6 - WHEN THE BALL DOES NOT ROLL: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AMERICAN FOOTBALL IN BRAZIL

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Introduction

We consider that each country or region of a determined country acquires a specific way of practicing sports, since each society adapts and apprehends in sports its cravings and values, that is, each society gives it a national identity that will perpetuate as a speech of identity. (DaMatta, 1982).

The Brazilian way of playing soccer is attractive all over the world, propagated by the sporting media as the "soccer art", in which beauty and creativity are essential elements. It is a consequence of the results that our national team and our players have been achieving in the last decades, conquering important prizes in matches and championships abroad.

But if one of the Brazilian marks abroad is soccer, other nations apprehend different sports and combine narratives that try to associate countries to sports. As an example, we have baseball, basketball and the American football in the United States; rugby in the United Kingdom; cricket in Pakistan and India. Such sports may seem strange to our culture, but it is necessary to understand how these sports develop in the Brazilian territory and which conditions are necessary so as to be able to expand them. (Dimeo & Mills, 2001).

In Brazil, the influence of soccer in the sporting culture is hegemonic. In terms of economy and society, this country is represented as the "Country of Soccer", mainly in the months that precede the accomplishment of a World Cup.

However, other sports have been appearing in the Brazilian sporting scenery with a significant amount of practitioners, and these start counting on the media coverage for their divulgation, expansion and spreading through the masses, among the Brazilian people. We find volleyball in this case, because since the decade of 1980, it has gained space in the Brazilian sporting scenery.

In this article, we will linger on the American football practiced in Rio de Janeiro, called *Beach Football*. This modality counts on an increasing number of practitioners. However, when it becomes a guideline for the media, we verify that there is a direct association between its practitioners and the questions of violence. Moreover, we realize that there is a direct relation between this sport and the North American culture.

We discuss the necessary conditions so that this sport, which is still in a phase of expansion, can become known by the public and create conditions of developing itself in both economic and social aspects.

To adjust to the Brazilian sporting culture, this sport has been modifying innumerous rules and adapting itself to the televising model. We understand that the sporting rules have been modifying themselves so as to reach a model that contemplates the necessities of the media, sponsors and public in a delicate, but victorious triangulation (Ribeiro, 2005).

In the next pages, we tell a little of the history of the *Beach Football* practiced in the beaches of Rio de Janeiro. Later, we will analyze the interviews with the actors involved in this modality and the relation between media, sponsors and public so that this sport can develop in terms of economy and public.

A brief description of the American Football in the city of Rio de Janeiro: from its introduction to the current days

1986 - First records of the practice of the American football in the city of Rio de Janeiro, at the Copacabana beach, organized by Robert Lee Segal and Thomaz Brasil.

1992 - The first team of American football of Brazil, the *Rio Guardians Football Club*, is created, thus taking place the first adaptations of the rules from the game played at the field to the one played on the beach and of the materials that would be used.

1994 - Mel Owens (former-player of the NFL) creates the first sporting "clinic" on American football in Brazil, which is called *Let's Play*, at Rodrigo de Freitas Lagoon, in the south area of the city of Rio de Janeiro (in this "clinic", the modalities Flag Football and Touch Football were practiced). The second team of American football of Brazil, named *Mamutes da Barra*, is created.

1998 - The second "clinic" *Let's Play* takes place, this time at the Ipanema beach (in this "clinic", the modalities Beach Flag Football and Beach Touch Football were practiced).

1999 - CAAF (Carioca Association of American Football) is created. The I Carioca Bowl starts being idealized.

2000 - The I Carioca Bowl, which counted on the participation of six teams affiliated to the CAAF, is carried through.

2001 - The II Carioca Bowl happens. The NFL Films, the official company of communication of the National Football League, covered the cited event, under the direction of André José Adler. Moreover, NFL pledged the winning team of the II Carioca Bowl with a trophy, which was delivered personally by that distinguished gentleman to the directors of the Carioca Association of American Football and to the winning team. A news report on the final match was even exhibited in many countries, including the United States. The *Rio de Janeiro Sharks* and the *Copacabana Eagles* start to divulge the sport in schools of the south area of Rio de Janeiro.

2002 - The III Carioca Bowl is carried through. The translation of the rules of the game is initiated, seeking to facilitate the divulgation, spreading through the masses and comprehension of the sport.

2003 - On the 14th of April, two players of the NFL were in Brazil to divulge the sport and take part in the X games, Tony Gonzales (from the *Kansas City Chiefs*) and Damian Vaughn (from the *Tampa Bay Buccaneers*). The I National Meeting of American Football takes place in Rio de Janeiro, at the Copacabana beach. Teams from Rio de Janeiro, Paraná and São Paulo took part in it. The IV Carioca Bowl was carried through, this time, with the participation of eight teams divided into two conferences, which were the blue conference and the white conference. In this year, there was the participation of the first team from outside the city of Rio de Janeiro, the *Saquarema Tsunamis* (current *Saquarema Vikings*). In this championship, two soccer clubs of Rio de Janeiro decided to sponsor teams of American football: *Fluminense* sponsored the team from *Gorilas* (which changed its name to *FLU-Gorilas*) and *Botafogo* sponsored the team from *Reptiles* (which changed its name to *Botafogo Reptiles*).

2004 - The V Carioca Bowl, which happened with the participation of 12 teams, is carried through. The legalization of the BAAF (Brazilian Association of American Football) takes place, with headquarters in the city of Rio de Janeiro, with the main objective to spread the sport throughout Brazil. The local and international media stimulates the achievements of the BAAF, through news reports on the entity and its associated teams. The BAAF counts on the support of André José Adler (sporting journalist) on the practice of the American football in Brazil, during the transmissions of the matches from the National Football League - NFL, on Sundays (Sunday Night Football) and on Mondays (Monday Night Football), by the ESPN International.

2005 - The VI Carioca Bowl is carried through. News reports on famous artists who practice the sport are propagated in the media. Two plays from the final of the championship are selected for a program of the ESPN international, which is called "Top 10 plays of the week", presented by Chris Berman. The BAAF starts to idealize the system of Draft to facilitate the transferring of players between teams and to manage the choices for new players.

2006 - The VII Carioca Bowl is carried through, with 14 teams. However, only 12 dispute the Carioca Tournament. So as to choose these teams, a selection with the six last places in the VI Carioca Bowl, a team newly created under the name of *Gladiadores*

and the team of the *Copacabana Eagles* (that returned to the championship that year) was constituted. The system of Draft is institutionalized, due to the increase of practitioners.

Analysis of the interviews

After this brief description of the Brazilian version of the American football, we will analyze, on the following pages, the replies from the members involved in this sporting modality. We interviewed athletes, former-athletes, coaches and managers of this modality, as well as professionals from the sporting media. We had, as an intentional sample, 28 informers who answered a questionnaire elaborated with the purpose of clarifying our worries.

With this empirical material, we identified the difficulties that the American football practiced in Rio de Janeiro has found to adapt to the Brazilian sporting culture. Moreover, in our final considerations, we present the necessary conditions for the development of this modality.

a) When the sport that you practice is violent: prejudice and stereotypes

We consider that we are approaching a sport with high index of physical contact. However, this contact is limited by the rules of the game, which try to reduce the use of any form of verbal and physical aggression. We consider that the Beach Football is not more or less violent than any other sport in which the physical contact is allowed. However, it is its representation of violence that causes it to be identified as capable of bringing injuries or, still, of suscitating physical or verbal aggressions.

In the sports which physical contact is common, violence is contained by the inclusion of mechanisms of protection of the body of its practitioners so as to, in certain situations, avoid that the impetus of victory of the athletes may suscitate violent acts. That being said, we verify that this sport goes through its mature phase (Elias & Dunning, 1992).

This procedure diminishes the intensity of the shocks and limits the areas where it is allowed for this contact to happen. Besides, it is important to stand out that, when an athlete makes use of violence to interrupt a play, he will receive a severe punishment, including his possible declassification of the game and or the competition.

The *Beach Football* has six basic ways of punishing its trespasses to the rules that aim at protecting the body of its practitioners and to those that allow the players to move around the area of the game. These six ways are: 1) the faults of first automatic descent; 2) faults of five yards; 3) faults of ten yards; 4) faults of fifteen yards; 5) agreed faults (the faults of five and ten yards which make it possible for the team that owns the ball to lose a descent); 6)the faults of fifteen yards disqualifying.

Even with the rules that aim at protecting the athlete, initially, the *Beach Football* was identified by the media as a sport in which violence was the biggest attraction. According to some means of communication selected by the researchers:

"A kick from behind and any other dirty movement is allowed to knock the adversary down. Even so, the Americans insist on calling this sport football". (Jornal do Brasil, 01/15/94).

"The violent game that influences crowds in the United States has become the new craze of the youths from Rio who are seen as violent (...) the truculent players, in its majority, are students with ages between 15 and 26 years old". (Manchete Magazine, April of 2000)

"For those who do not know, the American football seems to be a very violent sport. But dozens of rules are imposed so as to discipline this apparent violence ". (Jornal dos Sports, 06/05/2005).

We consider that the American football is identified as violent and dangerous when its rules and its internal logic are not understood (Parlebas, 1988). This fact generates an initially negative way of perceiving this sport that is practiced at the beaches.

While it is still related to the "pit-boys" (middle class youths from Rio that are reported in the media as violent individuals), we understand that this sport will have little chance of developing. There is a direct and consequently negative association between the *Beach Football* and jiu-jitsu.

After all, which sponsor would like to have its mark related to the practitioners of a sport that is shown in the media as of truculent people?

According to our informers, the sport they practice is considered by many people as a strange and sometimes inadequate activity, and its practice can cause serious injuries.

"They think I am crazy, retarded, brainless and, so it goes (...)". (Informer 1)

"A great deal of my friends do not have knowledge about it and keep in mind that it is something that asks for a good physical condition or that it is something super violent, then, in a certain way, they think I am a crazy guy". (Informer 7)

"They think I am crazy to play without protection, and most people do not understand the game and find it boring, strange and too violent". (Informer 4)

"They think I am crazy, that it is a very violent sport and for gays, due to ignorance regarding the sport, and I end up not taking those comments seriously". (Informer 5)

"They say it is a very violent sport, but this is normal, since most of them do not know the sport so deeply. That is why they say those things". (Informer 12)

"My relatives think it is a very violent game. My friends find it an exotic sport". (Informer 13)

"They think it is dangerous and they do not understand why I like a game that is not so dynamic". (Informer 9)

"It is a pity that the Brazilian people find this sport violent and have a certain degree of prejudice". (Informing 26)

A cycle is formed in which few people are interested in the sport and those that are interested are identified as different people. Since most people do not understand the game and which its purposes are, these players tend to remain known as players of a sport that is exotic, strange and even ugly to be seen.

After the friends and relatives have contact and understand the rules of this modality, they lose a bit of the feeling of strangeness of the *Beach Football*.

"My mother, as the years went by, started to accept the idea better. (...) In what concerns my friends, I brought many of them to the American Football. Those who did not want to play had, at least, a good impression of the sport". (Informer 10)

"It took a while for my mother to accept it, but now she thinks it is normal, just like any other sport. My friends like it and they even go to the games, but at the beginning they found it a bit odd". (Informer 11)

"Some people support me, others are against... But when I start to explain the rules, I can convince some people that the sport is not so tough". (Informer 15)

We realize that there is a natural association between the friends and relatives of players from both modalities: the American football played on the field (which is practiced in the United States of America), with its protections and shocks between players; with our *Beach Football*. Both have their own protections, shocks and contacts. However, there are distinct rules and also a natural speed reducer at the *Beach Football*, which is the sand. When it is practiced at the beach, the speed is lower and, consequently, the shocks are less intense than those of the American football practiced on fields.

Conclusion

During this study, we noticed that the American football practiced in Brazil, has been coming across some difficulties.

The first of them is the fact that, initially, we could not find the basic materials for its practice, which forced the public interested in practicing it to create local adaptations (that is the case of the *Beach football*).

However, nowadays, the Beach Football counts on an easiness that did not exist before. The ball, which is the main equipment for its practice, can be found in almost all the sporting material stores of Rio de Janeiro, for prices lower than those of the balls used to play volleyball, basketball and soccer. The practitioners themselves, adapted, from the hockey played on the grass, a kind of pad (protection for the thorax, from the American football) to reduce the bruises that the athletes suffer during the game, and the teams have also been trying to affiliate to the companies of sporting material of the U.S.A., aiming at making the acquisition of specific materials of the modality easier.

The second difficulty found by the practitioners was that people started to associate the American football practiced in the U.S.A. with the one practiced in Brazil; ignoring its peculiarities and carrying a number of negative aspects from the American football played in the U.S.A. to the one practiced here.

We understand that the media has an important role in the divulgation of this sport and, to start with, its association in the creation of stereotypes for the sport, such as its identification of being violent, strange, boring, dangerous and that its athletes could be seen as violent people and jiu-jitsu fighters, can harm a positive image of this sport.

We noticed, from this research, that there are sports such as the American football in Brazil that, initially, had to be practiced only in a passive way; that is, the sport started with the spectator (through the television), who felt motivated to search for a way of playing it, found its way and became a practitioner. This athlete retires and starts to assist others in the organization of the sport.

Future studies should talk about the American football that has been practiced in many regions of Brazil and how these practitioners felt motivated to adapt it to their reality. Future studies must identify an association between its practitioners and the North-American sporting culture, a fact that makes them practice a sport that is little understood by the majority of the Brazilian population.

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WHEN THE BALL DOES NOT ROLL: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AMERICAN FOOTBALL IN BRAZIL

SUMMARY

The aim of this research is to identify the necessary conditions for the development of the American football in Brazil. We investigate here the case of the American football that is practiced at the beaches of Rio de Janeiro and its difficulties in adapting and expanding in the Brazilian sporting culture. We delineate this research from interviews carried through with athletes, managers and sporting journalists who are directly connected to this modality known as Beach Football. We also identify how the sporting media has been treating this modality. Studies in this area contribute to reveal how sports are adapted by the individuals and by the culture in which they are inserted, even when they are practiced in a distinct way from their native countries.

Key-words: American Football; Sport; Media.

QUAND LE BALON ROLÉ PAS: LE DEVELOPMENT DU FOOTBALL AMÉRICAINE AU BRÉSIL

RESUMÉ

L'objectif de ce travail est identifié les conditions nécessaires pour le development du football américaine , pratiqué dans les plages de Rio e ses difficultés en s'adapter et faire l'expansion dans la culture sportif brésilienne. Cet travail est structuré en interviews avec des athlètes, sportsmen et journalistes specializés en Beach Football, comme on l'appele. D'autrefois nous sommes engagé en verifié l'actuartion de la média à propos. Etudes sont une contribution our revelée comme les sports aon adapté pour le gent et la culture oú ils sont mélangé, même quand les façons n'est son pas la même dans son pays d'origine.

Mots-clés: Football Américaine ; Spots. Média

CUANDO LA PELOTA NO RUEDA: EL DESARROLLO DEL FÚTBOL AMERICANO EN BRASIL

RESUMEN

El objeto de este estudio es identificar las condiciones que el fútbol americano necesita para desarrollarse en Brasil. Investigamos aquí el caso del fútbol americano practicado en las playas de Rio de Janeiro y las dificultades que enfrenta para adaptarse y expandirse en la cultura deportiva brasileña. Delineamos este estudio a partir de entrevistas realizadas a atletas, dirigentes y periodistas deportivos relacionados directamente con esta modalidad, conocida como Beach Football. Identificamos también el tratamiento que los medios deportivos han venido concediendo a esta modalidad. Los estudios en este ámbito ayudan a comprender como los deportes son adaptados por los individuos y el medio cultural en el que están insertados, aun cuando sean practicados de modo distinto al de sus países de origen.

Palabra clave: Fútbol Americano; Deporte; Medios.

QUANDO A BOLA NÃO ROLA: O DESENVOLVIMENTO DO FUTEBOL AMERICANO NO BRASIL

RESUMO

O objetivo desta pesquisa é identificar as condições necessárias para o desenvolvimento do futebol americano no Brasil. Investigamos aqui o caso do futebol americano, praticado nas praias do Rio de Janeiro e suas dificuldades em se adaptar e expandir na cultura esportiva brasileira. Delineamos esta pesquisa a partir de entrevistas realizadas com atletas, dirigentes e jornalistas esportivos que estão diretamente ligados a esta modalidade conhecida como Beach Football. Identificamos também como a mídia esportiva vem tratando dessa modalidade. Estudos nessa área contribuem para revelar como os esportes são adaptados pelos indivíduos e pela cultura nas quais estão inseridos, mesmo que praticados de forma distintas dos seus países de origem.

Palavras-chave: Futebol Americano; Esporte; Mídia.