



Identification of Factors: Affecting the Performance of the Sri Lanka Netball Team

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ABSTRACT

This study employs a critical examination and methodical analysis of factors affecting the performance of the National netball team performance of Sri Lanka. Accordingly, the document will focus on (a) Identifying the factors affecting the performance of the national Netball team. (b) Reveal the relationships between the above-identified factors vs the performances of the team. (c) Identify the insights on how those findings are applied in the refereeing era. (d) Derive conclusions and recommendations of research findings for performance enhancement of the National Netball team. The findings of this document will emphasize National level Netballers in Sri Lanka to achieve their pinnacles in individual and team performances in order to keep the National flag high in the international netball arena. Further, these findings can be applied to other team sports and team-based professional environments for enhancing their performances too. Also, the author indirectly expects those revealed findings will simultaneously affect the promotion of the game and uplift women's empowerment among 52% of the feminine population in Sri Lanka, for their wellbeing.

Keywords: NFSL - Netball Federation of Sri Lanka, IFNA - International Federation of Netball Associations

INTRODUCTION

Netball is the most popular women's sport in the world. As per IFNA statistics, it is being played by more than 20 million globally in 80 countries. Girls and women in many age categories from teenagers to veterans, in different levels; e.g., School level, club level, national level, international level, etc. engage with the game. It is utilized for recreation/ leisure purposes at school and club levels, and the game is professionally played at national and international levels. The game has contributed immensely to uplifting women's empowerment; health and well-being, education, social inclusion, learning and skills development, partnership building, etc., worldwide.

The game is famous among Sri Lankan feminine, because of its more fittingness to their culture and social limitations than other sports. Small space (100m*100m) and fewer material requirements (goal post and the ball), smooth playing rhythm, comparatively a smaller number of players (7) requirements, limited time duration of the game (1 hour), flexible dress code, are

some of them. It is very rare to find a Sri Lanka woman who has not played Netball at school, irrespective of the area whether it is Colombo or a suburb.

GAME HISTORY

Netball was forecasted as a different version of a female basketball game in the USA by Prof. James Nic Smith in 1891 as a 9 A- Side Basketball game. Later, the game was introduced to England and the first match was played there in 1895 at Madame Ostenburg's College. The initial codified rules of the game were published in 1900/1901 by Ling Association; which later became the Physical Education Association. In the first half of the 20th century, the game spanned gradually over the countries under British colonization. Later, the International Federation of Netball Association (IFNA) was formed in 1960 in Colombo, Sri Lanka with the participation of the main five countries; England, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa & West Indies. Accordingly, it was decided to hold World Championship tournaments every four years, initiated in Eastbourne, England, in 1963. The first world youth championship was introduced in 1998 in Canberra and the game was qualified for the commonwealth games in 1988 in Kuala Lumpur. Further, Netball became a "recognized" sport too by International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1995.

The game was introduced to Sri Lanka by Mrs. Jennie Green. The initial match was played in 1921 by the Ceylon Girl Guide Company at Kandy High School. The first-ever international match against Australia's National Netball team was played in 1963 after the inauguration of the Netball Association of Ceylon. Later existing Netball Federation of Sri Lanka (NFSL) was formed in 1983 as the governing body of Sri Lanka Netball and is affiliated with International Netball Federation (INF) through Asian Netball Federation (ANF), presently Asian Netball. NFSL is the governing body of Sri Lanka Netball with the membership of 35 associations, including 24 districts and 11 affiliated members in 2014.

SRI LANKA NETBALL TEAM PERFORMANCES

There was a goal for the Sri Lanka Netball team to be among the best ten Netball teams in the world Since 1997. IFNA is the authorized body to declare the world Netball ranking considering its members' international performances. However, there are so many international tournaments conducted worldwide, Sri Lanka's rank mainly depends on the Asian championship and World Cup performances. Accordingly, It was observed that though Sri Lanka was the Asian top ranker in the IFNA ranking up to mid of the present decade, where Sri Lanka holds the 24th rank while Singapore and Malaysia hold 19th and 21st positions respectively as of 31st July 2014 INF ranking.

When it considers our Asian championship performances, we have become the Asian Netball Champions on four occasions in the 2nd, 4th, 5th, and 7th Championships in 1989, 1997, 2001, and 2009 respectively, Sri Lanka was not able to qualify for the World Cup in 2005 due to Asian performances drop to 2nd runner-up. Also, unable to defend the Asian champions in 2012 & 2014 both consecutive tournaments even though we have the asset of Asia's tallest Player "Tharjini Sivalingam" who has become the highest-scored shooter in the World Cup-2011. Having such a world-class player and other talented senior national players, instead of moving forward, a drop in our international performances could be observed. It has become the reason for conducting this research considering the same, responsibility of the author as a national netballer.

IDENTIFICATION OF FACTORS

International performances of the Sri Lanka Netball team were not aligning with national Netball expectations due to various reasons; unavailability of defined goals in world and regional rankings, unavailability of a national plan for game development lack of player motivation for best performance due to financial and non-financial reasons, limitations for international exposure, communication gaps, poor game plans or no game plans, failures in decision-making on the court, inappropriate training programs, due to conflicts inside the team and outside the team, etc., are some of the critical issues identified in National Netball.

Hence, there was a need for a methodical approach to ascertain this performance drop. Accordingly, a critical literature review was taken place to identify the main factors affecting the performance enhancement of the game.

Performance measurement can be measured from two perspectives, namely subjective and objective. Subjective performance is measured by considering the perception of the players, coaches, or spectators' performance (Besharat & Pourbohloul, 2011). Objective measures considered the actual performance which would be measured through win-loss percentages, points accumulated in a medal table, and many more (Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2013). Accordingly, both performances are important for the subject topic.

As per scholars' findings during past decades, motivation is the main factor affecting performance. The motivation of a team depends on intrinsic and extrinsic factors affecting team members. Intrinsic motivation (IM) and extrinsic motivation (EM) are important concepts for understanding motivational processes in sports settings (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2002; Vallerand & Rousseau, 2001). According to self-determination theory (SDT) by Deci & Ryan (1985; 2002), motivational processes are best understood as a continuum of itemizations ranging from volitional to highly controlling forms of regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). There are four sources of EM that have been identified in the sport motivation literature and include: external regulation, interjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation (Vallerand & Rousseau, 2001). Further, Vallerand and Rousseau (2001) identified three forms of IM. Those include (a) the Pleasure one receives from learning; (b) Pleasure and satisfaction received over accomplishment of a particular task or goal; and (c) and experience of stimulation due to pleasurable sensations (Vallerand & Rousseau, 2001). Irrespective of the unitary (Deci & Ryan, 2002) or tripartite (Vallerand & Rousseau, 2001) conceptualization of IM, arguments put forth within the framework of SDT contend that self-determined motivate on promotes adaptive cognitive, affective, and behavioral consequences including domain-specific indices of improved performance. Research has shown that more self-determined motives are positively associated with various cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes in sports settings (Gagne, Ryan, & Bargmann, 2003; Kowal & Fortier, 1999; Vallerand & Rousseau, 2001). One area of debate is the influence of performance-contingent rewards on IM. Performance-contingent rewards are defined as rewards "given explicitly for doing well on a task or for performing up to a specified standard" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 27) such as offering monetary incentives for performances that exceed a known standard. Deci and colleagues (1999a; 1999b; Ryan & Deci, 2000) claimed that the most detrimental reward contingency involves giving rewards as a direct function of performance. Conversely, Cameron and colleagues (1994; 1996; 2001) declared that rewards that are tied to specific performance standards and to success exert a positive influence on

Motivation under Need theories of motivation as the hierarchy of needs by Maslow (1954), ERG Theory by Clayton Alderfer (1972); Managerial needs theory of hierarchy by David McClelland (1973), attempt to explain what motivates people in the workplace. Expectancy theory by Victor Vroom (1964), Goal theory by Latham & Locker (1979), and Social Learning Theory by Bandura (1979) were also considered. However, setting up personal and team goals according to Goal setting theory and believing in effort for the desired outcome in Expectancy theory is widely accepted for effective team performance. In concerning competitive, international team sports, the availability of highly technical training schedules and the application of the latest technology are also important motives for players. The insight of sports performances is much more than physical structure, endurance, muscle strength, speed, technical skills and coordination application of techniques, game plan, etc. Training has to be motivated through goal setting. The phrase 'Mental Training' (Unestahl, 1982) has become a psychological technique aimed at positive mental and physical behavior. Sport confidence (Vealey, 1986) refers to the belief that an athlete possesses about his or her ability to be successful in sport in general (trait sport confidence) and in specific sports competitions (state sport confidence). Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) refers to an individual's belief in his or her capabilities to be successful in executing specific tasks and skills in specific situations and is measured in terms of the strength, level, and generality of self-efficacy.

Since the desired outcome of this document is a team achievement, teamwork is essential. Group cohesion is a dynamic process where the group tends to remain together and united in the pursuit of its goals for the satisfaction of affective needs of group members (Paskevich, Estabrooks, Brawley, and Carron, 2001). As per Jarvis (2006) clear role of team members, members' willingness to make personal sacrifices for the team, quality of communication, and shared goals are the factors that affect team cohesion. Team cohesion exists when players are united in a common purpose (Cashmore, 2002). Further, factors like environment, team, leadership, and personnel are correlated to team cohesion. Identification and management of team building stages of Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing (Tuckman, 1965) are also important.

The leadership of the coach also immensely affects team performance. According to Fiedler (1967) trait approach is more effective when the situation is highly favorable and highly unfavorable situations whereas the behavioral approach is effective only at moderately favorable situations. Later Path-Goal theory (House & Dessler, 1974), Life Cycle Model (Hensley & Blanchard, 1977), Transactional and Transformational models (Burns, 1978), etc., contributed a lot for the identification of different forms of leadership. MML (Chellanduri, 1978, 1990) was especially for sports and physical activities, characteristics of Situation, Leader, and Group members are three factors that interact to determine the behavior of the leader. There is no single behavioral category of leadership that can be identified as superior - Mullins (1999). Hence, the effectiveness of Leadership depends on the variables of the given situation. Leadership competencies emerge because of inherited abilities and learned skills. Gill (2000) indicated that integrationist theories give a more realistic explanation of human behaviors in sports.

Accordingly, the identification of the main three factors of motivation of players, team spirit, and leadership of the coach became independent variables of the research on the dependable variable of national Netball team performances.

The conceptual framework is as follows:

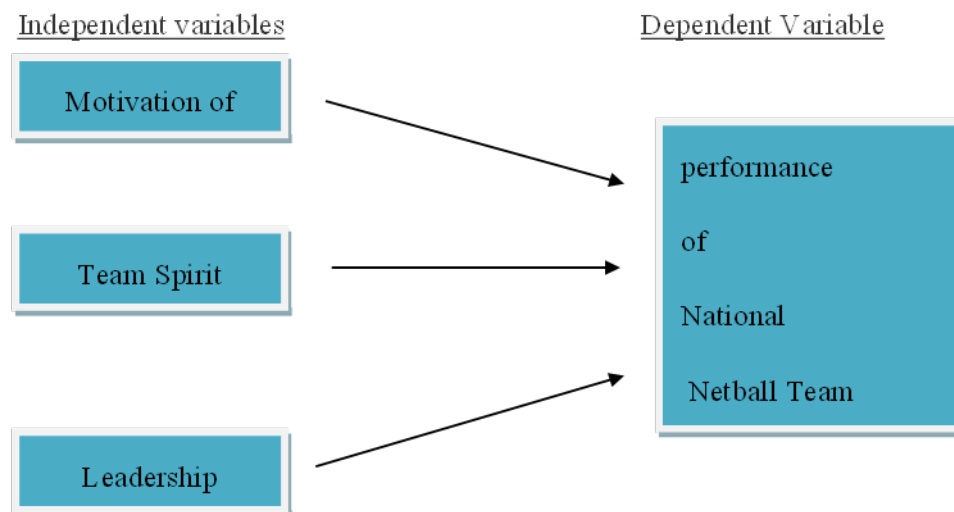


Figure I

The hypothesis was build-up accordingly and validation of the hypothesis has been taken place through primary and secondary data collected. Primary data were collected by application of a quantitative approach through a questionnaire among selected 67 National level Netball stakeholder samples. The sample includes 12 National players, 15 National pool players of the Senior Netball pool, 10 previous Sri Lanka Captains, 10 National coaches, 10 International experience umpires, and 10 Team officials including team managers and delegates. The questionnaire consisted of 30 questions including two multiple-choice/open-ended questions and 28 Likert/close-ended questions covering independent and dependable variables. Secondary data was also collected via a qualitative approach with identified sources; interviews, Journals, Publications, Internet, and Previous Research/s.

The answers to the questionnaire were tabulated with MS Excel spreadsheet and derived the average of each question under dependable and independent variables. Those averages were transferred to SPSS Version 20 package in the event of deriving Pearson's Correlation Coefficient between the above-focused variables. Accordingly, revealed the co-relationship between identified three in-dependable variables vs dependable variables; team performance separately and the hypothesis were validated accordingly.

VERIFICATION OF HYPOTHESIS

Validation of Hypothesis I

- H1a: There is a positive relationship between the Motivation of players and the Performance of the National Netball team
- H0: There is no positive relationship between the Motivation of players and the Performance of the National Netball team

Table 1: Correlation between Performance of the National Netball Team & Motivation of Players

		Performance of the National Netball Team	Motivation of Players
Performance of the National Netball Team	Pearson Correlation	1	.506**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.000
	N	67	67
Motivation of Players	Pearson Correlation	.506**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	
	N	67	67

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

As per Table, Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) for Hypothesis H1a is 0.506 strongly positive and this result is significant at 0.01 level (p) stands at 0.000(1 tailed).

The standard significant level was at 0.05 (1 tailed). Since $p < 0.05$, and within the standard significant level and Correlation Coefficient (r) which reached 0.506 positive, it was evident that the relationship is valid for Hypothesis H1a. ($R^2 = 0.256$). Therefore, this study established that there is a strong positive relationship between the two variables, named Performance of the National Netball Team and Motivation of Players.

Hypothesis H1a “There is a positive relationship between the Motivation of players and the Performance of the National Netball team” is valid and accepted. Simultaneously, the research voids and rejects the null hypothesis, H0, “There is no positive relationship between the Motivation of players and the Performance of the National Netball team.

Validation of Hypothesis 2

- H1b: There is a positive relationship between Team spirit and the Performance of the National Netball team
- H0: There is no positive relationship between Team Spirit and the Performance of the National Netball team.

Table II.: Correlation between Performance of the National Netball Team & Team Spirit

		Performance of the National Netball Team	Team Spirit
Performance of the National Netball Team	Pearson Correlation	1	.328**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.000
	N	67	67
Team Spirit	Pearson Correlation	.328**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	
	N	67	67

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

According to Table II, Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) for Hypothesis H1b is 0.328** moderately positive and this result is significant at 0.01 level (p) stands at 0.000 (1 tailed).

The standard significant level was at 0.05 (1 tailed). Since $p < 0.05$, and within the standard significant level and Correlation Coefficient (r) which reached 0.328 positive, it was evident that the relationship is valid for Hypothesis H1b. ($R^2=0.107$). Therefore, this study established that there is a moderately positive relationship between the two variables, named Performance of the National Netball Team and Team spirit.

Hypothesis H1b “There is a positive relationship between the Team spirit and Performance of the National Netball team” is valid and accepted. Simultaneously, the research voids and rejects the null hypothesis, H_0 , “There is no positive relationship between the Team spirit and Performance of the National Netball team”.

Validation of Hypothesis 3

- H1c: There is a positive relationship between the Leadership of the National Coach and the Performance of the National Netball team
- H_0 : There is no positive relationship between the Leadership of the National Coach and the Performance of the National Netball team

Table III: Correlation between Performance of the National Netball Team & Leadership of the Coach

		Performance of the National Netball Team	The leadership of the National Coach
Performance of the National Netball Team	Pearson Correlation	1	.298**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.007
	N	67	67
The leadership of the national Coach	Pearson Correlation	.298**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.007	
	N	67	67

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

As per Table III, Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) for Hypothesis H1c is 0.298** moderately positive and this result is significant at 0.01 levels (p stands at 0.007 (1 tailed)).

The standard significant level is at 0.05 (1 tailed). Since $p < 0.05$, and within the standard significant level and Correlation Coefficient (r) which reached 0.298 positive, it is evident that the relationship is valid for Hypothesis H1c. ($R^2=0.089$). Therefore, this study established that there was a moderately positive relationship between the two variables, named Performance of the National Netball Team and Team spirit.

Hypothesis H1b “There is a positive relationship between the Team spirit and Performance of the National Netball team” is valid and accepted. Simultaneously, the research voids and rejects the null hypothesis, H_0 , “There is no positive relationship between the Team spirit and Performance of the National Netball team”

Considering the results obtained from the study, hypothesis validation can be summarized according to the following table.

Table IV: Summary of Hypothesis Validation

Hypothesis	Variable Relationship	Pearson's Correlation Coefficient(r)	Significance Level (p) (1 tailed)	Results
H1a-Alternate H0- Null	Motivation of the Players	0.506**	0.000	H1a- Accepted H0- Rejected
H1b- Alternate H0- Null	Team Spirit	0.328**	0.000	H1b- Accepted H0- Rejected
H1c- Alternate H0- Null	Leadership of the National Coach	0.28**	0.007	H1c- Accepted H0- Rejected

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

- H1a “There is a positive relationship between the Motivation of players and the Performance of the National Netball team”
- H1b “There is a positive relationship between the Team spirit and Performance of the National Netball team”
- H1c “There is a positive relationship between the leadership of the coach and Performance the of National Netball team”

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first objective was achieved through the literature review by deriving three main factors influencing the performance of the Sri Lanka Netball team. They have been identified as the motivation of players, team spirit, and leadership of the coach.

The second objective was to find the relationship between the above-identified factors/ independent variables on the performance of the National Netball Team/dependable variables, through hypothesis testing and summary of data analysis as below.

Table V: Summary of data an analysi

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Motivation of Players	2.767	0.501
Team Spirit	3.158	0.590
Leadership of the Coach	2.889	0.404
Performance of the National Netball Team	2.113	0.567

According to Table No. V Motivation of team players, the Leadership of the coach, and the Performance of the National Netball Team variables have got the mean value of 2.767 and 2.889, and 2.113 respectively. It says, though the respective variables are below the average levels, the Mean value of 3.158 for Team Spirit indicates that the variable is in an average standard. Since those three variables are below average or average level, it has affected on low performance of the National Netball team.

The team performance of Netball is the visible result of its stakeholders; players, coaches, umpires, administrators, sponsors, media, and volunteers, alike. Their abilities and capabilities are also important. The gap in contribution among these parties will negatively affect the team's

performance. As per the primary data collected 2/3 of the sample believed that the Sri Lanka Netball team's performance internationally is below the expected level. The Impression about the present improvements of Sri Lanka Netball (playing, coaching, and umpiring) compared to international developments was not in satisfactory position. Further feedback on the environment (political, social, and administrative) of the game was not favorable, and international performance targets have been specified and periodically review not at a satisfactory level as there was no communicated short-term; midterm, and long-term strategic plan for the game.

The motivation of players has been affected by the lack of recognition and reward they received for their previous performances, and the unavailability of Transparent and well-defined selection criteria in place for selecting National players, coaches, and other officials. The standards of facilities provided with accommodation, meals with required nutrition, medical treatments, & vitamins, safety, and standard of grounds, equipment, shoes, and other required facilities focusing on international standard training, local tournaments with efficient umpiring, were not up to the level to inspire them for their best performances. Further, national players were not paid at all and employees get duty leave for attending national practices and there is no high demand for National Netball players in the Sri Lankan job market.

In the team spirit factor, there were gaps noted in belief and trust among team members, willingness to help each other effective communication, selection of team captain, and her acceptance by others in the recent past. Under the leadership of the coach, dissatisfaction was observed with the preparation of the game plan after analyzing competitors, decisions taken on the court, pursuing players for higher goals instead of self-interest, getting players and administration support, etc. National coaches are generally self-motivated and target-oriented ladies. It was a volunteer job around ten years back. Occasionally, we have obtained foreign coaches' support as well. However, establishing players' individual goals for team goals is the main responsibility of the coach, and proper guidance, performance monitoring, treating all equally, and supporting players to achieve their individual goals in the game are also important responsibilities of the coach.

Hence, it is required to improve the identified gaps to enhance/ develop the players' motivation, team spirit, and the leadership of the national coach to improve the performance of the National Netball Team internationally.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the research findings, the following recommendations are proposed with regard to the improvement of the National Netball team's performance with the expectation of keeping the Sri Lankan name at its best position in the international Netball arena.

Establishing specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-targeted goals for Sri Lanka's position in the world ranking. This has to be reviewed periodically and enhanced accordingly. The establishment of such goals only is not sufficient, there should be effective strategies to achieve those goals in the short-term, mid-term, and long-term. Hence, the requirement of an effective national plan is needed. Such plans have to be formulated to develop the game standards in all areas of the game: playing, coaching, umpiring, and administration. Changes/ deviations should not take place in the national plan with the changes of NFSL office-bearers.

The motivation of current and prospective National Netball players is essential for future performance development. Hence, the establishment of transparent and independent selection criteria, providing them with the required facilities like accommodation, nutritious food, medical facilities, career developments, etc., providing financial and non-financial benefits, celebrating victories and rewarding them accordingly, and providing more opportunities for players to gain more international experiences are vital. Further, the introduction of career pathways to national players as coaches, umpires, and administrators of the game.

Effective communication has to be implemented to inculcate team spirit. It will help to overcome lots of disputes, misunderstandings, and conflicts. It will overcome bypassing layers, especially in upward and downward communication. The team captain will be selected by considering discipline, capability, seniority, dedication, etc. Also, she is respected by all team members. Further, it is important to verify that each and every team member is familiar with their role in the team and their common goal as a team.

Developing the capacity of coaches by providing them opportunities to obtain the advanced and latest knowledge and technological applications relevant to the game. The selected national coach has to have a proper training plan on the expected target in line with the available time duration. Progress evaluation of individual players, application of new skills, and changes in routine practice must be there to motivate players. If required, getting the foreign coaches' assistance temporarily to develop a national training plan to par with the world's best Netball playing countries. Further, psychological training; e.g., goal setting has to be given an important place in the training schedule. It will help to bridge the gap in applying advanced technology and facilities used by developed countries for their training.

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