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## Football goalkeeper, first or last option?

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The aim of this study was to investigate the reasons that led professional athletes to play in the goalkeeper position.

**Methods:** This research is a descriptive, cross-sectional study, with primary data collection and convenience sampling. Data were collected during April and May 2018, through the application of a questionnaire previously structured by the researchers. To this end, 30 professional goalkeepers (women = 6, men = 24), Brazilians aged between 19 and 37 years, who had active contracts with national and international football teams were interviewed.

**Results:** The vast majority of the goalkeepers interviewed (83.33%) pointed out that the decisive factor for them to become professional football goalkeepers was their dedication in training. When it comes to physical attributes, especially height, 73.33% of respondents reported that this was a decisive factor in their trajectory as a goalkeeper. 53.33% of respondents attributed the decision to become goalkeepers at their own discretion. 36.66% of respondents reported that the desire to become a professional football goalkeeper was a childhood wish. 33.33% of the goalkeepers interviewed declared that if they could they would have another tactical position in the team. 20% of respondents reported that, during childhood, being a goalkeeper was an alternative to be included in matches by friends. Finally, 83.33% of the interviewees agreed that dedication in training was crucial for their professionalization.

**Conclusion:** Among the main findings of this study, we can highlight that only 36.66% of the interviewees wanted to become a professional football goalkeeper since childhood. And yet, even after professionalization, 33.33% of goalkeepers declared that if they could they would have another tactical position in the team. Together, these findings reinforce the need for further studies on the subject, in order to contribute to a better satisfaction in the initiation process and professional satisfaction of football goalkeepers.

**Keywords:** Football, goalkeeper, professionalization

### 1. Introduction

Football is the most popular sport in the world <sup>[1]</sup>. This popularity takes thousands of fans to the stadiums and arouses, especially in children, the desire to be part of this great show <sup>[1]</sup>. Despite this, a very small number of young people achieve professionalization <sup>[2]</sup>. A curious fact is that the vast majority of football players, among all the tactical positions typically present in this sport, see the goalkeeper position, almost always, as the last possibility to play it <sup>[3]</sup>. Unquestionably, the goalkeeper is a fundamental element for every football team, and his performance during the match will always be decisive to prevent the team's defeat <sup>[4]</sup>. And in many cases, it can also contribute to the team achieving victory <sup>[4]</sup>. This is because often, usually after preventing the opposing team from scoring a goal, it is necessary for the goalkeeper to organize the team in search of an offensive tactical action that may have the final outcome of a goal for his team <sup>[4]</sup>.

Despite the great relevance of the goalkeeper for a football team <sup>[4]</sup>, the vast majority of studies focus on the discussion of players from other tactical positions <sup>[5-7]</sup>, consequently, this results in a small amount of studies related to the goalkeeper of football. Specifically about the reasons that led athletes to become goalkeepers, the scientific literature is still incipient and restricted. Therefore, the objective of this study was to investigate the reasons that led professional athletes to play in the goalkeeper position.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1 Study design and ethics approval

This research is a descriptive, cross-sectional study, with primary data collection and convenience sampling. Data were collected during April and May 2018, through the application of a questionnaire previously structured by the researchers. To this end, 30 professional goalkeepers (women = 6, men = 24), Brazilians aged between 19 and 37 years, who had active contracts with national and international football teams were interviewed. All participants signed a Free and Informed Consent Form, expressing their desire to participate in the research and authorizing the publication of the results obtained. Finally, all the methodological procedures that were adopted in this research, were approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Centro Universitário Carlos Drummond de Andrade- UniDrummond, a collegiate body of technical and scientific nature, constituted under the terms of CNS Resolutions 466/12 and 510 / 16.

### 2.2 Procedures

A questionnaire containing 7 closed questions was designed by the researchers in order to verify reasons that led the athletes to become professional football goalkeepers (Table-1):

1. Did you want to be a goalkeeper as a child?
2. Did you decide to become a goalkeeper of your own free will or were other factors determining?
3. Was dedication in training the decisive factor for you to become a professional football goalkeeper?
4. Do you believe that physical attributes like your height were decisive for you to become a goalkeeper?
5. If you could have chosen another tactical position to play, would you have done that?
6. Was the decision to become a football goalkeeper influenced by a family member?
7. During childhood, at leisure, was being a football goalkeeper an alternative to be included in matches by friends?

### 2.3 Data analysis

The answers obtained with the application of the questionnaire on the reasons that led the athletes to become professional football goalkeepers were tabulated in the Bioestat software version 5.3 and expressed in frequency and percentage.

## 3. Results and discussion

The vast majority of the goalkeepers interviewed (83.33%) pointed out that the decisive factor for them to become professional football goalkeepers was their dedication in training. In fact, professional athletes, especially football players, perform a large volume of training weekly<sup>[8]</sup>, and in some cases, due to the sporting calendar of competitions, they play more than one match during the week<sup>[8]</sup>.

When it comes to physical attributes, especially height, 73.33% of respondents reported that this was a decisive factor in their trajectory as a goalkeeper. In fact, the football goalkeeper is usually one of the tallest players on the team<sup>[9]</sup>. A great stature is necessary during a football match, considering the large goal area that needs to be protected by the goalkeeper (width = 7.32m and height = 2.44m). Thus, a sum of attributes such as agility, reaction time, good stature and breadth are determinants for the good performance of football goalkeepers<sup>[9]</sup>.

To our surprise, 53.33% of respondents attributed the decision to become goalkeepers at their own will. This contradicted

our initial research hypothesis, since we believed that the decision to become a goalkeeper received greater influence from other factors. Perhaps, this result is due to the fact that in this study we have a relatively small sample, in this case, only 30 goalkeepers and also, for having included only professional goalkeepers in our research. It is likely that in amateur athletes, such results would have a different outcome. 36.66% of respondents reported that the desire to become a professional football goalkeeper was a childhood wish. Analyzed carefully, this finding points out that the vast majority of football goalkeepers, despite idealizing professionalization in football since childhood, at first, were delighted with the other tactical positions. This must occur, mainly, due to the greater visibility and attention that the other players of the professional teams receive from the various media resources such as magazines, TV and radio programs, the internet, among others<sup>[6]</sup>. In this sense, a good question that arises is to understand when this transition occurs, if at all.

In this sense, an interesting piece of data obtained from our research can help to endorse this discussion. We found that 33.33% of the goalkeepers interviewed declared that if they could they would have another tactical position in the team. This is an interesting result, especially for professional football goalkeepers. We speculate that this result may be influenced, in part, by the remuneration that goalkeepers receive, which is often inferior to players in other tactical positions<sup>[10]</sup>. In addition, the lesser prestige attributed to goalkeepers, as well as the constant blaming of the fans in cases of defeats of the team, which reinforces the stigma of ingratitude over football goalkeepers<sup>[11, 12]</sup>.

Analyzing the Brazilian scenario of sports initiation, context in which the interviewees were inserted during the process of initial experience / learning in football, it is very common that the other tactical positions are occupied by the most skilled players, leaving the function of goalkeeper to the less skilled. Our findings corroborate this, as we see that 20% of respondents reported that being a goalkeeper was an alternative to be included in matches by friends. Despite this fact constituting a cruel deprivation of motor experiences, especially in childhood, a period in which providing a broad motor repertoire is extremely beneficial for the growth, development and sports engagement of children and adolescents, this result allows us to understand that even for young people less skilled during childhood, there is a possibility, however small, of becoming professional athletes. Without a shadow of a doubt, as described by the goalkeepers interviewed in this survey (83.33%), dedication in training is crucial for this achievement<sup>[13]</sup>.

Finally, in order to verify whether the decision to become a football goalkeeper was influenced by any family member, we found that only 16.66% of respondents received this type of influence. Unfortunately, we cannot say whether this low level of influence was due to a greater preference by family members for the young person to perform other tactical positions, the number of family members who possibly had experiences related to the goalkeeper or due to a disapproval / indifference in the choice of young athlete.

## 4. Conclusion

Among the main findings of this study, we can highlight that only 36.66% of the interviewees wanted to become a professional football goalkeeper since childhood. And yet, even after professionalization, 33.33% of goalkeepers declared that if they could they would have another tactical

position in the team. Together, these findings reinforce the need for further studies on the subject, in order to contribute to a better satisfaction in the initiation process and professional satisfaction of football goalkeepers.

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