

A Wearable Embedded System for Detecting Accidents while Running

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Abstract: Every year 424,000 fatal accidents occur, they are the second cause of unintentional death after road traffic injuries. The difference between fatal and not fatal accidents often is the presence of other people able to promptly provide first aid or call for help. Unfortunately, even during the practice of group activities (e.g. team sports) an accident can happen when a person is alone or out of sight; thus, the availability of devices able to detect if a serious accident is occurred and consequently arise an alarm to other people is an important issue for the safety of people. Starting from these considerations, in this paper we propose a wearable device able to detect accidents occurring during the practice of running. The device uses a one class SVM trained only on the normal activity and classifies as anomalies all the unknown situations. Then, in order to avoid alarms related to non dangerous events, the output of the classifier is analyzed by an additional stage responsible to detect if the person is or not unconscious after an abnormal event. In the former case an alarm is arisen by the system.

1 INTRODUCTION

The number of fatal accident occurring each year has been estimated around 424,000, and this is the second cause of unintentional death after road traffic injuries. Approximately 37.3 million falls are severe enough to require medical attention (Sadigh et al., 2004; Kalace et al., 2008; Igual et al., 2013), and the seriousness of these accidents is higher if they happen when people are alone or out of sight, situation that typically occurs when people are doing some sports.

Therefore, the availability of a device that can be easily worn by the sportsman and able to instantaneously alert other people when an accident occurs can considerably reduce the consequences. Of course, the detection of falls strongly depends on the monitored activity. Indeed, a fall can be considered as an abnormal pattern in a traditional pattern recognition problem, and something that can be considered *normal* in a sport could be *abnormal* in a different sport.

For instance, the problem of detecting falls of skydiving person is completely different if compared with the same task on people who are running. The complexity and the diversity of fall detection is confirmed by the growing interest, in the recent years, of the scientific community ((Delahoz and Labrador, 2014; Brun et al., 2014; Habib et al., 2014; Koshmak et al., 2016; Khan and Hoey, 2017)). From the above papers, we can note that it is possible to identify two

main classes of fall detection systems: *context-aware systems* and *wearable systems*. In the first case the system is installed in the environment where the people to be monitored acts and uses sensors (like cameras, acoustic sensors, pressure sensors, infrared sensors, lasers and Radio Frequency Identification) that are properly deployed inside the monitored area. The advantage in this case is that the targeted person does not need to wear or carry any special device. However, they are suitable for those situations where the environment to monitor is well defined and circumscribed such as hospitals, nursing house or other indoor environment. If the activity is performed in a wide and uncontrolled area, this kind of systems becomes unsuitable due to the restrictions imposed by the mobility of the person. As an example, if the aim is to monitor running people, we should limit the activity inside a gym avoiding the people to run outside. Wearable systems are evidently the solution to the above issues when the monitored environment is not restricted or a priori known, and the activity can be practiced everywhere. In general, there are specialized devices composed of an elaboration unit and a batch of sensors like accelerometers, gyroscopes and magnetometers used to analyze people motion. In addition, these devices provide some kind of wireless connectivity to communicate with a smartphone in case of accidents, so as to phone some sets of emergency number. Differently from context-aware systems that can be in-

stalled on servers, the hardware in wearable systems is strongly limited by the size and the consumption. Indeed, they must be comfortable to wear and guarantee to be active for all the duration of the monitored activity (often a couple of hours). For this reason, most of these systems use very simple fall detection threshold-based algorithms aimed to provide a good trade-off between the accuracy and the computational requirements. A first impact based system has been proposed by (Chen et al., 2005); falls are detected by estimating the posture and by evaluating if the magnitude of the accelerometer is higher than a fixed threshold. Other interesting methods using accelerometer and gyroscope have been proposed by (Bourke et al., 2008; Bourke and Lyons, 2008; Bourke et al., 2010). Such methods differ in terms of used sensors, sensor positioning, and threshold. In particular, (Bourke et al., 2010) have proposed a system placed on the waist that uses thresholds in velocity, impact and posture. However, as highlighted in (Bagal et al., 2012), most of these systems are designed and tested to work in very simple situations such as monitoring elder people who are walking so as to detect falls, thus when they are applied in real environments or on more complex tasks their performance drastically collapses.

Only recently, more complex approaches based on machine learning techniques have been proposed by (Choi et al., 2011; Abbate et al., 2012; Albert et al., 2012; Shi et al., 2012; Fahmi et al., 2012; Khan and Hoey, 2017). Among them, the most interesting methods by (Jie Yin et al., 2008; Medrano et al., 2014; Micucci et al., 2017) are based on the observation that obtaining a large amount of training data of falls is unreasonable, but it is possible instead to obtain a large amount of data for Activity of Daily Living (ADL)s, corresponding to normal patterns. Thus, the detection of falls happening during the execution of daily living activities can be faced as an anomaly detection problem where the system is trained only on the ADLs and considers them as normal patterns, while classifying every other situation (e.g. falls) as an abnormal pattern. As evident, a similar assumptions can hold if we move from falls of elder persons to falls of sportsman.

In this paper, we will focus on the detection of falls happening during the practice of sports, with particular reference to running. In more details, we design and develop a device to be worn by the sportsman on the wrist, like a watch. The main advantage in this choice lies in the fact that such a device is unobtrusive, since it is comfortable to wear (e.g. no need to take them off while sleeping or changing clothes) and require little or no maintenance (e.g. charging once a month, no other interaction required). However, this



Figure 1: General structure of the proposed fall detection algorithm.

position makes the fall detection problem more complex to be solved. Indeed, differently with respect to the head or to the waist (positions typically adopted in the literature), which are in-built with the body of the person and thus move by following the movement of the body, the wrist is not in-built with the body, but have instead some random movements (different with respect to the ones of the body) that need to be taken into account.

Another important contribution of this paper is that both the data acquisition and the processing steps are performed in real time directly on board of the embedded device; however, the method has been designed so as to avoid paying the limited resources of the hardware with a decreasing in the accuracy. Indeed, a first stage (fall detection) is performed by a multi-stage classification using a One-Class Support Vector Machine (OC-SVM) trained on the data that have been collected during different normal running sessions. Furthermore, a second classification stage (consciousness verification) is performed so as to also evaluate the temporal information and to effectively understand the unconsciousness of a falling person.

The paper is organized as follows: in Section 2 the details of the proposed approach are provided, while in Section 3 some preliminary results have been reported. Finally, some conclusions and future works are drawn in Section 4.

2 THE PROPOSED SYSTEM

The proposed system has been designed so as to be independent on other devices and comfortably wearable on the wrist, combined with bracelet or a smartwatch. Such a choice imposes several limitations on the hardware resources available to perform detection and classification stages, so it is important to find out the best trade-off between the expected accuracy of the system and the resources required to achieve it. In Figure 1 we show the structure of the proposed system.

We designed and realized an hardware prototype equipped with a low power MCU Cortex-M4 and two inertial sensors: a three-axes accelerometer and a three-axes gyroscope. In order to deal with the complexity of the task and to achieve good performance,

we propose a multi-stage fall detection system, working as follows: the first stage, namely *detection stage*, is based on a One-Class SVM (OC-SVM) and is responsible to detect the abnormal patterns with respect to the given normal model; the second stage (*consciousness verifier*), activated only after that the detection stage fires an alarm, aims to establish whether the user is still moving after the detected falls or if he can be considered as unconscious. The two stages are connected each other by an *interstage filter*, aimed to eliminate spurious detections. Since they have different goals, the two stages work on different features, computed on a sliding time window of two second. The sampling rate considered is 100Hz, so that each window contains 200 measures per each of the six axes (3 from the accelerometer and 3 from the gyroscope). Due to the nature of the problem, it is important to note that an event of interest can be contained in more than one window, thus we considered overlapped windows so that two consecutive time windows share a subset of their measures.

2.1 Fall Detector

The core of our system is represented by the fall detection module. It is responsible to continuously analyze the feature vectors extracted from the sensors and to detect if a fall occurs during the normal activity. As mentioned before, this task is performed by a OC-SVM trained on the expected patterns of a normal activity. In order to reduce the battery consumption, the detection stage is activated each 250 milliseconds (4Hz). Furthermore, in order to avoid losing important patterns, successive sliding windows share the 87,5% of their measures. Another important consideration which allows us to have an energy efficient system is related to the feature vector used by the SVM. Indeed, we have reduced as much as possible the number of features and at the same time we have avoided the use of features that are expensive to compute, such as spectral features. Therefore, according to the current scientific literature, for each sensor, we have computed the following features:

- Average value of the magnitude computed on the vector resulting from the three axes.
- The maximum and the minimum value of each axis.
- The distance between the maximum and the minimum value of each axis.
- Speed of variation (SPV) in the time interval t_{min} , t_{max} from the minimum value x_{min} to the maximum value x_{max} for each axis:

$$x_{spv} = \frac{x_{max} - x_{min}}{t_{max} - t_{min}} \quad (1)$$

- The maximum instantaneous variation of each axis in two consecutive time instants $k - 1$ and k (a.k.a. Slope):

$$x_{slope} = \max_{k=1:N} |x(k) - x(k-1)|, \quad (2)$$

being N the number of samples in the window under analysis.

- The Signal Magnitude Area (SMA) that is a measure of the magnitude of a single sensor over the three axes x , y and z . It is defined as:

$$sma = \frac{1}{N} \left\{ \sum_i^N x(i) + \sum_i^N y(i) + \sum_i^N z(i) \right\} \quad (3)$$

Note that for brevity we have shown only one axis for the SPV and the slope. Since different sensors have different scales, after the collection we have firstly standardized the features by using the Z-Score and then normalized with respect to the norm of the vector.

One drawback of OC-SVM algorithm, compared to simpler approaches like KNN, is that the selection of parameters can be quite tricky and a wrong choice could have serious effects on the overall final performance of the system. In our case, we have used an RBF kernel, thus we have to select both the regularization factor ν and the kernel size γ . Firstly, in order to get a lightweight classifier that fits the memory available on the device, we have limited ν to have no more than 300 support vectors in the model. The SVM parameter optimization has been performed via genetic algorithm (GA-SVM). Typical GA-SVM approaches use genetic evolution just to set the regularization and the kernel size. Differently from the latter, we exploited the GA to obtain an optimal shaping of the kernel. This shaping is achieved using ad-hoc feature scaling by assigning different weights to the each feature before training. In this case, the prediction will correspond to project the vector in feature space with a non-spherical kernel. So that, a chromosome is composed by the two parameters ν and γ followed by one weight for each feature, while the fitness function is represented by the area under the Precision-Recall curve. The choice of considering the Precision-Recall curve instead of the ROC curve is due to the fact that the a-priori distribution of the data sets is not balanced. The number of negative samples in the dataset is much larger than the number of positive ones. Therefore, the false positive rate becomes an optimistic index, while the precision will be much more suitable to control the real performance of the classifier.

2.2 Interstage Filter

The interstage filtering is an extension of the concept of *confidence window*. In real world, events evolve with continuity; in other words, if a person is falling at 12:00:00.000, he will be still falling at 12:00:00.250 and at 12:00:00.500. According to this consideration we can filter false alarms that appear as isolated anomalous classifications by taking the mean value of last decisions. The effect of this mean operation is that decisions will appear low pass filtered and shifted ahead in time, so that events are recognized with delay. A more accurate way of performing this filtering is using confidence values instead of binary classification results: samples that are clearly anomalous or clearly normal to the classifier will have a larger weight with respect to those that are borderline. We use a confidence window one second large (4 classification results) and consider anomalous only the ones containing at least 50% of anomalous samples. In other words, we use a 50% of confidence. We did not use a stricter criterion in order not to affect recall: indeed, remaining false alarms will be filtered by the consciousness verification stage.

2.3 Consciousness Verification

The aim of the second stage is to verify if the user is still conscious after a fall. If the first stage algorithm detects a fall, then the second stage will be in charge of checking if the user is still lying on the ground after a certain amount of time or if he got up to continue the activity. This allows to distinguish serious accidents that may lead to injuries from those with no consequences, in which persons stand up just after the fall. The second stage also allows to filter out false alarms coming from the first stage.

Note that, since the second stage algorithm will filter out false alarms coming from the previous stages, we can tune the fall detector in order to achieve a high recall (no real alarms lost) even at the expense of precision; that is a more sensitive detection stage that will hardly ignore a real fall but will produce some false alarms, since the second stage is expected to filter them out.

The consciousness verifier uses its own features, i.e. the average motion index (*m-index*). This measure is intended to summarize the quantity of motion of the used perceived by the sensor and represents the average acceleration sensed in a 1 second window before the current sample minus the module of gravity. More formally:

$$m(kT_s) = \sum_{i=k-\frac{1}{T_s}}^k ||\vec{a}(iT_s)| - |\vec{g}|| \quad (4)$$

where $|\vec{g}| = 1000mG$ is the estimated module of the gravity vector, \vec{a} is the acceleration vector measured at time t and T_s is the sampling time.

It is easy to understand that such a measure can be used to discern whether the user is moving or is almost still using as only input the module of sensed acceleration. The idea is that, when the user is moving, some produced acceleration will sum to the constant gravity module and, on average, will give a considerably high value of the *m-index*; when the user is not moving, on the other side, only gravity and noise will figure in sensed acceleration value and, if we subtract $|\vec{g}|$ to $|\vec{a}|$ we will get a value quite close to zero, i.e. just the noise. For this stage, a window of 6 seconds is considered after the fall. The user is considered unconscious if the *m-index* index is lower than a given threshold (in our case 100 mG) for more then the 50% of the window. An example of this stage at work is shown in Figure 3.

3 EXPERIMENTS

In this section we are going to show the results achieved by the proposed approach. We first introduce the protocol used in our experimentation (Subsection 3.1); then, in Subsection 3.2 the dataset used for testing the proposed approach will be described before presenting the results in Subsection 3.3.

3.1 Experimental Protocol

The performance of the proposed approach has been evaluated in terms of Precision (P) and Recall (R):

$$P = \frac{TP}{TP + FP} \quad (5)$$

$$R = \frac{TP}{TP + FN} \quad (6)$$

where TP, FP and FN represent, respectively, the number of True-Positives (TP), False-Positives (FP) and False-Negatives (FN).

Precision and recall are evaluated by analyzing both the sample (at the window level, after the first stage) and the event. On the one hand, the analysis on the samples gives a rough idea of the capacity of the classifier to give the correct answers. On the other hand, the analysis on the events gives an idea of the user feeling about the usage of the application. Indeed, in this last case a TP event is counted if at least one positive sample (classified as fall) overlap with a

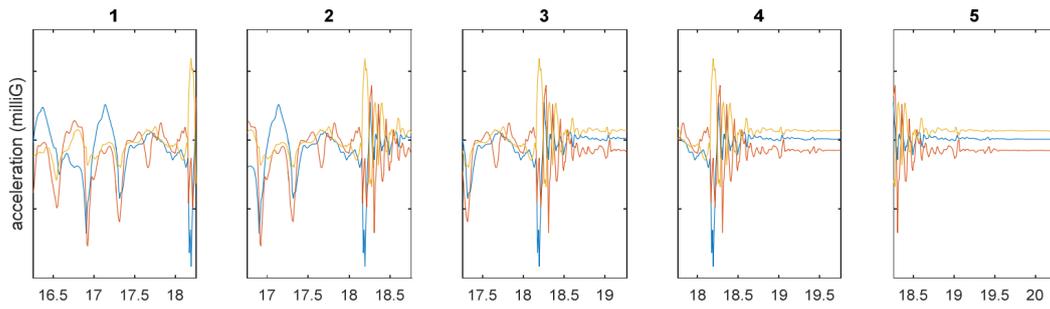


Figure 2: Example of sliding windows with 75% of overlap. Note that only in third and fourth windows the fall peak can be seen entirely. If there was no overlap, only windows one and five would have been considered.

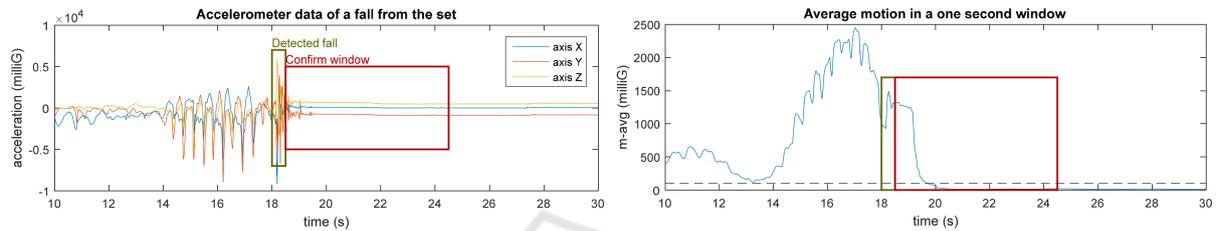


Figure 3: How the consciousness validator works: few seconds following the detected fall are evaluated to check that $m - avg$ is lower than a given threshold (the dashed line).

Table 1: MIVIA-Fall Dataset; the running times are reported in minutes, while the falls in terms of number of times.

| | Training | Validation | Testing |
|---------|----------|------------|---------|
| Running | 76 mins | 13 mins | 13 mins |
| Falls | - | 17 | 21 |

ground truth fall. Viceversa, a FN is counted only if there are not any positive samples associated to the consecutive ones of a ground truth fall.

3.2 Dataset

In order to test the proposed approach, we acquired a dataset (hereinafter MIVIA-Fall Dataset) that we made publicly available for benchmarking purposes¹. The aim of our dataset is to capture real life situations. Indeed, running data comes from real running sessions, while falls have been simulated on a soft mattress for safety reasons. The subject runs through an aisle, then stumbles and falls on the mattress as naturally as possible; that means that it falls frontally putting its hands forward. Note that we decided to capture real life data so as to ensure that the final real prototype performance would be similar to the one achieved by the testing algorithm on the recorded data.

Some details of the MIVIA-Fall Dataset have been reported in Table 1. The device, whose sensor's featu-

¹The dataset will be made publicly available on our website at the following link <http://mivia.unisa.it> after the publication of the paper.

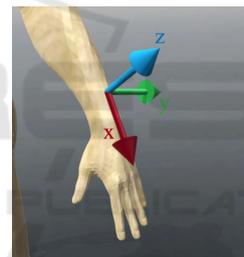


Figure 4: Data axes position and orientation with respect to the subject arm in the MIVIA-Fall Dataset.

res are reported in Table 2 (in terms of range and sensitivity), has been placed on the wrist of the runner, with the sensors mounted so as to acquire the data as shown in Figure 4. An example of the acquired data is plotted in Figure 5.

Table 2: MIVIA-Fall Dataset: main characteristics of the sensing equipment. Note that the sensitivity is expressed in LSB/unit. It means, for example, that a measure of 1G will give a raw measure of 2048, and then the minimum change in gravity that one will be able to appreciate will be $1/2048$.

| | Range | Sensitivity |
|---------------|---|--|
| Gyroscope | $\pm 2000 \frac{\text{deg}}{\text{secs}}$ | $16.4 \frac{\text{LSB}}{\text{deg}/\text{secs}}$ |
| Accelerometer | $\pm 16G$ | $2048 \frac{\text{LSB}}{G}$ |

3.3 Results

The choice of the parameters to be used in our experimentation has been performed by optimizing the re-

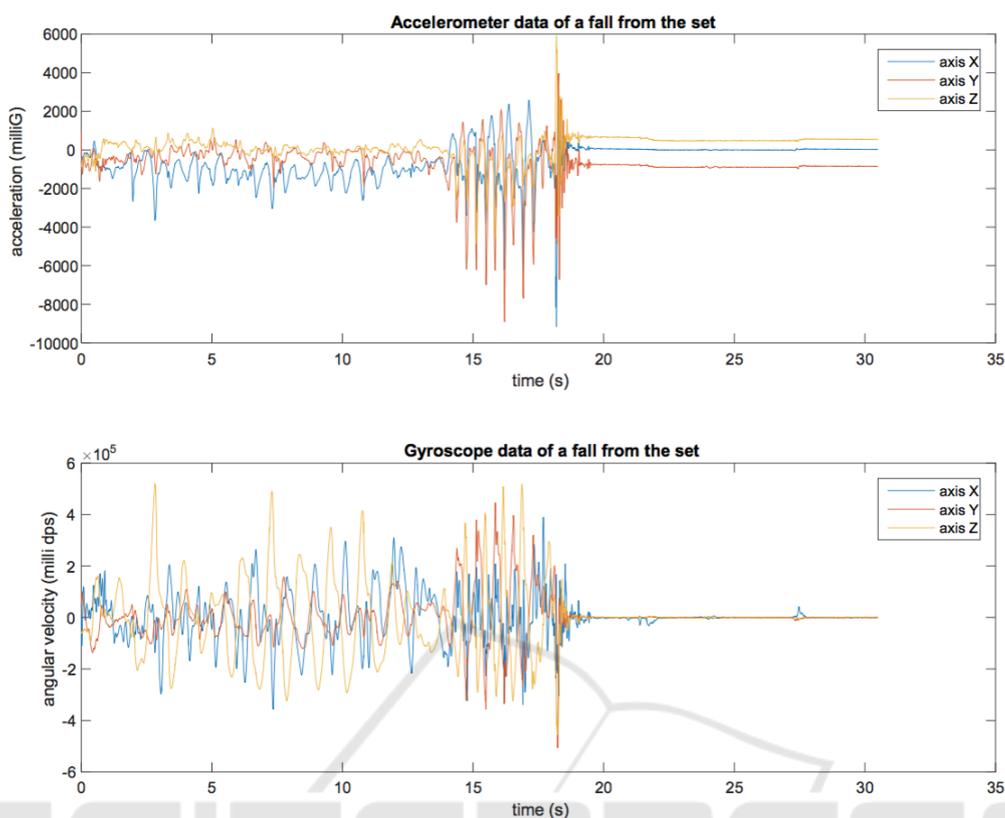


Figure 5: An example of the data in the MIVIA-Fall Dataset.

Table 3: Performance achieved on the test set. *S* refers to the fact that Precision and Recall are computed on the samples, while *E* refers to the fact that Recall is computed on the Events. False alarm rate is computed in terms of number of false positives (FP) for each minute.

| | Precision (S) | Recall (S) | False alarm rate | Recall (E) |
|----------------------------|---------------|------------|------------------|------------|
| Fall detector | 58.7% | 89.8% | 1.26 FP/min | 100% |
| Interstage filter | 69.3% | 89.8% | 0.58 FP/min | 100% |
| Consciousness verification | 100.0% | 89.8% | 0 FP/min | 100% |

sults on the validation set. The Precision-Recall curve for the first stage is reported in Figure 6, where the chosen operating point is reported in red. The choice has been guided by the following two points: first, in the particular application at hand, as mentioned in the previous section, it is required to have an high recall, even at the expense of precision. It depends on the fact that the second classification stage is able to filter out some potential false alarms, but it could be not able to recover missed event at first stage. Thus, it becomes important at the first stage to maximize the recall, while postponing at the successive stage the increasing of the precision. Furthermore, we need a point that yields an appreciable stability: points on a vertical edge of the curve indeed may represent a risky choice, since they may achieve rapidly descending values of precision at a fixed recall. It is worth to

remember that this is a curve estimated on the validation set and that the points could move toward worse performance when evaluated on the test set.

The performance achieved on the test set is reported in Table 3. As we can see from the table, the introduction of the interstage filter helps improving the performance of the proposed approach, both in terms of precision (fixed the recall to 89.8%, the precision is improved from 58.7% to 69.3%) and of false alarm rate (from 1.26% to 0.58%). However, the further increasing is due to the introduction of the consciousness verification stage. Indeed, on the test set no false alarms have been detected at all, and the precision is 100%. The results obtained by the proposed approach are thus very encouraging, opening to the possibility to use such system in real environments.

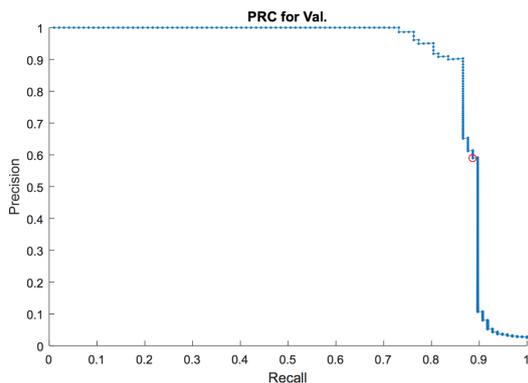


Figure 6: Precision-Recall curve obtained on the validation set at the first stage and used for the operating point selection. Red point identifies the selected operating point.

4 CONCLUSION

In this paper we have proposed a method for detecting falls while sporting, with particular reference to the running. The method is optimized so as to run directly on board of a wearable embedded device, without any additional external server in charge of the elaboration. The experimental results, conducted over a dataset made publicly available for benchmarking purposes, confirm the effectiveness of the proposed approach, where the possibility of running on embedded devices is not payed in terms of accuracy.

Although the method has been thought for detecting falls while running, its architecture is general enough to also deal with other sports. In the future, we plan to extend the proposed approach so as to deal with other typologies of sports. Future works also include an extension of the dataset and then of the experimentation, so as to confirm the effectiveness of the proposed approach.

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