

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Is one goal enough? Male strikers' views on their post-goal motivation level

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Abstract

The current study aimed to reveal the opinions influencing the post-goal motivation levels of male strikers who have played in various football clubs in the Turkish Professional Football League. Among the basic qualitative research designs, one of the qualitative research methodologies was employed to conduct this study. The study group consisted of 10 Turkish Professional Football League footballers who were playing professional football for many years. The study data were collected by a semi-structured interview form and analyzed by content analysis. The findings of the data analyzed are described in the discussion and conclusion sections. It is concluded that when the strikers scored the game's first goal, they used it wisely, conforming to the game strategy, without losing their desire and motivation to score new goals. It is generally believed, that physical, technical and tactical training of the strikers during the annual training schedule improves their mental toughness and effectiveness in maintaining self-motivation. Hence, it would be important for the Turkish Football Federation to engage in a long-term collaboration process with sports psychologists, football coaches and professional club managers to ensure the sustainability of the male strikers' motivation.

Keywords

Football; Qualitative research; Football goal; Football match

1. Introduction

This study, being qualitative in nature, aimed to explore the different perspectives of forwards playing in the Turkish Professional Football League revealing their opinions affecting their motivational contexts after goals. Football is one of the most popular games globally. Improved tactical thinking and technical competence, and elevated physical demands are the key requirements of current football sports [1]. An explicit increase in studies focusing specifically on football over the last two decades has been observed [2]. These studies indicate that the psychological dimension of football and its physical extent are key factors. Hence the physical and psychological factors should be evaluated jointly for consistent performance [3]. Mental, psychological and social attributes should be enhanced besides physical fitness and physiological competence for ideal performance in football [4]. Professional football players experience significant stress because they constantly focus on professional and personal development throughout the season. This can affect both their psychology and performance. A study of elite level football players revealed that four out of ten players were suffering from psychological problems [5].

Many psychological factors such as the pressure of the audience, teammates, opposing team, family, coach and manager affect the performance of a football player throughout the match in the ground. For example, constantly changing

the coaches of professional football players foster a changing normative environment [5]. Besides football players, other key decision-makers at football clubs, including managers, coaches, sports directors and presidents, may have to perform under extreme pressure and highly volatile, complex and even chaotic circumstances. Besides the economic dimension of football and the stress triggered by external sources, the pressure to score goals for absolute victory can also influence the performance of football players [6, 7]. These risks can destroy the team spirit negatively impacting the match result. However, the unintended consequences of these factors can be avoided by precautionary measures and cooperation with sport psychologists [8]. A negative correlation exists between perceived stress and factors determining players' competitiveness levels and influencing psychological well-being [9]. In this context, even though football players are ready for these situations, these external factors can affect the players' attention, motivation and concentration [10]. Part of the perceived stress is due to the struggle to achieve their personal and team goals in a normative competitive environment that demands results. A football player should be mentally strong to excel in such a competitive environment. Various elements affect the results in football [5].

Two fundamental principles of a football match are defense and offense. Given that each position requires a different task, the striker—whose key responsibility is to score a goal—is

the most significant member of the offensive line [1]. Performance expectations are higher for strikers than for football players playing in other positions [11]. Hence, strikers should remain motivated and quickly react to shifting circumstances due to their position in football matches. Analysis of the factors affecting the motivation levels of professional strikers is important to prevent the loss of motivation and ensure their sustainability, especially with infrastructural training [12]. The player's mental health is directly related to improvement in mental strength [13]. To overcome the negative situations such as pressure, excessive stress and failure to meet expectations of profession and to ensure the sustainability of favorable conditions, developing the ideal performance scenario for football players is necessary [14–16]. Mental training plays an effective role in the development of ideal performance status [17]. Mental training activities contribute significantly to team sports, especially where complex motor skills and mental issues are involved [18, 19]. This study will help coaches in observing the psychological dimension of performance through this type of training. Therefore, the current study aims to evaluate the post-goal motivation of professional strikers focusing the sustainability of motivation.

2. Materials and methods

Qualitative research method was used in this study. Qualitative research emphasizes the discovery of multiple realities derived from different interpretations. The face-to-face interview method provides in-depth information. In this context, the current study used a face-to-face interview technique with elite male football players [20]. Since the football players have intense training schedules, the day and time of the meeting was decided by the football players.

2.1 Sample

Ten professional strikers playing in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Leagues of Professional Football in Turkey participated in the study. They were high school ($n = 3$) or university ($n = 7$) graduates, ages ranging from 21 to 31 years, and playing experience of 16–24 years. The study used convenience sampling, one of the purposive sampling approaches, to determine the participants. This sampling method typically involves the researcher reaching the participants comfortably regarding time and convenience [19]. The study participants were chosen based on the strikers' active status in the Turkish Professional League and their sports playing experience. Official permission was obtained from the clubs where the players played, and the football players who met the specified criteria were contacted. Football players who were out of the city due to injury or other reasons were not included in the study. The study contents were shared through correspondence with the strikers who agreed to become study participants. They were coded as P1 to P10 to keep their identities confidential rather than using their real names.

2.2 Data collection

Two faculty members who were experts in the field assessed the semi-structured questionnaire, and subsequently,

researchers conducted a preliminary application and finalized the question set. The initial section of the form was used to collect data about the strikers' demographic features. The second part consisted of six queries allowing football players to convey their post-goal motivation. As a result, the current study strived to answer the following questions;

1. Do you set a target for yourself before the match?
2. How do you feel after scoring a goal in a game?
3. What are the elements influencing your request to go to your goal?
4. Do you make an in-seasonal target renewal for yourself after reaching a certain number of goal scores?
5. Do you feel motivated to goal-scoring when you take the field?
6. How do you mentally prepare yourself to improve your performance before and during the competition?

Interview is a data collection technique used in qualitative research [21]. The study utilized a semi-structured interview form as a data collection tool. Before the interview, researchers identified a suitable location and time for each participant, and after describing the research detail, they allowed the participants to sign a voluntary consent form. Each interview lasted 30–45 minutes. A voice recorder was used to document all the interviews, converted the gathered data into written form, and generated a database.

2.3 Analysis

The study employed the content analysis method to assess the research data. The researchers performed the relevant data analyses of being cognizant of its interpretive nature. They also performed a conversion process on interview data, translating it into a written format on the same day. To generate a database, the initial step of the analysis, was obtained by deciphering the data. After converting the data into Word format, it was made ready for detailed analysis by creating a digital copy. A study indicated that addressing all qualitative data analysis is primarily necessary from an inductive and comparative perspective [22]. Hence, researchers evaluated the database holistically. After a general conclusion, the significant points were labeled with the code tags. Four researchers identified similar and different aspects by this procedure. They also consulted the differences and met on common ground. Therefore, similar codes were pooled and grouped to form supporting data for broader information categories namely classes and themes. Finally, these assertions were interrelated and reported as research findings [23].

2.4 Rigor

The current study included direct quotations from the participants' responses to strengthen the validity. It further exemplified data collection, analysis and interpretation sections consistently and precisely to ensure internal validity. Four researchers evaluated the questions and responses from semi-structured interviews. A striker who was not a member of the sample group but met the eligibility requirements for participation was employed in the pilot study to evaluate the validity of the questions. Researchers interviewed the participants at the already decided locations and time to make them feel

comfortable and safe. Participants confirmation was ensured for collected data during the interviews for data accuracy procedure. Researcher notes and data obtained from the interview technique categories and themes should be augmented by literature support and presented with a general scheme [24]. Therefore, results are presented in six domains: Targeting, Motivation Sustainability, Elements Affecting the Request to Go Goal, Target Renewal, Goal-Scoring Motivation, and Performance Improvement. Codes were determined for each domain and presented in figures. The titles and codes were approached by the researchers holistically in the database and after formulating a general opinion, the important points that could have been coded were added with a code label. This process was applied by three researchers and similar and different aspects were identified. The differences were discussed by these researchers and a common point was reached. Similar codes were brought together and grouped to create supporting findings for broader categories of information, namely categories and themes. Finally, these statements were correlated with each other and reported as findings.

3. Results

Include a concise summary of the data presented in all display items (figures and tables). Excessive elaboration of data shown in display items should be avoided. Numerical data should be analyzed using appropriate statistical tests described in the Experimental Design and Statistical Analysis section. Authors must provide detailed information for each statistical test applied. Report exact p values rather than ranges (e.g., $p = 0.048$ rather than $p < 0.05$).

3.1 Domain 1: targeting

In line with the responses to the question “do you set a target for yourself before the match?”, the study found two categories and eight codes under the “target setting” theme (Fig. 1).

The participant views on these topics are as follows:

“I take the field aiming to contribute to team play. I believe that I have to do my best in terms of the match.” (P1, P7, P10)

“I set no target for goal number. It is something to change in the course of the game.” (P9)

On the contrary, P4 and P2 narrated that they take the field by setting a target of scoring a goal before each match.

“I set a target saying that ‘I will score a goal.’ That motivates me before the game.” (P4, P2)

P2 and P8 stated that they were always in the game and active by following the match even when they were substitute players.

“I display better performance when I am a substitute, thinking about what I will do when I enter the game and analyzing the opposing team well while following the game.” (P2, P8)

P6 emphasized that striker’s self-confidence was a critical aspect when taking on the field, and coaches’ leadership qualification would increase the self-reliance of the supporters.

“I consider the instance I get the first ball in the match as a critical moment. Additionally, the bond established between the supporters and coach always motivates me.” (P6)

P3 and P5 mentioned that their dreams of playing in better

football clubs had a motivating factor in their target setting.

“The more goals I score, the better my career is because the team I will play for and the salary I will earn will increase when I transfer.” (P5, P3)

P6, P9 and P10 similarly indicated that the primary factor influencing their objectives was higher economic earnings in the following season.

“My performance in the present year actually determines the amount of money I will earn next year” (P6, P9, P10)

P4, P8 and P9 commented that the quality of the players in the team is the most significant aspect in achieving the targeted goal-scoring.

“If the team is strong, it is easier for me to reach my targets, and thus, I set my targets accordingly.” (P4, P8, P9)

P7 emphasized that being at ease and re-experiencing the same post-goal happiness were the most critical components of his success.

“That feeling of happiness after scoring a goal is my only motivation.” (P7)

3.2 Domain 2: motivation sustainability

Regarding the question “After scoring a goal in a match, do you maintain your motivation as when you started the game?”, the study identified two categories and eight codes under the “motivation sustainability” theme (Fig. 2).

The participants used the following statements on this subject.

“A goal you score early in the game may change the way you play the game in terms of self-confidence.” (P1, P4)

“My motivation and self-confidence rise if I score a goal and get off to a good start.” (P2, P6, P7)

Besides remarks of the other participants, P6 added that he had experienced post-goal demotivation at a younger age since he had already achieved satisfaction early in the match. He asserted that his performance improved, and the number of goals he scored increased after learning that such a mindset was incorrect.

“When I scored a goal in my 20s, I would consider myself to have reached my target since I was inexperienced. But now, I realize that this is not so.” (P6)

Strikers indicated that after gaining the score advantage in the game, they tactically utilized it without losing motivation and the request to go toward new goals.

“I am trying to keep possession of the ball and keep it more in my team.” (P1, P3)

“After scoring the first goal, I try to score as much as I can.” (P4)

Among the participants, P2 emphasized that the injuries he had suffered, the stadium atmosphere, the fans, and the climate conditions influenced motivation sustainability.

“Due to my knee injury, synthetic football field, rough surface, and cold weather influence me mentally, whereas the spectators in the stadium motivate me positively.” (P2)

3.3 Domain 3: elements affecting the request to go goal

Regarding the responses to the question “What are the elements influencing your request to go goal?”, two categories and 14

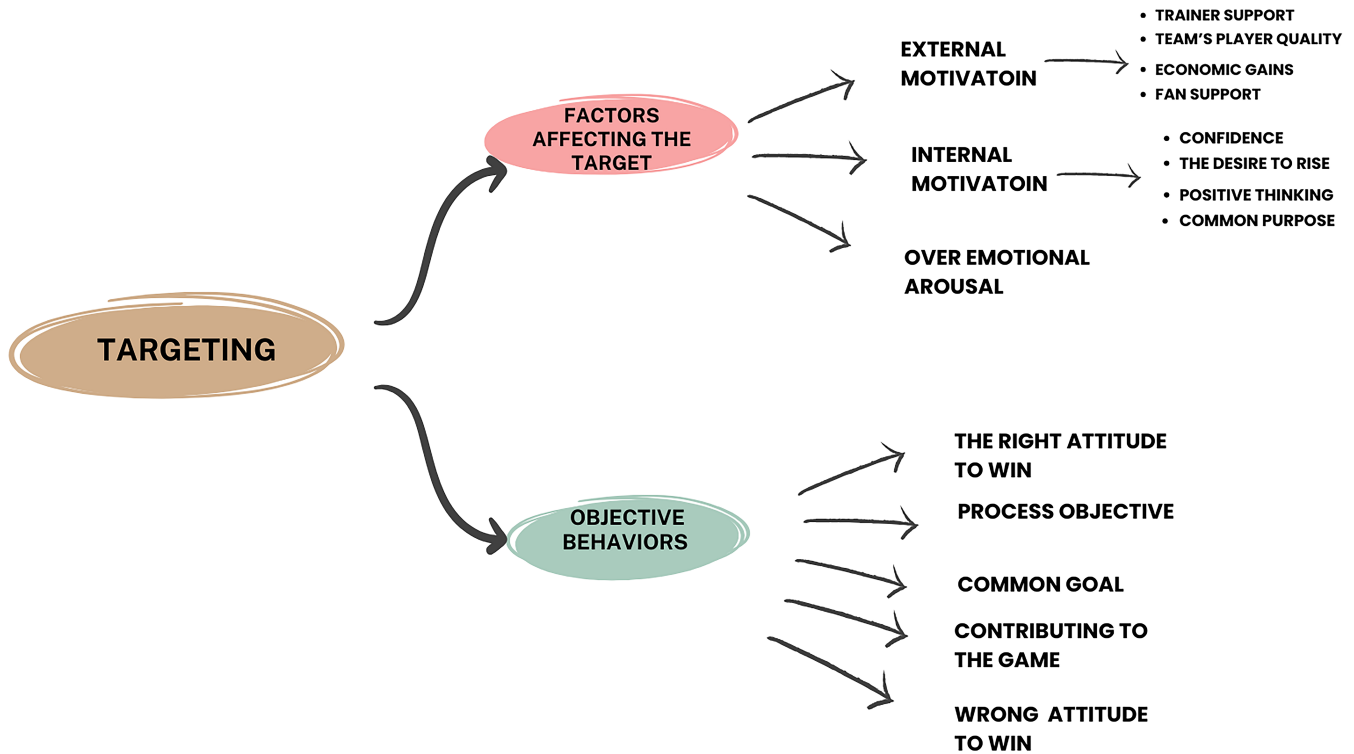


FIGURE 1. Targeting.

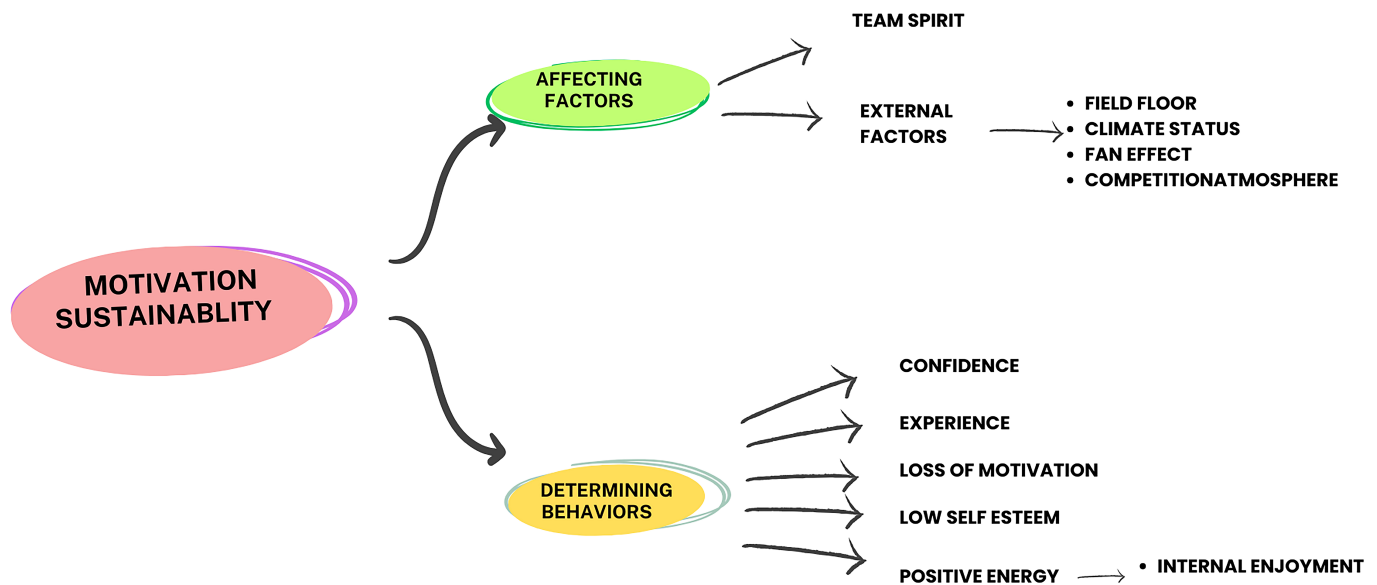


FIGURE 2. Motivation sustainability.

(fourteen) codes under the theme of “elements affecting the request to go goal” have been identified (Fig. 3).

The participants in this category explicitly emphasized a sense of belonging to their club.

“When I feel unable to establish a bond with my club, I cannot promptly perform the task that I was requested to do.” (P8, P9)

Strikers articulated that increased financial gain and better living conditions encourage them for scoring goals.

“Better economic conditions, international transfer, broadcasting my matches on international channels, transfer fees,

and the team you will get transferred to may be among these factors.” (P1, P3, P5, P6, P10)

“First of all, team selection is an important issue before the season. The better the quality of the players, the better you play, and the more you contribute to the game score.” (P1, P5)

P2, P5 and P7 wanted to relive the feeling they experienced after scoring a goal, emphasizing that this feeling positively influenced their goal-scoring motivation.

“I am thrilled by experiencing the feeling of scoring goals and enabling the team to win a game” (P2, P5, P7)

P6 expressed the significance of the experience.

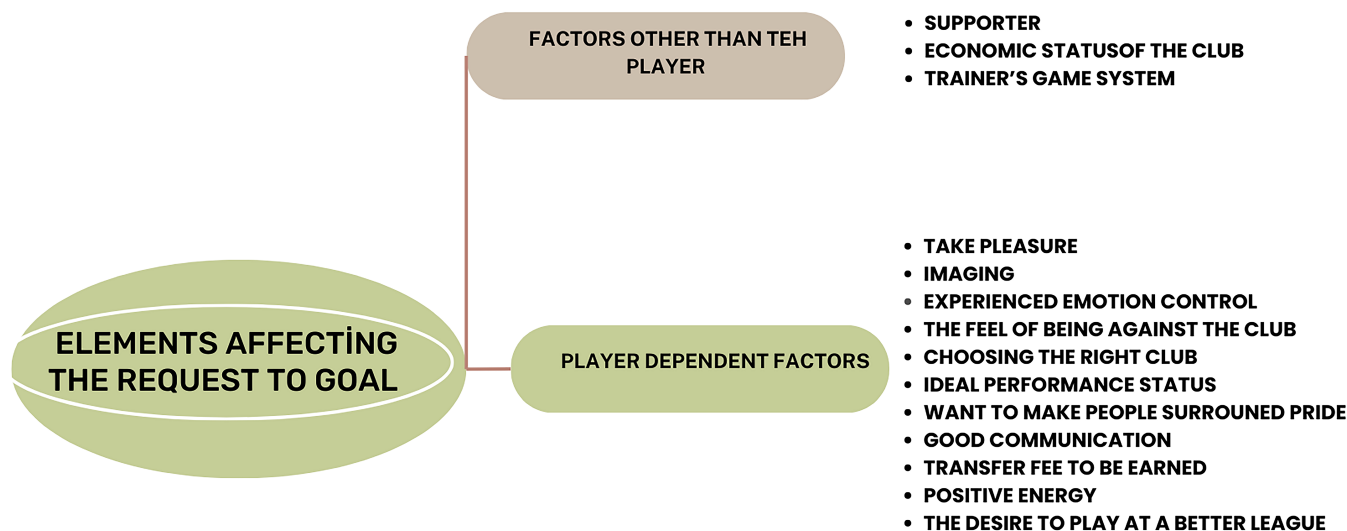


FIGURE 3. Elements affecting the request to go goal.

"I used to be ignorant. I was getting cards as much as I scored, but this state has changed as I gained experience." (P6)

P2 and P3 commented that when they scored, their friends, families, and community get proud, and thus this context reflected positively on their performance.

"What motivates me is making my family and the team supporters happy and proud." (P2, P3)

P5 asserted that he had to go beyond his limits.

"Transferring abroad to famous teams in better living conditions is my only target." (P5)

P7 claimed that positive relationships with his coach and teammates influenced his willingness positively to score goals.

"The attitudes of my coach and positive teammate dynamics within the team definitely affect me." (P7)

P9 remarked that he turned a striking moment in his football career into a totem and used to imagine it before every game.

"I was playing in the amateur league when I was 16. I still listen to the music the way I did since then whenever I go playing a game, and I continue to relive that moment." (P9)

P8 and P9 stated that motivational talks and support given by his surrounding circles contributed positively to score goals.

"The motivation of the team supporters and public expectations foster my motivation." (P8, P9)

P1 indicated that the club's economic condition and the coach's game system are significant issues of goal-scoring motivation.

"To agnize the game system of a coach and have a club that meets its financial obligations is always supportive." (P1)

3.4 Domain 4: target renewal

Analysis of the responses to the question "Do you make any in-seasonal target renewal for yourself after reaching a certain number of goal scores?", led to two categories and five codes under the "target renewal" theme (Fig. 4).

P1, P2 and P8 communicated that they favored setting no limits or restrictions on their seasonal goal-scoring targets. Strikers further indicated that they preferred to put forth the

best performance as setting a target.

"I never set a target for goal-scoring. My primary objective is to contribute my best. When I set a target, it makes me focused accordingly and delimits my abilities." (P1, P2, P8)

However, P4 is among the strikers who set a preseasonal scoring target for himself.

"My initial target is six goals, then 10, then 15, then 20, so as I reach my target, I renew my targets by myself." (P4)

However, P6, P7 and P10 indicated that strikers should set a preseasonal goal-scoring aim for themselves, emphasizing the need for such goals to be attainable and realistic.

"There should be a preseasonal goal-scoring target. I give myself realistic targets to strive for." (P6, P7, P10)

Contrarily, P9 commented that he set a target for the first time, whereas he strayed too far from it. He further stated that such circumstances would not trigger stress and would do his best to achieve the number of goal-scoring targets he has set.

"I set a goal-scoring target for the first time this year. I am aware that not setting a target is a shortcoming." (P9)

3.5 Domain 5: goal-scoring motivation

The responses to the question "When you take the field, do you feel yourself motivated for goal-scoring?", are grouped in two categories and eight codes under the "goal-scoring motivation" theme (Fig. 5).

Strikers mentioned that they inculcated such habits along with their personal and unique techniques to display high performance. However, they also noted that the goal-scoring pressure is one of the negative components affecting this context. The perception of "you have to score a goal" and repeated discourses on the strikers in Turkey adversely influenced their personal views leading to declined performance.

"There is a pressure to score a goal, especially in Turkey." (P4, P6, P8)

P2, P6 and P10 mentioned that they have some routine habits enabling them to feel better and think positively enhancing their performance.

"A good warm-up, for instance, is crucial to me. Weather

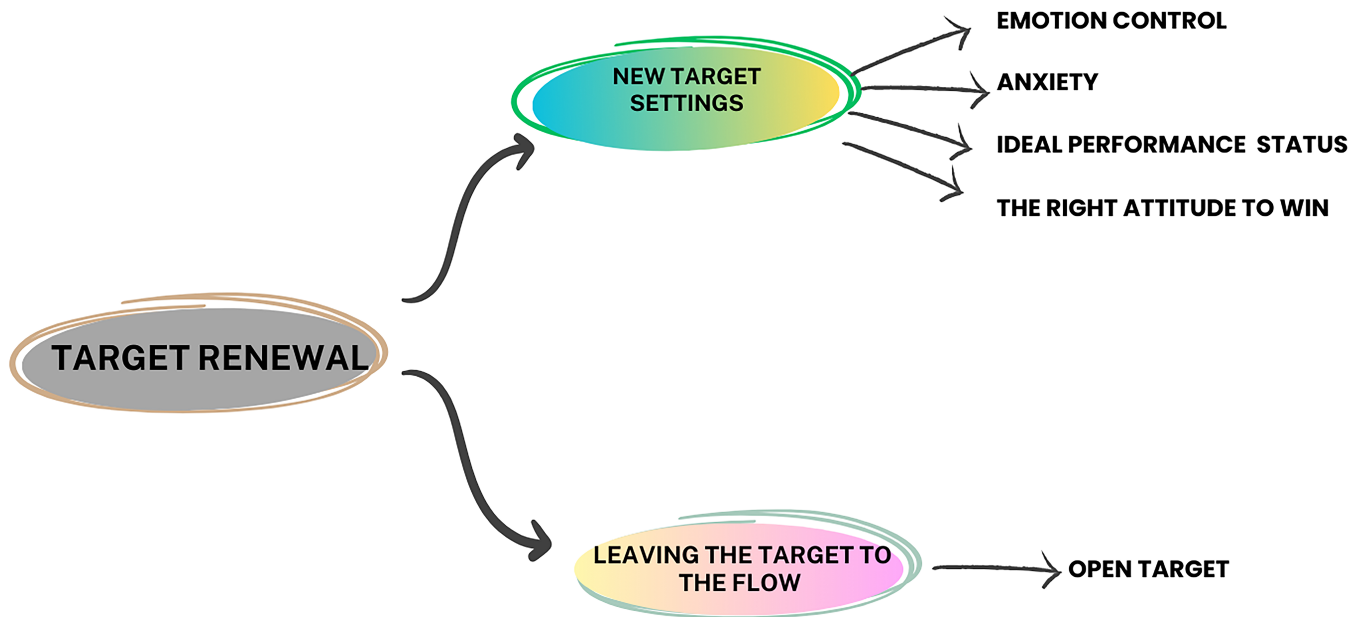


FIGURE 4. Target renewal.

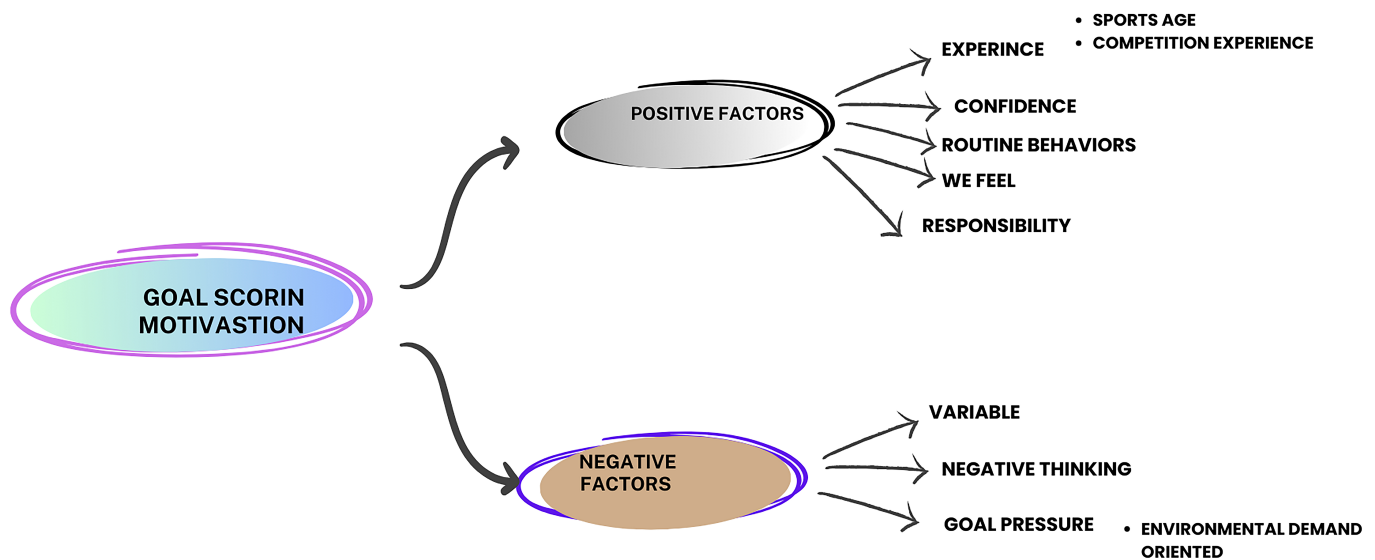


FIGURE 5. Goal-scoring motivation.

conditions, nutrition, and good sleep are also effective for my match performance.” (P2, P6, P10)

Strikers claimed that their energy fluctuated for no particular reason when asked about their goal-scoring motivation prior to the match. They mentioned that poor-quality football field and competition conditions, disparaging remarks of the coach and teammates, extreme air temperature, and persistence of the trainer to make the footballer play in a different position are the primary elements that contributed to this predicament.

“When I step on the field, I do not even feel like playing if the weather condition and the playground is bad, or there is no spectator.” (P2, P3)

“I intensely feel things as I warm up. Sometimes I feel bad, then things go bad.” (P4)

“I feel like scoring in the warm-up or on the bus. I think that I will score a goal.” (P5)

“Not as motivation, but energy is essential.” (P10)

P7 and P9, mentioned that we-feeling and sense of responsibility positively affect motivation to score goals.

“My sense of belonging to the team and the favorable attitudes of my teammates all influence me positively.” (P7, P9)

3.6 Domain 6: performance improvement methods

Analysis of the answers to the question, “how do you mentally prepare yourself to improve your performance before and during the competition?”, the analysis concluded one category and four codes under the “performance improvement method” theme (Fig. 6).

Participants stated that they thoroughly judged the strengths and weaknesses of the opposing team before each game and

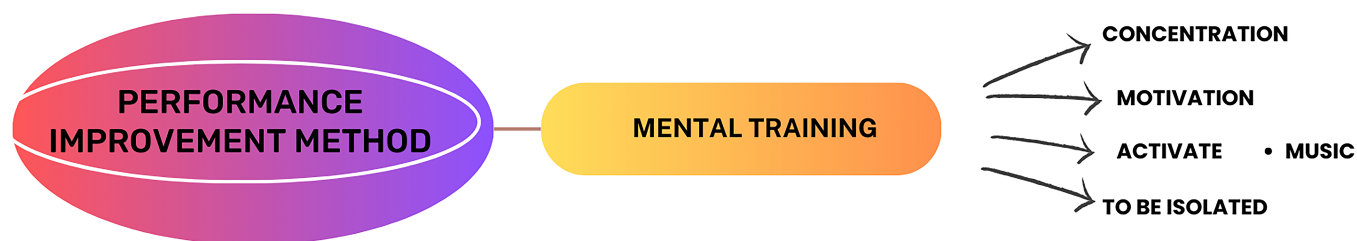


FIGURE 6. Performance improvement method.

consequently coached their football training on technical and tactical evaluation. They told that they mentally prepared themselves for the matches.

“I usually get some rest the night before the camp, contemplating the game. As mentioned by the phrase “live the match within while sleeping”, which has been iterated since the youth teams, I think about how I will react to the scenario and future scenarios that potentially occur While lying down.” (P6, P7)

P8, P9 and P10 claimed that from the moment they wake up on the day of the match, their mental preparation intensifies as the match time approaches.

“When I step on the field, I conceive everything in my mind for 20–30 minutes during warm-up and walking on the field. I visualize every position relevant to the match in my head. The team fans are also highly influential on me. Such mental preparation has a positive impact on the football field.” (P8, P9, P10)

The motivation and energy levels of the strikers are reportedly increased by using their lucky charms, listening to music on game day, and interacting with their families.

“I would rather get together with my family on the morning of the match. I eat the biscuit I always liked and have lucky charms. This contributes to me in terms of performance, energy, and power.” (P1, P5)

4. Discussion

The qualitative approach used in this study helped explore different perspectives of the strikers competing the Turkish Professional Football League revealing the factors that influenced their post-goal motivational context.

Analysis of strikers’ general responses regarding the importance of goal setting for performance in sports revealed that most of the interviewed players found that setting goals for scoring goals negatively worsens their performance, although some stated the opposite. Such a result may be indicative of strikers’ lack of knowledge on this issue. One of the important elements of ideal performance is goal setting. In the literature, the importance of goal setting is mentioned when defining the ideal performance situation. It is stated that some people’s detachment and self-acceptance can be explained by the psychological well-being of the athletes and are based on performance improvement and psychophysical training [25]. The coaches might also have to pay utmost attention to the psychological state of the football players when selecting them for the infrastructure so that they can comprehend their needs and orient them correctly. In addition,

players might reportedly receive individual-oriented support as part of psychological counseling [12]. The review of football-related studies revealed that mental effort is crucial in assisting players to focus on their objectives, make flexible decisions, and thus avoid anxiety and burnout [26].

The current study emphasized team spirit and external factors as factors influencing the post-goal motivation sustainability among strikers. It highlighted the codes, such as positive energy, scoring a goal, low self-esteem, loss of motivation, experience and confidence, as the determining behaviors. The experience is one of the most significant advantages of professional football players. The ability to control one’s emotions improves with age. Footballers’ motivation and concentration practices should start from the infrastructure and players should include such aspects in their daily training activities [27].

Football players display considerably different motivation levels [17]. Professionalism is a particular element affecting this context [28]. Junge and Prinz (2019), studying the women’s football teams competing in the German 1st League, reported that the primary reason for the low performance of the football players was the poor relationships with the team coach. Although many external factors impact motivation in team sports, effective communication between the coach and team players is important in minimizing the negative effects [29].

The fundamental urge is undeniably a goal-scoring target for all strikers. The number of goals scored is an especially effective element in the transfer period in the football sector [30]. Strikers acknowledged that they felt enormous pressure in Turkey in this regard. The current study also revealed that a variety of factors, besides financial gain, influenced a player’s wish to score goals. The team supporters, the club’s economic status, and the trainer’s game system critically affect the players’ desire to score goals. Following codes namely taking pleasure, imaging, experienced emotional control, sense of belongingness to the club, choosing the right club, wanting to make people surrounded pride, ideal performance status, good communication, transfer fee to be earned, positive energy, and desire to play at a better league level are key player-dependent factors. Hence, the strikers should be aware of all these factors and effectively manage them. The support received from senior teammates and the interplay established with them and team coaches play an active role in strikers’ careers [31, 32].

Regarding the urge of football players to make a target renewal after reaching a preseasonal goal score, strikers setting

new targets expressed this desire with the codes including emotion control, anxiety, ideal performance status, and the right attitude to win. However, strikers leaving target renewal to the flow indicated the open-target as codes. In this sense, the strikers' responses were very intriguing. While some strikers did not purposely set a numerical goal-scoring target, others claimed to focus it describing a preseasonal goal-scoring target as a negative factor. Strikers who value displaying performance rather than game results will be more productive, and their motivation will increase accordingly [33]. Football players' performance may suffer if they undertake too many tasks and obligations on the field to prove their superiority to their teammates. This conclusion is also consistent with the identified code of "the right attitude to win", the view that strikers expressed during the interviews. Nesti and Sulley (2015) postulated that football players should sustain positive thinking to accomplish their set targets in the face of negative feedback (adverse criticism) or mistakes committed. They also emphasized that players must focus on their targets by successfully managing their emotional states [34].

When the strikers' practices are assessed to achieve the goal-scoring motivation before and during the match, it is coded as mental preparation (imaging and analyzing studies before the game), having particular routines, besides experience, request to score goals and we-feeling. Macnamara and Collins (2011) stated that one of the psychological characteristics of displaying an outstanding performance is to manage the transitional periods, in which imagery, targeting and difficulties were experienced, through ideally analyzing it [35]. Mental Strength positively affects physical and psychological health [36]. Reverberi *et al.* [16], 2020 reported that mentally strong individuals potentially retain a higher level of control and confidence in stressful circumstances. This study revealed the factors affecting the post-goal motivation of the forwards playing in the Turkish Professional Football League and identifying different perspectives.

5. Conclusions

This study is one of the very few studies conducted to evaluate the post-goal motivation of strikers playing in different sports clubs in the Turkish Professional Football 1st, 2nd and 3rd League. Like other research studies, the present investigation has some strengths and limitations. The limitation of the study is the small sample size while the strength of the study is that it worked with professional football players. The results indicate that the most important source of goal motivation of strikers is financial factors such as money, good transfers and premium, *etc.* The participants indicated that the media, fans, club management and coaches pressurize the strikers to score goals. The second motivation stems from the joy of scoring goals with intensity, self-confidence and team success. Strikers generally go on the field before the match to motivate themselves to score a goal. Some of them are prepared for this situation with mental training, while others act in a flow. After scoring the first goal during the match, they were better motivated and made more effort to score new goals. The pressure applied to such players to constantly score goals sometimes negatively affects their in-game performance of the forwards, decreasing

the team performance. This situation can generally affect team performance and therefore goal motivation. The ideal performance status and goal motivation of the strikers determine the match outcome. For a good goal motivation, strikers should have good technique, good condition, and psychological well-being, starting from the infrastructure. Despite all this pressure to score goals, strikers having a solid stance and motivation can be less affected by these negativities during the match. Based on current study, strikers can be advised to give sufficient importance to mental training and not to ignore psychological factors to contribute to the development of all these elements. Employing sports psychologists in all football clubs affiliated with the Turkish Football Federation may impact the dealing with such negativities. Including mental training activities in the basic content of football coach training courses can increase goal or match motivation.

AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in (<https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/CI36TU>).

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

SKA and MB—performed the research; wrote the manuscript. ŞÇP and ÖÖ—provided help and advice on the research. MB—analyzed the data. All authors contributed to editorial changes in the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Gazi University Ethics Commission before data collection (Code: 2022-1487). Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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