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PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ON FOOTBALL PLAYERS PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine the psychological strength among football players. There were a total of (n=90). Psychological strength dimension consists of self-confidence, motivational control, and focus control. The data analyses were conducted using structural equation modeling (SEM) via AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structures) software package Version 20.0. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were performed to validate the scales. The results shown that social support from parents, coach, friends and the sports agencies directly contribute towards overall social support which in turn, has significant relationships self-confidence, task orientation and ego orientation. In future research, a longitudinal study would be particularly useful to observe the model changes from one phase of footballers or any other sports performance by applying the model.

Keywords: psychological strength; football players; performance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The recognition given to sport in Malaysia has helped support its development in a country with 30 million populations (www.statistic.gov.my) where football is one of the sports that



has been given special attention by the government for many years. With such a head start over the others in the region, Malaysia was the leading football nation and enjoyed success in the 50s through to the 70s and early 80s. Their success included qualifying for the Olympic Games in Munich (1972) and in Moscow (1980). The national body that is responsible for the development of the National football teams is the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM). According to the Youth Department Officer of FAM [1] the aims of this Association is to provide a strong base of many players who are technically, tactically, physiologically, and psychologically sound and strong. Its middle and long term plans include the concentration and focus on individuals.

For such reason, the FAM has always placed great importance on the development of young players for the future of football in Malaysia and various development programmes were formulated and implemented from the 80's and these programmes are being constantly refined and modified to suit prevailing conditions. In 1995, the implementation of a new concept of youth programme, in the form of State Football Academies (SFA) under the supervision of the State Football Association was seen as the best way to develop young footballers.

Mental strength is a combination of psychological skills package which has to be mastered by the athletes ever since the starting of the involvement, practice sessions, competitions up until the end of competitions and it is a booster in determining the success or failure of the athletes [2]. Thus, a further research on the mental strength of Malaysian athlete should be expanded to find the level of mental strength of the football players especially to allow the coaches to evaluate and improve the training program.

To elaborate more on what is mental strength [4] had earlier listed seven psychological factors: 1) self-confidence (e.g., knowing self-limit to give the best and succeed), 2) negative energy control (e.g., handling the emotions like fear, anger and frustration and also adapting with current needs), 3) focus control (e.g., focus), 4) visual and imagery control (e.g., always imagining positive things), 5) motivational control (e.g., readiness to be patient and winning), 6) positive energy control (e.g., experiencing fun, enjoyment and satisfaction) and 7) behaviour control (e.g., following orders) as the mental strength factor.

Thus, this research is taking the approach of Athletes Excellent Training (AET) that explain

the psychological factors influencing mental strength and the psychological skills are closely related with one another which can increase the level of athletes' mental strength [3]. Thus, a further research on the mental strength of Malaysian athlete should be expanded to find the level of mental strength of the football players especially to allow the coaches to evaluate and improve the training program.

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2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Mental Strength

Researchers, practitioners, coaches, sports commentators, sports fan, and athletes noticed the important of mental strength in sporting performance. This term is not a new term used in the interview, newspaper statement, or even magazines when the performance of the athletes in the competition is discussed. The same thing happens to our National football. In addition to Middleton [5] highlight that coaches feel that mental strength is a great significant fact in achieving success, while Kuan [5] emphasizes the importance of mental strength in developing successful athletes.

In proportion with Creasy [6] stated that modern sport psychologists all accept the importance of the mental side of sports performance. It is accepted that athletes can only perform at peak level of efficiency, if they possess and use a number of psychological skills. Behncke [7] suggests the used comprehensive mental training programme to help athletes achieve peak

performance is psychological skills training (PST) programmes.

Psychological Skills Training (PST) is perfectly designed with a combination of methods selected to hit psychological skill needs [8]. PST refers to systematic and consistent practice of mental or psychological skills for the purpose of enhancing performance, increasing enjoyment, or achieving greater sport and physical activity.

PST is not only for the elite athletes. It is appropriate for all athletes, including young and developing athletes. For instance, a study by Gucciardi [9] reviewed 23 published studies of the effectiveness of various psychological interventions (e.g. stress inoculation, imagery, relaxation, reinforcement, systematic desensitization) in many competitive settings. They conclude that generally, educationally based psychological interventions improve competitive performance in collegiate and adult athletes.

Mental strength is specified as having the natural or developing psychological edge that enables an athlete to: 1) cope better than opponents with the many demands (competition, training, lifestyle) that sports places on a performer, and 2) being more consistent and better than opponents in remaining determined, focused, confident, and in control under pressure [10].

Andrea [11] proposed that mental strength as mentally tough individuals tend to be sociable and outgoing as they are able to remain calm and relaxed, they are competitive in many situations and have lower anxiety levels than others. With a high sense of self belief and an unshakeable faith that they control their own destiny, these individuals remain relatively unaffected by competition or adversity.

Other definition by Middleton resolved that 'mental strength is specified as unshakeable persistency and conviction towards some goal despite pressure or adversity and also identifies the actions of mental strength' (e.g., emotion management, perseverance, and task focus) as well as the role of commitment, attitude and familiarity) and 12 mental strength characteristics are stress minimisation, self-efficacy, task specific attention, self concept, potential, goal commitment, positive comparisons, personal bests, perseverance, task familiarity, task value, and positivity.

2.2 Research Problems

In Malaysia, psychological and mental preparation aspects of athletes are still not given much attention during competition. Inadequate service from sport psychologists in many sports associations in Malaysia shows that this mental and psychological aspect is not given serious attention by the related parties. There is not enough psychological training for all athletes in order to improve their psychological need such as mental strength, motivation, goal setting and social support especially to compete in stressful and tight situation. When they are defeated in competition, there is no scientific research analysis or detailed report on that particular part, except only general report in local newspaper [11]. This shows that research or documentation in sports psychology that focuses on mental preparation, social support and achievement goal are few that is being highlighted.

In fact, psychological strength is the key factor and important aspects toward athlete's performance especially in footballers. Research done by Astrid [12] stated that poor relationships with teammates, family, coaches, and government resulting from low support, disagreements, lack of cooperation, arguments, conflicts, and clashing personalities, do have a negative impact upon sports performance. Unfortunately, there is much research that has been done in assessing the three components as separate key factors but not as an integrated whole [13]. Previous studies also found out that these three elements known as contributor that influenced the performance and achievement of the athletes in a competition [14]. The key component as an integrated whole is most fundamental in ensuring the success especially in any football matches. Therefore this study attempts to analyses the psychological strength impact to the team performance.

2.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 To determine the antecedents of the overall psychological strength.

1.3.2 To examine the relationship of overall social support antecedents (parents, coach, friends, and sports agencies) and mental strength antecedents (self confidence, motivational control, focus control).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The sample consists of (n= 90) academy football players that are actively involved in local

competitions. A theoretical framework is regarded as a reasonable structure of inquiry that allows an investigator to systematically tackle a definite research problem. The choice of data collection method for any research is naturally dependent upon its research problem [15]. The following sectors qualify the rationales for employing non-experimental and the method of dispensing the questionnaire which is chiefly via the survey method. For the purpose of gathering data in this study, three adopted questionnaires will be used to test the relationship of social support, mental strength, and goal orientation in the case study of academy football players. All questionnaires will be measured using a 7 point likert scale from either (1) 'very strongly disagree' to (7) 'very strongly agree'.

For this current research, mental strength is functionalized using three dimensions as follows: 1) self-confidence, 2) motivation control and 3) focus control. Psychological Performance Inventory (PPI) remains the most significant mental toughness instrument. Loehr model also claims that the instruments measure the seven most crucial psychological factors that reflect mental toughness: self-confidence, negative energy, attention control, visual and imagery control, motivation, positive energy, and attitude control [16].

4. RESULTS

The present study has created an opportunity to the researcher to acquire a new skill pertaining to the technique of data analyses and more importantly, the methodological contribution is the mainly related to the development of robust measures which enable empirical testing of the hypothesized model. In light of the paucity of studies on football players in the among university students, it is argued that this present study contributed by providing empirical evidence on the indeed, the four constructs are significantly related to the overall social support, which are in turn found to have significant relationship to mental strength and goal orientation. The concept of mental strength as depicted in the hypothesized model is argued to be pivotal to achieving higher standard among football players.

Practical implication of this study's result revealed that overall social support, mental strength and task orientation can be a valuable means to provide powerful and streamlined techniques for enhancing the footballer's performance. This study suggest that Football Association

Malaysia (FAM), National Sports Council, Ministry of Youth and Sport, coaches, and others involved in the enhancing the excellence standard of footballers to vigilantly look into the OSS, mental strength, ego and task orientation antecedents by personal improvement of training, courses, seminars or other forms of learning in order for the country achieving and sustaining world-class performance in sport.

It can be concluded that there is positive connection between OSS mental strength and goal orientation towards footballers' achievement. Footballer with high task-goal orientation tends to have positive relationship of attachment, enjoyment, be more immunity to positive experience and better overall performance. Thus the model of this study should be strategizing and be implemented before, during and after the training. It also enhances the Malaysia pride of sport spirit with the proper guidance from the policy makers.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study suggests that future study should include qualitative studies in addition to quantitative method in understanding the real world of the footballers or sportsman during the competition and also looking into bigger samples of amateur and professional sportsman [17]. It is affirmed that the findings of the present study add to the body of knowledge on overall social support, mental strength and goal orientation[18]. By virtue of the fact that sports in football academy has been developed involving in the local and international competition every, more in-depth studies towards other forms of sports should be undertaken, particularly with specific objective of alleviating the standard of the players.

The first objective is to determine the antecedents of the overall social support. The first objective has untangled the following findings:

- 1) It has been established that social supports from the government, parents, friends and coach are found to be significant.
- 2) Social support from the government is perceived as the most important as football players are dependent on the availability of suitable football fields to say the least and as such, the government is seen as the most important social support as their parents, coach and friends are not in a position to provide a football field.

3) Social support from parents and friends are the next sources of social support. This is attributed to the fact that adolescent especially athletes when they are at the university level they are dependent on the parents tolerance and support to enable them to be part of a football team[19]. Besides, the teammates and other friends are central to their activities as a football team. The coach is seen as providing additional support in terms of imparting new skill; sustain their motivation and focus and provide leadership to the football players[20].

The second objective is to examine the relationship between overall social support (OSS) and mental strength. The following findings justify the researcher's contention that the second objective has been achieved.

- 1) A significant antecedent for self-confident is found to be the overall social support.
- 2) A significant antecedent for motivation control is found to be self-confidence.
- 3) Self-confidence is also found to a significant antecedent to focus control.

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