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Dark Traits, Bright Results? The Psychology Behind the Hidden Side of Football Performance - a Theoretical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, the specialized literature has increasingly focused on the so-called “Dark Triad” of personality traits – Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy – recently expanded into a “Dark Tetrad” by including sadism. These traits are frequently associated with manipulative behaviors aimed at achieving personal goals, sometimes at the expense of social norms. In the context of high-performance sports, particularly football, these traits can play an ambivalent role – generating both risks and potential competitive advantages. The aim of this theoretical endeavor is to lay the scientific groundwork for a future study that seeks to investigate how dark personality tendencies – with a focus on manipulative behaviors – influence performance in football, as well as the potential mediating role of life satisfaction in this relationship. The proposed hypotheses address the significant influence of dark traits (Machiavellianism, psychopathy, narcissism, and sadism) on achieving performance in football, while also considering life satisfaction as a potential mediating factor. Methodologically, the research will employ the “Dark Side of Personality” (DSP) questionnaire and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), both validated in the Romanian language. This conceptual approach aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of how the dynamics of personality traits may impact athletic success, while also paving the way for tailored psychological interventions in high-performance sports.

Keywords: athletic performance; dark personality; football; life satisfaction; sports psychology