

Lack of Enjoyment Reduces the Motivation to Succeed in Sport

Dear Editor-in-Chief

Goncalves et al. (2014) recently published a study in which young Portuguese athletes from a volleyball club, an elite volleyball center, and a soccer club reported on their will to excel and will to compete before and after the season. The results showed that soccer club athletes were the only group to experience an increase in their will to excel over the 6-month period, and all three groups experienced a decline in their will to compete with the elite volleyball players showing the greatest decline in both will to excel and will to compete. The researchers concluded that the primary influencing factor is the potential to become a professional athlete in the sport, as the soccer players in Portugal have a better opportunity to have a lucrative professional career than the volleyball players.

Overall, this study presented valuable findings about the competitive nature of Portuguese athletes at different levels and at different stages of competition. However, before concluding that the opportunity (or lack of) to become a well-known professional in the sport had the greatest influence on the athletes' will to compete and to excel, the athletes' emotions also should have been considered. Enjoyment is a discrete emotion related to achievement; it is a positive activating emotion and therefore is believed to positively predict achievement in athletics and other areas (Daniels et al., 2009; Puente-Diaz, 2012). The elite volleyball players practiced an average of 19 hours per week, approximately 3 times more hours than the club athletes. The volleyball players also lived at the center where they practiced. Enjoyment does have a positive effect on sport satisfaction, effort, and performance, as Puente-Diaz demonstrated in a study looking at the effects that these factors had on each other in regards to adolescent tennis players (Puente-Diaz, 2012). It has also been found to be a predictor of achievement in academics due to (Daniels et al., 2009). The amount and intensity of training that the elite athletes experienced at the center as well as an extreme amount of time spent around the sport, coaches, and teammates could have easily burned the athletes out, making the sport less enjoyable and causing a drop in the will to excel and to compete (Brenner, 2007).

Considering the amount of time and money that is spent on developing athletes in the United States (U.S.), it would be valuable to determine the factors that cause athletes to want to excel and to compete or not. However, some factors outside of those considered in this study would need to be given attention in order to conduct similar research in the U.S.

The socioeconomic status of young athletes in the U.S. plays a major role in the success that they have; athletes who come from poor socioeconomic backgrounds often struggle to be successful at a higher level because they have different goals and ideas of what it means to be

successful (Lewis, 2010). Playing with swagger, as opposed to learning to play with the fundamentals of the sport, is one factor that makes athletes from urban areas unique. Urban males at an American university believe that this playing style leads players to eventually experience conflict due to a lack of game knowledge, selfishness, no discipline, and being non-coachable (Peters et al., 2012). These things make it difficult for athletes from urban, low socioeconomic upbringings to adapt to the behavioral norms and expectations of organized athletics, causing them to experience conflict with their coaches and teammates and possibly reducing their wills to excel and to compete.

The facilities available to American high school athletes can also impact how they feel about competition. The first concern is simply access to facilities; educational, financial, and geographical aspects have been found to correlate with the types of sports that people end up participating in due to the facilities available (Karusisi et al., 2013). People in more affluent neighborhoods with higher education and socioeconomic standing have access to more expensive activities such as swimming and racquet sports. The second concern is the economic state and the resources of the facility itself. The quality and amount of equipment available, the amount of space available, and the number and quality of coaches that can be employed depends on the funding and resources that the facility has, and these kinds of resources give players an advantage. Having better endowed training facilities likely motivates athletes to want to excel and compete, while lacking these resources would have the opposite effect.

The coach's background and style of coaching can also affect athletes' desires to excel and compete. Highly experienced coaches and coaches with a high certification level tend to place more importance on social issues and cultural issues and their management than their less experienced and less certified counterparts (Mesquita et al., 2011). Coaches who have had more opportunities and time to learn how to coach will manage athletes from different social and cultural backgrounds differently than their less experienced counterparts. Like experience, coaching styles vary markedly and can resonate better with certain athletes depending on their learning styles and backgrounds (Chen, 2013). For example, coaches with a paternalistic leadership style appear to create better team adhesiveness, and different leadership styles affect aspects of the team differently. Under virtuous leadership, teamwork, interpersonal affinity and team adaptation is significantly improved while benevolent leadership leads to improvement in interpersonal affinity and interpersonal attraction (Chen, 2013). The insight into the will to compete and to excel of athletes at different levels of competition in this study is unique and very valuable for coaches and other athletic professionals. If more of this research

is going to be done, particularly in the United States, then the athletes' emotions and socioeconomic backgrounds need to be taken into consideration as well as the facilities that they use and their coaches' styles and backgrounds.

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