



4-26-2024

## Mental Toughness In Athletics

Hope Goebel  
hope.goebel@und.edu

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.und.edu/psych-stu>

---

### Recommended Citation

Hope Goebel. "Mental Toughness In Athletics" (2024). *Psychology Student Publications*. 27.  
<https://commons.und.edu/psych-stu/27>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Psychology at UND Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Psychology Student Publications by an authorized administrator of UND Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact [und.common@library.und.edu](mailto:und.common@library.und.edu).

Hope Goebel

Research Methods in Psychology

Dr. Travis Clark

4/12/2024

As I was growing up, I was strongly influenced by the world around me, particularly sports. My dad would be guaranteed to have football playing on Sundays regardless of what was on, and my mom would always encourage me to go out on a run with her. This led me to eventually run 5Ks monthly with her and my uncle, who were always by my side pushing me forward. Growing up I understood how important it was for me to find some physical activity that I enjoyed doing and would be willing to push myself forward to succeed, here I found a love for cross country and dance especially. I strived to work hard as I hated the thought of letting others down if they were depending on me. This led me to give my best effort in everything I did, whether that was academically, personally, or athletically; improving my mental toughness.

For many decades coaches, professional athletes, and parents preached the importance of mental toughness on and off the field. Whether it may be because they see how it affects the players ability to play for their team or how they play the game for themselves. Many people today may still think that too high of emotions can greatly affect an athlete's ability to play the game they love at the level they are playing at; but if emotions don't get in the way of playing the game, then in a way that shows how little the athlete cares about their sport. The more grit, determination, and love for a sport will seep into their emotions as they practice and compete. Now just because an athlete expresses high levels of mental toughness that doesn't mean they aren't a team player, quite on the contrary, those are the individuals who give their all to their sport and dedicate every moment to their team.

Mental toughness is more than just wanting to win a game in fact many athletes who have large amounts of mental toughness strive to get better every day, dropping 110% effort in every game, practice, lift session and more. They are the athletes who pick up their team when they are feeling low and without these athletes many sports wouldn't be where they are today. Although mental toughness isn't easy, in fact it can be hard to achieve for many individuals have to work hard every day to get to the point where they are today.

In an article written by Connaughton et Al. (2008), titled "The development and maintenance of mental toughness: Perceptions of elite performers," it developed the idea that "mental toughness [may] require maintenance," (Connaughton et al., 2008). While this may not come as a surprise to some, it is important to continue to work and strive for success because without any motivation, dreams of athletic success will feel even farther away. In order to maintain mental toughness, there are three important mechanisms that will set these athletes up for success. These mechanisms include good support network, desire and motivation to succeed, and the efficient use of various skills within their sport (Connaughton et al., 2008). While these three mechanisms were found to be important regarding maintaining mental toughness in athletes, they are not entirely exclusive to just athletes, for it is important to be dedicated, motivated, and have a strong and stable support network in just about anything you do. As individuals will be set up for success having that strong of a mindset about anything they come across in life.

As stated earlier it is extremely important to have a strong support system, especially in the form of coaches. An article written by Cody, Gerber and Gygax (2024) titled, "Coach-athlete relationship and burnout symptoms among young elite athletes and the role mental toughness as a moderator," discusses the importance of coaches having positive working relationships with

their athletes. Whether that may be by them being someone their athletes can trust or just having a normal conversation knowing that they should have their best interest at heart. This specific study followed the effect on coach-athlete relationships by examining the coach's leadership skills/behaviors and the effect it has on their athlete's dedication and determination to the sport and their subsequent goals. As it has been found that a positive relationship between athlete and coach can lead to “better sport performance, lower injury rates, higher perceived ability, higher general happiness . . .” (Cody, Gerber, & Gygax, 2024). This article and study really highlighted the importance of a good coach, as a coach can make all the difference in the world on how enjoyable the sport is. For the athlete could absolutely love their sport originally and be extremely dedicated to it but if they have a bad coach, it could completely change their outlook and love for their sport.

While an article titled “Developing and training mental toughness in sport: a systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies and pre-test and post-test experiments,” by Cowden et al. (2020) investigated how successful mental toughness training is in relation to sports. This was conducted through a series of pre-tests and post-tests; these tests are conducted to have a good baseline on the participants mental toughness levels before any part of the experiment is started. Through both tests, this study will increase its validity (how well it will relate to the general population) as we can see the experiment's direct impact on mental toughness in these participants. Participants were chosen at random if they were involved in some sport at any level, in which they would then receive a level of mental toughness intervention. These intervention types could have been a mix of psychological or physical approaches, after a period of time the participants were evaluated to determine if the intervention was affecting their mental toughness levels. They were evaluated through self-reporting as well

as being assessed by their coaches, this study was conducted by using information gained from previous studies like this one to make sure everything was being conducted properly with changes made to improve the outcome of the study to be more accurate (Cowden et al., 2020).

Even though it is found that mental toughness is important in sports that doesn't mean it only applies to athletes; in reality everyone can apply some aspects of mental toughness to their lives, and they just may see a change in how they view the world and those with whom they surround themselves with. In an article written by Sutton (2024) they quoted many individuals who also shared their perspectives on what makes mental toughness important and how it improves individuals' lives. One specific quote stuck out to me, "Mental toughness is essential because it helps us be the best possible version of ourselves, lead a productive and contented life, and strive toward our goals," (Loehr, 1986, as cited in Sutton, 2024). This quote illustrates the importance of always trying to better yourself in everything you do, for you are the only one holding yourself back from things you may think you can't do.

While there is a lot of research supporting mental toughness in sports and the important life skills it teaches athletes, there has been some research conducted that may lead some people to believe there is more to success in athletics than just being tough mentally. This topic was introduced by Day, Hardy III, and Imose (2014) in an article titled, "Relating trait and domain mental toughness to complex task learning." Here this experiment tested mental toughness not only on athletic ability but also on individuals' ability to perform various skill-based tasks and their self-efficacy (or their belief that they can be successful). Here they found that while mental toughness is important in the realm of sports psychology it had shown that there was "no relationships between trait-based mental toughness and any learning criteria" (Day, Hardy III, & Imose, 2014). Which leads us to believe that while mental toughness is important for athletes to

be strong on the field and in their sport, it doesn't necessarily correlate towards being successful within their academics. This means that being mentally tough doesn't always improve their ability to learn cognitive skills faster than others, but their determination to their academics may be what sets them apart from other (they may be more determined to succeed due to their mental toughness).

Overall, mental toughness is an important area of research that is still being studied today, as the benefits of it are great in the realm of competition and sporting excellence. Especially in preparing athletes for their future by showing them that hard work, determination, and dedication can reap many benefits in the end. There is more to mental toughness than originally meets the eye for allows individuals to see that there is more to the world than winning and that they should feel happy and confident in who they are and what they can accomplish when they are giving it their all.

## References

- Cody, R., Gerber, M., & Gygax, B. (2024). Coach-athlete relationship and burnout symptoms among young elite athletes and the role of mental toughness as a moderator. *Sports Psychiatry: Journal of Sports and Exercise Psychiatry*, 3(1), 5–14.  
<https://doi.org/10.1024/2674-0052/a000071>
- Connaughton, D., Hanton, S., Jones, G., & Wadey, R. (2008). The development and maintenance of mental toughness: Perceptions of elite performers. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 26(1), 83–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02640410701310958>
- Cowden, R., Grandjean, P., Koutakis, P., Morgan, G., Padgett, R. N., & Stamatis, A. (2020). Developing and training mental toughness in sport: a systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies and pre-test and post-test experiments. *BMJ open sport & exercise medicine*, 6(1), e000747. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjsem-2020-000747>
- Day, E. A., Hardy, J. H., III, & Imose, R. A. (2014). Relating trait and domain mental toughness to complex task learning. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 68, 59–64.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.04.011>
- Sutton, J. (2024, Apr 1). *Boosting Mental Toughness in Young Athletes & 20 Strategies*. Positive Psychology. [Boosting Mental Toughness in Young Athletes & 20 Strategies](https://www.positivepsychology.com) ([positivepsychology.com](https://www.positivepsychology.com))