



Regulatory inertia in sports confederations: the impact of statutory omission on the performance of athletes commissions

Inercia regulatoria en las confederaciones deportivas: el impacto de la omisión estatutaria en el desempeño de las comisiones de atletas

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Abstract

Introduction: Recent concerns regarding sports management have driven the pursuit of more democratic processes, aiming for greater transparency and the active participation of athletes in decisions that directly affect them.

Objective: The present study sought to analyze the existing regulatory elements in the statutes of Brazilian sports confederations regarding the electoral process for athlete representation.

Methodology: The research was conducted through a qualitative documentary analysis involving the bylaws and internal regulations of the 34 confederations linked to the Brazilian Olympic Committee. Four indicators were defined for analysis: committee competence, term of office, possibility of reappointment, and voting method.

Results: The findings indicate a significant lack of regulation: only 29.41% of the confederations formally describe the committee's competences.

Discussion: A lack of succession planning and gaps in the regulation of athletes participation were also observed, which weakens their deliberative role and consolidates a predominantly symbolic representation model.

Conclusions: The analysis of the electoral process for athlete representation in Brazilian sports confederations revealed a lack of clear regulation regarding their competencies, requiring greater transparency, strategic planning, and training for effective democratic governance.

Keywords

Sports governance; athlete representation; democracy in sport; athletes commissions; statutes.

Resumen

Introducción: Las recientes preocupaciones sobre la gestión deportiva han impulsado la búsqueda de procesos más democráticos, con el objetivo de lograr una mayor transparencia y la participación activa de los atletas en las decisiones que les afectan directamente.

Objetivo: El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar los elementos regulatorios existentes en los estatutos de las confederaciones deportivas brasileñas con respecto al proceso electoral para la representación de los atletas.

Metodología: La investigación se llevó a cabo mediante un análisis documental cualitativo que involucró los estatutos y reglamentos internos de las 34 confederaciones vinculadas al Comité Olímpico Brasileño. Se definieron cuatro indicadores para el análisis: competencia de la comisión, duración del mandato, posibilidad de reelección y método de votación.

Resultados: Los hallazgos indican una importante falta de regulación: solo el 29.41% de las confederaciones describe formalmente las competencias de las comisiones.

Discusión: También se observó una falta de planificación de la sucesión y lagunas en la regulación de la participación de los atletas, lo que debilita su rol deliberativo y consolida un modelo de representación predominantemente simbólico.

Palabras clave

Gobernanza deportiva; representación de atletas; democracia en el deporte; comisiones de atletas; estatutos.

Introduction

The emergence of scandals in major international sports organizations (FIFA, IOC) has highlighted the urgency for greater transparency and the democratization of power structures (Mazzei et al., 2012). In the Brazilian context, the Pelé Law (Law 9.615/98) and subsequent legislation sought to establish mechanisms for governance and representation. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the regulatory frameworks that govern athlete representation in national sports confederations, investigating how such structures promote or limit athletes effective participation in decision-making processes. Above all, after the scandals involving major global sports organizations (FIFA, IOC), there was a need for democratizing processes within these sports management entities, paving the way for athletes to participate in regulatory acts that could monitor and make the processes more transparent.

In this context, there is a correlation between these processes and a new perspective on the concept of democracy, which these sports entities (FIFA, IOC) have incorporated into their governance process, leading to the creation of mechanisms capable of exercising the ambivalence of the concepts of representation and delegation of the agents involved in the democratic process.

Nowadays, athletes are paying more attention to issues related to the management of their respective sports entities (Grigaliūnaitė et al., 2019). This involvement is becoming increasingly intense, leading to them playing important roles in the creation and development of policies and decisions that directly affect them. Thibault et al. (2010) reinforce this understanding that athletes constitute one of the main stakeholder groups in the world of sport.

Kihl et al. (2007), argue that the involvement of athletes in the policy-making process is becoming increasingly accepted in the management of international sports entities. The same author focuses on research into the misrepresentation of the IOCs management in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This investigation was based on the observation that there has been greater participation of athletes in their committees and representative groups, as well as in the decision-making process, which at the time would be the selection of competing cities to host the Summer Olympic Games. Based on the aforementioned study, the author pointed out that the IOCs athletes commission ends up establishing a symbolic representation, suggesting that, despite the demands in the formulation of new policies for the participation of other stakeholders within sports entities, involving athletes as a priority decision-making group, this has not happened.

The representation of athletes in the decision-making processes of Brazilian Olympic confederations has become a central theme in discussions on democratization and sports governance. However, despite regulatory advances – such as the legal requirement that at least one-third of the votes be cast for athlete representatives in sports entities (Law 9.615/1998, Art. 18-A) – questions remain as to whether this participation goes beyond a merely symbolic character. articulating them with perspectives from authors in the sociology of sports and sports management. To deepen this analysis, we utilize specific theoretical perspectives from sports sociology, particularly the works of Kihl et al. (2007) on symbolic representation in sports organizations, Thibault et al. (2010) on stakeholders in sport, and Grigaliūnaitė et al. (2019) on the growing involvement of athletes in sports management. These authors were selected for offering consolidated conceptual frameworks on democratic participation in sport and for their specific analyses of the structural limitations that athletes face in decision-making processes of sports entities. This theoretical approach reveals how sports organizations reproduce symbolic and institutional inequalities that hinder the full participation of athletes as political agents, and what are the limits and possibilities of the recent institutionalization of Athletes Commissions in reconfiguring the distribution of power.

In the case of sports confederations, studies such as that of Grix & Phillpots (2010) demonstrate that leaders tend to accumulate greater administrative and institutional power due to their position in hierarchical governance structures, while athletes, despite being protagonists of sports practice, generally exercise mainly communicative and symbolic power limited to their performance and public recognition, but with little power in deliberative arenas (Kihl et al., 2007). This asymmetry is characteristic of what Grix and Phillpots (2010) call asymmetric governance in networks, where patterns of resource dependence and hierarchical power structures remain largely unchanged in the sports sector.

Authors such as Pires (2005) and Damo (2007) reinforce the relevance of this approach by analyzing sport as a field where agents compete for legitimacy and influence, and where the trajectory of athletes often does not qualify them for the political games of sports entities. Pires (2005), for example, highlights that athletes are often used as objects of discourse, but excluded from deliberation, evidencing a structural asymmetry in power relations within sports organizations.

In this power struggle, the creation and consolidation of Athletes Commissions can be understood as an attempt to strategically reposition athletes within the sports field, seeking to expand their participation in decision-making processes and accumulate political-institutional capital. However, as Damo (2010) observes, simple access to formal decision-making bodies does not guarantee political autonomy if the codes of the institutional game are not mastered by the new agents.

In other words, the participation of athletes in the deliberative spaces of the confederations is still limited by symbolic and structural barriers that restrict their influence. An analysis of the statutes of the Brazilian Olympic confederations shows, for example, that in more than 70% of them there is no clear mention of the competences of the athletes commissions (Leite, 2023), which compromises their performance as deliberative bodies and reinforces the symbolic nature of their presence.

According to Kihl et al. (2007), the effective inclusion of athletes in the decisions of entities requires more than the right to vote: it requires political training, mastery of institutional norms and collective articulation, elements that are part of what Bourdieu calls political habitus — that is, the incorporation of dispositions that allow them to act effectively in the field in question.

This evidence shows that the current democratic movement was far from being considered a movement of representation. Up until that point, a possible passive participation of athletes was observed, creating a sense of democratization within these entities. Based on these notes, the present study sought to analyze the existing regulatory elements in the statutes of Brazilian sports confederations regarding the electoral process for athlete representation.

Representative Democracy

When the participation of athletes in Brazilian sports entities was noticed, many people asked what they would actually do there and whether their representation would have any real value in decision-making. The question is, would these decisions be made through the direct participation of interested parties or would these interested parties have elected representatives to make these decisions?

According to Bobbio (1997) representative democracy is characterized by the deliberations of a group that are not taken by the general group, but by a representative elected by that group. It is extremely important to know that in this system of representation of interests, there is a progressive disengagement of the elected representative, subjecting decision-making to his own interest.

In representative democracy, in order to have an integral democratic regime, it is necessary to demand a process of transparency and visibility on the part of the representative, considering that once elected, he becomes the showcase for the exhibition of his interest group, although during the process this representation begins to suffer a rupture, now emphasizing the interests of the representative rather than those represented.

Regarding politicized representation, Bobbio (1997) he indicates three possible models that indicate how representatives would behave in the democratic process: a) representation as a relationship of granting; b) representation as a relationship of trust between representatives and those represented; c) representation as a mirror of social interests. Based on these assumptions, these models of representation identified by Bobbio show in a more intrinsic way how this representative agent acts.

It is necessary to monitor the actions of representatives in the democratic process, so that one can at least be sure that this representation can achieve effectiveness in its actions. In this way, the relationship between representative and represented becomes closer and allows for a more solid and trusting approach. Bobbio (2000) emphasizes that democratic theory and pluralist theory are complementary and that they represent the struggles encountered in the democratic process.

Thus, Bobbio's pluralist theory is based on the assumption that political power is distributed among various groups and institutions in society, such as political parties, unions, business organizations, among others. According to this theory, pluralism is essential for the maintenance of democracy, as it

allows the expression of diverse opinions and interests in society and prevents the excessive concentration of power.

Bobbio draws attention to the monocratic theory, which is based on the idea that political power is concentrated in the hands of a single individual or group. According to Bobbio (1997) this system leads to faster decision-making; however, he recognizes that monocracy represents the negation of democracy and the concentration of power in a few hands, in contrast to the democratic theory that seeks the distribution of power and the participation of citizens in political decisions.

Athlete representation models and the athletes commission

The document *Strengthening Athlete Power in Sport: A Multidisciplinary Review and Framework*, Carrio et al. (2021) published by Play The Game, an organization managed by the Danish Institute for Sports Studies, provides a solid theoretical basis for this study, as it offers an analysis of athlete participation in sports governance. The document integrates democratic theory with labor relations and the socio-economic and legal aspects of sport, and is crucial for categorizing athlete participation pathways. In this document, the organization classifies three forms of athlete participation: unions, political groups, and committees (Table 1).

Table 1. Representation model

Model of Representation	Objective
Athletes Unions	To guarantee fair working conditions, better treatments, benefits, and safety for athletes. In Brazil, it is generally established by geographical region, e.g, São Paulo Professional Football Players Union.
Political Groups	To promote changes in the sports environment through political actions. These groups can have a variety of objectives, such as defending gender equality in sports, combating doping, promoting environmental sustainability, or addressing relevant social issues.
Athletes Commissions	To strengthen athletes participation in sports decisions, guarantee their rights, and promote a fairer and more inclusive environment for the development of sports modalities.

According to Grigaliūnaitė and Eimontas (2018), sports entities grant a voice through athletes commissions, making it possible for them to have a significant involvement in influencing decision-making. This issue is also addressed by Houlihan (2004), pointing out that although sports policy formulations are often made for athletes, they are rarely consulted before such decisions are made. The International Olympic Committee recognises the importance of athletes involvement in the Olympic Movement. Since 1999, the IOC has worked closely with athletes to ensure that their voices are heard and that they play an active role in decision-making within the Movement.

According to the Olympic Charter, the fundamental document governing the IOC, the Athletes Commission aims to "protect and promote the interests of athletes throughout the world" (IOC, 2021). The Olympic Charter designates the Athletes Commission as having an equal number of men and women, elected by the athletes participating in the Olympic Games.

The Athletes Commission is a representative body composed of athletes from different sports in Brazil and around the world. The main objective of this commission is to promote the participation of athletes in the decisions and political constitutions of sports confederations. The creation of this representative body seeks to meet the need to involve the main stakeholders in decision-making, directly affecting their careers and the development of sports in their respective modalities.

In recent years, we've seen in practice how the Athletes Commission has been active, specifically in defending athletes rights and in establishing guidelines that enable this group to participate in the sports entity's decision-making. However, before this consolidation, this representative group faced some obstacles. The national exposure achieved by the media is one of the ways in which this structure's ability to offer athletes a platform to express their opinions, actively participate in decisions in the sporting field and influence the development of policies that have a direct impact on their careers and experiences in the sporting world stand out.

In 2017, a report by ESPN Brazil pointed out an irregularity in the process of choosing the representatives of the athletes committee of the Brazilian Aquatic Sports Confederation (CBDA). During the selection process, some athletes went to court to prevent the confederation from appointing the representatives of the athletes committee, thus using an undemocratic and illegal process, since the selection of the



representatives of the committee would have to take place through an election. The lawsuit requested that the names of the representatives of the committee be chosen through an election, since the general election was approaching and the athletes committee would have the right to two votes. If there was no judicial intervention, the person who would represent the committee would be chosen by the president at the time, who was running for reelection.

Already in 2021, the report in the sports column of the UOL website (UOL, 2021) described that the commission was facing legal impediments due to the lack of a document that could regulate the functioning of the respective commission, as well as the regulation of the rights and duties of each representative, halting the autonomy of this commission.

By including athletes in discussions and decisions, the Commission aims to promote transparency, democratic participation and act as a control tool in the actions developed by the entity. The members of the commission represent the collective interests of the athletes and not of the so-called “bossolas” (a term used to define the position of a sports director who stands out in the administration of their sports entity, whether in a positive or negative way) and work in collaboration with the sports confederations to develop policies and actions that benefit sport as a whole.

The main objectives of the Athletes Commission are: 1) To defend the rights and interests of athletes, seeking fair conditions for development, adequate financial support, medical and psychological assistance, career development programs, among other aspects relevant to the well-being and development of athletes. 2) To contribute to the improvement of sports policies, both at the national and international levels, through dialogue, the exchange of experiences and the presentation of proposals that seek to improve sports and strengthen sports. 3) To actively participate in decision-making processes in sports confederations, influencing the formulation of regulations, the distribution of resources, the preparation of competition calendars and other measures that directly impact athletes. 4) To establish direct communication channels between athletes and sports confederations, facilitating the flow of information, the receipt of feedback and the exchange of ideas, in order to ensure that the voices of athletes are heard and considered (IOC, 2021).

To understand the entire context of athletes insertion in this position, it will be necessary to analyze how sports entities provide opportunities for athletes to participate in decision-making, and if and how this participation occurs. In addition, the literature will indicate that their participation in the democratic process reduces conflicts of interest, helping to develop policies that benefit all interested parties (Thibault et al., 2010).

In the Brazilian sports scene, a topic of increasing importance and debate is the participation of athletes in the democratic process of sports confederations. Over the years, the voice of athletes has often been underestimated in the decision-making processes that shape their own careers, the development of the sport and the policies that regulate competitions. In this context, concerns arise about how exactly Brazilian sports confederations guide the participation of athletes within their democratic structures.

Sports confederations play a crucial role in the organization, administration and development of sports in Brazil. They establish rules, regulations and policies that directly affect the lives of athletes, from training conditions to participation in high-level competitions. However, historically, athletes participation in confederation decision-making has been limited, often relegating them to a secondary role in the process. The central problem is how Brazilian sports confederations have managed to ensure athletes participation in the democratic context of these entities.

Although confederations are encouraged to involve athletes in decision-making by these entities, through the creation of an athletes commission or discussion forums, there are still challenges that need to be overcome. The representation of these bodies and the incorporation of athletes voices in high-impact decisions continue to be critical issues.

In Brazil, the Brazilian Olympic Committee created the CACOB (Athletes Commission of the Brazilian Olympic Committee) in 2009 with the aim of strengthening communication between athletes and the organization, providing an opportunity for issues related to the interests of athletes, especially with regard to competitions, to be shared and discussed. The first action actually taken by this commission was

to draft a proposal whereby each confederation linked to the COB would form its own athlete representation commission, thus increasing the participation of athletes in matters related to the improvement of their sports, putting into practice what was already established by Law No. 9,615/1998.

On March 24, 1998, when Law No. 9,615, known as the Pelé Law, was sanctioned, it also established rules for conducting sports that included, among other things, aspects related to democracy, and that should be used by Brazilian sports entities (Brasil, 1998). However, a movement was perceived that was still without strength, which apparently is tied only to the suffrage movement.

According to Carrio et al. (2021), in order to have legitimacy in the democratic process, more active participation of interested parties is necessary. Maintaining legitimacy in the democratic process within an institution is directly linked to the power that keeps all people connected to the process, and who are affected by observing the laws or regulations imposed (Carrio et al., 2021).

Based on the assumption, and despite the fact that hypothetically the athletes involvement is conditioned by the electoral process established and ordered by law (Lei no 9.615 de 24 de março de, 1998) a gap is visible in this participation process, having a significant impact on the sports system, since athletes are fundamental in building the dynamics of organization and functionality of these entities.

Law 9.615/98, known as the “Pelé Law” in its Article 18 – A, determines that non-profit entities that are part of the Brazilian National Sports System will only receive federal resources if they comply with ten basic requirements of good governance practices, and among these requirements is athlete participation.

When analyzing these regulations and trying to approximate what is observed in practice, we get the impression that the athletes participation is directly linked to the weight of the vote, leading to minimal influence in their participation, since the law determines in Art. 18º-A, paragraph h that athletes will have the right to at least 1/3 (one third) of the votes. Therefore, it is necessary to understand whether this participation goes beyond suffrage. Mezzadri et al. (2018) corroborates by stating that it is necessary to have equal treatment for all agents involved in this democratic process.

Placing the athlete as the center of sports development within the scope of sports administration may not yet be a priority for sports administration entities, but it is necessary even if it is still a discussion project that seeks changes. Kihl et al. (2007) report that it is expected that with these changes, athletes will be able to get involved in the management and democracy processes of these entities, especially when it comes to policies and decisions that directly affect them.

With sports organizations seeking excellence in their management, we have noticed that, in Brazil, the democratic process has been debated and increasingly consolidated in the search for excellence through good governance practices, involving all agents of this organizational process (coaches, referees, athletes, boards, directors) (Brasil, 1998). The representation of athletes in institutionalized meetings of the organization is directly linked to good governance practices, strengthening the democratic process, increasing the legitimacy of decisions and opening the space for broader discussions, seeking equity in participation and decisions enacted by the actors involved in this process (Thibault et al., 2010).

Symbolic Representation vs. Effective Athlete Participation

Recent initiatives to include athletes in governance bodies – councils, assemblies and commissions – face the challenge of transcending mere symbolic representation. The presence of athletes is often seen as tokenism: a formal compliance with the rules of good governance, with no intention of altering power correlations. International literature has already pointed out this trend. Kihl et al. (2007) analyzed the International Olympic Committee and found that the then newly created IOC Athletes Commission configured a symbolic representation, with passive participation and limited impact on decisions of greater relevance. Similarly, Lucie Thibault et al. (2010), when discussing the democratization of international sport, point out that although governance decisions directly affect athletes, they generally have relatively little decision-making power within organizations (Grigaliūnaitė, Eimontas 2018). In other words, athletes have a voice, but not a proportional vote; they are heard, but they are rarely the ones who decide. In the Brazilian scenario, this reality also manifests itself. The mandatory 1/3 vote for athletes – introduced in the revised Pelé Law – was an important step towards ensuring the formal presence of athletes in the electoral colleges of the confederations. However, this third minority often means that, unless there are strong cohesion and alliances with other stakeholders, the influence of the athlete bloc

remains limited. Mezzadri et al. (2018) emphasize that it is necessary to seek equal treatment for all agents in the decision-making process, so that the participation of athletes is not limited to minority proportional suffrage but rather becomes real involvement in the deliberations.

One indicator of the limits of athlete representation is the distinction between administrative power and communicative power within entities (Kihl et al., 2007). While administrative power refers to the formal authority to make decisions (usually held by confederation directors and presidents), communicative power refers to the ability to influence debates and bring perspectives – the space where athletes committees operate. Even when athletes are able to articulate themselves and present demands (exercising communicative power), the final decision often remains in the hands of the traditional governing body (administrative power). Thus, many athlete representatives come up against institutional barriers: lack of access to strategic information, little familiarity with complex internal regulations, or even explicit resistance from directors to accept suggestions. In this sense, representation can become “playing games” – conferring symbolic legitimacy on entities (“look, we have athletes on the board”) without necessarily empowering them.

It is important to note that the athletes themselves, when they enter sports politics, face a dilemma: in order to be heard, they need to accumulate relevant capital in the new field. Therefore, there is a movement by some athletes- invested-in-leadership to seek academic qualifications (for example, graduates in physical education or sports management), administrative experience (some become members of national commissions or working groups of the Brazilian Olympic Committee) and to build alliances with other actors (former prestigious athletes who have already moved into political roles, sports media, etc.). This process of converting capital is crucial. Sports glory alone may not confer authority in Council meetings; however, the combination of the symbolic authority of a champion with cultural capital (technical management knowledge) and social capital (political experience) increases the chances of an athlete representative being taken seriously as a protagonist in decision-making. In short, only by accumulating different capitals and legitimizing them in the new context can athletes stop being seen as “symbolic extras” and become real political agents. As Bourdieu reminds us, symbolic capital is “another name for legitimacy”, that is, it is necessary to convert sporting prestige into recognized legitimacy within the field of power of the confederations.

Method

Study characterization

The information obtained in this study was collected through a documentary analysis (Silva; Almeida; Guindani, 2009). Document analysis is a research technique that allows a researcher to examine written documents in order to obtain information on a specific subject. In this sense, our analysis is based on primary sources that provide evidence of the existing regulatory elements in the statutes of Brazilian sports confederations regarding the electoral process for athlete representation.

In Brazil, sports are managed by sports confederations, which are responsible for regulating sports activities in the country and promoting healthy competition. However, the participation of athletes in the decisions of these confederations has been a matter of discussion due to the lack of clarity in the actions developed by these agents. To analyze the data, the following descriptors were searched for in the documents for analysis purposes:

- Statute → Composition / Electoral process
- Internal Regulations → Composition / Electoral process

Regarding the Statute, the analysis of this descriptor was based on how the statute described the purpose, the role of the athletes commission and its structure within the organizational process of the confederation. To do so, it was necessary to understand the process of drafting a statute and which factors would need to be addressed in this construction process. On January 10, 2002, law no. 10,406 was sanctioned, establishing the new Brazilian civil code, which was created to establish general standards for the organization of civil society and regulate actions between society and institutions. Its objective is to establish the fundamental principles that guide social and economic relations in the country, protecting the rights of citizens and promoting justice and equity in society.



According to the compilation of legislation of the Chamber of Deputies, in Art. 54 (2008), the statute must contain the following requirements for its construction: a) Have clearly described the purposes of the entity and for what it was created; b) Requirements for the admission, dismissal and exclusion of members; c) The rights and duties of the members; d) The way in which the deliberative bodies operate.

Still in the legislation, and pointed out in its Art. 60, the deliberative bodies must be convened guaranteeing one fifth (1/5) of the participation of the associates in the collegiate bodies. Firstly, the statute establishes the organizational structure of the sports confederation, including the creation of governance bodies, such as general assembly, administrative council and technical committees. This clearly defined organizational structure defines the responsibilities and functions of each body and establishes the decision-making hierarchy in the confederation (Presidência, 2016).

Regarding the athletes commission, the statutes may provide for its creation and define its composition, ensuring the participation and representation of athletes in the confederation's governance process. This allows athletes to have a voice in decisions that directly affect their careers and well-being. In addition, the statutes may establish specific guidelines for the athletes commission, such as its mission, responsibilities, powers and election procedures. This ensures that the athletes commission plays an active role in defending the interests of athletes, promoting fair play, protecting rights and establishing appropriate conditions for sports development.

Through the statute, the athletes commission can be recognized as an advisory or deliberative body, with the ability to influence the confederations decisions on matters related to athletes. This includes participating in the drafting of sports regulations, the establishment of anti-doping policies, the promotion of career development and athlete welfare programs, among other relevant issues.

According to the Brazilian Civil Code, Senado Federal (2008) the electoral process within a bylaw must follow general guidelines and principles to ensure transparency, equality and legitimacy. Although the Civil Code does not specifically address this process, it establishes general applicable bases. Some basic steps and principles include: establishing rules in the bylaws regarding positions, mandates, eligibility criteria and voting methods; defining deadlines, communication to members and requirements for calling the election; determining eligibility criteria, such as membership time and payment of financial obligations; establishing rules for registering candidates, electoral campaigns and voting methods; defining procedures for counting votes and creating an electoral commission; providing mechanisms for appeals and challenges; conducting the process in a transparent manner, ensuring access to information for members; and recording and documenting all stages of the electoral process. It is important to note that these are general guidelines, and the organizations specific bylaws and complementary laws should be consulted for more precise guidelines.

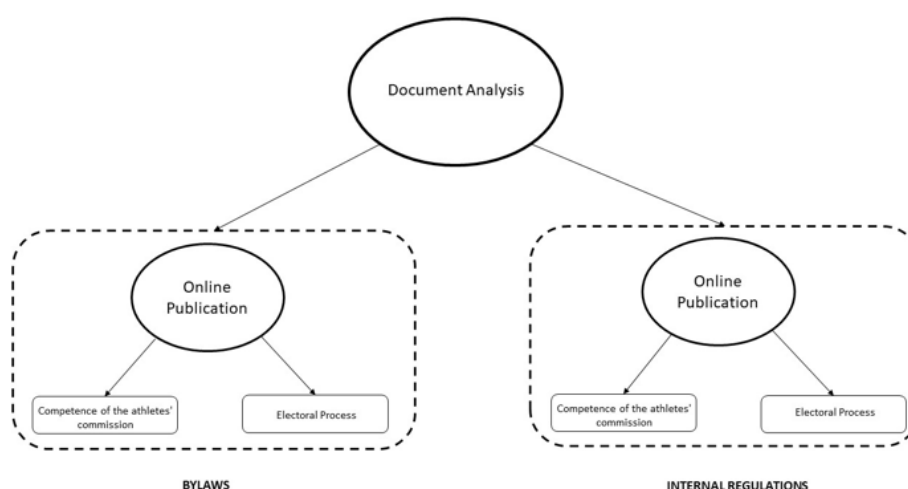
The athletes commission, as established, can also play an important role in overseeing the electoral process, ensuring compliance with the established rules and impartiality in the counting of votes. In addition, the bylaws may allow the athletes commission to participate in the electoral commission, ensuring that their voices are heard and considered in decisions related to the election.

A crucial aspect is the transparency provided by this document. According to Bitencourt and Pase (2015), the statute establishes the obligation of the bodies to disclose the candidacies in a broad and transparent manner, ensuring that all interested parties in the process have access to information about the candidates and their proposals.

Data collection and analysis

The Social Statutes and internal regulations of the athletes commission from the 34 Brazilian Olympic Confederations associated with the Brazilian Olympic Committee (COB) were collected and systematized. These documents outline the rights and duties of their organizational structure, particularly the athletes commission. The analysis of the documents was based on two axes: initially, a review was performed on the specific articles regarding the athletes commission, succession process, and the commissions powers, whether they were present in the statutes or not. Subsequently, the powers, rights, and duties of the athletes commission in each confederations internal regulations were verified (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Conceptual analysis model



Portaria 115/2018 from the Ministry of Sport is a regulation that establishes guidelines for the management of sports entities in Brazil. It addresses issues such as the structuring of administrative committees, athlete participation in decision-making, financial management transparency, among other important aspects. It also aims to promote democracy within sports entities, ensuring that all stakeholders, including athletes, have an active voice in decisions that affect the sport. Based on this premise, the first stage was important for outlining the path forward, considering that the statute is fundamental to the organizational conduct of institutions, dictating and regulating the competencies of the agents involved in the entity's administrative processes.

In accordance with the rigorous methodology employed in the research, the criterion addressed successfully utilized the data collected from the entity's website, governance section. This approach was based on one of the principles of sports governance (transparency) and aligned with Decree 7,724/12. This decree specifies which documents must be published for transparency by non-profit entities. It states: "Art. 63. Private non-profit entities that receive public funds to carry out actions of public interest must provide transparency on the following information: I - a copy of the entity's updated social statute; II - an updated list of the entity's board members; and III - a complete copy of the covenants, contracts, partnership terms, agreements, adjustments, or similar instruments made with the federal Executive Branch, their respective amendments, and final accountability reports, as required by applicable law.

Thus, aiming to achieve the objective of the present study, we sought to identify in the documents consulted the information related to the following indicators: Competence of the athlete commission (has or does not have), term of office (number of years or not mentioned), reappointment (Number of term cycles allowed, not allowed or not mentioned) and form of voting (direct elections or not mentioned) (Table 2).

Table 2. Characterization of the identified variables

Indicator	Type of responses
Athlete commission competence - Statute	Yes or no
Term of office	Number of years or not mentioned
Reappointment	Number of term cycles allowed, not allowed, or not mentioned
Voting method	Direct elections or not mentioned

Based on this assumption, the analysis sought to verify whether the statute established clear guidelines and specific guidance for the athletes commission in the electoral process, ensuring active participation, transparency in candidacies and adequate representation in the governance structures of sports confederations.

Results

After analyzing the statutes of the 34 sports confederations analyzed, it can be observed that, in general, most of the confederations mention in their documents information about the term of office ($n=29$, $f=85.29\%$). On the other hand, half of the sample mentions the criteria for reappointment ($n=17$, $f=50\%$) and approximately 70.59% do not mention aspects related to competence.

Table 3. Approach to indicators in the statutes

	Competence		Term of Office		Reappointment		Voting Method	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Mentions	10	29,41	29	85,29	17	50,00	28	82,35
Doesnt mention	24	70,59	5	14,71	15	44,12	6	17,65
Doesnt allow	0	0,00	0	0,00	2	5,88	0	0

The results of this first indicator indicate that 29.41% of the Confederations have in their bylaws a description of the competence assigned to the athletes commission. This competence is directly linked to how the athletes commission should function, including designating that the commission has full autonomy of operation as long as it has its own guiding document, the internal regulations. On the other hand, 70.59% do not present in their structural document any citation that refers to how the commission should act or perform, or any other mention of the commission.

The presence of a clear and detailed description of the Athletes Commissions remit indicates an acknowledgement of the importance of this body in the sporting context. This can be interpreted as a positive step, providing a solid guide for the functioning of the Commission and ensuring that it has the necessary autonomy to select its functions effectively. On the other hand, the absence of any mention of the Athletes Commission in most Confederations is a gap that deserves attention. This may indicate a lack of clarity about the role and importance of the Commission, or potentially limiting its ability to contribute to the development of sport within the institution. Without specific guidance, the Commission may face difficulties in exercising its responsibilities effectively. The absence of guidelines may reflect a lack of understanding of how the inclusion of the Athletes Commission can add value to the sporting environment.

The second indicator shows the length of each representative committee's term of office. In the documents analyzed, and in some Confederations, the term "Olympic cycle" is used to indicate that the term of office has a maximum duration of four years. The diversity in the practices of reappointment of competition committees, as evidenced in the text, reflects the autonomy granted to each entity to establish its own guidelines and rules of procedure. This autonomy is an important characteristic in sports governance, as it allows the regulation of the particularities of each entity, adapting to its specific needs and contexts. The fact that 17 entities allow only one reappointment, limiting the total time of the committee's activity to a maximum of 8 years, suggests a concern with balancing continuity and experience with the periodic updating of leadership. This approach seeks to avoid excessive concentration of power in a specific group, while monitoring the importance of stability over a significant period.

On the other hand, the existence of 15 entities that do not explicitly mention reappointment in their documents leaves room for different interpretations. This may generate uncertainty regarding the renewal policy of these committees and highlights the importance of transparency in the rules governing the functioning of the entity. The lack of clear guidelines on reappointment may have implications for stability and representation in the long term.

Finally, the two entities that explicitly do not allow reappointment take a more restrictive approach. This can be interpreted as a deliberate choice to introduce new leadership at a set interval, possibly to promote the entry of fresh perspectives and ensure a faster turnover in the composition of the committee.

This diversity of approaches highlights the complexity involved in sports governance, especially when it comes to athlete representation. Finding the balance between continuity and renewal, considering the specific needs of each entity, is a constant challenge. Transparency in policies, whether in relation to reappointment or lack thereof, is essential to ensure the trust of athletes and others involved in government governance practices.

In this indicator, 5 entities did not present in any document (Statute and Regulations) the term of office that the elected committee should serve. Therefore, 29 entities (85.29%) mention in their documents that the term of office of the committee is one Olympic cycle, and some allow reappointment for another cycle, that is, a group of athletes can serve their terms of office for a maximum of eight years.

Within this model, an interesting variation can be observed: some entities allow reappointment for one more cycle, extending the maximum term of office to eight years. This permission for reappointment can be interpreted as a balance between continuity and the need to renew leadership over time.

The fourth indicator sought to verify the mention of direct elections in the statutes analyzed. It can be seen that around 82.35% of the confederations mention the voting method as direct elections. This choice demonstrates a commitment to empowering athletes, granting them direct responsibility in choosing the members who will represent them.

On the other hand, the presence of 17.65% of those who do not specify the form of election in their documents raises questions about the standardization and transparency of this process. The absence of clear guidelines can create ambiguities, impacting predictability and equity in the electoral system. The lack of specific regulations can result in diverse interpretations and, potentially, challenges in conducting fair and inclusive elections.

The diversity in these approaches reflects the complexity of sports governance and the different perspectives on how to facilitate athlete representation. Direct, predominantly chosen, election highlights a commitment to internal democracy and the active voice of athletes. However, the lack of a clear approach in some highlights the importance of reflecting on best practices and seeking standards that ensure the effectiveness and legitimacy of electoral processes.

Discussion

The presence of an explicit description of the Athletes Commission in the normative documents is discussed in line with the literature, emphasizing the need for clear foundations for transparent and effective action. The approach to the subsequent indicators delves into the analysis of the role of the Athletes Commission, examining everything from operational autonomy to specific criteria such as reappointment, voting methods and participation requirements. The interdisciplinary analysis, involving concepts from sports sociology and leadership theories emerges as an essential tool for understanding the underlying complexities.

The lack of clear information regulating the actions of the athlete commission in the documents that guide and direct the duties and obligations within the entities may be of dubious understanding, being at the mercy of the understanding and will of whoever will assume the functions of the commission. Even though there are no rules and laws for the constitution and mandatory nature of this device within the guiding documents and even though the commissions have autonomy, it is necessary to have explicit formal guidance for each action developed by the athlete commission.

With regard to the operational autonomy of the Athletes Commission, the importance of a solid and transparent regulatory structure stands out, as observed in the indicators analyzed. Clear definition of responsibilities and the presence of specific regulations emerge as essential factors to ensure that the commission can perform its role effectively and in line with the interests of the athletes. Furthermore, the autonomy provided by these regulatory elements contributes to more participatory and inclusive governance.

Regarding the term of office of the Athletes Commission, the limitation to four years, with the possibility of reappointment for one more cycle, reveals a delicate balance between stability and renewal. Houlihan (2004) highlights the need for flexibility in sports structures, and the term limit can be interpreted as a mechanism to avoid excessive concentration of power and ensure dynamic and adaptive management.

The discussion on reappointment, present in indicator 3, highlights the importance of periodic renewal of sports leadership. This practice not only avoids stagnation but also opens space for the entry of new perspectives and the promotion of diversity in decision-making (Friedberg, 1977). Limiting reappointment is a measure that seeks to balance continuity with the need for innovation.



In the context of direct elections, participatory democracy is promoted, allowing athletes themselves to have a voice in choosing their representatives. This practice, aligned with the idea of Ferkins et al. (2010), strengthens the engagement of athletes in decision-making bodies, contributing to more representative and inclusive governance. According to IBGC (2011), the succession process in an administrative entity refers to the search for and development of one or more candidates who have the knowledge, experience, skills and attitudes necessary to succeed the current occupant of a specific position. This process aims not only to ensure a smooth transition, but also to ensure the implementation of the strategy in the medium and long term, aiming to achieve the expected results and guarantee the lasting continuity of the organization.

The documentary analysis carried out in this study, which focused on the statutes and internal regulations of the Brazilian Olympic Confederations, provided a comprehensive overview of the governance of the Athletes Commission. By delving into the nuances of these documents, we identified patterns and discrepancies that outline the complexity of the practices adopted by national sports entities.

Normative clarity, outlined in the first indicator, emerges as a crucial starting point. The presence of an explicit description of the Commission in the normative documents was considered not just a formality, but as an essential foundation for transparent and targeted action. In this sense, the conclusions align with theories of sports governance, where transparency is essential for the legitimacy and effectiveness of sports organizations. The subsequent discussion delves deeper into operational autonomy, reappointment and voting methods. The tension between continuity and renewal, discussed in the light of authors such as De Bosscher et al. (2006) and Shilbury et al. (2008), highlights the need for balance to ensure stability and innovation in athlete representation.

The results suggest that confederations should maintain an ongoing dialogue between theory and practice, regularly reviewing their policies to align them with evolving dynamics in sport. The governance of the Athletes Commission should be a dynamic and adaptive process, guided by principles of equity, transparency and active athlete participation.

Looking more specifically at the data, we observed that 29.41% of the Confederations present an explicit description of the Athletes Commissions competence in their normative documents, while 70.59% do not provide this clarity. This divergence highlights the need for more consistent normative standards and the importance of promoting transparency in national sports structures.

In the analysis of operational autonomy, we found that 17 entities demonstrate practices that favor continuity, allowing the reappointment of Commission members. This approach, although it can guarantee accumulated experience and knowledge, also raises questions about renewal and diversity of perspectives. Considering the in-depth analysis, a final consideration emerges based on specific theories and studies, developing the governance of these commissions.

The implementation of training and capacity building programs for committee members is essential, in line with the perspective of Slack et al. (2006), which highlights the importance of adequate training to ensure that members understand their roles and contribute to the organization's objectives. McPhee et al. (2009) supports the need for effective communication for the success of committees, therefore, Athlete Representatives have access to adequate resources to facilitate open and transparent communication, promoting not only interaction between them, but also dialogue with the community of linked athletes.

The standardization of regulatory documents is a vital recommendation, aligning with the corporate governance practices proposed by Monks et al. (2011). Clear regulatory documents are essential to ensure transparency and accountability in organizations, eliminating ambiguities and promoting a consistent interpretation of policies.

In this sense, the training and qualification of committee members should not be seen as a mere formality, but as a strategic tool to enhance the contribution of these representatives. The approach Cotterill et al. (2016) highlights a comprehensive relationship with the training of athletes. Contrary to the narrow perception that training is limited to improving technical skills, the researchers emphasize that its impact goes beyond, permeating crucial areas such as commitment and understanding of the responsibilities inherent in representing athletes.

In this context, training is not only a means to improve technical skills, but also proves to be an essential tool in building a deeper and more committed understanding on the part of athletes regarding the responsibilities associated with their representation. The ethical and social dimension of training thus becomes a fundamental piece in the formation of complete athletes who are aware of their role not only on the playing field, but also off it. By recognizing that training transcends the mere transmission of physical skills, the authors also highlight the importance of cultivating values such as commitment, sports ethics and the understanding of responsibilities that go beyond individual performance. This holistic approach to sports training aims to create athletes who not only excel technically, but also become responsible and aware agents within and outside the sporting context.

In terms of communication, organizational communication theory highlights the importance of effective communication both vertically and horizontally for the success of an organization (Mcphee et al., 2009). Therefore, ensuring that committees have the appropriate tools and time to communicate with all athletes and other stakeholders is essential to establishing participatory and transparent governance.

The central premise is that clear and uniform regulatory documents not only mitigate ambiguity but also foster a consistent understanding of the policies adopted by the organization, thus strengthening the fundamental principles of transparency and accountability. By aligning an organizations regulatory documents with governance principles, a solid foundation is established for efficient and ethical management (IBGC, 2015). Clarity in guidelines and policies provides an environment in which all stakeholders, internal and external, can unequivocally understand the expectations and standards established by the entity. This not only reduces the possibility of divergent interpretations but also promotes trust, an essential element for the proper functioning of any institution.

Transparency, promoted by the standardization of regulatory documents, goes beyond the mere dissemination of information (IBGC, 2013). It involves the creation of an organizational environment in which practices and decisions are understood in an open and accessible manner, allowing for evaluation and scrutiny by stakeholders. Furthermore, the uniformity in the presentation of these documents facilitates comparison over time and between different sectors of the organization, contributing to a holistic view of governance.

The succession process, according to Taylor et al. (2019), is a key piece in governance, requiring a strategic approach to ensure continuity, renewal and effectiveness in representation. The continuous training of athletes represents an essential pillar in the succession process; ongoing training programs strengthen the skills necessary for leadership roles.

Promoting diverse leadership contributes to a more comprehensive and inclusive representation, fostering more effective and representative management. Succession aligned with the Olympic cycle is a strategy that balances stability with innovation. Term limits and the possibility of periodic renewal ensure dynamic management that is adaptable to the international sporting context (Martins et al., 2017).

Conclusions

The present study aimed to analyze the existing regulatory elements in the statutes of Brazilian sports confederations regarding the electoral process for athlete representation. Through the analysis, it can be seen that only a small portion of Brazilian sports confederations mention consistent regulation on the competence of the confederations, evidencing the absence of a well-defined succession process and highlighting the need for greater transparency and strategic planning. From this, it can be seen that the continuous training of athletes and the anticipation of changes are crucial to ensure an effective transition and sports governance that truly reflects the principles of representative democracy.

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