

Spirituality and Competitive Anxiety: A Study on Soccer Athletes in Dormitory X

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Abstract

Competitive sports involve complex dynamics and high pressure that can trigger anxiety, including among soccer players who have already competed at Dormitory X. Excessive anxiety has the potential to interfere with athletes' performance. This study aims to explore pre-match and in-match anxiety among soccer players, identify its causes, and determine the sources of anxiety experienced. Participants consisted of four main subjects (soccer athletes aged 12–17 years residing at Dormitory X) and two supporting subjects (coaches familiar with the athletes). Subjects were selected using purposive sampling with criteria including anxiety experience and involvement in matches in 2024. The research approach used was qualitative narrative, with data collection methods including interviews, observations, and documentation, analyzed using Miles and Huberman's analysis technique. The results showed that athletes experienced anxiety before and during matches, stemming from internal factors (such as self-doubt) and external factors (such as pressure from expectations). The anxiety management strategies used included thought regulation, behavior control, breathing techniques, and support from Asrama X through competition preparation and joint spiritual activities such as night prayers and reading the holy book (the Qur'an or the Bible). These strategies proved effective in reducing anxiety, as reflected in the athletes' achievements in the competition.

Keywords : *Competitive Anxiety; Spirituality; Soccer Player; Atletes Dormitory X.*

Introduction Section

Athletic success and achievement in the realm of sports are highly dependent on an athlete's performance during competition. According to Nissa and Soenyoto (2021), success is influenced by four interrelated components: mental, physical, technical, and strategic factors. The mental component refers to the athlete's psychological and emotional state, encompassing elements such as motivation, self-confidence, and problem-solving abilities. The physical component pertains to the physiological condition of the body, including stamina, strength, endurance, speed, agility, motor coordination, balance, and flexibility. The technical component involves sport-specific skills. In the context of football, for instance, these include ball dribbling, passing, and shooting abilities. Lastly, the strategic component relates to planning and decision-making during competition, including formations, offensive and defensive patterns, and the distribution of roles and responsibilities among team members.

Achieving peak performance and securing victory are aspirations shared by all athletes. However, in practice, athletes often encounter psychological challenges during competition, particularly in the form of anxiety. Generally, anxiety refers to a state in which individuals experience feelings of unease or worry. According to Nevid (2005), anxiety is a condition characterized by concern or apprehension about the possibility of negative outcomes. More specifically, Smith, Smoll, and Schutz (1990) define competitive anxiety as a negative response that arises from feelings of discomfort in relation to the competitive environment.

According to Smith, Smoll, Cumming, and Grossbard (2006), competitive anxiety consists of three dimensions: (1) somatic anxiety, (2) worry, and (3) concentration disruption. Somatic anxiety refers to the physiological symptoms of anxiety that manifest physically in the athlete's body. These may include muscle tension, stomach discomfort, nervousness, rapid or pounding heartbeat, frequent urination, physical tightness, irregular breathing, excessive thirst, cold sweats, and other similar symptoms. The worry dimension pertains to cognitive concerns, such as apprehension or nervousness about performance outcomes. Lastly, concentration disruption involves difficulties in maintaining focus and sustaining attention during competition, which can negatively impact performance.

In competitive sports, performance anxiety is a common experience encountered by all athletes during competition, including football players. Football is a sport played by kicking or passing the ball from one player to another, with the primary objective of scoring as many goals as possible against the opposing team; the team with the highest score is

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declared the winner (Jusran & Syahban, 2024). Football is classified as a major team sport, played by two teams consisting of 11 players each, over two halves of 45 minutes (Noprizal et al., 2024). Football is considered the most popular sport in Indonesia and globally. According to a survey conducted by Ipsos in September 2022, Indonesia ranks as the country with the highest percentage of football fans worldwide, at 69%. This reflects the high level of enthusiasm among the Indonesian population toward football, which explains why in almost every region of the country, it is common to find children, adolescents, and even adults either playing or watching football.

Research on competitive anxiety among football athletes has been extensively conducted in Indonesia. Several studies have examined this issue, including Lukman et al. (2024), who found that competitive anxiety in football players encompasses several indicators, such as restlessness, irritability, nervousness, frequent urination, difficulty concentrating, and trouble sleeping. Similarly, Dahari et al. (2024) identified both cognitive and somatic indicators of competitive anxiety. Cognitive indicators include excessive worry, self-doubt, and reduced concentration, while somatic indicators involve physical tension, abdominal tightness, and increased heart rate. According to Nuzulah and Syafi'i (2024), competitive anxiety arises from two main sources: internal factors (such as unprepared mental states) and external factors (such as high-pressure environmental conditions). In a study conducted by Dahari et al. (2024) involving 25 football players from SSB Putra Jaya FC, 19 athletes were found to experience competitive anxiety at moderate to high levels. Furthermore, Nuzulah and Syafi'i (2024) reported that, during the 2024 POPKAB Jombang competition, 12 out of 18 junior high school football athletes from SMPN 1 Sumobito exhibited high levels of competitive anxiety.

Becoming a professional football player is a dream shared by many children in Indonesia. This aspiration has led to the emergence of football schools (Sekolah Sepak Bola or SSB), both residential and non-residential (Mustafidin & Wahyudi, 2024). Asrama X is a football school that operates under a boarding school system and has been established since 2021 in Toriyo, Sukoharjo. The primary objective of establishing a residential SSB is to provide intensive development across multiple domains, including mental, physical, technical, tactical, and spiritual aspects. These development programs are structured within a well-organized and systematic framework.

While residing in the boarding facility, athletes are required to adhere to all dormitory regulations, including obtaining permission to leave the premises and limiting the use of electronic devices to designated free time or emergency situations only. The dormitory enforces strict rules mandating that all students live on-site to ensure proper education and training (Perdana et al., 2018). Asrama X currently accommodates 90 male students aged between 12 and 19 years, supervised by a team of 10 coaches. Students attend formal education at SMA V and return to the dormitory for football training and character development. Training sessions are scheduled twice daily, in the morning and afternoon, from Monday to Friday, and once daily on weekends. The athletes' daily routine begins optionally at 3:00 a.m. with tahajud (night prayer), followed by the obligatory Subuh (dawn prayer) in congregation. From 5:15 to 6:00 a.m., the students are divided into four groups: two groups engage in football training, while the other two participate in spiritual development activities, such as reading the Qur'an or the Bible. This is followed by formal schooling from 6:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Afterward, students have a break for lunch, rest, and prayer until 2:00 p.m. The afternoon session, from 2:30 to 4:00 p.m., alternates the earlier groups: those who trained in the morning join spiritual activities, and vice versa. On Saturdays and Sundays, training is limited to a single session, either in the morning or afternoon.

The development program implemented at Asrama X involves children aged 12 to 19 years, an age group categorized as adolescence by Santrock (2016). During this developmental stage, individuals typically experience fluctuating emotional states (Ruimassa, 2023), making it essential for them to learn how to regulate emotional expression (Mones & Toba, 2021). Improper emotional expression—such as engaging in physical altercations or other forms of violence—can pose serious risks to athletes. Such behavior is clearly incompatible with the character of a professional athlete and contradicts the core values of FIFA's mental youth profile, which emphasizes self-control, stress resilience, and competitiveness.

While athletes residing in the dormitory are expected to develop optimal football skills and strong mental resilience to perform at their best during competitions, observations and preliminary interviews conducted by the researcher with coaches and dormitory supervisors at Football Academy X revealed a different reality. Several athletes, despite having considerable potential, were unable to perform optimally in actual matches due to competitive anxiety. In some cases, this anxiety led athletes to withdraw from the academy entirely. However, it is also important to acknowledge that many athletes at Academy X are capable of managing their competitive anxiety effectively and exhibit strong mental fortitude, which has enabled them to achieve numerous accomplishments. To become a successful football player, possessing strong mental resilience—especially during competitions—is essential. Coaches have noted that competitive anxiety is experienced by virtually all players and is, in fact, addressed during regular training sessions. An athlete's ability to regulate competitive anxiety plays a significant role in achieving success and securing victories. According to Harsono in *Sports Coaching Methodology: Stages and Program Development* (2020), 80% of an athlete's success in competition is determined by mental factors.

Competitive anxiety is a natural and common experience among athletes (Gunarsa, 2008; Hindiari & Wismanadi, 2022), affecting both novice and professional athletes alike (Lukman et al., 2024; Kumbara et al., 2018; Nurkadri et al., 2022). This form of anxiety may arise before, during, or approaching the time of competition (Sartono et al., 2020; Selpamira & Roepajadi, 2022). Excessive competitive anxiety can have detrimental effects, including impaired technical performance (muscle coordination), increased errors, lack of concentration, emergence of negative thoughts, and disrupted execution of motor skills such as flexibility and coordination (Qory & Rhamadian, 2022; Muhajir, 2024). If left

unaddressed, such anxiety may ultimately lead to a decline in athletic performance (Kleine, 1990; Virginia & Fathoni, 2020; Swastiratu & Izzaty, 2021; Ferinadia et al., 2019).

Given the critical importance of stable mental conditions in supporting optimal performance among adolescent athletes, it is essential for coaches and mentors to understand the nature of competitive anxiety and strategies for managing it. Therefore, research on competitive anxiety in adolescent athletes is of urgent relevance. Based on the problem formulation described above, the objective of this study is to explore the emergence of competitive anxiety among adolescent athletes and the strategies employed to cope with it. This research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of psychological aspects involved in the mental development of football athletes at Asrama X. Accordingly, the research questions guiding this study are: What is the nature of competitive anxiety experienced by adolescent athletes at Asrama X? What are the contributing factors to the emergence of competitive anxiety? What strategies are practiced to manage competitive anxiety?

METHOD

Design

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore and understand the research theme in depth. Qualitative research seeks to interpret the meaning of phenomena in natural and holistic settings through narrative descriptions (Wamuru, 2023). The researcher serves as the main instrument, interpreting situations and behaviors based on participants' verbal and non-verbal expressions. A narrative approach was used to examine experiences from the perspective of those who lived them, focusing on subjective meaning and presenting the findings in narrative form (Clandinin, 2006).

Participants

The research subjects were divided into two groups: (1) Primary subjects consisted of four football athletes from Dormitory X, selected through purposive sampling—where participants are chosen based on specific criteria. The inclusion criteria were: athletes aged 12–17 years, with national-level competition experience or achievements, a history of competitive anxiety, and currently active in competitions. (2) Supporting subjects included two football coaches from Dormitory X, selected based on their direct involvement and familiarity with the primary subjects. The table below presents the list of informants included in this study. Data from the primary subjects were cross-checked with those from the supporting subjects. In certain aspects, the supporting subjects had limited understanding—particularly regarding emotional symptoms such as anxiety and concentration difficulties experienced by the primary subjects. However, they were more capable of identifying physiological signs and the coping strategies used by the athletes to manage their anxiety.

Procedures

This study employed data triangulation through observation, interviews, and documentation. The observation method included both structured and participant observation, where the researcher was directly involved in participants' activities while guided by a pre-designed observation protocol to align with the research objectives (Hasibuan et al., 2023). Observation served as supplementary data to support interviews and was conducted in the dormitory and training areas, with flexible timing based on research needs. The observation guide focused on training behavior, social skills, body gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice, and discipline. This approach allowed the researcher to gather comprehensive data by identifying symptoms, behaviors, and participant issues. Tools used during observation included a voice recorder, camera, and field notes.

This study utilized semi-structured interviews guided by two sets of protocols: preliminary and core interviews. The preliminary interview aimed to explore the athletes' background, while the core interview focused on gaining a comprehensive understanding of competitive anxiety, including its manifestations, contributing factors, and coping strategies. Sample questions included: "How does your body feel physically tense before a match?" and "How do you feel during the match?" Additionally, documentation methods were employed by collecting player reports from both managerial and coaching staff.

Data Collection

For To ensure data validity, this study employed triangulation (both technique and source) and member checking. Triangulation is used to examine the credibility of data by cross-verifying information from the same source using different techniques (Alfansyur & Mariyani, 2020). Technique triangulation was conducted through interviews, observations, and documentation with each participant, using pre-designed research protocols to ensure consistency and complementarity. Source triangulation involved cross-checking data from the primary subjects with information obtained from the supporting subjects. In addition, member checking was conducted to validate the data by involving participants in reviewing the researcher's interpretations. This process ensured that the findings accurately reflected participants' perspectives

(Anggriani & Syaoki, 2022). The researcher provided each participant with the analysis results and requested confirmation of their accuracy. Once confirmed, participants signed a member check statement.

Transferability in qualitative research refers to the clarity with which the researcher describes the study and its context (Khadafi & Qamariyah, 2024). This study involved two groups of participants: four primary subjects (boarding school football athletes) and two supporting subjects (coaches). All four athletes had competed in and won national-level tournaments. The research was conducted at Boarding School X, which follows a boarding education system with 90 students and 10 coaches. Students attend formal schooling at SMA V and return to the dormitory for football training. Training is held twice daily from Monday to Friday and once on weekends. The study took place from February 28 to March 4, 2025. The dormitory environment is characterized by a competitive and disciplined culture.

Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis is the process of selecting, sorting, and organizing data obtained through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation in order to generate a deep, meaningful, and unique understanding, as well as new findings that may be descriptive in nature, involve categorization, or reveal patterns of relationships among research categories (Nasution, 2023). Various models of data analysis are available in qualitative research. This study employs the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of three key stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Nasution, 2023).

RESULTS

Data pertaining to competitive anxiety will be systematically organized according to categorical classifications. For each research participant, the presentation will encompass a demographic profile, an overview of competitive anxiety, contributing factors, coping strategies employed, and a concluding summary of the individual case

The primary subjects in this study are four male adolescent football athletes residing in Dormitory X, namely Dv, Ra, Re, and Ad. All participants are second-year high school students with an average age of 17 years. They have been living in the football dormitory for over a year. The subjects come from three different regions: Dv and Ra from Balikpapan, Re from Bandung, and Ad from Batam. During their stay in the dormitory, they have participated in more than three national-level competitions and have also achieved national championship titles.

Competitive Anxiety

Competitive anxiety experienced by the athletes occurred not only during the match but also beforehand. This anxiety manifested in interrelated symptoms, including physical tension, emotional distress, and concentration disturbances. Physical symptoms were often triggered by cognitive and emotional stressors related to performance pressure.

Findings from interviews with the main subjects (Dv, Ra, Re, and Ad), corroborated by supporting interviews with their coach, revealed that concentration disturbances before matches included: (1) scattered thoughts, (2) lack of mental clarity, (3) overthinking game strategies, and (4) difficulty sleeping the night before the match. These issues contributed to a general sense of discomfort prior to competition.

Emotional symptoms of pre-competition anxiety included: (1) fear of underperforming or making mistakes (e.g., blunders, poor play, failure to score), (2) fear of superior opponents, (3) concern about disappointing others (parents, coaches, teammates), (4) worries about team performance (lack of cohesion, poor discipline), (5) fear of losing and pressure to win, (6) fear of injury, and (7) fear of being benched.

As a consequence of these emotional experiences, athletes reported experiencing physical symptoms such as: (1) increased heart rate, (2) excessive drinking, (3) frequent urination and defecation, (4) fatigue, (5) bodily weakness, (6) hand tremors, (7) stomach pain or diarrhea, (8) restlessness, (9) stammering speech, and (10) flushed face with visible anxiety

In addition to pre-match anxiety, the athletes also experienced competitive anxiety during the match. Based on interview findings, concentration disturbances during matches were attributed to both internal factors (e.g., confusion over sudden strategy changes, negative thoughts, performance errors) and external factors (e.g., distractions from the coach's warnings to avoid conceding goals, loud instructions to increase tempo, and teammates' shouting). These concentration issues triggered various anxiety responses throughout the match.

Emotional symptoms of in-game anxiety included: (1) fear of underperforming or repeating mistakes (e.g., playing poorly, making blunders, failing to implement strategies, missing goal opportunities, hesitating to make decisions or take shots, especially in critical zones such as the penalty box); (2) fear of the opponent's performance (e.g., stronger opponents, counterattacks, continuous pressure); (3) concern about disappointing significant others (parents, coaches, teammates); (4) worries about team performance (e.g., poor teamwork, lack of cohesion or discipline); (5) anxiety over match outcomes (e.g., trailing behind in score); (6) fear of injury; (7) concern about being substituted; and (8) pressure from spectators.

These emotional states were accompanied by physical tension symptoms, which included: (1) increased heart rate at the beginning of the match, (2) frequent drinking, (3) repeated spitting, (4) throat discomfort, (5) anxious facial expressions, (6) scratching the head, (7) frequent cramps or injuries, (8) physical pain, and (9) bodily weakness

Factors Contributing to Competitive Anxiety

The athletes' experience of competitive anxiety was influenced by various factors, which can be categorized into internal and external sources. Based on interview data, internal factors contributing to anxiety included: (1) role-specific responsibilities, (2) making blunders, (3) negative thoughts about the match and its outcome, (4) poor first touch, (5) fear of disappointing others, (6) failure to create scoring opportunities, (7) lack of understanding of game strategies, and (8) gameplay errors.

External factors identified by the athletes included: (1) opponents' shouting, (2) superior opponents, (3) continuous offensive pressure from the opponent, (4) dominance of opposing supporters, (5) sudden strategy changes, (6) aggressive pressing by opponents, and (7) conceding multiple goals

Strategies for Managing Competitive Anxiety

Athletes experienced competitive anxiety due to a combination of internal conditions and the high intensity of matches. To manage this anxiety, they employed a variety of coping strategies, which can be grouped into two categories: pre-match and in-match strategies.

Pre-match coping strategies included cognitive regulation (e.g., self-affirmation, positive self-talk, dismissing distractions), behavioral techniques (e.g., shouting motivational phrases, listening to music, engaging in light conversations or humor with teammates, using the restroom to relieve physical tension, contacting parents for emotional support), and spiritual practices (e.g., late night prayer and religious recitations). Athletes reported that these strategies helped reduce anxiety symptoms such as negative thoughts, tension, and concentration difficulties. Shouting, in particular, was considered effective in releasing nervous energy and increasing self-confidence—a finding supported by interviews with coaches.

In-match strategies comprised continued cognitive regulation (e.g., self-talk to maintain focus and motivation), behavioral responses (e.g., encouraging teammates, shouting, enjoying the game), physiological regulation (e.g., breathing exercises), and team communication. Breathing techniques were commonly used when anxiety persisted, involving repeated deep breaths to induce calmness.

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DISCUSSION

Competitive anxiety is a common and inevitable experience for athletes, including football athletes at Dormitory X. Despite having more than two years of training at the dormitory and participating in over three national competitions—with some even achieving national titles—these athletes still experience anxiety both before and during matches. This is consistent with findings by Lukman et al. (2024), Kumbara et al. (2018), and Nurkadri et al. (2022), who emphasize that competitive anxiety affects not only novice athletes but also professionals with extensive competition experience. Similarly, Gunarsa (2008) and Hindiari & Wismanadi (2022) argue that such anxiety is a natural response in competitive situations. Sartono et al. (2020) highlight that athletes may experience anxiety before, during, and leading up to a match due to the high intensity and complexity of the competition. Selpamira & Roepajadi (2022) also note that anxiety frequently occurs prior to and during competition.

Competitive anxiety among athletes can be identified through symptoms expressed during interviews, some of which were also validated by coaches. According to Smith et al. (2006), competitive anxiety consists of three interrelated components: somatic symptoms, worry, and concentration disruption. Physical tension experienced by athletes during competition often stems from cognitive disturbances and emotional pressure. This aligns with findings by Prasetya (2009) and Selpamira & Roepajadi (2022), who state that anxiety is triggered by concentration disruption, which leads to emotional changes—particularly feelings of anxiety—that manifest as physical tension.

Based on interview data, athletes experienced pre-competition concentration disruption characterized by mental distraction, including: (1) scattered thoughts; (2) unclear thinking; (3) excessive preoccupation with game strategies; and (4) difficulty sleeping the night before the match. The most dominant symptom was scattered thinking, often involving concerns about past mistakes, upcoming match scenarios, and negative thoughts. Athletes also reported unclear thinking, which hindered their ability to make sound decisions. Negative thoughts related to self-performance, opponent performance, and match outcomes contributed to anxiety and lack of focus. According to Hindiari & Wismanadi (2022), such negative cognition is a major source of competitive anxiety. These concentration issues led to discomfort and emotional tension prior to competition.

Anxiety symptoms identified before the match included: (1) worry over personal performance (e.g., fear of making mistakes, playing poorly, or failing to score); (2) fear of opponents' superior performance; (3) concern over disappointing others (parents, coaches, teammates); (4) team performance issues (lack of cohesion, undisciplined behavior); (5) anxiety about match outcomes; (6) fear of injury; and (7) concern about being benched. The most prominent concerns were fear of underperforming and disappointing supporters. Athletes expressed fear of repeating past mistakes such as poor passing, first-touch errors, blunders, and misjudged ball control. The perceived superiority of the opponent in terms of tactics, technique, and strategy also intensified performance anxiety.

As a result of this anxiety, athletes experienced various physical symptoms, including: (1) increased heart rate; (2) excessive drinking; (3) frequent urination or defecation; (4) fatigue; (5) body weakness; (6) hand tremors; (7) stomach pain; (8) diarrhea; (9) restlessness; (10) stuttering; and (11) facial flushing and anxious expression. The most dominant somatic symptoms were increased heart rate, dry throat (leading to frequent drinking), and frequent urination/defecation, which occurred during pre-match routines, warm-ups, and in the locker room.

In addition to pre-competition anxiety, athletes also experienced competitive anxiety during the match. Based on interview data, concentration disruptions during competition were triggered by internal factors (e.g., confusion due to sudden strategy changes, negative thoughts, and performance errors) and external factors (e.g., pressure from coaches' instructions, teammates' shouting, and fear of conceding a goal). The most dominant issues included fluctuating focus, distraction from external stimuli, confusion over strategy changes, performance-related errors, and persistent negative thoughts. These disruptions led to heightened anxiety during gameplay.

Anxiety symptoms during the match included: (1) fear of underperforming (e.g., making mistakes, repeating past errors, failing to execute strategies, missing goals, hesitating to take action, fear of errors in the penalty box); (2) fear of opponent's superior performance (e.g., counterattacks, intense pressure); (3) fear of disappointing others (parents, coaches, teammates); (4) concern over team performance (e.g., lack of cohesion, poor discipline); (5) anxiety about match outcomes (e.g., trailing by one or more goals); (6) fear of injury; (7) fear of substitution; and (8) pressure from spectators. The most dominant anxieties were fear of making technical errors (e.g., poor first touch, passing mistakes, blunders, dribbling and control errors), being overwhelmed by repeated attacks, and feeling their performance was suboptimal. These emotional symptoms were accompanied by physical tension, including: (1) elevated heart rate (especially at the start of the match and during critical moments); (2) frequent drinking; (3) frequent spitting; (4) dry throat; (5) anxious facial expression; (6) scratching the head; (7) cramps or injuries; (8) physical pain; and (9) general fatigue. The most prominent somatic symptoms were increased heart rate, dry throat (leading to frequent drinking), and oral discomfort resulting in frequent spitting.

The symptoms of competitive anxiety experienced by athletes were influenced by both internal and external factors. According to Kurniawan et al. (2021), anxiety sources can be categorized into internal (originating from within the individual) and external (originating from the environment). Based on interviews, internal factors included: (1) positional responsibilities, (2) fear of making blunders, (3) negative thoughts about the match and outcome, (4) first-touch errors, (5) fear of disappointing others, (6) failure to create opportunities, (7) confusion over strategies, and (8) general performance errors. The concern over positional responsibilities refers to the pressure athletes feel regarding their specific roles on the field. External factors reported by athletes included: (1) opponents' shouting, (2) opponents' superior skills, (3) frequent attacks, (4) dominant opposing supporters, (5) sudden strategy changes, (6) high-pressure pressing, and (7) conceding multiple goals. The high-intensity nature of the game and situational pressure contributed significantly to athletes' anxiety.

To manage these anxieties, athletes applied various coping strategies. While each athlete had their own unique approach, some strategies were commonly used. This supports the view of Fadilah & Priambodo (2024), who stated that individuals adopt distinct strategies to manage competitive anxiety, shaped by the specific internal, external, and competitive pressures they face, all of which can impact self-confidence.

Interview findings revealed that athletes employ various personal strategies to manage competitive anxiety, both prior to and during matches. Pre-competition strategies include cognitive regulation (e.g., self-confidence, ignoring irrelevant thoughts, and self-motivation) and behavioral strategies (e.g., shouting, listening to music, using the restroom, stretching, calling parents, and socializing with teammates). Athletes reported experiencing interconnected symptoms of anxiety—physical tension, worry, and concentration disruption—which negatively affect performance. Music and humor were perceived to reduce anxiety by promoting relaxation and enjoyment before competition. Emotional support from parents, particularly through calls or video communication, was described as enhancing confidence and reducing anxiety.

During competition, athletes implemented strategies such as self-talk for cognitive regulation (e.g., reinforcing focus, encouraging team spirit), behavioral engagement (e.g., shouting, communicating actively, enjoying the game), and physiological regulation (e.g., deep breathing). Communication among teammates played a key role in sustaining focus and reducing anxiety by preventing miscoordination. Shouting was used to release tension and build confidence, while deep breathing exercises helped calm the body and mind. These findings align with previous studies (e.g., Nurkadri et al., 2022) that emphasize the effectiveness of relaxation techniques in reducing competitive anxiety.

Findings indicate that athletes experience different patterns of competitive anxiety symptoms before and during competition. Anxiety symptoms tend to intensify during the match, particularly in situations of losing. Despite these heightened symptoms, competitive anxiety does not always impair performance. For athletes at Dormitory X, anxiety was sometimes perceived as a motivating factor, contributing to their drive to achieve and reflected in their consistent athletic

accomplishments. Interview findings revealed that athletes employed various strategies to manage pre-competition anxiety, categorized into cognitive and behavioral approaches. Cognitive strategies included self-belief, disengaging from irrelevant thoughts, and self-motivation. Behavioral strategies involved shouting, listening to music, engaging in light physical activity, using the restroom, calling parents, and joking with peers. Athletes reported experiencing interrelated symptoms of anxiety: physical tension, emotional unease, and concentration difficulties. These findings align with previous research (Prasetya, 2009; Selpamira & Roepajadi, 2022) suggesting that cognitive disruption contributes to emotional distress and somatic tension, which in turn impact athletic performance.

During competition, athletes utilized a combination of cognitive, behavioral, and physiological strategies to manage anxiety. Cognitive strategies included self-talk and team motivation; behavioral strategies involved shouting, active communication, and focusing on enjoying the game; while physiological regulation was achieved through breathing relaxation techniques. Athletes reported that anxiety symptoms—physical tension, emotional distress, and cognitive disruption—were interrelated and often co-occurred during matches. To regain focus and reduce anxiety, athletes employed self-talk such as affirmations of ability and reminders to avoid mistakes. Team motivation and communication were also emphasized to maintain group morale and minimize miscommunication. When anxiety intensified, athletes practiced deep breathing to regain composure. These findings support Nurkadri et al. (2022), who noted that breathing relaxation is effective in reducing competitive anxiety.

According to the coach at Asrama X, anxiety management strategies provided to athletes primarily focus on behavioral approaches. These include technical and tactical football training designed to simulate match conditions, classroom discussions analyzing match strategies (“in-class” sessions), listening to music, contacting parents, player-coach communication, and spiritual activities. The coach emphasized that match preparation aims to build athletes’ confidence through skill reinforcement and opponent analysis. Communication with parents is encouraged to boost athletes’ motivation and self-confidence. Although coaches are open to individual consultations, athletes are often reluctant to discuss personal issues, including anxiety, due to concerns over confidentiality. Additionally, spiritual practices such as (late night prayer) tahajjud and religious readings (e.g., Quran or Bible) are incorporated to promote mental calmness before competition. Based on athletes’ feedback, these strategies are perceived as effective in reducing both pre- and in-competition anxiety.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that despite having competed at national levels and achieved notable victories, athletes from Asrama X still experience competition anxiety. Such anxiety is natural and expected, considering the competitive and high-pressure nature of sports. Symptoms observed include physical tension, emotional distress, and concentration difficulties—attributed to both internal (e.g., self-doubt) and external (e.g., match demands) factors. To manage these symptoms, athletes engage in self-regulation strategies (cognitive, behavioral, and breathing techniques) and structured behavioral strategies provided by coaches, including technical preparation and spiritual coping practices, such as joint night prayers and reading the holy book (the Qur’an or the Bible), as promoted within the dormitory environment. These strategies are perceived as effective, as evidenced by athletes’ continued performance success. However, a limitation of this study lies in the staggered timing of interviews and the homogeneous participant pool, which may have influenced response consistency due to shared environments.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for athletes, coaches, researchers, and sports management:

1. Athletes are encouraged to adopt individualized and positive coping strategies for managing competition anxiety, both before and during matches. This includes psychological techniques such as relaxation, positive thinking, and comprehensive preparation encompassing physical, technical, and tactical aspects. Effective anxiety regulation may transform stress into positive energy, thereby enhancing athletic performance and increasing the likelihood of success.
2. Coaches are advised to be more attentive and responsive to signs of athlete anxiety, identified through behavioral cues such as facial expressions, frequent restroom use, or body language. Training programs should integrate physical, technical, tactical, and mental components to strengthen athletes’ confidence and mental readiness.
3. Researchers are encouraged to replicate this study in different sports contexts or use simultaneous data collection to improve reliability.
4. Sports management should collaborate with sport psychologists to design structured mental training programs, including regular psychological screening and interventions to support athletes’ mental health and performance.

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Author's contribution

Alfian Faqih Ajiputra: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Collection, formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft
Setia Asyanti: Review & Editing, Supervision.
Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of interest

Both the first and second authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in relation to the content and publication of this article.

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