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Original article

The Ecuadorian Paralympic tennis: an approach to the real historical context of its sport evolution

El tenis paralímpico ecuatoriano: un acercamiento al contexto histórico real de su evolución deportiva

O ténis paralímpico equatoriano: uma abordagem do contexto histórico real da sua evolução desportiva

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ABSTRACT

The Paralympic tennis at international level has had a remarkable development in the last decades, so many ethnographic studies have been made since its creation. The objective of this research is the historical collection of informative data about the origin of Paralympic tennis in Ecuador, with a description of the characters who made such events possible, the circumstances and their influence on the future of the sport. The study was framed in the qualitative paradigm, from a complex historical field, applying the ethnographic method to structure the theoretical information collected through the techniques of documentary review, supported by a category matrix instrument and the interview with two question bank instruments. The first one applied to five personalities of the Ecuadorian Paralympic tennis among sports leaders and coaches, approaching the historical dimension of the Ecuadorian Paralympic tennis; the second one applied to five elite sportsmen of wheelchair tennis with the dimension of sports anecdotes in the



Paralympic tennis. The data was analyzed through the technological tool Atlas.ti, emerging unpublished and relevant findings, with an approach to the real historical context. This study will create a structural basis with which athletes, coaches, managers and sports researchers will understand the historical process and evolutionary development that this sport has had, ensuring a sense of relevance that, added to the strong motivation and difficulties overcome, will allow the acquisition of tools necessary for personal improvement and sports against their disabilities.

Keyword: History; Paralympic tennis; Wheelchair; Sport.

RESUMEN

El tenis paralímpico a nivel internacional ha tenido un desarrollo destacado en las últimas décadas, por lo que se han realizado muchos estudios etnográficos desde su creación. El objetivo de esta investigación es la recopilación histórica de datos informativos sobre el origen del tenis paralímpico en el Ecuador, con una descripción de los personajes que hicieron posible tales sucesos, las circunstancias y su influencia en el futuro del deporte. El estudio se enmarcó en el paradigma cualitativo, desde campo histórico complejo, aplicando el método etnográfico para estructurar la información teórica recopilada a través de las técnicas de la revisión documental, apoyadas con un instrumento de matriz de categorías y la entrevista con dos instrumentos de banco de preguntas. La primera aplicada a cinco personalidades del tenis paralímpico ecuatoriano entre dirigentes deportivos y entrenadores, abordando la dimensión histórica del tenis paralímpico ecuatoriano; la segunda, a cinco deportistas de élite del tenis en silla de ruedas con la dimensión anécdotas deportivas en el tenis paralímpico. A los datos, se les analizó a través de la herramienta tecnológica Atlas.ti, emergiendo hallazgos inéditos y relevantes, con un acercamiento al contexto histórico real. Este estudio creará una base estructural con la cual deportistas, entrenadores, dirigentes e investigadores deportivos comprenderán el proceso histórico y el desarrollo evolutivo que ha tenido este deporte, garantizando el sentido de pertinencia que, sumado a la fuerte carga de motivación y dificultades superadas, permitirá que se adquieran herramientas necesarias para su mejora personal y deportiva frente a sus discapacidades.

Palabras clave: Historia; Tenis; Paralímpico; Silla de ruedas; Deporte.

RESUMO

O ténis paralímpico a nível internacional teve um desenvolvimento notável nas últimas décadas, pelo que muitos estudos etnográficos foram feitos desde a sua criação. O objetivo desta investigação foi a recolha histórica de dados informativos sobre a origem do ténis paralímpico no Equador, com uma descrição das personagens que tornaram possíveis tais acontecimentos, as circunstâncias e a sua influência sobre o futuro do desporto. O estudo foi enquadrado no paradigma qualitativo, a partir de um campo histórico complexo, aplicando o método etnográfico para estruturar a informação teórica recolhida através das técnicas de revisão documental, apoiada por um instrumento de matriz de categoria e a entrevista com dois instrumentos de banco de perguntas. A primeira aplicou-se a cinco personalidades do ténis paralímpico equatoriano entre dirigentes desportivos e treinadores, abordando a dimensão histórica do ténis paralímpico equatoriano; a segunda aplicou-se a cinco desportistas de elite do ténis em cadeira de rodas com a dimensão de anedotas desportivas no ténis paralímpico. Os dados foram analisados através da ferramenta tecnológica Atlas.ti, emergindo descobertas não publicadas e relevantes, com uma abordagem ao contexto histórico



real. Este estudio irá crear una base estructural con la cual los deportistas, entrenadores, gestores e investigadores deportivos comprenderán el proceso histórico y el desarrollo evolutivo que este deporte ha tenido, garantizando el sentido de pertenencia que, sumado a la fuerte carga de motivación y dificultades superadas, permitirá la adquisición de las herramientas necesarias para su mejora personal y deportiva frente a sus deficiencias.

Palabras-clave: Historia; Ténis; Paralímpico; Silla de ruedas; Deporte.

INTRODUCTION

One of the noblest activities the human being can perform is sports, it is the root of many benefits from personal and social nature; in this sense, it can be highlighted the phrase *Sane mind in sane body*, but if it refers to people that, due to different circumstances have seen their physical faculties reduced, then, it is possible to understand there is more nobility in the human spirit when different sports are practiced. Since a little time, it was stated that the high level and high performance sport was a privilege only for people with innate talent for sports, but it would be worth to ask: What happens with people that love sport, but they do not have superlative levels of sport skills? For this reason, governments incorporated public health programs in which people with different disabilities actively participated; another question arises here: What is the level of people with special disabilities in physical activity and sports participation?, it would seem there is not any level; but happily with medicine and social development, as well as with an inclusive approach in the physical activity (Posso Pacheco, Barba Miranda, Marcillo Ñacato, Acuña Zapata and Hernández Hernández, 2020) the sport practice emerged as project to an inclusive future.

To deeply understand about tennis on Wheelchair, it is necessary to visualize the difficulty there is when playing tennis in wheel chair. That is why, Moreno, Oña and Martínez (1999) contribute the idea that for practicing it, the sportsman or sportswoman ought to have impressive physical conditions and very developed technical abilities. In addition, the sportsman or sportswoman has a disability degree. Bullocky and Sanz (2010) mention that for practicing this sport it is necessary that the player uses the wheel chair due to any physical disability related to the lower limbs, among them, lesion on the spine, amputee limbs, spina bifida suffering, among others.

Paralympic tennis appeared in the second half of the past century, it is practiced by many countries (Colombian Tennis Federation, 2020). Ecuador was no extent and from the very beginning had sportsmen and sportswomen, coaches, officials and keen tennis players; at present there are many events and participants. It can be said that this Paralympic sport is one of the most practiced in the international level; in this sense, Sánchez (2019) affirms that,

"Wheelchair tennis (TSR in Spanish) has been established as one of the favorite Paralympic sports for the spectators and among the four most important in the Summer Paralympic Games" (p.236); showing a deep strengthening by all the actors of this sport.

In the latest years, there has been a metamorphosis in the Paralympic sport, clearly approaching to high performance, which has favor Ecuador can participate in several international events. This has stimulated the managers to permanently work in the sport initiation and development. There are different researches that have described



Paralympic sport in different countries. Pacheco Rodríguez, Espinosa Samper and Hernández Moya (2016) mention the origin and lived processes, as well as the competitive development it has had in Cuba; Sanz Rivas (2003) also have looked back at origin, development and competitive success of Paralympic tennis in Spain, highlighting the spread and motivation for practicing this sport.

In this context, the objective of this research is the historical compilation of informative data on the origin of Paralympic tennis in Ecuador, with a description of the characters that made such events possible, the circumstances and their influence on the future of the sport., in a synopsis that may be an instrument, which contribute to the literature of Paralympic tennis in Ecuador.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research is based on the qualitative paradigm that according to Denziny Lincoln (2012): "Any description about what happen with the qualitative research should work from complex historical field". (p. 46). Ethnographic method, proposed by Miguelez, M. M (2006) was applied, which make possible theoretically to structure the collected information from the interview and documentary review, as well as from the analysis through the Atlas.ti.

Following this guideline, two interviews through qualities intentional selection were carried out; the first one with five personalities of Ecuadorian Paralympic tennis, three managers and two coaches, covering the *historical dimension of the Ecuadorian Paralympic tennis*; the second one with five top level wheelchair tennis athletes, covering *sport anecdote dimension on Paralympic tennis*. These data made possible the information categorization, trying to revive past and present realities; then, information transcription was done, they were divided in main ideas and associated in similar group.

All this information was linked with a qualitative analysis process through the technological toll Atlas.ti, emerging unpublished findings with an approach to the real historical context of the research, following the guidelines of Fernández Solá, Granero Molinay Hernández Padilla (2020), where it is stated that Atlas.ti helps to carry out the interview analysis through the information decomposition; while build graphic nets that reflect significant findings, therefore the researcher should interpret and contextualize the information, making a theoretical approach.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Next, the categories resulting from this study will be shown through the proposed methods, in addition to a qualitative interpretation of the results, as well as a comparison of these results with research conducted on a similar object of study.

Documentary review

The Paralympic Games have been developed as a version of the Olympic Games, exclusively for people with disabilities. In this sense, Brittain (2010) mentions that these games involve athletes with physical, mental and sensory disabilities, which are created to highlight their competitive achievements, but in no way their disabilities or forms of practice. The first Paralympic Games were held in 1960, paradoxically inspired by the international participation of former World War II combatants.



Paralympic tennis had its first appearance two weeks before the 1992 Barcelona Olympics and with this, wheelchair tennis became more popular all over the world. **Moore and Snow (1994)** mention that another event that catapulted this sport was the inclusion in the Grand Slam tournaments. In this sense, the development of the Paralympic tennis in Ecuador was made through wheelchair tennis clinics, first in the city of Quito through the Pichincha Tennis Association in 2005; in 2006 the Ecuadorian School of Wheelchair Tennis was created, which was in charge of organizing different official exhibition events throughout the country.

Ecuador makes its presence in the Paralympic Panamerican Games of Rio de Janeiro in 2007, which was the beginning of the increase of the participation in the international tournaments organized by the Paralympic Committee, like the tournaments of the circuit of the International Tennis Federation [ITF] wheelchair: ITF Future Series, ITF 3, ITF 2, ITF 1, ITF Super Series, ITF Masters and Grand Slams.

Interview with officials and coaches

With the information obtained from interviews with coaches and leaders of wheelchair tennis about the history of Ecuadorian Paralympic tennis, a qualitative analysis was conducted through the tool Atlas.ti, obtaining the following findings.

The origins of Paralympic tennis in Ecuador began in 2005, when Marck Bullock arrived in the country and gave the first Paralympic tennis clinic in the city of Quito. Players such as Diego Jaramillo, Carolina Lasso, Silvia Dillon, Carlos Valdivieso and Roberto Galeano attended the clinic, which was held in the Carmelo neighborhood, north of the city of Quito. The second clinic was held in the city of Guayaquil where Esteban Ortiz and Edmundo Merizalde participated. In addition to these statements, **Bullock and Sanz (2010)** comment that wheelchair tennis has had an evolution until consolidating the Paralympic Games in Barcelona 1992; from there it reached the massification in all countries of the world, among them Ecuador, where Mark Bullock himself, the legend of wheelchair tennis, was part of the Committee of the Paralympic Games, the International Paralympic Committee, delegate of the Sports Council and the General Assembly and the one who brought wheelchair tennis to Ecuador.

It is also noted that Esteban Ortiz is the pioneer of Paralympic tennis in Ecuador, David Sanz as the driving force behind scientific knowledge of wheelchair tennis and the first trainer of this sport. Sanz, after studying a university career in sports, adapted in Spain and having knowledge in conventional tennis, decides to specialize in wheelchair tennis. He started as a coach in this sport despite the fact that there were not many wheelchair tennis players in Spain; later he decided to give courses and training programs in wheelchair tennis.

In the data obtained, it can be analyzed that, in Ecuador, some members of the wheelchair tennis team were ex-sportsmen of conventional tennis, who suffered some accident that caused them a physical limitation or were Paralympic sportsmen of other sports that became involved little by little. Esteban Ortiz, together with Efraín Cabrera and Edmundo Merizalde, are considered the icons of wheelchair tennis, because they were the first to arrive at a World Cup of Paralympic tennis. In addition, Ortiz is considered an essential person who, with his predisposition, was in charge of giving a great impulse to the Paralympic tennis; for this, he based himself on an empirical knowledge, recruited players and managed for the diffusion and practice of this sport in Quito, Cuenca and Guayaquil, where clubs were formed and through self-management and sponsorships they managed to carry out competition tournaments and represent



the country in official Paralympic tennis tournaments, which allowed to reach a high performance since wheelchair tennis had its peak.

When the federations and associations took over this sport, a decline was noted due to the lack of economic support from the government and the Ministry of Sport; the practice of wheelchair tennis was centralized for young players, leaving the older players aside. All this led to a scarce development of the sport, which caused the separation of the sportsmen from the Paralympic tennis and several difficulties in the development and expansion of this.

The economic factor in wheelchair tennis has not been consolidated over the years, since there has not been enough support for Paralympic tennis from the Ministry of Sport and the federations, probably because the latter managed more than 10 adapted sports, despite creating working commissions were not supplied to attend all Paralympic sports.

The Ecuadorian Paralympic Sport Federation organized events sporadically, while in Quito, the Pichincha Sport Concentration, the governing body of sport in the province, took charge of Paralympic tennis, contributing with coaches; this caused a centralization of wheelchair tennis, leading to difficulties in the development and expansion of the sport.

With this background, the wheelchair tennis athletes had the need to perform self-management to be able to develop the sport until that moment stagnated. This initiative was led by Esteban Ortiz, who, with this process, has been able to consolidate structures of sports support and have formed their own clubs at the beginning in Quito, Guayaquil and Cuenca, expanding gradually to other cities, achieving sponsorships that have allowed them not only to acquire their implementation, but also organize and attend official national and international tournaments to improve their ranking.

Due to the pandemic, the future of wheelchair tennis is currently uncertain due to the restrictions on opening sports venues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, however, coaches are sending out training sessions weekly in order to maintain the physical and technical fitness of developing and top-level athletes. In this sense, it is important to consider what **Sanz, Fuentes, Moreno, Iglesias and Del Villar (2004)** say when they say that the athlete has more development in training, when the coach can permanently perform the technical and tactical feedback; therefore, in this pandemic it is considered that the athletes have not had any sport improvement.

Interview with athletes

With the information obtained from interviews with elite wheelchair tennis athletes, about their anecdotes and sports experiences in Paralympic tennis, a qualitative analysis was carried out through the Atlas.ti tool, obtaining the following findings.

There is a coincidence in stating that at the beginning they did not know about the existence of wheelchair tennis, however, they all have in common their passion for field tennis. Having a disability, being a Paralympic athlete was the best option to become an amateur, active participant, besides, they manage to be part of the national team of Paralympic tennis and participate in different official tournaments.

Everyone points out that Esteban Ortiz was one of the most important Paralympic athletes, who has been in charge, in one way or another, of promoting this sport; they also point out as an important anecdote the first two Paralympic tennis clinics, given by



Marck Bullock. The narratives mention that, although the economic factor is somewhat important, they have organized themselves to seek sponsorship and have made self-management to participate in the various tournaments.

The difficulties that have arisen for the normal training of wheelchair tennis are the lack of adequate infrastructure, the acquisition of specific sports implements for their practice and the scarce support to cover the expenses involved in training and participating in official events. [Sánchez-Pay, Torres-Luque, Fernández-García and Sanz-Rivas \(2013\)](#) state that the training of this sport requires commitments of exhausting training on surfaces and specific implements to obtain sport results.

As satisfactory sport experiences, they point out the personal realization as outstanding sportsmen, to manage to strengthen friendship bonds among the practitioners up to the point of calling them a sport family, which help each other both morally and economically. They point out that the trips around the world, representing Ecuador, have been the greatest patriotic gesture they have had in their lives because, through this sport, they have managed to make their roots and origin known, which has stimulated them to obtain the best ranking at a South American and world level. This coincides with the study carried out by [Cervelló, Fuentes and Sanz \(1999\)](#), where they state that wheelchair tennis players consider victory as the peak of achievement, due to the hard training, all the difficulties overcome and, above all, they highlight that beating oneself is the best prize that could be won.

CONCLUSIONS

In a conclusive way, it is proposed that through this study it has been possible to obtain fundamental information about how Paralympic tennis originated in Ecuador and which were its percussionists; furthermore, it has been possible to describe from two points of view the circumstances that involved its sporting evolution through a chronology of the most important activities, without a defined position on the future of Ecuadorian Paralympic tennis, but there is still optimism that favorable changes will arise through the achievement of sporting results.

For some athletes, the sporting difficulties experienced are irrelevant, due to the support among the Paralympic tennis family. They have emphasized that their motivations come from the different national and international participations, in which they were sports ambassadors of their country; another of their motivations is their sports results, acquired throughout their sports life and their label of champions when they beat themselves in the face of physical difficulties, in a highly competitive and complex sport such as Paralympic tennis.

It can be said that through this research a great contribution has been obtained, due to the fact that, until this moment, the country did not have a document in which such relevant information was gathered; undoubtedly, this study will serve as a basis for future research and for the understanding of the formation of a consolidated and outstanding sports structure such as Paralympic tennis in Ecuador.



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Conflict of interests:

The authors declare not to have any interest conflicts.

Authors' contribution:

Roberto Manolo Castro Cevallos: Conception of the idea, literature search and review, data base preparation, general advice on the topic addressed, drafting of the original (first version), review and final version of the article, article correction, authorship coordinator, translation of terms or information obtained, review of the application of the applied bibliographic standard.



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