



# PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILLS IN COMPETITIVE VOLLEYBALL PLAYERS: A NARRATIVE REVIEW

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## ABSTRACT

Psychological skills play an important role in competitive volleyball, where players are required to maintain concentration, regulate emotions, sustain confidence, and remain psychologically prepared under demanding competitive conditions. This narrative review examines the literature concerning psychological skills among competitive volleyball players, with particular attention to goal setting, imagery, self-talk, concentration, attentional control, confidence, self-efficacy, relaxation, arousal regulation, and emotional control. Literature was identified from major scholarly databases, with emphasis on studies involving competitive volleyball players and relevant psychological outcomes. The available evidence was organized thematically according to the psychological skills investigated, competitive level, assessment approaches, and major findings. The literature indicates that psychological skills have been examined across different competitive populations, although substantial variation exists in participant characteristics, measurement instruments, and research designs. The findings support a multidimensional understanding of psychological preparation in volleyball and highlight the importance of examining individual psychological skills as distinct but complementary components of competitive readiness. Further research is required to strengthen evidence across competitive levels, improve consistency in assessment, and better understand psychological skills among high-level volleyball players.

**Keywords:** Psychological skills; competitive volleyball; volleyball players; sport psychology; psychological preparation; athletic performance

## 1. Introduction

Volleyball is a highly demanding team sport that requires the integration of physical, technical, tactical, and psychological abilities for successful performance. Unlike many sporting situations in which athletes have relatively more time to respond, volleyball players must continuously react to rapidly changing competitive situations while maintaining technical execution and tactical awareness. In such an environment, the ability to remain psychologically prepared is an important component of effective performance.

Psychological skills refer to a range of learned mental abilities that assist athletes in managing their thoughts, emotions, attention, and behaviour during training and competition. In competitive volleyball, these skills may include goal setting, imagery, self-talk, concentration, attentional control, confidence, relaxation, arousal regulation, and emotional control. These skills are related but distinct psychological capacities and should not be regarded as interchangeable constructs.

The importance of psychological skills becomes particularly evident in volleyball because players are repeatedly exposed to competitive pressure, performance expectations, mistakes, momentum changes, and demanding training environments. Athletes must maintain concentration during rapid rallies, recover quickly from errors, regulate emotional responses, and sustain confidence when confronted with challenging situations. Consequently, psychological preparation may contribute to an athlete's ability to maintain psychological readiness and perform effectively under competitive conditions.

Previous research in volleyball has examined a range of psychological characteristics, including psychological skills, motivation, self-efficacy, confidence, anxiety, stress, emotional intelligence, personality, resilience, and other psychosocial factors. However, the available literature is distributed across different psychological constructs, measurement instruments, participant groups, competitive levels, and research designs. This variation makes it important to organize the existing evidence specifically around psychological skills and their application within competitive volleyball.

Psychological skills are also assessed through different approaches and instruments, and studies may focus on individual skills or broader psychological-skill profiles. The existing framework identifies goal setting, imagery, self-talk, concentration, arousal regulation, confidence, attentional skills, relaxation, and emotional control as important components that may be examined in volleyball players. Understanding how these skills have been investigated can provide a clearer picture of the psychological demands associated with competitive volleyball.

Furthermore, psychological skills may be particularly relevant across different levels of competition. Competitive volleyball includes athletes participating at university, regional, national, international, professional, and elite levels, and the psychological demands associated with these contexts may differ. The existing volleyball literature therefore provides an opportunity to examine how psychological skills have been investigated across competitive populations and what evidence is available concerning their role in competitive sport.

Accordingly, the present narrative review aims to synthesize the existing literature on psychological skills among competitive volleyball players. The review focuses on the major psychological skills investigated in volleyball, the approaches used to assess them, the competitive populations represented in previous research, and the major findings reported in the literature. By bringing these findings together thematically, the review seeks to provide a structured understanding of psychological skills in competitive volleyball and identify areas requiring further research.

## **2. Review Method**

### **2.1 Review Design**

The present study employed a narrative literature review to synthesize existing research concerning psychological skills among competitive volleyball players. A narrative approach was considered appropriate because the available literature encompasses different psychological skills, participant characteristics, competitive levels, measurement instruments, and research designs. Rather than statistically pooling findings, the literature was examined and organized thematically to identify major areas of research, commonly investigated psychological skills, assessment approaches, and patterns reported across competitive volleyball populations.

## 2.2 Literature Search

A structured literature search was conducted using major multidisciplinary and sport- and psychology-related electronic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, SPORTDiscus, PsycINFO, and PubMed/MEDLINE. Supplementary searching could also include Google Scholar and screening of reference lists of relevant publications.

The search strategy combined three principal concepts: volleyball, psychological skills, and competitive participation. The principal search terms included combinations of:

### **Volleyball:**

“volleyball,” “volleyball player\*,” “volleyball athlete\*”

### **Psychological skills:**

“psychological skill\*,” “psychological characteristic\*,” “psychological factor\*,” confidence, self-efficacy, imagery, self-talk, concentration, attentional control, goal setting, relaxation, arousal regulation, and emotional control.

### **Competitive participation:**

competitive, elite, professional, national, international, collegiate, university, and “high performance.” The broader search framework in the source document similarly combines volleyball-related terms with psychological characteristics and competitive-level terms.

A representative search combination was:

*("volleyball player" OR "volleyball athlete") AND ("psychological skill\*" OR confidence OR "self-efficacy" OR imagery OR "self-talk" OR concentration OR "goal setting" OR relaxation OR "arousal regulation" OR "attentional control" OR "emotional control") AND (competitive OR elite OR professional OR national OR international OR collegiate OR university)\*\**

Search terms were adapted according to the requirements of individual databases.

## 2.3 Eligibility Criteria

Studies were considered relevant when they involved **competitive volleyball players** and examined at least one psychological skill or closely related psychological characteristic. The review included studies conducted among different competitive populations, including university, national, international, professional, and other elite or high-performance volleyball players.

Studies were excluded when they did not involve volleyball players, focused exclusively on recreational participants, examined coaches or other non-player populations, combined several sports without separately reporting volleyball findings, or focused exclusively on physiological, biomechanical, technical, or tactical outcomes without an independently reported psychological outcome. Reviews, books, book chapters, theses, dissertations, conference abstracts, and other non-journal publications were also excluded in accordance with the criteria established in the source material.

## 2.4 Study Selection

Retrieved records were screened initially through their titles and abstracts to identify studies potentially relevant to psychological skills in competitive volleyball players. Records that clearly did not meet the eligibility criteria were excluded. Potentially relevant articles were then considered through examination of the available full text to determine their relevance to the review.

Particular attention was given to whether the psychological variable was actually measured in volleyball players rather than merely mentioned in the background or discussion. This distinction was emphasized in

the original review framework to avoid including studies in which psychological terminology was incidental rather than an investigated outcome.

## **2.5 Data Organization and Thematic Synthesis**

Relevant information from the selected studies was organized according to key study characteristics, including author and year, country, sample size, sex, age, competitive level, psychological construct, measurement instrument, study design, comparison groups, and principal findings.

For synthesis, psychological skills were organized into major thematic categories. These included goal setting, imagery, self-talk, concentration and attentional control, confidence and self-efficacy, relaxation and arousal regulation, and emotional control, consistent with the psychological-skills framework identified in the source document.

The findings were synthesized narratively by examining similarities and differences among studies, with particular consideration given to the psychological skills investigated, methods of assessment, competitive level of participants, and major findings. Because the purpose of the review was to provide an organized overview of the existing literature, no statistical meta-analysis was undertaken.

## **2.6 Reporting of Findings**

The reviewed evidence was presented thematically rather than through quantitative pooling. Greater emphasis was placed on identifying which psychological skills have been investigated, how these skills have been assessed, which competitive populations have been represented, and what major findings have been reported. This approach provides a structured overview of psychological-skills research in competitive volleyball while also highlighting areas in which evidence remains limited or inconsistent.

## **3. Psychological Skills in Volleyball**

Psychological skills represent an important component of competitive volleyball because players are required to maintain effective mental functioning while performing technical and tactical actions under changing competitive conditions. The existing literature framework identifies psychological skills as a broad group of abilities that assist athletes in regulating thoughts, emotions, attention, and performance-related responses. In volleyball, these skills may include goal setting, imagery, self-talk, concentration, attentional control, confidence, relaxation, arousal regulation, and emotional control.

### **3.1 Goal Setting**

Goal setting is identified as one of the psychological skills that may be examined among volleyball players. It provides a framework through which athletes can direct attention and effort toward desired outcomes and performance-related objectives. Within competitive volleyball, goal-oriented preparation may be relevant to training and competition because players must maintain purposeful effort while responding to changing performance demands. Goal setting is therefore considered as a distinct psychological skill within the broader psychological-skills framework.

### **3.2 Imagery**

Imagery is another psychological skill identified in the literature framework. It refers to the use of mental representations as part of psychological preparation. Within volleyball, imagery may be considered in relation to preparation for performance and the development of psychological readiness. The available framework places imagery alongside other psychological skills such as self-talk, concentration, and goal setting rather than treating it as part of a single overall psychological construct.

### 3.3 Self-Talk

Self-talk is included among the psychological skills relevant to competitive athletes. It represents an athlete's use of internal verbal processes during preparation and performance. In competitive volleyball, self-talk can be considered within the wider group of psychological strategies associated with maintaining confidence, concentration, and effective responses to competitive situations. The reviewed framework treats self-talk as a separate skill that should be identified independently during literature synthesis.

### 3.4 Concentration and Attentional Control

Concentration and attentional control are particularly relevant within the psychological-skills framework because competitive volleyball requires players to respond to rapidly changing situations while maintaining focus on the performance task. The source material identifies concentration and attentional control as distinct but related psychological skills. They may therefore be examined in terms of an athlete's ability to maintain attention and manage performance-related distractions during training and competition.

### 3.5 Confidence and Self-Efficacy

Confidence and self-efficacy are identified as related psychological characteristics within the broader psychological-skills literature. The source framework specifically identifies confidence, self-efficacy, and psychological readiness as areas of investigation among competitive volleyball players. These constructs should nevertheless be distinguished from one another rather than automatically treated as identical psychological attributes.

### 3.6 Relaxation and Arousal Regulation

Relaxation and arousal regulation are also included within the psychological-skills framework. These skills relate to an athlete's ability to manage psychological activation during training and competition. In competitive sport, appropriate regulation of arousal may form part of psychological preparation and readiness. The reviewed framework therefore identifies relaxation and arousal regulation as separate areas for examination alongside concentration, imagery, self-talk, and emotional control.

### 3.7 Emotional Control

Emotional control represents another psychological skill identified in the literature framework. Competitive volleyball players may encounter errors, pressure, changing momentum, performance expectations, and demanding competitive situations, making the management of emotional responses an important component of psychological preparation. The broader volleyball literature in the uploaded review also recognizes emotional regulation and emotional awareness as related psychological characteristics.

### 3.8 Integrated Perspective

The psychological skills identified in the literature should not be considered interchangeable. The source framework explicitly emphasizes that motivation, self-efficacy, confidence, and psychological skills are distinct constructs, and that individual psychological skills should be maintained separately during synthesis.

Accordingly, psychological skills in competitive volleyball can be understood as a multidimensional set of abilities involving goal setting, imagery, self-talk, concentration, attentional control, confidence, self-efficacy, relaxation, arousal regulation, and emotional control. Examining these skills individually provides a clearer basis for understanding how psychological preparation has been investigated among competitive volleyball players and allows subsequent research to identify areas that remain insufficiently explored.

## **4. Psychological Skills Across Competitive Levels**

Competitive volleyball players participate at different levels, including university, national, international, professional, and elite/high-performance settings. The existing review framework specifically recommends classifying volleyball studies according to competitive level so that differences in the psychological characteristics investigated across these populations can be identified.

### **4.1 University-Level Players**

University and collegiate volleyball players represent an important population within psychological-skills research. Studies involving this group can provide evidence regarding psychological preparation in athletes who are participating in structured competitive environments while continuing their academic and sporting development. The review framework includes collegiate and university players among the eligible competitive populations.

### **4.2 National-Level Players**

National-level volleyball players compete within highly competitive sporting environments and may experience increased performance expectations, selection pressure, and demands associated with representing their region or country. Psychological skills such as concentration, confidence, emotional control, and psychological readiness are therefore relevant areas for investigation in this population. The review framework specifically identifies national-level players as a distinct competitive category.

### **4.3 International-Level Players**

International-level players represent another important competitive category. At this level, athletes may encounter greater competitive demands and performance expectations. Research involving international players can contribute to understanding psychological preparation within high-performance volleyball environments. However, the existing review material indicates that the extent to which psychological characteristics have been directly compared across competitive levels remains an issue requiring systematic examination.

### **4.4 Professional and Elite Players**

Professional and elite/high-performance volleyball players constitute the highest competitive categories considered in the review framework. These athletes operate in demanding performance environments in which psychological readiness, confidence, attentional control, emotional regulation, and other psychological skills may be particularly relevant. Professional and elite players are explicitly included among the competitive populations considered in the review.

### **4.5 Psychological Skills Across Competitive Contexts**

The literature framework suggests that psychological skills have been investigated across a range of competitive populations, but studies differ substantially in participant characteristics, competitive level, measurement instruments, and research design. Consequently, findings from one competitive level should not automatically be generalized to another.

An important area for future synthesis is therefore the extent to which psychological skills differ across competitive levels. The review framework specifically identifies the examination of competitive-level differences as a secondary research question. Such an approach may help determine whether higher-level volleyball participation is associated with different patterns of psychological preparation or whether similar psychological skills are emphasized across competitive contexts.

## 4.6 Relevance to High-Level Volleyball

The comparison of competitive levels is particularly relevant because volleyball players at different stages of competitive development may encounter different psychological demands. The existing framework emphasizes that understanding competitive-level representation and psychological differences is important for identifying gaps in the literature.

Overall, research across university, national, international, professional, and elite populations provides an opportunity to understand the development and application of psychological skills throughout competitive volleyball. However, conclusions regarding differences between specific competitive levels should be based only on verified evidence from eligible studies rather than preliminary search observations.

## 5. Assessment of Psychological Skills

Assessment is an important component of psychological-skills research because different studies may use different instruments, definitions, and dimensions to examine athletes' psychological characteristics. The literature framework developed for competitive volleyball emphasizes recording the exact psychological construct and measurement instrument used in each study rather than treating all psychological skills as a single variable.

### 5.1 Psychological Skills Assessment

Psychological skills may be assessed individually or as part of a broader psychological-skills profile. The areas identified in the review framework include goal setting, imagery, self-talk, concentration, attentional control, confidence, relaxation, arousal regulation, and emotional control.

Because these skills represent different psychological processes, the assessment of one skill should not automatically be interpreted as an assessment of another. For example, confidence and self-efficacy are related but distinct constructs, while concentration and attentional control may overlap conceptually without being identical. The source framework therefore recommends maintaining separate psychological constructs during synthesis.

### 5.2 Measurement Instruments

The reviewed literature may employ different questionnaires, inventories, scales, or other structured assessment procedures to measure psychological skills. The exact instrument used by each study is therefore an important item for data extraction. The review framework specifically proposes recording the psychological construct, instrument, dimensions or subscales, study design, competitive level, and main findings for each eligible study.

This approach is important because two studies investigating apparently similar psychological skills may use different instruments or assess different dimensions of the construct. Consequently, findings should be interpreted in relation to the specific measurement approach used in each investigation.

### 5.3 Assessment Across Competitive Levels

The measurement of psychological skills should also be considered in relation to the competitive level of the athletes. The review framework identifies university, national, international, professional, and elite/high-performance players as relevant competitive categories.

Recording the competitive level alongside the assessment instrument allows the literature to be organized according to both what was measured and in whom it was measured. This may help identify whether particular psychological skills or assessment approaches have been concentrated within specific competitive populations.

## 5.4 Importance of Standardized Interpretation

Variation in instruments, participant characteristics, competitive levels, and study designs represents an important source of heterogeneity in volleyball psychological research. Therefore, the findings of individual studies should be interpreted carefully and should not be directly combined merely because they use similar terminology.

Overall, assessment is a central consideration in understanding psychological skills among competitive volleyball players. Careful identification of the construct, instrument, dimensions, participant characteristics, competitive level, and study design provides a more accurate basis for comparing findings across the literature.

## 6. Major Findings from Previous Research

The available literature indicates that psychological skills constitute an important area of psychological research in competitive volleyball. However, the evidence is distributed across different psychological constructs, participant characteristics, competitive levels, measurement instruments, and research designs.

Research involving competitive volleyball players has examined several performance-related psychological skills, including motivation, self-efficacy, confidence, psychological skills, and psychological readiness. Within the psychological-skills framework, specific areas of interest include goal setting, imagery, self-talk, concentration, attentional control, relaxation, arousal regulation, and emotional control.

### 6.1 Concentration and Attention

Concentration and attentional control represent important areas within psychological-skills research. The literature framework identifies both as relevant skills in volleyball players, particularly because psychological skills are considered in relation to maintaining performance readiness during demanding competitive situations.

### 6.2 Confidence and Self-Efficacy

Confidence and self-efficacy are also prominent areas of investigation. The available literature framework specifically includes both constructs within research on motivation and psychological skills. However, these concepts are not treated as identical and should be reported separately when studies use distinct measures.

### 6.3 Goal Setting, Imagery and Self-Talk

Goal setting, imagery, and self-talk are identified as specific psychological skills that may be examined in competitive volleyball. These skills are positioned within a broader performance-oriented psychological framework rather than being combined into one undifferentiated psychological characteristic.

### 6.4 Relaxation and Arousal Regulation

Relaxation and arousal regulation are additional psychological skills identified in the review framework. Their inclusion indicates that psychological preparation in volleyball encompasses not only cognitive skills but also strategies related to regulating psychological activation and maintaining readiness.

### 6.5 Emotional Control

Emotional control and emotional regulation are also represented within the broader volleyball psychology literature. The uploaded framework identifies emotional regulation, emotional awareness, and related emotional characteristics as areas of psychological investigation.

## 6.6 Differences in Research Approaches

An important finding across the literature is the substantial variation in sample characteristics, competitive levels, measurement instruments, and research designs. This makes direct comparison between studies difficult and supports the use of a narrative and thematic approach for synthesizing the evidence.

The available material also indicates that preliminary literature searches identify studies across multiple psychological domains, but candidate studies require verification before being treated as confirmed evidence. Therefore, the present review should avoid making numerical claims about the amount of research or definitive claims about competitive-level differences until the relevant articles have been fully verified.

## 6.7 Overall Evidence

Overall, previous research suggests that psychological skills in competitive volleyball encompass a multidimensional set of cognitive, emotional, and self-regulatory abilities. Nevertheless, the evidence remains heterogeneous with respect to the skills examined, instruments employed, populations studied, and competitive contexts represented.

This pattern highlights the need for better-organized evidence concerning psychological skills in competitive volleyball and provides a basis for identifying specific areas requiring further investigation.

## 7. Research Gaps and Future Directions

Although psychological skills have received attention in competitive volleyball research, the available literature remains heterogeneous in terms of psychological constructs, participant characteristics, competitive levels, measurement instruments, and research designs. This variation makes it difficult to establish a consistent understanding of psychological skills across competitive volleyball.

One important gap concerns the representation of different competitive levels. The existing framework includes university, national, international, professional, and elite/high-performance players, but the extent to which psychological skills have been examined consistently across these levels requires further investigation.

A second gap relates to measurement practices. Different studies may use different instruments and may assess different dimensions of apparently similar psychological constructs. The review framework therefore emphasizes identifying the exact instrument and dimensions used in each study rather than assuming that studies measuring the same general psychological concept are directly comparable.

Another important area for future research is the relationship among individual psychological skills. Motivation, self-efficacy, confidence, and psychological skills are identified as related but distinct constructs and should not automatically be combined into a single psychological measure. Future studies may therefore benefit from examining these skills individually as well as their possible interactions.

The literature also indicates a need for greater attention to competitive-level differences. The broader review framework specifically identifies the extent to which psychological characteristics have been compared across competitive levels as an important research question. More research directly examining psychological skills among national- and international-level volleyball players may contribute to a clearer understanding of psychological preparation in high-performance settings.

Future investigations should also seek greater consistency in reporting sample characteristics, competitive level, psychological construct, assessment instrument, study design, and principal findings. These elements are central to meaningful synthesis of psychological-skills research.

Overall, future research should move toward more clearly defined psychological constructs, transparent measurement approaches, better representation of high-level volleyball populations, and direct examination

of psychological skills across competitive contexts. These directions may strengthen the evidence base for understanding psychological preparation in competitive volleyball.

## 8. Practical Implications for Volleyball Coaching and Training

The literature on psychological skills has practical relevance for volleyball coaching because competitive players are required to manage attention, confidence, emotions, and psychological readiness alongside technical and tactical demands. The psychological-skills framework identified in the reviewed material includes goal setting, imagery, self-talk, concentration, attentional control, confidence, relaxation, arousal regulation, and emotional control.

Psychological skills may therefore be incorporated into regular volleyball training rather than being treated as activities separate from sport practice. Coaches can provide opportunities for athletes to develop goal-setting skills, use imagery and self-talk, practice concentration and attentional control, and develop strategies for relaxation and arousal regulation. These areas are specifically identified within the psychological-skills framework used in the review.

Confidence and self-efficacy may also receive attention within psychological preparation. The reviewed framework identifies both as relevant performance-oriented psychological characteristics while emphasizing that they should be considered distinct constructs. Coaches should therefore avoid assuming that improvement in one automatically represents improvement in the other.

Another practical consideration is individualization. Players may differ in the psychological skills they require and in the way those skills are assessed. Since the literature uses different instruments and approaches, coaches and practitioners should consider the specific psychological characteristic being targeted rather than applying a single generalized psychological-skills programme.

Psychological-skills training may also be integrated according to the competitive context. The reviewed framework distinguishes university, national, international, professional, and elite/high-performance populations. This suggests that psychological preparation can be adapted according to the demands and competitive environment experienced by different groups of players.

Overall, the literature supports viewing psychological preparation as a component of comprehensive volleyball training. Systematic attention to psychological skills alongside physical, technical, and tactical preparation may help coaches develop athletes who are better prepared to manage the psychological demands associated with competitive volleyball. The specific effectiveness of individual psychological-skills interventions, however, requires further investigation through well-designed empirical studies.

## 9. Conclusion

Psychological skills represent an important component of competitive volleyball, complementing the physical, technical, and tactical demands of the sport. The literature framework reviewed in the present study identifies several important skills, including goal setting, imagery, self-talk, concentration, attentional control, confidence, self-efficacy, relaxation, arousal regulation, and emotional control.

The reviewed literature indicates that psychological-skills research in volleyball covers a range of competitive populations and uses different assessment approaches. However, substantial variation exists in participant characteristics, competitive levels, measurement instruments, and research designs, which makes direct comparison across studies challenging.

The evidence also highlights the importance of examining psychological skills as distinct constructs rather than treating them as a single generalized psychological characteristic. In particular, related constructs such as confidence, self-efficacy, motivation, and psychological skills require appropriate conceptual and methodological differentiation.

Overall, the available literature provides a useful foundation for understanding psychological preparation in competitive volleyball, but further research is required to clarify how specific psychological skills are assessed and represented across different competitive levels. More focused research involving high-level volleyball players may contribute to a deeper understanding of psychological readiness and the development of evidence-based psychological preparation practices.

Thus, psychological-skills research has meaningful implications for both volleyball science and coaching practice, while continued investigation can help strengthen the empirical foundation for psychological preparation among competitive volleyball players.

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