

Women's judo in Spain. Past and present

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Abstract

Women interested in sports have faced up some barriers and prohibitions, in order to participate and become competitors, especially in martial arts and combat sports. Despite this, Spanish female judo has achieved great international success and the female participation in judo is high at all levels. However, their presence in sports media is not equal, taking into consideration the main results and medals obtained by female judokas from Spain. This study aims to show the history of women in judo, particularly in Spain, as well as to highlight their achievements. In addition to offering a description of the female judo coverage in the media and analyzing if there is an unequal treatment depending on the gender in judo. We started with a deep review of the literature about history of female judo, then the incursion and evolution of female judokas were examined and the main results of Spanish judokas since the beginning of women's competitions were highlighted. Also, we performed a descriptive and an exploratory study to analyze the online press related to sport in Spain.

Keywords: Martial arts; combat sports; judo; women; sport history; female judo coverage; sport online press.

1. Introduction

Women's history through sport have faced up some barriers and prohibitions (Rizo, Valdez, Flores & Chalico, 2014), in order to participate and became competitors, especially in martial arts and combat sports. According to Osúa (2013), sport was created by men and thought for them, despite being a social activity of great interest and relevance all over the world. Even so, more and more women succeed in different sports modalities, breaking the obstacles, for competing in equal conditions as men do.

Regarding judo, women integration occurred in two stages (Brouse & Matsumoto, 1999). First, from the early 20th century to the 1960s, where females participating in judo were a minority and depending on their social status; secondly, from the 1960s to our days, when women sport experienced important changes related to the wider changes of women in society. At this time, judo was already experiencing a process of occidentalization and sportification, which had in France, with judo master Mikonosuke Kawai and their pedagogical method of teaching Judo, one of its key exponents (Espartero, Gutiérrez-García, & Villamón, 2002).

In Spain judo started to consolidate since the 1950s, evolving and becoming a quite common sport (Gutiérrez-García, 2004). The participation of Spanish judokas in the European Judo Championships was only for men until 1975, when the first female European Championship took place in Munich. Women had to wait for female World Championships and the Olympic Games up to 1980 (in New York) and 1988 (in Seoul), respectively. Miriam Blasco, gold medalist in Barcelona 1992 Olympic Games, was the first Spanish female judoka in obtaining a medal in a summer Olympic competition, so she can be considered a pioneer in female sport. As Gutiérrez-García, Montero and Escobar (2018) states, Spanish female Judo has achieved great international success, even getting the 69% of the whole medals won in this sport (98 medals from 141 obtained in total).

Sports media have always played an important role regarding sports social impact and sports socializing effect. The way in which the media address some news (or not), their quantity

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and quality, the approach used in descriptions and treatment of sports participants or events, influence the general public and, even more, the young people. The sports references showed by the media often determines the choices of parents, children or adolescents for selecting one or other sport.

News about female sports athletes are scarce, and sportswomen are usually treated different due to gender reasons – news on sportswomen are relegated to the background, objectified and sexualized (Hull, Smith & Schmittl, 2015). This serves to legitimize and perpetuate the gender stereotypes and the heteropatriarchy prevailing in modern sport.

2. Objectives

The aim of this study is, firstly, to show the history of women in judo, particularly in Spain, as well as to highlight their outcomes. Secondly, we offer a description of the female judo coverage in current Spanish sports online press, analyzing a possible unequal treatment depending on the gender in judo.

3. Methodology

We performed a deep review of the literature about history of female judo, at the global and at the national level. The incursion on women in judo and the evolution of female judo were examined. The main results of Spanish judokas since the beginning of women competitions were highlighted, showing the medals obtained from the beginning of international competitions. A descriptive and an exploratory study was developed to analyze the online press related to sport in Spain: as.com and marca.com, tagging 'Judo' as a filter, since October 2018 (after the World Championships). We investigate the presence of a possible unequal treatment between men and women, for instance, by analyzing sexist sentences or images.

4. Results and Discussion

Spanish Judo in the women's category, according to the Spanish Olympic Committee, has achieved greater successes in the Olympic medalist compared to the men's category. At the summer Olympics of Barcelona 1992 Almudena Muñoz (-52kg) y Miriam Blasco (-57kg) won the gold medal. Then in Atlanta 1996, Yolanda Soler (-48kg) e Isabel Fernández (-57kg) won the bronze medal. Isabel, four years later won the gold medal at the Sydney Olympics. Moreover, Almudena Muñoz (-52kg) in Atlanta 1996, Úrsula Martín (-70kg) in Sydney 2000, Isabel Fernández (-57kg) in Athens 2004, Leire Iglesias (-70kg) in Beijing 2008 and María Esther San Miguel (-78kg) in Beijing 2008 achieved a fifth place. Currently, many female judokas from Spain are struggling to be at the top level and get a place for the summer Olympics. For example, the silver medal of Ana Pérez and Julia Figueroa in the Grand Slam of Ekaterinburg; Julia Figueroa's gold, Ana Pérez's silver and Estrella López's bronze at the Grand Prix in Marrakech. Also, María Bernabeu won the bronze medal at the Grand Slam in Germany. In this way, they have relevant positions at the IFJ World Ranking. On-line press such as marca.com and as.com included during the last year news about Judo ($n = 104$; 33 specifically on women, 31.7%). It seems that they are trying to leave behind gender stereotypes and that they talk about judokas in terms of fairness.

5. Conclusion

Despite having a hard beginning, women in judo have achieved a great international success in Spain. They have been very frequently in top positions at international championships, and winning more medals than men. However, their presence in sports media is not equal, regarding the main results and medals obtained. It is true that a progress and some improvements are shown, and that the treatment of women's judo seems to be not stereotyped by gender. But it is necessary to progress towards the fair status that the sportswomen deserve.

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