedication to a single sport is not a prerequisite for reaching elite level (Black et al., 2019; Ross et al., 2021); other studies claim that without sports diversification during childhood athletes will hardly achieve high performance (Côté et al., 2014; Côté et al., 2020).

Gullich et al. (2021) found that senior athletes who reached the world-class level engaged in more coach-led practice in sports other than their primary sport during childhood and adolescence. Consequently, they began practicing their main sport later, accumulated less practice in a single sport, and achieved performance milestones at a slower pace compared to athletes who reached the national level. In contrast, junior athletes who achieved superior performances started practicing their main sport earlier, accumulated more practice in that sport during childhood and adolescence, but engaged in less practice in other sports and reached performance milestones more quickly than their peers with lower performance outcomes.

From the perspective of Côté et al. (2014), although deliberate practices (coach-led activities aimed at improving performance) are essential to achieving elite performance, athletes should not specialize in a single sport or engage in intensive deliberate practices until late adolescence. According to the authors, this late specialization should be preceded by a period of deliberate play (activities organized by the participants themselves, rather than by a coach, and focused on enjoyment) during childhood and adolescence, involving multiple sports (Gullich et al., 2021).

Based on this scenario, this study expands the literature on sports training by examining the characteristics that enable athletes to be selected for state and national teams in Brazil, using mixed method and pragmatism as a philosophical foundation. Given the scarcity of literature on the subject and the importance of the results to be discovered, this study investigated the relation between athletes' personal engagement and selection for state and national basketball teams, specifically the motivation, interest and engagement in physical and sports activities in the school environment and in other modalities.

Methods

Study design

This mixed-method study followed an explanatory sequential design (QUANT → which), with a pragmatic orientation (Cresswel, 2014). Construction of the explanatory sequential design followed two sequential phases (Cresswel & Plano Clark, 2018). First, the problem was explored by collecting and analyzing quantitative data; subsequently, the qualitative study was designed and analyzed.

The research was approved by the Ethics Committee for Research Involving Human Beings of the State University of Santa Catarina (CEPSH/UDESC, 4.733.011).

Phase 1: quantitative stage

The 141 basketball athletes (78.7% male and 21.3% female) who participated in this stage of the study were selected by convenience sampling (Ibáñez et al., 2019). Selection criteria involved the recruitment of 18- and 19-year-old athletes who were competing in Brazil in the year of data collection (June to December 2021).

This criterion is based on the competition structure for athletes in training in Brazil aimed at young people up to 19 years old, the last category before entry into adult competitions. It is also in line with the Sports Development Model of the Brazilian Olympic Committee (COB), according to the fourth stage of sports career development called 'Training and Competing' which ends with the transition from the youth to the adult stage (Comitê Olímpico Brasileiro, 2022).

Four strategies were used for participant recruitment: dissemination of the study via e-mail, social media of the state federations and affiliated clubs, available on the website of the Brazilian Confederation of Basketball (<https://www.cbb.com.br/federacoes>); sharing link access to the online instrument and survey dissemination on social media; resharing the research with the help of the academic community, coaches, athletes, former athletes and sport admirers throughout the country; non-probability sampling technique - snowball (Sparks & Smith, 2014).

The Instrument for Evaluation of Sports Training in Basketball (IAFEB), validated by experts in the sports training of Brazilian athletes, was used. The IAFEB was adapted into an online version, from the Instrument for Evaluation of Sports Training in Volleyball – IAFEV (Collet et al., 2019) and based on the three dynamic elements indicated by the Personal Assets Framework – PAF (Côté et al., 2020; 2022).

It was also divided into sequential age groups, considering the mandatory stages of Basic and Higher Education in Brazil: (I) eight items on activities practiced in School Physical Education; (II) 46 items on elements of sports training, subdivided into four parts: (1) up to 10 years old – Early Childhood Education and Primary Education (1st to 5th grade); (2) 11 to 14 years old – Lower Secondary Education (6th to 9th grade); (3) 15 to 17 years old – Upper Secondary Education; (4) 18 and 19 years old – Tertiary Education. Personal and sports information were collected using a characterization form built for the study.

Participation was effected by accepting the online Informed Consent Form (ICF). After agreeing to participate in the study, the athletes were directed to fill out the instrument on Google Forms platform. Once filled out, the information was automatically forwarded to an online spreadsheet generated by the platform.

Data were initially analyzed using descriptive statistics, with quantitative variables presented as mean and standard deviation and qualitative variables as relative and absolute frequency. Differences between age groups were analyzed by Kruskal-Wallis's test in the SPSS statistical package, version 24.

Correlations between the variables and selection for the state and national teams were verified using a generalized linear model. Given the binomial distribution of the variables of interest, we chose a binomial distribution with a Logit linkage function. Assumptions of multicollinearity and presence of outliers were verified. Odds ratio (ORs) and respective confidence intervals (CIs) were estimated. Missing data were excluded and $p < 0.05$ was considered significant. All analyses were performed with the R programming language, version 4.2.2.

Phase 2: qualitative stage

This second stage was started soon after the quantitative stage ended, following the design of an explanatory sequential study (Cresswell, 2014). In-depth interviews were conducted with 24 athletes (seven women and 18 men), selected in an intentional non-probabilistic manner from the sample in phase 1 (Mcgrudden & Mctigue, 2019).

Participants were selected according to the following criteria: athletes (I) selected for the national team; (II) called to the state team; (III) with longer time of basketball practice. In regions without both male and female athletes, two athletes of the same gender were selected. To compare the reality of athletes' sports training within the same region or state, the first participant was selected based on selection criteria I or II, whereas the second was selected based on criterion III.

When a selected athlete was unavailable or rejected to participate in the study, another athlete who met the predetermined criteria was chosen and, if necessary, we invited athletes who agreed to participate in this second phase, regardless of meeting the criteria. To include athletes from throughout Brazil, in regions with only one participating athlete in phase 1, this same athlete was invited to participate in phase 2 regardless of selection criteria.

Retrospective interviews were conducted using a semi-structured script, based on the dynamic element - personal engagement in activities (characteristic of physical and sports activities practiced, personal motivation to practice, weekly frequency of engagement and participation in complementary physical and sports activities)—according to the sequential age groups of Basic and Higher Education in Brazil. A pilot study was conducted to evaluate instrument specificity and data quality (Galatti et al., 2019), which found that the script was suitable for use.

The selected athletes were contacted by email, social media, and WhatsApp messaging informed in phase 1 and obtained through information sharing. Each selected athlete was contacted for a maximum of four tries at different times.

Athletes' participation was effective after acceptance of the online ICF for this study stage and a consent form for Photographs, Videos and Recordings (CFVG). Upon accepting the ICF and CFVG, we scheduled the day and time for the interview with each athlete individually. All interviews were conducted by telephone between April and July 2022 and recorded on the Windows platform for later transcription and analysis, with prior participant authorization. All interviews lasted on average 1 hour. All narratives were transcribed in full and sent to the athletes for content validation. Two athletes requested changes to the transcribed material, which were readily complied with.

Data analysis was guided by the hybrid deductive/inductive thematic approach (Braun & Clark, 2006; Braun et al., 2022), based on the six guidelines proposed by Braun & Clark (2006): (I) familiarization with the data from reading the transcripts; (II) generation of initial codes through deductive (theory-driven) and inductive (data-driven) approaches; (III) construction of themes with the help of visual mapping and continuous data engagement; (IV and V) review and definition of themes and export of the initial codes and their associated excerpts to a specific software; and (VI) production of the final report. Dataset management and thematic organization was achieved using NVivo software package (version 20.7, ©QSR International) in the analysis stages.

Quality of the analysis and data reliability were ensured by adopting the critical friend strategy (Smith & McGannon, 2018), which aims to stimulate reflective conversations among research members as a way to foster alternative data interpretations (Descombe, 2008).

Results

Figure 1 shows the age at which athletes started practicing basketball. We see that few children engaged in the sport up to 10 years old; but from the age of 11, most were already practicing the sport.

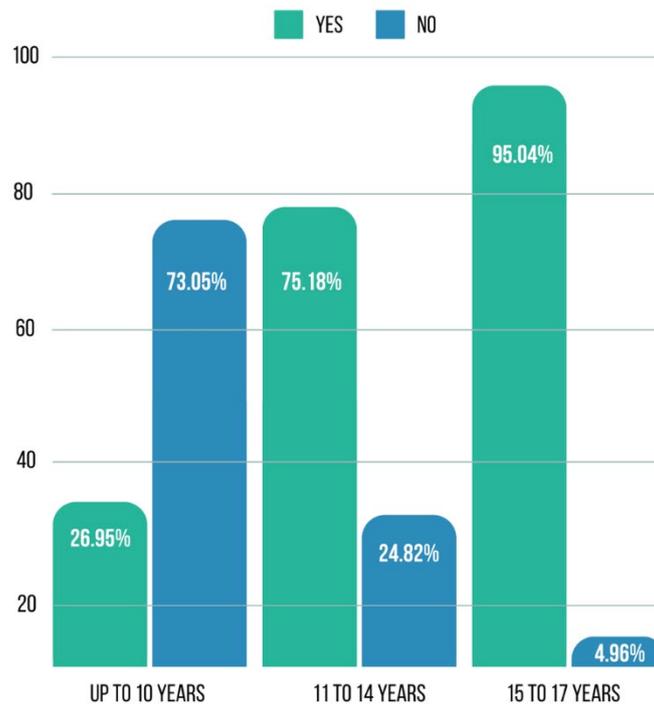


Figure 1. Basketball practice, according to athletes' age over the years.

Table 1 summarizes the participation of athletes in state basketball teams. Only 10% of the participants were selected for state teams. The Under-15 and Under-17 categories accounted for most athletes, corresponding to 17% of the study sample.

Table 1. Participation of athletes in state basketball teams.

Category	Once		Twice		Three times or more		Never participated	
	f	%	f	%	F	%	f	%
U 13	8	5.7	2	1.4	1	0.7	130	92.2
U 14	7	5.0	1	0.7	2	1.4	129	91.5
U 15	15	10.6	4	2.8	3	2.1	119	84.4
U 16	6	4.3	3	2.1	5	3.5	127	90.1
U 17	16	11.3	2	1.4	6	4.2	117	83.0
U 18	5	3.5	1	0.7	3	2.1	132	93.6
U 19	5	3.5	2	1.4	3	2.1	131	92.9

On the interviews, the participants expressed their perception regarding their participation in state teams during their time in the youth categories. We note that this experience was a game changer for the athletes, boosting their engagement with the sport and consequently their motivation to practice.

"[...] What left a deep impression was the Under-13 team in 2016. We got first place; it was my first team. In the Under-15, we got second place [...]. I think what left a mark in me the most was the national team. It's a week of training with several girls from the state; we have to adapt; everything is extremely fast but we still managed to win" (Athlete 90).

"[...] I decided that I really wanted to play, to train for real, when I was selected for the state team that would compete in the Southern Brazilian Championship. I felt like I should focus more [...]. Realizing that I was among the best in the state and participating in the team was really cool" (Athlete 7).

Results showed that only 5% of the study participants were selected for national basketball teams. Of these, most participated in the national team in the Under-14, Under-17 and Under-18 categories (Table 2).

Table 2. Participation of athletes in national basketball teams.

Category	Once		Twice		Three times or more		Never participated	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
U 14	7	5.0	0	0.0	1	0.7	133	94.3
U 15	5	3.5	0	0.0	1	0.7	135	95.7
U 16	4	2.8	0	0.0	2	1.4	135	95.7
U 17	3	2.1	0	0.0	5	3.5	133	94.3
U 18	6	4.3	1	0.7	2	1.4	132	93.6
U 19	5	3.5	0	0.0	2	1.4	134	95.0

Despite the low percentage of athletes who represented Brazil in international competitions, we can glimpse in their accounts that it was an enriching experience for their sports training.

“[...] It was a home game, so everyone wanted to take pictures with us. The crowd was in our favor, so playing in a Copa America at 16 was very cool, especially a home game. We were the main attraction of the city at that time of year, so it was very cool [...]” (Athlete 102).

“It was a new experience. I came from a small project and entered the national team which had an impeccable structure [...], I did things I had never done in my life. I felt good there and wanted to be there more often. I dreamed of wanting to improve myself so that I could go back there, because I came from a small project that had some difficulties, so for me it was a dream come true” (Athlete 98).

Figure 2 illustrates the association between the age at which basketball practice begins and being selected for state and national teams. Results showed no significant association, i. e., the age at which athletes start practicing basketball did not influence the possibility of being selected for state or national teams.

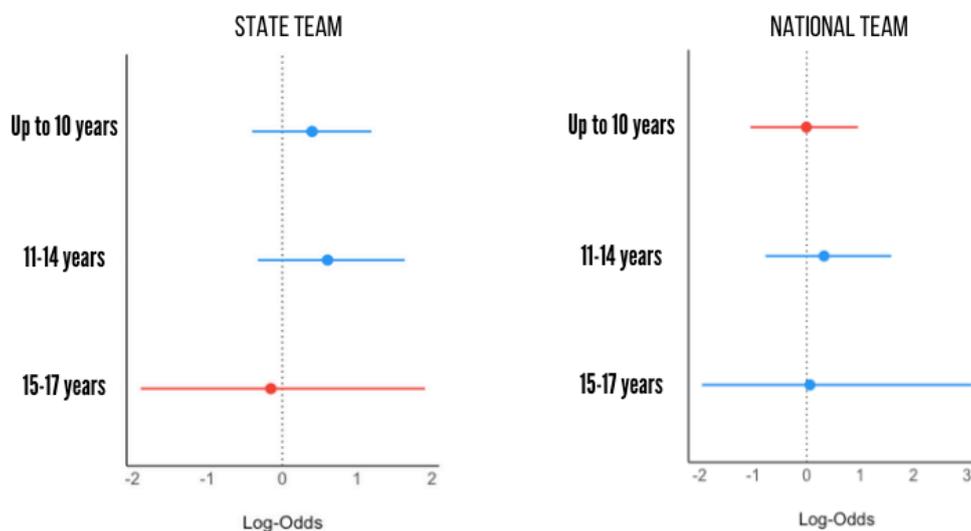


Figure 2. Relation between playing basketball and being selected for state and national teams.

Findings on motivation, interest, influence of physical and sports activities practiced at school and engagement in other modalities, in terms of being selected for state teams, showed that athletes who did not participate in Physical Education classes up to 10 years old or who perceived ‘little’ influence of these activities on their involvement with basketball, were 95% less likely to be selected for state teams compared with athletes who did participate and perceived this influence as high (Figure 3). The levels of motivation, interest and participation in other sports were not associated with the call for state teams.

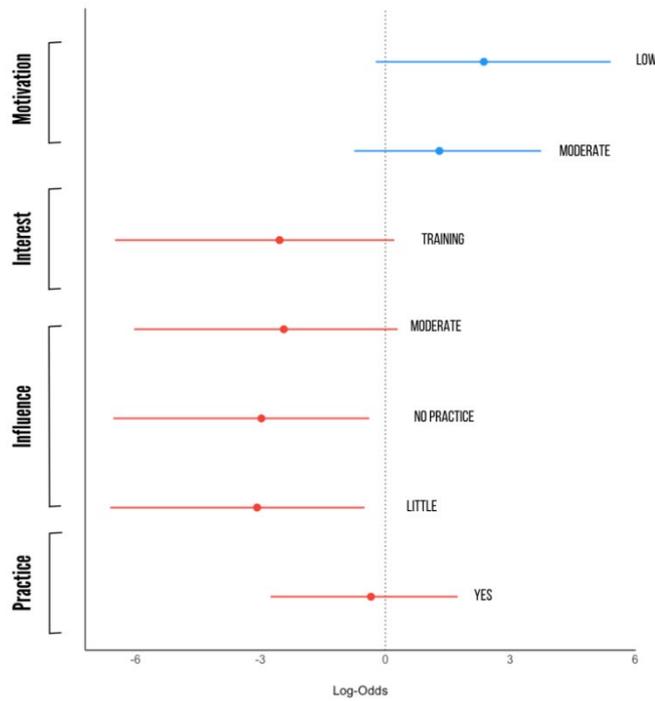


Figure 3. Influence of physical and sporting activities practiced up to 10 years old on being selected for state teams.

"[...] until I was 10 years old it was practically more playful games at school, but it was the subject I liked the most [...]" (Athlete 98 – National Team).

"[...] both in Physical Education and after class, whenever I could I was playing, running or kicking a ball. After a while, basketball came into my life [...]" (Athlete 19 – State Team).

Results showed that athletes who practiced basketball with an interest in training between the ages of 11 and 14 were 83% less likely to be selected for state teams and 81% less likely to be called for the national team when compared with athletes who practiced the sport for leisure and health. However, athletes with little engagement in physical and sports activities were 70% less likely to be selected for state teams. Motivation and practice of other modalities were not associated with being called up for state teams (Figure 4).

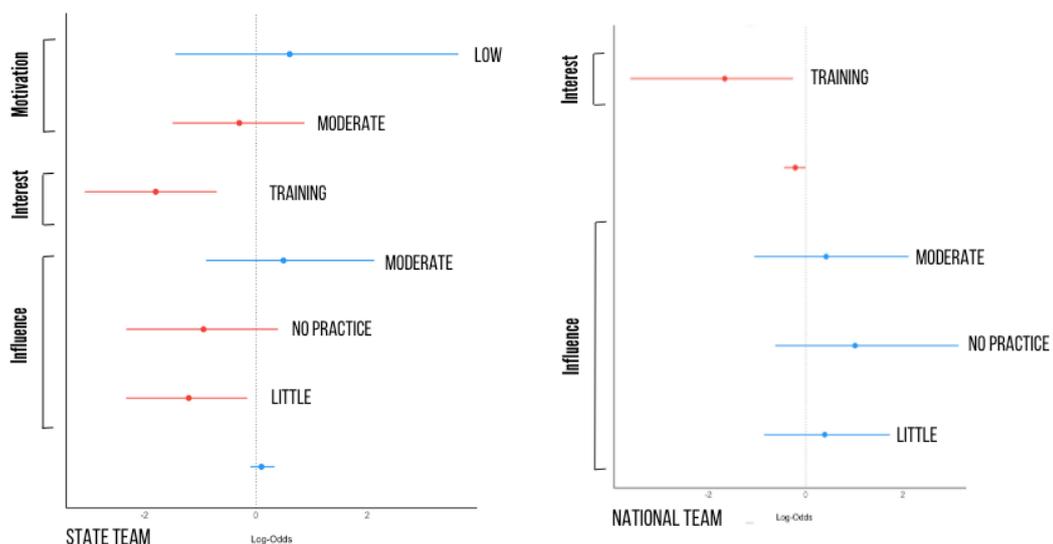


Figure 4. Influence of physical and sporting activities practiced from 11 to 14 years of age on being selected for state and national teams.

“Before that, I already played sports at school. No serious training, but I practiced all other modalities at school and in Physical Education classes. Basketball, Volleyball, Futsal, Handball. I swam when I was young and played tennis for three years before starting basketball” (Athlete 16 – National Team).

“[...] in Physical Education I always liked to practice all kinds of sports. [...] I started practicing basketball at school to play school games. A teacher came by the classroom asking if I wanted to be part of the basketball team due to my height, so I joined. I think I was 12 or 13 years old” (Athlete 32 – National Team).

Athletes who did not participate in physical and sports activities at school from 15 to 17 years old (1st to 3rd grade of upper secondary education) were 68% less likely to be selected for state teams compared with athletes who did participate and perceived the influence of these activities on practicing basketball as high (Figure 5). Motivation, interest and practice of other modalities showed no association with being called up for state and national teams.

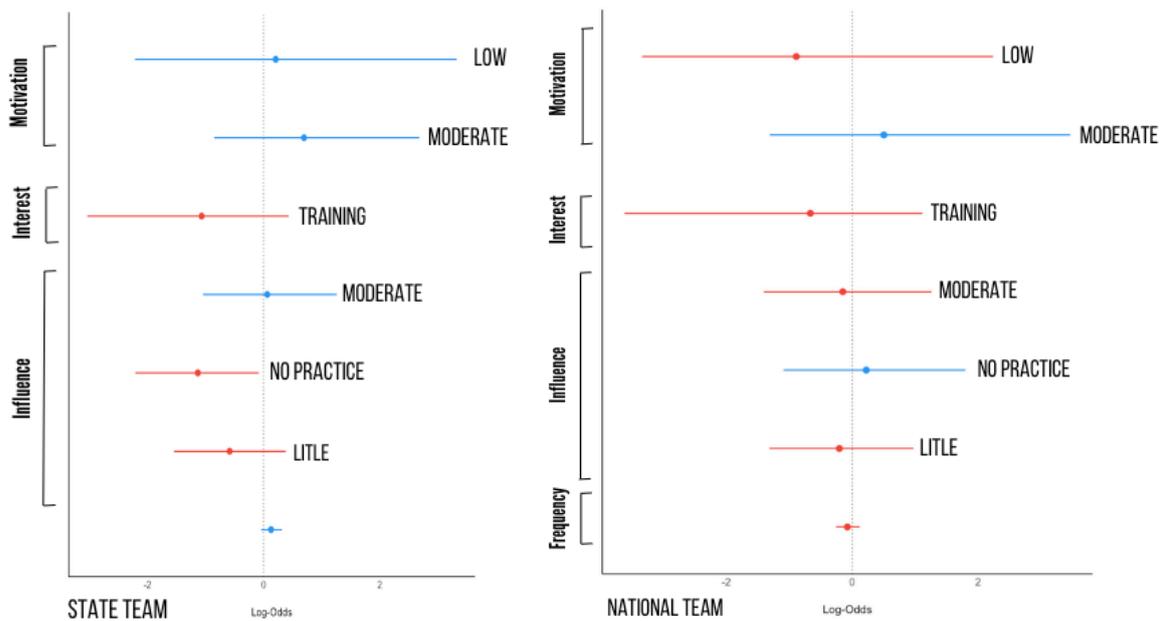


Figure 5. Influence of physical and sporting activities practiced from 15 to 17 years of age on being selected for state and national teams.

“[...] at the age of 7, 8 I was already playing all the sports at school plus the Physical Education classes [...]” (Athlete 16 – National Team).

“I always liked it a lot. I don’t know at what point I decided to specialize, but I always loved playing basketball, especially at school [...]. There was a school championship in which I was the best player, the top scorer of the championship. It was memorable” (Athlete 33 – State Team).

Discussion

This study investigated the relations between athletes’ personal engagement and selection for state and national basketball teams, specifically the motivation, interest and engagement in physical and sports activities in the school environment and in other modalities. Results showed that few of the interviewed athletes were selected for state teams and even fewer for national teams. Athletes who did not participate in physical and sports activities at school were less likely to be selected for state teams compared with athletes who did participate and perceived the influence of these activities on practicing basketball as high. Additionally, athletes who practiced basketball from 11 to 14 years old with an interest in training were less likely to be selected for state and national teams compared with athletes who practiced the sport for leisure and health.

Factors related to sports success have been discussed by different authors on different modalities, since there is unanimity in the understanding that sports performance is complex and involves multiple physiological, cognitive, perceptive,

motor and interactive processes (Birrento et al., 2021; Guillich et al., 2021; Pezoa-Fuentes et al., 2025). To identify common characteristics among high-performance athletes, studies have been investigating aspects such as training characteristics at the beginning of sports practice (Collet et al., 2017; Oliveira, 2021; Daniele, 2023; Maciel et al., 2024), social influences (Maciel et al., 2021), motivational factors for practice (Inderdonato et al., 2008; Tatara, 2011; Bernardes et al., 2015), demographic social profile (Galatti et al., 2021) and place of start (Galatti et al., 2021; Oliveira, 2021).

When investigating Brazilian athletes selected for the 2012, 2016 and 2020 Olympic Games' delegations, Oliveira (2021) identified the school as the setting where most athletes started practicing athletics, artistic and rhythmic gymnastics, handball, table tennis, volleyball and basketball. From this evidence and our results, the school emerges as a space that provides opportunities for students to get closer to sports, whether as a future career or a lifestyle.

Maciel et al. (2024) observed that when athletes began specializing in basketball from the age of 11, motivation and engagement with school sports became highly influential. According to Raimundi et al. (2024), engagement is a critical factor in enhancing athletes' motivation and positively influencing their personal and social functioning.

Similarly, when investigating Brazilian athletes in the Women's Basketball League, Galatti et al. (2021) found that 29.8%, which totaled most of the participants, also started practicing the sport at school. Daniele (2023) also evinced this relevance of the school environment when investigating university and non-university athletes over 18 years of age. Results showed that 44.4% of the athletes pointed out that the school influenced the continuity of sports practice, whereas 91.1% considered this space fundamental for training athletes and discovering talents.

Our results reveal that athletes' engagement in different sports activities at school directly influenced the possibility of achieving high performance. A study conducted with Portuguese volleyball athletes observed that expert players (participants in the national first division and former players in the Portuguese national team) practiced more hours of diversified activities between the ages of eight and 20 compared with non-expert players, both men and women. Additionally, regardless of the age at which sports practice began, evidence showed that expert athletes specialized later in volleyball than those who did not reach high performance (Coutinho, 2015).

In Brazilian volleyball, Collet et al. (2017) investigated elite athletes and identified that during diversification years (up to 12 years old) athletes spent a greater number of hours engaging with deliberate play than with deliberate practice. Such characteristic, according to Collet et al. (2018), may have positively influenced the athletes' sports training and achievement of elite performance since the diversification of activities at the beginning of sports practice favors the acquisition of specific skills in later phases.

In the study conducted by Gullich et al. (2021), early involvement in talent development programs was negatively correlated with the performance of adult athletes who achieved a world-class competitive level, indicating that early selection is neither necessary nor beneficial for long-term adult success. According to the authors, the Developmental Model of Sport Participation (DMSP) proposed by Côté et al. (2014) is inconsistent with the findings, as there was no evidence that the accumulated amount of deliberate play undertaken by young athletes predicted subsequent performance. That is, athletes who reached elite levels, started their main sport early, and specialized represent the exception rather than the rule.

Regarding interest in sports practice, our results showed that athletes who practiced basketball from 11 to 14 years old with an interest in training were less likely to be selected for state and national teams compared with athletes who practiced the sport for leisure and health. According to Gullich et al. (2021), sports programs typically select young athletes who demonstrate advanced performance during childhood and early adolescence, leading them to invest significant amounts of time in specific sports practices while engaging in little or no participation in other sports. Once selected, these programs aim to further expand the specific sports practice of young athletes, which may sometimes increase the likelihood of early success in youth competitions but compromises the sustainability of long-term development.

Scientific literature on the motivational factors for sports practice in different modalities and age groups has shown that, in many contexts, leisure and health rank among the first positions among determining factors for sports engagement. Bernardes et al. (2015), in a systematic review, identified technical competence, competition, fun and pleasure among the main reasons that lead athletes to get involved in sports practice. As for age, 14-year-old athletes attributed greater

importance to fun and affiliation, whereas from the age of 15 athletes began to focus on competition, technical competence and physical fitness. Conversely, in a study with youth aged 10 to 14 years old practicing different modalities, Inderdonato et al. (2008) found that most athletes considered sports competence to be of 'great importance' when compared with leisure and health in basketball.

In the context of national teams, Tatara (2011) identified technical improvement followed by affiliation as the main motivational factors for the practice of Brazilian and Argentine field hockey athletes. According to Lonsdale et al. (2007), engagement is recognized as one of the optimal experiences that athletes can develop through their practice. It is considered a persistent experience involving a prolonged period of sports participation rather than a transient state. This supports the notion that engagement is a multidimensional construct composed of various variables (Raimundi et al., 2024).

Based on the evidence and literature presented, it can be argued that young athletes have greater chances of success when their focus on a primary sport emerges from experiences in multiple disciplines. This approach increases the likelihood of selecting a sport in which they are particularly talented while also reducing the risk of overtraining injuries and burnout (Waldron et al., 2020; Gullich et al., 2021). Athletes who engage in multiple sports during their early athletic development are more likely to identify the sport that best aligns with their talents and preferences (Gullich et al., 2021), which can potentially enhance their performance and increase the likelihood of representing their state or country in a national team.

Gullich et al. (2021) highlighted in their study that only a minority of athletes reached a world-class level in adulthood despite early specialization. The few successful athletes with early specialization likely either probably selected their ideal sport without prior sampling or possessed talent in multiple sports, one of which became their chosen discipline. Our findings indicate that the contributing factors for sports practice may vary according to the scenario, age group and sport modality. Despite the results obtained, we suggest that more research be conducted to expand the literature on the subject and seek alternatives for the growth of sports practice in Brazil.

Conclusions

Results showed that most athletes started practicing basketball at 11 years old, however only 10% of the sample investigated was selected for the state team and only 5% were called to the represent national team at some point in their career. Athletes who did not participate in Physical Education classes until 10 years old and from 15 to 17 years old were 95% and 68%, respectively, less likely to be selected for the state team. Likewise, athletes who played basketball with an interest in training from 11 to 14 years old were less likely to be called up for the state (83%) and national (81%) teams.

Limitations and practical applications

Some limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this study. As we applied non-probabilistic sampling techniques and a retrospective questionnaire, we cannot rule out the occurrence of selection and memory bias. As the qualitative study used a convenience sample, results generalization may be limited, as well as our number of participants is acceptable for qualitative interpretation but low for statistical analyses.

Opportunities for sports practice in the school environment and diversification of sports activities, especially in the early stages of training, are factors that can influence achieving higher levels of excellence. Hence, Physical Education teachers and coaches should develop strategies that consider the integral training of young athletes from a holistic perspective and the balance between deliberate play and hours of deliberate practice, based on each individual's development.

Given the significance of representing one's state or country in competition, it is essential to maximize access opportunities for the largest possible number of athletes. This approach aims to provide a transformative experience for young individuals aspiring to pursue a long-term career in sports. Such opportunities are likely to enhance expectations and motivation for participation in physical and sports activities across all levels.

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