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Original Article

Pregame Mindset of Athletes: Psychological Readiness, Anxiety, and Instruction Following Across Individual and Team Sports

Yashasvi Gehlot

Neerja Modi School, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India.

Corresponding Author : yashasvigehlot60@gmail.com

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Abstract *- The pre-game period is one of the most crucial as it shapes mental readiness, enhances anxiety, and improves athletic performance. This study surveyed a sample of 94 athletes, out of which 43 played team sports and 51 played individual sports, with a focus on their years of experience. In order to assess their performance, a seven-item scale was created to assess the readiness to follow instructions. The I-PRRS Inventory of Psychological Readiness to Perform in Sport was modified for pre-game application to assess athletes' psychological readiness, and the Sport Anxiety Scale was adapted to measure pre-game anxiety levels. The study found that psychological readiness is negatively correlated with pre-game anxiety. In conclusion, the study reinforced that a stable and well-regulated mental state shaped by emotional regulation, anxiety management, and respect for hierarchy is crucial for optimal athletic performance.*

Keywords *- Athletes, Pregame mindset, Psychological readiness, Emotional regulation, Pre-game anxiety, Respect for hierarchy.*

1. Introduction

Athletic performance has traditionally been measured on the basis of physical strength, technical strength, and a strategic gameplay plan. However, in recent times, there has been a significant shift towards understanding the impact of the psychological state of an athlete on their performance and excellence. Psychology in the sports field has been growing, and in the current time, it emphasizes that an athlete's performance is not solely an act of physical stimulation but is also a complex interplay of both the mind and the body. As a result, psychological preparedness and its impact are being increasingly integrated into the athletic training programs worldwide.

Along with this, elite sports centres and teams have also employed dedicated sports psychologists; recognition of the mental state of the athletes is just as important as physical drills in determining the outcomes. This evolution of sports psychology marks a turning point in the world of sports, going from being purely physical to having a more well-integrated approach that values emotional and cognitive readiness. Athletes are no longer judged solely on the basis of how well they run, throw a punch, or exhibit any other physical strength, but also on how well they prepare, adapt, and regulate themselves mentally before their performance begins.

One of the most important and overlooked phases of an athlete's performance is their pregame window, the time just before their performance has to begin. During this period, the athlete goes through multiple internal proceedings as they deal with overwhelming thoughts about expectations, fears, strategy, and personal capabilities or self-expectations. All of these together collide in their mind, thus impacting their psychological state. This phase is of great significance as the state of mind formed here often determines how the athlete will perform once the competition begins. Research by Nigam (2023) has observed that athletes who are younger in age generally have rather higher levels of anxiety, which is mainly related to their inexperience and underdeveloped emotional management. This suggests that not all of the athletes enter the game with the same psychological mindset, and thus, the pregame mindset for the athletes can either be their greatest strength or their greatest weakness. However, in contrast to this, experienced and professional athletes have better emotional regulation, planning, and greater self-efficacy, along with emotional balance, all of which together enable them to perform better and deal with pressure in a more effective manner. Therefore, the growing body of research on sports psychology has been highlighting that the mental state before the game is not passive because it has an active contribution to the athlete's performance under all the external pressure and stress.

Studies by Popovych et al. (2020), Wachsmuth et al. (2016), and Balk et al. (2017) have emphasised that an athlete's state of mind just before their game has a major and direct impact upon how they perform and how the game unfolds. In accordance with Popovych et al. (2020), the pregame mindset of the athletes can be divided into two different dimensions, those being conscious expectations and unconscious beliefs, both of which influence the athletes' mindset and their readiness just before the game. Athletes who generally show a better and stable mental state usually perform better than those with unstable mental states. This is mainly because they are more vulnerable to pressure, self-doubt, and emotional collapse. These studies also further found that athletes who have higher levels of self-regulation, motivation, and a high level of internal belief system are generally a part of the winning team because they perform better than other athletes with lower self-esteem. Along with this, the coaches who assess and respond to the mental state of the athletes before the game also contribute to the better performance of those athletes. All of this together thus again emphasizes the idea that the pregame mindset is not passive but rather active, and therefore requires a proper understanding, as it plays an active role in the athlete's performance.

Other than that, there have been further studies done by Popovych et al. (2020) on the Realistic Valuable Type (RVT) and Active Moderate Type (AMT) athlete groups, which support the role of the pregame mindset of the athlete in their performance. These studies categorised the athletes depending upon their psychological attributions such as internality, activity, openness, and adequacy. The studies showed that the RVT athletes who had scored higher levels of internality, which is taking responsibility, higher level of activity, mental engagement, higher levels of openness to communication, and lastly adequacy, that being realistic evaluation, consistently performed better than the other groups. Similarly, the AMT athletes who showed high activity and a moderate level of the other traits also showed strong performance in the competitions. However, the Passive-Moderate Type (PMT) and Unrealistic-Pragmatic Type (UPT) athletes who showed lower levels of internality, adequacy, and emotional understanding had been performing significantly worse. Thus, the findings from these studies confirm that those athletes who have a stronger and more stable pregame mindset perform much better, not just because of their physical strength and readiness but also because of their psychological composition. Therefore, it overall highlights the importance of emotional balance, motivation, and regulation in an athlete's performance and the deep ties of the relationship that psychology has with their performance.

1.1. Pregame Environment and its Importance

The pregame environment of the athletes plays a significant role in shaping and impacting an athlete's mindset just before the competition begins, which also impacts their performance. According to Popovych et al. (2020), the state of mind before the game is a complex psychological structure that consists of conscious or subconscious elements like expectations or internal beliefs. Thus, the study focuses on the athletes' preparedness and their mental stability during the pregame stage because of its influence over the performance of the athletes as well as the flow of the game.

Further, the study also emphasizes that coaches should understand and have suitable responses towards the mental state of individual athletes. This is important because their awareness can directly have an impact on an individual athlete's performance and also have an impact on a team's overall success. A pregame atmosphere rooted in emotional stability and regulation, along with mental clarity, helps create a strategic and well-focused performance plan for each athlete. The findings thus conclude that a stable and well-planned pregame environment is highly essential for the performance of the athletes as it impacts their psychological state, which furthermore impacts the flow of the game.

According to Birrer and Morgan (2010), apart from the physical aspects, an athlete's mental preparedness and psychological stability, especially during the pregame phase, play a highly critical role in how an athlete enters the competitive stage and how it impacts their overall performance. Their research emphasizes that an athlete's readiness is not only dependent on physical factors but is also heavily influenced by the athlete's ability to regulate their emotions and maintain cognitive clarity during the period leading up to the competition. Birrer and Morgan (2010) highlight that athletes with poor emotional regulation tend to experience mental fatigue and inconsistent performance. This underscores that the pregame environment can either provide emotional stability and focus, promoting better performance, or contribute to psychological disruption that negatively affects the athlete's functional capacity and outcomes.

Other than that, in accordance with Lochbaum et al. (2023), the regulation of emotions and mental stability during the pregame stage significantly influences an athlete's capability and mental state to perform optimally while maintaining functionality. These factors support psychological stability, decision-making capacity, and adaptability during competition. The study suggests that athletes who experience higher levels of emotional stability and regulation in the pregame stage tend to maintain sharper focus and respond effectively under pressure throughout the game, compared to those with lower levels of emotional stability. This psychological steadiness enables them to react appropriately to unexpected game dynamics, make rapid decisions, and sustain a consistent performance flow. Thus, the pregame phase is highly critical, as it shapes the major flow of the game, with the athlete's mental state during this stage being a decisive factor in overall performance.

Lastly, according to Popovych et al.(2021) and Birrer and Morgan (2010), athletes who have a strong pregame mindset are generally characterised as calm, confident, and those having high volitional self-regulation. All of these together enable the athlete to perform better and manage their emotions while maintaining the readiness and stable performance throughout the game.

Lochbaum et al.(2023) further elaborate that a high level of self-belief, along with minimal anxiety levels, is linked to better performance and competitive outcomes of the athletes. At the same time, the over-arousal of the athletes reduces the decision-making efficiency. In football, Popovych et al. (2021) had observed that players who had strong emotional and volitional regulation were able to perform and maintain goal-directed behaviour even under high-pressure environments. Thus, showing that a regulated mindset improves performance even in highly stressful environments.

1.2. Psychological Readiness

Psychological readiness is an individual's state of mind that handles upcoming challenges, which are marked by clarity of thoughts, emotional balance, and confidence in one's own self and ability. Psychological readiness is a combination of focus, self-belief, and most importantly, emotional regulation, which allows an individual to maintain their mental stability, composure, and stay calm even under significantly high-pressure situations while also quickly adapting to the changes. This state of mind is not static but remains dynamic; it is influenced by preparation, past experiences, and also situational factors (Weinberg & Gould, 2019). During the time period where psychological readiness is high, individuals are able to manage their stress a lot more easily and also process information efficiently, which also allows an individual to make choices more rationally without getting overwhelmed or consumed by doubt and hesitation (Hanton et al., 2008).

In the context of sports, psychological readiness is a counterpart to physical conditioning. Just as an athlete trains to gain endurance and strength, they must also prepare their mind for focus and resilience (Weinberg & Gould, 2019). An athlete who is psychologically ready is able to adapt better to unexpected or rapid changes in a competition; they would also be able to react appropriately during setback situations and think tactically, even under high-pressure situations (Hodge et al., 2009). In combat sports, psychological readiness becomes a lot more crucial as the area for error is minimal. Fighters are required to quickly recognise and respond to the opponent's actions and rhythms; the athletes are required to think strategically and maintain their aggression so that they do not lose their composure (Tod et al., 2011). Mental readiness also ensures that the athlete is not only physically but also psychologically prepared to execute strategies consistently throughout the competition and perform to their best (Birrer & Morgan, 2010).

During the pre-game stage, psychological readiness enables an athlete's ability to maintain a stable state of mind and follow their fight plan (Hanton et al., 2008). High levels of readiness help to reduce the anxiety levels of an athlete and prevent them from overthinking; it also helps to sharpen the mental focus of an athlete, especially on immediate tasks instead of potential failures (Weinberg & Gould, 2019). For combat athletes, this means that they are entering the competition with mental clarity, which enables them to control and maintain their pace early in the fight. They are able to adjust better to their opponent's style just within the first exchanges, while continuing to maintain a steady state of mind and remain composed (Birrer & Morgan, 2010). Thus, ultimately, the pre-game state of mind generally sets the tone for an athlete's performance throughout the competition and determines whether the athlete will perform to their true potential from the very beginning of the competition (Hodge et al., 2009).

1.3. Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation is an individual's skill to be able to manage their emotions while being in complete control of their own reactions, such as fear, frustration, or aggression (Gross, 2015). It allows a person to remain composed even under high-pressure situations. Emotional regulation does not mean suppression of emotions but rather using emotions in a constructive manner, thus enabling the individual to act in a strategic manner rather than react disproportionately (Lane et al., 2012). Emotional regulation includes the recognition of triggers, the identification and modulation of arousal levels, and also maintaining mental clarity under stressful situations (Griffith et al., 2021). When emotional regulation of a person is strong, it allows them to have well-calculated responses instead of reflexive reactions. It also increases the focus levels and the decision-making capacity of an individual (Laborde et al., 2015).

Across sports, emotional regulation is a fundamental factor that is required in order to continue or keep a high level of performance and consistency (Kavussanu & Robazza, 2016). Athletes in high-pressure environments, whether that be any sports, must manage both their internal emotions as well as external pressure to perform to their highest capability. In combat sports such as MMA, this requirement becomes even more intense as these fighters are exposed to physical threats, there is more crowd intensity, and several other intense factors that might serve as emotional triggers (Robazza & Bortoli, 2007). High levels of emotional regulation would thus allow the fighters to turn their high levels of emotions into tactical focus, whereas poor emotional regulation may result in irrational decision-making, several errors, and make the fighter feel overwhelmed under the high-stakes levels. (Griffith et al., 2021).

During the pre-game stage, strong emotional regulation allows the fighters and athletes to enter the competition calm,

focused, and with a stable state of mind (Laborde et al., 2015). This regulation helps them to avoid extreme adrenaline rush, emotional collapse, etc., and ensures that their emotions are also exhibited in a well-managed manner. These high clarity levels allow the athletes to execute their techniques sharply and sustain composure throughout the fight. A fighter with well-managed emotions starts performing with not just skill but with a balanced state of mind, which defines their performance consistency (Kavussanu & Robazza, 2016).

1.4. Anxiety

Anxiety in the field of sports psychology is the psychological state of an athlete, characterised by higher arousal levels along with apprehension regarding outcomes (Martens et al., 1990). Anxiety is generally divided into two forms, the first being cognitive anxiety, which involves several mental processes like worry, intrusive thoughts, and overthinking. The second form is somatic anxiety, which involves physiological symptoms such as an increase in the heart rate of the athlete, more tension in the muscles, and it can even create multiple changes in the athlete's body, like a change in their patterned breathing (Craft et al., 2003). In competitive contexts, both forms of anxiety usually arise because of uncertainty in one's own self, which is followed by extreme levels of pressure and significantly high stress, which in turn creates a fear amongst the athletes about underperforming. For athletes, the balance between cognitive and somatic anxiety can significantly help them to perform better and not lose their composure.

In sports settings, anxiety plays a dual role as it can be both a motivator and a performance inhibitor. At the lower levels of anxiety, it can help to sharpen the reaction time amongst the athletes while also improving their awareness and alertness, which in turn provides them a competitive edge (Hanin, 2000). However, when the anxiety levels start to become higher, the performance of athletes starts to deteriorate because of the loss of focus, reduced decision-making skills, and at times, anxiety at higher levels might also disrupt the important motor controls. (Craft et al., 2003; Woodman & Hardy, 2003). High anxiety level, whether in team or individual sport, can cause the tarnishing of the athlete's performance due to their vulnerability to spirals, where early mistakes can also lead to self-doubt, which would lead to further errors and mistakes. Thus, this dynamic is particularly dangerous in high-pressure environments where decision windows become narrow.

During the pre-game stage, anxiety usually reaches its peak during the minutes leading up to the competition; it is generally high during the transitional moments, that is, walking into the arena or the field or the opening whistle (Wilson et al., 2009). For some of the athletes, this moment leads to heightened focus and fuels as their mind prepares itself with a "ready to attack" mindset: for the other athletes, it might also trigger overthinking, hesitation, or even a freeze response. In MMA specifically, during the pre-fight stage, anxiety can influence the way the fighter performs during the opening minutes, which determines whether the fighter will impose their game plan from the start or if they struggle to find their own rhythm. The way that an athlete manages their emotional state just before the competition determines their performance and the tone of the entire fight (Robazza & Bortoli, 2007).

1.5. Respect for Hierarchy

Respect for hierarchy is an athlete's acknowledgment of structured authority within the sporting context, whether it be in the form of coaches, captains, or even senior teammates. In sports psychology, this factor is closely aligned to discipline, along with the trust shared between the athletes and coaches, who bond with each other. Along with this, the adherence to establish team or camp protocols (Birrer & Morgan, 2010; Balk et al., 2017). Hierarchical structures are usually rooted in both cultural and organisational manner, which shapes the communication flow and how decisions are made, especially in high-pressure environments. For the athlete, specifically in an individual yet team-supported sport like MMA, respecting hierarchy often leads to deferring to the strategic expertise, along with leadership of those who have greater experience, even though the personal instincts might differ (Lochbaum et al., 2023). This dynamic creates a cohesive environment where athletes are able to stay with their support system to optimize their performances.

Within competitive sports, respecting hierarchy has played a significant role in maintaining an organised and well-maintained environment. This factor promotes discipline during training camps and training in general and ensures that strategic instructions are applied consistently throughout the athletes' training and performance (Lochbaum et al., 2023). During high-pressure situations, such as during a fight or in the field, athletes who value the hierarchy will continue to follow the advice and instructions from their higher-ups without any hesitation, which in turn would help them in reducing risk and also allow them to perform better and maintain a consistent strategy throughout the competition (Balk et al., 2017). This is mostly evident in combat sports, where any adjustments mid-round suggested by the coaches or the corner help to dictate the outcome of the fight. The ability to process and act upon their feedback and implement their instructions quickly relies on the respect that they have for the authority within the sporting hierarchy (Birrer & Morgan, 2010).

During the pre-game stage, respect for hierarchy usually creates a positive influence on the athlete's state of mind, especially when the stress levels are high. By trusting their coach's game plan and experience, along with their preparation, the athlete enters the event with clarity, purpose, and, most importantly, all confidence. This trust reduces their

anxiety and also helps them to avoid overthinking, as last-minute adjustments are given by the figures of authority rather than left to the athlete's sole discretion (Lochbaum et al., 2023; Birrer & Morgan, 2010). Along with this, the trust of the athlete can create a sense of calm in their mind as it shifts most of the burden that an athlete faces to the coach, thus, also creating a sense of relief, it gives athletes the permission to have their complete focus on their performance, and allows them to flawlessly implement techniques and strategies while remaining consistent with their game plan even under high pressure situations. (Balk et al., 2017). This way respects hierarchy functions in two ways, one being that it helps to maintain the stability both physically and mentally in the athlete throughout the performance, and second, it acts as a performance enhancer during the pre-game stage, as it helps to reduce anxiety and provides the athletes with a sense of calm. (Lochbaum et al., 2023).

1.6. Interaction of Psychological Factors

The studies that were conducted have implied that emotional regulation, psychological readiness, anxiety, and hierarchy are not the only factors responsible for the athlete's performance. Popovych et al.,(2021). Had noted that one of these factors can trigger another factor, which can alter the athlete's performance greatly just before the game. For example, an athlete with poor emotional and mental regulation can have high levels of anxiety, which can impact their readiness before the game. Similarly, if there is a lack of respect for hierarchy, it may reduce the athlete's ability to regulate their emotions because of their lack of trust in their own coach. Therefore, the interaction between these factors leads to an understanding that there should be a proper balance between them so as to grasp their impact on the athlete's mind during the pregame stage.

1.7. Research Gaps in Pregame Mindset Studies

Although several studies have discussed factors like anxiety or readiness in individual aspects, very few studies have actually explored how these factors interact with each other in the specific pregame phase. The existing research tends to isolate these constructs or see their application to the overall performance. This creates a gap which enables us to understand how emotional regulation, respect for hierarchy, and psychological readiness, etc., combine to impact the athlete's mind during the pregame stage.

Recent studies by Popovych et al. (2020) & Lochbaum et al. (2023) consistently emphasised upon the importance of pre-game mindset of an athlete which is shaped by psychological factors such as anxiety, ability to manage and regulate emotions, and both external as well as internal expectations along with cultural expectations, in combat sports athletes usually rely on individual coping mechanisms and strategies. Whereas, in team sports, athletes rely on a more collective identity and leadership structures. However, most research done regarding this topic has been conducted based on Western variables and contexts, providing a very limited insight as to how the pre-game mindset of athletes unfolds within the Indian athletes, especially when it comes to the newly growing sports such as Mixed Martial Arts (MMA). The present study thus addresses this research gap as it focuses specifically on the Indian MMA fighters and compares their psychological patterns with athletes from sports like football and cricket, two of India's most widely known and dominant team sports.

The elements that make our investigation particularly distinct are the emphasis on the often unexplored factors such as anxiety, emotional regulation, and respect for hierarchy, and all these are evaluated within a cultural and sporting environment which has only rarely been analysed in depth. Furthermore, this study prioritises years of experience rather than gender, as it accounts for psychological maturity that has developed because of the long-term training and exposure. All of it, when taken together, not only offers a timely contribution towards understanding the mental preparation of athletes in India but also states the unique psychological state that MMA demands from the athletes within the broader sporting landscape, thus making it possible to see how culture and sport type of the athletes interact and shape their pre-game mindset.

The study focuses on a sample of 43 athletes in team sports and 51 athletes in individual sports. The emphasis of the study is on years of experience rather than gender to ensure the psychological maturity that comes from the training exposure. The comparison between the different sports, like MMA and team sports like football or cricket, helps to analyse different sporting environments that affect the pregame mindset of the athletes, especially with respect to other factors like emotional regulation, anxiety, and respect for hierarchy.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Aim of the Study

This study explores and examines key factors that influence an athlete's pre-game mindset, with a particular focus on the role of readiness to follow instructions, psychological readiness, and pre-game anxiety. The study intends to explore differences between individuals engaged in individual versus team sports across the psychological dimension of psychological readiness. Specifically, it examines whether these groups differ significantly in their levels of readiness to follow instructions, psychological readiness, and pre-game anxiety. By integrating these objectives, the study goes on to develop an in-depth understanding of both individual skills to maintain a steady psychological mindset, along with the nature of sport participation, to collectively shape athletes' mental preparedness before competition.

2.2. Hypothesis

H1: There is a high likelihood of significant variations between athletes of individual and team sports on the dependent variable of readiness to follow instructions.

H2: There will be a significant difference between respondents participating in team sports and individual sports on the dependent variable for psychological readiness.

H3: There will be a significant difference between respondents participating in team sports and individual sports on the dependent variable for pre-game anxiety.

H4: The likelihood of a significant negative correlation is high across the pregame anxiety and mental preparedness amongst athletes.

H5: Readiness to follow instructions will be positively correlated with psychological readiness among athletes.

H6: Readiness to follow instructions will be negatively correlated with pre-game anxiety among athletes.

H7: Psychological readiness will significantly predict pre-game anxiety, such that higher readiness is associated with lower anxiety.

2.3. Participants

The study was done using purposive sampling to select participants from different sports such as Mixed Martial Arts, football, and cricket. There were a total of 94 participants, out of which 51 played individual sports and 43 played team sports. The level of competition varied with school-level athletes being 18, district-level being 20, state-level being 24, national-level being 29, and lastly international-level being 3. This method was chosen as it ensures that all participants match the requirements for the study and the aim of comparing individual and team sports. Athletes from both amateur and professional levels were involved, with demographics such as years of experience and exposure to long-term training taken into consideration, instead of gender.

2.4. Instrumentation

1. Readiness to follow instructions: The present study looks at the readiness of the athletes to follow instructions from authority figures such as their coaches. In order to do so, seven items were created that centered around this key variable in the context of a pre-game scenario. Respondents rated each item using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 corresponded to "Strongly Disagree" and 5 corresponded to "Strongly Agree."

   An example of an item from the readiness to follow instructions questionnaire is: "I feel more confident going into a match when I have clearly understood my coach's plan."

2. Pre-Game Anxiety

   The present study looks at the anxiety that athletes experience during the pre-game stage. This variable tries to understand the situation and pressure that athletes face during the pregame period as it tries to examine the magnitude of stress and different types of anxiety levels, which include somatic symptoms, concentration disruption, and these affect the performance of the athletes. Thus, to understand this, a 15-item measure was created that centred around this key variable in the pre-game context. Respondents rated each item using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated "not at all" and 5 indicated "very much." An example for this item from anxiety during the pre-game stage to follow the instruction questionnaire is "Before the match, I often feel tense in my body, like rapid heartbeats, sweaty palms, etc. The Lens of the scale was based on the second version of the Sport Anxiety Scale (SAS-2)(Smith et al., 2006), adapted for situational pre-game responses.

3. Psychological Readiness

   The present study also looks at the perceived psychological readiness in athletes, that is, their confidence, focus, and mental preparedness just before the competition or during the pre-game period. To understand this in depth, a 6-item scale measure was created that centred around this key variable in the pre-game context. Respondents rated each item using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 corresponded to "Strongly Disagree" and 5 corresponded to "Strongly Agree." An example for this item from psychological readiness to follow the instructions of the questionnaire is "Right before competition, I feel mentally ready to perform my best. The lens of the scale was adapted from the I-PRRS Inventory of Psychological Readiness to Perform in Sport, modified for pre-game application.

2.5. Data Collection Procedure

The data for this study were collected via Google Forms, thus making it a structured, administered, and well-analysed questionnaire. The questionnaire was disseminated to a diverse pool of athletes across different sporting disciplines to ensure broad participation.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations were taken into consideration throughout the entire study. Participants were all made well aware of the information on which the study was based, and a complete informed consent was taken from all the participants after explaining to them the study's purpose, its voluntary nature, and that the participants were also given a clear option to withdraw from the study at any given point in time. The instructions were clearly explained to avoid any confusion by the participants on how to proceed and answer the questionnaire; they were also informed of the option to retreat or exit the study at any time. Participants' responses were held in strict confidentiality, with no collection of any personal identification information that could reasonably have allowed the athletes and coaches to be open about their experiences. These kinds of ethical considerations are very important, especially in the context of mixed martial arts, as fears of exposing inner states of mind might interfere with free and candid participation.

3. Results (Please check At The end)

3.1. Discussion

The results of the current study revealed that there is no substantiating difference between athletes of team sports and athletes of individual sports on willingness to follow instructions. Contradictory findings have been reported in popular research, which suggests that athletes who prefer to practice sports at the individual level are more responsive towards the coach's training than athletes who engage in sports at the team level (Veljkovic et al., 2016). Such contradictory findings have also been reported in research, which suggests athletes belonging to the individual level are more responsive to the coach's inputs along with their guidance in comparison to athletes belonging to the team level (Zeng, Leung, Bian, & Liu,2011). Along with this, contradictory findings have also been reported in research, which suggests athletes belonging to team sports have a lower chance of suffering from poor mental health, like anxiety or depression, in comparison to athletes belonging to individual sporting levels, making them more responsive to coach input (Pluhar et al., 2019).

Analysis of the results did not demonstrate a significant distinction between athletes belonging to non-team sports and athletes belonging to collective sports in psychological readiness. Related findings have been reported in research, which suggests that athletes belonging to the individual level of sports show an even more optimistic attitude toward the psychological field of sports consulting in comparison to athletes belonging to the team sports level (Rooney, Jackson, & Heron, 2021). Related findings have also been reported in research, which suggests that athletes belonging to individual and team level differ in terms of psychological skills and success athletically, along with motivation. Apart from this, the comprehensive emotional awareness amongst the groups did not differ (Kajbafnezhad, Ahadi, Heidarie, Askari, & Enayati, 2011). Such findings are also reported in related research, which suggests that athletes belonging to the team level of sports generally possess higher levels of psychological toughness in comparison to athletes belonging to the individual sports level (Adiguzel, Karataş, Soylu, Taş, & Serin, 2022).

Results of the study indicated non-substantial distinctions amongst athletes belonging to the individual and team sporting levels on the basis of pre-game anxiety. Contradictory findings have been reported in related research, which indicate that athletes who belong to the individual level of sports exhibit enhanced levels of pre-game anxiety in comparison to athletes belonging to the team sports level (Palgunadhi, Kurniawan, Jajat, Sultoni, & Nuryanti, 2024). This has been contradicted in related research findings, suggesting that individual athletes exhibit significantly higher pre-game state and trait anxiety levels compared to team sport athletes (Allayarov, 2024). Research findings also suggest that athletes belonging to team sports have lower chances of suffering from poor mental health levels or suffering from anxiety or depression in comparison to athletes belonging to individual sports level (Pluhar, McCracken, Griffith, Christino, Sugimoto, & Meehan, 2019).

The results revealed a statistically meaningful inverse relationship between Psychological readiness and pre-game anxiety, thus indicating that those athletes possessing a greater level of psychological readiness generally experience lower to minimal levels of pre-game anxiety. Similar findings have been reported in previous research, which observed a significant negative correlation between the athletes' psychological resilience and their level of anxiety amongst judo athletes (Çutuk et al., 2017).

Related studies in the medical context also found a significant correlation between psychological readiness and pre-surgical anxiety, suggesting that readiness factors are consistently linked to anxiety levels, although the exact direction of this relationship may vary across contexts (Alkhaqani et al., 2025). Similar findings have been reported in previous research, where perceived social support was found to reduce reinjury anxiety, thereby increasing psychological readiness in soccer players, rather than being directly influenced by readiness to follow instructions (Forsdyke et al., 2022).

The analysis further demonstrated no significant correlation between Readiness to follow instructions and Psychological readiness, and between Readiness to follow instructions and Pre-game anxiety. A similar trend is observed in research prior to the present, where the correlation between psychological readiness and anxiety during competitions was not directly addressed, indicating that the association may be weak or context-dependent (Kaplánová, 2024). Contradictory evidence has been reported in prior research, which found that athletes' view of a task-focused and motivational environment was positively associated with their preparedness and capability to engage in psychological skills training (Beyer, 2016).

Along with these, similar findings have been observed in earlier research, which identified psychological factors such as mental coping, regulating and managing emotions on one's own, and independent confidence as key determinants of athletic performance, without directly linking them to readiness to follow instructions (Pramesti, Hermahayu, & Faizah, 2022).

The results revealed a statistically meaningful inverse relationship between Psychological readiness and pre-game anxiety. Comparable results have also been found in prior research, which indicated that higher psychological readiness is related to a minimum level of fear and avoidance of an athlete to return to their sport after an injury (Juggath & Naidoo, 2024). It has been observed in previous research that

factors of psychology, such as anxiety and skills, are also connected to athletic outcomes, with their distinctions being based on the different sports (Ríos Garit et al.,2022). Such findings have also been reported in previous research, which indicated that good and poor performing athletes differ in their levels of pre-competitive anxiety, highlighting the role of psychological preparedness in managing anxiety before competition (Hussain, Shah, & Ali, 2021).

Regression analysis indicated that psychological readiness significantly predicted pre-game anxiety, with higher psychological readiness being associated with lower pre-game anxiety. This is supported by previous research, which found that factors like esteem and anxiety during competitions have a close relation to the preparedness and performance of an athlete, although the study did not specifically examine simple linear regression predicting pre-game anxiety from psychological readiness (Kaplánová, 2024). A related study by Forsdyke et al. (2022) has examined how felt social support and anxiety caused by injuries predict the psychological preparedness of an athlete to come back to their sports, but it does not directly address pre-game anxiety or employ a simple linear regression model. Similar research has also been done by Suppiah et al. (2016), who studied the influence of the factors of psychology amongst the elite soccer players and their impact on their performance, but it does not specifically address predicting pre-game anxiety from psychological readiness.

4. Conclusion

The study highlighted the significant role played by athletes' pre-competition mindset (psychological preparedness, anxiety, respect for rank, etc.) during their performance. Several studies have highlighted this significance. (Popovych et al., 2020; Birrer & Morgan, 2010; Lochbaum et al., 2023). All these variables together allow the athlete to focus, regulate their emotions, and thus ultimately help to enhance their performance. However, there are some findings that compel the interplay between these factors and have remained under-researched, especially when it comes to sports at both the individual and team levels, in the Indian context. Therefore, the current study focuses on providing a background in this area and investigates the relationships between the psychological constructs, which provide an understanding of how these variables may impact the pre-competition mindset, preparedness, anxiety, and performance in competition.

The study maintains that a negative association exists between anxiety before the game and psychological readiness, so that the higher the readiness, the lower the athletes' anxiety. Meanwhile, this further highlights that an athlete's preparedness levels help them overcome pre-competition anxiety and instill confidence that most lessens fear and avoidance behaviors. Our findings, along with studies by Birrer and Morgan (2010) and Lochbaum et al. (2023), suggest that preparation and emotional regulation determine the athlete's ability to maintain stability and concentration during the performance. In summary, therefore, psychological readiness appears to have a pivotal influence in reshaping the pre-game pre-image amongst athletes through emotion control for better competitive performance.

The analysis did not identify a statistically significant correlation between respect for hierarchy, psychological readiness, and anxiety. More precisely, respect for authority, or hierarchy, is implied not to directly affect readiness or anxiety; however, it is underlined that maybe its impact is far more indirect and is largely dependent on the overall team environment, the prevailing leadership style, or cultural norms. Contrasting these findings with earlier studies, these results have been explained with various degrees of uncertainty as either a mixed or weak influence of hierarchy on the athletes (Popovych et al., 2020; Nigam, 2023). At any rate, these findings clarify the ambiguity and, thereby, unlike psychological preparedness, hierarchy does not necessarily predict an athlete's state before a game. It seems that hierarchy has more of a situational influence and, therefore, psychologically can influence an athlete's mindset as a variable that exists in varying contexts and situations related to team or individual sport.

Overall, the research emphasizes how psychological readiness is at the heart of an inevitable and generalizable inverse relationship with anxiety, while hierarchy is more likely a situational factor. Differences between sports support this distinction: individual sports, like MMA, focus more heavily on self-regulation and confidence; and team sports, hierarchy and cohesion dominate pre-game psychology. These examples help reflect the reality that pre-game psychological readiness is both a dimensional construct defined by the link between readiness and anxiety, and a context-specific construct defined by the cultural and sporting context.

4.1. Limitations of the Study

1. The study focused on team and individual sports rather than specific sports. This limitation generalises the findings of particular sports or disciplines, because sport-specific factors can affect athletes' psychological readiness in various ways.
2. The study did not garner enough data on the years of experience of the athletes. Thus, the influence that long-term training exposure has on the athletes' pregame mindset is not completely examined or studied.
3. The study only took into consideration three variables: psychological readiness, pre-game anxiety, and their readiness to follow instructions. Other factors, such as psychological or environmental factors, were examined as thoroughly.

4. The study did not take into consideration the actual performance outcomes of the athletes. Therefore, the study could not directly link the effect of pregame mindset with the actual competition results.

4.2. Future Recommendations

1. Future studies should use more qualitative methods, interviewing coaches and athletes before and after their games, allowing the obtaining of a deeper knowledge of the pregame mindset, along with the experiences that athletes come across in different sports, both team and individual.
2. Future research should also include participants who have competed at the international or professional level for their respective sports for a better understanding of their mindset, while also being able to explore how elite experiences shape psychological readiness, especially before the game.
3. Cross-cultural comparisons should also be conducted to examine the differences in pregame mindset across multiple cultural contexts. This would in turn help in the better understanding of different psychological characteristics amongst athletes while also helping to determine the patterns that have been observed in the present study, which has been conducted in India, are consistent for other sporting environments as well.
4. A greater number of variables, including actual performance, need to be considered, thus providing a rather detailed and in-depth knowledge of these factors that impact the athletes during their pregame psychological state.
5. The athletes' performance should be tested under different combinations of variables.

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Results Section (should come after Methodology)

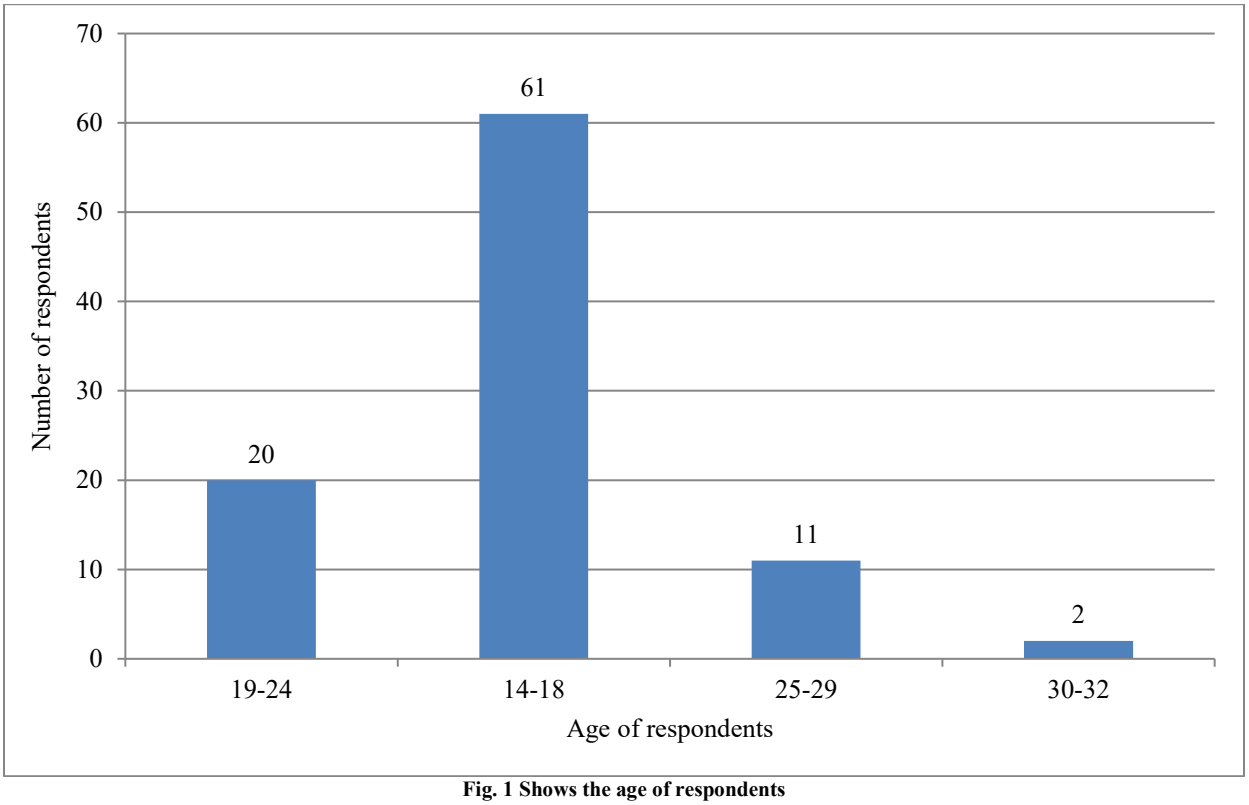

Fig. 1 Shows the age of respondents

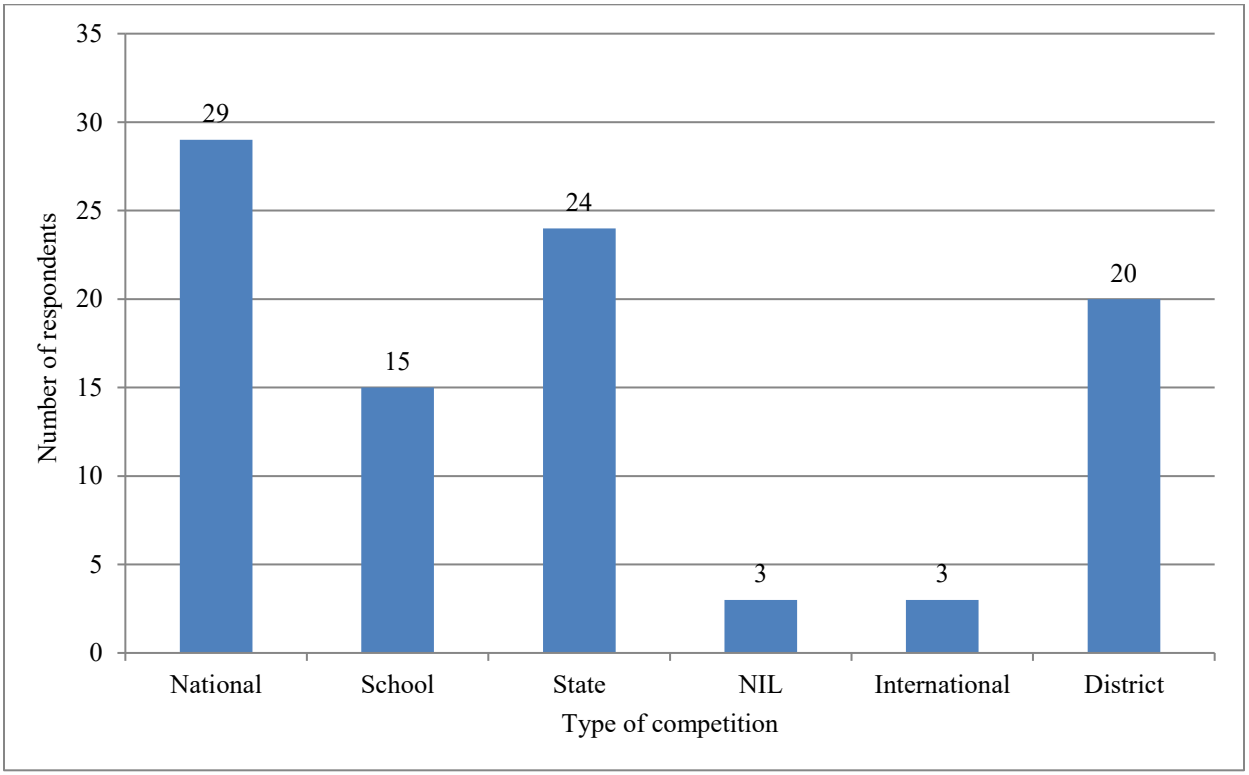

Fig. 2 Shows the level of competition

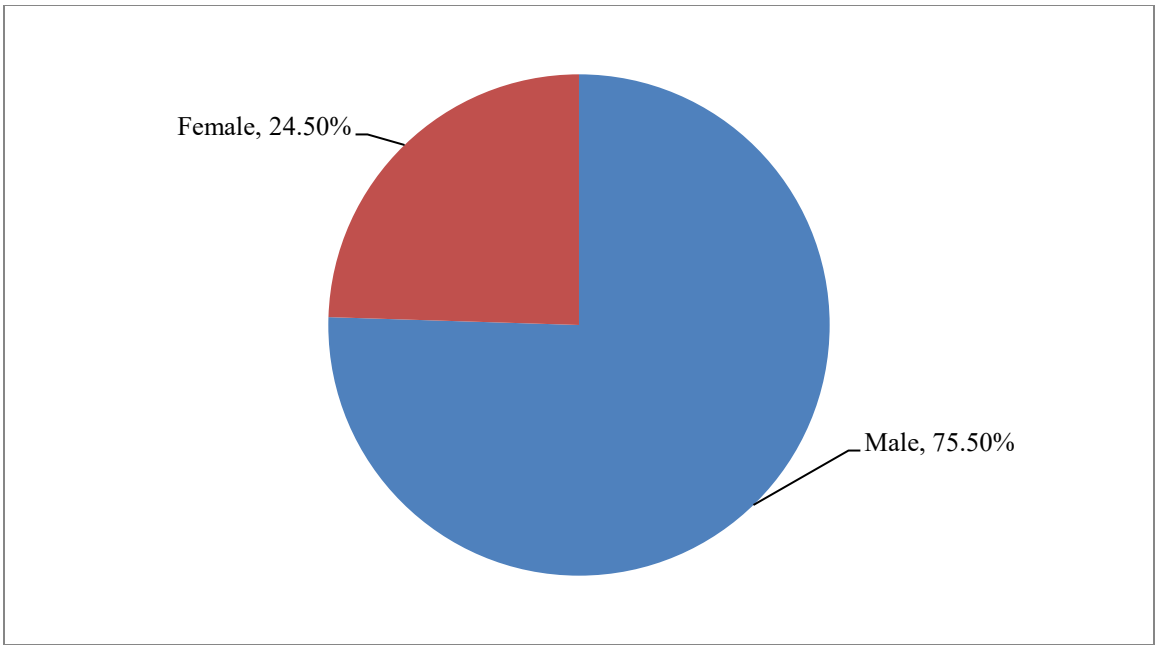

Fig. 3 Shows the gender demographic

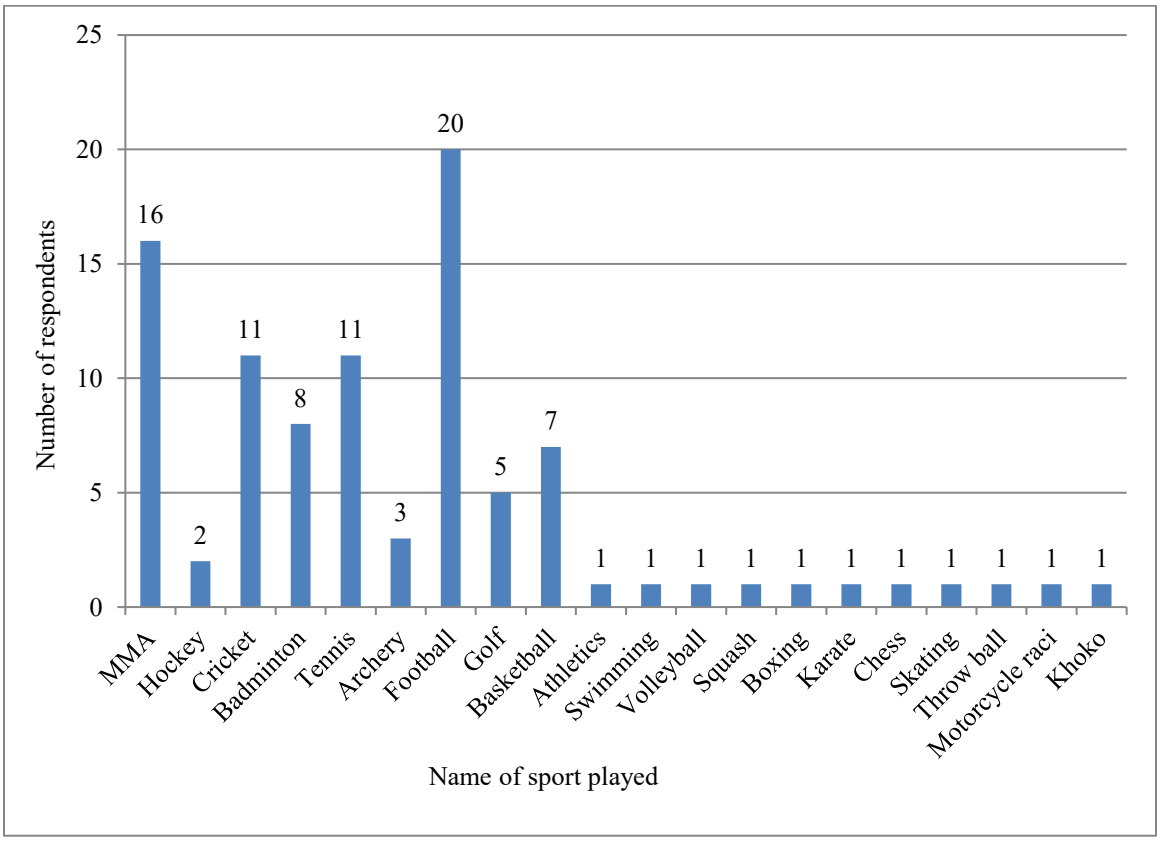

Fig. 4 Shows the type of sport played by the respondents (N=94)

As per the figure above, the majority of the respondents engaged in Football (N=20), followed by MMA (N=16). The type of sports selected has been divided into individual and team sports, with sports like MMA, Archery, Golf, Athletics, Badminton, Boxing, Chess, Skating, Motorsports, etc. coming under the category of "individual sports" and the remaining, which includes football, basketball, cricket, hockey, etc. come under the category of "team sports."

Table 1. Shows the t-test values for the type of sport and readiness to follow instructions

		n	M	S.D.	t	df	p	Cohen's d
RFI	Individual	51	25.92	4.73	-1.08	92	.284	0.22
	Team	43	26.84	3.19				

**RFI = Readiness to follow instructions, *p < 0.05*

According to Table 1, those respondents who engage in individual sports have a slightly lower mean score on readiness to follow instructions (M=25.92, SD=4.73) compared to those who engage in team sports (M=26.84, SD=3.19). However, there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups on the dependent variable of RFI, t = -1.08, p = .284 (p > 0.05). The Cohen's D value of 0.22 suggests a small effect size. Thus, the hypothesis that there will be a significant difference between respondents playing individual sports and those playing team sports on the dependent variable of RFI is rejected.

Table 2. Shows the t-test values for the type of sport and Psychological readiness

		n	M	S.D	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Psychological readiness	Individual	51	21.43	4.3	-1.33	92	.186	0.28
	Team	43	22.63	4.38				

According to Table 2, those respondents who engage in individual sports have a slightly lower mean score on psychological readiness (M = 21.43, SD = 4.30) compared to those who engage in team sports (M = 22.63, SD = 4.38). However, there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups on the dependent variable of Psychological readiness, t = -1.33, p = .186 (p > 0.05). The Cohen's D value of 0.28 suggests a small effect size. Thus, the hypothesis, which states that there will be a significant difference between respondents playing individual sports and those playing team sports on the dependent variable of Psychological readiness, is rejected.

Table 3. Shows the t-test values for the type of sport and pre-game anxiety

		n	M	S.D.	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Pre Game Anxiety	Individual	51	25.39	6.76	0.87	92	.389	0.18
	Team	43	24.14	7.24				

According to Table 3, those respondents who engage in individual sports have a slightly higher mean score on pre-game anxiety (M = 25.39) compared to those who engage in team sports (M = 24.14). However, there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups on the dependent variable of pre-game anxiety, t = 0.87, p = .389 (p > 0.05). The Cohen's D value of 0.18 suggests a small effect size. Thus, the hypothesis, which states that there will be a significant difference between respondents playing individual sports and those playing team sports on the dependent variable of pre-game anxiety, is rejected.

Table 4. Shows the correlation between RFI, Psychological Readiness, and Pre-game Anxiety

		Readiness to follow instructions	Psychological readiness	Pre Game Anxiety
Readiness to follow instructions	Correlation	1	0.03	0.1
	p		.802	.335
Psychological readiness	Correlation	0.03	1	-0.63
	p	.802		<.001
Pre Game Anxiety	Correlation	0.1	-0.63	1
	p	.335	<.001	

According to Table 4, the results show that there is no significant correlation between Readiness to follow instructions and Psychological readiness (r = 0.03, p = .802) and between Readiness to follow instructions and Pre-game anxiety (r = 0.10, p = .335). However, there is a statistically significant negative correlation between Psychological readiness and pre-game anxiety (r = -0.63, p < .001). This indicates that higher levels of Psychological readiness are associated with lower levels of pre-game anxiety.

Table 5. Shows Simple Linear Regression Predicting Pre-Game Anxiety from Psychological Readiness

Model	B	β	SE B	t	p	95% CI for B
Constant	46.9	-	2.91	16.1	<.001	[41.12, 52.69]
Psychological readiness	-1	-0.63	0.13	-7.73	<.001	[-1.26, -0.75]

**Note. $R = .63$, $R^2 = .39$, Adjusted $R^2 = .39$, $F(1, 95) = 59.68$, $p < .001$.*

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine whether psychological readiness predicted pre-game anxiety. The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 95) = 59.68$, $p < .001$, and accounted for approximately 39% of the variance in pre-game anxiety ($R^2 = .39$). Psychological readiness significantly predicted pre-game anxiety ($\beta = –.63$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher psychological readiness was associated with lower pre-game anxiety. Specifically, for each one-unit increase in psychological readiness, pre-game anxiety decreased by approximately one unit.