DIFFERENCES IN EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND TEAM SPORTS ATHLETES

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to establish differences in emotional competence level between individual and team sports athletes. The data was collected from 467 active athletes, aged 18 − 64 years (M=26,5). Emotional competence was measured using UEK-45 questionnaire, which consists of three emotional competence subscales: ability to perceive and understand emotions; ability to express and name emotions; and ability to govern emotions. T-test was used to establish differences between the two groups. Results showed that there are no significant differences between individual and team sports athletes in emotional competence level either in total or in each subscale independently (p>0,05). It is considered that sport and physical exercise increase the ability of athletes to govern emotions regardless of the type of the activity.

Key words: emotional intelligence, physical exercise, ability to govern emotions

Introduction

Emotional intelligence can be defined as the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotions and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Idea to develop new concept came as a result of researches which showed that for managing in everyday situations one need different skills then those measured by traditional intelligence tests. Individuals who scored high on intelligence tests were often unsuccessful in their career and personal life, unlike those who were good in recognizing, expressing, understanding and regulating emotions (Salovey and Mayer, 1990).

Emotional competence is a similar concept that can be defined as combination of skills and abilities that individual puts to use to express, regulate and understand emotions (Takšić et al., 2006). Its importance is widely recognized so educational programs with purpose of enhancing emotional competence are being created (Takšić et al., 2006).

Emotional intelligence has significant role in sport, especially regarding emotion regulation (Goleman, 1998). Non efficient regulation of emotion impulses can lead to weaker sport performance. On the other side, detecting and understanding emotions can enhance athlete performance, but can also help coaches to better understand their players (Goleman, 1998). It has been found that there are emotional intelligence level differences between in favor of athletes compared to non-athletes (Ardahan, 2012; Bostani and Saiiari, 2011; Sohrabi et al., 2011). Takšić et al. (2005) found that adolescents in Sport Gymnasium have better emotional competence than those in Regular Gymnasium, but the only significant difference is found in ability to express and name emotions. Students from Sport Gymnasium are better in expressing and labeling emotion compared with their peers in Regular Gymnasium.

Presence of emotions is inevitable during participation in sports competitions, and there are numerous examples of athletes losing control over their emotions which has negative effect on their performance. Crombie, Lombard and Noakes (2009) found that team emotional intelligence of six cricket teams, measured by MSCEIT ability test, was positively correlated with sports performance of teams in question. This could suggest that emotional intelligence may contribute to the success of teams participating in complex sports.

Therefore, importance in recognizing all factors that may contribute to higher emotional competence in sport is understandable. One of the factors that could be related to athlete's ability to control, express or recognize others emotions is whether he or she is participating in individual or team sports. Ilyasi et al. (2011) found that there is no significant difference in emotional intelligence level between team and individuals athletes. In this research we tried to examine this relationship further, mainly because prior researches were conducted only on male student athletes, by using a reliable tool for measuring emotional competence level Emotional Skills and Competence Questionnaire (UEK-45).

Methods

The data was collected from 467 active, both male and female, athletes (N=467) from different sports (Table 1). Out of the total sample number 146 athletes competed in individual and 321 athletes competed in team sports. All subjects were aged 18-64 years (M=26,5). The athletes filled out emotional competence questionnaire UEK-45 (Takšić et al., 2006), which consists of three emotional competence subscales: 1. ability to perceive and understand emotions, 2. ability to express and name emotions, 3. ability to govern emotions. All subscales use a five point Likert scale and have proved to be highly reliable (α_{cr}) 0,87-0,92.

Table 1. List of individual and team sports athletes used in the study

INDIVIDUAL SPORTS ATHLETES	TEAM SPORTS ATHLETES
Athletics Fencing Judo Karate Kayak-canoe Rowing Shooting Skiing Swimming Table tennis Tennis Wrestling	Football Baseball Basketball Handball Hockey Ice hockey Rugby Softball Synchronized swimming Volleyball
n=146 (number of athletes)	n=321 (number of athletes)

Results

The results of UEK-45 questionnaire were tested using Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality which showed a normal distribution (p>0,05) and made it possible to proceed with the quantitative analysis.

Four separate t-tests for independent variables were used to determine differences in emotional competence between individual and team sports athletes, one for every subscale of the questionnaire and one for totals (Table 2). The level of significance was set to p<0,05. No significant differences were found between individual and team sports athletes when comparing total emotional competence levels of the used questionnaire (t=1,12; p=0,26).

Table 2. Results of t-tests for independent variables

Emotional competence subscale	Sport	n	M	SD	df	t	p
Ability to perceive and understand emotions	Team	321	56,85	5,85	465	0,85	0,39
	Individual	146	57,3	5,4			
Ability to express and name emotions	Team	321	49,7	5,88	465	0,11	0,91
	Individual	146	49,7	7,56			
Ability to govern emotions	Team	321	58,56	7,04	465	1,77	0,07
	Individual	146	59,84	7,52			
Emotional competence UEK-45 total	Team	321	165,15	14,85	465	1,12	0,26
	Individual	146	166,95	16,65			

* N – number of participants, M – mean, SD – standard deviation, df – degrees of freedom, t – test value, p - value

Although emotional competence level was similar among athletes that competed alone and athletes that competed in teams, we decided to analyze each emotional competence subscale independently with a purpose to determine whether individual and team sports athletes possess specific emotional abilities. Again no significant differences were found between two different types of competing athletes in any of the subscales. Individual sports athletes scored a little higher emotional competence values in ability to govern emotions (t=1,77; p=0,07) and ability to perceive and understand emotions (t=0,85; p=0,39), non being statistically significant. Levels of the ability to express and name emotions were equal among the subjects (t=0,11; p=0,91).

Discussion and conclusions

The results of this study indicate that there is no significance difference in emotional competence among team and individual athletes on either UEK-45 subscale, or on total UEK-45 competence level. These results are similar to those found by some other authors (Ilyasi et al., 2011) which showed no relationship between sport orientation and emotional intelligence. The connection between athletic performance and success and emotional intelligence is well known, the results of conducted studies concerning identification of medalist athletes' properties imply that from among effective factors impacting the performance of athletes, the ability to recognize, express and manage the feelings logically in stressful situations is highly important (Soflu et al., 2011). If athlete manages to develop emotional competencies to understand and govern emotions he will be able not only to value them in himself and others, but also will be able to use them to achieve the best result possible, and meet the psychological demands of certain sport (Garcia-Coll et al., 2010) However, emotional competencies used and needed to succeed in individual sports and those used and needed to succeed in team sports are not always the same, so relationship between each UEK-45 subscale and team/individual sport performance/success should be explored more to establish emotional competencies that are more important in specific sport type.

Results of Soflu et al. (2011) research showed that there are some differences in emotional intelligence between individual and team sports athletes, mainly in emotional intelligence micro scales. The significant difference was found in following micro scales: self-management, self-motivation and social skills, but no significant difference was observed in self-awareness and empathy micro scales. Calmels (2002; in Soflu et al, 2011) in a similar research stated that the nature of sport (individual or team based) and the gender of athletes are of effective factors impacting the performance of them. He stated that individual athletes compared to team ones experience higher levels of self-talk and negative thinking but team athletes possessing better communicative skills have more ability in motivating their teammates.

It is clear that emotional intelligence and competencies that derive from it are often in correlation with other psychological constructs and to explain their importance on sport performance we must be aware of those correlations. The results of Pigozzi's study (2008, in Soflu et al., 2011) indicated that professional athletes have good motivation and self confidence through controlling competitive anxiety

by mental skills (such as imaging, emotion control) but amateur athletes are faced with a significant decrease in their performance due to high anxiety during competitions. Hanton (2000, in Soflu et al., 2011) believes that Olympic athletes use mental skills particularly imaging and self confidence for displaying an excellent performance, but amateur athletes, with the aim of reducing competitive anxiety in stressful conditions, apply mental skill techniques. Lane et al. (2006) in their study on investigating the relationship between emotional intelligence and behavioral features with performance of student athletes, believe that having balanced behavioral features such as controlling negative emotions and motivations in a proper level are the characteristics of superior athletes and states that emotional intelligence has a positive relationship with optimum performance and self efficacy of superior athletes that separates the performance of these athletes from others in sensitive and important events.

It is considered that sport and physical exercise increase the ability of athletes to govern emotions regardless of the type of the activity. Ability of an athlete to regulate emotions while competing is valuable asset. High emotional intelligence as ability to assess and regulate oneself emotions, understand it among others, and emotional competence used to resolve incoming issues due to training or competition, excel sportsman craftsmanship to a mastery performance. Further research of relationship between level of sport success and emotional competence regarding sport orientation (individual vs. team sports) is needed so more emphasis on developing specific emotional competencies can be put into tracing excellence in sport.

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