

---

## THE PARALYMPIC ATHLETES' CAREERS IN BRAZIL

Submitting author: Ms Lina Nakata  
Universidade Federal de Uberlandia, FAGEN  
Uberlandia, MG, 38408-100  
Brazil

All authors: Lina Nakata (corresp), Tania Casado

Type: Scientific

Category: 14: Other sport management related issues

### Abstract

In 1960, Rome hosted the first edition of the Paralympic Games, as the emergence of adapted sports occurred after the Second World War, in order to include the large number of people injured during the conflicts. This type of event tried to provide sports activities for people with disability. In the last decades, we could see the creation of many Paralympic organizations to manage the adapted sports.

It becomes important to understand the trajectory a para-athlete career, since it is his/her development that leads them to obtain better results. Research has shown that the development of an elite athletic career usually takes ten years of acquiring the experience necessary to become a professional athlete, and five to ten years to compete at the highest level (Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavalley, 2004; Sosniak, 2006). In their careers, athletes typically confront what they are with what they wanted to be (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007), as a combination of events that will not only bring a strong mix of emotions, thoughts and behaviors, but will also take athletes to a development challenge.

Athletes face two types of transitions along their career. One is predictable, the other is more or less unpredictable. We need a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of career transitions in order to support the career development of talented athletes (Wylleman & Reints, 2010).

The aim of this work is to analyze the characteristics of the Paralympic athletes' sporting career in Brazil. We intend to identify and describe the stages of the para-athletes' career, comparing it to the stages of the traditional athletic career.

Methodology: the type of research is exploratory and we used the case study method. The data are from primary and secondary sources, as the respondents were personally interviewed using semi-structured

---

guidelines, and other public information was collected from Internet sites. As for the sample, we studied three Brazilian medal-winning athletes at the Paralympic Games to observe their complete athletic career paths. To analyze the data, we used the content analysis technique.

Results: the three survey respondents are Brazilian and they all attended the same four editions of the Paralympic Games (Atlanta, Sydney, Athens and Beijing). Interviewee1 was born in 1981, has had impaired vision since the early days of life, competing in the S11 swimming category, winning three medals. The second respondent was born in 1970, had polio at the age of two, losing body movements, and swam for 22 years, winning three medals, too. Interviewee3 was born in 1977 with visual impairment, competed in the T11 athletics category and raced professionally for 16 years, winning four medals. Although their performance at the Paralympic Games was quite similar, their career paths were quite different. As for the early athletic career, what happens in the early years (Wylleman & Reints, 2010), was the process that occurred for respondents 1 and 3, but in different ways - the first medically indicated, at three years of age and the second through school at seven years of age. Interviewee2 first swam at 16 years, since he had limited movements and had been in physical therapy so far. The development phase is not a milestone to interviewee 1, since swimming for disabled people in Brazil does not distinguish the age of the competitors. For interviewee2, this phase began at 19 years of age as soon as he entered the university and intensified his pool training. Interviewee3 began competing in the junior level at age 12. Mastering, the next step, presented an earlier milestone for the three surveyed than predicted by Wylleman and Reints (2010): 14, 20 and 16 years for interviewee1, 2, and 3, respectively. It was noticeable that the first respondent had had eleven years of training, and she experienced her improvement phase (Stambulova, 1994) after she was 14, which usually happens after 20.

Finally, the discontinuation phase was divergent among the participants: interviewee1 ended her career at age 27, interviewee2 at 42, and interviewee3 at 33. It also occurred differently: it was voluntary for interviewee1 and 2 and involuntary for interviewee3, who was recovering from surgery and had an unexpected pregnancy, without success in returning to the sport. Also, interviewee1 and 2 felt happy and satisfied with their sporting career, but not interviewee3. Unlike the lifespan model presented by Wylleman and Reints (2010), designed for professional athletes, the para-athlete suffers some expected hardships because of their physical conditions. The contribution of this paper is that Paralympic committees and organizations could understand their career cycles and profit from better results.

## References

- 
- Alfermann, D., & Stambulova, N. B. (2007). Career transitions and career termination. In: G. Tenenbaum, & R. C. Eklund (Eds.) *Handbook of sport psychology*, 3rd ed. New York, NY: Wiley, pp. 712-733.
- Sosniak, A. (2006). Retrospective interviews in the study of expertise and expert performance. In: K. A. Ericsson, N. Charness, P. J. Feltovich, & R. R. Hoffman (Eds.) *The Cambridge handbook of expertise and expert performance*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, pp. 287-302.
- Stambulova, N. B. (1994). Developmental sports career investigations in Russia: a post-Perestroika analysis. *The Sport Psychologist*, 8, pp. 221-237.
- Wylleman, P., Alfermann, D., & Lavallee, D. (2004). Career transitions in sport. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 5, pp 3-5.
- Wylleman, P. & Reints, A. (2010). A lifespan perspective on the career of talented and elite athletes: Perspectives on high-intensity sports. *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine and Science in Sports*, 20(2), pp. 88-94.