



INFLUENCE OF BASIC PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS AND SPORT IMAGERY ABILITY ON THE ENGAGEMENT AMONG COMBATIVE SPORTS ATHLETES: A CONVERGENT DESIGN

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Abstract:

This study employed a mixed methods design, specifically a convergent design, to explore the influence of basic psychological needs and sports imagery ability on athlete engagement among combative sports athletes in Region XI. Stratified and purposive sampling techniques were used to select participants. Quantitative data were collected using validated questionnaires and analyzed through mean, standard deviation, and multiple linear regression, while qualitative data from interviews were examined using thematic analysis. Data revealed a significant influence of basic psychological needs and sport imagery ability on athlete engagement. Lived experiences emphasized self-belief, extra effort, holistic training, balancing responsibilities, collaboration, personal fulfillment, and familial bonds. Experiences shaped attitudes through personal growth and discipline, beliefs through growth, opportunity, resilience, perseverance, and commitment through strong dedication and motivation from past experiences. The data integration resulted in merging converging for confidence and autonomy with the experiences of training for holistic athletic performance, goal images with the experiences defining success through personal fulfillment, and confidence with the experiences of dedicating extra effort. Goal images also demonstrated a merging-expansion dynamic with experiences of defining success through personal fulfillment, as athlete engagement extended to aspirations such as competing in prestigious events like the Olympics.

Keywords: Physical Education, basic psychological needs in exercise, sports imagery, athlete engagement, convergent design, Philippines

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1. Introduction

Athlete engagement is a consistent and stable state of experience characterized by positive thoughts and emotions about one's sport (Curran *et al.*, 2015). According to Jiang *et al.* (2023), athlete engagement plays a crucial role in promoting positive psychology and improving performance. Despite its importance, athletes face challenges that can affect their engagement, such as burnout, injuries, and high dropout rates (Gaston & Lynch, 2019). There is a strong indication of a problem with the engagement of athletes to enhance their performance (Foskett *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, in a study conducted, it was found out that 40 percent of athletes showed low engagement during training (Graham *et al.*, 2022). More so, Stambulova *et al.* (2021) exposed that nearly 60 percent of athletes cited insufficient sport engagement.

In the United States, an estimated 6 to 11 percent of aspiring young athletes displayed deteriorating engagement in the sport they belong. This is because athletes have experienced burnout symptoms, with reports of athletes feeling irritable, weary, depressed, and dissatisfied. Athletes' suffering results in unfavorable attitudes toward sports, dislike of training, and low levels of engagement (Jowett *et al.*, 2016). In addition, Japan athlete engagement has started to decline, which has impacted their performance (Ellenbecker & Aoki, 2020). Additionally, those problems of athlete engagement are somehow dictated by the pressure of high expectations, rigorous training regimes, and cultural norms emphasizing discipline and perfectionism, which contribute to mental and physical strain among athletes. Likewise, in the neighbouring country Korea, Kim *et al.* (2020) exposed that their athlete engagement has also faced evident disparities in access to training facilities resulting in athlete's low engagement in their sport.

Meanwhile, In the study of athlete engagement, athlete identity, and individualism versus collectivist cultural behaviors, Valbuena (2015) compared Filipino athletes to US American athletes. Statistical data reveals that Filipino athletes' engagement exhibits lower levels compared to their counterparts from other backgrounds or cultures. Specifically, he noted that Filipino athletes demonstrate an average level of 7 out of 10, indicating a notable disparity in engagement dynamics. Baldos (2023) explains that the concept for the study, titled "Skill Competencies and Problems of Student-Athletes Under the New Normal in Secondary Schools in the Philippines," originated from noticing how the pandemic affected student-athletes' skill levels and participation in training. Through the statistical analysis, the research revealed that athlete engagement in training hours declined by 40 percent during the pandemic, underscoring the difficulties that pandemic-related restrictions introduced for athlete growth and development.

In the meantime, Sustainable support from government and private sectors is crucial to address these issues and enhance sports engagement and development in the region (Pedrosa, 2018). In the study titled "Creating a Sports Program for Everyone in Mindanao's Indigenous Communities" by Daut (2014), it was found that factors such as insufficient attention and support from the government, as well as faced exclusion and

prejudice against these groups from the mainstream of society, contribute to low athlete engagement in sports-for-all programs and participation among the Indigenous people of Mindanao.

In the study conducted by Dunton *et al.* (2023), it was clearly established that basic psychological needs play a crucial role in influencing athlete engagement. Further, another study by Sin and Song (2022) revealed that the satisfaction of basic psychological needs such as competence, relatedness, and autonomy is positively associated with higher levels of engagement in physical activity. Further, studies have shown that when athletes have their basic psychological needs met, they exhibit higher levels of engagement, leading to improved performance and adherence to exercise regimens (Mateo *et al.*, 2023).

On the relationship between sport imagery and athlete engagement, research conducted by Aikawa and Takai (2021) indicates a significant correlation between sports imagery ability and athlete engagement, with athletes demonstrating enhanced imagery skills often exhibiting superior performance and improved motor learning outcomes. Likewise, Dhoubi *et al.* (2021) supported the idea that athletes effectively practice their movements, leading to heightened skill execution and overall athlete success during sporting engagements through rehearsing mentally and visualization. As such, cultivating imagery ability among athletes shows potential for enhancing their commitment to competitive performance and overall athlete development.

Comparing this study with the existing research reveals several significant research gaps. Initially, while previous research such as those by Jiang *et al.* (2023) and Gaston & Lynch (2019) recognize the significance of athlete engagement and its factors affecting their participation, there is a lack of specific focus on combative sports athletes and how their engagement is influenced by basic psychological needs and sport imagery ability. Also, existing literature highlights the occurrence of low engagement and its unfavorable effects on athlete performance and well-being, but the researcher has failed to access studies regarding the relationship between basic psychological needs, sport imagery ability, and engagement, specifically within the context of combative sports.

Lastly, while some studies like those by Dunton *et al.* (2023) and Aikawa and Takai (2021) have examined the influence of basic psychological needs and sport imagery on athlete engagement, they primarily focus on elite groups, leaving a gap in understanding these dynamics among combative sports athletes in the local scene. Thus, the proposed study aims to address these gaps by investigating how basic psychological needs satisfaction and sport imagery ability contribute to engagement among combative sports athletes, providing valuable insights for suitable interventions and support strategies in this specialized athletic aspect.

2. Purpose Statement

This mixed methods research utilized particularly a convergent design to determine the influence of basic psychological needs and sport imagery ability to engagement among combative sports athletes in Region XI through stratified random sampling using an adapted questionnaire in gathering quantitative data and the use of guide questions in the in-depth interview (IDI) and focused-group discussion (FGD) for qualitative phase.

2.1 Research Questions

This study determined the significant influence of basic psychological needs and sport imagery ability on engagement among combative sports athletes in Region XI. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

- 1) What is the level of basic psychological needs in exercise, sport imagery ability, and engagement among combative sports athletes?
- 2) Do basic psychological needs in exercise and sport imagery ability significantly influence engagement?
- 3) What are the lived experiences of combative sports athletes regarding athlete engagement?
- 4) How do these experiences shape the attitude, beliefs and commitment of the participants towards athlete engagement?
- 5) To what extent do the qualitative results corroborate with quantitative data?

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study used a mixed methods research approach, specifically a convergent design. This means it combined both quantitative and qualitative methods for collecting data. To fully answer the research questions or hypotheses, the mixed method design entailed obtaining and assessing data from both qualitative and quantitative sources. By integrating data from both types, the approach deepens comprehension of research problems beyond what each strategy could achieve individually (Creswell, 2018).

A convergent study designs seamlessly integrated quantitative and qualitative methodologies to examine basic psychological needs in exercise, sports imagery, and athletic engagement among combative sports athletes. By combining survey data with qualitative insights, rating athlete engagement using both quantitative measurements and qualitative observations and gauging athletic participation through both standardized assessments and qualitative reflections, this universal technique aided in the triangulation of sport imagery capacity. Understanding the complexities of physical education and effectively guiding education activities depended on this design.

Further, this research utilized a convergent design. It was a research design that merged both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This design aimed to answer research questions and deeply understand certain phenomena by collecting data

concurrently but separately by keeping results independent from one another (Doyle *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, both approaches were used so that the objective aspects were measured using the quantitative approach, while the subjective aspects were described and explained through the qualitative approach. Hence, it was a design used to study a problem in its entire dimension by using two parallel phases (Almeida, 2018).

3.2 Research Instruments

In the context of this research, the purpose of the instruments was to systematically collecting data on basic psychological needs in exercise, sport imagery ability, and athletic engagement among participants in combative sports. These instruments, which included surveys, interviews, and standardized assessments, were carefully designed to measure the targeted variables with accuracy and reliability. By using validated instruments, the study aimed to gather objective data that effectively addressed the research questions and hypotheses, ultimately ensuring the validity and credibility of the findings.

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 Quantitative Strand

During the data collection phase, respondents who had agreed to take part were given survey questionnaires. These questionnaires were administered in person to increase response rates, as face-to-face interaction was more likely to engage respondents to encourage their participation. The researcher arranged a suitable location for gathering all the respondents. To ensure high-quality data, the researcher explained any unclear parts of the questionnaire and was available to answer any questions. Clear instructions were given to emphasize the importance of providing accurate and thoughtful responses. Once completed, the surveys were collected promptly to minimize the risk of data loss, thus enhancing overall efficiency and reliability.

3.3.2 Qualitative Strand

Both IDI and FGD were employed to extract information regarding participants' perspectives and experiences concerning engagement. Participants received full information about the study's objectives, interview format, and their rights prior to the interviews, including the option to maintain anonymity and withdraw from the study at any point. Each participant was allotted a 30-45 minute slot for an in-depth-interview, which began after the participant signed a permission form and received a briefing on the study goals. IDI was conducted face-to-face to allow for follow-up questions and to probe deeper into responses, yielding richer, more detailed information and insights. Coding was used in transcribing the data.

3.4 Data Analysis

3.4.1 Quantitative Strand

In the quantitative phase, specific statistical methods were employed to analyze the data collected from the survey questions. The **mean** was calculated to evaluate the levels of psychological needs in exercise, sport imagery ability, and athletic engagement among combative athletes in Region XI. The **standard deviation** was used to determine the extent to which the fundamental psychological needs in exercise, sport imagery abilities, and athlete engagement of combative sports players in Region XI varied from the mean. Additionally, **multiple linear regression** analysis was performed to examine the influence of basic psychological needs in exercise and sport imagery ability on athlete engagement in combative sports.

3.4.2 Qualitative Strand

Thematic Analysis played an important role in uncovering these patterns, as the researcher immersed themselves in athletes' accounts through a thorough examination of transcriptions (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2017). This data was taken from IDI and FGD. Primary codes were established to categorize the data, and themes were developed by linking these codes, supported by pertinent information. This rigorous process resulted in the establishment and definition of each theme's significance, facilitating an exclusive analysis of athlete-provided data and enriching insights into athlete engagement.

In the study of athletic engagement, the primary coding stage involved gathering, transcribing, condensing, and organizing data related to athletes' personal experiences and insights. This process adhered to the study guide questions through data reduction, ensuring that insignificant material was eliminated while key insights were preserved. In the second coding cycle, the data was recreated and reanalyzed to identify trends and sequences in athlete engagement, which aided in the creation of themes relevant to athletic engagement.

4. Results

4.1 Level of Basic Psychological Needs in Exercise

The table below shows the levels of basic psychological needs in exercise, focusing on three categories: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The overall mean score is 4.53, which is described as very high, indicating that basic psychological needs among the athletes are always observed. Additionally, the standard deviation of .36 means that the data is clustered around the mean.

Table 1.1: The Level of Basic Psychological Needs in Exercise

		Mean	SD	Description
Autonomy				
1	Following an exercise program that is highly compatible with my choices and interests.	4.61	.58	Very High
2	Following exercise that fits perfectly the way I prefer to exercise.	4.54	.60	Very High
3	Exercising as an expression of self.	4.55	.54	Very High
4	Having the opportunity to make choices with respect to the way of exercising.	4.65	.62	Very High
	Category Mean	4.59	.40	Very High
Competence				
1	Making huge progress with respect to the result pursued.	4.54	.61	Very High
2	Executing very effectively the exercise of my training program.	4.48	.63	Very High
3	Exercising is an activity in which there is a high level of success.	4.44	.64	Very High
4	Managing the requirements of the training program involved.	4.51	.70	Very High
	Category Mean	4.49	.44	Very High
Relatedness				
1	Feeling extremely comfortable when with the other exercise participants.	4.60	.60	Very High
2	Associating with the other exercise participants in a very friendly way.	4.54	.63	Very High
3	Maintaining open channels of communication with other exercise participants.	4.48	.65	Very High
4	Feeling very much at ease with the other exercise participants.	4.44	.69	Very High
	Category Mean	4.52	.47	Very High
	Overall Mean	4.53	.36	Very High

A. Autonomy

This indicator has a category mean of 4.59, which is described as very high. As shown in the table, all items in this category range from 4.54 to 4.65. The item following exercise that fits perfectly the way they prefer to exercise has a mean rating of 4.54, described as very high. Meanwhile, the item about having the opportunity to make choices with respect to the way of exercising has a mean rating of 4.65, which is very high.

B. Competence

This indicator has a category mean of 4.49, which is described as very high. The mean ratings range from 4.44 to 4.54. The item, exercising is an activity in which there is a high level of success, obtained a mean rating of 4.44 with a description of very high. The item, making huge progress with respect to the result pursued, obtained a mean rating of 4.54 with a description of very high.

C. Relatedness

This indicator has a category mean of 4.52, which is described as very high. The mean ratings range from 4.44 to 4.60. The item, feeling very much at ease with the other exercise participants, obtained a mean rating of 4.44 with a description of very high. The item,

feeling extremely comfortable when with the other exercise participants, obtained a mean rating of 4.60 with a description of very high.

4.2 Level of Sport Imagery Ability

It is shown in Table 1.2 that the level of sport imagery ability of athletes has an overall mean of 4.59, described as very high, which means that the level of sport imagery ability of athletes is always demonstrated. The standard deviation of is .36, showing that the response is relatively clustered around the mean.

Table 1.2: The Level of Sport Imagery Ability

		Mean	SD	Description
Strategy Image				
1	Imagining alternative plans and strategies before or during the game.	4.58	.59	Very High
2	Creating plans and strategies in the head before or during a game.	4.60	.60	Very High
3	Creating a new event/game plan before or during the game.	4.31	.95	Very High
	Category Mean	4.50	.55	Very High
Goal Images				
1	Being interviewed as a champion.	4.49	.73	Very High
2	Winning a medal.	4.73	.53	Very High
3	Winning the sport, I join.	4.77	.52	Very High
	Category Mean	4.66	.46	Very High
Affective Images				
1	Imagining the excitement associated with performing the sport.	4.61	.62	Very High
2	Imagining the anticipation and excitement associated with the sport.	4.51	.64	Very High
3	Imagining the positive emotions felt when doing sport.	4.58	.69	Very High
	Category Mean	4.57	.51	Very High
Skill Images				
1	Imagining refining a particular skill.	4.50	.65	Very High
2	Imagining improving a particular skill.	4.69	.51	Very High
3	Imagining making corrections to physical skills.	4.70	.57	Very High
	Category Mean	4.63	.42	Very High
	Overall Mean	4.59	.36	Very High

A. Strategy Image

This indicator received a category mean of 4.50, which is described as very high. Mean ratings range from 4.31 to 4.60. The item, *creating a new event or game plan before or during the game* had a mean rating of 4.31, which is considered very high, while the item *regarding creating plans and strategies in the head before or during a game* has a mean rating of 4.60, also described as very high.

B. Goal Images

This indicator has a category mean of 4.66, which is described as very high. The mean ratings in this category range from 4.49 to 4.77. For the item, *being interviewed as a champion* has a mean rating of 4.49, which is also considered very high. Also, the item related to *winning in the sport, I join* has a mean rating of 4.77, which is again described as very high.

C. Affective Images

This indicator has a category mean of 4.57, which is described as very high, with mean ratings of the items that range from 4.51 to 4.61. The item about *imagining the anticipation and excitement associated with the sport*, received a mean rating of 4.51, also described as very high. Meanwhile, the item *imagining the excitement associated with performing the sport* scored a mean rating of 4.61, which is described as very high.

D. Skill Images

This indicator has a category mean of 4.63, which is described as very high. The mean ratings in this category range from 4.50 to 4.70. The item, *imagining refining a particular skill*, had a mean rating of 4.50, which was also described as very high. The item about *imagining making corrections to physical skills* scored a mean rating of 4.70, which is described as very high.

4.3 The Level of Athlete Engagement

It is shown in Table 1.3 that the level of engagement of combative sports athletes has an overall mean of 4.69, which is described as very high, which means that the level of engagement of combative athletes is always manifested. The standard deviation is .29, indicating that the responses are relatively clustered around the mean.

Table 1.3: The Level of Athlete Engagement

		Mean	SD	Description
Confidence				
1	Accomplishing goals in sport.	4.71	.51	Very High
2	Being capable of success in sport.	4.65	.56	Very High
3	Believing of having the skills/techniques to be successful in sport.	4.55	.62	Very High
4	Being confident in abilities.	4.55	.60	Very High
	Category Mean	4.62	.40	Very High
Dedication				
1	Being dedicated to achieving goals in sport.	4.73	.50	Very High
2	Being determined to achieve goals in sport.	4.74	.49	Very High
3	Having devotion to the sport.	4.60	.60	Very High
4	Wanting to work hard to achieve my goals in sport.	4.77	.48	Very High
	Category Mean	4.71	.38	Very High
Vigor				
1	Feeling energized comes from participating in sport.	4.65	.52	Very High
2	Feeling energetic when participating in sport.	4.66	.53	Very High
3	Feeling alive when participating in a sport.	4.73	.50	Very High
4	Feeling mentally alert occurs when participating in the sport.	4.66	.55	Very High
	Category Mean	4.68	.53	Very High
Enthusiasm				
1	Feeling excited about sport.	4.80	.46	Very High
2	Being enthusiastic about the sport.	4.58	.63	Very High
3	Enjoying the sport.	4.88	.33	Very High
4	Having fun with the sport.	4.83	.41	Very High

	Category Mean	4.77	.32	Very High
	Overall Mean	4.69	.29	Very High

A. Confidence

This indicator has a category mean of 4.62, which is described as very high. The mean ratings range from 4.55 to 4.71. The item, *believing in having the skills/technique to be successful in sport* has a mean rating of 4.55, described as very high. Meanwhile, the item related to *accomplishing goals in sport* scored a mean rating of 4.71, which is described as very high.

B. Dedication

This indicator has a category mean of 4.71, which is described as very high. The mean ratings for this item range from 4.60 to 4.77. The item, *having devotion to the sport* has a mean rating of 4.60, also described as very high. In contrast, the item, *wanting to work hard to achieve my goals in sport* scored a mean rating of 4.77, which is described very high.

C. Vigor

This indicator has a category mean of 4.68, which is described as very high. This item has a mean rating range from 4.65 to 4.73. The item, *feeling energized comes from participating in sport*, obtained a mean rating of 4.65 with a description of very high. The item, *feeling alive when participating in a sport*, obtained a mean rating of 4.73 with a description of very high.

D. Enthusiasm

This indicator has a category mean of 4.77, which is described as very high. The mean ratings range from 4.58 to 4.88. For the item related to *being enthusiastic about the sport* received a mean rating of 4.58, also described as very high. The item, *enjoying the sport* scored a mean rating of 4.88, which is very high.

4.4 Significance of the Influence of Basic Psychological Needs in Exercise and Sport Imagery Ability on Athlete Engagement

Table 2 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis. It reveals that basic psychological needs in exercise significantly predict athlete engagement, with a p-value of 0.011, which is below the .05 level of significance (2-tailed) ($F = 74.280, p < .05$). The standardized Beta coefficient for basic psychological needs in exercise is 0.167. This result suggests that each unit increase in the fulfillment of basic psychological needs in exercise corresponds to a 0.167 increase in athlete engagement.

In comparison, sport imagery ability shows a stronger influence on athlete engagement, with a Beta coefficient of 0.388, a t-value of 6.033, and a highly significant p-value of 0.000.

This finding indicates that for every unit increase in sport imagery ability, there is a 0.388 increase in athlete engagement, underscoring the substantial role that visualization and mental rehearsal play in enhancing engagement levels.

The overall model explains 43.1 percent of the variance in athlete engagement, as indicated by an R Square value of 0.431. This suggests that while both basic psychological needs in exercise and sport imagery ability contribute significantly to predicting athlete engagement, 56.9 percent of the variance is due to other factors not included in this model. The high F-value of 74.280, along with a p-value of 0.000, confirms the model's statistical significance, affirming that basic psychological needs in exercise and sport imagery ability are essential predictors of athlete engagement.

Table 2: Significance of the Influence of Basic Psychological Needs in Exercise, Sport Imagery Ability on Athlete Engagement

	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	p-value	Interpretation
Basic Psychological Needs in Exercise	.167	2.582	.011	Significant
Sport Imagery Ability	.388	6.033	.000	Significant
R = .657				
R Square = .431				
F = 74.280				
p value = .000				

4.5 Lived Experiences of Combative Sports Athletes as Regards Athlete Engagement

Table 4 offers a comprehensive view of the athlete's experiences with engagement, bringing to light six major themes identified through in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD). These themes include believing in oneself and dedicating extra effort, training for holistic athletic performance, balancing responsibilities for success, empowering and collaborating in athlete development, defining success through personal fulfillment, and building strong familial bonds. These themes feature multifaceted character of athlete engagement, providing valuable insights into the engagements of athletes.

Table 4: Lived Experiences of Combative Sports Athletes as Regards Athlete Engagement

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Believing in Oneself and Dedicating Extra Effort	<p>Extra dedication through self-training is key to improving and performing well.</p> <p>Being well-prepared and passionate about the sport is essential for success.</p> <p>Athletes rely on their self-belief during competitions.</p> <p>Sports build discipline, mental toughness, and self-confidence.</p> <p>Staying resilient and committed helps athletes overcome challenges and achieve their goals.</p>
Training for Holistic Athletic Performance	<p>A structured training schedule is vital for addressing all performance aspects, including stamina and technique.</p> <p>Effective coaches adapt training to athletes' needs and provide emotional support.</p> <p>Athletes benefit from a step-by-step approach to learning, starting with basics to prevent injury.</p> <p>Coaches help manage athletes' nerves through supportive training and pre-competition practices.</p> <p>Coaches focus on both athletic skills and overall well-being, emphasizing education and personal growth.</p> <p>Coaches serve as mentors and supportive figures, helping athletes with both sports and personal challenges.</p>
Balancing Responsibilities for Success	<p>Balancing academics, training, and personal responsibilities is essential for student-athletes to succeed.</p> <p>Trusting oneself is crucial for reaching goals and overcoming challenges in sports.</p> <p>Athletes use their struggles as motivation to persevere and achieve success.</p> <p>Maintaining weight is a challenge for athletes, requiring discipline in diet and training.</p> <p>Managing anxiety and doubt through techniques like meditation helps athletes perform better in competitions.</p>

Empowering and Collaborating in Athlete Development	<p>Athletes recognize their limits and communicate them to coaches to prevent burnout.</p> <p>Coaches adjust training schedules to accommodate school, creating a collaborative environment.</p> <p>Athletes blend their own pace with coach guidance for optimal performance.</p> <p>Athletes design individual training programs based on their strengths and weaknesses.</p> <p>Athletes take personal responsibility for their training and performance.</p> <p>A respectful coach-athlete relationship allows for individual autonomy and balance with personal life.</p>
Defining Success Through Personal Fulfillment	<p>Athletes see achievements like medals and coaching allowances as success indicators.</p> <p>Many athletes aspire to compete in prestigious events like the Olympics.</p> <p>Athletes face challenges, such as age limits and difficulties in competing at higher levels due to commitment.</p> <p>Athletes emphasize ongoing training and personal growth despite setbacks.</p> <p>Success is defined by contentment and fulfillment in the sport, not just by winnings.</p> <p>Athletes take on leadership roles, mentoring younger players while pursuing their goals.</p>
Building Strong Familial Bonds	<p>Athletes prioritize strong, friendly relationships, treating each other like family.</p> <p>The bond among athletes is deep, fostering unity during training and events.</p> <p>Respect for diverse attitudes and adaptability are essential for team harmony.</p> <p>Athletes balance camaraderie with discipline, maintaining boundaries in training.</p> <p>Open communication helps resolve conflicts, reinforcing team identity.</p> <p>Relationships are viewed as brotherhood, blending humor with focused training.</p>

A. Believing in Oneself and Dedicating Extra Effort

In this study, Believing in Oneself refers to having confidence in one's abilities and mental resilience to overcome challenges, while Dedicating Extra Effort highlights disciplined, persistent, and hardworking preparation for peak performance. Combative athletes emphasized that self-belief and dedication, particularly through self-training, are key to

improving performance and achieving goals. Passion and preparation keep them focused and motivated, especially in individual sports where self-reliance is crucial. Participants noted that sports foster discipline, mental toughness, and self-confidence, enabling them to overcome challenges and perform better despite difficulties.

A few of them explicitly mentioned that:

"Kami sa grupo... naa mi responsibility sa among pag-improve, dili tanan salig sa coach, labi na sa training. Kung gusto mi maglambo, kinahanglan pursigido mi." (FGD5)

"In our group, we each have a responsibility for our own improvement... we don't rely entirely on our coach. If we want to progress, we must be determined."

"Kung wala kay dedication... mag-salig lang ka sa training sa gym, dugay ang improvement, Sir. Pero kung after gym training naa kay self-training ug self-discipline, mas mag-improve ka as an athlete, Sir." (IDI1)

"If you have no dedication... relying only on gym training will slow down your improvement, Sir. But if you do self-training and have self-discipline after gym, you'll improve more as an athlete, Sir."

"ay individual man ang taekwondo, Sir... wala nay makatabang nimo sa mat or ring, so kinahanglan magtuo jud ka sa imong kaugalingon, Sir." (IDI4)

B. Training for Holistic Athletic Performance

In combative sports, this theme highlights a holistic approach to athlete development, emphasizing physical conditioning, mental toughness, strategic thinking, and emotional resilience. Athletes stressed the importance of structured training schedules addressing stamina, technique, and tailored methods to meet individual needs. A step-by-step learning process, starting with fundamentals, was noted as essential for injury prevention. Coaches play a pivotal role, offering emotional support, managing pre-competition nerves, and fostering overall well-being by prioritizing education and personal growth. Beyond skill development, coaches serve as mentors, guiding athletes through both sports and personal challenges.

A few of them explicitly mentioned that:

"Importante Sir nga naka-arrange among training... kay kung dili ka maka-stretch, pareho sa amoa sa combative sports, nay posibilidad nga ma-cramps imong muscles, then ma-bikogan ka." (IDI3)

"It's important, Sir, that our training is arranged... because if you don't stretch, like in our combative sports, there's a possibility of muscle cramps and injury."

"kay sa taekwondo, Sir pantay gyud dapat walay mag una dapat sabay gyud na tanan kay pag dula, Sir, kay hangin, sipa, mentally, physically, tanan gyud, Sir." (IDI1)

In taekwondo, Sir, everything has to be balanced; nothing should be ahead of the other. Everything should work together—breathing, kicks, mental and physical aspects—all of it, Sir.

“Ku-an po, Sir, among coach kay motivated kaayo sila nga mo help sa amoa. Mo hatag sila ug mga tips gyud kung unsaon namo, nagapangita sila ug paraan para ma-improve mi.” (FGD6)

C. Balancing Responsibilities for Success

This theme highlights student-athletes' ability to balance schoolwork, training, and personal responsibilities effectively. Participants shared that managing these aspects is crucial for success, even after setbacks that initially shook their confidence. Rebuilding self-belief emerged as a vital factor in overcoming challenges and achieving goals. Interestingly, struggles and failures fueled their determination and drive for success. Discipline, particularly in weight management, and practices like meditation were emphasized as strategies for staying focused, managing anxiety, and competing with a calm mindset under pressure.

A few of them explicitly mentioned that:

“Para sa akoo, Sir, kay ga-work ko online, tapos student pa ko, athlete, and coach. Mag-time management lang akong gina-buhat... Mao gyud na akong struggle, pero makaya ra man pud. Naabot man gihapon ko sa kung asa ko karon.” (IDI5)

“For me, Sir, as a working individual doing online work, being a student, athlete, and coach... Time management is my main struggle, but I can manage it. I've still reached where I am now.”

“Naay mga panahon, Sir nga mura ug mawala among self-confidence kay usahay ma pilde man mi ba, pero bisan paman nga ingon ana Sir, sa sige ug training, mo balik rapud among kumpyansa sa self po.” (FGD2)

“There are times, Sir, when it feels like we lose our self-confidence because sometimes we get defeated, but even so, with continuous training, our confidence in ourselves eventually comes back.”

“Isa gyud sa lisod kaayo pag combat sports ka Sir kay ang pag manage sa among weight kay gina timbang man mi, unya lisod kaayo sabayon ang diet ug hard training.” (IDI8)

“One of the hardest things about being in combat sports, Sir, is managing our weight because we get weighted. Balancing diet with hard training is really challenging.”

D. Empowering and Collaborating in Athlete Development

This theme emphasizes empowering athletes through mutual respect, collaboration, and support from coaches, peers, and stakeholders. In combative sports, it highlights

fostering self-confidence, decision-making, and skill development in a collaborative environment that values athlete input and holistic growth. Participants stressed the importance of open communication with coaches to prevent burnout and maintain long-term performance. Flexible training schedules and personalized programs tailored to individual strengths and weaknesses were identified as essential. Athletes also recognized the need for personal responsibility in their training and performance, balancing autonomy with guidance from coaches. This mutual respect and balance help sustain motivation, optimize performance, and support both athletic and personal success.

A few of them explicitly mentioned that:

"Kami man ang nakabalo sa akong kahinaan, Sir. Kabalo mi sa among weakside, so kung asa mi hina gapatabang mi ana sa among coach Sir para ma tudlo-an mi unsaon pag develop." (FGD1)

"We're the ones who know our weaknesses, Sir. We know our weak spots, so we ask our coach for help in those areas so that we can be taught how to improve."

"So, ahh, in terms sa among training, ga adjust gyud na among coach pud, Sir. Kay kabalo man siya nga estudyante pud mi ba. So ga give and take rami Sir pag abot sa schedule para dili pud mi ma stress Sir." (IDI10)

"So, ahh, in terms of our training, our coach really adjusts, Sir, because he knows that we're also students. So we work on a give-and-take basis when it comes to scheduling to avoid getting too stressed, Sir."

"Uhm as an athlete gyud Sir, maski naa mi coach, dili gyud tanan training is sila ang mag buot, naa mi times labi nagyud ko Sir nga ako-ako lang pud para bahalag wala among coach ma improve gihapon ko Sir." (FGD5)

"Uhm, as an athlete, Sir, even though we have a coach, not all training is directed by them. There are times, especially for me, when I just train on my own, so even if our coach isn't there, I can still improve, Sir."

E. Defining Success Through Personal Fulfillment

In combative sports, success goes beyond winning, focusing on personal growth, skill improvement, and intrinsic motivation. Athletes find fulfillment in their journey, valuing effort and self-improvement. Participants highlighted that achievements like medals, allowances, and aspirations to compete in events like the Olympics symbolize success. Despite challenges such as age limits and personal responsibilities, they prioritize ongoing training and growth. Success is defined by contentment, passion, and development rather than titles. Many also mentor younger athletes, finding fulfillment in contributing to their sport and community while pursuing their own goals.

A few of them explicitly mentioned that:

“Sa tanan-tanan po nga nakadula ko, maka-ingon ko nga na-reach nako akong mga goals, kay nakakuha pud kog medal pareho anang gold, so kahit papaano successful nako Sir.” (IDI6)

“Out of all the times I’ve competed, I can say that I’ve reached my goals because I’ve also won medals, like gold. So, in some way, I consider myself successful, Sir.”

“Syempre, Sir, every athlete akong gina-aim jud para maka-ingon ko nga successful ko kay Olympic jud or SEA Games.” (IDI4)

“Of course, Sir, as an athlete, I aim to achieve something like participating in the Olympics or SEA Games.”

“Sa highschool pako Sir kay naay panahon nga wala ko ka dula kay na abtan ko sa age limit, pero wala gyud gihapon ko nag quit, nag padayon gihapon kog training, Sir uy.” (FGD3)

“When I was in high school, Sir, there was a time when I couldn’t compete because I reached the age limit, but I still didn’t quit. I continued training, Sir.”

F. Building Strong Familial Bonds

In combative sports, athletes emphasize fostering unity and treating teammates like family, blending camaraderie with discipline to maintain focus. Open communication, mutual respect, and shared humor strengthen team bonds and enhance performance. Participants described their teams as a brotherhood, where friendly relationships and adaptability create harmony during training and competitions. Balancing closeness with discipline ensures focus, while constructive communication resolves conflict and reinforces team identity, fostering a supportive and cohesive environment.

A few of them explicitly mentioned that:

“For me, Sir, kay we are like a family. Hantod karon, kauban lang gihapon mi, maski college. Mura gyud mi ug magsoon, Sir, kay among coach mura na pud namo ug Papa.” (FGD6)

“For me, Sir, we are like a family. Until now, we’re still together, even in college. We really feel like siblings, Sir, and our coach is like a father to us.”

“Mura mi ug mag-igsoon... Pero, as a Senior, medyo strict ko. Kung naa koy makita nga dili appropriate sa training, ginabalang nako sila.” (IDI4)

“We’re like siblings... But as a senior, I’m quite strict. If I see something inappropriate during training, I call them out.”

“Mura na nako sila ug pamilya, or kanang mga manghod nga naay time nga mag-yaga-yaga. Samot na sa gawas, or naa pud seryoso nga time labi na sa part sa training.” (IDI8)

“I see them as family, or like younger siblings who sometimes joke around. Especially outside of training, but there are also serious moments, especially when it comes to training.”

4.6 Role of Experiences in Shaping the Attitude of the Participants Towards Athlete Engagement

Table 5.1 explains the role of experiences in shaping the attitude of combative athletes towards athlete engagement. The qualitative question's focus is on the role of these experiences in shaping their perceptions. IDI and FGD were used to unfold two major themes: Fostering personal growth and disciplining oneself through sports involvement.

Table 5.1: Role of Experiences in Shaping the Attitude of the Participants Towards Athlete Engagement

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Fostering Personal Growth	Staying humble despite success Boost in self-confidence and personal improvement through sports Sports foster better control of bad attitudes and cooperation with others Maturity gained through managing emotions and respecting others Managing aggression and channeling it productively
Disciplining Oneself Through Sports Involvement	Ongoing training is necessary for self-betterment Focus on physical and mental discipline, including respect for seniority and time management Sports shape attitudes, guiding athletes toward discipline and purpose Athletes resist quitting and maintain strong commitment to their sport Training builds focus and improves physical health, especially during tournaments

A. Fostering Personal Growth

In combative sports, athletes develop humility, self-confidence, and emotional maturity, learning to manage aggression productively and foster cooperation. Participants emphasized that personal growth, beyond awards and applause, is a key outcome of their journey. Sports boost self-confidence, refine attitudes, and enhance teamwork, helping athletes handle high-pressure situations with emotional control and respect for others. Transforming aggression into motivation, they highlighted the role of reflection and emotional management in their development as athletes and individuals.

A few of them explicitly mentioned that:

"Ku-an man ko nga tao before, Sir, wala kaayo koy confidence, pero the more nga naa ko ani, Sir, sa five years naka-gain ko ug confidence, like sa akong dula." (IDI4)

"I used to be someone without much confidence, but the more I engage in this sport, Sir, over these five years, I've gained confidence, especially in my performance."

"Naay gi-tudlo sa amoa nga... dili mo dako imong ulo. Kung unsa ka, humble lang. After training, training napud." (IDI1)

"We were taught to stay humble and not let success get to our heads. For us, it's all about staying grounded and focusing on the next training."

"Sa six years po nako nga pag-training, kanang maka ingon gud ko nga ma oni ang nakapa develop sa akong self-confidence kay sa una ulawon man ko, pero karon dili nagyud." (IDI6)

B. Disciplining Oneself Through Sports Involvement

In combative sports, athletes emphasize continuous training and discipline, fostering physical and mental resilience. Participants highlighted respect for seniority, time management, and focus as key aspects of their development. They view training as essential for personal growth, shaping attitudes, and building purpose. Despite challenges, athletes remain committed, valuing preparation for tournaments to maintain peak physical and mental condition. This dedication and discipline form the foundation for success and holistic development in their sport.

A few of them explicitly mentioned that:

"Diri sa among sport man gud Sir, kailangan gyud nga naa kay disiplina. Kay kung wala kay disiplina, dili ka mag silbi ani nga sport." (FGD5)

"In our sport, Sir, you really need to have discipline. Because if you don't have discipline, you won't be able to succeed in this sport."

"Maski mapilde or madaog, dapat padayon lang gyud. Usahay matwala among gana, pero nagkadugay nga daghan nami ug naagihan, mas grabe na among motivation, Sir para mo lambo." (FGD4)

"Whether we win or lose, we must keep going. Sometimes, we lose our enthusiasm, but as time goes on and we go through more experiences, our motivation grows even stronger, Sir."

"Isa sa akong na build pud Sir kay respect kung kinsa among mga senior, dapat mo bow ka nila, and also kanang discipline pud sa pag organize sa among time ba." (IDI9)

"One of the things I've built, Sir, is respect for our seniors—you must bow to them. Also, discipline in organizing our time."

4.7 Role of Experiences in Shaping the Beliefs of the Participants Towards Athlete Engagement

Table 5.2 presents the role of experiences in shaping the beliefs of combative athletes towards athlete engagement. The qualitative question's focus is on the role of these experiences in shaping their perceptions. IDI and FGD were used to unfold two major themes: growth through opportunity and achievement and resilience through training and perseverance.

Table 5.2: Role of Experiences in Shaping the Beliefs of the Participants Towards Athlete Engagement

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Growth Through Opportunity and Achievement	<p>The realization that opportunities in sports extend beyond high school, motivating continuous training.</p> <p>Combative sports shaped an athletic path, offering scholarships and opportunities that changed personal direction.</p> <p>Achieving goals in sports pushes athletes to aim for higher levels, altering beliefs about personal limits</p> <p>Experiences at different competition levels change athletes' goals and raise their aspirations</p> <p>Passion and persistence in sports help achieve goals and lead to continuous improvement</p> <p>Combative sports athletes provided a new opportunity and changed the athlete's perspective on life after an injury in another sport.</p>
Resilience Through Training and Perseverance	<p>Training fosters self-improvement, boosting belief in the ability to compete at higher levels.</p> <p>Success is defined by doing one's best, regardless of the outcome</p> <p>Overcoming physical limitations through training fosters the belief that success is achievable.</p> <p>Success requires persistent action, especially in sports like combat athletes, where there is always more to learn</p> <p>Learning from competition and injury shaped the athlete's resilience and belief in recovery.</p> <p>Engagement in sports drives personal growth, strengthening belief in perseverance through challenges.</p>

A. Growth through Opportunity and Achievement

In combative sports, opportunities like scholarships and new challenges motivate athletes to continue training and set higher goals. Achievements reshape their

perspective, pushing them to exceed limits and strive for greater success, even after setbacks like injuries. Participants shared that those sports, particularly Taekwondo and Arnis, opened doors and provided growth opportunities, encouraging them to aim for higher performance levels. Passion and persistence drive their achievements while competing at different levels broadens their vision of success and reinforces their commitment to personal development in sports.

A few of them explicitly mentioned that:

“kay elementary hantud karon kauban lang gihapon mi Sir maski college.” (FGD6)

“We’ve been together since elementary, and even now in college, we’re still together, Sir.”

“Kay pareho karon nga varsity ko sa school dako ug discount akong tuition, so in a way dako siya ug tabang para sa akona Sir, and, naka compete nako bisan asa Sir.” (FGD3)

“For example, now that I’m a varsity player at school, I get a big discount on my tuition, so in a way, it’s a huge help for me. Also, I’ve been able to compete anywhere, Sir.”

“Syempre po Sir every athlete po Sir akong gina aim jud Sir para maka ingon ko nga successful ko Sir is Olympic jud Sir or Sea games.” (IDI4)

Of course, Sir, every athlete aims for this. What I truly aim for, to be able to say that I am successful, is the Olympics or the SEA Games, Sir.

B. Resilience through Training and Perseverance

In combative sports, resilience is the ability to overcome challenges and setbacks through consistent effort and self-improvement. Athletes view training as key to building belief in their ability to compete at higher levels, with success defined by effort rather than outcomes. They emphasize persistence, particularly in sports like Arnis, where learning and growth are continuous. Participants shared how overcoming physical limitations through rigorous training and experiences with competition and injury strengthened their resilience. Engaging in sports has fostered personal growth, reinforcing the belief that dedication can overcome hardship.

A few of them explicitly mentioned that:

“My experiences... mas ma-motivate ko permi to perform and do good sa practice.” (FGD3)

“My experiences constantly motivate me to perform well and improve during practice.”

“Ma pilde, pasabot ana kailangan pa ug training, kung ma daug training gihapon kay wala may kahumanan ang kalaban gud, Sir.” (IDI1)

“If you lose, it means you still need more training. If you win, training still matters because the competition never ends, Sir.”

“Ako ang pinaka mubo sa team... pero napulihan nako akong pagtuo nga kaya ra nako makisabay sa mga tag-as. Kulang ra ko ug training.” (IDI7)

“I’m the shortest on the team... but I changed my belief, realizing I can keep up with taller teammates. I just need more training.”

4.8 Role of Experiences in Shaping the Commitment of the Participants Towards Athlete Engagement

Table 5.3 presents the role of experiences in shaping the commitment of combative athletes towards athlete engagement. The qualitative question's focus is on the role of these experiences in shaping their perceptions. IDI and FGD were used to unfold two major themes: strong dedication to personal growth and highly motivated by experience.

Table 5.3: Role of Experiences in Shaping the Commitment of the Participants Towards Athlete Engagement

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Strong Dedication to Personal Growth	<p>Higher belt levels bring more responsibility, requiring full commitment to stay long-term.</p> <p>Balancing school and training help athletes stay disciplined and focused.</p> <p>Long experience in sports solidifies passion and commitment, even with life challenges.</p> <p>An athlete’s dedication improves over time, even when balancing other priorities.</p> <p>Sports instill discipline and personal growth, strengthening long-term commitment.</p> <p>Sports scholarships reduce family financial burdens, increasing commitment.</p>
Highly Motivated by Experience	<p>Fear of re-injury can hinder progress, but coach motivation pushes athletes forward.</p> <p>Defeat deepens commitment, motivating athletes to improve despite setbacks.</p> <p>Positive experiences and recognition reinforce the athlete’s drive to continue.</p> <p>Training provides a physical outlet for stress, making the sport more enjoyable.</p> <p>The gym offers support and community, fostering lasting commitment.</p> <p>Despite setbacks, athletes return stronger with coach support and motivation.</p>

A. Strong Dedication to Personal Growth

In combative sports, athletes balance training, education, and responsibilities, fostering discipline and focus. Their commitment deepens over time, driven by passion, personal growth, and opportunities like scholarships that ease financial burdens. Achieving higher belt levels brings responsibility, requiring full dedication to long-term engagement.

Juggling school and training enhances time management and prioritization. Their dedication grows with experience, overcoming challenges and strengthening their commitment to both athletic development and life goals. Sports scholarships further motivate athletes, supporting their continued training and success.

A few of them explicitly mentioned that:

“Labaw nag taas imong belt sa taekwondo... daghan imong responsibilities. Karun nga first-class brown belt ko, naa koy task nga mo-tabang sa gym para mag-black belt.” (IDI1)

“The higher your belt in taekwondo... the more responsibilities you have. As a first-class brown belt, I help in the gym as part of my task to earn a black belt.”

“Diri na nako gina-hatag akong oras... eskwela unya training. Sa una, mo-laag ra ko, pero karon mas gi-ganahan ko.” (IDI3)

“I now dedicate my time... to school and training. Before, I’d just hang out aimlessly, but now I’m more focused and motivated.”

“Kung naa koy skill nga gusto buhaton... paningkamotan gyud nako ma-achieve. Kung walay dedication, dili gyud maigo tanan.” (IDI1)

“If I want to master a skill... I work hard to achieve it. Without dedication, nothing will align properly.”

B. Highly Motivated by Experience

In combative sports, athletes draw motivation from both challenges and victories, using setbacks to deepen their commitment to improvement. They cited the fear of re-injury as a challenge, but support from coaches and positive experiences helped them persevere. Downfalls, like defeats, strengthen their determination to improve, while achievements boost their drive. Training also serves as a stress outlet, contributing to overall well-being. Gym environments provide a supportive community that reinforces their commitment. With guidance from coaches, athletes return stronger, fueling their resilience and continued dedication to the sport.

A few of them explicitly mentioned that:

“Naay times sa akoo during nag dula tong time nga na-disgrasya ko nga murag nahadlok ko mo-balik sa akong sport because basin ma-injured na pud ko, salamat sa akong coach’s kay na gabayan ko nila ug tarong.” (IDI2)

“There were times during my games, especially when I got injured, that I felt scared to go back to my sport because I might get injured again. I’m thankful to my coaches for guiding me properly. “

“Sa Arnis... dili tanan daug. Bisag mapilde, padayon gihapon sa practice, dili mo undang.” (IDI7)

“In Arnis... you don’t always win. Even in defeat, you must keep practicing and never give up.”

“Pag maka medal ko Sir labi na ug gold unya mag sagonson, lami kaayo sa paminaw na siya. Maka ingon gyud ko nga dapat mag tuloy-tuloy pagyud ko para maka abot pako sa mga higher nga tournaments.” (FGD3)

“When I win a medal, especially a gold, and it happens repeatedly, it feels really great. It makes me think that I should keep going so I can reach higher-level tournaments.”

4.9 Data Integration of the Salient Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

Table 6 presents a comprehensive combination of quantitative and qualitative findings, clarifying the factors basic psychological needs and sport imagery ability on the engagement among combative sports athletes. The first column involves the area of research, and the second column shows numbers and descriptions. The third column explains a relation of things to one another. A comparison of description and number data was done with utmost care to establish sameness and difference. This led to a more evident outcome.

Merging analysis explains how data has been combined by providing insight into how numbers and descriptions work well together. The main goal for the merging analysis is to understand how data integration happens clearly as well, illustrated by how numbers and descriptions have been put together drawing a comparison from the compared presentation of the quantitative and qualitative findings reveals several major comparisons that describe how experiences relate to athlete engagement and motivation:

Table 6: Joint Display of the Salient Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

Aspect or Focal Point	Quantitative Findings	Qualitative Findings	Nature of Integration
Basic Psychological Needs in Exercise - Competence	Table 1.1 on the Status of Basic Psychological Needs in Exercise indicator 2 <i>Competence</i> which talks about <i>executing very effectively the exercise of my training program</i> is rated very high at $M=4.48, SD=.63$	Table 4 on the Lived experiences of combative sports athletes as regards athlete engagement, highlights the following essential theme, <i>training for holistic athletic performance</i> which is clearly expressed in one of the core ideas which says: <i>Coaches help manage athletes’ nerves through supportive training and pre-competition practices</i>	Merging-converging
- Autonomy	Table 1.1 on the Status of Basic Psychological Needs in Exercise indicator 1 <i>Autonomy</i> , on item, <i>following exercise program that is highly</i>	Table 4 on the Lived experiences of combative sports athletes as regards athlete engagement, highlights the following essential theme, <i>Training for holistic athletic performance</i> which	Merging-converging

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	<i>compatible with my choices and interests</i> is rated very high at M=4.61, SD=.58	is clearly expressed in one of the core ideas which says: <i>A structured training schedule is vital for addressing all performance aspects, including stamina and technique</i>	
Sport Imagery Ability - Goal Images	Table 1.2 on the Status of <i>Sports Imagery Ability</i> indicator 2 <i>Goal Images</i> , on item, <i>winning a medal</i> is rated very high at M=4.73, SD=.53	Table 4 on the Lived experiences of combative sports athletes as regards athlete engagement, highlights the following essential theme, <i>Defining success through personal fulfillment</i> which is clearly expressed in one of the core ideas which says: <i>Athletes see achievements like medals and coaching allowances as success indicators</i>	Merging-converging
	Table 1.2 on the Status of <i>Sports Imagery Ability</i> indicator 3 <i>Goal Images</i> , on item, <i>winning the sports I join</i> rated very high at M=4.77, SD=.52	Table 4 on the Lived experiences of combative sports athletes as regards athlete engagement, highlights the following essential theme, <i>Defining success through personal fulfillment</i> which is clearly expressed in one of the core ideas which says: <i>Many athletes aspire to compete in prestigious events like the Olympics</i>	Merging-expansion
Athlete Engagement - Confidence	Table 1.3 on the Status of <i>Athlete Engagement</i> indicator 3 <i>Confidence</i> , on item, <i>believing of having the skills/techniques to be successful in sports</i> rated very high at M=4.55, SD=.62	Table 4 on the Lived experiences of combative sports athletes as regards athlete engagement, highlights the following essential theme, <i>dedicating extra effort</i> which is clearly expressed in one of the core ideas which says: <i>Believing in oneself and extra dedication through self-training are key to improving and performing well.</i>	Merging-converging
Role of experiences in shaping the beliefs of the participants towards athlete engagement	Table 1.3 on the Status of <i>Athlete Engagement</i> indicator 4 <i>Dedication</i> , on item <i>wanting to work hard to achieve my goals in sport</i> rated very high at M=4.77, SD=.48	Table 5.2 on the Role of experiences in shaping the beliefs of the participants towards athlete engagement highlights the following essential theme, <i>Growth through Opportunity and Achievement</i> which is clearly expressed in one of the core ideas which says: <i>Passion and persistence in sports help achieve goals and lead to continuous improvement</i>	Merging-expansion

<p>Role of experiences in shaping the attitude of the participants towards athlete engagement</p>	<p>Table 1.2 on the Status of <i>Sports Imagery Ability</i>, indicator 2 <i>Skill Images</i>, on item, <i>imagining improving a particular skill</i> is rated very high at M=4.69, SD=.51</p>	<p>Table 5.1 on the Role of experiences in shaping the attitude of the participants towards athlete engagement highlights the following essential theme, <i>Disciplining oneself through sports involvement</i>, which is clearly expressed in one of the core ideas, which says: <i>Training builds focus and improves physical health, especially during tournaments.</i></p>	<p>Merging-expansion</p>
<p>Role of experiences in shaping the commitment of the participants towards athlete engagement</p>	<p>Table 1.2 on the Status of <i>Sports Imagery Ability</i>, indicator 3 <i>Affect Images</i>, on item, <i>feeling positive emotions when doing sports</i> is rated very high at M=4.58, SD=.69</p>	<p>Table 5,3 on the Role of experiences in shaping the commitment of the participants towards athlete engagement highlights the following essential theme, <i>Highly motivated by experience</i> which is clearly expressed in one of the core ideas which says: <i>Positive experiences and recognition reinforce the athlete's drive to continue</i></p>	<p>Merging-expansion</p>
<p>Regression Analysis</p>	<p>Table 2 on the Significance of <i>the Influence of Basic Psychological Needs In Exercise and Sport Imagery Ability</i> to Athlete Engagement reveals a significant combined influence where the p-value is .000</p>	<p>Table 4 on the Lived experiences of combative sports athletes as regards athlete engagement, highlights the following essential theme, <i>Balancing responsibilities for success</i> which is clearly expressed in one of the core ideas which says: <i>Balancing academics, training, and personal responsibilities is essential for student-athletes to succeed.</i></p>	<p>Merging-converging</p>

A. Merging-converging

The data on athletes' competence in basic psychological needs in exercise reflects how their training success aligns with real-life experiences. Quantitative data shows athletes rate their competence in executing training programs highly (average: 4.48), indicating confidence in their performance. This is supported by qualitative findings, where athletes emphasize "Training for holistic athletic performance," with coaches helping manage nerves and contributing to overall performance.

Autonomy, rated highly (average: 4.61), aligns with the qualitative theme of structured, personalized training, reinforcing the athletes' desire for autonomy in choosing training that matches their interests. Both data sets highlight the importance of a balanced, individualized training schedule.

Regarding sport imagery and personal fulfillment, athletes scored high (4.73) for their ability to visualize success, with qualitative data underscoring that success is defined by achievements such as medals and coaching allowances. This convergence reveals that athletes' mental preparation is closely linked to tangible accomplishments, enhancing their motivation.

Both quantitative and qualitative findings converge on the importance of confidence, with athletes attributing their belief in their abilities to consistent training and extra effort, further driving engagement. The integration of these insights highlights how emotional experiences, supported by a strong foundation in psychological needs, fuel long-term commitment to sports.

B. Merging-expansion

Additionally, quantitative results (mean: 4.77) show athletes' commitment to achieving their goals through mental imagery, which is expanded by qualitative data revealing broader aspirations like competing in prestigious events. This merging-expansion relationship shows how immediate goals tie into long-term ambitions.

Finally, the data indicates that athletes' commitment is reinforced by both their efforts (4.77) and the positive experiences and recognition they gain from the sport, further motivating continued engagement. This merging-expansion approach combines quantitative insights with qualitative experiences to provide a holistic understanding of athlete engagement.

5. Discussion

5.1 Level of Basic Psychological Needs in Exercise

This study examines the basic psychological needs (BPN) in exercise among athletes in Region XI, focusing on autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The results show that combative athletes in the region report high satisfaction with their psychological needs, suggesting that current training programs effectively address these needs. When athletes' BPN are met, they experience increased engagement, motivation, and confidence, which enhances their performance and well-being.

This satisfaction implies that training programs in the region create an environment where athletes feel supported, challenged, and connected, contributing to continuous growth. Coaches who understand the importance of fulfilling these needs can further foster athlete engagement and peak performance.

Studies by Jakobsen (2023), Gagné *et al.* (2020), Bhavsar *et al.* (2020), and Cheon *et al.* (2019) align with these findings, showing that fulfilling BPN leads to improved motivation, performance, and overall well-being. Additionally, the Frontiers Research (2023) study highlights the importance of competence and relatedness, especially during challenging times like the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring the role of BPN in athletes' motivation and connection to their sport.

A. Autonomy

Autonomy in exercise refers to the ability to choose activities that align with personal interests and values, fostering self-expression and intrinsic motivation. High satisfaction (mean: 4.54-4.65) in autonomy-related aspects, such as exercising according to personal preferences, suggests that athletes are highly motivated and empowered. This aligns with Weinstein *et al.* (2012), who highlight autonomy's role in enhancing fulfillment, and Hedger (2020), who notes that strong relationships further support autonomy.

B. Competence

Competence refers to an athlete's confidence in performing and mastering training tasks. High satisfaction in areas like progress and effective execution (mean: 4.65) supports the role of competence in motivation and performance. This is consistent with Walle *et al.* (2012) and Ryan & Deci (2017), who emphasize that confidence boosts motivation and engagement, leading to improved athletic performance.

C. Relatedness

Relatedness refers to the sense of connection with others in the training environment. Athletes reported very high satisfaction with relatedness, reflecting strong social support and positive interactions. This enhances motivation, well-being, and participation, aligning with Martino (2017) and Ryan & Deci (2017), who emphasize the importance of social connections for psychological health and engagement. A supportive social environment also reduces feelings of isolation, which can have negative psychological effects (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2023).

5.2 Level of Sport Imagery Ability

This study examines the sports imagery ability of athletes in Region XI across categories such as strategy, goal, affective, and skill imagery. The results show a very high level of sports imagery ability, indicating that athletes are effectively using mental imagery to enhance performance, focus, motivation, and success.

These findings align with Dawn and Armstrong (2023), who found that high imagery proficiency contributes to successful sports outcomes. Cumming and Williams (2012) noted that elite athletes demonstrate superior mental imagery ability. Mao (2022) emphasized that athletes with higher motor skill proficiency also exhibit stronger imagery skills, aiding in skill acquisition and performance. Furthermore, research by Yashwant Singh (2021) and Gregg *et al.* (2011) highlights mental imagery's role in reducing anxiety, boosting confidence, and improving cognitive performance.

A. Strategy Image

Athletes consistently demonstrate high levels of strategic imagery, reflecting their ability to mentally plan and rehearse tactics. This mental preparation is vital for combat sports, where critical thinking and adaptability are key. Studies highlight how mental imagery

can enhance performance, reduce anxiety, and improve strategic decision-making under pressure (Maurer, 2013; MacIntyre *et al.*, 2020; Zhou *et al.*, 2022; Nikolova *et al.*, 2021).

B. Goal Images

Athletes consistently visualize success, which boosts confidence and performance. Goal setting, including outcome, performance, and process goals, enhances motivation and guides athletes through training and competition stages. This aligns with research on the positive impact of goal-setting on performance and self-confidence (Vicar, 2018; Hargreaves & Waumsley, 2013; Nideffer *et al.*, 2020; Wilson *et al.*, 2021).

C. Affective Images

High levels of positive emotional imagery, such as excitement and pride, enhance focus, motivation, and performance. These emotions are crucial in combat sports, where mental and physical demands are high. Positive emotions improve engagement and reduce stress, supporting both performance and psychological well-being (Allen *et al.*, 2013; Lane, 2013; Lemyre *et al.*, 2023).

D. Skill Images

Combat athletes regularly use skill imagery to mentally rehearse and refine techniques, aiding in skill acquisition and performance improvement. Visualization enhances precision, fluidity, and decision-making under pressure. Research shows that skill imagery strengthens motor skills and boosts self-efficacy, which is crucial for performance in dynamic sports environments (Scott *et al.*, 2021; Johnson & Vaidhyathan, 2020; Lee *et al.*, 2023).

5.3 Level of Athlete Engagement

The study reveals very high athlete engagement among combat athletes in Region XI, marked by strong commitment, confidence, vigor, and enthusiasm. This high engagement boosts performance and sustained participation. The findings align with Martins *et al.* (2014), who emphasize engagement's role in positive sporting experiences, and Curran *et al.* (2015), who highlight its link to mental and physical resilience in high-pressure sports.

The study also supports Kelecek and Göktürk (2017), who note enthusiasm as a key element of engagement, and Jiang *et al.* (2023), who connect engagement to reduced burnout and improved focus. This sustained engagement enhances athletes' psychological foundation for handling challenges, aligning with Francisco *et al.* (2018) and Fenton *et al.* (2016), who stress its importance in fostering motivation, growth, and fulfillment.

Additionally, the findings relate to Jowett *et al.* (2016) and Podlog *et al.* (2015), who emphasize the role of supportive environments and personalized training in sustaining athlete engagement, especially in high-demand sports like combat sports.

A. Confidence

Refers to an athlete's belief in their abilities to succeed, contributing to resilience, focus, and persistence. High confidence in combat sports enhances motivation, goal achievement, and performance. This study aligns with findings by Yachise *et al.* (2021) and Johnson *et al.* (2013), showing that dedication and self-belief improve expectations of success. Combat athletes' commitment builds confidence, helping them perform under pressure and achieve ambitious goals.

B. Dedication

Involves persistent effort and commitment to achieving goals. Dedicated athletes prioritize training, develop resilience, and enhance performance. Findings align with Türk & Korkmaz (2022) and Gacar *et al.* (2021), emphasizing that dedication fosters mental toughness and peak performance. It fuels athletes' growth and success, as seen in the long-term commitment of elite athletes (Reyes, 2019).

C. Vigor

Represents physical and mental energy, enhancing performance, focus, and enjoyment. High vigor in combat athletes supports both physical endurance and mental agility, allowing effective performance under pressure. Lautenbach *et al.* (2021) and Kadhum (2022) highlight vigor's role in improving resilience and decision-making. However, elite athletes must manage mental fatigue to sustain high performance (Loch *et al.*, 2020).

D. Enthusiasm

Reflects intrinsic motivation and excitement, driving athletes to engage actively in their sport. Enthusiastic athletes show commitment, improve performance, and maintain focus. This study supports findings by Hwang *et al.* (2021) and Chen *et al.* (2019), noting that enthusiasm fosters persistence and reduces burnout. For combat athletes, enthusiasm fuels dedication, driving long-term success and engagement.

5.4 Significance of Basic Psychological Needs and Sport Imagery in Athlete Engagement

Basic psychological needs (BPN) and sport imagery significantly predict athlete engagement. Fulfilling BPN (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) enhances motivation and long-term participation, leading to improved performance (Daisuke *et al.*, 2022). This satisfaction fosters enthusiasm, creating a feedback loop that strengthens commitment (Dunton *et al.*, 2023; Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2016). Imagery also boosts mental focus, confidence, and resilience, improving engagement (Munroe *et al.*, 2017; Aikawa *et al.*, 2021). Both BPN and imagery support self-determined motivation, aligning with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980), fostering sustained athlete engagement and success.

A. Lived Experiences of Athlete Engagement Believing in Oneself and Dedicating Extra Effort

Confidence and perseverance are key to optimal performance, with athletes demonstrating discipline and commitment to overcome challenges (Martinez *et al.*, 2016; Reyes, 2019; Mergan *et al.*, 2023).

B. Training for Holistic Performance

A comprehensive approach combining physical, mental, and emotional strength enhances overall performance (Lautenbach *et al.*, 2021; Kadhum, 2022).

C. Balancing Responsibilities for Success

Time management, self-doubt recovery, and stress management techniques (e.g., meditation) are crucial for success, helping athletes balance academic and athletic duties (Ferrenburg, 2023; Cancommit, 2023).

D. Empowering & Collaborating in Athlete Development

Mutual respect and support from coaches and teammates foster skill development, self-confidence, and decision-making, promoting holistic growth (Smith & Smoll, 2017; Frasier, 2023).

E. Defining Success Through Personal Fulfillment. Athletes focused on personal growth, rather than external rewards, experience greater satisfaction and sustained engagement (Feinstein, 2023; Chung, 2021; Deci & Ryan, 2020).

F. Building Strong Familial Bonds

A supportive team culture, based on trust, open communication, and shared goals, enhances both individual and team performance (Athletic Insight, 2023; Move Sports, 2023).

5.5 Role of Experiences in Shaping Participants' Attitudes Towards Athlete Engagement

This study explores how experiences shape combative athletes' attitudes towards engagement. Interviews and focus groups revealed two main themes: fostering personal growth and disciplining oneself through sports involvement.

A. Fostering Personal Growth

Athletes grow both personally and athletically by emphasizing humility, teamwork, and self-confidence. Personal traits like respect and determination lay the foundation for strong performance characteristics, helping athletes stay focused on long-term success (Fish, 2024; Athlete Assessments, 2023).

B. Disciplining Oneself

Consistent training develops mental and physical discipline, building resilience and focus. Athletes learn time management, respect, and how to push through challenges, ultimately strengthening their mental toughness (Elite Gymnastics Academy, 2023; The Oracle, 2023; Meyer & Adcock, 2022).

5.7 Role of Experiences in Shaping Participants' Beliefs Towards Athlete Engagement

This section discusses how athletes' experiences shape their beliefs towards engagement. The study uncovered two themes: growth through opportunity and achievement and resilience through training and perseverance.

A. Growth Through Opportunity and Achievement

Combat sports provide life-changing opportunities, such as scholarships, pushing athletes to surpass limits and set higher goals (Czarny & Błach, 2024; Wright & Hopwood, 2016).

B. Resilience Through Training and Perseverance

Dedicated training enhances self-confidence and mental fortitude. Athletes learn to recover from setbacks, demonstrating that resilience is essential for success (Gupta & McCarthy, 2024; American Psychological Association, 2023; University of Portsmouth, 2024).

5.8 Role of Experiences in Shaping Participants' Commitment Towards Athlete Engagement

This study reveals how experiences shape athletes' commitment. The key themes identified are strong dedication to personal growth and high motivation driven by experience.

A. Strong Dedication to Personal Growth

Sports foster discipline and focus, with advancing levels of achievement requiring sustained commitment. Balancing training with school enhances time management and reinforces dedication (Martinez-Alvarado *et al.*, 2016; Gacar *et al.*, 2021).

B. Highly Motivated by Experience Athletes

Highly Motivated by Experience Athletes' enthusiasm is fueled by personal and external factors. Support from coaches and overcoming setbacks deepen their resolve, turning challenges into motivation (Huang *et al.*, 2021; Abdel & Meguid, 2022; Chen *et al.*, 2019).

C. Data Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

Data integration is essential for merging quantitative and qualitative insights to offer a comprehensive understanding of athlete engagement. This study used merging-

converging (finding similarities) and merging-expansion (exploring new perspectives) methods.

D. Competence and Supportive Coaching

The quantitative results show high competence in athletes' training abilities, which aligns with the theme of supportive coaching practices, emphasizing the importance of structured feedback in boosting intrinsic motivation (Csata & Szekely, 2023; Carpentier & Mageau, 2013).

E. Autonomy and Personalized Training

Athletes' perceived autonomy in training reflects their personal preferences, enhancing their engagement (Slemp *et al.*, 2024).

F. Goal Images and Visualization

Athletes' ability to visualize success and compete at elite levels aligns with their intrinsic motivation to pursue long-term goals. This visualization fosters focus and motivation (Lochhead, 2024; Tod *et al.*, 2023).

G. Dedication and Persistence

The integration reveals how dedication and perseverance lead to continuous growth, reflecting both short-term and long-term athletic success (Crede *et al.*, 2017; Duckworth, 2007).

6. Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from the findings of the study:

The status of basic psychological needs in exercise of athletes in Region XI is very high. This very high status means that training environments in the region are effectively supporting athletes' autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Likewise, sport imagery ability is also very high which means that athletes are effectively utilizing mental imagery techniques to enhance their performance. This strong ability may contribute to improved focus and interest. Furthermore, combative athlete engagement is very high, which means that athletes consistently demonstrate strong involvement and dedication in their sport, likely leading to enhanced performance and sustained enthusiasm.

In this study, there is a significant influence of basic psychological needs in exercise and sport imagery ability on the engagement among combat sports athletes. These two variables, basic psychological needs and the ability to use sport imagery, are crucial for enhancing athlete engagement.

The lived experiences of participants as regards athlete engagement emerged in themes, and this includes believing in oneself and dedicating extra effort, training for holistic athletic performance, balancing responsibilities for success, empowering and

collaborating in athlete development, defining success through personal fulfillment, building strong familial bonds.

Meanwhile, the roles of experience in shaping the attitude of participants towards athlete engagement were presented in two emergent themes namely: fostering personal growth and disciplining oneself through sports involvement. Moreover, two emergent themes unfold in shaping the beliefs towards athlete engagement: growth through opportunity and achievement and resilience through training and perseverance. In addition, this study unfolded two major themes on the roles of experiences in shaping the commitment of the participants towards athlete engagement: strong dedication to personal growth and highly motivated by experience.

The qualitative results provide valuable insights into the diverse factors influencing athlete engagement. The themes highlight the importance of personal drive, social collaboration, and meaningful experiences in shaping athletes' growth and commitment. Key findings emphasize the need for designed support systems to nurture self-belief, holistic training, and the ability to balance responsibilities. Sports also play a transformative role in fostering discipline, personal growth, and resilience, underscoring the value of experiential learning opportunities.

Perseverance, the results show that belief in growth through achievement and perseverance strengthens engagement, while meaningful experiences inspire dedication and motivation. These findings call for holistic programs that integrate personal development, social support, and impactful experiences to enhance athlete engagement and success.

And finally, the integration of quantitative and qualitative data. This study found out that the descriptive levels of combative athletes' basic psychological needs in exercise, particularly at competence and autonomy results, showed merging-converging with the experiences of combative athletes' engagement, specifically on training for holistic athletic performance. This implies then that to enhance the mental and physical growth of the athletes, there is a need to meet these psychological needs.

Additionally, the descriptive levels of combative athletes' sport imagery, particularly goal-setting result showed merging-expansion nature of integration with the experiences of combative athletes' engagement, particularly on defining success through personal fulfillment which is clearly expressed in one of the core ideas, which says: Many athletes aspire to compete in prestigious events like the Olympics. This implies that sportsmen who utilize imagery of sport predominantly centered on personal satisfaction would tend to have an enhanced feeling of success that would transcend the simple winning or losing of contests.

Also, the descriptive levels of combative athletes' engagement particularly confidence results, showed merging-converging nature of integration with the experiences of combative athletes' engagement particularly on dedicating extra effort, which is clearly expressed in one of the core ideas, which says: Believing in oneself and extra dedication through self-training is key to improving and performing well. These

results emphasize the importance of self-belief and extra dedication, such as self-training, as critical factors for improvement and optimal performance.

Moreover, the nature of data integration, specifically the role of experiences in shaping the beliefs of the participants toward athlete engagement, reveals a merging-expansion, athletes' personal experiences shape beliefs about athlete engagement. Dedication, driven by passion and persistence, emerges as the key to achieving goals fostering continuous growth, highlighting the transformative role experience in athlete engagement. This emphasizes the importance of creating opportunities and supportive environments that nurture passion and hard work, enabling athletes to integrate their individual journeys into broader pathways of continuous development of success.

In addition, the nature of data integration, specifically the role of experiences in shaping the attitudes of participants toward athlete engagement, reveals a merging-expansion: athletes' personal experiences influence attitudes toward athlete engagement. The high rating of skill images highlights the theme of disciplining oneself through sports involvement, emphasizing that training builds focus and improves physical health, particularly during tournaments. This emphasizes the importance of self-discipline in skill development and performance. Integrating individual experiences with sports imagery highlights the need for structured opportunities that foster mental discipline and focused training, helping athletes align personal growth with broader development success.

Furthermore, the nature of data integration on the role of experiences in shaping the commitment of the participants towards athlete engagement, reveals a merging-expansion, where personal experiences significantly shape participants' commitment to the engagement of athletes. The very high rating of feeling positive emotions when doing sports underscores the theme of being highly motivated by experience, highlighting that positive experiences and recognition reinforce athlete's drive. This emphasizes the need for supportive environments that encourage emotional connections and celebrate achievements, supporting personal fulfillment with long-term athletic engagement and success.

The regression analysis on the significance of the influence of basic psychological needs in exercise and sport imagery ability to athlete engagement reveals a merging-converging nature of integration with experiences of combative sports athletes, particularly in balancing responsibilities for success, which is clearly expressed in one of the core ideas: balancing academics, highlight the importance of effective responsibility management as a critical in fostering athlete engagement and achieving success.

7.1 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are suggested:

- 1) The independent variables, basic psychological needs in exercise and sports imagery ability, are rated very high as predictors of combative athlete engagement, though some items ranked lowest among all evaluated factors. Specifically, the item in the competence, "exercising is an activity in which there

is a high level of success” has a mean of 4.44, and the item in the relatedness, “feeling very much at ease with the other exercise participants”, for the strategy image, the item “creating a new event/game plan before or during the game” indicate areas for improvement. To address these, **physical education teachers, coaches, and trainers** should enhance competence by providing consistent success opportunities through goal-setting and positive reinforcement. Relatedness can be strengthened by fostering inclusive, team-oriented environments. To strategy image in the sport imagery ability of combative athletes, structured sessions focusing on visualizing and adapting event or game plans can develop athletes’ strategic thinking and adaptability. These actions will further boost athletes’ engagement and performance.

- 2) Basic psychological needs in exercise and sport imagery ability are key predictors of combative athlete engagement, impacting goal, performance and sustained participation. **Policymakers** should create policies that integrate psychological skills training into athletic programs, focusing on autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Coaches and trainers should be guided to incorporate structured sport imagery exercises to help athletes visualize success. These measures would enhance psychological well-being and imagery skills, encouraging long-term engagement and success in combative sports.
- 3) The regression analysis reveals that both basic psychological needs in exercise and sport imagery ability are significant predictors of athlete engagement, with sport imagery ability showing a stronger influence. This model highlights the importance of addressing psychological needs and mental skills in enhancing combative athlete engagement. **School administrators** should adapt this model to enhance athlete engagement by prioritizing athletes' psychological needs in sports programs. This can include coach training on mental skills, funding sport psychology workshops, and offering imagery skills coaching to improve visualization, goal-setting, and emotional control.
- 4) While confidence in athlete engagement is rated very high overall, two items, "believing in having the skills/techniques to be successful in sport" and "being confident in abilities", received the lowest means, both at 4.55. This suggests that while athletes generally feel confident, there is room for improvement in their belief in their skills and abilities. **Combative athletes** should focus on strengthening their self-confidence by engaging in mental training techniques, such as visualization and positive self-talk, to reinforce their belief in their skills and abilities. Setting specific performance goals, celebrating small successes, and seeking constructive feedback from coaches can also help build a stronger sense of self-efficacy and belief in their potential for success.
- 5) Based on the regression analysis results, the model explains 43.1% of the variance in athlete engagement, suggesting that there are other factors influencing engagement beyond the basic psychological needs and sport imagery ability included in the current model. For future studies, it is recommended to explore

additional factors that may contribute to athlete engagement, given that the current model only accounts for 43.1% of the variance. **Researchers** should investigate other psychological, environmental, or social factors that could further explain variations in athlete engagement, potentially enhancing the understanding of what drives combative athletes' sustained commitment and performance.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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