

Sports performance: a mosaic of values, meanings and significances

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Abstract: Winning and losing are integral parts of sports drama. To “win”, certain competitors see no limits to their ambition; others, despite having excellent physiological data, do not achieve positive results. However, sports are more than an unbridled struggle for victory; they are a metaphor for life itself and an educational means – a means to educate on values. This work makes a comparative analysis of the philosophical principles and athlete preparation programs published by John Wooden and Bernardo Rocha de Resende. From these comparisons, we suggest a new model based on values.

Key words: Sports; Philosophy; Education.

1 TO BEGIN WITH...

In sports, as in life, many people run desperately after success and likewise, they flee failure; but even with all the effort, we are

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faced time and again with the bitter taste of defeat. Fortunately, on other occasions, we reap the fruit of that effort and delight with the sweetness and joy of victory. In life, everyone is called to face such trials, and each person has his or her peculiar way of responding to feelings, emotions and impacts caused by those experiences.

Winning and losing are integral parts of sports drama: a contagious, vertiginous joy takes over everyone when we win; on the other hand, defeat, when it happens, is a source of great frustration and sadness. In sports, as in ordinary life, obsession with “winning” routinely ends up pushing us to try to win at any cost and prevents us from considering the numerous opportunities for human enrichment provided by sports practice, regardless of the outcomes.

On the other hand, we think that most people who work in the sports field have witnessed or heard of a situation in which a team or athlete, despite being technically, tactically and physically much superior to its opponents, cannot actually achieve good results. Another interesting situation is when athletes show excellent physiological, anthropometric and other data, which are methodologically planned and organized, and yet their practical results are not those expected. Or yet when a team or athlete that are allegedly more limited in technical and tactical terms have better performance. Moreover, coaches often prefer a player who is not very talented but shows determination and perseverance to one who, although technically gifted, does not have the same attitude.

What are the dilemmas behind such questions? What can we learn from these experiences? Which reflections should we derive from the emergence of these situations?

Of course, these questions are the result of a huge amount of variables that interfere, to a greater or smaller extent, on performance and sports results. We intend to reflect, in the light of axiology, to answer questions related to the very task of sports and, in particular, those used in the day-to-day of coaches and teachers who experience the challenges of that environment. The choice of

a value-oriented approach does not mean disregarding economic, political or ideological aspects; although considered of paramount importance, literature has dealt with these topics extensively. Therefore, this paper is concerned with discussing aspects related to the soul of educating for values: pedagogical practice.

We are confident that sports are much more than an unbridled struggle for victory. Therefore, taking advantage of the mosaic of values that pervades sports, we stress the need to seek, together with other knowledge areas such as anthropology, mythology and philosophy, some possible answers to the enigmas that usually emerge in the sports field, particularly those presented above.

We will conduct a comparative analysis between the philosophical principles published by John Wooden¹ (2010) and Bernardo Rocha de Resende² (2006), which sustain their actions and their respective athlete preparation programs. After this description and comparison, we would like to suggest a new value-based model formulated.

We believe that such information and reflections can help both sports coaches and Physical Education teachers who work with sports (school, community, clubs, etc.) to better understand their experiences, dilemmas and challenges that arise from the training and competition process, whether in initiation and specialization or in high performance. Thus, we hope to contribute to the training of teachers and coaches in the sense that they can act pedagogically in a more serene and creative way, bringing sports practice to its level of educational and cultural significance.

2 MYTH AND PEDAGOGY

If we ask what the purpose of competitive sports is, the vast majority of people will answer that it is winning: victory is what

¹John Wooden (1910-2010) was called the “coach of the century” by ESPN. As UCLA basketball coach, he won ten US national championships and led his team to the amazing feat of 88 consecutive victories.

²“Bernardinho” (Rezende), coach of the Brazilian men’s National Volleyball team.

matters! Everyone wants to win, but only one can be the winner, leaving many losers. According to that view, only a Manichean view of sports remains, and it needs to be overcome! When we lose sight of sports' social, educational and cultural importance, we allow an unbridled struggle for sporting achievements to prevail: the obsession with winning!

However, does “winning” equal “victory”? We can win in dice, in a lottery, by using illicit mechanisms, circumventing rules, among other methods. Victory, according to mythology, may have another connotation because the word for victory in Greek is *Nikê*,³ i.e., a goddess. According to Plato (1996), the gods are perfect beings and therefore make no mistakes, have no flaws, ambiguities or lapses: victory, unlike winning, is something built from an immaculate process and tends to perfection.

The goddess Athena is the favorite daughter of Zeus – the most powerful of the Greek gods – who, according to Vernant (2006, p. 31), “represents justice” and, on many occasions, is nicknamed *Nikê* – victory. That is, on many occasions, *Nikê* would be an expression and extension of Athena herself. As Athena is also known as the goddess of wisdom, we can interpret that “victory” is the result of a process that combines justice and wisdom: victory is generated in the womb of wisdom (Athena) and assisted by power and justice (Zeus). Therefore, it is the result of the gods' search for perfection! In light of values, it would be the art of displaying effort, patience, passion, persistence, courage and intelligence among others, aiming at perfection, or *aretê*. He who does not learn and apprehends (wisdom) anything during this process may win. But victory...

“*Nikê* is the angelical messenger who delivers the coveted laurel wreath sent by the true sources of victory, Zeus and Athena,

3 In her personification, *Nikê* is represented with wings and flying very fast. It belongs to the generation of gods previous to Olympic gods and was identified by Greek writer Hesiod as a daughter of Titan Pallas and Styx. Another tradition recognized her created by Pallas, who would have consecrated a temple to her on top of its hill, in Rome, the Palatine. In Athens, *Nikê* is only an epithet of Athena. The goddess Athena is often called Pallas Athena; hence Pallas is considered a ritual epithet for Athena.

respectively the god of power and the goddess of wisdom” (COUSINEAU, 2004, p. 225). Victory can bring power, status, recognition; but if they are used unwisely, the athlete, the politician and the artist can find misfortune, rather than happiness. Under mythological inspiration, when facing victory and defeat we must adopt a stance of simplicity and serenity, as the goddess “*Nikê* brings not only the news of victory, but also news saying that victory does not last long” (COUSINEAU, 2004, p. 225) just like defeat. *Nikê* “represents the transience of triumph, the evanescence of fame, the impermanence of the talent by which victors are often so splendidly rewarded” (COUSINEAU, 2004, p. 226). In this matter, we will always be lifelong learners; and a good amount of art and pedagogical relevance is required to deal with it.

3 FROM INTERNAL TO EXTERNAL DIMENSIONS

For Socrates, physical beings, along with the expression of movement, are the mirror of their own interior and qualities, shining their moral content and their interiority (XENOFONTE, 2006). For several reasons, many people working in the educational field have a superficial view on sports competitions. Therefore, Bento (2006) says that sports have an educational and cultural character precisely because of their competitive nature. The best expression of the educational relationship is that which arises when the same interests, goals and purposes of two or more people are in conflict. It is at such moments that we see whether people actually control their instincts, their limitations and the situation itself. In sports, there is an ongoing struggle for victory, a score and a championship; and, even so, in such limit situation of physical, emotional and psychological effort, in most cases, protagonists do not go over the boundaries of respect, consideration and appreciation for teammates, opponents and the competitive task.

To investigate the process by which one can develop a healthy personality through sports’ values, we found that several components involved in the sports game can make a great

contribution to the development and improvement of an athlete or a team. They include techniques and tactics, physical-motor skills, biological capabilities, emotional and psychological characteristics, in addition to methodological choices. However, as this process is developed and conducted by the Human Person, we can add some reflections that offer clues about how the healthy development of a personality can be translated, through the axiological content of sports, as a better athlete and a better and more balanced Human Being.

Who performs the sports task? Man! Who is that man? According to Patrício (2008) and Ibañez (1976), it is that who builds his life by the realization of values, whether in common life or in sports life. According to Ibañez (1976), values have to do with our tendencies and our inclinations, and they play a role in improvement and/or acquisition of dignity. In Monteiro's (2007) view, man is the only being able to say no to what is harmful to him and say yes to what elevates, ennobles and perfects him.

The most sensible way to identify a person's familiarity with values is to know his or her attitudes.⁴ If we have an inventory of attitudes for a particular person, knowing his or her acceptance, neglect and rejection of certain values; if we know the intensity or profile of that person's preferences in the configuration of his or her lives, we will have a good portrait of his or her personalities (IBAÑEZ, 1976): attitudes are thus the expression of values.

Therefore, sports are one of the routes and the annunciation of what might free men and grant them autonomy. It is a proposal for humanization of man, society, powers, practice and word, because the fate of that man is to humanize himself, to trigger his powers to the maximum, and in an orderly way (IBAÑEZ, 1976). These considerations are not exaggerated, since, as we observe the tasks of training and sports competition, we verify and identify the fact that, although bodies are in motion, value is being exercised

4 Attitude is the organization of beliefs around an object or situation that predisposes one to respond preferentially (ROKEACH, 1981).

(MONTEIRO, 2007). Sweat derived from those practices, even if often misunderstood, is more than the product of transpiration caused by exercise: it is the result of the “Man-Whole” sculpture, in the person outside and in the expression of his or her greatness in the person inside. And this understanding and holistic state of the human form I dare call excellence and artistry, the Greeks’ *areté*” (BENTO, 2004, p. 68). Undoubtedly, this is one of the greatest meanings provided by sports practice.

Although today’s athletes are often seen as people concerned especially with money, the fact is that what gives value and support to their lives is displaying value, struggling to improve, recognition of their performance, stimulus to the pursuit of happiness, overcoming adversity and availability to exceed in a society that no longer recognizes itself as valuable. Perhaps that is the reason for misunderstanding by some critics. On this subject, let us hear the words of Savater (2000, p 100):

He who at sporting events can only denounce the muscle simplicity of challenges, low collective passions, ostentation of eagerness for preeminence or fraudulent behind-the-scenes manipulations may get it tight in this or that shameful detail but will lose sight of the genuine interest at stake: the humanizing meaning underlying the most heralded of stadium legends. These doctrinal enemies of sports competition may well understand what some men want and what they do, but they will never know the depth of what men want and why they do it.

The Spanish philosopher, it seems, points to the updating of myths, gods, metaphors, stories, heroes and primeval events carried by sports practice. He underscores the importance of the ideas of “why” and “what for”, whose main references are linked with the values, significances and meanings to which man ritualistically commits himself in the sports task, in which the fleetingness of the moment puts his eternity to test: he takes the risk of chance against internal and external forces and against the risk of failure, but with a commitment to overcome limits and challenges in order

to demonstrate to himself and to mankind that there are endless possibilities circumscribed in the art of human doing.

We can consider that the best human performance (in any area) is when “the forces of movement that take part in the game are perfectly integrated, they all cooperate for the most perfect harmony, without any resistance, without wasting energy, and therefore without opposite reaction in Nietzsche’s sense for the term” (FERRY, 2010, p. 167). Such integration and fluency may be the result of value-based sports education as we will point out in a description to be presented later, together with Wooden’s and Rezende’s pedagogical models.

4 THE MOSAIC OF MEANINGS AND SIGNIFICANCES

When the importance of values for sports education are ignored, the tasks of training and competition are developed without due fluidity and aesthetic harmony and thus cause resistance to socialization and malefic adherence to collectivity. This can undermine teammates’ performance and foster mistrust and imbalance between different actors in the sports scene. According to Ferry (2010), the forces of the game, rather than cooperate, oppose, mutilate and block each other, so that the clumsiness of the movement reflects their impotence.

On the other hand, when we observe the trajectory of victors, their (individual and collective) attitudes denounce the greatness of their values, meanings and significances; because, according to Ferry (2010), the subtlety of their gestures seems to be of perplexing simplicity and ease. They pass, control, kick, dribble and dodge with elegance, spontaneity and unpredictability that leave nothing to be desired in comparison with a great musician, sculptor or poet: only that their instruments for making music, sculpture or poetry are their bodies. As a result, we can see a remarkable reconciliation of “Beauty” and “Power” already made by gifted youth.

This narrative exposes openness to understanding the

meaning of talent. At the time of the ancient Olympics, teammates and coaches would tell an individual showing some talent to take advantage of it since a god dwells inside him. That god, of course, was the proof that the art of human action came from sacred heights.

While talent can be divine gift or genetic legacy, (team sport) coaches sometimes prefer athletes less gifted with technical skills over more talented ones. Both Bernardo Resende (2006), Jackson and Delehanty (1997), and Wooden and Jamison (2010) agree that talented players who cannot make their teams great cannot be considered essential. This usually happens when talented athletes give up the effort needed to improve their divine/biological potential; and because in most cases, teamwork is harder for those athletes, since mass media are keen to emphasize individual actions to the detriment of a team's collective movement. In this sense, Wooden and Jamison (2010) note that it is very hard to find talent, but it is even harder to get that talent to sacrifice themselves for the team.

The lack or limited achievement of training (learning), without concern for values such as concentration, motivation, discipline, joy, enthusiasm and others, limits the development and improvement of sports' potential. Eventually, as with everything in life, the level of learning is directly proportional to the quality of training and one's dedication to it. Furthermore, vocation seems to be an attribute that awakens initiative, mobilizes energies, availability for effort and learning, pleasure in turning a simple act into a reference of love for the task. In sum, vocation is the assertion of an identity.

You could say that thwarting young people's development of their vocation for a given task is not very pedagogical because, as reported by Ferry and Vincent (2003), depriving talented young people with a vocation of practicing their art will make them unhappy – true happiness lies in realizing their potential as completely as possible. Talent, education and vocation are the pillars that ensure human development and improvement.

From an anthropological point of view, many authors consider man as an incomplete being (IBAÑEZ, 1976; FERRY, 2010; VAZ, 2004). Viewed from the other side of the coin, man is the one who systematically seeks to overcome his limits. Overcoming limits is a complex process; but since human beings are highly adaptable, the process of overcoming is one that considers – being man incomplete and/or imperfect – the pedagogical possibility for human elevation through self-improvement. As Monteiro (2007) points out, in sports, overcoming the opponent is the external, visible and clear conduct, but growth is internal: being invisible and barely expressible, it is translatable as a unique and educationally valuable beauty. Cousineau (2004, p. 180) makes a crystal clear contribution to the subject: “Excellent performance is the stimulating effort that carries animation or supreme satisfaction, because athletes or artists overcome themselves in a moment of truth, thanks to their effort, their courage and their enthusiasm”.

As an important facet of education, sports may be one way, through their practice and embedded values, to achieve a cultural mission: the search for the meaning of life, which inherently depends on axiological content. Speaking about education for values, Ibañez (1976) declares that the man who does not overcome himself decays. The author goes further by saying that the subject who does not undertake every day the noble task of doing something for his own improvement, to improve the relationship with his peers and to aggrandize his whole community defects from his human condition. In sports, those who cease, even for one day, to strive to learn and strengthen anticipates an unpleasant future for themselves and their team. In this perspective, we see sports as a remarkable means for education and culture as discussed by authors such as Kohlberg (1964) and Fagundes (2001): conflict situations, dilemmas and questions are pedagogical means to develop and educate people towards autonomy, dignity and interaction with the social environment. Let us add to this list strengthening of the will, effectiveness of acting and the art of permanent self-education.

One of the most worthwhile meanings for sports lovers is the search for self-overcoming; therefore we consider appropriate to note that its value can only be realized after experience: speaking about self-overcoming is not the same thing as accomplishing it. Self-overcoming is more than a word, impossible to be used as rhetoric; in most cases, it is the achievement of something new, superior and enriching through practice and in an unmistakable way. In a self-overcoming event, we immediately realize that this was only possible because we assumed and practiced a list of values such as determination, strength, courage, perseverance, trust, honor and discipline (as expressed in Figure 1).

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Figure 1 - String of values necessary to overcoming.



Source: The authors

Self-overcoming as a is only recognized after its accomplishment, since it is an experience that takes place under the influence of other values previously available. We sense, then, that such an action bears, in addition to the synthesis of numerous values , a self-knowledge process: we find something in ourselves that we did not know and that we were able to accomplish. That is, can we imagine the feeling of happiness and fulfillment? Note what Nancy Hogshead (COUSINEAU, 2004, p 167.) – gold medalist in the 1984

Los Angeles Olympics – tells us:

Why push yourself? [self-overcome] (...) because the rewards of reaching for excellence are profound. I'm not talking about a pay raise, a plaque or even a gold medal. It's living into a purpose or a calling that enlivens even the most mundane tasks. It's a deep pride in the life we are living.

5 THE MODELS OF WOODEN AND RESENDE

On one occasion, Jamison and Wooden (2010, p 24) wrote a letter to their athletes:

If each of you makes every effort to develop to the best of your ability, follow the proper rules of conduct and activity most conducive to good physical condition, subordinate individual acclaim for the welfare of the team, and permit no personality clashes or differences of opinion with teammates or coaches to interfere with your or a teammate's efforts, it will be a very rewarding year.

As we can see, and if we interpret it well, the possibility of “a very rewarding year” is subject to the undertaking and practice of values such as endeavor, effort, skill, proper conduct (ethics), welfare of the team (solidarity), common sense, judgment and others. On the other hand, after the victory over Italy that gave Brazil the Olympic gold medal in volleyball, Rezende said:

Life experiences, some victories and disappointments gradually show the way. And the way is this: sharing, being supportive, compete healthily with each other so we could grow. This group has worked hard and was above all a group (RESENDE, 2006, p. 181).

In the words of Rezende, after a long period of preparation, values such as experience, effort, solidarity, ethics, team spirit, endeavor, self-overcoming, among others, besides offering conditions for “a rewarding year”, also point to a life experience

that resulted in a resounding collective success: an inspiration for education. The prize awarded in this journey was the gold medal. Both Rezende and Wooden bet that those values were decisive to overcome high challenges.

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In 1948, John Wooden, interested in training – behavior, attitude, values and quality – of their basketball student-athletes at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), established a framework of values that he called “Pyramid of Success” (Figure 2). Asked about the essence of his model, he replied: “My definition of success and the Pyramid establishing how to achieve it encompass everything I do as a coach, teacher and leader” (WOODEN; JAMISON, 2010, p 47.). The idea was to organize a structure based on values that should support, encourage and inspire all of Wooden’s pedagogical actions toward building a strong, organized, inspired, dedicated and focused team.

Figure 2: The Pyramid of Success



Source: Wooden, Jamison (2010, p. 48).

To achieve sports success, Wooden felt that his pyramid represented the highest standard and the most effective guide to awaken the best in the people under his direction as well as in himself. For that sports coach, success “is peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming” (WOODEN; JAMISON, 2010, p 48.). This postulate echoes the words of Pindar, the great poet of the ancient Olympics, when he urged people in general and athletes in particular to “become what [they] are” (JAEGER, 2003, p. 263). Thus, it is up to human beings to seek to develop – in an orderly way and at every moment of their existence – the maximum of their potential and excellencies, trying not to pass up opportunities to become men, always understanding their humanity as something deeply personal and proper, and therefore universal.

Bernardo Resende, using the example of Wooden’s Pyramid of Success, created a model he called “The Wheel of Excellence”. The coach of Brazil’s volleyball national team decided to build an image in the shape of a wheel, since he considered that Wooden’s figure generated a sense of immobility (RESENDE, 2006). However, the Wheel of Excellence, even aiming at presenting something more dynamic, is pervaded by values and intended to direct and guide coaches’ actions, as well as strengthening their leadership. The Wheel of Excellence revolves around an axis and rolls over the path of planning toward a goal (Figure 3). The notion of movement causes each group of values to be permanently in contact with the planning sphere, with a view to achieving the goals.

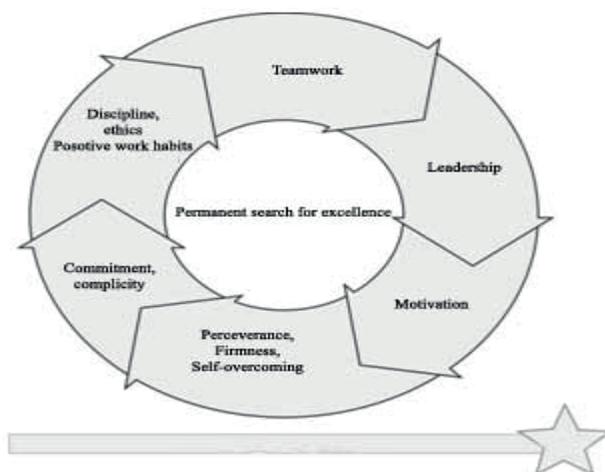
Both Wooden’s and Bernardo’s models, regardless of their shapes or more or less dynamic images, are subject to axiological authority and, therefore, are pedagogical.

6 CONVERGENCES BETWEEN MODELS

Initially, the main targets of the models in question – “excellence in competition” (WOODEN, 2010) and “constant

pursuit of excellence” (Rezende) – direct their practice to celebrating the quest for competitive excellence. Leadership is explicitly mentioned by Rezende; Wooden (2010), in turn, emphasized that the essence of leadership can be found in the Pyramid of Success itself. We can conclude that, in both models, leadership as well as ethics (described by Rezende and not noted by Wooden) pervade their formulas/models, regardless of being underscored as such.

Figure 3: The Wheel of Excellence



Source: Resende (2006, p 110.).

The key point exposed by both authors lies in assuming and practicing values that guide and sustain their respective ways of thinking, acting, organizing and evaluating the process of sports education. Following that path, we noticed a special harmony between the models in question, especially when both refer to two groups of values: collective and personal values.

For Wooden, values expressed in collectivity were friendship, loyalty, cooperation and team spirit (put the good of all before private

interests). Rezende highlights the following values for that modality: teamwork, commitment, complicity and (collective) ethics.

As for personal values, Wooden sees industriousness, initiative, self-control, consistence, fitness (physical, mental, emotional and moral), skill (to seek knowledge and information), confidence (self-confidence is a personal value and trust in others – fellow and team – is a collective value), poise (maintaining balance both in defeat and in victory), enthusiasm and alertness (agility of thought and attention to detail). In turn, in this sphere of values, Rezende sees leadership, motivation, perseverance, firmness, (personal) ethics, discipline and positive work habits.

Although the words are used to determine key attitudes and behaviors related to the actions of the coaches studied, we note that many of them are synonymous with or somehow resemble the postulate of their creators. Compare, for instance, consistency (Wooden) with perseverance and firmness (Rezende); friendship, loyalty and cooperation (Wooden) with commitment and complicity (Rezende); skill, alertness, initiative, poise, and self-confidence (Wooden) with positive work habits (Rezende); dedication (Wooden) with discipline (Rezende); enthusiasm (Wooden) with motivation (Rezende); and finally, Wooden calls team spirit what Rezende stresses as teamwork, because although it may be considered that the word “spirit” is more valuable than the word “work”, it is at work that values linked to group spirit are manifested, recorded, deepened and realized.

Wooden’s goal is at the last block of the Pyramid of Success: “[...] in all cases my goal has always been the same: excellence in competition” (WOODEN; JAMISON, 2010, p. 56). The apex of the pyramid is the intention guiding the organization of the model: success. And success for Wooden and Jamison (2010, p. 48) is “peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming”. According to this reflection, it is understood that, far from being consumed by thinking about wins and defeats, the psychological idea is to undertake and achieve what one has under one’s control, and

precisely for that, it is fully achievable. Success, more than an ideal for few, it is a guiding ideal that is able to move personal resources with a view to the discovery, understanding, mastery and practice of a mosaic of values that lead people to recognize themselves as subjects responsible for their education process.

Similarly, near the apex of the pyramid, Wooden placed two more values: faith and patience. The advice offered by that wise man of the sports courts is to do what one must and can accomplish, and then have faith in what the future holds and patience so that the seeds of actions can bear fruit.

In line with much of what was said and explained by Wooden, Rezende's model suggests, among other things, that his goal is the "constant pursuit of excellence" (RESENDE, 2006, p. 110). From this perspective, Rezende adds that success is a very personal concept of multiple resolutions, while excellence means achieving something to be achieved in the best possible way (RESENDE, 2006). But it is close to Wooden's view when it says the following: "And I'm not referring to targets like winning, being a champion or setting a record. All that may come as a consequence and not as a cause of the pursuit of excellence [...]" (RESENDE, 2006, p. 111).

Although Rezende does not refer, in his Wheel of Excellence, to values such as faith and patience, we note that the volleyball team he led – gold medal in Athens 2002 – kept a ritual at least regarding faith. When the team was preparing to start the final match for the gold medal in Athens, Rezende describes the moment as follows: "[...] the ritual was fulfilled: each of us touched Henrique's shirt, always there, hanging, open. For luck" (RESENDE, 2006, p. 175). Luck is an attribute sent by the gods and thus the ritual is a way of remembering and appealing to them, for the team to have luck as their companion on the journey, that is, touching Henrique's shirt was an expression of faith in good luck. Of course, on the court, the team, covertly, had more than six athletes because Henrique was among them – the messenger of the gods who brought luck: an epic drama typical of human life that sports expose, reveal and update in its many

expressions, including faith.

Through this analysis, we conclude that, in addition to personal and collective values – both Wooden’s and Rezende’s – directly or indirectly recognize the importance of faith: a sacred or religious value (PATRÍCIO, 1993).

7 BOLDNESS AS A NEW PROPOSAL

Based on the proposals of the authors above, on our own experiences and supported by theory, we are challenged to suggest a model (Figure 4) in order to support actions aimed at sports performance based on a balanced, harmonious and pedagogical view. This view is particularly supported by axiological contribution, reflection and argument having (sports) man and his social group (his team) as foundations and purposes (GARCIA, 2007) of the sports context, in order to propose, evaluate, sustain and expand the possibility of a human-sports performance of excellence.

Initially, our model focuses on the axiological interaction between the main actors of the sports scene – athletes and teachers/coaches. From this perspective, we consider the example of the teacher/coach very important, but it is the exemplary (value-based) action of all that builds a community/team with ethics.

Figure 4: Upward Spiral of values.

Source: The authors.

As we can see in Figure 4, it is illustrated by an upward spiral whose representation is identified with a process of constant development and expansion, and it is open to the future, without finitude. The purpose is to achieve sports excellence in individual action, collective and interactive plans of athletes, coaches and other collaborators.

To achieve that ideal, away from the obsessive concern for winning at any cost, we suggest the incorporation of habits, customs and behaviors that are linked to the most cherished individual, collective, organizational and spiritual values. While those values form the base, they are also the essence of the spiral and therefore must contribute in a balanced, harmonious and integrated manner – in training, in competition and in life – to form the sportsperson (athlete, coach and collaborator). That is, first of all, as mentioned

by Wooden and Jamison (2010) and Resende (2006), the process of excellence at sports must be a process of education: an expression of culture described by gesture, action, symbolism, poetry and values.

Values that go through the spiral are the center of education of actions related to sports and life, and also promote the ability to experiment, take risks, overcome and transcend the simple task of training and competition, in the art of movement and wisdom-in-action. According to Aristotle (2004, p. 10), “by wisdom we do not mean anything other than excellence in art”.

In order to bring together, in one context, expressions of practical wisdom and its companion, art, let us remember the sports action taking place within football: an athlete with full control of his or her body and the environment moves, jumps, dribbles, kicks, creates and re-creates, branding artistic refinement of excellence and virtuosity in each technique directed to perfection. From rapport with teammates, the athlete is agitated and looms toward the lucid and playful, thus promoting joy, satisfaction and ecstasy. Those are some of the principles that help release and express the happiness of all. Thus, in the football stadium as in any other stadium or gymnasium, “astonishment, artistic invention, freedom, spontaneity come in. A football filled with sparks of genius – Apollonian while still Dionysian ...” (BENTO, 2006, p. 141).

This axiological view of the sports process is contemplated by Garcia (2007) when he suggests that, above all, there is a set of values that must be preserved in order for sports not to end in themselves, and be projected beyond that: beyond results, passions, financial resources, persons of low value and the media. Sports are a space where there is constellation of values that are part of the human essence in living and socializing – attributes without which humanity itself would not be possible.

8 THE FINAL EXERCISE

On many occasions, people imagine that high performance sports are permeated with attitudes and habits that are on the verge of folly. To avoid commonplace, we decided to conduct a study on the way of acting in high-performance sports by two of the most respected sports world leaders: John Wooden (basketball) and Rezende (volleyball).

Contrary to what is routinely thought, those coaches' models, as well as that which we now suggest, are not concerned about winning or losing – Wooden even says that he does not mention the word victory – but rather about the practice of certain values: that is the very expression of success.

Therefore, we can understand that, to be successful at sports, a team or an athlete needs more than being physically, technically and tactically well prepared, even with the presence of great players. Skilled athletes are very important for their teams, as long as their talents serve a higher and common goal. Success, both in sports and in life outside them, happens through harmony between different components of the same team, through attention to what one masters – learning, personal effort, attention; through the ongoing need for self-improvement, among others; through the pleasure of doing something one enjoys doing; and through incorporation of higher values.

Some sports scholars consider the practices linked to the school and recreational categories as educational, since they provide opportunities for participants to develop values such as cooperation, participation, sociability, respect, solidarity, etc., leaving high performance sports in a secondary position and with their educational goals not always recognized. The coaches who are the focus of our study, as we have seen in the models presented here, seem to contradict the idea contained in the preceding paragraph, as their sporting goals are the result and consequence of assuming and practicing a constellation of values.

It is also important to stress the emphasis these coaches give to the importance of training and competition as a process of teaching-learning and education, in their mission to achieve high levels of excellence. One of them even said that the most important point was not winning, but rather the way one trains and plays.

On the other hand, the model we propose – inspired by the coaches we investigated and by our experience – considers sports as a pedagogical space; therefore, it can ascribe meaning to our practice by acting from education in values, both at school and clubs, in social projects and elsewhere.

Our intention is to point to another sphere of reflection on this issue: high performance sports can and should be educational, given all characteristics previously presented. For this, we noted that while the so-called sport education highlights some values that should be developed by students along with the sporting task, high performance sports, through the models investigated in this article, present an axiological proposal where values should guide the teacher's pedagogical attitudes. Thus, in the coach-athlete – or teacher-student – interaction, first of all, coaches should be a mirror of the education they propose: coherence between words, actions, reactions and interactions.

Sustained by this belief based on professional practice, we certainly consider high performance sports as a particularly educational expression. Therefore, we accept as educational those sports that develop values whose purposes are to strengthen the person's character and personality, with a view to external and especially internal accomplishments. The force of example, based on values, makes the socio-sports group overcome the barriers posed by the limits of winning and losing, playful and agonal, educational and non-educational, and then take off towards culture!

Speaking about sports is reflecting on man and his existence. The founding, building and renovating elements of human life emerge from sports – dramatization of reality in which actors and scenario remember, relive and perpetuate the moments of human

birth, life and ending: moments of insecurity, glory and failure, that is, moments of life.

Sports are an expression of interdependence of the individual and collective spheres; it is a structure that, by its very nature, ascribes meaning, significance and value to the several human expressions, and whose essence is rich in symbolic wealth where, in context, an education for life expresses itself. Therefore, we have structured our model considering the subtlety of those interconnections in the form of an upward spiral, open and without finitude. Such spiral registers the need to articulate, in an effective and participatory way, personal, collective, organizational and spiritual values with a view to excellence performance for everyone (athletes, coaches and collaborators), so we can celebrate a victory over our difficulties, limitations and villainies at the same time.

We also understand that each upward movement of the spiral must be propelled, strengthened and expanded by the experience of the athletes, coaches and collaborators in the practice of values. That experience should not be limited to a single event but rather to an endless series of events that, by their complexity, multiply indefinitely toward excellence performance, which will be that in which actors can feel fulfilled, full of dignity and abounding in satisfaction. As for victory, if we look from the perspective of the goddess *Niké*, it will already be in our company even before the competition starts. Success will be demonstrated in the ability of each protagonist (athlete, coach or contributor) to transform his or her sports and personal life into something full, grand, dignified and beautiful, therefore ethical, aesthetic and sacred! Values, sports excellence and competitive greatness are pedagogical attributes that resemble the real source of inspiration circumscribed by the symbolism represented by the goddess *Niké*.

The sports world – just as human beings themselves – is yet to be discovered. This is an open debate!

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