



THE IMPORTANCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL PREPARATION FOR COMPETITION DURING THE TRAINING PROCESS OF TABLE TENNIS, BADMINTON AND PICKLEBALL FOR VIETNAMESE STUDENTS

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Abstract:

In the process of studying and practicing sports such as table tennis, badminton, and Pickleball, the psychological factor of competition plays a particularly important role, deciding the effectiveness of technical implementation, tactics and overall achievements. This article focuses on analyzing the role of psychological preparation in competitive sports with nets, including Table Tennis, Badminton and Pickleball. Through synthesizing theoretical foundations, practical surveys and analyzing psychological characteristics of students, the study shows that proper psychological preparation helps learners improve their self-confidence, emotional stability, and flexible response in competition. From there, the article proposes a number of practical measures in teaching to improve the quality of sports training in the higher education environment.

Keywords: competition psychology, students, Table Tennis, Badminton, Pickleball, physical education

1. Introduction

In the current context of physical education, training students in technique, tactics and physical strength through sports such as table tennis, badminton and Pickleball has always received deep attention. However, the competitive psychology factor - an important factor determining the ability to perform in competitive sports - has not been given due attention.

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Sports such as Table Tennis, Badminton and Pickleball all require players to have high concentration, quick reaction, emotional control and flexible situation handling. In particular, Pickleball - a new sport introduced to Vietnam - also requires high psychological adaptation for students.

Therefore, this article aims to clarify the importance of preparing for competition psychology in the process of practicing the above sports, and at the same time propose appropriate measures to improve training efficiency, contributing to the comprehensive development of physical, mental and competitive psychology for students.

2. Content

2.1 Theoretical basis

In the field of sports in general and sports using rackets such as Table Tennis, Badminton and Pickleball in particular, the psychological factor of competition plays a very important role in determining the performance and comprehensive development of the practitioner. According to the perspective of modern sports psychology, competition ability does not only depend on technical level, physical strength or tactics, but is also strongly influenced by psychological state. A stable mentality helps athletes control emotions, maintain concentration and maximize their abilities in high-pressure competition conditions.

For Vietnamese students - a group of people who both study and practice sports in an educational environment - preparing mentally for competition is of special significance. During training, students often face many influencing factors such as study pressure, limited training time, lack of competition experience, or fear when facing stronger opponents. Therefore, training competitive mentality should be considered a core content in the school sports teaching and training program.

In theory, psychological preparation for competition is understood as the process of forming and strengthening positive psychological states before, during and after competition. This process includes the following contents: defining clear competition goals; forming self-confidence; developing the ability to concentrate, self-regulate emotions and maintain internal motivation. Research by Weinberg & Gould (2019) shows that athletes with good psychological training often have higher competition performance, faster recovery after failure and make fewer tactical mistakes in competition.

In sports such as Table Tennis, Badminton and Pickleball, competition psychology directly affects the ability to make decisions, reflexes and control movements in a short time. A small fluctuation in emotions can lead to errors in technical or tactical handling. For example, in Table Tennis – a sport with a very high ball speed – losing concentration for just a few seconds can cause a player to miss consecutive shots. Similarly, in Badminton and Pickleball, psychological stress can easily lead to errors in movement, serving or hitting the ball inaccurately. Therefore, training the competitive mentality needs to be regularly integrated into students' training sessions. Methods such as

simulating competition situations, training through visualization, regulated breathing, or self-talk all bring positive effects. In addition, physical education instructors also need to play a guiding role, creating a positive training environment, helping students build confidence, team spirit and a positive competitive attitude.

2.2 Practical basis

In the current practice of physical education and school sports movements, preparing students mentally for competition is still an aspect that has not received due attention, although this is a factor that has a profound impact on the quality of training and competition performance. Through observation and research at many colleges and universities in Vietnam, it can be seen that most students when participating in sports competitions such as Table Tennis, Badminton and Pickleball often lack the necessary mental preparation, leading to competition performance not commensurate with professional ability.

In student sports competitions at the faculty, school or provincial levels, many cases show that students have good technique and physical strength but cannot demonstrate their true ability when entering official competitions. Common manifestations such as anxiety, loss of concentration, fear of losing, lack of confidence against strong opponents or confusion when being behind in points often occur. An unstable mentality can cause technical movements to be incorrect and reflexes to be slower, which directly affects the results of the competition. Especially in sports such as Table Tennis, Badminton and Pickleball — sports that require speed, precision and quick reaction — just a moment of psychological fluctuation can cause the player to lose points or make consecutive mistakes.

Practices at universities and colleges show that students who are instructed in psychological training often have more stable and confident performances in competition. They know how to control their breathing, regulate their emotions, use self-talk methods to maintain a positive spirit, or apply competition visualization techniques to increase their ability to concentrate. Some universities specializing in physical education and sports or universities with physical education departments, have initially integrated competition psychological training into their training programs. Actual survey results show that students participating in these training courses have the ability to compete more stably, control their emotions better and achieve higher results in student competitions. In addition, in the current social context, students face many pressures from studying, life and career orientation. These factors can also negatively impact their psychological state during competition if they are not well prepared. Therefore, psychological training not only serves sports competitions, but also contributes to forming emotional control skills, improving self-confidence and the ability to cope with pressure in life.

From the above practical bases, it can be affirmed that preparing for competition psychology is an inevitable requirement, playing a decisive role in the training and competition process of Vietnamese students. The harmonious combination of technique,

physical strength and psychology will help students maximize their potential, achieve high achievements, and at the same time contribute to building a comprehensive, sustainable and more professional school sports movement in the future.

To clearly evaluate the importance of psychological preparation for competition in the process of training for Table Tennis, Badminton and Pickleball for Vietnamese students, we have created an interview form for students to evaluate the important role of psychological preparation for competition in the process of training for Table Tennis, Badminton and Pickleball for students through 3 levels, very important, important, and not important with the following 5 criteria:

- Level of confidence and motivation to compete,
- Ability to control emotions and pressure,
- Ability to concentrate and maintain attention,
- Team spirit and sports communication,
- Ability to set goals and maintain mental discipline.

We distributed questionnaires and interviewed 930 students from universities and colleges across the country and obtained the results as shown in the table below.

Table 1: Questionnaire on the importance of psychological preparation for competition during training in Table Tennis, Badminton and Pickleball for students (n = 950)

Evaluation criteria content	Evaluation level					
	Very important		Important		Not important	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Level of confidence and motivation to compete	723	76,10%	221	23,27%	6	0,63%
Ability to control emotions and pressure	712	74,94%	227	23,91%	11	1,15%
Ability to focus and maintain attention	728	76,63%	217	22,85%	5	0,52%
Team spirit and sports communication	710	74,73%	232	24,43%	8	0,84%
Ability to set goals and maintain mental discipline	704	74,10%	234	24,64%	12	1,26%

Through the evaluation table from the interview form, we can see that the Very Important evaluation level achieved a very high rate in the criteria. The level of confidence and motivation to compete reached 76.10%. The ability to control emotions and pressure reached 74.94%. The ability to concentrate and maintain attention reached 76.63%. Team spirit and sports communication reached 74.73%. The ability to set goals and maintain mental discipline reached 74.10%.

At the Important evaluation level, the achievement rate in the criteria is: the level of confidence and motivation to compete reached 23.27%. The ability to control emotions and pressure reached 23.91%. The ability to concentrate and maintain attention reached 22.85%. Team spirit and sports communication reached 24.43%. The ability to set goals and maintain mental discipline reached 24.64%.

In particular, at the assessment level, the results obtained in the criteria with the ratio: Level of confidence and motivation to compete reached 0.63%. Ability to control emotions and pressure reached 1.15%. The ability to concentrate and maintain attention

reached 0.52%. Team spirit and sports communication reached 0.84%. The ability to set goals and maintain psychological discipline reached 1.26%.

Through the results obtained above, we can see that the majority of students evaluate that preparing mentally for competition during the training process of Table Tennis, Badminton and Pickleball for students is very necessary and important for students to practice and train to best prepare mentally for competition, thereby achieving effectiveness in competition when participating in competitions organized by all levels.

2.3 The importance of mental preparation for competition in Table Tennis, Badminton, and Pickleball

Mental preparation for competition in table tennis plays a very important role, greatly determining the athlete's performance. A stable mental state helps players maintain concentration, quick reflexes, and handle situations accurately in each high-speed ball phase. On the contrary, a tense or anxious mentality can easily lead to mistakes and loss of tactical control. Therefore, during training, players need to practice self-confidence, perseverance, and calmness to achieve stable performance and maximize their ability in competition.

In badminton, mental preparation for competition plays a special role, contributing to the effectiveness and performance of athletes. Badminton is a sport that requires speed, flexibility and quick judgment, so a stable mentality helps players maintain concentration, control emotions and handle situations accurately. A confident, calm athlete will easily develop technique, tactics and physical strength at the highest level. Stress, anxiety or lack of confidence can cause them to make unnecessary mistakes and lose the rhythm of the match. Therefore, training courage, the ability to withstand pressure and maintain a positive spirit before entering the competition is a key factor to help players achieve stable performance and achieve the best results.

In Pickleball, mental preparation for competition directly affects the performance and results of the player. Pickleball is a sport that combines speed, reflexes and sophisticated tactics, so players need to maintain high concentration and confidence to flexibly handle situations on the field. A stable mentality helps athletes control the pace of the match, make accurate decisions and limit errors due to stress or loss of composure. On the contrary, anxiety or lack of confidence can easily lead to hasty shots and loss of tactical control. Therefore, during training and competition, training for courage, perseverance, and the ability to cope with pressure are essential factors to achieve high performance and compete effectively in Pickleball.

2.4 Some measures to prepare the psychology of competition in Table Tennis, Badminton, and Pickleball

Foster an understanding of the role of psychological factors in sports, help athletes realize that psychological state directly affects technique, tactics and performance, educate with a positive attitude and self-confidence, through orienting optimistic thinking, encouraging perseverance and belief in one's own abilities. Instructors can use

encouragement, positive feedback and lessons on sportsmanship to stimulate the will to strive:

- Organize specialized education sessions on sports psychology, helping learners understand the role of confidence, perseverance and emotional control during training and competition.
- Integrate psychological training content into training sessions, through competition simulation games, concentration exercises and quick reflexes, helping learners form the habit of responding positively to pressure and improving their competitive spirit.
- Create hypothetical competition situations such as being behind in points, competing with strong opponents or being under pressure from the audience, helping learners practice the ability to stay calm, confident and make accurate decisions.
- Organize practice sessions simulating real tournaments, requiring students to comply with competition rules and handle unexpected situations, thereby developing the ability to adapt, control emotions and strengthen a stable competitive mentality.
- Analyze and respond to hypothetical situations, through group discussions or recording the competition process, helping learners identify strengths and weaknesses in psychological reactions, thereby building appropriate adjustment strategies, forming competitive spirit and a positive attitude in actual competitions.
- Practice emotional self-awareness skills, helping trainees to recognize early psychological states such as anxiety, stress, anger or loss of confidence. Through self-observation and feedback from teachers, trainees learn to identify the causes of negative emotions and adjust them promptly.
- Guide trainees to practice relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, positive imagination and self-talk to maintain a stable psychological state during training and competition.
- Organize exercises to handle frustrating situations, such as making consecutive mistakes or being reminded by the referee, helping trainees practice the ability to control emotions, stay focused and maintain stable competition performance.
- Set specific and appropriate goals for each training stage, and recognize and reward small improvements to strengthen confidence and encourage learners to make more efforts.
- Use successful simulation exercises, allowing learners to experience the feeling of victory, thereby forming a positive mindset, increasing internal motivation and developing confidence in actual competition.
- Use self-encouragement and positive feedback methods, encouraging learners to recognize progress, maintain an optimistic spirit and a strong will. Teachers need to create a supportive psychological environment, helping learners feel trusted

and recognized, thereby maintaining motivation and stable performance in competition.

- Promote the role of instructors in guiding and supporting students' psychology, helping them understand their goals, maintain their beliefs and positive attitudes in training. Instructors need to observe, advise, and promptly adjust students' psychology when they are under pressure or show signs of anxiety.
- Build a collective environment of solidarity, cooperation, and mutual encouragement, creating a friendly and open atmosphere to help students feel shared and supported mentally. Group activities, sports exchanges, or internal competitions help increase team spirit and reduce psychological stress.
- Organize feedback and encouragement activities after each practice session or trial match, in which instructors and the group evaluate, record progress, and point out areas for improvement. This approach helps students develop their will, strengthen their confidence, and form a strong mindset before entering official tournaments.

3. Conclusion

From the theoretical and practical basis presented, it can be affirmed that psychological preparation for competition plays a very important role in the training process of Table Tennis, Badminton and Pickleball of Vietnamese students. The survey results show that the majority of students highly appreciate the importance of this factor, especially in criteria such as confidence, emotional control, concentration and psychological discipline. A stable psychological state helps learners maximize their technique, tactics and physical strength, while increasing their ability to adapt and master themselves in a stressful competition environment. Training in competitive psychology not only improves sports performance but also contributes to forming steadfast qualities, courage and a positive attitude in study as well as in life. Therefore, physical education training institutions need to pay more attention to integrating psychological training measures into the curriculum, promoting the role of lecturers, the collective and the training environment to help students develop comprehensively both physically and mentally, towards a modern, professional and sustainable school sports movement.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

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