

# A Study on the Psychological Tension of High Level Football Players During "Penalty Kicks"

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**Abstract:** Through a study of current players in the Chinese Super League, the importance of psychological training and the main reasons for players' excessive psychological tension during penalty kicks were analyzed, and training methods to reduce players' excessive psychological tension during penalty kicks were proposed.

**Keywords:** High level; Football; Penalty kicks; Psychological tension

In the theoretical perspective of sports psychology, the "psycho-emotional disorder" of athletes is the main psychological factor affecting their competition performance. Usually, a certain degree of tension is conducive to motivating athletes' initiative and enthusiasm, which helps athletes' performance on the field, while on the contrary, excessive tension or even anxiety will be detrimental to athletes' performance on the field.

In today's high level football competitions, players are no longer just competing at the technical and tactical level, but are also testing their emotional control, psychological quality and will. Since the penalty kick has become one of the main means of scoring in football, coaches and players have paid great attention to the penalty kick, and have conducted in-depth research and training on this means of attack. A number of factors influence the success of the penalty kick, including the technical action, the physiology and psychology of the game, and pre-match training factors. The psychology of the field of play is one of the most important factors influencing the success of penalty kicks, therefore, the development of good psychological quality and tenacity in the game is essential to eliminate the psychological barriers of the field of play and to help the players to achieve the goal.

## 1. Survey results and analysis

Through a questionnaire survey as well as statistical analysis of 128 active football players from 12 teams in the Chinese Super League, the study found that the factors affecting players' penalty kick play are objective.

### 1.1 The arrangement of the weighting of competitive ability training needs to be further adjusted

Table 1 Annual weighting of competitive ability training for current football players

Players	Number of people	Valid questionnaires	Physical ability %	Technical Combat Ability %	Intelligence%	Mental ability %
Chinese Super League	128	116	92.3	98.4	62.8	58.6

Competitive ability is the ability of an athlete to compete, and is made up of physical ability, technical ability, motor intelligence and mental ability, and is integrated in the process of special competition. After research and study, it was found that there is a serious imbalance in the proportion of annual competitive ability training for current football players, of which 92.3% are physical ability training, 98.4% are technical combat ability training, 62.8% are intelligence training and only 58.6% are mental ability training. The compensatory effect of the unbalanced structure of athletic ability can compensate for the psychological instability of football players to a certain extent, but it is far from solving the substantive problems. In particular, for high-level athletes, the combination of competitive abilities, including psychological abilities, should be developed to a high level so that they can truly compete in world competitions against their opponents. This is the only way to truly compete in the world championships against their opponents, rather than the current situation of "sitting on the fence" and limiting themselves to the domestic series.

## 1.2 Factors affecting the mental stability of players in penalty kicks are objective

Research has found that the weight of factors that cause athletes to be overly nervous when taking penalties during matches varies. In addition to the athletes' own factors, they also involve the coaches' factors, the players of their own team, the referees' factors, the opponents' factors and other factors. The statistical results analyse that the proportion of these major factors also varies, being 92.6%, 62.5%, 86.6%, 90.2%, 12.8% and 6.8% respectively.

Table 2 Weighting of factors affecting the mental state of football players during penalty kicks

Influencing Factors	Athletes themselves%	Coaches%	Teammates%	Opponents%	Referees%	Others%
Percentage of	92.6	62.5	86.6	90.2	12.8	6.8

### 1.2.1 The player's own reasons

Every goal in football is a must, and often the difference between one goal and the whole game can lead to a total loss. Penalty kicks are an extremely important means of scoring goals. Inadequate training in the technical movements of penalty kicks, lack of experience in large international matches, lack of experience in major competitions, lack of pre-match professional psychological training and the psychological pressure caused by the ability to regulate oneself during the match can all lead to mistakes in penalty kicks. A typical example of this is Pacquiao's missed penalty in the 1994 World Cup final. It is well known that athletes who are able to participate in the World Cup are the best in terms of experience and personal skills. However, in the 1994 World Cup, Italy and Brazil went all the way to the final and still drew after extra time. As you can imagine, the athletes on both sides carried the weight of expectation, and under the high physical and psychological load, Baggio missed a penalty kick, leaving regret in the Apennines forever, showing how much psychological pressure the players taking part in the penalty kick were under.

### 1.2.2 Coaching factors

The coaches did not know enough about the importance of penalty kicks, lacked psychological guidance when taking penalty kicks, did not establish the right psychological cues to encourage confidence in their usual teaching and training, and put forward too many demands in the preparation meeting before the match, causing the athletes to be psychologically unstable and to behave nonchalantly and fidgety at the crucial moment of the match. In the World Cup Asian qualifying round of 20 matches, the national football team missed a penalty kick at home and drew unfavourably with Australia in the World Qualifying round, and head coach Forrado also admitted that "the players were a bit unserious in penalty kick training before the match, there was penalty kick training before the match, but penalty kicks are something instantaneous, and the atmosphere in training and matches is different. The players did practice penalty kicks a bit unseriously, we paid a very heavy price and will have to train seriously in the future." Therefore, in addition to the athletes' own subjects, as a coach should take more responsibility. The embarrassing situation that caused the national football team not to train seriously in penalty kicks is inseparable from the responsibility of the head coach.

### 1.2.3 The influence of the players of this team

As a collective sport of football, the performance of all 11 players on the field affects the course and outcome of the game. In the field of attacking and defending and other competitive activities, no matter the core players or non-core players, their technical and tactical performance, body language and verbal communication on the field will have some positive or negative influence on their peers. When the players of the team on the field convey the performance of expecting too much from the penalty taker, or do not care about the penalty taker, do not have positive psychological implication and encouraging behaviour, or complain or argue with each other about the situation on the field, all will have a certain influence on the player who implements the penalty, and eventually affect the success of the penalty.

### 1.2.4 Opponent conditions

The most important aspect of a football match is the absolute strength of the opponent, and the level of strength of the opponent will have an impact on the psychology of the player, i.e. the psychological expectation of the outcome of the match. The opponent situation is a matter of competitive balance and when the weaker team on paper beats the stronger team on paper, the game can be very exciting. Often, an evenly matched opponent is more conducive to the team's players performing at their normal level, i.e. both teams are similar on paper and the players are in an emotional, high and moderately nervous state on the field. According to previous research in sports psychology, a moderate level of emotional tension can fully mobilise an athlete's intelligence and skills on the field, putting him or her in a state of high nervous concentration, whether it is reflecting speed, flexibility, coordination, or his or her thinking, situation analysis and technical and tactical presentation, all in an optimal state. Conversely, if an athlete is mentally relaxed or

over-stimulated, his or her performance on the field will be more or less uncharacteristic. This is what we call a state of competitive imbalance, where the two opposing players are so disparate in strength that the player on the psychologically weaker side, even if he or she is awarded the penalty, will be more or less affected by his or her own control of the action and the technical and tactical play of the penalty kick.

### **1.2.5 Other factors**

The final outcome of a football match is the result of a combination of factors, including the players' own football skills and the coaches' abilities, as well as the external environment, such as the stadium facilities, referees and even spectators. The interference of environmental factors around the football arena affects the players' mental state of mind when playing on the field to varying degrees. For example, the unfamiliar away environment, the weather conditions of the playing field, the turf conditions of the pitch, the lighting environment, etc.; or the new epidemic state of the crown, the empty field game system, no longer have the cheering of the audience; or the tendency of the referee in the award of penalties a series of factors may directly or indirectly affect the success rate of players penalty kicks.

## **2. Countermeasures**

Modern football has reached a new level of competition, requiring football players to have both strong physical reserves and mental energy in training and competition. Strong mental energy is an indispensable quality for football players, which requires special mental training for football players. By purposefully and intentionally targeting the psychology of football players during a training cycle and competition cycle, scientific psychological training is needed to enhance and improve the psychological quality of football players in line with the characteristics of modern football competition.

### **2.1 Clarify the task of the game, correct the motivation of the game; establish the confidence to win, play their own potential**

The right direction and positive motivation is one of the necessary elements for the success of an activity. To correct motivation is to make athletes understand why they are playing and to develop their inner drive. Through ideological education during training, athletes are correctly guided to find their own motivation and enthusiasm to pursue this career. At the same time, it is necessary to establish within the athletes a sense of mission, responsibility, honour and shame regarding this profession and career, and to bring this internal drive to training and competition, forming the team's own atmosphere and culture. In this way, athletes are motivated by both self-discipline and self-discipline, so that they can mobilise all their energy to focus on their respective challenges in competition, perform and complete their tasks with ease and fulfil their potential. Conversely, they will not have enough internal motivation and will often be intimidated by difficult situations, and will not be able to give full play to their skills and tactics in penalty kicks.

Confidence is an important factor in an athlete's ability to fulfil their potential. Modern competitive football is a high level of information technology warfare, which requires the uniform team to collect and analyse information and data on the physical ability, psychological characteristics, technical characteristics of the opponent's players, the tactics and characteristics of the opposing team and past history of the match, and to design a tactical response plan that meets the characteristics of their own team, taking into account the condition of the playing field, the time of the match and the climate. The team will be able to fight a prepared battle, so that the players will have the technical, tactical and psychological initiative before the match, so that they can build up the right confidence in the game, so that they can really play their own level and potential in the match.

### **2.2 Pre-match simulation training strictly in accordance with the requirements of "three from one", the implementation of the principle of differentiation, seriously treat every penalty kick training task**

The intensity of the game in the arena is so high that it requires a high level of neural response in terms of quick judgement, agility and flexibility, which is significantly different from the state of ordinary training. This requires the appropriate use of simulation training, which is adaptive training that involves placing the athlete in a simulated playing environment and providing conditions appropriate to the intensity of the game. Through simulation training, athletes gradually improve their physical and psychological adaptability to high levels of competition. In regular training and pre-competition simulations, athletes should be held to a high standard and trained rigorously. At the same time, coaches should be careful to keep the intensity and difficulty within the limits of what the athletes can handle, i.e. what can be achieved with hard work and dedication. Within this range, the coaches should implement "strict, difficult and realistic" training, so that the athletes can accumulate successful experience in practice, and can play normally or extraordinarily well in matches. Each athlete has their own personality, which is reflected in their psychological differences. Therefore, coaches need to grasp the differences between athletes and adopt training methods that match the athletes' own psychological characteristics in order

to achieve the ideal training effect.

### **2.3 Do a good job in the intelligence work of the tournament, while appropriately increasing the number of matches, firmly grasp the opportunity of penalty kicks in each match, and improve the success rate of penalty kicks in the pre-tournament warm-up matches**

Firstly, you should do a good job of pre-match intelligence work, for example, analyse and summarise the characteristics and habits of the opponent's goalkeeper's saves and arrange targeted training. Secondly, a quality warm-up match should be arranged before the match, try to arrange the corresponding warm-up opponent according to the opponent's characteristics, which is the best simulation training. Show the results of your own technical, tactical and psychological training to the warm-up matches. Take the penalty kick opportunities that arise in the warm-up matches seriously, and review and summarise accordingly after the warm-up matches, so that you can try to get something out of each match.

### **2.4 Players are in a good frame of mind and strive to win matches**

In football, the player's mind and body are always under a certain level of tension, and the emotional experience that goes with this tension is always strong and varied. Emotions are a person's experience of the relationship between objective reality and human needs. The emotional state of a footballer can have a direct impact on the course of the game and its outcome. For example, in July 2006, the World Cup final between Italy and France, France's Trezeguet missed a penalty kick due to emotional instability, while Italy won the World Cup with all five penalties, which is a typical example of psychological tension causing certain defeat. Therefore, it is important to strengthen pre-match psychological target training, according to the actual psychological situation of the athletes themselves and their technical and tactical level, to take corresponding psychological adjustment measures, so that the athletes maintain a good mood, the effect of penalty kicks as well as to obtain the final match victory.

### **2.5 Enhance the cultivation of will power for penalty kicks and improve the self-control ability during penalty kicks**

Modern football has long gone beyond the technical and tactical level of confrontation and has high demands on the quality of will. The level of willpower in a match affects the technical and tactical ability of the player and has an important influence on the trend of the match. Therefore, it is important to train athletes with a specific focus on willpower training, so that they are able to persevere in the face of the difficulties and pressures of the competition, and to be strong when they are strong, thus improving their self-regulation and self-control in the process of competition. At the same time, there are various forms of willpower training, so it is necessary to combine pre-match willpower training with regular willpower training, to enhance the willpower training of players on penalty kicks, and to improve their self-control ability when taking penalty kicks.

### **2.6 Coaches' daily psychological training and control is the key to overcoming players' bad psychological state**

First of all, coaches need to correctly understand the development level and training methods of modern competitive football. Current competitive football training is no longer limited to the cultivation of basic qualities such as physical fitness, skills and tactics of players, but the psychological training of players is one of the important tasks of coaches. The psychological training of athletes includes their daily psychological training and competition psychological training, of which daily psychological training is the key to help athletes overcome their psychological difficulties. Coaches are required to change their training mindset and pay more attention to the mental representations of the athletes' behavioural attitudes and psychological tendencies in their daily training. According to the psychological representations of the athletes, the coaches should provide corresponding measures to help the athletes to get psychological help from the coaches, so that the athletes and the coaches as well as the whole team can operate freely, so that the coaches can make better tactical arrangements and personnel rotations, and the athletes have positive and positive attitudes both on and off the field, so that they can achieve good team behaviour through body language and other behavioural representations. The positive attitude of the athletes on and off the field, through body language and other behaviours, can achieve a good atmosphere for the whole team.

## **3. Conclusion**

According to the theory of sports psychology, athletes are moderately tense in the game to help their technical and tactical performance, on the contrary, excessive tension or no tension is not conducive to the performance of the game. In this paper, through the investigation and analysis of the current players in the Chinese Super League, it is concluded that the factors that affect the psychology of athletes during penalty kicks include the athletes themselves, the coaches, the players of the team, the situation of the opponents

and other factors. This paper argues that in order to solve the psychological tension of players during penalty kicks, it is necessary for players to clarify the task of the game, correct the motivation of the game, conduct pre-match simulation training, do a good job of pre-match intelligence work, maintain a good psychological state of the players, enhance the cultivation of the will power of penalty kicks, implement daily psychological training and control, and other measures, so as to improve the psychological quality of players during penalty kicks and help the team achieve the goal. This will help the team to win the match by improving their psychological quality during penalty kicks.

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