

JACKIE SILVA: AN OLYMPIC CHAMPION'S JOURNEY**A TRAJETÓRIA DE UMA CAMPEÃ OLÍMPICA: O CASO DE JACKIE SILVA**Marcelo Luis Ribeiro Silva Tavares¹ and Erik Giuseppe Barbosa Pereira¹¹Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro-RJ, Brasil.**RESUMO**

O objetivo deste artigo é compreender a inserção, a permanência e a aposentadoria como jogadora de voleibol da campeã olímpica Jacqueline Silva. Por atuar no voleibol há décadas nota-se que seu legado estende-se para além de uma expressiva contribuição ao voleibol e inclui, com mérito, a afirmação da mulher no esporte. Para atender nosso foco, realizamos uma entrevista semiestruturada com a ex-jogadora, utilizando como base metodológica os referenciais da História oral. Verificamos que a ex-atleta enfrentou e superou muitas barreiras para se inserir e manter-se ativa e com grau de excelência no voleibol. Inferimos que sua trajetória singular é uma referência de sucesso com notória contribuição para a profissionalização do esporte feminino e para a ascensão do voleibol brasileiro e mundial.

Palavras-chave: Esporte. Voleibol. Mulher. História. Profissionalização.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to understand the start, permanence and retirement as a volleyball player of Olympic champion Jacqueline Silva. In volleyball for decades, she shows that her legacy goes far beyond an expressive contribution to it and includes, with merit, the affirmation of women in sports. In order to meet our objective, we conducted a semi-structured interview with the former player using as methodological basis the oral History framework. We found that she overcame many barriers in order to start and keep herself active in volleyball. We inferred that her unique journey is a reference of success and a remarkable contribution to the professionalization of women's sports and to the rise of sports in Brazil and worldwide.

Keywords: Sports. Volleyball. Women. History. Professionalization.

Introduction

Volleyball and women are an important, long-standing partnership. Known as the net sport, volleyball, just as tennis, used to be a women's modality for years due to lower risk of physical contact with opponents. However, the relationship between sports and women, who have always challenged limits and impositions, contributed to the overcoming of the biologicistic argument that has historically justified the exclusion and limitations that used to prevent women from doing certain sport activities, as attested by a series of studies on the theme around the late 1980s¹. It was during this decade that pioneer studies on gender started addressing women as professional athletes². Today, the field of studies on women and sports is outstanding in Brazil³, and there is an increasing number of researches about the specificities of a certain sport or cultural conditions that still stand as barriers to female athletes⁴.

In light of the foregoing, the aim of this study is to understand the journey of Brazilian athlete Jacqueline Silva as to her start, permanence and retirement in volleyball. This athlete's career evidences many breakthrough processes, which seemed common and natural in the '80s but, for her and many athletes of her generation, were obstacles to be overcome. With great technical quality and argumentative capacity, she definitely contributes to bringing to light discussions around women's pay gap, sponsorship and professionalization in sports. The athlete's journey is remarkable for having, in a pioneer way, lessened problems that, unfortunately, persist to this day but were even more recurrent decades ago.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that the news about limitations faced by women in sports, however, are much older and date back to the Ancient Greek Olympic Games (776

B.C.), when they were completely denied participation, even as viewers. It was only at the end of the 19th century, in the first Modern Age Olympic Games (1896), that Baron de Coubertin allowed women to award winners the triumph crowns⁵. After centuries of prohibition, women's participation in the Olympic Games was authorized in the Paris Olympics (1900), when the organizing committee accepted their participation in ball sports, cricket, horseback riding, golf, tennis and sailing⁶.

In that same period in Brazil, many transformations that occurred at the end of the 19th century, such as the abolition of slavery, the Republic proclamation, the consolidation of capitalism and the rise of an urban life, caused women to join the workforce, in a small number with more qualified jobs, as teachers, and mostly as cheap labor in factories^{7,8}. It is worth noting that an exception in sports back then was swimmer Maria Lenk, the first South American woman to compete in the Olympic Games, in Los Angeles, 1932⁹.

After two major world wars, the Brazilian government admitted that women could practice some sport modalities, but only consented ones and that helped them with their future condition as mothers. Regardless of their will, a control political intervention was established, which aimed to prepare female bodies so that they were shaped and fit for maternity in order to guarantee the so-called future generations of the country¹⁰.

Women in Brazil began playing volleyball only in 1931 and for recreational purposes. Their effective participation happened in 1933 during the Central American and Caribbean Games, in San Salvador, and later in 1938 during the women's open tournament. In that year, the Young Men's Christian Association of Rio de Janeiro held an open tournament as well, with the winner being *Botafogo de Futebol e Regatas* club¹¹.

World women's volleyball increased its participation in the sports scenario only from the 1950s, when the world championship started, and in 1964, when volleyball was included in the Olympics, in Tokyo. In the 1980 Olympic Games, Brazilian volleyball became very popular, and the women's squad began drawing the world's attention for being a group of talented players, who were also greatly admired for their beauty and charm, a stereotype that the media commonly highlights^{12,13}. It was during that period that, gradually, a fight to transform the sport from amateur into professional was started. Athlete Jaqueline Silva, or Jackie Silva, as she is internationally known, participated actively in this process along with other players of her generation and helped rethink women's participation in this sport¹⁴.

This brief historical recap reiterates the restlessness and non-conformity that many athletes nurtured face what was then established. If in the first half of the 20th century, within a profoundly transformed scenario, Brazilian women began their emancipation in society, going further into the public space and seeking knowledge about and the recognition of their rights, from the '60s, they consolidated this emancipation. With respect to sports in Brazil, the legal scenario of impositions and restrictions aimed at women changed only in 1979 with the repeal of the 1941 law, which set forth consented practices and allowed women to participate only in some sports¹⁵.

This Brazilian political openness period in the late '70s culminated not only with the first Olympic participation of a Brazilian collective sport female squad, but also brought other important achievements to the national team, such as the South American Championship (1981), the second place in the 1st *Mundialito* (1982), the introduction of corporate clubs in the Brazilian championship (1983) and the second Olympic participation (in Los Angeles, 1984). In this important decade for volleyball, the Brazilian women's national team developed and proved to be competitive for the first time.

Thus, from a theoretical point of view, it is important to see that the rise of an exponent in society usually happens within a generation of equal success, as pointed out by sociologist Vivian Weller's studies on the currentness of the generation concept that Karl Mannheim elaborated in 1928. For the first author, the concept of generations is being re-

discussed in sociological spheres as they point at gender inequalities and class differences. However, when Mannheim talks about the notion of generational bond as a product of experiences lived in contemporaneity, inspired in a qualitative concept of time, he “draws attention to the fact that different age groups experience different inner times in one same chronological period”^{16:209}. This approach makes sense when considering that the volleyball generation of the 1980s had athletes of different ages and who formed a powerful and argumentative group that redefined the volleyball course in that decade and as of that generation. In this sense, the idea of generation is given highlight with the example of women’s volleyball and, specially, athlete Jacqueline.

Following these initial ideas, the question is: How did Jacqueline Silva start, stay and retire in high-performance sport? What are the milestones that attest this athlete’s contribution to volleyball development and to women’s professionalization in the modality?

Methods

The methods used in this study are those that normally characterize qualitative and exploratory researches, in which literature reviews that gather researches on gender and sports combine, in this case, with oral history procedures for data collection and the analysis of the conducted interview, comparing the interviewee’s speech with documents on news and magazine stories and, mainly, with the two books published by Jackie herself^{17,18}.

Participants

This article highlights athlete Jacqueline Silva not only for her active participation in the national team during the first five years of the 1980s, but, above all else, for the argumentative stance she took during this period, contributing to redefining the course of women’s volleyball, mainly concerning professionalization and equality of rights in relation to men.

Procedures

The procedures used for information collection were based on oral history experience practices at the *Museu da Pessoa*²⁰, which understands interview in a more colloquial manner as a way to make the interviewee more comfortable, without the pressure of video recordings or the presence of many researchers. Thus, a semi-structured script with 26 questions was developed and organized into three sections to support the oral history technique: (1) the athlete’s start in the sport; (2) her permanence in volleyball, and (3) questions concerning retirement. The interview was only audio recorded for further transcription and interpretation of information, with few grammatical and linguistic interventions so that the information provided by her could be safeguarded and have their meanings expanded²¹. This reinforces the idea that “every story primarily depends on its social purpose and, for this reason, in the past, it was passed on to generations through oral tradition and written chronicle”^{22:20}. In this way, this research is based on the knowledge that “oral sources, therefore, present memories that must be leveraged by scholars so that stories can be produced”^{23:161}. This was the central objective: to use the oral history methodology to collect fundamental information from an athlete that deeply experienced an important decade for sports. Even though the use of “oral history” is relatively recent, it proved to be more efficient than that of traditional interviews, when the interviewee’s reports usually are at risk of generalization. The opportunity of understanding history through the testimony of someone who intensely lived in a historical moment is of great value to register the ideas and impressions of active characters within a certain context to be highlighted.

Data Analysis

The analyzed data sought to expand the interviewee's report by dialoguing with the literature on the pillars that sustain the research – the athlete's start, permanence and retirement – in order to evidence challenges, frustrations and conquests throughout Jacqueline's journey as a high-performance athlete, which started when she was 12 years old and continues up to the present days with her entrepreneurial activities in this segment. Data analysis showed that the script designed with the questions divided into three blocks was important to ensure the coverage of all themes to be addressed, but this did not prevent neither the interviewee nor the interviewer from making digressions and incorporating new questions or subtracting others.

Results and Discussion

Based on the interview and previous researches, Jacqueline Silva's ideas on her own journey are presented below in italicized text between quotation marks. Her firm stance face difficulties called the attention of leaders, athletes and society, helping to change situations that seemed unchangeable in sports, in addition to contributing to discussions around the role of the female high-performance athlete in the 1980s.

Her Start in Volleyball

Athlete Jacqueline Louise da Cruz Silva was born on February 13, 1962, in Rio de Janeiro, and from a very young age she would go to the beach on the weekends together with her parents: *“Well, I used to go to the beach during the weekends with my parents, to Copacabana beach. My dad really liked to play volleyball and my mom did too. I played with the kids, and our fun was to play volleyball”*. The athlete's report confirms that sports initiation happens, most of the time, by influence of one's family or school, which corroborates with studies of this nature^{24,25}, as to the influence of parents or family on an athlete's sports career.

On the other hand, Jacqueline does not recall having contact with any other sport before playing volleyball: *“No, not that I remember. And I loved playing volleyball. I was really good, since very young (laughs)”*. She also states that she started playing in school and always with the same person: *“I actually started in school, at Colégio Notre Dame, and then I joined Flamengo; about clubs, Flamengo was the only one I was part of, since 1972, and always with Ênio Figueiredo, who later became the national team's coach, Rio de Janeiro team's. He always worked really hard for the growth of sports”*. The coach to whom Jackie referred, Ênio Figueiredo, led the Brazilian national team between 1978 and 1984 and passed away in 2014.

About indoor volleyball, the athlete started at *Colégio Notre Dame* and later joined Flamengo, the club that revealed her to the Brazilian national team. Her early start, soon in the 1970s, would give her a successful sports career in Brazil and worldwide: *“My first match with the children's team was against Fluminense. I was on the Flamengo seat, with the jersey number 10, which was huge on me. I got that jersey right away, it was a big surprise”*^{17:13}. The promising start would confirm, a few years later, a talent recognized very soon, when she was invited to join the Brazilian national team at the age of 14.

Her Permanence in the Sport

The permanence theme intends to identify, through the interviewee's report, the paths she walked, especially in the 1980s. In that period, Brazilian volleyball went through deep changes but women still had less visibility than men did, a condition that still persists²⁶. Among other events of the 1980s, it is worth highlighting the transition from amateurism to

professionalism and the volleyball spectacularization with the broadcasting on the open TV of important matches, such as those of the Los Angeles Olympics, in 1984¹⁸. When asked about how it was to be a volleyball player in the 1980s, Jacqueline said that she did not have many aspirations, differently from current days: *“So, the sport was really just a sport, it was not like today, with this machine behind it, with all this professionalization. So, we followed those basic steps: started in a football school, on the children’s team, then moved to older teams and so on, without any bigger ambitions but to win the championship. So, the idea I have it is that we were always a close-knit group, a team that grew up together in the same club, of people with strong bonds; there was this passion for the jersey, for the flag. We did not care about these things we have today, like material possessions, money”*. The player refers to the volleyball period called “romantic”, when, before professionalism, the athletes were more driven by their love for their clubs and received, at most, a small allowance¹⁷.

While describing her sport journey, Jacqueline highlighted that she started playing in the same school that player Isabel Salgado was. Then, she moved to *Clube de Regatas do Flamengo* [Flamengo Rowing Club] and, soon after, joined the Brazilian national team: *“I was studying at Colégio Notre Dame and, by coincidence, other players studied there as well, including Isabel. From there, I was invited along with other players to form a team inside Flamengo, and while on Flamengo I was invited to join Rio de Janeiro team and the Brazilian national team (...) I played in two Olympic Games, Moscow and Los Angeles. I played for Supergasbrás, then for Ribeirão Preto’s Recra; I also played in Italy and then I went to the United States to play beach volleyball. Wow, that is a lot”*.

When asked about the people who were important to consolidate her career, the athlete highlighted three coaches: *“Ênio Figueiredo, with whom I started playing (...). But there were ups and downs, good and bad things, you know? But, without a doubt, he was a very important person on this journey. Ramon, his assistant, was also someone that really helped me because he was in charge of youth categories. Then, the most remarkable one for me was my last coach, in the United States, who helped me conquer the Olympic medal, Pat Zartman”*. Despite acknowledging the importance of Ênio Figueiredo in building her career, Jacqueline stresses the relationship issues she had with this coach, which resulted in some cuts from the Brazilian national team for bad behavior. The former athlete points out Ênio’s and Ramon’s importance, but credits her Olympic medal to Pat Zartman because he taught her the beach volleyball technique and was the patron of her return to Brazil to compete in the Atlanta Games, when beach volleyball was included as an Olympic sport, in 1996¹⁸, which created new professional possibilities for her.

When it comes to more important events that happened in the 1980s, Jacqueline talked about the transition from amateurism to professionalism: *“It was an amateur sport, we all started as amateur athletes and, throughout our experience, which was not even a career, because there was no career, this change from amateurism to professionalism started with the introduction of corporate clubs”*. Marchi Júnior²⁷ also considers that the 1980s were fundamental to the rise of volleyball as a national sport, supported, above all else, by the greater visibility that media gave it, the same media that tends to reinforce stereotypical standards on female bodies and men’s supremacy in sports¹².

An interest in the volleyball professionalization theme led to another question, now about her participation in that moment of transition from amateurism to professionalization, and the athlete spoke of the tension installed back then and the consequences she needed to face because of her decision of wearing the training uniform inside out in order to gain rights that were equal to men’s. On that occasion, the men’s and women’s teams had the same sponsor, but only the former was benefited^{17,18}. *“Among the women on our team we always wondered how all that worked, since it seemed that one side was being favored at the sake of the other. And because this was not made clear to us, we had that doubt. And maybe I was the*

one who demanded to know why one side had something the other did not". Despite being aware of the importance of her role in this professionalization process, since she draw attention to the discomfort that this distinction caused among the women, Jacqueline recognizes that her career could have ended at that very moment because the board of the Brazilian Volleyball Confederation [*Federação Brasileira de Voleibol*] (CVB) was uncompromising, and her stance was very assertive: "(...) *I managed to make a lemonade out of the lemon, considering how it all happened and how it turned out*".

Jacqueline considers that the experience gained in indoor volleyball was fundamental to her maturing and conquering the Olympic gold in 1996. The player highlights that volleyball was the basis of her life: "*I see volleyball as a very solid, concrete thing that keeps me standing up to this day*". She adds that her search for excellence has always been what made her different: "*I received individual awards but it was not intentional. I played to be the best but I really liked to learn. I admired the Japanese and Chinese setters. I always strived to be at the top and brought this habit with me to the beach. I went after those who knew the technique. I wanted for my technique to be exemplary*". Although it was hard to balance volleyball demands and her personal life, Jacqueline always made the sport her priority: "*If I had to play volleyball, then I would play volleyball. It was a priority. If I had to go to Italy, then I would go to Italy. If I had to live in the United States, then I would. It was very strong, it was my essence*".

Regarding her training routine, differences between the men's and the women's teams, and the legacy left to the next generations, Jacqueline revealed intriguing facts that justify the determination in her attitudes. In her opinion, the Brazilian national team's training routine in the 1980s was inefficient, ineffective and little useful, which compromised the athletes physically: "*Everyone did the same thing. Everyone did everything. You did not have a specific training because your knees were injured, it was in series*". In addition, despite admiring the player generation of the 1980s, she stresses that there were big treatment differences between men and women: "*We were the promotional part, the promotion: 'buy one and get two. Pay for one team and get two', but they were the only ones being paid*". Even with all these differences, Brazilian women's volleyball in the 1980s, in Jacqueline's opinion, "*clearly had potential, so much so that investments were being made and taking them to other places. It was promising, it was the start of something*". Thus, what did the 1980s volleyball generation leave for the next ones? From her point of view, "*it paved the way. We came digging in the desert and they entered the desert in a different situation, with another mindset, with the professionalism that changes an athlete's perspective*".

Jacqueline talked not only about her permanence in the courts by recalling the clubs for which she played, coaches who were important in her career, and the most relevant facts in her opinion, but also and mainly about how it was to be a volleyball player in the 1980s. With strong opinions, she put on her uniform inside out to claim equality of rights, despite acknowledging the male generation's talent. The player also showed her pride for belonging to a generation of powerful female players who questioned and discussed what bothered them. Aware of her determination to achieve excellence, Jacqueline always established volleyball as the basis to her flights and, for this reason, attributes her Olympic gold medal to the experiences gained along the two Olympics she competed in back in the 1980s and believes that her generation was responsible for paving the way to the growth of women's volleyball, which culminated with the conquest of the 2008 and 2012 Olympic championships¹⁹.

Retirement

The retirement theme aims to identify how the transition process towards the final moment took place and identify what scenario was established so that Jacqueline could end her career. Because there are differences in career transition between ordinary women and athlete women, we resorted to a previous study²⁸ to support our investigation. The life and

career transition of female volleyball athletes are not always easy. It is important to invest in higher education and plan this transition, broadening social and professional insertion possibilities after retirement²⁹.

In Jacqueline's specific case, there were two final moments: for the court and for the beach. Because the athlete, from a very young age, always played at the beach, even though it was for fun, the outdoor scenario looked pleasant and appealing. She reveals: *"When I was banned from the Brazilian national beach volleyball team and, basically, from Brazil, I dived head first, I decided to go for beach volleyball in the United States, once and for all"*^{18:97}. Therefore, this first transition was painful on one hand, but the only way out she found to continue in volleyball.

Jacqueline states that her transition towards a definitive end occurred for a natural exhaustion: *"Beach volleyball is way harder. You have to pressure your sponsor, your partner, your team. I slowed myself down and said: 'I will no longer put all this effort on this anymore, I do not want it anymore, it is over'"*. However, as for her definitive end, she says: *"There comes a time when that is how it happens, you still have that desire to keep playing but you cannot handle the routine anymore, so you start pushing yourself too much to seek motivation"*.

Despite missing the times when she played, Jacqueline says that after she stopped *"you no longer have to wake up early, you no longer have to be in a hurry"*. On the other hand, when *"you stop having this discipline, it is a trap. You have to create a new routine, and it is not always as efficient as before"*. Though considering the trips to be very tiresome and saying that *"you spend your life packing and unpacking"*, she highlights: *"the emotion of the game (...) I will never be able to make this happen again. Sometimes I sleep and dream that I am playing and then wake up with a huge smile, but I cannot make the dream come true anymore"*. Santos, Carvalho and Ribeiro³⁰ found that many volleyball athletes opt for retirement voluntarily and judge that they stopped at the right time. This seems to be Jacqueline's decision as well.

Even retired, Jackie Silva is still involved with volleyball. The former athlete has a project called "Smart Athletes" that trains new volleyball talents. *"These children have never played volleyball. Before it was all about kicking a ball around but then football started to lose space. Today, everyone plays volleyball, and you can see a teamwork happening from the basis"*. As a result, *"the students' behavior in school gradually changed, and so did the teacher's"* and *"the best thing is that it is a community work, because these companies that invest in the project need these students as their future employees. They saw in this project a means to educate"*. This project transformed Jacqueline's lifestyle and connected her even more with volleyball: *"Volleyball is my way of living. I cannot imagine my life without it, without this sport. It provides my basis, it gives me ideas, it makes me see the things that I want"*. Besides, this is a way for her to keep playing: *"Today, I play differently, I play for the others, I play with the others"*.

In short, since Jacqueline's retirement happened in two stages, it can be stated that the first one, in 1985, when she was banned from the national team, at the age of 23, propelled her into later conquests. The second one, however, was motivated by the overwhelming demands of beach volleyball, as well as the physical and emotional effort she was making in a constant search for motivation. By means of her routine as an entrepreneur and with her educational and sports projects in the third sector, the athlete keeps her story alive with volleyball and is rewarded through the success of new talents for the sport.

Conclusions

Limited by the circumstances of their time, the generation of women's volleyball athletes faced challenges in the 1980s that are still discussed, such as men being paid higher, having better career opportunities, different perspectives after retirement, in addition to all particularities of the female universe, which are common themes of a discussion that is still open. Jacqueline Silva was an athlete with an outstanding participation in that decade, as it was possible to observe through a set of expressive achievements that span more than 40 years of dedication to the sport.

Her start in volleyball was not different from that of the vast majority of athletes, that is, by influence of parents and family. However, from a very young age, she managed to overcome adversities that were typical of a period when volleyball was an amateur sport with little investment. During her permanence as a player for the national team, she always deserved highlight for her creativity and precision as an athlete, which brought her many international individual awards. Her interrupted journey on the national team, in 1985, as a consequence of her argumentative attitude in favor of equal rights in relation to the athletes on the men's team contributed to making her stronger as a person and a player who reinvented herself in beach volleyball in the United States and would win an Olympic medal, in 1996.

Far from the athletic routine since 2000, Jacqueline maintains her strong connection with volleyball through a series of investments in her career as a sports entrepreneur. With a pioneer project, she set a franchise of beach volleyball schools at over 25 locations along Rio de Janeiro's shoreline. In 2006, she was the first Brazilian woman to join the Volleyball Hall of Fame and, in 2009, was recognized by UNESCO for her contribution to sports.

Through the player's report, it is possible to see that, within the amateur volleyball scenario of the 1980s, her consistency and high resistance capacity made her journey an important element in her moments of struggle and overcoming, which contributed to help redefining the perception about volleyball as a sport of high potential and high social value that was turning from amateur to professional at that period.

The idea to be sustained is that, from her start as a player to her participation as an entrepreneur, her journey is a unique legacy to sports, even before she became Olympic beach volleyball champion along with Sandra Pires, in 1996. Her great effort to volleyball professionalization shows that the contribution provided by her generation and herself represents a milestone in the history of the sport and for the women in the 1980s, who longed for being emancipated and recognized for their talents, as well as professional and sports abilities, a challenge that persists to this day.

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