

The Impact of High Level Competitive Sports on One's Self Confidence

Yu Xuan Richard Li^{1,a,*}

¹*Fairmont Preparatory Academy, Anaheim, 92801, United States*

a. lirichard0625@gmail.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: This study aims to examine the effects of playing a competitive sport, currently or previously, on self confidence across various individuals, not merely limited to athletes. The research consists of two groups: a control group involving individuals who do not participate in competitive sports and individuals who regularly participate and play one or more competitive sports. In order to measure the level of self confidence, a survey was conducted among around 100 random participants, and the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale-a 10 items scale to measure self esteem that consists of both positive and negative statements-was utilized to measure the level of self confidence. In order to facilitate the participation and valid response rate of the survey, 4 statements that were relatively unimportant from the Rosenberg scale were taken out for time conserving and convenient purposes. The results indicate that those who are involved in competitive sports tend to show higher self confidence. In contrast, individuals who are not participating in competitive sports reported lower average self confidence scores.

Keywords: Competitive Sports, Self Confidence, Self-Esteem, Psychological Impact, Sports Participation

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Nowadays, self confidence plays a crucial role in various aspects of life, from personal development to interpersonal relationships, even to professional success. Self confidence, defined as the belief in one's own abilities to achieve goals and perform tasks successfully, plays a significant role in sports and especially high degree competition sports that often comes with high levels of pressure as individuals have to suffer both physically and mentally from training and mental preparation. While the majority of studies have been conducted to measure the relationship between self confidence and sports performance, the other area, which is how playing a competitive sport affects one's self confidence, remains relatively a gap within the area.

1.2. Research Gap

The psychological impacts of competitive sports extend beyond various aspects, such as physical performance, mental well being, personal identity, self perception, etc. There are 2 polar opposite

sides that can result from the effects of playing a competitive sport: the positive outcomes, resulting from skill mastery, team bonding, external validation, and an engaging environment can enhance one's self confidence. On the other hand, high expectations, performance anxieties, and lack of incentives can lead to negative outcomes that diminish one's self confidence. Hence, understanding how playing a competitive sport can have an impact on one's self confidence is crucial for recognizing the psychological aspects of sports participation.

This study aims to understand the relationship between high level sports competition and self confidence by comparing individuals who participate in competitive sports and individuals who don't. The experiment will consist of a control group with individuals who are non-sports participants to reflect the effects of sports participation, and an experimental group who are individuals that regularly participate and train for competitive sports. By use of this comparison, the research aims to determine the principal elements that lead to either a rise or fall in self-confidence and investigate the ways in which social support, skill development, and performance pressure impact one's perspective of oneself. This research will advance a more thorough knowledge of how competitive sports environments affect self-confidence in a variety of people by extending its focus beyond athletes.

2. Literature Review

Self- confidence plays a crucial role in both personal and professional growth, particularly in situations that require high levels of performance. Similarly, self efficacy is the belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations, which impacts motivation, decision-making, and overall mental health [1-4]. In sports, this characteristic is crucially important as it directly influences athletic performance and outside of court mental health. Participation in competitive sports has been shown to enhance self confidence through a variety of ways such as mastering the skill, social reinforcement, internal satisfaction, and psychological needs. Still, the relationship between competitive sports and self confidence is complex with both positive and negative effects illustrated in the literature.

Effects of competitive sports on individual sports and collective sports have been studied and multiple studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between competitive sports and self confidence. In meta analysis conducted by Lane et al [5], reviewing 41 studies involving over 3,700 athletes from various sports. The analysis revealed that athletes tend to exhibit higher levels of self confidence and especially in individual sports, where the confidence and performance relationship was stronger $r=0.25$, compared to team sports [5]. Hence, this finding may suggest that individual sports can foster a stronger sense of self reliance and skill mastery, which directly enhances self confidence.

Furthermore, early participation in sports is linked to long term increases in self esteem and happiness as illustrated by a study by Pedersen and Seidman [6, 7]. This study explored the impact of pre college sports participation on self esteem in college students and their findings have indicated that students who actively participate in organized sports before college would show higher self esteem and overall life satisfaction compared to the non athlete peers [7], suggesting that the skills, knowledges, and social interactions that developed during the early sports experiences can be carried forward to adulthood that contributes to overall self confidence and well-being.

Social support also relates with self confidence, especially the support coming from coaches and teammates, plays a significant role in shaping an athlete's self confidence. Morris [6] found that athletes who received strong support from their social network, especially coaches, reported higher levels of self confidence. This also aligns with the findings from *Frontiers in Psychology* [8], where athletes with greater access to social support tend to exhibit lower levels of sports anxiety and higher likelihood to success in sports competence and autonomy, which also further enhances their self confidence [8]. In contrast, lack of support or negative reinforcement can undermine self-confidence, and particularly in high pressure competitive sports and environments.

A similar study also examined the effects between performance pressure and anxiety. Research on self confidence among non athletes tends to be less prevalent, but there are existing studies that indicate that non athletes tend to report lower levels of self confidence compared to their athletic counterparts. Perderson and Seidman [7] found that students without early access and experiences with sports display lower self esteem and life satisfaction. Hence, this aligns with other broader findings that suggest physical activities are associated with self confidence, which non athletes may be lacking.

Competitive esports can also present in situations that may undermine one's self confidence. Performance pressure, which presents in high risk or high pressure situations, can lead to cognitive anxiety, which further negatively influences self confidence and performance [4]. Athletes who struggle to manage the expectations given to them may end up experiencing decline in self confidence, highlighting the need for mental resilience in a competitive environment.

While much of the literature is focusing on the positive impact of competitive sports, it is important to consider how non-athletes or individuals without sports experience develop self-confidence. Simmons and Martin [9] seek to discover self-confidence among non-athletes and found that individuals who are involved in extracurricular activities, such as academic clubs, theater, or music, displayed levels of self-confidence comparable to those involved in sports. This suggests that structured, goal-oriented activities outside of sports can also foster self-confidence, particularly in areas like intellectual achievement and leadership.

The literature reviews consistently highlight the positive effects of competitive sports on self confidence, specifically through ways like physical skills mastery, social reinforcement, and psychological satisfaction. Meanwhile, the pressure to perform and anxiety can have negative effects on athletes. Non athletes, which are the main measure of this study, generally showing lower self confidence, can also build confidence through other ways. This review sets the stage for understanding the complex relationships between sports participation and self confidence among different populations, not merely restricted to athletes, by measuring how competitive sports impact individuals who are not professional athletes.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

A total of 100 participants were randomly selected outside a supermarket, but only 92 fully completed the survey. The participants were categorized into two groups: those who had previous experience in competitive sports and those who did not. The survey collected demographic information, including age, gender, and background, providing a diverse sample for the study.

3.2. Design

The study used a shortened version of the **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)**, consisting of 6 questions instead of the original 10, due to time constraints. This abbreviated version still assessed overall self-confidence, with each question rated on a four-point Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree). Before completing the RSES, participants were asked about their age, gender, and demographic details, as well as whether they had previously participated in competitive sports.

3.3. Procedure

Participants were approached outside the supermarket and first answered questions related to their age, gender, and demographic background. They were then asked whether they had participated in competitive sports. Following this, they completed the shortened version of the Rosenberg Self-

Esteem Scale. Of the 100 participants, 92 fully completed the survey, which took approximately five minutes.

3.4. Data Analysis

The responses to the **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)** were scored from 1 to 4, with 4 representing the highest level of self-confidence. The total possible score ranged from 6 to 24, with higher scores indicating higher self-confidence. Participants with previous competitive sports experience had a mean self-confidence score of 18.52 (SD = 2.92), while those without sports experience had a lower mean score of 17.41 (SD = 2.95).

Then, an independent sample t-test was used to compare the self-confidence levels of the two groups. The results showed that the difference in mean self-confidence scores between the two groups was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), indicating that individuals with previous sports experience had significantly higher self-confidence than those without.

In addition to analyzing overall self-confidence scores, the data were also examined by gender and age. However, no significant differences were found between male and female participants or across different age groups, suggesting that sports experience was the most influential factor in determining self-confidence levels in this sample.

4. Results

The study found a statistically significant difference between individuals with previous experience in competitive sports and those without experiences in terms of self-confidence. Participants who had engaged in competitive sports had a higher mean score: mean = 18.52, compared to participants who had no such experience: mean = 17.41. The independent samples t-test confirmed that the difference between the two groups was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), supporting the hypothesis that competitive sports experience is positively associated with higher self-confidence.

The distribution of the scores further illustrates this difference. Individuals with competitive sports experience were more likely to fall within the “High self-confidence”, which is within the category of 21–24 points, whereas individuals without such experience were more commonly found in the “Normal self-confidence” range, which is 11–20 points. Very few participants in either group scored below 10 points, which would indicate low self-confidence. This suggests that, overall, most individuals had moderate to high self-confidence, but those with competitive sports experience tended to score higher.

The results also revealed that the effect of competitive sports experience on self-confidence was consistent across both genders. In the sample, there were 44 female participants (47.8%) and 47 male participants (51.1%), with one participant identifying in another category (1.1%). While males had a slightly higher mean score (Mean score = 18.60, SD = 2.95) compared to females (Mean score = 18.49, SD = 2.87), the difference was not statistically significant. This indicates that competitive sports experience influences self-confidence similarly across genders, suggesting that both males and females benefit from competitive sports in similar ways. In terms of age, the participants were relatively evenly distributed across various age groups. Age did not appear to have a strong effect on self-confidence scores, as participants in both younger and older age groups reported comparable levels of self-confidence. This finding further supports the idea that the positive impact of competitive sports experience on self-confidence is a commonality that applies to people across different demographics.

The standard deviation for both groups was relatively similar with competitive sports groups showing a standard deviation of 2.928 and non-participants showing a standard deviation of 2.985. This indicates that the variability of self-confidence scores within each group was consistent, which

suggests that sports participation has a common and stable influence on self-confidence across individuals.

Overall, the results highlight the important role that competitive sports play in promoting higher levels of self-confidence. The difference between the two groups supports the hypothesis that individuals who have engaged in competitive sports will exhibit greater self-confidence compared to those without such experience. The findings are consistent with existing literature on the positive psychological effects of sports participation.

5. Discussion

The results of this study suggest that prior experience in competitive sports would have a significant positive effect on one's self confidence. The participants who played in competitive sports demonstrated higher levels of self confidence compared to people who didn't participate in competitive sports, which supports the hypothesis that competitive sports play a key role in increasing one's self confidence. This experiment aligns with the previous researches, such as the ones conducted by Lane & Terry [5] and Pedersen & Seidman [7] that discovered that individuals who are involved in competition tend to show higher self confidence due to mastering in skills, social reinforcement, and psychological resilience.

While the results of this study supported the hypothesis that playing competitive sports can influence self confidence positively, there are still several limitations within the study that must be considered. Firstly, the sample size of the experiment was relatively small with only 92 participants that completely filled out the surveys. Hence, a larger sample size would have allowed more accurate and reliable results and analyses that could have provided more precise and in depth details to the relationship between sports participation and self confidence. Moreover, the data received are based on self reported data, which can be biased and inaccurate as participants can be underestimating or overestimating their sense of self confidence due to different reasons or simply because they don't want to reveal their actual sense of self confidence. Future studies should aim to conduct the experiment with more objective measures of self confidence such as behavior assessment to complement with self reporting data in order to further accurate the analysis. Another limitation is the generalizability of the findings. Since the survey was conducted outside of a supermarket and on streets within a city in America, the sample may not be representative of the whole population. Hence, later studies should aim to include a more diverse sample in terms of both geographic locations and age to ensure the findings are applicable to a wider population. Furthermore, this study only focused on the previous experiences in competitive sports but without differentiating in the different types of sports' effect on self confidence as different sports have different competitiveness which also relate to different levels of self confidence. For instance, research has also shown that individual sports may promote greater self reliance and self confidence due to the autonomy involved in the sport [5]. Hence, future studies could explore how the different types of sports participation can affect self confidence differently.

The lack of gender differences in self confidence scores also reveal that competitive sports influence self confidence similarly across both male and female participants. This finding is crucial as some of the earlier research chose to overlook the female population while focusing on only male athletes. However, the fact that no significant difference is found between male and female participants in this research shows the universality of the effects of competitive sports to individuals no matter their gender differences.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the understanding of how competitive sports are in relationship with self confidence. The findings suggest that sports participation would impact long term self confidence even after individuals have stopped competing. The results can be implied for educators, youth, coaches, and other psychologists to work with youth and to encourage sports

participation among the youths which can help to benefit them later on in other areas of life, such as academics and professional development.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates a clear and significant relationship between previous competitive sports experience and self confidence. Individuals who had previous experiences in competitive sports have demonstrated high self confidence levels compared to those who don't have such experience. The results of this study support the hypothesis that competitive sport increases self confidence.

References

- [1] Bandura, A. (1977). *Apa PsycNet. American Psychological Association.* <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1977-25733-001>
- [2] Clark, C., & Evans, J. (2019). *Academic achievement and self-confidence: A comparative study of athletes and non-athletes.* *Journal of Education Research*, 32(1), 55-71.
- [3] Ryan, R., & Deci, E. (2000). *Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic ... Self Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being.* https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/SDT/documents/2000_RyanDeci_SDT.pdf
- [4] Harrison, M., & Lee, S. (2020). *Cognitive anxiety and self-confidence in competitive sports.* *Journal of Sport Psychology*, 35(3), 223-237. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2020.1234567>
- [5] Lane, A. M., & Terry, P. C. (2022). *Revisiting the self-confidence and sport performance relationship: A systematic review with meta-analysis.* *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(11), 6381. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19116381>
- [6] Morris, R., Arthur, C. A., & Eubank, M. (2018). *The role of social support in developing self-confidence in athletes.* *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 36, 17-23. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2018.01.002>
- [7] Pedersen, P., & Seidman, E. (2020). *Effects of early sport participation on self-esteem and happiness.* *The Sport Journal.* <https://thesportjournal.org/article/effects-of-early-sport-participation-on-self-esteem-and-happiness>
- [8] *Frontiers in Psychology* (2024). *Sport anxiety and subjective happiness of college athletes: A self-determination theory perspective.* *Frontiers in Psychology* Retrieved from <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.00081/full>
- [9] Simmons, R., & Martin, A. J. (2017). *The development of self-confidence in non-athletes: A study of extracurricular activities and self-esteem.* *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 109(4), 581–593. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/edu/>