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PERCEPTION AND MOOD OF YOUTH VOLLEYBALL PLAYERS AFTER TEAM DEFEAT: an ethnographic study

PERCEPÇÃO E ESTADO DE HUMOR DE ATLETAS JUVENIS DE VOLEIBOL APÓS A DERROTA DA EQUIPE: um estudo etnográfico

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the perception and mood states of youth volleyball athletes after defeat in official competitions. A total of 483 male athletes, aged 17 to 19 years, participated in the research, all of them competing in the 2024 São Paulo State Interior League Championship. Data collection was carried out through direct and systematic observations, field notes, a sociodemographic questionnaire, and an open-ended questionnaire on mood states. The theoretical framework addressed mood states, resilience, and experiences of defeat in team sports. The methodological approach was ethnography, which allows for an in-depth and contextualized understanding of the sporting experience. Expected results suggest that defeat can trigger negative emotional reactions but also foster resilience and learning processes, depending on how athletes and teams collectively process such experiences. This study contributes to Sport Psychology by expanding the understanding of subjective aspects involved in competitive youth sports.

Keywords: Sport Psychology; Mood States; Volleyball.

RESUMO

Este estudo tem como objetivo investigar a percepção e os estados de humor de atletas juvenis de voleibol após a derrota em competições oficiais. Participaram da pesquisa 483 atletas masculinos, com idades entre 17 e 19 anos, integrantes do Campeonato da Liga do Interior do Estado de São Paulo de 2024. A coleta de dados foi realizada por meio de observações diretas e sistemáticas, caderno de campo, questionário sociodemográfico e questionário aberto sobre estados de humor. O referencial teórico abrangeu estudos sobre estados de humor, resiliência e vivências da derrota no esporte coletivo. A abordagem metodológica adotada foi a etnografia, por possibilitar uma compreensão profunda e contextualizada da experiência esportiva. Os resultados esperados indicam que a derrota pode desencadear reações emocionais negativas, mas também favorecer processos de resiliência e aprendizado, dependendo da forma como atletas e equipes elaboram

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coletivamente essa vivência. Este trabalho contribui para a Psicologia do Esporte ao ampliar a compreensão dos aspectos subjetivos que permeiam o esporte juvenil competitivo.

Palavras-chave: Psicologia do Esporte; Estados de Humor; Voleibol.

1 INTRODUCTION

High-performance sport is a fertile ground for understanding the psychological, emotional, and social variables that directly affect athletes' performance and well-being. Defeat, inevitable in any competitive sport, triggers different emotional responses, ranging from frustration and sadness to resilience and motivation. In the case of volleyball, a team sport where interaction between team members is fundamental, the perception and mood of athletes after defeat present specific characteristics that deserve scientific investigation.

Previous research (Beedie; Terry; Lane, 2000; Brandão; Machado, 2020) highlights that mood states are relevant indicators for understanding how individuals process experiences of victory and defeat, impacting both their subsequent athletic performance and their mental health. Thus, understanding how youth volleyball athletes experience and perceive defeats becomes fundamental so that coaches, sports psychologists, and managers can develop effective support and intervention strategies.

Sports practice, especially in team sports like volleyball, constitutes a privileged space for observing psychological phenomena that transcend the immediate result of the competition. In this scenario, defeat emerges as an inevitable and recurring event, capable of provoking intense emotional and cognitive reactions in athletes, especially in the youth phase, when they are still in the process of personal and athletic maturation. Studying these reactions makes it possible to understand not only the momentary impacts of competitive failure, but also the ways in which young athletes process their experience in sports and develop psychological resources to cope with adversity.

Research in Sports Psychology demonstrates that the mood of athletes after competitions significantly influences their motivation, engagement, and subsequent performance (Lane; Terry, 2000). In defeats, negative emotional states such as anger, frustration, or sadness tend to emerge with greater intensity, affecting both individual self-perception and group cohesion.

At the same time, the way an athlete processes such feelings is directly related to their resilience, defined as the ability to face, resist, and overcome adverse experiences (Fletcher; Sarkar, 2012). Thus, defeat presents itself not only as an obstacle but also as an opportunity for emotional strengthening, provided it is mediated by appropriate coping mechanisms.

In volleyball, a sport characterized by strong interdependence among players, defeats are experienced collectively, but each athlete attributes their own meanings to the experience. This tension between the individual and group dimensions of emotions makes the phenomenon even more complex, justifying the need for studies that explore the perceptions and moods of young athletes in the face of failure. This perspective broadens the view of sport, understanding it not only as a competitive practice, but also as a field of human development, marked by emotional experiences that impact the psychological and social development of individuals.

Therefore, this study seeks to analyze the perceptions and mood states of male youth volleyball athletes, participants in the 2024 São Paulo State Interior League Championship, after experiencing defeat in competitions.

2 OBJECTIVES

2.1 General objective

To analyze the perception and mood of young volleyball athletes after their team's defeat in competitions.

2.2 Specific objectives

- To identify, through observations and questionnaires, the main emotional reactions manifested by athletes after defeat.
- To understand how the experience of defeat influences the group's collective perception and the interpersonal bonds between athletes.

3 JUSTIFICATION

The study of the relationship between sporting defeat and mood states is of paramount importance, especially in the youth category, where athletes are in a phase of sporting and identity formation. The literature indicates that late adolescence is a critical period of transition, marked by emotional, social, and cognitive redefinitions (Erikson, 1976; Paludo; Koller, 2017). In this context, volleyball, as a high-impact competitive team sport, can both contribute to psychological resilience and accentuate emotional vulnerabilities in moments of defeat.

By focusing on athletes aged 17 to 19, this study provides insights for coaches, psychologists, and sports managers in planning interventions that not only enhance athletic performance but also promote mental well-being. Furthermore, the research contributes to Sports Psychology by offering updated and contextualized data on young athletes from the interior of São Paulo state, broadening the understanding of how defeat is understood within this specific sociocultural context.

4 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review will be structured around three main themes:

1. **Mood states and sport** – Studies such as those by Morgan (1980), Lane and Terry (2000), and Terry and Lane (2011) discuss how mood states influence athletic performance and how competitive events trigger emotional changes. In Brazil, authors such as Brandão and Machado (2020) explore the emotional impacts of victory and defeat on athletes' performance and health.
2. **Defeat and resilience in team sports** – Research indicates that defeat in team sports is experienced differently than defeat in individual sports, given the role of group dynamics and shared responsibility (Gallahue; Ozmun, 2013). In volleyball, in particular, the interaction between players is crucial for interpreting the competitive experience (Ueno; Costa, 2018).

3. Youth, sport and emotional development – The adolescent phase is marked by psychological transformations that make young people particularly sensitive to competitive experiences (Côté; Hay, 2002). Authors such as Samulski (2009) and Weinberg and Gould (2017) emphasize the need to understand youth sport not only as a space for talent development, but also for the integral development of the individual.

Understanding mood states in the context of sports has been the subject of numerous investigations, especially since the *Profile of Mood States* (POMS) model, proposed by McNair, Lorr, and Droppleman (1971), which has become a worldwide reference. Morgan (1980) advanced this field by developing the "iceberg profile" hypothesis, which suggests that high-performance athletes exhibit a mood pattern characterized by high levels of vigor and low levels of tension, depression, anger, fatigue, and mental confusion. This profile, however, undergoes significant changes in situations of defeat or frustration, which can compromise not only immediate performance but also future motivation for sports practice.

Contemporary research (Lane & Terry, 2000; Terry & Lane, 2011) indicates that mood states act as mediators between competitive stimuli and the athlete's behavioral response. In other words, it is not only the defeat itself that influences the emotional response, but also how this experience is perceived and internalized by the individual. This understanding reinforces the need for investigations that consider the social and cultural context of sports practice, since athletes of different ages, sports, and regions may attribute distinct meanings to the experience of defeat.

In the case of team sports, defeat takes on even more complex dimensions, as it involves shared responsibility and interpersonal interaction. According to Brandão and Machado (2020), the perception of defeat in teams can trigger feelings of solidarity and cohesion, when the group interprets failure as an opportunity for joint learning, as well as feelings of isolation and blame, when one or more members are held responsible for the result. Thus, the emotional response to defeat is not limited to the individual, but extends to relationships of belonging and group identity.

Literature on resilience in sports also offers important contributions to the analysis of mood states after defeat. Fletcher and Sarkar (2012) define sports resilience as the athlete's ability to maintain optimal performance or even improve it after exposure to stressors, adversity, or failure.

In this sense, defeat is not understood merely as a negative experience, but as an opportunity for psychological strengthening and the development of socio-emotional skills. Samulski (2009) reinforces that the construction of resilience depends on the mediation of internal factors (such as self-confidence, self-efficacy, and emotional control) and external factors (such as social support, leadership quality, and motivational environment).

In youth categories, the experience of defeat can take on even greater weight due to the specific characteristics of human development at this stage. Authors such as Côté and Hay (2002) and Paludo and Koller (2017) highlight that adolescents are in the process of identity construction and experience a strong need for social recognition.

Thus, sporting defeats can be interpreted as personal failures, generating intense emotional reactions such as anger, sadness, or demotivation. On the other hand, when properly mediated by coaches, teammates, and family members, such experiences can contribute to emotional maturity and the strengthening of coping strategies.

Another relevant dimension to consider is the role of Brazilian sports culture. Unlike other contexts where defeat can be interpreted in a naturalized way, in Brazil there is a strong emphasis on success and victory, which directly impacts how young people interpret failures. According to Rubio (2001), the national sports culture frequently associates victory with the athlete's identity, which increases psychological pressure and, consequently, intensifies emotional reactions to defeat. This cultural perspective makes it essential to investigate how young athletes from the interior of São Paulo, immersed in a local and regional competitive environment, perceive and process their experiences of sporting failure.

Recent studies reinforce the importance of analyzing these variables. Balbim et al. (2023), when investigating the psychosocial development and mental health of Brazilian youth athletes, identified that sports involvement influences emotional and social dimensions, suggesting that the experience of defeat can impact not only immediate mood but also the perception of general well-being. Silva, Samulski, and Brandão (2024) showed that psychological attributes such as self-efficacy and emotional control are direct predictors of resilience in high-performance athletes, indicating that similar factors can modulate the response of youth athletes in contexts of defeat.

In a specific study on youth volleyball, Costa et al. (2023) compared pre-competition mood states between winners and losers in beach volleyball competitions, finding that the variable "confusion" explained a significant part of the difference between the groups.

This finding suggests that emotional dimensions such as cognitive insecurity and internal disorganization may be closely linked to how defeat is perceived. Furthermore, recent psychometric research using the Brazilian Mood Scale (BRAMS) has shown that different temporal references ("now" or "last week") directly influence responses related to fatigue, depression, and tension (Souza; Terry; Lane, 2023), a relevant aspect for instruments applied in the field, as will be the case in this investigation.

Machado and Brandão (2006) investigate in their research how external psychological factors - media, fans, others' expectations - shape the emotional state of adolescent athletes, generating anxiety and aggression. This work demonstrates that the perception of external evaluation can anticipate negative emotional reactions in moments of defeat, since athletes concerned with their public image or criticism tend to experience shame or guilt with greater intensity. This finding suggests that, in their study, it will be important to observe not only the athletes' internal reactions, but also the external context (fans, repercussions) as a modulator of these mood states.

In the article by Machado and Balbinotti (2011), "Training and intervention of the Physical Education professional...", there is a discussion about emotional states, sports identity, and the interpersonal demands involved in performance. They emphasize that the professional (coach, psychologist) must be able to intervene not only technically, but also emotionally, providing support to the athlete to regulate emotions, including after setbacks and defeats, as well as promoting an environment of trust so that athletes can express their discomfort and recover emotionally. This reinforces that defeat can have an impact since its emotional repercussions depend on institutional support and the team environment.

Balbinotti et al. (2011) also developed the Balbinotti Scale of Motives for Competitiveness in Sport (EBMCE-18), which identifies competitive orientations such as victory, performance, and status. Among young people aged 13 to 16, they observed that greater orientations towards victory or status can increase internal pressure and possibly exacerbate negative emotions when defeat occurs, as expectations - either personal or external - are not met. In this sense, competitive orientation can function as a mediating or moderating variable in mood states after a defeat, something that can be incorporated as a hypothesis or category of analysis in the open-ended questionnaire or observations.

Lenamar Fiorese Vieira (2013), in "Sports Psychology: an emerging area of psychology", highlights that there are gaps in Brazilian scientific production regarding the study of negative emotions in competitive sports, especially among young people.

She points out that many studies focus on motivation, performance, or physiological variables, but dedicate less attention to the subjective experiences of defeat, frustration, depressed mood, or emotional coping strategies. This finding reinforces the value of her study, which seeks precisely to focus on these emotional experiences, offering new data in a field that is still little explored.

Furthermore, studies dealing with academic training and intervention (Machado; Brandão; Balbinotti) suggest that coaches, sports psychologists, and physical education professionals play a central role as emotional mediators. The way these professionals interact with athletes, the follow-up after games or defeats, the feedback discourse, the team culture, and whether there is openness to acknowledging negative emotional states, seem to strongly influence how the athlete perceives their defeat, whether as a definitive failure or a learning opportunity. This institutional and cultural dimension deserves strong attention in the discussion of their data, to understand not only "what" the athletes feel, but "how" this is interpreted within their team and support network.

Finally, combining the findings on competitive motivation (Balbinotti) with the expected results of your study may allow for more refined hypotheses: for example, athletes with a high orientation towards victory/status are likely to report more negative moods after defeat, or take longer to recover their emotional state; whereas athletes with a predominantly performance or growth orientation may demonstrate greater resilience and less negative impact from mood. These possible differences may emerge in open-ended questionnaires or systematic observations, and should be included in the analysis and discussion, comparing your youth volleyball group with patterns found in other sports or age groups.

Thus, the literature demonstrates that the analysis of the emotional reactions of youth volleyball athletes after defeat should consider not only the immediate manifestation of mood states, but also factors of individual resilience, the local sports culture, and the processes of cohesion and group identity characteristic of team sports.

5 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This study will be conducted using a qualitative approach, with ethnographic inspiration, seeking to understand the meanings attributed by athletes to the experience of defeat in the competitive context of youth volleyball. The adoption of this perspective is based on the understanding that the emotional and symbolic phenomena experienced in sport emerge from the social interactions established in the competitive environment.

As Clifford Geertz (1989) points out, the interpretive analysis of social practices allows access to the meanings constructed by subjects in their context, even when it is not a classic long-term ethnography.

Data collection was carried out with 483 male youth volleyball athletes, aged between 17 and 19 years, participating in the São Paulo State Interior League Championship in 2024. Considering the size of the sample, the study is characterized as a qualitative, interpretive investigation, using procedures inspired by ethnography, without the intention of prolonged immersion in the field, but paying attention to the symbolic and relational dynamics present in the sporting context.

The following data collection instruments were used: direct and systematic observations during and after the games, recorded in a field notebook; a sociodemographic questionnaire, aimed at characterizing the athletes' profile; and an open-ended questionnaire, focused on identifying the athletes' perceptions and moods after experiencing defeat.

The data analysis was performed using content analysis, as proposed by Laurence Bardin (2016), enabling thematic categorization and interpretation of the meanings attributed by participants to their lived experiences, as well as the records from field observations.

Regarding ethical aspects, the study respected the ethical principles established for research with human beings, ensuring the confidentiality of information, the anonymity of participants, and voluntary participation, through agreement with the consent terms presented at the time of data collection.

6 DISCUSSION

The aim was to discuss the results in light of the literature on mood states in sport, youth, and resilience processes. The analysis sought to identify whether defeats were interpreted predominantly as negative experiences or whether they functioned as learning opportunities, highlighting the variables that modulate these perceptions (practice time, team bond, role in the competition, etc.).

The mood of athletes after defeats is one of the most recurring topics in Sports Psychology, especially due to its ability to affect future performance, group cohesion, and continued participation in competitive sports.

According to Lane and Terry (2000), mood states vary on a continuum ranging from positive affects (such as vigor and enthusiasm) to negative ones (such as anger, depression, and fatigue), fluctuating according to competitive results and frustrated expectations. In team sports like volleyball, defeat is not just an individual experience, but a shared phenomenon, since each athlete perceives themselves as an integral part of a group whose performance is evaluated collectively.

Literature also indicates that defeats can trigger intense emotional reactions, ranging from demotivation to a search for overcoming challenges (Weinberg; Gould, 2017). This ambivalence is related to resilience, understood as the ability to face and reframe adversity (Fletcher; Sarkar, 2012). In young athletes, whose emotional and social maturity is still developing, such processes can have profound effects not only on athletic performance but also on their psychological development.

In this context, the study of mood states after defeats is relevant because it allows us to understand how athletes cope with frustration and what strategies are mobilized to regain emotional balance.

According to Brandão and Machado (2014), defeat can function as a pedagogical element, generating learning, but also as a risk factor if it is accompanied by intense feelings of failure or personal devaluation. This duality reinforces the importance of considering the role of the technical team, group cohesion, and social support in coping with these experiences.

Furthermore, recent research highlights that psychological resilience in athletes is strongly associated with their ability to regulate emotions in situations of competitive stress (Galli; Vealey, 2008). Resilient athletes tend to view defeat as a temporary event that can serve as a basis for future growth, while those less resilient may develop prolonged negative emotional responses, harming both their performance and their motivation.

Literature also points out that, in team sports, the perception of defeat is influenced by social and cultural aspects that modulate mood states (Oliveira; Rúbio, 2018). In regional or national championships, such as the São Paulo Interior League, the pressure to win intensifies due to the presence of the fans, the expectations of the managers, and the qualifying nature of the games. This causes defeat to be experienced in a more intense and collective way, affecting not only the individual athlete but the entire group.

Therefore, the concepts of mood, resilience, and sporting defeat form an interpretative tripod that will guide the discussion of the data in this research. By observing how young volleyball athletes perceive and react emotionally to defeats, the aim is to understand to what extent such experiences can strengthen their resilience or, conversely, weaken them emotionally. The analysis will seek to highlight the nuances of these experiences, relating them both to existing literature and to the specificities of the group studied.

7 CONCLUSION

This research, by investigating the perception and mood states of young volleyball athletes in the face of defeat, highlights the relevance of understanding the sporting phenomenon from a broader psychosocial perspective. The findings indicate that defeat should not be reduced to a simple marker of negative performance, but understood as an experience rich in meaning, capable of mobilizing emotions that influence both the individual identity of the athletes and the collective dynamics of the teams.

The analysis of the data, in light of the literature on mood states, resilience, and team sports, indicates that defeats can be experienced as moments of emotional fragility, but also as opportunities for psychological growth and strengthening group cohesion. This ambivalence highlights the importance of the role of coaches, sports psychologists, and other professionals in mediating these experiences, creating conditions for frustration to be reframed as learning and development.

In this sense, the study reinforces the relevance of emotional support strategies in the competitive youth context, especially in highly representative tournaments such as the São Paulo Interior League. By valuing the subjective processes involved in experiencing defeat, the research contributes to understanding sport not only as a space for performance, but also as an educational and formative environment, in which resilience is configured as a central competence for the continuity of the sporting trajectory and for human development.

Finally, it is hoped that the results presented here will provide support for future research and interventions aimed at promoting mental health and the holistic development of young athletes, respecting the emotional specificities inherent to the competitive context.

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