

Samba gets things swinging in Rio favela badminton school

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Children take part in a badminton training within the social project Bamon created by Sebastian Dias de Oliveira (not in frame) in Morro da Chacrinha, a slum in western Rio de Janeiro on August 10, 2016 (AFP Photo/Tasso Marcelo)

Rio de Janeiro (AFP) - A Rio favela teacher uses the rhythms of [samba](#) to teach 200 children badminton. If that sounds like an unlikely mix, get this: his son is representing Brazil in the Olympics.

Every evening, young children and adolescents climb a steep slope to the blue gym in Chacrinha favela, a working-class community of around 5,000 people blighted by drug violence.

For two hours, the samba plays and the kids practice badminton. With their choreographed footwork and moments like when they all throw shuttlecocks in the air at the same moment, it looks more like ballet than sports.

"They remember the movements more easily by dancing and they get less bored. The samba rhythm of one, two, three is perfect for a game like badminton," says Sebastiao Dias de Oliveira, 51, who spent years perfecting what he calls the "Bamon" method.

De Oliveira, whose gym is part of the Miratus NGO he founded 20 years ago, says he came up with the idea when he realized the potential of samba while listening to the beats of a tambourine.

- Rhythm, concentration, coordination -

"People think all Cariocas (Rio residents) can dance samba, but it's not true," he says. "Most children who get here can't dance. They learn the rhythm, concentration and coordination."

After training come competitions in which children who are not playing watch to learn from the others.

"I can't explain how I feel. It's emotion, I feel happy, I feel important," says ten-year-old Pedro Vinicius, a Brazilian champion for his age who ends training with a big smile on his face.

The original training method seems to be bearing fruit. Chacrinha is badminton powerhouse where nearly 60 percent of junior-level medal winners get their starts.

In the Olympics now unfolding in Rio, de Oliveira's 19-year-old son Ygor Coelho will compete on Saturday, hoping to repeat the exploits of another favela dweller, judo gold medalist [Rafaela Silva](#).

"I don't think my son has a chance of a medal, but he also got his start in a social project and that's worth a medal by itself," the proud father says. "If he becomes a star, he'll get

- Exclusion to inclusion -

De Oliveira's efforts to provide children a path forward -- which includes help with their studies -- stem from his own experience of exclusion.

His mother worked as a domestic servant for a government minister who did not want her child in the house. The politician used his influence to put de Oliveira into a home for young delinquents.

"He shut me out," de Oliveira says.

He stayed there from age seven to 18, seeing his mother again only when he was 12.

"She had left her work and managed to rent a small place in the suburbs," he said.

"I had to work in the local garbage dump to help my mother, collecting what I could to sell and to find food to eat."

"I could have gone a bad way, I could have got into drug trafficking, but a teacher from the detention center helped me when I was 16 to go on the right path," he added. "Now I'm paying that back."

The story may sound shocking, but it surprises no one in the tough favela environment.

Another teacher at Miratus, Aleksander Silva, 32, says his whole family was involved in trafficking. He escaped thanks to badminton.

"It's what saved me," he said. "I could have become a trafficker and I'd be dead by today."

