



## PREFERRED PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES AMONG POLISH TRACK AND FIELD ATHLETES

*Krzysztof Ziemia, Aleksandra Lach*

Faculty of Physical Education and Physiotherapy, Opole University of Technology, Opole, Poland

---

### **Abstract**

*Physical activity is one of the most important activities in human life. Regardless of age or gender, we all experience it. From walking, cleaning the house, biking and other activities of daily living to playing competitive sports. Our mental state improves as various hormones are released during physical activity, reducing feelings of pain and improving mood. The purpose of the study was to survey track and field athletes to find out which sports were most popular among them. 210 athletes (119 women and 91 men) participated in the survey. The respondents answered questions about a variety of physical activities. One question asked them to choose between summer and winter sports. Next, respondents were asked to select their preferred team sport. Subsequent questions were divided into several sections, allowing for more freedom of expression. Respondents also gave their opinion on their favorite combat sports. The last question, unlike the others, was completely open-ended. The athletes were asked to list sports or different types of physical activities they would do if they were not training in track and field. The results in this case are very surprising, especially because of the number of sports mentioned. Thanks to the survey, we have a broader view of the interests of young people and athletes in different types of sports. The carefully summarized answers also showed the extent to which sports are popular not only in terms of playing them, but also in terms of watching them. The number of sports mentioned in the last question allows us to see that young people are familiar with and interested in many sports.*

**Key words:** *popularity of sports, athletes, sports disciplines*

---

### **Introduction**

Physical activity is an essential part of a healthy lifestyle. However, it is difficult to associate physical activity only with the satisfaction of biological needs, since it has a great impact on the social, motor and psychological spheres of life related to the proper somatic development of a young person. Physical activity in sports, recreation and tourism usually takes place in a joyful atmosphere and with positive emotions that lead to mental relaxation. Athletics is a group of sports in which utilitarian qualities are also clearly perceived as influencing activities of daily life and work [4]. Individuals with better motor skills adapt more quickly to new tasks or specialized motor activities, so they use less energy to perform them and work more economically. Mobility is an important part of

independent living and leads to better well-being, especially in older people. Appropriate physical activity is also one of the best ways to develop regular habits and willingness to participate in physical recreation [3]. Health-promoting recommendations for physical activity vary according to age, gender, and the purpose for which we engage in physical activity. Physical activity should be understood as a variety of activities associated with the performance of movements by skeletal muscles that result in energy expenditure at a higher level than at rest. Basic activities of daily living include housework, gardening, and activities related to locomotion, such as walking, running, cycling, or rollerblading. Regular physical activity is important because it reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease and diabetes

and improves relevant indices of human somatic build.

### **Aim**

The aim of the study was to examine the opinions of track and field athletes regarding their preferred other forms of physical activity and sports.

### **Materials and methods**

The research method used in the study was a diagnostic questionnaire survey. The respondents were given a questionnaire specially prepared by the author, which included 4 basic closed questions and 3 open-ended questions, allowing them to express their opinions with the possibility of their own answers. The questionnaire was designed to ensure anonymity. The respondents were a group of 210 track and field athletes (119 women and 91 men), youth and juniors aged 15-20 years. All of them had a valid license from the Polish Athletics Association and represented forty-five sports clubs from all over Poland. The majority of the respondents were attending training camps and club camps of the Polish National Athletics Team at the time of the survey. The athletes represented various track and field disciplines, such as walking, running, jumping, and throwing.

### **Results**

#### *Preferred sports by season of the year*

Respondents first selected their most preferred sports by the season of the year. The athletes' choices were intended to show which sports they found more attractive, better known, and more frequently watched. The study revealed a clear dominance of summer sports over winter sports for both men and women. Out of 210 respondents, only 8% preferred winter sports, which may reflect the lower attractiveness of these sports among track and field athletes and the fact that in Poland, winter sports are practiced by far fewer people than summer sports, mainly due to the popularity of the latter among young people. 88% of female respondents preferred summer sports, which may reflect the lower attractiveness of these sports among the athletes surveyed.

Attractiveness of team sports according to track and field athletes

The male respondents selected 9 out of 10 different sports, while the female respondents selected only 6 different sports (Fig. 1). This indicates a wide range of choices and a diversity of interest in other sports among track and field athletes. Women preferred individual sports because they tend to feel more comfortable as individuals. They indicated dancing, figure skating or artistic gymnastics as their most popular sports. Men, on the other hand, tend to be more diverse in their choice of team sports. This may indicate that men begin their physical activity with team sports, most often football.

The most attractive sport for women was volleyball (68 votes, 58%). Volleyball also had the largest difference between men's and women's choices (49%). Basketball, on the other hand, was the most attractive sport for men: out of 50 votes, 28 (56%) were cast by male athletes. Compared to volleyball, the difference between women's and men's choices for basketball is small, amounting to only 12% (6 votes). This may be influenced by the fact that there were more female respondents in the study.

The difference between male and female preferences for football was 37.14% in favor of male respondents. This means that of the 35 votes for football, 24 were cast by men, or 13 more than by women. If we look only at the team sports that received more than the usual 5% of all votes cast, i.e. the value set to obtain an answer to the question of the attractiveness and popularity of a given team sport, this limit is exceeded for both men and women in only 4 of the 10 sports that respondents could choose from: basketball, football, handball and volleyball, i.e. team sports that are among the most popular worldwide.

The most popular individual summer sport among the men and women surveyed was track and field (95 women, 80% of the votes), while the rest of the votes were distributed among eleven other disciplines: artistic gymnastics - 6 votes, sports gymnastics - 5, equestrian - 3, and swimming - 3. Fencing, badminton, tennis, windsurfing, sailing, indoor climbing and cycling each received 1 vote. Men,

on the other hand, voted for only eight sports. Again, track and field received the most votes (87%). They also chose artistic gymnastics, swimming, badminton, tennis, table tennis and windsurfing. In total, respondents included 13 different sports in their choices, or 72%. Sports such as diving, triathlon, rowing, weightlifting and shooting were not included. This indicates that there is very little interest in and popularity of these sports, resulting in a lack of attractiveness in both training and watching. Analysis of the data shows that athletics is the sport of greatest interest to the respondents. This may be due to the fact that a particular sport is more familiar and attractive to us when we practice it, and we are more willing to watch it. Athletics received 175 votes from 210 respondents, 83% more than any other sport. The other sports received between 1% and 6% of the votes, which also shows the very low interest of men and women in them.

The figures below show percentage summaries of the differences in the number of votes cast by male and female respondents for preferred summer sports. There are no differences in the number of votes between the two sexes for windsurfing, tennis, and badminton. The largest percentage difference among women is in artistic gymnastics (50%). The case of 100% differences is only due to the fact that the athletes of one sex cast a single vote for a given event, while the athletes of the other sex cast none. However, such disciplines do not show much attractiveness and possible comparability of differences in popularity.

The exception is equestrian sports (100% more for women, 3 votes). There was also a significant difference in the attractiveness of gymnastics and swimming between male and female athletes.

In terms of the attractiveness of individual winter sports, the most popular sports were those included in the Winter Olympic program: bobsleigh, luge, biathlon, figure skating, snowboarding, cross-country skiing, downhill skiing, long-track speed skating and short-track speed skating. This question was the least homogeneous in terms of respondents' votes. Both women and men voted for each of the sports listed. Figure skating received the most votes from women

(44 votes, 37%). Significantly, male respondents cast the lowest number of votes for this sport. This shows the difference in attractiveness and interest in figure skating among both genders. In contrast, men gave the highest number of votes for ski jumping (40 votes), while women gave significantly fewer votes for this winter sport (16%). Bobsleigh and short-track speed skating received the lowest number of votes from women (1%), while short-track speed skating, long-track speed skating, figure skating and luge received the highest number of votes from men (2 votes each, 2%). Short-track speed skating received the lowest number of votes from both genders, and biathlon and cross-country skiing received the same number of votes from both genders. The sports that received the same number of votes from men and women were luge, biathlon and cross-country skiing. Snowboarding and ski jumping were the sports with the closest percentage of votes cast by men and women, 16% and 43%, and 10% and 28%, respectively.

#### *Attractiveness of combat sports according to track and field athletes*

The third question was the final closed-ended question and addressed eleven combat sports that may be attractive to and preferred by the track and field athletes surveyed. Each of the sports had specific rules regarding weight classes and technique. Most of the athletes were introduced to some of the combat sports early in their careers or participated in them in school physical education classes. Among women, the most popular martial art (Figure 2) was karate. This is particularly influenced by the fact that more than 100 karate styles have now been established, each of which teaches discipline and concentration. This is in contrast to boxing, which was the most popular sport among men (38%). Karate is much less brutal and has more rules, resulting in fewer injuries. 38 female athletes (28%) and only 3 male athletes voted for karate. However, boxing was the second most popular combat sport among women (21% of the votes). Both men and women also cast a significant number of votes (37 total) for mixed martial arts. It is noteworthy that no respondents voted for kendo. This may be due to the very low popularity of this martial art

and the respondents' ignorance of its rules. The lowest number of votes by both men and women was for sumo (3 women, 2 men). This may be due to the body weight requirements for this sport. Surprisingly, judo was chosen 22 times by women and only 7 times by men. Wrestling received the third highest number of votes from men (11 votes, 12%). Women gave the same number of votes (5) for aikido, kickboxing and capoeira (12%). Men, on the other hand, had a total of 5 votes for these sports: aikido and kickboxing - 1 vote each, and capoeira - 3. In the case of martial arts, significant differences were found in the popularity and attractiveness of these sports between male and female athletes: more than 60% in the case of kickboxing, karate, and aikido. Each of these martial arts was more popular among women. With the exception of kendo, which did not receive any votes, the smallest difference between gender preferences for martial arts was found in boxing (only 14%). On the other hand, more men than women preferred wrestling, with a difference of 58%. Mixed martial arts and boxing were chosen more often by men. Both disciplines received a difference of nine votes. It should also be noted that the smallest difference was for sumo (1 vote, or 20%), and small percentage differences were found for mixed martial arts (24%) and capoeira (26%).

#### *Attractiveness of other physical activities according to track and field athletes*

One of the questions was about the type of physical activity that athletes would choose if they did not train track and field. This was the only question that did not include any specific disciplines or sports. The respondents' freedom of choice resulted in the listing of 31 different physical activities (Figure 3). Most of the respondents indicated the sports they had previously practiced, their passions, and their future or additional activities outside of their athletic training. Very often, despite being trained in a particular sport, the athletes chose additional forms of physical activity that helped them develop or provided a "respite" from their daily training. The gender differences in

the different forms of physical activity chosen by the athletes, and the total number of votes cast for each activity, indicate great variation among the respondents. The most frequently mentioned physical activities by women were playing volleyball (20), dancing (18) and swimming (14). Men, on the other hand, most often chose football (22 times, 24%), followed by basketball (10) and volleyball (9). Looking at the first most preferred activities, women clearly preferred individual or non-contact sports. This may indicate that they prefer to work on their own and not focus on the team, but on self-realization and more individualistic. Men, on the other hand, preferred team sports where they could share their energy, work together, and feel a sense of belonging to a group. In as many as 16 cases, only one gender mentioned a particular sport and the other did not mention it at all. The largest difference was for dancing, which was mentioned 18 times by women and not at all by men. Dancing was listed as an activity more popular with women. It is very rare to find a man engaged in dancing, and this was reflected in the questionnaire. A greater number of activities were listed by women (26) than by men (20). This may be a reflection of women's greater interest in different sports and the fact that men know fewer of them and tend to follow the traditional disciplines.

Table tennis and working out in the gym received the same number of votes from both genders. The surprising aspect was that the latter received a total of 10 votes, i.e. only 5%. It might seem that working out would be the most common activity chosen by athletes, as it is close to their daily training and is very popular these days. Physical activities such as figure skating, acrobatic gymnastics, dancing, aerobics, pole dancing, short-track speed skating, downhill skiing and CrossFit were only mentioned by women. Men were the only ones to list sports such as rugby, biathlon, triathlon, shooting, and aikido. Volleyball and football received the most votes. These two sports would have been chosen by the most respondents if not for their track and field training. Basketball was preferred by 13% and football by 12%.

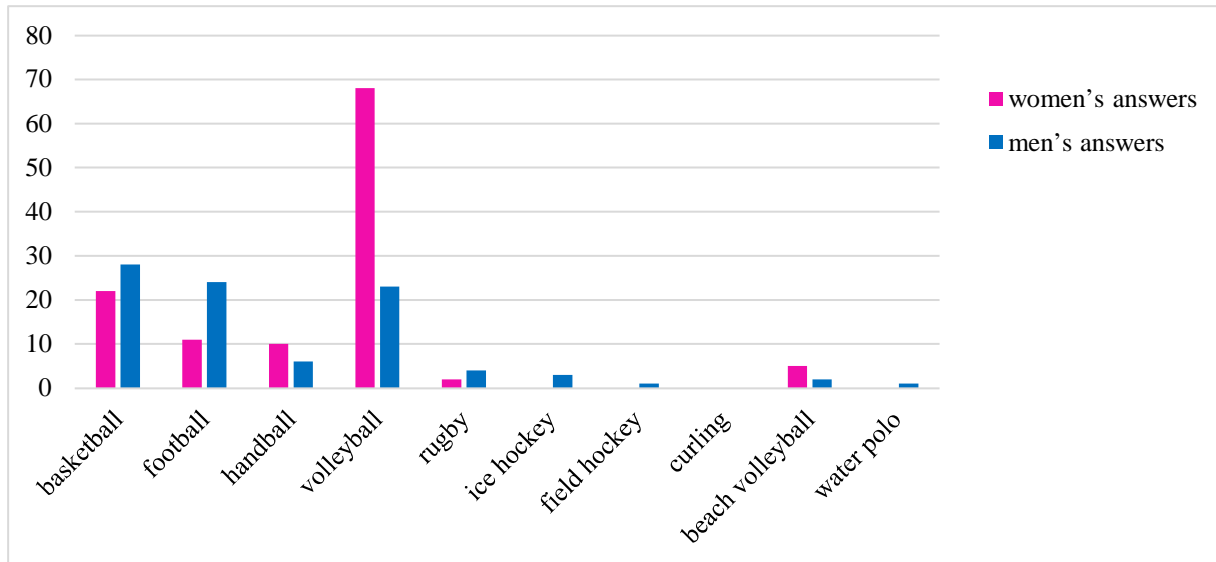


Figure 1. The attractiveness of team sports among male and female track and field athletes.

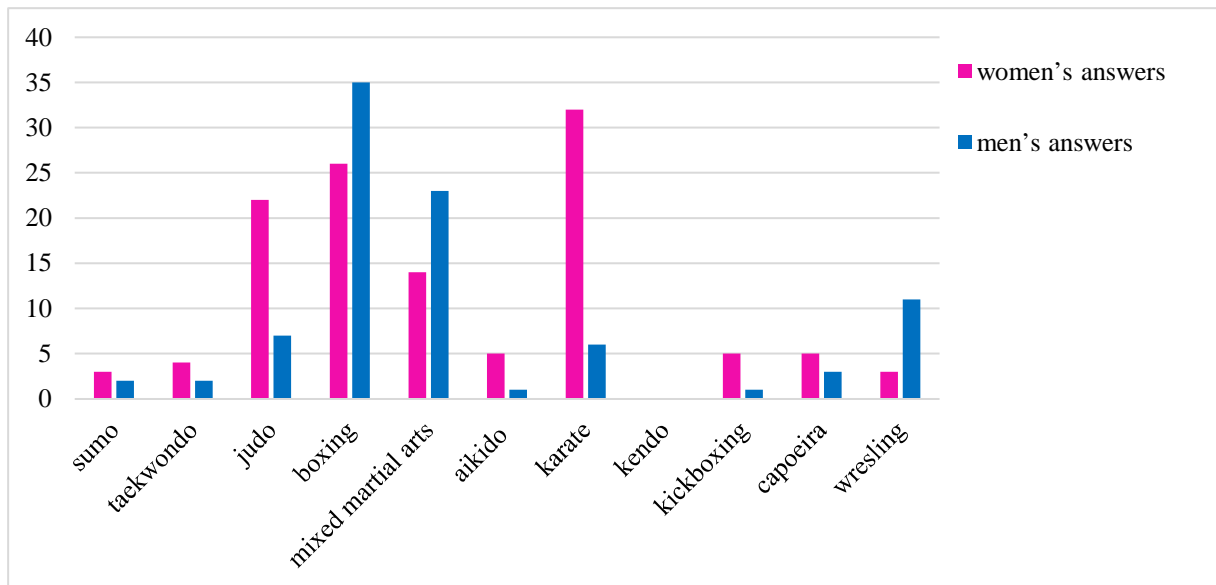


Figure 2. The attractiveness of combat sports among male and female track and field athletes.

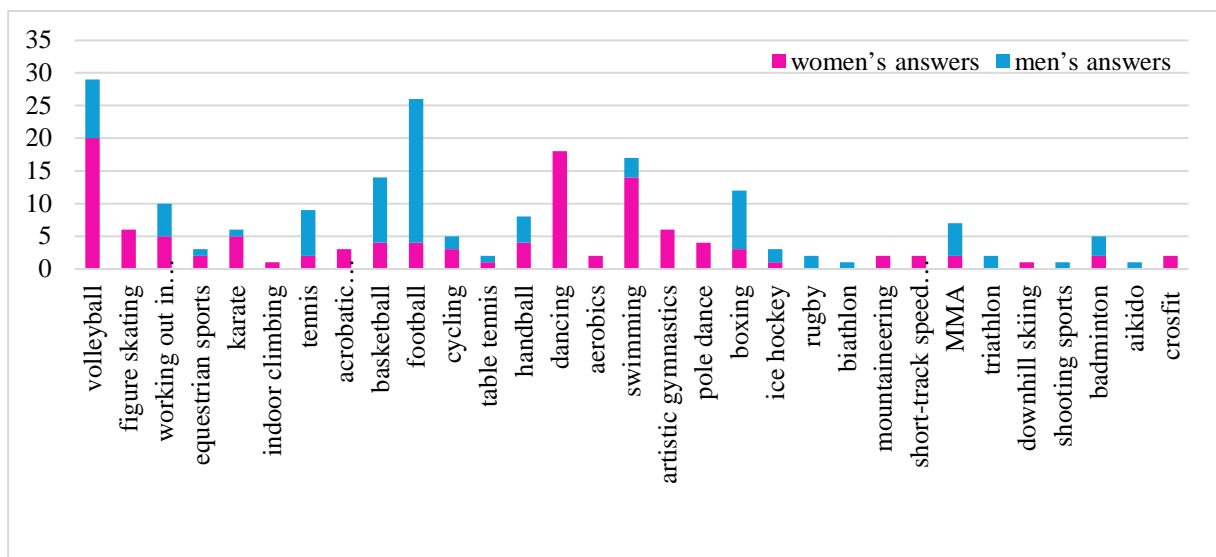


Figure 3. The attractiveness of other physical activities according to track and field athletes.

## Conclusions

In literature, sport is defined as a field of physical culture by many practitioners and theorists. Athletics is a sport that includes many competitions with different movement characteristics, such as walking, running, jumping and throwing. Track and field trainers and coaches of high performance sports must take into account rest and recovery periods when preparing a specific periodization of the respective training cycles. However, recovery periods cannot be completely passive, without physical activity. Supplementing this time seems to be another form of physical activity preferred by track and field athletes. The results of the study showed which sports are suitable to fill this transitional period with the benefits of recovery, including mental recovery, after an overworked training period. For another form of physical activity suggested by the coach to be effective, it must be enjoyed and performed willingly by the trainees. Many studies show that the variety of daily physical activities also has a positive effect on the athlete's psychophysical state, which is directly related to training and competitive success. For example, studies conducted in Trois-Rivers (Quebec, Canada) showed that children who had a variety of physical activities and 5 hours of physical education per week performed better at school [1].

The popularity of different forms of physical activity varies by athletes' gender and

interests, but the vast majority of respondents prefer summer sports. This trend may be influenced by the fact that the respondents were athletes who train track and field, which is a group of summer sports. The most attractive team sport according to female athletes is volleyball. It is noticeable that women prefer non-contact team sports. The fact that the respondents were athletes who train individually on a daily basis also contributed to their choices.

For men, basketball was the most attractive team sport. Curling is the only team sport that no respondent chose. Winter team sports show less interest among respondents. However, figure skating received the highest number of votes among women. For men, however, this winter sport was the least attractive. Among martial arts, women voted most often for karate, followed by boxing and judo. Men, on the other hand, chose boxing most often. Mixed martial arts was also popular among respondents. Kendo, on the other hand, did not receive a single vote.

Track and field athletes know and are interested in many different sports. When choosing a sport, volleyball and football were the most popular choices. More women than men chose volleyball, while more men than women chose football. These two sports are the most popular and the most attractive to track and field athletes. If it were not for track and field, these are the two sports that respondents would be playing.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Bigus J., Szymczak A., Warchoń K. (eds.) *Kształcenie animatorów sportu szkolnego*. Warszawa: MEiN, SZS, 2022.
2. Lach A.: *Opinie zawodników trenujących lekką atletykę na temat popularności innych dyscyplin sportowych. Praca magisterska*. Opole: Politechnika Opolska, 2024.
3. Lipiński W., *Humanistyczna encyklopedia sportu*. Warszawa: Sport i Turystyka, 1987.
4. Mynarski W., Rozpara M., Królikowska B., Puciato D., Graczykowska B. *Jakościowe i ilościowe aspekty aktywności fizycznej*. Opole: Politechnika Opolska, 2012.
5. Szczepański S. *Kluczowe zagadnienia dydaktyki wychowania fizycznego*. Opole: Politechnika Opolska, 2008.
6. Szujewski K. *Sport – Dyscypliny letnie i zimowe*. Warszawa: Arti, 2016.
7. Żak S. *Gry zespołowe jako środek przeciwdziałania zjawiskom patologicznym u dzieci i młodzieży*. Kraków: AWF, 2005.

**Received:** November 2023

**Accepted:** December 2023

**Published:** December 2023

 **CORRESPONDENCE**

**Krzysztof Ziemia**

Faculty of Physical Education and Physiotherapy, Opole University of Technology,  
Opole, Poland

E-mail: [k.ziemia@po.edu.pl](mailto:k.ziemia@po.edu.pl)

*This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited*

