



The Impact of Competitive Regulatory Changes on Psychological Indicators Ensuring the Efficiency of a Wrestler's Performance

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Abstract

Background. The study attempts to reveal those psychological leading indicators that have emerged as a consequence of the recent regulatory changes in wrestling, which can ensure stable and high competitive results.

Objectives. This study aimed to identify the primary psychological factors that ensure the stability of a wrestler's high competitive results and to characterize the specifics of their manifestations, as influenced by the regulatory requirements.

Materials and methods. To organize the research process more effectively, modern advanced sensory technologies, tests, questionnaires, observations, and mathematical statistical methods were used. All of these techniques have proven to be of practical significance in sports psychology. The study was conducted among 33 highly qualified wrestlers from the national team of the Republic of Armenia (winners and medalists of World, European, and International Competitions).

Results. The comparative analysis of the research results revealed the leading psychological indicators that ensure the effectiveness of wrestlers' competitive performance under previous and current regulatory requirements. The study also interpreted the reliable interrelationships of these indicators with mental states, various stress factors, individual personality traits, and psychomotor abilities.

Conclusions. In modern wrestling, the effectiveness of technical and tactical preparation is realized through the patterns of interconnected manifestations of psychomotor indicators, whereas in the past, manifestations of the emotional sphere prevailed, which have undergone significant transformations over the years due to regulatory changes.

Keywords: regulatory changes, intercorrelation connections, psychomotor abilities, comparative analyses.

Introduction

The continuous structural and regulatory changes in competitive activities introduce new requirements for professionals in almost all sports fields (Arias et al., 2011; Pluta et al., 2014; Janowski et al., 2020), including coaches, educators, sports doctors, psychologists, and others (Li & Hopkins, 2022; Rennie et al., 2024).

Wrestling is among the sports that undergo regulatory changes from one Olympic Games to the next. These changes not only pose new challenges for the wrestler's competitive style, tactics, and strategy but also introduce new psychological challenges for athletes in international competitions (Geghamyan, 2018).

The most significant regulatory changes in wrestling were introduced by the International Wrestling Federation in 2013 (United World Wrestling. Official Website) and are still ongoing to this day. Significant changes have been made to weight categories, the overall duration of matches and competitions, and the draw system. Under the new regulations, mandatory leg clinches in freestyle wrestling, determined by the draw, have been eliminated, as well as the kneeling position work in Greco-Roman wrestling. New regulations have been introduced, including an increase in the total duration of matches and competitions, changes in the scoring system for techniques, adjustments to the timing of athlete weighings, and many other similar modifications (Matthew et al., 2005; Tünnemann, 2013; Korobeynikov et al., 2016).

The aforementioned regulatory changes, along with the increased intensity of participation in competitions,

the expanded volume of training loads, and other factors in recent years, have introduced new psychological challenges for wrestlers (Ahmed Abdo Hassan Abdel Wareth, 2022; Farzizadeh & Abravesh, 2022; Mousavi et al., 2023). These challenges require the effective distribution of physical and mental resources, an acute sense of time perception, mobilization readiness, functional abilities for rapid and efficient recovery, a specialized level of development in musculoskeletal sensations, a high degree of development in sensorimotor reactions, exceptional stability to external and internal stress factors, strong willpower, competitive psychological reliability, and more (Rutkowska & Gierczuk, 2017; Rutkowska, Gierczuk, & Buszta, 2020; Ranjbar et al., 2023). Due to all this, despite many years of experiments and research, the previously studied and developed psychological indicators that ensure the effectiveness of a wrestler's competitive activity are not justified under current conditions (Eklund, Gould, & Jackson, 1993; Bernthal & Medway, 2005; Geghamyan, 2016), and this issue has not yet been finally clarified and needs to be continuously improved in the ways of its implementation (Cieśliński, Gierczuk, & Sadowski, 2021; Korobeynikov, 2022).

Thus, the problem of revealing the psychological foundations of the effectiveness of a wrestler's competitive activity is one of the primary requirements of psychological science and sports psychology, as it is one of the main guarantees of achieving high results in sports.

Research hypothesis: It is assumed that the psychological indicators of competitive performance efficiency in wrestling are significantly linked to the regulations adopted by the International Wrestling Federation. As these regulations change, they in turn evolve and introduce new demands on the wrestler's readiness and psychological state.

The study purpose: To identify the primary mental factors that ensure the stability of a wrestler's high competitive results and to characterize the specific ways these factors manifest, influenced by the regulatory requirements.

Materials and Methods

Study Participants

The research included 33 highly qualified wrestlers from the national team of the Republic of Armenia (winners and medalists of World, European, and international competitions).

Study Organization

The research was carried out in 2023-2024, in the Chair of Sports Pedagogy and Psychology of Armenian State Institute of Physical Culture and Sport and in the scientific research laboratories of the Institute "Sport EMI". The research process adhered to the requirements of the Helsinki Declaration, and the results were approved by the Ethics Committee of Armenian State Institute of Physical Culture and Sport.

The research focused on studying the indicators of wrestlers' mental phenomena (mental processes, emotional states, personal and psychomotor abilities, etc.) that (Gould, Eklund, & Jackson, 1992; Ahmet İslam, 2022; Matkarimov et al., 2024), according to several authors, can serve as key and leading factors in achieving high competitive

performance (Fuentes et al., 2020; Dominic Malcolm et al., 2023; Poghosyan et al. 2024).

In 2012-2014 based on the results of the research, a comparative and correlational analysis of the psychological indicators of the highly qualified wrestlers, who participated in competitions under the previous regulations, was carried out by us.

The following methods were included in the research process:

1. In the laboratory-instrumental studies, reactionometry equipment was used, allowing for the assessment of indicators of simple, complex, and motor reactions to moving objects. The emotional-volitional domain indicators of the wrestlers were diagnosed using methods of electrodermal resistance and tremometry. Indicators of movement tempo self-regulation and mobilization readiness were assessed through the tapping test.
2. Non-instrumental methods were implemented based on the following:
 - V. E. Milman's questionnaires on "Competitive Mental Reliability" and "Pre-Competition Mental States Diagnosis,"
 - The Khanin-Spielberger Anxiety Self-Assessment Scale,
 - Eysenck's Personality Inventory (EPI version),
 - L. P. Ponomarenko and R. V. Belousova's "Assessment of Personality Stress Resistance" test,
 - R. Lazarus's "Coping Strategies" questionnaire,
 - N. Hall's "Emotional Intelligence" questionnaire,
3. Mathematical statistical methods: The processing of numerical data was carried out using the StatPlus Pro software. This was aimed at the comparative and correlational analysis of indicators related to wrestlers' mental readiness, as well as the analysis of factor indicators. Based on the results, psychological profiles were developed.

Statistical Analysis

Overall, more than 60 psychological indicators of wrestlers were studied. From the multitude of obtained indicators, those with the most reliable and direct correlations were selected. These indicators held central positions within the system of all the studied variables due to their significance.

Among the presented factors, the indicators primarily included those with a factor weight of $r = 0.40$ or higher.

Results

Through research, an attempt was made to conduct a comparative analysis of the leading psychological indicators that ensure the effectiveness of wrestlers' competitive performance under the conditions of former and current regulatory requirements. The goal was to identify and interpret their reliable correlational relationships with mental states, various stress factors, personal characteristics, and psychomotor abilities (See Figures 1 and 2).

The results of previous research, presented in Figure 1 (Geghamyan, V., 2016), indicate that the following demonstrated the most numerous and strongest correlational relationships:

The indicator of competitive emotional endurance, which ensures “mental freshness” during training and competitive processes. This mental freshness serves as a foundation for the effective functioning of not only other mental phenomena but also for the manifestation of physical, technical, and tactical readiness, as well as the organism’s full reserve energy and capabilities.

The indicator of internally meaningful stressors, which is reflected in the wrestler’s fears and doubts. These are associated with concerns about effectively demonstrating readiness when needed, losing points, sustaining injuries, failing to meet the expectations of the coach and teammates, or having their personal initiatives fail. Such stressors lower the wrestler’s confidence in their own abilities.

These indicators have reliable correlational relationships not only with each other but also with personal psychological characteristics, mental states, and psychomotor abilities. This provides a basis for considering that these two indicators, along with those correlated with them, were previously the leading and primary indicators in wrestling.

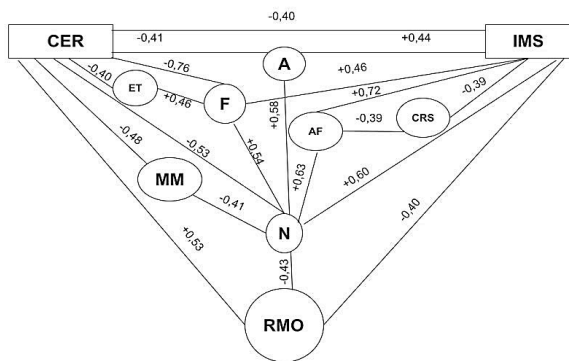


Fig. 1. Reliable correlational relationships among the studied indicators prior to the 2013 regulatory changes (Geghamyan V., 2016). Note: □ – Leading indicators; O – Main indicators. Competitive Emotional Resilience (CER), internally meaningful stressor (IMS), Pre-Competition Apathy (A), Pre-Competition Fever (F), Personal Anxiety (PA), Combat Readiness State (CRS), Emotional Tension (ET), Neuroticism (N), Reaction to a Moving Object (RMO), Simple Motor Reaction (SMR), Maximum Mobilization (MM)

The analysis of the correlational relationships of the above-mentioned leading indicators also demonstrates that, previously, certain personal factors predominantly occupied positions within the internal mechanisms of the correlational structure. These included emotional stability based on temperament type and the indicator of personal anxiety. However, indicators of mental state manifestations, such as pre-competition fever, apathy, and emotional stability, prevailed. Among psychomotor abilities, only the indicators of reaction to a moving object and mobilization ability were incorporated into the internal structure of the correlational relationships.

The analysis of the results from the research carried out after the latest regulatory changes reveals that the picture has significantly changed (see Figure 2).

Thus, the indicator of Competitive Emotional Resilience (CER) has demonstrated direct reliable correlations with several factors: Complex Motor Reaction (CMR, $r=-0.58$),

Emotional Tension (ET, $r=-0.61$), Control of Movement Tempo (CMT, $r=-0.42$), Reaction to a Moving Object (RMO, $r=+0.81$), and Emotional Intelligence (EI, $r=-0.53$) (see Figure 2).

As we can observe, this indicator has shown the most numerous and strongest correlational relationships with the indicators of psychomotor abilities. Such correlations are justified, as the latest regulatory changes in wrestling have specifically impacted the overall duration of matches, thereby increasing the intensity of the matches. Under time-limited conditions, the wrestler must solve the tasks set before him, be able to implement tactical plans, demonstrate activity to avoid penalties, and so on. Wrestlers with different competitive styles handle this in various ways. For instance, many wrestlers perform tactical actions at the very end of the match, within the last 10 seconds, while others show activity at the beginning of the match, scoring points early and then attempting to maintain their advantage until the end. All of this places new demands on the wrestler, particularly regarding their time perception, mobilization readiness, and motor reaction.

The indicator of Internally Meaningful Stressors (IMS), unlike previously, has shown relatively fewer correlations with Complex Motor Reaction (CMR, $r=+0.49$), Stress Resistance (SR, $r=-0.77$), and the Number of Errors in Complex Motor Reaction (CMR-Errors, $r=-0.50$). Interestingly, no direct reliable correlational relationship was observed with the Emotional Resilience (CER) indicator. These correlations were mediated through the indicators of Complex Motor Reaction (CMR).

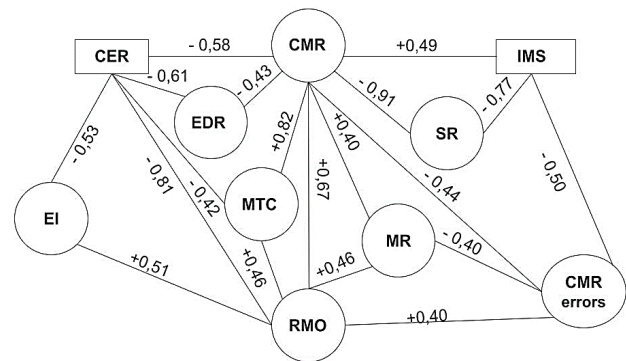


Fig. 2. Reliable correlational relationships among the studied indicators following the regulatory changes in wrestling competition. Note: □ – Leading indicators; O – Main indicators. Competitive emotional resilience (CER), internally meaningful stressor (IMS), complex motor reaction (CMR), reaction to a moving object (RMO), emotional intelligence (EI), stress resistance (SR), mobilization readiness (MR), movement tempo control (MTC), number of errors in complex motor reaction (CMR-errors), electrodermal resistance (EDR)

The analysis of these correlations indicates that a significantly high presence of internally meaningful stressors (IMS) in a wrestler leads to a decrease in the accuracy and speed of performing complex motor actions, as well as the manifestation of technical errors in both simple and complex situations. This, in turn, can result in anxiety manifestations of behavior and a state of excessive emotional tension.

Discussion

The research hypothesis suggested that psychological indicators of competitive performance efficiency in wrestling are significantly linked to regulations adopted by the International Wrestling Federation. As these regulations change, the psychological indicators evolve and introduce new demands on the wrestler's readiness and psychological state. Our research results confirm this hypothesis, showing that after the regulatory changes in 2013, the structural mechanisms of wrestlers' psychological indicators have significantly changed. Specifically, psychomotor ability indicators have gained a more central role in the psychological readiness structure of wrestlers, in contrast to the past when emotional domain indicators were predominant.

The analysis of our research results reveals several important shifts in the psychological readiness structure of wrestlers that directly align with research discussed in the introduction. For example, our findings on the impact of competitive regulations on psychological indicators are consistent with Arias et al. (2011), who noted that regulatory changes create new requirements in almost all sports. Similarly, Pluta et al. (2014) and Janowski et al. (2020) also revealed adaptations in athletes in response to regulatory changes, which aligns with our results.

The general patterns of competitive duels noted in Korobeynikov et al. (2016) work are confirmed by our research, particularly the assertion that regulatory changes dictate changes in technical and tactical preparation mechanisms. However, our work extends this view by revealing that psychomotor ability indicators have become key components of this mechanism, which was not specified in Korobeynikov's work.

Rutkowska and Gierczuk's (2017; 2020) studies emphasized the importance of psychological factors in wrestling, which is further confirmed by our research. In their work, however, the role of psychomotor abilities was not emphasized, which is one of the important discoveries of our research.

Ranjbar et al. (2023) work, which links mental toughness with motor learning in wrestling, is supported by our results, which show that complex motor reaction indicators and movement tempo control are closely related to competitive emotional resilience. Mousavi et al. (2023) studied the effect of interventions on symptoms of stress and depression in wrestlers, which complements our discovered connection between internally meaningful stressors and stress resistance.

Our research also confirms the conclusions of Gould, Eklund, and Jackson's (1992) classic study on the mental preparation of wrestlers, but our work shows that under modern regulatory conditions, the importance of psychological indicators has shifted towards the psychomotor domain.

Our study results have several practical applications that can be useful for coaches, sports psychologists, and wrestlers. First, our findings suggest that in modern wrestling, the preparation process should be reoriented towards the development of psychomotor abilities.

Given that complex motor reaction, reaction to a moving object, and movement tempo control indicators are key indicators in modern wrestling, coaches should provide specific exercises to develop these abilities. For example,

training processes could include exercises that develop wrestlers' ability to quickly respond to opponent movements, feints, and attacks. These exercises may include working at different speeds, responses in unexpected situations, and performing technical actions under time-constrained conditions.

We suggest that sports psychologists develop new models of psychological interventions aimed not only at emotional stability but also at improving psychomotor abilities. In particular, mental training can be applied to help wrestlers improve their time perception, mobilization readiness, and motor reaction.

It is important for wrestlers to realize that in modern regulatory conditions, competitive effectiveness depends not only on technical skills and physical fitness but also on a high level of psychomotor abilities. Therefore, they should pay attention to the development of this area in their individual training.

The importance of our research results is not limited to theoretical value alone. First, this work illuminates the fundamental changes that have occurred in wrestling following recent regulatory changes, which is important for coaches and athletes to effectively plan their training process.

Second, our findings that psychomotor ability indicators have become leading factors in ensuring competitive effectiveness help reorient traditional approaches to wrestler preparation, which were predominantly focused on emotional stability.

Third, our discovered correlational relationships between competitive emotional resilience, internally meaningful stressors, and psychomotor abilities shed new light on the structure of wrestlers' psychological readiness, which can help develop more targeted and effective psychological preparation methods.

Fourth, our research shows that regulatory changes in sports can lead not only to technical and tactical changes but also to fundamental psychological shifts, which is important for sports regulators and managers.

Fifth, the results of our work may be useful not only for wrestling but also for other martial arts and combat sports that have similar requirements for psychomotor abilities.

Based on our research results, several directions for further studies can be proposed.

First, it would be valuable to conduct longitudinal studies that follow wrestlers' psychological adaptation to regulatory changes. Such studies would help understand how wrestlers adapt to new rules over time and what psychological mechanisms they develop.

Second, training methods specifically aimed at developing psychomotor abilities in wrestlers could be developed and tested. Evaluating the effectiveness of these methods could help improve the preparation process for wrestlers.

Third, it would be interesting to conduct cross-cultural comparisons of wrestlers' psychological readiness in different countries and wrestling schools. Such studies would help reveal whether there are cultural peculiarities in psychological adaptation.

Fourth, the impact of changes in psychological indicators on wrestlers' choice of technical and tactical actions could be studied. Such research would help understand how psychological factors affect wrestlers' decision-making process during competition.

Fifth, it would be valuable to study the peculiarities of psychological readiness of wrestlers in different age groups under modern regulatory conditions, which would help develop training methods appropriate to age characteristics.

Thus, our research not only reveals changes in the role of psychological indicators in modern wrestling but also opens new horizons for further studies that can contribute to the development of wrestling and improvement of athlete preparation.

Conclusions

The data obtained from the studies conducted before and after the recent regulatory changes in wrestling led to the conclusion that the new manifestations and significance of the correlational relationships among the studied psychological leading indicators have become more emphasized. This was not expressed or substantiated in the field of wrestler readiness in previous research.

Although similar correlations were observed in the past, they were predominantly characterized by manifestations of the emotional domain. In modern wrestling, however, the effectiveness of technical and tactical readiness is realized through the interrelated manifestations of psychomotor indicators. This is clearly evidenced by the research results.

The entirety of the presented correlations also indicates that continuous processes are occurring within the psyche of wrestlers, which can later acquire a qualitatively new nature. These processes have the potential to enhance the effectiveness of competitive performance and lead to the achievement of new results, provided no new regulatory changes are introduced.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Вплив регуляторних змін у змагальній діяльності на психологічні показники, що забезпечують ефективність виступу борця

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Авторський вклад: А – дизайн дослідження; В – збір даних; С – статаналіз; D – підготовка рукопису; Е – збір коштів

Реферат. Стаття: 7 с., 2 рис., 26 джерел.

Історія питання. У дослідженні здійснено спробу виявити ті психологічні випереджаючі індикатори, поява яких зумовлена нещодавніми регуляторними змінами у спортивній боротьбі, що можуть забезпечити стабільні та високі змагальні результати.

Мета дослідження. Це дослідження мало на меті визначити основні психологічні чинники, що забезпечують стабільність високих змагальних результатів борця, і охарактеризувати специфіку їх проявів залежно від впливу регуляторних вимог.

Матеріали та методи. Задля ефективнішої організації дослідницького процесу використовувалися сучасні прогресивні сенсорні технології, тести, опитувальники, обсерваційні та математико-статистичні методи. Доведена практична значущість усіх зазначених методик в галузі спортивної психології. Дослідження проведено серед 33 висококваліфікованих борців національної збірної Республіки Вірменія (переможці та призери світових, європейських та міжнародних змагань).

Результати. Порівняльний аналіз результатів дослідження встановив провідні психологічні індикатори, що забезпечують ефективність змагальної діяльності борців відповідно до попередніх та поточних регуляторних вимог. У дослідженні також інтерпретовано достовірні взаємозв'язки цих показників із психічними станами, різними стресовими факторами, індивідуальними рисами особистості та психомоторними здібностями.

Висновки. У сучасній спортивній боротьбі ефективність техніко-тактичної підготовки реалізується через закономірності взаємопов'язаних проявів психомоторних показників, тоді як раніше переважали прояви емоційної сфери, які з роками зазнали значних трансформацій внаслідок регуляторних змін.

Ключові слова: регуляторні зміни, міжкореляційні зв'язки, психомоторні здібності, порівняльні аналізи.

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