

Evaluation of the effects of nationality swapping on Turkish sports from the perspective of sports scientists

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ABSTRACT

National Athletes who are representing a different country from their country of birth are called "naturalized/nationality-swapped athletes". The purpose of this study was to evaluate the nationality-swapping system in Turkish sports with its why, how, and effects on Turkish sports. The study was designed as a case study, which is one of the qualitative research methods. The research data were collected through face-to-face interviews with sports sciences academics (who have/had important roles in sports federations) and collected data were analyzed via the inductive content analysis method. The results show that the main reasons for the application of naturalized athletes are, use them as a shortcut to success, governmental pressure and the presentation of the country and branches; when it comes to its effects although they have some positive effects, naturalized athletes have much more negative effects on Turkish sports; The society's failure to internalize success of naturalized athletes and favoritism to naturalized athletes by managers has seen as most marked negative effects, and increasing interest in the sports and naturalized athletes' role model being too young athletes are found as the most marked positive effects.

Keywords: Turkish sports, naturalized athletes, nationality swapping, national allegiance.

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INTRODUCTION

The Olympic Games are governed by the rules and regulations of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Those rules, set forth in the Olympic Charter, set a baseline for the terms of competition, for the citizenship status of the athletes who will participate in the Olympics and which countries they will represent as with other matters (Spiro, 2020). According to Olympic Charter (Rule 40-41), *"Any athlete at the Olympic Games must be a citizen of the country (National Olympic Committee) entering the competition. A competitor who is a national of two or more countries at the same time may represent either one of them, as he may elect"* (IOC, 2021). An athlete who has participated in international competitions for one country may represent another country, provided that it has been three years since the athlete last competed for another country (Spiro, 2016). That "cooling off period" can be reduced or eliminated by the IOC, contingent on the agreement of the national Olympic committees

involved. In this context, the nationalities that the athletes can represent in the Olympics are largely dependent on their citizenship status. This means that some athletes technically have the right to represent more than one country (Jansen et al., 2018). All these reasons have caused the athletes to compete on behalf of different countries and the concept of "naturalized athletes" emerged.

Especially, the increasing population mobility in the world has made the traditional concept of citizenship (i.e. birthright and the right of descent) quite controversial (Kivisto and Faist, 2007). In parallel with this increasing mobility, the number of people with multiple citizenships has also increased. In particular, people who are descendants of immigrants or people who marry from a different country often have the right to citizenship in more than one country. For example, an athlete born in country X to a father born in country Y and a mother born in country

Z is, in theory, eligible to represent all three countries in three consecutive editions of the Olympic Games (Jansen et al., 2018). In addition, athletes can legally acquire citizenship in their new country by marrying a citizen of another country or by fulfilling a certain residence requirement (Maguire, 2008; Jansen et al., 2018). At this point, it should be noted that changing citizenship by marriage or residence seems less "controversial" than acquiring athletes to compete in the Olympics in exchange for money from national sports federations or governments (Maguire, 2008).

Although the number of Olympic athletes representing their countries of origin has not increased much (increased from 5% to 9%) since the Second World War, the concept of recruited athletes has become increasingly common since the 1990s (Jansen et al., 2018).

The willingness of the athletes to sell their talents to countries with no real ties of origin for "money" and the country with the highest bid to compete in the Olympics has caused the naturalized athletes to be referred to as "mercenaries" (Elendu and Dennis, 2021). International sports federations (for example, the International Association of Athletics Federations - IAAF), which are frequently exposed to this situation, are looking for ways to deter athletes from changing citizenship for money. In addition, the increasing controversy due to naturalized athletes has also led to the dilution of the concept of citizenship. Moreover, citizenship has become a commodity that can be exchanged for talent (Shachar, 2011; Spiro, 2014, 2019).

Discussions about the naturalized athletes in the Olympic games are constantly on the agenda due to both the increasing number of naturalized athletes and the differences of opinion about the "representation of the country". The IOC, on the other hand, responded to these discussions as "global citizenship" (Roche, 2022). In a study by Jansen (2019), newspaper reports on naturalized athletes between 1978 and 2017 were examined, and it was stated that every four years, in the same calendar year when the Summer Olympic Games were held, the number of articles about naturalized athletes significantly exceeded the number of articles in previous years.

The practice of naturalized athletes, which is increasing day by day in the global sense, has also been seen in some sports branches in Turkey. For the first time in 1984, Turkey was represented in the sailing branch at the Los Angeles Olympic Games with naturalized athletes, and then the number of naturalized athletes gradually increased. When it comes to the 2016 Rio Olympic games, the number of naturalized athletes made up almost one-third of the Turkish team (29 out of 103 athletes). In the Olympic game in question, 29 naturalized athletes from different 17 countries of origin represented Turkey in nine branches (Hürmeriç et al., 2017). Afterward, 12 naturalized athletes competed on behalf of Turkey in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Since the first Olympic game in which naturalized athletes took part in the name of Turkey, a total

of 87 naturalized athletes has taken part and these athletes only won 5 medals.

Considering the academic studies on naturalized athletes in Turkey, it is seen that these are generally review studies. On the other hand, qualitative studies in which stakeholder views are questioned are very limited (Reiche and Tinaz, 2018; Duman et al., 2019). It is an important requirement in terms of the ongoing global debates to reveal empirical studies on the effects of naturalized athletes on Turkish sports. From this point of view, the aim of this study is to evaluation of athlete migration in Turkish sports with its causes and effects on Turkish sports from the perspective of academics in sports sciences.

METHOD

Research model

In order to determine the perceptions of academics in sports sciences towards naturalized athletes, the case study design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in this study. The case study focuses on investigating the factors related to a situation with a holistic approach, how they affect the relevant situation and how they are affected by the relevant situation (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013).

Participants

Quota sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling strategies, was used to determine the participants of the study in order to prevent errors that may arise in the selection of units. In this context, faculty members from the Departments of Physical Education and Sports Teaching, Sports Management, Coaching Education and Recreation in the Faculty of Sports Sciences were included in the study. The participants of the study consisted of 17 faculty members (3 female and 14 male) (Table 1).

Research publication ethics

This study was approved by the decision of Gazi University, Assessment and Evaluation Ethics Working Group, dated 08/02/2022 and numbered 2022-224.

Data collection tool

In this study, a semi-structured interview form titled "Perceptions of Academics in Sports Sciences Towards Naturalized Athletes" developed by the researchers was used. In the formation of the interview form, first of all, the relevant literature was examined and the process of

Table 1. Demographic information.

	Gender	Academic title	Department
<i>P1</i>	M	Professor	Sport Management
<i>P2</i>	M	Associate professor	Sport Management
<i>P3</i>	M	Professor	Sport Management
<i>P4</i>	M	Assistant professor	Sport Management
<i>P5</i>	F	Associate professor	Recreation
<i>P6</i>	M	Associate professor	Recreation
<i>P7</i>	M	Professor	Recreation
<i>P8</i>	M	Associate professor	Recreation
<i>P9</i>	M	Assistant professor	Physical Education and Sports Teaching
<i>P10</i>	M	Associate professor	Physical Education and Sports Teaching
<i>P11</i>	M	Professor	Physical Education and Sports Teaching
<i>P12</i>	M	Associate professor	Physical Education and Sports Teaching
<i>P13</i>	F	Associate professor	Coaching Education
<i>P14</i>	M	Assistant professor	Coaching Education
<i>P15</i>	M	Professor	Coaching Education
<i>P16</i>	M	Professor	Coaching Education
<i>P17</i>	F	Associate professor	Coaching Education

defining the problem situation was carried out. After this process, a question pool was prepared to represent the research problem. Expert opinion sought to ensure the content validity of the prepared interview form. In this context, the interview form was examined by three faculty members from the Faculty of Sport Sciences and one faculty member from the Department of Measurement and Evaluation in Education. At this stage, the clarity and comprehensibility of the questions and the adequacy of determining the perceptions of academics in sports sciences towards naturalized athletes were tested. Considering the feedback obtained, an interview form with 5 questions was created. In the interviews, the following questions were asked to academics of sports sciences:

- What does the concept of naturalized athletes mean to you?
- What do you think about the reasons for the emergence of naturalized athletes?
- What do you think about the effects of naturalized athletes on sports branches?
- What do you think about the effects of naturalized athletes on the athletes in that sport branch?
- If you were the decision maker, what would you like to do about naturalized athletes?

Data collection

In this study, data were collected using the individual interview method, one of the qualitative data collection techniques. With the individual interview method, it is aimed that the participants can freely express their

thoughts. Before all interviews, participants were informed about the study. Afterwards, a comprehensive consent form was presented to the participants, which included statements such as the purpose of the research, the data obtained from the interview will be used only within the scope of the research without using names, and the interviews will be recorded. Individual interviews lasted an average of 30 to 35 min.

Analysis of data

Inductive content analysis was applied to the data obtained within the scope of the research. Content analysis in qualitative research; It is analyzed in four stages: coding the data, finding the categories, organizing the codes and categories, and defining and interpreting the findings (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013). First of all, the identities of the participants were hidden and codes such as P1-P17 were given. The interview recordings obtained from the participants were deciphered and transcribed. Afterwards, the statements of the participants were coded separately by the researchers, and the codes were brought together according to their common characteristics to reach categories and subcategories. Categories, sub-categories and codes were explained and interpreted in relation to each other, and results were obtained. For each category obtained as a result of the analysis, examples from the opinions that are assumed to represent it best were selected and direct quotations were included. The categories, subcategories and codes obtained as a result of the research were examined, criticized and approved by two faculty members from Gazi University Faculty of Sport Sciences.

Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability are important factors that concern the stages of creating the conceptual framework of any research, collecting, analyzing and interpreting data, and presenting the findings. The qualitative method offers explanations that can convince the reader that the presented conclusion is reasonable and logical. The concepts of credibility, portability, reliability and verifiability used in qualitative research literature correspond to the concepts of internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity in quantitative research. In this context, in order to ensure the credibility of the research, the method of comparing the findings obtained with the participation of more than one researcher, one of the triangulation techniques (Merriam, 2015), was used. Within the scope of the analyst variation, the researchers coded separately, and then another researcher controlled the codes identified by each researcher. After discussion on the

codes that were determined differently, the codings were rearranged. Expert opinion was sought during the development and analysis of data collection tools. The stages of the study (conceptual framework, participant knowledge, research model, data collection and analysis) were explained in detail in order to ensure the transferability of the data within the study group and environment (Lincoln and Guba, 1985 as cited in Merriam, 2015). The codes were presented to the readers in tabular form, and direct quotations were made from the participant statements.

FINDINGS

In this part of the study, the analyses and results of the data obtained are included. The codes regarding the perceptions of the participants towards the concept of naturalized athlete are given in Figure 1.

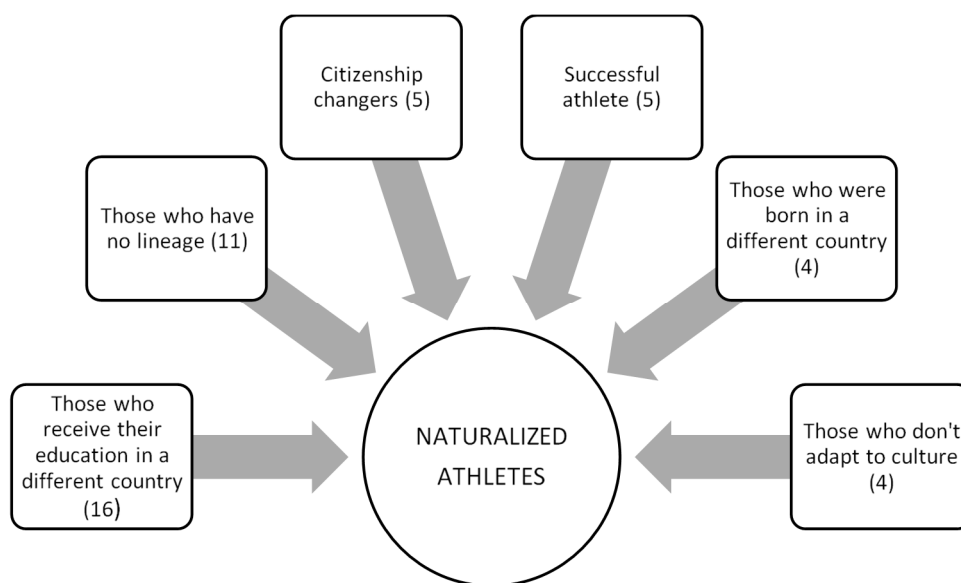


Figure 1. Perceptions of the participants towards the concept of naturalized athletes.

According to Figure 1, the perceptions of the participants towards the concept of naturalized athletes were classified in 6 groups: those who receive their education in a different country, who do not have lineages, who have changed citizenship, who are successful athletes, who were born in a different country and who do not adapt to the culture.

The perceptions of the participants towards the concept of naturalized athletes are as follows:

P1: « There is a Syrian athlete. He plays in the lower age categories. He came as a refugee and is growing up in this country. If this athlete joins the national team, I wouldn't

call it naturalized, because he grew up in our country» (Receive their education in a different country)

P6: « It is not naturalized for Azeri Turks to come and compete for Turkey. For me, the competition of a black athlete of African origin on behalf of Turkey is not the same as the competition of someone with Turkish ties» (Without lineage)

P15: « In my opinion, every person who chooses to be a citizen of another country while being a citizen of one country is a person who gains the naturalized feature» (Changing citizenship)

P2: « Naturalized athlete means that successful athletes who are citizens of another country compete in our

national uniform» (Successful athlete)

P12: « *Those who were born in another country and trained in the education system of that country and became elite athletes, change their country to become citizens of another country and compete on behalf of that country, it means naturalized athlete» (Those who were born in different country)*

P15: «*We have a sample of Elvan Abeylegesse. She was my national teammate. She came at the age of 16, learned*

Turkish in a few years, still lives in Istanbul and coaches the national team. I don't see her as naturalized because she acts like one of us» (Those who do not adapt to culture)

The categories, sub-categories and codes of the participants' reasons for athlete naturalization are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Opinions of the participants on the reasons for athlete naturalization.

Categories	Codes	f
Political	Ministry pressure	10
	Budget-success relationship	9
	Success criterion (medal)	8
	Maintaining the position	7
	Short tenure of office	6
The easy way out	Shortcut to success	17
	Increasing the number of medals	15
	Participation in the Olympics	5
	Country culture	4
Sportive	Lack of trained ready athletes	4
	Naturalized athlete density in the branch	3
	Inadequate youth setup	1
Recognition	Country presentation	8
	Gaining sponsorship support	2
	Lobby power	2
Development	Developing the branch	2
	Benefit from their coaches	2
	Developing local athletes	1
	Motivating the community	1

According to Table 2, the opinions of the participants on the reasons for athlete naturalization were classified in 5 sub-categories as political, the easy way out, sportive, recognition and development.

The opinions of the participants on the reasons for athlete naturalization are as follows:

P11: «There is the idea that success equals a medal... This needs to be adopted by the Ministry. They ask the Ministry how many medals you will get at the Olympics. If such a question comes to you, when you take office as the new federation president, then you would prefer to take the short cut while under this pressure» (Ministry pressure)

P13: « *After the federation presidents are elected, they want to maintain their position and they want to show*

themselves. That's why they turn to naturalization» (Maintaining the position)

P4: «*Countries want to achieve success. If they do not have trained and ready athletes in the short term, they turn their eyes to the world. First, they look at their surroundings, then to Europe, and then they bring athletes who can achieve a certain level of success in their own branch to their country» (Maintaining the position)*

P1: « *But what do we do, we bring people who never knew our culture to our country in order to get medals quickly and compete in branches» (Increasing the number of medals)*

P5: «*The biggest reason is the desire of countries to announce their name for prestige in international organizations. In order to achieve these goals, they aim*

to gain superiority over other countries by increasing the number of medals of the country» (Country presentation)
 P9: «... They bring in naturalized athletes to promote and develop the branch» (Developing the branch)

According to Table 3, the participants' opinions on the effects of athlete naturalization were classified into two sub-categories as positive and negative.

Table 3. Opinions of the participants on the effects of athlete naturalization.

Category	Sub-Categories	Codes	f
Effects of the Naturalized System	Negative	Society's failure to internalize success	16
		Naturalized athlete favoritism	9
		Image degradation	7
		Decreased motivation	7
		Quitting sport	5
		Feeling worthless	3
		Burnout	5
		Being aimless	4
		Learned helplessness	3
		Breaking unbreakable records	2
		Waste of resources	2
		Decreased performance	1
		Psychological pressure	2
		Impact on Turkish coaches	1
	Positive	Increasing interest in the branch	5
		Increasing the number of medals	4
		Being a role model	3
		Increasing opportunities	2
		Image contribution	2
		Locomotive	2
		Vision	2
		Benefiting from a foreign coach	2
		Increased motivation	1
		Increased performance	1
		Lobby power	1
		Increasing number of athletes	1

The opinions of the participants on the effects of athlete naturalization are as follows:

P1: « For example, a black athlete receives a medal on behalf of our country. Our people cannot accept this medal. However, if this naturalized athlete had grown up in Turkey, then they would have internalized it. » (Society's failure to internalize success)

P4: «It was such a process that much more of the unpaid scholarships that weren't given to me were given to the naturalized athletes who came at that time. Why didn't you give it to me, why didn't you send me to the camp with that money? Why did you take me to camp in Ankara while you camped the athlete in Ethiopia.» (Naturalized athlete favoritism)

P17: « Turkish athlete does his self-training. However, he gets upset when the things that are done to naturalized

ones are not done to him. For example, there are too many athletes that quit sports in athletics. They quit when they're on top» (Quitting sport)

P12: « It causes the motivation of some domestic athletes to drop. They say they will race anyway, why should I race» (Decreased motivation)

P8: «When 9 out of 10 athletes are naturalized in the athletics branch, neither you can own the success, nor do others, nations other than us, criticize this. They do not see that this success is yours, our situation is the blind leading the blind... This damages the country's reputation» (Image degradation)

P14: « Halil Mutlu is a similar case, we can consider him as naturalized. They really contributed to Turkish sports. They increased the popularity of the branch. They increased the interest in the branch» (Increased interest in the branch)

P2: « We need to increase our wealth by incorporating the working methods of naturalized athletes into our own processes. Naturalized athletes only contribute to our medal count» (Increasing the number of medals)

P7: « An athlete named Melek Hu came, her name was neither in Europe nor elsewhere. The federation brought her; she was taken to camps etc. The girl became the European champion. She was a role model for our girls» (Rol Model)

P10: « When the athlete receives a medal, the first thing

heard is that we have a medal in athletics. It is said that you can be successful in fencing. I can say that it acts as a locomotive for branches that are not very known in our country» (Locomotive)

According to Table 4, the opinions of the participants about what they will do if they are the decision authority are classified in two sub-categories as criteria and application methods.

Table 4. Opinions about what the participants will do if the academics are the decision authority.

Category	Sub - Categories	Codes	f
Decision authority	Conditions/Criteria	Residence	6
		Training with local athletes	4
		Training in our country	3
		Cultural adaptation	3
		Being able to speak Turkish	3
	Application methods	Quota	6
		Locomotive	5
		Benefiting from their coaches	5
		Unsuccessful branches	4
		Naturalized athletes to youth setup	3
		Not giving money	3
		Lineage	2
		Branch specific application	1
		Athletes from the same continent	1

The opinions of the participants are as follows:

P4: « It is necessary to make the period of stay in Turkey compulsory. These people should not come and complete their citizenship procedures and return to their country. You have to stay here for 1 year or 2 years» (Residence)

P17: « They can be the partner of the trainer and also with Turkish athletes, this will also make Turkish athletes better» (Training with local athletes)

P14: « I strictly forbid athletes from training abroad» (Training in our country)

P1: « I am not completely against naturalized athletes, but if they are going to come, 1-2 athletes should come. If half of the 20-person group is naturalized, I will not allow it» (Quota)

P10: «If we need a locomotive, we have no success in that field and if we think we can achieve success, then I think we should consider it. If there is a certain momentum of failure, naturalized athletes can be made to act as a locomotive and to break it» (Locomotive)

P10: « We are talking about the athlete, but here we also need to talk about naturalized in the trainer. It is necessary to provide a trainer support before the athlete» (Benefiting from foreign coaches)

P7: «I don't see a problem in the development and spread of the sport, especially in the branches where we can't go to the Olympics, where we lag behind, and being brought to the point of being a role model for the athletes» (Unsuccessful branches)

DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings obtained from the opinions of sports science academics on naturalized athletes.

Perceptions of the participants towards the concept of naturalized athlete

The perceptions of the participants towards the concept of naturalized athlete were classified into 6 groups: those who receive their education in a different country, who do not have lineages, who have changed citizenship, who are successful athletes, who were born in a different country and who do not adapt to culture.

Understanding the conceptual intricacies of citizenship

is crucial when trying to understand how citizenship swapping practices work, as International Olympic Committee regulations state that an athlete's Olympic nationality is dependent on their citizenship status (which allows athletes to be selected by national committees). Citizenship is a multifaceted concept and its examination includes both formal aspects (legal status, rights) and informal aspects (participation, identity and belonging) (Bosniak, 2006; Joppke, 2007; Bloemraad, 2018). Studies investigating the controversial status of naturalized athletes have mainly centered around two intertwined but analytically distinguishable ideas. The first mainly concerns the alleged marketization of citizenship (Iorwerth et al., 2014; Jansen et al., 2018; Kostakopoulou and Schrauwen, 2014; Shachar and Hirschl, 2014; Spiro, 2014). The second is about the citizenship issue of the debate (Adjaye, 2010; Black, 2016; Campbell, 2011; Poli, 2007). In this context, when we look at the answers from the participants, the expressions “to receive athlete training in a different country” and “successful athlete” can be considered within the scope of the marketization of citizenship and the expressions “without lineage”, “changed citizenship”, “born in a different country” and “those who do not adapt to culture” can be considered within the scope of citizenship problems.

Opinions of the participants on the reasons for athlete naturalization

The participants' opinions on the reasons for athlete naturalization were classified into 5 sub-categories as political, the easy way out, sportive, recognition and development.

For political reasons, athlete naturalization consists of codes such as “ministerial pressure”, “budget-success relationship”, “success criterion (medal)”, “maintaining the position”, “short tenure of office”. Considering the sports targets of the development plans in our country, the number of medals won in international competitions is seen as a criterion (SBB, 2018). In addition, federation budgets are directly proportional to their sportive success (Altun and Koçak, 2015). Therefore, the success of both the ministry and the federations is measured by the sportive success achieved, namely the medal. This can be said as one of the reasons for having a naturalized athlete.

In terms of the easy way out, athlete naturalization consists of “success in a short way”, “increasing the number of medals”, “ready athlete”, “participating in the Olympics” and “country culture”. Most federations depend on government subsidies based on international sporting success. This is seen as an incentive to make naturalized athletes natural instead of developing long-term strategies to encourage youth in the country (Reiche and Tınaz, 2018). In the study of Shachar and Hirschl (2014) on naturalized athletes, where countries aim to increase their own strength, metaphorical terms such as “hiring the

best in the world” have emerged. This is a parallel view to the expressions “success in a short way” and “ready athlete”.

Athlete naturalization for sporting reasons consists of “lack of trained athletes”, “naturalized athlete density in the branch”, “inadequate youth setup” codes. When the concept of naturalized athlete is considered in terms of “naturalized density in the branch”, Kenya can be given as an example, especially for the athletics branch. In Kenya, there is a worldwide density of middle- and long-distance runners. However, in international competitions such as the Olympics, only three athletes from a country are allowed to compete. This means that many top-notch runners from Kenya are not eligible to compete in the Olympic Games. These athletes, who cannot compete on behalf of Kenya, apply to race ways on behalf of other countries. Therefore, there are Kenyan runners in many countries, including Turkey. In a study conducted by Reiche and Tınaz (2018), most of the athletes who came to Turkey stated that they could not join the national team in their own country and therefore there was an export of athletes from Kenya to the rest of the world. Another example of this is table tennis. Almost all naturalized athletes in table tennis all over the world are of Chinese origin and the most important country that keeps table tennis as a live sport is China (Uçar, 2020). For this reason, it is frequently seen that two Chinese people compete on behalf of different countries in the table tennis final competitions of major sports organizations.

For recognition purposes, athlete naturalization consists of codes such as “country promotion”, “earning sponsor support”, “country prestige” and “lobby power”. It is known that in the developing economic and industrial world, sports is an extremely important tool in reaching the masses and is very meaningful for the recognition of the country when properly managed (Türkmen and Eroğlu, 2018). For this reason, sport has been a great means of sanction and power among people in international relations and will continue to be a force due to its own nature and internal dynamics. Therefore, all the successes obtained as a result of the acceptance of sports as a state policy have a great impact on the countries of the world and in the international arena (Sunay, 2010; İnce, 2016; Bingöl and Polat, 2021). Moreover, in a study conducted by Algün Doğu and Sunay (2010) on academics, deputies, federation presidents and general secretaries, it was stated that sports are used as a secondary diplomatic tool in international politics when the primary diplomatic tools fail. Therefore, according to Grix (2016), countries' naturalization of athletes is due to this unique and global impact of sports. For many years, while countries aim to raise their international profiles with sportive success, they have followed the path of naturalized athletes (Njororai, 2010; Reiche and Tınaz, 2018). The dissemination of these policies by countries causes the “marketing” of citizenship, that is, its transformation from a “sacred” value to a marketable “commodity” (Shachar, 2017).

In terms of development, athlete naturalization consists of the codes of “developing the branch”, “benefiting from coaches”, “developing local athletes” and “motivating the society”. There are many opinions parallel to these statements from the participants. Turkish Judo Federation President Sezer Huysuz made the following statements about naturalized athletes in a speech given to an Anadolu Agency reporter: *“We want to bring one or two young people, who have won medals in the Olympics and will carry the team forward. When we bring them, they will carry the Turkish Judo National Team forward. Our children will take them as a role model. When naturalized athletes bring medals, our children will also use their opportunities. There are talented ones among our own children. We are trying to introduce them. In order to achieve it, we need a showcase, an exemplary athlete. We’re not going to bring in two naturalized athletes and chase them. We will make them locomotives. We will win medals with naturalized athletes in 2020 and win medals with our own children in 2024.”* (Anadolu Agency, February 1, 2017). An incident similar to this aim of Huysuz has been experienced in athletics. 9 of the 12 medals participating in the 2016 European Athletics Championships were won by naturalized athletes. Although it has caused criticism in the international arena (Bloom, 2016), 8 medals won in athletics in the Olympic Games held in Rio De Janeiro in the same year came from athletes of Turkish origin. This shows that the naturalized sports system can lead to development in individual sports (Bulmus, 2018).

Opinions of the participants on the effects of athlete naturalization

Opinions of the participants on the effects of athlete naturalization were classified into two sub-categories as positive and negative. The expressions of favoring the naturalized athlete, damaging the image, decreasing motivation, quitting the sport, feeling worthless, burnout, being aimless, learned helplessness, breaking records that cannot be beaten, waste of resources, decreased performance, feeling uneasy, psychological pressure, impact on Turkish trainers are negative responses for athlete naturalization.

In a study conducted on the evaluation of sports management by sports managers in Turkey, it was stated that the naturalized athlete system is wrong from a political point of view (Türkmen and Eroğlu, 2018). In a study conducted by Duman (2019), it was stated that when the opinions of the trainers were examined, it was stated that naturalized athletes and Turkish-born athletes did not have equal opportunities, therefore there was a negative point of view about naturalized athletes. In addition, the fact that Turkish-born athletes cannot find a place in the national team is seen as a reason for leaving their sports branches. About “waste of resources”, which is one of the other negative factors, Weightlifting Olympic Champion Halil

Mutlu made the following statement: *“In management dimension, money is not transferred to the right place. Why are naturalized athletes being brought at high prices? If they say to me that I brought this athlete for 200 thousand dollars, I’d answer that you give me that money, I will get 2 children and I will bring a medal in the competition you want 4 years later”* (Temel et al., 2021).

Increasing interest in the branch, increasing the number of medals, being a role model, increasing opportunities, image contribution, locomotive, vision, benefiting from foreign trainers, increasing motivation, increasing performance, lobbying power, and increasing the number of athletes are expressed as positive results of athlete naturalization. In a study conducted by Beltekin and Kuyulu (2020) on sports science faculty students, it is seen that participants’ opinions on naturalized athletes are generally positive in terms of their role in the sports sector. Moreover, the positive effects of naturalized athletes, such as setting big goals for Turkish athletes, understanding the importance of disciplined work, helping them to develop technically, and realizing that Turkish athletes can do sports for many years, are also among the opinions of sports science students (Duman, 2019).

In the framework of “benefiting from a foreign coach” among the positive opinions, the Turkish table tennis community giving opportunities to foreign coaches in the early 2000s contributed to our country’s making its voice heard on international platforms. This started to gradually change the perception of table tennis in the country and led to the growth of youth setup targets (Salici, 2016).

Opinions about what the participants will do if they are the decision authority

The opinions of the participants about what they would do if they were the decision authority were classified into two sub-categories as criteria and application methods. If the participants are the decision authority, the criteria they will set are listed as a residence, training with local athletes, training in our country, cultural adaptation, and speaking Turkish. Their opinions on the application methods were expressed as quota, locomotive, benefiting from foreign coaches, unsuccessful branches, naturalized youth setup, not paying money, lineage, branch-specific application, and athletes from the same continent.

Within the framework of “cultural adaptation” and “being able to speak Turkish within the criterion code, it is seen that some naturalized athletes actually attach importance to them (Çakay, 2020). For example, our long-distance runner Ali Kaya, originally from Kenya, stated that he was discovered in his own country and that he teamed up with our national team in the first professional race of his career. He stated that he was very happy with the national jersey, that he wanted to fly the flag of our country in the highest places, and that he would fight to the last drop of his sweat. Ali Kaya also stated that he does not see himself

as naturalized, that he is a person born again in Turkey and that he wants to do his military service (Gençlik and Spor Bakanlığı, 2020). Azerbaijani-born Turkish athlete Ramil Guliyev, on the other hand, thinks that the athletes who will come from another country and compete on behalf of Turkey should also learn Turkish, live here and adopt the culture of this place. He stated that if they came to Turkey just to compete, they would have used the country for advertising purposes and that this would harm Turkish sports (Newspaper Vatan, August 18, 2018).

Within the framework of “not giving money” in the code of practice, in a study on physical education and sports school students, the following statements about the development problem of sports in the activities dimension were stated: “The biggest problem is the lack of infrastructure, the inability to train elite athletes, and the acquisition of naturalized athletes for success in competitions. If naturalized athletes win medals in individual sports, they are rewarded in exorbitant amounts, and similar situations occur in team sports, creating a negative effect on domestic athletes” (Tek, 2019). In addition, in a study conducted by Karakuş and Işık (2017), it was stated that the money spent on naturalized athletes who became Turkish citizens by giving large amounts of money in the short term is unnecessary, and this money should be spent on the development of the sports culture of the citizens of the country. On the other hand, this difference in the money/reward system causes Turkish athletes not to feel equal with naturalized athletes, negatively affects their perspective on sports, and causes athletes who are in the same branch as naturalized athletes to quit sports earlier (Duman et al., 2019).

Regarding the quota for naturalized athletes, it is seen that some federations already do this in terms of the code of the application. An example of this is the volleyball branch. Natalia Hanikoğlu, a Russian-born volleyball player, stated that she has been warmly welcomed since she came to Turkey, she has never felt alienated, the only naturalized quota in the national team is used for her and she has a successful sports life (Gençlik and Spor Bakanlığı, 2020). The quota application for naturalized athletes in any branch may lead to better research on the athlete to be recruited in order to achieve success. In addition, as can be understood from the words of Natalia Hanikoğlu, it can increase the awareness of the responsibility that the athlete should take.

In terms of “benefiting from foreign coaches” from the codes of application, İmamoğlu (2016) stated that in some branches, coaches can be brought from abroad both for the athletes and the youth setup and that these coaches can train both the athletes and the local coaches.

As a result, in this study, which was conducted to examine the effect of nationality swapping in Turkish sports, it has been stated that the orientation to the naturalized athletes is mostly to achieve success in the shortest way, but the main reason is political. Although it is stated that naturalized athletes have positive effects on

Turkish sports, it is emphasized by the participants that they have more negative effects. According to the participants, if there will be naturalized athletes in Turkish sports, criteria must be determined for this and the aim should always be the development of Turkish athletes/sports.

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