

Multiple Identities and Trans-culturalism: Joaquim Cruz, a Brazilian Olympic Hero

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Abstract

Although Brazil is considered the country of soccer, athletics might be the modality which better represents sports in the country. Athletics was the modality holding the larger amount of Olympic medals, up to the Beijing Olympic Games. At that time, all the Brazilian medal winners were African descent, migrants and poor. Joaquim Cruz is part of this group and stands out not just because he is a medalist, but because he is an athlete and post-athlete, concerned with social matters. The current article discusses the transformations in Joaquin's identity: a migrant - as well as a member of a poor community in Brasilia - who moved to the U.S.A, in order to study and practice. He got married, had kids and became a renowned and respected coach in the USA. However he did not abandon his poor community behind. He states a heroic status that just a few athletes are able to keep, after finishing their sport's career.

Key words: identity; life story; hero myth

Introduction

Identity Searches and Disruptions in Brazilian Sports

Brazilian sport's image is strongly linked to soccer, either internationally and within the country, due to the fact that the country won the world cup five times and because many of its soccer players are in the top leagues around the world. Athletes from other sport's modalities as well as other relevant characters in the Brazilian sports' scenario do not get recognized by their sporting acumen, not even for the important social role they use to play.

It is expected that in a country rating continental proportions, with a population of nearly 200 million people and holding innumerable cultural differences, sport's practicing would be massive and that there would be many sport icons. The Olympic Games are, for some, a reference when assessing sports' development, because they rely on the amount of medals shown on the medal tables. Based on such viewpoint, Brazil is seen as in an underprivileged position, once throughout the last 92 years attending the Olympics, the country holds 108 medals only. It means that athletes who somehow have achieved significant results, overcoming all sorts of adversities, should become a reference that would lead to a reflection and to actions regarding sports' development. However, it is observed that just a few of them build a different professional life after finishing their careers in sports. Part of the problem lays on lack of academic background and on profound changes over their identity, due to their lives in sport's environment.

They lose the reference of their origins, due to excessive city changes, living away from family and friends; the need to get used to new cultural habits, the weather changes and food as well as the engagement to many forms of social actions, take Brazilian athletes into a trans-cultural process that leads to the formation of an identity that can also preserve the memory of their deeds as athletes afterwards.

I understand identity based on the perspective of Hall (2000), he stated that identity means: the meeting point between discourses and practices that *try to "interpellate" us, to speak with us or summon us to assume our places as social subjects of specific discourses*, and, on the other hand, the subjectivity production processes, *that construct us as subjects to whom it is possible to 'speak'*. *The identities are, therefore, temporary attachment points to the positions-of-the-subject that the discursive practices have constructed for us* (p. 112).

Hall (2001) suggests the occurrence of significant disruptions that took place throughout the last century and that lead individuals into a crisis inside their own supposed unique identity, facing the possibility of multiple identities.

Such identities - built inside recognition practices - are produced in unique historical and institutional places, emerging from power relations. They result from differences, not from an identical unity of otherness' practices.

Joaquim Cruz - Olympic champion in 1984 and 800m sprint Olympic silver medalist in 1988 - is an athlete who represents and synthesizes Brazilian sport's ills due to his origins within the country as well as based on the international recognition he had achieved. It made him a trans-cultural athlete and showed his importance as a coach after his career transition and the role he played as a social actor engaged to the development of sport's policies in Brazil.

The son of a family who migrated from the country's northeast and went to Brazil's Midwest, he represents, in first place, the saga of many Brazilians who leave their original towns and head to more developed urban centers, seeking for new opportunities. A few years later, already as a professional athlete, Joaquim Cruz experienced a second migratory situation when he went to the U.S.A., in order to practice and study. During the time that he was living there, he got married, had children, finished his career as an athlete and became the North American Paralympic team's coach. Simultaneously, he managed a social project in his Brazilian original city, aiming to provide the opportunity of sports' practicing to children and youngsters who nowadays face the same social conditions he lived in the past.

Although he has been living in the U.S.A for almost 20 years, Joaquim still keeps such a strong relation with sports in Brazil. That is why he was chosen - among several Olympic champion athletes - to light up the torch at the Pan-American Games in Rio de Janeiro - 2007. It was a clear recognition to his importance. By the time Rio de Janeiro was chosen to host the 2016 Olympic Games, Joaquim was led to his repatriation process. He was among one of the most required leader ex-athlete. He was seen as the one to achieve the high performance sports' development on Brazil and also had a parallel project regarding personal improvement through sports' practicing.

The current article aims to present the life story of Joaquim Cruz, highlighting the disruption moments experienced throughout his career and how it led to the formation of his identity. To do so, the life histories' methodology was used, in accordance to Bosi (1994; 2003), Ferraroti (1983), Poirier, Valladon, and Raybaut (1999), and Rubio (2006a). Interviews were conducted on different days and places (São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Brasília, in Brazil in June 2002¹, June 2004, September 2005, May 2011 and San Diego, California, USA in April 2007). Such meetings totaled more than 50 hours of interviews, some of them were video-recorded and others registered in a diary. The procedure was similar to an in-depth interview, which, according to Coakley (2001:38) *is the best method to understand how people define situations, create an identity, and make decisions regarding the way they act.*

Meetings achieved in different moments of Joaquim's life enabled data collection regarding his background, because it used to be transcribed, as by Meihy (2007); but the transcriptions also made it possible to follow his path over the past 9 years and the different disruptions he had gone through. It led to a reflection about the course of his identity.

Who is Joaquim Cruz?

Joaquim is the Cruz family's youngest child. His father migrated from Piauí, one of the poorest states in northeast Brazil to the country's Midwest. Aiming to work on construction sites, he left the family behind. A few months later, with no news from her husband, Joaquim's mother left with the children in order to go after her husband. They rode on the back of a truck for 15 days before arriving at their final destiny.

As soon as they got to the new city, the family went to live in an occupation settlement where the land had no documentation and a 3 room house had to fit the whole family. If on one hand the house was quite small, on the other it had the whole city as its backyard. Thus, just as Joaquim, many other children in his age used such area among the Brazilian Serrado (local vegetation in this area) as a territory to their adventures and playing, in a moment when school was mandatory in the age of 7. Joaquim reported that this time of his childhood enabled the acquisition and the development of motor skills that allowed him to become the athlete he was.

¹This first interview was performed for the project on the Brazilian medal winners that resulted in the book *Heróis Olímpicos Brasileiros e Medalhistas Olímpicos brasileiros: história, memória e imaginário.*

There was a tract of land and a little wood near the house. We cleaned the area, cut the trees to make poles and built a football camp... I learned to swim in puddles. When it rained we used to jump into the puddles after the flurry, we swam in the holes, played on the streets and hunted birds in the woods... This is part of my life, of my growing-up, of my freedom to explore the environment.

From the time he was admitted to school, Joaquim's life underwent profound changes. The first school he attended to was located in his own neighborhood. Just as the rest of the place, the school also had no infrastructural and seemed to be forgotten. The will of reaching new horizons started with the idea of attending better school in a neighbor suburb. The school in the adjacent neighborhood had more infrastructural resources and offered many other perspectives. The mentioned school was sponsored by Sesi², supported another community and had a curriculum that included sport's classes since the first grade in elementary school and students could also get a free lunch, such a big stimulus for someone coming from a family where there was no lack of food but where it also never exceeded the minimum needed.

It can be considered the first rupture in Joaquim's identity. The migration from a native town to another city led to an appropriation of new cultural values he met in his new neighborhood. Although he was still a child, based on the references he had about the world, he observed the differences between his neighborhood and school and the neighborhood and the school located several kilometers away. The desire to seek for new challenges made him different from his five older brothers and highlighted the direction his life would take in the future. The person he was at that moment did not prevent him from picturing new possibilities and other identities in a society marked by social inequality and lack of opportunities.

According to Hall (2000), the deep social changes that happened in the 20th century created new forms of identity and had fragmented the modern individual, who, so far, was seen as a unified individual. The author defines such moment as *identity crisis* and highlights it as one of the main issues in the contemporary world. *The so-called "identity crisis" is seen as part of a broader process of change, which is moving the central structures and processes of modern societies and shaking the references' frameworks that provided a stable anchoring to individuals in the social world.* (Hall, 2001: 07). In Cruz' specific case, the search for a better school in another neighborhood already represented a way of breaking up the social determinism so many of his friends experienced. The other school meant the way and the determination to break through barriers, a remarkable aspect of his life.

Joaquim Cruz wanted to be a basketball player. His physique helped to reinforce such will. Besides that, Basketball made him dream of other places, other worlds. Joaquim participated as a demonstrator in a basketball clinic administered by the George Washington University's coach, in Brasília, and caused great impression due to his skills and physical features. As soon as his work had finished, the coach gave him a pair of tennis shoes and promised him a place in an American university after his high school graduation in Brazil.

This moment was recorded in Joaquim's life story for two reasons: the possibility of playing basketball in the U.S.A and mainly the need to go deep in the studies, in order to start college - a goal he and his family had never thought about before.

Playing basketball in the United States was a dream for all basketball players! But, one thing that no one ever talked about in my house was University... Among street fellows we thought that poor kids did not have the right to go to college. From that moment on I dived into my books and played basketball like never before. I started to take studies a little bit more seriously.

In a country in which illiteracy has not yet been eradicated, schooling - as well as the rituals involving the school environment - is, in most of the cases, an indication of an unquestionable social mobility, particularly for families whose prior generations had not achieved such privilege. Studying is more than going to school and attend classes. As it is implicit in Joaquim's discourse, taking studies seriously means finding applicability for what was learnt. So, according to such process of giving education a meaning, the individual meets its strength, its power to make changes in the course of life.

² *An employers' entity, financed with resources from industrialists from all over the country. The institutions used part of their resources to finance schools spread all over the country. These schools were characterized by excellent teaching and the practice of sports, which were not common among Brazilian schools.*

According to Freire (1996:22), educating means teaching to humanize. In regards to the contents, *teaching does not mean transferring knowledge, but creating the possibilities to its production or to its construction*. Humanizing means the process that takes to the formation of a critical, reflexive and creative individual, able to recreate or rebuilt the teaching process. It means sensitizing the individual in face of the world, create a conscience for freedom. In the very moment when Joaquim accepted the challenge of studying in the U.S.A his relationship with studying changed the course of his life and took him even more apart from his original community, and later on, from the country. It helped building his Brazilian sports' icon profile.

However, what he did not know, was that the highlight of his career would not be on the basketball courts, but on the athletic tracks. His sports' teacher was able to observe that. Although he was a good basketball player, his natural skills actually would make him a middle distance runner. Even displeased in the beginning, at the age of 14 he accepted to take part in a tournament with 18 years old athletes and finished the competition in the third place. Despite the initial doubt, the certainty of a career in athletics started to materialize. In his first international match, a South American championship, he went back home with three gold medals.

In 1981, his first dream came true: studying and living in the U.S.A. Such experience marked his life because he was getting away from his family, from his hometown, and from all the cultural references that surrounded him. His first experience was in Provo, Utah, a city with harsh winters - something quite unknown to the athlete. It forced him to practice on an indoor track, radically changing his way of living. He was used to live in a warm and dry region, so he needed to pass through an adaptation process to live in a new country which included learning a new language and new habits.

Learning a new language had an impact on Joaquim's story once going to college meant being approved in the English Proficiency Exam.

It was very difficult for me to learn English, because I did not even know the Portuguese grammar structure. That is, I was learning two languages at the same time, which was positive. But the fact that I was shy hampered my speech. In despite of it there was the pressure to pass the tests to go to college. Going to the US and to college helped me to become a mature athlete.

Right after that, there was Eugene, Oregon, the American capital of athletics, and college, where he stayed for 5 years and experienced being hosted by a community which celebrated his achievements, both at the college campus and at international tournaments. Such difficulties reinforced his determination to go on with his childhood dreams. First, he had to learn and master a new language, which would allow him to communicate and get adapted to the new country. Then, he had to learn to deal with the new practicing styles and to live in the edges of injuries – a ghost that had appeared early in his life. Once feeling part of the community, Joaquim erased the sense of being a foreigner, a different person, away. It enabled him to practice otherness, a condition hardly experienced by Brazilian athletes in foreign communities.

Such experiences meet Guareschi, Medeiros, and Bruschi (2003) statements. They said that the process of identity construction is always involved with differences, with the relationship with what is not always referred to the other one: I am what the other one is not. If the debate about identity assumes a prominent position in contemporary discussions, it is because they are located inside social, political, and economic changes that lead to transformations. The debate about the extension in which the identities are contested leads to an analysis of the importance of differences and oppositions in identity's construction.

Woodward (2000) claims that difference is a central element in classification systems through which meanings are set. Both social and the symbolic systems take to classification structures that provide some sense and order to social life, and the substantial distinctions that are in the core of systems that set cultural meanings. However, such classification systems alone cannot explain the level of personal investment that individuals make in the identities they assume.

Identity and difference are creations of a cultural and social world. Identity and difference, according to Silva (2000a.; 2002), have to be actively produced. It means that they are the result of acts of a linguistic creation, and it is only by means of acts of speech that they are established as such. However, it does not mean that they are determined by the discursive and symbolic systems that define them. Silva (2000b: 16) defines otherness as: "The condition of what is different from me, the condition of being another one."

The Heroic Identity of an Olympic Champion

There were only two Olympic champions, up to 1984 in Brazil: Guilherme Paraense, in rapid-fire pistol, and Adhemar Ferreira da Silva, in triple jump. Although the country has a population of hundreds of millions of inhabitants, Olympic success was limited to a few privileged ones. Although at that point Brazilian population rated over 100 million inhabitants, the number of athletes in Olympic conditions and the number of medals won indicated lack of sports' public policies. Such situation would remain up to 1990's.

Joaquim joined this small group of Olympic medalist athletes, after being successful in the American circuit and achieving his first record in a college tournament. He rapidly moved from a foreign athlete competing in the disputed American championship into a record-holder. So, slowly, he started to understand that sports meant more than practicing and competing. It would be the opportunity to change his life as well as his family's life. Due to sports he had left Brasilia and changed his life's conditions, but it was worth getting an Olympic medal in order to become part of history along with two other Brazilians, up to that point in time. The will of reaching such status reinforced Joaquim's heroic identity, once he outcame racial barriers breaking the hegemonic logic of athletes from other countries historically stronger in sports competitions, mainly in the 800 meters.

Thus Los Angeles 1984 came up. His victory in the 800 meters in the Olympic Games, 26 years after a Brazilian athlete won an Olympic medal, set Joaquim's mark in history: the athlete who competes to win - such an unusual attitude among Brazilian athletes. He got used to compete for the university, in American territory, against the best local athletes and faced the world champion Sebastian Coe as his main opponent. Joaquim was known among his colleagues and opponents as an athlete who practiced and competed up to his limit and who learned that victory was a consequence of such work.

The period which followed the Los Angeles Olympic Games highlighted his adaptation to the status of Olympic champion. He became a reference in terms of behavior and performance for athletes worldwide. As he was not pleased with the visibility the new status gave him, Joaquim decided to keep the same life strategy he used to live before winning the medal. He preferred running away from honors and awards, using the excuse that he had to dedicate himself to work. He did not return immediately to Brazil and when he did so he went to his family home and soon went back to his practicing place. He set the target to get a similar performance in Seoul Olympic Games. It is worth highlighting that the historical context in which it happened allowed Joaquim to follow such strategy. Professionalism was taking its first steps and the athlete, along with his coach, was the person who used to set all the paths to be taken, no matter the commercial interests involved.

The four years before Seoul meant hard work, allowing no distraction with activities that could take him away from his target. He believed that the moment he had already experienced could happen again. The plans were changed due to injuries that required a new surgery. His arrival at Seoul was quite celebrated because, after all, he was the Olympic champion. However, a social episode broke the vibe experienced in Los Angeles four years before: a report about the involvement of athletes in doping after the problem with Ben Johnson, forced Joaquim - a person who hated TV cameras - to be in the spotlights of the international media. One of his reports, intentionally edited by a Brazilian TV channel, put him in an embarrassing situation, simulating that he was accusing a North American athlete. The report was shown in TV channels all over the world, leading to different reactions from athletes, coaches and sports directors. Despite the discomfort experienced at that time and the unfavorable competitive mood which came after the episode, it marked Joaquim Cruz's life due to the recognition he got from other athletes and from the sports' community that saw him as their representative in the "zero tolerance" movement regarding the use of illegal substances.

It was also in Seoul that Joaquim got his second Olympic medal, at this time, a silver one. It was the second Brazilian medal for athletic tracks. It had given him the status of one of the biggest athletes in Brazil's history. After such achievement a new life and working style were set, they have been the milestone of his life up to the present moment: dedication to work, search for perfection, facing adversities and the consistence in not giving up dreaming.

Both the valorization of the silver and bronze medals and the willingness to face difficulties and victory are attributes uncommon among Brazilian Olympic athletes. Such matter had been debated by Tavares (2003) and Nascimento and Rubio (2010) based on Holanda (2006) reflections about Brazilian cultural and social formation, considering aspects such as colonization, miscegenation, and multiculturalism - the reflex of many migratory flows that have occurred throughout several centuries.

Holanda presents ideas about the formation of Brazilian's identity and proposes so far unique formulations regarding the idiosyncrasies of Brazilian society. They are necessary for those who are willing to think critically about what Brazil actually is.

One of the main concepts developed by Holanda (2006) regarding Brazilian society was cordiality. According to the author, the concept of cordiality is represented by gentleness in dealing with other people, hospitality and generosity - considered as a virtue by foreigners - is a defined feature of Brazilian profile, coined by ancestral influences from human sociability patterns in rural and patriarchal environment.

Far from representing civility or good manners, these adjectives are legitimate expressions of an emotional connotation that is also configured as rich and overflowing. The author says that no other people get so apart from the sense of life ritualistic than Brazilians, given that their social conviviality ways represent the opposite of politeness. He understands that the willful mimic of spontaneous manifestations in the "cordial man" is a natural form of living which changed itself into a kind of liberation formula from the fear that individuals feel when they live with themselves and respond for acts and actions in different dimensions of their existence, it is a kind of living in the other ones. The reflex of such subjective construction occurs in a sort of aversion to social ritualism, which generates a prolonged reverence before a superior person, and respect takes place in the will to establish intimacy. "Our temper kindly admits ways of reverence, but as far as they do not totally suppress the possibility of a more familiar sociability" (Holanda, 2006: 148).

When Joaquim assumed his willingness of being the best, even knowing that to do so he would have to practice up to his limit and try to improve his skills, he broke up with the standard discourse and competition behavior, in order to participate among athletes that are able to be among the best. Curiously, in Brazil, athletes who state the will to be among the best use to be defined as arrogant, due to their discourse of excellence that goes beyond the emotional standard and heads to rationality.

Holanda points out that unawareness of any kind of sociability, not sat in an emotional ethics, would perhaps be one of the most singular aspects of Brazilians' lives, a condition that remains current even in activities in which rationality should prevail over emotion, such as the case of trade or professional relationships of any nature.

Such identity feature, based on cordiality, leads many Brazilian Olympic athletes to move away from the basic principle of competitive sports, what means the willingness to win. It is curious to observe how satisfaction discourse in participating in the Olympic Games is repeated in the discourse of Brazilian Olympic athletes (Rubio, 2004; 2006a). An athlete rarely states his/her willingness to compete for wining, as if such feeling would indicate almost a deviant character. It is possible to state that such construction is linked to the internalization of a cordial behavior, according to Holanda's conception. The aforementioned statement, in Joaquim's case, is socially understood in a distinct way, once his origins are common to the majority of the Brazilian population, that is, the poor migrant who builds his successful trajectory with hard work. In addition to it, there is the fact that Joaquim's introversion kept him away from the media and from the celebrity life (so common to other athletes who reach his importance).

After his achievements in Seoul, new injuries and surgeries led Joaquim Cruz to experience the will to keep his career, but applying other life style and practicing procedures. After returning to the U.S.A, he moved to San Diego and started a new phase in his life and training. The injuries kept him away from the Barcelona Olympic Games, but in Atlanta he was highlighted as the athlete who held the country's flag in the opening ceremony, an honor conceded to an athlete recognized as an icon in the sports' scenario.

A New Identity: The Post-Athlete

High performance athletes have their life stories directly related to sport's practicing, an activity that is often performed since childhood. Thus, sport's practicing is directly related to their identity, a situation that defines individuals within society and their social group and leads them to the definition of "legends" or "icons". If sport's practicing promotes the development of an athlete's identity, the end of their careers will represent the demand for changing a social role, and the consequent development of a new identity. Just as with athlete's identity which demands several years to consolidate the transition to a new social role, it happens throughout a process which demands time as well as emotional and material resources to be completed. Such process is called career transition and can be planned or compulsory.

It can be said that retreating from the sports' career means the need to get adapted to new life conditions, in different roles and acting in ways that are not necessarily related to their past identity. Thus, it is worth understanding the athlete's identity construction process in order to pay the necessary attention to this time of transformation and changes. It happens because the athlete's identity can be understood from a motivational aspect, the reasons that take him/her to be above the average and thus reach remarkable positions within their competitive sport sphere. Such feature is related to their capability of seeking out targets and stand still before adversities.

According to Alfermann (2000) and Lavallee and Anderson (2000) career transition, in such sense, can represent an experience that opens up new opportunities to the athlete, where he can try new paths and explore new opportunities. That was how Joaquim realized the right time to retire, although he believed that the effort to make such decision was as big as the one to keep practicing:

While we are competing we don't think that in a certain time it will be finished. It is impossible to believe that it will meet an end. When the end comes, warnings arise in different forms: mind starts to reject practicing, injuries recovery takes longer, and the same effort does not generate the same result. This is natural. It happens to everyone.

The athletic career transition results from several individual and social factors. They go from aging to successive injuries, the choice of another career to the wish of dedicating more time to family, etc. It can be defined as an event which results from a change in suppositions about oneself and the world and, therefore, requires a corresponding change in relationships and behaviors (Puig & Vilanova, 2006).

Regarding Joaquim Cruz, the career transition started to be prepared when his body showed signs of exhaustion. As he was used to assiduously practice in the limit of his capacity, it became difficult to recognize that it was not possible to achieve the same results anymore. Getting to such conclusion was substantial in order to get used to his new physical condition and start seeking for new life projects.

I became human, but up to that moment I did not know it, I only got to know it afterwards. On the competition's day, I started to warm up and all my life passed by... There is no modality like athletics, individual competition, to make you experience so much emotion. You know you are vulnerable, that you are already at an age in which your time is about to finish, your window is about to close. All the practicing, all competitions become a victory.

There is no doubt that Joaquim Cruz's career transition was planned and in a moment fulfilled with accomplishments. After winning his two Olympic medals and becoming part of Brazilian and international sport's History, as one of the greatest runners of all times, he needed to finish that process. When he retired from his career as an athlete he started to dedicate his life to new projects where his life story and experiences could provide to others the chances he had in the beginning of his career.

Differently from many other Brazilian athletes, Joaquim studied, finished his college degree, and acquired other professional, personal and physical skills throughout his life. Although his retirement from sports had been prepared, the moment when it effectively occurred provoked great suffering and led to the end of a particular part of his life. The suffering, due to such an end, led him to new projects he became intensely dedicated to. As in the Quiron's myth, the master of the heroes and the great healer (Brandão, 1999), Joaquim started to take care of forming and preparing athletes in order to overcome the pain caused by the end of his own career.

It took 4 years for me to start feeling the effect of the absence of this 20 years career. I retired, but the athlete was still present. So, the athlete Joaquim started to get away from myself during the Sydney Olympic Games. At first I did not know what was going on. I used to wake up in the middle of the night to go to the toilet and kept on looking at the street in the dark, feeling a strange emptiness inside me without knowing what was going on. I did not tell anybody anything. I was just silent and sad. I knew I would never practice and compete as before. I would never be an athlete at that level anymore. Then, that feeling went away from me and, day by day, disappeared forever.

Although Joaquim Cruz has remained in San Diego, California, his links with Brazil were strengthened with the creation of a social project for athletics practicing in the city where he grew up: Brasília. A memory from his childhood, from the time when his family did not have money to buy him shoes, obliging him to walk barefoot most of the time, inspired the name of the project: "Bare feet".

Profiting from his public person's status he launched an international campaign to collect used tennis shoes to be distributed among children who attended the formation center. Joaquim consolidated his career as an athletics coach in the U.S.A. He became the American Paralympic team coach and was considered the best one in the year of 2011.

By reinforcing his role, Joaquim Cruz nowadays is a central character in a country that is gathering its forces for the 2016 Olympic Games. On the other hand he saw the reinforcement of his representative character status when he was the athlete nominated to light the Olympic torch in the Pan-American Games of Rio de Janeiro in 2007, an honor given to outstanding athletes in recognition to their careers as a whole, not just for one unique, specific result. However, such kind of institutional recognition did not delude a person who had learned to deal with many promises and few actions. The confirmation of his new identity links his image with proposals or projects that have social relevance or commitment.

Recognized as someone committed to ideals, nowadays Joaquim currently performs a number of different actions for athletes and post-athletes, and he understands the importance of what they represent to the current Brazilian moment. He became a sort of "ambassador" of an association called "Athletes for citizenship", whose main goal is to involve important athletes in a debate about public sport policies in the country.

His way between U.S.A and Brazil, over the years marked Joaquim Cruz's identity beyond a double nationality. His activities with the Paralympic team and his family marked his link with the U.S.A. However, his efforts to develop sports in Brazil reinforced his identification with his native country and it is not a paradox. More than a national identity, Joaquim showed a sporting identity, which is, above all, heroic.

Conclusions

Among the various phenomenon modern society has been producing to the emergence of heroic attitudes, sport stands out as a privileged *locus*. It is worth remembering that the hero as a mythical character represents the deadly ones who manage to approach the gods due to a great deed (Rubio, 2001). His prodigious deeds mix strength, courage and intelligence, putting this person apart from a character who wins due to physical attributes only. By taking such character to the present time it is possible to identify it in high performance athletes, a sort of hero seen in game courts, fields, pools and tracks that turned into arenas in major competitions' days.

In countries in which victory in the Olympics is rare, champion athletes are celebrated as heroes and, as such, follow similar features as those from the characters described in mythical literature, as already demonstrated by Campbell (2005) or Eliade (1989).

By following sports' heroic structure (Rubio, 2001), Joaquim Cruz takes each one of these steps as a mythical character. The first stage, known as the *call*, refers to the moment in which the individual finds out personal physical skills above the average and is identified because of them. This is the moment when the presence of another becomes important; once a sensitive teacher or coach to those skills provides the necessary conditions to allow the talent to flourish. In many cases, such moment also means leaving the parent's house and facing an unknown world. The *initiation*, strictly speaking, is a path that involves persistence, determination, patience and some luck. This is the time when limits of the athlete's determination are tested. They will end up representing their country in national and international events, achieving social recognition for their deeds, experiencing overcoming limitation.

This is a space reserved for real heroes and also a place where they can get the awards regarding their status. But, considering the transiency of such moment and once the hero is a human being, there is the inevitable *return*, many times denied because it gives back the athlete to his mortal condition. The *return* can be considered as a return to their daily practicing routine in clubs in their hometowns or even in their limit, to the social condition of a citizen, far from their career in sports and the competitive environment. And in the attempt to resist such status they try magical escapes as a lack of motivation to go back to their original club, the excuses to delay practicing schedules, or, even, the innumerable and repeated "farewell ceremonies" from competitions. However, as paradoxical as it may seem, it is only at this point that they find freedom to live their lives.

People ask me: "Don't you miss competitions, and athletics competitions?" I answer: "No, because I have practiced sports with such intensity that the time to stop came naturally. I enjoyed everything I was entitled to! I have learned a lot about the world of sports, and I can assure you that I will keep on learning. Little by little, I am learning to know the athlete Joaquim better, the reasons why he practiced sports with such intensity, the internal dragons he had to overcome, the meaning of a gold medal, of a competition, of holding the Brazilian flag at a parade. Each day these experiences get further and become immortal in my life. Before, I felt immortal; now, I have to live with fragilities and the limits of my body.

Throughout the formation of their identity, it is not rare for athletes to get identified with a spectacular character suggested by the sportsman status – the one able to achieve great deeds. It makes their participation in daily life situations and in other social activities difficult. If on the one hand their condition as athletes distinguishes them from most of the population, enabling them to enjoy privileges reserved to a few, on the other, it makes it difficult to them to make private decisions, because they are public characters.

Joaquim gained the respect of his fellows and opponents throughout his years as an athlete because of the seriousness and professionalism he showed both on and out of the tracks. After his career transition, he developed other social roles that reinforced the heroic identity he had constructed in the past, seeing such heroism in a person who is dedicated to social transformation.

Besides that, Joaquim Cruz stands out in the history of Brazilian sports due to his strategy of competing to win, overcoming a tendency on Brazilian sports. After interviewing hundreds of Olympic athletes from different generations it was possible to observe that there are athletes who overcome their limits in order to go to the Olympic Games, but who are not trained or prepared to get there and be a winner. Joaquim Cruz is part of a very restricted group which aims to get to the finals and give up social scenes that athletes enjoy, such as participating in the opening parade, the conviviality in the Olympic City and many other things, because they go there to compete and win only. Curiously, some of these athletes are known as arrogant, nasty or greedy.

Joaquim assumed himself not only as a representative character of Brazilian sports when he faced all the personal, social and cultural challenges that confronted him but also as a great human example, almost a hero. After all, sharing the gotten glories with the community is what differentiates a hero.

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