

Psychological profile of young footballers depending on playing role

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Abstract:

Problem statement. Empirical data confirm that psychological factors are an integral part of the footballer player's talent model. There is insufficient scientific development of approaches to the inclusion of psychological characteristics in the selection process of young football players. The purpose of the study is to identify the psychological profile of young football players depending on their playing role. **Material and Methods:** The study involved 76 athletes aged 13 to 15 years old at the stage of preliminary basic training. A number of standardized psychodiagnostic methods were applied. **Results:** The video analysis of the competitive activity of young football players allowed systematizing and performing a qualitative analysis of the player technical and tactical actions, determining their effectiveness by game role and the effectiveness of team interaction. Comparison of psychological indicators (cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety and self-confidence) between players of the first and second teams within each playing role allowed to determine the statistically significant differences in the athlete's psychological profile depending on the participation in the main or reserve team. The use of psychological methods in the structure of the study made it possible to identify the relationship between technical and tactical game efficiency and psychological characteristics of young football players depending on their playing role. Clustering analysis selected three types of player game profiles, among which potential leaders were identified by the set of technical-tactical and psychological characteristics. The constructed clusters allow the coaching staff to understand the specifics of the game profiles of each football player, adapt training loads, and also consider psychological and motivational features when making a final decision on selection. After the formation of individual player profiles and their clustering, a final multi-attribute assessment of candidates for the team was carried out using a multi-criteria decision making method VIKOR. **Conclusion:** Individual selection of players for the main team should consider not only the level of skill, but also psychological variables: cognitive anxiety (16–23 scores), somatic anxiety (15–18 scores), self-confidence (>26 scores), predominance of task orientation, high level of intrinsic motivation (≥5.5 scores).

Key Words: cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, self-confidence, task orientation, ego-orientation.

Introduction

In modern football, the athlete's psychological characteristics play an equally important role as physical training and technical skill (Lisenchuk, et al., 2025). Empirical data confirm that psychological factors are an integral part of the football player's talent model. Successful players demonstrate not only a high level of technical & tactical skills, but also the ability to emotional self-regulation, strong-willed qualities, resistance to pressure and intrinsic motivation (Oguntuase & Sun, 2022).

Scientists have identified some individual psychological differences between football players of different playing roles (Pshenychna, et al., 2019). Spielmann, et al. (2024), noted that goalkeepers are characterized by high concentration of attention, self-control in critical situations, leadership qualities and communication, speed of decision-making, responsibility for the result. Kristjánsdóttir, et al. (2019), identified the following characteristics of defenders: self-confidence, determination in single combat, endurance and readiness for high loads, strategic thinking, team interaction. Bonetti, et al. (2025), identified the characteristics of defensive midfielders: high concentration of attention, speed of decision-making, resistance to stress, responsibility for the balance between attack and defense; central attacking midfielders: creativity and unconventional thinking, quick decision-making, emotional endurance, high responsibility for attacks; wing midfielders: determination in attack, self-confidence in one-on-one play, flexibility in decision-making. A study conducted by Spanish researches Álvarez-Kurogi et al. (2019) confirms the existence of statistically significant differences in the psychological characteristics of young futsal players aged 16 and 19 according to their role. In

particular, goalkeepers demonstrated the highest levels of stress resistance, self-confidence and concentration, which is explained by the specifics of their functions related to responsibility for the result and the need to make decisions in stressful situations. On the other hand, forward players showed a lower level of self-confidence and control over emotions.

Analysis of cognitive and psychological characteristics of elite football players allowed us to identify psychological patterns associated with high sports performance. According to the results of the study by Bonetti et al. (2025), top-level players demonstrate higher concentration of attention, make faster decisions, have a high level of emotional stability, and cope better with stress compared to the general population.

In the work of Holt and Dunn (2004), the importance of such qualities as discipline, motivation for achievement, concentration of attention, psychological resilience and endurance was emphasized. It is these characteristics, according to the results of comparative analysis, that most clearly differentiate players who achieve high results from less successful athletes. According to the concept of identifying sports talent by Baker, et al. (2020), selection should be oriented not only to the current level of preparedness, but also to prognostic markers of development, in particular psychological resources. The works of Junge, et al. (2000) as well as MacNamara, et al. (2010), emphasize that psychological resilience, emotional regulation and self-control are critically important for the transition from potential to the realization of athlete's capabilities. In European football academies, multidisciplinary approaches are increasingly being implemented, which combine the assessment of technical actions, data analytics, psychodiagnostics and coaching judgment (Sarmiento, et al., 2018; Saward, et al., 2020; Barraclough, et al., 2025). The researchers identified the motivational component of the coach's personality; also the organizational and communication skills as the components of their pedagogical mastery; professionally important personality traits of coaches that determine the individual style of their activities; data from the analysis of the degree of formation of professional burnout of coaches (Voronova, et al., 2021). Against the background of these trends, the training practice of young football players demonstrates the fragmentation of the use of psychological assessment in selection.

The relevance of the study is due to the insufficient scientific development of approaches to including psychological characteristics in the selection process of young football players. The significance of the selection process in the context of long-term training of young football players is explained by the need to minimize errors in making decisions about the prospects of a young football player and create prerequisites for the individual development of each player.

The purpose of the study is to identify the psychological profile of young football players depending on their playing role.

Material & Methods

Participants:

The study was conducted from 2021 to 2025 based on Kyiv Children-Youth School No 15.

The study involved 76 athletes aged 13 to 15 years old at the stage of preliminary basic training:

- 40 football players born in 2010 (13-14 years old):

1st team (main) – 19 footballers: 3 forwards; 5 midfielders; 9 defenders; 2 goalkeepers;

2nd team (reserve) – 21 footballers: 5 forwards; 5 midfielders; 9 defenders; 2 goalkeepers.

- 36 football players born in 2009 (14-15 years old):

1st team – 22 footballers: 4 forwards; 7 midfielders; 10 defenders; 2 goalkeepers;

2nd team – 14 footballers: 2 forwards; 5 midfielders; 5 defenders; 2 goalkeepers.

During the assessment, adolescents and their parents were informed about the study and asked to provide written consent to participate. The study received an approval from the ethics committee at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University (Romaniuk, 2024).

Methods Research Design

The video analysis of the competitive activity of young football players was conducted in 2022-2023:

- U14 – 1st team – All-Ukrainian United Tournament "DUFLU Cup" of Ukrainian Youth Football League;
- U15 – 1st team – All-Ukrainian United Tournament "DUFLU Cup".

2023-2024:

- U15 – 1st team – Ukrainian Championship, Higher League Group I;
- U15 – 2nd team – Kyiv Championship Higher League;
- U16 – 1st team – Ukrainian Championship, Higher League Group I;
- U16 – 2nd team – Kyiv Championship Higher League.

Video analysis was carried out using the specialized LongoMatch program, which allowed systematizing and performing a qualitative analysis of the technical and tactical actions of the players, determining their effectiveness by game role and the effectiveness of team interaction. The LongoMatch program provided the

opportunity to: tag key moments of the match (kicks, passes, duels, ball losses, tackles, etc.); analyze the tactical location of players in different game situations; assess the effectiveness of the players' actions depending on their position on the field; create video clips with key episodes for further analysis; export statistical data for comparison and assessment of player performance.

A number of standardized psychodiagnostic methods were applied:

- The Illinois Self-Evaluation Questionnaire (ISEQ) was used to assess the level of anxiety and confidence of an athlete before competitions. It allow us to identify three main indicators: cognitive situational anxiety, somatic situational anxiety, and self-confidence (Duffy & Hinwood, 1997).
- The Sport Competition Anxiety Test (SCAT) was used to assess the athlete's level of anxiety in competitive situations. The test determines how prone an athlete is to anxiety, nervousness, and stress during competition. The SCAT assessed an athlete's personal anxiety before competition and identified athletes who may need additional psychological training to reduce anxiety. (Potgieter, 2009).
- The Task and Ego Orientation in Sports Questionnaire (TEOSQ) was used to determine the dominant motivational orientation of an athlete (Dagsdóttir, et al., 2023). High scores on the TASK scale indicate a strong focus on self-improvement, developing one's own skills and achieving mastery, while high scores on the EGO scale characterize an athlete for whom winning, comparing oneself with others and focusing on external criteria for success are priorities. Analysis of the results obtained allows us to determine the dominant type of motivation of an athlete in sports activities.
- Sports Motivation Scale (SMS-28) was used to assess the motivational factors that motivate athletes to participate in sports activities. Its theoretical basis is the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (2000).

Amotivation is characterized by a complete lack of motivational drive: the individual does not realize the meaning of participating in sports activities and does not feel control over its results. External Regulation is based on the desire to obtain external reward or avoid punishment, while Introjected Regulation indicates internal pressure and the desire to avoid guilt or maintain self-esteem. Identified Regulation indicates a deeper internalization, when the person recognizes the personal value of the sports activity in achieving meaningful goals.

Three subtypes of intrinsic motivation, which are the highest degree of autonomy in the motivational continuum, reflect the hedonic and cognitive satisfaction from sports activities: Intrinsic Motivation to Know indicates the pleasure of the learning process; Intrinsic Motivation to Accomplish – the pleasure of overcoming difficulties and achieving mastery; Intrinsic Motivation to Experience Stimulation – the emotional and sensory experiences that arise during the activity. Athletes rate each statement on a Likert scale, usually from 1 (does not correspond at all) to 7 (completely corresponds), which allows to obtain a differentiated motivational profile.

Statistical analysis

The following methods of mathematical statistics were used: descriptive statistics; Shapiro-Wilk test for normality, U-Mann-Whitney test; correlation matrix analysis, [cluster analysis](#) by Ward's criterion and K-means methods, decision-making methods: AHP (Analytic Hierarchy Process) and VIKOR (Vise Kriterijumska Optimizacija I Kompromisno Resenje) method. The obtained data were processed using Statistica Version 14.0.1.25 (Copyright 1984-2020 TIBCO Software Inc.).

Results

A comprehensive comparison of the psychological profile of players (born in 2010) of the main (1st team) and reserve (2nd team) youth football teams in the U-15 age category was conducted. The results showed that athletes from the 1st and 2nd teams generally demonstrated a psychological profile dominated by a high level of self-confidence. In the 1st team, self-confidence has average values: $M = 26.8$; $SD = 3.88$, in the 2nd – $M = 25.5$; $SD = 2.80$.

A particularly high level of confidence is recorded among forwards and defenders, which suggests that these roles unite the most psychologically stable players.

Comparison of psychological characteristics of players born in 2009 which compete in the 1st and 2nd teams allowed to identify common features and differences in the indicators of cognitive and somatic anxiety and self-confidence (see Table 1).

The Shapiro-Wilk W test was used in testing for normality. As the W statistics were not significant for cognitive anxiety – $W = 0.949$; $p = 0.308$ and somatic anxiety – $W = 0.964$; $p = 0.577$, the hypothesis that the respective distributions were normal should be approved. As the Shapiro-Wilk test was significant for self-confidence: $W = 0.888$; $p = 0.01$, the hypothesis that the respective distribution was normal should be rejected. So, considering the non-normal data distribution and the limited volume of samples in individual subgroups by role, it was decided to use nonparametric Mann-Whitney U-test for two-group comparisons.

Table 1. Mean scores $\pm$ standard deviations (M $\pm$ SD) of footballers' psychological indicators of the 1st and 2nd teams (born in 2009) by playing roles (n=36)

Role	Cognitive anxiety		Somatic anxiety		Self-confidence	
	1st team	2nd team	1st team	2nd team	1st team	2nd team
<u>Forwards</u>	22.2 $\pm$ 3.03	17.5 $\pm$ 0.71	17.6 $\pm$ 5.13	13.0 $\pm$ 0.00	26.0 $\pm$ 2.00	25.0 $\pm$ 1.41
<u>Midfielders</u>	24.6 $\pm$ 2.88	22.0 $\pm$ 4.69	16.2 $\pm$ 2.17	13.4 $\pm$ 3.29	24.8 $\pm$ 2.59	24.6 $\pm$ 2.79
<u>Defenders</u>	22.7 $\pm$ 3.35	19.2 $\pm$ 2.39	16.1 $\pm$ 2.67	13.8 $\pm$ 2.17	25.8 $\pm$ 3.70	26.2 $\pm$ 3.27
<u>Goalkeepers</u>	22.5 $\pm$ 9.19	11.0 $\pm$ 0.00	18.0 $\pm$ 4.24	17.0 $\pm$ 0.00	25.0 $\pm$ 0.00	25.0 $\pm$ 0.00

Comparison of psychological indicators (cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety and self-confidence) between players of the first and second teams within each playing role allowed us to determine the statistically significant differences in the athlete's psychological profile depending on the participation in the main or reserve team. Only the level of self-confidence in the group of defenders demonstrated a statistically significant difference between players of the first and second teams. According to the results of the Mann-Whitney test, the value $U = 69.0$ was obtained at $p = 0.0116$, which indicates a significant difference between the 1st and 2nd teams. In the remaining roles, no statistically significant differences were found. Despite the fact that for cognitive anxiety in defenders there was a tendency to difference – $U = 61.0$; $p = 0.0756$, it did not reach a statistically significant level.

The results indicate a relative psychological similarity of most roles between the 1st and 2nd teams according to the obtained characteristics, with the exception of the self-confidence indicator in the defenders' group. When forming the composition of a football team for participation in responsible tournaments, it is advisable to give preference to players with a stable somatic profile (15–18 scores), low or moderate cognitive anxiety (16–23 scores) and a high level of self-confidence (from 26 scores and above).

The results of the assessing the athlete's competitive anxiety level according to the SCAT test indicated, that athletes of the 1st team (born in 2010) had an average SCAT score of 17.6 ± 3.30 , which is on the border between low and medium anxiety levels; the 2nd team clearly falls within the medium level – 19.0 ± 3.83 .

Analysis of the obtained data taking into account the playing role in the 1st and 2nd teams, the goalkeepers of the 2nd team demonstrated the most pronounced level of anxiety: the average SCAT score was 23.5 (SD = 4.95), which corresponds to the upper limit of the average level and is close to high. In contrast, the goalkeepers of the 1st team had significantly lower scores – 16.0 (SD = 5.66), indicating a low level of anxiety. An increase in anxiety was also observed among the defenders in the 2nd team: the average score was 19.11 (SD = 4.70) versus 16.67 (SD = 2.40) in the 1st team. As for the midfielders, the anxiety indicators were approximately the same: 18.00 (SD = 4.00) in the first team and 18.40 (SD = 2.88) in the second one. It is worth noting the relative psychological stability of players in this role, regardless of the composition of the team.

A similar trend is observed among forwards: 17.33 (SD = 3.51) in the first team and 17.60 (SD = 3.05) in the second. Both indicators correspond to the lower limit of the average level of anxiety. The level of anxiety among goalkeepers of the second team is of greatest concern, which requires additional psychological support for athletes. In the process of selecting players for the main team, it is advisable to give preference to those who demonstrate a low or moderate level of anxiety (up to 20–21 scores).

We analyzed the results of the competitive anxiety test (SCAT) among young football players of the age category born in 2009 ($n = 36$). The assessment was carried out in terms of playing roles and depending on whether the players belonged to the main (1st team) or reserve (2nd team) team. Statistical characteristics indicate a number of role-specific features.

The most pronounced difference was found among goalkeepers. The players of the 1st team had an average SCAT score of 15.0 (SD = 4.24), which corresponds to a low level of anxiety, while the goalkeepers of the 2nd team had an average score of 22.0 (SD = 1.41) — at the upper limit of the average level. The players of the 2nd team showed emotional tension and an insufficient level of psychological preparedness. We obtained similar results among the defenders, so in the first team the average anxiety score was 15.78 (SD = 2.86), and in the second – 19.00 (SD = 4.30). Both groups are within the average level, but the indicators of the 2nd team are higher because the athletes have low adaptation to the competitive load. The forwards demonstrated a relatively similar level of anxiety, so in the 1st team – 17.00 (SD = 5.10), in the 2nd team – 15.00 (SD = 4.24). Both values are on the border between low and medium levels of anxiety, so the athletes are emotionally balanced. In the group of midfielders, the level of anxiety also varied slightly between the groups, so 1st team – 16.14 (SD = 3.58), 2nd team – 17.20 (SD = 4.92).

In athletes of 2nd team (see Fig. 1) there is a gradual increase in the level of anxiety from the role of forwards to goalkeepers, with particularly high indicators in goalkeepers (23.5 scores), which significantly exceeds the corresponding indicator of 1st team (16.0 scores).

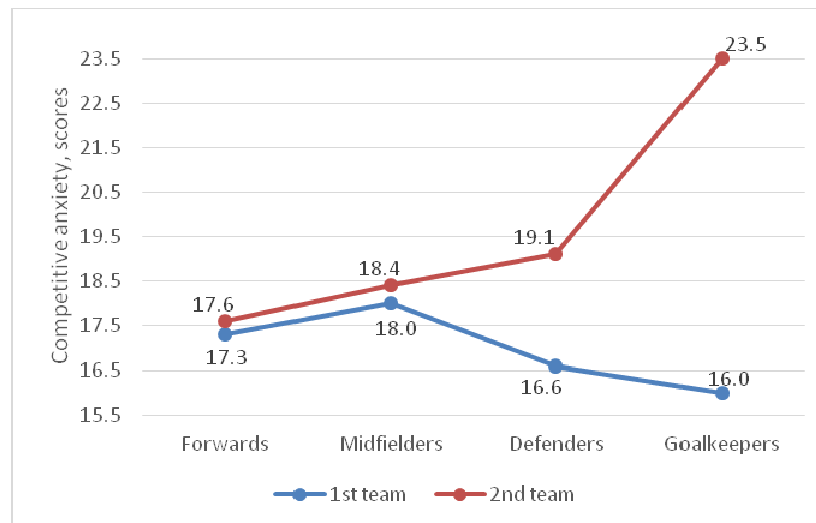


Figure 1. Average values of the anxiety in sports competitions (scores) by playing roles of athletes of the 1st and 2nd teams (born in 2010)

Similarly to the previous age group (born in 2010) (see Fig. 1), in the 2nd team of athletes born in 2009 (see Fig. 2) a clear trend towards increasing anxiety from forwards to goalkeepers is recorded, with a peak value in goalkeepers (22.0 scores).

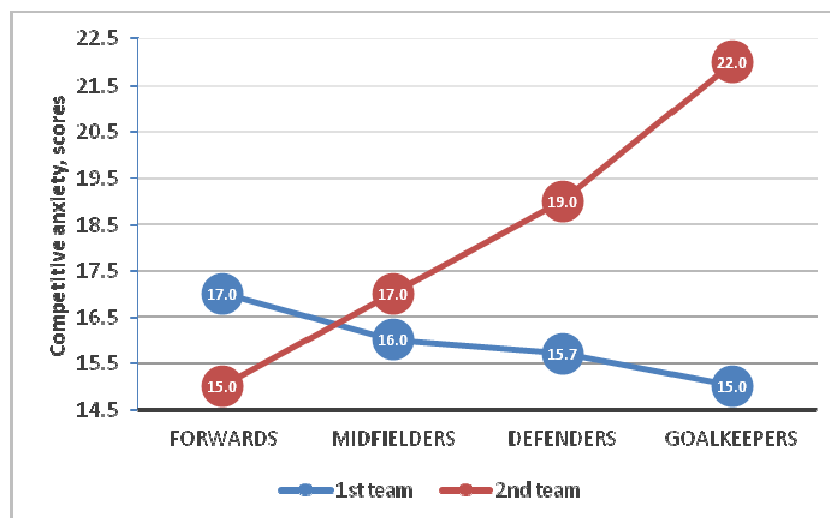


Figure 2. Average values of anxiety level in sports competitions (scores) by playing roles of athletes of the 1st and 2nd teams (born in 2009, n=36).

While in athletes of the 1st team, anxiety fluctuations are less pronounced, with a tendency to decrease in the positions of defender and goalkeeper. Athletes of the 1st team demonstrate a decrease in anxiety level from forwards (17.0 scores) to goalkeepers (15.0 scores).

Athletes of the 1st team of both age groups (2009/2010) demonstrate low anxiety indicators. Goalkeepers of the 2nd team are characterized by a high level of anxiety (22 scores) among all playing roles.

We used a standardized psychological questionnaire to assess the motivational orientation of athletes (TEOSQ), where

Task orientation is intrinsic motivation, the desire for improvement, self-growth, and the value of effort (Dagsdóttir et al., 2023). Athletes in the 1st team have a balanced and high level of both ego-orientation and task orientation (see Fig. 3).

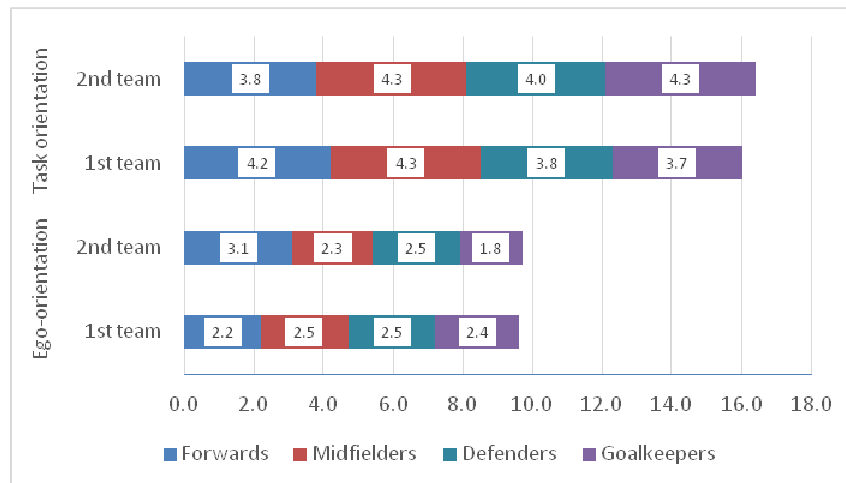


Figure 3. Average levels of ego-orientation and task orientation of athletes of the 1st and 2nd teams (born in 2010), scores (n= 40).

Athletes of the 2nd team have a predominance of task orientation over ego-orientation. Athletes of the 2nd team are less self-confident than athletes of the 1st team. Goalkeepers of the 2nd team have the lowest ego-orientation indicators (1.8 scores). According to the results of the assessment of the motivational orientation of athletes born in 2010, players were identified who demonstrated an optimal combination of high task orientation (≥ 4.3 scores) and a sufficient level of ego-orientation (≥ 2.5 scores), they are psychologically prepared for competitive activity due to stable internal motivation and self-confidence.

Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (ρ) was used to test hypotheses about the existence of relationships between technical-tactical and psychological indicators.

Figure 4 presents a graphical interpretation of statistically significant correlations ($p < 0.05$) between technical-tactical and psychological indicators in defenders born in 2009-2010 ($n = 26$). A strong positive relationship was found between long forward passes and the accuracy of long passes ($\rho = 0.799$; $p < 0.001$), which is quite logical, since an increase in the number of such actions is often accompanied by an increase in their effectiveness.

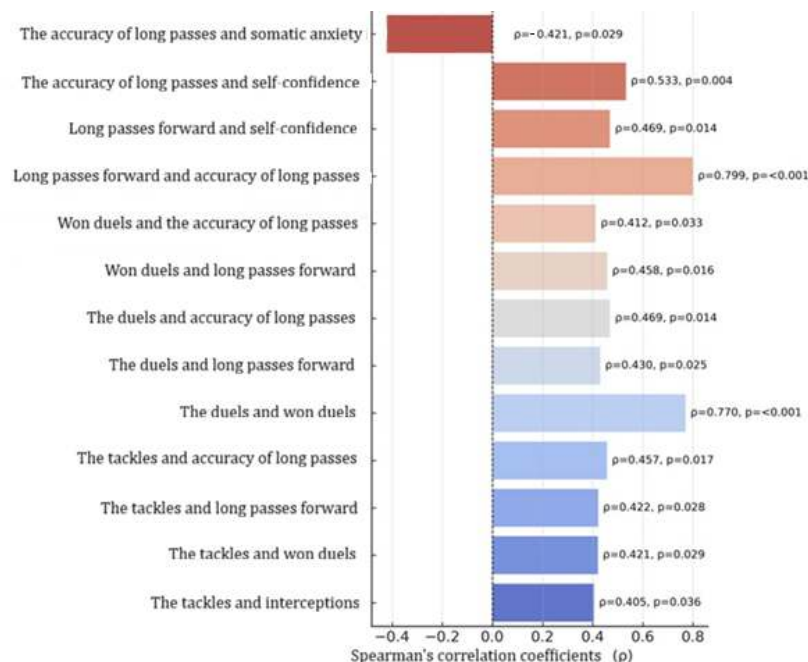


Figure 4. Spearman correlation coefficients between technical-tactical and psychological indicators in defenders ($n = 26$, born in 2009/2010)

There is also a strong correlation between the number of duels and won duels ($\rho = 0.770$; $p < 0.001$), which indicates the effectiveness of the player's actions in the fight. It is the positive correlations between technical indicators (tackles, passes, interceptions) and self-confidence ($\rho = 0.469$ – 0.533), which may indicate the psychological stability of defenders, capable of accurately performing actions under pressure. At the same time, a negative relationship was found between the accuracy of passes and somatic anxiety ($\rho = -0.420$; $p = 0.029$), which confirms the hypothesis about the influence of the emotional state on the quality of decision-making in the game.

In general, the graph visually demonstrates that high technical and tactical indicators in defenders are associated with both physical activity (duels, tackles) and psychological characteristics, in particular the level of confidence and lack of anxiety.

The purpose of the cluster analysis was to identify groups of football players similar in terms of game and psychological characteristics. Figure 5 presents the results of cluster analysis of midfielders ($n = 10$), performed by the hierarchical clustering method using the Ward's criterion and Euclidean distance.

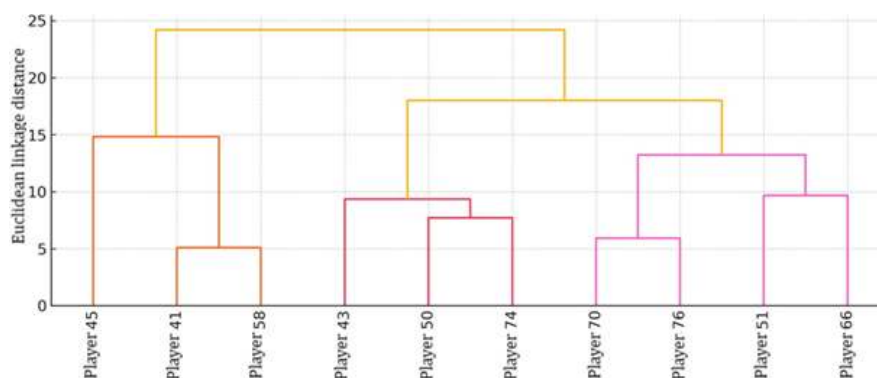


Figure 5. Tree diagram as a result of cluster analysis of midfielders' playing efficiency ($n = 10$).

According to the dendrogram, the players were grouped into three main clusters: Cluster 1 (Players No. 41, No. 45, No. 58) characterized by high values of progressive passes, self-confidence, as well as moderate motivational orientation, they are the most active in constructive actions and demonstrate a high level of involvement in the attacking phase.

Cluster 2 (Players No. 43, No. 51, No. 70, No. 74, No. 76) demonstrate lower technical indicators (fewer passes, tackles, goal opportunities) and have higher anxiety indicators. Athletes need psychological support or an individual approach in the training process.

Cluster 3 (Players No. 50, No. 66) occupy an intermediate position, the athletes are stable in indicators, with unexpressed anxiety and a fairly high task orientation. We can state that the players have potential.

Based on previously collected factual data on the technical-tactical, psychological and motivational characteristics of forwards of the U15 age category, a multivariate statistical analysis was carried out using clustering K-means methods. It allowed grouping football players according to the similarity of multifactor profiles. The optimal number of clusters for the sample was set as three, which corresponds to the empirical division of typical game models of forwards.

As a result of cluster analysis, players were divided into three groups, each of which has similar values key features. In particular:

Cluster 1 united a player with high values of technical performance (strikes, realization of opportunities), a moderate level of anxiety and strong motivation to achieve. This may indicate a type of forward with an orientation to completing attacks.

Cluster 2 includes two players who have average values for most indicators, a low level of realization of opportunities, but noticeable fluctuations in emotional stability. Their profile may correspond to players who are still forming the performance stability.

Cluster 3 contains one player with the highest AHP (Analytic Hierarchy Process) index (0.8362), which indicates a high subjective weight of his characteristics from the score of view of expert assessment. His profile is distinguished by sufficiently high game performance and significant cognitive activity, which indicates a potential leader of the group.

The constructed clusters allow the coaching staff to understand the specifics of the game profiles of each football player, adapt training loads, and also take into account psychological and motivational features when making a final decision on selection. The use of cluster analysis at this stage serves as an effective tool for profiling players and provides preparation for the final stage – multi-criteria ranking according to the VIKOR method (Opricovic & Tzeng, 2008). The VIKOR method is a multi-criteria decision making (MCDM) method. After the formation of individual player profiles and their clustering, a final multi-attribute assessment of

candidates for the team was carried out using the VIKOR method. This method is based on the principle of compromise ranking, i.e. determining the alternatives that are closest to the ideal solution, taking into account priorities according to many criteria.

The calculation took into account the full set of technical-tactical, psychological and motivational characteristics of football players, previously standardized and reduced to a unified scale. The VIKOR method allowed to carry out an objective integral ranking of young football players based on a multifactorial assessment, consistent with the priorities of the football club. This result can be used in combination with the results of cluster analysis and expert discussion at the final stage – making a final decision on the composition of the team. The psychological characteristics of the players according to the results of the Illinois Self-Assessment Questionnaire indicate the dominance of a high level of self-confidence in both teams. At the same time, the players of the 2nd team had higher cognitive anxiety (71% of cases of high level), which indicates low adaptation to competitive stress. Goalkeepers of the 2nd team in both age groups revealed high levels of competitive anxiety according to the SCAT scale, which requires further psychological correction.

The motivational profile of the athletes indicates the dominance of task orientation and a high level of intrinsic motivation. At the same time, low indicators of ego-orientation were recorded in the 2nd team, and the players need to develop self-confidence.

The level of self-confidence is the most stable variable in both age categories. In the U-15 team (born in 2009), the players of the main team demonstrated an average score of $M = 26.8$ ($SD = 3.88$), the reserve team – $M = 25.5$ ($SD = 2.80$). A similar trend was recorded in the group born in 2010. A high level of confidence was characteristic of forwards and defenders of both teams. Cognitive anxiety in reserve players is higher compared to the main team. In the 2nd team of U-15, the average value reached $M = 23.0$ ($SD = 3.62$), against $M = 22.3$ ($SD = 4.55$) in the 1st team. In 71% of football players of the 2nd team, this indicator exceeded 25 scores, which indicates insufficient formation of psychological adaptation mechanisms. Somatic anxiety was mainly at an average level. In the 1st team (born in 2009), it was $M = 17.2$ ($SD = 3.21$), in the 2nd team – $M = 16.7$ ($SD = 3.25$). In the 2010 group, 52% of the reserves had an average level, and 48% – low level. However, there is a tendency for this indicator to increase in players without experience of performances at a high level. Goalkeepers of both age groups demonstrate the lowest level of cognitive anxiety in the main team ($M = 18.5$), but the highest – in the reserve team ($M = 23.5$). Goalkeepers of the 2nd team born in 2009 showed SCAT result $M = 22.0$ ($SD = 1.41$), which indicates psychological tension. Motivational orientation according to the TEOSQ scale demonstrated the dominance of task orientation in both teams. Goalkeepers only of the 2nd team in 2010, had a low level of ego-orientation (1.8 scores). Profiles of intrinsic motivation according to the SMS-28 scale were high and homogeneous within each team. In players born in 2010, intrinsic motivation was: cognition – $M = 5.61$, achievement – $M = 5.61$, stimulation – $M = 5.11$, in the 2nd team – 5.59, 5.59 and 5.09 respectively. Identified regulation is stable – $M = 4.50$. Amotivation is low – $M = 2.31$ (1st team) and 2.36 (2nd team).

A statistically significant difference between the main and reserve teams was found only in one role – defenders, where the level of self-confidence was higher in the 1st team ($U = 69.0$; $p = 0.0116$). Other roles demonstrated similar profiles, which may indicate a general internal psychological homogeneity of the team players.

Individual selection of players for the main team should take into account not only the level of skill, but also psychological variables: cognitive anxiety (16–23 scores), somatic anxiety (15–18 scores), self-confidence (26+ scores), predominance of task orientation, high level of intrinsic motivation (≥ 5.5). Correlation analysis established statistically significant relationships between psychological characteristics and game actions, so in defenders, the accuracy of passes is positively correlated with the level of self-confidence ($\rho = 0.533$, $p < 0.05$) and negatively – with somatic anxiety ($\rho = -0.420$, $p < 0.05$). In midfielders, positive relationships were found between progressive passes and task orientation ($\rho = 0.693$, $p < 0.05$), as well as ego-orientation ($\rho = 0.650$, $p < 0.05$). A negative correlation was determined between confidence and competitive anxiety ($\rho = -0.898$, $p < 0.05$).

Discussion

The process of identifying football talents requires not only an analysis of technical-tactical and physical readiness, but also taking into account psychological characteristics that form the basis for the development of an athlete depending on his playing role. The psychological characteristics of football players significantly depend on their position on the field. Forwards tend to have higher levels of motivation and confidence, defenders have better relaxation skills, and midfielders may need additional support in developing psychological skills. Understanding these differences can help coaches develop individual training programs to optimize each player's performance. Psychological qualities are important for a goalkeeper to be successful in football. They affect his ability to react to different game situations and make decisions under pressure. The main psychological qualities of a goalkeeper include stress management and self-confidence. Goalkeepers have the best psychological profile among other positions, which includes high levels of self-confidence and stress management, which allows them to act effectively under high pressure (Álvarez-Kurogi et al., 2019). Attention is also critical for goalkeepers, as it helps them process information quickly and make decisions in dynamic

game situations; reactivity and explosiveness are also important for performing quick and accurate actions (Montesano, 2016). Goalkeepers show higher scores in psychological skills such as coping, concentration, goal preparation, confidence and motivation to achieve (Laws, 2006). Research by Vapayev (2025) showed that there was no significant correlation between factors such as motivation to achieve, anxiety, stress, and responsiveness with penalty saving performance. Spielmann, et al. (2024). found significant differences in agreeableness and neuroticism levels between goalkeepers of different skill levels and gender. Psychological qualities such as stress management, attention, reactivity, and confidence are key to successful goalkeeping. They help goalkeepers to perform effectively under high pressure and make quick decisions. Developing these qualities can significantly improve their performance and overall contribution to the team.

So, the psychological characteristics of football players may vary depending on their playing roles, although research by Baiju (2020) shows that these differences are not always significant. This study did not find significant differences in psychological resilience between defenders, midfielders and strikers. This suggests that psychological resilience may be similar regardless of playing position. Goalkeepers have the best psychological profile, while players in the midfielder and forward positions have lower self-confidence and stress control (Altmann et al., 2024).

Robinson et al. (2024) emphasize that personal factors such as psychological resilience, self-control and positive attitude are fundamental for the formation of a long-term successful career of a football player. Scientists define psychological resilience as one of the most important parameters in the age category, which has prognostic value. Self-control, according to Wolff et al. (2019), significantly distinguishes elite football players from less successful ones, which is confirmed by a high statistical indicator (Bayes factor = 54.99). Positive attitude, according to Towlson et al. (2021), contributes to adaptation to the changing conditions of the training and competition environment.

Cognitive abilities include decision-making ability, cognitive flexibility and self-awareness. According to Robinson et al. (2024), decision-making is one of the three leading characteristics that determine the potential of a player. Altmann et al. (2024) note that cognitive flexibility is a significant predictor of adaptability in conditions of rapidly changing game dynamics. Wixey et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of self-awareness as a factor of reflexive development of players in the process of forming an elite football level.

Self-confidence, according to Towlson et al. (2021), distinguishes players before and after the peak growth period, and is also a key element in assessing the psychological profile of an athlete. The study by Popovych et al. (2023) substantiates that focusing on the development of footballers' emotional intelligence, in particular, of such parameters as self-motivation and empathy can give an essential advantage over competitors. Modern research allows us to distinguish three main categories of psychological qualities: characteristics related to performance, personality factors and cognitive abilities. Each of them has its own significance for effectiveness in specific game roles. Characteristics related to performance include motivation, coping skills and self-confidence.

The conclusions of scientists can be directly applied in the process of selecting young football players. In particular, in the process of preliminary diagnostics and psychological testing, coaches and sports psychologists can identify potentially promising players not only on the basis of technical or physical indicators, but also relying on psychological characteristics that approach the profile of an elite player. This approach allows to reduce the risk of subjectivity in selection and contributes to the formation of balanced teams, where each role is represented by a player with the appropriate psychological potential.

Conclusions

The generalization of the results of empirical research allows us to clearly identify key psychological characteristics that are predictive of achieving sporting success in youth football. Despite different methodological approaches (interviews, psychometric questionnaires, instrumental measurements), all researchers agree that the psychological component is no less important than physical or technical training. The use of psychological methods in the structure of the study made it possible to identify the relationship between technical and tactical game efficiency and psychological characteristics of young football players depending on their playing role.

Clustering and multivariate analysis methods (K-means, VIKOR) made it possible to identify three types of player game profiles, among which potential leaders were identified by the set of technical-tactical and psychological characteristics. The integration of the results of psychological testing and the assessment of game efficiency allows not only to objectively determine the level of readiness of football players, but also to form personalized development trajectories for each athlete.

The obtained data have high practical value for the coaching staff and can be used to form a balanced, psychologically stable and technically effective team composition. So, individual selection of players for the main team should take into account not only the level of skill, but also psychological variables: cognitive anxiety (16–23 scores), somatic anxiety (15–18 scores), self-confidence (26+ scores), predominance of task orientation, high level of intrinsic motivation (≥ 5.5).

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work the authors didn't use of AI in the writing of the article.

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