

## Sport Behaviors of Turkish Soccer Players: An Observational Study on Personal and Team-Related Dimensions

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**Abstract:** The current study aims to explore both personal and team-related sports behavior dimensions of Turkish children soccer players. It has been argued that several personal dispositions such as achievement motivation, fear of failure, and aggression levels (Wann, Haynes, McLean, and Pullen, 2003) could be at play when the child is trying to achieve in a sports context. Among related outcomes of these personal dispositions, sports performance, teamwork (Martin, Carron, Eys, and Loughhead, 2012), fairplay and sportsmanship behaviors (Arthur-Banning, Wells, Baker, and Hegreness, 2009) have been widely researched and discussed in the literature. The current study will try to explore the relationships between these dimensions from a personal disposition perspective using an observational method. The sample consisted of 79 selected male soccer players. A total of 6 teams were observed during soccer play competition games. The results revealed interesting findings regarding the relationships between several personal and team-related behavior dimensions.

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### 1. Introduction

Participation in sports has been reported to have many positive effects on the quality of life (Dinç, 2011), well-being (Hassandra, Goudas, Hatzigeorgiadis, and Theodorakis, 2007) and character formation (Mouratidou, Barkoukis, and Rizos, 2012; Ryska, 2003) of a child especially studying in the grade and secondary schools-the period during which the character is more apt to be influenced by the child's surroundings and his or her activities (Feltz, 1986). In addition to the influence of sport participation on young children, it has also been argued that several personal dispositions such as achievement motivation (Elliot, 1999); fear of failure (Conroy and Elliot, 2004; Sagar, 2009; Sagar, Boardley, and Kavussanu, 2011), pre-competition anxiety (Hatzigeorgiadis and Biddle, 2008) and aggression levels (Ramazanoğlu, Canikli, and Saygın, 2002; Topuz, Sanioğlu, and Çağlayan, 2010; Wann, Haynes, McLean, and Pullen, 2003) could also be at play when the child is trying to achieve in a sports context (Coudevylle, Ginis, and Famose, 2008; Duda and Nicholls, 1992; Wang, Chatzisarantis, Spray, and Biddle, 2002). Especially regarding processes and outcomes of certain sports activities, performance

(Pedersen and Seidman, 2004; Steinberg, Singer, and Murphey, 2000; Van de Pol and Kavussanu, 2012), teamwork (Aghazadeh and Kyei, 2009; Fox, Barr-Anderson, Neumark-Sztainer, and Wall, 2010; Gayton and Very, 1993; Martin, Carron, Eys, and Loughhead, 2012), fairplay and sportsmanship behaviors (Arthur-Banning, Wells, Baker, and Hegreness, 2009; Cassel, Chow, Demoulin, and Reiger, 2001; Ryska, 2003; Vidoni and Ward, 2006) have been frequently studied. Although none of these studies have tried to look at the links between more than three variables mentioned above, there are studies that proposed that motivation of a child might have an influence on his or her competitiveness such as task or ego-level involvement in sport motivation (White and Duda, 1994; Williams and Gill, 1995). And other studies have proposed the importance of sports participation for self-esteem (Bowker, 2006) and some others studying the link between sports and self-efficacy of adolescents (Dinç, 2001). Among the most widespread and commonly studied sports related variables, performance, teamwork, aggression, sportsmanship and fairplay, fear of failure and achievement need and achievement motivation can be listed.

Teamwork has been documented to be vital when we consider team sports such as soccer (termed as football in Europe), volleyball, basketball, baseball, and others. Especially for a team to succeed, it has been argued that a team should coexist and coaches need to look at which factors are more effective for team unity (Aghazadeh and Kyei, 2009). Team cohesion as a concept has been defined as a tendency for a group of people to remain together for reaching the desired goal (Carron, Brawley, and Widmeyer, 1998). And that cohesion is positively linked with increased willingness to accept responsibility for negative results (Brawley, Carron, and Widmeyer, 1987). In their study carried out for the development of a cohesion inventory for children's sport teams, Martin, et al. (2012) have concluded that, especially for children between the ages of 9 and 12; there is a cognitive ability to distinguish between task and social aspects of cohesion. In addition, there have been studies that outlined the importance of team sports on the healthy behavior development in young children and adolescents. As an example, Pedersen and Seidman (2004) have argued that team sports are more likely than individual sports to enhance certain competencies such as increased involvement with peers in a prosocial context. In line with that context, there is an opportunity for the youngster to develop his or her skills on collaboration with others, responsibility-taking, self-regulation, taking initiative, and self-efficacy. In their study looking at the relationship between achievement motivation across training and competition in individual and team sports, Van de Pol and Kavussanu (2012) found that team-sport athletes who participated in the study experienced higher levels of enjoyment. Another concept, team identification was argued to be linked with trust and social acceptance (Wann and Weaver, 2009) and that it was an important factor in supporting your team whether you were part of a fandom or the sports team itself. In sum, teamwork was studied in many contexts including sports. And it is not possible to discuss all the findings in all different contexts here but it might be useful to say that especially in children's team sports, what kinds of factors are more influential remain to be explored.

As can be seen from previous research, there are many different types of relationships between sport behavior dimensions of young participants such as performance, team orientation, aggression, sportsmanship or fairplay, achievement need and/or fear of failure. As these variables might have their roots in the personal as well as situational domains, the current research is about looking at several links between those variables especially using an observational type of methodology with a selected

group of young Turkish soccer players. Concerning sports research with children, Bush, McHale, Richer, Shaw, Smith, and Vinden (2001) argue supportively that using observational tools such as playground monitors are more likely to provide more objective and comparative data compared to self-report.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Participants

79 ( $M_{age} = 10.32$ , age range: 9-15 years) out of 120 male junior soccer players who were part of the first section of an international soccer training camp participated in the study. The junior soccer players were selected via nationwide sports selection program. This program was organized for the purpose of training young soccer players by one of the world's largest international soccer school coaches and trainers for creating future star soccer players. Originally, the candidate pool composed of nearly 5000 students and only 250 students were selected based on Turkish School Sports Federation competition standards. The program intends to teach excellent and high quality soccer play skills for junior soccer players. All players were coming from different regions of Turkey and were grade and secondary school students.

### 2.2 Data Collection

In the first day of the camp, the soccer teams were formed and first trial games were played. The teams composed of 9 to 15 players. A total of 6 teams were observed. These teams continued with the same players during the 4-day camp period. For each team, 2 trained observers were assigned, and on the first day, based on the behaviors of the players, a behavioral checklist was formed composed of several behavioral dimensions related to sports; such as performance, teamwork, aggressive behaviors, fairplay behaviors, and frustration behaviors after a missed goal (see also Arthur-Banning, et al., 2009).

The observers counted the frequency with which a certain behavior took place during that specific game play. In addition to counting with a naked eye, each observer used a personal voice recording device for recording each behavior observed at the moment that it is detected. The behavioral pool was formed based on several research findings including what type of dimensions they belong to. As an example, scoring and dashing as they relate to performance; communicating and supporting the teammate as part of teamwork; not tripping or swearing as part of fairplay (Hassandra, et al., 2007; Ryska, 2003); and losing enthusiasm when misses a goal or lost motivation after a missed goal as part of achievement need or fear of failure (Sagar, Boardley, and Kavussanu, 2011).

Prior to the study, the researcher conducted an interactive training session for the observers based on possible behaviors that could occur during a soccer team play. The following were carried out as part of the training program: Forming a list of possible behavioral examples related to soccer play performance, teamwork, aggression, fairplay and some behavioral reactions after a missed goal. All observers were male psychology students and were acquainted with soccer games as they either played or regularly watched soccer games in their daily lives. During the 4 days in which the observers recorded behaviors, the inter-rater reliability ranged between .88 to .93

### 2.3 Procedure

The observations took place during the morning game sessions between 9:00 and 10:30 AM. The observers were situated in a place where they could see the team from different angles. They were

situated so that there was enough space for recording the behaviors as well as creating an appropriate space between them and the team without interrupting any players by observers' presence. The observers were presented to players as assistants in the playground and they let coaches know and took their consent that they would just observe and take notes for a research project in sports psychology. All school officials and the camp administrators were contacted before the study and their permissions were received regarding the study.

### 1. Results

Before data analyses, all of the variables in the original dataset was re-coded as where "1" represents *positive attribute* for the given criteria and "0" represents a *negative one*. For instance, for the criterion of scoring, "1" represents *scoring*; while, for "swearing" criterion, "1" represents attribute of *not swearing*.

Table 1 *The dependability and relationships among criteria of sports behaviors*

	$X^2$	$df$	$p$	$r_{time}$
Scoring	0,69	2	0,71	0,09
Dashing	5,26	2	0,07	0,16*
Running	0,60	2	0,74	0,04
Falls behind his team during competition	0,23	2	0,89	0,03
Enthusiastic at defense	1,97	2	0,37	-0,01
Passing the ball to the teammate	2,12	2	0,35	-0,06
Disconnects from his team during competition	0,86	2	0,65	-0,06
Communicates with his teammates	2,32	2	0,31	0,10
Rushes to support his teammate	0,53	2	0,77	-0,02
Shows aggression to himself	0,70	2	0,70	0,06
Hits player from the competitor team	2,94	2	0,57	-0,09
Pulls jersey of the player from the competitor team	3,87	2	0,14	-0,11
Shows aggression to his teammate	2,86	2	0,24	-0,11
Yells at his teammate	4,65	2	0,10	-0,12
Pulls jersey of his teammate	4,32	2	0,36	0,08
Demonstrates negative body language to his teammate	0,80	2	0,67	-0,04
Attacking any person	3,29	2	0,19	-0,11
Swearing	0,76	2	0,68	0,02
Obeying the rules of the game	0,56	2	0,75	-0,06
Tripping	0,44	2	0,80	0,02
Becomes frustrated after a missing goal	4,87	2	0,09	-0,18
Decreased motivation after a missing goal	3,50	2	0,17	-0,17

Later, as an answer to the research questions, first of all, dependability of rating scores on the occasions (time) was computed by using chi square statistics. According to the results, none of the criteria seem to be dependent on occasions (Table 1). The relevant  $p$  values for the criteria ranges between 0.890 (Fall behind the Team in terms of

Competitiveness) and 0.072 (Pace). Only two criteria were found to be significant at the .01 level. Those are "Dashing" and "Becomes Frustrated after a Missing Goal" ( $p=0.09$ ).

Additionally, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was computed in order to see the relationship between the criteria and occasion (time)

and total football attributes. Spearman's rho revealed that only "Dashing" seems to have a statistically significant and positive relationship with time criterion ( $rs[72] = .16, p < .05$ ). That shows that, dashing scores of the young players increase as the number of observations increases.

The possible relationships between each individual behavior criterion were also investigated. Scoring is positively related with pacing ( $rs[79] = 0.289, p < .05$ ) and negatively related with running ( $rs[79] = -0.348, p < .01$ ), not showing aggression to himself ( $rs[79] = -0.332, p < .01$ ) and positively related with not showing anger to teammates ( $rs[62] = .355, p < .001$ ) and not demonstrating negative body language to the teammates ( $rs[79] = .274, p < .05$ ) and negatively with not becoming frustrated after a missing goal ( $rs[79] = -0.277, p < .05$ ).

Table 2. *Sub-dimensions of the criteria used during the observations*

Dimensions
<i>1. Performance</i>
Scoring
Dashing
Running
Falls behind his team during competition
<i>2. Team orientation</i>
Enthusiastic at defense
Passing the ball to the teammate
Disconnects from his team during competition
Communicates with his teammates
Rushes to support his teammate
<i>3. Aggression to himself</i>
Shows aggression to himself
<i>4. Aggression to competitor</i>
Hitting the opposing player
Pulling the jersey of the opposing player
<i>5. Aggression towards teammate</i>
Shows aggression to his teammate
Yells at his teammate
Pulls jersey of his teammate
Demonstrates negative body language to his teammate
<i>6. Fair play</i>
Attacking any person
Swearing
Obeying the rules of the game
Tripping
<i>7. Fear of failure/achievement need</i>
Becomes frustrated after a missed goal
Decreased motivation after a missed goal

Being enthusiastic at defense is positively related with communication ( $rs[79] = 0.209, p < .01$ ) and rushing to support his teammate ( $rs[79] = 0.221, p < .01$ ). Rushing to support his teammate is also positively related with passing the ball to the teammate ( $rs[79] = 0.290, p < .01$ ), and not falling behind one's team during competition ( $rs[79] = 0.241, p < .01$ ), and communicating with one's teammate ( $rs[79] = 0.403, p < .01$ ). Not disconnecting from his team during competition is positively correlated with not hitting the opposing player ( $rs[79] = 0.476, p < .01$ ), not pulling the jersey of the opposing player ( $rs[79] = 0.194, p < .01$ ), not showing anger to his teammate ( $rs[79] = 0.312, p < .01$ ), not yelling at his teammate ( $rs[79] = 0.179, p < .01$ ), not demonstrating negative body language to this teammate ( $rs[79] = 0.301, p < .01$ ), not attacking anyone ( $rs[79] = 0.194, p < .01$ ), not swearing ( $rs[79] = 0.550, p < .01$ ), obeying the rules of the game ( $rs[52] = 0.490, p < .01$ ), and not tripping ( $rs[79] = 0.337, p < .01$ ).

Additionally, the results revealed that many of the negative and non-fairplay attributes observed concurrently on the players (see Table 1).

Later on, the behavioral criteria used during the observations, were combined to form certain behavioral sub-dimensions (see Table 2). Then the binary data were summed up for each sub dimension for the total score to reflect an increase in the amount of attribute in that relevant dimension. For instance, for the sub-dimension of "fair play", increasing total score meant an increase in that attribute for each player observed.

In order to see the relations between the sub-dimensions of the observations, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed. Later, partial correlation coefficients were also computed after controlling for some of the dimensions. The findings were presented in Table 3. According to the results, the relationship between performance and team orientation is negative but not statistically significant ( $r[72] = -0.079, p > .05$ ). When the effect of fair play was controlled, the relationship became positive and statistically significant ( $r[32] = 0.410, p < .01$ ). Similarly, when the effect of total aggressiveness (aggression to both teammates and competitors) was controlled, the relationship became positive and statistically significant ( $r[71] = 0.364, p < .01$ ). Additionally, after controlling the effect of both total aggressiveness and fear of failure, the relationship didn't increase significantly ( $r[69] = 0.363, p < .01$ ).

Later, the relationship between performance and fair play was investigated. According to the results, there is a negative relationship ( $r[65] = -0.383, p <$

.01). When the effect of Fear of Failure/Achievement Need was statistically controlled, the relationship became significant at the .05 level ( $r[63] = -0.301, p < .05$ ). In other words, the significance level decreased. When the same procedure was repeated with controlling the effect of showing aggression to himself ( $r[65] = -0.244, p > .05$ ) and the effect of total aggression ( $r[65] = -0.085, p > .05$ ), the

relationship was not statistically significant anymore. When both Fear of Failure/Achievement Need and total aggressiveness was controlled simultaneously, the relationship became positive but not statistically significant ( $r[61] = 0.051, p > .05$ ). Finally, after controlling for the effect of aggression to one's teammate only, the significance level decreased to .05 level ( $r[45] = 0.245, p < .05$ ).

Table 3. Correlation and Partial Correlation Results between the Sub-dimensions of the Observations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Performance	-	-0,079	-0,381**	0,071	0,366**	0,354**	0,311**	0,326**
		<i>0.410**</i> (3)	<i>-0.301*</i> (4)	0.011(5)				
		<i>0.364**</i> (8)	<i>-0.244</i> (5)					
		<i>0.195</i> (4)	<i>-0.085</i> (8)					
		<i>0.363**</i> (4-8)	<i>0.051</i> (4-8)					
			<i>0.245*</i> (7)					
2 Team Orientation	0,507	-	0,232**	-0,026	0,071	-0,14	-0,126	-0,233**
			<i>0.410**</i> (3)					
			<i>0.379**</i> (4)					
			<i>0.465**</i> (5)					
3 Fair Play	0,002	0,005	-	-0,120	-0,328**	-0,749**	-0,583**	-0,708**
				<i>-0.279*</i> (5)	<i>-0.122</i> (7)			
4 FF/Ach. Need	0,532	0,796	0,245	-	-0,004	0,152	0,368**	0,332**
5 Agg. to Himself	0,001	0,341	0,000	0,962	-	0,264**	0,261**	0,289**
6 Agg. to Competitor	0,001	0,061	0,000	0,107	0,000	-	0,419**	0,732**
7 Agg. to Teammate	0,005	0,092	0,000	0,000	0,000	0	-	0,933**
8 Total Aggression	0,003	0,002	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	-

Note: the italic values show the partial correlations. Parenthesized values show the controlled variable. Upper diagonal values show the coefficients while lower diagonal values show the p values of simple correlations.

Finally, when the relationship between Fair play and Fear of Failure/Achievement Need was investigated, the relationship was found as negative but not statistically significant ( $r[35] = -0.120, p > .05$ ). However, when the effect of aggression to himself was controlled, the relationship became negative and statistically significant ( $r[35] = -0.279, p < .05$ ).

#### 4. Discussion

From the analyses of the statistical data, it looks like only dashing as a variable has been dependent on time, which is a normal and expected result given the fact that time might have played a positive role in

terms of increasing athlete's performance. While the sports setting has not changed, the time has passed, the exercises increased and thus familiarity with the setting combined with more exercise might have played a very positive role in running even faster as each day passed.

As we look at the correlational results, there are interesting findings. First, scoring was found to be positively related with dashing and negatively with running. This might mean that running alone may not be related with soccer performance, but running fast may be more related. In addition, performance has been found to be related with "not showing aggression to himself or to one's teammates, including not demonstrating negative body language to them". This finding is important as soccer is a team game and aggression to one's own self including

towards one's teammates might be serving as a blocking variable towards both individual and team performance. It is also important to note that performance has been found to be related to "not being frustrated after a missed goal" which represents an approach motive in performance compared to an avoidance motive that involves fear of failure. This shows the importance of personal factors playing a critical role in team success. Similarly, Cassel, Chow, Demoulin and Reiger (2001) argues, no team is stronger than its weakest link, and that each individual in a team is as important as every other team member.

Regarding defense, being enthusiastic has been found to be related with communication which we categorized under the team orientation dimension. It was also correlated positively with supporting one's teammate and passing the ball, and not falling behind one's team during competition-this is a performance factor. Again as part of the team orientation dimension, not disconnecting from one's own team was found to be positively related with many non-aggressive behavior dimensions as not hitting or yelling the other player and with many fairplay behavior dimensions such as not swearing or tripping.

As for the meditational types of analyses, again there are interesting results such that there is actually a positive relationship between the performance and team orientation behaviors when the effect of fair play was controlled. This is important as there is a strong negative relationship between fair play and performance. Thus, the lack of any significant relationship between performance and team orientation might be blocked by the availability of the fairplay types of behaviors which are evident from the positive relationship that exists between fairplay and team orientation. In line with this finding, when the effect of aggression to another person (one's teammate or opponent) was controlled, the relationship between performance and team orientation became also significantly stronger. Of course, these results should be approached with caution such that the current study did not look at the differentiating aspects of hostile and instrumental aggression (Wann, et al., 2003) where the intent is performance not violence.

Regarding the role of fear of failure/achievement need in explaining the relationship between performance and fair play dimensions, we can say that there is a mediating role. The relationship between the two weakens when we control the achievement need/fear of failure dimension. This finding is important in that, fear of failure/achievement might have a role in that relationship as a soccer player may not be demonstrating fair play behaviors because of a fear of

loss of the game, or because of being too result oriented in terms of scoring. The same issue applies for performance which also played a mediating role in that relationship. For the same result-orientation factor, which is scoring, aggression might be playing an instrumental goal in terms of reaching one's goal in a game like soccer. In line with this finding, Mouratidou et al. (2012) have found that high performance orientation was associated with lower moral functioning which indicated an inclination towards antisocial behavior. Their study involved soccer and basketball athletes and it was an important finding also that as the professionalism and ability of the athlete increased, the less moral competent he or she was. In our study, sample of players were selected based on their ability and competence. As is stressed also before (Sagar, 2009) young elite athletes typically compete in the public arena and their performances are regularly evaluated by selectors (judges) and public. Therefore, there might be important links between both studies.

Finally, regarding the relationship between fair play and fear of failure/achievement need, the player's aggressive behaviors towards himself was found to play a mediating role. This is also very interesting as one's aggressive behavior towards himself might be a result of devaluing himself, depressive personal qualities, harsh judgment of oneself, having no pity for oneself, no self-respect or less self-esteem...etc. In terms of the relationship becoming significant, this might mean that the above personal characteristics might be more at play in terms of blocking one's fair play behaviors when combined with fear of failure. In line with our finding, Ryska (2003) claimed that sports players' specific behaviors (other than competitiveness) are more apt to be influenced by an athlete being ego or task involved in his or her motivation. Accordingly, in his study, he came up with the following finding: Athletes participating in sport for intrinsic reasons exhibited greater sportsmanship behaviors compared to those who endorsed extrinsic reasons (for similar results also see Tod and Hodge, 2002). In a study carried out with Turkish Elite volleyball players, Bayraktar and Sunay (2007) have found that professional involved in volleyball was motivated more by "increasing financial income" by male players, as compared to female players who chose the profession more for "loving it". In addition, there were other reasons outlined for both sexes such as: To be a good sports player, to be a good coach, to make friends more easily, to be healthy and to be a team with friends. In relation to these, Ryska (2003) further argues that the underlying relationship between the satisfaction of specific psychological needs and the development of certain prosocial

attitudes (sportsmanship per se) still remains unclear. Our study might be important in terms of offering roles of some possible personal variables at this point.

## 5. Conclusion

This study is important regarding its sample characteristics. First of all, it has been argued elsewhere that pediatric sport research is still not clear with respect to how athlete's participation goals affect their sportsmanship behaviors in relation to competitiveness and achievement goal perspectives (Ryska, 2003). Our study reveals important findings especially concerning variables that might be of interest in explaining or understanding further the sportsmanship/fairplay behaviors in young athletes.

Regarding fear of failure which was an important variable explored in our study, as Hatzigeorgiadis and Biddle (2008) argue strongly, at a personal level, athletes should find ways to understand that anxiety symptoms are normal reactions to competition and in addition, especially for young players, coaches should help towards their personal awareness regarding negative self-talk, goal-performance discrepancies...etc. In addition, fear of failure has been strongly argued to be a less known variable in the sports domain especially concerning youth sport context (Sagar, 2009) and that by reducing children's fear of failure, psychologists and coaches are said to help enhance their performance, including their well-being and social development which are said to be also related with participation in sports, self-esteem (Bowker, 2006) and also school achievement (Fox, et al., 2010).

In addition, to increase both performance and fairplay factors in a team, our study offers findings which might be of strong relevance for the coaches to understand factors that contribute to team unity and thus find ways for improving that (Aghazadeh and Kyei, 2009). This is crucial especially for soccer which is said to be one of the highest interdependent sports that require high task cohesion for success and that leaders of those teams play a very vital role in creating and maintaining that cohesion (Murray, 2006).

As for the dichotomous discussion related with fear of failure vs. goal theories, although we did not measure whole or any part of mastery or ego-orientation to performance, our results can be evaluated more from the dispositional perspective which is represented by the fear of failure dimension in sports behavior which was found to carry a causal quality in some of the major sports studies (see Conroy and Elliot, 2004).

Finally, beyond limitations of our study which are to be mentioned below, our study is important

also for the fact that it relies on field observation which is said to be rare in sport psychology literature (Hatzigeorgiadis and Biddle, 2008).

## 6. Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

Given the observational nature of our study, we cannot deduct any directionality between the variables. And given the fact that the observations were carried out only for 3 days, more sample behaviors would be good to collect if observers had more time. And, although the observers tried to catch all the behaviors in the study, it was not easy to capture all behavioral data as the games were fast and forward. Regarding the age group, none of these findings can be generalized to other age groups no matter how important the variables are to sports performance and player's well-being and motivation. It has already been discussed strongly that conceptual models that were developed for a specific age group should not be generalized to be applicable to other age groups (Eys, Loughheed, Bray, and Carron, 2009). And, our study only involved male participants so our findings cannot be generalized to both sexes.

Future research should definitely continue to explore personal and team related issues and their relationships in sports with larger sample sizes and groups including those from different sport types and different cultures.

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