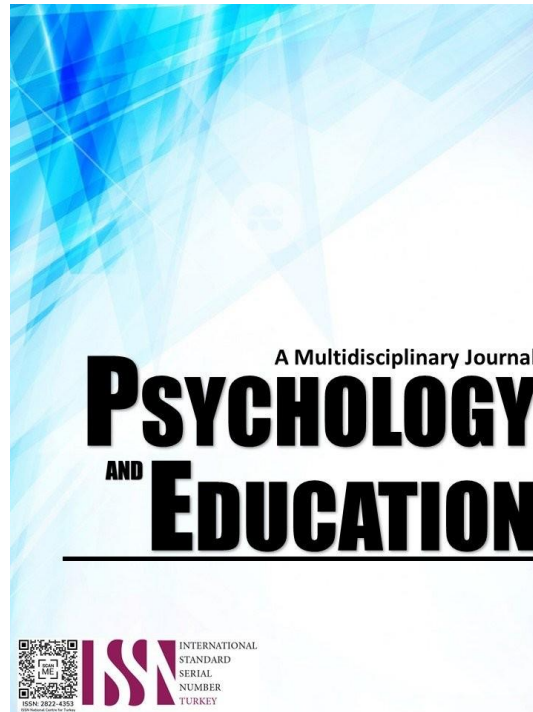


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Dreams on the Field: Exploring the Aspirations and Challenges of Male College Student-Athletes

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Abstract

During undergraduate years, student-athletes experience a great deal of change and encounter numerous new obstacles. This study aimed to explore the experiences, motivations, and challenges faced by male college student-athletes and gain insights being a student and athlete. This study utilized narrative design to explore the experiences of the participants regarding the respondent's life as student-athletes and used purposive sampling in choosing participants at Jose Rizal University. Interview questionnaire was used in gathering the data and ensured the confidentiality of the participants throughout the study. The researchers identified the following superordinate themes with their corresponding subordinate themes; the decision of becoming a student-athlete with the subordinate themes of benefits, other people's perspective towards to student-athletes, and essential events. Career-related reasons with its themes; motivation, having a role model in life, university's stakeholders. It's concluded that being a student-athlete in undoubtedly one of the most difficult paths one can choose; in addition to academic commitments, there are social responsibilities, as well as sports training. It's recommended to properly balance the time.

Keywords: *student-athlete, time management, scholarship*

Introduction

The undergraduate years are a time when young student-athletes go through a lot of changes and face a lot of new challenges. Compared to other students, they must deal with many responsibilities and challenges associated with school and athletic life. As Dos Santos noted in 2020, students face the responsibilities of academic performance (completing coursework, passing exams), social obligations, adjusting to life away from home, and financial challenges in school. Time management is one of the major issues for male student-athletes. After training for hours almost every day, they are exhausted and unable to handle other responsibilities, especially academics, which will have a major impact as they need to study and exercise. As Hill said in their 2019 study, some student-athletes devote even more time to their sport.

For most aspiring student-athletes, being active in college sports is viewed as an achievement. Little do they know that being part of it requires huge sacrifices and responsibilities. Being a good student and a good athlete requires a lot of effort, time, and discipline, which are difficult to accomplish simultaneously, causing their performance to conflict (Thunderbolt, 2021). Therefore, student-athletes face many challenges due to their dual roles. According to Rahmat, N. and Zulkifli, A. (2022), the academic success of student-athletes is seriously hampered by time constraints. Time management is one of the common issues when it comes to being a student-athlete, especially how to balance time for training and studying simultaneously. This can lead to physical and mental exhaustion, affecting their normal performance in school. What's more, student-athletes go through a lot of stress related to their academic achievement. Studies found that academic stress peaked during the academic year, which is also an athlete's in-season and postseason. Students have a hard time coping with the pressure of academic obligations. This leads to a decrease in energy and sleep deprivation, which has an effect on the athlete's health and well-being and can result in illness or injury (Strauss, M., 2021).

There is growing concern about the academic performance of student-athletes in our current institutions of higher education. Speculation for this poor performance is that student-athletes are not as ready for college as their non-athlete counterparts. Student-athletes have an image of being academically weaker compared to their non-athletic peers, however, this is not scientifically proven and is simply a stereotype. As stated by Kylee Jo Ault in 2023, positive developmental outcomes for youth are likely to occur when adults intentionally design environments to facilitate that development. However, in sports, research often examines only one adult relationship at a time, rather than the presence of many such relationships. Student-athletes had basic life skills recognition when learning without meaning was fostered by low-engagement relationships, development through adverse experiences when learning through need occurred through challenging relationships, and meaningful development when anchored learning experiences were supported by transformative relationships in their sports world.

As Hutchinson et al. (n.d) noted, many student-athletes are expected to be mentally resilient to achieve optimal physical condition while striving to balance social life, physical health, and academic performance. However, the reality is that mental health challenges are prevalent among college students, with one study showing that 33% of college students experience significant symptoms. Worryingly, only 30% of these students seek professional help, indicating a severe lack of support. The problem is even more pronounced among college athletes, with only 10% percent seeking professional help. As McMillian (2022) points out, this may be due to factors such as burnout, lack of awareness, and fear of consequences. In the world of professional sports, mental health challenges are even more prevalent, affecting 35% of athletes. These challenges, including stress, anxiety, depression, and eating disorders, often

stem from the intense pressure to excel in high-stakes competitions (Reardon, 2019).

Among college athletes, if the difficulties students-athletes face is ignored, they may suffer in silence, which can lead to acute or chronic illness that seriously affects their quality of life. Additionally, untreated mental fatigue becomes a problem, increasing the risk of injury. These mental health challenges can also strain relationships with family, friends, or fellow athletes, as individuals may find it difficult to cope effectively and function cohesively as part of a team. Tragically, the consequences of untreated mental health problems can even extend to suicide. Oberlin College in Ohio serves as an example where mental health in sports doesn't get enough attention. High-profile athletes like Kevin Love and Simone Biles have bravely shared their mental health struggles, shedding light on the urgent need for preventive measures in sports to avert tragic outcomes among student-athletes (Nguyen, 2022).

Research Questions

This study aimed to explore the narratives of male college student-athletes. Specifically, this intends to answer:

1. How do male student-athletes describe the influence of socio-cultural and institutional contexts on their identity formation and self-perception, and in what ways do they perceive sports as shaping their identities?
2. What narratives do male college student-athletes share about the support systems and coping mechanisms they use to navigate the unique demands and stressors of balancing academics, athletics, and personal lives?

Literature Review

A considerable amount of research has been done about the mental health and coping strategies of student-athletes. However, there remains a notable gap in the literature concerning the role of local institutions, including schools in supporting student-athletes and addressing governance-related concerns within their respective sports. As noted by Blanco (2018), issues within the governance of college basketball in the Philippines such as alleged piracy and recruitment of players and coaches, the implementation of the two-year residency rule, and disparities in media coverage furthermore, there is a limited exploration of the narrative story of male college student-athletes at Jose Rizal University.

Research has tended to focus on studying the challenges or coping mechanisms/strategies of student-athletes. Few researchers have explored the attitudes of coaches and teammates, as well as the role models meant to motivate student-athletes. Furthermore, there is a connection between the coach and athlete relationship, which can impact the depression and life satisfaction of the student-athlete (Powers et al., 2020).

The question remains on, how susceptible does the student-athletes at Jose Rizal University to experience burnout? Numerous factors contribute to student-athlete burnout, including injury history, NCAA eligibility status, age of specialization, and gender (Giusti, 2022). Student athletes used both cognitive and vigilant avoidance coping strategies. They prioritized their studies, sought help from coaches, superiors, and counselors, and made sure they had enough time to sleep. Other examples of their vigilant coping include time management, which includes talking things out with their teammates, attending to the needs of other athletes, remaining focused on their task, and making sure they had enough time to sleep (Ines, 2021). Moreover how does the male college student-athlete of Jose Rizal University manage to cope up with their challenges in life?

Furthermore, do the coaches and teammates at Jose Rizal University formed a good relationship? According to Cutler (2020), when student-athletes were asked to describe their relationship with their coaches and team members, the most common response was 'family.' These individuals are considered the most significant figures in the athletes lives in terms of their careers, and establishing a strong connection with them is deemed the most important relationship student-athletes could cultivate. However, does this 'family' environment encourage student-athletes to express their vulnerabilities or openly discuss their mental health?

Is there any advantage in college athletics for 98% of student-athletes who do not become professional athletes (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2018)? An overwhelming majority of college athletes end up becoming professionals outside of playing their respective sport. Is all the time and effort put into their athletic career worthless or did it prepare them for their future? It is easy to conclude that the lessons acquired in college athletics have value, but how do we prove it? According to Henderson, Olbrecht, and Polacheck (2006) over the course of a lifetime, former student-athletes make an average of 4% more than non-student athletes. It is important to determine if student-athletes are benefiting from all the extra sacrifices that they take on being a part of an athletic program. If there is no use or benefit from engaging in college sports, these same studies could focus their time and efforts in other areas that might be most relevant to arrange them for life after college. It is also critical to discover whether their future hiring manager places importance on college sports or if work proficiency is more valid in their point of view. Does college athletics build better employees? A considerable number of student-athletes take a big risk in playing a role in college sports and it is important for them to figure out if they are setting themselves up for their future by learning the lessons of being a student-athlete. It takes a lot of time and most of the time money, in order to be able to pursue the sport that they desire. It is believed that lessons learned from engaging in college sports are useful for student-athletes after graduation. Being a member of a college sports program improves skills of time management, learning to become more responsible for their actions, and surviving while working under pressure, these characteristics are important to employers. Student-athletes are expected to be dedicated full-time students, be able to attend strict practice and game schedules during their athletic season, study future opponents, lift weights, and work on their cardiovascular endurance. In addition, college

freshmen and transfer student-athletes also have to get familiar with new surroundings and routines which could add stress. This experience teaches most student-athletes how to prioritize the important tasks throughout the day and week.

As stated by Kaminska (2020) Athletes who simultaneously hold the role of a student experience a lot of additional demands that may distort their natural circadian rhythm (e.g., early hours of lectures at the university or late hours of going to sleep due to their roommates' late-night activities). It may lead to the so-called social jet lag, understood as both the misalignment of biological and social time and the alterations between sleep patterns on free days and workdays. Apart from numerous burdens connected with training and competitions, student athletes are also exposed to the demands of everyday life resulting from various social roles, such as a student, a friend, a partner in a relationship, or an employee. To sum up the idea the student-athletes would have a long journey of ended and they have many roles to do as student-athlete by still they tend to be more look in their dreams and feel the inspirations of what they wanted.

In the pursuit of becoming a student-athlete, there are advantages and disadvantages that an individual may encounter. According to Nthangeni (2021), the benefits of becoming a student-athlete are the enjoyment of playing sports, making friends, making their families proud, receiving performance-related incentives and awards, being seen on television, and being scouted by professional teams. However, the consequence of becoming a student-athlete is their academic timetables, pressure to excel academically, lack of sports equipment, fear of injury, and poor academic support that helps them to keep up with their studies.

Student-athletes need to balance their academic and sports performances simultaneously, which may affect the relationship between regular students and student-athletes. Most regular students who distinguish themselves from student-athletes tend to hold negative stereotypes, perceiving student-athletes as privileged because the institution supports their sports careers through scholarships, incentives, and academic aid. To reduce stereotyping, regular students need to enhance their interpersonal contacts with student-athletes (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2022). On the other hand, the relationship between student-athletes and their parents can significantly influence the pressure of pursuing a sports career. Among parents, mothers have high expectations for the academic success of student-athletes (Nikander, 2022).

Methodology

Research Design

The research employed a qualitative methodology with a narrative design to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of student-athletes. By adopting this approach, the study was able to capture the complex and nuanced narratives of the participants, offering insights into how their dual roles as students and athletes influence their daily lives and personal development. The narrative design facilitated an in-depth exploration of individual stories, enabling the identification of recurring themes and patterns that characterize the student-athlete experience. This approach provided a comprehensive framework for analyzing the subjective experiences of the participants, thereby contributing to a richer and more detailed understanding of the challenges and dynamics inherent in balancing academic and athletic commitments.

Participants

In this study, a purposive sampling method was employed to select six male college student-athletes enrolled at Jose Rizal University as participants. This sampling strategy was deliberately chosen to ensure the inclusion of individuals who met specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The participants were selected based on their status as male college student-athletes across any year level, a demographic central to the study's focus, thereby ensuring that the sample accurately represented the population of interest.

Instrument

A researcher-made interview questionnaire was used as the main instrument in the study. This has been validated by the three (3) experts in the field of psychology.

Procedure

For this study, the researchers created an interview questionnaire that was validated by experts and laid out with clear instructions. Before conducting the interview, the researchers gave the participants an overview of the study and asked some questions that fit the study. After discussing it with the participants, the researchers handed out the consent forms and set a convenient day and time for the conduct of the data gathering. The researchers conducted the interview using the validated questionnaire. During the interview, the researchers did not provide any personal comments or biases that could affect the opinion of the participants. The participants did not discuss things that are not related to the study; however, they were informed that they have the right to refuse to answer questions as they see fit. After the interview, the researchers analyzed and interpreted the data through thematic analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers prioritized the participants' confidentiality and privacy by allowing them the option to provide personal information such as their name, age, gender, or any relevant medical history for safety purposes. Any data collected during interviews was treated discreetly, ensuring the accuracy of the information without introducing any researcher bias. The responsibility of recruiting

respondents lies with the researchers, who ensured that respondents are physically, emotionally, and socially prepared for the interviews. Researchers also provided a comprehensive explanation of the research's purpose and the benefits it offers to participants. When interpreting respondent data, researchers avoided exaggeration or data manipulation. Those involved in the research process include the researchers themselves, the professor overseeing the project, and the subject matter experts related to the research topic.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the emerging themes that were validated by the experts. The researchers identified three (3) superordinate themes with each superordinate there are three (3) subordinate themes. The following are the superordinate themes with their corresponding subordinate themes; the decision of becoming a student-athlete, career-related reasons and challenges encountered.

Table 1. *Emerging Themes*

<i>Superordinate Themes</i>	<i>Subordinate Themes</i>
Decision of becoming a student-athlete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits • Other people's perspectives towards student-athlete • Essential events
Career related reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation • Having role model in life • University's program for student-athletes
Challenges Encountered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure • Time management • Dealing with university's stakeholders

Decision of becoming a student-athlete. As stated in Nthangeni's study (2021), one of the benefits of becoming a student-athlete is to make their family proud, enjoy playing sports, receive incentives and awards based on their sports performances, and be scouted by professional teams. Among the student-athletes of Jose Rizal University, the majority pursue this path for privileges such as scholarships, incentives like free lunch in the cafeteria, financial aid, academic support, and to pursue their passion in the sports industry. The researchers identified this subordinate theme because of the constant answer of the participants as quoted "To be franked dahil sa scholarship, yun yung nagmomotivate sa kin na mag pursue sa dalawang yun parang study and sports kasi libre ka sa lahat eh.", "Unang una, gusto ko makapag-aral ng libre, yung course ko is parang bata palang ako, gusto ko na talaga siya.", "Kapag varsity ka daw po sa isang school, which is really prominent, meron ka mga incentives, mga beneficiary, mga ganon, mga para ma-help ka as para hindi ka masyadong mahirapan." and "Being a student athlete it's been a privilege for us to have this opportunity namakapag aral tayo ng libre and higit sa lahat ay magawa yung bagay na gusto natin which is yung sports na binibilangan natin.". Most of the participants in this research are satisfied with the assistance and programs of Jose Rizal University.

Some students' perspectives suggest that student-athletes are perceived as more privileged, given their ability to easily obtain extensions for school activities and the academic support provided by the institution. Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2022) found that undergraduate students perceive student-athletes as prioritizing their sports performance over academic achievement. Those who view student-athletes as different are more likely to harbor negative stereotypes. Regarding the response of Participant 4 (P4): "Pero kasi may ibang mga classmates, or ibang prof na hindi talaga nag eexcuse eh na parang may naging kaklase nga ako, na parang nagsabi na ano daw ba gagawin nya kung nagkasabay, sya daw ba magdedecide tapos ganto ganyan." This response indicates the presence of negative stereotyping at Jose Rizal University. To reduce this occurrence, undergraduate students need to enhance their interpersonal contacts with student-athletes. On the other hand, family members, such as mothers of the student-athletes, have high expectations for their children (Nikander, 2022). There is little to no related research about the relationship between student-athletes and their family members. As quoted from Participant 5: "...Dahil sa mga magulang at pamilya ko kasi tingin sa pamilya ko is sobrang baba. Like pinaka-kulelat. Sobrang baba." This statement from the participant suggests that some parents might be against their children pursuing a sports career in higher education.

There is a significant of events that can happen to student-athletes such as their winning and losing in a match. Student-athletes are trained every day to enhance their performance in their sports careers, they give a hundred percent of their will to practice and lessen the mistakes that they can make during competitive matches. We all know that winning is a such the best feeling when we put our effort and time into achieving it so does in the student-athletes as quoted by the participants "Sobrang saya na nafeel namin na after na malaman naming champion kami kasi everyday talaga walang tawanan. Hindi kami kasi- pagkagising namin, hindi kami nagtatawanan kasi sa sobrang pagod; hindi ka pa fully recovered, tapos mag eensayo ka nanaman. Ayon yung pagiging champion namin." and "yung success ko ngayon is proud ako sa sarili ko kasi napagsasabay ko yung studies ko and yung sports na hindi ako bumabagsak kahit na may trainings and games, siguro ayon yung success ko for now." At the moments like stated they are proud and grateful for the sacrifices that they made however when the student-athletes lose from their competitive match or encounter a problem during the match, they need to be resilient and handle their emotion. As quoted in one of the participants "one of the biggest learning na natutunan naming last year is yung nagkaroon kame ng incident against sa benilde siguro one thing na natutunan naming dun is to control your emotion, kailangan palaging compose yung emotion mo and kailangan maging kalmado ka all the time, kailangan makapag isip ka ng tama.". In that statement programs or interventions that are related to mental health can significantly help and improve their quality of

life.

Career related reasons. We can never have equality of achievement, but we can have equality of motivation: That was the mission of John Nicholls (1979). His goal was “equality of optimal motivation” (p. 1071) so that everyone should achieve the best that is possible for him or her to fulfill their potential. Motivation is important to student-athletes. They will strive harder to commit to a good outcome by sacrificing, according to most of the interviews in which the participants are motivated by doing the routine every single day. Could be an intrinsic motivation or extrinsic motivation because it highlights the importance of sports experience for pleasure, as well as for a sense of fulfillment and contentment. As stated of the majority of the participants, “I want to prove them na, kasi gusto ko yung ako yung magbibigay ng pag-asa dun sa parents ko na “kahit mahirap tayo, magpatuloy tayo.” I want to, you know prove to them. Kasi mahirap na nga kami, kung hindi ko ipupush yung sarili ko, hanggang dun lang kami. Diba? Sila yung naging motivation ko, sila yung naging dahilan. Isa rin ako sa parang magbibigay sa kanila ng karangalan. I want to continue kung ano ‘yong nasimulan ko para sa kanila.” Most of the participants’ motivation came from intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Beyond just sports, we should and do look to athletes to emulate and develop traits like emotional intelligence, sportsmanship, and fair play that we witness on the field. Finally, but just as importantly, athletes can encourage kids to participate in sports; more precisely, they can drive them to work harder in their training, join a local team, or aim to be better than the performances of their idols. This answer was found during the interview “Since Olympian ang coach namin, Malaking bagay sakin/samin yon. Isa siya sa mga successful athletes sa Philippines dahil ito ay nakarating nga siya sa World stage and ayon parang may impact.” and “So my family is very sports oriented, my father was in palarong pambansa for basketball, tapos he’s supposed to be a PBA player.”. In athletic career research, it has been noted that youth athletes benefit from interactions with senior elite athletes who act as potential role models (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017) and there’s an influence regarding the role model in their lives. Having a role model is like a pillar, an anchor that keeps youngsters motivated and gives them a sense of dedication. This is important and shouldn’t be devalued because kids are naturally bored and bounce from activity to activity, especially when faced with challenges.

Aside from the physical exhaustion physically the student-athletes some suggestions from the participants “Feeling ko, yung need gawin ng university is, parang every athletes na may game, for me, dapat day before the game magkaroon ng counseling, kasi malaking bagay yun eh, nakakaboost ng confidence ng ibang tao.” because this can lead to some mispractice or leading to not performing well. Bishop (2018), provides information that high school sports have both positive and negative effects on the lives of the students who participate in them. Participating in sports demands a lot of practice and commitment, which can interfere with other activities like academics. Because of the time it takes to concentrate on athletics, some kids experience academic setbacks. A student can only concentrate on academics and athletics when a good balance is struck between the two.

Challenges encountered. Student-athletes often described experiencing academic-related stress. They mentioned that they often do not have enough time to study for a test and are too exhausted from training to keep studying. They experience pressure to maintain grades for their scholarship or for merit such as dean’s list, pressure to meet deadlines for academic requirements, and missing out on classes due to training for national competitions. Commonly, they have difficulty finding a balance between academics and sports. One male student-athlete reported. “Siyempre sa pag-aaral naming malaking tulong yung mga classmates naming na tumutulong kasi minsan hindi kame nakakapag cope up sa klase, minsan nala-late kame na de-delay kame so malaking tulong yung mga classmates naming na nagbibigay ng tulong na tinuturuan kame sa na-miss na klase if may mga activities nire-remind nila kame”. Participants show the pressure of balancing sports and academic work. Most of the participants stated that their classmates help them a lot to cope with their academic work.

As stated by Thunderbolt study 2021 a significant challenge described by many respondents is the amount of time they have to dedicate to athletic activities, whether with the team or without. The general schedule for student-athletes during their sports season consists of going to school from morning to early afternoon, homework/conditioning/break time between school and practice (except on game days which take the entire afternoon), practice/games midafternoon, then homework/conditioning/other activities during the evening and often at nighttime. Even during off days and the offseason, a significant amount of time is allotted to conditioning to stay in shape. The packed schedules leave less time for student-athletes to work on their schoolwork and other obligations, and even less time to spend on their personal lives. “Siguro bakit ngayon nandito pa rin ako sa pagiging student athlete is yung time management is isa pinakamalaking bagay na dapat mayroon yung isang student athlete, kase if hindi natin na ma-manage ng maayos yung time natin magkaroon tayo ng lapses and other things na alam natin na magkakaroon ng consequences later on”. Participants always value their time as they manage their schedules.

There are instances when working as an athletic coach and a teacher might be uneasy. Most coaches and teachers share the same objective of helping their players learn in the classroom, but they also want to succeed. As participant 2 said, “Nahihirapan ng onti dun sa ibang prof na walang consideration. yung challenges na hinaharap ko is sa mga prof na hindi nagbibigay ng considerations or sa mga classmates na walang pake kahit student athlete ka basta ang gusto lang nila is pumasa ganon, wala silang pake kung bumagsak ka, di ka nila tutulungan.” According to the participants that the researchers interviewed, some professors and their classmates are inconsiderate, especially because some just look at it as an excuse to not get involved in some academic activity. This is one of the challenges that student-athletes face right now as stated by another participant, “Siyempre, yung mga pinag dadaan naming sa mga academic. First yung mga prof na hindi naming nakakasundo, misan may mga games tayo mga practices tayo na nasasagasaan natin

yung oras ng klase nila, nasasagasaan natin yung oras ng quizzes natin and siguro meron at meron naman din mga prof or teacher na considerate sa mga student athlete as long as may mga valid reasons.” some professors or stakeholders are considerate but they can’t avoid a professor who doesn’t have any considerations.

Conclusions

The study provides a comprehensive examination of the multifaceted experiences of student-athletes at Jose Rizal University, shedding light on the significant demands of this dual-role pursuit. The research delves into the intricate balance required to juggle academic responsibilities, social commitments, and intensive sports training. Through qualitative data collection, the study reveals that while each participant's experience is unique, common themes emerge regarding the struggle to manage time effectively amidst a rigorous schedule. Despite these challenges, the participants exhibit resilience and adaptability, with some demonstrating that balancing academics and athletics is feasible with proper time management. However, they also report facing difficulties with unsympathetic faculty members, which exacerbates their stress levels. The findings underscore the importance of understanding and supporting student-athletes, as their narratives of triumph amidst adversity offer valuable lessons in perseverance and success, serving as motivational examples for others aspiring to follow a similar path.

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