



THE IMPACT OF INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PHYSICAL, SKILL, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PERFORMANCE IN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL PLAYERS

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Abstract

This paper investigates the differential impact of **intrinsic motivation (IM)** and **extrinsic motivation (EM)** on the performance domains of professional football players: physical, skill-based, and psychological. Drawing on a narrative review and synthesis of empirical findings from recent literature, the study confirms that while EM (e.g., financial rewards, recognition) can yield short-term performance gains, IM (e.g., passion, enjoyment, self-determination) is fundamentally linked to sustained high performance, long-term commitment, and psychological resilience [1]. Empirical evidence from studies on elite football players demonstrates a significant correlation between high competence and intrinsic factors like passion [4]. Furthermore, the absence of motivation (**amotivation**) is shown to be a major predictor of stress and burnout [6]. The findings underscore the critical need for professional football organizations to adopt coaching strategies that cultivate IM to ensure optimal and sustained athlete development.

Keywords: Motivation, physical performance, technical/skill performance, psychological performance

1. Introduction

Motivation is a cornerstone of athletic success, particularly in the highly competitive and demanding environment of professional football. The drive that propels athletes to endure rigorous training, maintain focus, and perform under pressure can be broadly categorized into two types: intrinsic and extrinsic [1]. **Intrinsic motivation** refers to engaging in an activity for the inherent satisfaction, enjoyment, and personal challenge it provides. A player driven by IM loves the game itself, the feeling of mastery, and the pursuit of personal excellence [1]. Conversely, **extrinsic motivation** involves engaging in an activity to obtain a separable outcome, such as tangible rewards (e.g., salary, bonuses), social recognition (e.g., trophies, media praise), or to avoid punishment [1].

The objective of this research is to synthesize current academic literature to determine the specific effects of IM and EM on the three critical performance dimensions in professional football players: **physical performance** (e.g., endurance, speed, consistency), **skill performance** (e.g., tactical execution, technical proficiency), and **psychological performance** (e.g., mental toughness, stress management, long-term commitment). Understanding the nuanced interplay between these motivational types is crucial for developing effective coaching and management strategies in elite sports settings.

2. Methods

This paper employs a **narrative review** methodology, synthesizing findings from empirical studies and comprehensive reviews published in peer-reviewed journals between 2001 and 2024. The focus was specifically on research applying Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and related motivational constructs within the context of elite and professional football (soccer) and general athletic performance [1].



The search strategy targeted databases such as PubMed, Scopus, and academic search engines using keywords including "intrinsic motivation," "extrinsic motivation," "professional football," "soccer performance," "physical performance," "skill development," and "psychological resilience." The selected studies provided quantitative data and qualitative insights necessary to structure the findings according to the IMRAD format, allowing for a detailed analysis of the impact of motivation across the three specified performance domains.

3. Results

The synthesis of the literature reveals distinct patterns regarding the influence of IM and EM on the performance dimensions of professional football players.

3.1. Impact on Physical and Skill Performance

Empirical studies consistently link higher levels of intrinsic motivation, particularly the concept of **passion**, to superior skill and competence in football [4]. A study comparing high-competence (HFC) and low-competence (LFC) groups in elite and junior football teams found a statistically significant difference in passion scores [4].

Group	Motivational Factor	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Significance (p)
Elite HFC	Passion	4.75	0.22	p = .04
Elite LFC	Passion	4.42	0.52	
Junior HFC	Passion	4.87	0.20	p = .004
Junior LFC	Passion	4.46	0.35	

Note: Passion was measured on a Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater passion for the sport [4].

These statistics suggest that the intrinsic drive, or passion, is a critical differentiator for achieving and maintaining high technical and physical standards. IM fosters the sustained adherence to demanding training programs necessary for physical conditioning and the deliberate practice required for skill mastery, whereas EM alone often leads to a focus on minimal effort required to secure the reward [1].

3.2. Impact on Psychological Performance

The psychological domain is where the distinction between IM and EM is most pronounced, particularly concerning long-term career sustainability and mental health.

Intrinsic Motivation and Commitment: IM is strongly associated with **self-regulated learning** and a focus on long-term goal-setting, which are vital psychological traits for professional athletes [5]. Players with high IM exhibit greater resilience and a more sustained commitment to their careers, as their satisfaction is derived from internal sources rather than fluctuating external rewards [1].

Amotivation and Stress: Conversely, the absence of motivation, or **amotivation**, poses a significant psychological risk. Research on elite soccer players indicates a strong correlation between amotivation and psychological distress [6].

Amotivation accounted for 49% of the variance in overall stress and 62% of the variance in sport-specific stress among elite soccer players [6].



This finding highlights that a lack of intrinsic drive leaves players psychologically vulnerable to the pressures of professional sport, increasing the risk of burnout and overtraining.

4. Discussion

The results confirm that while extrinsic rewards are an inherent part of professional football and serve as a necessary form of compensation, they are insufficient for driving optimal, sustained performance across all domains.

4.1. The Role of Intrinsic Motivation in Sustained Excellence

The data on passion and competence [4] strongly support the notion that IM is the engine of elite performance. A player who is intrinsically motivated will seek out challenges, persist through setbacks, and engage in the deep, focused practice required to develop superior physical and technical skills, even when external rewards are not immediately present. This is particularly relevant for the development of complex skills and tactical intelligence, which require years of dedicated, self-driven effort.

4.2. Extrinsic Motivation as a Reinforcer, Not a Driver

Extrinsic motivation, such as large contracts or public acclaim, can provide a powerful initial boost or a short-term focus [1]. However, when EM is the primary driver, it can lead to a phenomenon known as the "**overjustification effect**," where the introduction of an external reward diminishes the intrinsic interest in the activity [1]. In professional football, this could manifest as a player performing only to the level required to maintain their contract, rather than striving for continuous improvement.

4.3. Implications for Coaching and Organizational Strategy

The findings have clear implications for professional football clubs. Coaches must shift their focus from solely using external controls (e.g., threats, excessive bonuses) to creating a supportive environment that nurtures IM [1]. Key strategies include:

Fostering Autonomy: Allowing players input into training and tactical decisions.

Enhancing Competence: Providing specific, constructive feedback that focuses on mastery and improvement, rather than just outcomes.

Promoting Relatedness: Cultivating a positive team environment and strong coach-player relationships [1].

By integrating these elements, clubs can leverage the necessary EM of the professional environment while ensuring that the core drive remains intrinsic, thereby protecting players from psychological stress and maximizing their long-term potential.

5. Conclusion

The evidence overwhelmingly suggests that **intrinsic motivation** is the more potent and sustainable factor in the development of physical, skill, and psychological performance among professional football players. While extrinsic motivation provides necessary short-term reinforcement, it is the player's internal passion, enjoyment, and sense of self-determination that drives the sustained effort required for elite-level excellence and provides a buffer against the psychological demands of the sport. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies tracking the motivational profiles of players across their careers to further solidify the causal links between IM, EM, and career longevity.



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