



TRAINING MENTAL SKILLS AND ITS IMPACT ON MANAGING COMPETITION ANXIETY AMONG FOOTBALL PLAYERS

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Abstract: This research aims to identify the impact of training mental skills on managing competition anxiety among senior football players.

The researchers used the experimental method with a single-sample design through pre- and post-measurement for a group of football players totaling 16 players in the Annaba Regional League. After applying the statistical treatments to determine the significance of the differences between the pre- and post-measurements, the results were analyzed, which confirmed the validity of the hypotheses. The researcher concluded the following:

- 1- After applying the mental training program, the results showed an improvement in mental skills among the players in favor of the post-measurement.
- 2- After applying the mental training program, the results showed a decrease in the level of sports competition anxiety.
- 3- From the above, we conclude that mental training has a positive impact on confronting sports competition anxiety and developing some mental skills during the competition phase among football players.

Keyword: Mental training, sports competition anxiety, football players, mental skills development, experimental method.

ENTRAÎNEMENT DES COMPÉTENCES MENTALES ET SON IMPACT SUR LA GESTION DE L'ANXIÉTÉ LIÉE À LA COMPÉTITION CHEZ LES FOOTBALLEURS

Résumé : Cette recherche vise à identifier l'impact de l'entraînement des compétences mentales sur la gestion de l'anxiété liée à la compétition chez les footballeurs seniors. Les chercheurs ont utilisé une méthode expérimentale avec un échantillon unique, en effectuant des mesures avant et après la compétition, auprès d'un groupe de 16 footballeurs de la Ligue régionale d'Annaba. Après avoir appliqué des traitements statistiques pour déterminer la significativité des différences entre les mesures avant et après la compétition, les résultats ont été analysés, confirmant la validité des hypothèses. Les chercheurs ont conclu :

- 1- Après l'application du programme d'entraînement mental, les résultats ont montré une amélioration des compétences mentales chez les joueurs par rapport à la mesure après la compétition.

2- Après l'application du programme d'entraînement mental, les résultats ont montré une diminution du niveau d'anxiété liée à la compétition sportive.

3- De ce qui précède, nous concluons que l'entraînement mental a un impact positif sur la gestion de l'anxiété liée à la compétition sportive et le développement de certaines compétences mentales pendant la phase de compétition chez les footballeurs.

Mots-clés : Entraînement mental, anxiété liée à la compétition sportive, joueurs de football, développement des compétences mentales, méthode expérimentale.

Introduction and Research Problem:

Preparation for competitions is one of the most important stages included in the modern training process, which requires comprehensive preparation that covers all aspects without neglecting any of them. The physical, tactical, technical, and psychological aspects all participate comprehensively in achieving results during competitive phases, and the latter has become one of the decisive determinants for teams aspiring to achieve the desired results.

Training is considered an adaptation process aimed at meeting the requirements of competition under its conditions. Training and competition are characterized by a complementary relationship, as success in competition is impossible without respecting the training phases according to the nature of the competition and the desired results. (Weinek, 1997, p17)

The modern training process includes several dimensions, making it distinctive and complex, as the physical, neurophysiological, and cognitive aspects each contribute to achieving the intended results during competition. Research interested in addressing the field of sports and all types of preparation and building the lateral forms for all types of physical, morphological, and mental measurements agree that an athlete's success passes through three interrelated determinants: physical adaptations, technical aspects, and knowledge of mental skills and the ability to use them. The cognitive axis is particularly concerned with everything mental, such as helping the athlete confront stress and manage emotions, or anticipate the course of competition, all of which is related to studying personality traits and intrinsic and internal motivations. (Géorges, 2013, p22)

Stress and anxiety occupy an important part in our lives and are not limited to a specific category but affect all individuals. It is necessary to understand that stress allows us to adapt to situations containing stressors. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress is an interaction between the individual and their external environment and works to change the athlete's behavioral responses psychologically, leading to unadapted cognitive responses resulting from the player's self-evaluation, which produces negative or positive reactions that vary from one individual to another. (Virginie, 2012, p12)

Training mental skills is an important part in preparing players to enter competitions, as it includes all dimensions and components of competition from referees, fields, and external influences such as weather or the audience. The athlete must be able to develop strategic and objective plans, as sports practice requires a degree of mental uses. (Khasky et Smith, 1999, p88)

Therefore, preparation and training processes are supposed to include methods to reduce stress and anxiety associated with competition and should aim to mobilize the players' physical, skill, and mental abilities as well. It is required of program developers to consider that these programs include methods and approaches for the intellectual development of players. This is confirmed by Singer (1980) and Ezzat Mahmoud Al-Kashef (1991) that performance efficiency requires the physical, skill, and mental factors. (Al-Ansari, 2005, p11)

Football has become a sport that produces emotions for the audience and players in particular, as it contains many situations that lead the practicing individual to interact negatively or positively with these situations, and responses vary according to comprehensive preparation methods.

The competition phase is one of the phases with the greatest load on players, whether from the training or competitive aspect in the Annaba Regional League, where players face league competitions as well as cup competitions, resulting in high anxiety and arousal that can be observed directly among players. Coaches in these teams lack the basic techniques and methods for psychological preparation, and this is one of the observations noted by the researcher in a preliminary exploratory study to assess the reality of attention to the psychological aspects of players. It was found that the training phases for football in the Annaba Regional League focus only on the physical, technical, and tactical aspects with almost complete neglect of the psychological aspects despite their importance. The deficiency lies in the field application of psychological preparation techniques for players.

From here, the outlines of the research problem emerge, which aims to highlight the impact of mental training sessions during the competition phase in confronting competition anxiety and developing some mental skills for players.

1. Research Objectives:

1.1. General Objective:

This research aims to highlight the impact of mental training during the competition phase in confronting sports competition anxiety and developing some mental and psychological skills.

1.2. Partial Objectives:

- Preparing a mental training program for football players.
- Identifying the level of sports competition anxiety among football players.
- Identifying the level of the mental skills under study.

2. Research Hypotheses:

2.1. General Hypothesis:

Mental training has an impact on confronting sports competition anxiety and developing some mental skills during the competition phase among senior football players.

2.2. Partial Hypotheses:

- 1- There are statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements among the players of the Ittihad Hammam Chellala team (males - seniors) in some mental skills in favor of the post-measurement.
- 2- There are statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements among the players of the Ittihad Hammam Chellala team (males - seniors) in the level of sports competition anxiety in favor of the post-measurement.

3. Research Fields:

3.1. Human Field:

Players of clubs active in the first regional division, seniors category, for the Annaba Regional League for the 2016/2017 sports season.

3.2. Temporal Field:

From 13/11/2016 to 2017/03/25.

3.3. Spatial Field:

The municipal stadium of the Hammam Debagh district - Annex Souidani Boujemaa, Guelma Province.

4. Research Terms:

4.1. Psychological Preparation:

Psychological preparation concerns the medium term, i.e., at least one sports season, as it addresses the athlete's relationship and adaptation to their external environment. (Nicolas & Johan, 2004, p27)

It is preparing the player psychologically to overcome all obstacles that affect their performance during sports competitions, by controlling behavioral aspects through developing psychological skills. (Al-Houri, 2017, p57)

4.2. Sports Competition Anxiety:

Sports Competition Anxiety means the anxiety resulting from competition situations (the match) in sports, and it is a special type of anxiety that occurs for the athlete in connection with match or sports competition situations, compared to the type of anxiety as a trait and as a state - according to Spielberg's concept, which can occur for the individual in any life situation that the individual considers threatening to them.

Martens (1977) sees that sports competition anxiety has great importance for the athlete and can be classified as a trait or state. (Al-Ansari, 2005, p75)

4.3. Psychological Skills:

Psychological skill is an ability that can be learned and mastered through learning, practice, and training. The term training psychological skills is used in sports psychology to refer to the process in which mental skills are taught and trained within the framework of the mental training process, which means the systematic and organized application of scientific psychological and mental methods to elevate the athlete's performance level. Training the mental skills of athletes is not a magical or medical prescription or a quick therapeutic program, but an organized and standardized educational and teaching program aimed at helping athletes acquire and master mental skills, which in turn aim to elevate the sports performance level. (Allawi, 2002, pp. 192-194)

4.4. Sports Competition:

Alderman sees it as a struggle between two people to reach the desired goal or some result, and defines competition as any situation where there is a struggle between two people or a group of people to obtain all or the largest part of the reward, and this is related to the athlete's performance. (Adel, 1995, p67)

4.5. Mental Training:

Suinn defined it as: those strategies that use psychological and mental methods and skills in attempts to improve performance.

Morgan sees it as one of the special training methods that affect modifying and changing behavior and reinforcing learning. (Morgan, 1972, p94)

Training on mental skills is considered an important part in preparing players to enter competitions, as it includes all dimensions and components of competition from referees, fields, and external influences such as weather or the audience. The athlete must be able to develop strategic and objective plans, as sports practice requires a degree of mental uses. (Khasky & Smith, 1999, p88)

5. Research Procedures:

5.1. Research Method:

The researcher used the experimental method using a single group through pre-measurement and post-measurement for the experimental group due to its suitability for the nature of the research.

5.2. Research Population:

The research population consisted of players from clubs active in the first regional division in the Annaba Regional League for the sports season (2016-2017), seniors category.

5.3. Research Sample:

The research sample consisted of senior football players active in the first regional division of the Annaba Regional League for the sports season (2016-2017), distributed as follows:

- Basic Research Sample:

It was represented by the Ittihad Hammam Chellala team (I.HAMMAM CHELLALA), where their number reached (23) players. The researcher excluded (03) players from the team due to injury and irregularity in training, and took (04) players for the purpose of conducting the exploratory study in addition to (11) players belonging to the Ittihad Belkheir team (IRB.BELKHEIR). Thus, the basic research sample reached (16) players.

- Exploratory Study Sample:

It was selected randomly, and Table (01) shows the distribution of the exploratory study sample according to the selected clubs.

Table (01): Distribution of the Exploratory Study Sample According to the Selected Clubs

Number	Club Name	Number of Players
1-	Ittihad Belkheir (IRB.BELKHEIR)	(11) players
2-	Ittihad Hammam Chellala (I. HAMMAM CHELLALA)	(04) players

And Table (02) shows the final classification of the research sample with the percentages for the sample distribution.

Table (02): Final Classification of the Total Research Sample

Samples	Number of Players	Percentage
Exploratory Study Sample	15	44.11 %
Excluded Players	03	08.82 %
Basic Study Sample	16	47.05 %
Total Number	34	100 %

- Homogeneity of Sample Members in Primary Variables:

In order to control the extraneous variables that affect the experiment results and to achieve homogeneity among group members, the researcher used the statistical method of the coefficient of variation among sample members in the variables that included "chronological age - height - weight - training age," and Table (01) shows that.

Table (01)

Homogeneity of the Research Sample in Primary Variables (Chronological Age, Height, Weight, Training Age) Using the Coefficient of Variation (cv) (Less Than 30%) (n=16)

Variables	Unit of Measurement	Arithmetic Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Skewness Coefficient	Coefficient of Variation
Chronological Age	Years	23.687	1.447	-0.578	6.111%
Height	cm	178.75	4.905	0.609	2.744%
Weight	kg	77.687	5.510	0.312	7.092%
Training Age	Years	11.062	0.771	-0.112	6.977%

It is evident from Table (01) that the skewness coefficients range between (+3) and (-3), and the values of the coefficient of variation are less than 30% in the variables (chronological age, height, weight, training age), which indicates the normality of the frequency distribution and homogeneity among the basic research sample members.

- Homogeneity of Sample Members in Sports Competition Anxiety and Mental Skills:

The researcher described the basic research sample in sports competition anxiety in each of the dimensions (cognitive anxiety state - somatic anxiety state - self-confidence) as well as in psychological skills, and Table (02), (03) show that:

Table (02)

Arithmetic Means, Standard Deviations, and Skewness Coefficients for the Dimensions of the Sports Competition Anxiety State Scale for the Basic Research Sample (n=16)

Variables	Unit of Measurement	Arithmetic Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Median	Skewness Coefficient
Cognitive Anxiety State	Degree	20.375	0.5	20	0.571
Somatic Anxiety State	Degree	23.625	1.5	23.5	0.0634
Self-Confidence State	Degree	16.375	1.024	16	0.809

It is evident from Table (02) that the skewness coefficients range between (+3) and (-3), which proves the homogeneity of the basic research sample members in the sports competition anxiety state scale.

Table (03)

Arithmetic Means, Standard Deviations, and Skewness Coefficients for the Basic Research Sample in Mental (Psychological) Skills (Mental Skills Questionnaire) (n=16)

Variables	Unit of Measurement	Arithmetic Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Median	Skewness Coefficient
Self-Talk	Degree	26.937	2.015	27.5	-0.907
Imagery Ability	Degree	14.125	1.962	14	0.104
Relaxation Ability	Degree	14.562	1.787	14.5	0.523
Attention Focus Ability	Degree	11.75	2.352	11.5	0.026
Anxiety Coping Ability	Degree	13.625	2.5	13	0.547
Self-Confidence	Degree	13.375	2.629	14	-0.266
Achievement Motivation	Degree	11.50	2.943	11	0.636

It is evident from Table (03) that the skewness coefficients range between (+3) and (-3), which proves the homogeneity of the basic research sample members in mental (psychological) skills.

5.4. Exploratory Study:

The researcher conducted the exploratory study on a sample consisting of (15) players who do not belong to the basic study sample. This study aimed to:

Investigate the reality of psychological preparation and training of psychological skills through conducting interviews with coaches who supervise the training process for teams in the Annaba Regional League, totaling 15 coaches.

Identify the level of sports competition anxiety among players in the Annaba Regional League.

Determine the place and time factors for applying the study tools.

5.5. Research Tools:

A- Tools used to determine the homogeneity of the sample in some primary variables (descriptive and physical) as well as other variables, consisting of the following:

Height measurement device to measure total body height (measures to the nearest cm).

Medical scale to measure weight (measures to the nearest 0.5 kg).

Data collection form related to age (in years).

Data collection form related to training age (in years).

Personal interview with coaches to investigate the reality of psychological preparation and training of psychological skills and to identify various negative and positive emotions of players during the competition phase.

B- Scales used in the research:

Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2 (CSAI-2) by Martens et al. (1990), Arabized by Osama Kamel Rateb (1995).

Mental Skills Questionnaire, prepared by Mohamed Hassan Allawi.

C- Mental Training Program:

Based on references and previous studies, the program was applied over a considerable time period during the competition phase for the 2016/2017 sports season, where this period amounted to (12) weeks with the application of between (4), (3), and even (02) units per week. The duration of the units was limited to a period ranging between (10) and (15) minutes due to the available application time for the target sample. The total number of units and sessions in the program reached (42) sessions.

5.6. Main Experiment:

The main experiment began after standardizing the scales and ensuring their validity for application according to their scientific coefficients, determining the time period for applying the program units to the target sample, and adjusting the deficiencies faced by the researcher during the initial application of the exploratory experiment. The main experiment was applied during the period from 01/01/2017 to 25/03/2017. The researcher followed the following steps:

Conducting the pre-measurement for sports competition anxiety and mental skills.

Applying the mental training program.

Conducting the post-measurement for sports competition anxiety and mental skills.

5.7. Statistical Methods:

The researcher processed the data statistically using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version twenty-three (23) (SPSS V.23.00), to assist in determining the following statistical coefficients and values :

- Descriptive Statistics:

Arithmetic mean.

Standard deviation.

Percentages.

Skewness coefficient.

Coefficient of variation.

- Inferential Statistics:

Student's t-test.

Pearson correlation coefficient.

6. Presentation and Discussion of Results:

In light of the statistical analysis used by the researcher to test the research hypotheses, a set of results emerged, which we will address sequentially as follows:

6.1. Presentation of Pre- and Post-Test Results for the Basic Research Sample in the Athletes' Mental Skills Scale:

First Hypothesis:

There are statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements among the players of the Ittihad Hammam Chellala team (males

- seniors) in some mental skills attributable to the application of the mental training program.

To verify the validity of the first hypothesis, the researcher calculated the arithmetic mean and standard deviation for the basic research sample, where the t-test was applied to find the significance of the differences between the pre- and post-measurements for the psychological skills scale and to determine the percentage of differences between the pre- and post-measurements, as shown in Table (04):

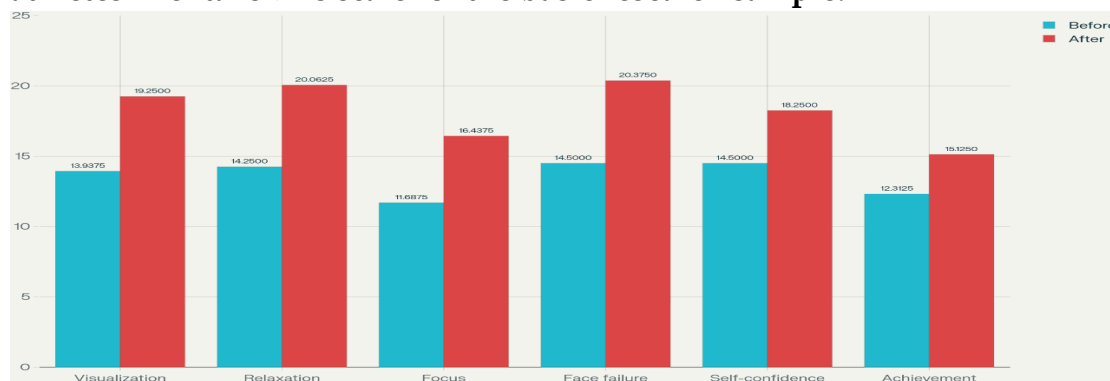
Table (04)

Differences Between Pre- and Post-Measurements for the Basic Research Sample in the Athletes' Mental Skills Scale. (n=16)

Variables	Pre-Test Arithmetic Mean	Post-Test Arithmetic Mean	Calculated t Value	Change Percentage
Imagery Ability	13.93	19.25	10.33	38.19%
Relaxation Ability	14.25	20.06	11.04	40.77%
Attention Focus Ability	11.68	16.43	7.98	40.66%
Anxiety Coping Ability	14.5	20.37	9.71	40.48%
Self-Confidence	14.5	18.25	7.83	25.86%
Achievement Motivation	12.31	15.12	5.05	22.82%

Tabulated t value at level $\alpha \leq 0.05$ and degrees of freedom 15 = 2.131

Figure (01): Shows the average of the pre- and post-measurements for the athletes' mental skills scale for the basic research sample.



Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion of Results from Table (04):

It is evident from Table (04), which shows the differences between the pre- and post-measurements for the basic research sample in the athletes' psychological skills scale:

- 1- There are statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements in the imagery ability skill, where the arithmetic mean reached 13.93 for the pre-test and 19.25 for the post-test.

The results of the t-test also showed substantial differences between the pre- and post-test results, where the calculated t value reached 10.33, which is greater than the tabulated t value of 2.131 at significance level $\alpha \leq 0.05$ and degrees of freedom 15.

- 2- There are statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements in the relaxation ability skill, where the arithmetic mean reached 14.25 for the pre-test and 20.06 for the post-test.

The results of the t-test also showed substantial differences between the pre- and post-test results, where the calculated t value reached 11.04, which is greater than the tabulated t value of 2.131 at significance level $\alpha \leq 0.05$ and degrees of freedom 15.

- 3- There are statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements in the attention focus ability skill, where the arithmetic mean reached 11.68 for the pre-test and 16.43 for the post-test.

The results of the t-test also showed substantial differences between the pre- and post-test results, where the calculated t value reached 7.98, which is greater than the tabulated t value of 2.131 at significance level $\alpha \leq 0.05$ and degrees of freedom 15.

- 4- There are statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements in the anxiety coping ability skill, where the arithmetic mean reached 14.5 for the pre-test and 20.37 for the post-test.

The results of the t-test also showed substantial differences between the pre- and post-test results, where the calculated t value reached 9.71, which is greater than the tabulated t value of 2.131 at significance level $\alpha \leq 0.05$ and degrees of freedom 15.

- 5- There are statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements in self-confidence, where the arithmetic mean reached 14.5 for the pre-test and 18.25 for the post-test.

The results of the t-test also showed substantial differences between the pre- and post-test results, where the calculated t value reached 7.83, which is greater than the tabulated t value of 2.131 at significance level $\alpha \leq 0.05$ and degrees of freedom 15.

- 6- There are statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements in achievement motivation, where the arithmetic mean reached 12.31 for the pre-test and 15.12 for the post-test.

The results of the t-test also showed substantial differences between the pre- and post-test results, where the calculated t value reached 5.05, which is greater than the tabulated t value of 2.131 at significance level $\alpha \leq 0.05$ and degrees of freedom 15.

The results also showed an increase in the change percentage for mental skills respectively (imagery ability, relaxation ability, attention focus ability, anxiety coping ability, self-confidence, achievement motivation), amounting respectively to (38.19%, 40.77%, 40.66%, 40.48%, 25.86%, 22.82%).

After obtaining the differences from the statistical processing of the athletes' mental skills scale between the pre- and post-measurements for the experimental sample members, the researcher was able to interpret them as follows: The researcher attributes these statistically significant differences to the role of psychological preparation, which included all these skills, including activating motivations, where this dimension represented 5.29% of the components of the proposed program.

The observed differences in the mental imagery skill confirm the effectiveness of the program in improving this skill, and these results agree with the study of Hassan Sadaghi (2010) on mental training among football players, as the results led to a noticeable increase in imagery skill among players. Studies by (Gammage, Hall & Rodgers, 2000) and (Vealy & Greenleaf, 2001) confirmed the possibility of improving and acquiring mental imagery skill through training on it according to a training program, and its role in modifying the competitive behavior of players. (Hassan, 2010, p82)

As for the relaxation ability skill, the difference between the pre- and post-measurements is clear and evident in the results of the two measurements, where the change percentage reached 40.77%, which is the largest value, indicating the success of the players in acquiring this skill, due to the repeated uses of relaxation techniques and it being the link between all stages in implementing the program.

This agrees with the study of Jebali Radwan (2013), and the study of Bahjat Abdul Majeed Abu Suleiman (2007), where differences appeared in the improvement of relaxation ability skills after applying the program.

Osama Kamel Rateb (2000) confirms that progressive and cognitive relaxation achieves the acquisition of the skill of getting rid of tension and feeling relaxation in different body areas, and breathing control techniques lead to acquiring the relaxation skill for athletes. (Rateb, 2007, p27)

As for the attention focus ability skill, we obtained differences in favor of the post-measurement, and the researcher attributes these differences to the effectiveness of the program in improving the skill.

Jake Pearson (2001) also confirmed that proper mental imagery training helps control anxiety, deal with sudden events, and develop skill performance in sports. (Jake, 2001, p80)

This is what Mahmoud Anan (1995) and Osama Rateb (2001) pointed out regarding the importance of developing the player's ability to direct attention towards stimuli related to performance, as it works to mobilize psychological energy that helps mobilize physical, emotional, and mental powers better and avoid negative thoughts that are a source of stress. (Abd Al-Fattah, 1995, p219)

An increase in the level of self-confidence on the scale between the pre- and post-measurements was also observed as a result of receiving the program units.

This is what Jones & Hardy confirmed in the results of interviews with (63) athletes in different sports, that (90%) of them who were undergoing mental and psychological training and preparation obtained the best results in self-confidence level as a result of practicing positive self-talk and activating their motivations towards optimal achievement. (Al-Houri, 2017, p86)

Positive results were obtained in the level of achievement motivation between the pre- and post-measurements.

This is what Martens et al. (1990), and Hardy (1996) obtained and confirmed, that it is necessary to undergo mental skills training programs to develop athletes' motivations towards achieving the desired results. (Amanda, 2014, p15)

This is confirmed by Guay (2014) regarding in-depth training of mental skills and its role in developing motivation, and this achieves the first hypothesis.

6.2. Presentation of Pre- and Post-Test Results for the Basic Research Sample in the Dimensions of the Sports Competition Anxiety State Scale:

Second Hypothesis:

There are statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements among the players of the Ittihad Hammam Chellala team (males - seniors) in the level of sports competition anxiety attributable to the application of the mental training program.

To verify the validity of the first hypothesis, the researcher calculated the arithmetic mean and standard deviation for the basic research sample, where the t-test was applied to find the significance of the differences between the pre- and post-measurements in the dimensions of the Competitive State Anxiety

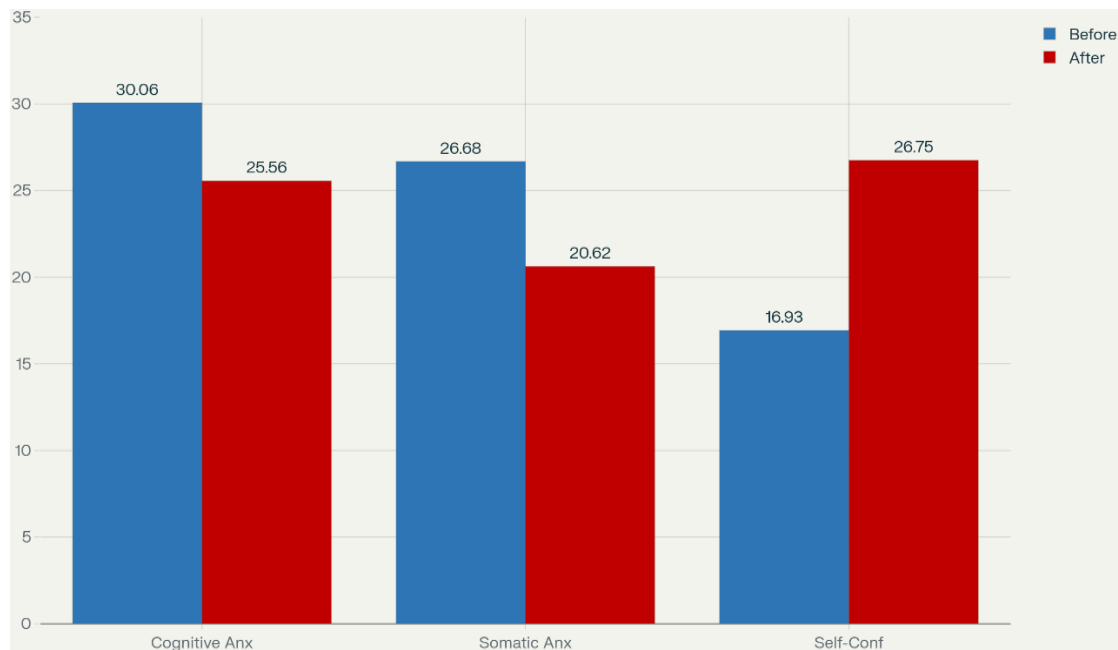
Inventory-2 (CSAI-2) and to determine the percentage of differences between the pre- and post-measurements, as shown in Table (05):

Table (05) Differences Between Pre- and Post-Measurements for the Basic Research Sample in the Dimensions of the Sports Competition Anxiety Scale. (n=16)

Variables	Pre-Test Arithmetic Mean	Post-Test Arithmetic Mean	Calculated t Value	Change Percentage
Self-Confidence State	16.93	26.75	12.39	58%
Somatic Anxiety State	26.68	20.62	10.70	-22.71%
Cognitive Anxiety State	30.06	25.56	10.27	97.14%

Tabulated t value at level $\alpha \leq 0.05$ and degrees of freedom 15 = 2.131

Figure (02): Shows the average of the pre- and post-measurements for the dimensions of the sports competition anxiety state scale for the basic research sample.



Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion of Results from Table (05):

It is evident from Table (05), which shows the differences between the pre- and post-measurements for the basic research sample in the dimensions of the sports competition anxiety state scale:

There are statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements in the self-confidence state variable, where the arithmetic mean reached 16.93 for the pre-test and 26.75 for the post-test.

The results of the t-test also showed substantial differences between the pre- and post-test results, where the calculated t value reached 12.39, which is greater than the tabulated t value of 2.131 at significance level $\alpha \leq 0.05$ and degrees of freedom 15.

There are statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements in the somatic anxiety state variable, where the arithmetic mean reached 26.68 for the pre-test and 20.62 for the post-test.

The results of the t-test also showed differences between the pre- and post-test results, where the calculated t value reached 10.70, which is greater than the tabulated t value of 2.131 at significance level $\alpha \leq 0.05$ and degrees of freedom 15.

There are statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements in the cognitive anxiety state variable, where the arithmetic mean reached 30.06 for the pre-test and 25.56 for the post-test.

The results of the t-test also showed differences between the pre- and post-test results, where the calculated t value reached 10.27, which is greater than the tabulated t value of 2.131 at significance level $\alpha \leq 0.05$ and degrees of freedom 15.

The results also showed an increase in change rates in the post-measurements compared to the pre-measurements in the dimensions of cognitive anxiety and somatic anxiety, where the change percentage reached respectively 97.14% -22.71%, and an increase in the change percentage for the self-confidence state of 58% among the basic research sample.

After obtaining the differences from the statistical processing of sports competition anxiety state (cognitive anxiety state, somatic anxiety state, self-confidence state) between the pre- and post-measurements for the experimental sample members, the researcher was able to interpret them as follows:

The researcher attributes these statistically significant differences to the role of psychological preparation in reducing sports competition anxiety, as the program included relaxation exercises at a rate of 25.16% of the total program, indicating a positive impact on anxiety and stress states that players face during entering sports competition. This indicates the importance and role of mental training and preparation and relaxation training in reducing pressures and stress faced by players in teams aspiring to success.

This is confirmed by Osama Kamel Rateb (2004) that attention to the psychological aspect leads to reducing cognitive and somatic anxiety, and

relaxation training is one of the most important methods that lead to reducing tension and help confront pressures and anxiety states. (Rateb, 2007, p647)

This indicates that the program applied to the experimental group of players had a positive impact, and thus gave them the ability to confront anxiety resulting from competition situations. This can be interpreted as through applying muscular relaxation, the player acquires the ability to control breathing as well as release the tension present in the muscles, thereby reducing secretions including cortisol, as the latter has a direct relationship with stress. Cognitive relaxation also works on forming concepts and reorganizing information, resulting in modification of cognitive responses towards competitive situations. Relaxation works to reduce accumulations and tensions to facilitate the task and motor duty for the player, and also leads to modifying situational responses, especially those with high intensity and in stages of physical fatigue or stress that results in what is called mental fatigue. Relaxation produces situational responses and states with less anxiety at the somatic and cognitive levels. Relaxation is also one of the self-enhancement techniques that lead to normal reactions towards the competitive situation accompanied by mental processes represented in organizing and arranging information and finding answers to ambiguous stages of competition. (Christian, 2016, p133)

Le Scanff confirms in this regard that the absence of control and confrontation results in an increase in stress level, where if the cognitive aspect for confronting the situation or position decreases, it leads to a decline in control ability and results in an increase in negative reactions at the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional levels. (Le Scanff, 1999, p18)

Spiel-Berger (1972) directs that attention to the psychological and mental aspects of the athlete contributes in turn to improving the performance of the athlete and the team, in terms of bearing the intensity of the training load and competitive situations that generate psychological stress. Competition requires enhancing confrontation methods and optimal guidance of sports directions, raising the level of motivation, and improving communication methods among team members. These techniques are used to alleviate competitive anxiety that appears on the athlete and which in turn leads to a decrease in their level. (Bakil Al-Sufi, 1994, p113)

Al-Ghurayri (2005) indicates in this regard that the good psychological state that characterizes the player makes them more capable of transforming negative thoughts into positive thoughts, as they remember the pleasant events and emotions that passed during their success in something, which affect their competitive behavior positively. Conversely, the bad psychological state reminds them of negative and failed events and emotions they experienced, and then it will affect their competitive behavior negatively. This is achieved by training on

various mental skills such as imagery, self-talk, and relaxation. The players' positive expectations towards their abilities and capabilities had a major role in their positive behavior in competitions, as the players' high confidence in these abilities led them to deal with different competition situations with high positivity. (Al-Ghurayri Wafaa Turki Muzaal, 2005, pp.114-115)

Cox (2002), Carr (2004), Snyder & Lopez (2005) also confirmed that adopting the cognitive behavioral model including self-talk techniques, goal setting, mental imagery contributes effectively to guiding positive behavior and modifying arousal. (Michael & Golby, 2006, p05)

Mohamed Al-Arabi (2001) reinforced this by pointing out that relaxation is the common factor in all psychological training and preparation programs due to its importance in reducing the intensity of tension and anxiety and preparing the psychological climate and nervous calm to achieve the best results. (Mohamed Al-Arabi Shamoun, 1999, p222)

From the above, it is clear that subjecting the research sample to the psychological preparation program, which includes confrontation strategies and cognitive and behavioral methods and contains relaxation techniques, led to reducing cognitive and physical anxiety states and reinforcing self-confidence towards the competitive situation, and this achieves the second hypothesis.

From here, the researcher concludes that mental training has an impact on confronting sports competition anxiety and developing some psychological skills during the competition phase among senior football players.

Conclusions:

In light of the sample limits and its characteristics, the method used, and the statistical analysis approach followed, the researcher was able to reach the following conclusions:

- 1- After applying the mental training program, the results showed an improvement in psychological skills among the players in favor of the post-measurement.
- 2- After applying the mental training program, the results showed a decrease in the level of sports competition anxiety.
- 3- From the above, we conclude that mental training has a positive impact on confronting sports competition anxiety and developing some psychological skills during the competition phase among football players.

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