

Personality characteristics of elite table tennis athletes of the Philippines: basis for a proposed recruitment program

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Abstract: Sport psychologists have long been attributing successful athletic performance to their personality characteristics. Several of them have concluded that there is a positive relationship between personality and some aspect of athletic performance. This study sought to investigate what personality characteristics do elite table tennis athletes of the Philippines have, so as to propose an effective recruitment program for associations wanting to develop elite table tennis players. Making use of the Descriptive Research Design, we investigated the personality profile of 28 male and 22 female elite table tennis players of the Philippines through the use of the Manchester Personality Questionnaire (MPQ), a 90-item questionnaire which measures 14 attributes of personality and a scale which measures socially desirable responding. Findings reveal that both male and female athletes scored high on 7 of the 14 personality traits namely communicativeness, competitiveness, conscientiousness, perfectionism, apprehension, achievement, and extroversion. On the big five factors, both males and females scored high on 2 personality traits namely achievement and extroversion. There is no significant difference between the two groups. We propose then, that in the recruitment of table tennis players, the assessment of personality characteristics of the athlete should be taken into consideration in developing them to be elite athletes in the future. We also recommend that personality characteristics of table tennis athletes be assessed across cultures to further identify traits that would be significant in determining potential elite athletes.

Keywords: Personality characteristics, elite athletes, recruitment program

1. INTRODUCTION

Sport psychology has long been making its impact in the field of sports for many years. Many teams around the world have been utilizing mental techniques in the improvement of athletic performance. One of the facets of the field is the determination of future performance through the possibility that elite athletes possess personality characteristics that make them successful in their particular sport. In the Philippines, sport psychology as a branch of psychology is largely practiced in the academe rather than in its application for the improvement of athletic performance and for the well-being of athletes. A lot of sports officials, coaches, team managers, and athletes talk about the benefits and significance of sport psychology but rarely include it in their training regimen.

Personality characteristics are traits possessed by individuals and are commonly regarded as “properties of persons that dispose them to react in certain ways in given classes of situations” [1]. These traits may define an individual’s future reactions to situations as an athlete’s personality predicts how he or she will perform in future situations. The assessment of such personality characteristics as samples of behaviors could be measured through the use of standardized psychological tools.

Sport psychologists have long been attributing successful athletic performance to their personality

characteristics. Some of them have concluded that there is a positive relationship between personality and some aspect of athletic performance. It was also thought that a person’s answers on a questionnaire could be used to predict successful performance [2]. Coaches were at first ecstatic about the possibility of selecting their players based on the ability of a psychological inventory to predict success [1].

A thorough review of related literature in the journal of table tennis sciences, reveal that research on personality of table tennis athletes have been scanty. This gives significance to this present endeavor. In 1992, however, Matytsin of the Moscow Table Tennis Federation conducted a study on the “Role of personal characteristics of the table tennis player in providing efficiency and stability during competitions” [4], and found interesting results through the use of the 16 Personality Factors Test among a group of 15 highly qualified sportsmen in table tennis. Results of his study reveal that efficiency and stability of table tennis players during competitions are highly related to personality characteristics of high morale, independence, emotional balance, collective thinking, abstract thinking, quick response, rival mentality, activeness, extroversion, sagacity, and communicative ability.

In the Philippines, where table tennis is a fast developing sport, the selection and development of elite table tennis players is of utmost importance. Hence, an assessment of personality characteristics of such athletes that will aid in a recruitment program was the aim of

this study.

1.1 Statement of the problem

We investigated the personality characteristics of elite table tennis athletes of the Philippines as a basis for a proposed recruitment program. The following specific questions were answered:

1. What is the personality profile of the elite table tennis athletes (male and female) as measured by the Manchester Personality Questionnaire?
2. Is there a significant difference between the personality characteristics of the respondent-athletes when grouped according to gender?
3. What recruitment program can be proposed for table tennis based on the results of the study?

1.2 Hypothesis

There is no significant difference between the personality characteristics of the respondent athletes when grouped according to gender.

1.3 Scope and limitation of the study

50 elite table tennis athletes were randomly chosen from different sports associations. Some are current players of the national team of the Philippines, others were former national players, and others were top players of the University athletic association of the Philippines. In the analysis and interpretation of data, only the prominent high scores of the players were subjected to analysis as representing the personality characteristics of the elite table tennis athletes. A comparison between the high and low mean scores was only done between male and female respondents on factors showing a difference of high and low.

2. METHODOLOGY

The descriptive research design was used to gather data about the personality characteristics of elite table tennis athletes. Respondents were composed of 28 male and 22 female elite table tennis players, gathered through the use of a purposive sampling technique. The players were chosen on the basic criteria of "elite table tennis athlete" as one who has been a national player, or one who has participated in an international table tennis competition representing the country. The instrument used was the Manchester Personality Questionnaire (MPQ), a 90-item standardized questionnaire which measures 14 attributes of personality and a scale which measures socially desirable responding [3]. Mean analysis and inferential statistics such as the test of significant difference (t-test of independent samples) were employed for analyzing data. The hypothesis was tested at .05 level of significance.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Personality profile of the elite table tennis athletes (male and female) as measured by the Manchester Personality Questionnaire.

Table 1. Personality profile of respondents

Personality Trait	Male (SS)	Female (SS)
Originality	A (5)	LA (4)
Rule Consciousness	A (5)	LA (4)
Openness to Change	HA (6)	A (5)
Assertiveness	A (5)	LA (4)
Social Confidence	HA (6)	A (5)
Empathy	LA (4)	HA (6)
Communicativeness	H (7)	HA (6)
Independence	A (5)	A (5)
Rationality	HA (6)	A (5)
Competitiveness	HA (6)	HA (6)
Conscientiousness	H (7)	H (7)
Perfectionism	HA (6)	HA (6)
Decisiveness	A (5)	LA (4)
Apprehension	HA (6)	HA (6)

SS: stanine score; H: high; HA: high average; A: average; LA: low average; L: low

Noticeably, both male and female athletes scored high (mean SS of 6-7) on personality traits of *communicativeness*, *competitiveness*, *conscientiousness*, *perfectionism*, and *apprehension*.

Table 2. Profile of respondents on the big five factors

Big Five Factors	Male (SS)	Female (SS)
Creativity	A (5)	LA (4)
Agreeableness	HA (6)	A (5)
Achievement	HA (6)	HA (6)
Extroversion	HA (6)	HA (6)
Resilience	A (5)	A (5)

SS: stanine score; LA: low average; H: high; L: low; HA: high average; A: average

Both male and female athletes scored high (sten scores of 6-7) on factors of *achievement* and *extroversion*.

3.2 Is there a significant difference between the personality characteristics of the respondent-athletes when grouped according to gender?

Table 3. Test of significant difference between personality characteristics of male and female

	Male	Female	t	p	Decision and Interpretation
Mean	20.29	19.77	0.56	0.58	Accept Ho (Not Significant)
SD	2.24	2.64			
SEM	0.60	0.70			
N	14	14			

A p-value of .58 reveals that there is no significant relationship between the scores obtained by the respondents when grouped according to gender. Therefore male and female elite table tennis players did not differ in their display of personality characteristics as described by the Manchester Personality Questionnaire.

4. DISCUSSION

Table tennis is a complex sport. It entails numerous strokes and shots required to be mastered through long hours of practice. Competition is mentally demanding. To be an elite player means having the ability to be communicative, competitive, conscientious, perfectionist, and resilient, among others.

High scores in *communicativeness* indicate expressiveness, more open and talkative. The athletes are more confident expressing their feelings. In competition, they have the ability to be more at ease playing in the presence of a crowd. High scores in *competitiveness* indicate commitment to career, have a strong need to achieve and work hard to achieve their goals. Athletes set themselves challenges, they play to win and need to feel they are accomplishing something. High scores in *conscientiousness* indicate perseverance and a strong sense of duty and responsibility and tend to be somewhat conservative and traditional. They see the value in rules and traditions and respect people in authority. Elite athletes need a persevering attitude to be the best. Respect for their coach, rules of the game, and sportsmanship are more than important elements in competition and training. High scores in *perfectionism* point to a quality driven and detail-oriented personality. Individuals with this trait have high standards for their tasks, they tend to be perfectionists and work harder than the average person. This is an important attribute of elite players. They need hours and hours of practice to perfect their strokes and other technical aspects of the game. Competition is a test of skills between players. Perfect skills make a player win against a mediocre opponent. High scores in the *apprehension* scale show sensitivity to people's approval and worry about what others think of them. They lack self-confidence and tend to get defensive when they are criticized. In contrast to

an important attribute of an elite athlete which is to be calm and relaxed, the respondents of the study reveal that they tend to be worried and have a high need for approval.

High scores in *achievement* indicate a quality driven goal, wanting to achieve a high level of performance, committed and conscientious. Elite athletes are driven to achieve the best in their sport and are persevering to get to the top.

High scores in *extroversion* show communicative, outgoing, sociable, and spontaneous individuals. Elite athletes feel comfortable dealing with other people. In competition, there is always a crowd which becomes a factor that affects the performance of a player. Table tennis is an individual and team focused sport. It presupposes a great importance of the players' communicative ability and contact-making ability of the athlete within the same team.

It is noted that the male and female athletes differ on the following factors (though not statistically significant) when comparing their mean scores: *Openness to change* (males: high), (females: average), this reveals that the male players are more interested to be innovative and interested in new ideas, whereas, the female players are more traditional. *Social confidence* (males: high), (females: average), this points to male players as more confident and aware of their own impact in the presence of other people, whereas, the female players are more unsure of their impact with other people. *Empathy* (males: low), (females: high), however shows that the male players are more likely to disregard other people's views and feelings when acting or making decisions. They tend to be seen as more independent and self-reliant, whereas the female players are more participative who seek other's views and try to take account of what they have heard. They praise people for their efforts, acknowledge points other people make and apologize when they have made a mistake (refer to table 1 for the stanine scores).

Finally what recruitment program can be proposed for table tennis based on these results?

- The inclusion of a personality assessment of athletes in the recruitment program for table tennis, in order to identify their strengths and weaknesses in relation to their personality characteristics. This will help the sport association identify whether a player has the potential of becoming an elite athlete. Talent and skill, however, is still the best measure for choosing. Between two players of the same skill level, it is advisable to recruit one who possess the more desirable personality factor.

- Part of the program suggests, the design and inclusion of a psychological skills training in order to make table tennis athletes become more mentally prepared for

competition and overcome their anxieties and worries, making them more mentally tough.

- The personality assessment may serve as a TNI (Training Needs Identification) for table tennis athletes who may be found having low or high scores on certain factors of personality that needs to be addressed such as excessive worrying, poor confidence during competition, fear, low resiliency, overly aggressive, and other debilitating traits.

5. CONCLUSION

We found out that elite table tennis athletes of the Philippines obtained high scores on personality factors of *communicativeness*, *competitiveness*, *conscientiousness*, *perfectionism*, *resiliency*, *extroversion*, and *apprehension*. Table tennis like any other sport demands certain personality characteristics that a player needs in order to be an elite player, such as the capacity to be outgoing and at ease playing in front of a crowd, being competitive and wanting to win. Perseverance and perfectionism are ingredients to develop well-honed skills where the game of table tennis with its complexity requires. The desire to achieve and being committed to the sport are also marks of a top athlete.

It is an observation though, that the table tennis athletes of this study showed high scores in *apprehension*. This means that the table tennis players, though belonging to the elite group still are apprehensive and lack confidence in their skills and worry about what other people think of them. This calls for a psychological skills training program to be included in their training regimen.

Overall, our results can be utilized for selecting and developing top athletes in the future. It recommends that personality characteristics of table tennis athletes be assessed across cultures to further identify unique traits that would be significant in determining potential elite athletes with considerably noting specific instruments appropriate for the sport.

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