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ORIGINAL STUDY

Effectiveness a Guidance Program Combined with Specific Exercises on Reducing Psychological Stress among Players in the Stars League of Football

Ahmed Thare Hani 

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of a combined guidance and physical exercise program on psychological stress levels among Star League football players during competitive matches. The study is significant due to the need for validated strategies that help players regulate emotions, follow a structured mental plan, and optimize performance under competitive pressure. It aimed to determine whether the proposed program would significantly reduce psychological stress, thereby contributing to the psychological dimension of sports performance research. An experimental design with one group and two measurements (pre- and post-test) was employed. The sample consisted of 15 players from Al-Student Club competing in the Star League. The intervention lasted two months, with two sessions per week. The program integrated counseling and psycho-physical techniques, including progressive muscle relaxation, diaphragmatic breathing, positive visualization, and structured physical exercises designed to support psychological stability. The findings demonstrated the effectiveness of the program in reducing psychological stress. The mean stress score decreased from 119.07 in the pre-test to 81.29 in the post-test, with a mean difference of 37.78 points. The calculated t-value ($t = 6.845$) at a significance level of 0.000 was lower than 0.05, indicating statistically significant differences in favor of the post-test. These results suggest that integrating guidance sessions with specific physical exercises effectively reduces psychological stress and enhances concentration during competition. The study recommends incorporating structured psychological-physical programs into regular training regimens to improve mental preparation and psychological performance among football players, and this achieves one of the sustainable development goals of the United Nations in Iraq which is (Quality Education).

Keywords: Guidance program, Psychological stress, Football players, Iraqi premier league

1. Introduction

Football is one of the most psychological team games, as it involves high intensity competitive experiences that demand great share of mental effort, precise emotional control and fast decision making under public scrutiny and changing game conditions. In this regard, the psychological dimension has an essential role in determining the quality of performances during a game and can be identified as the factor that makes certain players more successful than others on football grounds, even if they have errors (Abdulghani et al., 2025).

Because football is a practice that requires constant and continuous development, the field of sports psychology it is considered as one of the most important trends for its modernization (Hassan & Abdulkareem, 2025).

Given that importance, this study is conducted to determine the effect of proposing a guidance program and exercises in reduction of psychological stress among players participating in the Iraqi Stars League as the team represents an elite setting of competitors who encounter constant competitive pressures during competition season. The proposed program includes a variety of contemporary psychological techniques including

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muscle relaxation, deep breathing and visualization combined with well-thought-out physical exercises designed to foster emotional regulation and develop the player's ability for self-regulation under pressure.

This study also attempts to fill the gap that seems to exist in terms of psychological preparation in typical preparations programs, where physical and technical-trainings are frequently trained more than mental health which plays a key role on stability and excellence. As such, this work is a first step in systematically and sustainably incorporating the psychological dimension into professional athlete development.

This study is important as it presents an evidence-based and pragmatic program that will concern the psychological stress of sport from the laboratory to the field, improving athletes' performance under tension. This is a true requirement of the modern sports world let, where psychological training programs are still disturbingly under served. In addition, the results of this study may be used to help build practical tools that coaches and sport psychologists could use in an integrated training schedule to, maintain the focusing ability, physical balance, both mental and body performance level throughout all momentarily match play.

Psychological stress and pressure were found to be one of the most challenging issues facing footballer players among them is in higher competitive levels –like Iraqi league stars-of which having great effect on players' attention, decision making and emotion regulation during the game playing. Despite the clear highlight in the vast majority of training maneuvers that focus on enhancing physical and skill-related domains, the psychological dimension is still poorly attended to or skimmed, which can compromise the stability and effectiveness of performance during encounters (Khalid, Adnan, & Layth, 2019).

In the field while watching the Stars League games, many of the scouts observed that some players are victims of attention diversion, excessive stress and emotional lability (especially at sensitive times) which seem to lead a poor performance collectively and individually. These findings have led us to investigate whether psychological recovery programs, supplemented with selective exercises, are a scientific and practical approach that could reduce stress, improve certain Performance Indicators (PIs) and maintain focus among such players.

Psychological recovery methods are psychological interventions that are designed to help restore emotional balance, reduce stress responses, and promote cognitive control following competitive pressure.

Psychological pressures of football players, notably in outstanding tournaments and competitions, are

one big reason undermining the technique and mentality for performing on the field. Despite advances in the physical and skill training of players, psychological development often receives less attention when developing a player leading to increased risk of stress-induced episodes, loss of focus, emotional disorders especially during the most critical moments in matches.

Football is one of the team sports that requires psychological readiness and training in order for players to control their emotions and moderate their behavior according to conditions and states represented as psychological (Abdulhusein et al., 2026).

The author's field experience as well the observation of training realities have shown that many teams may lack structured psychological restoration programs for psychological restoration, and yet such methods as relaxation, breathing exercises or mental visualization techniques are ignored in preparation methodologies, even though their positive effect on enhancing psychological balance and sports performance is fully documented in many studies.

Therefore, the problem of the study was formulated in a question as follows: To what extent can a guidance program accompanied by some exercises affect psychological stress and encourage players of Stars' League and enhance some performance-related indicators?

The research aims to develop a guidance program combined with a set of specific exercises to reduce psychological stress among players in the Stars League and to identify the impact of the proposed guidance program combined with specific exercises on reducing psychological stress among these players.

Guidance programs aim to foster new behavioral orientations in individuals characterized by flexibility and adaptability through the use of diverse methods that equip individuals with new skills, concepts, information, orientations, and values that assist them in changing and modifying their behavior (Amer Abdulhussain et al., 2025).

The research hypothesizes the existence of statistically significant differences between pre-test and post-test measurements of psychological stress among players in the Stars League, with the human domain comprising advanced players from Al-Student Club participating in the Iraqi Stars League for the 2024–2025 season, the temporal domain spanning from November 26, 2024, to March 20, 2025, and the spatial domain located in the smart hall at the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, University of Baghdad, and Al-Burj Stadium at the university.

Table 1. Details of the research sample and percentage distribution.

No.	Sample Type	Number	Percentage of Sample	Percentage of Population	Total Number
1	Pilot Sample	5	25%	17.24%	29 players
2	Main Study Sample	15	75%	51.72%	
Total Sample		20	100%	68.96%	

2. Methodology

Methods is the suitable scientific method that should be used by scientist to realize the intended target declared from the start of research (Mohammed, Shamkhi, & Mohammed, 2023). For this approach, I chose the experimental method as it is appropriate to acquire information about one process, using a single group design with pre-test and post-test. The study sample is represented by 20 clubs of the Iraqi Stars League at (2024–2025) season, which include (570) players. A sample was chosen from this population, that is, from one club to control independent variables and it is AL- Student Team club consists of (29) players representing 5.09% of the total population of league. After pre-test, (15) players were diagnosed as psychologically stressed and it cause to exclude (14) players while in exploratory experiment (5) players were only retained. Table 1 illustrates this.

2.1. Devices, tools and data of collection

- References and Arabic Sources.
- The World Wide Web (Internet).
- Psychological Stress Scale.
- Psychological Recovery Program (Appendix A).

2.2. Defining the research variable

2.2.1. Definition of the psychological recovery program

The psychological recovery program A structured program of psychological interventions (PRP) has been developed to help athletes rebalance emotionally, reduce the level of additional stress on the system, and develop improved attentional control post-exposure to competitive pressure. Evidence-based strategies, including diaphragmatic breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, mindfulness exercises, and guided imagery, are combined with targeted physical exercises to improve coping skills and emotional regulation.

2.2.2. Psychological stress scale (Ahmed Kazem Fahd, 2013)

The researcher utilized the psychological frequency scale developed by Ahmed Kazem Fahd, which consists of 36 statements distributed across four domains,

comprising both positive and negative statements as follows:

- Physiological Domain: 8 statements.
- Competitive Domain: 10 statements.
- Emotional Domain: 9 statements.
- Cognitive Domain: 9 statements.

The response keys are as follows: (applies to me completely - applies to me - applies to me somewhat - does not apply to me - does not apply to me at all). The scoring for positive statements is as follows: (5, 4, 3, 2, 1), while the scoring for negative statements is as follows: (1, 2, 3, 4, 5). See Appendix A.

2.2.3. Exploratory experiment

To ensure the appropriateness of the scale for the sample level, as well as to determine the time required for application and to identify potential obstacles that may be encountered in the pre-test and post-test (Amer Abdulhussain et al., 2025), the exploratory experiment was conducted on November 26, 2024, with a sample consisting of 5 players from Al-Student Club in the smart hall at the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences. This led to the conclusion that the scale is suitable for the sample.

2.3. Main experiment

2.3.1. Pre-test

The pre-test was conducted on the research sample, which consisted of 29 players from Al-Student Club on December 2, 2024, at 3:00 PM.

The scale revealed that only 15 players suffer from psychological frequency, indicating that they require the guidance program and constitute the research sample.

2.3.2. Guidance program coupled with exercises

A psychological guiding program plus an appropriate specific exercise group with basic techniques was built. The intervention was aimed at reducing psychological distress and enhancing attentional focus of the athlete football players, 2× /week for 45-60 minutes. The program consists of four primary interventions at each intervention session fronted by deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, mindfulness meditation and positive visualization towards games. The intervention starts at a moderate level in the first week

Table 2. Shows the level of psychological stress and the t -value between the arithmetic mean and the hypothetical mean for the main study sample in the pre-test.

Statistical Procedures	Unit	Hypo Mean	Mean	Mean Difference	t -value	Sig Value	Significance
Pre-test(Psychological Stress)	Score	108	119.0714	9.94186	4.167	0.001	Sig

The significance value is considered statistically significant if it is less than 0.05 at a degree of freedom ($df = 14$).

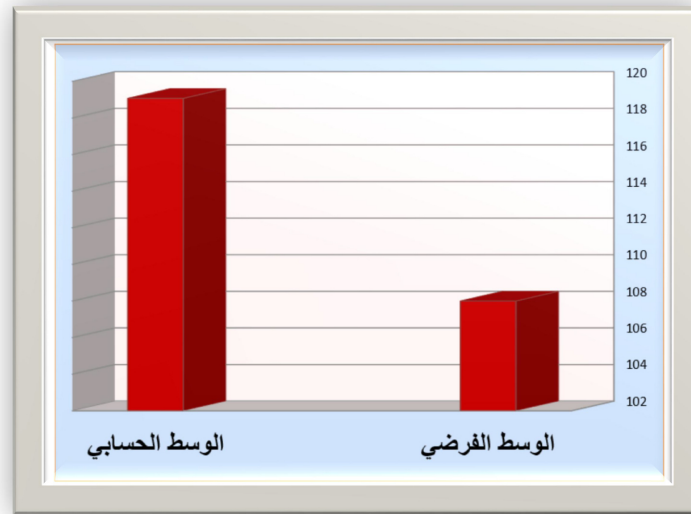


Fig. 1. Illustrates a comparison between the hypothetical mean and the arithmetic mean of the pre-test psychological measurements.

of the pre-season and increases gradually during 4 weeks to develop players' skills in coping with psychological stress. One day of the intervention (guide interview, relaxation exercise, technical exercise) is provided over eight weeks. See [Appendix B](#).

2.3.3. Post-test

The researcher conducted the post-test under the same spatial and temporal conditions as the pre-test for the sample of 15 players from Al-Student Club on March 20, 2025, at 9:00 AM, with the test continuing until 12:00 PM.

2.4. Statistical methods

The researcher employed the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyze the research results and to ascertain the differences between the pre-test and post-test measurements.

3. Results

Table 2 illustrates the level of psychological stress among the research sample in the pre-test by presenting the mean and standard deviation and comparing them with the hypothetical mean of the scale. In addition, the calculated t -value and its statistical sig-

nificance are reported in order to identify the degree of psychological stress among the sample participants prior to the implementation of the guidance program.

The results are interpreted as follows: -It can be seen that the small sample of elite footballers suffers levels with high psychological stress, and that can be observed as a counter-productive indicator, directly influencing their performance in competition. Excessive psychological stress has a negative impact on the attention of many players, their decision-making capacity and regulatory mechanisms (emotional control or mental readiness in competitive situations), which contribute to decrease technical and physical performance levels during games. This is illustrated by the plot presented in [Fig. 1](#).

A successful intervention is therefore required to relieve this tension, as previously shown. Thus, a proposal for the development of a guidance program and series of exercises targeted for such was proposed - aimed to decrease levels of psychological stress in athletes and promote psychological and physical balance, providing them with better achievement conditions for their athletic performance and competitive levels.

Table 3 Post-measurement demonstrate the psychological stress situation among the population subject in the second measuring through mean &

Table 3. Level of psychological stress and *t*-value between the arithmetic mean and the hypothetical mean for the main study sample in the post-test.

Statistical Procedures	Unit	Hypo Mean	Mean	Mean Difference	<i>t</i> -value	Sig Value	Significance
Post-test (Psychological Stress)	Score	108	81.2857	11.95780	8.359	0.000	Significant

The significance value is considered statistically significant if it is less than 0.05 at a degree of freedom ($df = 14$).

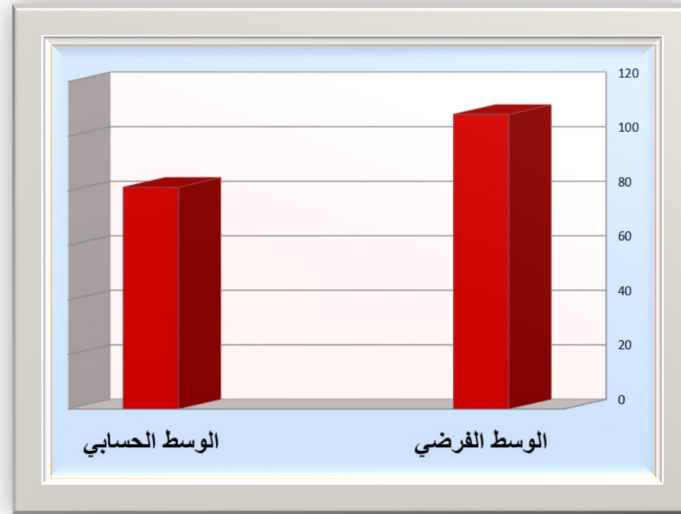


Fig. 2. Illustrates a comparison between the hypothetical mean and the arithmetic mean for the post-measurement in psychological assessment.

standard deviation and make comparison against to them, however compared with the hypothetical mean of scale. The calculated *T* and its probability (*P*) will be used for the purpose of exploring to what extent psychological tension was experienced by the individuals in the sample after application of the guidance programme.

The study results showed that, after introduction of the proposed guidance programme enhanced by different physical exercises accompanying this programme, psychological stress was low among senior football players. This decrement is explained in terms of greater effectiveness of the program on emotional self-regulation and feeling management during competitive play, as confirmed by the chart shown in Fig. 2.

The inclusion of psychological physical exercises – such as breathing exercise, PMR, and mental imagery—has minimized effects physiological response due to stress (e.g., increased heart rate and respiratory rate) and attenuated the negative consequences of stress on performance (Abdulkareem & Hassan, 2025). This reduction in stress levels suggests that the program successfully treated and helped players develop mechanisms of internalize to cope with the psychological strains associated with competition. In addition, this result

highlights the significance of psychological and physical dimensions in preparing to race advanced levels which require the highest degree of focus and mental stability for achieving best results. Table 4: The differences between the pre-test and post- test measurements of psychological stress levels for the sample Players in psychological stress; in terms of means, standard deviations and calculated value (*T*).

Fig. 3 illustrates the difference between the pre-test and post-test measurements of psychological stress.

We can see from the psychological stress change pre- and post- measurement in our Fig. 3. Findings of the study revealed that developed coaching program was effective in reducing advance football players psychological stress levels significantly, post-intervention when compare with preMP stages among there internal level. This is consistent with the direct benefits of the structure guidance program that was prepared to cater for both psychological and physical needs of players in competitive environment; which become relevant at advanced level.

The pre-measurement indicated that players were suffering somewhat from psychological stress, as expected in this vulnerable competitive phase. There are many pressures that players face (coaching expectations, audience expectations, level of competition, failure or the fear to succeed

Table 4. Differences in arithmetic means, standard deviations, and t-value between the pre-test and post-test for players in psychological stress.

Variable	Unit	Mean Difference	S. D of Differences	Standard Error	t-value	Sig Value	Significance
Psychological Stress	Score	37.78571	20.65533	5.52037	6.845	0.000	Significant

The significance value is considered statistically significant if it is less than 0.05 at a degree of freedom (df = 14).

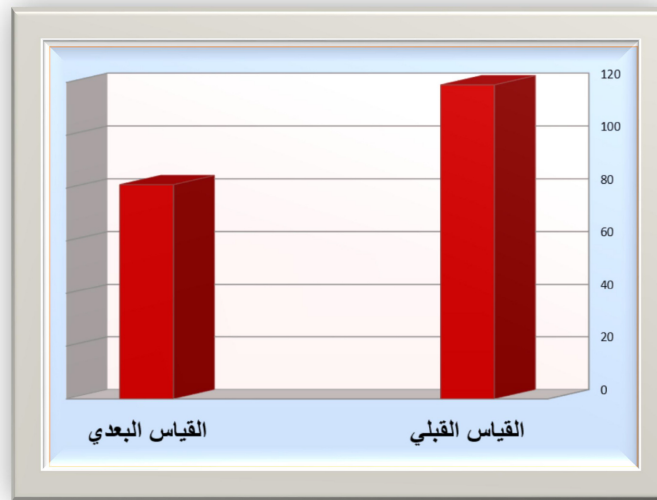


Fig. 3. Illustrates the difference between pre-measurement and post-measurement in psychological stress.

and dealing with injury for example) as well as performance pressure. This psychological condition negatively influences concentration, decision-making and emotional management in the performance (technical-tactical and physical) of the players.

The post-test results demonstrated a statistically significant reduction in psychological stress levels after the intervention prove that this program had been very successful and managed to meet its goals (Waleed Abdulkareem & Sattar Jabbar, 2025). This decrease is considered to be a result of several interacting reasons:

1. **Psychological Guidance Program Component:** The intervention consisted of a series of group and individual guidance sessions aimed at teaching psychological coping skills, how to manage stress, cognitive restructuring, mindfulness exercises, and remaining positive in the face of difficult situations. "Community is actually a really good way of making people aware of where their sources of stress are and how they could then address them."
2. **Physical-Psychological Training Component:** We included groups of physical activities related to the psychological state (fee deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and visualization) with a direct effect on neural

arousal's regulation in this program; however, low intensity training is one way to decrease the hyper-activity that was demonstrated by dysfunctional sympathetic nervous system due to stress. These activities proved effective as evidenced by functional indicators such as heart rate and respiratory rate reduction in response to the psychological improvement.

3. **Self-Confidence Enhancement Component:** The program implementation established a positive psychological atmosphere and assisted the players in regaining a sense of control over themselves in the competitive environment, thereby improving self-confidence – an important ingredient for stress reduction. "When players feel they are prepared with coping strategies, the less likely they are to have psychological collapse under pressure."
4. **Teamwork Reinforcement Component:** a sense of mutual support among players, helps them express themselves when needed, thereby helping to relieve psychological stress and enhancing the program.

Regarding the change in the two training sections (pre-measurement and post-measurement), it is proven that an impressive decrease occurs in psychological variables (anxiety, stress, emotionality)

but also in performance variables occurring during games: body function and mental skills to be exact relationships with other team members. This emphasizes that systemic guidance programs combined with the proper physical activity can act as a constructive instrument in sports players' mental-health adjustments for better performances.

These results are consistent with the current sports psychology literature, that emphasizes psychological support as a major need in training programs especially for advanced levels that show more stress. Furthermore, the findings indicate that programs of this nature need to be maintained in the long term rather than being used to serve emergency situations solely and must be embedded into permanent training schedules (Furley & Memmert, 2016).

4. Conclusions

1. The applied guidance programme in combination with specific physical training has proved to be efficient in the lowering of psycho-stress level among top footballers.
2. Findings of the study highlighted that psychological assistance, combined with physical preparation was crucial in sports.
3. The program strengthened the ability of players to cope with competitive pressures which was accompanied by increased attentional control and emotional balance during matches.
4. Its use of Pranayama "breathing" techniques, relaxation skills, positive visualization themes and mental focus exercises supported the notion of mind-body balance in players in the quest to develop coping skills for stress.

5. Recommendations

1. It is suggested that all sports teams should include psychological guidance programs and training of emotional regulation skills in their training plans.
2. The research recommends educating coaches and assistants about the basics of triggering psychological support and stress prevention to help them dealing with the pressure situations players face.
3. Physiological stress indicators: These include heart rate, respiratory rate, etc. It is recommended that coaches and manager/physicians of teams check their players for these measures, which can be used to measure the effectiveness of psychological programs.
4. Psychological support in the form of guidance should be tailored to specific nature features of

the young players and their competitive levels - sources of stress and coping mechanisms differ between age groups.

5. It is suggested that sports psychologists working in collaboration with the coaching staff may add a value as to offer an integration of psychological and technical aspects for player's development.
6. The study suggests that future studies should be expanded to include other categories (e.g.: youth and professionals), as well as compare the effects of psychological programs for individual and team sports.
7. Based on the obtained results, it might be recommended to generalize the guidance program applied in this study to other clubs and training centers with some necessary modification based on different nature of each team that has an influence or can play a role in reducing their psychological stress.

Author's declaration

Conflicts of interest

We confirm that all tables and figures in this article are ours and written by the researchers themselves.

Ethical clearance

This manuscript approved by Ahmed Thare Hani on (8/2/2026).

Author's contributions

All contributions of this study were done by the researchers Ahmed Thare Hani who get the main idea and work on writing and concluding also with Asst. Lecturer Abeer Talib Abdul-Majeed Yousif (University of Baghdad, College of Physical Education and Sport Sciences, M.A. in English Language/Linguistics) contributed to the translation of the research and the linguistic revision of the manuscript.

Facilitate the task

This study was supported by College of Physical Education and Sports Science/University of Baghdad.

Roles of each researcher in the research

The researcher, Ahmed Thare Hani, was responsible for conceptualizing, designing, reviewing

literature, collecting data, interpreting results, writing the draft, and final reviewing the manuscript.

Funding statement

This research received no external funding.

Data availability

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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Appendices

A. A guidance program

Session One (50–60 minutes)

Session Title: Introduction to the Guidance Program for Psychological Stress

Related Sessions: Introduction to the Guidance Program

General Objectives

Prepare football players for positive interaction with the guidance program by introducing the program, its objectives, and its content.

Specific Objectives

- Encourage players to actively participate in the program.
- Create an atmosphere of familiarity and trust between the guide and group members.
- Remove psychological barriers associated with competitive stress on the field.

Session Content

- The guide introduces the program, its objectives, and activities, emphasizing the importance of addressing psychological stress in sports situations.
- Agreement with players on the rules and regulations governing the sessions (confidentiality, respect, no interruptions, active participation).
- Present real-life examples from matches illustrating the impact of competitive stress on athletic performance.
- Open a discussion with players about personal experiences of competitive stress during matches and its effect on performance.
- Use a short video clip depicting situations where competitive stress played a critical role, followed by a discussion of better decision alternatives.

Formative Assessment

Pose the question: “What is the most significant situation in which you felt competitive stress during a match? How did it affect you and the team?”

Session Two (50–60 minutes)

Session Title: Psychological stress and Its Causes Among Football Players

Related Sessions: Understanding the Nature and Causes of Psychological stress in Sports Situations

General Objectives

Assist players in understanding the nature of psychological stress and its sources during matches.

Specific Objectives

- Recognize the concept of psychological stress and its impact on decision-making on the field.
- Identify sources of psychological stress (crowd pressure, fear of making mistakes, loss of confidence, criticism from coaches or teammates, importance of the match).
- Clarify how competitive stress leads to slowed performance or missed opportunities.

Session Content

- The guide provides a definition of psychological stress and its dimensions, with examples from local and international matches.
- Discuss the causes of competitive stress experienced by players during matches.
- Present short video clips illustrating how competitive stress affected match outcomes, followed by group analysis.
- The guide explains how self-confidence and positive thinking reduce the likelihood of competitive stress.
- Mini-training: “Quick Decision” exercise (present specific game situations and require players to make decisions within seconds).

Formative Assessment:

The guide asks players to mention a specific situation they faced that involved competitive stress, suggesting the best way to handle it after the session.

Session Three (50–60 minutes)

Session Title: The Effects of Psychological stress on Athletic Performance

Related Sessions: Understanding the Consequences of Psychological stress in Sports Situations

General Objectives:

Recognize the impact of competitive stress on both individual and team performance in football.

Specific Objectives:

- Clarify how competitive stress leads to missed opportunities on the field.
- Understand the relationship between competitive stress and slow decision-making.
- Connect the effects of competitive stress to match outcomes.

Session Content:

- Present examples from local/international matches where victory was lost due to competitive stress.
 - Discuss players’ personal experiences regarding the outcomes of competitive stress.
 - Activity (Situation Analysis): Present a specific game situation and request alternative decisions from players.
 - Clarify that a team free from competitive stress is characterized by quick performance and collective confidence.
-

Formative Assessment:

Open question: "Mention a situation where you felt you missed an opportunity due to competitive stress, and how could you have acted better?"

Session Four (50 – 60 minutes)

Session Title: Positive Thinking as an Alternative to Competitive stress

Related Sessions: Skills of Positive Thinking in Sports Situations

General Objectives:

Train players to replace negative thoughts with positive ones that reduce competitive stress.

Specific Objectives:

- Identify negative thoughts associated with competitive stress.
- Learn to reframe thoughts positively.
- Enhance the ability to confront rather than retreat.

Session Content:

- Explain the concept of cognitive alternatives with real-life examples.
- Discuss common negative thoughts among players ("I will fail if I shoot the ball").
- Reframe them positively ("I will try shooting, and I might score a goal").
- Group activity: Worksheet to transform negative thoughts into positive ones.

Formative Assessment:

Each player is asked to mention a negative thought they encountered during play and reframe it positively in front of their teammates.

Session Five (50–60 minutes)

Session Title: Self-Confidence and Its Role in Confronting Competitive stress

Related Sessions: Enhancing Self-Confidence Among Football Players

General Objectives:

Increase self-confidence levels to mitigate psychological stress.

Specific Objectives:

- Recognize the relationship between low confidence and competitive stress.
- Identify practical steps to enhance self-confidence.
- Utilize past success experiences to bolster confidence.

Session Content:

- Discuss previous success experiences of each player.
- Clarify how successful experiences can motivate reducing competitive stress.
- Explain methods to boost confidence (mental visualization, group support, continuous training).
- Activity: "Memory of Success" exercise where players describe a successful situation they experienced on the field.

Formative Assessment

Players are asked to write about a successful situation they take pride in and how they can leverage it to overcome current competitive stress.

Session Six (50–60 minutes)

Session Title: Quick Decision-Making

Related Sessions: Speed of Decision-Making in Critical Situations

General Objectives:

Train players to make swift decisions in sports situations.

Specific Objectives:

- Learn strategies for quick thinking.
- Break the barrier of competitive stress before acting.
- Enhance the ability to choose the best alternative in a short time.

Session Content:

- Explain the importance of instantaneous decision-making in football.
- Provide examples of players known for their quick decision-making.
- Practical activity: "Decision in 5 Seconds" game where the guide presents game situations and players must respond immediately.

Formative Assessment:

Evaluate players through short situations in which they are required to make immediate decisions, discussing the accuracy of their choices.

Session Seven (50–60 minutes)

Session Title: Managing Psychological Pressure During Matches

Related Sessions: Strategies for Coping with Sports Pressure

General Objectives

Equip players with skills to manage psychological pressure to reduce competitive stress.

Specific Objectives:

- Distinguish between positive and negative pressure.
 - Learn breathing and relaxation techniques.
 - Employ emotional regulation skills on the field.
-

Session Content:

- Brief explanation of psychological pressures in sports.
- Discuss the effects of pressure on psychological stress.
- Practical application of deep breathing techniques and mental focus.
- Group activity: Practical training on relaxation before a match.

Formative Assessment:

Players are asked to practice breathing exercises in front of the group and evaluate their ability to relax.

Session Eight (50–60 minutes)**Session Title** Summary and Final Evaluation**Related Sessions** Review and Assessment**General Objectives:**

Evaluate the extent to which players benefited from the guidance program.

Specific Objectives:

- Review what has been learned during previous sessions.
- Develop a personal plan for each player to confront competitive stress.
- Enhance motivation to continue applying the skills.

Session Content:

- Open discussion about the most important lessons learned by players from the program.
-

B. Relaxation exercises utilized

Deep Breath This approach focuses on the low and deep diaphragmatic respiration that helps soothe the nervous system, calming psychological stress, and increase oxygen in the body. Inhalation and exhalation are recommended to be controlled in a counted way (e.g., 4 counts for inhalation, 6 counts for exhalation).

Progressive Muscle Relaxation: This technique consists of tensing the muscles in certain regions of the body (e.g. feet, legs, stomach, arms, shoulders) and then letting go completely. This practice helps relieve psychological and physical stress and increases awareness of the locations that hold tension.

Mindfulness Meditation (Cognitive Focus): A short meditation in which the participant focuses on the here and now, like noticing their breath or physical sensations without thinking that things should be better. This practice enhances concentration and eliminates unnecessary thoughts.

Competitions Related Positive Imagery: A mental image of a victory or some positive ideal moments on the pitch (e.g., making perfect shot, concentration when receiving the ball) which helps in increasing self-confidence and providing a lift in good mental state before and during competitions.

Programme Structure (Monthly): The table below presents an overview of the four sessions per week as well as the exercises and their specific times. Below table is an example of exercises for each session in week 1, some duration were increasing within the weeks:

Week 1 (Learn Exercises Described in Moderate Repetition): The emphasis is set on teaching the subjects the exercises and have participants to practice the actions with slow exercise frequency.

Guidance Program Exercises and Session Duration

Exercise	Session One	Session Two	Session Three	Session Four
Deep Breathing	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes
Progressive Muscle Relaxation	20 minutes	20 minutes	20 minutes	25 minutes
Mindfulness Meditation	10 minutes	15 minutes	15 minutes	15 minutes
Positive Imagery	5 minutes	5 minutes	10 minutes	10 minutes
Short Break	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes

The second week (slight increase in duration and focus)

The length of time spent on some exercises is increased in the second week to improve concentration. The added sessions could consist of place-specific exercises or a more intense form of muscle relaxation.

Exercise sessions during the second week.

Exercise	Session One	Session Two	Session Three	Session Four
Deep Breathing	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes
Progressive Muscle Relaxation	25 minutes	25 minutes	25 minutes	25 minutes
Mindfulness Meditation	10 minutes	10 minutes	15 minutes	15 minutes
Positive Imagery	5 minutes	10 minutes	10 minutes	10 minutes
Short Break	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes

Release time has been extended to 25 minutes in this case, including a gradual step up of meditation and visualization (some) with certain sessions. For example, session 5: (3)min of breath, 25min muscles which could include the adding of more warmth and relaxation while still keeping the breathing taking place in inhalation/exhalation with (within) muscles occurring first, then meditation (15)min plus visualization at end for 10 min = 55 min. This method helps the athlete train themselves to focus and relax even under slightly more prolonged circumstances.

Week Three (Deepening the Experience Under Simple Stress Factors):

The practice of exercises is deepened, and small stimuli may be added (such as playing soft music or light effects) to simulate gradual stress. This enhances mental focus and stress management times. Example of timings:

Exercise sessions during the third week.

Exercise	Session One	Session Two	Session Three	Session Four
Deep Breathing	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes
Progressive Muscle Relaxation	25 minutes	25 minutes	30 minutes	30 minutes
Mindfulness Meditation	15 minutes	15 minutes	15 minutes	15 minutes
Positive Imagery	5 minutes	10 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes
Short Break	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes

This week, the sessions focused on the stability of breath timing, meditation, and breath retention, as well as increasing the duration of muscle relaxation in sessions 3 and 4 to 30 minutes. Additional details can be incorporated into positive visualization (such as envisioning a preferred color on all sides, with the playing field being green and your clothing and everything else) during the second session. The total duration of most sessions is approximately 60 minutes, which contributes to training the players in patience and mental concentration for extended periods.

Week Four (Peak Training and Full Control Application)

Week four represents the pinnacle of the program, during which the athlete's ability to manage stress is fully developed. In this week, all techniques are applied for the longest duration possible, with an emphasis on stimulating the visualization of success in competitions comprehensively. For instance, in this final week, all sessions last for 60 minutes, and breathing exercises focus on increasing volume.

Exercise	Session One	Session Two	Session Three	Session Four
Deep Breathing	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes
Progressive Muscle Relaxation	30 minutes	30 minutes	30 minutes	30 minutes
Mindfulness Meditation	5 minutes	15 minutes	15 minutes	15 minutes
Positive Imagery	5 minutes	5 minutes	10 minutes	5 minutes
Short Break	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes

C. Technical exercises

Exercise 1: Calm Possession

Psychological Objective: Reduce excessive arousal + Restore the sense of control

Execution: Area: 15×15 m 4v2 or 5v2

Condition: Two touches only

Pass the ball quietly (without shouting or rushing)

Each loss of possession = 3 mandatory additional passes for the possessing team

Psychological Impact:

1. Calms the nervous rhythm
2. Transitions the player from “anxiety mode” to “control mode”

Exercise 2: Silent Play

Psychological Objective: Reduce mental noise and increase internal focus

Execution: 3v3 or 4v4

Speaking is completely prohibited

Communication is permitted only through gestures or body movement

Duration: 3 × 2 minutes

Psychological Impact:

1. Reduces tension associated with shouting and pressure
2. Increases momentary awareness and attention

Exercise 3: One Decision – One Touch

Psychological Objective: Eliminate overthinking

Execution: 2v2 + neutral player

One touch only

The decision must be made in less than one second

Rapid role changes

Psychological Impact:

1. Frees the player from anxiety related to mistakes
2. Enhances confidence in automatic decision-making

Exercise 4: Shooting After Psychological Control

Psychological Objective: Link calmness with positive performance

Execution: Pass → Half-second pause → Shot

Shooting is only permitted after complete control of the ball

Shooting calmly without rushing

Psychological Impact:

1. Breaks the relationship between tension and urgency
2. Restores confidence in the final touch

Exercise 5: Free Guided Play

Psychological Objective: Complete psychological release

Execution: 5v5 free play

The coach intervenes only with short positive phrases:

“Take your time”

“You are in control”

“Play under control”

تأثير برنامج إرشادي مقترن بتمارين خاصة في خفض التوتر النفسي لدى لاعبي دوري النجوم بكرة القدم

احمد ذاري هاني

الملخص

تعنى هذه الدراسة بالتعرف على أثر برنامج إرشادي مقترن بتمارين بدنية في خفض التوتر النفسي لدى لاعبي دوري النجوم في كرة القدم، وذلك خلال مواقف اللعب التنافسي. وتتبع أهمية الدراسة من الحاجة إلى أدوات فعالة تساعد اللاعبين على تحسين التحكم الانفعالي، وتحقيق التركيز الذهني والأداء المثالي أثناء المباريات. وتتمثل مشكلة البحث في مدى ملاءمة البرنامج المقترح في خفض مستويات التوتر النفسي لدى اللاعبين. وقد هدفت الدراسة إلى الكشف عن أثر البرنامج الإرشادي-البدني في تقليل التوتر النفسي لدى العينة، بما يسهم في دعم الجوانب النفسية المرتبطة بالأداء الرياضي. وافترضت الدراسة وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين نتائج القياس القبلي والبعدي لمستوى التوتر النفسي لدى أفراد العينة. كما وأستخدم المنهج التجريبي بتصميم المجموعة الواحدة ذات القياسين (القبلي - البعدي)، على عينة مكونة من (15) لاعباً من لاعبي نادي الطلبة المشارك في دوري النجوم، طُبّق البرنامج لمدة شهرين، بواقع جلستين أسبوعياً، وتضمن مجموعة من التقنيات الإرشادية والبدنية مثل: الاسترخاء العضلي التدريجي، والتنفس العميق، التخيل الإيجابي، وتمارين بدنية موجهة تخدم الجانب النفسي. وأظهرت النتائج فروقاً ذات دلالة إحصائية لصالح القياس البعدي، مما يدل على فاعلية البرنامج الإرشادي المستخدم مع التمرينات الخاصة في خفض التوتر النفسي وتحسين التركيز أثناء الأداء التنافسي. كما وتوصي الدراسة بإدماج البرامج الإرشادية-البدنية ضمن الخطط التدريبية المنتظمة للفرق الرياضية لما لها من أثر إيجابي في تعزيز الجانب النفسي وتحقيق الجاهزية الذهنية للاعبين. وهذا ما يحقق احد اهداف التنمية المستدامة للامم المتحدة في العراق (الصحة الجيدة).

الكلمات المفتاحية: البرنامج الإرشادي، التمرينات، التوتر النفسي، لاعبي كرة القدم، دوري نجوم العراق، الإرشاد النفسي الرياضي.