



World Wide Review of Science and Football Research

Sport Psychology in Coaching - Special Edition

By Paul Ford

Introduction

Perceived success in football impacts on players' perceptions of competence, which in turn affects their self-confidence, and ultimately their performance. Players and coaches define success within the football environment in two distinct ways: task and ego. They are *task-oriented* when they base their perceptions of success on personal improvements. For example, a task-oriented player will feel successful if he/she masters a new skill. They are *ego-oriented* when they base their perceptions of success by comparing their own ability with that of others. For example, an ego-oriented player will feel successful if he/she is better than their team mates at the skill.

The orientation a player adopts (either generally or temporarily) can be either: self-directed or socially-driven. Self-directed orientations are internal recognitions of success by the individual themselves (e.g., I am better at the skill than my team mates). Socially-driven orientations are



external recognitions of success (e.g., verbal praise from a coach). Coaches, parents, and significant others play a major role in creating socially-driven orientations. As part of their interactions with players they create an environment that is either task- or ego-orientated. The environment is *task-orientated* when

significant others emphasise personal improvement. For example, a coach may instruct his team prior to a match to “switch play when you cannot play forward”. The environment is *ego-orientated* when they compare their players’ ability with that of others. For example, a coach may instruct his team prior to a match to “win the match”, or a parent may ask after the match “what was the score?” (Harwood & Swain, 2001, 2002).

This month’s World Wide Review of Science and Football Research includes summaries of three research studies conducted within football that examined this area of sport psychology.

Goal orientation differences on perceived achievement environment, perceived peer relationships and achievement-related responses of youth players

Smith and colleagues at Purdue University in Indiana investigated differences in the way young players’ define their success (i.e., task or ego) on their perceptions of the coach-created environment, perceptions of peer relationships and achievement-related responses. They had 223 male football players (aged 9 - 12 years) complete a multi-section questionnaire. This questionnaire assessed the players’ general orientations (task, ego), the perceived task- and ego-involving features of the environment, perceived peer acceptance and friendship quality (i.e., positive friendship quality, conflict), perceived ability, football enjoyment and satisfaction with one’s performance and the team. Players with a high task/low ego orientation (in comparison to those with a high ego/low task profile) reported higher perceptions of a task-orientated environment, peer acceptance, football enjoyment, and satisfaction with both performance and team. They also

perceived the coach-created environment to be less “ego involving” and reported less conflict with their best friend on the team. There were no differences in



responses between these players with a high task/low ego orientation and those with a high ego/moderate task orientation. This finding supports previous research on youth-based goal orientations that suggests relatively high levels of ego orientation are not maladaptive when coupled with at least relatively moderate levels of task orientation. Players with a high ego/low task orientation reported lower perceived task-involving environment, lower enjoyment of football and less satisfaction with performance and team than the players with a high ego/moderate task orientation and those with a moderate ego/low task orientation. Those with a moderate ego/low task profile reported lower perceived ability than those with a high ego/moderate task orientation. Findings suggest that those reporting either lower task goal orientation exhibit less adaptive responses to environment, peer relationship and enjoyment/satisfaction measures.

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Observed prosocial and antisocial behaviours in male football teams: age differences across adolescence and the role of goal orientations

Kavussanu and colleagues at the University of Birmingham investigated the frequency of observed prosocial and antisocial behaviours in football teams. Participants were 313 adolescent football players (under 13, under 15 and under 17 years of age). Each age group was represented by eight teams. Players were filmed during a game and completed questionnaires after the game. Videotaped games were analyzed by two observers. They recorded behaviours for each team. Antisocial behaviours were more frequent than prosocial ones. Under 17's displayed more



frequent antisocial and less frequent prosocial behaviours compared to younger age groups. They also perceived a stronger ego-orientated environment and a weaker task-orientated environment in their team compared to the two younger groups. The orientation of the environment was shown to have a greater affect on the

anti- or prosocial behaviours of the teams compared to their own self-directed orientations. These findings demonstrate the importance of a task-orientated coach-created environment to promote prosocial behavior and reduce antisocial conduct in football.

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Parental and coach support or pressure on psychosocial outcomes of

young football players



Parents and coaches cause both enjoyable and stressful sport experiences for young players. Ommundsen and colleagues from the Norwegian School of Sport Science examined the effects of supportive and/or pressuring influences of parents and coaches on young players' maladaptive

perfectionist tendencies, relationships to friends and competency perceptions. They had 677 young Norwegian football players (aged 10 to 14 years; 504 male, 173 female) complete a questionnaire. Pressure from both coaches and parents led to maladaptive achievement striving, as indicated by an over concern for mistakes, doubt about one's football actions, and lowered perceptions of football competence. In contrast, predominantly supportive task-orientated coach-created psychological environments led to psychological outcomes comprising high-quality friendships, positive competency perceptions and the absence of specific worries related to achievement striving. In summary, supportive, mastery-oriented coaching was beneficial for constructive psychosocial outcomes in young players. Players who experienced social pressure to excel from both coaches and parents may benefit less psychosocially through participating in sport.

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Take home messages

Coach-created task-orientated environments promote sportsmanlike behavior, lead to constructive psychosocial outcomes, feelings of competence and success, and adaptive behaviours in young players compared to coach-created ego-orientated environments.

Implications for coaching

Football contains many inherent ego-orientating features (i.e., comparisons with others), such as player selection, winning/losing and opponents. Coaches who emphasise these features without also emphasising many task-orientating features (i.e., performance improvement) tend to create players more inclined to maladaptive behaviours who are more likely to drop-out due to low perceived competence. Coaches can alter their behaviours (e.g., instructions, goal-setting, feedback) to promote a task-orientated climate, which should lead to more adaptive behaviours in their players. Researchers are currently investigating the effects of task- and ego-orientated coach-created environments on team performance.

Further Reading

Harwood, C. G., & Swain, A. B. (2001). The development and activation of achievement goals in tennis: I. Understanding the underlying factors. *The Sport Psychologist, 15*, 319–314.

Harwood, C. G., & Swain, A. B. (2002). The development and activation of achievement goal in tennis: II. A player, parent and coach intervention. *The Sport Psychologist, 16*, 111–137.

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