

RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Mental Fitness and its Relationship to Achievement for Professional Players in the Palestinian Soccer League

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### Abstract

The current study aimed to know the mental fitness and its relationship to achievement among the players of the professional soccer league in Palestine, and to achieve the objectives of the study the descriptive analytical approach was used. The researchers designed a questionnaire based on previous studies. It was distributed to stratified random sample consisted of (121) male soccer players from professional clubs, and the study sample was chosen in a stratified random manner, due to its suitability to the nature of the current study. SPSS program was used to analyze the results of the respondents' responses, and the study concluded that there is a high mental fitness in all its fields (the ability to imagine, mental preparation, self-confidence, dealing with anxiety, the ability to focus, motivation, focus and decision-making and the total score), among professional players and similar regardless of the player's position on the field, the study also showed that the players of the clubs that occupied the top ranks have a higher level of mental fitness. The researchers suggested the necessity of taking care of mental skills and trying to develop them to raise the level of achievement motivation for soccer players, and the need to pay attention to training mental perception of players, and conduct research on the relationship of mental perception with other soccer skills.

### Keywords

Mental Fitness, Achievement, Soccer, Professional League

## INTRODUCTION

The mental fitness is important for the player, as he makes great and distractive efforts for possession of the ball, as well as knowing the strength and weakness of the opposing player. Mental fitness reflects the health and quality of the overall mental state of the player, with its simple and complex abilities, thinking and analytical capabilities, interacting with coach, sharing information, summoning what has been stored and making judgments on specific situations (Budeir 2019).

Mental fitness is among the most important factors and determinants in the process of learning and training motor skills, which workers in the

sports field have paid attention to for the purpose of studying and knowing the individual differences between people, and that mental fitness is important in the performance of sports skills, as it is what enables the athlete to reach a mental state that prevents the entry of negative and distracting thoughts towards his sporting activity (Aljenabi, 2018).

In order to raise sporting achievement to the maximum level, the athlete needs to develop his mental ability, and mental preparation plays an important role in the ability to think properly and behave well for players during training and matches, the importance of mental preparation increases as the competition between the two teams intensifies and at all times of the match, especially in critical moments during the course of the match.

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Any coach must develop the mental capabilities of the players to help them think properly and act appropriately during the match. The coach must also provide his players with theoretical and applied knowledge and information, such as the rules and laws of play, health aspects, and human characteristics, in addition to the technical and tactical aspects of soccer. To help them understand such matters and deal with them mentally (Banhan, 2016).

The feeling of dread during confrontation remains dominant, and may even become a belief and obsession experienced by players, coaches, administrators, and the public. It is similar to negative customs and traditions in societies, and it is difficult to remove negative belief once one recognizes it, and here comes the role of mental preparation during training periods, and matches, to treat cases, all cases that occur to the player using correct scientific methods that do not contradict the method that the player learned during the stages of development. The coach must know the importance of mental preparation, neglecting this aspect causes the players to not behave properly in difficult situations during the course of the matches, and this may cause the failure of the player and perhaps the failure of the entire team, and the results may be disastrous in some cases. The reason is the coach's lack of attention to the mental preparation and development of the mental capabilities of the players, especially since Mental preparation is an important educational duty of the coach, because developing the player's mental abilities makes him a creative player with principles who knows how to move on the field consciously, and how to use the appropriate basic skills that he possesses for different playing situations, and it is closely linked to tactical preparation (Altoto, 2018).

The athlete's arrival at the highest levels of sport is based on what is called athletic achievement motivation, which means the athlete's readiness to confront situations of sporting competition and try to excel and excel by showing the greatest possible amount of activity, effectiveness and perseverance as an expression of the desire to struggle and strive for excellence and excellence. In sporting competition situations (Sanari, 2017).

Halawa, (2017) pointed out that the personal components of sports achievement motivation are:

- Motivation to achieve success: This motivation represents the internal motivation of the player to turn towards certain activities and the

motivation to try to achieve excellence and thus the feeling and feeling of satisfaction and happiness. This is not affected by external influences, but rather it can be said that it is an internal state in the individual that directs and moves him to achieve a specific goal that he sets for himself. This motivation can be considered one of the personal characteristics of the player, that is, that Pure individuality, and is completely different from the other player, and this motivation changes with the two variables (the probability of success, the attractiveness of achieving the goal).

- Motivation to avoid failure: This motivation represents the internal motivation of the player to turn towards certain activities and the motivation to try to achieve excellence and thus the feeling and feeling of satisfaction and happiness. This is not affected by external influences, but rather it can be said that it is an internal state in the individual that directs and moves him to achieve a specific goal that he sets for himself. This motivation can be considered one of the personal characteristics of the player, that is, that Pure individuality, and is completely different from the other player, and this motivation changes with the two variables (the probability of success, the attractiveness of achieving the goal).

Mental fitness is one of the psychological matters that plays an important role in the process of learning skills and applying game plans during matches. It is also considered the decisive factor in many cases of playing during matches, and through the researcher's experience and his follow-up of football in general and the performance of players in the partial professional soccer league in Palestine. In particular, he noticed that the process of paying attention to mental fitness and the dimensions it includes, such as the ability to imagine, mental preparation, self-confidence, dealing with anxiety and other mental skills, as well as the type of its relationship with basic skills, were not given sufficient attention by trainers and those responsible for the training process despite its impact on the player's ability to perform optimally if mastered and trained in it, This is often due to the lack of the training curricula developed by coaches in the part related to psychological preparation, and this is the root of the problem (Daşkesen & Alp, 2024). Therefore, the researcher decided to study the mental fitness of the players of the partial professional soccer league in

Palestine and the impact of that fitness on the level of achievement of these players.

Many studies have been conducted in the field of mental fitness (Budeir, 2019; Majeed et al., 2018; Hawari, 2017; Abu-Tame, 2015; Awwad, 2015; Hidayat, 2014; Bervoets, 2013), While a number of those interested in studying sports achievement motivation (Salama, 2023; Bahri & Kharmoush, 2021; Amer & santaresi, 2021), There are, as far as the researcher knows, no studies to find the relationship between them, so this study seeks to identify:

The level of mental fitness among players in the professional soccer league in Palestine.

Differences in fitness level among professional players depending on player position(goalkeeper, deffender, midfield, striker).

**Table 1.** The characteristics of the study sample according to the variables of age, hight,and body weight

Variable	Measuring Unit	Arthmetic Mean	Std.Dev	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness
Age	Year	24.7	4.46	18	33	.339
Weight	Kg	73.8	4.94	65	83	.220
Hight	M	1.77	.053	168	190	.220
BMI	Kg\M <sup>2</sup>	23.42	1.97	18.01	27.73	.220

It is evident from Table.1 that the results of skewness for (age, weight, hight, and BMI) came between (-3 and +3) which indicates the achievement of homogeneity between the study group, and their subjection to a normal equilibrium distribution.

**Ethics Statement**

Regarding the ethical appropriateness of the study, consent was obtained at the meeting of Faculty of physical education and sports sciences, Palestine Technical University – Kadoorie dated 24.06.2024 and numbered 2024/06. Participant provided informed consent, with the volunteer form covering research details, risks, benefits, confidentiality, and participant rights. The research strictly adhered to the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki, prioritizing participant's rights and well-being in design, procedures, and confidentiality measures.

**Table 2.** Actual limits of the degree of response levels according to the five-point Likert scale

Percentage%	Mean	Level
84-100	4.2-5.0	Very high
68- less than 84	3.4 – less than 4.2	High
52 – less than 68	2.6 – less than 3.4	Moderate
36- less than 52	1.8 less than 2.6	Low
Less than 36	Less than 1.8	Very low

The relationship between mental fitness and achievement among professional players in Palestine league.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

To achieve the objectives of the study descriptive and relational survey model", one of the quantitative research methods was used.

**Study Group**

A total of (121) male players representing professional clubs in Palestine, selected in a stratified random manner were included in the study

**Data Collection Tools**

A questionnaire was designed based on many studies and expert opinion, It included eight areas of mental fitness (the ability to imagine, mental preparation, self-confidence, dealing with anxiety, the ability to focus, The ability to relax, motivation, focus and decision-making). In line with the objectives of the study, a five-point response scale was developed for the questionnaire items, and a score was assigned for each response as follows: To a very much agree (5 marks), to a highly agree (4 marks), to a moderately agree (3 marks), to a slight agree (2 marks), and to agree very small extent (1 degree). The researchers relied on judging the level of responses of the study sample using the criterion that relies on the true limits of the degree of response levels according to the following table (2).

**Data Analysis**

A statistical program was used in the statistical analysis of the data obtained. Arithmetic mean, standard deviation, percentage were used to find the level of mental fitness. One-Way Anova were used in the analysis of differences in the mental fitness between professional players regarding there position in the field (goal keeper,defender,midfield,and striker). Spearman's correlation coefficient was used in the analysis of the relationship between mental fitness and achievement of professional clubs in the palestinian league. Data were collected using the statistical package for social sciences-SPSS version 20.0 software (IBM,USA)

**RESULTS**

The results related to Table (3) in the areas of mental fitness showed that the field of focus and decision-making came in first place and obtained the highest percentage, reaching (80.4%) at a high level, then the field of motivation, with a percentage reaching (74.6%), at a high level. The field of self-confidence, the field of dealing with anxiety, and self -confidence came at a moderate level, with a percentage of (66.6%, 57.2%, , respectively, while the field of ability to focus came in last place, with a percentage of (50%) and a low level, and the total score for mental fitness came in a high level, with a percentage (69.4%).

**Table 3.** Arithmetic means, standard deviations, and percentages for areas of mental fitness n=121

Rank	Field	Mean Square	Std.Dev	Percentage%	Level
1	Focus and decision making	4.02	.49	<b>80.4</b>	High
2	Motivation	3.73	.79	74.6	High
3	Mental preparation	3.72	.73	74.4	High
4	The ability to imagine	3.5	.44	70	High
5	The ability to relax	3.44	.46	68.8	Moderate
6	Self confidence	3.33	.45	66.6	Moderate
7	Dealing with anxiety	2.86	.97	57.2	Moderate
8	The ability to focus	2.5	.87	50.0	Low
	Total	3.47	.29	69.4	High

Table 4 & 5 showed that there are no statistically signifigant differences at a position in the field (goal keeper, defender, midfield, and striker) significance level ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) in the mental fitness

**Table 4.** Arithmetic means, standard deviations of mental fitness for professional players n=121

Position of player	N	Mean Square	Std.Dev
Goal keeper	14	3.47	0.32
Defender	41	3.52	0.28
Midfield	43	3.39	0.27
Striker	23	3.51	0.29

**Table 5.** ANOVA results for mental fitness between professional players n=121

	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	P
Between groups	380.027	3	126.676	1.689	<b>.173</b>
Within groups	8775.940	117	75.008	0.075	
Total	9155.967	120			

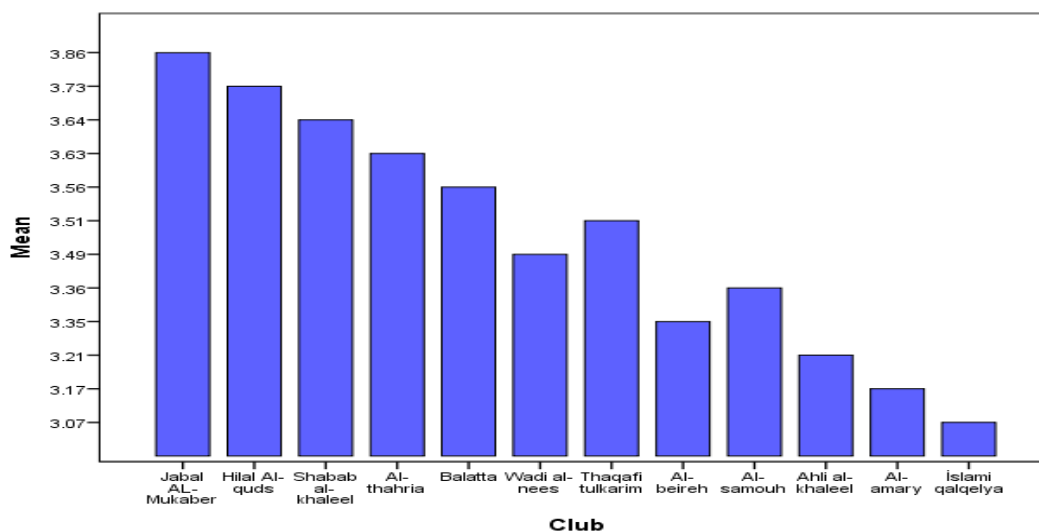
\*p<.05

Table 6. results showed that the players of clubs that were in the lead at the end of competition were mentally fit at a high level, the champion of the competition was Jabal Al-mukaber club with the most level of mental fitness and with average (3.86),then came Hilal Al-quds club,which finished

runner-up in second place in terms of mental fitness and with average( 3.73).while Al-amary club and Islami Qalqelya came in last and last in terms of fitness with an average of (3.17),(3.07) respectively and were the last two teams in the final league standing and dropped to the lower level.

**Table 6.** Arithmetic means, standard deviations, and percentages for the professional clubs and their rank in the league

No.	club	mean	Slandered deviation	Percentage%	level	Rank in league
1	Jabal AL-Mukaber	3.86	.15	77.2	high	The Champion
2	Hilal Al-quds	3.73	.23	74.6	high	2
3	Shabab al-khaleel	3.63	.24	72.8	high	3
4	Al-thahria	3.64	.17	72.6	high	4
5	Balatta	3.56	.13	71.2	high	5
6	Wadi al-nees	3.51	.20	70.2	high	7
7	Thaqafi tulkarim	3.49	.07	69.8	high	6
8	Al-beireh	3.36	0.8	67.2	moderate	9
9	Al-samouh	3.35	.07	67.0	moderate	8
10	Ahli al-khaleel	3.21	.20	64.2	moderate	10
11	Al-amary	3.17	.16	63.4	moderate	11
12	Islami qalqelya	3.07	.35	61.4	moderate	12



**Figure 1.** The means of mental fitness for the professional players regards to the rank in the league

**Table 7.** showed the correlation coefficient and the significance value for mental fitness and the rank of professional clubs in the palestinian league.

Variables		Correlation coefficient	P value	Sig
<b>Mental fitness</b>	Achievment(Rank in the league)	.993**	.000	significant



## DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to Identifying the level of mental fitness among players in the professional soccer league in Palestine, the results showed that the players have high mental fitness, especially in the field of focus and decision-making and motivation, as high mental fitness is caused by preparing the players and this leads to a high level of skill, physical, tactical, psychological and mental performance of the players in terms of their possession of high capabilities and skills (Köse & Atlı, 2020) . They enjoy a good physical level and develop their collective thinking. Progress in the game results from the development of offensive and defensive game plans, as it represents one of the pillars that the team relies on to achieve the best results. The researchers attributes this result to the fact that mental fitness has become essential for soccer players, along with other components, “because of its impact on the player’s intellectual excellence on the field when implementing the required tactic and helping to develop the necessary skills for the player and the ability to analyze tactical situations appropriately in matches. Mental fitness It is useful for treating the psychological stress that the player is exposed to as a result of narrow-mindedness and the inability to find solutions to some of the opposing team’s tactical situations, or the player’s inability to implement the tactics required of him due to his inability to analyze tactical situations or think quickly about finding solutions to them because carrying out duties in matches. It requires acquiring some mental skills that qualify the player with the mental fitness required in the world of soccer.

The study showed that there were no fundamental differences between professional players depending on the playing position, which may be due to the similarity of the training programmes and the mental preparation of each club regardless of the player,s position in the field.

The study concluded that there was a positive correlation between the club's end-of-league ranking and the level of mental fitness of its players.the researchers believe this is due to the fact that players who had acheived advanced league ranking were fully prepared to train all the time without getting tired or bored due to their great confidence, that training constantly enhanced their skills and increased their self-confidence and thus this enhanced their mental fitness, and all of this

contributed to It is in the interest of the player and achieved victory for the team, and here the players will be satisfied with their sports performance. This is consistent with what (salama,2023., Amer, m., & santaresi,2021., Kunvarsing,2020., Budeir,2019) found that individuals who are "high achieves" choose difficult or challenging tasks (they will see value in their success in difficult challenges),it also explains that a "low achiever" will choose easier tasks because they are less likely to fail and are therefore usually guaranteed success. Coach have to balance both (need to achieve ) and (need to avoid failure) in his coaching so players improve their performance and achieve goals.

### Conclusion

The result obtained in the present study suggest that the level of mental fitness of players of professional soccer clubs in Palestine was high, and is similar regardless of the player's position in the field, and there is also a relationship between mental fitness and achievement among players of professional soccer clubs in Palestine.

Studies that show the relationship between mental fitness and achievement are still few, Therefore, it is necessary to include mental fitness skills in scientific research and the training process as a major and indispensable part in training soccer players, emphasizing interest in training players’ mental imagery, and conducting research on the relationship of mental imagery to other soccer skills.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Ethics Statement

This study was approved by the scientific and ethics committee of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport Sciences, Palestine Technical University- Kadoorie (PTUK) written informed consent was obtained from all participants before starting the study. (Approval Number: 06.2024).

### Author Contributions

Study Design, AQ, JA, Data Collection, AQ, OD; Statistical Analysis, AQ and JA; Data Interpretation, JA; Manuscript Preparation, OD; Literature Search, AQ, OD, JA. All authors have

read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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