

“WHAT IS SUCCESS?” THE PERCEPTION OF JUNIOR HANDBALL PLAYERS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOTIVATION AND PERFORMANCE

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Abstract: *The researches documented by literature have tried to identify the mechanisms which drive sportspeople to achieve great performances. The goals of sports clubs and organisations, mainly oriented towards achieving performance, can only be reached through the sportspeople's efforts. One of the reasons for which some are more efficient than others, is the quantity and quality of the efforts made by the sportspeople, efforts which are directly linked to motivation. To do well, handball players must be deeply involved in their work and eager to reach certain goals, from the simplest (such as the desire to beat their opponents in the training room) to the most complex ones (the desire to obtain a leading position in the greatest competitions).*

Key words: *sports performance, competition, handball, motivation, perception, junior handball players.*

1. Motivational Variables Involved in Achieving Performance in Handball Matches

In performance sport as well as in the sport practised by most of the people for keeping fit, motivation plays an extremely important role in obtaining success / reaching one's goals. Although we are tempted to believe that success in sports is only due to innate abilities, we must be aware of the fact that motivation is equally important. We outline, once more, the fact that motivation refers to the mental process which determines, guides and supports certain behaviours.

Motivation represents the active factor in the decision of an individual to become involved in a certain activity and to make an effort to that end. It may be defined as “the direction and intensity of an effort” [6]; “the dynamic factors which determine an individual's conduct” [9]; “the totality of intrinsic motives of the conduct, either innate or acquired, conscious or unconscious, simple biological needs or abstract ideals” [7]; “it is, at the same time, selective orientation of the behaviour and energising factor of the same” [4].

We distinguish between two types of variables which might influence performance in handball matches:

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1.1. Internal Variables

a) *demographic* – they are closely linked to physical activity. Education, the male genre, income and socioeconomic status have been constantly and positively associated with physical activity

b) *cognitive and personality-wise*

Self-efficacy and self-motivation are the most consistent predictors of the adhesion to a program of physical activities.

Bandura defined self-efficacy as “the individual’s belief in his ability to organise and to perform a certain action, to solve a problem or to accomplish a task” [1] Self-efficacy is one’s belief in one’s successful accomplishment of a desired behaviour. For instance, the beginning of a program of physical activities is affected by our belief in the ability to accomplish the desired behaviour (for instance, running) and to continue it. It is important to help people trust their capacities and abilities, through social support and encouragement. Success can lead to stronger confidence and stronger confidence can lead to a stronger wish to continue an activity.

Self-efficacy represents a strong predictor of physical activity [1]. Studies show that adults who are physically more efficient are likely to get involved in regular physical activities, to make more effort and have greater success than those with a low level of physical efficiency.

c) *behaviours*

There is a positive relationship between participation in physical activities as a child and participation in physical activities as an adult. A vast research, carried out on 40,000 children from ten European countries, shows that it is highly likely for children whose parents and friends participated to sports to do sport as well and to continue it later, in their adult life [2]. These results underline the importance of encouraging the early

involvement of young people in various physical activities and the positive role model of their parents, friends, etc.

1.2. External Variables

- External settlement: the perspective of rewards, praise, admiration and avoidance of punishments;
- Cultural factors;
- Contextual factors: family, friends, any significant relationship associated with achieving success in sports;
- Elements specific to sports: it fulfils creative needs, affiliation needs, the individual’s need to unwind.

2. The General Goal of the Study

- The investigation of the manner in which handball performance is associated with a high level of motivation of the sportspeople belonging to the investigated group (junior handball players (10–12 years old).

The motivational level, as research variable, has been put into practice through:

- Sportspeople’s degree of perception of the advantages brought by handball on a personal level;
- Sportspeople’s degree of perception of the changes that sport has brought to their lifestyle;
- Sportspeople’s degree of perception of the (internal or external) factors which can be associated with the achievement of sports performance;
- Sportspeople’s degree of perception on future perspectives concerning playing handball.

The performance level is quantified according to the sportspeople’s appreciations of the achieved performances: week, medium and high performance.

2.1. The Hypotheses of the Study

In the light of the above, we have elaborated the **specific hypotheses of the present paper:**

- High-level performance perceived by junior handball players is associated with their high degree of perception of the advantages implied by this sport;
- High-level performance perceived by junior handball players is associated with their high degree of perception of the changes that this sport has brought to their lifestyle;
- High-level performance perceived by junior handball players is associated with their high degree of perception of the (internal or external) factors which can lead to success.

2.2. Research Tool

The questionnaire for handball players aged 10-12 contains 9 items (excluding the socio-demographic data) which concern the following:

- sportspeople's perception of the reason which determined them to take up this sport – 4 possible answers, a single choice;
- sportspeople's perception of the advantages brought by handball on a personal level – 5 possible answers, from "To a great extent" (1) down to "Don't know/Refused to answer", a single choice;
- the perception of the 10-12-year old sportspeople of the aspects which represent the advantages of doing this sport – question addressed to the respondents who chose option 1, respectively 2 for the previous question, 5 possible answers, a single choice;
- sportspeople's perception of the attractive aspects of handball playing – 4 possible answers, a single choice;
- the perception of junior handball players of the changes brought by sport

to their lifestyle – 4 possible answers, a single choice;

- sportspeople's perception of the degree in which playing sport may be useful in the future, from "To a great extent" (1) down to "Don't know/Refused to answer", a single choice.

2.3. Sample

The research sample consisted of 60 subjects – junior handball players, 59 girls and 1 boy.

2.4. Procedure

Participants were asked to fill in the questionnaires after having been explained the purpose of the research and reassured of the confidentiality of the results and of their anonymity.

None of the participants refused to answer the questionnaire and they were asked to select the option which best corresponded to their beliefs, by circling the number in front of the selected option. The task was achieved in 5 to 10 minutes.

2.5. Research Methodology

The correlation-type design means to emphasise the degree of association between two or several parameters without being concerned with establishing a cause-effect relationship, but only one of covariance or association. The dependent and independent variables are measured in conditions which do not allow causal confusions. In our research, as independent variables are label-like (genre, subjects' age, living environment), dependent variables are represented by certain items of the questionnaires.

3. The Results

The correlative analysis of the statistical

indicators obtained in various stages of the research is detailed below:

- **Hypothesis 1** - High-level performance perceived by junior handball players is

associated with their high degree of perception of the advantages implied by this sport.

Perception of 10-12-year old handball players about advantages of playing sport

Table 1

		To what extent do you consider that this sport brings personal advantages to you?	How do you appreciate the sports performance of your team?
To what extent do you consider that this sport brings personal advantages to you?	Pearson correlation coefficient	1	0.420*
	Probability level		0.122
	N	60	60
How do you appreciate the sports performance of your team?	Pearson correlation coefficient	0.420*	1
	Probability level	0.122	
	N	60	60

* Significant correlation at threshold 0.01

A high and significant correlation ($r = .42$; $p < 0.01$) was obtained between the variable concerning the perception of 10-12-year old handball players of the extent in which playing a sport brings personal advantages and the variable concerning the sportspeople's perception of the performance level of their team (see table 1). The result indicates an association between high values and levels given to the two variables by the respondents.

The hypothesis is thus confirmed, indicating that obtaining sports performance brings about a stronger belief in the personal advantages and benefits associated with playing a sport. The two variables are reciprocal, one bringing about the other.

- **Hypothesis 2** - High-level performance perceived by junior handball players is associated with their high degree of perception of the changes that this sport has brought to their lifestyle

Perception of 10-12-year old handball players about the link between lifestyle and sport performance

Table 2

		What has changed in your life since taking up this sport?	How do you appreciate the sports performance of your team?
What has changed in your life since taking up this sport?	Pearson correlation coefficient	1	0.340*
	Probability level		0.152
	N	60	60
How do you appreciate the sports performance of your team?	Pearson correlation coefficient	0.340*	1
	Probability level	0.152	
	N	60	60

* Significant correlation at threshold 0.01

A smaller, but significant, correlation ($r = .34$; $p < 0.01$) was obtained between the variable concerning the perception of 10-12-year old handball players of the changes brought by handball to their lifestyle and the variable concerning the sportspeople's perception of the performance level of their team (see table 2). The result indicates an association between average, moderate values and levels awarded to the two variables by the respondents.

The hypothesis is confirmed, emphasising the strong connection between the success obtained and the obvious, beneficial changes of the sportspeople's lifestyle. A healthier lifestyle creates, in its turn, the premises for obtaining notable sports success.

- **Hypothesis 3** - High-level performance perceived by junior handball players is associated with their high degree of perception of the (internal or external) factors which can lead to success.

Table 3

Perception of 10-12-year old handball players about the aspects below leads to sports performance

		Which of the aspects below leads to sports performance?	How do you appreciate the sports performance of your team?
Which of the aspects below leads to sports performance?	Pearson correlation coefficient	1	0.360*
	Probability level		0.112
	N	60	60
How do you appreciate the sports performance of your team?	Pearson correlation coefficient	0.360*	1
	Probability level	0.112	
	N	60	60

* Significant correlation at threshold 0.01

A smaller, but significant, correlation ($r = .36$; $p < 0.01$) was obtained between the variable concerning the perception of 10-12-year old handball players of the (internal or external) factors which may lead to success and the variable concerning the sportspeople's perception of the performance level of their team. The result indicates an association between average, moderate values and levels awarded to the two variables by the respondents.

The hypothesis is confirmed, emphasising that motivated sportspeople, aware of their reasons for doing a certain sport, will rank among the performers,

their victories being strongly supported, both affectively and motivationally.

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