

УДК 796.332:159.923.2+159.953+612

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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PERSONALITY TRAITS, COGNITIVE ABILITIES, AND PHYSICAL FITNESS AMONG FOOTBALL PLAYERS ACROSS POSITIONS

Football is a highly dynamic sport that requires a harmonious blend of physical endurance, cognitive sharpness, and psychological resilience. Recent empirical research has uncovered significant variations in these attributes among players occupying different positions – midfielders, defenders, and attackers. A comprehensive understanding of these distinctions has important practical implications for athlete development, specialized training programs, and strategic team management [1, p. 339].

1. Personality Traits by Position. Empirical evidence indicates distinct personality traits associated with different football positions:

Midfielders: Central to orchestrating play and tactical decision-making, midfielders exhibit heightened assertiveness, cognitive agility, and leadership abilities. Their rapid information processing and strategic decision-making significantly impact team cohesion and effectiveness [1, p. 340].

Defenders: Players in defensive roles demonstrate emotional stability, composure, and resilience under pressure. These attributes are essential for successfully managing opposition threats and coordinating defensive actions during challenging game situations [1, p. 342].

Attackers: Forward players are characterized by boldness, creativity, and decisiveness. Their performance depends on confidence, adaptability, and the ability to take calculated risks to maximize scoring opportunities [1, p. 343].

Statistical validation of personality factors – including Assertiveness (Factor A), Boldness (Factor H), and Emotional Stability (Factor N) – reinforces these positional distinctions. Comparative studies with hockey players further illustrate sport-specific psychological demands, highlighting superior strategic cognition in footballers, attributable to the sport's unpredictability, contrasted with the reactive speed emphasized in hockey [4].

2. Cognitive Abilities and Performance Cognitive abilities profoundly influence football performance, directly affecting decision-making accuracy, situational

awareness, and adaptability. Young football players display superior cognitive skills to non-athletes, particularly in pattern recognition, spatial reasoning, and rapid decision-making. Professional footballers demonstrate even more advanced cognitive abilities due to extensive tactical training [2].

Research from Oxford University confirms that elite football players possess significantly enhanced cognitive capabilities, notably in anticipation, reaction speed, memory, and visual processing, collectively contributing to superior tactical intelligence and improved performance under pressure [5]. Therefore, specialized cognitive training programs are recommended to enhance football players' tactical decision-making skills and adaptability.

3. Physical Fitness and Positional Requirements. Physical conditioning requirements vary notably across positions, necessitating specialized training protocols:

Midfielders: Require exceptional aerobic endurance and agility due to their extensive field coverage and transition involvement. Training emphasizes cardiovascular stamina, endurance drills, and agility training [3, p. 176].

Defenders: Focus on building strength, stability, balance, and aerial ability to counteract offensive threats effectively. Training typically involves strength-building exercises, stability drills, and reaction time enhancement [3, p. 177].

Attackers: Depend heavily on explosive speed, agility, and refined coordination. Training prioritizes sprinting, agility drills, and plyometric exercises to maximize performance [3, p. 179].

4. Comparative Psychological Analysis: Football vs. Hockey Psychological research comparing football and hockey athletes highlights significant cognitive differences. Football players show greater strategic flexibility and adaptability due to the game's inherent unpredictability. Hockey players excel in reaction speed and physical endurance, consistent with hockey's rapid and continuous demands [4]. This comparative analysis proves the importance of tailored psychological training and preparation specific to each sport.

These studies underscore the interconnection of personality traits, cognitive abilities, and physical fitness in determining the effectiveness of football players across positions. Recognizing and integrating these insights can enhance talent scouting, improve targeted training regimens, refine coaching methodologies, and elevate athletic performance in football.

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