



## Exploring the Influence of Sports on Student-Athletes' Competitive Mindsets during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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**Abstract:** Sports aim to enhance an individual's formation through organized physical and mental involvement. As sports participation promotes teamwork and dedication, athletes develop sportsmanship, mindfulness, and mental toughness, which brings out their confidence. While the COVID-19 pandemic has caused distress and tested the resilience of people, the effects of the situation on student-athlete mindset and competitiveness remain unresolved. With Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory as its foreshadowing theory, this qualitative study focused on the experiences of 10 high school to collegiate student-athletes from a private university in Manila who were asked about their mindsets during the COVID-19 pandemic. After analyzing the data from the transcribed interviews through thematic analysis and the use of the Tracy Coding Matrix, findings revealed the effects of Bandura's sources of self-efficacy expectations that influenced the student-athletes' will to win, particularly performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. The researchers found that sports affect student-athletes' competitive mindsets by developing their traits, such as self-confidence, motivation, self-assurance, self-reformation, and wellness. Although sports participation also caused feelings of insecurity and pressure among the participants, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, student-athletes were able to adapt, particularly through being supported by their environment. With this, some of the findings suggest that a social circle's presence may ignite student-athletes' drive for victory but may also demotivate them. Finally, the findings of the study may be used to understand student-athlete behavior and strategies such as positive reinforcement and goal-setting may be used to improve their mentalities.

**Keywords:** Sports, Mindset, Competitiveness, Student-Athlete, Self-Efficacy

### 1. Introduction

As ambassadors of their respective schools, particularly in the field of sports and athletics, student-athletes inspire and provide to the entire institution (Ines, 2021) pride, which may be positively associated with performance accomplishments in sports (Aicinena, 2011). However, pride can also produce pressure on student-athletes in athletic competitions (Steiner, 2010). In fact, when student-athletes become actively involved with their community, they also experience the pressure to win from numerous factors, including the fans demanding them to win (Iñigo *et al.*, 2015) and their coaches wanting them to succeed (Nite *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, demands on athletes increase due to a rapidly evolving and highly competitive environment (Soligard *et al.*, 2016).

However, maintaining a balance between education, training, and personal interests is no easy task because it takes notable dedication and commitment (Morilla & Mercado, 2017), especially as student-athletes are required to play a competitive sport in addition to fulfilling their academic responsibilities (Imm, 2021). They also encounter experiences related to their cohort, such as intense daily practices, physical demands, game schedules, injuries, sport-specific social support, and playing status (Ines, 2021). Moreover, student-athletes also face unique stresses like extensive time demands, losing their status, and experiencing injuries, which lead to health concerns, such as lack of sleep, fatigue, and digestive issues (Dominado, 2019). Undeniably, these hardships faced in the realm of sports and athletics only emphasize the need to develop

healthy and strong minds among student-athletes (Goldberg, 1998).

On another note, mindset beliefs have substantial implications for sports performance, highlighting the idea that high-performing athletes' mindsets determine how they handle competitive situations and influence their sports achievement (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Schroder *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, due to the difficulties faced in the field of sports, coaches encourage student-athletes to develop a growth mindset, which refers to the view that talents may be developed over time (Dweck, 2019) to embody characteristics such as the drive to perform, work hard, and learn from failure (Paden, 2020). For this same reason, (Potgieter & Steyn 2010) recommended developing the type of mindset that prepares student-athletes to face obstacles, enjoy learning, and exhibit maximum effort, so they could seek out chances for progress.

In addition, due to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which has been acknowledged as a psychologically stressful circumstance (Manchia *et al.*, 2021), mindsets have been proven to be more important as students' anxiety levels have increased (Li *et al.*, 2020), particularly for those without sufficient social support (Cao *et al.*, 2020). Consequently, students with lower levels of mental well-being encountered more stress about their academic activities, a decrease in self-efficacy, dissatisfaction with academic performance, and no sense of belonging to their university (Capone *et al.*, 2020). Apart from these, constrained social lives among students also resulted in encountering a sense of loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Essadek & Rabeyron, 2020).

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has also caused uncertainty in the student-athletes' sports participation because of the disruption of regular training and competition (Tanglao Jr., 2021). In the Philippines, student-athletes who had been continuously preparing for major high school and collegiate sports leagues, such as the University Athletic Association of the Philippines (UAAP) and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), were forced to readjust because of the pandemic's cancellation of tournaments (Espina, 2021). In fact, after a two-year hiatus, UAAP marked its return in March 2022 with Season 84 (Morales, 2022) with only seven events (Leongson, 2022), which have gradually expanded to its full calendar in Season 85 (Ulanday, 2022) with 60 events in 21 sports (Leongson, 2022). The resumption

of activities marked another readjustment for student-athletes, especially as classes (Canque *et al.*, 2023), training (Zieschang *et al.*, 2023), and tournaments (Stolzenberg, 2023) have been progressing by the transition from online to onsite setups for the school year 2022 to 2023.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, sports seasons and practices have been disrupted in all areas (Laredo *et al.*, 2021), which led athletes of all ages to experience a sense of loss (Tanglao Jr. 2021). Athletes were also constrained to modify their training habits without adequate time for coaches, conditioning professionals and athletes to develop a structured routine (Jagim *et al.*, 2020). As a result, student-athletes had to restructure their athletic life and training, including their training habits, goals, mindsets, source of motivation and social connection with the team, in addition to adjusting to the online mode of academic learning (Espina, 2021).

Moreover, adolescent athletes' physical activity and quality of life were shown to be poorer than that of athletes assessed years prior in research conducted before and during the pandemic's intensification (McGuine *et al.*, 2021). Having no access to sports facilities was commonly cited by student-athletes as a problem affecting their physical condition and competition readiness prior to the season, especially during the summer vacation (Levine *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, student-athletes have gained weight as a result of a lack of training due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Cana & Santos, 2022).

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic also caused a negative emotional response toward student-athletes whose playing years were abruptly terminated (Economou *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, lockdowns also affected professional athletes' mental health, including stress and psychological distress, but with less severe repercussions than the public due to healthy coping mechanisms (Pellino *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, the unwillingness to train among student-athletes has also affected their motivation and confidence as they returned to the sports scene (Levine *et al.*, 2022) due to the pandemic that hindered and intervened with their work ethics (Boiseau, 2022). Taking everything into consideration, there is no doubt that it is a must for student-athletes to develop a mindset that can prepare them to face and surpass these obstacles (Potgieter & Steyn, 2010).

At its foundation, sports affect and form a student-athlete's sportsmanship, mindfulness, and

mental toughness (Anselmo & Go, 2021) through organized physical and mental involvement (Sutula, 2018). With this in mind, high time demands among student-athletes need a strong mind to balance their sport and study amid a schedule of early morning and late night training sessions (Provencio, 2016).

Moreover, sports offer hurdles, such as social pressure, insufficient sporting equipment, and poor academic support (Nthangeni *et al.*, 2021) that emphasize the importance of maintaining a positive mental attitude in achieving success (Karageorghis & Terry, 2011). In fact, it is widely believed in the sports community that a mentally tough athlete has a higher chance of succeeding in the field (Guszkowska & Wojcik, 2021), showing that athletes with a strong mindset handle situations with pressure and stress in sports by embracing and looking them as challenges.

Furthermore, due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, some student-athletes were faced with mental challenges that increased their anxiety (Shepherd *et al.*, 2021) and depression (Economou *et al.*, 2021). In fact, (Antoniak *et al.*, 2022) student-athletes have a higher level of depression and anxiety compared to normal high school and college students. On top of this, student-athletes are most often faced with stigma and shame regarding mental health (Hopple, 2021), thus forming reluctance to seek psychological help from professionals (Cheng *et al.*, 2024).

Moreover, due to the changes during the pandemic, multiple studies have found different kinds of mindsets that were formed. To illustrate this, the stress mindset was developed due to separation from teammates, coaches, and the outside world (Avery *et al.*, 2022), while the mindset of gratitude was used to express their thankfulness for the opportunity to play their chosen sports (Mehta *et al.*, 2020). Indeed, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, student-athletes still have a positive mindset to cope and maintain their physical and mental health (Espina, 2021). Furthermore, it is undeniable that sports participation plays an integral role in strengthening a player's mental wellness (Hiremath, 2019), as it can aid a student-athlete in developing their character and mindset (Weinberg & Gould, 2015).

Without a doubt, sports is considered competitive in nature, given that athletes compete to achieve the goal of winning, and research shows that individuals demonstrate an inherent drive to excel in all areas of human endeavor (Harter, 1978). In fact, in the

field of sports, various athletic competitions allow the participants to reach their maximum potential through rigorous training sessions and preparations with the purpose of setting new records and outperforming their competitors (Zhang & Liu, 2008). Furthermore, in addition to their physical abilities, athletes must also focus on having the right mindset to exert maximum potential in competitions (Ohuruogu *et al.*, 2016). In fact, (Galli and Gonzalez 2014) also emphasized that across all levels of sports, winners are recognized based on the capacity of athletes to handle the pressure and strains from competitions.

Notably, competitiveness can be defined as the will and determination to win in 'interpersonal situations' (Warmath *et al.*, 2022). It has also been said that a "playing to win" competitive mindset, in which "athletes begin to clearly understand the concept of winning and losing and self-identify with their competitive outcomes," is necessary for these situations (Naylor, 2006). Furthermore, competitions provide various opportunities for the youth, such as social skill improvement for children (Choi *et al.*, 2014) and self-esteem maintenance among adolescents (D'Anna *et al.*, 2015).

The COVID-19 pandemic has notably brought many constraints to student-athletes, such as the lack of motivation (Sedjo *et al.*, 2021) to train by themselves, apart from their colleagues and coaches, and in regular competitive environments. Furthermore, student-athletes also stated that people in athletics have such a competitive mindset that they require an environment that can maintain it, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Johnson, 2021).

Additionally, previous research has shown that the social environment in sports settings influences student-athlete experiences. This environment, referred to as the interaction between interpersonal relationships among individuals within a social setting (Shaw, 1981), impacts a student-athlete's social behavior (Benson & Bruner, 2018). However, with the social restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this isolation has significantly impacted the sports industry (Keshkar & Karegar, 2022), including sports media (Horky, 2020). During this time, competitions were suddenly disrupted, but as team sports were temporarily halted, some individual sports gained popularity amid the period of isolation, such as chess (Fuentes-Garcia *et al.*, 2020), cycling (Budi *et al.*, 2021), and esports (Crone, 2022).

Consequently, as sports competitions and traditional training methods were disrupted (Hussain *et*

*al.*, 2023), athletes resorted to alternative routines, such as digital training (Tjønndal, 2021) and virtual competitions (Schneider *et al.*, 2022). Training shifted to synchronous and asynchronous modalities, referring to live virtual interactions between the team and sessions that are nonconcurrent in time, respectively (Cardinali *et al.*, 2022). Coaches also adapted and employed online strategies such as providing cues through pedagogical activity through video feedback (Souissi *et al.*, 2021). Because of this, (Tjønndal, 2020) despite the pandemic, athletes can still see their peer's successes through video feedback and online tournaments. According to (Diel *et al.* 2021), this social comparison to fellow athletes is considered crucial for enhancing performance, not only in terms of motivation but also emotions.

Although the effects of the disruption of athletic endeavors have been proved by existing literature already, there continues to be a lack of research on the impact of the resumption of sporting events on student-athletes, with (Levine *et al.*, 2022) qualitative study as the only published example available to the investigators as of writing. Regarding this, there is a noticeable knowledge gap in the study where the lack of information cannot provide in-depth details of the research topic.

With this, the aftermath of the transitions from onsite to online and vice-versa, of both academic and athletic endeavors, for student-athletes remain uninvestigated. There exists a gap in academic research regarding the implications of the sudden suspension and subsequent gradual resumption of sports events on an individual's mindset. With this, it is imperative to thoroughly examine the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the competitive mindset of student-athletes, especially because there is a dearth of scholarly literature addressing this particular phenomenon.

## 2. Methodology

The study explored the role of sports in the development of student-athletes' views on such endeavors by describing its effects on mindset. In this exploratory research, perceptions of student-athletes on their self-accomplishment in the field were conveyed through (Bandura, 1977) sources of self-efficacy expectations, particularly performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal.

This study used the qualitative approach since the research sought to perceive the student-athletes' competitive mindsets. This was chosen by the researchers to aid in understanding ideas and concepts (Streefkerk, 2019) and to explore the beliefs, experiences, or phenomena experienced by the participants. Non-numerical data was collected and analyzed to gain deeper insights into generating new ideas (Bhandari, 2020) regarding the influence of sports on their mindset and their experiences during the pandemic. This approach also allowed the researchers to attain new knowledge about the different external factors that help student-athletes strengthen their determination to succeed.

Furthermore, the study is phenomenological as it investigated the experiences of student-athletes after the continuation of sports competitions. Likewise, (Yin, 2012) emphasized that phenomenological study pertains to understanding a specific phenomenon and gaining valuable insights by interviewing participants related to the phenomenon. Additionally, the primary goal of phenomenological study is to unveil the innermost thoughts of an individual, and that is to understand their perceptions on their lived experiences (Creswell, 1998). Similar to these aims, the researchers sought to gather information regarding the lived experiences of students-athletes, and how sports were able to enhance their mindset despite the disruption brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moreover, this study follows the exploratory design, for it addresses research questions that have not previously been studied in depth. Exploratory studies, which may be referred to as interpretative research or grounded theoretical approach (George, 2021), are tools for understanding what is going on, seeking new ideas, asking questions, and evaluating experiences in a new light. Consequently, the study was exploratory to uncover more conceptions about student-athletes' behavior in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the research investigated student-athletes' experiences after the resumption of sporting events, it also retrospectively explored the impact of the height of the COVID-19 pandemic on their mindsets when there was limited guidance because of the lack of presence of coaches and teammates during their training sessions.

### 2.1 Population and Sample Gathering

In choosing the suitable population for the study, purposive sampling and convenience sampling were used by the researchers. Purposive sampling, also

known as judgmental, selective or subjective sampling, is a sampling technique in which researchers use their discretion in selecting individuals from a general population to participate in the study (Alchemer, 2021). Rather than selecting people at random from a particular population, convenience sampling was used as it involved selecting the people from whom the researchers can readily and easily attain information (Taherdoost, 2016).

The researchers recruited high school and collegiate student-athletes from a private university in Manila as they aimed to explore the influence of sports on the mindset of student-athletes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the universal impact of the pandemic, the investigators sought to analyze its effects on the university's student-athletes in general. The university offers varsity sports for high school to collegiate levels, which prompted the researchers to include both age groups in its sample to ensure broad and sufficient representation. In addition, the study's sample recruitment has equal distribution; the sample comprised 50% junior athletes and 50% collegiate student-athletes.

With this, ten (10) interview participants were chosen in accordance with a specified profile. The following criteria were set in selecting the study respondents: a bona fide high school or college student at a private university in Manila for the academic year 2022 to 2023, a student-athlete of any individual or team varsity sport of the University, and a participant of at least two sports competitions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 2.2 Data Gathering

After selecting the participants through convenience sampling, the researchers contacted and provided them with an informed consent form. They were given ample time to read and understand the form before affixing their signatures and confirming participation in the study. With their consent, they participated in semi-structured interviews, where the interviewers prepared a set of questions to gather information (Longhurst, 2003). As one of the most vital methods in acquiring data (Fox, 2019), interviews were done to get detailed information about experiences (Easwaramoorthy & Zarinpoush, 2006).

These interviews were conducted through Zoom, an online video conferencing platform for safety measures and for the convenience of the interviewees. With that said, the researchers interviewed and

compiled the experiences of five junior division and five senior division student-athletes in their previous competitions. All the interview questions were based on the sources of self-efficacy expectations (see Table 1).

The interviews with the student-athletes were then recorded using Zoom's built-in video recorder. These recordings were kept only among the researchers and transcribed in a restricted folder, which was only visible to the investigators and their adviser. They were labeled with pseudonyms, Student-Athletes A to J, and all information given remained confidential in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Only the study's researchers had access to the raw data from the interviews.

### 2.2.1 Design of Interview Questions

The researchers sought to determine the experiences of the UST student-athletes and their relations to the factors indicated by (Bandura, 1977) self-efficacy theory. In particular, the researchers provided the following interview questions to the 10 participants of this study.

The interview questions were validated by a communication and language expert. Moreover, the researchers ensured that the interview questions were objective, and did not cross any personal boundaries with the participants.

## 2.3 Data Analysis

In this study, thematic analysis was implemented because it does not require the detailed theoretical and technological knowledge needed by other approaches, which makes it accessible to beginning researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analysis is a method for tracking down, studying, and reporting patterns (themes) within the findings. In addition, this way of analysis refers to a collection of text, such as interviews or transcripts, which is minimally organized and structured.

One of the two main approaches in identifying data in thematic analysis is the deductive "top-down" method (e.g., Boyatzis, 1998), which involves the researcher's theoretical interest in the area, thus approaching the data with anticipated findings based on theories or previously held information (Patton, 1990).

With this, the researchers approached the data using the deductive or "top-down" method, which was guided by (Bandura, 1977) self-efficacy theory as its

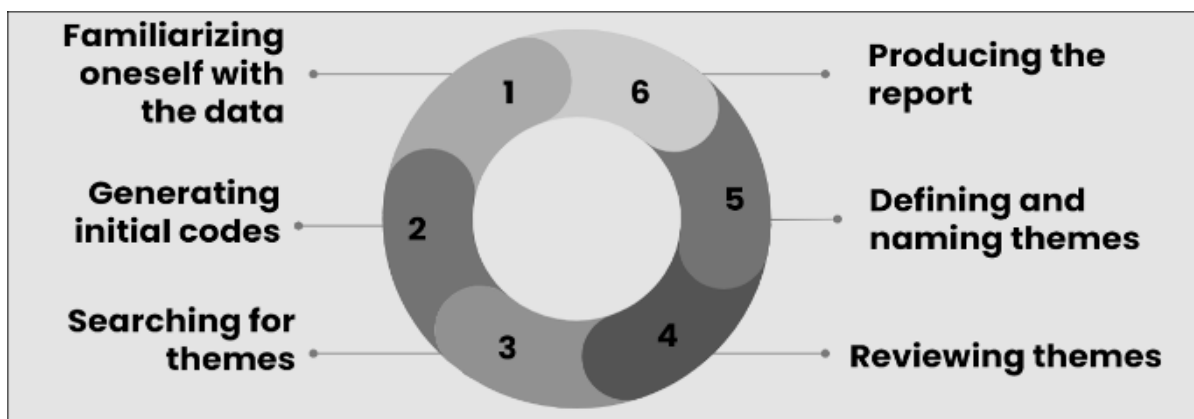
foreshadowing theory, where the researchers focused on a particular feature in coding the data.

researchers conducted involves the six-step process developed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To summarize, the phases of analysis are indicated in the figure 1.

There are several approaches to conducting thematic analysis; however, the form that the

**Table 1** Interview Questions in Relation to the Four Sources of Efficacy Expectations

<b>Bandura’s (1977) Sources of Self-Efficacy Expectations</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
Performance Accomplishments	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. As a student-athlete, how have the outcomes in your sports competitions during the pandemic affected your mindset?</li> <li>2. What was your most memorable winning moment during the pandemic, and how did it boost your confidence?</li> <li>3. What was your most remarkable loss in a sports competition during the pandemic, and how did you cope with it?</li> </ol>
Vicarious Experiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do the achievements of your peers in sports competitions amid the pandemic affect your perception of your abilities? Why or why not?</li> <li>2. How do your observations of your colleagues’ skills during training benefit or detriment your drive for victory?</li> </ol>
Verbal Persuasion	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How does the support of your family members strengthen your will to win?</li> <li>2. What effects does feedback from social media platforms about your performance in matches have on your self-esteem?</li> <li>3. During a match, what do the feedbacks of your coaches contribute to your morale?</li> <li>4. How does pressure from your environment affect you as a student-athlete?</li> </ol>
Emotional Arousal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What mental challenges do you think the COVID-19 pandemic has brought upon student-athletes?</li> <li>2. How would you rate your overall mental health during the pandemic? How so?</li> <li>3. How has the pandemic affected your emotional well-being as a student-athlete?</li> </ol>



**Figure 1** Braun and Clarke’s (2006) Six-Phased Process of Thematic Analysis

The researchers conducted a thematic analysis using the steps outlined above. They performed transcripts checking to check that the transcription document meets the requirements regarding verbatim and formatting (McMullin, 2021). After transcribing, the researchers generated codes from the athletes' data sets, interpreted and reviewed the themes, and created the report.

Furthermore, the researchers also used Tracy Coding Analysis, a method that condenses raw data into themes by the identification of codes relevant to the student-athletes' mindset. They utilized a Tracy Coding Matrix through a spreadsheet and were able to analyze 252 field texts by identifying meaning units relevant to the layer of experience. These meaning units were then condensed and coded, which stood as the basis for the categories, the representations of findings and concepts (Smith & Medin, 1981). In this step, the researchers compiled a collection of similar data and sorted it in the matrix before formulating themes (Jones, 2022).

On another note, the researchers also performed member checking (Jonsen & Jehn, 2009), which was done by requesting the participants to review and verify the draft in which they were featured (Candela, 2019) to maintain the paper's trustworthiness and corroborate the study's findings (Yin, 2014).

## 2.4 Roles of the Researchers

Qualitative researchers serve as the main instrument of the study through their ability to interpret a phenomenon despite vague and complex data (Barrett, 2007). For this study, the researchers reviewed existing methodological literature connected to the research objectives. After recruiting participants who fit the criteria set by the researchers, interviews were conducted online and analyzed thereafter. In carrying out qualitative research, the researchers also observed responsibility against ethical challenges, such as but not limited to confidentiality and informed consent (Sanjari *et al.*, 2014). As such, the researchers protected the participants and the data they shared in the study.

Having student-athlete and non-student-athlete researchers in the group, the researchers have backgrounds that aided in understanding the experiences of the student-athletes. The group used its combined insights to analyze the role that involvement in sports plays in developing and enhancing mental formation amid competition, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 2.5 Ethical Considerations

In accomplishing this study, the researchers ensured the participants' confidentiality and privacy by disseminating informed consent forms, containing all pertinent information, such as the purpose, reason for selection, risks and benefits in participation. There were little to no risks in participating in the study, and participation was emphasized to be voluntary.

After securing informed consent from the participants who wished to join, interviews were conducted and recorded. The interview questions (see Table 1) involved asking for personal accounts of sporting experiences but it did not include any inquiries straying from the objectives. Additionally, data was kept locked within the investigators and deleted upon the fulfillment of the study.

Having three student-athlete researchers from varying sports, the group has backgrounds that aided in understanding the experiences of their fellow student-athletes. Paired with the knowledge of the remaining researchers with no experience in playing for the University, the group used its combined insights to analyze the role that involvement in sports plays in developing and enhancing mental formation amid competition, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Considering the researchers' affiliations, the study also implemented reflexivity that reminded them of their identity, purpose, and engagement in the study (Jamieson *et al.*, 2022) by allowing them to reflect on their beliefs and judgments (Palaganas, 2017). Finally, they also made use of bracketing, which sets aside any biases to avoid any misinterpretation (Creswell, 2003) and member checking, where the participants verified the draft in which they were included (Candela, 2019), to ensure the accuracy of the results.

## 3. Results and Discussion

This part of the study presents and expounds on the data collected from the interviews with the 10 student-athletes. The transcriptions were analyzed using thematic analysis, using the Tracy Coding Matrix, and validated by the participants through member checking.

Table 2 summarizes the main findings obtained, which were organized based on four sources of self-efficacy expectations.

**Table 2** Four Factors of Information and the Major Themes

<i>Bandura's (1977) Source of Self-Efficacy Expectations</i>	<i>Major Themes</i>	<i>Descriptions</i>
<i>Performance Accomplishments</i>	Perseverance Determinant	This theme refers to how performances highlight a student-athlete's drive to improve and succeed in future competitions.
	Self-Confidence Determinant	This theme refers to how victories or defeats develop or weaken a student-athlete's belief in themselves.
<i>Vicarious Experience</i>	Insecurity Developer	This theme refers to how peer success discourages a student-athlete from performing their best.
	Motivation Developer	This theme refers to how peer achievement enhances a student-athlete's will to compete.
<i>Verbal Persuasion</i>	Self-Assurance Stimulus	This theme refers to how a student-athlete remains self-assured in their capabilities despite negative comments.
	Pressure Stimulus	This theme refers to how environmental and societal factors elicit expectations and pressure on a student-athlete.
	Self-Reformation Stimulus	This theme refers to how a student-athlete desires to hone their abilities through mentoring their peers.
	Support Stimulus	This theme refers to how social support inspires a student-athlete to strive for improvement.
<i>Emotional Arousal</i>	Adaptability Factor	This theme refers to how a student-athlete exhibits the ability to adapt to change amid the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.
	Wellness Factor	This theme refers to how a student-athlete improves and strengthens their well-being throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

suggested that student-athletes' competitiveness is ignited through competition results.

### 3.1 Simulacrum

A total of 10 themes, which were categorized based on four sources of self-efficacy expectations, emerged from the data. To represent how different sources affect a student-athlete, presented below is a simulacrum in the form of a meda (figure 3). Furthermore, a medal's incenter serves as an indicator of sports ranking, linked to the study's findings, as

### 3.2 Performance Accomplishments

Given that performance accomplishments influence an individual's belief in themselves, participants were asked how their outcomes in sports competitions affected their perception of their abilities. Presented below is a table summarizing the data that emerged under performance accomplishments.





**Figure 3** Medal of Sports’ Roles on Student-Athlete Mindset.

**Table 3** Themes and Categories under Performance Accomplishments

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Categories</i>
<i>Perseverance Determinant</i>	Strengthening Mindset and Determination Gaining Knowledge from Experience Boosting Commitment to Sports Wanting to Improve Abilities Preparing for Future Games
<i>Self-Confidence Determinant</i>	Gaining Confidence from Winning Deciding Belief in Abilities

### 3.2.1 Perseverance Determinant

Based on the findings, the student-athletes emphasized the improvements driven by tournament outcomes. Participants shared that as they gained knowledge from their experience and strengthened their composure, their tendency to improve was uplifted. This shows that the student-athletes' perseverance is boosted by their mastery outcomes.

**Student-Athlete F:** *Bago mag-pandemic may competition na ang pangit talaga ng performance, kung ano man pinerform ko noong competition na yon, doon lang nag-focus at yung drive ko para ayusin yon ay mataas na as a student athlete.*

[There was a competition before the pandemic where I performed really badly, but whatever I performed during that time, that's where I focused my drive to improve as a student-athlete.]

Student-Athlete F seconded the idea that defeats improve an individual's focus on themselves, while Student-Athletes B, C and D mentioned that losses serve as learning experiences for them to improve their skills. Moreover, Student-Athlete B noted that victories also help them aim higher, while Student-Athlete G said that they got motivated and more committed to sports after their first victory during the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, through mastery outcomes, student-athletes become more driven to achieve and perform better.

Undeniably, student-athletes developed their character from the reflections obtained from the outcomes of their competitions, and this includes the formation of perseverance. These findings concur with previous studies where perseverance is noted as a skill towards an endeavor's success (McNevin, 2021). In addition, these papers also highlight perseverance as a motivation that contributes to passion along with the set goals (Von Culin *et al.*, 2014).

### 3.2.2 Self-Confidence Determinant

The researchers found that the student-athletes agree that the outcomes of sports competitions impact the students' belief in viewing themselves, particularly their abilities and qualities. As the majority stated that they boosted their confidence through victories and performances, losing or performing unsatisfactorily made the student-athletes doubt their capabilities. With this said, the student-

athletes emphasized the role of sports in accepting and trusting their skills.

**Student-Athlete D:** During the pandemic, I was able to join many leagues but there was a time when I joined that league, and we won the league, and I was able to win the MVP award. That's when I realized that although I still have so much to improve on, my hard work paid off, and that boosted my confidence as a player.

Through winning, Student-Athletes A, C, D, E, G, and H also mentioned that they gained confidence from feeling victorious. Being entrusted with the game-winning shot, winning the MVP award, and obtaining a medal or place on the podium were cited as situations from which the student-athletes became more confident in their abilities. As Student-Athletes G and J questioned their capabilities when faced with defeat, Student-Athletes B, C, D, F, G, and H also shared that they saw defeats as room for improvement.

This theme aligns with the effects of sports that (Hicks, 2018) found on strengthening a student-athlete's well-being, which included boosting their confidence. Moreover, (Vealey *et al.* 1998) established that athletic participation builds a student's belief in their abilities to succeed, which is in line with the findings of the study.

## 3.3 Vicarious Experience

Vicarious experiences influence one's self-efficacy beliefs through exhibiting and transmitting competencies from another person, which was why student-athletes were questioned regarding their feelings when they saw their peers' successes in sports. Table 4 is summarizing the data that emerged under vicarious experience.

### 3.3.1 Insecurity Developer

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers discovered that the participants agree that the achievements of their peers can give them a feeling of inferiority. Participants shared that they get intimidated and discouraged by the achievements of their peers. The pressure they feel may be derived from various sources, such as their fellow student-athletes' standings in e-tournaments and feedback from coaches on their performance, which lead to individuals comparing their performance to another. Furthermore, the participants also mentioned that

they feel insecure with their abilities when they feel they are falling behind their peers who are improving.

**Student-Athlete I:** *Kailangan mag-extra din sa training para mapantayan ko din yung skills nila kasi nakakahiya na ang sobrang lakas nila tapos ako lang yung naiiwang mahina sa team.*

[I need to do extra training in order to prove my skills because it is embarrassing to know that they are very strong already, and I am left alone as the weak point in our team.]

Student-Athletes E, F, and J also stated that they feel insecure about their performance when they encounter less progress than their teammates, which makes them doubt their abilities and get embarrassed because of their performance. Through the achievement of their peers, Student-Athlete B stated that they get a sense of enviousness, while Student-Athlete E gets nervous from their teammates' accomplishments. These results are consistent with the findings of (Mottaghi et al., 2013), which state that athletes' views of themselves, their goals, the status of their coaches, and the presence of their teammates are factors that cause uncertainty, insecurity, and anxiety. Additionally, a study by (Klucsarits, 2020) states that athletes value certain skills, exclusively skills that they believe are acceptable to their group.

### 3.3.2 Motivation Developer

The researchers found that student-athletes gain motivation by wanting to catch up to or exceed their teammates. Participants shared that they use jealousy or envy in a competitive manner that does not harm anyone. They also shared that these desires help them develop a drive of motivation to improve their skills and performances.

**Student-Athlete C:** Sometimes I get jealous, but I do not do something that would harm them; instead, I use that jealousy to motivate myself.

Furthermore, Student-Athletes A, B, D, G, H, and J all share the same perspective of using jealousy as the driving force to improve abilities, catch up to others, and become better than their peers. Additionally, the achievements of their peers allowed them to become more competitive and boosted their motivation to perform better.

These results concur with the findings of (Tjosvold et al., 2003) which state that team competition can influence team effectiveness in sports. Additionally, (Crawford and LePine 2013) claim that competition promotes collective outcomes by encouraging people to do their best.

**Table 4** Themes and Categories under Vicarious Experience

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Categories</i>
<i>Insecurity Developer</i>	Feeling a sense of inferiority
<i>Motivation Developer</i>	Wanting to be on par with others Wanting to be better than others Establishing competitiveness

**Table 5** Themes and Categories under Verbal Persuasion

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Categories</i>
<i>Self-Assurance Stimulus</i>	Becoming self-assured in capabilities
<i>Pressure Stimulus</i>	Experiencing discouragement from feedback Facing expectations from environment
<i>Self-Reformation Stimulus</i>	Wanting to improve to teach others
<i>Support Stimulus</i>	Gaining motivation and knowledge from feedback Gaining encouragement and support from family Boosting morale through team dependence Enhancing faith and self-belief

### 3.4 Verbal Persuasion

To illustrate how this source pertains to how comments make a person feel certain that they have the skills to successfully complete a task, the student-athletes were asked about the roles of their social circles in boosting their morale. Table 5 summarizing the data that emerged from the study under verbal persuasion.

#### 3.4.1 Self-Assurance Stimulus

Findings of the study showed that the student-athletes maintained a headstrong and focused mindset despite the feedback or comments they received. They agreed that while remarks can affect their self-esteem, they remain self-assured that their efforts and capabilities were enough. Despite the presence of criticism, particularly from social media, student-athletes focus on themselves and their abilities.

**Student-Athlete A:** Social media nowadays is very popular, especially in our generation. I don't let it affect my self-esteem; as long as I keep in mind that I did my best. Win or lose, as long as I did my best, it really doesn't affect my self-esteem.

Moreover, Student-Athletes D, E, F, G, and H shared that they remain indifferent to criticisms they receive from social media, stressing that these people are unaware of the events that occur apart from their performance outcomes.

This data is in line with (Skinner, 2013) study, which found that positive beliefs are significant in developing and attaining sports confidence levels that safeguard against the continuous psychological and environmental obstacles of competitive sports. Furthermore, it also agrees with (Browning and Sanderson 2012), who discovered four ways in which student-athletes read and respond to tweets. According to their study, several athletes stated they could care less; others ignored the material, but the problem lingered in their minds, while others said it gave them more drive to perform well in the following competition.

#### 3.4.2 Pressure Stimulus

The study found that the most common types of pressure student-athletes receive are pressure from peers, school, and social media. Participants shared that high expectations from others due to continuous achievements are also a source of pressure for them.

In addition, these student-athletes also revealed that these pressures have helped them gain the motivation to improve more and reach the expectations given to them by the people around them.

**Student-Athlete B:** When you read their expectations from the social media, though they are good terms and good encouragement, *ma-fe-feel mo minsan na ma-pressure ka nang sobra, na* you need to do more, I need to achieve more for them to be happy *parang ganon*.

[When you read their expectations from social media, though they are good terms and good encouragement, sometimes you get pressured that you need to do more. I need to achieve more for them to be happy.]

Student-Athletes C, H, and J shared the same idea of pressure to give their best to satisfy the people giving them expectations. In addition to these, Student-Athlete J shared that expectations come from constant achievements, which lead to receiving pressure to do well. However, some student-athletes, namely Student-Athletes A, D, and E, shared that they feel weaker when faced with pressure, especially negative remarks from social media.

These results match the findings of the studies conducted by (Carodine *et al.*, 2001), (Cosh and Tully (2015), (Halvorson, 2012), and (Miller and Kerr 2002) that concluded that student-athletes are concerned about the academic and athletic responsibilities that are imposed on them. Moreover, the data concur with studies conducted by (Richards and Aries 1999) and (Watson and Kissinger 2007) stating that "performance pressure" is regarded as a two-edged blade that may either motivate or crush a student-athlete's spirit.

#### 3.4.3 Self-Reformation Stimulus

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers also found that student-athletes gain belief in themselves by being an inspiration to their teammates. Exhibiting altruism, which can refer to the athletes' desire to teach others, boosts their drive to improve further and push themselves even more so they can help them develop and improve their peers' skills. Influencing their teammates benefits them to exert effort.

**Student-Athlete E:** *I think, para sa akin nakaka-boost siya ng confidence kasi alam*

*kong nakaka-inspire and may natutunan yung ibang tao sa akin.*

[It boosts my confidence because I know that I am an inspiration to others and that they can learn from me.]

Furthermore, Student-Athletes E and H stated that helping their teammates made them push themselves to improve more and boost their confidence as being an inspiration to others.

These results concur with the findings of (Bird, 2022) that once an individual has gained more understanding of the sport, they can then use this to teach others and pass on the knowledge they gained. Furthermore, (Nalepa, 2019) claims that confidence can be facilitated through a culture that involves supported and trusted interpersonal relationships among athletes, teammates, and coaches.

### 3.4.4 Support Stimulus

The researchers also discovered that student-athletes agreed that moral support boosts their morale. As the majority iterated that their support system was a great influence for their drive for victory, some also stated that the moral support from family heightens their drive to ace medals as an approach to reciprocating such support.

**Student-Athlete H:** *'Pag nakikita ko 'yong mga teammates ko rin na nag-m-medal, sobrang happy rin, kasi sabi nga ng coach aming, "win of one is win of all."*

[When I see my teammates garner a medal, I become happy. As our coach says, "win of one is win of all."]

Moreover, Student-Athletes A, B, C, D, E, G, H, and J also shared how they were able to maintain their composure amid the pandemic with the aid of their family and coaches. They gave emphasis on how the support they obtained motivated them to perform better.

This theme coincides with the findings on the athletes' perception of social support (Robbins & Rosenfeld, 2001) that confirmed the positive impact of athletic trainers' support. Additionally, Thompson, 2010 highlighted how the interpersonal relationship with family is one of the prominent social supports, while other existing literature emphasized how social communication is regarded as one of the efficacy-enhancing techniques (Erdner & Wright, 2017).

## 3.5 Emotional Arousal

Because of the distress brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, the student-athletes were interviewed concerning the effects of the pandemic on their well-being. Table 6 summarizing the data that emerged under emotional arousal.

### 3.5.1 Adaptability Factor

The study found that participants agreed that the pandemic made it difficult to adapt to the transition from physical interaction with others to isolation. Additionally, due to the transition, some of the participants emphasized that they had languished during the pandemic and had also lost passion for their sports.

**Student-Athlete C:** In the pandemic, it was hard for me to adjust; there were no practices, [and] there were no tournaments. Student-Athletes A, B, D, E, H, and I also stated that they had difficulty in adjusting due to the pandemic because of the sudden shift and the loss of tournaments and physical interaction with coaches and teammates, which also caused them to be lazy and unmotivated. The lack of tournaments made Student-Athlete J doubt their abilities because they failed to reach the levels of their teammates and garner medals.

**Table 6** Themes and Categories under Emotional Arousal

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Categories</i>
<i>Adaptability Factor</i>	Facing obstacles during the pandemic Languishing amid the pandemic Losing passion for sports Adapting to change
<i>Wellness Factor</i>	Developing fortitude during the pandemic Maintaining and improving well-being Strengthening social bonds

Furthermore, Student-Athletes D and I mentioned that they felt unpassionate due to prolonged non-exposure to training and also thought of quitting their sports. While some participants mentioned that they got a chance to improve in academics and outside sports.

These results are consistent with the findings of (Uroh and Adewunmi 2021), which state that when athletes do not regularly express themselves, they are more likely to experience a deterioration in their identity as athletes. Some studies also showed that a reduction in the opportunity to participate in sports, such as the pandemic, harms the mental health of athletes and their athletic identity levels (Masten *et al.*, 2006).

### 3.5.2 Wellness Factor

Findings of the study showed that the student-athletes maintained a positive mindset during the pandemic and that self-discipline and sacrifice played a huge role in continuing their passion. In addition, the participants also shared that they were able to take care of their bodies physically, mentally, and emotionally and that creating better relationships with their families and friends also helped them cope with the challenges and improve their mental health during the pandemic.

**Student-Athlete C:** Just focusing because apparently during the pandemic, coaches were non-existent so all day I was practicing, and it was a huge boost of confidence because I was able to hone my skills and I was able to condition myself.

Furthermore, Student-Athletes A, B, C, and G shared the same perspective on having a positive mindset during the pandemic. Prioritizing self-discipline and sacrifice were stated as essential to achieving the goals they had set.

These results concur with the findings of (Gupta and McCarthy 2021), stating that the aim of the research was to identify the adversity experiences of athletes caused by COVID-19 and explore the process of resilience used by competitive elite athletes for positive adaptation. Furthermore, (Fletcher and Sakar 2016) found that a challenging mindset during the pandemic can help athletes perceive stressors as opportunities for personal and professional development.

## 3.6 General Discussion

The outcomes of this research have provided insights into the relationship of the given themes to the mindset of student-athletes. With this said, the researchers discovered that building several good qualities, such as perseverance, self-confidence, motivation, self-assurance, self-reformation, and wellness, aids in strengthening the competitive mind. In addition, while sports participation also caused feelings of insecurity and pressure, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, student-athletes could adapt. The study also observed several factors that affect student athletes' mindset and competitiveness in sports competitions, including performance outcomes, peer achievements, environmental pressure, and social support.

The results stated that student-athletes focus on training more whenever they lose a game so that they can win in their next tournaments. Moreover, winning strengthened student-athletes' self-confidence, while losing negatively affected their belief in themselves; nonetheless, these defeats boosted their drive to perform better. In addition, a few student-athletes mentioned that peer success incited feelings of insecurity, demotivating them to believe in themselves. The student-athletes also shared that they wanted to improve their abilities so that they could teach others and be an inspiration to them.

Another outside factor that affects the mental state of student-athletes is pressure. Student-athletes learn how to ignore unfavorable comments from strangers and fans via social media, and they strengthen their mindset by neglecting social media criticism. The findings also suggest that self-esteem is enhanced through attained support from coaches and teammates, while good familial relationships improve student-athlete performance. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought countless changes to the sports scene, particularly distress and stress to which student-athletes have been forced to adapt despite causing a loss of passion. The data implies that student-athletes faced major difficulty and felt hopeless in the shift to online modalities although they have overcome these challenges by accepting the situation and observing self-discipline.

In addition, both secondary and collegiate student-athletes shared the same sentiments on the role of interpersonal relationships that build prominent social support and influence their development. While high school athletes focused more on their

physiological and emotional states, collegiate athletes, on the other hand, delved more into their mastery experiences, enabling them to perceive their abilities based on competition outcomes. With this, the accumulated data implied that both junior and senior athletes had their competitiveness ignited through the abovementioned factors.

## 4. Conclusion, Recommendations, and Implications

Despite the situation the COVID-19 pandemic brought to the student-athletes, the study showed that they were still able to strengthen their competitive mindsets with the qualities sports have developed among them. While the factors that exist in their environment contribute to some student-athletes' declined composure, these components also aid in developing their attitudes toward their sports. With this said, this portion of the study concludes the research and provides recommendations and implications for future researchers in the field.

### 4.1 Conclusion

Competitions boost a student-athlete's commitment to their field by motivating them to improve and prepare for future games. Whether victories or defeats, student-athletes gain knowledge from their experiences to apply to their performance in succeeding endeavors. Moreover, student-athletes become more competitive when peers succeed or exceed expectations. Consequently, observations of other teammates' skills can first lead to feelings of inadequacy, which may adversely affect their confidence and performance. Nevertheless, these observations also consequently motivate them to persevere and be on the same level as their fellow players.

Moreover, experiencing discouragement and feeling expectations leads student-athletes to feel pressured, while accepting validation from their environment incites encouragement. For student-athletes in team sports, being dependent on their teammates encourages them to serve as an inspiration to their peers. Meanwhile, coaches and family members strengthen their belief in themselves and faith in religion. Notably, the loss of competition and the lack of training because of the COVID-19 pandemic dwindled student-athletes' emotional health by making them feel unmotivated in their sport. Among the challenges that student-athletes must encounter include an array of emotional and mental obstacles that arise as a result of

online training, social isolation, financial constraints, and difficulties with digital access. These challenges generated senses of loneliness, inadequacy, and hopelessness, creating feelings of uncertainty concerning the future within their respective sports. Despite the challenges, student-athletes learned to adapt to the changes, developing their mindsets amid any difficulties they may have faced.

### 4.2 Recommendations

The study only covered a limited sampling size of Student-Athletes from a private University in Manila, which may lead to the data being deemed constrained as it focuses solely on the perspectives and answers of high school and collegiate student-athletes from the University. Future research should aim to gather athletes from high school to professional levels to have a broader scope and discover more information about the role of sports in training the athlete's mindset during the pandemic. Additionally, research should involve more participants from various teams or schools in different areas to obtain a broad range of perceptions from athletes. Furthermore, future investigators may also identify more situations where sports can affect competitiveness so that more discoveries on the topic can contribute to the limited information about the field of this study.

Moreover, researchers can implement mixed-method research in the field of sports and athletics (Ryba *et al.*, 2020) because the mixed method incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data into a single study, providing more robust inference than either approach on its own (Creswell, 2014). In addition, several studies have been using mixed-method research in the field of sports and exercise psychology because this approach has been said to aid in the discovery and validity of findings (McKim, 2017).

### 4.3 Theoretical Implications

The results expanded the researchers' perspectives toward student-athletes as the participants iterated how social persuasion could either stimulate or detriment the composure of these individuals. A key area emerging, given the findings, is that the student-athletes' drive for victory is insinuated by social presence. With this said, the findings suggest that social dynamics play an integral part in the competitiveness of student-athletes as these ignite their inclination to level or exceed their teammates and defeat their rivals. With this said, under social persuasion lies the factors,

suggestion, self-instruction, and interpretive treatments (Bandura, 1977), which were present in the findings.

Emphasizing how tournament outcomes serve as self-confidence boosters and how defeats become perseverance stimulants aids individuals to strive better. These findings concur with performance accomplishments, which contribute to self-instructed performance, its exposure, desensitization and coincides with the participants' modeling. However, defeats are not the sole determinant of an individual's condition; unequal skills from the source of vicarious experience also build up a sense of inferiority, which ignites their individual drive to level among peers.

Furthermore, it consistently conveys that the transition of circumstances presents a struggle for adjustment. Additionally, in line with emotional arousal stating how challenging situations may impact self-efficacy, the study also highlights the connection between the well-being of student-athletes and their experiences throughout the pandemic. Overall, the findings of the study support Bandura's sources of self-efficacy expectations from the self-efficacy theory.

#### 4.4 Practical Implications

Results of the study contribute to the knowledge of the influence of self-efficacy sources derived from athletics on the mindsets of student-athletes to compete and persevere in their respective sports. Its findings may consequently serve as a valuable resource for coaches in implementing programs aimed at bolstering student-athletes' competitive disposition, both cognitively and behaviorally.

Moreover, as social presence has been found as the most significant contributor to student-athlete competitiveness, this study emphasizes the need for a positive athletic environment, which may be built through diverse strategies such as goal setting, positive reinforcement, and pressure management.

Lastly, the study aids in raising awareness toward the wellness of these populations and promotes knowledge about the sensitivity derived from feedback. Proving that belief in oneself comes from several sources of influence, a student-athletes competitive mindset may be strengthened through supporting and exploring their motivation and the reasons behind them.

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### Informed Consent

Informed consent forms were disseminated to the study's respondents to ensure ethical approach and clarify their roles and responsibilities in the study. Moreover, to guarantee the privacy and integrity of the study's respondents, strict confidentiality procedures were implemented.

**Author's contribution & Statement**

All authors contributed to the study, although the authors were arranged based on their contributions.

**Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there was no conflict of interest.

**Does this article pass screening for similarity?**

Yes

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