

## MOTIVATION AND INCLUSION: the case of the first brazilian women's national amputee football team

## MOTIVAÇÃO E INCLUSÃO: o caso da primeira seleção brasileira feminina de futebol para amputadas

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### Abstract

The participation of women with disabilities in amputee football represents progress in social inclusion and the advancement of parasports. This case study, adopting both quantitative and qualitative approaches, investigated the motivational factors and inclusion aspects of athletes from the first Brazilian Women's National Amputee Football Team through a semi-structured questionnaire administered to ten participants. The analysis combined descriptive statistics with content analysis. The main motivators identified were the enjoyment of practicing sports and the pursuit of social recognition, although the athletes reported challenges such as limited recognition and insufficient financial support. We conclude that this sport is a powerful tool for personal and social development, requiring institutional and financial support to strengthen the presence of women in parasports.

**Keywords:** Amputee Football; People with disabilities; Adapted sport; Sport psychology; Sport motivation.

### Resumo

A participação de mulheres com deficiência no futebol para amputadas representa avanços na inclusão social e no fortalecimento do paradesporto. Este estudo de caso, com abordagem quantitativa e qualitativa, investigou os fatores motivacionais e aspectos de inclusão de atletas da primeira seleção brasileira da modalidade por meio de questionário semiestruturado aplicado a dez atletas que participaram da primeira copa do mundo feminina. A análise combinou estatística descritiva e análise de conteúdo. Os principais motivadores identificados foram o prazer pela prática esportiva e a valorização social, embora as atletas relataram desafios como a falta

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de reconhecimento e apoio financeiro. Concluímos que a modalidade é uma ferramenta de desenvolvimento pessoal e social, demandando de apoio institucional e financeiro para fortalecer a presença feminina no paradesporto.

**Palavras-chave:** Futebol de amputadas; Pessoas com deficiência; Esporte adaptado; Psicologia do esporte; Motivação esportiva.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The participation of people with disabilities in sports has gained prominence both for the excellence of sporting practice and for the inclusion and recognition of these individuals (Simim *et al.*, 2018). Paraspors have advanced technically and tactically through increased resources, technological development, and government incentive programs, raising the number of athletes involved in different sports modalities (Baumgart *et al.*, 2022). Brazil stands out in paraspors, consistently achieving leading positions in various sports at the Paralympic Games (CPB, 2024).

The creation of the Brazilian Paralympic Center (CPB) was one of the pillars of the success of Brazilian paraspors, serving as a global reference for training in several Paralympic modalities (Simim; Coswig, 2024). The Agnelo/Piva Law, enacted in 2001, also had a significant impact on the development of paraspors in Brazil. This law establishes that 2% of the gross revenue from federal lotteries must be allocated to sport, with 15% of this amount directed to the CPB, ensuring a steady source income to be invested in projects and athlete training.

Although amputee football is not an official Paralympic Games modality, Brazil stands out worldwide in this sport, consolidating itself as a powerhouse on the international stage. Men's amputee football demonstrates a high technical level and has achieved notable victories, even in the face of limited resources and less visibility compared to other Paralympic sports. In Brazil, men's amputee football includes hundreds of active athletes who compete for different clubs in regional and national championships, and the national team has already won four titles as well as other continental championships.

Amputee football emerged in the 1980s in the United States when Don Bennett, a para-athlete, adapted the game for people with amputations by using crutches to move and kick the ball, which gave rise to the sport (Frère, 2007). In 1987, the International Amputee Football Association was created and organized the first World Cup of the modality. In Brazil, amputee football arrived in 1986 through the

initiative of João Batista Carvalho e Silva, who founded the first team at the Niteroiense Association of People with Physical Disabilities (ANDEF). In 1989, the country participated in its first World Championship, achieving third place (Matos; Zuzzi; Strapasson, 2020). Since then, Brazil has established itself as a world power, becoming a world champion in 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2005, standing out for its organization and technical performance (Museu do Futebol, 2023).

In recent years, following the growth of female football, women with amputations have begun to play the sport, and in 2024, the first Brazilian women's national team was formed and participated in the inaugural Women's Amputee Football World Cup held in Colombia. This cup featured 12 teams: Colombia, Brazil, Poland, Cameroon, Peru, Haiti, England, Ecuador, Kenya, the United States, Ukraine and Nigeria. The Colombian National Team becoming the first champion in amputee women's football. The Brazilian women's team finished ninth in the tournament and had standout players in the competition.

Despite the challenges faced by the athletes, their participation highlighted important advances in the inclusion and visibility of women with amputations in sport (Globo Esporte, 2024). This trajectory highlights the role of amputee football as an instrument of social inclusion, empowerment, and the promotion of citizenship for the participating women, while also inspiring other women with disabilities to join the sport, breaking barriers and expanding the recognition of adapted football as a diverse and inclusive environment. The importance of amputee football as a tool for personal and social development and highlights the need to pay attention on the emotional complexity of this high-performance environment (Dantas; Simim; Meireles, 2025).

The participation of women with amputations in football broadens opportunities for inclusion and social participation, as well as personal development for the athletes. Through the practice of the sport, these women gained access to spaces for social interaction, overcame physical and social barriers, and achieved autonomy and self-esteem. Moreover, by providing visibility to the achievements and challenges of athletes, adapted sports contribute to breaking prejudice and reducing the social stigma associated with disability, promoting significant changes in how society views people with disabilities. Adapted sports showcase the potential of these individuals, highlighting their ability to overcome challenges and their competence, which fosters public admiration and respect.

In light of this scenario, this study aims to investigate the motivational factors and aspects related to the inclusion of female amputee football players who were part of the Brazilian Women's Amputee Football Team that participated in the first World Cup.

## 2 PROCEDURES AND METHODS

### 2.1 Research Design

This research is characterized as an exploratory and descriptive case study, with a quantitative approach to the data. The main objective was to investigate the motivational factors and aspects related to the inclusion of female amputee football players who were part of the first Brazilian Women's Amputee Football Team during its participation in the first World Cup of the modality.

### 2.2 Participants

The sample consisted of ten female athletes who were members of the first Brazilian Women's Amputee Football Team and participated in the aforementioned World Cup.

### 2.3 Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire, specifically designed for this study. The instrument consisted of closed-ended questions aimed at identifying the initial motivations for playing football and the factors that contributed to maintaining participation in the sport over time. The items explored intrinsic aspects (pleasure, challenge, personal development) and extrinsic aspects (recognition, social support, performance outcomes). Two closed-ended questions related to the reasons for continuing to play and train, as well as the difficulties faced, were included. The questionnaire was reviewed by the authors to ensure clarity, relevance, and content validity.

## 2.4 Data Collection Procedures

The questionnaires were administered online via Google Forms to ensure that most athletes could respond. Before completing the form, participants were informed about the objectives of the study, the guarantee of anonymity, and their right to withdraw from participation at any time. The technical staff (sports psychologist, physiotherapist, and coach) who accompanied the Brazilian team during the World Cup were informed about the study but did not directly participate in data collection with the athletes.

## 2.5 Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected through the closed-ended questions of the questionnaire were organized and analyzed using descriptive statistics. To investigate motivational factors and aspects of inclusion, the mean response for each item or group of related items was calculated. For motivational factors, items related to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were grouped, and the mean responses for each dimension were calculated. For aspects of inclusion, items addressing the sense of belonging, the impact on self-esteem and quality of life, and the support received were grouped, with the mean calculated for each of these constructs. The responses to the open-ended questions were subjected to content analysis, aiming to identify emerging patterns and categories that complemented the quantitative findings, providing a deeper understanding of the athletes' experiences and perceptions.

## 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ten responses were obtained from athletes of the Brazilian Women's Amputee Football National Team, with a mean age of 29.5 years ( $SD = 3.53$  years). All athletes who responded were among those called up for the first Women's Amputee Football World Cup. The athletes indicated their level of agreement with statements regarding motivation and inclusion through their participation in the Brazilian national team. Table 1 presents the questions with the highest mean agreement scores.

**Table 1 – Questions with the Highest Means**

Question	Mean Score
I feel motivated to keep playing football even in the face of difficulties.	4,9
Playing football and participating in the national team motivates me to overcome challenges.	4,8
The sports experience inspires me to help other people with disabilities.	4,7
I feel that playing football changes the way people perceive disability.	4,6
Sports have helped me feel more included valued in society.	4,5

**Source:** Authors, 2025

Among the questions with the highest agreement rates, it was observed that the possibility of helping other people with disabilities, the feeling of being more included and valued by society, and the possibility of overcoming challenges while playing soccer demonstrate that the athletes feel motivated to engage in the sport, in accordance with Freire *et al.* (2023), who highlighted that sport participation among women fosters feelings of competence and personal appreciation.

Furthermore, the athletes perceive sport as a tool for inclusion, overcoming obstacles, and social transformation, as they understand that people change the way they view disability when they see them playing soccer with crutches. One of the athletes mentioned in the open-ended questions that "being an example for other girls with disabilities" (P6) was one of the main reasons to continue to play soccer.

However, the athletes also perceive that the practice is undervalued and that they need recognition for their participation in soccer in order to improve their financial gains and increase opportunities outside the sports environment. In Table 2 below, the questions with the lowest average agreement among the participants are listed.

**Table 2 – Questions with Lowest Average Scores**

Question	Mean Score
Participating in the Brazilian national team opened possibilities to increase my financial earnings.	2,0
Participating in the national team increased my social recognition.	3,6
Sport and participation provided me with new opportunities for social interaction outside the sports environment.	3,9

**Source:** Authors, 2025

It is noticeable that even though the social and economic benefits outside the sports environment were perceived as limited by the participants, they still reported motivation to practice, corroborating García, García, and Pérez (2023), who evidenced that para-athletes have to face economic barriers as well as social recognition challenges to succeed in paraspors. This can be highlighted in the responses to the open-ended questions about motivation and difficulties in proceeding with training and competing, where two main themes were identified, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3 - Themes related to motivation and difficulties in staying in football**

Theme	Details
Motivation to play football.	Love and enjoyment of the sport.
	Desire for personal and athletic development.
Difficulties faced in staying in football.	Physical difficulties (improving speed and technical skills).
	Structural barriers (lack of other women to form a team).
	Difficulty balancing training, work, and family.

**Source:** Authors, 2025

Most of the athletes reported that their main motivation to continue playing football is the love and enjoyment of the sport, as participant 5 stated: "My main motivation to keep playing and training football is the passion for the sport and the pleasure I feel being on the field", highlighting that the enthusiasm for practicing a sport with which they have an emotional connection is decisive for their continued engagement (Silva *et al.*, 2019).

Moreover, the athletes mentioned that the constant desire to improve is an even stronger motivational factor: "I want to get better every day to reach where I want" (P2), "Love for the sport and knowing I can go beyond my limitations every training session" (P7).

"The feeling of overcoming challenges, improving with each training, learning new skills, and, of course, the companionship with friends and teammates makes everything more rewarding. Football is a constant challenge, both physically and mentally, and this quest for improvement is what keeps me motivated" (P5).

As Silva *et al.* (2019) pointed out, passion for the sport is one of the main factors in the retention of athletes with disabilities. Love for the sport and the desire to overcome challenges can be understood as intrinsic motivators that are important for athletes' adherence and retention (Zhang, Huang, Wang, 2025).

Regarding difficulties, some athletes reported not facing major obstacles. However, others mentioned physical limitations, such as the need to improve speed and technical skills, as a factor that made it difficult to continue training (García, García, Pérez, 2023). In addition to structural challenges, such as the lack of enough women to form a complete female team, and personal issues, they highlighted the difficulty of balancing training, family, and work as a relevant barrier. Participant 8 reported: "There is a lack of financial support to help with transportation and the purchase of accessories and supplements" (P8).

In this sense, García, García, and Pérez (2023) pointed out that female para-athletes receive less financial support compared to male para-athletes, a factor that hinders their continued participation in the sport. Although the main motivators for practice are pleasure and social appreciation, the competitive environment exposes the athletes to intense psychosocial demands. The analysis of emotional variations demonstrated that athletes presented an increase in scores of tension, depression, anger, and fatigue after a defeat. Even after the victory, there was a sharp increase in fatigue and mental confusion, accompanied by a drop in vigor, reflecting the

psychophysiological cost of high performance (Dantas; Simim; Meireles, 2025). These findings reinforce the conclusion that the modality requires institutional support, with an emphasis on the implementation of specific psychological interventions for amputees.

The difficulties reported by the athletes reflect common barriers in women's parasports, such as a lack of infrastructure, small team sizes, and the challenge of balancing other demands. In this way, the promotion and monitoring of adapted sports help to dismantle a limited and stigmatized view of disability, foster social interaction, and value the athletes' identity as protagonists of their own stories. Thus, the participation of women in amputee football directly benefits the participants and raises societal awareness, strengthening respect and social inclusion.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that adapted sports for women go beyond the competitive aspect; they involve strengthening self-esteem, self-confidence, and the sense of overcoming challenges, while also fostering a love for football. Furthermore, the athletes reported feeling more confident and expanding their social relationships. However, greater recognition and investment in women's parasports are necessary for athletes to overcome these difficulties. These results highlight the need to create strategies to minimize such barriers, including incentive policies, the formation of regional teams, the organization of exhibition matches to promote the sport and recruit women with amputations for training and games, and more flexible training schedules.

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