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A REVIEW OFTHE EFFECT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS ON SOCCER PLAYER'S PERFORMANCE

Nima Nakisa [1] and Mahboobeh Ghasemzadeh Rahbardar [2*]

AFFILIATIONS:

1. Faculty of Physical Education and Sport Sciences, Kish International Campus, University of Tehran, Niyayesh St., Mirmohanna Blvd., Kish Island, Iran., Tel.: +98 9123092236 Email: nimanakisa1354@yahoo.com
2.* University of Medical Sciences, Mashhad, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, Mashhad, Iran, E-mail Address- ghasemzadeh_mahboobeh@yahoo.com Mobile- +98 9151564700; **Corresponding author**

ABSTRACT

Soccer is a popular sport with a large number of players all over the world. Alongside, its considerable economic and social effects it also has a remarkable impact onhealth and recreation. It is necessary to find out the factors which influence soccer players' performance. Most researches have assessed physical, physiological, and biomechanical factors but nowadays psychological factors such as confidence, motivation, goal setting, self-talk, relaxation, imagery, attention, and anxiety control are introduced as important items responsible for each individual soccer player as well as the team success. Thus, the leaders and coaches of soccer teams should increase their knowledge in this field and learn new methods to elevate the players' and coaches' psychological skills to be able to compete with professional components and reduce the negative impacts of stress, anxiety, depression, and exhaustion on their players. The main goal of the present study is to review how psychological factors affect the performance of soccer players.

Keywords: Soccer, Performance, confidence, motivation, goal, self-talk, relaxation, imagery, attention, anxiety

1. INTRODUCTION

Soccer is likely the most popular sport worldwide, with developing attention and an elevating number of players. It is a competitive game which requires various skills with distinct intensities including physical skills, various techniques and tactics, as well as psychological skills for optimal performance **(1).** Soccer is one of the most investigated sports fields in the scientific literature. Although, most of the studies were centralized on physical and biomechanical features.

Nowadays, numerous professional soccer teams have noticed the importance of psychological features in soccer to improve performance. It was proposed that psychological skills including confidence, anxiety control, motivation, and attention have a remarkable role in the development of soccer players' performance. Considering psychological skills, athletes who are sociable, confident, and inherently motivated, have been displayed to surpass from other teammates or opponents **(2).**

Regarding the theory of differentiated model of gift and talent **(3)** to work concurrently with personality attributes, obtained skills and psychology demands for the sports competitions, it has been inspected that the psychological condition is one of the elements that have been strictly appended to this analysis. Psychological skills strongly influence the player's competitive success and performance. In this regard, it has revealed that physiological features were responsible for45-48% of the sport performance, but when the psychological variables were integrated, the proportion developed around 79–85% in particular sports **(4).**

The aim of this review is to introduce and reinforce the potential and beneficial effect of psychological training on the performance of soccer players.

2. METHODOLOGY

The data were gathered by searching the English articles in Google Scholar, Web of Science, Scopus, and PubMed. The keywords used as search terms were 'soccer players, 'psychological factors', 'confidence', 'motivation', 'anxiety control', 'goal setting' 'self-talk', 'imagery', 'attention', and 'relaxation'. All kinds of related articles, abstracts and books were included. No time limitation was considered in this review.

3. EFFECT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS ON SOCCER PLAYER'S PERFORMANCE

3.1. Confidence

Confidence is a character seen in numerous aspects of life and society. Accordingly, confidence is not unfamiliar to the sport since it can be linked up with conditions such as stability, strength, belief, mental toughness, and courage. The world of sport admits the valuable influence of confidence on success **(5).**

Joe Paterno who is an American soccer coach elucidated: ''When a team outgrows individual performance and learns team confidence, excellence becomes a reality''**(6).** Having confidence in the competency and potency of the team, particularly when encountering problems has been seen to be are remarkable factor in the prosperity of sports teams. Mainly in difficult games, when the condition is hard and the mental pressure tops out, team confidence can make the team win or lose.

Two kinds of team confidence have been determined. The first type is called collective efficacy and was initially outlined by Bandura as a team's common notion in its conjoint ability to arrange and perform the action needed to produce essential levels of achievement **(7).** Therefore, this kind of team confidence captures players' confidence in the team's capabilities to fulfill the desired processes successfully including encouraging each other and communicating

well following the tactical game plan. The second kind of team confidence is defined team outcome confidence or comparative efficacy which grabs players' confidence in the team's qualifications to acquire a goal or to win a game **(8).** It has been reported that athletes who are more confident in the potency of their team define more stimulating goals for themselves, apply more effort, and indicate more flexibility when facing distress. Furthermore, a definite relevance between the intensity of team confidence and performance was also shown **(9).** In short, there is no conflict that team confidence may be believed as a principal factor for the team's ideal performance and, as a result, for the success of the team.

Bandura pointed out four major sources for situation-specific self-confidence such as self-efficacy: 1. past performance including previous success improves self-efficacy, while former failure weaken it, 2. vicarious experiences, for example, observing similar people success or failure following continuous attempts might intensify or spoil people's self-efficacy, 3. social persuasion, for instance, verbal encouragement by other people that one has the required qualifications to accomplish a task, and 4. physiological and emotional states for example arousal or stress may affect the confidence in one's own capabilities **(7).** Additional factors of athletes' self-confidence have also been suggested, including coaches' leadership, tactical awareness, the received social support, and superiority to the opponent **(10)**.

The progress and advancements of the leaders and coaches of any team depend on their ability to motivate and inspire the players they lead. Athlete leaders and the coaches are the chief ones who can provoke an increase or decrease in team confidence, thereby influencing all the players **(11).** It seems that coaches who convey the feeling of confidence might over take the ones who elevate fear and uncertainty **(12).** Thus, it could be suggested that a coach's confidence in the abilities of the team has a linear effect on the players' confidence and improve their performance. In addition, some experimental documents propose that leaders' confidence can be effective in a better future. A study done by Norman and colleagues showed that leaders' optimism can lead to followers' hopefulness**(13).** In line with the previous study, in another investigation, it was illustrated that leader certainty could improve follower's positivity **(14).** This research reinforces the previous studies that examined the influence of leaders' confidence in their team on the players' confidence and efficiency. In another recent document, it was observed that leaders' confidence can boost members' confidence and performance by promoting members' adjustment with the team**(15).** To sum up, it seems that by expressing that "we will win", leaders are able to inspire the players to carve out a way to success. Leaders can do this by enhancing confidence in their own leadership and also by affecting the team members.

3.2. Motivation

An athlete's motivation is believed to be one of the chief factors for success and promotion in sports **(16).** In sports practice, motivation is supposed to depend on the interaction of situational and personal factors **(17).** Motivation is also considered as an important item for stability during sports activities, and being determinant to the athlete's behavior, since it activates and regulates performance-oriented behavior**(18).** Hence, it is acceptable to concede that an athlete's ability to be motivated in soccer, in spite of the situational pressure and professional difficulties, might contribute to his/her professionalism.

The self-determination theory has been employed to interpret the sporting behavior of athletes**(19).** Based on this theory, one's behavior is based on motivational sequences differentiated by self-determination levels which might range from the least self-determined to the most and leads to three distinct kinds of motivation including de-motivation, intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation. De-motivation is expressed by a state in which the person

prefers not to act and fetch up giving herself /himself into the process. Intrinsic motivation refers to doing an entertaining and pleasant task and extrinsic motivation involves doing something provoked by external items**(20).**

In soccer, motivation is associated with various psychological concepts such as mental resistance, commitment, coping, perfectionism, burnout, and factors of tactical and technical performance as well **(21, 22).**

It was observed that Australian soccer players with high degrees of mental resistance had a high amount of intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation **(23).** Another study assessed the relation between forms of passion and burnout in professional soccer players, investigating a mediating function of self-determined motivation, which demonstrated to be a protective impact to inhibit the burnout syndrome**(24).** By comparing the motivation amount of soccer players with long playtime and short playtime in competitions, it was disclosed that long play time players in official games obtained higher scores in intrinsic motivation and self-determination levels. While, those with short playtime in official matches showed a higher level of de-motivation in comparison with the former group **(25).**These findings emphasize the importance of controlling and tracking the activity time of players in official matches since it appears that play time influences the players' motivation levels in the final formation phase.

There has been another document studying the effect of perfectionist features on the self-determined motivation of junior and elite soccer players, detecting that adaptive perfectionism orientations-standards of personal accomplishment and arrangement have a positive effect on professional players' intrinsic motivation **(26).** Furthermore, a positive relevance has been seen between motivation and tactical and technical performance in young soccer players**(27).**

Another group of researchers investigated how motivation, imagery skills, and anxiety contribute to soccer experience among five different groups: professional, semi-professional, intermediate, pre-intermediate, and beginner soccer players. They reported that professional players are more intrinsically motivated to go through stimulation and to learn new methods and strategies to improve their sports performance **(28).** Hence, the development of the indicated features that belong to professional players in comparison with the less experienced soccer players might be due to the psychological preparation in soccer.

Accordant with the psychobiological paradigm of endurance performance, the greatest amount of attempt that people are willing to dedicate is controlled by motivation**(29).** When motivation level is higher, it is expected that people endure higher amounts of perceived attempt and, therefore improve their performance despite being exhausted. It might be proposed that strengthening athletes' motivation might impede performance decline under fatigue. Indeed, it has already been shown that a high level of motivation promotes endurance performance **(30).** Since higher levels of motivation might help individuals' bear a particular workload for a longer time, soccer players are able to uphold a definite speed of motion or keep correct movement control while passing or shooting a ball, when they are exhausted. A recent research approved that in professional soccer players; high task motivation was relevant to less self-perceived performance reduction in different soccer skills when fatigued **(31).** In another study done by Barte et al. the effect of motivation on fatigue-induced reduction in soccer performance was investigated experimentally. Their results revealed that motivation has an important role in performance under fatigue, and fatigue-induced decline in soccer passing capacity can be compensated by high amounts of motivation**(32).** Although, future studies might consider the extents of this counteracting property and out stretch in tuitions to other related performance aspects. Totally, these documents reinforce the concept that performance reduction under fatigue

might be seen as a kind of task fallback rather than restricted physiological status. It is essential to find different motivational strategies to help players maintain pivotal features of their performance when it is necessary. It would be useful if future studies focus more on the differences between different kinds of motivation, the restrictions of this counteracting impact of motivation, and the probable negative effects on future performance and recovery.

In a study done by Garcia-Mas and colleagues, the relation between enjoyment, commitment and motivation were studied. Their findings revealed an obvious pattern between them and defined the positive role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to enjoyment and commitment. They also suggested that extrinsic motivation contributes mainly to enjoyment whilst intrinsic motivation contributes to commitment more **(33).**In brief, if a team is interested to improve the level of intrinsic motivation in soccer players, the leaders and coaches should not focus on external control strategies, which are related directly with performance, instead they should concentrate on providing situations that are intrinsically challenging and interesting, and then be interpersonally encouraging and supportive towards the players in different situations.

Motivation also has striking implications on the identification and promotion of young, skilled soccer players. In this regard, a survey was designed to assess Iranian elite male soccer players' motivational characteristics. The data were classified considering players age and primary position played. It was observed that the motivation to gain success and evade failure of these professional players was high and low, respectively. In addition, senior national team soccer players and midfielders had more competitive motivation than other players**(34).**Thus, leader and coaches can evaluate players' psychological characteristics to determine their current performance and predict future success.

3.3. Anxiety control

Success and defeat in sports and competitive matches depend on emotions. Players might feel stressed, tensed, worried, before or within a competition. Being uncertain might lead to anxiety in soccer players. The importance and level of the competition and the crowd can play a part in a player's anxiety**(35).**Normal anxiety is motivational and has an adaptive function. It motivates planning, caution, and deliberation, and impedes repeated vulnerability to tense or painful conditions. This type of anxiety can be controlled, but pathological anxiety happens beyond threatening and hazardous situations, and usually remains a long time after the stressful or dangerous incidence, intervenes in person's performance and can negatively alter one`s way of thinking and acting. This kind of anxiety cannot be controlled. Defined anxiety is a negative emotional status that is elucidated by restlessness, discomfort, fear, nervousness, and uncertainty and is accompanied by stimulation or activation of the body. Anxiety is unleashed by stressful stimuli and reveals itself in one's lack of compatibility on behavioral, cognitive, and physiological characteristics. Thus, it offends the players' performance **(36).**

In this regard, the likelihood of attentional control theory in a sporting environment was studied. Fourteen professional soccer players took penalty kicks under low- and high-threat counterbalanced situations whilst using a gaze registration system. Fixations to target positions for instance goalkeeper and goal are diagnosed by using frame-by-frame analysis. When soccer players were anxious, they made faster first fixations and fixated for remarkably longer in the direction of the goalkeeper. This deviation in gaze behavior caused serious decrements in shooting precision, with shots becoming obviously centralized and within the bounds of the goalkeeper's reach**(37).**The findings of Horikawa and Yagi confirmed the data of previous research. This group examined how the level of anxiety affects the penalty shoot-out performance under pressure. They reported that a higher level of anxiety interferes with goal

performance**(38).**These findings might suggest a mechanistic interpretation as to why penalty kicks are missed under pressure conditions.

Competitive anxiety is the propensity to find out antagonistic conditions and consequently act with stress, nervousness, and pressure. The competitive anxiety immediately increases just before the match and instantly decreases after it**(39).** In general, competitive anxiety is an outcome of one's tension, failure, and stress. It is accompanied by acute agitation of the automatic nervous system. This incident usually happens within the day before a game and is defined as pre-competitive anxiety **(40).**

The home and away competition schedule is believed to affect the relation between sports confidence and competitive anxiety via alterations in environmental factors. An investigation focused on the relationship between competitive anxiety and confidence of soccer players. The results showed that competitive anxiety had a notably more extensive impact on self-confidence in the away group than in the home group**(41).** Hence, efficient handling of stress in players in away games could probably a meliorate their confidence and as a result, improves their performances. The results also reinforce the necessity for the application and improvement of impressive and principled methods to control or wipe out the factors inducing anxiety in competing soccer players.

A research was carried out to deal with competitive anxiety and concentration level of soccer players from the first and second league. The results unfolded a negative relevance between concentration and self-confidence**(42).**Another group of researchers checked out the correlation between self-confidence, pre-competitive state anxiety, and success in Croatian soccer players of the first and second league. The results of the direction of anxiety, and self-confidence, strikingly vary between the players of distinct levels of competition. The ambiguity of a competition result affects the elevation of anxiety level, although it is not inevitably reflected negatively on the soccer players' concentration and success **(43).** Additional studies should track state anxiety in more than one paradigm, such as matches within the entire competition season. Besides, future investigations should assess the relation between anxiety level and different playing positions in the team.

3.4. Goal setting

Goal setting has attracted plenty of attention and its use has been confirmed well-known fitness magazines and personal trainers. It was claimed in an old study that determining goals is more effectual than not defining them, short-term goals such as goals to be performed today or in the early future) are more impressive than longer-term ones, and self-set or instructor goals are identically helpful. They also reported that goal setting is fortified when the goals are made publicly**(44).**

Coaches must learn goal-setting to be prosperous and effective in working with athletes and players (Sports Coach UK 2000). Sports Coach UK, sports psychologists, and textbooks admit the SMART acronym as an instruction to remind coaches of the five main features of well-stated goals. Goals must be specific, measured, action-oriented, realistic, and timely (16). Coaches should write the goals down and track their progress regularly, set short-range goals to help to achieve the longer-range goals and to assure the goals are interiorize by the players **(45).** Coaches should appoint in a two-way including interactive and ongoing dialogue with players, take their own and the players' motivational needs into account and the environment within which they work as well, in order to boost the efficacy of goal-setting as a strategy, and also their potency as a coach **(46).** The data from these studies suggest the social-cognitive motivational requirements of the players, and although it is implied that the coach has identically reflected

motivational requirements in the goal-setting procedure, further investigation is essential to provide evidence and to test the pattern completely.

It was represented that goal setting influences performance by conducting attention, organizing effort, boosting persistence, and stimulating strategy development**(47).** Some more studies also supported this principle**(48, 49).** Goals attract athletes like a magnet to higher levels and novel horizons. Moreover, a group of researchers claimed that both emotional and motivational components were major mediators in enhancing the impression of goal setting in endurance sports**(50).**Concurrently, sports psychologists believed that there is a close correlation between goal setting and imagery during competitions and practice times **(51, 52).**

Furthermore, applying goal setting has been observed to ameliorate self-confidence and performance and reduce competitive anxiety, arousing a paradigm to assume a positive correlation between goal setting and intrinsic sources of enjoyments**(53).** Although competitive excitement might be generated in different ways, a principal feature of setting an appropriate goal complexity level is not to set goals too high that they cause stress, but high enough to create positive motive to develop consistently**(52).**It can be concluded that once a soccer player has a specific goal the direct mechanisms work almost spontaneously to invigorate action, as well as providing the amount of effort required to achieve the goal and persuading persistence over time.

3.5.Self-talk

One of the psychological traits that have attracted researches in the mental training field is self-talk. Self-talk occurs anytime an individual think about something. It is also characterized as a. statements and verbalizations directed to the self; b. having explanatory items accompanied by the subjects of statements used; c. multidimensional in nature; d. is partly dynamic; and has at least two roles, motivational and instructional for the athletes **(54).**It was revealed that self-talk improves skills and performance and skills in soccer players **(55).** In addition, self-talk is also advantageous for using tactics, reinforcing effort and emotion, attention focusing, relaxation and chilling out, conserving self-assessment and self-confidence. Mainly, positive self-talk helps improving self-esteem, concentration, motivation, and performance. On the contrary, negative self-talk is known to be self-demeaning and has a negative impact on performance by increasing self-doubt and anxiety **(17).**

A research team used a single-subject multiple baseline design to assess the potency of a self-talk intervention procedure on female soccer players, evaluating performance level in the low drive shot over a three-month study. The results showed that shooting performance amended in two of the three soccer players, whilst the three players reported improved self-confidence in comparison to the baseline. Researchers also reported that soccer player used more positive self-talk throughout a competition and more negative in the course of injury**(55).**Another document evaluated the influence of self-talk among some Iranian elite soccer players. The data analysis illustrated that soccer players perceived self-talk affects their performance positively and negatively. The perceived impacts could be classified into two categories, mental and behavioral. Most notable positive influences of self-talk at mental level contain cognitive advantages including improving focus and attention, boosting decision making abilities and attenuating reaction time. Besides, mental level profits consist of emotional effects of self-talk, for instance, stimulating players to intensify efforts, handling with complicated situations, and reducing anxiety. Emotional effects might have some negative consequence, too. Self-criticism can debilitate confidence, and increase stress. At the behavioral level, self-talk can improve the execution of tasks by elevating concentration and providing a consciousness of the negative impacts of determined behaviors and as a result strengthening the entire performance of the

soccer players **(56).** These findings suggest team managers as well as soccer players to be aware of self-talk as a psychological skill which can improve players' proficiency and also work on players' self-talk skills to achieve favorable results. Daftari et al., that self-talk training will progress energy management, motivation, stress management, attention, goal setting, and self-confidence**(57).**Altogether these findings demonstrated that self-talk is used during competition by athletes including soccer players. But with insight, these findings shed light on the noteworthiness of self-talk for soccer players and addressed more of psychological training in their athletic life.

The combined impact of goal setting and self-talk in performance of shooting skill was investigated. Both self-talk and goal setting was observed to be effective in improving performance, some of the observed advantages might probably derive from a combined intervention**(58).**It is believed that self-talk and goal setting is effectual methods to augment players' performance when employed in isolation, but it is worthy to recommend the combination of these techniques into one intervention. However, more research should be designed by using larger samples, and by expanding the study period over a longer time. Another research determined the effect of motivational self- talk on learning of soccer shot in beginner players were intervened by anxiety. The results proposed that self-talk might affect players' performance and motor learning**(59).** Although, it should be noted that the motivational self-talk might also have different impacts on motor skills learning and performance.

3.6. Imagery

Another psychological skill that researchers in the sports field have recently been attracted to is imagery. Imaging a sport technique is identical to conducting the skill, but athletes encounter the technique in their mind. Likewise, imagery is exerted as the process in which one feels himself/herself through his/her minds. The imagery skill can make the performance easier as it is one of the individual's skills. Several investigations revealed the effect of mental imagery on the improvement of athletic performance, learning tactical strategies, motor performance, and skills **(60, 61).** According to these documents, imagery can be a great help on the successfulness of athletes and extend physical performance particularly throughout a competition.

The effect of imagery skill in soccer players' perception of anxiety during penalty kicks was investigated. The soccer players practiced imagery skill for 10 weeks and 4 times each week. It was observed that imagery practice reduced anxiety level and imagery practice with kick training had a more beneficial effect on attenuating anxiety compared to just kick practice during the penalty kick **(62).** A study was designed to assess the relation between young soccer players' imagery use and the level of their innovation, and efficacy. It was observed that players with a higher level of imagination are more prone to employ imagery skill in their practice. Their finding also pointed out that mental-imagery training might lead to improved performance among young soccer players. It was indicated that soccer players employ both motivational and cognitive images. The authors reported that beginner soccer players use motivational images more often, but later they integrate them with the cognitive kind of images**(63).**In this regard, it can be suggested that higher levels of imagination supply a substructure for imagery application in young soccer players' performance improvement. In line with the previous study, the influence of an ecological imagery program on the elite soccer players' performance (in four age classifications including U16, U19, U21 and over 21) was investigated. The analysis indicated that the prosperous pass rate elevated remarkably in the intervention group in comparison with the control group. Further analysis showed that the results are just statistically significant in U16 and U21groups but not others. They deduced that effective soccer passing during competitions as

a multidimensional open skill might be elevated by an ecologically precise procedure of mental imagery **(64).**Hence, it could be proposed that merging two kinds of cognitive imagery instructions has a positive effect on soccer performance throughout real competitions.

In a study designed by Adegbesan, imagery skill was used as a predictor of soccer players' confidence. The results indicated a striking relevance of imagery use and sport confidence. Regarding the social cognitive theory, the recognition of the features of confidence particularly with the supplementary influence of imagery use leads to a better estimation of the soccer players' performance confidence and the general assessment of the sport experience**(65).**In the mentioned study, soccer players' confidence can be prefigured by their imagery capability. It is recommended to investigate the mediatory impact of imagery use in soccer with other social cognitive elements, and considering the player's post as well. Furthermore, mental imagery training can be applied for managing anxiety level in soccer players but it was reported that more workout is necessary if players want to benefit more from this skill which subsequently leads to improved performance **(66).**Additionally, motivation, anxiety and imagery levels of soccer players from different leagues were compared by a research team. The obtained results showed that anxiety and motivation levels vary regarding the league level of elite soccer players**(67).** Thus, it was illustrated that professional soccer players did not significantly impress their self-confidence even with their sub dimensions that construct imagery skills, motivation, cognitive and somatic anxiety levels. Since the improvement of soccer is relevant to the development of the soccer players, it is necessary to boost the motivation amounts to reduce the anxiety level that negatively influences the athletic performance and to place imagery training sessions in the training schedule for the promotion of the modern soccer.

The specificity of imagery used by young soccer players and the potency of an imagery training program on their performance were investigated. The achieved data indicated that soccer players with an elevated level of imagination are more willing to employ mental imagery in their practice. Besides, age differences in kinds of imagery usage were observed. Beginners (younger teens) use motivational images more often and only later they integrate them with the cognitive images. Their data also reinforced that mental imagery training can lead to improved performance on young soccer players **(63)**. Thus, it can be proposed that the use of imagery training sessions designed according to the specific use of various kinds of images by soccer players' results in appreciable progress of sports performance.

An investigation assessed the imagery skill in Portuguese soccer goalkeepers, and also examined the probable differences of imagery usage among soccer players in different ages. The results showed that imagery was more used during competitions than in training sessions. Besides, soccer players used imagery skill for cognitive and motivational purposes, although, the motivational function was used a bit more and with more clear images. After competition and when injured, under-21 soccer players used imagery remarkably less than older players**(68).** The results of this study display an effective start to the examining of imagery usage by soccer goalkeepers; but, there are some study limitations that is essential to be mentioned, including the sample size which does not permit to generalize the results. Extending the samples to other World soccer leagues would be advantageous for more precise analysis. In addition, it was not clear if goalkeepers really had known how to use imagery skill. Managing these fundamental variables are important for further future research.

3.7.Attention

Attention is one of the most important topics for athletic performance. Soccer players' capabilities are not just the techniques they know; focusing attention is the most fundamental

factor for decreasing anxiety about performance, about what other people might think, and to re-concentrate after a doing mistake. Attention is a mental process that targets an individual's consciousness as some information appears to the senses**(69).**Learning what stimuli to pay attention to, how to switch attention when required, and how to determine one's attention are indispensable skills for effective performance.

Attention has been analyzed in different ways which have useful implications for athletes. It is believed that people give general (passive) or close (active) attention to stimuli or situations. General attention is typically a less alert condition so responses are made at a slow pace. On the other hand, close attention is associated with arousal and responses are quicker and mainly more expedient. Close attention needs more energy compared to general attention. In sports close attention is required for prolonged activities; talented athletes might have an intrinsic ability or maybe learned to shift their attention from general to close attention when it is essential. For example, a soccer player has to take a look at the whole field at first and after that kick a pass to a selected teammate **(70).**Some soccer players can rapidly monitor the entire field to detect the open player waiting for the pass, but others might not be able to see even one meter beyond the ball **(71).**Since soccer is a rapid-moving game, it needs visual flexibility. Hence, it is crucial that soccer players be able to shift their attention immediately from one stimulus to another. Players have to concentrate their vision when they trap or shoot a ball and focus their vision for the other probable offensive conditions. It can be suggested that attentional control training helps athletes to learn different kinds of attentional focus and to administer each type at the appropriate situation. However, it might be more useful if athletes practice this skill in game-like training sessions.

The effect of an attentional shift training procedure on the performance of skills during soccer drills was evaluated. Following training sessions, the precision of the experimental soccer drill enhanced **(72).** Furthermore, the efficacy of an attentional focus training program on the development of attention of young soccer players was studied before and after training procedure. It was illustrated that the attentional focus training program was effectual in developing positive attentional traits and reducing negative attentional traits (**73)**.These results mean that training procedures helped soccer players learn to sustain a more restricted, task-relevant focus.

The attentional focus has appeared as a leading mediator of performance and also helps to learn a large number of motor skills. An athlete can concentrate internally on his/her body movements and the movement process or focus externally on the influence of the movements on the environment or the movement outcome. Accordingly, it was proposed that the internal focus compels the motor system by intervening to automatic motor control procedure that would typically modulate the movement, while an external focus grants the motor system to self-organize **(74).** In this regard, two experiments were designed to evaluate the impact of attentional focus on 10-meter sprint time and start kinetics in a group of soccer players and experienced sprinters. During the first experiment, the soccer players were asked to accomplish 10-meter sprints under an internal focus state, external focus situation, and a control condition. The results of the 10- meter sprint time illustrated that both the control and external focus situations led to notably faster sprint times compared with the internal focus state. In the second, the experienced sprinters executed the same 10-meter sprint exercise employing the same instructions as the first experiment. For the 10-meter sprint time and kinetic factors, there were not any remarkable differences across the mentioned conditions. These findings prepare new clues that experience level mediates the effect of attentional focus on sprint performance **(75).**The obtained data in

experiment one also provide further evidence for the advantages of an external focus rather than an internal focus in practical conditions that need instructions. Thus, the instructions should direct the players' attention to the movement outcome (external) more than to the movement procedure (internal).

3.8.Relaxation

Relaxation is a state of feeling compromise, peace and the absence of tension in the mind and body which is often associated with attenuated neurological arousal. Since the stressors which are generally existing in a sport mostly cause physical tension, physical relaxation might be effective to help athletes control the level of their physical energy to permit them to perform well. In the same way, it was declared that relaxation can reduce unfavorable muscular tension, decrease excessive activation of the sympathetic nervous system, and calm the mind (**52)**.It was also claimed that successful athletes frequently apply relaxation skill to control their physical energy **(76).** Moreover, some other researchers suggested that relaxation techniques can improve performance **(77).** Coaches must recognize the importance of relaxation in competitive conditions. It is essential to encourage athletes to relax or psych up in order to be more successful.

Different relaxation methods are available and can be classified as mental relaxation or physical relaxation including autogenic relaxation and progressive muscle relaxation respectively. Each relaxation method induces distinct relaxation responses. For instance, techniques with cognitive modules such as autogenic relaxation probably provoke particular cognitive effects like attenuating anxiety level and improving positive mood. On the contrary, progressive muscle relaxation which emphasizes on skeletal muscle has been observed to influence muscular components. Progressive muscle relaxation or active relaxation is a technique that helps an individual feel calm increasingly by contracting and loosening particular muscle groups effectively **(78).** It was clearly observed that progressive muscle relaxation eliminated the competitive sport anxiety among the Algerian elite soccer players and the effectiveness of this method continued even after the training period **(79).** Thus, it can be suggested that muscle relaxation process leads to positive results in players' mental state and consequently their performance. However, it is recommended to use a larger sample size to allow generalizing the observed results.

Another study compared the progressive muscle relaxation and autogenic relaxation on young soccer players' moods. Both of these methods induce corresponding mood responses and might be employed to modulate young soccer players' mood states(8**0)**. Hence, both methods may be beneficial for players' mood states. Besides, enjoyment of the training sessions should be appointed to be effective enough and also, minimize a probable negative feeling towards the training sessions.

4. CONCLUSION

Being successful in soccer requires appropriate mental skills as well as physical techniques. It should be taken into account that the psychological aspect in sports prepares the required psychological care for the soccer players before the competitions to lower anxiety, stress, and depression, relaxes their mind and body and regulates mood states which ultimately improves the performance. Consequently, persuading soccer players to exert various mental skills such as confidence, anxiety control, self-talk, motivation, goal setting, imagery, attention and relaxation would seem to be a beneficial approach. With respect to future research, the potency of the in corporate effect of psychological skills in soccer players' performance should be examined. Sports psychologists should advice soccer players to use psychological skills to

help them integrate the skills into training sessions and competition settings. In addition, it is essential that team managers and coaches who are responsible for the soccer players' preparation notice the advantages of psychological skills training since they are in the best position to provoke soccer players to apply psychological skills in training and competition environments.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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Graphical Abstract