

From Court to Conquest: Unveiling the Challenges among Basketball Players in Sports Participation. A Case Study

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Submitted: 2024-01-15. Revised: 2024-07-08. Accepted: 2024-08-08

Abstract. This study explores the challenges experienced encountered among basketball players in tournament sports participation. The study employed a descriptive-exploratory case study approach. The researcher used semi-structured interviews and non-participatory observation to collect data from six basketball players who met the researcher's criteria. The finding's revealed that the participants were challenged during tournament sports participation. The participants pointed out that during sports tournament participation, the participants revealed that some of their struggles were physical restraints, health conditions, such as injuries, not enough resting time, in-game pressure, and lack of communication. Results revealed that the presence of pressure, miscommunication of the team, and health conditions are their highly faced struggles during the game. The findings have proven that the challenges experienced by athletes undeniably affect their performance, which is also influenced by how they perceive situations in a competitive sports environment. This study highlights the importance of addressing both physical and mental health concerns to enhance player performance and team success in competitive sports environments.

Key words: miscommunication ; game pressure; challenges experienced; sports participation

How to Cite: Medina, Sachie D., Medina, Daisy B., Magdaong, Christian Dave Q., Ong, Zandra Kathryn D., Pabillaran, Bea Nadine M., Pabillar, Dale Davies, Pacquiao, Jamaila O., Pongao, Range V., Quindo, Christine Nicole S., Malalis, Jamaica S., Longakit, Jet C., Aliser, Johnlenon N. (2024). From Court to Conquest: Unveiling the Challenges among Basketball Players in Sports Participation. A Case Study. *ACPEJOURNAL of Physical Education, Sport, and Health*, 4(1), 36-43.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15294/ajpesh.v4i1.288>

INTRODUCTION

Basketball requires a diverse range of technical and tactical skills, along with a high degree of physical fitness, among other attributes Basketball is a highly popular sport that captivates fans with its fast-paced action and intense competition. Nevertheless, even the most proficient and adept athletes encounter hurdles and impediments that might assess their perseverance and drive (Asistio et al., 2023; McLean et al., 2019; Tufa, 2015). Athletes may be driven by it to surmount challenges, exert maximum effort during competition, and achieve their goals (Asistio et al., 2023). By understanding the specific factors that propelled these teams, we can gain valuable insights into the dynamics that contribute to their success. Motivation is a crucial factor in influencing sports performance. Athletes that possess a high level of motivation typically outperform those who lack motivation (Longakit, et al., 2023; Fatih Kucukibis et al., 2019). Throughout the game, players are bound to encounter obstacles and difficulties, since they provide them with opportunities to enhance their skills and deepen their understanding of their respective domain. Difficulties are frequently regarded as an inevitable yet significant component of the learning process (Lodge et al., 2018). The difficulties of measuring any of these obstacles are further exacerbated when one team influences the intensity and strategies that the other team must employ. Individual player movements during a basketball game consist of frequent, brief accelerations that are rarely forward-facing or in a straight line. Efficient collaboration is crucial for achieving success in the sport of

basketball (Worley et al., 2020). Research has investigated the difficulties experienced by players in relation to communication, unity, and guidance within teams (Poulus et al., 2021). Various studies investigated basketball team dynamics and emphasized the value of trust, shared goals, and team building in promoting positive team dynamics (McNeese et al., 2021; Poulus et al., 2021; Worley et al., 2020)

Mental and Physical Challenges of Sports Participation

A study of Harris et al. (2021) showed that both senior and youth players are influenced by variables of audience behavior and feel pressured and anxious throughout matches. The players also reported that supportive behavior from the audience helps improve performance, while negative behavior can cause a negative impact (Salcinovic et al., 2022). This suggests that it is important for coaches and administrators to create a positive and supportive atmosphere during matches. Student-athletes are individuals who compete in college sports as amateurs primarily due to their scholastic goals and the anticipated physical, mental, and social benefits from involvement (Asistio et al., 2023). This issue is particularly evident in the international context, where the allocated time for players' comprehensive development is often inadequate. Overemphasizing systems, plays, game preparation, mental training, leadership development, decision training, and improving a player's basketball IQ can have negative consequences (Worley et al., 2020)

Additionally, research indicates that regular flight travel and the demanding game schedule commonly experienced by athletes can lead to sleep disturbances, including changes in sleep duration, sleep quality, and sleep timing (Johnston et al., 2020). These disruptions have profoundly negative impacts on both physical and mental well-being (Singh, et. al 2021). A recent investigation has underscored the physical requirements of basketball, specifically focusing on the problems associated with stamina, agility, power, and injury prevention (Čaušević et al., 2022; Li et al., 2017). Various studies conducted a high occurrence of lower extremity injuries, such as ankle sprains and knee ligament tears, among elite players competing at the international level (Alahmad et al., 2020; Pardiwala et al., 2020). Performance anxiety, stress, pressure, and the ability to stay focused during high-pressure conditions are some of the mental problems that athletes face, according to research by Poulus et al. (2021). The study stresses how important it is to mentally prepare, be resilient, and have confidence in order to improve success.

Current Study

Previous study had shed light on the struggles of sports participation on various sports (Asistio et al., 2023; McLean et al., 2019), however, there is limited research in understanding the experiences of basketball players during sports participation. Thus, this study aims to analyze the various challenges experienced among basketball players in in tournament sports participation. This will contribute to the broader understanding of the challenges faced by the athletes and provide valuable perspectives on the strategies and mindset for triumphing in high-pressure competitions.

METHODS

Design

The researcher sought solutions to the abovementioned difficulty and justified and met the study's aims. Researchers applied a descriptive exploratory approach as the research method of the study. This study also involves interviews and a non-participant observation method that allows the researchers to evaluate the players' performance. The researchers, in particular, used descriptive- exploratory research to comprehend better an existing problem that had yet to be well explored and characterized.

Participant

The participants of this study were six basketball players based on the following criteria: (1) They must be officially enrolled in MSU-IIT. (2) Basketball players with more than 3 years of experience competing in any tournaments. The data gathered entirely through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. The researcher employed purposive sampling based on specific criteria to pick individuals.

Data Collection Procedures

The researchers conducted the collection of data through observation and purposive sampling. The researchers have taken the following steps which are necessary for the validity of the results. Before the interview, the researchers assessed and determined the eligibility of the athlete if they have participated various tournaments in Basketball. The interview was conducted twice with some participants and there were also

participants who were interviewed once and each athlete had free time to answer the questions given. The researchers utilized different tools that they can use to be able to collect data during the interview session. Using the voice recorder, through interviewed chats on Messenger, and actual/personal discourse, the researchers gathered their data for this study. With the approval of the participants, the researchers then proceeded to the next step. Moreover, in the observation method, some of the researchers have witnessed the games and written field notes that indicate the environment, the game, and more helpful details about the game. The obtained data from the players were analyzed. The raw data from the interview went through three steps: transcription, translation (Bisaya to English), and validation to ensure the fairness of the results. This data becomes the basis of thematic analysis and interpretation.

Data Analysis

Descriptive exploratory case study research methods like interview and observation allow the researchers to employ thematic analysis to evaluate experiences, ideas, and actions across a data set. They were transcribed, coded, and interpreted interview guide data. The thematic analysis classifies and interprets emergent themes based on frequency. They are grouping comparable phrases. To determine relationships, these categories are replaced and reevaluated. The analysis involves identifying relevant keywords and comments from transcribed interviews.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The population of this study was composed of student-athletes from different Colleges and Universities in Iligan City. A purposive sampling procedure was employed. A total of 1,015 student-athletes who participated in formal sports competitions and any level of participation were taken as respondents of the study.

Research Instrument

The principal instrument that was used in this study is a questionnaire which consists of three (3) parts. Part I composed the demographic profile of the respondents which contains the athlete’s age, gender, school, type of sport, and level of participation. Part II consists of the motivation for Sports Measure-Revised (MSM-R), a modified version of the motivation for Physical Activity Measure-Revised (MPAM-R) developed by Ryan, Frederick, Lepes, Rubio, and Sheldon (1997). The 30 questions were categorized into 5 types of motivation: appearance, competence, fitness, interest/enjoyment, and social. Respondents answer each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Part III covers sports participation. This was measured through the Sports Participation Model Questionnaire (SPMQ) which was developed by Avicenna (2002). The SPMQ which has a Cronbach alpha of 0.873 was composed of seventy questions, where the subjects were to choose “agree” or “disagree” with each statement reflecting on how they feel about the sport in general, in youth sport or school sport, and how they feel about their teammates, coaches or even their opponent.

Statistical Analysis

The analysis of data was carried out in several steps using the SPSS Version 20.0. The estimation-maximization technique of imputation was used to replace values that were missing at random. Specifically, descriptive statistics was used to assess the demographic profile of the respondents while Pearson R was used to test the significant relation between and among variables.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The themes of this study are identified through data analysis done by the researcher out of the participants' recurring answers and responses to the research question and during the semi-structured interview conducted. The themes were used to identify and classify the challenges faced by basketball players during sports participation. The themes and subthemes were enumerated in the given table below.

Table 1. Summary of Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
	Mental and Physical Strain
	Health-risk condition

Challenges Experienced	Game Pressure
	Team Miscommunication
	Lack of connection among teammates

This first collective code discusses the mental and physical challenges players undergo while playing. The observed categories and codes assist categorize and assess health risk conditions from different struggles, which is useful for further investigation. In the second collective code, participants struggle mentally and physically during intramural games. These codes relate to game pressure, a sub-theme of player challenges. The findings examine how mental discomfort affects athletes and how physical activity affects mental health. The studies underscore the need of assessing and treating psychological distress in high-performance sports. Challenges occurred under the topic of lack of teamwork in the third collective code. It stressed team communication, which is crucial to teamwork and team ability. Keeping team members informed, engaged, and focused on the game improves collaboration and productivity. The result of this case study will help the different basketball teams in MSU-IIT to prevent and strategize for the next sports participation for their team to excel more in the game and the chances and probabilities of winning the game are clear and attainable.

Discussion of the Research Findings

The implementation of Jones’s Theory of Challenges and Threat States in Athletes is vital for the study to fully grasp how challenges and threat states in athletes affect the overall performance of the team (Meijen et al., 2020). Throughout identifying various factors that cause challenges to a player's gameplay the researchers identified the theme challenges encountered. This theme is organized by the research question based on the general purpose of the study.

Mental and Physical Strain

Based on the data analysis, all six participants acknowledged that the following challenges they faced during the various sports participation were health-risk conditions and competitive pressure.

Sports can be mentally draining due to physical and psychological problems, including health risks such injuries and chronic illnesses (Li et al., 2017). Participation in basketball involves various mental and physical strains for players. Mental toughness plays a crucial role in optimizing performance, with studies showing that mental toughness development programs can significantly enhance skills related to challenge, commitment, emotional control, and self-confidence (Dereceli, 2018; Pocius & Malinauskas, 2024). Mental strain can be increased by uncertainty about the disease, fear of re-injury, and the emotional toll of limits. Health issues might also increase performance pressure (McLean et al., 2019). Medical care, rehabilitation, psychological support, and a solid support network can help athletes cope with health-risk illnesses' mental stress (Fogaca, 2019). Stress is a significant psychological aspect for athletes, with competitive situations leading to stress categorized into sources like psychological states, physical aspects, game-related factors, team preparation, and social evaluation (Hepler, 2015). Decision-making under stress is also impacted, as mental stress impairs decision speed, highlighting the importance of stress management strategies for maintaining optimal cognitive performance during time-pressured situations (Dereceli, 2018). Additionally, mental health issues among basketball players can affect athletic performance, emphasizing the need for professionals to recognize and address these issues to ensure players can cope effectively and maintain focus and motivation (LaBode-Richman & Groenewal, 2020).

One of the participants highlighted his struggles during their championship match in Basketball.

P1 ...i think one of the challenges that our team encountered during the Palakasan finals is that after the semifinals we head on straight (and fight) fought for the championship with only having an hour or so to rest from the semifinal game...

P2 biggest challenge that we have encountered was we were lacking air during play. It was also the reason why some of my teammates struggled to run because their sides hurt. The game was also played twice, which is why we felt a lot of pain....

According to McLean et al. (2019) examined athletes' psychological challenges like performance anxiety, stress, pressure, and focus under pressure. Research shows that mental preparation, resilience, and confidence boost performance (Poulus et al., 2021; Fogaca, 2019). According to Murphy et al. (2020) competitive nature

of sports, along with the expectations and demands imposed on athletes during games, generates intense psychological pressure and stress. This pressure can result in various outcomes, including performance anxiety, heightened stress levels, and an increased sense of responsibility (Johnston et al., 2020). Athletes who displayed higher levels of perfectionism, specifically self-oriented perfectionism, encountered greater psychological stress during competitive scenarios, this stress was linked to heightened anxiety, decreased performance, and an overall reduction in well-being (Freire et al., 2020; Johnston et al., 2020; Palazzolo, 2019).

Basketball players experience various stressors related to game pressure during sports participation. Research has shown that defensive and time pressures in small-sided games (SSG) increase the physical demands on players, with formats like 3vs3FULL and 3vs3RT leading to higher acceleration zones, transition sprints, fakes, and jumps compared to 3vs3HALF (Bredt et al., 2020). Additionally, individual and team stressors in basketball games can impact both the team's overall functioning and individual player performance, highlighting the synchronized appraisal of stressors within a team during a game (Doron & Bourbousson, 2016). Furthermore, professional basketball players face stress from organizational aspects, competition issues, demands of the game, career development, travel, finances, personal situations, and relational issues, all contributing to the pressure experienced during sports participation (Leite et al., 2014). Moreover, analysis of NBA free throw data indicates that players tend to choke under pressure, shooting worse in the final seconds of close games, especially if they are already struggling with free throw shooting overall (Bredt et al., 2020).

Participants emphasized pressure during the tournament in basketball

P3.more pressured, especially that many people have high expectations of us because we are the defending champions. Even before the palakasan started, we would always hear about us being the most powerful and that many have high expectations of u...

P4... pressure will lead you into panic and rush that will affect your focus, speed up the heartbeat and the game plan. These factors affect my game a little bit....

Sports game pressure increases physiological responses and body demands during intensive competition, causing physical strain as well as mental strain (Schweickle et al., 2021). Game pressure can cause different levels of physical strain in different sports.

Team Miscommunication

Communication plays a crucial role in team sports, influencing various aspects of team dynamics and performance. Research indicates that parents feeling a lack of communication with their children's coaches can stem from factors such as the duration of their children playing the sport, parental sports experience, dissatisfaction with their children's attitude towards sports activities, and awareness of interpersonal violence within the team (Yabe et al., 2021). Effective communication within sports teams involves knowledge sharing, role clarity, goal setting, motivation, culture, and cohesion, all of which contribute to successful physical and mental coordination (Ishak, 2021). However, defining communication in team sports can be complex, with players and coaches often focusing on verbal communication and passes while overlooking other crucial aspects like motor signals used during gameplay (Alexandre et al., 2016). Moreover, enhancing communication skills among coaches is essential to foster positive coach-athlete relationships, increase team efficacy, and reduce aggressive behaviors within team sports (Choi et al., 2019).

".....we won because we communicate with each other. At first, it was our problem. However, during the finals we decided that we work on our teamwork."

A lack of connection with teammates in sports refers to a situation where athletes experience a lack of rapport, camaraderie, or effective communication within their team (Salcinovic et al., 2022). This lack of connection can hinder team cohesion, collaboration, and overall performance (McLaren & Spink, 2019). Although the majority of the studies consider this as normal for a starting team, specifically the pendular model which provides a theoretical framework that explores the evolving nature of team cohesion over time.

"....And as for the team, the challenge that we faced was that we struggled to understand each other when it comes to the defense but along the way we were able to figure it out despite the intensity of the game...."

Sports team miscommunication happens when team members fail to communicate information, instructions, or signals during gameplay or team activities (Worley et al., 2020). Poor communication, misconceptions, language hurdles, and team coordination can cause poor sports performance. Team miscommunication can cause errors, confusion, disrupted play, missed opportunities, and overall performance and cohesiveness issues (Salcinovic et al., 2022; McLaren & Spink, 2019). Communication determines how players work together, develop a strong team bond, and handle sport's ups and downs (Worley et al., 2020). Thus, it is important for teams to avoid misunderstandings among themselves because it limits their performance and makes it difficult for them to play to their full potential.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the challenges faced by basketball players during tournament sports participation. The primary challenges faced were related to health risks, game pressure, and team miscommunication. Players frequently struggled with maintaining their physical and mental health due to the demanding nature of the sport, including insufficient rest and injury management. Game pressure was another significant factor, as the expectation to perform well in high-stakes situations often led to mental strain and physical exhaustion. Additionally, lack of effective communication among team members negatively impacted team cohesion and performance. In order to address these problems, it is essential for teams to cultivate stronger camaraderie and communication by engaging in frequent training and team-building activities. It is important to prioritize sufficient rest and effective injury management to sustain individual health and optimize performance. By solving these challenges, teams can enhance their chances of success in upcoming competitions.

It is important to recognize that the study had various limitations. Initially, the issue emerged from the availability of participants and researchers, as the coordination of schedules proved challenging due to their academic and personal commitments. This frequently impeded the capacity to carry out subsequent interviews. The study was conducted with a small sample size of only six people, which restricts the capacity to apply the findings to a broader population. Increasing the sample size would yield more reliable and inclusive results. The data were obtained via semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. This approach is highly dependent on the subjective viewpoints of the participants and the researchers' interpretations, which may add bias and impact the impartiality of the findings. Lastly, this study largely concentrated on the internal dynamics of the team and individual challenges. This research did not thoroughly investigate external elements such as coaching strategies, administrative support, and external pressures, which could offer further understanding of the difficulties encountered by athletes.

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