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AI Acknowledgement Table

URL	Date Used	Prompts
https://app.grammarly.com/	14/04/26	Check my grammar
copilot.microsoft.com	11/04/26	Provide research on anxiety in sport

An analysis of competitive state anxiety at three pre-event time points in players from Dafen AFC

Competitive state anxiety is the mix of nerves, thoughts and physical feelings that athletes experience before taking part in a match or event. In football, this type of anxiety can have a big impact on performance because it affects how players think, feel and behave. When anxiety becomes too strong, players may lose focus, rush decisions or feel tense and uncomfortable. But anxiety is not always negative. Sometimes a small amount of anxiety can help players feel more alert, more awake and more ready to perform. Jones and Swain (1992) explained that anxiety can be interpreted in different ways depending on how the athlete views the situation. If a player sees anxiety as helpful, it can actually improve performance. If they see it as harmful, it can make things worse.

A common tool used to measure competitive anxiety is the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2 (CSAI-2). This questionnaire looks at three areas: cognitive anxiety, which includes worrying and negative thoughts, somatic anxiety, which includes physical symptoms like a fast heartbeat or tense muscles; and self-confidence, which is how strongly a player believes they can perform well. These three areas give a clear picture of how an athlete feels before a match.

Research shows that anxiety usually changes as the match gets closer. Mellalieu, Hanton and Fletcher (2006) found that cognitive anxiety tends to rise because players think more about the match, the pressure and the possible outcomes. Somatic anxiety also increases because the body naturally prepares for action. Players may feel butterflies, restlessness or tension as kick-off approaches. These changes are normal and happen to athletes at all levels.

Anxiety and confidence are closely linked to performance. Craft et al. (2003) found that higher anxiety is often linked to poorer performance, while higher confidence usually helps players perform better. Woodman and Hardy (2003) also explained that confidence is one of the strongest psychological factors that predicts success in sport. When players believe in themselves, they are more likely to stay calm, make good decisions and handle pressure effectively.

Pressure is another important factor. Nicholls, Polman and Levy (2010) found that athletes feel more anxious when they believe the match is important or when they doubt their ability to cope with the situation. Football players often feel pressure from teammates, coaches, fans and even themselves. This pressure can increase anxiety, especially before important matches.

Because anxiety can affect football performance, this study looked at how cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety and self-confidence changed at three different times before an important league match for players from Dafen AFC.

Three male football players aged 18-19 from Dafen AFC took part in the study. Two were defenders and one was a striker. All players had more than five years of experience playing football. Even though the sample was small, it still provided useful insight into how players feel before a match.

A repeated-measures design was used. This means the same players completed the CSAI-2 at all three time points. This design helps show how each player's anxiety changed as the match got closer.

Players completed the CSAI-2 questionnaire at three different times:

1. One week before the match
2. 24 hours before the match
3. The morning of the match

The match was important because the team was close to the relegation zone. This likely increased pressure and anxiety. Players were given numbers instead of names to keep their answers private and reduce any pressure to answer in a certain way.

Table 1. Mean scores

Time Point	Cognitive Anxiety	Somatic Anxiety	Self-Confidence
1 Week Before	17.7	16.3	25.0
24 Hours Before	21.3	20.0	23.0
Morning of Match	25.0	23.3	21.0

Cognitive anxiety increased at each time point. Somatic anxiety also increased, showing that players felt more physical nerves as the match got closer. Self-confidence dropped slightly over time. One defender and the striker said they felt a bit nervous, while the other defender felt very nervous, likely because it was his first match in 2-3 months.

The aim of this study was to examine how anxiety and confidence changed before an important football match. The results showed clear increases in both cognitive and somatic anxiety as the match approached, while self-confidence decreased.

The rise in cognitive anxiety supports Mellalieu, Hanton and Fletcher (2006), who found that worry increases when players think more about the match and its importance. Because the team was close to the relegation zone, the players may have felt extra pressure. When players think about the consequences of losing, their anxiety naturally increases. This type of thinking can make players feel tense and unsure of themselves.

Somatic anxiety also increased. This means the players felt more physical symptoms such as nerves, tension or a fast heartbeat. Jones and Swain (1992) explained that athletes often notice physical symptoms of anxiety before competition, and these symptoms can feel stronger as the event gets closer. This is a normal response as the body prepares for action. Players might not always see these feelings as negative, but they can still affect performance if they become too strong. For example, a player with shaky hands might struggle to control the ball, or a player with a racing heart might find it harder to stay calm.

Self-confidence decreased slightly as the match got closer. This may be because the players felt more pressure and were unsure about the outcome. Woodman and Hardy (2003) found that self-confidence has one of the strongest links to performance in sport. So a drop in confidence could affect how well players perform. The defender who had not played for 2-3 months felt the most nervous, which supports Nicholls, Polman and Levy (2010) found that athletes who doubt their ability to cope with pressure tend to experience higher anxiety. When players doubt themselves, anxiety increases, and performance can suffer.

Craft et al. (2003) reported that higher levels of competitive anxiety are often associated with lower performance. This means the increased anxiety seen in this study could have had a negative effect on how the players performed in the match. When anxiety rises and confidence drops, players may hesitate, make mistakes or struggle to stay calm under pressure. These changes can affect decision-making, communication and overall performance on the pitch.

These results are similar to other studies in football. Domínguez-González et al. (2024) found that young football players often experience changes in anxiety and confidence before matches, and these changes can affect how they play. This shows that the results from Dafen AFC players match what is seen in other football teams.

There are several reasons why anxiety increased. The match was important, the team was under pressure, and one player had not played for a long time. These factors can all increase worry and physical nerves. Players may also think more about mistakes or negative outcomes as the match gets closer. When players focus on what could go wrong, anxiety naturally rises. This type of thinking can make players feel overwhelmed.

These findings are useful for coaches and players. Coaches can help players manage anxiety by using simple techniques such as breathing exercises, positive self-talk and relaxation methods. Hanton, Thomas and Maynard (2004) found that athletes who use coping strategies feel less anxious and perform better. Players can also benefit from routines that help them feel calm and focused before a match. For example, listening to music, doing light stretching or talking with teammates can help reduce nerves. Coaches can also create a positive environment that reduces pressure and helps players feel more confident.

There were some limitations in this study. Only three players took part, which is a very small sample. This means the results cannot be applied to all football players. The study also focused on one team and one match, so the results may be different in other situations. Another limitation is that the CSAI-2 is a self-report questionnaire, meaning players may not always

answer honestly or may not fully understand their own feelings. Some players might under-report anxiety because they do not want to appear nervous.

Future studies should include more players from different teams and levels of football. It would also be useful to compare anxiety levels in matches with different levels of importance. Researchers could also look at how anxiety changes during the match, not just before it. Another idea is to test whether anxiety-management techniques actually reduce anxiety in football players. This could help coaches develop better support strategies.

In conclusion, this study found that both cognitive and somatic anxiety increased as the match approached, while self-confidence decreased. The importance of the match and individual differences likely influenced these results. Understanding and managing anxiety is important for improving performance in football. Coaches and players can use simple strategies to help reduce anxiety and increase confidence before matches.

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