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Self-efficacy of Professional Athletes

Peter Voelker
pvoelker91@gmail.com

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Self-efficacy of Professional Athletes

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, ST. PAUL

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

COLLEGE OF KINESIOLOGY

Self-efficacy of Professional Athletes

A GRADUATE PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts in Sport Management

by

Peter Voelker

St. Paul, Minnesota

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Dedications

To mom and dad – thank you for your love, patience, and generosity. To Allison, Abbey, and the Knaeble family – thank you for your lifelong support. To Bob Dahm, Eric Hansen, and Stefan Van Voorst – thank you for your friendship, mentorship, and career guidance.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was designed to use the definition of self-efficacy by Bandura (2002) as well as previous research on the topic of self-efficacy to investigate self-reported performance evaluations of professional athletes. The initial literature review included studies that investigated athletes participating in a wide range of sports at different age and experience levels. The parameters and methods of each study differed, but all took a qualitative or mixed methods approach. Based on these previous studies, this study suggested a qualitative approach using a questionnaire based on the Strength Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Tsai et al. (2013). The proposed study would focus on the participants being professional athletes or athletes from the highest competitive level of their sports, preferably from professional sports league in North American with at least 50 to 75 participants from each league. The leagues will represent professional baseball, basketball, football, and hockey.

Keywords: Self-efficacy, sports science, sports psychology, athletics, athletes, behavioral science

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction..... 1

Chapter 2: Methodology 4

Chapter 3: Discussion and Conclusion..... 8

References..... 11

Appendix..... 13

Chapter 1: Introduction

Athletes have long been thought to have superior human abilities in athleticism, physical strength, and the will to perform at their highest level. Some of the most revered athletes have been noted for their self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as “an individual’s assessment of his or her capacities to organize and execute specific actions necessary to achieve the desired goals” (Stanković et al., 2022, p. 2). Bandura (2002) further noted that “self-efficacy beliefs regulate human functioning through cognitive, motivational, affective, and decisional processes” (p. 270) and affects individuals in either “self-enhancing” or “self-debilitating” ways. Self-efficacy affects how an individual motivates themselves and how they persevere after setbacks; their emotional wellbeing, and how they make important decisions at critical moments (Bandura, 2002).

In sports, self-efficacy has been measured in various settings with differing parameters. Using the HEXACO model of personality structure created by Lee and Ashton (2012), Stanković et al. (2022) compared the self-efficacy of athletes participating in team sports to athletes competing in individual sports, such as Judo, and found that athletes of team sports showed less “pronounced self-efficacy” than Judokas. Using the IZOF model created by Hanin (2003), Nogueira et al. (2019), studied the relationship between anxiety and an athlete’s performance and concluded that the IZOF model is applicable to measuring these variables while suggesting extending the use of the model to measure self-efficacy. Finally, using the Social Cognitive Theory created by Bandura (1989), McCaffrey et al. (2014) noted the potential relationship between an athlete’s self-efficacy and injury occurrence.

Rationale of the Proposed Study

While a focus on specific groups of athletes is useful to individual studies, there has been a general lack of evidence studying self-efficacy in larger groups of athletes in a wider variety of sports. Both studies conducted by Stanković et al. (2022) and Nogueira et al. (2019) measured the results of small groups of individuals in specific sports. However, a universal approach that measures the results of a larger group of individuals will either solidify or be critical of the models used in previous studies, such as the HEXACO model and the IZOF model.

Research Question (Purpose Statement)

The purpose of this project will be to investigate the correlation between self-efficacy and the self-reported performance evaluations of professional athletes across four major North American sports leagues. This applied project contains the following parameters that will examine the variables of self-efficacy and its effects on the variable of athletic performance:

- The variable of self-efficacy will be defined using the research of Bandura (2002).
- The definition of self-efficacy by Bandura (2002) and previous research into the variable of self-efficacy will be measured by the performance evaluations taken by high-level athletes who participate in a variety of sports including basketball, baseball, football, and hockey.
- The results will then be compiled and compared within each sport, and sport to sport with the intended purpose of gaining insights from universal results across a wide range of sports.

Bias and Assumptions

As with any project, this one is not without its biases and assumptions. The main assumption of this project is that professional athletes are exposed to situations that are more stressful and that require higher levels of self-efficacy than the situations experienced by amateur athletes. This will be discussed in future chapters.

Limitations

This project will be limited to using the definition of self-efficacy by Bandura (2002) and the Strength Self-Efficacy Scale by Tsai et al. (2013). A second limitation is that the scale developed by Tsai et al. (2013) analyzes the subjective responses by participants. As with any research project that uses human subjects, the data collected will be subjective and influenced by the participant's personal experiences and opinions (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

Conclusion

The study of self-efficacy in sports has been well defined and reported. However, there is a general lack of a universal approach to self-efficacy across multiple sports in a single study. Using the definition by Bandura (2002), this project will define the parameters for a study looking into self-efficacy of athletes across a spectrum of sports. Chapter 2 will share the methodology necessary for this proposed study.

Chapter 2: Methodology

The subjective nature of an individual's mentality requires a qualitative, conceptual approach to understand self-efficacy. The Strength Self-Efficacy Scale (SSES) developed by Tsai et al. (2013) allows participants to measure their own abilities and strengths through self-assessment. This study will focus on professional athletes and their personal beliefs regarding self-efficacy. The details of the methods are shared next.

Participants

Whereas previous studies have focused on smaller groups of participants, the goal of this study is to measure the results of a larger group of 100 to 300 participants across a wider range of sports. Therefore, the participants for this proposed study will be current professional athletes from the sport of basketball, baseball, hockey, or football. These participants have been purposefully chosen due to the insights they may share across various sports and countries.

The participants will be selected randomly and the only criterion for participation is that every athlete is an active player in their respective league. The percentage of participants per league will vary based on the number of total players in each league. For example, the National Basketball Association (NBA) has approximately 450 active players each season (Heffernan, 2021), but the National Football League (NFL) has over 1,600 each season (Putnik, 2021). Therefore, equal representation across all leagues is not a requirement for this study, though the total responses may be examined for commonalities based on the percentage of participants from each league.

Instrument

The study proposes the use of the Strengths Self-Efficacy Scale (SSES) which measures how confident participants are in their abilities to achieve their goals (Tsai et al., 2013). The instrument will begin with an Informed Consent statement and then, if they agree to participate, participants will complete a 34-item questionnaire based on the SSES model (Appendix A). Questions will ask participants to measure their confidence level on a scale of 0 to 10 on various questions regarding on-field performance and whether the participant feels prepared for failure and setbacks related to performance. Whereas a typical SSES questionnaire includes questions about a participant's personal life and the health of personal relationships, a modified questionnaire will be used to focus on athletic performance. This can be found in Appendix A.

Procedures

The SSES questionnaire will be delivered in electronic form via email addresses gathered on professional athletes in North America. The questionnaire completion will be a single 20 to 30 minute occurrence with no further participation required or expected. Even though this study will be conducted across North America, it is not assumed that English is the first language of participants. Therefore, the electronic form of the questionnaire will allow for the language of the questions to be translated as needed. The questionnaire may be taken in groups of participants as long as enough computers are provided. If this occurs, participants will be asked to refrain from speaking during the questionnaire. This includes reading the questions out loud or discussing the questions with other participants. In this case, at least one administrator will be present during the questionnaire period and will assist the participants if needs arise. All answers will be collected through the online survey.

Design & Statistical Analysis

The intent of analyzing the results of the questionnaire will be to (1) find whether a relationship exists between the assumed dependent variables of professional athletes and assumed higher levels of self-efficacy and (2) report how meaningful the results are based on the mean of the 0 to 10 scale for each question. The results of answers on the 0 to 10 scale will signify how strong the assumed relationship of the variables is. In other words, an answer nearer to 10 would signify that a participant felt confident in their ability in a specific circumstance.

The goal of these methods will be to have participants reflect on general experiences relating to their confidence, both on the field and off, and honestly acknowledge their responses on the scale. Once the data has been gathered, responses can be separated and further analyzed based on the theme of the question, such as questions about on-field performance or about a coach's affirming remarks. Doing this theme analysis will allow for a clearer investigation of a smaller group of responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

Ethical Considerations

The personal safety and privacy of the participants will be of utmost concern during this study. Therefore, informed consent will be gathered from each participant prior to starting the questionnaire. During the evaluating period, no personal details will be collected from participants other than the names of the leagues they participate in and the names of the organizations they are employed by.

Administrators of the evaluations will be present whenever participants are completing the questionnaire. Administrators will ensure that evaluations have been completed correctly and before subsequent participants begin their evaluation. Though answers to the evaluations will be

used during the writing of the study, the participants will not be credited for quoted answers. Participation is voluntary, and the research project will undergo Internal Review Board (IRB) review for approval prior to the commencement of the study.

Conclusion

To measure the self-efficacy of high-level athletes, a questionnaire based on the Strength Self-Efficacy Scale (SSES) created by Tsai et al. (2013), will be administered to participants who are a part of a wide range of North American sports leagues. The SSES questionnaire is a 25 to 35 question, single occurrence self-assessment that allows participants to assess their strengths relating to self-efficacy. Data gathered from the questionnaire will be helpful for understanding the self-efficacy of high-level and professional athletes in future studies.

Chapter 3: Discussion and Conclusion

To reiterate, the purpose of this study will be to use Tsai et al.'s (2013) Strength Self-Efficacy Scale (SSES) to examine the self-efficacy of professional athletes. It is assumed that professional athletes have high self-efficacy and an examination into the topic of self-efficacy of professional athletes is worth investigating. Using the data gathered from Tsai et al.'s (2013) SSES questionnaire, valuable insight can be gathered on the self-efficacy of professional athletes in North America.

Practical Applications

A study based on the topic of self-efficacy of professional athletes may benefit the sports psychology field. Evidence examining the self-efficacy of professional athletes, at least in the four major sports leagues in North America, is already lacking. As stated before, much of the work already done on this topic has been in amateur sports. However, a study focusing on professional participants may give insight into a topic that has been widely discussed by academics and fans for decades – the psychological makeup of professional athletes.

Limitations

The first potential limitation for conducting this study is gaining access to participants who are active athletes in professional sports leagues. The leagues and their teams do not need to grant access to their athletes for any reason and may be apprehensive to grant access to an outside research group. It is suggested that administrators of this study request permission from the league managers before soliciting email addresses from individual teams.

A second limitation lies in the methodology of Tsai et al.'s (2013) questionnaire, namely in the effectiveness of the model. Tsai et al.'s (2013) questionnaire may be too imprecise for some researcher's preferences. However, as mentioned in the introduction, there are other

models to measure an individual's self-efficacy. Researchers may decide that another model may be more useful and thorough to examine a participant's self-efficacy. Furthermore, common limitations such as unwilling or unenthusiastic participation by athletes, unexpected cancellations, rushed or unthorough questionnaire administration and technological failure must be expected.

A third limitation is that the sports leagues mentioned only allow male participants. A future study on this topic will need to make note that the participants play in male-only leagues. Furthermore, a study focusing on the results of participants in female-only professional sports leagues may need to be a separate study from the one proposed here.

Recommendations for Further Research

One recommendation for future research into the topic of self-efficacy in professional sports is to investigate specific groups, such as racial and gender minorities, within the larger focus group. A questionnaire can then be tailored to these specific sub-groups. A second recommendation is to continue to refine a questionnaire that suits a specific group of participants in order to gain the clearest understanding of responses possible. A third recommendation is to directly compare questionnaire results by professional athletes to those of amateur athletes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a study based on the topic of self-efficacy in professional athletes could lead to an opportunity to examine athletes in a way that has not been accomplished before. As stated before, there has been work published related to self-efficacy, but there has also been a severe lack of work published about the self-efficacy of athletes at the highest levels of sport. A study based on this proposal could have positive effects on the topic often wondered about in the

field of sports psychology, sports media and general fandom since professional sports first began.

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Appendix A

Participant Questionnaire

Peter Voelker, a graduate student at Concordia University, St. Paul is conducting research on self-efficacy and athletes. This project has been reviewed and approved by the IRB Board. All answers are confidential with personal identifiers removed prior to data analysis. Any questions can be sent to Peter Voelker at voelkerp@csp.edu.

I, _____ understand the purpose of the study, the potential risks of my involvement, and my level and type of participation. I acknowledge that I may withdraw my participation in the study at any time and that I am guaranteed full confidentiality to participate.

By clicking into the survey, you are agreeing to participate. Thank you!

Please check the professional sport you currently play:

- Basketball
- Football
- Baseball
- Hockey

Please share the name of the sport, organization, and team you currently play for:

Organization: _____ Team: _____

For the following questions, please mark your answer on a scale of 0 to 10 with 0 indicating “Zero or No Confidence” and 10 “100% or Very Confident”.

How confident are you in your ability to

1. _____ use your strengths at work?
2. _____ use your strengths in your relationships?
3. _____ focus on developing your top strengths?
4. _____ apply your strengths in several situations?
5. _____ focus on your strengths every day?
6. _____ identify ways to build on existing strengths?

7. ____ determine your ways to apply your strengths?
8. ____ find ways to regularly use your strengths?
9. ____ use your strengths without any struggles?
10. ____ develop your strengths through practice?
11. ____ use your strengths to enhance your relationships?
12. ____ track the growth of your strengths overtime?
13. ____ find ways to apply your strengths in the things you do every day?
14. ____ accomplish a lot by using your strengths?
15. ____ identify different areas where your strengths can help you?
16. ____ allow your strengths to play a major role in your life?
17. ____ put your strengths into action in your daily life?
18. ____ apply your strengths at work/school?
19. ____ focus on developing your most important strengths?
20. ____ use your strengths in many situations?
21. ____ put your strengths to use in your daily life?
22. ____ use your strengths to overcome any obstacle?
23. ____ use your strengths to succeed?
24. ____ determine how to build on your current strengths?
25. ____ identify strengths that you use to improve your relations with others?
26. ____ use your strengths in your leisure activities?
27. ____ to utilize several strategies for enhancing your strengths?
28. ____ use your strengths every day?
29. ____ identify a strength that you need to use to accomplish a task?
30. ____ find ways to use your strengths at work/school every day?
31. ____ use your strengths at any time?
32. ____ use your strengths to help you achieve your goals in life?
33. ____ improve your life through focusing on your strengths?
34. ____ practice your strengths in areas where you excel?