The Coach-Athlete Relationship in Football and its Implications for Achievement Motivation

Mahesa Agustira[1✉], Nurlan Kusmaedi[2], Finaldhi Palgunadhi[3]

Sport Science, Faculty of Sport and Health Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia[123]

Abstract

This study aims to explore the relationship between coach-athlete relationships and achievement motivation in football players. This research is based on the significance of quality interaction between coaches and athletes as a psychological element that influences motivation, satisfaction in training, and athletic performance. This study applied a quantitative method with a descriptive correlational design, involving 40 football athletes from the Indonesian University of Education's Student Activity Unit Football. The measurement tools used include the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q) to assess commitment, closeness, and complementarity, as well as the Sport Motivation Scale II (SMS-II) to measure six aspects of motivation. Findings from descriptive analysis indicate that the level of coach-athlete relationships is high and consistent across all dimensions of CART-Q. Motivation evaluation shows the dominance of autonomous motivation, reflected in high scores on intrinsic motivation, integrated regulation, and identified regulation, with low levels of amotivation. Pearson's correlation test revealed a positive and significant relationship between coach-athlete relationships and achievement motivation ($r = 0.438$; $p < 0.01$). These findings imply that the better the quality of the relationship formed between coaches and athletes, the greater the athletes' motivation to achieve. This study confirms that a high-quality coach-athlete relationship serves as a crucial factor in building achievement motivation, so coaches are expected to improve communication, trust, and emotional support during the coaching process.

How to Cite

Agustira, M., Kusmaedi, N., & Palgunadhi, F. (2026). The Coach-Athlete Relationship in Football and its Implications for Achievement Motivation. Journal of Physical Education, Sport, Health and Recreation, 15 (1), 45-51.

✉ Correspondence address :
   E-mail: agustiramahesa12345@upi.edu

INTRODUCTION

Football does not only depend on physical and technical abilities, but also psychological factors, such as the bond between the coach and the athletes (García–naveira, 2023). In football, motivation to achieve is influenced by the relationship between the coach and the athlete (Alkharouf & Salman, 2022). The relationship between coaches and athletes has a positive impact on behavior and psychological needs (Zhang & Rhim, 2024). Athletes face a lot of pressure in the competitive environment of sports, including high expectations for their performance, a difficult selection process, and a high risk of injury. These challenges contribute to psychological fatigue in athletes, a condition characterized by emotional exhaustion, reduced sense of accomplishment, and participation in sports (Raedeke & Smith, 2001). In this case, coaches play an important role in maintaining player motivation. The quality of the coach-athlete relationship in a football team increases athlete satisfaction during training and reduces boredom levels during training (Jiahao & Jing, 2024). Relationships characterized by trust, emotional support, and effective communication create an ideal environment for athletes to develop internal and external motivation. Ultimately, this has an impact on athletes' performance on the field (Sulistiyo et al., 2024).

In various fields related to sports and physical activity, such as psychology, motivation has become a broad subject of research (Clancy et al., 2017). To help athletes perform at their best, sports psychology plays an important role by considering mental aspects such as motivation and focus (Dwi Pramesti et al., 2022). Motivation is defined as a person's reaction or feeling to achieve a goal or change for the better (Victor Simanjuntak1, 2021) From a sports science perspective, motivation is an important component that influences a person's decision to participate in sports activities (De Meester et al., 2016). Applying sports motivation requires a good strategy that takes psychological factors into account (Salsabillah, 2018) Motivation significantly influences athletes' desire to improve. It is also important for setting short-term and long-term goals, evaluating their performance, and the voluntary effort used to complete specific tasks. All of these factors contribute to athletes' success in sports (Rosario, 2023). To achieve motivation in the face of competitive pressure, a strong relationship with an athletic coach can increase motivation. (Longakit et al., n.d.).

The relationship between coaches and athletes is crucial in determining athletes' motivation, confidence, and performance, especially in competitive environments at various levels. The quality of coaching influences athletes' motivation to achieve (Wijayanti et al., 2024). Support, motivation, and enthusiasm for achievement from intrinsic and extrinsic sources create high motivation (Moradi et al., 2020) In addition, players' psychology is also influenced by the team's goals and environment (Salsabillah, 2018). Habitual positive attitudes and verbal motivation will shape strong character in athletes, who hope to improve their thinking during competition. High-achieving athletes must receive good support from a coach. Competent coaches are believed to produce good athletes and improve performance (Foulds et al., 2019). The coaching style has a different impact on each athlete (Remaja, 2025) Coaches can greatly assist athletes in improving their motivation and self-confidence in facing competitive pressure by building a relationship between the two. A positive relationship between coaches and athletes can help create a supportive training environment that allows athletes to develop optimally (Coussens et al., 2024)

This study focuses on this issue and examines how the relationship between coaches and football players can affect motivation to achieve. It uses an effective two-way communication approach to build strong connections and assist with team mental coaching. Interactive communication allows coaches to give direct instructions and receive feedback from players (Abinaskholani & Nurrachmad, 2024). Coaches can understand the physical and emotional needs of athletes. Communication skills between coaches and athletes include active listening, adjusting communication styles, and using empathy (Adolph, 2016). Athletes can acquire psychological skills to control their emotions, improve their focus, and become more confident (Manalu et al., 2024) By reviewing various related theories and research, this article is expected to increase understanding of the importance of the relationship between coaches and athletes in coaching and how it affects motivation levels. In addition, the results of this study are expected to help coaches create better coaching plans to improve athletes' performance and motivation.

The coach-athlete relationship is crucial for increasing athlete motivation and performance, according to earlier research (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004), but the majority of these studies still concentrate on developed nations, elite athletes, or measuring motivation in general. This study is novel because it uses the Self-Determi-

nation Theory approach, which sees motivation as a spectrum from intrinsic motivation to amotivation, to simultaneously administer CART-Q and SMS-II (Pelletier et al, 2013) to Indonesian university-level football athletes. The results provide new empirical evidence that interpersonal relationships in soccer coaching play a strategic role in the process of internalizing sports values and forming long-term achievement motivation in athletes. They demonstrate that the quality of the coach-athlete relationship not only correlates with overall achievement motivation but is specifically related to the dominance of autonomous motivation (intrinsic, integrated, and identified regulation).

METHODS

This study uses a quantitative approach with a descriptive correlational design to analyze the relationship between coach-athlete relationships and achievement motivation in football athletes. This design was chosen because it allows researchers to objectively describe athletes' perceptions of the quality of their relationship with their coaches, while also testing the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables without manipulating the research conditions. A quantitative approach was used because the data was obtained through a numerical Google Form questionnaire, allowing for systematic and measurable analysis in accordance with the characteristics of quantitative methods.

This study was conducted at the Indonesian University of Education's student football club, which has a structured system and a sufficient number of active athletes. The population here consists of all active athletes who participate in the UPI Football Club training program, and purposive sampling was used to select the sample, with the reasoning that only athletes who met certain criteria were selected as respondents, such as having been active for at least six months, training regularly with the same coach, having competed with the same coach, and being willing to participate voluntarily. Based on this, the sample size was set at around 40 athletes to represent the population.

The main variable in this study was the coach-athlete relationship, which was measured using the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q) developed by (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004) This instrument is based on the 3C Model, which consists of three main dimensions: Closeness, Commitment, Complementarity. These three dimensions reflect the emotional,

cognitive, and behavioral aspects of the coach-athlete relationship, such as mutual trust, loyalty in training cooperation, and the quality of interaction during the training process. The CART-Q instrument consists of 11 statement items with a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). All items are designed to accurately capture soccer players' perceptions of the quality of their relationship with their coaches. The CART-Q instrument has been proven to have high validity and reliability based on various studies. In terms of construct validity, Jowett and Ntoumanis (2004) showed that the three-dimensional structure of the CART-Q had good model fit through confirmatory factor analysis, with model fit indices (goodness of fit index and comparative fit index) above 0.90. This proves that each statement item truly measures the intended aspect in accordance with the theory of coach-athlete relationships. In addition, the CART-Q also has strong content validity because the questions have been developed based on theoretical studies and reviewed by sports psychology experts. In terms of reliability, this instrument shows a very good Cronbach's Alpha value, ranging from 0.85 to 0.94, which indicates a high level of internal consistency between questions.

The second variable in this study was the athletes' achievement motivation, which was measured using the Sport Motivation Scale II (SMS II) instrument developed by (Pelletier et al, 2013). This instrument was developed based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which consists of six main dimensions of motivation, namely intrinsic motivation, integrated motivation, identified motivation, introjected regulation, external regulation, and amotivation. The SMS II instrument consists of 18 statement items that are assessed using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The construct validity of the SMS-II has been tested through various international studies and shows consistency in measuring the seven dimensions of motivation in accordance with Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Meanwhile, its reliability is also very good, with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients above 0.70 for each dimension, indicating that the items in this scale are consistent in measuring aspects of sports motivation.

Data collection began after obtaining official permission from the management of the UPI Football Club, with questionnaires distributed directly or online using Google Forms, and researchers assisting in the completion process to ensure respondents understood the statements correctly. The confidentiality of the collected data

was maintained. Quantitative methods were used to analyze the data for this study. SPSS was used to identify the relationship between the quality of the relationship between coaches and athletes and the motivation to achieve success in football. In the first step, the tendency of each variable's value is measured through descriptive statistical tests, which include minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation values. Next, prerequisite tests for analysis, including normality and linearity tests, are conducted to ensure that the data meets the requirements for correlational analysis. Since both variables are interval scaled and normally distributed, the relationship between variables is measured using Pearson's correlation test. The correlation coefficient (r) is a measure used to describe the strength and direction of the relationship between the quality of the coach-athlete relationship and achievement motivation. Next, the analysis continues with a simple linear regression test. This test aims to measure the extent to which the coach-athlete relationship can predict an athlete's achievement motivation and to determine the extent of the contribution of that relationship.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. CART Q deskriptive statistics

Dimension	n	M	SD	1	2	3
Commitment	40	18,13	2,053	-		
Closeness	40	25,50	2,196	.000	-	
Complementarity	40	25,62	1,628	.017	.000	-

The results of the **Table 1** descriptive analysis show that all dimensions of the coach-athlete relationship are in the relatively high category. The commitment dimension has an average value of M = 18.13 with SD = 2.053. The closeness dimension shows a higher average value (M = 25.50; SD = 2.196), while the complementarity dimension has the highest average value (M = 25.62; SD = 1.628).

The correlation analysis between dimensions shows a significant relationship between closeness and complementarity (p = 0.000), as well as between commitment and complementarity (p = 0.017). This indicates that the stronger the sense of closeness and commitment between coaches and athletes, the better the functional cooperation that is built in the training and competition process.

Based on the **Table 2** Sport Motivation Scale II instrument, the intrinsic motivation and integrated regulation dimensions each had an av-

erage value of M = 18.60, indicating a fairly strong level of internal motivation among athletes. The identified regulation dimension showed the highest average value (M = 18.63; SD = 1.750), indicating that athletes recognized the importance of sports activities as part of their personal goals.

On the other hand, the amotivation dimension had the lowest mean value (M = 13.52; SD = 5.378), suggesting that the majority of athletes were not experiencing a lack of motivation. Additionally, a number of significant relationships were discovered, including those between amotivation and external regulation (p = 0.000) and identified regulation (p = 0.014).

Table 2. SMS II deskriptive statistics

Dimensi	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
instrinsic_motivasi	40	18,60	1,905	-					
integrated_regulation	40	18,60	1,692	.000	-				
Indentified_Regulation	40	18,63	1,750	.001	.000	-			
Introjected_regulation	40	17,60	2,061	.322	.068	.111	-		
External_regulation	40	17,33	3,033	.535	.628	.339	.050	-	
Amotivation	40	13,52	5,378	.262	.143	.014	.538	.000	-

Table 3. Corelation

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2
Cartq (pelatih – Atlet)	40	69,25	4,834	-	
SMS II (Motivasi)	40	104,28	8,653	.005	-

The average value of the coach-athlete relationship variable, as determined by the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire, was M = 69.25 with SD = 4.834. In contrast, the average value of the achievement motivation variable was M = 104.28 with SD = 8.653.

Coach-athlete relationships and achievement motivation are significantly correlated, according to the correlation analysis results (p = 0.005). These results suggest that a key factor in boosting athlete motivation is the caliber of the relationship between coaches and athletes.

High scores on the dimensions of commitment, closeness, and complementarity demonstrate the high quality of the relationship between coaches and athletes (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004), according to the study's findings. These characteristics show that athletes and coaches have a stable, supportive, and positive relationship (Coussens et al., 2025). These favorable opinions are fairly constant among athletes, as evidenced by the high average scores and minimal variation. Theoretically, these strong bonds align with the idea of successful coach-athlete relationships, where cooperation, communication, and trust serve as the primary pillars that propel the

best possible training regimen (Pan & Sui, 2025).

Athletes are primarily motivated by autonomous motivation, which is typified by high scores on intrinsic motivation, integrated regulation, and identified regulation, according to SMS-II analysis (Pelletier et al, 2013). These three motivational factors show that athletes participate in sports due to intrinsic interest, important values, and the incorporation of sports into their sense of self. Conversely, lower values with more variation are seen in controlled motivation, such as introjected regulation and external regulation. This suggests that although the intensity is less than that of autonomous motivation, some athletes still experience pressure from both the inside and the outside (Manninen et al., 2022). The majority of athletes do not feel meaningless or lose motivation in sports, as evidenced by the amotivation dimension's lowest average score (Motivations et al., 2018). This pattern reinforces the finding that athletes in this study generally have healthy motivation and are focused on self-development.

The study's primary conclusion is that, with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.438$ ($p < 0.01$), coach-athlete relationships and achievement motivation are significantly positively correlated. This moderate correlation suggests that athletes' motivation to succeed increases with the quality of their relationship with coaches. Positive interpersonal relationships, particularly those that offer support, effective communication, and a sense of connectedness, can boost athletes' internal motivation and achievement orientation, according to Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and earlier research, which is supported by these findings. In this situation, coaches are essential because they not only provide technical guidance but also support athletes' basic psychological needs, including the need for relatedness, competence, and autonomy.

Overall, the study's results support the idea that one of the main elements influencing high achievement motivation is a strong coach-athlete relationship. The perfect psychological environment for athletes to grow and perform at their best is created when dominant autonomous motivation and positive interpersonal relationships coexist. These results can help coaches create a more communicative, humanistic coaching style that supports athletes' long-term goals.

A number of limitations must be taken into account, despite the fact that this study offers empirical evidence about the relationship between coaches and athletes and achievement motivation in football players. The cause-and-effect relationship cannot yet be directly explained by this study because it employs a correlational descriptive design. Additionally, it only comes from one student activity unit and has a comparatively small sample size, which restricts how broadly the results can be applied. Furthermore, this study has not accounted for other factors like coaching style, competition experience, playing position, and competitive pressure, and the use of self-report instruments may lead to respondent subjectivity bias. In order to better understand the mechanism of the relationship between the quality of the coach-athlete relationship and achievement motivation, future research is advised to use a longitudinal or experimental design, involve a larger and more diverse sample, and add mediating or moderating variables like training satisfaction, motivational climate, or basic psychological needs.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the quality of the relationship between coaches and soccer players is relatively high, particularly in terms of commitment, closeness, and complementarity. This indicates that athletes experience a positive, stable, and mutually supportive relationship with their coaches. Furthermore, the results of the motivation evaluation using the SMS-II instrument reveal that athletes generally show stronger autonomous motivation than controlled motivation or amotivation, which means that their participation in sports is triggered by personal interest, individual values, and the integration of sports into their self-concept. This study also identified a positive and significant correlation between the coach-athlete relationship and achievement motivation, with a correlation coefficient value of $r = 0.438$. These findings imply that the better the quality of the relationship between the coach and the athlete, the greater the athlete's drive to achieve. Thus, this study confirms that a high-quality coach-athlete relationship plays a crucial role in driving achievement motivation. Therefore, coaches are expected to develop more humane and empathetic communication and interaction strategies and provide support to create a training atmosphere conducive to the athletes' progress.

REFERENCES

Abinaskholani, R., & Nurrachmad, L. (2024). Komunikasi Interpersonal Manajemen , Pelatih , dan Atlet Bolabasket Putri dalam Meningkatkan Motivasi Berprestasi. 14(5), 344–350.

Adolph, R. (2016). 済無No Title No Title No Title. 1–23.

Alkharouf, A., & Salman, R. (2022). The influence of the relationship between the coach and the athlete on the level of motivation of the athlete's achievements. Current Issues of Sports Psychology and Pedagogy, 2(1), 73–84. https://doi.org/10.15826/spp.2022.1.23

Clancy, R. B., Herring, M. P., & Campbell, M. J. (2017). Motivation measures in sport: A critical review and bibliometric analysis. Frontiers in Psychology, 8(MAR), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00348

Coussens, A. H., Stone, M. J., & Donachie, T. C. (2024). Coach–athlete relationships, self-confidence, and psychological wellbeing: The role of perceived and received coach support. European Journal of Sport Science, May 2024, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsc.12226

Coussens, A. H., Stone, M. J., & Donachie, T. C. (2025). coach support. October 2024, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsc.12226

De Meester, A., Maes, J., Stodden, D., Cardon, G., Goodway, J., Lenoir, M., & Haerens, L. (2016). Identifying profiles of actual and perceived motor competence among adolescents: associations with motivation, physical activity, and sports participation. Journal of Sports Sciences, 34(21), 2027–2037. https://doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2016.1149608

Dwi Pramesti, A., Hermahayu, H., & Faizah, R. (2022). Study of identifying factors for the developing measuring instrument on the psychological readiness of athletic athletes. Jurnal SPORTIF : Jurnal Penelitian Pembelajaran, 8(3), 17–36. https://doi.org/10.29407/js_unpgri.v8i3.18807

Foulds, S. J., Hoffmann, S. M., Hinck, K., & Carson, F. (2019). The coach–athlete relationship in strength and conditioning: High performance athletes' perceptions. Sports, 7(12), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.3390/sports7120244

García–naveira, A. (2023). Revista de Psicología Aplicada al Deporte y al Ejercicio Físico. Revista de Psicologia Aplicada Al Deporte y Al Ejercicio Fisico, 8(1), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.5093/rpadef2023a8

Jiahao, L., & Jing, L. (2024). Examining the link between coach-athlete relationship and athlete burnout among college soccer players: the mediating role of training satisfaction. Frontiers in Psychology, 15. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1409609

Jowett, S., & Ntoumanis, N. (2004). The Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q): Development and initial validation. Scandinavian Journal of Medicine and Science in Sports, 14(4), 245–257. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0838.2003.00338.x

Longakit, J., Toring-aque, L., Jr, F. A., & Sayson, M. (n.d.). The role of coach-athlete relationship on motivation and sports engagement. https://doi.org/10.15561/20755279.2024.0503

Manalu, N. C., Rahmadini, S. D., Yolanda, N., Hulu, M. F., & Gea, F. S. (2024). Pengembangan Mental Atlet Wushu Sanda melalui Pendekatan Kepelatihan berbasis Psikologi Olahraga. Jurnal Pendidikan Olahraga, 14(6), 412–418. https://doi.org/10.37630/jpo.v14i6.2038

Manninen, M., Dishman, R., Hwang, Y., Magrum, E., & Deng, Y. (2022). Psychology of Sport & Exercise Self-determination theory based instructional interventions and motivational regulations in organized physical activity : A systematic review and multivariate meta-analysis. Psychology of Sport & Exercise, 62(July), 102248. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2022.102248

Moradi, J., Bahrami, A., & Dana, A. (2020). Motivation for participation in sports based on athletes in team and individual sports. Physical Culture and Sport, Studies and Research, 85(1), 14–21. https://doi.org/10.2478/pcssr-2020-0002

Motivations, I., Climate, M., Perceptions, P. C., & Study, R. (2018). Enjoyment , and Physical Competence Perceptions. 1–11. https://doi.org/10.3390/sports6040165

Pan, F., & Sui, W. (2025). relationship and team performance based on 3Cs theory : the chain mediating role of emotional intelligence and athletic engagement. June, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1587900

Pelletier et al. (2013). Why do you practice your sport? Psychology of Sport and Exercise, Volume 14(Issue 3), 329–341.

Raedeke, T. D., & Smith, A. L. (2001). Development and preliminary validation of an athlete burnout measure. Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 23(4), 281–306. https://doi.org/10.1123/jsep.23.4.281

Remaja, A. S. (2025). Studi Perbandingan Gaya Kepemimpinan Pelatih Dan Posisi Bermain Terhadap Kecocokan Hubungan Pelatih-. 7(1), 67–78.

Rosario, M. A. B. (2023). Level of Motivational Factors of Athletes in Relation To Their Sports Participation. European Journal of Physical Education and Sport Science, 10(2). https://doi.org/10.46827/ejpe.v10i2.4961

Salsabillah, I. (2018). T He R Elationship B Etween E Mpowerment and. Journal of Education, Teaching, and Learning, 11(1), 157–164. https://doi.org/10.26737/jetl.v9i1.6459

Sulistiyo, Setyawan, H., Primasoni, N., Widiyanto, Fudin, M. S., Sabariah, Rufi'i, Pranoto, N. W., Gontara, S. Y., Arien, W., Susanto, Wahyuni, D., & Sanjaykumar, S. (2024). Coach-athlete emotional relationships in football and their impact on achievement motivation. Retos, 61(2018), 1520–1533. https://doi.org/10.47197/retos.v61.110183

Victor Simanjuntak1, H. M. (2021). media. Jurnal SPORTIF: Jurnal Penelitian Pembelajaran, 7(2), 317–332.

Wijayanti, N. P. N., Tomoliyus, Alim, A., Wedi, S., Artanayasa, W., Sudiana, K., Sukamti, E. R., Fauzi, Hariono, A., & Prabowo, T. A. (2024). The influence of coaches' behavior on achievement motivation and performance of Riau athletes. Sport TK, 13, 1–13. https://doi. org/10.6018/sportk.564811

Zhang, R., & Rhim, Y. T. (2024). The Effect of Coach–Athlete Relationships on Motor Behaviour in College Athletes Mediating Effects of Psychological Needs. Behavioral Sciences, 14(7). https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14070579.