

Developing team leaders' hearts and minds: Links between athlete mindfulness, emotional intelligence, and leadership

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Introduction and Research Objective

Sport would not be what it is without emotions, which greatly influence athletic performance, be it positively or negatively¹. Particularly in team sports where relationships multiply emotions, coaches need to know how to help athletes manage their emotions to achieve optimal performances. **What and how to train to improve this emotional control is unclear**, and therefore, is not always worth a coach's time and energy to investigate.

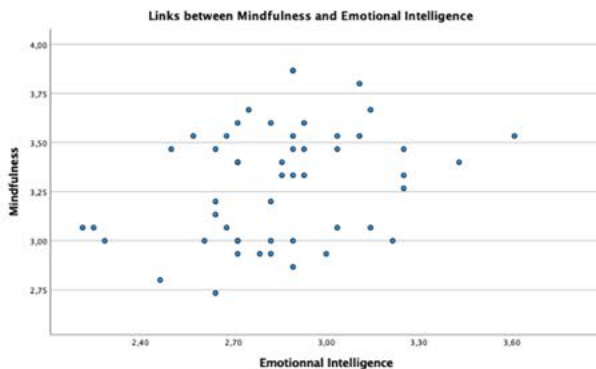
Recent sport psychology literature has measured emotional control as 1) mindfulness² and 2) emotional intelligence³, yet the relationship between the two is disputed. Additionally, the links between these traits and an athlete's leadership capacities are also unknown.

The objective of this study is to explore the link between trait-mindfulness and emotional intelligence, as well as the impact of age, sport experience, and leadership on those traits in floorball, a sport where group cohesion is a deciding factor in outcomes⁴.

Trait-mindfulness is a measure of an athlete's current capacities in mindfulness, without any specific mindfulness training program. Other studies have shown how mindfulness levels improve with training programs⁵, but this study only aims to evaluate existing levels. The clarification of the players' trait mindfulness and its relationship with emotional intelligence will justify the application of mindfulness training if a coach wants to develop emotional intelligence in team sport leaders.

Method

51 male floorball (unihockey) players between 19-32 years old in the Swiss National League (NLA) voluntarily responded to the FFMQ⁶ measuring mindfulness and the EI4⁷ measuring emotional intelligence. Each questionnaire provides a score for the overall trait (mindfulness or emotional intelligence), as well as scores for sub-traits. For example, "acting with awareness" and "not reacting to inner experiences" are two sub-traits of mindfulness. Statistical ANOVA analyses were conducted to compare the relationships across the multiple areas of interest.



Results

The results show a significant positive correlation generally between mindfulness and emotional intelligence, $r=.31$, $p<.05$. Specifically, the mindfulness sub-trait of "not reacting to inner experiences" is positively and significantly correlated to the emotional intelligence sub-traits of "emotional self-control," $r=.49$, $p<.01$, and "persuasion," $r=.37$, $p<.01$.

Age, experience in the NLA, and self-identified leaders' scores were all positively correlated with overall mindfulness (age: $F(1.49)=4.72$, $p<.05$, experience: $F(1.49) = 10.82$, $p <.01$, leadership: $F(1.49) = 8.68$, $p<.01$), and its sub-trait of "Not reacting to inner experiences" (age: $F(1.49) = 13$, $p<.01$, experience: $F(1.49)=8.03$, $p<.01$, leadership: $F(1.49) = 7.65$, $p<.01$). None of these three conditions were correlated with emotional intelligence or any of its sub-traits.

Conclusion

This study found that, among male floorball players in the NLA, there is a significant positive correlation between trait-mindfulness and emotional intelligence, specifically as it relates to emotional self-control and persuasion. Mindfulness and its sub-trait of "not reacting to inner experiences" are both positively and significantly correlated with age, experience in the NLA, and the athlete's self-assessed level of leadership. The study did not find any link between those three qualities and emotional intelligence.



So What?!

This study shows that the traits coaches look for in leaders, such as **emotional self-control and persuasion, cannot be guaranteed to develop on their own**. Emotionally intelligent team leaders may emerge over time, but more likely as a consequence of their mindfulness growing naturally with age⁸. Mindfulness can, however, also be trained intentionally⁵. **Coaches can accelerate leadership development in athletes** by investing their time and effort in scientifically supported **mindfulness programs**. While coaches may have traditionally relied upon older, more experienced athletes to fill leadership positions in team sports, this study shows that the traits that make those athletes the leaders that they are can be trained in every athlete today.

Literature

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