2.1 Self-Confidence

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1. Introduction

Among the psychological variables that explain athletic performance, self-confidence – along with cognitive processes, pre-competition anxiety, motivation, and concentration – is a focus of study and a deciding factor for athletic success.

High levels of self-confidence are related to the technical and tactical mastery that athletes possess after years of training and participation in numerous athletic performances. The most hesitant athletes are those who do not feel capable or do not believe that their abilities will result in success. When we doubt ourselves or assume that something will go badly, we create what is known as a **self-fulfilling prophecy**. If we anticipate that an event will occur, we predispose ourselves to its eventual occurrence.

Coaches and athletes often talk about the importance of confidence in reaching the highest level in sports. We often hear phrases like "you weren't confident in that play," "you should trust yourself more," and "what that player needs is confidence; he hasn't made a goal in a long time."

When athletes fail and it is not clear why, confidence becomes a possible explanation. It is a way to explain vague psychological aspects, and they seemingly make sense: "If he misses this penalty shot, it's because he isn't confident."

And I say "seemingly" because measuring confidence by external behavior is hasty and unfounded. As sports agents, it is important to be clear on what confidence (or assurance) is and how it can become our ally.

In this unit, we will cover the different definitions used to describe this construct, some of the theories related to confidence and athletic performance, and we will also analyze the advantages of developing confidence from very young ages at the beginning of an athletic career.

2. Definition of Self-Confidence

A very common definition in sports psychology revolves around the belief that there is a relationship between self-confidence and executing a desired behavior satisfactorily, with the assumption that success will be achieved.

Self-confidence has been defined as the psychological skill that gives athletes more certainty in terms of their personal ability to perform and their chances of achieving success when faced with challenges (Weinberg & Gould, 2010).

Another definition would be the belief or the level of certainty that individuals possess in terms of their ability to be successful in sports (Vealey, 1986, p. 239).

Carrascosa (2003) proposes that self-confidence depends, to a large extent, on how performance has been evaluated in past experiences.

Having confidence does not guarantee 100% success in sports, but lower confidence does not predict positive execution either. There are many coaches and athletes who equate having confidence with believing that they will win the race, trial, or competition.

Thus, we must also consider that confidence influences other psychological variables in the following way (Table 1):

1) **Positive emotions**: influence positive-thought activation, which will allow athletes to feel more sure of themselves, stay calmer and more relaxed under pressure, and achieve a more energetic state of mind and optimal performance.

2) **Motivation:** influences the athletes' focus on correctly executing actions; they will achieve their objective, which, in turn, promotes the expectation of continuing to achieve the same or similar objectives in the future. The desire to do something is created, giving athletes a positive, never-give-up attitude to overcome adversity.

3) **Concentration**: when athletes feel confident, their minds can focus on key aspects of their motor action. Instead of getting distracted by their level of performance, they are free to concentrate on the task at hand, simply doing it the way they know how.

4) **Objectives:** Athletes with optimal confidence tend to establish stimulating objectives and strive to achieve them. Therefore, confidence allows us to set increasingly higher goals and achieve our maximum potential.

5) **Effort:** Confidence generates effort, since the amount and duration of effort exerted in reaching an objective depends to a large extent on confidence. In other words, athletes who believe in themselves are very persistent and never give up, employing maximum effort to reach the objective in all situations (training and competitions).

6) **Physical endurance**: as is the case with effort, confidence leads to an increase in this capacity, as well as a reduction of athletes' perceived level of exertion, both physically and psychologically.

7) **Playing strategy**: confidence affects these strategies because athletes who are sure of themselves play to win; they have no fear of taking risks or taking control of the competition. A lack of confidence, however, leads athletes to play to avoid losing, producing inefficiency and indecision, and favoring errors and uncertainty in their movements.

8) **Ability to handle pressure**: Confidence evokes positive emotions, motivation, and concentration; it makes players mentally relax, since, by trusting in their abilities, they avoid pressuring themselves about what might be going on in the immediate surroundings, allowing them to compete in a more relaxed condition and with less pressure.

9) **Likelihood of injury**: confident athletes will be less prone to injury since they exhibit appropriate levels of arousal. Likewise, athlete motivation, concentration, and predisposition are also geared toward optimal levels. (Carrascosa, 2003).

10) **Confidence in execution promotes optimal performance**.

Table 1: Psychological variables and their behaviors

Psychological variables	Behavior
Positive emotions.	Positive thoughts, self-talk, tension regulation.
Concentration.	Focus on the key aspects of the action.
Objectives.	Internal, realistic, and reachable attribution.
Effort.	Focused on the amount and intensity of the effort.
Physical endurance.	Physical effort as part of the action.
Playing strategy.	Focused on the task of execution and controlled action.
Ability to better handle pressure.	Focused on maintaining relaxed states.
Injury prevention.	Focused on controlling arousal levels.

Optimal Performance

Source: FCB Department of Psychology (n.d.)

The aforementioned authors also state that optimal confidence equates to the certainty of what can be achieved, orienting one's actions (with their corresponding intensity, perseverance, and effort) toward the established objectives. "The objectives must be realistic and thus convince us that they can actually be achieved" (Urquijo, Sánchez, Acosta, 2013).

> According to the authors, "We may make mistakes, lose concentration, or experience other adverse situations, but optimal self-confidence will help us face these setbacks while maintaining great efforts toward the objective" (p. 11).

Example:

A tennis player prepares to serve after a double fault. At this moment, two things may occur, with their corresponding results at the behavioral level.

Table 2: Positive and negative psychological strategies

Situation	Positive psychological strategy	Response	Evaluation
Significant error	I focus on the ball "Come on." "I can do this." "Breathe."	Increased concentration on the relevance of the current action and what the athlete can control. Regulate the action. Handle the pressure.	Increased likelihood of completing the task successfully.
Significant error	**Negative psychological strategy**	**Response**	
	"It isn't working." "I can't adjust."	Increased **distraction** Decreased ability to regulate action. Increased perception of one's lack of confidence.	Decreased likelihood of completing the task successfully.

Source: FCB Department of Sports Psychology (n.d.).

The so-called lack of confidence in athletes who have the great physical skill needed for success, becomes a shortcoming when performing under pressure; in other words, during a pressure-filled moment in competition, athletes who lack confidence are unable to make optimal use of their skills.

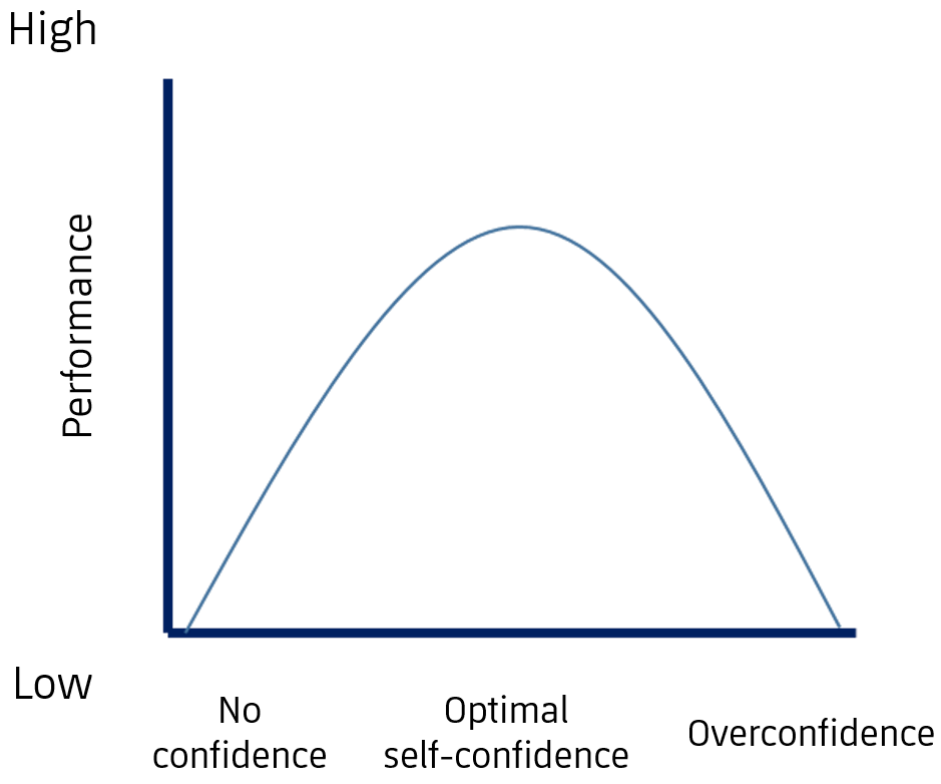
Here, "self-doubts" unexpectedly flourish, resulting in weakened performance, and thus, anxiety, and a break in concentration. Athletes in this situation also experience indecision, which hinders the normal flow of their execution. Likewise, athletes who lack confidence focus more of their attention on their weak points than on their strengths, thus leading to a lack of concentration on their central objective or main task.

On the other extreme, we will find athletes who tend to be overconfident. In this way, **overconfidence** gives athletes a false assurance in themselves. In other words, their performance decreases because they think – **based on unfounded beliefs** – that they do not need to prepare or put in effort to improve during a given exercise, task, or session as a result. **This could lead to** an overestimation of oneself and, therefore, a lack of preparation when faced with competition; it can also lead to an underestimation of the opponent, who may be more motivated and focused. Either of these two situations take us further from optimal performance. This overconfidence can lead to a drop in athletes' arousal levels as well as decreased concentration; it can also lead athletes to prepare inadequately and, thus, execute their techniques incorrectly.

In many cases, we can observe **false overconfidence** or assuredness when athletes try to mask or conceal from their coaches the uncertainties they have about themselves. In these episodes, coaches encourage their players to feel assured, because these athletes do not want to show their shortcomings. Instead, they pretend to be overconfident, with the objective of hiding their true feelings of doubt and indecision.

The image we obtain when showing the relationship between self-confidence and performance in a competition (see Figure 1) does a good job at explaining that either an excess or a lack of confidence is equally negative for athletic performance. The interaction that emerges between confidence and performance can be illustrated in the inverted U curve. Here, we can see how performance improves as the level of confidence increases up to an optimal point. Beyond this, any further increase in confidence corresponds to a decrease in performance; this means a drop in the athlete's ability to execute.

Figure 1: Inverted U Curve

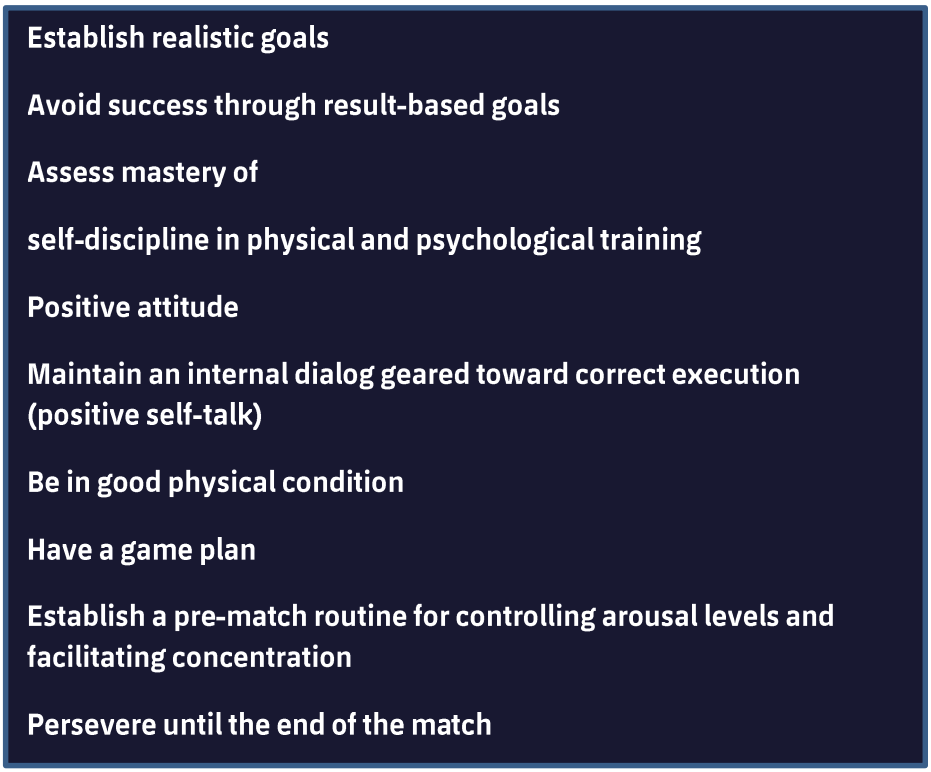


Source: Urquijo, Sanchez, Acosta, p. 1 (2013). https://www.efdeportes.com/efd183/mejorar-la-autoconfianza-de-taekwondo.htm

Each person has an optimal level of self-confidence. Therefore, problems in athletic performance will emerge when confidence levels are either excessive or insufficient.

In Figure 2, we propose a series of steps that could help coaches and athletes themselves design tasks geared toward improving the perception of self-confidence (Loehr, 1991; Weinberg, 1988).

Figure 2: Guide to designing tasks for optimizing perceived self-confidence



Source: Loehr, 1990, p. 12.

3. Relationship between confidence and performance

There are two main theories that have studied and investigated this topic, providing clarification of some concepts that were confusing up until then. On one hand, we find Bandura's self-efficacy theory; on the other, Vealey's confidence model.

3.1. Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1977)

> For Bandura, there is a connection between three basic factors that influence an individual's optimal performance: personal-cognitive, environmental, and behavioral factors. Thus, the value judgments that we have about ourselves influence our execution (emotions) (Marin, 2009). **https://www.efdeportes.com/efd128/autoconfianza-y-deporte.htm**

The self-efficacy theory plays an important role in referential thinking about the psychosocial functioning that acts as a mediator between behavior and motivation.

The judgments we make about our ability to complete a concrete task influence the behavior performed (effort, persistence, intensity, etc.), as well as thought patterns and emotional reactions. The expectations of self-efficacy, along with the results, have different causes: achievements in execution, observation of the behavior of others, verbal persuasion, and one's own perceived physiological state.

1. **Achievements in execution**: this has the greatest influence on athletes' perceived self-efficacy, and it comes from their own experiences. If they are seen as successes, the perception of self-efficacy increases; if seen as failures, perception of their own ability will decrease. Along this line, the following must also be considered: the perceived difficulty of the task, the athlete's mastery of the task, and the external information received.

   For example, let's think about a penalty kick: The player is preparing for the kick, focusing on the objective – the direction is the goal. The execution refers to the athlete's attempt to strike the penalty with a "good feel", coordinating an appropriate level of arousal with the motor action.

2. **Vicarious experiences**: personal experiences are not the only things that make up our learning. Modeling – the observing of others – is also a source of knowledge. We analyze other people's behavior, and this information serves as a guide for our own improvements.

   Now let's think about coaches in general during training: they give technical and tactical instructions, and these instructions are accompanied by real actions to focus on the key aspects of the motor action. The coach or a teammate may execute the action. Watching videos – of actions that one's team trained for or those of another team – may also have the same effect.

3. **Verbal persuasion**: persuasion allows athletes to modify expectations of self-efficacy, but the change is weak and does not last long, since it lacks the effect of personal experience. To be effective, the person giving the advice must have the history, credibility, and strong knowledge of the topic. In addition, the information must be within realistic limits and possibilities for the athlete.

   For example, an athlete suffers an injury and shares with another player – a younger and less experienced one – a kind of testimony about the emotions and feelings he experienced when receiving the news and what the recovery process was like. This testimony will have a big impact on the less experienced athlete, leading to

an identification with the situation that will help him accept his injury and rehabilitation.

4. **Physiological states**: The level and state of physiological variables also form part of the construction of self-efficacy, especially if we take into account the cognitive interpretation that generates these states. We are referring to evaluating the causes of arousal, the arousal level, the situation within which certain states occur, and previous experiences.

   In this case, we could refer to those moments where a change in heart rate is detected as a consequence of a threatening perception. It is common to see how certain athletes resort to controlling their breathing (deliberately) as a technique for controlling the anxiety they feel in certain moments.

Athletes are always receiving information from these sources, dynamic information that is renewed constantly. All of this leads them to consider what they are capable of doing, and in which situations they can intervene.

To understand the relationship between confidence and sports, we must also take a look at the theory developed by Vealey (1986). According to this author, confidence in sports is the belief or level of certainty subject-athletes have in terms of their abilities and how to use them for success. This model describes the following aspects:

1) A dispositional construct called **trait sport confidence** (*SC-trait*).
2) A situational construct called **state sport confidence** (*SC-state*).
3) The competitive orientation of the subjects.
4) Behavioral responses.
5) Subjective result.

Trait sport confidence is the belief or level of certainty that individuals typically have regarding their ability in playing their given sport. **State sport confidence** is the belief or level of certainty that individuals have in a specific moment while playing their sport. In addition, Vealey (1986) introduces a construct that takes the contributions of Nicholls (1980) – who suggested that the meaning of success was different for each person – and highlights that it is the competitive orientation that determines whether an athlete is geared toward results or execution. Playing well and winning are the two goals on which Vealey bases competitive orientation. Despite the fact that athletes can be oriented toward one direction or another, they may develop a greater tendency toward results or toward execution through successive experiences.

What this model aims to explain is that trait self-confidence and competitive orientation become interrelated with the objective situation that arises within the sport, resulting in a given state self-confidence. State self-confidence (looking at a specific and concrete situation) and competitive orientation (the athlete's objective is geared toward task mastery or the result of their execution) may predict how athletes will perceive certain factors within an objective situation in sports as well as their level of state self-confidence.

An example could be a basketball team that is preparing for a final in a tournament. The competition has been successful and they have reached the final without losing a single game. The team has faith in itself, they are playing fluidly, as if from memory, and they have perfected all the plays they have practiced. But before the final game, during the warm-up, the point guard in charge of playing the first quarter complains of a pain in the back of his knee and feels like his knee will give out. The team must come up with a new plan for this first part of the game to maintain state confidence – the player's injury generates a change that alters the team's initial pre-game state. The coach reminds the team, including the player that will replace the injured athlete, that mastery of the task is the most important aspect, and not the athlete playing point guard. Managing the first minutes to ensure confidence and orienting the attention toward execution may help ensure and maintain confidence in the team and in their game.

4. Optimizing self-confidence

According to Marin (2009), self-efficacy is a highly valuable achievement. Even so, it is essential to know how to strengthen it in order to reach optimal performance. With this in mind, Nieto et al. (1998) bring different points to be aware of:

- Achieve success and correct execution
- Act and think confidently
- Trust the professionals who help you (psychologists, coaches, trainers)
- Visualize and plan the practice-action
- Adapt the results to the characteristics of the athletes
- Establish clear objectives that gradually increase in complexity
- Work with the resources available
- Offer feedback appropriately

5. Limitations of self-confidence:

While we do believe that self-confidence positively influences performance, we should not underestimate its limitations.

1. One's ability to be self-confident does not replace so-called incompetence; this would be false confidence (described above).

2. Self-confidence levels follow the inverted U theory. This states that performance improves as confidence levels increase until reaching an optimal point, after which, any increase in confidence corresponds to decreased performance or execution levels, which are the same thing.

3. The optimal level refers to the point at which one is certain of achieving the objective; it is always associated with putting in the necessary effort and the persistence in reaching that point.

4. The inflection point or moment of truth will depend on the individual and his or her perception of the situation.

6. Assessing self-confidence in sports

For this point, we are going to provide some systems that may help us assess self-confidence and athletic performance:

a) According to Marín (2009), Vealey (1986) was able to develop three instruments intended to measure the interaction between confidence and performance, from the perspective of the model of trait sport confidence (TSCI), state sport confidence (SSCI), and competitive orientation (COI) The three instruments have an adequate internal consistency that makes them reliable.

b) For his part, Bandura suggests a methodology called microanalysis, through which specific measures are taken for each task performed. Here, referential thoughts are analyzed in the form of specific self-perceptions of efficacy, which may be seen through different activities and/or situations. It is carried out by analyzing the expectations of individuals' self-efficacy, analyzing and evaluating their thoughts in terms of three dimensions:

- Magnitude or level.
- Strength.
- Generality.

It will proceed through sports-related questions that are centered on evaluating self-confidence, separating tasks in order of increasing difficulty.

c) The sport confidence inventory

This aspect refers to the importance of evaluating confidence levels with a series of situations that athletes may find in their daily practice. In this way, it seeks to measure confidence both on a physical and mental level, in both training and competition situations.

Example:

One possible format is the one we find below, where we would use a log sheet to note the reactions of the subject when a lack of confidence occurs, from a self-analytical perspective.

Figure 3: The sport confidence inventory

Read the questions carefully and, for each question, think about your confidence while you competed during the last season. For each item, indicate the percentage of time in which, in your opinion, you had too little, too much, or the right amount of confidence. Below is an example to help you complete the questionnaire correctly.

You are a pole vaulter	**Not confident (%)**	**Confident (%)**	**Overconfident (%)**
How confident are you each time you try to jump 5 meters?	20	70	10

The three responses must always add up to 100%. You may distribute this 100% however you feel it is most appropriate. You may assign the entire percentage to a single category, divide it between two, or divide it among the three, as done in the example.

How confident are you in terms of...	**Not confident (%)**	**Confident (%)**	**Overconfident (%)**
1) Your ability to execute the skills of your sport or exercise?			
2) Your ability to make essential decisions during competition?			
3) Your ability to concentrate?			
4) Your ability to act under pressure?			
5) Your ability to execute a strategy successfully?			
6) Your ability to make the effort needed to achieve success?			
7) Your ability to control your emotions during competition?			
8) Your training or physical preparation?			
9) Your ability to relate with your coach(es) in a satisfactory manner?			
10) Your ability to react when you are behind or when you are performing poorly?			

Source: Weinberg and Gould, 2010, p. 160.

d) Competitive State Anxiety Inventory

This measures athlete self-confidence. It is a proposal that seeks to put into practice the feeling of self-confidence of the human/athlete using the multidimensional theory of anxiety, where execution and self-confidence play a leading role, including the Cognitive Anxiety Scale, Somatic Scale, and Self-Confidence Scale.

7. Recommendation for developing self-confidence

Whichever model is chosen, we must keep in mind a series of important recommendations for evaluating self-efficacy:

Regardless of the model selected to study self-confidence in athletes, the following points must be considered in order to evaluate self-confidence:

- It is important to obtain information regarding physical – and not just mental – self-efficacy.
- Include indicators that we can use to assess and record possible scenarios where overconfidence is present.
- It will be essential to have a process for evaluating self-efficacy during training sessions.
- Incorporate other agents such as pressure, refereeing, teammates, and more.
- Plan the scenario and the challenges that may be present.
- Establish preparatory routines.
- Monitor effective demonstrations.
- Adapt the sport to the characteristics of the athletes.
- Exercise self-confidence in training and competition.
- Establish effective objectives.
- Maintain a feeling of control.
- Work within the context of one's current resources and limitations.
- Obtain feedback from several sources.
- Pay attention to aspects that depend on us.
- Control the perception of success and how it is attributed.
- Accept errors as indicators for improvement and not as indicators of a loss of effectiveness.
- Alternate between potentially stressful situations.

8. Conclusions

To conclude, Marín (2009) emphasizes that many people associate the idea of having confidence with believing that they are going to win even when it is not possible, and being encouraged by saying they are capable of it.

> "Having self-confidence is having a realistic perspective about what can be achieved. It is not what athletes hope to do, but what they realistically feel like they are able to do. If

> athletes have an optimal level of self-confidence, they will establish goals that are in line with their individual abilities and characteristics, knowing what they can achieve and what their limits are, recognizing errors, and working to correct them" (Marín, 2009, retrieved from: https://www.efdeportes.com/efd128/autoconfianza-y-deporte.htm)

The sooner we incorporate training as part of the athlete's development of self-confidence, the sooner we will emotionally safeguard the athlete.

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Introduction

When athletes are asked what helps them feel confident to compete, they often share the need to have a plan, as well as routines that allow them to feel fit and eager to compete, and be able to experience positive sensations. That is how they explain confidence.

A few studies on Olympic athletes suggest that the most successful athletes have strategies and plans that they follow rigorously before competing (Weinberg & Gould, 2010). Knowing what to do at all times, even having alternate plans for contingencies, provides elements that allow us to feel assured and confident in achieving success.

There is a belief about confidence that "you either have it or you don't," but in reality, we can work on confidence through training and planning. Throughout this unit, we will present some techniques that, when applied in training, will make us aware of how to develop it.

Developing confidence

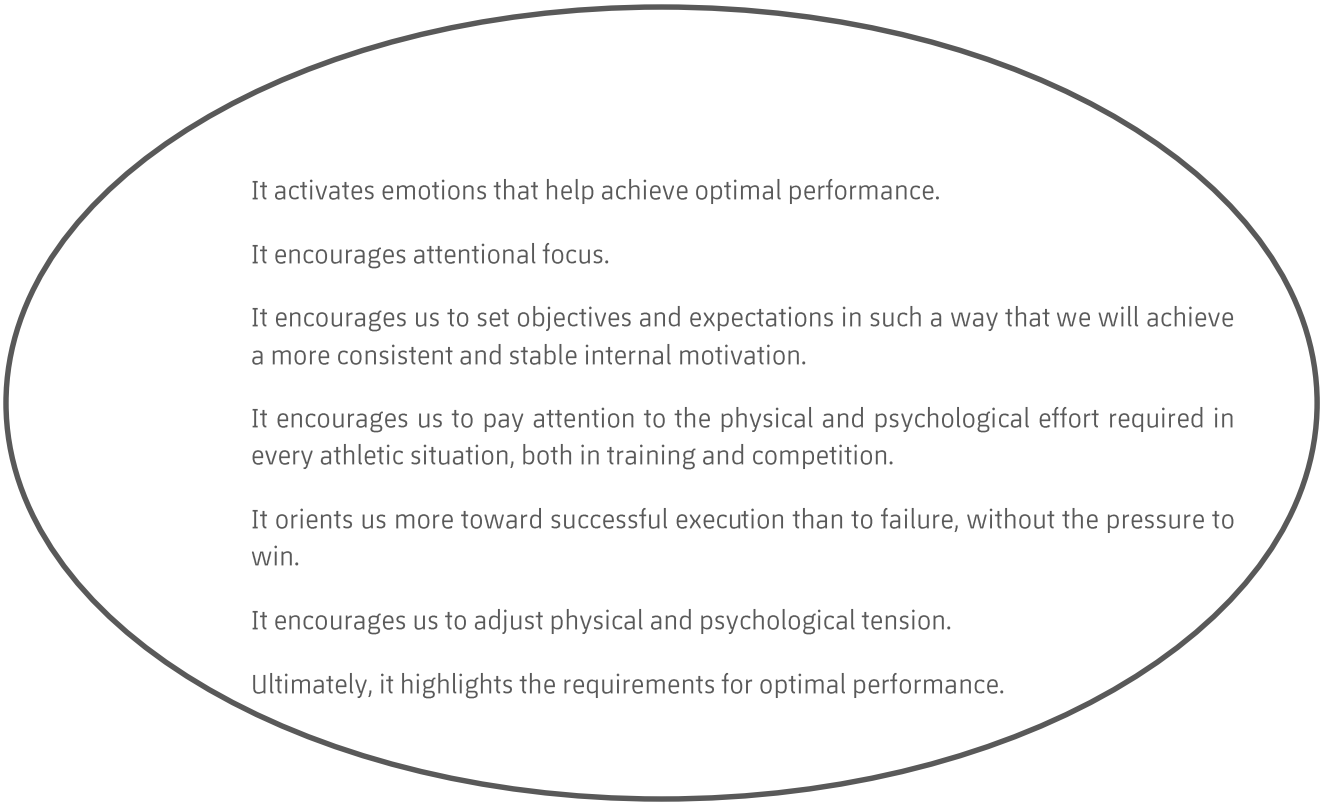
Based on what we saw in Unit 1, we will review the variables, strategies and specific techniques for training confidence:

1. Beyond psychological training, it is important to feel physical self-efficacy. Psychological training helps and complements, but never substitutes for, physical training.
2. Attention must be given to what is controllable, that is, the aspects that depend on the athletes themselves.
3. Control the perception of success and failure.
4. Manage internal attributes, as a system, to facilitate subjective control.
5. Being in good physical condition and having mastery over tasks are important aspects for building our confidence.
6. Quality training in all of the variables: physical, technical, tactical, and psychological.
7. Training any psychological competency requires consistency, perseverance, and a systematic approach, as well as physical training.
8. Achieve results.
9. Control thoughts to focus on positive aspects.
10. Establish realistic, reasonable, and reachable objectives.

11. Use internal dialog with positive and constructive messages.
12. Control the arousal levels necessary for each moment in training and competition.
13. Positive external reinforcement of the desirable behaviors that bring the athlete closer to succeeding in the motor action.
14. Achievements in execution based on results, but especially in terms of improvement in the execution.
15. Plan for athletic scenarios to include routines both during training as well as competition.
16. Establish preparatory routines in trainings, but especially in competitions.
17. Train to compete. Facilitate trainings that simulate competition as much as possible.
18. Train the attitude, intensity, and result orientation within training sessions; do not relegate these aspects to competition itself.
19. Control expectations without damaging the motivation of each athlete.

If we consider these strategies, variables, and techniques, we should remember why it is important to work on athlete confidence.

Figure 4: Importance of working on athlete confidence



Source: FCB Department of Sports Psychology, n.d.

Developing techniques for training confidence

We have named strategies, and at this point, we will introduce specific techniques for developing self-confidence. It is important to keep in mind that these techniques should not be used in emergencies, but incorporated into technical training sessions so that the work of the psychologist and coach are aligned.

1. Identify strengths

In order to build confidence, in addition to values we need to believe that we have strengths within ourselves. If we dedicate time to doing this analysis, we will be capable of differentiating those things that we do well and have mastery of, and those where we have less certainty and which cause us to doubt. Below, we propose a two-part exercise:

First part

In searching for and finding strengths, think about five achievements you have reached in your life, such as finishing college while working, passing a complex topic or subject, or a positive athletic result. If at first it is difficult to think of your own achievements, this means that you are not being completely generous with yourself. In this case, you must imagine that it is a success of a person who you feel close to, such as a friend. Based on this, what would you say? How would you recognize it?

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

Second part

The following comes after the first part:

Afterwards, the person must think about the positive personal characteristics that were necessary to meet each one of the achievements. For example, the cases named above could be associated with perseverance, curiosity, or initiative. This will, therefore, represent one's personal strengths.

Table 3: Achievements and positive behaviors

Achievement	Positive behaviors
Example: improving a race time	Enduring the intensity and power of the race. Focusing on tolerating fatigue.
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	

Source: Prepared by the author

2. SWOT Analysis

SWOT is a tool for studying and analyzing personal competencies, which originates in the psychology of organizations. This instrument allows us to explore the situation of an organization, institution, group, or person to analyze their internal characteristics (weaknesses and strengths) and their external situation (threats and opportunities) within a square matrix.

Figure 5: SWOT Matrix

Source: Prepared by the author.

Essential parts to keep in mind when creating a SWOT analysis:

- It is a simple, very personal and concrete analysis.
- It provides a general vision that allows us to approach a personal style of behavior.
- It detects the most relevant aspects and is a starting point to facilitate behavioral changes.
- A single idea may be presented in more than one quadrant, since sometimes what is seen as a threat may also be an opportunity at another time.
- Focus on concrete, not abstract, concepts.
- Review to ensure that there are no contradictions.
- It must analyze the present time.
- The analysis may be done in any environment.

What will we achieve with this instrument?

Table 4: Objectives of the SWOT analysis

SWOT	Objectives
Weaknesses	Correct
Threats	Confront
Strengths	Maintain
Opportunities	Explore

Source: FC Barcelona Department of Sports Psychology, (u.d.)

3. Convert negative thoughts into rational responses

During this period, the two previous points can be seen to have been important when providing techniques that, based on values and strengths, allow athletes to train their confidence. From here, we propose developing an "inner voice" through training. We must consider the contextual story of each individual, that is, the past experiences that form part of our lives and continue affecting it. These may include experiences that do not appear in our records. It is through these past and present experiences that our lives are constantly exposed to the reality in which we find ourselves, thus creating an internal dialog.

For these reasons, those with positive self-esteem tend to have an inner voice that is rooted in kindness and which provides a comforting path. On the other hand, subjects with a low or negative self-esteem become their own worst critic, questioning and punishing their own errors and undervaluing their achievements. In this sense, this type of self-esteem causes an internal dialog that adds anxiety to their lack of self-confidence. As a result, they seek and

remain in the comfort zone, which does not allow them to experience new situations or personal improvements.

The biggest issue comes from that inner voice being irrational. As a consequence, these individuals tend to interpret situation "x" in the worst way possible, even when there is no objective proof to arrive at a conclusion that provides a constructive solution.

We suggest performing the following exercises.

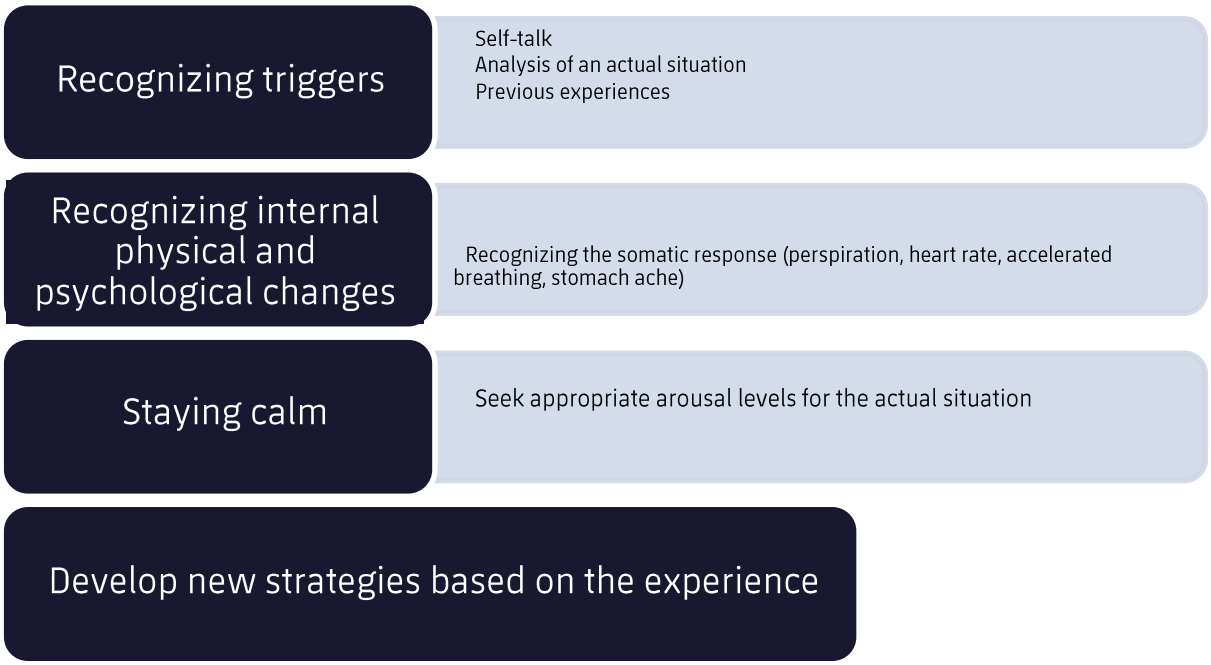
3.1. Steps towards recognizing our personal resources

With this exercise, we suggest analyzing our personal resources and becoming aware of:

- the triggering stimuli of a specific response;
- the type of response that we automatically display when faced with a stimulus;
- the strategies we can use to return to a state of calm and a perception of control.

This will allow us to design strategies that we can train for whenever the situation is interpreted as threatening.

Figure 6: Strategies for optimizing personal resources



Source: FC Barcelona Department of Sports Psychology (u.d).

3.2. Developing a competition plan

A competition plan is a list of ordered behaviors and routines that athletes execute in the competitive situations in which they participate.

The objective is:

- To control concentration, paying attention to the sensations associated with executing the task.
- To orient yourself toward positive thoughts.
- To control the arousal inherent in competition.
- To increase one's confidence and assuredness in execution.
- To adjust the technical motor patterns of an action.
- To avoid improvisation as much as possible.

The sheet presented below (Table 5) is completed by athletes themselves as a self-observation, under the supervision of the coach.

In the first column, we will note the different situations that occurring during a competition (arriving at the institution, in the locker room, in the warm-up session, moments before the competition, during the competition, after the competition).

In the second column, we will note:

- ✓ Routines and behaviors, occurring on the field of play as well as off it (hydration, food intake, etc.).
- ✓ Emotional states and associated thoughts.
- ✓ Points on which to focus the execution.

In the third column, we will make note of the mistakes that were made.

In the fourth column, we will record the distractions detected.

Once the first draft is completed, it will be put into practice and adjusted as necessary to arrive at a final competition plan:

- ✓ Create the first draft of the plan.
- ✓ Verify the plan in an actual training situation.
- ✓ Verify the plan in an actual competition situation.
- ✓ Corrections and adjustments.
- ✓ Verify in an actual competition situation.
- ✓ Adjustments and subsequent corrections.
- ✓ Creation of the final plan.
- ✓ Development of a final competition plan.

Table 5: Competition plan

Situation	Behavior	Mistakes	Distractions

Source: FC Barcelona Department of Sports Psychology (n.d.).

4. Overcoming fear with acceptance and commitment

It is possible that, despite identifying and rationalizing negative thoughts, athletes will still experience blocks because of doubts that lower their confidence or orient them in a less positive direction.

There is a tendency to try to force the blocking of negative thoughts: the theory of acceptance and commitment – either by blocking our thoughts or distracting ourselves by thinking about something else. It has been shown that this type of tool does not work. It even leads to a "rebound" effect in which the scenarios or circumstances that we are afraid of become stronger.

A few details of this theory would lead us to consider the following aspects:

. Avoid blocking the thought that causes the fear or preoccupation

. Space, time, and feeling are processes a person should go through

. Become familiar with the fear. For example, give it a name or imagine what its physical shape would be. Expressing it through a drawing will further assist in the process.

. The practice of mindfulness is essential in this type of scenario, since it facilitates the flow of the disturbing thoughts and negative emotions we experience.

5. Forgive yourself with self-compassion

Within our value system, there is a need to promote our strengths. At the same time, we must accept that we have recurring thoughts that lead us to become blocked. For this reason, we must also consider accepting our mistakes in building our confidence. Accepting mistakes is the first step in improving our ability to learn, and this principle in athletic practice is very important for developing optimal performance.

Example: a player delivers a poor pass in the midst of a link-up play, and the teammate that should be receiving the pass is late in arriving.

These cases suggest how much we should train for these situations beforehand and also provide recovery strategies. Likewise, it is especially important for athletes to have assignments that allow them to overcome being blocked or even paralyzed in the absence of a "plan B." This also tends to be the beginning of negative self-talk ("I am a disaster," "they are going to bench me," "my teammates won't pass me the ball because they won't trust me").

I am still learning, and I will forgive myself for my mistakes

In the field of psychology, this type of situation is called **self-compassion**. In many cases, it is common for us to react as the toughest judges toward ourselves and the way we act.

Self-compassion is associated with **treating ourselves with the same empathy with which we would treat a friend or teammate.** This means giving support and being understanding with yourself, without criticism or judgment. It means controlling our emotions and thoughts to calm ourselves down and offer ourselves new opportunities.

There are different ways to develop self-compassion. The simplest way is by talking to yourself with tolerance, understanding, and patience, as we would with a friend.

6. Increase your confidence with power postures

According to Cuddy (2012), self-esteem is visible by its location in the body. That is, body language influences how others see us, but it can also change how we see ourselves. This challenges the idea we have about self-esteem in our culture, simplifying it as a state of mind.

Consequently, added to this is the idea that non-verbal communication also influences mood (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Posture after a loss

Source: [Untitled image of posture after a loss] n.d. Adapted from http://theaposition.com/robertfagan/coaching/golf-coaching/2071/golf-let-your-feelings-be-your-guide

In addition to the emotional manifestation, there is a bodily manifestation (the body hunches, the head hangs), and this behavior reinforces the perception of being ineffective, increases poor confidence, and further removes the athlete from optimal performance.

Mistakes and unsuccessful actions can be trained for, taking into consideration posture control (Figures 8 and 9).

Figure 8: Mistakes

Source: http://www.golayercake.com/the-devil-in-overlooking-the-details-how-to-recover-from-mistakes/

Figure 9: Mistakes and posture control

Source: https://9brains.es/mentalidad-de-crecimiento/

The so-called power postures are connected to a behavioral style in which the person has their head up, shoulders back, chest forward, and hands on their hips. In this respect, it has been shown that maintaining this posture for two minutes is enough to improve both one's assuredness and confidence.

6. Conclusions

To conclude the first unit, we have insisted on the importance of self-confidence in achieving optimal performance, as well as the importance of training for this psychological skill as an emotional safeguard. In the second unit, we have suggested providing techniques and strategies for training them.

As stated previously, it is essential to always keep in mind that we cannot approach psychological training as an emergency. Rather, it requires systematic training and, in particular, a serious commitment by coaches and athletes.

Below, we present separate exercises (for coaches and athletes) to train on self-confidence in both training sessions and competitions.

How coaches improve self-confidence:

- Demonstrating their own game pattern.
- Offering feedback to the athletes regarding their own performance, reflecting on the positive aspects observed, and especially on the aspects that can be improved.
- Reinforcing both individual and group behaviors that boost performance (individual and group).
- Valuing individual and collective success.
- Choosing to correct before criticizing or punishing.
- Creating expectations for individual and group success (winning without forgetting about improvement).
- Encouraging a culture of effort and perseverance.
- Promoting the internal competence of the group and always seek individual improvement to add to the team.
- Boosting group cohesion and self-confidence.
- Identifying the vulnerable aspects of the opponent (techniques, tactics, physical and psychological vulnerabilities) to train for team competitiveness, without losing personal identity.

How athletes improve self-confidence:

- Objectively and realistically identifying your own qualities (technical, tactical, physical, and psychological).
- Seeking to improve the most deficient qualities on a daily basis.
- When facing difficulties, identifying individual and collective resources to overcome them.
- Using psychological techniques to improve self-confidence in training as well as competitions.
- Reinforcing your teammates.
- Recognizing the vulnerable aspects of the opponent (techniques, tactics, physical and psychological).

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