

Sport and Exercise Psychology

The interviewee was a 20-year-old male, who is currently in full-time employment as a builder at his dad's business. The athlete has been training/playing football since he was 6 and he is trying to make a full-time career in this sport as he is playing semi-professional for a team within the Welsh Premier League. He is currently within a full-time schedule with the club, training up to three nights a week, with analysis sessions included, with a game almost every Saturday and sometime midweek. With the aim of identifying positive, perceived sources and detrimental elements of sport confidence and how they may affect performance, the research was conducted using semi-structured interviews.

After conducting the interview, it was clear it was clear to see that the interviewee was a very strong-minded and confident individual, there were several factors that supported this and boosted his overall confidence. Such as;

Physical preparation:

Throughout the interview, it was clear to see that the interviewee was very strong-minded in his ability and on the run to any game was always feeling confident about the task ahead if everything was going to plan. He highlights key factors in his preparation for the game, which was his diet and sleep, for example, he said; "Number of reasons to be fair, if I played well the week before, training well, if I'm feeling good and eating well. Just several factors really, if everything goes right on the day if you had a good night's sleep. A number of reasons."

There are many aspects of physical preparation, this can refer to the process of getting your body ready for a specific task. It involves taking steps to enhance your physical fitness, mental focus, and overall well-being order to perform at your best.

Physical preparation includes activities such as exercise, proper nutrition, and adequate rest. Regular physical activity helps improve strength, endurance, flexibility, and coordination, which are essential for optimal performance in various activities. Eating a balanced diet and getting enough sleep are also crucial for maintaining energy levels and supporting overall physical health. This is shown in the interview as he mentions several factors such as his sleep, diet and previous sessions.

Physical preparation is important for achieving success in any task. By taking care of your body, you can enhance your performance, improve your ability to handle challenges and increase your overall well-being.

Performance accomplishments:

Another positive aspect that boosted his confidence in the build-up to any game was his performance accomplishments, if the interviewee was training well and playing well in previous sessions/games this also played an aspect. He quotes when asked what increases confidence on the build up to a game "if I played well the week before, training well".

The experience of previous successes can have a positive impact on an individual's self-confidence and motivation. It provides evidence that they can perform well and overcoming challenges in similar future situations. Additionally, performance accomplishments can serve as a source of inspiration and motivation for setting new goals and pursuing further growth and development.

Coaching:

Furthermore, in the interview, another point he made that increased his confidence was encouragement from the coach and players in the warm-up before the game. "Unknowingly probably, maybe some of the players, some of the coaching staff. Maybe just saying little things like good pass or nice touch or something, all those little boosters just give you a boost throughout the week". It is always a positive to know that the coach has recognised your individual talent in certain situations, an encouraging coach focuses on individual skill development by providing personalized attention and tailored feedback. They identify areas for improvement, set achievable goals, and offer guidance on techniques and strategies to enhance performance.

However, throughout the interview we was struggling to identify any clear factors that could decrease the interviewees confidence as he seemed a very confident person, but using the information provided there are some aspects that could decrease his confidence.

Isolation:

The player did mention in the interview that he felt isolated after a certain game he did not perform well in, "You feel quite isolated in that time but that's the only word to describe it really, isolated." This was after the player had performed poorly and had made a few mistakes within the game. He also mentions that it was an important game which could have influenced his confidence creating a more tense and nervous environment, "It was quite a high pressure game, so there was a lot riding on".

Situational favourableness:

Within the interview, I also felt like situational favourableness could decrease the players' confidence, situational favourableness is an individual that shows great leadership skills and can be relied upon. I felt like the player did not show these qualities as once he started describing the game he played poorly in it felt like he did not have these qualities, for example, "if I do misplace a pass then someone would be on to me, which is fair enough, but that can obviously decrease your confidence." In my opinion to be a strong leader for a team you should not be able let team-mates have an influence on your game, you should be the individual to keep your head up and encourage your peers.

Environmental comfort:

The final factor that played a part in a decrease in confidence was the environmental comfort once the player was challenged to play in different conditions in different countries. For example, "But yeah, it definitely affected me, I lost concentration towards the end of the game because it was so hot and humid, you know, most of the boys are used to training in the rain and everything but yeah it definitely decreased confidence." This shows that once the player is given the task to perform outside his comfort zone he struggles, which therefore decreases confidence.

Findings linked to research:

After reading over the Hays et al 2007 paper I was able to see a range of clear comparisons throughout, the benefit of using this paper to identify similarities was that the paper was based on a professional athlete competing at a high standard which reflects mine using a player competing at a high standard around the semi-professional and professional level. The study determined the sources and categories of confidence that were important to 14 successful world-class (professional) athletes (7 males and 7 females). Preparation, performance successes, coaching, intrinsic factors, social support, experience, competitive advantage, self-awareness, and trust were found to be the nine sources of confidence. Six categories of sports confidence were also identified, demonstrating the multifaceted character of the concept: achievement, superiority over opponents, physical variables, psychological factors, skill execution, and tactical awareness. Gender was associated with the athletes' sources of confidence as well as the subsequent categories of confidence they encountered. For instance, women valued strong individual performances more than men did, who got confidence from winning. The results and their implications for sport psychology and coaching techniques were examined in light of earlier research on sport-confidence.

Within the Hays Et al 2007 paper, they highlighted how competitive outcomes have an influence on their performance, by finding, All male athletes (one team player, and six individual sports participants) highlighted competition outcomes as a source of confidence, and it was evident from the athlete's responses that successful results strengthened the athlete's feelings of confidence and contributed to future successful performances. This was also reflected within the interviewee answers, my player commented "Number of reasons to be fair, if I played well the week before, training well" this was his response when asked what improves his confidence. This shows the similarities that individual sport athletes have the same confidence boost as team players.

Furthermore, in Hays Et Al 2007 they discuss how trust is an important factor for increasing confidence, for example, Two of the male athletes (one team player, one individual sport participant) identified trust as a source of confidence. One of these athletes referred to trust within the support team, while the other referred to "the belief you have in your teammates to perform to the same standard as you want to achieve." On the contrary, I feel like my interviewee felt almost the opposite, being apart of a team trust is essential but when my player mentioned having a bad

game he mentioned how team-mates would berate him, "so if I do misplace a pass then someone would be on to me, which is fair enough, but that can obviously decrease your confidence." This could then effect the trust the players have with my interviewee, they may lose their trust in the player which could see the team avoiding him which would furthermore decrease their confidence.

In addition to this, my interviewee shared a very popular aspect which boosted confidence to all the athletes who participated in the Hays et al 2007 paper. Eight of the fourteen athletes (four male, four female) were confident about psychological factors such as goal achievement, pre-performance routines, and ability to deal with nerves and expectations. This is also highlighted within my interview as a key aspect to my interviewee's confidence boost is how he psychologically prepares in the run up to a game. He states: "100% yeah, when you got the luxury of waking up later and getting to the stadium later in your own car and you're not travelling 2/3 hours in a bus it's always nice, then you feel a bit livelier in your legs and you can have a bit of a run round before the game Aswell, you just feel better in yourself after a short journey." The pre-performance routine played a big role in my interviewees confidence to the game, for example, when the player was forced to break his natural routine and had to travel earlier and wake up earlier it was clear that it affected him and his confidence. Having to travel the long distances causes the decrease in confidence knowing you wont be feeling as fresh as a home game. It shows in the Hays et al paper that having pre-performance routines can help your confidence and helps the ability to deal with certain emotions, but as soon as the routine is broken you will see a drop in confidence like you did with my player.

Practical Implications:

Environmental factors play a crucial role in shaping an athlete's confidence levels, but further research and study are necessary to fully understand their impact and potential for enhancing sports confidence. The sports environment is complex and varies, it includes various factors such as team dynamics, coaching styles, facility quality, and competitive pressures. Each of these elements can influence an athlete's confidence differently, and it is essential to explore the specific mechanisms through which they operate.

One reason why environmental factors require more research is the recognition of individual differences among athletes. Athletes have unique personalities, backgrounds, and experiences that can shape their responses to environmental factors. What may boost one athlete's confidence may not have the same effect on another. Conducting research that considers individual differences will provide valuable insights into how specific environmental factors can be tailored to optimize strategies for different athletes.

Lastly, the impact of environmental factors on athlete well-being and mental health should not be overlooked. Environmental factors can influence not only sports confidence but also overall athlete well-being. Understanding the relationship between environmental factors, sports confidence, and athlete well-being is crucial for creating supportive and healthy athletic environments. Further research can shed light on how environmental factors can be optimised to enhance both sports performance and athlete well-being.

In conclusion, while environmental factors are recognised as important for enhancing sports confidence, further research and study are needed to gain a deeper understanding of their specific impacts, individual differences, long-term effects and their relationship with athlete well-being. By conducting more research in these areas, we can develop evidence-based practices that effectively enhance sports confidence through the environment.

Highlights:

In conclusion, after interviewing my professional athlete it was clear that there was plenty of factors that played a crucial role in increasing and decreasing his confidence, it also felt like my interviewee had a solid structure to his week and game day and anything that interrupted this would play a big part and affect him going forwards. It was also very clear after looking into the Hays et al journal that many professional athletes all gain confidence from a range of factors and it was not just the same for all professional athletes, but it varies for everyone.

References:

Hays Et Al. (2007) 'Sources and Types of Confidence Identified by World Class Sport Performers'
'Journal of Applied Sport Psychology

Interview transcript:

How long have you played football for?

I have played football pretty much all my life, I started when I was 6 years old in a local team and gradually then when I'm older I'm 20 now so around 14 years.

What club do you currently play for?

I play for Haverfordwest County who play in the Cymru Premier League

What is your preferred position?

Preferred position is Centre Back but i can play anywhere across the defence or even into the holding midfield role.

What has been your most valued achievement through sport?

Probably this season playing in Europe winning against Shkendija a North Macedonian team beating them in Cardiff City stadium, probably that one.

Okay, now we are now going into section two to discuss confidence levels. We will go through some sources, to understand what increases and decreases your confidence levels, and how it influences your performance. Think of a game or competition where you performed really well, and you were very confident about that game or performance. Now describe the week in the run up to this game/competition?

Um, when you are high on confidence, you're not really thinking of the game you're looking forward to it and you know you're not going to make any mistakes. You are looking forward to it and you are thinking you're going to win, um, and then it's just a normal week to be fair.

Why were you so confident?

Number of reasons to be fair, if I played well the week before, training well, if I'm feeling good and eating well. Just a number of factors really, if everything goes right on the day if you had a good night's sleep. A number of reasons.

Did your confidence increase as you got closer to the game?

In the warmup probably, i would say if you are going into it confident and you do well in the warmup then your confidence always increases on the day. Because you know, you're training well and, in the warmup, you're playing, your touch is good and you're going to feel more confident.

Did anyone have an influence on your confidence levels during that week or before the game?

Unknowingly probably, maybe some of the players, some of the coaching staff. Maybe just saying little things like good pass or nice touch or something, all those little boosters just give you a boost throughout the week, but nothing of note.

Would that be the same in a game while you're playing?

100% yeah.

Now can you describe the morning of the game, up to the point when you won or finished playing?

Morning of the game, standard. Walk up around 8:30/9 o'clock, have some breakfast, have a chill, have a stretch maybe. Have a shower, have a shave, eat some pasta which is pre-match so around 11:30, then get to the stadium around 12:00, kick off is 2:30 and then throughout the normal stage, so standard, get there chill, have a few stretches maybe a massage. Then standard, right sock left sock then.

You also mentioned playing in the Europa league, did you have to travel away?

So, in the Europa league competition, we played Shkëndija in the first round which was two legs, we managed to beat them and then qualify for the second round which we then played B36 Tórshavn in two legs again. In both fixtures we had to travel abroad, the first round we travelled to North Macedonia and the second round to Faroe Islands.

Travelling away to different countries, how did this affect you? Did this boost your confidence, or did it decrease? How did you find yourself adapting to the environmental changes?

Yeah, when we got off the plane it was so hot, but we had to limit our time outside. Then when we trained, we trained at night, but even then, it was absolutely boiling, but luckily the sun was in by then. It was just making sure you ate the right foods and drunk enough to see you through the game. But yeah, it definitely affected me, I lost concentration towards the end of the game because it was so hot and humid, you know, most of the boys are used to training in the rain and everything but yeah it definitely decreased confidence.

Right so we are now going to move onto section 3 which is factors that influence your confidence levels again but factors that you think influenced your confidence levels in a negative way: to understand what could decrease your confidence levels. So, think of a game or competition where you were expected to perform really well, and you were very confident about that game or

performance. However, for some reason, your confidence levels dropped in relation to how you felt you should perform in this game? Do any games spring to mind?

Probably. There are a few, just trying to think of where they were. Pontypridd away last year, I didn't play great.

What happened?

Just a few mistouches, heavy touches, I let a few boys run in behind when I shouldn't have. Then just little passes then don't go right to the player, but I was feeling confident on the build-up to the game. I was not confident going into the second half as such.

Were there any specific things that caused this drop in confidence, or was it just like you said, the mistakes when playing?

It was quite a high pressure game, so there was a lot riding on it and when there is a lot riding on it people are more tense and are a lot more likely to shout at you, so if I do misplace a pass then someone would be on to me, which is fair enough, but that can obviously decrease your confidence. So just a lot of that really, nothing of note but yeah luckily no goals were my fault but yeah more or such just little things like passes not going to the right player and you think you're not going to play that pass again so already you're limiting your options.

Did anyone cause this drop in confidence, team-mates, opposition, coach, friends on the sideline, anything like that?

Probably a few of their fans, maybe. And then maybe players, them shouting at me but mostly from their fans to be fair.

Now can you describe the morning of this game as well, was it similar to the last one?

It was similar in a way; it was away this time whereas the other one was home. So, a bit more travelling involved, again you wake up pretty much the same time, have breakfast, have a shower, have a shave, eat pasta at the same time. The only difference is that you're not eating pasta at your house you're eating it on the bus, but I don't think that would have affected me but you never know, just an upset in rhythm.

Do you think that travelling away as well, a long distance played a part?

100% yeah, when you got the luxury of waking up later and getting to the stadium later in your own car and you're not travelling 2/3 hours in a bus it's always nice, then you feel a bit livelier in your legs

and you can have a bit of a run round before the game Aswell, you just feel better in yourself after a short journey.

After the game, once it was all done and you were in the changing rooms, how did you feel?

To be fair you don't really feel anything, you just feel like you've let the players down really, you don't really want to speak to anyone because your scared they're going to say it was your fault, which they probably won't, but that's how you feel really, you just feel like you want to have a shower and go, you don't want to speak to anyone, you don't want to talk about the game to anyone. You feel quite isolated in that time but that's the only word to describe it really, isolated. Especially when you haven't played well, and you lose you just feel like you don't want to speak to anyone just in case they say it's your fault.