



**SECTION 1 — Research Articles**

**1. Effects of 12-week mindfulness-based intervention on executive functioning skills, brain oxygenation, and biomarkers of cognitive function in baseball players: A randomized controlled trial**

**Authors:** Wen Chen, Yue Yang, Shan He, Xinyu Liu, Xiru Du, Min Hu, Ting Liu, Lu Leng, Junhao Huang

**Journal:** Psychology of Sport and Exercise

**Publication Date:** May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2026.103061>

**Summary:**

This randomized controlled trial examined whether a 12-week mindfulness-based intervention

could improve executive functioning in baseball players. Thirty-four baseball players were randomized to an intervention or control group, and outcomes included working memory, inhibitory control, cognitive flexibility, prefrontal brain oxygenation measured with fNIRS, and cognitive-function biomarkers. The study targeted a highly performance-relevant question because baseball requires rapid attention shifting, inhibition, and decision control under time pressure. The intervention was designed to test both behavioral and biological mechanisms rather than relying only on self-report. Findings indicated beneficial effects of mindfulness training on executive functioning and related neurophysiological markers, supporting mindfulness as a mental-performance intervention for athletes with high cognitive and perceptual demands.

## **2. The relationship between mindfulness, competitive anxiety, and self-efficacy in Taekwondo athletes with/without injury: The moderated mediation model**

**Authors:** Jeffrey Yu, Jui Ti Nien, Mu Yen Chu, Yi Zhen Yang, Yi Chih Ko, Yun Han Chen, Nai Chi Chen, Yu Kai Chang

**Journal:** Psychology of Sport and Exercise

**Publication Date:** May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2026.103080>

### **Summary:**

This study examined how athletic mindfulness relates to pre-event self-efficacy through competitive anxiety in collegiate Taekwondo athletes. The sample included 105 athletes assessed before a national competition, with injury status tested as a moderator. The main mediation pathway showed that mindfulness predicted stronger pre-event self-efficacy through lower cognitive anxiety. Injury status did not moderate the whole indirect effect, but it did moderate the mindfulness-to-cognitive-anxiety path, with mindfulness showing stronger anxiety-reducing effects among injured athletes. The study is important for combat-sport mental preparation because injury can intensify threat appraisal, reduce confidence, and increase pre-competition worry.

## **3. Interpersonal interactions improve the representativeness of embodied decision-making behaviour in football**

**Authors:** Daniel Müller, Oliver Höner, Danique van der Veerdonk, Willem van der Meer, David Mann

**Journal:** Psychology of Sport and Exercise

**Publication Date:** May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2026.103063>

### **Summary:**

This football decision-making study examined whether adding interpersonal interaction improves the representativeness of embodied decision tasks. The article focused on ecological validity in perceptual-cognitive performance research, where isolated laboratory tasks can underrepresent the social and dynamic constraints of football. The authors tested decision behavior in contexts that varied in their interpersonal information and action demands. The findings indicated that interpersonal interaction makes decision behavior more representative of real football performance. The study strengthens the case for designing mental-performance assessment and training around live, interactive, perception-action contexts rather than static or decontextualized decision tasks.

#### **4. The impact of sport retirement on mental health and sleep: A qualitative study with female ex-gymnasts**

**Authors:** Ashley Montero, Murray Drummond, John Baranoff, Robert Adams

**Journal:** Psychology of Sport and Exercise

**Publication Date:** May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2026.103085>

##### **Summary:**

This qualitative study investigated how retirement from women's gymnastics affects mental health and sleep. Thirteen former female gymnasts completed one-on-one semi-structured interviews, which were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Four themes were identified: abuse within coach-athlete relationships, drastic lifestyle and identity change after retirement, inadequate education and support, and potential for positive change. The findings showed that retirement disrupted identity, social belonging, sleep routines, body image, and help-seeking. The study contributes to mental-performance research by showing that athlete functioning after sport is shaped by earlier performance cultures, transition support, and education about sleep and psychological health.

#### **5. You can call me monster thighs': Exploring women's body image in gym culture through photo-elicitation**

**Authors:** Emma S. Cowley, Aline Tinoco, Jekaterina Schneider

**Journal:** Psychology of Sport and Exercise

**Publication Date:** May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2026.103096>

##### **Summary:**

This qualitative study explored women's body image experiences in gym and strength-training culture using photo-elicitation interviews. Seventeen women captured or selected images representing their gym experiences, then discussed those images in semi-structured online interviews. Reflexive thematic analysis generated themes concerning strength training for lifelong health, empowerment, diet-culture pressures, and the coexistence of positive and negative body image. Participants often described strength training as empowering while still reporting appearance comparison, discomfort in gym clothing, and sociocultural body pressures. The article is relevant to mental performance because body image, confidence, belonging, and perceived safety in training spaces can influence persistence, motivation, and psychological readiness.

#### **6. Self-actualization and self-transcendence: An empirical model of athletes' meaning in elite sport**

**Authors:** Violetta Oblinger-Peters, Kristoffer Henriksen, Andreas Küttel, Noora Ronkainen

**Journal:** Psychology of Sport and Exercise

**Publication Date:** May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2026.103149>

##### **Summary:**

This article developed an empirical model of meaning in elite sport, focusing on self-actualization and self-transcendence. The study used longitudinal interviews over 2.5 years with 13 international Olympic athletes. The research addressed what makes elite sport meaningful

and how athletes respond when meaning is lost, challenged, or no longer sufficient. Its model positions meaning as a dynamic performance and wellbeing resource rather than a fixed motivational trait. The study is important for mental-performance work because sustained elite functioning depends not only on confidence, focus, and coping skills, but also on athletes' ability to connect performance striving with identity, purpose, and contribution.

### **7. Effectiveness of yoga training program as a pre-exercise activity on sport anxiety and athletic mental energy in adolescent football players**

**Authors:** Qun Yu, Zheng Liu

**Journal:** Acta Psychologica

**Publication Date:** May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2026.106690>

#### **Summary:**

This study examined whether a brief pre-exercise yoga routine was associated with lower sport anxiety and higher athletic mental energy in adolescent football players. The sample included 468 Chinese adolescent football players from Wuhan, Hangzhou, Nanjing, and Xi'an. Measures included sport anxiety, athletic mental energy, mindfulness in sport, yoga self-efficacy, interoceptive/body awareness, and weekly training load. PLS-SEM analyses showed that pre-exercise yoga practice was linked with reduced sport anxiety and increased athletic mental energy, with mindfulness operating as part of the proposed mechanism. The study is applied and performance-relevant because it frames yoga as a warm-up-compatible mental preparation strategy that can support emotional regulation without extending training time.

### **8. Perceived autonomy support and subjective sport performance evaluation: Serial mediation via exercise self-efficacy, autonomous exercise motivation, behavioral engagement, and concentration ability**

**Authors:** Jingchao Tian, Huiying Zhang, Junjun Sun

**Journal:** Frontiers in Psychology

**Publication Date:** 19 May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2026.1826081>

#### **Summary:**

This study tested how perceived autonomy support relates to subjective sport performance evaluation. The sample included 532 adult recreational sport participants who completed measures of autonomy support, exercise self-efficacy, autonomous motivation, behavioral engagement, concentration ability, and subjective performance evaluation. Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling were used to test the proposed mediation model. Perceived autonomy support was positively associated with subjective performance evaluation. Two serial mediation pathways were supported: autonomy support through self-efficacy and autonomous motivation, and autonomy support through behavioral engagement and concentration ability.

### **9. Psychological factors demonstrate the largest incremental predictive value in a multi-domain machine learning model for secondary injury risk after ACL reconstruction**

**Authors:** Shengjie Xiong, Yongtie Wu, Shunmei Liu

**Journal:** Frontiers in Psychology

**Publication Date:** 15 May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2026.1832229>

**Summary:**

This retrospective cohort study developed a machine-learning model to predict secondary injury after ACL reconstruction. The sample included 487 patients assessed at a standardized 6-month postoperative follow-up, with predictors spanning demographic, MRI, gait, strength, and psychological domains. Five machine-learning algorithms were evaluated using nested cross-validation, with SHAP analysis and domain ablation used to interpret model behavior. Sixty-four patients sustained a secondary injury, representing 13.1% of the sample. Logistic regression showed the best discrimination and calibration, and psychological variables produced the largest incremental predictive value. The paper is highly relevant to mental performance because it positions psychological readiness and recovery-related psychological factors as central components of safe return-to-sport decision-making.

### **10. Supporting physical education teachers to create an empowering motivational climate**

**Authors:** Stéphanie Girard, Audrey-Anne de Guise, Élise Désilets, Jean-François Desbiens, David Bezeau

**Journal:** Frontiers in Psychology

**Publication Date:** 15 May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2026.1771885>

**Summary:**

This collaborative action-research study evaluated support for physical education teachers implementing empowering motivational strategies. The experimental group included nine PE teachers supported by six educational consultants, while the comparison group included five PE teachers without the training and support. The study analyzed 130 videos through systematic observation and collected questionnaire data from 329 pupils in the experimental group and 166 pupils in the comparison group. Student motivational variables changed only slightly, and between-group differences were limited. However, teachers in the experimental group became less need-thwarting and appeared more need-supportive than comparison teachers, which is relevant to youth mental performance because motivational climate shapes confidence, engagement, persistence, and perceived competence.

### **11. Empowering coaching in youth basketball: The balancing mechanism between coaching authority and athlete autonomy**

**Authors:** Junmin Zhang, Yongfeng Liu, Xiaogang Zhang, Ruobing Chen, Guang Feng, Shuiyou Hu

**Journal:** Frontiers in Psychology

**Publication Date:** 19 May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1678196>

**Summary:**

This study examined how youth basketball coaches balance authority with athlete autonomy. Using U.S. youth basketball coaching as a case, the authors analyzed publicly available coach interviews from Spotify through Procedural Grounded Theory. The model suggested that coaches' identification with basketball, family, community, and professional environments generates affective commitment, responsibility, and self-disciplined coaching behavior. These foundations supported coaching philosophies involving team awareness, balanced rigor and flexibility, humanistic values, developmental guidance, tactical instruction, and empowerment-

oriented management. The paper contributes to mental-performance research by clarifying how coach authority can coexist with autonomy support in youth development contexts.

### **12. Correlates of competitive anxiety in student athletes: The interactive roles of competitive stress, psychological resilience, and achievement motivation**

**Authors:** Yin Chen, Yan Bu, Chen Sun, Dae Hee Kim

**Journal:** Frontiers in Psychology

**Publication Date:** 22 May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2026.1832383>

#### **Summary:**

This original research article examined competitive stress, psychological resilience, achievement motivation, and competitive anxiety in college student athletes. The study used a cross-sectional questionnaire design to test how resilience and achievement motivation interact in the stress-anxiety relationship. The paper is grounded in the idea that anxiety is not only a direct product of competitive pressure but is shaped by psychological resources and motivational orientation. Its model positions resilience and achievement motivation as key mechanisms that may buffer or transmit the effects of competitive stress. The study is relevant for mental-performance programs because it supports assessing both stress exposure and psychological resource profiles when addressing competitive anxiety.

### **13. Mindfulness-based interventions for competitive anxiety in athletes: The moderating role of control type—Preliminary evidence from a systematic review and meta-analysis**

**Authors:** Kun Chen, Yiran Xing

**Journal:** Frontiers in Psychology

**Publication Date:** 28 May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2026.1832397>

#### **Summary:**

This systematic review and meta-analysis examined mindfulness-based interventions for competitive anxiety in athletes, with attention to whether control-condition type moderates effect estimates. The paper was published in the Sport Psychology section of Frontiers in Psychology and synthesized intervention evidence relating mindfulness to competitive anxiety. Its methodological focus is important because different control conditions can meaningfully change estimated intervention effects. The review contributes to the evidence base by separating mindfulness effects from comparison-design artifacts more carefully than many earlier syntheses. For mental-performance practitioners, the article supports mindfulness as a promising anxiety-regulation approach while emphasizing cautious interpretation of effect sizes and control-group quality.

### **14. Talent development environment and psychological safety in English professional academy soccer players**

**Authors:** Matthew Hillyer, Russell Martindale, Steven Young, John Sproule, Dave Collins

**Journal:** International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology

**Publication Date:** 27 May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2026.2674619>

#### **Summary:**

This study examined psychological safety within talent development environments among male

English professional academy soccer players. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 157 players from three academies, with players completing the Talent Development Environment Questionnaire-5 and Psychological Safety Scale approximately three months into the competitive season. The article addressed a significant gap because psychological safety has been discussed as important for player learning, communication, and development but remains underexamined in academy soccer systems. The findings linked perceived development-environment quality with psychological safety, highlighting the environment as a mental-performance factor rather than a background condition. The study is especially relevant for academy systems because psychological safety may influence help-seeking, feedback use, error tolerance, learning, and long-term development.

### **15. Motivational self-talk improves muscular endurance performance by increasing cerebral asymmetry and reducing neuromuscular fatigue**

**Authors:** Luana Loss Cabral, Adriano Eduardo Lima-Silva, Evangelos Galanis, Gleber Pereira

**Journal:** International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology

**Publication Date:** 6 May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2026.2662258>

#### **Summary:**

This experimental article investigated whether motivational self-talk improves muscular endurance performance and whether effects are associated with cerebral asymmetry and neuromuscular fatigue. The study is directly relevant to mental performance because self-talk is one of the most widely used psychological skills in sport. Its contribution is mechanistic: rather than only testing whether self-talk improves performance, it examined possible neurophysiological and fatigue-related pathways. Findings indicated that motivational self-talk improved muscular endurance performance while increasing cerebral asymmetry and reducing neuromuscular fatigue. The paper strengthens the evidence that self-talk can influence both cognitive-emotional regulation and physiological performance processes.

### **16. Through the coach's lens: Exploring social support functions and social networks via photo-elicitation**

**Authors:** Luke A. Norris, Faye F. Didymus, Mariana Kaiseler

**Journal:** Journal of Applied Sport Psychology

**Publication Date:** 13 May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2026.2671105>

#### **Summary:**

This study explored how sport coaches perceive social support functions and social networks using interviewee-aided photo-elicitation. Ten coaches participated in two semi-structured interviews spaced three weeks apart and supplied personal images representing their social networks. Abductive thematic analysis showed that coaches perceived their networks as consistent, supportive, understanding, and challenging. The study highlights the psychological load of coaching and the importance of reliable emotional and developmental support for coach functioning. It is relevant to athlete mental performance because coach wellbeing, reflective capacity, and perceived support can influence the emotional climate, communication quality, and support available to athletes.

### **17. Challenges and opportunities to address mental health in elite sport: A multidisciplinary perspective**

**Authors:** Meredith A. Whitley and colleagues

**Journal:** Journal of Applied Sport Psychology

**Publication Date:** 27 May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2026.2672085>

**Summary:**

This article examined mental health in elite sport from a multidisciplinary perspective. It addressed the challenges and opportunities involved in improving psychological support across high-performance environments. The article discussed psychological safety and the wider elite sport system, including pressures embedded in performance cultures. Its relevance to mental performance lies in its system-level framing: athlete mental health is not treated only as an individual coping issue, but as something shaped by organizational demands, support structures, and cultural expectations. The paper contributes to the applied sport psychology literature by linking mental health support with the design of healthier elite performance environments.

### **18. The complexities of athlete development in North American professional sport**

**Authors:** Dustin Lablans, Kathryn Johnston, Joseph Baker

**Journal:** Frontiers in Psychology

**Publication Date:** 18 May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2026.1804236>

**Summary:**

This review examined athlete development in North American professional sport. The article focused on athlete support, career progression, transitions, elite athletes, and high-performance sport. It considered how professional systems shape developmental pathways and the psychological demands athletes face as they progress. The review is relevant to mental performance because development environments influence identity, confidence, coping, learning, and transition readiness. By emphasizing the complexity of professional pathways, the article supports a broader view of mental performance that includes support systems, career transitions, and organizational structures.

### **19. Future athletic career direction as a determinant of perceived university conditions for sport**

**Authors:** Michal Varmus, Nikola Staffenova, Richard Adamik, Adam Jacko

**Journal:** Frontiers in Sports and Active Living

**Publication Date:** 29 May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2026.1786150>

**Summary:**

This study examined how athletes' future career direction relates to their perceptions of university sport conditions. The article was framed around dual career development, university studies, sport conditions, and youth athletes. It treated sport career as a multidimensional developmental process involving identity, personal fulfillment, performance, education, and professional development. The study is relevant to mental performance because dual-career support can reduce identity foreclosure, help athletes manage role conflict, and prepare them for transitions beyond sport. Its focus on perceived institutional conditions highlights that psychological readiness is shaped by the compatibility between sport ambition and educational environments.

## **20. Relationships among sport participation, sport and social competence, and mental health symptomatology**

**Authors:** Dawn Anderson-Butcher, Samantha Bates, Anthony J. Amorose, Simon Quick

**Journal:** Frontiers in Sports and Active Living

**Publication Date:** 26 May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2026.1833949>

### **Summary:**

This article examined relationships among sport participation, perceived sport competence, social competence, and mental health symptomatology. It was motivated by rising adolescent mental health concerns and the possibility that sport can provide both protective benefits and unique stressors. The study is relevant to performance psychology because perceived competence and social functioning are central to motivation, confidence, belonging, and emotional resilience in youth sport. By linking sport and social competence with mental health symptoms, the paper contributes to a more nuanced understanding of when sport participation may support or undermine wellbeing. The findings are especially relevant to youth development environments where performance, peer belonging, and self-perception interact.

## **21. The relationship between perceived motivational climate and psychological well-being among youth handball athletes**

**Authors:** Zrinka Greblo Jurakić, Lidija Bojić-Ćaćić, Višnja Ljubičić

**Journal:** Frontiers in Sports and Active Living

**Publication Date:** May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2026.1827113>

### **Summary:**

This brief research report examined perceived motivational climate and psychological well-being among youth handball athletes. Regression analyses showed that higher task-involving climate was associated with higher self-esteem, whereas higher ego-involving climate was associated with lower self-esteem and stronger anxiety, depressive, and stress symptoms. Among female athletes, being coached by men was associated with lower perceived task-involving climate and higher ego-involving climate compared with being coached by women. The study is relevant to mental performance because motivational climate shapes athletes' emotional safety, confidence, stress experience, and self-worth. Its findings reinforce the importance of task-focused, development-oriented climates in youth sport.

## **22. Self-Compassion and Psychological Well-Being in Collegiate Athletes: The Mediating Role of Resilience and the Moderating Role of Self-Efficacy**

**Authors:** Kyoo Ho Lee, Kyung Rok Oh

**Journal:** Frontiers in Sports and Active Living

**Publication Date:** 18 May 2026

**DOI/URL:** <https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2026.1814251>

### **Summary:**

This study examined how self-compassion relates to psychological well-being in collegiate athletes through resilience and self-efficacy. The sample included 342 Korean collegiate athletes who completed measures of self-compassion, resilience, self-efficacy, and Ryff's psychological well-being domains. Conditional process analyses showed that resilience

mediated relationships between several self-compassion dimensions and well-being outcomes. Self-efficacy moderated several indirect pathways, indicating that the effect of self-compassion through resilience varied across well-being domains depending on athletes' confidence in their capabilities. The article contributes to mental-performance research by linking self-compassion, resilience, and self-efficacy as interacting psychological resources for athlete wellbeing.

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