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Perceived motivational climate, need satisfaction and indices of well-being in team sports: A longitudinal perspective

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Abstract

Objectives: Grounded in the self-determination and achievement goal frameworks [Ames, C. (1992). Achievement goals, motivational climate, and motivational processes. In G. C. Roberts (Ed.), *Motivation in sports and exercise* (pp. 161–176). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics; Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The ‘what’ and ‘why’ of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behaviour. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11, 227–268; Nicholls, J. G. (1989). *The competitive ethos and democratic education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press], the purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between changes in perceptions of the motivational climate to changes in athletes’ need satisfaction and indices of psychological and physical well-being over the course of a competitive sport season.

Design: A field correlational longitudinal design, including two data collections over the course of a competitive season, was used.

Method: Participants were 128 British university athletes (*M* age=19.56; *SD*=1.83). Athletes completed questionnaires assessing perceptions of the motivational climate; the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness; subjective vitality and physical symptoms.

Results: An increase in perceptions of a task-involving climate positively predicted an increased satisfaction of the needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. In turn, changes in the satisfaction of the needs for autonomy and relatedness emerged as significant predictors of changes in subjective vitality.

Conclusion: Findings suggest that for sport participation to facilitate athlete well-being, the sporting environment should be marked in its task-involving features.

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Keywords: Perceived motivational climate; Need satisfaction; Psychological and physical well-being

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There seems to be general consensus, both in the research literature and among the lay public, that physical activity is good for one's psychological and physical health (Fox, Boutcher, Faulkner, & Biddle, 2000; Landers & Arent, 2001; World Health Organisation, 1995). For some, however, sport participation can lead to negative psychological and physical consequences, especially when such individuals experience pressure from significant others in the social environments (e.g. the coach or ones parents; Duda, 2001; Krane, Greenleaf, & Snow, 1997). Specifically, the motivational attributes of the sporting environment are presumed to play a vital role in influencing potential psychological, emotional, and physical effects (both positive and negative) of sport involvement (see Duda, 2001).

Although well-being has been conceptualised in different ways, most definitions emphasise positive psychological states as opposed to the absence of negative cognitions and feelings. Furthermore, according to Caspersen, Powell, and Merritt (1994), well-being is one of the two elements of quality of life and is concerned with the subjective internal states of the individual, or the way in which the individual feels physically and mentally. In their definition of health, the World Health Organization (WHO, 1997) recognises that mental well-being plays an all-important role in health measurements as they state that health incorporates "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being not merely the absence of disease" (p. 1).

One theory well suited to study the potential implications of social environmental factors on well-being in sport is the recently formalized sub-theory of self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), termed basic needs theory (BNT) (Ryan & Deci, 2002). BNT assumes three needs to be fundamental for the nurturance and growth of the human psyche: namely the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The satisfaction of the need for autonomy involves the experience of choice and the feeling that one is the initiator of one's own actions, but also that one's actions are in accordance with one's values as opposed to being controlled by external forces or internal pressures (deCharms, 1968). The satisfaction of the need for competence is fulfilled by the experience that one can effectively bring about desired effects and outcomes (White, 1959). Satisfaction of the relatedness need pertains to feelings that one is securely connected to and understood by others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). According to BNT, variations in need satisfaction will directly predict variations in indices of psychological and physical well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2002).

Applied to the domain of sport, satisfaction of athletes' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness via their sport environment should lead to higher levels of well being. To the extent that the needs are suppressed in the sport setting, inverse relationships are hypothesised. What is particularly attractive about the concept of need satisfaction is that it allows researchers to identify the environmental conditions under which the three needs could be satisfied and, in turn, promote well being.

One important social environmental factor assumed to nurture the fundamental needs is the motivational climate created by the coach (Ntoumanis, 2001; Reinboth, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2004; Sarrazin, Guillet, & Cury, 2001). Coaches design practice sessions, group athletes, give recognition, evaluate performance, share their authority and shape the sport setting. In doing so, they create a motivational climate which can have an important impact on an athlete's motivation. Indeed, past work has suggested that the coach has a major influence on athletes' stress responses, reported enjoyment and feelings of self-efficacy in sport settings (e.g. Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986).

Grounded in the achievement goal framework (Ames, 1992), more or less ego-involving (or performance) and/or task-involving (or mastery) climates are hypothesized to exist and sport research has supported this supposition (e.g. Newton, Duda, & Yin, 2000). An ego-involving climate is characterized by interpersonal competition, social comparison and public evaluation. In contrast, an

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