

# Strategies And Psychological Skills Training Experience In Malaysia National Rugby Team During The Asia Rugby Championship

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this study is to examine the application, experiences, and perceptions of the psychological skills training (PST) among Malaysian national rugby 15's players during the Asian Rugby Championship (ARC). In this study the mixed method research design (Exploratory Sequential Mix-Method) using questionnaire (quantitative) and interview (qualitative) methods were employed. Firstly, the Test of Performance Strategies (TOPS) questionnaire was administered with all 25 players. Using the MANOVA statistical analysis the study findings showed that there were only significant differences in the two aspects of strategy namely automacity and goal setting ( $p < 0.017$ ) out of nine psychological performance strategies during the ARC 2018. In terms of psychological strategy based on player position and experience, there were significant differences only in each aspect of the strategy encompasses goal setting and automacity only ( $p < 0.017$ ). Secondly, semi structured interviews were conducted with 10 key players, the results indicated that 70 percent of players were unable to provide accurate information on the use of psychological strategies during competition. There is some inconsistency comparing both quantitative and qualitative data. The implications of this combined analysis indicate that there is no difference in the use of sports psychology strategies overall or in terms of player position and experience. Malaysia rugby players' also have limited experience on comprehensive psychological skill training due to lack of consistent psychological skills training. In conclusion, Malaysian rugby players were in need of specialized training in sports psychology with prolonged and assimilated to training periodization program to enhance understand and training efficiency.*

**Keywords:** *Psychology skills training,*

## **1. Introduction:**

Rugby is a two-team ball game played in several categories such as seven, ten and 15 team players. Rugby game is considering physical and psychological demanding game as the nature of the game that requires physical and mental strength during competition (Hodge, Lonsdale & Ng, 2008). Physical training program in rugby game was well establish in many publication, conversely for psychology study they are many important aspect could be examine (Mellalieu, 2017). In relation to psychology training preparation, a diagnose phase is important. During this diagnose phase athletes' psychology requirements is accumulated. Basically, there are two types of diagnose measures can be adopted encompasses employing questionnaire and face to face interview (Borges, Rosado, & de Oliveira, 2015). Examining Malaysian rugby games situation, although sports psychology preparation was detected among Malaysian rugby players, according to 15's team manager Raimi Yusof there are no specific programs and models of sports psychology training ever used in national team. These

situations occur due to limited study was conducted among the Malaysian 15 rugby team. For this reason, a diagnose phase considering these two method were conducted in this study. These combined methods were employed to gain a better understanding of the psychological needs and athletes involvement in it (Azizuddin, Morris, Marchant, 2015).

## **2. Method Participants**

Volunteer participation from all national 25 players rugby players were recruited for quantitative methods using questionnaires. For interviews measure, 10 players representing the play position and years' of experience represented national team were invited to participate.

### **Measures**

#### **Questionnaire (TOPS)**

Test of Performance Strategies (TOPS) is a self-report instrument designed to measure the overall use of athletes' psychological skills and strategies during tournaments were employed in this study (Hardy, Roberts, Patrick, & Murphy, 2010). The questionnaire included psychological training that were used namely automacity, negative thinking, goal setting, relaxation, self-motivation, attention control, self-communication, activation and immigration.

#### **Interviews**

The use of structured semi-structured interviews was adopted in this study. For interview method a semi structured interview could provide important information in parallel to questionnaire measure (Azizuddin, Morris, Marchant, 2015). Interview was conducted in isolated room and audio recorded. The audio interview were transcribed into verbatim and compared with the audio. The interviews were re-read, coded and categorized according to a specific theme. From this interview, player's views perception and knowledge on specific questions were gained. This method usually results in higher response rates. Athletes are more likely to answer interview questions orally rather than fill out questions that can be several pages long.

#### **Triangulation Method**

The aim of this research is to generate new knowledge including findings about the relationships and predictions of the findings of this study in this context focused on the Malaysian rugby team 15's team psychology training preparation and used during competition. Therefore, the implementation of method triangulation that is questionnaires and interviews could provide holistic information (Jones, Brown, & Holloway, 2013).

#### **Procedures**

This study was conducted following permission from the Malaysian Rugby Union and the Sultan Idris University of Education (UPSI). Players were provided with study information and consent forms. The purposed of the study were explained to all players who volunteered to participate and researchers managed the TOPS questionnaires. For interview measures, 10 players who related to the designated position of play and number of experience representing national team were invited. Semi structured face to face interviews were conducted with all players selected in an isolated room.

#### **Analyses**

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS: version 17.0) software was used to calculate the means and standard deviations. Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was employed to test for significant differences between the conditions in terms of participants' position of play and experiences. For interview analysis, audio data were transcribed into verbatim and crosscheck with the audio. Transcribe interview were presented

to the players to be check to enhance trustworthiness. Employing pencil and paper techniques the thematic analysis produces was conducted by two different panel of expert to gain information on players experience, perception and knowledge regarding PST training.

### 3. Results

#### Psychological Strategy During Competition (TOPS)

MANOVA test was used to assess the number one to three question at a significant level of  $p < 0.17$ . Pearson correlation was used to answer the research question at a significant level of  $p < 0.017$ . Wilk's Lambda. is used to determine significant levels. According to Table 1, the results of the analysis of nine psychological strategies during the ARC 2018 tournament involving Malaysian rugby players ( $n = 25$ )  $F = 7.206$   $p = .001$ , Wilk's Lambda = .56, partial eta squared = .440. Based on Table 1, the 9 sub-scale analysis results of the current ARC 2018 performance strategy involving 25 Malaysian rugby players showed that there were significant differences in 2 aspects of strategy namely Automacity ( $p < 0.015$ ) and Goal Setting ( $p < 0.017$ ). Studies show that 7 out of 9 performance strategies make no significant difference in the use of player psychological strategies during the 2018 Asian Rugby Championship.

*Table.1 Psychology Strategy During Competition*

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Sig *</i>
Self-talk	25	3.61	0.79	0.083
Emotional Control	25	2.96	0.76	0.157
Automacity	25	3.41	0.51	0.015*
Goal Setting	25	3.85	0.69	0.017*
Imagery	25	3.65	0.89	0.355
Activation	25	3.59	0.69	0.152
Relaxation	25	3.61	0.75	0.615
Negative Thinking	25	2.97	0.68	0.633
Disruption	25	3.05	0.72	0.038

Significant Level:  $p < 0.017 *$

#### Psychological Strategy During Competition Based on Player Position (TOPS)

The results of the analysis based on the player's position showed that there was a significant difference in only one aspect of the strategy that is goal setting ( $p < 0.017$ ).

*Table 2 Psychological Strategy During Competition Based on Player Position.*

	Position	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Sig*</i>
Self-talk	Forward	17	3.16	0.78	.083
	Backline	8	4.06	0.79	
Emotional Control	Forward	17	3.00	0.57	.157
	Backline	8	2.91	0.95	
Automacity	Forward	17	3.31	0.58	.969
	Backline	8	3.66	0.53	
Goal Setting	Forward	17	3.72	0.86	.017*
	Backline	8	3.97	0.53	
Imagery	Forward	17	3.62	0.83	.626
	Backline	8	3.72	0.91	
Activation	Forward	17	3.50	0.64	.315

Relaxation	Backline	8	3.78	0.82	.933
	Forward	17	3.47	0.74	
Negative Thinking	Backline	8	3.94	0.79	.991
	Forward	17	2.93	0.59	
Disruption	Backline	8	3.06	0.700	.038
	Forward	17	2.85	0.55	
	Backline	8	3.25	0.89	

Significant Level:  $p < 0.017$  \*

### Psychology Strategies During Competition Based on Experience (TOPS)

The results of the analysis based on the player's experiences indicate that there is significant differences only on automaticity component ( $p < .017$ ) however, eight out of nine performance strategies were found no significant difference in player experience over five years and less than five years.

*Table 3 Psychological Strategy During Competition Based on Experience*

	Experience	N	M	SD	Sig*
Self-talk	< 5 Years	12	3.08	0.82	.862
	> 5 Years	13	3.79	0.82	
Emotional Control	< 5 Years	12	3.02	0.55	.377
	> 5 Years	13	2.92	0.83	
Automaticity	< 5 Years	12	3.13	0.60	.015*
	> 5 Years	13	3.69	0.41	
Goal Setting	< 5 Years	12	3.48	0.84	.180
	> 5 Years	13	4.10	0.57	
Imagery	< 5 Years	12	3.54	0.76	.355
	> 5 Years	13	3.75	0.91	
Activation	< 5 Years	12	3.42	0.59	.152
	> 5 Years	13	3.75	0.78	
Relaxation	< 5 Years	12	3.35	0.80	.615
	> 5 Years	13	3.87	0.69	
Negative Thinking	< 5 Years	12	2.94	0.67	.633
	> 5 Years	13	3.00	0.60	
Disruption	< 5 Years	12	2.96	0.80	.316
	> 5 Years	13	3.00	0.59	

Significant Level:  $p < 0.017$

### Qualitative Study Findings (Interviews)

Based to the theme analysis (Patton, 2015) interview result on 10 Malaysian rugby players selected based on team position and experience was analyzed. Three main themes emerges encompasses player PST knowledge, personal experience based on position and duration of played, and individual perception. The findings show that 70% of Malaysian rugby players have limited knowledge of sports psychology despite representing the country at the highest level of competition. Employing semi structured interview the result indicates that there are some inconsistency on results from quantitative study and interview. Player having some difficulties to explain main component on PST training, even though they think that the training is important. From experience perspectives, interview results indicates that there are not much differences between player position and experience of representing nation team regarding types of PST employed during competition. This result was also consistent with the

quantitative data. In addition, most of the players believe that PST is important during competition, however they could not provide any information regarding holistic and prolonged PST training program during representing national rugby team.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings show that the diagnostic phase was important to be conducted before any psychological intervention was planned. Through diagnostic phase an individual and team basic needs of psychology training can be accumulated. In this study, the triangulation data indicates that the national 15's rugby players have limited knowledge and less consistent involvement in PST training. Previous PST training conducted was found less to accommodate specific need of individual team requirements and better understanding of the training purpose. Therefore, national rugby team is in need of a holistic and consistent PST program that can be embedded with physical training periodization. Finally, the questionnaire and interviews measures were found to be beneficial to gain more information regarding athletes PST training needs.

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