



Impact of Mental Skills Training on Psychological Readiness and Competitive Performance Among Volleyball Players

Vinod Kumar Baudha

Research Scholar

Prof. Anil Suryavanshi

Supervisor

Bundelkhand University- Jhansi

Abstract

Mental skills training has emerged as an essential component of modern sports performance enhancement, particularly in team sports such as volleyball, where psychological readiness significantly influences competitive outcomes. The present study aims to examine the impact of mental skills training on psychological readiness and competitive performance among university and state-level male volleyball players. A quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test research design was proposed involving 80 male volleyball players aged between 18 and 25 years. The intervention consisted of an eight-week structured mental skills training programme conducted five days per week. The programme included goal setting, imagery, self-talk, concentration exercises, relaxation techniques, and breathing control. Psychological readiness and competitive performance were assessed before and after the intervention using standardized assessment tools. The collected data will be analysed using descriptive statistics, paired sample t-test, and one-way ANOVA with the level of significance set at 0.05. The findings of the study are expected to provide scientific evidence regarding the effectiveness of mental skills training in enhancing psychological preparedness and improving competitive performance among volleyball players. The study will also contribute to the development of evidence-based psychological training programmes for coaches and sports psychologists.

Keywords: Mental Skills Training, Psychological Readiness, Competitive Performance, Volleyball, Sports Psychology, Performance Enhancement

1. Introduction

Volleyball is one of the fastest-growing team sports in the world and demands a combination of physical fitness, technical proficiency, tactical intelligence, and psychological preparedness. Modern volleyball has evolved into a highly competitive sport where players are expected to make rapid decisions, maintain concentration under pressure, and execute complex motor skills with precision. Consequently, success in volleyball depends not only on physical conditioning but also on the athlete's mental strength and psychological readiness.

Psychological readiness refers to an athlete's ability to maintain confidence, emotional stability, concentration, motivation, and decision-making ability before and during competition. Athletes who possess high levels of psychological readiness generally perform better under stressful situations because

they are capable of controlling anxiety, maintaining focus, and adapting effectively to changing game situations.

Mental skills training has become an integral component of sports psychology and athletic development. It consists of systematic psychological techniques designed to enhance mental abilities that influence sports performance. Common mental skills training techniques include goal setting, imagery, positive self-talk, attention control, relaxation training, breathing exercises, emotional regulation, and confidence building. These techniques help athletes prepare mentally for competition and improve consistency in performance.

Research has shown that psychological factors significantly influence competitive performance in volleyball. Players frequently encounter situations involving high competitive pressure, crowd influence, fatigue, and tactical uncertainty. Under such conditions, athletes with superior psychological skills demonstrate greater confidence, better concentration, improved emotional control, and more effective decision-making than those who rely solely on physical preparation.

Mental skills training enhances an athlete's ability to cope with competitive stress by strengthening cognitive processes involved in perception, anticipation, attention, and motor execution. Regular practice of imagery allows athletes to mentally rehearse successful performance, thereby improving confidence and reducing performance anxiety. Similarly, positive self-talk reinforces motivation and helps athletes maintain focus during challenging situations.

In volleyball, every rally requires rapid information processing and quick tactical decisions. Players continuously analyse opponents' movements, anticipate ball trajectory, coordinate with teammates, and execute technical skills within fractions of a second. Consequently, psychological readiness becomes a decisive factor influencing match performance.

Despite increasing awareness regarding sports psychology, many volleyball training programmes continue to emphasize physical conditioning while giving comparatively less attention to systematic psychological preparation. This creates a need to scientifically evaluate the effectiveness of mental skills training among competitive volleyball players.

The present study has therefore been undertaken to examine the impact of mental skills training on psychological readiness and competitive performance among volleyball players. The findings are expected to provide useful information for coaches, sports psychologists, and physical education professionals in designing evidence-based mental training programmes that enhance athletic performance.

2. Review of Literature

Sports psychology has gained remarkable importance over the past three decades because psychological variables have been recognized as major determinants of athletic performance. Mental preparation enables athletes to optimize performance by improving confidence, concentration, motivation, emotional regulation, and stress management.

Weinberg and Gould (2019) emphasized that mental skills training plays a significant role in enhancing athletic performance by improving self-confidence, attention control, and emotional regulation. According to these authors, psychological skills should be integrated with physical and technical training rather than treated as separate components.

Moran (2012) highlighted that concentration and attentional control are among the most important psychological characteristics of elite athletes. Athletes capable of maintaining focus despite distractions generally achieve superior competitive performance.

Martin et al. (1999) reported that mental imagery strengthens neural pathways associated with motor learning and skill execution. Visualization enables athletes to rehearse performance mentally, thereby improving movement accuracy and confidence during actual competition.

Simonsmeier et al. (2018), in a comprehensive meta-analysis, concluded that imagery interventions produce significant improvements in sports performance across different age groups and competitive levels. The authors recommended incorporating imagery training into regular coaching programmes.

Afonso et al. (2012) observed that successful volleyball players demonstrate superior perceptual-cognitive abilities, anticipation skills, and tactical decision-making. Their findings suggest that psychological preparation is equally important as technical training in volleyball performance.

Research conducted by Ribeiro et al. (2019) demonstrated that mental imagery improves decision-making ability, concentration, and motor coordination among volleyball players. The study recommended systematic psychological training as a regular component of volleyball coaching.

Collectively, previous research supports the importance of mental skills training in enhancing athletic performance. However, comparatively fewer studies have specifically examined its influence on both psychological readiness and competitive performance among university and state-level volleyball players, particularly in the Indian context.

3. Research Gap

Although numerous studies have reported the positive influence of mental skills training on sports performance, limited research has specifically investigated its impact on both psychological readiness and competitive performance among university and state-level volleyball players. Most previous studies have focused on individual psychological variables such as anxiety, confidence, or imagery rather than adopting a comprehensive mental skills training programme. Furthermore, very few studies have been conducted in the Indian context involving competitive volleyball players aged 18–25 years. Therefore, the present study attempts to fill this research gap by examining the effectiveness of a structured mental skills training programme on psychological readiness and competitive performance among volleyball players.

4. Objectives of the Study

The present study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To determine the effect of mental skills training on psychological readiness among volleyball players.
2. To examine the effect of mental skills training on competitive performance among volleyball players.
3. To compare the pre-test and post-test scores of psychological readiness after the intervention.
4. To compare the pre-test and post-test scores of competitive performance after the intervention.

5. Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for the study:

- H₁: Mental skills training will significantly improve psychological readiness among volleyball players.
- H₂: Mental skills training will significantly improve competitive performance among volleyball players.
- H₃: There will be a significant difference between pre-test and post-test psychological readiness scores following the intervention.
- H₄: There will be a significant difference between pre-test and post-test competitive performance scores following the intervention.

6. Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test research design to investigate the effectiveness of mental skills training on psychological readiness and competitive performance among volleyball players.

Participants

The study consisted of 80 male volleyball players aged between 18 and 25 years. The participants represented University and State-level volleyball competitions.

Sampling Technique

Participants were selected using the Purposive Sampling Technique, ensuring that all selected players had regular competitive playing experience.

Duration of the Study

The intervention programme was conducted for eight weeks, with training sessions held five days per week.

Mental Skills Training Programme

Each training session lasted approximately 50 minutes and included:

- Goal Setting (10 minutes)
- Mental Imagery / Visualization (10 minutes)
- Positive Self-talk (10 minutes)
- Relaxation and Breathing Exercises (10 minutes)
- Concentration and Attention Control Drills (10 minutes)

Research Instruments

The following tools were proposed for data collection:

- Psychological Readiness Questionnaire
- Volleyball Competitive Performance Assessment Sheet
- Coach Observation Rating Scale
- Match Performance Evaluation Record

Data Collection Procedure

Psychological readiness and competitive performance were assessed before the commencement of the intervention programme (Pre-test). Following the completion of the eight-week mental skills training programme, the same variables were reassessed (Post-test). The obtained scores were recorded for statistical analysis.

Statistical Analysis

The collected data will be analysed using:

- Mean
- Standard Deviation
- Paired Sample t-test
- One-way ANOVA
- Level of Significance: 0.05
- Statistical Software: IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26.0

7. Results

Table 1. Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Variable	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value
Psychological Readiness					
Competitive Performance					
Reaction Time					

(Fill the above table after statistical analysis.)

Table 2. Position-wise Improvement

Position	N	Pre-test	Post-test	Improvement (%)
Setter				
Attacker				
Blocker				
Libero				

(Fill the above table after data analysis.)

Interpretation of Results

The collected data will be analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The pre-test and post-test scores of psychological readiness, competitive performance, and reaction time will be compared using a paired sample t-test. Position-wise comparisons may also be performed using one-way ANOVA where appropriate. The results will be interpreted at the 0.05 level of significance.

8. Discussion

The discussion section should interpret the findings in relation to the objectives and hypotheses of the study. After analysing the data, explain whether mental skills training significantly improved psychological readiness and competitive performance among volleyball players.

The findings should be compared with previous studies. If the results show significant improvement, they would support the findings of Weinberg and Gould (2019), who reported that mental skills training enhances confidence, concentration, and emotional control. Similarly, Moran (2012) emphasized that attentional control is a key psychological characteristic of elite athletes.

The results may also be discussed with reference to Afonso et al. (2012), who highlighted the importance of perceptual and cognitive abilities in volleyball performance, and Simonsmeier et al. (2018), who reported positive effects of imagery interventions on sports performance. The discussion should explain how goal setting, imagery, self-talk, relaxation, and concentration training contributed to improvements in competitive performance.

9. Practical Implications

The findings of this study may have several practical applications:

- Mental skills training should be integrated into regular volleyball coaching programmes.
- Coaches should include goal setting, imagery, self-talk, relaxation, and concentration exercises in daily practice sessions.
- Sports psychologists can use structured mental training programmes to improve athletes' psychological readiness before competitions.
- Physical education institutions may incorporate mental skills training into athlete development programmes.

10. Limitations of the Study

The study has the following limitations:

- Only male volleyball players were included.
- Participants belonged only to university and state-level competitions.
- The intervention programme was limited to eight weeks.
- Psychological variables were measured using questionnaire-based assessment.

11. Conclusion

The present study was undertaken to examine the impact of mental skills training on psychological readiness and competitive performance among volleyball players. It is expected that a structured mental

skills training programme will positively influence athletes' confidence, concentration, emotional control, motivation, and overall competitive performance.

Mental skills training is an important component of modern sports psychology and should be incorporated into regular volleyball coaching programmes. The final conclusion will be based on the statistical analysis of the collected data and will indicate whether the proposed hypotheses are accepted or rejected.

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