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Mental toughness in Indian junior soccer players: A review and prospect

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Abstract

Purpose: The present study is based on comparison of Mental Toughness among the I-league academy and football school, where in 36 participants from both teams voluntary participated in the Mental Toughness (MTQ) develop by Goldberg (2004). The study compared five elements of mental toughness, 1) Rebound ability 2) Pressure Handling, 3) Concentration 4) Confidence 5) Motivation. Results: Reveled no significant difference in the components of mental toughness and direct towards the development of football at grass roots level consisting of mental skills along with psychomotor components. The study directs the future of football being based on more scientific domain at grassroots level training comprising of coaching system addressing the requirements of elements necessary for the growth of quality players in India.

Keywords: Mental Toughness, Sports Psychology, Soccer

1. Introduction

Modern sports training and coaching are much related with psychological variables, after the emergence of sports psychology as distinct scientific discipline, many attempts have been made to help coaches and athletes in their pursuits in a number of ways like assessing various psychological demands, providing psychological techniques, identifying problems and using various psychological intervention programs for enhancing sports performance (Cox, 2002) [2]. Mental toughness is one of the psychological qualities that are highly valued in sports. Today, a sports psychologist's role is more accepted as a part of the regular coaching staff for teams and for individual athletes. The roles of sports psychologists are numerous, but they primarily teach athletes mental game skills to improve their performance and learning (Patrick, 2016) [9]. FIFA report (2014) [4] by Prof. Dr. Astrid Junge, Head of Research at the FIFA - Medical Assessment and Research Centre (F-MARC) documented expression of emotional and cognitive behavior disorder by footballers of top level, wherein they experience high level of stress due to physical training load as well as high expectation of performance along with potential conflicts within them. The discussion correlates with the report of (WHO, 2003) [10] expressing development of mental disorder in 1 out of 4 person in a lifetime and about 450 million people suffering from mental disorder. The report reflected football being no different from general population and reflecting that psychological factors contributed to risk of injury and to a prolonged recovery from injuries along with development of mental and behavior disorder.

Mental toughness provide psychological edge to cope better than opponent players and also to be consistent in remaining determined, confidence, focused and handle pressure (Jones, 2002) [8]. Mental toughness is an ability of athlete to witness positive responses to situations to persist and refuse to give in (Gould, 1987) [7] includes of motivation (Gould, 1987), [7] concentration (Goldberg A. 1998) [6], and confidence (Goldberg A. 1998) [6].

Those who are elite athletes and those who can become elite athletes do not possess the same characteristics. Those who can become elite athletes do need to have certain core domains which can be useful for developing the characteristics possessed by elite athletes along with the necessary intervention techniques consisting of regulating and modifying external influencing factors which can facilitate learning of required behaviors associated with transformation into elite athletes. Research by Durand-Bush & Salmela (2001) [3] has shown

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that elite athletes possess significantly higher levels of mental skills than the less elite athletes. Characteristics like Commitment and self-confidence have consistently been associated with high level Performance. Abbott and Collins (2004) [1] reach the same conclusion and mention psychological skills such as goal setting, realistic performance evaluation, imagery and commitment as factors that may potentially distinguish between successful and less successful elite level athletes. Therefore, development and maintenance of mental skills is considered important for the evolution of talent and thus creating scope for research in the identified area.

2. Methodology

Twenty elite players from I-league clubs and twenty players of the Bhaichung Bhutia Football Schools, Delhi between 16 to 18 age group were identified for the purpose of the study. The study was conducted by administering Mental Toughness Questioner by (Goldberg A. 2004) [5] consisting of thirty questions emphasizing on five following variables:

- 1) Rebound ability: Ability of an individual to bounce back from setback and mistakes during competition.
- 2) Pressure Handling: Ability to stay calm under pressure without this an athlete will always underachieve. Peak performance demands that you are relaxed once the

performance begins.

- 3) Concentration: In every sport, your ability to focus on what's important and block out everything else is one of the primary keys to performance excellence.
- 4) Confidence: One characteristic of the mentally tough athlete is he/she possesses a confidence level that seems to be unshaken by setbacks and failures.
- 5) Motivation: Motivation is the fuel that will drive your training to a successful completion and the accomplishment of your goals.

2.1 Administration of Test

The data of forty football players were collected from football Schools and Club academy. Two data from each team found redundant due to incomplete information was removed data of eighteen football players each from football schools, and clubs academy were used for final analysis of the study (n=36). The data was collected from Pune, Maharashtra during an invitational tournament from a pre-match situation.

2.2 Statistics: T-test was applied for the inference of mental toughness scores of two teams.

- 1- Football Schools
- 2- I league team

Table 1: Comparison of mental toughness between the football teams.

	Team	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df
Rebound ability	1	18	3.1667	1.58114	.37268		
	2	18	2.8333	1.20049	.28296	.712	34
Pressure Handling	1	18	4.3333	1.37199	.32338		
	2	18	4.4444	1.29352	.30489	-.250	34
Concentration	1	18	4.3889	1.14475	.26982		
	2	18	4.3889	1.14475	.26982	.000	34
Confidence	1	18	3.7778	1.26284	.29765		
	2	18	4.3333	.97014	.22866	-1.480	34
Motivation	1	18	4.5000	1.09813	.25883		
	2	18	4.8889	.96338	.22707	-1.129	34
Total Mental Toughness	1	18	24.6667	4.36564	1.02899		
	2	18	25.7778	3.91912	.92374	-.804	34

3. Result and findings: The table reveals an insignificant difference found with regard to mental toughness between I-league academy and Football schools players in Rebound ability, Ability to Handle Pressure, Concentration, Confidence, Motivation and Overall Mental Toughness. The overall mental toughness of two teams at 24.66 and 25.77 indicates average to moderate skill in mental toughness.

Ability to bounce back by forgiving self-committed mistakes and not getting emotionally defeated 'Rebound ability' of two teams with an mean score of 3.16 for BBFS and 2.83 for I-league team directs towards need for Psychology Skill Training (PST) for the player along with soccer skill training. Below average score on rebound ability reflects tendency among players to dwell on their mistakes while competition continues, end up repetition of the same.

Ability to stay calm in clutch and to remain relaxed during performance 'Pressure handling' skill of two teams with an average score of 4.33 for BBFS and 4.44 for I-league team highlights as a non-liability component of mental toughness ability but need to be addressed by players of two teams before aggravating in future.

Ability to focus on important task on hand and blocking external influencing factors 'Concentration ability' of two teams with mean score of 4.38 for BBFS and 4.38 for I-league reveals above average ability towards scope for players to

become intimated due to concentration on undesired task and non-essential components.

Ability to be unshaken by setback and failures 'Confidence' of two teams with a mean score of 3.77 for BBFS and 4.33 for I-league reveals of possession of confidence level not to the optimal, therefore reflecting towards need for enhancement of player ability to perform under pressure to help them nurture upon their gifted talent and lift performance to next level.

Ability to fuel with drive to train towards successful completion and accomplishment of players goal 'Motivation' of two teams with a mean score of 4.50 for BBFS and 4.88 for I-league reveal to have adequate motivation to get stuck having 'permanent potential'. Players of two teams reflect necessary work and effort to become winner.

4. Discussion: Physical abilities, technical skill, tactical knowledge of the game does influence the selection process of players but consistency in performance and to maintain peak performance defeating difficult times does depend on the mental toughness related abilities of the players. Low in confidence will neutralize natural abilities, hard work & talent of players. Player need ability to forgive himself because it's difficult to win if they emotionally beat themselves as it keeps the player tense and affect confidence. It's essential for players to poses ability to revert focus and attention on to the game or

task in hand from the setbacks. Psychological Skill Training needs to be inducted into the training system of players to attain and maintain optimal performance of youth players if long term benefits are desired and expected from the young players. Mental toughness as an essential component does have the potential to support and enhance player out-put at its maximal.

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