

Research Article

THE MENTAL PREPARATION PALLIATIVES OF FOOTBALLERS IN SMALL CATEGORIES SELECTED IN NATIONAL TEAMS IN BURKINA FASO

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Mental preparation is crucial to achieving athletic performance regardless of the discipline, the level of practice. In Burkina Faso, studies on this determinant of football performance are rare.

Objective: This study aims to identify the different forms of palliative mental preparation among footballers in small categories selected in national teams.

Method: The survey was conducted through a semi-direct interview with 51 subjects composed of 04 coaches and 46 players with a seniority of at least 1 year in the selection. Content analysis was the main method of data analysis.

Results: after the analyses, it appears within these teams, the absence of a structured method of mental preparation. The main methods used for this purpose as a mental preparation are encouragement, talks, video sessions, prayer. Rather, these methods are palliative mental preparation.

Conclusion: This study revealed the lack of structured mental preparation in footballers because it emerged that there is no sports psychologist in these teams. In order to optimize the sporting performance of these teams, reflections should be carried out on the training and recruitment of sports psychologists within these teams, but much more on the integration of endogenous cultural data into psychological practices.

Keywords: Sports Performance, Mental Preparation, Footballers, Endogenous Culture.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, sport requires a very advanced methodical training, oriented towards competition where the search for victory or the best result becomes almost an imperative. And to optimize performance, the players in the sports world understood the need to integrate the psychological dimension in performance preparation. Hence a careful mental preparation. Mental preparation refers to the work done on the athlete's report to himself as part of his preparation for performance and the management of results (Raimbault & Pion, 2007). It is a preparation proper of the psychological state intervening favorably on the qualities required by engagement in competitive sport. It is about promoting the positive transfer of training skills to that of competition (Heuzé and Lévéque, 1998). For these authors, mental preparation therefore aims to develop basic mental, performance and facilitator skills through relaxation, mental imaging and thought control. To do this, Nideffer (2006) categorizes these mental abilities into three categories:

- basic mental skills such as motivation, goal setting, self-esteem, self-awareness;
- mental performance skills such as self-confidence, optimal psychic energy, optimal attention; and finally the facilitating skills that are relationship skills, lifestyle management. In their attempt at classification, Fournier and al. (2006) listed three mental skills:
- basic skills such as goal-setting, trust, commitment;
- psychosomatic skills that are related to stress responses, control; fear, relaxation, activation;
- cognitive skills that represent concentration, distraction control, imaging, mental practice, competition planning.

Widely shared by many authors, mental skills are of paramount importance in mental preparation and form the basis of psychological follow-up. They are the elements on which the psychologist relies to carry out his intervention. Indeed, mental preparation is short-term and aims to enable the athlete to be mentally ready to face the realities of competition. Mental preparation is to be differentiated from the psychological preparation, which concerns the medium term (sports season: championship). This psychological preparation deals with the relationship of the athlete and his adaptation to his environment (management of competition, travel, family ...). (Heuzé & Lévéque, 1998). Its main aim is to give the athlete the means to approach the competition serenely. On the other hand, many books refer to these notions, but it is still difficult to foresee a truth because each has its own repository in terms of their curriculum, their sensitivity and their beliefs (Heuzé & Lévéque, 1998). However, there are a few things that stand out. Mental preparation focuses primarily on technical learning and strategies that allow athletes to progress and better manage their performance mentally, emotionally and physically, but also to better manage their environment (Raimbault & Pion, 2007). It is generally a regular training where the athlete, a real player in the process, becomes familiar with techniques and tools to apply them in a competitive situation, in order to maintain the efficiency of his gesture, manage his stress and thus "perform" in optimal conditions (Six, 2020). Psychological preparation, on the other hand, would take on a different depth and meaning. It would identify the source of the difficulty and find the appropriate solutions to allow the athlete to express himself fully. In other words, discover and get rid of the reasons for the blockage (Raimbault & Pion, 2007). This is what is done with the athlete upstream of the performance, creating a favorable environment for an effective sports investment. It is part of the sports project in the broadest sense, gravitating around performance (Six, 2020). Although there is a difference between these two concepts theoretically, mental preparation cannot be separated from psychological preparation since both encompass many common skills to train (self-esteem, motivation, etc.) in practice.

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These two concepts are intertwined and complementary since they are the result of the same reality. The goal of mental preparation is to get the athlete to be mentally ready to achieve his goal. It is a matter of putting it in optimal conditions so that it can succeed. Moreover, with regard to psychological intervention with the athlete, it is carried out in the form of a co-construction work between the athlete and the mental trainer, i.e. the second helps the former to become aware of his situation and most of the time, it is the athlete himself who solves his problem (Six, 2020). According to the author, this co-construction work involves various exercises, intermediate evaluations to make possible adjustments and a final evaluation. There is therefore an intervention mechanism to be put in place to successfully prepare a team or an athlete. Speaking of the intervention system, Lévêque (2005) explains that for the most part, the request for intervention comes, more often than not, from officials (coaches, managers) and not from the athletes themselves. The intervener is therefore obliged to develop, first of all, a mechanism to generate individual demands (Heuzé, 2009). After this initial phase of setting up the device and building the athlete's confidence, the sports coach or psychologist must conduct his intervention program which is based on observation phases during certain training sessions and matches of the conduct of individual interviews and group meetings, a web of exchanges with the coach, regular communications with the medical team (Heuzé, 2009). In summary, the system has two distinct phases of intervention:

- the construction of the team and
- optimizing its operation, which corresponds to the time-cutting of a sports season between the preparation phase and the official competition phase (Heuzé, 2009).

For the implementation of these phases, individual or collective strategies can be developed according to context and discipline (Heuzé, 2009). With regard to individual psychological intervention strategies, the author discusses four strategies. The first strategy is the development of mental skills and is of interest to all players. However, the other three become individualized especially during the competitive phase (Heuzé, 2009) and move towards a work on the coach-player relationship, the place of the athlete in the collective, the acceptance of his role and the analysis of his sports performances. Collective strategies involve a phase of preparation dedicated to the construction of the team and the formulation of collective objectives determined by the managers and assigned to the managers. While the scientific literature recommends a joint development of collective objectives at the level of collective sports, the professional context seems to outlaw this type of strategy because psychological intervention remains holistic and casuistic (Heuzé, 2009). Therefore, the behavioral expectations of the players towards their teammates, training and competitions, their preferences in terms of daily functioning are another aspect to explore. Communication between partners is also still to be explored to help the team establish an open internal communication, independent of the statutes. For example, players are invited to comment on what can be communicated (for example, the action performed, a finished adjustment). Similarly, the identity of the team is to be worked in the run-up to the resumption of the championship. Players are encouraged to think about the signs of identity they might adopt to signify the existence of their team. Describing an experience with a basketball team, Heuzé (2009) mentions that teamwork is added a web of exchanges with the coach, which will focus on his action with the coach. This web of exchanges takes the form of sharing information, collected through observations and interactions with players. Three strategies are thus highlighted according to the author: the development of social cohesion within the collective; awareness and encouragement from the captain to take into account all the actors interacting. In light of this field experience,

Rosnet (2005) states that while individualization is to remain a strong focus of intervention, it is difficult to build an evaluation for each athlete. It therefore proposes to build up a battery of tests, to which all athletes will be subjected. These tests must be chosen according to the sport, the athletes (age, level) and the precise demand of the institution. The purpose of this assessment is to assess the individual's relationship with his environment, to analyze his ways of adapting, to determine whether these correspond to the requirements of the situation and to identify the psychological resources on which to rely for follow-up (Rosnet, 1992). If this is the reality of mental preparation and/or psychological preparation, it is clear that only "sworn" psychologists, i.e. graduates in sports psychology, are entitled to intervene (Heuzé - Levêque, 1998). Talking about mental preparation for a team is therefore not a matter for coaches. Even if the coach is at the dome of everything according to some practitioners, he lacks the skills required for mental preparation. The psychological aspect addressed by coaches cannot in any way be used as mental preparation for several reasons:

- mental preparation is not within their area of competence;
- educational chat sessions, coaching sessions during maths, video sessions etc. complement their actions in the field and therefore cannot replace the mental preparation which is the sole responsibility of the sports psychologist.

In Burkina Faso, as in some emerging countries, the lack of knowledge and/or ignorance of psychology in general and the psychology of sport are very remarkable. There is therefore a lack of sports psychologists in Africa in general and Burkina Faso in particular in the technical supervision of national selections. The coaches then invest themselves in technical and tactical preparation at the expense of mental preparation. By ignorance, they refuse to embark on this path of performance improvement, claiming that their practitioners are not sick and that the mind is more of the order of the innate. Indeed, sports performance is multi factorial and mental preparation, which is part of these factors, should be taken into account in the preparation of young Burkinabe athletes. This is reflected in the findings of our national selections of small categories, namely cadets and juniors who are unable to optimize and/or maintain their performance on the African and global level. As an illustration, in 2001, the junior national team was ranked third (3rd) at the World Cup junior at Trinito and Tobacco, the juniors third (3rd) at the 2003 Junior CAN in Burkina Faso and the 2011 Junior CAN in Rwanda, the junior team won its first African title. These unprecedented continental and international performances have not been maintained or optimized since these periods. It is in the light of these findings that this research examines the palliative mental preparation carried out by small-class coaches in the run-up to competitions in Burkina Faso?

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The search took place in the city of Ouagadougou. A cross-sectional study of an exploratory type, it was carried out in footballers of small categories selected in national teams. Semi-direct maintenance was the method of data collection. Using a maintenance guide, the study involved 46 footballers with between one and three years of seniority and five resource people. The probabilistic method and the exhaustive technique were used to select this sample. The interview was conducted after their workouts. Content analysis was the method of data processing. It consisted of establishing categories as the fact sheets were read until the saturation of the categories was reached (Bardin, 1993). Topics were thus defined.

RESULTS

The results of this study are presented on figure 1 and in Table I.

This figure shows that coaches use encouragement (33.33%), discipline work (24.44%), self-giving (22.22%) concentration (20%) as elements of mental preparation. This table highlights the mental preparation elements of small-class football coaches. These coaches focus on encouraging and educational talks before, during and after competitions.

The key words that emerge from these verbatim are encouragement, an invitation to a gift of self for the group; extrinsic motivation, the coach's ability to remain serene during matches etc. It is clear that this daily coaching work is far from mental preparation. It complements the fieldwork and under no circumstances can be considered a mental preparation either in terms of content or form. The analysis shows that there are an absence of a mental trainer in the process of preparing athletes for performance. The players themselves claim to use prayer or "Wack", music for their mental preparation.

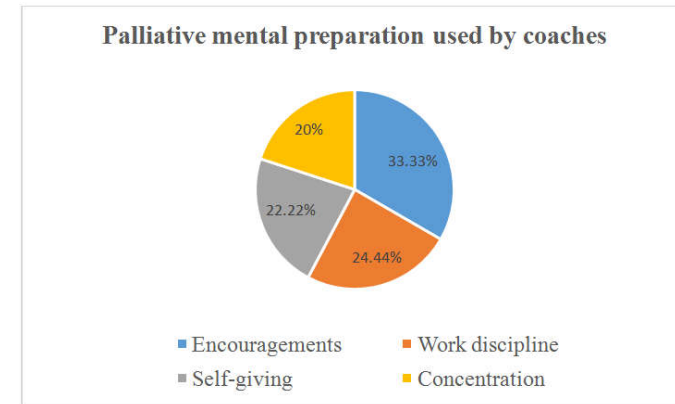


Figure 1. Palliative mental preparation used by coaches

Table 1. Typology of mental preparation elements

Mental preparation elements	Encouragement		Educational talks		Mental Preparation Method	
	verbatim	Keywords	verbatim	Keywords	verbatim	Keywords
pre-competitive period	Pedagogical-type advice; self-giving; concentration Discipline; extrinsic motivation; -make it clear to the players realities of football	information, education, communication on practice	- put players in the game -to encourage concentration and relieving players -optimize the level of performance - avoid big nonsense on the ground.	encouragement	- mental preparation is essential and is one of the three qualities to work with young people - integrated method, -talks and video prayer sessions are the methods -used as PM methods at the BF;	-importance of PM -Method incorporating all skills
competition period	coaching and relocating players	coaching	-Be in the game -allow you to relocate; -build confidence; -encourage to be in the game.	serenity and self-confidence	Same ideas	Same ideas
post-competitive period	take stock of what whether the result is congratulate Players. - Taking Awareness of Mistakes	meeting-balance sheet	-encourage and congratulate -boosting morale and making it possible to do better in the near future; - make individual corrections; - advise on mistakes made, travel and behaviour during matches	results management and correction	same ideas	same ideas

DISCUSSION

Identifying the different forms of palliative mental preparation among footballers in small categories selected for national teams is the aim of this study. Analysis of the results showed that coaches in the small categories selected for the national team use encouragement, educational talks, video sessions, prayer, etc. as a method to mentally prepare their athletes. These results suggest that mental preparation as a scientific intervention approach based on the optimization of mental skills is somewhat obscured as these coaches try to intervene in an area that is not theirs. Indeed, as Heuzé and Lévêque (1998) point out, mental preparation is the positive transfer of training skills to that of competition. It aims to develop basic mental, performance and facilitator skills through relaxation, mental imaging and thought control (Heuzé and Lévêque, 1998). Talking about mental preparation in athletes requires the intervention of a technician in the field who can only be the sports psychologist.

The latter, as noted above, has the necessary training to intervene. To do this, Raimbault & Pion (2007) points out that mental preparation is an approach that involves systematically seeking to improve the perfectible points. He adds that techniques such as relaxation and mental imaging are no longer the essentials of the intervention, but are tailored to the athlete's needs and objectives. The purpose of mental preparation methods is to teach everyone to see and feel the positive they possess in them (Caycedo, 1960). Mental preparation is therefore a scientific work that must be based on the work of the coach on the ground. From the above, it appears that the mental preparation work carried out by the coaches before, during and after competitions including encouragement, video sessions, prayer etc. are only palliatives of mental preparation (Figure 1 and Table 1) because this intervention does not incorporate any psychological device that must focus on optimizing performance understood as the result of multiple and reciprocal causes and determinations (Reid Stewart and Thorne, 2004). The intervention approach must take into account different levels of interlocking, articulated (individual, groupal, organizational), because each individual is a member of a group (leaders, technical team, sports team), himself inserted in a club located in a given social environment (Heuzé, 2009). In addition, the integrated method was mentioned in the verbatim of the respondents. According to the coaches, this method combines technique and concentration in performance preparation. It is very important, but it cannot be considered as a mental preparation process for a team. According to research by some authors, four mental skills appear to be the most important to develop in athletes in mental training. It is about relaxation, goal management, imagery and internal dialogue (Le Scanff, 2005). These mental skills are trainable and can only be optimized as part of a structured psychological intervention. Indeed, psychological well-being is paramount for the athlete, that is, the job is to get the athlete away from his daily and personal worries in order to be as free as possible in his head during competitions (Raimbault & Pion, 2007). From the analysis of verbatim, it has emerged that coaches use religion as a method of searching for psychological well-being. To this end, Bourdieu (1971) mentions that religion brings fear and psychic tensions back to a tossable level through the promise of faith and the hope of justice. As described, the use of religion in mental preparation can enhance certain skills such as self-confidence, self-efficacy, etc. However, mental preparation is a scientific approach and cannot be the preserve of so-called irrational methods. From the above, it appears that the methods of performance preparation used in these teams are not scientific methods even if they tend towards the search for psychological well-being. Moreover, all interviewees recognize the need for mental preparation and stress its crucial contribution to the achievement of the performance of Burkinabe footballers because it

is the mind that makes the difference between athletes. It's in that sense that some authors point out that mental training is a vital component of the athlete's training program (Raimbault & Pion, 2007). If the athlete is armed with precise psychological skills and well prepared physically, he can achieve optimal performance in major events. However, performance instability in small categories is very recurrent. As performance preparation is incomplete, it is difficult to maintain the gains and achieve the level of performance that is so sought after by all coaches. Sports performance is nowadays a scientific, programmable and necessarily multidimensional data and the coach alone without a synergy of action with other specialists cannot promote its realization. All in all, it appears that the mental preparation palliatives used by coaches in the small categories to prepare the performance of their athletes are advice given in the form of encouragement. These elements of encouragement used by coaches cannot be used as mental preparation. Thus, it appears that there is an ignorance and/or lack of knowledge of the methods of mental preparation. The results obtained show that the talks and encouragement used by coaches during matches are conducted collectively and depend on the capital expertise of the coaches. Each trainer having his skills, his approach and these methods cannot be effective because it is not often said, that to keep oxen it takes a single stick, but for men, it takes several sticks. This multiplicity of 'sticks' that the coach must use in his coaching and education work must be integrated into a synergy of action in this case with a mental trainer, a physical trainer, a dietician in a word all the specialists in the field for a coordinated action towards an optimization of sports performance.

CONCLUSION

Football, since its inception in English schools in the 19th century, has undergone a great evolution both socially and economically. Indeed, this can be seen not only through the large number of people it mobilizes but also the huge sums it generates. The current stakes of football require professionalism both among players and coaches. In addition to the intrinsic qualities required for any athlete, footballers should be physically, technically and mentally competent. It is in this logic and based on the observation of the absence of a mental trainer, that this study aims to describe the palliative mental preparation of footballers in small categories selected in national teams in Burkina Faso. To do this, interviews were conducted with selected small-class footballers and their coaches. Analysis of the results identified encouragement, educational talks, prayer, video sessions, etc. as methods to help players stay focused during a competition or match. It thus emerges that the concept of mental preparation is very often used wrongly and through because the coaching work carried out cannot be used as preparation since it is not within their prerogatives. These coaches do not have the skills to do mental preparation. Mental preparation must be taken into account in the training of footballers in small categories in Burkina Faso as it is one of the essential qualities to achieve optimal performance.

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