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5. INCLUSIVE SPORT IN SCHOOL SETTINGS: LEARNING FROM THE BASKIN EXPERIENCE

by Luciana Taddei, Marta Candussi, Luca Grion, Luca Bianchi*

Abstract: The article explores Baskin, an inclusive sport developed in Italy in 2001, as a strategy to promote equity and participation in schools. By adapting rules and roles to individual abilities, Baskin addresses the exclusion of students with disabilities, valuing diversity. Grounded in inclusion theories, it offers a new pedagogical and social vision of sport, challenging traditional barriers and fostering transformative learning, thus promoting more inclusive educational and social environments.

Parole chiave: baskin, inclusion, school, sport, innovation, transformative method.

Abstract: Il contributo esplora il Baskin, uno sport inclusivo nato in Italia nel 2001, come strategia per promuovere equità e partecipazione nelle scuole. Adattando regole e ruoli alle abilità individuali, il Baskin affronta l'esclusione degli studenti con disabilità, valorizzando la diversità. Radicato nelle teorie dell'inclusione, propone una nuova visione pedagogica e sociale dello sport, sfidando le barriere tradizionali e favorendo un apprendimento

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trasformativo, promuovendo così ambienti educativi e sociali più inclusivi.

Keywords: baskin, inclusione, scuola, sport, innovazione, metodi trasformativi.

Introduction

In an era where schools are increasingly called upon to address complex challenges related to equity, participation, and the valorization of diversity, sport assumes an ambivalent role: on the one hand, it is celebrated as a space for socialization and personal growth; on the other, it often becomes a stage for exclusion, selection, and the reproduction of inequalities. This contradiction is particularly evident in educational settings, where physical education still tends to reflect meritocratic and performance-based logics, in contrast with the ideals of inclusion promoted at both institutional and pedagogical levels.

Within this scenario, the need to imagine and experiment with truly inclusive and innovative practices becomes all the more urgent. Born in Italy in 2001 from the idea of a teacher and a parent, Baskin is much more than a sport inspired by basketball: it is a pedagogical and social device that reinterprets the game through the lens of diversity, transforming it into a genuine opportunity for participation and recognition (Grion *et al.*, 2023; Taddei *et al.*, forthcoming). Far from representing a form of passive integration, Baskin proposes a true social innovation (Landri, 2000), capable of challenging the selective and performance-driven logics that often dominate school systems, particularly in the realm of physical education.

In a school context still deeply marked by rigid classifications, structural inequalities, and an educational model

oriented toward standardization, Baskin emerges as a transformative and evolving practice. Through the adaptation of rules, roles, and spaces, it enables the valorization of every student according to their individual abilities, embodying a dynamic idea of equity grounded in justice and personal dignity.

The following article offers an in-depth exploration of the educational and inclusive potential of this discipline, proposing Baskin not merely as a sport, but as a metaphor for a new way of doing school – a school in which excellence is not achieved through exclusion, but built through the active participation of all.

1. Sport and the paradox of inclusion: between classification and equity

The sport-inclusion nexus can be considered a historical turning point in the processes of societal modernization. Sport, in its dual nature as both a disciplining practice and an experiential space, has played a central role in the construction of collective identities, while also contributing to the production and reproduction of inequalities.

In current debates, the urgency of translating inclusive policies into concrete practices often finds in sport a fertile yet challenging domain – particularly when examining its classificatory forms: from performance hierarchies to normative frameworks, and even innovative models such as the inclusion spectrum, which, although originally developed within the field of disability, proves to be a valuable tool beyond its initial context.

The emergence of modern sport is closely tied to the rationalization and civilizing processes that have marked Western modernity. As Guttmann (1978) points out, the key features of modern sport – secularism, formal equality, specialization,

rationalization, bureaucratization, quantification, and the pursuit of records – define a highly normative classificatory paradigm, where the body, performance, and measurability become the primary criteria for participation (Bianchi, 2023), relegating the relational dimension to the background.

What emerges most clearly is the ambivalent nature of the concept of equity. It is important to recall how this concept differs sharply from equality in that it is substantive, pluralistic, and contextual – especially when the focus is on the inclusion of individuals facing forms of fragility. While equality tends to level differences in the distribution of resources and opportunities, equity seeks to empower by recognizing structural and individual differences as significant factors (Sen, 1992; Nussbaum, 2011). Practiced equity, in the fullest sense, does not merely guarantee equal means, but ensures that every person has a fair chance to realize their life project without facing barriers.

Although modern sport claims to offer equal opportunity through standardized rules, it often performs a systematic selection that excludes individuals who do not conform to normative ability standards – standards frequently based on peak performance. A concept of equity that remains rhetorical in form can thus become a generator of structural inequality. As Elias (1990) argues, sportification not only disciplines bodies but arranges and classifies them according to a performative hierarchy that marginalizes those who do not fit the dominant models (Bianchi, 2023). The intensification of this selective and performative logic leads to negative consequences at all levels: from elite sports to youth categories, from doping to overcome limits and opponents, to the abandonment of sport in adolescence. All of these are united by a sense of inadequacy experienced by the athlete, facing ever-rising expectations that seem impossible to reach.

From this perspective, it becomes easier to understand how

inclusion processes can take on paradoxical tones when applied to sport. On the one hand, sport has historically been seen as a tool for socialization, civic education, and collective cohesion. On the other hand, its regulatory and classificatory structure – centered on performance, competition, and efficiency – limits its inclusive potential. As Taddei and Bianchi (2023) observe, the classifications that permeate sporting practices act as cultural devices that authorize or exclude, affecting particularly vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, migrants, women, and LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Inclusion in modern sport, then, cannot be reduced to mere access to practice; it requires a rethinking of the classificatory logics that determine who can participate, how, and in what roles.

The adoption of alternative models such as the inclusion spectrum offers a critical response to the paradox of inclusion in sport: it proposes a dynamic and relational classification system, based on the interaction between individuals and the game setting, with the goal of overcoming the dichotomy between ability and disability, between normativity and alterity. It offers a concrete foundation for rethinking inclusion through the lens of social justice and mutual recognition (Bianchi, 2023). What makes the difference, in this case, is the attention to how the concept of equity is enacted.

The inclusion spectrum model, developed within disability studies, offers an innovative and critical approach to traditional sport classification. It is based on the idea that inclusion is not a binary condition – either present or absent – but a continuum in which ideas and practices vary according to their degree of openness and adaptability to the diversity of participants (Bianchi, 2023).

The model spans a range from exclusive sport (where access is governed by rigid and standardized performance criteria), to integrated sport (which allows coexistence but not necessarily real interaction between people with and without disabilities), up to fully

inclusive or adapted sport, where rules, roles, and objectives are designed to value difference as a resource. In this sense, the spectrum provides a dynamic classification system that enables critical reflection on existing practices and supports the design of alternative models within sports disciplines (Bianchi and Taddei, 2023).

The epistemological value of the spectrum lies in its ability to expose the normative assumptions underlying sport classifications. It reveals that every sport practice relies on an implicit set of codes determining who can play, how, and in what role. Rather than accepting these codes as fixed, the model encourages their renegotiation in light of differential accessibility. The aim is not merely to include "the other," but to question the very premises of what sport is and who is entitled to play. The focus shifts to the individual, with their intrinsic characteristics, needs, and – why not – their limitations. The result is a less paradoxical and dissonant framework for understanding inclusion, and above all, a form of equity genuinely practiced on the field.

From what has been discussed, it becomes clear that for sport to be truly inclusive, it must transform its classifications from instruments of selection into tools of personal recognition. The inclusion spectrum model provides a framework to measure and guide this transformation, offering an analytical lens that values plurality and reconsiders the primacy of performance.

In summary, this model includes the following types of sport activities (Black and Williamson, 2011):

1. Separate activities. Groups are divided: some practice one activity, others (often people with disabilities) a different one. Time, space, and rules differ.
2. Parallel activities. All participants share time, space, and rules, but play in parallel homogeneous groups, with

different levels and methods according to group characteristics (e.g., lower intensity or competitiveness).

3. Sport for people with disabilities (reverse integration). Sports originally designed for people with disabilities are also played by people without disabilities. Time, space, and rules are shared, but individual abilities are matched to the discipline.
4. Open activities. Everyone engages in the same activity, with few or no modifications to the context or equipment (typically less complex sports, such as trekking). These are inclusive insofar as all participants can adapt relatively easily.
5. Modified activities. Sports designed for all and playable by all, with specific adaptations to rules, space, and equipment.

A concrete application of the inclusion spectrum is undoubtedly Baskin, a sport that falls under the category of adapted sports. With nearly 6,500 athletes in Italy alone and growing presence in at least seven other countries, Baskin does not merely allow for the coexistence of diverse abilities – it reconfigures the entire structure of sporting practice: its rules, game setting, and equipment (Bianchi *et al.*, 2023).

2. Baskin: what it is and how it includes

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) enshrines the right of persons with disabilities to full inclusion in society and community life. Integration alone is therefore not sufficient; a further effort is needed to ensure that this right is truly upheld. In this regard, the Social Model of Disability (Oliver, 1991) offers an important insight: it does not view disability as an individual deficit, but rather focuses on the

social processes and forces that act to render people with neurodivergence or impairments effectively disabled. As Goffman (1963) reminds us, the risk lies in triggering a process of stigmatization that begins with the individual's own perception of being different from others, which then manifests as reduced ability (or willingness) to engage socially. This, in turn, limits community participation and ultimately disrupts the co-construction process that is essential for the progress and survival of the community itself (Pauli *et al.*, 2015).

From this perspective, sport plays a fundamental role: in addition to being closely linked to quality of life, it serves as a communicative vehicle that transcends barriers and interpretive boundaries. The Convention, in fact, affirms the right to sport as any form of physical activity that, through organized or unorganized participation, aims to improve physical and mental well-being, develop social relationships, and achieve results in competitions at all levels (United Nations, 2006). Engaging in sport – not merely physical activity – allows individuals to develop key dimensions of emotional life, self-image and self-perception, as well as social and relational skills. It becomes a space for self and group reflection, where interactions serve an explicitly educational function: I grow because I strive to improve, but also because I engage with others pursuing the same goal. Sport, after all, is both enjoyment and commitment, light-heartedness and discipline, and the ability to endure physical and mental fatigue while maintaining a balanced relationship between competition and cooperation (Grion, 2023).

The use of sport as a socio-educational tool has not only promoted social engagement in the co-construction of community-based learning but has also enabled a rethinking of sports practices in light of the right to inclusion. This is not about so-called integrated sports, where the playing setting remains unchanged and the main adaptation is to limit the involvement or capabilities of

non-disabled individuals – a move that, as noted earlier, does not eliminate the stigmatization or marginalization of people with disabilities or other socially excluded identities. On the contrary, envisioning truly inclusive sports means enhancing individual abilities – whatever they may be – and modifying the structure and expression of a discipline, without undermining its core nature: a competition among athletes in which everyone can perform to the best of their ability in order to achieve victory.

In this sense, as previously discussed, Baskin represents a sport belonging to the category of adapted sports within the inclusion spectrum.

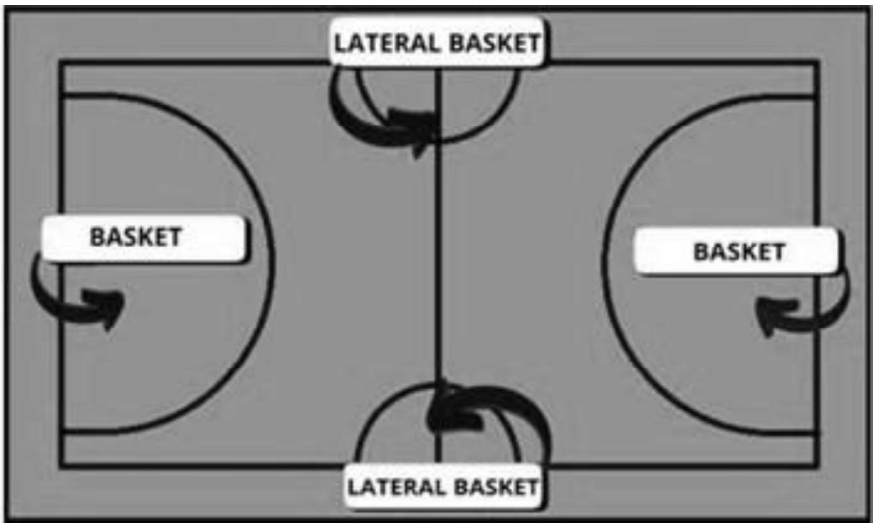
The term "Baskin" combines "basketball" and "inclusive," and refers to a sport inspired by basketball that reflects the principles outlined in the UN Convention. By modifying the rules and the structure of the game, it retains the dynamic nature of basketball while opening participation to anyone, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity – or, crucially, disability or personal difficulties. The true innovation of Baskin, like that of other genuinely inclusive sports, lies in its understanding of diversity not as *dis-ability*, but as *different ability*. Each person is included in a context where they can participate using their own tools and skills, while preserving their dignity and sense of importance.

This goal is achieved by applying John Rawls's (1971) principle of difference: the individual differences among athletes must be balanced with their right to participate, by acting on the context in ways that allow each person to play to the best of their potential (Bianchi, 2023). This reasoning aligns with the broader distinction between equality and equity: while equality implies giving everyone the same tools, regardless of individual starting points, equity recognizes the need for different tools based on individual needs and capacities. After all, can we really expect a fish and a mountain goat to be equally capable of climbing a mountain?

Clearly, they need different tools: equity means keeping the same objective but providing each with the appropriate means to reach it. Returning to the metaphor, perhaps we might gift the fish a climbing course – who's to say it won't outperform the goat?

In Baskin, the concept of *Person at the Center* is key, along with a *design for all* approach aimed at valuing human diversity and promoting social inclusion. This is achieved through the adaptation of space, equipment, rules, and player instructions (Andriola, 2023). Starting with space: two protected zones are added to the traditional basketball court, designated for specific categories of players. This is based on the awareness that some participants might feel discomfort or face risks when playing in close contact with others due to the physical demands of the game. These protected areas are located at each end of the midcourt line and, during play, are accessible only to specific roles – namely, the pivot players – and, in some cases, to designated teammates called tutors (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Baskin court



To encourage genuine participation from everyone, the equipment used during the game is also modified: while the

traditional basketball hoop is retained, two additional hoops are added within the protected areas at different heights – 2.20 meters and 1.10 meters – to give players with less strength the opportunity to score (Figure 2). At the same time, the possibility of changing the material, weight, or size of the ball has been introduced to facilitate shooting for people with varying levels of hand ability.

Figure 2: Baskin's lateral basket, placed in the two safe areas

Rules, too, are different. In Baskin, there is a rule of excellence, which concerns the role: the five typical basketball roles are redefined here based on the athletes' characteristics and are adapted to them – not the other way around – in order to provide each player with a meaningful space for expression and peer-level comparison. Furthermore, the rules are responsive to the participants, adjusting certain elements and modifying some rules

according to the abilities present.

Table 1 shows the classification of roles in Baskin along with a brief description; as can be seen from the table, roles 1 and 2 are the so-called pivots.

Table 1: How roles are assigned in Baskin

Role	Description
1	A player with a disability who is unable to move independently (due to motor impairments), not even using a wheelchair unless pushed by others, and who cannot propel the wheelchair a full wheel turn using either upper limb. The player is only capable of shooting and remains in the area near the side hoops (pivot area). The ball is handed to them by a teammate.
2	A player with a disability who has full or partial use of their hands for shooting at the higher side hoop. They are able to walk, which allows them to move around, but they are either unable to run or cannot make use of running. They remain in the area near the side hoops (pivot area), and the ball is handed to them by a teammate.
3	A moving player, able-bodied or with a disability, with limited hand use and unsteady running. Dribbling is not continuous, and balance is poor. Execution speed is low.
4	A moving player, able-bodied or with a disability, with functional hand use and fluid running. Dribbling is regular, and basic skills are not perfect. Execution speed is moderate.
5	A moving player, able-bodied or with a disability, who possesses all the fundamental basketball skills. Execution speed is high.

Source: elaboration by the authors.

Finally, with regard to the instructions given, the presence of tutors is a critical element: they are higher-role players who act as intermediaries between the game and their lower-role teammates,

guiding them toward the full expression of their abilities. Each athlete has not only a designated role, but also specific and personalized goals and tasks. The collective achievement of these individual tasks leads to the accomplishment of the team's overall goal: victory.

Victory, in this context, takes on multiple meanings. It refers to winning a single game – as in team performance – but also to success as active participation grounded in inclusion, where every individual is a protagonist. Lastly, it also represents victory as a demonstration of one's life journey: for people with disabilities especially, becoming a full-fledged athlete means affirming one's dignity as a person. It means setting achievable goals by being part of a group that understands one's starting condition, tracks progress, and recognizes improvements and milestones. Competitive performance, therefore, is no longer limited to a numerical result; it becomes the sum of athletic effort plus personal growth trajectories that extend beyond the playing field.

The personal and social impact of Baskin as a model of inclusive sport is evident in the reflections of its own participants (and here we refer to athletes, coaches, managers, educators, families, and all those close to the discipline): overall individual growth involves concepts related to the self, such as improved self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-image. However, there are also noticeable improvements in communication and relational skills, particularly in individuals who initially face significant challenges in these areas. The social networks of those involved also expand, thanks to both the diversity of skills and knowledge shared and the mutual support that develops within the group.

The outcome of these dynamics contributes to the co-construction phenomenon mentioned at the beginning: in Baskin, this happens spontaneously as a reflection of its core values, first and foremost inclusion.

A final, fundamental reflection in recognizing the true value of inclusion concerns the rejection of any form of charity or pity-based participation in regard to athletes with disabilities. As highlighted throughout, Baskin is a sport that demands something from everyone; each participant must demonstrate commitment to the game, whether able-bodied or living with a disability. Among the rules, for instance, there is one that limits the number of baskets per game segment: 3 baskets every 8 minutes. What does this mean? It means that game strategies must involve all roles in order to maximize scoring opportunities. It means that pivots are just as valuable as other players. It means that even roles typically associated with able-bodied players carry the moral and competitive responsibility to train seriously and improve their gameplay. It means facing individual insecurities and finding in the team the strength to overcome them.

3. The Value of Competition in Inclusive Sport

At this point in our reflection, it is appropriate to pause and consider the role of competitiveness within the context of inclusive sports. There is an important issue that deserves careful attention: it is not uncommon for some to believe that competitiveness is not only unnecessary, but more radically, in direct conflict with the spirit of inclusion. From this assumption, it follows that non-competitive sport is seen as preferable – where the drive to win should give way to the promotion of values such as health, social interaction, and overall well-being.

But is it truly appropriate to speak of “non-competitive sport”?

From a conceptual point of view, the expression “non-competitive sport” is an oxymoron. If we consider its underlying

logic, we realize that every genuine sporting activity necessarily contains a competitive component. In other words, sport always involves contending for a shared and regulated goal. Indeed, the first rule of any sport clarifies the objective of the game – what must be done to win (e.g., scoring a goal, running a distance in the shortest time, making a basket). All other rules exist to define what is permissible in pursuit of that result.

In and of itself, the desire to compete and win is not negative; in fact, it constitutes the essence of the sporting phenomenon. Eliminating the competitive element – the contest for victory – means giving up what is truly sport (Grion, 2025). Without this element, physical activity would lose much of its appeal: the thrill of the challenge would disappear, along with that mix of emotion and motivation that pushes every athlete to give their best. Eliminating competition in the name of a misunderstood egalitarianism would strip sport of its nature, reducing it to mere exercise or recreational activity. This holds true even for inclusive sports like Baskin (Grion *et al.*, 2023; Crepaz, 2019).

Competition only becomes problematic when it is adopted as the sole guiding principle – when, in the name of victory at all costs, all the other values that enrich the sporting experience are sacrificed.

Even in contexts where inclusion is especially valued, competition not only can, but must be expressed – provided that it is done in healthy and respectful forms. Properly understood, competitive challenge becomes a stimulus for growth and a source of shared enjoyment.

3.1 Agonism and Inclusion, Competition and Cooperation

Recognizing the value of competition, as noted, does not mean ignoring the other dimensions of sport. On the contrary, it

requires the ability to keep in balance the various values at stake: the drive for victory and for excellent performance on one side; the participation of all, fairness, and positive relationships between teammates and opponents on the other (Grion, 2015). What is needed – not only in inclusive sports – is what we might call a "responsible agonism," that is, an agonistic mindset capable of tempering multiple values without sacrificing any.

Responsible agonism avoids both the excess of those who aim solely at the result at any cost and the opposite mistake of those who, in order to "include," give up every challenge and competitive spirit. Rather, it means holding together performance and inclusion, commitment and *fair play*, the will to win and respect for everyone. In a well-designed inclusive sport, the result matters – because it is right that there be something at stake to give meaning to the challenge – but not at the expense of the dignity of each participant. This, however, does not happen spontaneously. On the contrary, it requires precise organizational and pedagogical choices (Farnè, 2008). For example, in inclusive youth sports one must give space even to the less experienced players, while still aiming for victory. Likewise, rules must be adapted so that each athlete can compete according to their own abilities. Inclusion thus becomes a journey in which no one is excluded and, conversely, everyone can feel like the protagonist of a shared adventure.

This balance must be built with awareness, remembering that sport, to be truly educational, must serve a clear human and communal purpose. In other words, competition must be put at the service of people's growth and of relationships. Only in this way does agonism reveal its educational potential.

What has been said so far helps us to focus on a further aspect: sporting practice, beyond being competitive, also presupposes a *cooperative* dynamic. In fact, one cannot speak of authentic competition without first having created a space of

cooperation in which participants share objectives, spaces, times, and rules. Every contest, in fact, implies an agreement on the rules and a mutual respect between the challengers. Without these common foundations, competition would degenerate into destructive conflict. In the sporting arena, however, something special happens: opponents who fight for opposite objectives (to beat one another) collaborate in creating together a meaningful play experience.

Consider a game of Baskin or any other sport: the two teams want to prevail, but to do so they must jointly build and protect the playing space, adhering to the same rules and recognizing each other as partners in a common enterprise. In this light, the opponent ceases to be an enemy to eliminate and rather becomes a companion on the journey, indispensable for me to practice the activity I love. After all, without opponents there would be no possibility to compete and improve. The other who competes with me is also the one who spurs me to give my best; their presence urges me to express the best of myself, acting as an – perhaps unintended – allied force in my highest *performance*.

Cooperation is not limited to the relationship between opponents but is fully manifested within teams. In Baskin, for example, athletes with different abilities must collaborate closely: the more skilled assist teammates in difficulty, and the outcome of the match depends on the cohesion of the entire group. In general, every team sport teaches that success is the fruit of synergy among members and that the value of one depends on the contribution of all. But even in individual sports there is an implicit cooperation: those who organize the event, those who respect the competition schedule, those who encourage the opponent with a gesture of sportsmanship – all contribute to creating a context in which each athlete can give their best. Competition and cooperation, then, are not irreconcilable opposites but rather the two faces of the same

coin. Inclusive competition makes this clear, since only by helping each other – even within the challenge – can all participants grow and feel valued. Ultimately, the greater the capacity to cooperate, the more engaging and formative the agonistic challenge will be. Once again, it is not by renouncing agonism that a simple contest is transformed into an experience of shared growth, but by intertwining competition with loyalty and respect for everyone's dignity.

3.2 Beyond Absolute Primacy: The Challenge as Personal Improvement

One of the most important aspects of responsible agonism is overcoming the logic that views victory as the sole purpose of sporting practice. Nowadays, especially at *élite* levels, too much emphasis is placed on records, winning at all costs, and the idea that only being first and the best truly matters (Berruto, 2025; Gaspari, 2022). This approach, however, generates unhealthy dynamics. The athlete is no longer content with being the best version of themselves, hoping that this will be enough to win; instead, they want to be superior to everyone else, chasing an ideal of absolute perfection that risks losing the human meaning of sport (Danani *et al.*, 2022). It even happens that a victory is perceived as "mutilated" if not accompanied by a record – as if winning alone were not enough.

This exasperation with absolute primacy not only takes the joy out of ordinary achievements – even a "normal" victory, if not impressive enough – but ends up overshadowing what truly matters in sport: personal growth, satisfaction with the performance given, and the ability to overcome what were thought to be one's own limits. An inclusive and responsible agonism instead shifts the emphasis from the external result to the internal performance. In this

perspective, winning does not necessarily mean crossing the finish line first, but rather achieving the satisfaction of having given one's best, winning the challenge against oneself. This is clearly evident in inclusive contexts (though it applies to all): those who start with disadvantages or lower abilities know very well they are unlikely to reach the podium, and yet the race still holds great significance for them. Or think of a popular marathon: thousands of people run knowing that only a very few can compete for victory. Can we really say the others "are not truly competing?" Of course not. Each of them is in competition with their own limits, driven by the desire to improve themselves.

Thus, the concept of victory expands and becomes accessible to everyone. A winner is someone who embraces the sporting challenge with courage and tenacity, who does not let themselves be overwhelmed by difficulties and inevitable failures, who fights to the end and brings out the best in themselves. This is perhaps the most beautiful lesson sport can offer, and it is a profoundly inclusive lesson. It teaches us that what matters is not only vertical comparison with others (being above or below them in the ranking), but also – and above all – horizontal comparison with ourselves, within a community of play. Of course, the *official ranking* will continue to distinguish first, second, and last place; but the *educational ranking* – the one that shapes the person – values each individual for the effort invested and the progress achieved. For this reason, a mature approach to sport – especially in youth or amateur settings – privileges performance over results. The latter, in fact, may depend on external and uncontrollable factors, while the quality of performance depends on us and is always a source of learning.

When athlete and coach remain focused on the growth journey rather than on victory at any cost, sport rediscovers its educational mission. One then realizes that the only true failure is

giving up or not even trying – not losing a match. Every time *one plays to the best of their abilities*, something precious is already gained: greater self-awareness, a refined skill, the tangible proof that we can become better than we thought. Speaking of responsible agonism means exactly this: accepting the challenge of knowing and surpassing oneself, perhaps discovering along the way the possibility of becoming better. And this, ultimately, is the most beautiful victory for any athlete, at any level (Grion, 2019).

3.3 Baskin: An Example of Inclusive Agonism

Baskin is the sport that most clearly embodies all the principles discussed so far. The innovation of this sporting practice, as previously noted, lies in the profound rethinking of basketball – from rules to spaces, from equipment to roles – in order to enable a form of competition that is both balanced and inclusive. But perhaps the most interesting aspect is this: no athlete is asked to "hold back" to make room for others. On the contrary, everyone is encouraged to give the very best of what they are capable of. The key to making this happen lies in intelligent rules that balance the forces on the court. The result is a concept of competition based on dynamic fairness: it's not simply a matter of "giving each their due", but of creating a condition in which everyone can give their own. It is indeed fair not only to reward individual merit, but also to ensure that everyone is in a position to contribute to the success of the team. Baskin shows that recognizing differences – for instance, assigning roles and tasks based on individual abilities – does not mean "doing someone a favor", nor lowering the bar of the challenge. On the contrary, it is a way of honoring the equal dignity of every athlete, creating a context in which no one feels excluded.

In a Baskin match, everyone knows they matter: the final result truly depends on everyone's contribution, and every player –

regardless of role – feels responsible for the outcome. What emerges, then, is a form of agonistic competition in which no one is useless, and no one is irreplaceable, because the team needs everyone's baskets.

Seen from this perspective, Baskin is much more than a game: it is an extraordinary social experiment. It proves, in practice, that with a clear educational purpose, well-designed rules, and respect for the spirit of agonism, it is possible to create a sporting experience where differences among people not only coexist but interact in creative and fruitful ways. The joint presence of competition and inclusion creates a unique environment: the *challenge* remains authentic – players compete to win, with commitment and strategy – but *cooperation* and attention to the value of each individual are held to the highest standard. Everyone, in relation to their own abilities and talents, can feel they bring something meaningful to the shared goal.

From this perspective, winning a Baskin match truly means having made the most of all available resources, having created harmony through diversity, having achieved a goal through the combined contributions of the strong and the weak, the fast and the slow, the champions and those who will never be champions. Challenges conceived in this way foster both personal and collective growth: the most skilled player learns responsibility and sporting generosity; the most fragile player finds the courage to step up and the joy of succeeding in what once seemed impossible.

The message Baskin gives us is powerful – even beyond the world of sport: *a community truly works when each person is able to give their best and is valued for it.*

One might even think that our societies would be better if they could learn the lesson of Baskin: that true victory lies in creating conditions where every individual, however different, finds their place and can contribute meaningfully. Inclusive sport, with

its deep commitment to both agonism and equality of dignity, points the way toward a more human competition, one capable of uniting rather than dividing. Ultimately, the value of competition in inclusive sport lies precisely here: in being a shared challenge, where the desire to excel goes hand in hand with the will to bring everyone to the top – each with their own means, at their own pace. When competition embraces inclusion, sport fully regains its educational and social power, becoming – truly – *a training ground for a better life, for everyone.*

4. To conclude: opportunities and challenges of school settings

As we conclude our reflection on Baskin and the broader implications of inclusive sport, it becomes essential to reframe the role of physical education (PE) within school environments. Schools are often structured as classificatory spaces, where students are measured through standardized performance metrics, and where PE becomes a site of reinforced competition, hierarchy, and exclusion (Bianchi, 2023). In such a context, physical activity risks being reduced to a battleground for grades, records, and rankings rather than a space for discovery, cooperation, and personal growth. The dominant logic of comparison can generate anxiety, marginalization, and disaffection – particularly for those whose physical abilities or social circumstances do not align with the norm.

Reflecting on the Baskin experience within the broader educational context invites a critical question, as Taddei and colleagues (forthcoming) yet underline: how can innovation be developed in schools, and how can educational practices be changed to promote equity?

Traditionally, the literature on schooling has emphasized the inertia of educational practice and the deep-rooted resistance to

structural change. As demonstrated, competition in sport is not ever compatible with inclusion, but it is a necessary driver of engagement and growth if it is framed within a logic of responsible agonism. Yet, this possibility remains largely unrealized in many school settings, where the dominant structure of education often resists change and reinforces inequality. Schools, as described by Tyack and Tobin (1994), follow a persistent "grammar" – a deeply ingrained set of organizational norms and routines – that tends to reproduce existing social hierarchies rather than challenge them (Maulini & Perrenoud, 2005; Meyer & Rowan, 2006). Educational practices, including those in physical education, often reflect the priorities and values of the dominant culture, functioning more as a tool for classification than for emancipation. As a result, students with disabilities, migrants, and those who deviate from standard norms frequently encounter exclusionary barriers, including subtle forms of ableism.

In this landscape, the introduction of truly inclusive models – like Baskin – offers a valuable counter-narrative. Rather than imposing change from above, Baskin embodies a form of situated innovation (Landri, 2000; Nichols, 2022), emerging from specific social needs and local actors committed to transforming exclusion into participation. Innovation, in this case, does not mean dismantling competition, but redesigning its conditions so that all students can engage meaningfully. This is precisely what Baskin does: by adapting spaces, roles, and rules, it fosters a form of dynamic equity, where the desire to win remains intact, but the path to victory is reconfigured to value each player's contribution. The competitive dimension is preserved – not diluted – but it is made accessible to everyone, regardless of ability.

Such models reveal the educational potential of inclusive sports: they encourage effort, resilience, and personal excellence, while simultaneously building empathy, cooperation, and mutual respect. They show how agonism and inclusion, often seen as

opposites, can instead be mutually reinforcing. However, for these practices to be adopted and sustained, schools must undergo a cultural and pedagogical shift. This means rethinking the purpose of physical education not as a space for selection and ranking, but as a laboratory for relational learning, where competition serves the development of both individuals and communities.

Future research, as highlighted by Taddei and Bianchi (2025), must further explore how such practices can be scaled, and how professional development can equip teachers to embrace inclusive pedagogies. Attention should also be paid to students' voices, the role of non-formal learning, and the social-emotional dimensions of sport. Studies already suggest that co-participation between students with and without disabilities significantly enhances self-esteem and fosters a more inclusive school climate (Hansen *et al.*, 2023; Emmers *et al.*, 2023; Schluchter *et al.*, 2023).

Ultimately, Baskin teaches us that inclusion does not require the erasure of competition, but its redefinition. It demonstrates that schools can be places not of exclusion through excellence, but of excellence through inclusion. In doing so, it points toward a vision of education where diversity is not tolerated but celebrated, and where each student – not despite their differences, but because of them – has the opportunity to strive, compete, and grow. This is not just a lesson in sport, but a model for reimagining school itself.

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