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The Psychology of Performance Failure in Professional Football

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ABSTRACT

This theoretical paper advances a conceptual framework for understanding performance failure in football as a multidimensional phenomenon emerging from the dynamic interaction of psychological, contextual, and performance-related factors. Although failure is an inherent component of competitive sport, in professional football it carries heightened consequences due to public scrutiny, financial stakes, and organizational pressures. Existing literature has often examined isolated predictors of underperformance, yet fewer approaches integrate cognitive, emotional, and environmental determinants into a coherent model.

Drawing on cognitive-behavioral theories, stress-vulnerability models, and contemporary sport psychology perspectives, the present paper conceptualizes performance failure as the outcome of maladaptive appraisal processes, dysregulated emotional responses, and attentional disruptions under pressure. Key mechanisms discussed include fear of failure, perfectionistic concerns, rumination, reduced self-efficacy, and identity foreclosure in athletes. Contextual contributors such as coaching climate, team culture, media pressure, and injury history are also considered as amplifiers or buffers of failure risk.

The objectives of this theoretical endeavor are: (1) to systematize the main psychological pathways leading to performance failure in football; (2) to distinguish between acute failure (momentary underperformance) and chronic failure patterns; and (3) to outline theoretical directions for prevention and intervention, including resilience training, cognitive restructuring, and psychologically informed coaching practices.

By integrating individual and contextual perspectives, this framework aims to stimulate empirical research and support the development of evidence-based interventions designed to reduce performance failure and promote adaptive functioning in competitive football.

Keywords: anxiety; coping; perfectionism; resilience; self-efficacy