

# Motivation and challenges in a humble beginning: The case of potential young Filipino (Batang Pinoy) boxers

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## **Motivation and challenges in a humble beginning: The case of potential young Filipino (Batang Pinoy) boxers**

### **Abstract**

Many successful professional athletes start from a humble beginning where investing time, dedication, and hard work is required. This research investigates the motivations and challenges young Filipino (Batang Pinoy) athletes experience while pursuing careers in boxing. It purposively selected 10 young male boxing athletes who had already competed in provincial, regional and national games from the Bicol region, Philippines. Using a phenomenological approach, the participants participated in an in-depth interview using the validated interview questions. It reveals that poverty is portrayed as a great motivator of young athletes, where the life stories of successful world boxing champions serve as their basis. They are also influenced and supported by their peers and family in their boxing careers. However, insufficient facilities and fundings are mainly the cause of their struggles. This study serves as a call for the national governing body of sports in the country to further extend its efforts to support the needs of young potential athletes. Specifically, safety equipment and training, strengthening sports policies, and funding are necessary to solve these challenges.

**Keywords:** boxing, young athletes, sports motivation, boxing career

### **INTRODUCTION**

Boxing is a game that requires strength, agility, and perseverance (James et al., 2016). For some people, it is only for recreation and exercise to engage in socialization and attain individual fitness (Reynolds, 2017). However, for some players, specifically those who belong to the lower class, boxing can be their way to escape poverty (Bonhomme et al., 2020). In addition, many professional Filipino boxers earned much in their career (Remollino, 2021).

The Philippines is the Asian nation with the most boxers in the world boxing hall of fame (Gems, 2014). It is the country's most renowned individual sport that has given honor and glory to the nation, with countless Olympic medalists, professional world champions, and great boxers whose names were established or will be future awards in the boxing hall of fame. Compared to international boxers, Filipino fighters looked to be small giants of the ring (Sheehan, 2012) regarding height and stature. Furthermore, boxing also gives a chance for athletes to escape from poverty. Many boxers' life stories relate that their desire to overcome poverty pushes them to participate in boxing (Bonhomme et al., 2020).

Most boxers descend from central and southern Philippines rural areas, and practically all of their families are poor (Ishioka, 2012). Underground boxing is prominent in impoverished nations like the Philippines. Despite the danger and inadequate money, young prospective boxers, notably in certain distant districts of the nation, are recruited in non-sanctioned boxing events (Runstedtler, 2013). Boxing is life-threatening, particularly for young athletes (Fife et al., 2013). A young athlete's brain is considerably more sensitive to concussion than an adult's (Donnell et al., 2018). In addition, young athletes' head injuries take far longer to recuperate than adults (Davis & Purcell, 2014). If even among adult amateur boxers, the danger of primary head and facial injuries is significant, it is worse for young players (Sigurdsson, 2013).

The argument over boxing in society has raged for decades (Leyva, 2020). Numerous scholars and medical associations have advocated for the prohibition of boxing, citing ethical, legal, and moral concerns (Camacho, 2014; Perkins et al., 2014; Sethi, 2018). Others argue that participants should be allowed to make their own participation choices (Dixon, 2001). Boxing is preferable to gang-related activities for certain poor adolescents because it provides supervision, structure, and objectives (Cruz, 2018). The danger of injury in amateur boxing is lower than in other contact sports (Siewe et al., 2015). In contrast to these other contact sports, boxing promotes and rewards head and face hits (Dixon, 2015). The Canadian Pediatric Society and the American Academy of Pediatrics condemn boxing and discourage children and adolescents from participating (Loock et al., 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Emmanuel Dapidran “Manny” Pacquiao, more popularly known as Pac-Man, is a Filipino boxer, media celebrity, and politician (Poole, 2011). <sup>1</sup> He started his boxing career at 14 and is the first and only eight-division boxing champion in the world. Pacquiao has won 10 world titles and is also the first boxer to win lineal championships in four separate categories. His rise from poverty to worldwide fame is a remarkable story.

Aside from the possible injuries and health risks of boxing, potential young boxers in the Philippines experienced problems. Lack of equipment, facilities, and allowance is commonly experienced by young athletes in the country (Bonhomme et al., 2020). The country does not have a good amateur boxing program and facilities compared to other countries (Blanco, 2016). This means that, on a technical level, most Filipino boxers could be better. That also means that any Filipino boxer who can gain fame in boxing must be supremely talented to compensate for the lack of fundamentals.

Young potential boxers should possess determination and hard work to succeed (Jump, 2021). The mentioned studies show the opportunities and dangers of boxing, especially for beginners. However, limited studies explore the young boxers' motivation and challenges. Hence, this research investigates the motivations and obstacles young athletes experience while pursuing careers in boxing. Consequently, this research may give pertinent insights to the national government and supporting entities about the demands of young Filipino athletes and provide countermeasures to the obstacles they confront.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

The study used a qualitative phenomenological research approach that investigates human experience in social situations and strives to make sense of social behaviors (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). The study design investigated the motivations and obstacles young prospective boxing athletes experience regarding training, coaching, opportunity, and risk. Field notes and audio recordings were used to guarantee the accuracy of the data.

### **Context of the study**

The study was conducted in Region V Philippines, where Bicol Regional Games for basic education and invitational games are conducted annually for young Filipino athletes. Combative sports such as boxing were among the sporting events in regional competitions. For this study,

the researchers obtain permission to gather information from young Filipino boxers in the region using an interview format. The study used purposive sampling to identify the 10 participants. The participants were purposively selected based on the records provided by the coaches and parents, such as the highest event participation and boxing exposure. The selected participants have competed in the provincial, regional and national games spearheaded by the Department of Education. The study considered only the boys' division since boxing is not open for girls in basic education. The participants of the study ranged from 15 years old to 17 years old. This is in accordance with the guidelines and procedure in the screening and accreditation of athletes, coaches, and chaperon in 2019 [Section 17(a) of Department of Education Order No. 43, s2016], where elementary athletes should have been born in 2006 or after and 2001 or after for secondary athletes. The data gathering of the study was conducted from January to June 2022.

**Table 1.** Profile of the participants

Pseudonym	Age	Highest Event Participated	Number of years Participated as Athlete
Andy	16	Provincial Games Qualifier	2
Bert	15	Regional Games Qualifier	3
Carl	15	Regional Games Qualifier	3
Jade	17	Provincial Games Qualifier	2
John	17	National Games Qualifier	3
Luke	15	National Games Qualifier	3
Manuel	16	Provincial Games Qualifier	2
Mike	17	National games Qualifier	3
Samuel	16	Regional Games Qualifier	3
Sean	16	Regional Games Qualifier	3

### **Research Instrument and Validation**

This study used structured interview questions to assess the research variables. Following an assessment of relevant literature, training experience, coach experience, opportunity, and risk, the following questions drove the research.

1. *Can you explain what pushed you to pursue boxing as a sporting career?*
2. *What challenges did you face during the training session? And why do you consider it a challenge?*
3. *Can you share negative experiences about your coach?*

4. *In terms of opportunity, how can you differentiate boxing from other sports?*
5. *Based on your experience, can you explain the risks you observed in boxing?*

The interview questions were critiqued by five experts in the field of sports sociology, and then conducted test-retest reliability of the relevant participants in the field. The data were evaluated with further modification and refining to make the instrument more suitable for the participants. For the purpose of enhancement, comments, ideas, and recommendations from authorities or resource individuals were invited. Then, the final text demonstrating relevance to the ideas was used.

#### **Data Gathering Procedure**

In doing the actual data collection, the study used a systematic process. After validating and assessing the dependability of the study instrument, the researchers sought permission from the coaches and parents of the participants and engaged in discourse to provide direction and coordination. The informed consent form was presented and completed, and signed forms were collected from parents and participants. The paper included the study's goal, participant's role, prospective advantages, confidentiality, data management, permission, and voluntary participation. The researchers' in-person and virtual interviews with each participant lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Even though the interview questions were asked in English, the researchers let individuals answer in their native language for a more straightforward response. Before replying, the researchers checked that the participants understood the questions. Audio recordings and field notes were employed to ensure the accuracy of data gathering.

#### **Data Analysis**

After completing the interview, the researchers examined the transcripts and listened to the audio recordings to match the data, then translated the acquired data into English and labeled the pertinent portions, including words, sentences, and phrases. The researchers then

determined which codes were significant and constructed categories by grouping many codes, identifying the categories, determining which were the most relevant, and linking each code. The tabular presentation of the data used verbatim and coded transcripts to classify comparable information supplied by the participants. Documentary analysis of secondary data was employed to substantiate the produced data and elaborate on interpreting the results.

## RESULT

Some common themes emerged from the participants' sharing (DiCicco-Bloom & Cunningham, 2015). These themes were used to describe the phenomenon. Table 2 shows the data on reasons for boxing engagements by the participants, which generated 1 theme focused on the reason for boxing engagement from the 4 categories: idolizing professional boxers, rewards and incentives, peer and family influence, and poverty.

**Table 2.** Reasons for boxing engagement of the participants

Participant s	Verbatim Transcript	Categorie s	Theme	Descriptio n of Themes
P1	<i>"My interest in boxing started when I was 7 years old when my father and I always watch the match of Manny Pacquiao and the story of his life from poor to billionaire."</i>	Idolizing Professional Boxers	Reason for engagement	The basis of the participants for boxing engagement as a sporting career
P5	<i>"I started to like and engage in boxing when the professional boxers come into our barangay and conducted a free sports clinic. I admired them when they tell us that they use boxing both as a career and for self-defense."</i>			
P8	<i>"Because based on my observation, there is money in boxing compared to other games. There is a great chance for me to achieve my dream life if incase."</i>	Rewards and incentives		
P2	<i>"Because if I became a professional boxer, whether I win or lose, there is a prize."</i>			
P7	<i>"I want to be a professional boxer to travel the world and buy things I wanted."</i>			
P9	<i>"My father is a former amateur boxer and now a trainer. Because of my father's encouragement, I'm now enjoying and like boxing."</i>	Peer and family influence		
P10	<i>"I want to escape my family from poverty."</i>	Scape from		
P4	<i>"To provide my family a better way of life."</i>	Poverty		
P3	<i>"To become a successful boxer so I can pay back my parents for their sacrifices."</i>			
P6	<i>"I believe that boxing can change our social status."</i>			

Furthermore, table 3 shows the data on the challenges faced by the participants. It generates 4 themes focusing on 7 categories. The lack of equipment and facilities and insufficient allowance were anchored on the challenges during training. The athlete and coach's conflict were focused on words towards their mistakes. On the other hand, the advantages of other sports compared to boxing focused on the availability of facilities, rare to find opponents for practice, and poor game acceptance. Lastly, the possible risks were based on health risks and law violations.

**Table 3.** Challenges Faced by the Participants in Boxing Career

Themes	Coded Transcripts	Categories	Description of Themes
Challenges during Training	All the participants echoed that they received poor and limited boxing equipment and facilities. Whereas most of the time, they tend to practice using alternative equipment, such as used sacks for drills. Participants also highlight their personal expenses in membership fees in a boxing gym in order to practice their skills with the support of necessary equipment and facilities.	Lack of equipment and facilities	The problems encountered by the participants during training
	The majority of the participants voiced that lack of training allowance disrupts their training. Their training allowance was normally used for travel allowance, food allowance, facility fees, and clothing allowance.	Insufficient allowance	
Athlete and coach conflict	All the participants stated that the only problem they faced with their coaches was the painful words and punishment they received if they made a mistake during training and competition. They stressed that their coaches tend to reprimand and insult them to correct their actions.	Negative words and punishment for mistakes	Conflicts and issues arise between the participants and their coaches
Advantages of other sports compared to boxing	Most of the participants expressed that compared with boxing, other sports facilities for basketball and volleyball were common in every community. This means that boxing is one of the rarest sports being practiced in one community.	Availability of facilities	The opportunity of other sports compared with boxing.
	Since most of the participants mentioned that boxing is one of the rarest sports in the community, they stressed that competitors or opponents for sparing were also rare.	Rare to find new opponents for practice	
Possible risk	All the participants stated that boxing was a very dangerous sport. They also cited that there were a lot of recorded injuries and deaths of players because of its intensity. Possible health risks were cited by brain damage, bone fractures, and death.	Health risk	The potential danger in boxing engagement
	The participants also explain that boxing competition is prone to gambling which is prohibited by the particular law in the country. Sometimes, boxers also in engage in gambling.	Possible law violation	

## DISCUSSION

### Reasons for Boxing Engagement of the Participants

Based on the study results, two participants shared that their boxing engagement was because of their boxing idols. The life story, matches,



and sharing of their idols motivate them to further pursue their career at a young age. According to many scholars, great boxers influence young individuals to pursue boxing careers, moreover, the story of struggles to success enhances the desire for young potential (Aguilera, 2021; Allen, 2022; Bates, 2016). In addition, a free sports clinic was also mentioned by the participants. Sports clinics teach the basics of the sport to the youth, with the main goal of introducing the student to the sport (Mortejo et al., 2022). Significant sports support programs allow the youth to correct and advance their skills and abilities in sports.

Another reason for engagement was the rewards and incentives in boxing. A participant responded that earning money is easier in boxing compared to other professional games. Each boxer's purse, the amount they are paid for the bout, is negotiated before every fight (Akin et al., 2022). Boxers are paid differing amounts based on their matchup, who is favored, sponsors, and previous experience, among other factors (Keshkar et al., 2019). Because of ambitions, wants, and needs, the participants aimed for rewards and incentives in their boxing careers.

Furthermore, peer and family influence were also cited as reasons for boxing engagement. Family history and background influence the members' career and life goals (Janmaat & Hoskins, 2022). Many scholars agree that family plays a significant role in the development of talented athletes (Celestino et al., 2015; Knight, 2017; Scott et al., 2019). Compared to children without parental guidance, children with parental help are more likely to engage in sports and assume they possess superior athletic abilities (Somerset & Hoare, 2018). Parents have a crucial influence on the growth of a young athlete. The partnership is founded on inspiration, impetus, and inspiration, as well as practical, mental, and monetary support. There is a correlation between parental support and childhood sports involvement, the child's physical and emotional health, and his or her final performance and passion for the activity (Merkel, 2013).

Lastly, the majority of the participants pointed out that poverty drives them to engage in boxing. Participants believe that if they succeed in their chosen sporting career, they will earn enough to sustain their family needs. It was quite dramatic in the way that the participants, at a young age, found ways to help their parents. Boxing and poverty are strongly intertwined in the Philippines (Ishioka, 2012). Most boxers come from rural areas in the central and southern Philippines, and almost all of their families are impoverished.

### **Challenges Faced by the Participants in Boxing Career**

There are a lot of Filipino boxers that are very famous and recognized internationally but came from very humble beginnings. Sports and academic issues were common in developing countries like the Philippines (Pocaaan, 2022). In this study, the participants shared challenges they faced in sporting involvement.

### **Challenges during training**

All participants agreed that their boxing equipment was inadequate and restricted. In contrast, they often exercise using improvised equipment such as old bags for drills. In addition, participants detail their boxing gym membership costs to hone their talents with the aid of the appropriate equipment and facilities. In terms of sporting facilities, the country has been surpassed this year by smaller ASEAN countries (Blanco, 2016; Morbo, 2021). The absence of quality sports facilities has negatively impacted athletes' performances at all levels of competition. Nevertheless, the current inventory of sports facilities in the country reveals that the government has invested a great deal in building sports venues across the nation. However, many of these sports venues have poor performance due to the lack of sports programs to sustain their viability and local funding to maintain these facilities (Davao, 2018).

Another issue faced by the participants during training was the insufficient allowance. Most participants voiced that lack of training allowance disrupts their training. Their training allowance was normally used for travel allowance, food allowance, facility fees, and clothing

allowance. For athletes, full allowances are worth more than their monetary value (Navarro, 2020). Published scholarly research linked the good performance of athletes to the amount of allowance and incentives they received (Wilson, 2017; Zia-UI-Islam et al., 2020). Proper funding as support to the athletes may be an advantage for the country to produce more world-class athletes.

#### **Athlete and coach conflict**

Between the coach and participants, only negative words towards their mistakes were the issue. Many coaches who implement punishments think they will help teach the kid a lesson (Pryor, 2019). It may link to operant conditioning, wherein athletes learn to behave in good ways in different types of reinforcements and punishments (Leeder, 2022). However, scholars proved that punishments do not help athletes learn; what they do was to make athletes afraid to make mistakes. In reality, everyone makes mistakes; in most cases, perfection will never be achieved. Coaches need to teach players through the learning process how they can fix those mistakes and improve. By constantly punishing players, the team is not creating an environment conducive to learning (Battaglia et al., 2017). Instead, it creates an environment where players never step outside of their comfort zone or take risks because they are afraid to make a mistake.

#### **Advantages of other sports compared to boxing.**

The participants shared their views regarding the advantages of other sports compared to boxing. One of the issues is the availability of the facilities; as mentioned earlier in the challenges during training, most participants expressed that compared with boxing, other sports facilities for basketball and volleyball were common in every community. Boxing is among the rarest sports practiced in most of the community. It manifests the notion that although boxing is one of the most famous sports in the country, the lack of facilities shows that boxing receives less support from the local and national governments. In addition, compared to other sports,

boxing needs more equipment to ensure safety, even during practice or fitness sessions (Okon et al., 2020).

Since the participants shared a lack of boxing facilities, they added that boxing was one of the rarest sports conducted in the community. They stressed that competitors or opponents for sparing were also rare. It may link to the possible risk of engaging in boxing. Fear and injuries were recorded as barriers to boxing participation (Okada, 2018; Rudd et al., 2016). Moreover, to pursue boxing as a career, one should expect pain and possible injuries (Dixon, 2015).

### **Possible risk**

Boxing is a life-threatening sport and is considered one of the killer sports (Alevras et al., 2022; Poliakoff, 2021). In addition, all the participants stated that boxing was a hazardous sport. They also cited many recorded injuries and deaths of players because of their intensity. Possible health risks were cited as brain damage, bone fractures, and death. It implies that participants understood the risk of boxing and the possible outcome of their careers. In addition, Filipino boxers are prone to injuries and even death caused by a lack of safety equipment, less-trained coaches, and illegal competition (Correales, 2018).

The participants also cited possible law violations as a risk of boxing engagement due to betting or gambling. The participants also explained that boxing competition is prone to gambling which is prohibited by the particular law in the country. They also added that some boxers also engage in in-game betting. Betting or gambling is prohibited in the Philippines (Lamoste & Prasetyawati, 2012). Although gambling and professional sports often have an incredibly close relationship, this does not necessarily mean players themselves have the freedom to gamble. Internationally, a rule restricts professional sports personnel from betting on an event or sport; they are usually involved in helping protect the integrity of the sport (Lastra et al., 2018; Moriconi & de Cima, 2020). For a sport that has long been known to suffer issues with corruption, such as boxing (Huggins, 2018), this is a critical issue.

## **CONCLUSION**

The engagement of young potential Filipino athletes in boxing is due to their motivation and ambitions. However, certain challenges made it hard for them to pursue their chosen career. Poverty is portrayed as a great motivator of young athletes, this is to improve the status of their families. Young athletes also observed and admired the early beginnings of the Filipino world boxing champions with the support from family and peers. This means that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations drive their engagement.

Furthermore, boxing in the country is being ignored and receives less funding from the government, which is common in developing countries. It is expected that problems such as insufficient facilities, little to no allowance, and nutrition. In addition, it is undeniable that boxing is prone to life-threatening injuries. The need for safety equipment and training for the persons involved, strengthening sports policies, and sports funding are necessary to support the needs of potential young Filipino boxers.

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