

Psychological preparation and sports performance in football: players' perspectives.

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Abstract

This study aimed to clarify the importance of psychological preparation in improving the level of sports performance among football players, based on their perspectives. It highlights their level of awareness regarding the role of such preparation in enhancing the outcomes of the sports team. The descriptive method was adopted, using a questionnaire consisting of (18) closed-ended questions addressed to male senior football players. The research sample included (60) players from three sports clubs in the Wilaya of Setif. Data were statistically processed using percentage calculations and the Chi-square (χ^2) test. The analysis and interpretation of the results revealed that the players demonstrated a good level of awareness regarding the positive impact of psychological preparation on enhancing team performance and improving individual athletic performance. Furthermore, the players indicated the existence of a positive correlation between the psychological state and the physical, technical, and tactical levels of performance. Therefore, it is recommended that athletes receive psychological preparation under the supervision of a qualified sports psychologist.

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1. Introduction

The progress achieved in the field of sports highlights the importance of the theoretical aspect in the training and education of sports coaches. Today, sports training relies on systematic scientific foundations based on numerous studies and projects across various scientific disciplines. These foundations are built upon data analysis and field observations gathered by experts in the sports domain. All these disciplines aim to collaborate towards enhancing athletic performance and achieving optimal results through the most effective methods (Rateb, 1997, 195). Among these domains, the psychological aspect plays a significant role (Cherifi, 2020), which calls for the activation of this component by a qualified sports psychologist (Rateb, 2003, 283; Rassoul, 2018), who motivates athletes to reach a state of effective psychological calmness (Qatsha, 2015).

Football, enjoying massive popularity among its followers, generates increasing public demand for dynamic entertainment. This, in turn, creates psychological pressure on players to improve their physical, technical, and tactical performance (Jamil, 1986, 53). Thus, psychological preparation becomes the most reliable means of managing the psychological stress experienced by players both on and off the field. This preparation goes through specific stages and uses targeted methods and tools with the aim of developing athletes' mental skills, which are closely linked to their physical and motor abilities in preparation for competitions (Gueddi, 2021).

Moreover, psychological preparation helps improve players' attention levels and contributes to better emotional regulation, especially in managing competition-related anxiety (Rateb, 2001, 23), leading to better psychological balance in athletes (Bensalem, 2023). Therefore, football is considered one of the first sports to have paid attention to psychological preparation (Khallouf, 2016), which aims at achieving optimal results and improving the overall performance of the team (Ben Abderrahmane & Bouhaj, 2013).

To facilitate the study, we have broken it down into three research questions:

-Do football players believe that psychological preparation affects team performance?

- Do football players believe that psychological preparation improves individual athletic performance?
- Do football players believe that psychological preparation is related to the physical, technical, and tactical levels of the player?

2. Method and Materials

2.1. Participants

The research sample was selected intentionally (purposive sampling) and consisted of (60) senior male athletes from three sports clubs in the Wilaya of Setif: Chabab Riadhi Baladiat El Djemila, Amal Ain Sebt Club, and Mouloudia Maâouia.

2.2. Materials

A closed-ended questionnaire consisting of (18) questions was used and administered to football players from three sports clubs in the Wilaya of Sétif: Chabab Riadhi Baladiat El Djemila, Amel Ain Sebt Club, and Mouloudia Maâouia.

2.3. Design and Procedure

A pilot study was conducted on (06) six players who were subsequently excluded from the main study. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were determined through face validity and the test-retest method.

The percentage of agreement among expert reviewers regarding the questionnaire content was:

- Psychological preparation and team performance (85.40%);
- Psychological preparation and players' performance level (79.60%);
- Psychological preparation and its relation to physical, technical, and tactical levels (85.75%);
- Overall questionnaire (83.58%).

The value of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient used to measure the reliability of the questionnaire was: (0.87).

Psychological preparation and sports performance in football: players' perspectives.

After confirming the psychometric properties of the questionnaire, it was manually distributed to the research sample, and the responses were collected on the same day.

2.4. Statistical Analysis

The study was conducted between February and May 2021. Statistical analysis was carried out using percentage calculations, the Chi-square (χ^2) test, and Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, utilizing the SPSS version 22 software, with a significance level set at 0.05.

3. Results

Table 1: The following table presents the Chi-square test results for the overall questionnaire, including the tabulated value, calculated value, and statistical significance:

Question	χ^2 (Tabulated)	χ^2 (Calculated)	Significance
Q1	5.99	120	*
Q2	3.84	26.66	*
Q3	3.84	6.66	*
Q4	5.99	40	*
Q5	3.84	6.66	*
Q6	3.84	6.66	*
Q7	3.84	26.66	*
Q8	5.99	92.5	*
Q9	3.84	60	*
Q10	3.84	4.26	*
Q11	3.84	41.66	*
Q12	5.99	92.5	*
Q13	3.84	60	*
Q14	3.84	41.66	*
Q15	3.84	26.66	*
Q16	3.84	41.66	*
Q17	3.84	41.66	*
Q18	3.84	60	*

4. Discussion

Based on the analysis and interpretation of the results related to the first sub-hypothesis "Psychological preparation has a positive effect on team performance" it was found that the more psychological preparation is characterized by the development of motivation, attitudes, self-confidence, cognitive and emotional awareness, along with guidance and counseling for players, the more stability is achieved within the team. This manifests in cohesion among team members, enhanced self-confidence, and a stronger spirit of performance, all of which positively reflect on the team's results. That is, the presence of these factors leads to improved team performance, and their absence leads to decline. Following the statistical analysis using percentage calculations, it was confirmed that psychological preparation positively influences team outcomes. In response to the second question, the majority of players indicated that the absence of psychological preparation negatively affects the team's performance, reinforcing the idea that psychological preparation is a core component that cannot be overlooked if good results are to be achieved (Atab, Kheloul & Medani, 2021). This conclusion was also reflected in questions 3, 4, and 5, thereby validating the first hypothesis.

As for the second sub-hypothesis "Psychological preparation contributes to enhancing players' performance" the analysis revealed that when the coach's psychological preparation efforts are effective, whether at an individual or group level, players are more motivated and better prepared for achievement (Baq, Bouchahir & Hanna, 2021), which contributes to improved performance levels (Zehouani, 2018; Rassoul & Ben Aki, 2017). The statistical analysis of the second axis confirmed this hypothesis. In question 8, the majority of players affirmed that psychological preparation enhances their performance (Charef & Ben Aki, 2023). This was further reinforced by questions 7, 9, and 10. Allawi (1985, p.28) also emphasized that psychological preparation plays a key role by stimulating motivation, leading to more intense physical activity and higher performance quality

Psychological preparation and sports performance in football: players' perspectives.

(Mellouhia & Abdelli, 2022), thus validating the second hypothesis.

Regarding the third sub-hypothesis "There is a correlation between psychological, physical, and tactical preparation" the statistical treatment demonstrated a significant correlation between these dimensions. In questions 17 and 18, most players confirmed that neither physical, technical, nor tactical preparation is meaningful without psychological preparation, and vice versa. This interdependence was also reflected in questions 15 and 16, indicating that the preparation process is hindered when any of these components is absent. These findings align with the work of Al-Dulaimi & Lahmar (1997, pp. 104–105), thus confirming the third hypothesis. Most players agreed that the connection between psychological, physical, technical, and tactical preparation is inseparable, as the training plan is composed of these interrelated elements. The absence of any component undermines the team's ability to improve and perform well. The main hypothesis was built on the assumption that psychological preparation affects the performance level of football players in the Wilaya of Ain Defla. After statistical analysis using percentages and the Chi-square test, it was evident that psychological preparation significantly influences player performance. Players affirmed this through responses across all three axes.

Psychological preparation is a shared responsibility between coaches, players, and clubs. It is an essential component that cannot be neglected if optimal performance and positive results are to be achieved. Coaches' instructions play a motivational role and have a substantial impact on team performance. The presence of effective psychological preparation, proper planning, and mutual trust between coaches and players significantly enhances outcomes. A coach's competence directly stimulates player performance. Psychological preparation is closely linked to physical and physiological readiness. The more effective the psychological state, the better the physical development. These aspects are mutually reinforcing: psychological, physical, and technical preparation are integral to one another. Without psychological preparation, skill and physical development are compromised. Furthermore, psychological preparation cannot achieve its objectives without appropriate tools and techniques. Declines in player

performance are more often due to players' own errors than coaching faults. Therefore, football coaches particularly at the youth level must prioritize psychological preparation in their foundational training (Zehouani, 2021; Alwan, 2016), taking into account the psychological characteristics and stressors specific to adolescence. Coaches must apply effective psychological strategies and tools to improve players' performance, which remains far from the professional standard (Mansouri, 2023). Psychological preparation has a positive and vital role across all developmental stages (Djamaa & Benaki, 2023). It must be adapted to each player's abilities, traits, and psychological needs to maintain healthy levels of stress (Qemini, 2012). Team managers should provide the necessary means and equipment for psychological training and moral support, ensuring that every team has access to a qualified sports psychologist capable of managing difficult competition-related situations. Coaches must ensure that all players clearly understand their guidance, as football is a collective sport where the performance of one player can affect the whole team. Coaches must also develop their own skills in psychological preparation to apply it effectively. They should assess the psychological demands of their players before matches and familiarize themselves with the characteristics of adolescence. Finally, the coach's own psychological readiness has a cascading effect on the entire team's results (El Antri, Ayad & Ben Sassi, 2020).

5. Conclusion

Through this study, we have concluded that psychological preparation plays a vital role in achieving the intended goals of the training process and realizing the desired outcomes. Psychological preparation has a positive and effective impact on players' performance, and attention to the psychological aspect by coaches is an essential necessity that cannot be overlooked. It is crucial for enhancing and developing the performance level of football players. The psychological dimension serves as a supportive factor in developing physical, technical, and tactical aspects. It also contributes to the evolution of the game itself by enhancing the entertainment value and alleviating the psychological pressures that players face before, during, or after competitions. The more psychological preparation services whether

Psychological preparation and sports performance in football: players' perspectives.

direct or indirect are effectively integrated within the training system, the more positive the impact will be on both players and teams as a whole. All of this can only be achieved successfully if the coach is capable of presenting a proper model and fulfilling the role of psychological preparation effectively. In conclusion, we hope that the findings of this study will serve as a reference for specialists in football, as well as for the broader field of physical education and sports sciences, and for football enthusiasts in general. We also hope it acts as a catalyst for increased interest in the psychological preparation of football players and encourages the inclusion of a qualified sports psychologist to help elevate player performance to higher standards.

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