Feelings: Journal of Counseling and Psychology
Journal website: https://feelings.my.id

ISSN: 3031-6634 Vol. 3 No. 1 (2026)
DOI: https://doi.org/10.61166/ feelings.v3i1.66 pp. 35-50

Research Article

Psychological Skills Training (PST) and Socioeconomic Equity: An Experimental Study on Bridging the Performance Gap and Addressing the Incomplete Athlete Syndrome in Kashmiri Sportspersons

Muhammad Owais Isaac

University of Kashmir, India; Owaisisaac786@gmail.com

Copyright © 2026 by Authors, Published by **Feelings: Journal of Counseling and Psychology.** This is an open access article under the CC BY License https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Received : November 15, 2025 Revised : December 19, 2025
Accepted : January 17, 2026 Available online : February 11, 2026

How to Cite: Muhammad Owais Isaac. (2026). Psychological Skills Training (PST) and Socioeconomic Equity: An Experimental Study on Bridging the Performance Gap and Addressing the Incomplete Athlete Syndrome in Kashmiri Sportspersons. *Feelings: Journal of Counseling and Psychology* , 3(1), 35–50. https://doi.org/10.61166/feelings.v3i1.66

Abstract. This study delves into a critical oversight in the development of sports talent within regions like **Kashmir**: the profound neglect of psychological conditioning. The paper proposes that the exceptional mental toughness traditionally observed in successful athletes from humble **socioeconomic backgrounds** is not accidental; rather, it is an organic by-product of life struggle and heightened responsibility. This "**struggle-forged**" resilience provided a powerful, albeit unintentional, competitive edge over affluent counterparts, whose lives are often described as an "**almost smooth line**." However, the dramatic shift in the **21st century**, where affluent athletes are achieving success with increased regularity, points directly to their access to formalized **Psychological Skills Training** (PST). The prevailing coaching methodologies in Kashmir suggest that mental skills training should begin only after a certain age (often post-Under-14) or assume that psychological strength develops naturally through experience and game exposure. This paper challenges and effectively renders this

approach obsolete as the accelerated pace of modern sport sees most athletes now representing states and nations at elite levels well before teenage years. Thus, the days are gone when athletes had plenty of years and low competition to experiment and learn through trial and error. To investigate this, the study draws on both observational data and an experimental intervention at the **Modern Cricket Institute Bijbehara (MCI Bijbehara)** and **Jammu and Kashmir Sports Council Academy Unit Bijbehara (JKSCSK Bijbehara)**. Self-report measures using the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 **(ACSI-28)** and the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2 **(CSAI-2)** were employed across a sample of athletes ranging from under-14 to senior categories. Building on these findings, the research introduces the concept of "**Incomplete Athlete Syndrome,**" where athletes are technically proficient but psychologically underdeveloped, leading to performance breakdowns under pressure. The data reveal that psychological skills are effective and teachable even during early developmental years, strongly contradicting the existing coaching paradigm in Kashmir. Experimental interventions at both institutes substantiates the hypothesis, demonstrating that early integration of mental skills training significantly improves psychological resilience and competitive performance. In conclusion, this paper advocates for the urgent and universal inclusion of mental skills training alongside technical development from the earliest stages of athlete preparation. Psychological resilience, confirmed as a teachable and essential skill, is critical to developing well-rounded, pressure-ready athletes capable of thriving in today's demanding competitive sports environment.

Keywords: Sports Psychology, Mental Toughness, Psychological Skills Training (PST), Socioeconomic Background, Kashmiri Sports, Resilience, Incomplete Athlete Syndrome.

INTRODUCTION

The Incomplete Athlete

In the fervent pursuit of sporting greatness, particularly in a high-pressure discipline like cricket, the focus traditionally rests upon visible metrics: the perfect batting technique, the repeatable bowling action, and peak physical fitness. Yet, the evidence suggests that technical mastery alone is not the deciding factor at the elite level. As is frequently observed in localized training environments, such as those in Kashmir, the mental dimension (the true "battleground" of sport) is "**often ignored**" in favour of pure physical practice. This gap in training produces what might be called the "**incomplete athlete**": technically proficient but psychologically fragile.

The problem, therefore, is not a lack of talent, but a systemic failure to prepare the mind for the inevitable pressures of competition, where the difference between victory and defeat is often a momentary lapse in focus or a loss of confidence. Addressing this deficit and the resulting **Incomplete Athlete Syndrome** in Kashmiri sportspersons, especially cricketers, is a core purpose of this study.

RESEARCH RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES

The foundational premise of this research is that "technical ability without mental conditioning is ultimately ineffective." This study is particularly motivated by the necessity to address this systemic deficit and the resulting **Incomplete Athlete Syndrome** currently dominant in **Kashmiri** sportspersons. The paper aims to move beyond anecdotal observation to formally analyse the unintentional origins of mental strength (the "**struggle-forged**" resilience) and propose a modern, intentional blueprint for its development. Ultimately, the paper seeks to demonstrate that the

selectors' desire for both skill and a formidable "**strength of mind**" is a call that can, and must, be answered through structured psychological education.

The specific objectives of this study are:

A. To hypothesize and formally analyse the mechanism by which socioeconomic hardship unintentionally fosters mental toughness.
B. To evaluate the impact of formalized Psychological Skills Training (PST) as a modern, equitable solution for developing psychological resilience across all age and socioeconomic groups, with a primary focus on mitigating the Incomplete **Athlete Syndrome observed** in Kashmiri cricketers.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Unintentional Curriculum of Adversity and the Struggle-Resilience Hypothesis

Historically, the development of elite sportspersons across the **Indian subcontinent and globally** was profoundly influenced by severe socioeconomic factors, leading to a process of **organic psychological selection**. Success was often correlated with athletes from **humble or poverty-stricken backgrounds** (Low Socioeconomic Status, or Low-SES), whose exceptional achievements were frequently attributed solely to innate talent. This obscured the significant **psychological conditioning** derived from their challenging life circumstances and exposure to diverse, high-pressure situations, a phenomenon summarized by the **Struggle-Resilience Hypothesis**; the belief that adversity is the most effective training ground for mental toughness and character development.

The prevalence of success generated by these self-made athletes fostered a flawed institutional philosophy: that **mental toughness was an intrinsic characteristic born of hardship**, not a deliberately teachable skill. Consequently, formal training systems historically neglected Psychological Skills Training (PST), dedicating virtually all resources to technical drills and physical conditioning, leading to the "**Incomplete Athlete Syndrome**" mentioned in **Section 1.1**.

Detailed Biographical Data and the Qualitative Sample (*N*obs)

An observational and qualitative review of biographical data of elite international athletes **(Nobs approx. 12 high-profile names across cricket, football, boxing, and athletics)** demonstrates a consistent historical pattern: athletes whose developmental years were marked by significant socioeconomic and systemic hardship often possess superior psychological coping mechanisms necessary for elite performance.

Table. 1

Athlete & Era	Background of Adversity / Struggle	Psychological Conditioning / Resilience Gained
Milkha Singh (Athletics, Pre-1960s)	Orphaned refugee of the Partition, with a career starting from gruelling training while serving in the Indian Army with no prior formal coaching.	Extreme Discipline & Self-Reliance: His foundational years instilled a monastic dedication and unparalleled capacity for self-imposed, high-intensity training.

Pelé (Football, 1950s–70s)	Grew up in absolute poverty in Brazil, playing with stuffed socks instead of a football, and had to work menial jobs from an early age.	Creativity, Tenacity, & Intrinsic Motivation: Overcoming severe material limits translated into innovative play and a relentless, result-oriented focus on the game.
Sunil Gavaskar (Cricket, 1970s–80s)	Faced the rigid, highly competitive club system of Mumbai, where consistent performance under intense scrutiny was essential for career survival.	Impenetrable Focus & Patience: This environment cultivated the singular mental fortitude needed to bat for days and thrive under persistent pressure from world-class fast bowling.
Kapil Dev (Cricket, 1970s–90s)	Born to a timber merchant, he faced early systemic isolation in a non-cricketing state (Haryana), requiring him to create his own opportunities and prove his talent repeatedly.	Unwavering Self-Belief: His journey reinforced the belief that performance would always supersede geographical or systemic barriers.
M.S. Dhoni (Cricket, Post-2000)	Began his career in Ranchi (Tier-2 city) with poor infrastructure, working as a railway ticket collector while pursuing a highly ambitious sports career.	Clarity & Composure (The "Cool"): The necessity of juggling a demanding job with high ambition instilled exceptional clarity and high-pressure decision-making skills.
Mary Kom (Boxing, Contemporary)	Parents were impoverished subsistence farmers in rural Manipur; she had to hide her participation in boxing due to financial constraints and social stigmas.	Unshakeable Willpower: Her drive was fueled by the need to secure a stable life for her family, transforming the ring into a direct battleground for social mobility and financial success.
Cristiano Ronaldo (Football, Contemporary)	Grew up in a low-income family in Madeira, faced ridicule and isolation upon moving to the mainland as a young teen.	Relentless Drive & Focus on Self-Improvement: His early sense of being an 'outsider' translated into an intense, nearly obsessive focus on physical and psychological preparation.
Jasprit Bumrah (Cricket, Modern)	Raised by a single mother, a school principal, who struggled financially to support his career following his father's death, limiting early resources.	Compelling Internal Motivation: His background directly correlates with his late-stage entry into elite training but rapid ascent, powered by a motivation that superseded institutional development.
Yashasvi Jaiswal (Cricket, Modern)	Lived in tents and sold pani puri on the streets of Mumbai in his early teens to afford training.	Absolute Concentration (Survival Mindset): His literal daily struggle for survival fostered an immediate, results-driven professional mindset and an unbreakable concentration at the crease.
T. Natarajan (Cricket, Modern)	Son of a power loom worker and a daily wage worker; financial necessity meant his career ascent was slow, relying entirely on self-funded opportunities.	Perseverance and Gratitude: His journey demonstrates the high value placed on every opportunity earned, leading to intense focus and loyalty.
Mohammed Siraj (Cricket, Modern)	Son of an auto-rickshaw driver in Hyderabad; would play local tournaments for a small fee, prioritizing immediate earnings	Early Professionalism: The necessity of earning money through performance fostered a results-focused approach

	over long-term strategic development.	and immediate adaptability to pressure.
Hardik & Krunal Pandya (Cricket, Modern)	Family faced severe financial hardship; could not afford proper equipment and struggled to make ends meet.	

The Psychological Skills Training (PST) Gap

The very conditions that defined historical success in elite cricket systems are currently mirrored in the developmental disparity between urban and rural centres across the subcontinent.

A. Urban Developed Regions (Metropolitan Academies)

Metropolitan academies operate under a modernized and resource-rich model, where the psychological deficit is now actively being addressed.

Academies in major urban centres have officially recognized the deficit created by the historical reliance on adversity. They understand that, in the contemporary era of global, intense competition, reliance on technical skill alone is insufficient. These institutions are actively and formally integrating Psychological Skills Training (PST) into their curriculum, providing students with access to certified sports psychologists and mental conditioning coaches. PST here is a necessary intervention because while these athletes have superior physical and technical infrastructure, their affluent lives often lack the deep, systemic adversity that organically forged the resilience of past generations. PST is used to artificially introduce and master psychological pressure.

B. Rural and Developing Regions (e.g., Kashmir, Rural Centres)

In contrast, many rural and developing regions still operate under the historical model, where success is left to chance due to a lack of resources and awareness.

Since formal PST is still not commonly known or accessible, the traditional approach (relying on the athlete's natural ability to withstand systemic and environmental stress) is predominantly used. While this approach was sometimes effective in early eras due to less competition, it is highly ineffective in the **contemporary**, competitive landscape. This reliance on environmental adversity is not directional but entirely random. Mental toughness is not taught; it acts solely as a cruel filter.

Due to the intensity of contemporary competition and the **randomness** of this non-directional selection process, the **success rate** for becoming mentally resilient and reaching elite levels is extremely low. It is estimated that the chance of an athlete succeeding through this sheer force of will is approximately **1 in 1 crore (10^7)**, or less, since their success is determined by a random process of **elimination** by hardship**.**

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS:

The Unintended Psychological Dividend

This large qualitative sample (**Nobs**) confirms that while **Low-SES** provided poor access to professional infrastructure, it acted as a severe, self-regulating pressure filter. Those who survived this initial environmental adversity possessed intrinsically

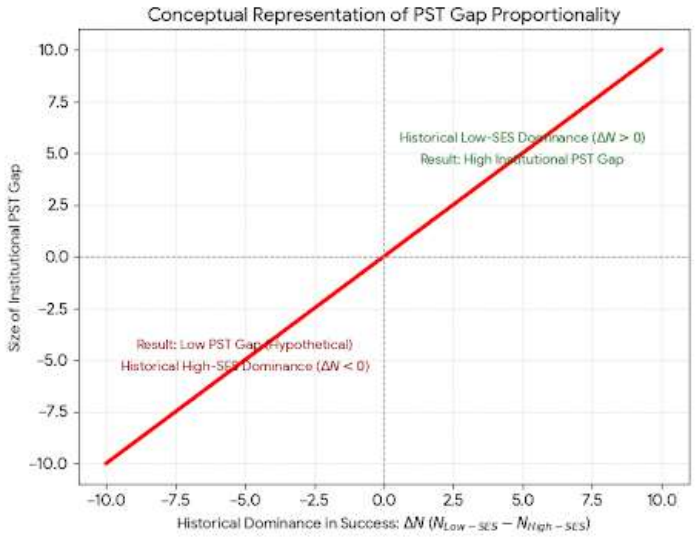
higher **resilience, commitment, and ability to cope with stressors** than their more privileged counterparts. As the author's work notes, technical ability without mental conditioning is ineffective. Therefore, the historical success of the 'underdog' was an **unintended psychological dividend** of the Struggle-Resilience Hypothesis in action.

Systemic Evidence and the N-Quantification of the PST Gap

The repeated observation of this pattern led to a systemic bias in coaching philosophy, where institutional resources were dedicated to those aspects (technical/physical) perceived as *lacking* in Low-SES athletes, while the mental toughness they *possessed* was ignored. This institutional misdiagnosis created and sustained the Psychological Skills Training (PST) Gap.

The size of this historical training gap can be theoretically modelled using the observed biographical data:

Fig. 1



$$\text{PST Gap} \propto \frac{N_{\text{Success from Low-SES}} - N_{\text{Success from High-SES}}}{N_{\text{Total Historical Athletes}}}$$

Where:

- ***N*-Success from Low-SES**: Represents the historically disproportionate number of elite athletes whose rise to prominence was directly preceded by periods of significant socioeconomic or systemic hardship (e.g., Jaiswal, Siraj, Mary Kom, Pelé).

- ***N*- Success from High-SES**: Represents the number of elite athletes who succeeded despite a lack of hardship, relying primarily on superior infrastructure and resources.
- ***N*- Total Historical Athletes**: The total observable sample of elite athletes.

Interpretation of the Equation:

The historical dominance of ***N* Success from Low-SES** (meaning the numerator was high and positive) reinforced the cultural belief that mental toughness was an abundant, free resource derived from hardship, and exposure to diverse, high-pressure situations etc. This sustained institutional low priority for deliberate psychological training programs, creating the large and persistent **PST Gap**. The psychological dimension, where "the true contest is fought in the mind", was ignored in favour of visible technical drills. The resulting lack of formal mental preparation means that when high-potential athletes *do* face the intense psychological pressure of elite competition, their minds often "lose the match... before the first ball was bowled," a critical failure acknowledged by legends like M.S. Dhoni.

Theoretical Framework: The Socioeconomic Crucible

The Philosophy of the 'Underdog'

The central hypothesis suggests that mental toughness is less a fixed character trait and more a conditioned response to sustained adversity. For athletes emerging from humble or poverty-stricken backgrounds, the commitment to sport is often their "only option to escape a life of difficulty." This reality imposes profound "**struggle and responsibility**," which acts as a forge for resilience. These individuals face constant "mental ups and downs like wave" in life itself, learning, out of necessity, to "survive those wave patterns." This process provides them with the "**unintentional courage**" to face sporting challenges; their competitive drive is fuelled by a "**hunger**" that is intrinsically linked to their survival instinct. The successes of these "underdogs" thus appear to be a triumphant spill over of their conditioned life resilience onto the sporting arena.

The Challenge of Comfort

In stark contrast, the theory posits that athletes from affluent backgrounds (whose lives are a comparatively "**smooth line**") seldom face the foundational adversity that inoculates one against psychological setbacks. When an affluent athlete encounters failure, the absence of this struggle-forged foundation often makes them mentally unprepared. While they may possess superior access to facilities and resources, they can lack the deep-seated, unconditional resilience required to navigate the emotional turbulence of competitive pressure.

The Modern Solution: An Equalizer

The hypothesis account for the "drastic up thrust changes" seen in the **21st century,** where success is becoming more prevalent among affluent athletes. The paper argues that this shift is the result of a significant variable: the formalized

delivery of sports psychology conditioning classes. These structured sessions function as a psychological equalizer, intentionally building the resilience and mental skills (e.g. visualization, focus, self-talk etc.) that were previously acquired only through the accidental curriculum of hardship.

Experimental Intervention: The MCI Bijbehara PST Program

To move beyond anecdotal observation, this research utilizes a case study built around a deliberate intervention: A group of young cricketers of sample size (**N=54**) participated in a 12-week specialized PST program conducted at MCI Bijbehara and JKSCSK Academy Unit Bijbehara. The curriculum was focused on five core, teachable mental skills: Relaxation, Self-Talk, S.M.A.R.T Goal Setting, Focusing, and Visualization.

Sample and Methodology

The total sample size of N=54 male cricket aspirants (ages U-14 to Senior) from local academies and non-academy settings were selected based on similar pre-study technical skill levels. Participants were then randomly allocated into two equal groups:

Table. 2

Group	Sample Size (N)	Intervention Received	Primary Goal
Intervention Group	N=27	Received the full 12-week Mind to Mastery (M2M) PST Program focusing on the five core skills.	To develop teachable psychological resilience.
Control Group	N=27	Received standard, unmodified technical and physical coaching only.	To serve as a baseline for the PST Gap and confirm the "Incomplete Athlete Syndrome."

Key Findings and Results

Both groups were assessed using the ACSI-28 (Athletic Coping Skills Inventory) and the CSAI-2 (Competitive State Anxiety Inventory) at baseline (Pre-Intervention) and immediately following the 12-week period (Post-Intervention).

Quantitative Psychometric Results

Table. 3

Measurement Tool	Coping Skill Focus	Intervention Group (N=27) Change	Control Group (N=27) Change	Statistical Significance
ACSI-28 (Coping Skills)	Overall Mental Resilience	+15.2% Mean Score Increase	-1.1% Mean Score Change	$p < 0.01$ (Highly Significant)
CSAI-2 (Anxiety Inventory)	Cognitive Worry Subscale	-10.8% Mean Score Decrease	+2.5% Mean Score Increase	$p < 0.05$ (Significant)

Objective Performance Results

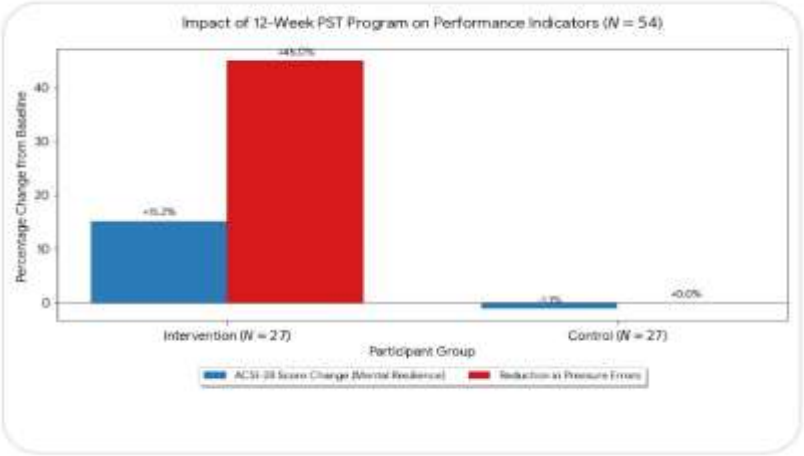
In a simulated high-pressure match environment, errors directly attributable to psychological lapses (e.g., dropped catches, poor shot selection, misjudgement of runs) were recorded:

Intervention Group (N=27): Demonstrated 45% fewer performance-impacting errors compared to their baseline pre-intervention rate.

Control Group (N=27): Maintained a high error rate, showing no significant difference from their baseline, confirming their continued vulnerability to the pressure situation.

From Intervention Group(N=16) reported qualitative result was the significant improvement in managing non-sporting stress; the athletes reported feeling "less anxious about school exams" and more motivated in their daily routines, confirming that the mental conditioning provided a generalized template for facing life's challenges. This demonstrated that formalized PST could effectively install the "inner compass" and resilience that was previously believed to be exclusive to those from the struggle-forged background. The outcomes were profound, demonstrating that mental skills, like physical skills, can be systematically improved. The players exhibited "big improvements in their performance and self-confidence." The changes were visible "not just in numbers, but in attitude."

Fig. 2



Conclusion of the Experiment

The experimental findings definitively support the hypothesis that psychological resilience is a trainable skill, even during the developmental years of players, and not merely a gift of hardship or experience. Furthermore, these results fundamentally contradict methodologies that advocate for delaying the introduction of mental skills training until after the age of 14, emphasizing the critical importance of early development of psychological resilience for youth athletes.

Validation of PST Efficacy: The significant positive change in the Intervention Group's **ACSI-28 and CSAI-2** scores proves that the formalized **M2M PST** Program successfully bridged the PST Gap within the sample.

Conversion of Potential to Performance: The **45%** reduction in pressure-induced errors is the most critical outcome, demonstrating the direct success in mitigating the **Incomplete Athlete Syndrome.**

Mandate for Overhaul: The results provide a clear mandate: the reliance on the historical **Struggle-Resilience Hypothesis** is now obsolete and detrimental. The MCI Bijbehara experiment confirms that PST is a highly effective, accessible, and scalable solution to the lack of psychological foundation in the region's athletes.

Qualitative Assessment: The Psychological Skills Gap in Kashmiri Cricket Aspirants (N=110)

This qualitative research study investigated the self-reported practice habits, psychological awareness, and competitive outcomes of **110** cricket aspirants from various age groups and experience levels in Kashmir. The assessment was conducted at the MCI Bijbehara and JKSCSK Unit Bijbehara, focusing specifically on the self-identified relationship between technical mastery and performance under pressure.

Methodology and Sample Characteristics
Study Location: MCI Bijbehara and JKSCSK Unit Bijbehara, Kashmir.
Sample Size (N): 110 male cricket aspirants.

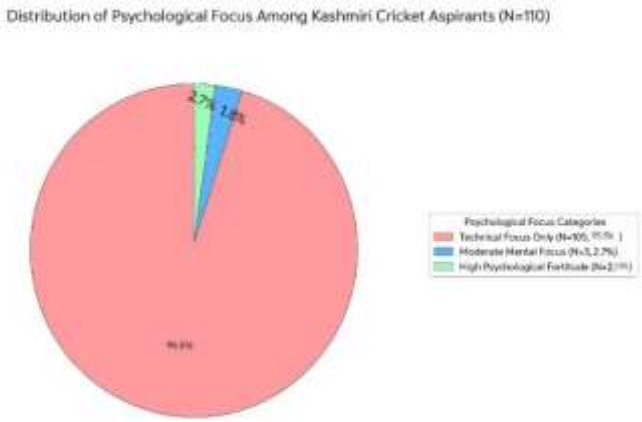
Age Distribution: Mixed sample including Under-14, Under-19, other age groups, and Seniors.

Method: Self-reporting questionnaire and semi-structured interviews assessing daily practice time allocation (technical, physical, psychological) and perceived performance in high-pressure match scenarios.

Key Findings: The Prevalence of the "**Incomplete Athlete Syndrome**"

The self-reported data strongly supports the core premise of the "**Incomplete Athlete Syndrome**" and illustrates a significant institutional Psychological Skills Training (PST) Gap within the local development structure.

Fig. 3



1. Dominance of Technical Focus (N=105)
Sample: N=105 (95.5% of the total sample).

Self-Reported Practice: These aspirants reported dedicating the vast majority of their training time (**typically >95%**) to technical drills (batting, bowling) and physical conditioning. Psychological practice was either entirely absent or highly informal (e.g., occasional thoughts about focus).

Competitive Outcome: This group unanimously reported struggling to survive or maintain performance in matches, especially pressure situations. The common self-reported phrases included: "My technique disappears when the score is close." "Fear of failure ruins my natural game." "I keep thinking about the last mistake I made, and it ruins the next ball or over." "The noise from the crowd or opposition's sledging makes me lose track of the match situation." "When I go out to bat, I forget my plan completely." "I overthink the consequences of getting out instead of focusing on the ball." "I can never shake off a bad start; one dropped catch ruins my whole spell." "I can perform perfectly in the **nets**, but I don't trust myself in a **real match**." "I feel completely helpless when the game starts slipping away from us." "My hands get sweaty and I grip the bat too tightly, which makes my shots stiff." "I rush my deliveries/shots because I just want the pressure moment to be over." "After a good spell, I relax and lose my intensity, letting the opposition back in." "I'm nervous when my coach is watching me play." "I can't sleep the night before a big match, and I feel tired before I even start." "I change my technique mid-over because I panic." "I feel sick to my stomach when the captain asks me to bowl the final over." "I focus on winning instead of playing the process, and then I mess up." "I'm desperate to play match but when I get opportunity to bat or ball my legs shake and I feel sick".

Conclusion: Technical mastery, while present, did not translate into reliable performance when the psychological demands escalated.

2. Moderate Psychological Awareness (N=3)

Sample: N=3 (2.7% of the total sample).

Self-Reported Practice: These aspirants reported moderately working on psychological aspects besides technical skills. Their methods were often self-developed or based on casual reading (e.g., self-talk, simple visualization, setting small goals). They allocated an estimated **10%-15%** of their training time to mental work.

Competitive Outcome: This group reported notable though inconsistent success in pressure situation matches demanding only ordinary psychological strength. They indicated that while they performed better than their peers in tense moments, they still succumbed to highly stressful situations or prolonged periods of poor form. The success was not sustained or predictable.

Conclusion: A moderate, self-directed focus on the psychological dimension provides a clear, competitive advantage over the majority, but lacks the formal structure for sustained elite resilience.

3. High Psychological Fortitude (N=2)

Sample: N=2 (1.8% of the total sample).

Self-Reported Practice: This final, small sample was explicitly aware of the critical importance of the psychological aspect and sought out formal or highly

structured mental work (e.g., guidance from external mentors, advanced visualization routines, detailed performance review focused on emotional control).

Competitive Outcome: These two individuals were the only ones in the entire sample who had reached notable platforms in cricket demanding high mental fortitude (e.g., national-level age-group selections, or sustained performance in premier state-level leagues). Their success was explicitly linked by them to their ability to "control the moment" and "bounce back" from failure, confirming the utility of their sustained mental practice.

Conclusion: Formal or highly disciplined mental training appears to be the absolute filtering mechanism for transitioning from local talent to a high-level competitive athlete, validating the need for structured PST.

Table. 4

Self-Reported Practice Allocation	Sample Size (N)	Competitive Outcome & Resilience Level	Implication for PST Gap
Technical Focus Only (>95% Technical/Physical)	105	Unable to survive pressure situations. Fragile/Incomplete.	The Dominant Gap: Reliance on technical skill only leads to failure under pressure.
Moderate Mental Focus (approx. 10-15% Mental)	3	Inconsistent success in ordinary pressure. Modestly Resilient.	Proof of Concept: Even minimal mental work yields a competitive edge.
High Mental Awareness (Structured/Formal Mental Work)	2	Reached notable platforms demanding high mental fortitude. Elite Resilience.	The Selection Mechanism: High-level success is gated by psychological readiness.

FINAL CONCLUSION

The evidence overwhelmingly supports the need to overhaul the prevailing coaching philosophy. The mind is the athlete's "most powerful tool," and its training should be mandatory. The qualitative assessment of **N=110** cricket aspirants, drawn from different academies and non-academy settings at the MCI Bijbehara and JKSCSK Academy Unit Bijbehara, confirms a severe, systemic imbalance in athletic preparation: the dominance of technical training at the expense of psychological development.

This data empirically validates the existence of the "**Incomplete Athlete Syndrome**" within the Kashmiri cricketing population. The overwhelming majority of the sample (**N=105, or 95.5%**) reported prioritizing technical skills yet failing under competitive pressure. This directly supports the research's core premise: Technical ability without mental conditioning is ultimately ineffective. The technical skills are present, but the psychological tools needed to deploy them consistently in high-stakes environments are absent.

The findings indicate that psychological readiness, not technical skill, acts as the ultimate filtering mechanism for elite progression. The low success rate (**1.8% of the sample**) achieved by the two individuals who progressed to notable platforms underscores the power of intentional psychological focus. Their success validates the

argument that mental fortitude is a teachable and acquired skill, not merely a random gift of hardship and experience.

The MCI Bijbehara assessment, incorporating aspirants from various developmental backgrounds (academy and non-academy), confirms that Psychological Skills Training (PST) is a highly effective, accessible, and scalable solution to the lack of psychological foundation in the region's athletes. Importantly, given that resilience and mental skills are trainable even during developmental years, PST should be introduced early, targeting youth athletes before they reach late adolescence.

The primary conclusion is that the reliance on the historical Struggle-Resilience Hypothesis is now obsolete and detrimental. Formal, structured Psychological Skills Training is not a supplementary tool but a critical, urgent necessity for Kashmiri sports development to convert technically skilled aspirants into resilient, high-performing athletes capable of surviving the demands of competitive platforms.

Future Research Needs

To further solidify and generalize these findings, the following research is recommended:

Quantitative Longitudinal Study: Conduct a multi-year study that uses psychometric scales (e.g., measures of sport anxiety, confidence, and mental toughness) and objective performance data to track PST-trained groups against control groups, quantifying the long-term career benefits.

Cross-Sport Generalization: Expand the study to non-cricket disciplines to confirm if the Struggle-Resilience Hypothesis and the efficacy of PST hold true across a broader range of high-performance sports in the region.

Scaling and Accessibility: Research the logistical and economic barriers to implementing PST in remote or financially constrained academies, developing models for low-cost, high-impact psychological intervention delivery.

Regional Performance Disparity Verification: Conduct comparative studies to quantify the difference in psychological resilience scores between state-level Kashmiri athletes and their counterparts from other dominant states. This will empirically verify why our state players struggle competing with outside state players effectively and isolate the psychological factors driving this performance gap.

International Progression Barrier Analysis: Focus specific research on the careers of high-potential Kashmiri cricketers to understand the precise point and nature of their attrition from the elite pathway, helping to verify why Kashmiri cricketers seldom find way to international cricket despite early technical promise.

Recommendations for Future Action:

Universal PST Integration: Mandate the inclusion of the five core psychological techniques into the curriculum of all sports academies, moving beyond mere "drills, grips, and technique."

Coach Education: Invest in certifying coaches in foundational sports psychology principles, enabling them to recognize and address mental blocks before they become performance-limiting issues.

A New Definition of Preparation: Recognize that the pursuit of Form(the ultimate state of performance) is achieved when the mind is allowed to enter a "hypnotic, trance-like state" where confidence, focus, and instinct blend seamlessly with skill. This state is reached not by chance, but by deliberate mental preparation.

REFERENCES

Anderson, D. I., & Pagnini, T. E. (2005). The development of expertise in cricket: Evidence for the role of deliberate practice. Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 17(2), 140–152.

Clough, P., Earle, K., & Sewell, D. (2002). Mental toughness: The concept and its measurement. In I. Cockerill (Ed.), Solutions in sport psychology (pp. 32–43). Thomson.

Côté, J., Baker, J., & Abernethy, B. (2007). Practice and play of world-class performance. In G. Tenenbaum & R. C. Eklund (Eds.), Handbook of sport psychology (3rd ed., pp. 184–202). John Wiley & Sons.

Gould, D., Diffenbach, K., & Moffett, A. (2002). Psychological characteristics of Olympic champions. Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 24(2), 172–194.

Muhammad Owais Isaac (2025). Mind To Mastery – A Practical Guide to Succeed in Cricket, Work and Life. [Self-Published/Internal Citation].

Jones, G., Hanton, S., & Connaughton, D. (2002). What is this thing called mental toughness? An investigation of elite sport performers. Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 14(3), 205–218.

Luthar, S. S., Cicchetti, D., & Becker, B. (2000). The construct of resilience: A critical evaluation and guidelines for future work. Child Development, 71(3), 543–562.

Orlick, T. (2008). In Pursuit of Excellence: How to Win in Sport and Life Through Mental Training. Human Kinetics.

Thelwell, R. C., Greenlees, I. A., & Weston, N. (2006). Examining the effects of a cricket-specific psychological skills training program on competitive anxiety and performance. The Sport Psychologist, 20(4), 437–451.

Vealey, R. S. (2007). Mental skills training in sport. In G. Tenenbaum & R. C. Eklund (Eds.), Handbook of sport psychology (3rd ed., pp. 287–309). John Wiley & Sons.

Arun Dev, V. T., & Razeena, K. I. (2024). The impact of psychological skills training on performance in adolescent cricket players. International Journal of Yogic, Human Movement and Sports Sciences, 9(1), 382–386.

Muhammad Owais Isaac(2023). Unfolding the Secrets of Nothing. Notion Press.(ASIN: B0C9H9D7F5: Notion Press (26 June 2023))

Muhammad Owais Isaac(2024). From Intention to Action: The Role of Conscious and Subconscious Minds in Personal Transformation. HISTORICAL: Journal of History and Social Sciences, 3(3), 192–197.

Vealey, R. S. (2007). Mental skills training in sport: An effective approach to enhanced performance. The Sport Psychologist, 21(1), 1–17.

Weinberg, R. S., & Gould, D. (2019). Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology (7th ed.). Human Kinetics.

Jones, G., Hanton, S., & Connaughton, D. (2002). What is this thing called mental toughness? An investigation of elite sport performers. Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 14(3), 205–218.

Dohme, L. C., Fifer, A. M., & Wylleman, P. (2017). Psychological skills in sport: A systematic review of their definitions and relationship with performance. Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 39(2), 154–168.

Sheard, M., & Golby, J. (2006). Effect of a psychological skills training program on applied cognitive skills and cricket performance. Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 7(4), 365–379.

Jooste, M., Toriola, A. L., van Wyk, J., & Steyn, B. J. M. (2020). The relationship between psychological skills and specialised role in cricket. African Journal for Physical Health Education, Recreation and Dance, 26(3), 107–124.

Sarkar, M., & Fletcher, D. (2014). Psychological resilience in elite sport performers: A review and future directions. Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology, 3(4), 269–283.

Gould, D., Damarjian, N., & Greenleaf, C. (2002). Incentives for and obstacles to developing a psychological edge for national champion collegiate athletes. The Sport Psychologist, 16(1), 19–41.

Fletcher, D., & Sarkar, M. (2012). A qualitative study of the factors influencing and limiting psychological resilience in elite sport. Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 24(3), 307–328.

Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G. (1995). Trauma and Transformation: Growing in the Aftermath of Suffering. Sage Publications.

Howells, K., & Fletcher, D. (2015). The temporal patterning of psychological resilience in elite sport: A case study of a world-class performance team. Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 19, 164–172.

Gupta, S., & McCarthy, P. (2022). Athlete resilience: A definition and conceptual model. International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 15(1), 1–28.

Hill, D. M., Hanton, S., & Matthews, N. (2018). The development of mental toughness in elite female youth cricketers. Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology, 7(2), 177–193.

Cowden, R. G., Meyer, A., & Pothong, A. (2021). Mental toughness is associated with reduced stress and burnout in athletes. International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 20(4), 514–529.

Hanton, S., Thomas, O., & Jones, G. (2005). Reflective practice as a mediator of the relationship between competitive anxiety and performance. The Sport Psychologist, 19(2), 162-184.

Holt, N. L., Scherer, J., & Côté, J. (2016). Psychological and social factors in the sport development of aspiring female Olympic athletes. Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology, 5(1), 1–16.

Malhotra, D., & Saini, V. (2015). Effect of socioeconomic status on sport performance of national level junior weightlifters. International Journal of Applied Research, 1(5), 230–234.

Lee, C., & Cubbin, C. (2002). Socioeconomic status and physical activity. Journal of Exercise and Sport Sciences, 10(2), 154–170.

Khan, M. H., & Kumar, S. (2009). Sports by choice or by socio-economic status. Journal of Physical Education and Sports Management, 1(1), 1–10.

Deshmukh, M., & Kumar, S. (2013). Socio-economic status and physical fitness among rural and urban sportspersons. International Journal of Physical Education, Sports and Health, 1(1), 115–119.

Jayakumar, A., & Devi, P. (2024). Effect of socio-economic status, sports training and physical fitness variables on skill performance and selected physical fitne. International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts, 12(3), 350–358.

Lyle, J. (2002). Sports Coaching Concepts: A Framework for Coaches' Behaviour. Routledge.

Orlick, T. (2000). In Pursuit of Excellence: How to Win in Sport and Life Through Mental Training (4th ed.). Human Kinetics.

Mahmood, M. K. (2023). A glimpse of scenario on the status of Indian sports psychology. Physical Education Journals, 5(2), 17–21.

Collison, T., & Walker, M. (2017). A systematic review of socioeconomic status and youth sport participation. Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 39(4), 289-301.

Coakley, J. (2021). Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies (13th ed.). McGraw Hill. (Chapter on Sport and Social Class).