

Studying: physical education

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Athlete interview (sports confidence)

Assignment 1: sports and exercise psychology

Findings of participant A

The participant (referred to as *Participant A*) is a competitive male footballer who recently joined Llan Gernal Football Club, where he plays primarily as a midfielder. He has previous experience competing at a high level, including making a Welsh Premier League debut for Carmarthen Town. Participant A identified several key factors that both enhanced and debilitated his sport confidence, highlighting how confidence fluctuates depending on situational, social, and psychological influences.

A major source of confidence for Participant A was past performance and achievement. His most valued sporting accomplishment was making his Welsh Premier League debut, which held particular significance as he had progressed through the club from a young age. This achievement strengthened his belief in his own ability and provided a strong foundation of confidence that he could draw upon in future competitions. He described this experience as “a great honour,” explaining that making the first team was especially meaningful because he had joined the club at around ten years of age. This sense of achievement appeared to reinforce his self-belief and contributed positively to his overall confidence levels.

Coaching support and trust were also identified as important contributors to Participant A’s confidence, particularly after joining a new club. He reported feeling valued and reassured due to the coach’s eagerness to include him in the team and provide guidance throughout the week leading up to the match. This support helped him feel confident in his role within the team, as he explained that he was “building confidence since the manager was quite eager to bring me in.” Additionally, Participant A highlighted that tactical preparation and detailed pre-match briefings increased his confidence, as they demonstrated the coach’s commitment and effort, which encouraged players to respond with similar levels of effort and belief.

Social support was another key factor in enhancing Participant A’s confidence. Having two friends already at the club helped him feel more comfortable in a new environment and reduced feelings of nervousness. Their advice regarding team routines and expectations allowed him to settle more quickly and eased uncertainty. He stated that

having their support “helped ease my nerves” throughout the week leading up to the game. Family support was also highly influential, particularly from his father, who played an active role in recovery activities such as gym sessions and ice baths. This support provided emotional reassurance and helped Participant A feel supported both physically and psychologically, reinforcing his confidence.

Preparation, recovery, and routine were also highlighted as important sources of confidence. Participant A explained that during the week leading up to the game, he focused heavily on recovery strategies, nutrition, and maintaining consistent routines to ensure he was physically and mentally prepared. He stated, “I always made sure my recovery and everything else was spot on,” suggesting that feeling prepared helped him manage nerves and approach the match with confidence. On the day of the game, waking up early, staying busy, eating well, and arriving at the venue on time further contributed to his sense of readiness and control.

Maintaining a positive mindset was another significant source of confidence. Participant A deliberately avoided focusing on mistakes or negative outcomes and instead concentrated on enjoying the experience of playing, particularly in front of a crowd. He explained that he did not want to think about “faults or drawbacks,” which helped him remain focused and confident during the game. Despite losing the match, he reported feeling positive afterward due to his own performance and the high standard of the opposition, stating that his feelings were “fairly high thereafter.”

In contrast, several factors were identified as having a negative impact on Participant A’s sport confidence. Injury was the most significant debilitating factor. He described a semi-final in which he initially felt confident but sustained an injury during the week leading up to the match. Although he attempted to play, he was forced to leave the game early, which led to feelings of frustration and self-doubt. He expressed a strong sense of guilt, stating that he felt he had “let the squad down,” and questioned whether he should have attempted to play while injured.

This experience was compounded by a fear of letting the team down, as comments from teammates following the loss further contributed to his reduced confidence, despite receiving support from his coach and family. Following the injury, Participant A also reported excessive overthinking, which had a prolonged negative effect on his confidence. Being unable to train or attend the gym led to concerns about whether he would return to his previous performance level, reinforcing negative thoughts and self-doubt. Additionally, Participant A described experiencing significant pre-competition stress on the morning of the semi-final due to pain and uncertainty surrounding his fitness. Attempts to manage the injury through ice and heat treatments increased anxiety and negatively impacted his confidence before the match, with Participant A describing the experience as “quite stressful.”

Overall, Participant A's sport confidence was positively influenced by past achievements, coaching support, social support, effective preparation, and a positive mindset. Conversely, injury, fear of letting teammates down, overthinking, and pre-competition stress were identified as key factors that reduced his confidence. These findings demonstrate that sport confidence is dynamic and influenced by a complex interaction of psychological, social, and physical factors.

Evaluation of Findings in Relation to Sport Confidence Theory and Research

The findings from Participant A's interview align closely with established theories and research within the sport confidence literature. His experiences support the view that sport confidence is a multidimensional and dynamic construct influenced by a combination of personal, social, and situational factors. In particular, the findings can be effectively evaluated using Vealey's Sport Confidence Model (1986, 2001) and Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1977), alongside empirical research on confidence disruption and injury.

Vealey's Sport Confidence Model proposes that sport confidence is influenced by both trait and state components and is shaped by a range of sources, including mastery experiences, leadership, social support, and preparation. Participant A demonstrated relatively high trait confidence, developed through long-term involvement in football and reinforced by his previous achievement of making a Welsh Premier League debut. This supports Vealey's suggestion that repeated success and progression within a sport contribute to stable confidence beliefs over time. His ability to draw confidence from this past achievement indicates that mastery experiences form a core foundation of sport confidence.

At a state level, Participant A's confidence fluctuated depending on situational factors. For example, joining a new club initially led to increased nerves, highlighting the context-specific nature of confidence. However, this was effectively buffered by coaching support and positive leadership, which are identified by Vealey as key confidence sources. Participant A reported increased confidence due to the coach's eagerness to include him and the provision of tactical briefings. This is consistent with research suggesting that athletes experience greater confidence when they perceive their coach as supportive and competent (Feltz et al., 1999). The findings therefore reinforce the importance of leadership behaviours in maintaining confidence during transitional periods.

Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory provides further insight into the specific mechanisms underpinning Participant A's confidence. Bandura identified four primary sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and physiological and emotional states. Mastery experiences were clear through Participant

A's past achievements, particularly his professional debut, which strengthened his belief in his ability to perform at a high level. This supports Bandura's assertion that mastery experiences are the most powerful source of confidence.

Verbal persuasion was also influential, as encouragement and advice from the coach, teammates, and family helped reinforce Participant A's confidence. The supportive role of teammates, particularly those he already knew, reduced uncertainty and anxiety when entering a new environment. Previous research has similarly highlighted the importance of social support in enhancing confidence and reducing competitive stress (Hays et al., 2007). Family support, especially from his father, further reinforced confidence by providing emotional reassurance and stability outside of the sporting context.

Physiological and emotional states played a dual role in Participant A's confidence. While manageable nerves before competition did not significantly undermine his confidence during positive performances, injury had a profound negative effect. The physical pain and uncertainty surrounding his fitness led to increased stress, anxiety, and self-doubt. This aligns with Bandura's suggestion that negative physiological states can reduce self-efficacy, particularly when athletes interpret these sensations as indicators of incapability. Participant A's pre-competition stress on the morning of the semi-final illustrates how physical discomfort can negatively influence confidence even before performance begins.

The negative impact of injury on Participant A's confidence is well supported by previous research. Injuries have been shown to disrupt confidence, increase fear of re-injury, and negatively affect psychological readiness to return to sport (Podlog & Eklund, 2007). Participant A's feelings of guilt and fear of letting the team down further support research indicating that injured athletes often experience reduced confidence and heightened self-criticism, particularly in team sport environments where perceived responsibility to others is high.

Additionally, Participant A's tendency to overthink and engage in negative thought patterns following injury aligns with research on confidence fragility. Jones et al. (2002) suggested that confidence can be fragile and easily disrupted by setbacks, even in athletes who typically report high confidence. Participant A's concern about not returning to his previous performance level demonstrates how confidence can be undermined by uncertainty and lack of control.

Finally, the findings highlight the social and relational nature of confidence in team sports. Participant A's confidence was closely linked to his perceived contribution to the team and the reactions of teammates following injury. This supports research suggesting that confidence in team sport athletes is strongly influenced by social

evaluation and group dynamics (Fransen et al., 2015). However, the continued support from his coach and family suggests that positive leadership and social environments can help buffer confidence loss during challenging periods.

Practical Implications of Sport Confidence Sources

Understanding the sources of sport confidence identified by Participant A has important practical implications for athletes, coaches, and support networks. By recognising how confidence is developed and maintained, practitioners can implement strategies to enhance performance and psychological well-being.

Firstly, past performance accomplishments were a key confidence source for Participant A. Practically, this highlights the value of helping athletes reflect on previous successes, particularly during periods of transition such as joining a new club or returning from injury. Coaches and sport psychologists can use techniques such as performance profiling, confidence logs, and video feedback to remind athletes of their capabilities. This aligns with the use of mastery experiences to strengthen self-belief and promote consistency in performance.

Secondly, coaching behaviour and support played a central role in maintaining confidence. The participant reported increased confidence when the coach showed trust, provided clear tactical guidance, and demonstrated effort in preparation. Practically, this suggests that coaches should adopt positive communication strategies, offer constructive feedback, and express belief in athletes' abilities. Clear role definition and pre-match preparation can reduce uncertainty and anxiety, particularly for athletes in new environments. Coach education programmes should therefore emphasise psychological as well as technical skill development.

Thirdly, social support from teammates and family was crucial in reducing nerves and increasing confidence. This highlights the importance of fostering supportive team cultures and encouraging peer mentoring, especially for new players. Coaches can facilitate this by pairing new athletes with experienced teammates and promoting open communication. Family involvement, where appropriate, can also be encouraged, particularly during recovery periods, as emotional and practical support can buffer stress and protect confidence.

Another important implication relates to preparation, routines, and recovery behaviours. Participant A's confidence was enhanced by structured routines involving nutrition, recovery, and time management. Practitioners should encourage athletes to develop personalised pre-competition routines that promote feelings of readiness and control. These routines can also be used as confidence-regulation strategies when anxiety levels increase.

Finally, the findings highlight the need for effective injury management and psychological support. Injury was the most debilitating factor for confidence, leading to overthinking and self-doubt. Practically, this emphasises the importance of integrating psychological skills training into rehabilitation programmes. Goal setting, imagery, and reassurance from coaches and medical staff can help athletes maintain confidence during injury and reduce fear of re-injury.

Overall, enhancing sport confidence requires a holistic approach that involves coaches, teammates, family, and structured preparation strategies. Applying these practical implications can help athletes maintain stable confidence levels and perform more consistently under pressure.

Future research

Since recreational, semi-professional, and elite athletes may be influenced differently, future study should examine individual differences in sources of sport confidence across different levels of competition. Examining how confidence sources change over time, especially during significant changes like injury, returning to play, or switching clubs, would benefit from longitudinal research. Future studies should also look into how well focused interventions that boost confidence—like coach-led communication techniques or psychological skills training—maintain confidence under pressure. The generalizability of results might also be enhanced by expanding the study to include female athletes and other sports.

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