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The Interplay between Sports and Health: Insights from a Student Survey

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Abstract: Physical activity is widely acknowledged as a cornerstone of good health, yet its prevalence and impact on the well-being of students remain underexplored. This study delves into the intricate relationship between sports participation and health outcomes among a cohort of students, drawing insights from comprehensive survey data. The findings reveal a concerning trend: nearly half (49.5%) of the surveyed students abstain from engaging in physical activity, reflecting a significant portion of the population potentially at risk of compromised health. Among those who do participate, opinions diverge, with 24.9% considering their level of activity sufficient, while 25.5% perceive it as inadequate. This dichotomy underscores the subjective nature of perceived physical fitness levels and highlights the need for tailored interventions to address individual needs. Analyzing leisure-time activities provides valuable insights into the preferences and priorities of students. Despite the myriad options available, only a modest proportion (26.8%) partake in sports, indicating a potential disconnect between the perceived importance of physical activity and its actual integration into daily routines. Encouragingly, hiking emerges as a popular alternative, with 25.5% of students opting for outdoor recreational pursuits. However, concerns arise regarding sedentary behaviors, as significant portions of students spend leisure time on activities such as computer usage (14.2%) and television viewing (5.5%). In conclusion, this study underscores the imperative of promoting physical activity and cultivating healthy lifestyle habits among students. By addressing barriers to sports participation, tailoring interventions to individual needs, and fostering a culture of active living, educational institutions and health policymakers can significantly enhance the overall well-being and health outcomes of student populations.

Keywords: Sports, Physical activity, Health education

Introduction

Sports and physical activity play a crucial role on human health. Sports offer a numerous health benefits linked mainly to physical and mental health benefits as well as other positive impacts like healthy growth and development, better academic performance, development of social skills and discipline, improved life qualities, chronic disease prevention, etc. Although, people are more focused on the impact of sports on body weight management and weight loss, from the literature review, it is observed that physical activity is very helpful to the cardiovascular system by improving circulation, blood pressure, heart rate and prevents heart diseases and lack of physical activity is considered a critical contributing risk factor to cardiovascular disease (Gutenberg., et al 2022). Walking and regular physical activity is highly recommended also for maintaining the blood sugar level in balance. Regular physical activity helps improve insulin sensitivity, can lower blood sugar and reduces the risk of Type 2 diabetes (Malm., et al 2019). Diet and exercise (lifestyle modification) are considered by all diabetes clinical guidelines to be the foundation for diabetes management (Zahalka., et al 2023). Physical activity and sports helps build muscle also, which is crucial for overall strength and metabolism. More muscle mass increases glucose uptake and metabolism, helping to regulate blood sugar levels and reduce insulin resistance. Both, muscle activation and better circulation during sports, increase glucose uptake from muscles,

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lowering so the level of glucose in circulation. Contraction augments skeletal muscle blood flow and thereby increases the rate of glucose dispersion into the muscle interstitial space (McClatchey., et al 2019 & Zahalka., et al 2023). Based on various molecular changes and adaptations in skeletal muscle signaling, exercise can positively influence glucose homeostasis for up to 48 hours (Cartee, 2015).

Physical activity, not only help regulate blood sugar levels during exercise but also supports metabolic health. this extended effect is largely due to several key mechanisms, that include increased insulin sensitivity, glucose transport proteins (GLUT4), mitochondrial biogenesis, increased muscle glycogen storage and inflammatory response regulation (McGarrah., et al 2016; Way., et al 2016). Based on the positive associations between physical activity and blood glucose levels, both exercises and diet are considered as a key lifestyle factors, linked to diabetes type 2 (T2D) prevention, treatment, and disease-associated morbidity and mortality. There is evidence also that supports that exercise can reduce diabetes associated complications for type 1 diabetes (T1D) as well (Zahalka., et al 2023; Yan., et al 2021; Kuwata., et al 2017; Lee., 2015).

Sports and physical activity can have a profound impact on emotional health and overall well-being as well. Participating in sports enhances the release of endorphins, reduction of stress and anxiety, improved mood by reducing symptoms of depression and improved mood due to its impact on neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine and helps focus and productivity despite the age (Ecclestone., 2012; Barnes., 2015; Andersen., et al 2019; Abdullah., 2023). One of the most notable effects is the release of endorphins, often called "feel-good" hormones, which can lead to feelings of happiness and euphoria (Churchill., et al 2002). Additionally, physical activity serves as a natural stress reliever, lowering cortisol levels and promoting relaxation, which can help clear the mind and alleviate anxiety symptoms (Salmon., 2001).

As a conclusion, regular exercise and participation in sports are vital for maintaining overall human health for different reasons. First, engaging in physical activity enhances cardiovascular health, strength, flexibility, and endurance, thereby reducing the risk of chronic diseases. Exercise plays a significant role in mental health, as it is associated with lower rates of anxiety and depression. Physical activity boosts mood and cognitive function through the release of endorphins. In addition, participating in sports is an effective way to manage weight by burning calories and increasing metabolism. Team sports also promote social connections, fostering teamwork and a sense of community that enhances mental well-being. Furthermore, regular practice of sports instills discipline and encourages individuals to set and achieve personal goals. Improved sleep quality is another benefit of regular exercise, which is crucial for overall health. Moderate physical activity also strengthens the immune system, helping to prevent illness. In summary, we can say that incorporating regular physical activity and sports into daily life routines can significantly enhance both physical and mental health, leading to a better quality of life.

Method

This study aimed to explore the involvement of young people in sports by using a detailed questionnaire. The research examined not only the sports activities that take place within school, based on their sports subject program, but also those that occur outside of school. Students were asked a variety of questions to gather insights into their participation in sports at school. They provided information on whether they engaged in physical education classes or school sports teams. The questionnaire explored how students spend their free time, including any recreational sports or activities they might participate in outside of school. Participants were invited to share their opinions on the impact of sports on health and overall wellbeing. The survey specifically aimed to understand their views on how being active influences both physical fitness and mental health. For those students who actively participate in sports, the questionnaire included questions about the specific types of sports they engage in, as well as the environments where they practice these activities, such as gyms, parks, or community centers. This comprehensive approach allows us to gain a clearer picture of youth involvement in sports and its implications for their lives. The questionnaire requested information about the impact of sports in their emotional status as well and participants' body mass index (BMI), which serves as an important indicator of health.

The questionnaire aimed also, to collect important information from participants about their demographics and personal details. It included questions about gender (male or female), age, and employment status (employed, unemployed, or other work). Participants were informed about the criteria they needed to meet to take part in the study, ensuring they knew if they were eligible. They were also given an estimate of how long the questionnaire would take to complete, helping set expectations and encourage thoughtful answers. To protect their privacy, participants received clear explanations about how their personal information would be kept safe. They were

assured that their data would be handled confidentially and ethically. Finally, participants agreed to take part voluntarily, showing their genuine interest in contributing to the research.

Results and Discussion

This study aimed to evaluate the involvement of Albanian students in sports. To achieve this, we surveyed a total of 326 students from various universities across different regions of Albania, including Tirana, Durrës, Shkodra, Vlora, Gjirokastra, Elbasan and Korça University. Participants voluntarily completed an online questionnaire designed to assess their engagement in sports activities. Among the respondents, 250 (76.9%) were women, while 76 (23.4%) were men (Figure 1).

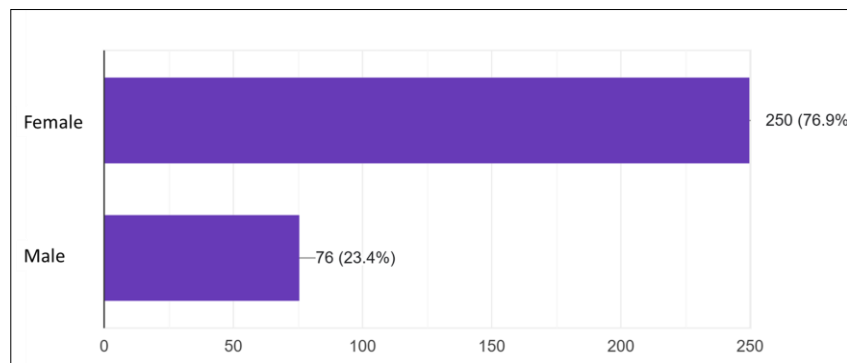


Figure 1. Gender distribution among students

This diverse sample provides valuable insights into the sporting habits and preferences of students in Albania, highlighting the gender dynamics and regional variations in sports participation. By analyzing the collected data, we aim to better understand the factors influencing student involvement in sports and the potential implications for promoting physical activity among young people in the country. The findings from this study could serve as a foundation for developing targeted initiatives to encourage greater participation in sports and improve overall health and well-being among Albanian students.

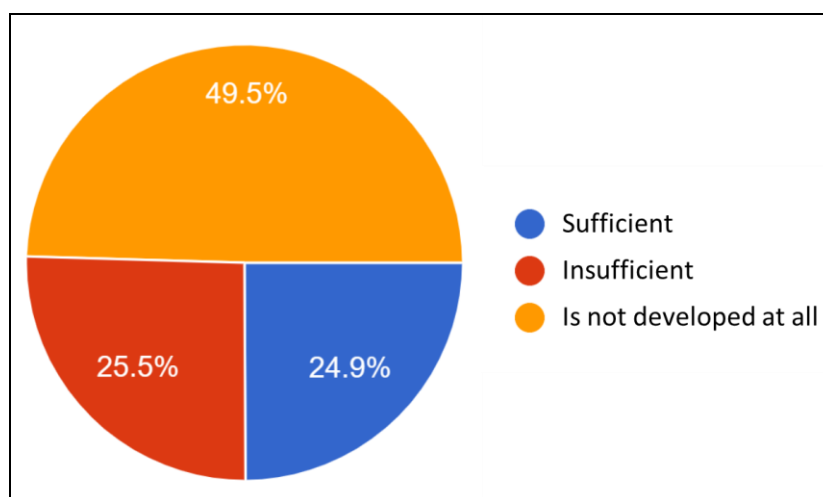


Figure 2. The results of the questionnaire on the development of the subject of sports in school

Students were asked about their engagement with sports education in school and whether they felt it was sufficient. The results showed that 24.5% of participants believed they receive adequate sports instruction and activity. In contrast, 25.5% felt that the physical activity provided at school is insufficient. Nearly half of the respondents, 49.5%, reported that they do not participate in any sports education at all. This lack of engagement can be attributed to the fact that sports education is classified as an optional subject within the school curriculum rather than a mandatory one. These findings highlight a significant gap in physical education, suggesting a need for schools to re-evaluate their approach to sports and physical activity to promote healthier lifestyles among students.

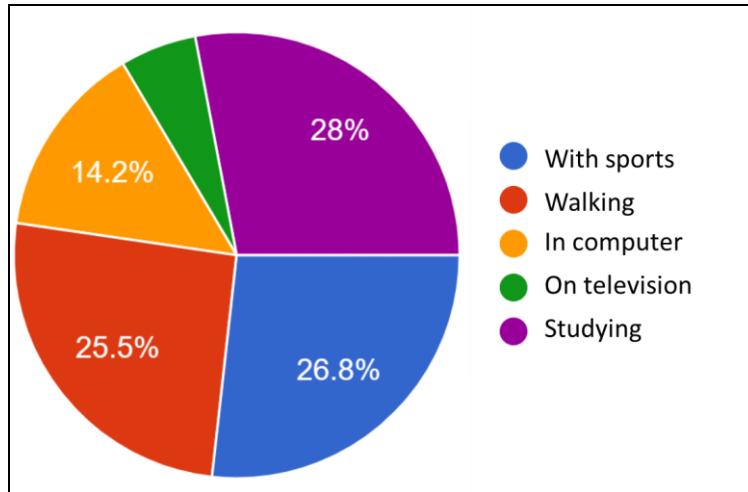


Figure 3. The way students use their free time

To gain insight into students' engagement in sports and their overall involvement in physical activity, participants were asked how they typically spend their free time. Among the 326 students surveyed, 26.8% reported participating in sports during their leisure hours, indicating a moderate level of engagement in physical activities. 25.5% of the student, indicated that they prefer walking, which can also be considered a beneficial form of exercise. A significant portion of the students, 28%, reported spending their free time studying, suggesting that academic commitments may take precedence over physical activity. Furthermore, 14.2% of students spent their leisure time on the computer, while 5.5% engaged in watching television. The data reveals a mixed landscape of physical activity among the students. While nearly a third engage in sports or walking, the dominant activities, studying and screen time, indicate a potential imbalance that could impact their physical health. The low percentage of students participating in traditional sports may reflect limited opportunities or encouragement in school settings, emphasizing the need for schools to promote more active lifestyles. Overall, these findings suggest that while some students are active, many prioritize academic work or sedentary pastimes, highlighting an area for intervention to foster greater physical engagement.

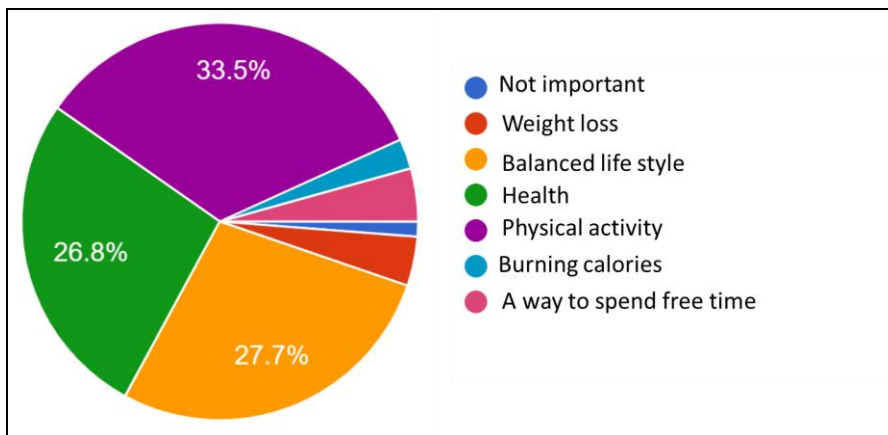


Figure 4. The way students evaluate the importance of sports in human life

Students often evaluate the importance of sports in their lives through various aspects, including personal development, social interaction, health benefits, and academic performance. Based on the questionnaire responses, the significance of sports in students' lives varies widely (figure 4). Approximately 33.5% of participants view sports as an essential aspect of physical activity and a valuable means of socializing. This perspective highlights the role of sports not only in promoting fitness but also in fostering connections with others, which can be crucial for personal development. Furthermore, 27.7% of students perceive sports as integral to a balanced lifestyle, indicating an awareness of the need for physical activity alongside other aspects of wellbeing, such as academic and social engagements. Meanwhile, 26.8% associate sports with health benefits, reflecting a recognition of the positive impact that regular physical activity can have on overall health. In contrast, a smaller segment of 12% sees sports primarily as a means for calorie burning and weight loss, or simply as a way to pass the time, indicating a lack of intrinsic motivation for participation. This perspective suggests a more utilitarian approach to physical activity, emphasizing external outcomes rather than recognizing

the holistic benefits that come from engaging in sports. These findings highlight a range of student attitudes toward sports, from a deep appreciation of its multifaceted benefits to a more superficial view, suggesting that educators and program organizers should tailor initiatives to address these diverse motivations and needs.

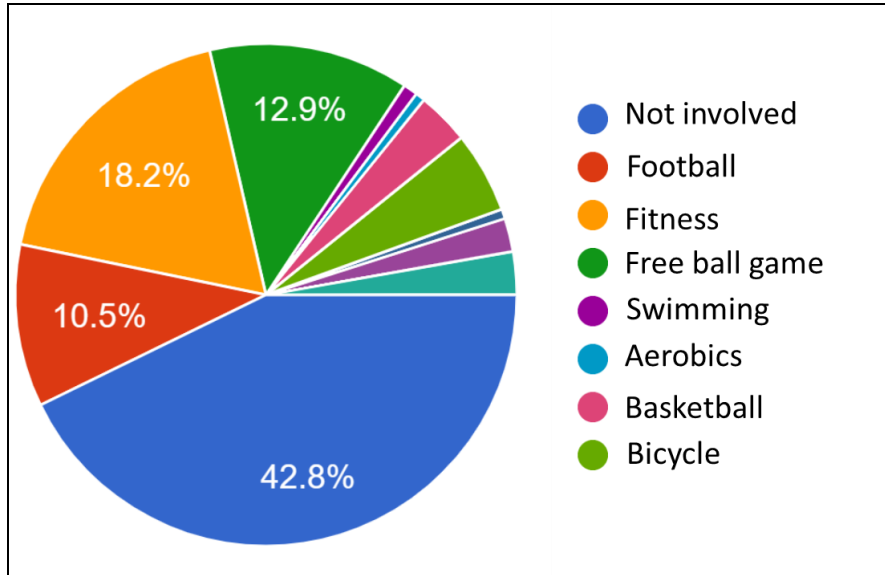


Figure 5. Involvement of students in sports

Through a questionnaire assessing student participation in various sports, it was found that a significant 42.8% do not engage in any sporting activities. Among those who do participate, 18.2% focus on fitness, while 12.9% play casual ball games, 10.5% are involved in football, and 15.6% engage in a variety of activities such as basketball, swimming, cycling, aerobics, simple walking, and hiking. This data reveals a concerning trend: over four in ten students are inactive in sports, which could have implications for their physical and overall wellbeing. The limited participation in organized sports highlights a need for initiatives that encourage more active lifestyles among students. To encourage more students to get involved in sports, professors organize sport activities across different faculties, including friendly competitions, team sports, or fun fitness challenges that allow students to meet each other and build connections as well. While fitness activities are the most popular, offering a variety of sports can help engage more students with different interests.

While recent years have shown increased enthusiasm among students for activities organized between faculties and universities, participation levels still remain low. These events not only attract students but also engage a substantial number of academic staff, promoting a sense of community and collaboration.

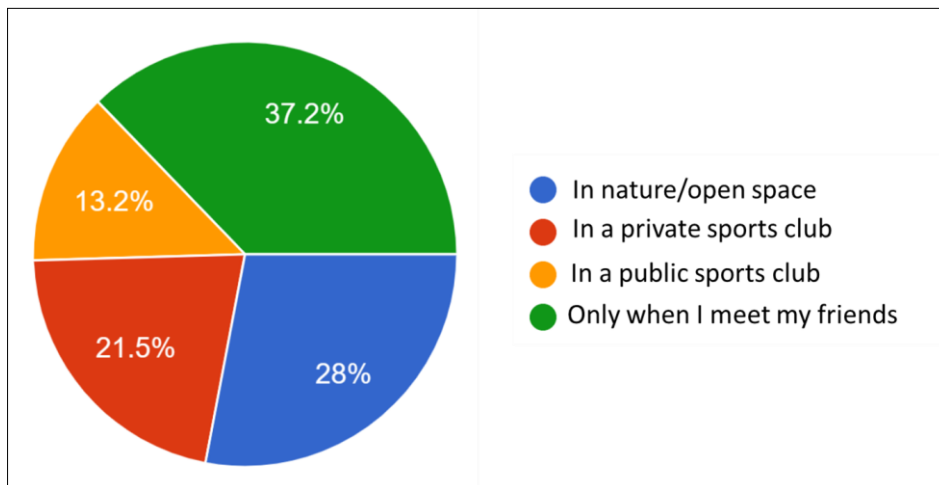


Figure 6. Distribution of students who regularly participate in sports

The data indicates that 37.2% of respondents participate in sports primarily when accompanied by friends. This suggests a strong social component in their motivation for exercise, highlighting the importance of friendship and social interaction in encouraging physical activity. Following this, 28% of individuals prefer to play in

natural or open spaces. This preference could be linked to the appeal of outdoor environments, which may enhance the enjoyment of physical activity and provide additional mental health benefits, such as reduced stress and improved mood. 21.5% of participants are affiliated with private sports clubs, indicating a willingness to invest in organized sports environments that offer structured training and facilities. 13.2% of respondents engage in sports at public sports clubs. The lower percentage could reflect barriers such as limited access, higher crowd levels, or a preference for more personalized experiences found in private settings. These findings underscore the diverse motivations and preferences in sports participation, highlighting the role of social connections and environmental settings in influencing how individuals choose to engage in physical activity.

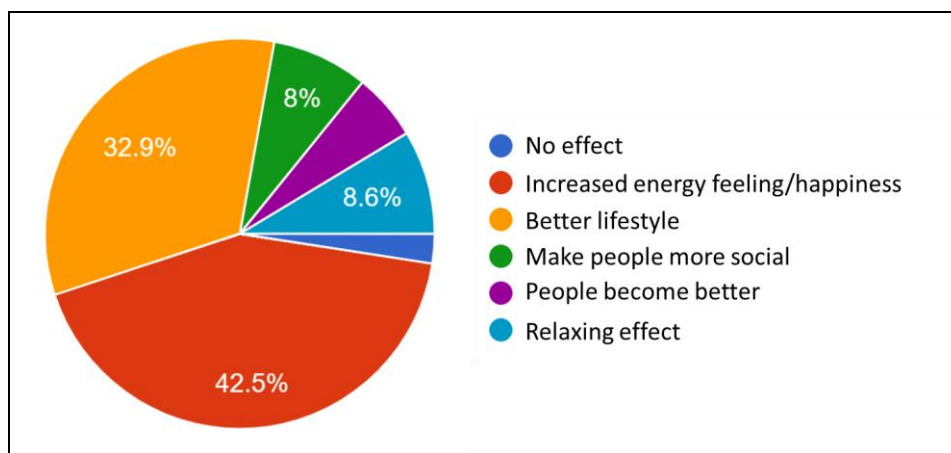


Figure 7. Student's perception on the positive impact of sports on the emotional state

The survey results on students' perceptions of the emotional benefits of sports reveal several noteworthy trends. A significant majority of students, of 42.5%, report that participating in sports boosts their energy levels and overall happiness. This suggests that physical activity is commonly associated with positive mood enhancements, likely due to the release of endorphins (Ecclestone., 2012; Barnes., 2015; Andersen., et al 2019; Abdullah., 2023) and the sense of achievement that often accompanies athletic endeavors. Nearly one-third of respondents (32.9%) believe that sports contribute to a healthier lifestyle. This perception may stem from the recognition that regular physical activity often leads to better habits, such as improved nutrition and sleep quality, which collectively enhance wellbeing. A smaller segment of students (8.6%) views physical activity as a means of relaxation. This indicates that while many associate sports with energy and excitement, some also appreciate its potential for stress relief and mental calmness. Approximately 8% of participants feel that sports enhance their social lives. This highlights the communal aspect of physical activity, where team sports or group exercises foster connections and friendships. About 6% believe that engagement in sports leads to personal growth, suggesting a recognition of the character-building aspects of sports, such as discipline, teamwork, and resilience. A minimal percentage (only 2%) feel that sports have no impact on their emotional well-being. This shows that most students recognize the positive effects of sports, even though a small number do not share this view.

Conclusion

The survey findings on student engagement in sports education reveal significant concerns regarding participation and perceptions of physical activity. A substantial number of students are not engaging in any form of sports education, with many indicating that they find the physical activity offered at school to be inadequate. This suggests that academic commitments are often prioritized over participation in sports. While a notable portion of students view sports as essential for social interaction and personal development, a concerning number remain inactive in sports altogether. This highlights an urgent need for schools to reassess and enhance their physical education programs. Moreover, many students acknowledge the emotional and health benefits associated with sports, linking it to increased happiness and energy. However, some adopt a more utilitarian perspective, viewing sports primarily as a means to burn calories or pass the time. This mixed viewpoint highlights the importance of tailoring school initiatives to address the diverse motivations behind students' participation in physical activities. To encourage greater engagement, schools should implement inclusive sports programs, promote friendly competitions, and highlight the social aspects of physical activity. By fostering an environment that prioritizes both physical and emotional well-being, schools can support students in leading

healthier, more active lifestyles. Ultimately, addressing these gaps in sports education is crucial for the overall development and well-being of students.

Recommendations

We highly recommend for everyone, and especially young, to incorporate sports into everyday life, aim for at least 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week. Choose activities people enjoy, whether it's running, cycling, swimming, or joining a local sports team. Scheduling workouts like appointments will help to ensure consistency. Include more movement into your daily routine by taking the stairs, walking or biking to work, or participating in group sports with friends. Everyone can also explore online workout classes or community events to stay motivated and engaged. The key is to find enjoyable ways to stay active, making exercise a natural part of your lifestyle.

Scientific Ethics Declaration

The authors declare that the scientific ethical and legal responsibility of this article published in EPESS journal belongs to the authors.

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Notes

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