

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND TEAM PERFORMANCE: A STUDY OF COLLEGE-LEVEL ATHLETES

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ABSTRACT

The synergy between emotional intelligence (EI) and team performance in sports has gained increasing attention in recent years. This study examines the impact of emotional intelligence on teamwork, cohesion, conflict resolution, and collective performance among college-level athletes in India. A sample of 400 athletes across team sports—including football, basketball, cricket, and volleyball—was selected from ten universities. The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) was used alongside a custom Team Cohesion and Performance Scale. Findings revealed a strong positive correlation between high EI and indicators of better communication, resilience, peer support, and fewer interpersonal conflicts. Theoretical frameworks including Goleman's EI model and Tuckman's team development stages were used to interpret the behavioral patterns. A case study of a college volleyball team further demonstrated how EI training enhanced team morale and game performance. The study suggests that integrating emotional intelligence development into sports training can significantly boost both individual and group outcomes, especially in high-pressure competitive environments.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Team Performance, College Athletes, Sports Psychology, Team Cohesion, Conflict Resolution, Leadership, Communication, Motivation, India

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INTRODUCTION

Team sports rely not only on physical skill and strategy but also on psychological harmony, interpersonal understanding, and mutual trust. In this regard, Emotional Intelligence (EI)—the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and those of others—has emerged as a key determinant of both individual and team success. College athletes frequently navigate stress, pressure to perform, interpersonal conflicts, and leadership challenges, which directly impact team synergy and performance outcomes. While coaches traditionally focus on physical training, limited attention is given to emotional competencies that foster collaboration, resilience, and effective communication. Goleman's Emotional Intelligence framework outlines five dimensions—self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills—that can enhance group coordination. This study explores the extent to which these dimensions influence team performance among college athletes. By employing both psychological scales and observational methods, this research contributes to understanding the psychological foundation of high-performing athletic teams. Moreover, it advocates the integration of EI development modules into university-level sports programs.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a quantitative correlational design to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and team performance. The study sample consisted of 400 college-level athletes (200 males and 200 females), aged 18–24, engaged in team sports across 10 universities in India. Sports included football, volleyball, basketball, and cricket.

Participants were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure equal representation across sport type and gender.

Instruments Used:

- **Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT):** A 33-item validated scale measuring global EI and sub-dimensions.
- **Team Performance and Cohesion Scale (developed for this study):** A 20-item Likert-based scale measuring communication, conflict resolution, leadership, and team coordination.

Data collection took place over a three-month period during inter-college tournaments. Ethical approval was obtained from participating universities, and written consent was received from all participants. Coaches were briefed and assisted in questionnaire administration. Data was analyzed using SPSS 26.0 with Pearson correlation, t-tests, and ANOVA to explore relationships between EI scores and team performance metrics.

DATA ANALYSIS (THEORETICAL)

Theoretical interpretation of the findings draws upon Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Model and Tuckman's Team Development Model. Athletes with high EI were observed to transition through Tuckman's stages—forming, storming, norming, performing—with greater ease. High EI athletes showcased increased self-awareness, allowing for quick emotional regulation during competitive stress. Self-regulation was directly associated with reduced interpersonal conflict, particularly during the storming phase of team formation.

Empathy and social skills were highly predictive of team cohesion and effective communication—essential elements of synchronized team performance. According to

Goleman's framework, motivation also played a critical role; emotionally intelligent athletes demonstrated greater internal drive, resilience after failure, and constructive support for teammates. Correlation analysis ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$) confirmed a statistically significant relationship between EI and team performance metrics.

In conclusion, the theoretical basis validates the practical observation: emotional intelligence is not a supplementary skill but a foundational asset for athletic excellence in team-based sports.

QUESTIONNAIRE WITH TABLES

Sample Questions Used:

1. I can stay calm under pressure during competitive matches.
2. I understand how my emotions affect my game performance.
3. I can resolve team conflicts constructively.
4. I motivate my teammates when they feel discouraged.
5. I actively listen to my coach and teammates during practice and games.
6. I adjust my behavior based on how others on the team feel.
7. I remain composed when my team is losing.
8. I recognize when a teammate is upset, even if they don't say so.
9. I prefer solving interpersonal issues over ignoring them.
10. I support new team members in adjusting to the group.

Table 1: Emotional Intelligence Level vs. Team Performance Indicators

EI Level	Avg. Team Cohesion Score	Conflict Resolution (%)	Peer Communication Quality (%)
High (Top 25%)	88/100	92%	90%
Moderate (Middle 50%)	71/100	74%	73%
Low (Bottom 25%)	55/100	48%	52%

Explanation:

Teams with high EI athletes performed better in cohesion and communication, displaying strong conflict resolution skills. These results align with psychological theory that emotionally competent individuals regulate not only their own emotions but also positively influence group dynamics.

Table 2: Emotional Intelligence Components vs. Specific Team Behaviors

EI Component	Associated Behavior	Frequency of Positive Behavior (%)
Self-awareness	Admits mistakes in team discussions	81%
Empathy	Comforts underperforming teammates	76%
Social skills	Initiates group huddles or strategies	83%
Self-regulation	Avoids outbursts during matches	79%
Motivation	Encourages team during setbacks	88%

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Explanation:

All five EI components directly correlate with critical team behaviors. The high frequency of these behaviors among emotionally intelligent athletes reinforces the argument that EI enhances not just individual performance but also the functioning and success of the team as a whole.

Case Study

Case: St. Xavier's College Volleyball Team, Mumbai

In 2023, the volleyball team at St. Xavier's College initiated an EI enhancement program as part of their regular sports coaching. The program included weekly group reflection sessions, empathy-building games, and emotional awareness workshops facilitated by a sports psychologist. Before implementation, the team often lost matches due to internal conflicts and poor communication during critical game moments. Within six months, measurable improvements were seen: the team advanced to the state-level semifinals for the first time in five years. Players reported feeling more connected, supportive, and less reactive under pressure. One key player, previously known for anger outbursts, became a motivational leader. Coach feedback emphasized improved morale, cooperation, and trust. The case underscores the transformative power of emotional intelligence training in team sports settings.

Conclusion

This research confirms that emotional intelligence significantly influences team performance among college athletes. Athletes with high EI display stronger communication, conflict resolution, leadership, and motivation—all of which contribute to better team dynamics and

competitive outcomes. Emotional intelligence facilitates not only individual psychological resilience but also group harmony, making it a vital skill set for modern athletes. The findings advocate for structured EI training in university sports programs, including emotional awareness sessions, reflection exercises, and peer feedback mechanisms. Coaches, sports psychologists, and institutions must recognize that enhancing athletic performance requires more than physical drills—it requires the emotional tuning of the entire team. Future research may explore the longitudinal impact of EI training and its effects on post-college sports careers and leadership development.

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