



Revista Processus de Estudos de Gestão, Jurídicos e Financeiros

ISSN: 2237-2342 (impresso)  
L-ISSN: 2178-2008 (on-line)

Ano I, Vol.I, n.03, jul./set., 2010.

Tramitação editorial:  
Data de submissão: 30/07/2010.  
Data de reformulação: 15/08/2010.  
Data de aceite definitivo: 28/08/2010.  
Data de publicação: 20/09/2010.

## BRAZILIAN SPORTS AND WOMEN DISCRIMINATION

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In times when the union among people has been widely acclaimed it is still possible to witness several forms of women discrimination in Sports.

Until a short time ago, women were treated in the Brazilian society as a co-operator for the political, social and cultural organization in the country.

Brazil was discovered in 1500 and approximately 20 years latter the colonization started. From then on, women lived in a rural slavery society, in which man was the family chief, responsible for the support and safety of the family members and the woman was the housewife, obedient to the man's will, educating mother and home administrator.

This situation has lasted for many years, and some movements have arisen seeking for equality of rights between men and women as the first legislation concerning women education, the signing of the law Aurea by Princess Isabel which freed all slaves in Brazil, the new electoral code which introduced women right of voting and the third Brazilian constitution in 1934 that forbid the salary differences based on sex, age, nationality or civil status.

From this period the rights were, little by little, being conquered. In 1984, Brazil ratified the Convention on the Elimination of Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which had been approved by the United Nations General Meeting in 1979. But it was with the Promulgation of the current Constitution of the Federal Republic of Brazil, in 1988, that the right was granted for equality for all Brazilian people before the law, with no distinction whatsoever from any nature, thus determining that *"men and women are equal in rights and duties"* and that *"the law will punish any offensive discrimination of the fundamental rights and liberty"*.

In the sports field, there is no specific legislation on women discrimination in Brazil. Thus, by analogy, besides the Magna Carta, the measures suggested by the Convention Against Women Discrimination elaborated by the UN in 1979 must be applied.

According to the Convention article 1<sup>st</sup>, the expression "discrimination against women" will mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction based on sex and which has as aim or result to cause damage or annulment of recognition, fruition or exertion by women, independently of her civil status, based on the equality of men and women, of the fundamental human rights and freedom in the political, economical, social, cultural and civil fields or any other field.

Through this legal document, the United Nations General Meeting recognized that the discrimination against women violates the principles of equality of rights and respect to human dignity. This constitutes an obstacle to the improvement of society and family well being, in addition to making difficult the development of women potentialities.

This convention was signed by Brazil. This international document has internal law enforcement, as provision in the § 2nd, article 5th, of the Federal Constitution in force,

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which says: *The rights and guarantees expressed in this Constitution do not exclude others arising out of the adopted regime and principles, or of international treaties in which the Federal Republic of Brazil is a party.*

It is noticeable that the convention emphasizes an equalitarian treatment between men and women notwithstanding each gender peculiarities.

Sports competition practice has some peculiarities that are beyond the regular practice it is necessary to be particularly attentive to each athlete, moreover in the physiological differences between men and women.

There isn't significant difference in the physical capacity of boys and girls in the pre-pubescent period (with control for physical demeanor and body composition). With puberty, girls show a relative increase in body fatness and the boys a relative increase in the thin muscular mass (due mainly to the hormonal influence). This muscular mass inequality after puberty, in women, reflects on decrease of the muscular resistance, strength and speed, in comparison to that which occurs with men.<sup>2</sup>

“The quantitative differences are related to body size, body composition and presence or absence of the sexual masculine hormone, testosterone.”<sup>3</sup>

It is almost impossible to believe that, but although the evolution in training and equipments most of the federations keeps leaving apart the physiological differences between men and women, submitting all the athletes to the same kind of training, which often results in lesions and stress due to effort.

Actually, these differences are often used to point out women as the weak sex and so ending by discriminating her presence in competitions.

From the beginning of times the female sex has not been valued enough in the sportive practices. In the Ancient Olympic Games women were not allowed to participate and even to watch the competitions. But along the times women come to achieve their place in the swimming pools, sports courts and even on the grass fields.

The first Olympic Games of the Modern Age were held in 1896, in Athens, Greece. However, it was in Paris, in the year 1900, that twenty two women participated for the first time in the Olympic Games in the sportive modalities golf and tennis.

From then on women have been participating in all Olympic Games and in the last games, held in Athens, Greece, in 2004, there was a record of women participation. From a total of ten thousand eight hundred and sixty four enrolled athletes, there were four thousand and twelve women, corresponding to 40% of the enrolled total.<sup>4</sup>

The first Olympic Games in which Brazil participated were held in 1920, in Antwerp, Belgium, with twenty one Brazilian men athletes.

The first Brazilian woman to participate in the Olympic Games was the swimmer Maria Emma H. Lenk Zigler in Los Angeles, USA, in 1932. From then on, Brazil participated in the Olympic Games with the presence of at least one woman in the delegation.

But female medals only come many years later. It was in Atlanta in the 1996 Games that the Brazilian women achieved the higher places in the podium. The beach volleyball duos won the gold medal and the silver medal and in the collective sports the

<sup>2</sup> SAFRAN, Marc R.; MCKEAG, B. Douglas; CAMP, Steven P. Van; **Manual de Medicina Esportiva**, Tradução: Dr. Fernando Gomes do Nascimento. Editora Manole. São Paulo 2002.

<sup>3</sup> GUYTON, Arthur C. & HALL, John E., **Tratado de Fisiologia Médica**, Tradução e publicação por: Editora Guanabara Koogan S.A. 10ª Edição, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> COMITÊ OLÍMPICO INTERNACIONAL The official Website of the Olympic movement. **Promotion of women in sport**. Disponível em: [http://www.olympic.org/uk/index\\_uk.asp](http://www.olympic.org/uk/index_uk.asp) Acesso em 5 de setembro 2005.

feminine basketball team won the silver medal and the volleyball team won the brass medal.

It was in 2004 at Athens Olympic Games that Brazil had the largest woman delegation in its history and where the women football team achieved its best result and won the silver medal for the country.

Brazil has had a great development in several sports modalities, mainly in the Olympic sports.

Those competitive sports practice is surrounded by plenty of sacrifice and prejudice. Men and women have both a hard time in sports living in general, as the high performance sports, per se, are a selective and discriminatory activity. To achieve a professional condition, one must be prepared for full time dedication, without the smallest possibility for escaping the rule, as any misstep may be a sentence to the unsuccessful category. In addition, the sportive modalities are endowed with specific characteristics, with attributes which consider a particular sport as an originally female or male one. That is, sports that present lightness and art are indicated for women, as this is appropriate for them. On the other hand, sports that enhance strength, violence and speed, are associated to men, as these characteristics are more accented in the male gender.

When women attempt to enter in sports classified as originally masculine, the prejudice and discrimination tend to be great.

Football, the most popular sports in Brazil, and traditionally related to men, is the one that presents most discrepancy in the treatment between the men and women teams. In general the justification is supported by two factors, one of which is financial, as all the revenue of the Confederação Brasileira de Futebol (CBF) comes from the masculine football and, therefore, the investment in the category is proportional. The other is directly linked to the lack of popularity of the women team, as it is not a Brazilian habit to associate women with football practice.

The first women football match was played in São Paulo in 1921.

The first women football team was formed by CBF in 1989, and in 2001 there was a championship organized in the category with competitive teams. Currently, most large clubs shut their women department claiming lack of profitability and because, actually, most football clubs face financial problems.

When the women's team is on activity CBF makes available a space dedicated to the team in its website.<sup>5</sup> When these women are convoked their training is held at the same place as the men's team, that is, the *Granja Comary*, in Teresópolis, in Rio de Janeiro State and has the same benefits as men's. During the championships, they receive rewards according to their performance, but most of them, who have won the silver medal in the last Olympic Games, in Athens, don't belong to any clubs and are not appropriately paid for playing in Brazil. Many depend on the team convocation for living on the daily wages paid by CBF. Some women who are outstanding sports personalities are hired by teams from Spain, England, and China and take part in championships for these teams.

On the other hand, swimming, which was the first Brazilian sports to have a representative in the Olympic Games, in 1932, is likely to show some equality in the treatment, with no great preferences for any of the sexes. Women do exactly the same as men, with the same meters, which sometimes cause lesions for effort in these athletes. This could be

<sup>5</sup> CBFNEWS O Site oficial da confederação brasileira de futebol. **Seleções** Disponível em: <http://cbfnews.uol.com.br> Acesso em 15 de setembro de 2005.

avoided if they had only the same training conditions but not the same training, that is, a differentiated program appropriate to the female reality.

If the training is carried out taking into account that women have less muscular strength, pulmonary ventilation and cardiac debt than men, the risk of effort lesion and stress will decrease very much and it is likely that these women athletes manage to improve their performance and therefore achieve new records, continuing the sportive practice beyond the competitive sports.

Volleyball is a sport whose practice tends to movement lightness and with no physical contact at all, that is, with no violence and, therefore, with characteristics more appropriated for feminine practice, less discrepancy in training and teams treatment. This may be seen for the number of conquests that both the female and male teams have achieved in the last years.

The Volleyball Brazilian Confederation has its Development in Saquarema, Rio de Janeiro State.<sup>6</sup>

This complex Sports Centre made the integration of all the categories training possible making the exchange among the technical committees easier providing athletes maximum development.

In turn, the Olympic Gymnastics is a sample of a traditionally feminine sports and most of Brazilian society doesn't value men who made the option for this modality.

This modality has a Sports University, in Curitiba, a centre of excellence in Olympic gymnastics for the permanent members of Brazilian selection training

The investment on this centre of excellence produced some medals for the country, in addition to its athletes international prominence, of whom Diane dos Santos is an outstanding example, who besides winning several world titles, created the jump double twist carpado which in the international competitions received the name "Dos Santos".

Each sportive modality presents remarkable characteristics that end by emphasizing a particular gender. However, this should not be used as a justification for discrimination, rather as a factor to be noted in order to propitiate equal conditions for everyone practice and development.

Brazilian Constitution clearly determines that men and women are equal before the law and that all forms of discrimination should be punished.

Women before society are not "the poor ones" or poor, miserable, unhappy individuals. They are just human persons that have different characteristics from men and must be seen by the sportive world as such.

Some measures may be suggested to promote women development and promotion before the sports community, such as:

- The government may create fiscal incentive programs to attract corporation and people investments in the sports in general and create compulsory quotes for investment in the feminine categories.

- The confederation may promote programs for training changes, that is, to develop appropriate programs for the female body structure, aiming to the performance improvement, without effort lesion or stress and also to carry out campaigns for public participation in the female category events.

<sup>6</sup> CBV- Site Oficial da Confederação brasileira de Voleibol. Disponível em: <http://www.volei.org.br/newcbv/home/index.asp> Acesso em 11 de setembro de 2005.

However, the most important, in addition to the application of measures for women performance improvement in their sports, - is to show the society that men and women are equal in sports practices and that there is no story of more appropriate sports for men and women. Both sexes are apt to practice any kind of sportive modality provided that the athletes are seen as subjects with specific demands, necessities and characteristics.

**Referência Bibliográfica deste Trabalho (ABNT: NBR-6023/2000):**

NICACIO, Gabriela Autran Dourado Dutra. Brazilian Sports and Women Discrimination. **Revista Processus de Estudos de Gestão, Jurídicos e Financeiros**, Brasília-DF, Instituto Processus, ano 01, edição 03, jul./set. 2010. Disponível na Internet: [http://www.institutoprocesso.com.br/2010/revista-cientifica/edicao\\_3/13\\_edicao3.pdf](http://www.institutoprocesso.com.br/2010/revista-cientifica/edicao_3/13_edicao3.pdf). Acesso em: xx de xxxxxxxx de xxxx.