



The Coach's Role in Instilling Mental Toughness in Young Badminton Athletes

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the coach's role in instilling mental toughness in young badminton athletes at Persatuan Bulutangkis Mutiara Sampurna, with emphasis on coaching practices, applied strategies, and contextual challenges. A qualitative approach with a case study design was employed to obtain an in-depth understanding of psychological development processes within a developmental club setting. Four coaches with a minimum of three years of experience in training early-age athletes were purposively selected as research informants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and supporting documentation, and analyzed using thematic analysis assisted by NVivo 12 Plus software. The findings indicate that coaches hold a central and strategic role in fostering mental toughness, functioning not only as technical instructors but also as mentors, motivators, and character builders. Key strategies include structured and progressive training design, autonomy-supportive communication, positive reinforcement, gradual exposure to competitive pressure, and reflective evaluation after matches. These approaches contribute to the development of discipline, self-confidence, emotional regulation, and competitive readiness. However, challenges persist, including variations in athletes' emotional maturity, limited competitive experience, parental pressure, and insufficient formal training in sport psychology. The study underscores that mental toughness development is shaped by the interplay between coaching leadership, strategic implementation, and environmental support. Implications highlight the necessity of strengthening coaches' psychological competencies and fostering collaborative support systems in youth athlete development.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of young athletes' performance is determined not only by technical mastery and physical fitness, but also by psychological readiness to face the pressures of competition (Gould & Maynard, 2016; Gucciardi et al., 2017; Nicholls et al., 2019). In modern competitive sports, mental aspects—particularly mental toughness—are recognized as a key determinant of performance because they function to maintain



focus, control emotions, maintain motivation, and help athletes bounce back after failure (Gucciardi et al., 2018; Cowden, 2020; Lin et al., 2023). For adolescent athletes, mental strengthening serves as a long-term foundation in a tiered development process toward high levels of achievement (Hill et al., 2018; Sarkar & Page, 2022).

In the context of badminton development, Indonesia is known as a global power, with a development system that begins with development clubs. Institutions such as the Mutiara Sampurna Badminton Association serve as initial platforms for developing athletes before progressing to the provincial and national levels. Ideally, the coaching process in clubs focuses not only on basic techniques and physical conditioning, but also on developing mental readiness for the complexities of competition (Harwood et al., 2015; Henriksen et al., 2020). However, in practice, mental training in small-scale clubs is often unstructured and not a top priority (Brown et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2022).

Preliminary interviews with coaches at PB Mutiara Sampurna Sumedang showed that approximately 60% of young athletes experience a decline in performance during competitions. Symptoms include excessive anxiety, tension, low self-confidence, and difficulty maintaining concentration during matches. This phenomenon aligns with findings that competitive anxiety is significantly correlated with decreased technical accuracy and decision-making effectiveness in adolescent athletes (Ford et al., 2017; Rice et al., 2016; Ivarsson et al., 2017). The disparity between modest training facilities and more representative competition venues can also trigger feelings of inferiority and psychological stress (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2016; Reeves et al., 2018).

This situation confirms that mental factors are often the main differentiator in performance, even surpassing purely technical aspects (Gucciardi et al., 2017; Cowden & Meyer-Weitz, 2016). In this context, coaches play a strategic role as agents of character formation, managers of the team's psychological climate, and models of emotional regulation for young athletes (Mageau & Vallerand, 2015; Appleton & Duda, 2016; Isoard-Gauthier et al., 2019). Therefore, analyzing the role of coaches in instilling mental toughness is crucial to addressing the challenges of developing young athletes at the development club level.

Recent literature indicates that mental toughness is a multidimensional construct encompassing self-control, commitment, challenge, and self-confidence (Gucciardi et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2023). In racket sports like badminton, mental toughness has been shown to significantly contribute to consistent performance, particularly in high-pressure rallies and matches with tight margins (Cowden, 2020; Nicholls et al., 2019). Longitudinal research also shows that young athletes with high mental toughness scores are more likely to persist in the coaching system long-term (Hill et al., 2018).

The role of coaches in developing mental toughness has been widely studied in the past decade. Transformational leadership and autonomy-supportive coaching approaches have been shown to increase athletes' intrinsic motivation, resilience, and emotional regulation (Appleton & Duda, 2016; Brown et al., 2021). Research by Ahady et al. (2024) demonstrated the significant contribution of coaches to increasing badminton athletes' self-confidence and ability to manage competitive pressure. Similar findings

were reported by Manalu et al. (2024) who noted that coaches play a strategic role in developing discipline, motivation, and a champion mindset in young athletes. Furthermore, Yusuf (2024) emphasized that failure to manage emotions directly impacts decreased concentration and match performance.

Empirically, coach-based psychological interventions—such as emotional regulation training, competitive pressure simulations, and post-match reflection—have been shown to be effective in improving the mental readiness of adolescent athletes (Henriksen et al., 2020; Sarkar & Page, 2022; Roberts et al., 2022). Studies in the Asian context also indicate that social support and the quality of coach-athlete communication significantly influence the development of mental toughness (Lin et al., 2023).

Thus, research developments indicate that mental toughness is not simply an innate trait, but can be developed through the right coaching environment, particularly through the active role of coaches as facilitators of athletes' psychological development (Gucciardi et al., 2018; Cowden, 2020).

Although extensive literature has examined the relationship between mental toughness and performance, most studies have focused on elite athletes or academy contexts with adequate facilities (Hill et al., 2018; Sarkar & Fletcher, 2016). Studies specifically analyzing the implementation of the coach's role in the context of small-scale development clubs with limited facilities and competitive experience are still relatively limited, particularly in Indonesia (Brown et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2022).

Furthermore, previous research tends to highlight the quantitative relationship between mental toughness and performance, without delving deeply into concrete practices, specific strategies, and the challenges coaches face in developing athletes' mental toughness (Gucciardi et al., 2017; Cowden, 2020). However, the socio-cultural dynamics and structural conditions of development clubs can influence the effectiveness of the mental health interventions implemented (Henriksen et al., 2020).

This gap highlights the need for contextual and applied research to understand how the role of coaches in development clubs is realized in everyday practice, including how they overcome resource limitations in building mental resilience in young athletes.

Based on these research issues and gaps, this study aims to deeply analyze the role of coaches in instilling mental toughness in young athletes at the Mutiara Sampurna Badminton Association. The research focuses on: (1) mental development practices implemented in training, (2) coaching strategies used by coaches to deal with competitive pressure, and (3) challenges faced in the process of developing athletes' mental readiness.

The novelty of this research lies in its contextual approach, which examines the implementation of the coach's role in small-scale development clubs with limited facilities, a topic that has been underexplored in international and national literature. This study not only examines the theoretical importance of mental toughness but also maps the actual practice of mental development within the regional club ecosystem. Conceptually, this research enriches the discourse on the integration of psychological training into early childhood development. Empirically, the research results are expected

to serve as a reference for badminton clubs in Indonesia in designing systematic, measurable, and sustainable mental development strategies to improve the competitiveness of young athletes at the national and international levels.

METHODS

This research used a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of coaches in instilling mental toughness in young badminton athletes. This approach was chosen because the development of mental toughness is a complex, contextual psychosocial phenomenon influenced by the dynamics of coach-athlete interactions (Gucciardi et al., 2017; Sarkar & Page, 2022). Case studies allow for a comprehensive exploration of coaching practices in a real-life setting, making them relevant for examining the processes, strategies, and challenges faced by coaches (Yin, 2018; Roberts et al., 2022).

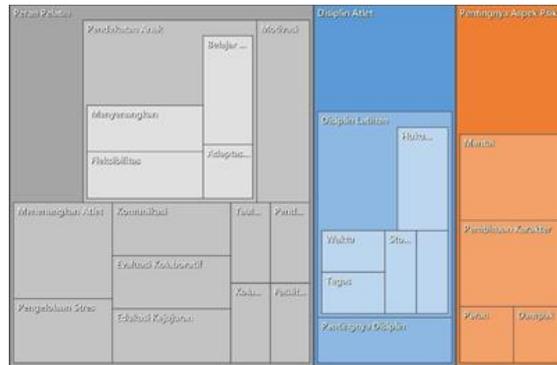
The research was conducted at the Mutiara Sampurna Badminton Association in Sumedang, West Java, in December 2025. This club was selected purposively because it actively trains young athletes and has experienced coaches in technical and psychological development. Recent literature confirms that the developmental environment plays a significant role in shaping the character and resilience of young athletes (Henriksen et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2021).

Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique with the following criteria: (1) active coaches who train young athletes, (2) at least three years of experience, (3) previously coached athletes participating in district or provincial championships, and (4) willing to participate. A total of four coaches participated in the study, with the number of coaches flexible following the principle of data saturation (Guest et al., 2017). The selection of coaches as key informants was based on empirical evidence that coaching style and the quality of the coach-athlete relationship contribute significantly to the development of mental toughness (Appleton & Duda, 2016; Isoard-Gauthier et al., 2019; Cowden, 2020).

Data collection was conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews and supporting documentation. The interview guide was developed based on indicators of the coach's role (leadership, communication, motivation, emotional regulation) and dimensions of mental toughness (self-confidence, self-control, commitment, and response to stress) (Gucciardi et al., 2017; Nicholls et al., 2019). Interviews allowed for exploration of coaches' subjective experiences in building athletes' mental readiness, including strategies such as simulating match pressure, providing reflective feedback, and establishing a positive motivational climate (Harwood et al., 2015; Sarkar & Fletcher, 2016). Documentation in the form of training programs, match evaluation notes, and competition agendas was used to strengthen the context and increase the credibility of the data.

Data analysis employed a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2019) with the assistance of NVivo 12 Plus software to enhance transparency and traceability of the

Emotion-related words such as "stress," "lose," and "confidence" indicate that emotional experiences—both winning and losing—are viewed as an integral part of the mental learning process (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2016; Rice et al., 2016). The presence of the terms "communication," "approach," and "reflection" reinforces the finding that the quality of coach-athlete interactions plays a significant role in shaping emotional regulation and self-confidence (Appleton & Duda, 2016; Isoard-Gautheur et al., 2019).



Picture 2.
 Hierarchy chart and categories of research findings

Hierarchy Chart: Dominance of the Coach's Role

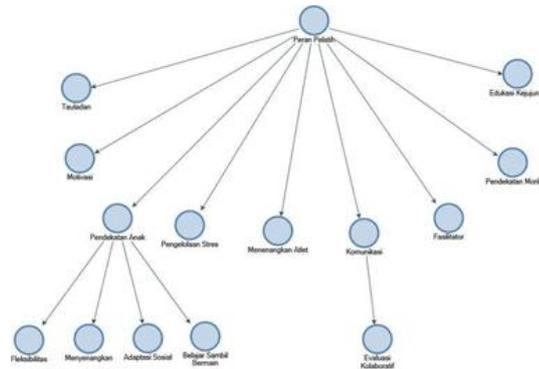
The hierarchy chart visualization shows that the theme "Coach's Role" serves as the central node that underpins all of the research subthemes. The most dominant subthemes include:

1. Adaptive Approach to Children
 Coaches implement flexible, enjoyable training methods that are appropriate to the psychological developmental stage of young athletes. This is consistent with the developmentally appropriate coaching approach recommended in youth development (Harwood et al., 2015; Brown et al., 2021).
2. Discipline and Emotional Regulation
 Discipline is built through consistent training schedules and responsibilities, while maintaining a balance to avoid excessive pressure. Research shows that discipline supported by a positive motivational climate increases mental toughness without increasing anxiety (Gucciardi et al., 2018; Roberts et al., 2022).
3. Attention to Psychological Aspects
 Coaches actively provide motivation, simulate match pressure, and engage in post-match reflective evaluation. These strategies have been shown to be effective in increasing self-control and confidence in young athletes (Lin et al., 2023; Hill et al., 2018).

Project Map: Coaches as the Center of Mental Development

The project map shows that coaches act as a liaison between all dimensions of mental development. These roles include: (1) Role model in emotional regulation, (2) Motivator in building self-confidence, (3) Facilitator of reflection through joint evaluation, and (4) Educator of moral values and sportsmanship. This finding aligns with the concept of transformational leadership in coaching, which emphasizes the

importance of role models and inspiration in building athlete character (Appleton & Duda, 2016; Cowden, 2020).



Picture 3.

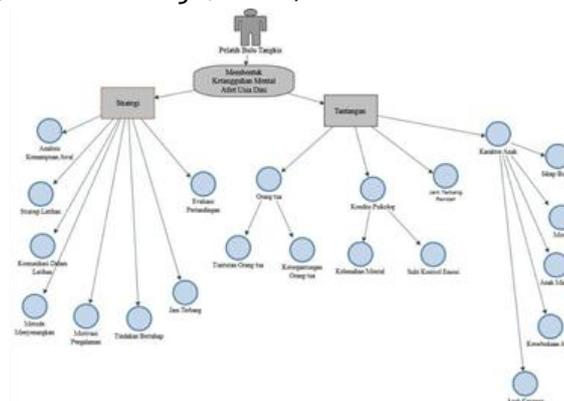
Project Map and Research Findings Categories

Concept Map: Strategies and Challenges

The concept mapping results identified two major clusters that influence the development of mental toughness:

1. Coaching Strategies
 - a. Structured training planning
 - b. Simulated competitive pressure
 - c. Empathic communication
 - d. Collaborative evaluation

This strategy aligns with the environment-based mental development model, which emphasizes the integration of psychological aspects into routine training programs (Henriksen et al., 2020; Sarkar & Page, 2022).



Picture 4.

Concept map and categories of research findings

2. Coaching Challenges
 - a. Internal athlete factors (emotional instability, lack of self-confidence)
 - b. External factors (parental pressure, expectations of quick results)

External pressure from parents has also been identified in previous research as a risk factor for increased competitive anxiety in young athletes (Reeves et al., 2018; Rice et al., 2016).

Table 1.
 Synthesis of Themes and Literature Support

Key Themes	Subthemes	Description of Findings	Literature Support (2015–2024)
Mental Integration in Training	Pressure Simulation	Training mimics a match situation	Nicholls et al., 2019; Cowden, 2020
Coach-Athlete Communication	Reflection & Dialogue	Collaborative evaluation builds confidence	Appleton & Duda, 2016; Isoard-Gauthier et al., 2019
Adaptive Discipline	Consistency & Support	Discipline without excessive pressure	Gucciardi et al., 2018; Roberts et al., 2022
External Challenges	Parental Pressure	Expectations increase anxiety	Rice et al., 2016; Reeves et al., 2018

Overall, the research findings indicate that mental toughness in young badminton athletes is developed through the integration of psychological strategies into training, supportive communication, and adaptive discipline management. Coaches play a central role in creating a coaching environment that supports mental resilience, consistent with recent empirical findings on the importance of coach leadership quality in the psychological development of young athletes (Gucciardi et al., 2017; Henriksen et al., 2020; Sarkar & Page, 2022).

Discussion

The Central Role of Coaches in Instilling Mental Toughness

The findings of this study confirm that coaches occupy a central and multidimensional role in instilling mental toughness in young badminton athletes. Coaches function not merely as technical instructors but as psychological architects who shape athletes' emotional regulation, resilience, and competitive identity. This aligns with contemporary perspectives that define mental toughness as a socially constructed and environmentally nurtured psychological capacity rather than a fixed personality trait (Gucciardi et al., 2017; Sarkar & Page, 2022).

The present findings demonstrate that discipline, emotional support, and behavioral modeling are core mechanisms through which coaches cultivate mental toughness. Consistent training rules, punctuality, and structured routines foster commitment and responsibility, which correspond to the "commitment" and "control" dimensions of mental toughness (Gucciardi et al., 2018; Cowden, 2020). Empirical studies have shown that athletes exposed to structured yet supportive coaching climates display higher levels of persistence and stress tolerance (Nicholls et al., 2019; Brown et al., 2021).

Furthermore, verbal encouragement and positive reinforcement were found to significantly enhance athletes' self-confidence, particularly under competitive pressure. This finding is supported by research indicating that autonomy-supportive and emotionally responsive coaching predicts greater psychological resilience and lower competitive anxiety (Appleton & Duda, 2016; Isoard-Gauthier et al., 2019). Emotional support strengthens athletes' perceived competence, which is a critical predictor of confidence and sustained motivation (Lin et al., 2023). Thus, the coach's interpersonal style directly influences how young athletes interpret stressors—whether as threats or as developmental challenges.

Importantly, the findings reinforce transformational leadership theory in sport, which emphasizes role modeling, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration as drivers of psychological growth (Cowden & Meyer-Weitz, 2016). Coaches in this study acted as moral exemplars and behavioral references, shaping athletes' attitudes toward victory, defeat, and effort. Such modeling contributes to adaptive coping patterns and long-term resilience (Hill et al., 2018).

Coaching Strategies in Building Mental Toughness

This study identified several strategic approaches employed by coaches to build mental toughness, including gradual exposure to competitive pressure, reflective evaluation, and adaptive communication. These strategies align with ecological models of athlete development, which argue that mental toughness emerges from systematic exposure to manageable stressors within a supportive environment (Henriksen et al., 2020; Sarkar & Fletcher, 2016).

Gradual challenge progression where athletes are introduced to increasingly demanding training scenarios mirrors the principle of stress inoculation. Research indicates that controlled exposure to stress enhances coping capacity and emotional stability in youth athletes (Nicholls et al., 2019; Roberts et al., 2022). By simulating match conditions during practice, coaches help athletes normalize pressure situations, thereby reducing performance anxiety.

Interpersonal communication emerged as a cornerstone of mental development. Constructive feedback, motivational dialogue, and post-match reflection foster self-awareness and emotional regulation. Effective coach athlete communication has been consistently associated with higher levels of confidence, concentration, and psychological well-being (Appleton & Duda, 2016; Isoard-Gautheur et al., 2019). Moreover, reflective practices encourage athletes to interpret failure as learning opportunities, consistent with growth mindset theory and adaptive attribution frameworks (Sarkar & Page, 2022).

The integration of reflection sessions after matches further strengthens athletes' cognitive appraisal skills. Studies demonstrate that athletes who engage in structured reflection show improved emotional regulation and resilience in subsequent competitions (Gucciardi et al., 2018; Lin et al., 2023). In this context, the coach acts as a facilitator of meaning-making, guiding athletes to process experiences constructively.

Another important strategy identified is the creation of an enjoyable yet disciplined training climate. According to motivational climate theory, mastery-oriented environments where improvement is valued over outcome promote psychological resilience and intrinsic motivation (Brown et al., 2021). Coaches who balance discipline with empathy enable athletes to internalize responsibility without experiencing excessive psychological pressure.

Challenges in Developing Mental Toughness

Despite their strategic efforts, coaches encounter substantial challenges in cultivating mental toughness. One major challenge involves variability in athletes' emotional maturity and personality traits. Youth athletes exhibit fluctuating emotional

regulation capacities, which can intensify under competitive stress (Rice et al., 2016). Differences in temperament require individualized coaching approaches, yet limited resources often constrain personalization.

Parental pressure also emerged as a significant external factor influencing athletes' psychological stability. Research confirms that excessive parental expectations can increase anxiety and undermine intrinsic motivation in youth sports (Reeves et al., 2018; Harwood & Knight, 2015). When parental demands focus excessively on outcomes rather than development, athletes may experience heightened fear of failure, which contradicts resilience-building processes.

Another critical challenge is limited coach education in sport psychology. While coaches rely heavily on experiential knowledge and intuition, contemporary sport science emphasizes structured psychological skill training (Gucciardi et al., 2017; Sarkar & Page, 2022). The absence of systematic psychological frameworks can limit the effectiveness of mental development strategies. Studies highlight that coaches with formal training in psychological skills intervention demonstrate greater confidence and efficacy in managing athletes' emotional responses (Roberts et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2023).

Institutional constraints further complicate implementation. Development clubs with limited access to sport psychologists or performance consultants must depend solely on coaching staff. Ecological research suggests that sustainable mental development requires multi-level support systems involving coaches, parents, and sport organizations (Henriksen et al., 2020). Without such synergy, psychological interventions may lack consistency and reinforcement.

Integrative Interpretation

Overall, this study reinforces the conceptual understanding that mental toughness in young badminton athletes develops through relational, structured, and context-sensitive processes. Coaches serve as central mediators between environmental stressors and athletes' psychological adaptation. Through discipline, supportive communication, progressive challenge, and reflective practice, coaches facilitate the internalization of resilience, confidence, and emotional control.

However, the findings also highlight systemic gaps particularly in psychological education and parental alignment that may hinder optimal mental development. Addressing these challenges requires institutional initiatives such as coach education programs in sport psychology, collaborative parent workshops, and structured psychological training modules integrated into regular practice.

From a theoretical standpoint, the results extend ecological and transformational leadership models by demonstrating how these frameworks operate within small-scale developmental badminton clubs. From a practical perspective, the study underscores the need to view mental toughness training not as an auxiliary component, but as an integral dimension of youth athlete development.

In conclusion, mental toughness in young badminton athletes is cultivated through deliberate coaching practices embedded within supportive relational environments. Coaches are not only technical trainers but key psychological mentors whose leadership

significantly shapes athletes' capacity to withstand pressure, adapt to challenges, and sustain long-term performance development.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that coaches hold a central and transformative role in instilling mental toughness in young badminton athletes. Beyond technical instruction, coaches function as psychological mentors who shape discipline, emotional regulation, confidence, and resilience through structured training environments and supportive interpersonal interactions. Consistent with contemporary sport psychology research, mental toughness emerges not solely from innate traits but from deliberate exposure to manageable stressors, reflective learning, and autonomy-supportive coaching climates. The findings demonstrate that systematic training design, constructive communication, progressive competitive simulation, and emotional reinforcement significantly contribute to athletes' readiness to cope with performance pressure.

However, the development process is influenced by contextual challenges, including variability in athletes' emotional maturity, limited competitive exposure, parental expectations, and insufficient formal training in sport psychology among coaches. These findings highlight that mental toughness development is ecological in nature, requiring synergy among coaches, clubs, and families. Therefore, youth athlete development should adopt a holistic framework integrating technical, physical, and psychological preparation. Strengthening coach education in sport psychology, enhancing institutional support, and fostering constructive parent-coach collaboration are essential to ensure sustainable mental and emotional resilience in young athletes.

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