

Determinants of psychological readiness and athletic performance: A perspective from sports journalism and case study analysis

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Abstract- This study aims to determine how psychological readiness influences high-level athletic performance among elite athletes, based on long-term qualitative observations and sports journalism field research. Using a qualitative case study design, seven elite athletes (T-1 to T-7) from five national team disciplines (Boxing, Weightlifting, Volleyball, Athletics, and Para-athletics) were selected through purposive and criterion sampling. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews and phenomenological observations. The findings identify sleep quality, weight-loss-related stress, environmental "vacuuming" (isolation), and professional psychological support as decisive factors for competitive success. Specifically, the integration of a professional sports psychologist with the national boxing team during the "Hangzhou 2022" Asian Games resulted in a significant increase in performance rankings and Olympic qualification quotas. These results underscore the urgent need to institutionalize sports psychology within national team structures to establish a professional support system.

Keywords- Sports psychology, Performance determinants, Mental toughness, Self-efficacy, Case study

1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary elite sports landscape, physical training methodologies have reached a global equilibrium, leading to a "physiological ceiling" and a subsequent "performance plateau" [1]. In such a highly competitive environment, the margin between victory and defeat is increasingly dictated by psychological readiness rather than physiological capacity alone. Consequently, sports psychology has emerged as the "psychological edge" and is often regarded as the "final frontier of performance" [2].

While research suggests that 80–90% of elite athletic success during critical moments depends on psychological states [3], the process of institutionalizing this field within the management and structure of national teams in Mongolia remains insufficient. Recent studies emphasize that an athlete's mental health and resilience are not merely individual traits but are directly dependent on systemic support [4], [5].

The lack of institutionalization in Mongolia acts as a "systemic barrier" to elite performance. To address this, the present study utilizes "phenomenological observation" [6] and the "rapport" established between athletes and sports journalists to uncover the internal psychological dynamics of performers. This research adopts an interdisciplinary

perspective, merging journalistic field observations with academic psychological theories to identify common stressors and propose practical solutions for Mongolian athletes.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Psychological preparation is defined as a systematic integration of techniques designed to ensure emotional stability and enhance cognitive performance. While historical frameworks, such as the Soviet/Russian school of psychology, prioritized "volitional power" [7], [8], modern paradigms focus on mental health, cognitive structures, and cultural contexts.

This study is grounded in two primary contemporary theories:

- **Self-Efficacy:** According to Albert Bandura, an athlete's belief in their ability to execute tasks and utilize resources is a primary driver for overcoming adversity [15].
- **Mental Toughness:** The "4C" model (Control, Commitment, Challenge, Confidence) developed by Clough et al. explains the mechanisms by which athletes maintain performance under extreme pressure [9].

Furthermore, research on Mongolian athletes indicates that balancing traditional upbringing with modern competitive pressure is fundamental to success [10], while studies on Asian athletes highlight mental toughness as a "collective factor" dependent on social and team support [11].

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a **Qualitative Case Study** design to gain an in-depth understanding of sports psychology phenomena within the athletes' real-world context [12].

- **Sampling and Participants:** Seven elite athletes (n=7) from the Mongolian National Team were selected using purposive and criterion sampling. Participants hold the title of International Master of Sports and regularly compete at continental and world levels. The small sample size is justified by the principle of "data saturation" and the restricted accessibility of elite performers. The "long-term rapport" established through sports journalism ensured "data richness" by uncovering sensitive psychological stressors.
- **Data Collection Methods:** Data were triangulated through:
 1. **Semi-structured Interviews:** 45-60 minute sessions focusing on pre-competition sensations, sleep, weight management, and social support.
 2. **Phenomenological Observation:** Field notes compiled over years of observation in training camps, competition arenas, and specialized "vacuumed" environments.
- **Data Analysis and Reliability:** Data were processed using Thematic Analysis following the six-step coding process (open, axial, and selective) proposed by Braun and Clarke [13]. Reliability was ensured through Data Triangulation (interviews, field notes, and performance statistics) and Member Checking to verify internal validity.

4. RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Four core themes were identified as primary determinants of elite athletic success.

4.1. The Foundation of Recovery: Sleep Quality A unanimous consensus was observed regarding sleep quality. Data indicate that sleep is not merely physical rest but is critical for "cognitive alertness" and decision-making speed. Sleep deprivation delays neuromuscular response and increases cortisol levels, which impairs emotional regulation during competition, as confirmed by participants T-3 and T-4.

4.2. Psychological Pressure and Weight-Loss Dynamics For combat sports and weightlifting (T-1 to T-4), weight loss is a significant psychological ordeal rather than a purely physiological process. T-5 noted that emotional instability leads to "metabolic resistance," where the body resists weight loss, demonstrating the link between mental state and metabolism.

This aligns with Bandura's Self-Efficacy theory [15], as athletes who maintain control over their weight loss exhibit higher competitive confidence.

4.3. Professional Intervention: The Role of Institutionalized Psychology A majority of participants stated that working with professional psychologists enhances their mental toughness and stabilizes self-esteem. In the boxing case study, "cognitive restructuring" techniques—transforming fear into a challenge—acted as a catalyst for T-1 and T-2. This confirms that coaching alone is insufficient and specialized, external psychological support is essential [14].

4.4. "Vacuumed" Environments and Flow State Athletes emphasized that environmental "vacuuming" (isolation from external information) facilitates the "flow state." However, individual variations exist; while T-5 preferred total isolation, T-7 derived energy from social facilitation and spectator support.

Table 1. Impact of Psychological Factors on Performance

Psychological Factor	General Trend	Scientific Explanation	Athlete Quote
Sleep Quality	Universal Consensus	Sleep deprivation hinders cognitive recovery and reduces reaction speed by 15-20% [1].	T-3: "The body has strength, but the brain doesn't function without sleep."
Weight Loss	High-Stress Trigger	Weight loss increases cortisol levels, making athletes emotionally vulnerable [4].	T-5: "If the mind is unstable, the body resists weight loss."
Psychologist's Role	Performance Catalyst	Professional support increases self-efficacy and enables anxiety management [14].	T-2: "For the first time, I entered the ring with 100% confidence."

5. CONCLUSION

Psychological preparation is a fundamental necessity, equivalent to physical training. Sleep quality, weight-stress management, and institutionalized support are the decisive determinants of success.

The results advocate for the official institutionalization of sports psychologists within national teams and the early psychological education of developing athletes.

Due to the qualitative nature and small sample size, results are context-specific. Future research should integrate quantitative metrics such as Heart Rate Variability (HRV) and cortisol analysis to complement qualitative findings.

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AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION


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