

## Tracing Sports Psychology in Sports Literature

**C. Idaya Rani, M.A., M.Sc. Research Scholar**

Corresponding Author  
[idayar99@gmail.com](mailto:idayar99@gmail.com)

**Dr. M. Subbu Lakshmi, Ph.D.**

Assistant Professor and Research Supervisor  
Department of EFL  
SRM Institute of Science & Technology  
Kattankulathur 603203, Tamil Nadu, India  
[subbulakshmi.srm@gmail.com](mailto:subbulakshmi.srm@gmail.com)

### Abstract

The term *Sport* has been profoundly entwined with its intrinsic facets: physical fitness, performance, and competence. It incorporates multiple components such as physical activity, exercise, gym workouts, rigorous training sessions, mental health, well-being, motivation, fun and enjoyment. Over the years, Sport has witnessed enormous growth in the field of study throughout the world since it is well-known for its diverse nature. Sport is one of the main fields of study in academics, which comprises many other sub disciplines such as sports science, sports medicine, sports management, sports psychology, sports nutrition, sports literature, and so on. Among the various subfields of study, the integration of sports literature and sports psychology has been taken together for this paper.

This in-depth analysis serves as a tool to explore the commonalities and differences between these two study dimensions; as sports studies have evolved as one of the prominent areas of study in the current scenario, the combination of these two sub disciplines attempts to propose a new perspective which considers the main objective for the optimal performance of athletes. Furthermore, this paper also aims to scrutinize sports literature and psychology in detail and conclusively, how these two different sub disciplines serve together for a common purpose, which adds more value, interpretation and meaning to sports and for athletes.

**Keywords:** sports literature, sports psychology, athlete, integration, new perspective, sports studies

### Introduction

In general, Sport is strongly associated with physical exertion and performance measures about any form of competitive physical activity that aims to maintain or improve physical ability and skills while giving enjoyment to participants and, most importantly, entertainment to

spectators ("Definition of Sport"). Understanding the term sport is quite easier in context, but the underlying interpretations have been boundless since it draws a profound connection with several disciplines because of their multifaceted nature.

Though Sport is one of the main disciplines of study, it has been in collaboration with other main streams. It entails integrating with another field of study, thereby providing the overall development of sporting activities, helping athletes to attain growth, and in the end, bringing out players' full potential to prepare them to perform well in a sport setting. "What we perceive as 'sport' in one instance may not be in another; Sport takes on many forms and is constantly changing based upon societal norms, trends, and new directions" (May). Thus, sports studies can be considered an interdisciplinary area of study that draws knowledge from other disciplines such as health science, psychology, nutrition, yoga and meditation, literature, culture, history, management, marketing, and so on.

A burgeoning area of sports studies has been associated with other disciplines through which several new sub disciplines have emerged. Sports Science, Sports Medicine, Sports Communication, Sports Management, Sports and Exercise Medicine, Sports History, Sports Culture, Sports Marketing and Sponsorship, Sports Psychology, Sports Humanities, Sport, Exercise, Performance Psychology, Sports Nutrition, Sports Literature, and so on. Thus, this paper attempts to integrate the two main subdivisions, Sports Psychology and Sports Literature, to highlight the commonalities and differences in detail to help athletes fathom sports and achieve their goals (Gratton and Jones).

To better understand the term *sport* and its functions, all sub disciplines can be classified into two main categories: sport-in-practice and sport-as-text. These two categories are interwoven into psychology and literature. Literature and psychology have been taken from distinct disciplines, but both play a substantial role in Sports. At the same time, sport psychology can be understood as sport-in-practice, whereas sports literature personifies itself as sport-as-text. Every physical activity, psychological, and mental aspect on-field have been associated with sport-in-practice. Sports in a written form, such as sports fiction, stories, autobiographies, etc., have been in alliance with sport-as-text. Michael Jordan, a Former Professional American Baseball player, quotes "I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed" ("Michael Jordan Quotes"). It explicitly states that sport is not only limited to winning or losing, but it also goes beyond boundaries that are learning the art of failure, wherein the real success of life lies.

Lessons from athletes are being expressed or written in their biographies or through stories, serving as a great motivation for everyone. Hence, this paper explains how the divisions of study can be blended to attain a common goal of building mental strength through practice and text. It further explains the analysis of the emergence of sports literature and sports psychology in detail. In addition, the commonalities and connection between them and how could be well utilized for understanding Sports much better or clearer. Thus, it is helpful for athletes to get into the depth of

sports, which eventually improvise their performance. This study also aims to represent the reading public to understand sports-in-practice through sports-as-text better.

## **Sport Literature**

Sport literature is a flourishing field of study that focuses on the core themes of sports and athletics and revolves around athletes and games. It encompasses sports fiction, essays, poetry, stories, novels, autobiographies, biographies, plays and graphic novels regarding sporting heroes.

The protagonist of sports stories or fiction is typically athletes with often involved in on-field competitions representing complexities of life through games. Sports has always been a part of every culture from ancient times. For example, in Greek mythology, the Poem contains one of the earliest accounts of organized Sporting competitions – the funeral games were held in honour of the slain Greek hero Patroclus.

Many of the sports featured have been part of the ancient Olympic Games, which were four years from 776 B.C at the sacred site of Olympia, in Greece. Running, the discus, the javelin, boxing, archery, and wrestling are still part of modern Olympic Games. At the same time, with its reckless manoeuvres, the chariot race echoes today's highly competitive Formula 1 races. There has even been a post-race inquiry and a hint of crowd trouble, too (Durant 5).

In the history of Sports literature, Iliad is thought to have been written in 700 B.C. Attributed to a blind poet named Homer, it described the bitter war between the Greeks and The Trojans. Even in the great epic of Mahabharata, the great warriors excelled in martial arts, for instance, archery, Mace, and so on.

Sports has always been a celebration and joy for those involved and participating. During Ramayana, hunting, archery, horse riding, and swimming were considered royal games. "Lord Ram was known for his mastery in archery, horse and chariot-riding. Ayodhya, Kishkindha and Lanka were the centres of many games and sports" (Sawai).

In addition, there are various Indian ancient games which includes Kapadi, Bull fighting, Silambam, Rekla Race, Cycle race, Jallikattu played by youngsters in both villages and urban side along with cultural programmes during the celebration of Indian festivals. During the period of British rule from 1858 to 1947, cricket has been brought into the cultures of India by the colonisers. Thereafter, cricket has evolved as one of the favorite games of India and it has been widely accepted by its people till today.

Further, the evolution of sports has been strongly rooted in western culture; as a result, some eminent writers such as Ernest Hemingway, Willa Cather, Norman Mailer, Don DeLillo, Tom Stoppard, Joyce Carol Oates, David Foster Wallace have made their immense contribution to sports ("Evolution of sports").

On the other hand, sports magazine and sports columns in the newspapers have also made an immense contribution in the development of sports. It offers analysis, news reports, interviews, feature, stories and opinion on sports news, trends, events and competitions. Moreover, the narrative style of sport writing is significant since it aims at the concept of what-happens-next.

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C. Idaya Rani, M.A., M.Sc. Research Scholar and Dr. M. Subbu Lakshmi, Ph.D. Research Supervisor

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Sport should aspire to the same sort of narrative excitement includes triumph and disaster remain in play until the climax of the game.

Great literary piece of writings in sports captures ambitions, goals, challenges, disappointments, failures, success, hope, mental strength, resilience, and courage through narrative techniques which demonstrates life lessons through literature. The written documents about physical activities by having sport setting as a background of the plot and players as the soul of the story; sports literature transcends sport from merely considered as an entertainment factor to a greater extent of being taken into the realm wherein the human mind brings out their full potential. All prominent themes are typically portrayed as motivational factors aiming at the realization of human dreams, individual growth, and transformation as an athlete by facing challenges, overcoming obstacles, and, at last, becoming a hardworking enthralling young personality who is driven by dreams and goals.

As discoveries such as this help reveal, understanding limits or expectations for sports literature can be achieved by discussing what we mean when we use the seemingly common terms "sport," "literature," and "sports literature." One of the reasons this can be such a useful starting point is that "sports literature" is a hybrid genre that draws from two highly contested concepts: Sport and literature (Reid).

Hence, the growing field of Sport literature has been termed as a hybrid genre by binding two highly contested concepts together: sport and literature. Sport undoubtedly plays a quite significant role in people's lives, whether as participants, spectators, or supporters, which is why sports stories have such resonance. The well-written stories of sports always give the best experience and bestow the enthralling, exciting and dramatic feeling as ever. Sometimes, watching sports with involvement induces an emotional roller coaster ride for the spectators for a while, and in the end, it leaves them satisfied or disappointed with the lessons learnt. In the same way, reading sports provides the same feeling if the story has been greatly written or well-narrated.

Despite heartbreaking and successful stories of sports, the important lessons learnt or achieved by both the players and spectators should go beyond the limits of mere winning trophies.

Thus, the stories must be narrated or presented in a way that often depicts sportsmanship, self-esteem, respect, growth, courage, confidence, focus and, finally, positive outcomes for everyone. It often should teach everyone how to handle failures, celebrate success with a balanced mindset, and focus on the game's process. By considering this motive, sports psychology, as another main study stream, has made its way into sports ("Sports Fiction").

## **Sports Psychology**

Sports Psychology was defined by the European Federation of Sport in 1996 ("Home"). Sports psychology is a scientific study of how psychological factors influence athletic performance, exercise, physical activities and sports (Cherry). In the history of sport psychology, Norman Triplett, a psychologist from Indiana University, made his initial contribution by conducting the first study on athletic performance in 1898 (Triplett). Later on, Coleman Griffith,

known as the father of sport psychology, established the first sports psychology laboratory in the United States.

According to American Psychological Association, "Sport psychology is a proficiency that uses psychological knowledge and skills to address optimal performance and well-being of athletes, developmental and social aspects of sports participation, and systemic issues associated with sports settings and organizations" ("Sports Psychology"). It is an interdisciplinary area that integrates health science, medicine, and exercise. It encompasses psychological knowledge and skills utilized for optimal performance in sports. Sports psychologists mainly investigate how participating in sports can improve health and well-being. They also help athletes utilize psychology to improve their athletic performance and mental wellness.

Although Sport psychology has been one of the subdisciplines, it has played a vital role in sports. Sports psychology initially intervened in its roots in sports with an assumption that the concept of mind over body. In general terms, physical fitness has been given greater importance over mental fitness in sports. Players who are professionals have spent most of their time building their physical strength through diet, exercise, practices and gym workouts to bring flexibility into their muscles and better control over their bodies. While professional players have shown their involvement through extraordinary efforts for physical preparation every day to mould their physical bodies into athletic figures, sports psychology argues and highlights the important role that the mind plays on-field.

Matt McGorry, the American writer, quotes that "The mind is the most important part of achieving any fitness goal. Mental change always comes before physical change" ("Matt McGorry Quotes"). Henceforth, the primary aim or motive of sport psychology is to provide training for mental fitness which most often decides the results of the game either winning or losing. Moreover, it often bestows mental strength to have a positive attitude and balanced mindset every player should have as part of one challenging field called sports (Prince).

Sports psychologists use techniques to focus on numerous psychological attributes, including positive attitude, confidence, focus, resilience, mental toughness, emotional intelligence, self-development, personal growth, awareness, motivation, self-management, adaptability, coordination, and self-control. Mental conditioning coaches often come up with predominant techniques such as visualization, meditation, yoga, self-talk, goal-setting, imagery, etc. "Of course, a sports psychologist can help – it's certainly helped me. People think you must be crackers if you've got a psychologist, but psychology is part of the building bricks to make a top athlete" ("David James"). It shows the key role psychology plays in an individual's life journey of becoming the so-called athlete. Usually, an effective psychologist considers a player as an individual personality, analyzes their unique nature, understands their strengths and weaknesses, and then works accordingly to inculcate the desirable qualities into them to transform them into a sporting personality (Ghildiyal).

In addition, sports psychology highly focuses on the self-growth and realization of individual player. As a result, it leads to coordination and provides desired results when each

unique individuals are being part of the team. Thus, it eventually increases the spirit of the game as team spirit is an important attribute in sports.

### **Integration of Literature and Psychology in Sport**

Even though sports is considered a scientific study of physical activity, games, athletic practice and exercise, it is still an interdisciplinary study by nature. The medium of sport prerequisites other disciplines to obtain an intended result from athletes. Consequently, some prominent subdisciplines, such as sports medicine, sports psychology, sports literature, sports nutrition, and sports management, have allied with other major areas of study.

To a greater extent, literature and psychology naturally have common elements that bind them together. The major theme of these two subdivisions of study is to explore the psyche of the characters or athletes. In addition, it also examines the nature of sports or games to understand greater outcomes, including a new power of human capacities and potential through involvement in sporting competitions. While sports literature documents texts as a primary source of portraying or depicting the challenges of athletes, sport psychology mainly utilizes verbal communication, observations, and one-on-one sessions to examine the personality of athletes. In the end, both divisions have been aimed at the performance of athletes in the competition levels and the individual growth as a matured player to have greater mental strength through texts and guidance ("Literature and Sport").

There are numerous sporting literary books available about sports literature that cover genres such as sports fiction, autobiographies and biographies of eminent sports personalities, stories, poems, essays, and journalistic pieces. Some of the well-known writings are **The Sport of Kings** by C. E. Morgan, **The Art of Fielding** by Chad Harbach, **Bleachers** by John Grisham, **Playing It My Way** by Sachin Tendulkar, **The Test of My Life** by Yuvraj Singh, **Ace Against Odds** by Sania Mirza, **The Poetry of Sport** by Andrew Lang, and **The Crossover** by Kwame Alexander (Noel).

Numerous autobiographies written by great athletes act as a guide for young or budding athletes to follow in their footsteps. Reading these phenomenal works enriches the knowledge of athletes who seek motivation and inspiration to evolve as unique sports players and for every individual who struggles to move forward in their life journey. These texts can be prescribed for the athletes to boost their confidence and positive approach to international competitions. Sports literature texts can also be taken as academic texts for sports psychologists and coaches to expand their knowledge and experiences. Hence, sport psychology and literature go hand-in-hand since both aim at the common theme of understanding psychological factors.

Sports psychologist helps athletes to understand themselves and the game better and motivate them internally, and the off-field communication or conversation between them is kept secret on most occasions. There are very fewer possibilities for spectators or for other young athletes to get to know the entire process of building an athlete who they are as a player with very few interviews and telecasts on digital platforms until or unless the concerned players write their autobiographies, wherein many players have revealed the complete truth beyond the boundaries.

Every experience of athletes, their success, failures, struggles, hard work, motivation, and personalities have been written in literary works concerning psychological factors. Henceforth, sports and sports stories manifest human capacities and cross beyond the limitations of the human mind.

However, the lessons from these extraordinary stories are not only meant for young athletes alone; they instill hope and inspiration for every human who thrives on moving ahead in their respective fields and life in general. Nelson Mandela, the first and former president of South Africa, may not be an athlete but his appreciation of the games at the inaugural Laureus World Sports Awards in 2000 in Monaco sounds great about sports of all time. He quotes

Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire; it has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope, where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all types of discrimination (Fraser).

In addition, the core attribute of mental fitness in sports psychology still needs recognition compared to physical fitness in sports. Moreover, psychology should not be merely related to mental illness; instead, it has to be connected with motivation for optimal performance of players. Therefore, there is a probability that players would be open and involved in psychological training and physical training equally.

Both authors of sports and sports psychologists perform as a mentor for athletes either through their writing or counselling. On the other hand, sports psychologists can also be considered writers as they have the power to rewrite their stories with proper guidance and motivation through the power of speech and words. Sometimes, the great stories narrate the arduous path of the protagonist, an athlete, filled with hurdles and challenges, and finally, how the protagonist faces those with the courage to achieve their dreams. Their stories convey to the readers how important mental strength is in sports as physical strength, at times revealing the truth of mind over body in sports. Thus, sports literature paves the way for understanding athletes and sports in-depth through its narration and varied genre of writing. Thus, literature acts as a lens here to look at sports from different perspectives to bring out its multifaceted nature and also to better understand this discipline to limelight its interdisciplinary nature in academics.

## Conclusion

This study discussed the way for a better understanding of the term *sport* and its subdisciplines, bringing forth a new perspective by incorporating literature and psychology in sports. Furthermore, it provides multiple interpretations, meanings, commonalities, and differences to sports about sports psychology and sports literature. Though the integration of literature and psychology proposes a new perspective in sports, the primary aim is to utilize this concept for the better performance of athletes. Sports has a deep-rooted connection with mental strength, the same way it has to do with physical strength. In addition, it bestows numerous life lessons and motivating factors for everyone. An American Soccer player, Alex Morgan, quotes,

"Always work hard, never give up, and fight until the end because it's never really over until the whistle blows." Various psychological attributes have been associated with sports which improve their mental strength and teach us an important life lesson: never give up on anything until people are alive. In this paper, sport literature acts as a medium of narrating psychology through literature texts by scrutinizing psychological factors.

Further, this study has aimed to synthesize the extant literature to gain insights into the overall impact of sport psychology on athletic performance. Henceforth, sport literature also serves as a resource for sports lovers and athletes curious to know more about the game and their favourite heroes, their off-field and on-field participation, and the preparation of their favourite game. This paper conveys that both sports psychologists and writers are considered mentors who rewrite the story of athletes by analysing them keenly, instilling hope, and providing motivation to them.

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