

Soccer coaches are an untapped resource in assessing and developing player psychology

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With the 2018 World Cup just around the corner, soccer players and

coaches are preparing to perform at their best. A recent article proposes that soccer coaches should be empowered to make reliable assessments of player psychological characteristics, based on their behavior during matches and training. Published in *Frontiers in Psychology*, the article suggests that coaches, with their extensive experience, could provide unique insights into the psychological characteristics required for player success. Using coach assessments could help teams to foster talented players and enhance their performance and well-being.

Previous research has identified that psychological skills and traits are important in sporting success. Researchers are increasingly investigating the [psychological characteristics](#) that make for a successful mindset on the pitch, such as commitment, discipline and resilience.

Recognizing and measuring these characteristics allows teams to identify and foster talented players. Currently, some soccer teams ask their coaches to assess their players' psychological characteristics. However, these assessments involve scouting sheets that haven't necessarily been approved by sports psychologists and which may not cover the most relevant psychological characteristics.

So far, studies on player [psychology](#) have been mostly based on standardized questionnaires filled out by the players themselves. While this is undoubtedly valuable, players may be tempted to overrate their own performance or downplay psychological issues. So far, these studies have not yet resulted in guidelines that teams can easily put into practice to identify and assist talented players.

In the new article, researchers based at the German Sport University Cologne propose that soccer coaches could provide a unique perspective on player psychology. So far, sports psychology researchers have largely overlooked coaches as a source of information on player psychology.

"We see coaches as experts who have an intuition about the relevant psychological characteristics a talented soccer player should have or develop," says Lisa Musculus, a sports psychologist who wrote the article along with Dr. Babet Lobinger.

Through working with a variety of players with different temperaments and skill levels, coaches have unique insight into the characteristics of successful players. While players may overestimate their performance, previous studies have shown that coaches do not. In addition, coaches can more easily compare players to each other. The authors propose that coach assessments could complement standard questionnaires completed by the players themselves.

However, if coaches are to contribute in assessing player psychology, it is important that they make sound judgements about [players'](#) psychological characteristics.

"We see great potential in getting coaches involved in assessing psychological characteristics that are relevant for sports performance," says Musculus. "However, it is important that we provide them with support, so that their assessments can be objective, reliable and valid."

By including many practical suggestions in their article, the authors aim to facilitate researchers and coaches in making robust and accurate assessments. These include providing coaches with clear definitions and explanations of each psychological characteristic when they complete an assessment.

The authors also advise that researchers should consult coaches on the most appropriate questions and criteria to include when developing these tests and that sports psychologists should also be involved in the process.

"Sports psychology should be included in youth [coach](#) education

programs, so that coaches get a better understanding of these issues," says Musculus.

The authors conclude their article by stressing that the benefits of assessing and fostering player psychology may extend beyond enhanced performances on the pitch, to increased player well-being and positive relationships among the squad.

More information: Lisa Musculus et al, Psychological Characteristics in Talented Soccer Players – Recommendations on How to Improve Coaches' Assessment, *Frontiers in Psychology* (2018). [DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00041](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00041)

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