Past literature on motivational orientation has suggested that task orientation more often than ego orientation protects the athlete from a lack of motivation (Duda, 1989). Accordingly, emphasis on task orientation can be expected to lead to a stronger persistence when an athlete’s performance is exceeded by others in competitive situations. The objective of the present study was to gain additional insights into this issue by examining the relationship between sustained competitive involvement, motivational orientation, and perceived ability in youth sport.

The participants for the study were 1,939 Finnish junior level soccer players. They ranged in age between 14 and 15 years (Mean= 14.5, SD= 0.3). Motivational orientation was examined using the Finnish version of the Perception of Success Questionnaire or POSQ (Liukkonen, 1998; Roberts, Treasure, & Balague, 1998). A longitudinal follow-up design was applied. Persistence, indicated by having a valid competition licence, was recorded 2.5 years after the initial phase of data collection.

The dependence of persistence on motivational orientation (task and ego), perceived ability in soccer (low, intermediate, high), and gender (female, male), and of their two-way interactions was studied with forward stepwise logistic regression with LR test in removing variables. The final regression equation contained task orientation main effect and ego orientation by perceived ability interaction. The fit of the final model was statistically significant, Chi square= 68.633, df= 3, p= .000. The task orientation main effect indicated that the players who scored high on task orientation were more likely to continue their participation in soccer. The ego orientation by perceived ability interaction was such that high ego orientation combined with high perceived ability was associated with sustained competitive involvement in soccer, whereas high ego orientation combined with low perceived ability appeared to be detrimental to the continuation of involvement.

The prediction for continuing soccer, based on the regression equation, was correct in 58.4 per cent of cases. Even though the success of prediction was far from perfect, it was better than predictions based on the actual attrition rates. In sum, the results lend support for the previous studies, demonstrating that motivational orientation is related to sustained competitive sport participation over the time span of several years, despite other factors affecting persistence in sport among young athletes.


Keywords: Soccer, Youth, Motivation