

Article

Swinging for Success: A Qualitative Study on Baseball's Role in Supporting a Player with ADHD

Eva Zöller ¹, Carsten Klöpfer ², Janine Bracht ² , Paul Martin Müller ²  and Matthias Grünke ^{2,*}

¹ Department of Health and Social Sciences, Hochschule Fresenius University of Applied Sciences, 50670 Cologne, Germany; eva.zoeller@hs-fresenius.de

² Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation, University of Cologne, 50931 Cologne, Germany; c.kloepfer@uni-koeln.de (C.K.); janine.bracht@uni-koeln.de (J.B.); paul.mueller@uni-koeln.de (P.M.M.)

* Correspondence: matthias.gruenke@uni-koeln.de; Tel.: +49-221-4704457

Abstract: In this qualitative study, we examined the experiences of Rafael, a professional baseball player diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), a prevalent neurodevelopmental condition. Through an extensive interview with the participant, our research aimed to determine how baseball can effectively support individuals with this diagnosis in overcoming their obstacles. Qualitative analysis of the verbal data revealed four interconnected themes—Formative Years and Key Experiences, Dealing with ADHD, Learning through Baseball, and Navigating Life Today—highlighting how the sport has served as a vital developmental and supportive activity for this athlete. Baseball ameliorated Rafael's personal growth and self-regulation, transforming his challenges into opportunities for resilience and self-mastery. The study emphasizes the importance of physical team activities, particularly baseball, as a beneficial strategy for individuals with neurodevelopmental challenges and recommends further research into the long-term effects and mechanisms through which sports can alleviate symptoms associated with ADHD and related diagnoses.

Keywords: ADHD; neurodevelopmental challenges; social inclusion; sports; baseball; qualitative research



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1. Introduction

Neurodevelopmental conditions involving significant challenges can impact an individual's academic performance, executive functions, and socioemotional well-being. The most common of these are attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia [1]. ADHD is defined as a persistent pattern of inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity [2], whereas dyslexia is characterized by difficulties in accurate and/or fluent word recognition, poor spelling, and deficient decoding abilities [3]. Although these conditions have historically been viewed as dysfunctional, the neurodiversity movement advocates for recognizing them as neurological variations that contribute unique strengths, such as creativity, resilience, and innovative thinking. Armstrong's influential work [4] highlights the value of understanding and embracing these differences.

However, despite these strengths, individuals with ADHD or dyslexia often face challenges in academic settings, time management, and working memory. These conditions can also affect self-esteem and impede social interactions, such as participating in conversations [5,6]. Childhood experiences such as bullying, family instability, or limited access to supportive resources can further compound social struggles, creating barriers that extend beyond the direct effects of neurodivergent traits [7]. These challenges should

be viewed within the context of broader social and cultural dynamics. Intersectional factors, such as race and socioeconomic background, can further compound the experiences of individuals with such neurodivergent profiles. Crenshaw's work on intersectionality emphasizes how overlapping identities influence the lived experiences of marginalized groups and may be crucial in understanding the unique challenges faced by individuals with certain neurodivergent traits within various social contexts [8].

Leisure activities are vital in combating the social marginalization caused by ADHD or dyslexia. They provide various benefits that foster social interactions, improve self-esteem, and enhance overall well-being. Team sports are especially helpful in this respect in several ways [9–13]:

- (1) They provide abundant opportunities for social interaction, as individuals must work together, communicate, and collaborate toward a common goal.
- (2) They create a sense of belonging by being part of a team and by providing a supportive and accepting environment.
- (3) They counterbalance the challenges faced in other areas, such as academics, by enabling success and recognition within a team, which boosts self-esteem.
- (4) They encourage goal setting and persistence, thus facilitating a growth mindset.
- (5) They enhance executive functions, as team sports often require players to follow rules, stay focused, and manage their time effectively during practices and games.
- (6) They reduce stress by releasing endorphins.
- (7) They provide a structured and predictable environment, which can help individuals with ADHD or dyslexia develop a sense of routine and familiarity.
- (8) They help affected individuals manage their emotions in various situations, such as handling success, failure, competition, and teamwork.
- (9) They contribute to physical health, which can positively impact cognitive functioning and overall well-being.
- (10) They are often fun and enjoyable, thus encouraging a positive outlook on life.

Different kinds of team sports are varyingly suitable for benefiting individuals with certain neurodevelopmental conditions, such as ADHD and dyslexia. To be especially useful in this respect, the sport has to inspire individual accountability in a team setting. Moreover, it has to allow for a person to be recognized for their unique contributions, promoting a sense of pride and inclusion. The sport also needs to permit ample opportunities to socialize and connect with teammates and opponents. Thus, there need to be several moments of downtime between plays, offering participants the chance to engage in conversations and connect. Lastly, a team sport that is relatively low in intensity and pace can be advantageous for individuals with neurodevelopmental conditions involving significant challenges, as it provides more time to process information, make decisions, and participate actively in the game [14,15].

Grünke and Martis [16] argue that baseball is particularly beneficial for individuals with ADHD or dyslexia, as it meets these requirements. They highlight how this sport offers greater potential for social inclusion, skill development, and self-esteem than basketball, football, hockey, or soccer. Its distinct features, such as individual accountability within a team setting, frequent downtime between plays, and relatively low intensity and pace, create an environment where individuals with ADHD or dyslexia can feel engaged and supported.

Baseball's emphasis on individual statistics and quantifiable contributions, exemplified by metrics such as "wins above replacement" (WAR), nurtures a sense of responsibility and underscores the value of personal effort in achieving success. The concept behind WAR is to answer the question, "How many more wins does a player contribute to his team compared to a freely available replacement player?" Therefore, it helps to gauge an individual's worth

by considering the victories added to the team's win total. Although such metrics may cause pressure to meet high expectations, which could be difficult for some, the benefits they offer in promoting accountability and recognizing personal achievement are substantial, often outweighing these minor challenges. More than 10 key metrics quantify a pitcher's performance (earned run average, walks and hits per inning pitched, strikeouts per nine innings, walks per nine innings, strikeout-to-walk ratio, batting average against, quality start, win-loss record, fielding independent pitching, etc.), and more than 10 quantify a batter's performance (batting average, on-base percentage, slugging percentage, on-base plus slugging, runs batted in, home runs, walks, walk rate, strikeout rate, isolated power, stolen bases, etc.). Statistics such as the WAR and other indices that pinpoint success or failure to one specific athlete are far less common in other popular team sports [17].

Despite the extended duration of baseball games—approximately three hours—the actual playing time in a Major League Baseball (MLB) match lasts less than 20 min. This distinctive feature grants players an uncommonly generous amount of time to interact while in the dugout. However, this time does not guarantee interactions, whether positive or negative. Additionally, the limited social exchange opportunities during field time can rival the time spent in the dugout. Nevertheless, these interactions, regardless of their nature, provide important chances for individuals, including those with ADHD, to communicate with their teammates. Moreover, it creates abundant occasions for participants to engage in crucial tasks such as information processing and strategic decision-making [16].

Scholarly literature regarding the inclusive power of baseball for individuals with neurodevelopmental conditions that involve significant challenges, such as ADHD or dyslexia, is limited. This lack of research is particularly significant when viewed through the neurodiversity perspective, which emphasizes recognizing these conditions not as deficits but as natural variations that foster diverse ways of thinking and problem-solving. Moreover, although educational support is important, it is often insufficient. Hence, although one can draw upon substantial empirical evidence to effectively help youth with ADHD or dyslexia overcome challenges in the classroom, after school, these individuals are largely left to fend for themselves. Nonetheless, in a qualitative study, Grünke et al. [18] focused on the experiences of a former professional baseball player with dyslexia. His account provided meaningful insights into the factors that, due to the lessons his dyslexia imparted, helped him to cultivate a happy and fulfilling life despite his challenges. Support from significant others, a sense of purpose, a fighting spirit kindled by sports, and the successes he achieved on the baseball field emerged as the most relevant factors.

This study aimed to extend the findings of Grünke et al. [18] by capturing the experiences of a professional baseball player with ADHD rather than dyslexia. The focus was solely on the athlete's perspective, excluding interviews with other informants, such as family members or teammates. By exploring his experiences, we sought to answer the research question: How can baseball support young individuals with ADHD in recognizing and leveraging their unique traits for empowerment?

2. Methods

2.1. Participant

The participant, a professional athlete in his late twenties from a Caribbean island, is referred to as Rafael in this paper (name changed for anonymity). His baseball journey began at the age of three, and by the age of 14, he had showcased his skills in the U16 and U18 leagues during both summer and winter ball seasons in the United States. Several clubs in MLB, a North American organization that signifies the highest level of professional baseball in the world, noticed Rafael's outstanding performances, and at the age of 19, he signed with a team. However, after two years in Rookie Ball (a developmental league

for newly signed players), he was released. Subsequently, another MLB club drafted him; he played one season for them before he joined various teams in independent leagues across the U.S. and other countries. At the time of this study, he was an active member of a baseball club in Europe.

Rafael stated that he was a lively child and faced difficulty concentrating on tasks. He became aware of his ADHD when he visited a psychologist at the age of ten. Since then, he has been striving to manage this challenge constructively while occasionally using medication. At the time of the study, he experienced difficulty focusing on tasks and a sense of inner restlessness, among other irritations. Despite these ongoing struggles, Rafael has worked to channel his energy and creativity into productive pathways, using strategies to empower himself by managing the impact of ADHD on his life and career.

2.2. Interview Format and Questions

A semi-structured, open-ended interview was employed to analyze Rafael's experiences of how baseball has supported him in empowering himself while managing the challenges associated with ADHD. Aligning with the study conducted by Grünke et al. [18], the key topics encompassed (a) his childhood, (b) navigating life as a student with ADHD during elementary and high school years, (c) the development of his interest in baseball, (d) the discovery of his talent for baseball, (e) the challenges he faced as a baseball player with ADHD, (f) baseball as a resource for empowerment in overcoming life's difficulties, and (g) his life as a professional baseball player. Nonetheless, these themes were merely a general outline. Whenever Rafael introduced new aspects related to leveraging his strengths to address living with ADHD as an athlete, he was allowed to freely express and elaborate on the topics that resonated with him.

2.3. Data Collection

The data collection process involved conducting a comprehensive interview with Rafael by the last authors. We held the interview in a serene corner of a restaurant and utilized voice recording equipment to record the conversation, which spanned 3 h and 20 min.

2.4. Data Analysis

The interview was transcribed using the "MP3 to TEXT" tool (<https://www.veed.io/tools/audio-to-text/mp3-to-text>, accessed on 15 May 2024) by VEED.IO. This online application facilitates the conversion of spoken language into written words. Subsequently, the last author cross-referenced the audio recording with the transcribed text and rectified any inaccuracies or omissions. The resultant transcript comprised 51 pages of standard 8.27×11.69 inches paper, encompassing a total of 31,402 words.

Employing the MAXQDA 2020 software, renowned for its adeptness in structuring and organizing verbal data, an inductive procedure was initiated to establish categorical constructs. According to Kuckartz [19], the methodological approach entails structuring qualitative content analysis, a systematic process that commences with the identification of pertinent segments within the interview data. Each distinct coding unit was defined as a declarative statement tailored to address the research inquiry. Subsequently, these coding units were elevated to a more abstract level within the overarching category framework. Concurrently, superfluous statements were excised to refine the dataset, and statements residing within this heightened level of abstraction, lacking substantive relevance, were omitted.

The ensuing phase encompassed the consolidation of categories through the amalgamation, integration, and formulation of novel paraphrased representations. Two experienced qualitative researchers independently immersed themselves in the transcript and discerned discrete empirical cues embedded within the textual material. Subsequently, they

assigned these cues to categories, aiming to maximize internal consistency and thematic coherence. A collaborative review followed, wherein discrepancies within the coding scheme were diligently examined and resolved through comprehensive discourse, ultimately culminating in a harmonized consensus.

3. Results

The qualitative analysis of the data yielded four overarching themes of 193 empirical indicators, as follows: (a) Formative years and key experiences (33 indicators), (b) Dealing with ADHD (28 indicators), (c) Learning through baseball (92 indicators), and (d) Navigating life today (40 indicators). Interdependencies exist between these themes as well as between their inner differentiations. In the following presentation of our findings, the source number after each quoted statement refers to the paragraph number in the interview.

3.1. Formative Years and Key Experiences (33 Indicators)

Rafael described several factors in his childhood that influenced his self-image. He grew up on a small island with a history of slavery, received little societal recognition, and was discriminated against due to his light skin color in a predominantly dark-skinned social environment: “So it’s like you feel like you’re less. So I’m coming from like the lowest of lows, from slaves and Indians. Almost everyone in my family is black, except for me, my kid, and my grandma” (2). Additionally, his small and unathletic stature contributed to his self-perception (20). Nevertheless, his mother, aware of a familial predisposition, recognized his ADHD early (2). Rafael described her as helpful and caring, unlike his father (6). She sought out support services (166) and facilitated various activities, including baseball and basketball, to help him manage his excessive energy (158, 162). However, Rafael retrospectively criticized her strategy of structuring his academic requirements: “Because she knew I wouldn’t go read through the book and I kept the time for it . . . But what happened is it made me a robot in this particular way. . . And now I’m 29 years old. I have a 50% discipline . . . and that’s generous” (14).

Rafael described the violent treatment by his father as a form of constant devaluation, which significantly affected him and contributed to his negative self-image: “And I lost myself in it it’s like oh damn it I’m a nobody . . . then my dad I’m probably just telling me yeah you suck it’s your fault . . . so then what happens is that like I hated myself” (124). In adulthood, Rafael experienced his ADHD and the categorization as a foreigner in Europe as a renewed dual stigmatization: “. . . if you mention you’re ADHD, you’re just banned for life and heavily medicated . . . After you suppress the oppression, you have to surpass being a foreigner in every country you live” (16). Additionally, ADHD significantly complicated his life over time: “Everything I got in trouble for in my life has been ADHD related . . . Like, in school, man, it was a rollercoaster . . . my mind, it was always racing, always somewhere else” (162).

Baseball, a popular sport in his social environment, became a defining aspect of Rafael’s life early in his childhood (10, 32). Supported by his father, he demonstrated considerable ambition as a child (20). He played against much older children from an early age, which also brought failures: “But because at three I started playing, my talent placed me in places I actually wasn’t ready to be in yet, which caused a lot of failures” (24). However, although his early interest in baseball represented a strength, it also distracted him from academic tasks: “. . . I was supposed to be doing a math test, and all I could think about was how the numbers on the page looked like baseball stats. So, I start calculating batting averages instead of solving the problems” (162). Focusing was significantly easier for Rafael in motion than in stillness (164, 168). Additionally, baseball represented a gateway

to another world, away from his harsh living environment: “For me, growing up on the island, baseball wasn’t just a game; it was my life” (32).

3.2. *Dealing with ADHD (28 Indicators)*

Rafael views his path in competitive sports as a process of personal development, overcoming the daily struggle with his challenging life conditions: “And yeah, I’ve got ADHD, but that’s just part of the story, part of the fight. You gotta keep moving, keep fighting, every single day. It’s about not losing to yourself, you know? Making progress, step by step” (8). ADHD presents both opportunities and challenges, providing the energy to continually undertake and overcome obstacles while also posing difficulties in social interactions and societal evaluations (34). This struggle convinced him that he must rectify his mistakes and convey a different societal image of ADHD-related behaviors (70). Being a person with ADHD (78), Rafael considers baseball as a central learning field: “Hard, but it works . . . It’s casting, it’s taxing, it’s tiring, it’s mentally exhausting. But I don’t like to give up. I will never give up. . . It doesn’t matter, disabled, disabilities, none of that matters. It’s you against you” (74; compare. 26).

Moreover, he utilizes baseball to seek validation—an issue associated with his ADHD and childhood: “So, I was always seeking this validation without realizing that imagine you have ADHD and you’re seeking validation all the time” (82). Previously, he perceived his excessive behaviors as negative, requiring change. Today, he accepts them as part of his character and recognizes that in the correct environment, they can be a resource for himself and others—a perspective that improves his self-esteem (82). He emphasized the importance of an honest relationship with himself (82), which enables him to control his behaviors more effectively (84). His personal development is thus linked to a struggle against himself and driven by a strong desire for change: “So I’m always fighting against me to get better. So it’s like, every day is a work, I’m working at it” (94).

3.3. *Learning Through Baseball (92 Indicators)*

Fundamentally, Rafael considers sports to help learn impulse control and concentration skills (88): “I hyper-focus if I’m interested. If I’m not interested, there’s no shot” (60). Therefore, he associates this sport with inner calm and meditation (168).

3.3.1. *Baseball and ADHD (Subcode, 20 Indicators)*

Baseball offers the opportunity to channel ADHD-related restlessness meaningfully and to experience focus and self-control: “. . . through baseball, I found a sense of discipline, a focus I never had in the classroom. On the field, everything just clicked. It was like all the noise in my head would quiet down, and for those few hours, I was in control . . . It teaches you control, resilience, and the power of channeling your energy into something positive” (26). The concentration on the game, the teammates, the flow of the match, and the task of delivering a good performance to the audience (88) demand absolute attention (118). Since the entire game can be altered if a single player is distracted (152, 114), Rafael enhances his concentration through medical support (154).

The new social role assignment on the baseball field enabled a reframing of Rafael’s severe ADHD-associated experiences: “On the field, I wasn’t the ‘problem kid;’ I was the star. But back in the classroom, I was just the kid who couldn’t sit still, who couldn’t keep quiet. I remember feeling so frustrated . . . It was tough, real tough. But you know, in a way, it also made me who I am . . . Maybe I wouldn’t be where I am today” (162). Being part of a team required Rafael to convey his desire for equality to his teammates: “Let’s say you have any type of disability and you want to be treated equally. Then you have to take it like an equal . . . Then I need to accept the judgment that comes in my first two months on the team where I wasn’t performing yet” (46). Moreover, challenges on the field became an

opportunity to reverse attributed traits and limitations from the social environment (26): “That’s the beauty of it, being able to be fully yourself and make a real impact, on and off the field. But even with my ADHD, I’m not trying to change the energy. I wasn’t trying. I was just being me” (36).

This engagement with himself and his experiences with ADHD made him an effective coach for children and enabled him to understand them better (54): “When I coach four to 12-year-olds, I’m the best coach in the world because I’m a little kid, I’m a little kid inside, and I’m wild, and we only scream, and we make noises, and we yell, and that’s what we do on my team. But a guy that doesn’t have what I have will tell the kids: Be quiet. Come on, I need more coffee to deal with them” (52).

Rafael drew numerous parallels between baseball and his life: “But it taught me to adapt, to be resilient. Like, in baseball, you can’t control the pitch, but you can control your swing. Same with life” (12). According to him, it is ultimately not the specific disability that is decisive, but the performance achieved despite its limitation: “. . . but if you have baggage, if you have a disability, it doesn’t really matter. It’s actually about what you’re bringing to the table” (208).

3.3.2. Baseball and Personality (Subcode, 42 Indicators)

Rafael wanted to prove what he could achieve despite his background, ADHD, and unsporting stature (26). He views liberation from others’ evaluations as a significant developmental step: “And I realized that I’m going to not care what people think of me” (29, compare 208). Simultaneously, the admiration of the fans enhances his self-confidence: “Once the fans started cheering for me, the kids came to the fence and started fist bumping me before I hit. Oh, I’m going to be good now. Because I know I’m good” (62, compare 145). However, it can also create performance pressure: “Because baseball is a sport of performing. If at your job you don’t perform, you’re fired” (148). “On the baseball field and in life, there is the possibility to decide who you want to be and how you want to present yourself publicly. But the way I see it then is that if I can win the battle between me and me, I will always be able to have the choice to choose who I want to be in public” (62). Ultimately, his long-term experience in baseball allows him a relaxed attitude (24).

The game taught Rafael self-acceptance regardless of assigned disability, background, or stigma (70, 106, 220) and the assumption of self-responsibility (64, 112, 200): “If I focus on me, on the daily battle and the struggle between me and me, I can maybe one day achieve the middle-class journey . . . I’m just trying to teach you to realize that if you work on you, you might make a step forward in a positive direction every day” (108; compare 174). He summarized this self-image in a life motto: “Believe in yourself, even when it’s tough because that’s when you grow the most” (226).

However, socialization within different baseball teams expanded this life motto: “You start realizing that every challenge, every tough practice, it’s building you up, piece by piece. . .” (30). This maxim offered Rafael the chance to shape his life: “Every day is a chance to get better, to push harder. . .to make something of myself” (32). Nonetheless, he questioned to what extent it is reasonable to adapt to the expectations of the social environment: “And once I got happy with me, I realized that, okay, am I really happy with me, or am I just fitting now in the environment that I’m in? And I realized that I was just fitting in the environment I was in” (72).

He considers his ADHD-associated energy as a resource to become a unique personality and team member: “That’s what makes a great player stand out, not just skills, but the energy they bring to the field” (36, compare 16). Furthermore, he sees opportunities in losing: “You grow as a losing team” (38). Positive feedback from teammates and assessment of his ADHD-influenced behavior by fans and peers strengthen his self-efficacy and

self-esteem (16, 48, 118). Rafael accepted this categorization; he noted the unique qualities he sees in himself (52) and expressed an understanding of why others sometimes need space from him: “You need a break from me from time to time” (50). Extreme moods and high tension levels also result in a desire to relax, which he has occasionally achieved through alcohol consumption after a game (68).

Difficult aspects of professional baseball include performance pressure, which affects the team atmosphere, and the stress experienced by individual players (38), culminating in unpredictable and sudden exclusion from the team. Rafael has experienced this due to a loss of control and injury, which he compared to an accident caused by sudden external braking (126). However, a contract with a new team can mitigate such cycles of injury and insecurity due to external control: “I get released three months later, I get signed again, I never fully healed. I stayed insecure, I’m broken, and my wound is still open. But because I get signed by another team, it covers the wound” (128).

Due to these aspects, baseball became synonymous with character building for Rafael: “It’s like, in those moments, you’re not just playing a game; you’re building character, you’re crafting your own story . . .” (30) and generated a sense of vitality: “when I’m out there on the field, it’s like I’m living in every single moment, you know?” (42).

3.4. Navigating Life Today (40 Indicators)

Rafael described his life as a roller coaster of opportunities, wrong decisions, and constant rebuilding (130). He sees a significant personal contribution to this process (132), which can be reduced through honesty with himself and empathy toward others (136). He has learned significantly from his role as the father of a son with ADHD (6, 8, 10) and from his current life in Europe, with a new culture, team, and partner (6, 16, 70, 144). According to Rafael, he was able to change his self-image and behavior in this new life environment, whereas his old environment prevented such change (96). He also critically evaluated the mistakes he associates with a lack of self-discipline and ADHD (66), which he has since tried to rectify (68, 70). Having acquired new competencies through baseball (90), his clear daily structure combined with fixed training times have enabled him to surpass his old self (70), even though the lack of free time affects aspects of his personal development (58, 172).

His growth in baseball teams and success in the professional league showed Rafael what is possible even with ADHD and positively influenced his self-image (16). Rafael considers the following aspects essential:

- Realizing one’s personal development throughout life;
- Accepting one’s strengths, weaknesses, and mistakes;
- Fostering self-acceptance and assuming self-responsibility (74).

Overall, Rafael described a radical change in his life, where the opportunities and learning experiences that unfolded through his baseball career significantly affected him professionally and personally (78).

4. Discussion

4.1. Main Findings

This qualitative study aimed to investigate the experiences of a professional baseball player with ADHD, focusing on how baseball aids in managing the challenges related to this condition. Through an extensive interview with Rafael, several pivotal themes emerged that illuminate the multifaceted role of baseball in his life. The analysis revealed that baseball serves as a critical platform for personal development, social inclusion, and emotional regulation for individuals with ADHD.

One notable finding is the structured yet flexible environment that baseball provides. The sport is characterized by individual accountability within a team setting, frequent

downtime, and the requirement for strategic thinking and decision-making. These aspects create a conducive atmosphere for individuals with ADHD to thrive [15]. Rafael's experiences illustrate that this sport helped him develop discipline and focus, factors that he struggled with in other areas of life. Its slower pace and emphasis on individual contributions allowed him to channel his energy positively and manage his impulsivity.

Another significant finding is the role of baseball in enhancing self-esteem and social skills. Rafael's narrative highlighted how being part of a team and receiving validation from teammates and fans effectively boosted his self-confidence. The social interactions and sense of belonging fostered by the sport provided him with essential emotional support, helping him cope with the stigma and challenges associated with ADHD see also [11].

Additionally, the study found that baseball contributed to Rafael's cognitive and emotional growth. The sport's demands for concentration, strategic planning, and resilience mirrored the challenges he faced in daily life, allowing him to develop crucial life skills. Baseball also offered him a unique sense of validation and purpose, helping him construct a positive self-identity despite the difficulties posed by ADHD.

Rafael's experiences also reflect crucial aspects of intersectionality. While growing up, being light-skinned in a predominantly dark-skinned community on a socially marginalized island presented unique social challenges. These experiences of racial and social marginalization were compounded by the stigmatization he faced as an adult foreigner. Furthermore, his trauma from a violent father deeply impacted his self-image, adding layers of complexity to his experiences. These intersecting factors significantly influenced his coping mechanisms and the role of baseball in his life.

4.2. Limitations

Although the study offers valuable insights, it has certain constraints. The findings are based on the experiences of a single participant, which may not be generalizable to all individuals with ADHD. The qualitative nature of the study provides in-depth understanding but lacks the breadth to encompass a wide range of perspectives. Moreover, the reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases such as memory recall inaccuracies and social desirability effects.

Another limitation is the context-specific nature of the findings. Rafael's experiences, shaped by his unique background, including his cultural environment, personal history, and the settings of professional baseball, may not apply to all individuals with ADHD or those engaged in different sports or activities. Additionally, his story is interwoven with significant elements of intersectionality—his light skin color in a predominantly dark-skinned social environment, his origin from a socially marginalized island, and the stigmatization he faced as a foreigner in adulthood.

Rafael's reflection on the interview process illustrates his desire to be perceived positively and the influence of the idea that achievement, especially persistent achievement, is rewarded. He was aware that through this interview, he was publicly sharing essential lessons about living with ADHD. This realization underscores the dynamic nature of qualitative research, where the interaction between the interviewer and the participant can influence the data collection and interpretation process [20].

4.3. Implications and Future Research

The findings of this study have several important implications for practice and future research. Practitioners working with individuals with pronounced neurodevelopmental traits, such as ADHD, should consider incorporating sports into their intervention strategies. ADHD can bring persistent and complex struggles that affect many areas of life, but it also

comes with unique strengths and potential that can be fostered through well-designed support [6,7,11,12].

Although this study focused on baseball, sports in general can be beneficial for learning impulse control and developing executive functioning skills [8]. Participation in any physical activity that requires strategic thinking, discipline, and teamwork can provide similar benefits, highlighting the broader applicability of these findings beyond a single sport. Nevertheless, as extensively argued in this study, due to its specific structure and the type of skills required, such as sustained attention and quick decision-making under pressure, baseball may be particularly advantageous for young people with ADHD and other neurodevelopmental disorders.

Understanding the potential benefits of sports can help educators and coaches design programs that cater to the specific needs of individuals with ADHD. Creating supportive and inclusive environments within sports teams can foster a sense of belonging and achievement, which is important for these individuals' emotional and psychological well-being. Although there is a distinction between high-performance and recreational sports, this should not be overstated when interpreting the results. High-performance sports may offer significant self-efficacy experiences and social recognition, contingent upon the sport's social status within a given society. However, the benefits of sports extend beyond elite performance. Recreational sports also provide valuable opportunities for social interaction, personal development, and emotional regulation, even without professional recognition [11,13].

Future research should explore the long-term impacts of sports participation on individuals with ADHD, examining both psychological and physiological benefits. Comparative studies investigating the effects of different types of sports on ADHD symptoms would provide a more nuanced understanding of how various physical activities can support individuals with ADHD. Additionally, research should explore the mechanisms through which sports influence ADHD symptoms, such as the role of social interactions, physical exercise, and cognitive challenges [8,12].

The study raises important questions about balancing individual performance and inclusivity in sports. While baseball's emphasis on individual statistics highlights personal achievements, it may also challenge the inclusive aspect of team sports. This focus on individual performance should be carefully balanced with supportive environments that value all participants, regardless of their performance level.

Rafael's perspective, which emphasizes performance and contribution, raises critical considerations for individuals with disabilities who may not excel in sports or other areas. Notably, societal value should not be solely determined by performance. Support systems should foster environments where individuals can thrive on their unique strengths and interests, irrespective of their level of achievement in socially recognized domains.

Rafael's ability to hyper-focus on baseball underscores the importance of aligning activities with individual interests. Sports or other activities that resonate deeply with an individual's passions are more likely to be effective in supporting their development. This finding highlights the need for personalized approaches in selecting interventions for individuals with ADHD.

The use of medication in managing ADHD symptoms within the context of sports, as discussed by Berg et al. [21], is an important consideration. The role of medication in enhancing focus and performance in high-stress environments such as professional sports warrants further exploration to determine its benefits and potential ethical implications.

Rafael's narrative aligns with the principles of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF). He emphasizes the importance of finding supportive environments and accepting communities where his strengths are valued, an approach that

underscores the need for inclusive practices that recognize and accommodate the diverse needs of individuals with ADHD.

5. Conclusions

To sum up, this study underscores the significant effect of baseball in the lives of individuals with ADHD. Through Rafael's experiences, it becomes evident that baseball provides a platform for personal achievement and social inclusion and a means of developing critical life skills such as discipline, focus, and emotional regulation. Despite the study's limitations, the findings highlight the potential of sports as a beneficial intervention for managing ADHD. Future research should continue to explore this promising area, aiming to develop evidence-based practices that leverage the positive aspects of sports to support individuals with ADHD in leading fulfilling and successful lives.

The study's insights contribute to a growing understanding of the inclusive power of sports, particularly baseball, in addressing the challenges faced by individuals with neurodevelopmental conditions that are characterized by specific difficulties, such as ADHD. By recognizing and harnessing the unique strengths and needs of individuals with ADHD, more supportive environments that promote their well-being and integration into society can be created.

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