

The Impact of Mental Happiness on the Athletic Success

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Abstract

Aims: The present study aims at determining the impact of mental happiness on athletic success.

Place and Duration: This study was conducted in Shiraz University of Medical Sciences during one academic term.

Methodology: 240 out of 1200 male athletes were enrolled in this study. They were randomly selected to participate in the study.

Results: The results of this study revealed that mental happiness is a significant indicator of the athletes' success ($r=0.68$ and $r^2=0.48$). Moreover, there was no significant difference between the athlete's scores in individual and group sports.

Conclusion: It was revealed that the effect of mental happiness on success in sport does not depend on the type of sport. The results of this study can be applied in training athletes and coaches.

Keywords: sport, athletes' mental happiness, success

1. Introduction

Today, in addition to physical abilities and professional skills, personality traits are considered important in athletic success. For many years, psychologists have focused on negative emotions more than positive ones. However, more attention has recently been paid to positive emotions (e.g. mental happiness) and researchers have tried to study their influence on components of performance. Positive psychological approach has a role in different aspects of life so that in the past decade, it has had a main place in the studies of mental health and psychology.^{1,2}

Mental happiness consists of emotional response, satisfaction and general judgment about life. Happiness is defined as “the predominance of the frequency of the occurrence of positive emotional experiences over negative ones.” (Pereira, 1997; as cited in Sarvardelavar & Arvin, 2012)³ It consists of 3 parts: satisfaction about life, pleasant emotion and unpleasant emotion, each one having subdivisions. Satisfaction about life can be categorized into satisfaction about different aspects of life such as recreations, love, marriage, friends, etc. Pleasant emotion is categorized into specific emotions and moods such as joy, affection and pride. Unpleasant emotions comprise specific emotions like embarrassment, sin, grief, anger and apprehension. (Dinner and Biswass-Dinner, 2000, as cited in Word, 2003)⁴

Generally, emotions and feelings are among the basics in life so that disturbance in their occurrence or functioning will lead to health and behavior problems. As concluded by Poursardar et al. (2012)¹, happiness positively affects life satisfaction though increasing mental health and "has an indirect effect on life satisfaction." (p.139)

As to emotions, there are various categorizations as positive and negative. Happiness can be defined through negative and positive emotions. So, such emotions are a constellation of feelings, moods and emotion of responses to pleasant and unpleasant events and constitute a normal life. As concluded in a study conducted in Australia,⁵ when positive emotion outweighs negative one, the individual enjoys more mental health, thus functioning more appropriately while, in the opposite case, mental health reduces and the individual's functioning is disturbed. In a more recent study conducted by Sarvardelavar and Arvin (2012)³, aiming at finding out the relationship between positive emotion and sport competition outcome, it was revealed that "winner expert athletes had a high happiness as compared to loser expert athletes" (p.609)

Cognitive assessment in different studies has been reported to correlate with athletic success (Lin, Rimen, Holmes, Schwartz, 1998, as cited by Blum and Mehrabian, 1999)⁶. Andrews and Whitey (1976)⁷ revealed that happiness is better recognized when the 3rd factor, i.e. cognitive assessment, is added and that is satisfaction about life.

Happiness as an aspect of positive emotion contributes to success, since it shows how individuals use their skills in stressful situations as sport matches. Today, many researchers believe that successful students, politicians, salesmen and athletes enjoy a high percentage of those emotions and it is likely that positive emotions play a more important role in the athletes' success than other spiritual factors. Therefore, considering the fact that these emotions are acquired and can be promoted through educational programs, this study aims to determine the role of positive emotions in success in sports. The results will contribute to qualitative promotion and athletic activities, leading to their further success.

Many studies have concluded that development of positive emotions significantly help individuals cope with stressful situation such as sport matches. Therefore, athletes or even coaches can be trained to practice such emotions to achieve more in their activities.

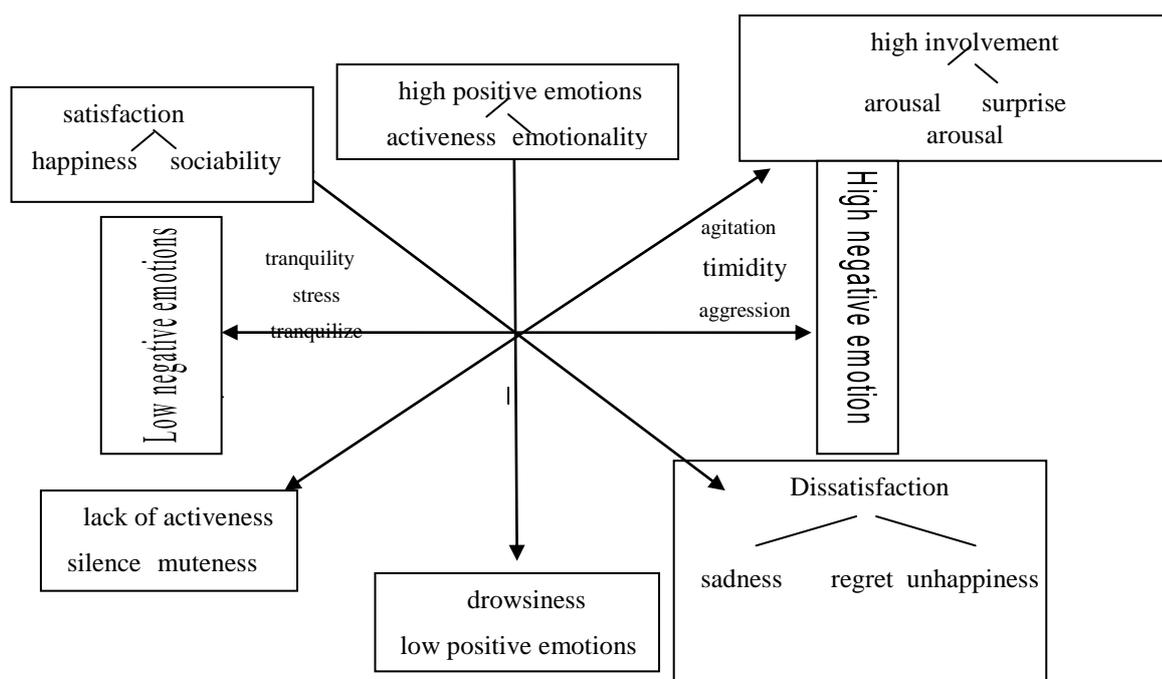
1.1. Review of literature:

It is obvious that in the case of matches, the athletes are emotionally involved, suffering such feelings as apprehension and tension. Those who have acquired sufficient skills to counter such emotions or are personally a positive person are more successful in sports.⁶

A great deal of research has been conducted on the association between personality traits and sporting behavior. In the regard, many studies have reported that different emotions might have positive or negative impacts on the way an athlete functions during sports.^{8,5} For example, Garland and Barry (1990)⁵ conducted a study on American college athletes in an attempt to determine the relationship between athletic success and personality traits. It has emerged that "tough mindedness, extroversion, group dependence and emotional stability accounted for 29% of the variance in skill" (p.309, as cited in Ghaderi & Ghaderi, 2012)⁹

Tsou and Liu (2001)¹⁰ described two balanced emotional activities as positive emotions (PA) and negative emotions (NA) which are sometimes called positive and negative activities. The descriptive model is by no means a perfect one but it describes two more important aspects of emotions. To them, those two aspects affect the individual's behavior in stressful conditions.¹¹

They also pointed out that emotions and positive or negative feelings have different effects on processing of the data. Also, it has been shown that positive and negative emotions are associated with different personality factors. Research has revealed different behavioral and neuropsychological systems. The following model of emotions has two aspects, the first one being positive and negative emotions and the second one satisfaction and dissatisfaction and involvement – lack of involvement or activity or high/low upheaval. Those factors constitute a circulatory model, which is presented below:



The emotions every human experiences have two opposite sides. As mentioned before, positive emotions are related to those of excitement and enjoyment and negative emotions arise as anger and grief. It is believed that those different levels of emotions affect a wide range of human behaviors and cognition, one of which being sport matches.

Abisamra (2000)¹² in an experimental study came to the conclusion that individuals will be more successful if they are trained to overcome their emotions. Psychiatry Association of America (1998, as cited in Abisamra, 2000)¹² has studied the patterns of success and intelligence development among female athletes. In this study, 21 amateurs aged 18-28 who had been successful attended educational programs of emotional happiness during matches. The results indicated that the experiment group showed more flexibility during matches and coped with their stress more successfully.

Pool in a study conducted in 1997(as cited by Kierestad)¹⁹ indicated that emotional mental health is a predictive factor for success in all social and competitive fields. Also, Mathews, et al. (1990)¹³ pointed out that individuals should be assisted to learn happiness. Having such abilities or even using some of those that can be acquired, individuals can promote and achieve their goals more efficiently.

Today, assessing mental happiness and surveying its effect on success is one of the most interesting fields in psychology. One aspect of individuals' personal success is their success in athletic activities. Coaches usually guide the athletes through accepting the fact that "they should be successful". Which abilities are required for reaching this success? Does intelligence and skillfulness contribute to one's success in matches? Today, researchers use the theory of mental happiness in determining and predicting educational and athletic success.^{14,15,16}

It is reported that success depends on a few factors as well as to the control of emotions.¹⁷ General intelligence and skillfulness alone do not guarantee the success, and research shows that at optimal conditions intelligence constitutes only 25% and in the worst conditions 4% of the variance of success and the remaining depends on mental happiness, social intelligence, and luck.¹⁸

As scientists have constantly searched for the factors influencing success and variables determining success (except IQ), extensive research in this field seems to be necessary. We can train more successful athletes through recognition of these variables and planning.

Is mental happiness, as claimed by its proponents, influential in educational and athletic success? Can mental happiness predict success more precisely than intelligence quotient?

Kierstead (1999)¹⁹ believes that the role of mental happiness in educational and athletic success is overstated and there are few studies that approve this chain. He believes that this might indicate those scientists' intention to find a factor other than intelligence quotient which contributes to success. As indicated by Golman, Mayer and Salovey (as cited in Kierstead, 1999)¹⁹, more research is yet to be conducted on the concept of social and mental happiness and its application in predicting educational and athletic success.

Nevertheless, Mayer & Salovey (1993)¹⁵ believe that "interest in mental happiness is an interaction to the belief that intelligence quotient is the only key to success " (p.439)

On the other hand, some researchers have indicated that regular exercise affects positive mental health and reduces anxiety and depression.²⁰

Therefore, there is controversy over the proponents and opponents of mental happiness theory as to its ability to predict success in sport and education. Therefore, the present study aims to find out the effect of mental happiness on a sample of professional and amateur athletes in Shiraz, using Baron's mental happiness questionnaire.

1.2. Significance of the study

For many years, scientists have sought to answer the question why some people enjoy more mental happiness than others. In other words, why some people are more successful in life than others? Which factors are influential in such differences?

Response to these questions necessitates a survey of the factors which are supposedly influential in success. It was immediately found out that intelligence quotient is not the key to determination and prediction of success. There are many people who are not successful in life in spite of high level of intelligence quotient. Still many people with low intelligence quotient are greatly successful in life. Perhaps, we know intelligent people who have not been successful due to lack of social competence or lack of motivation. Moreover, there are many people who, in spite of having a moderate level of intelligence, have great achievements through their self confidence in different social, educational and competitive activities using their precision and smartness.²¹

Furthermore, for many years, cognitive abilities scales have been utilized in assisting people to choose their jobs, favorite sport and also in predicting success in different fields. However, unfortunately, after 100 years of assessment of IQ, we still have little information to be used in predicting an individual's success in education, job and competitions.²¹

In the last few decades, considerable attempts have been made to find out the factors influencing success. High levels of mental happiness play an important role in individuals' success, achievement of goals, activation of their potentials and promotion.²² According to Sewart (1996)²³, mental happiness provides a comprehensive schema of the person's capability in achieving success. In fact, mental happiness justifies highly intelligent people's lack of success and moderately intelligent people's unexpected success in different aspects of life.²¹

Considering the above-monitored points and the results of the studies conducted in other countries, the need to help and guide sport managers and coaches to train successful athletes prompted us to conduct this study. Therefore, the present study aimed to determine the relationship between mental happiness and athletic success. Furthermore, there is an attempt to motivate the athletes to promote their mental abilities.

To this end, the following research questions were sought to be answered:

- 1- Is mental happiness a significant predictive factor of success in individual and team sports?
- 2- Does mental happiness similarly affect success in individual and team sports?

Based on the research questions, the following hypotheses were posed:

- 1- Mental happiness is a significant predictive factor of success in individual and team sports?
- 2- Mental happiness similarly affects success in individual and team sports.

2. Material And Method

2.1. Participants

This comparative study was conducted on 240 male athletes in Shiraz University of Medical Sciences participating in the 6th student Olympiad. The participants were selected through random sampling. The athletes who were non-professional or amateur were included and professional ones were excluded.

2.2. Instruments

First, the participants' demographic information including the type of sport, field of study, the university, marital status, and other membership in national teams or sport clubs was collected through a questionnaire containing information about the above points. The second instrument of this study was a revised version of Oxford's happiness questionnaire containing questions about the main aspects of mental happiness such as satisfaction in life, extroversion/introversion characteristics, sociability, sympathy, optimism, physical and mental health, happiness and self-esteem. The responses were scored based on Lickert's 5 point scale. The reliability of the questionnaire was measured using cronbach's X ($r=0.9$). The third instrument used was the revised version of NEO's personality questionnaire to measure some subscales of NEO test (extroversion, flexibility, apprehension, aggressiveness, sociability, positive emotions). This test was prepared by Costa and McCrae (1992)²⁴ and the main version contains 240 parts.

2.3. Procedure

The questionnaires were given to the students by the researchers, and the data were analyzed in SPSS using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficient test, and t-test.

3. Results

Descriptive statistics including frequency and percentage of the participants based on their field are displayed in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Frequency and percentage of the participants based on their field (team sports)

No	Field of activity	Frequency	Percentage
1	Football	41	48.8
2	Volleyball	24	28.6
3	Basketball	19	22.6
4	Total	84	100

Table 2. Frequency and percentage of the participants based on their field (individual sports)

No	Field of activity	Frequency	Percentage
4	Chess	19	12.2
5	Ping-Pong	17	10.6
6	Badminton	14	8.9
7	Swimming	17	10.6
8	Running	26	16.6
9	Shooting	15	9.9
10	Wrestling	24	15.3
11	Taekwondo	18	11.35
12	Tennis	6	3.8
13	Total	156	100

To find the answer to the first research question, i.e. "Is mental happiness a significant predictive factor of success in individual and team sports?", the correlation between mental happiness and athletic success was measured using Pearson correlation coefficient. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlation between mental happiness and athletic success in individual and team sports

Correlation Coefficient	No	Significance	R ²
0.63	240	0.001	0.48

As shown in Table 3, the results revealed that the relationship between mental happiness and athletic success ($p=0.001$) was statistically significant. Therefore, the first hypothesis was approved. Based on the correlation coefficient (r^2), mental happiness can predict 42% of the athletic success. In other words, increasing mental happiness greatly predicts the athletes' success in both individual and team sports.

To answer the second research question of this study, i.e. "Does mental happiness similarly affect success in individual and team sports?", t-test was used. Table 4 displays the mean scores of mental happiness based on the type of sport (individual, team).

Table 4. Mental happiness mean scores in individual and team sports

Type of sport	Frequency	Mean	SD	Freedom degree	T	T بحرانی	P
Individual sports	15.6	116.57	14.75	238	0.68	1.96	0.05
Team sports	84	115.31	18.54				

As the results in Table 4 show, there was no significant difference among the means of different types of sport (individual or team). Therefore, the second hypothesis of this study is also approved. In other words, mental happiness is not affected by the type of sport.

It was also revealed that there is a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and athletic success. Likewise, it was shown that there is a positive correlation between some of Neo's subscales and athletic success, being different in different subscales. Table 5 shows the results of the correlation computed.

Table 5. Correlation between (NEO- Pi – r) Neo's subscales and athletic success

Subscales	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level
Introversion	0.33	0.01
Flexibility	0.46	.01
Apprehension	0.34	0.01
Aggressiveness	0.32	0.01
Sociability	0.44	0.01

Positive emotions	0.38	0.01
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As shown in the Table, there is a significant correlation between NEO's subscales and athletic success.

4. Discussion

The results of the statistical analyses indicated that there was a significant relationship between mental happiness and success in athletic activities. Also, it was shown that there was no significant difference between mental happiness scores in individual and team sports.

The relationship between the two main variables of the study was significantly positive ($p=0.001$). The findings of the study are in the same line with the results of Floyd (1996), Pool (1997), Todesk and Swart (cited in Baron, 1997)²¹, Kanglocy, Peterson, Fenigan, and Ediger, 2000 (as cited in Abisamra, 2000).¹²

However, the results of this study do not accord with those of Kierstead (1999)¹⁹. According to him, at most 5-10% of the variance of athletic success can be attributed to mental happiness. He believes that the inventors of mental happiness have suggested this term just to make a terminology other than intelligence quotient to describe educational, athletic,...success.

It was revealed in this study that the athletes with high levels of mental happiness are more successful than those with low level of this variable. Therefore, it can be concluded that mental happiness has a main role in prediction of success in sports by athletes. As to the success hypothesis in this study, there was no difference in the mental happiness scores of athletes doing different types of sport. This finding accords with those of Baron (1997). So, the significant association between the two variables can be applied for both individual and team sports.

Using the results of other research on this topic as well as the findings of this study, the claim that 80% of the variance of success is determined by mental happiness (Goleman, 1995) is somehow overrated. The results obtained from previous studies indicate that personality features, social intelligence, and mental happiness can considerably predict success in the above mentioned variables. That is, mental happiness can best impact the individual's ability in achieving his/her goals (educational, competitive, athletic, etc.). However, as pointed out by some researchers, for success in sport, a balance or combinations of positive emotions is necessary.^{25,26,27,5} More studies are recommended to be conducted on the effect of other positive emotions on sport performance to further confirm the results of this study.

5. Conclusion

Thus, it can be concluded that many human capabilities are affected by mental happiness which is influential in athletic success.

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