

PUBLIC SPORTS POLICY: THE IMPACT OF THE ATHLETE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM ON BRAZILIAN MEN'S ARTISTIC GYMNASTICS

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Abstract

The Brazilian government established the Athlete Scholarship Program, by Law nº 10.891/2004, aiming to contribute for athletes' economical support, development and permanence in sports and to renew the Brazilian representation in national and international competitive events. This study intends to present the program and to discuss its impact on Brazilian Men's Artistic Gymnastics (MAG) according to the opinion of Brazilian experts. A bibliographic review has been used as methodological procedure, followed by a field survey consisting of semi-structured interviews applied to Brazilian representatives, coaches, judges and world-class gymnasts. The results revealed the important role of the Athlete Scholarship Program on the gymnasts support, however other actions are necessary to solve structural and financial problems that still affect this sport in Brazil. We suggest some changes in the program in order to increase the number of scholarships offered, to minimize the bureaucracy application and to make clearer the enrollment rules, the accountability and the selection process.

Keywords: *sports public funding, sports policy, sports legislation.*

INTRODUCTION

The sport phenomenon became a very important issue for government policies, mainly because of the utilitarian character that it plays as part of both social and educational policies. This fact can be observed in many countries that have several laws and programs designated to raise and support the sport community, as reported by Hoye, Nicholson and Houlihan (2010) and also Ferrando, Otero and Barata (2009).

We can observe, especially since the 70's, an international tendency in increasing governmental support (by the use of the

public funding) to sport related aspects, linked to a variety of national and international political goals (Houlihan, 1997). According to Houlihan and White (2002), it was in this period that many governments started projects and public policies to the development and consolidation of sport, particularly for the competitive sport, as part of an overarching policy for the social, educational and cultural areas.

In Brazil, it was in the 80's as reported by Tubino (1993), that the State definitely included sport in the National Constitution, precisely in the *Carta Magna* of 1988 (Federative Republic of Brazil, 1988). From

this moment on, the government's role concerning the sports phenomenon was redefined, consolidating sport funding as a government official commitment (in every level, from national do regional), aiming to promote and maintain sports from the educational bases to the highest level of competition.

Since then, the support of the Brazilian government has significantly increased proportionally to the role that sports acquired in its society. This can also be seen in other countries like Spain, as highlighted by Ferrando, Otero and Barata (2009)¹. Therefore, "more often the State uses the public resources to invest in sports, providing its development" (Tubino, 1987, p. 65).

Between 2000 and 2010, "there has been an increasing preoccupation of the Brazilian government in order to amplify its participation in the three different scope of the sport: the high level, the scholar and the sport for all" says Ferreira (2007, p. 2).

The development of a specific Ministry for sports in 2003 has signalized, in an even clearer way this time, that there was a Brazilian governmental provision for the sport phenomenon. According to Boudens (2007), the Ministry of Sports became a specific department focusing on the development of the national policies for sports and leisure. In fact, as mentioned by Houlihan (2005), before the 90's just a few countries had a specific budget for sports administration. Even though a bit late, Brazil has followed the tendency of the majority of economical developed countries.

According to the Brazilian governmental strategies, the Ministry of Sports intends, among other attributions, to promote issues related to sports activities as its principle. It is believed that the investment in sports can promote health and benefits for both education and social

inclusion (Ministry of Sport, 2010a). In this way, Boudens (2007) points out that the Ministry of Sports might guarantee free access to sports practice helping to improve the citizen's life quality and also human development in general.

According to Bergsgard et al. (2007), national governments started to consider sport as a very important factor for economical and social activities, considering also its contribution to a variety of areas (as educational, health, leisure, etc.), becoming sometimes a panacea for public policies. Coalter (2007) associates these decisions to the fact that sport can be important for the social and economic regeneration, crime and drugs fighting, educational and health improvements. As we may observe, there is a growing fascination among the national governments about the social and economic roles that sports play on communities through the non-sportive results (Hoye, Nicholson, & Houlihan, 2010). In the words of Parish (2008, p. 80),

Sport therefore has a public function and the expansion of its social and economic significance and its growing organizational sophistication and internationalization has attracted increased interest from public policy makers. Sport is used as a tool of nation building (particularly when sporting individuals and teams assume a representative function at European and World Championships), as a provision of a public good, as a tool for health promotion, as a means of combating social exclusion, as a tool for crime prevention, as a vehicle for economic development and as a tool of foreign policy.

Ferreira (2007) affirms that the Brazilian sport policies are now in a development phase, and they have three main characteristics for their execution and regulation. One of them consists in the existence and implementation of laws that recognize sport as a public interest activity and a population right. This strong position became evident when the Brazilian Constitution declared sport as a fundamental activity for the society (Tubino, 1987).

¹Bortoleto (2004) developed a detailed analysis of the Spanish MAG National Team, highlighting the importance played by the existence of scholarships and other financial help supported by governmental programs, as ADO Scholarship conceded by the Superior Council of Sports (Spain).

Another feature mentioned by Ferreira (2007) is about sport-funding, regulated through legal incentives, patronages and taxes. We would include the benefits offered to the athletes in order to guarantee means for their improvement. At last we may quote the political control to promote cooperation among many sports institutions, in a national, state or county level that also controls the creation and maintenance of the sport's infrastructure available in the country.

The Athlete Scholarship Program may be inserted in those sport policies features above said, since this consists in a group of principles, guidelines and strategic actions developed by the Ministry of Sports through legislation, looking for the promotion and development of the competitive sport culture.

The program's project has been prepared by former Sports Minister Agnelo Queiroz and its legislation has been instituted by the Federal Government Law n^o 10.891/2004, sanctioned by the ex-president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Federative Republic of Brazil, 2004).

Through the Athlete Scholarship Program, the Ministry of Sports intends to provide better conditions to the career development of Brazilian athletes by offering financial resources in order to help them dedicate themselves only to the training and competitions.

According to the Ministry of Sports (2008), the program invests with priority in Olympic and Paralympic Sports in order to build, maintain and renew, periodically, the athletes' generation with the potential to compete in high level. Since its implementation in 2005, the Artistic Gymnastics (AG) is one of the sports which are contemplated by these program's resources.

Trying to understand the Athlete Scholarship Program, or more specifically how this subvention has been used in Men's Artistic Gymnastics (MAG), this study descant about the scope of the program and its contribution to the MAG through the

opinion of experts involved in this sport at the high level.

Although the sport has been acquiring a greater role in Brazil, and therefore an increase in revenue in this sector may be noted, Veronez (2007) reports that maybe there is no study field so poorly explored as the sport funding area. So, there is the need for researchers to follow and analyze the policies and programs established by the Brazilian government to sports development, trying to constantly assess if these resources are being used correctly and achieving the expected results.

METHODS

At first we developed a bibliographic research alongside a documental one searching for primary information sources which were not treated analytically yet (Gil, 1999).

The field survey consisted of semi-structured interviews that, according to Triviños (1987), valorizes the researcher's presence and offers perspectives to the subjects to achieve the freedom and the spontaneity needed when the interviewed people expose their ideas, which helps to improve the investigation procedures.

About the population for this study, it was composed by nine (09) individuals: two gymnasts (2), three coaches (3), two judges (02) - who have also worked as coaches - and two federation officials (2). Since this is a qualitative research, these subjects were chosen following external criteria such as social stratum, occupation and category, as the focus of the investigation was the variety of issues presented and the argumentative structure applied (Bauer & Aarts, 2003 quoted by Lüdorf, 2004).

For this investigation, the subjects were selected according to their degree of relevance and representation in the competitive Brazilian MAG. The gymnasts and coaches are part of the Brazilian National Team, who have obtained national and international results along the 2005 to 2008 Olympic Cycle. The judges should have the international brevet, minimum

category 3 of FIG, and have participated in at least two international competitions from 2005 to 2008 cycle. About the officials, we opted for those who came from the most developed federations of this sport, that is, the federations who had the highest number of events, courses and gymnasts participating in national competitions.

For the data treatment, we have used the Content Analysis as a technique for the organization and summarization of the information collected. Following the directions pointed out by Bardin (2008), the analysis has followed three steps: pre-analysis, material exploration and inference.

PRESENTATION OF THE ATHLETE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

The national governments and their agencies invest a great amount of money in competitive sports in order to achieve better results, what would enable them to compete equally against other nations (De Bosscher et al. 2006). Intending to contribute to the development and maintenance of the athletes, and also to help Brazil to have better results in the international competitive panorama, the Athlete Scholarship Program has been instituted. This option to help the athletes through financial support, facilitating their sport activity as well as their personal development, represents an attitude of an advanced country which is capable to analyze the sport as an activity with social influences and positive values (Olmeda, 2006).

The program follows the norms instituted by the Law n. 10.891 of July/2004. It was regulated by the Statute n. 5.342 of January/2005, signed by the former Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and by the author of the project, the former minister of sports Agnelo Queiroz (Federative Republic of Brazil, 2004; 2005).

Five years after its implementation, the program legislation was reviewed and altered by the Provisional Measure n.502, sanctioned by former President Lula in September 20th of 2010. The goal of this

measure was to contemplate a larger number of athletes favoring the development of sports in the country, with a focus on the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro in 2016, increasing the governmental financial aid for the development of the national athletes. The Ministry of Sports (2010a) affirmed that those changes intend to qualify the program, and offer a better opportunity of development to those athletes who have chances of bringing medals back home.

The Athlete Scholarship Program is managed by the Ministry of Sports, who is responsible for all the procedures of concessions and the distribution of benefits that this law must contemplate in all of its categories. As mentioned before, the emphasis of this program is to provide, by a financial support monthly provided, the minimum conditions to enable training dedication and the participation of athletes in competitive events.

The law instituted that the funding may be oriented, with priority, to high level athletes who compete in Olympic and Paralympic sports. According to the changes made by the Provisional Measure n.502 (Federative Republic of Brazil, 2010), it has been stipulated that all the others sports that do not make part of these two categories would be analyzed and maybe able to also receive the financial aid, since the total amount invested does not exceed 15% of the total program funding. Gymnastics sports, such as aerobics and acrobatics, which are not Olympic sports, may be included in this budget.

The limits on the investments imposed to these non-Olympic sports come to correct the decreased percentage of scholarship conceded to the Olympic and Paralympic sports that should have the priority to receive the scholarships. The Court of Audit (Court of Audit, 2011, p. 26) verified that in the period between 2005 and 2009, there was a reduction of Olympic and Paralympic sports participating in relation to the scholarships conceded. The proportion, in 2005, was 81% (11% were non Olympic or Paralympic). In 2009, it was only 67%

(more than 33% were conceded to other sports).²

By looking at these numbers, we were able to note that there is a risk of scholarship losses conceded to the Olympic sports. According to the description of the law, the Olympic sports ought to have the preference to receive these scholarships, since the main goal of this program is to place Brazil in the top 10 medal-winning countries at the Olympic Games (Court of Audit, 2011).

The program divides athletes in different categories according to their results and ranking in national and international competitions. The values conceded and the athletes' categories are listed in Table 1. The Provisional Measure n. 502 added two new categories and increased the importance of the scholarships for 2011. In Figure 1 we can analyze the scholarship distribution according to the athlete's categories from 2005 to 2009.

Each category has some specific demands that must be followed cumulatively (Federative Republic of Brazil, 2010). In the Student Category, the athlete must be between 14 to 19 years old, needs to show an enrollment registration in an educational institution, which may be public or private, and must prove participation in any national sport event recognized by the Ministry of Sports. Moreover, he will only be provided with the benefit if he has reached at least a third place in an individual sport or has been elected among the top six athletes of a team sport.

The auditing, developed in 2010 by the Brazilian Court of Audit, showed that there is a small Student Category participation among the total of scholarships offered by this program. Between 2005 and 2009, this category corresponded only to 8% of the total (Figure 1). According to Court of Audit (2011), it has been identified as a possible causes to the weak

participation on the Student Category the following aspects:

- a) The minimum age criteria established by the legislation;
- b) Scholar Olympic Games as the only competition used as a parameter to select student athletes;
- c) Reduced number of sports who integrate the Brazilian Scholar Olympic Games;
- d) Low referral of student-athletes to the Athlete Scholarship Program by their enrolled sport association.

In the period before the Provisional Measure n.502, the law established that the minimum age to be able to receive the scholarship was 12 years old. So, children with potential to practice in the high level could not be contemplated with the subvention offered by the Ministry of Sports. We agree with the Court of Audit (2011, p. 28), who said that "this situation is especially compromising for those sports in which the development happen in the early years, as it occurs in Gymnastics".

We may highlight that the absence of many sports in the Brazilian Scholar Olympic Games became a problem, because this was the only sport event used as a selection criteria for the Student Category of the Athlete Scholarship Program. It means that those who didn't participate in this event, due to an injury or because their sport were not in the competition program, were not able to ask for the scholarship. In the existing format until 2009, the category covered only the finalists of one scholar competition, "discarding many potential talents who do not have the opportunity to participate in the national phase of the Scholar Olympic Games" (Court of Audit, 2011: 02). The auditing, developed in 2010 by the Brazilian Court of Audit, showed that there is a small Student Category participation among the total of scholarships offered by this program. Between 2005 and 2009, this category corresponded only to 8% of the total (Figure 1). According to Court of Audit (2011), it has been identified as a possible causes to the weak

²Translation made by the authors.

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Table 1. *Categories and Scholarship Importance of the Athlete Scholarship Program.*

Category	Until 2010 (R\$) ³	From 2011 (R\$)
Student	300,00	370,00
Base Athlete	-	370,00
National	750,00	925,00
International	1.500,00	1.850,00
Olympic/Paralympic	2.500,00	3.100,00
Podium Athlete	-	Up to 15.000,00

Source: Federative Republic of Brazil (2010).

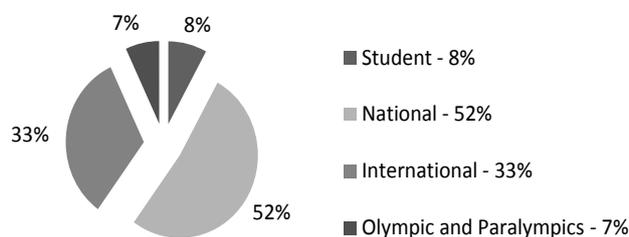


Figure 1. *Athlete Scholarship distribution from 2005 to 2009 (Court of Audit, 2011).*

³ “REAL” is the Brazilian Currency: R\$ 1,00 is approximately equivalent to U\$ 0,62 – Rate values based in August 2011.

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The Base Athlete category, created by the Provisional Measure n.502, contemplates the athletes between 14 to 19 years old that excelled in the base category of competitive sports. According to Court of Audit (2011), this category was established trying to meet an existent gap in the Student Category that did not contemplate all the athletes with potential to excel in the Olympic sports, either because the sport was not included in Brazilian Scholar Olympic Games or because the base athlete has missed the right to receive the student scholarship due to age limits.

To prove the athlete excellence to receive the scholarship in the Base Athlete Category, the individual athlete must be among the three first places of an event selected by the national sport entity or be indicated among the top ten athletes of a team sport one year before the scholarship is requested. In the majority of time the competition selected is the national championship because of its scope and importance in the sport area.

As criteria for the National Category, the athletes need to prove their participation in the most important Brazilian competitive event indicated by the national federation or sport association, and they need to place in the podium.

The athletes who make part of the Brazilian national team and who represent the country in an international event (e.g.: South-American Championships, Pan American Games or World Championships) conquering one of the top three positions, may apply for the scholarship in the International Category. The events must be recognized by the Brazilian Olympic or Paralympic Committee or other international entity that manages the sport in case of a non-Olympic sport.

The Olympic and Paralympic Category covers only those athletes who represent Brazil in the Olympic Games and still compete in international events with good results. By the Provisional Measure n.502, the athletes from this category who are ranked internationally in the top twenty

in their sport can apply for the Podium Athlete Category scholarship.

According to the Ministry of Sports (2010a), the subsidy for the Podium Athlete Category may last for four years, in a course of an Olympic cycle, or while the athlete remain in a top position in the international ranking. With the amount received, the athlete can afford their personal expenses, the competitive travels and the sport material.

The Podium Athlete scholarship also allows the athlete to contract a multidisciplinary team to assist him during the training. This positioning of the Ministry of Sports calls our attention to the fact that the athletes only start to have the right of having enough financial resources to attend his needs to achieve the high level in sport when he already reached his excellence, so that the previous stages of his development remains unassisted. We understand, according to Olmeda (2006), the need to highlight that a lower level athlete cannot be seen as less important or with less needs than an elite athlete.

As in the Podium Athlete Category, the Olympic and Paralympic athletes are going to receive the benefits for one Olympic cycle since they prove good results in the international panorama of their sport. In the other categories the benefits are renewed annually.

From the implementation of the Provisional Measure n.502, the athletes have been authorized to make partnerships with sponsors or earn other payments from sports entities (e.g.: sports clubs) as another

possibility to support their training and competitions, but they are required to submit the accountability of these incomes in the moment of enrollment. Before the Provisional Measure, athletes were not allowed to receive any funding support alongside the scholarship.

This new approach allows all athletes who will participated in the Olympic and Paralympic Games to have the right to apply for the scholarship, as seeing in the majority of time, and at the same time benefit from any funding provided by sponsors or sport clubs. According to the Ministry of Sports (2010a), the current proposal is to qualify the Athlete Scholarship Program as another funding option to stimulate the athlete.

Another resolution of the current program legislation is related to the approval of the annual athlete training plan, that mentions the goals and targets respecting the criteria and models established by the Ministry of Sports through the 'Administrative Rule' published in the Federal Official Gazette of Brazil. We believe that this proposal comes to correct problems like the non-participation of athletes who own the scholarships in competitions and the lack of good results during the period that the athletes are receiving the financial support (Court of Audit, 2011).

According to the worksheets of the Ministry of Sports (2010b), the Athlete Scholarship Program contemplated 102 artistic gymnasts through the period of 2005-2009, as we may see in Table 2.

Table 2. *Number of Gymnasts Contemplate by the Athlete Scholarship Program.*

Year	WAG	M AG	Number of Gymnasts Contemplate
2005	10	18	28
2006	0	4	4
2007	1	13	14
2008	6	21	27
2009	9	20	29
Total	26	76	102

Source: Ministry of Sports (2010b).

Many gymnasts apply for the scholarship because the benefits from sponsors are restricted in AG. The sponsors are rare in this sport since AG still has a poor visibility in the national media⁴. Moreover, there are few clubs or teams who have resources to support their gymnasts financially providing payments or scholarships (e.g. transportation, food and accommodation). This reveals the amateurism of this sport in Brazil.

The financial problems, besides making it even more difficult for the athletes to develop themselves, may also force many of them to drop out earlier from the sport practice because of their need to start working and help with their family expenses. Consequently, the gymnasts quit the sport without the opportunity to even reach the maximum of their performance, which usually occurs in MAG at the end of their teenagerhood and in the beginning of their adulthood according to the parameters dictated by Arkaev and Suchilin (2004), and Smoleuskiy and Gaverdouskiy (1996).

Authors such as Du and Tsai (2007) related the lack of financial support and the desire to improve their economic status as factors that influence the retirement of many athletes. The difficulty of the athletes in devoting themselves fully to training and competitions is also evidenced by Green and Houlihan (2005).

Approximately 74.5% of all the scholarships designated to AG have been conceded to MAG. We may infer that the major visibility and consequently the greatest investment designated to the WAG in Brazil may explain the minority of scholarships conceded to women gymnasts. Since the WAG team dispose of an official sponsor since 2004 has also contributed for this fewer number of female gymnasts

⁴ In the last years the SPORTV channel has been broadcasting regularly the main international events, and some of them by the main Brazilian TV channel. At the same time, the Brazilian Gymnastic Federation has been sponsored by important enterprises, which has enormously contributed for better conditions of this sport practice and a greater visibility in the mass media (Bortoleto, Ferreira, Rodrigues, 2011).

contemplated, in that period it was not allowed to accumulate scholarships along with the sponsors funding.

In 2006 there has been a decrease in the number of AG beneficiary athletes. We believe that the entrance of a new official sponsor for the Brazilian Gymnastics Federation, which contemplated both men's and women's AG, may have influenced the decrease in the number of gymnasts who had the scholarship that year (Oliveira, 2010). In Table 3 we present a summary of the program in the period of 2005 and 2010.

Table 3. *Number of athletes and amount of investment for Athlete Scholarship Program.*

Year	Amount (R\$)	Nº of Athletes benefit
2005	12.692.400,00	924
2006	13.220.400,00	846
2007	25.736.400,00	2.160
2008	40.181.400,00	3.370
2009	40.400.000,00	2.954
2010	40.000.000,00	3.009
Accumulated	172.230.600,00	10.254

Source: Ministry of Sports (2011a, 2011b).

Analyzing this data, the Court of Audit (2011) affirmed that the Athlete Scholarship Program consists in an action of major financial investment for the competitive sport sector made by the Ministry of Sports. Track & Field and swimming were the sports that most received scholarships during this period. We emphasize that the number presented in Table 3 also includes athletes with special needs.

The increasing number of scholarships given by the program shows the struggle, not only presented by the gymnasts, but from all sports when trying to find financial support from sponsors, clubs and sports associations. From 2005 to 2009 only the athletes with no income were able to apply for this support.

Next we are going to elucidate the impact of Athlete Scholarship Program in the daily routine of Brazilian MAG by asking some experts who make part of this reality daily.

THE IMPACT OF THE ATHLETE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM IN BRAZILIAN MAG BY THE EXPERTS PERSPECTIVE

The Brazilian MAG has passed through significant changes in the last decades. According to Oliveira and Bortoleto (2009) this sport came from an completely amateur organization during the 80's and early 90's, becoming later a more professional organization nowadays. We have also observed an expressive qualitative improvement in international competitions results (Table 4 and 5). The individual results, as the two gold medals won in World Championships by Diego Hypólito in

floor exercise (2005 and 2007), and recently medals in 2011 (a bronze medal in floor exercise by Diego Hypólito, and a silver medal in Rings by Arthur Zanetti), confirm this trend.

Table 4. *Number of medals at the Pan-American Games (1991-2011).*

Year	1991	1995	1999	2003	2007	2011
Gold	0	0	0	0	3	3
Silver	0	0	0	3	1	1
Bronze	0	0	0	3	1	0
Total	0	0	0	6	5	4

Table 5. *Team results at World Championships (1991-2011).*

Year	1991	1994	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2006	2007	2010	2011
Result	25th	*	*	*	*	23th	19th	18th	17th	19th	13th

* Brazil didn't participate with a full team.

This improvement of Brazilian's MAG results was partially supported by better economic condition provided by sponsors and mainly by public agencies. The governmental investment has offered better training conditions, regular opportunities for international exchanges, increase of Brazilian gymnasts in international competitions, and finally stronger financial support for new scholarships and equipments and facilities improvement (Oliveira, 2010). The opinion of Judge 2 (J2) reinforce this situation: "today's economic reality is one million times better than it was 20 years ago, today we have gymnasts who make living by practicing gymnasts. His profession is the gymnastics".

When we asked to Gymnast 1 (G1) about the Athlete Scholarship Program, he quoted to be contemplated with the benefit and affirmed that the program is effective and helps in the process of the athlete development. G1 also explained that more

than the financial provision, the program has become an aspect of motivation for the gymnastic practice:

It works, because today I see other gymnasts dying to win a medal in the Brazilian Championship and trying even harder to win an international medal, because, as I said: those with no results, nowadays, have difficulties to earn anything from their town or club compared to the amount provided by the International Category of the Athlete Scholarship Program, for example, it is difficult. (G1).⁵

In consonance with G1, the Gymnast 2 (G2) says that the program works and many athletes are looking for this option not only to pay the materials and supplies needed for training, but for their personal expenses, for living: "It works, man, I know many athletes, even from the Brazilian national team, and they use this option as a

⁵All the testimonials has been translated by the authors of this investigation.

way of living, not only to buy the supplies, grips that they need to practice gymnastics, but for their personal life” (G2).

The G2 mentioned that the amount paid by the Athlete Scholarship Program surpass, in the majority of time, the payment given by the club or even the income paid by the Brazilian Gymnastics Federation: “Some clubs, almost in the majority of times, do not offer this amount for the gymnast and by the Federation it wouldn’t be worth it either, so they keep the scholarship”.

The fact of the gymnasts who belong to the Brazilian Team refer to this program shows that even those in the high level have difficult to earn money from sponsors or from the sports institutions in which they are involved. This demonstrates the fragility of this sport regarding the economic aspects to sustain the athletes.

G2 affirms that the amount provided by the Student Category, in the previous period of the Provisional Measure n.502, is the same amount he earned when he first participated in the World Championship in the mid-90’s:

Three hundred bucks (R\$ 300,00) I got when I used to go to the World Championship. My first World Championship I got this. The gymnastic reality is completely different (today). [...] the younger gymnasts who are getting into the Brazilian Team will find this structure, maybe they do not recognize all the problems we have had before. (G2).

Despite the compliments, the Official 2 (O2) manifested that the Athlete Scholarship Program is a gain, but there are still problems to be solved:

It is a very good project that came to help the clubs a lot. Sometimes I think there are some distortions. There are sports, I work in a club, there are sports that the guy practice three times a day and go to a World Championship, second division, and he gets fifteen hundred *reais* monthly, you know? It is our sport reality. In gymnastics, for you to get the International Scholarship you have to win a competition abroad. South

American, Pan- American is really hard. (O2).

When analyzing the program’s law, we verified that there is no specification or requirement established for the quality of results reached or for the competitive level of the event. It would be pertinent that the results were compared to international parameters, as records or scientific protocols. According to the Court of Audit (2011), this act would contribute so that the scholarship would be designated to those athletes with real chances of reaching the high level practice. A complex decision, but consistent with a limited budget program that can’t contemplate all the athletes.

Other problems have been listed by Coach 3 (C3), despite his support to the Athlete Scholarship Program:

The Athlete Scholarship Program, yes. It works. Like this, it works with many problems of course. They delay a lot the payments to the athletes, when the contract expires they take five months to restart the payment and you can’t get back what you have lost. (C3).

Addressing C3's critics about the funding provision, the Court of Audit (2011) verified that the average time between the request for the scholarship at the Ministry of Sports and the first payment was around 417 days. This long wait also occurs between the scholarship's and its renewing process. These procedures need to be enhanced so the athletes become able to have the same support during the process analysis for the next benefit concession.

This issue was improved after the Provisional Measure n. 502 for the athletes who make part of the Olympic/Paralympic and Podium Athlete categories, because they will start to have an automatic renovation of their scholarship during the Olympic cycle, only if they are able to prove good results in competitions. We could verify that the delay on the publication of the contemplated athletes by the scholarship and the beginning of their payments, continue to be a problem and need to be solved by the managing agency.

We agree with the Court of Audit (2011, p. 29) about those athletes who use the scholarship to finance food and transportation expenses: “this delay may contribute for the drop out of the sport and the search of new working opportunities elsewhere, which contributes for the athletic career renounce due to the lack of perspective to continue practicing.”

Guimarães (2009) quoted that there have been just a few athletes who received the scholarship for three or four years between 2005 and 2008. This discontinuity can be related to the fact that the achievement of good results also helped some athletes to conquer better projection in the media, and, consequently, they received the support of sponsors and had to abandon the scholarship benefit because, in that period, they couldn't have both incomes. Another aspect that might have contributed for this discontinuity concerns to the absence of satisfactory results or even the lack of participation in competitive events (Court of Audits, 2011).

We also found that the values paid in the previous period of Provisional Measure n. 502 did not attend all the athletes' needs. Coach 1 (C1) affirmed that the athlete scholarship helped them to practice longer but the program didn't assure the necessary conditions for an adult gymnast with the responsibility to raise a family. We believe that with the increase of the value of scholarships, and the possibility of adding other income sources can minimize this problem.

Beside the changes on the Provisional Measure n.502, some of them predicted by Guimarães (2009) as the funding limits imposed to the non-Olympic sports, the creation of the Base Athlete Category and other aspects still need to be discussed.

One aspect deserving attention is related to athletes who have good competitive history, but who are injured and for this reason aren't able to demonstrate good results and ended up being cut off from the program. It makes their regress to competitions much more difficult. This requires attention in order to improve the

program and its success. Another consideration is about the scholarship concession to those low-ranked athletes when other better positioned athletes do not request the benefit. These are some of the alternatives that could be included in the Law aiming to improve the Athlete Scholarship Program, but unfortunately they are still not in the program legislation and barely make part of the academic debate about the public funding designated to the competitive sport in Brazil.

CONCLUSIONS

We agree with De Bosscher et al. (2009), when they affirm that the success of an athlete, professional or amateur, depends greatly on the governmental support and its efficiency to apply the funding for the sport. The financial aspect plays a determinant role, since the countries who invest in sports end up generating greater possibilities for their athletes to practice and to dedicate themselves under ideal circumstances.

The athletes' need to dedicate themselves completely since sport practice became a priority nowadays in order to achieve the sports elite (Verjoshansky, 1990). Therefore, as Houlihan and Green (2008) mentioned, without the whole dedication, the athlete is going to have enormous difficulties to be successful in the contemporaneous sports. The Athlete Scholarship Program created in 2005, after four years of discussion between the House of Representatives and the Senate in the Brazilian politic arena, has shown a great effort from the Brazilian government to offer real possibilities for a full-time regime of dedication of the athletes to their training and competitions. Between 2005 and 2009, a total of 102 scholarships were conceded to AG, 76 of these to the men's category.

We recognize that a great parcel of Brazilian Olympic athletes train in a non-professional system (amateur) using their own expenses, motivated by their pure dilettantism (Court of Audit, 2011). In MAG this is not much different, there are only a few gymnasts who are able to count

on the investment of sponsors or any other financial support provided by a sport entity that enrolls them (Oliveira, 2010). This situation may explain why, at least partially, the increasing on the number of AG athletes applying for the Athlete Scholarship Program.

We verified by what has been said by the subjects interviewed, that this program plays an important role supporting the MAG in Brazil, although some adjustments are still needed in order to improve its coverage with more scholarships granted, bureaucracy minimization and the transparency of procedures and accountability.

In general, we corroborate with Guimarães (2009) who says that all the investments applied to national sport is relevant, but in particular, revenues derived from the public source should be managed according to the principles established by the Constitution of 1988, among them: legality, impersonality, morality, transparency and efficiency (Federal Republic of Brazil, 1988). According to the Ministry of Sports (2008), Brazil needs to implement a permanent process of assessment aiming the efficiency guidance of the resources available.

We reiterate the need of a continuous diagnosis about the Athlete Scholarship Program impact on the development of MAG and also other sports. This kind of investigation would help the program to improve, aiming to help the development of the future generations of athletes in Brazil. We still highlight that researchers and the public and also private administrators should be aware of the existence of uncertainties regarding the relationship between public policies, the amount invested and the subsequent success in the high level sport due to the multidimensional aspects that interfere in the sport success.

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