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An Analytical Study of the Reality of Behavioral Opportunism during the Professional Sports Season among Athletes at the Sports Talent Care Center for Track and Field

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Abstract

Study purpose. With the growing professionalization of youth sport and the emergence of ethically problematic competitive behaviors, behavioral opportunism has become an urgent issue that lacks standardized measurement in sport psychology. Therefore, this study aimed to develop a psychometrically sound scale to measure behavioral opportunism during the professional sports season and to determine its level and key manifestations among track and field athletes at the Sports Talent Care Center.

Materials and methods. A descriptive research design using the case study approach was employed. The research population consisted of 215 male athletes aged 15–17 years enrolled at the Sports Talent Care Center for track and field during the 2024/2025 sports season. The entire population was intentionally selected using a comprehensive enumeration method. The sample was divided into three groups: an exploratory sample, a construction sample (n = 109), and an application sample (n = 96). A behavioral opportunism scale was constructed based on four dimensions: careerism, self-centeredness, goal justification, and task hoarding. Validity and reliability were verified, and data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results. The results indicated an unacceptable level of behavioral opportunism among athletes during the professional sports season. Athletes showed tendencies toward distorting facts, exploiting others' weaknesses, exceeding ethical boundaries, justifying unethical means, and hoarding tasks and knowledge for personal benefit.

Conclusions. Behavioral opportunism represents a critical psychological and ethical issue within the professionalization environment. Addressing it requires structured psychological preparation programs grounded in ethical values and strengthened collaboration with sport psychology specialists.

Keywords: Behavioral Opportunism, Professional Sports, Sports Talent in Track and Field.

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Introduction

Investing opportunities to achieve the desired goals of professionalization for talented athletes in track and field events must be carried out in accordance with ethical value standards. Such athletes cannot resort to deceptive methods or unethical practices to attain professional status. Although track and field events rely primarily on numerical competitive performance to determine superiority among athletes, professional contracts are not necessarily limited to first-place athletes only. This is because systematic training processes and proper preparation within sports clubs can lead to performance improvement, according to the perspectives of those responsible for professional contracts. Consequently, the ethical motivation underlying athletes' self-esteem must stand firmly against behavioral opportunism and seek to eradicate its motives and incentives within talent development centers for track and field. This, in turn, contributes to preserving the sports environment from such undesirable psychological phenomena and fulfills part of the objectives of sport psychology.

In this regard, (Rebbouh et al., 2025) indicates that "an individual's self-esteem, self-perception, self-evaluation, behavior, and awareness of personal capabilities and abilities determine future behavior." Similarly, (Al-Farhati, 2009, p. 33) notes that "self-esteem motivates individuals to continue developing their abilities and capacities when they accept themselves; however, when self-acceptance is lacking, individuals tend to direct their energy toward destruction rather than construction." Beginner athletes or those who trained in junior categories need to have psychological guidance and counseling on how the right way of professional sport should be because it does not only depend on individual gift that we have below average capacity knowledge, which has been equipped with performance achievement requirements to be achieved (Ozturk et al., 2025) also claims that "people spend the vast majority of their leisure time thinking about changing [their] beliefs in a way to move oneself closer or achieve a higher state and status than [one is] at present". Our reasoning needs to be practical and constructed according to the study of the need for change, rather than wishing such a 'change' was possible because excessiveness and unimaginable rationalization result from excessive thinking." (Zheng & Chen, 2025)

Following from the tradition of Allport, Zainab provides an optimistic view of human beings which are seen as active and rational agents inclined to shape, increasingly with their maturity; a good deal of their choices, alternatives for behavior and objectives to be attained. In this perspective, current and future events are most relevant in history. Man can project himself in the future and he is always a becoming, toward future ends and aims. Similarly, Rogers perceived human as rational beings who progress by nature in the direction of growth, development and achieving objectives thus aiming towards full self- actualization to take place in future carrying into assuming social responsibility (Al-Assadi, 2017; Al-maliki & Khalaf, 2024).

Later, the examination of opportunism became a particularly relevant, intriguing phenomenon that was understood as complex and area-specific. Opportunism is also to be dishonest and not straightforward about one's own interest. This idea has developed over the years, and most dramatically in recent times. First, a lot of attention was placed around how tasks can be executed in manner consistent with the actor's purpose and belief not considering any consequent effect on other persons (Leeson, 2011; Reja, 2025; Abdulkareem et al., 2025).

Hence, behavioural opportunism might be best understood as "an unfriendly behaviour or an action of dubious intent on the part of one player regarding another that is strategic in nature and often motivated by hidden reasons and intentions unbeknownst to the other player" (Morita & Servátka, 2014, p. 142). It is also conceptualized as "a behavior in which an individual tries to realize private gain through deceit" (Yuzhakova 2025; Hussein, 2023).

An opportunitsic is also a person who can make use of existing opportunity, consciously and rationally pursuing one's self-interest while taking advantage of opportunities in order to

gain it such as seeking profit at the cost of others if need be (Obeagu & John, 2026; Abdul Hameed & Shahbaz, 2025).

As pointed by Abdul Rahim (2024, p. 80), opportunistic agents create a lack of trust among individuals and makes them more alert about their interactions: more dependent on behavioural monitoring systems that perceive the spreadof meanness (unfriendliness) and antipathy in positive emotions induced by fear from being exploited.

Behavioral opportunism consists of four dimensions:

Opportunism: The act of putting yourself to the front with no FEAR, hesitancy, nor embarrassment or remorse. The opportunist acts without permission, it excludes cooperation and perseveres in the pursuit of self-achievement and personal exposure (Wu, 2014; Ali & Kareem, 2025).

Self-Absorption: It was defined as high level of self-centered cognition cognitive dysfunction which gives a feeling of superiority, grandiosity or inflated importance (Zuroff et al., 2012). They want to climb but they do not respect the others, think that they should be admired and don't like criticism; feel superior other people and they always need praise (grandiosity) (Ogurlu & Sarıçam, 2018; Ghanim, 2025).

Justification of Ends: It is the dimension of the philosophical rationale for irrational behaviours in accordance with developed goals, in which actions do not adhere to societal values and norms but are based on the saying "the end justifies the means." Advocates of this approach argue sophisticaly (Lozada-Martinez et al, 2025; Tayeh, 2025).

Task Hoarding: opportunist ill-adenoid person doesn't want to share methodologies, strategies or ways of accomplishing task which leads success. They refuse transferring knowledge and collaboration, a reflection of mature selfishness on account of the longing for monopoly and everlasting leadership (Al-Fiqhi, 2014; Jaleel, 2014).

In conclusion, from literature observations regarding this psychological characteristic a two-way analysis of its relevance for sport psychology can be made. Theoretical significance is reflected in the improvement of academic studies in sport psychology by revealing valuable explorations, while invoking systemic considerations with reference to talent development centres for track and field, as well as bringing attention from researchers' research orientation toward this kind of research on how to buttress training and competition environment. Pragmatic implications include advice to stakeholders involved in the administration of talent centers to attend to the need for capturing behavioral opportunism in talented athletes, a psychometric scale designed for direct measurement of this phenomenon and input provided to administrators of track-and-field talent centers regarding developing rules with which they can curb such opportunistic behavior, particularly when professionalization seasons or contracts offered by sports clubs begin.

Research Problem

The research problem in this paper is: how pervasive is behavioural opportunism within T&F talent development centers, especially when formalised professional contracts are first signed with sports clubs? This requires designing a specific scale for easily and objectively diagnosing the condition based on quantitative measures that are not hypothesis-laden in terms of its presence or absence. Therefore, the following research questions are presumed: 1-What is the level of behavioral opportunism during professionalization among athletes of track and field talent development centers? 2-What are the factors contributing to the growth of behavioral opportunism during professionalization among these athletes? 3-Does behavioral opportunism during professionalization negatively affect the sports environment of track and field talent development centers?

Research Objectives

1.To construct a behavioral opportunism scale for the professionalization season and identify its level among athletes of track and field talent development centers. 2.To identify the detailed characteristics of behavioral opportunism during the professionalization season among athletes of track and field talent development centers.

Materials and methods

Study participants

The research population comprised athletes from the Sports Talent Care Center for Track and Field during the 2024/2025 sports season, aged 15–17 years, with a total number of 215 athletes. All athletes were intentionally selected as the total research sample using the comprehensive enumeration (census) method, representing 100% of the population. According to the research requirements, the participants were divided into three subsamples: pilot, construction, and application, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Description of the Research Population and Samples

Event	Total	Pilot Sample	Construction Sample	Application Sample
100 m	8	–	4	4
200 m	14	1	7	6
400 m	8	–	4	4
800 m	5	–	3	2
1500 m	7	–	4	3
3000 m	5	–	3	2
5000 m hurdles	6	–	3	3
10000 m	7	–	4	3
Race walking	4	–	2	2
110 m hurdles	14	1	7	6
400 m hurdles	10	–	5	5
4×100 m relay	16	2	7	7
4×400 m relay	12	1	6	5
Half marathon (21.097 km)	5	–	3	2
Marathon (42.196 km)	4	–	2	2
Javelin throw	14	1	7	6
Hammer throw	12	1	6	5
Discus throw	14	1	7	6
Shot put	14	1	7	6
Long jump	10	–	5	5
Triple jump	12	1	6	5
High jump	8	–	4	4
Pole vault	6	–	3	3
Total	215	10	109	96
Percentage	100%	4.651%	50.698%	44.651%

Note. *Some percentage values were rounded.*

Considering the focus of our study on these factors as well as with the specific measurement sample, a scale was developed to measure the construct of behavioral opportunism. Thus, the researcher maintained scientific- based provenances and norms during the construction process, including a clear definition of the scale name and aim for developing

it by applying item statement-writing and response-alternative-criteria-based writing criteria after which the instrument was administered to a coloring sample. After administering the scale on my sample, I computed its statistical property that necessitated for accepting in Physical Education &Sport sciences. The reasons why there was construction of this scale (as described) are then precisely rooted in the phenomenon and population specific context.

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Study organization

Instruments and Data Collection Sources

The study relied on the following tools and sources for data collection:

- Arabic and foreign references.
- International information network (Internet).
- Expert opinion survey questionnaire.
- Behavioral Opportunism Scale during athletic professionalization.
- Official records of the Sports Talent Care Center for track and field.

Procedures

The research in this study was articulated with the construction of a Behavioral Opportunism Scale during Athletic Professionalization. Firstly, the aim to measure behavioral opportunism referred to athletes' professional sports orientation and behaviors in Sports Talent Care Center. Thus, the instrument was named "the Behavior Opportunities in Athletic Professionalization among Track and Field Talent Care Center Athletes."

Subsequently, the common characteristics of the research sample were analyzed in accordance with the study's orientation toward supporting the training environment of athletes at the Sports Talent Care Center for track and field. The athletes' chronological ages ranged from 15 to 17 years, and their duration of enrollment at the Center ranged from 5 to 10 years. Based on the concepts presented in the theoretical framework of the psychometric phenomenon under investigation and its four dimensions—careerism, self-centeredness, goal justification, and task hoarding—and after considering the level and characteristics of the target population, a total of 20 items were developed for the scale, with five items for each dimension.

The scale items were closed-ended with three response alternatives (Always, Sometimes, Never), scored 3, 2, and 1, respectively, using the Likert method. This scoring system indicates that the higher the individual's score, the higher the total level of behavioral opportunism on the scale.

To establish face validity and logical validity, an expert opinion questionnaire was prepared and accompanied by a copy of the scale. The instrument was presented to 19 experts in sport psychology and measurement and evaluation in sport sciences during the period from Sunday (4/5/2025) to Wednesday (14/5/2025). All experts (100% agreement) approved retaining all items and the scale instructions without modification.

Pilot Study

The readability of the scale items, response options and instructions to the study sample was pretested on 10 athletes who were not part of the main data set; they were tested on Friday (16/5/2025). Furthermore, in the interests of organization, the average time taken to fill out the scale was calculated which lasted 10 minutes.

Item Analysis and Scientific Properties of the Scale

A sample of construction (n = 109 athletes) was used to administer the scale and perform item analysis, confirming scientific indicators of construct validity (discriminant capacity, internal consistency), using different statistical methods. The procedure was done from

Saturday morning to Saturday in the following week (17/5/2025 – 24/5/2025), benefiting from athletes attendance at training sessions on Fridays and Saturdays.

Item Discrimination

Item Discrimination Estimation The wholesalers' scores on items were arranged in descending order, and 27% of the construction sample was extracted using the extreme groups method to examine item discrimination. This led to a total of 29 athletes in both the upper and lower groups. Between-groups comparisons were performed for each item using independent t-tests as displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Item Discrimination Results for the Scale

Item No.	Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.	Discrimination
1	Upper	29	2.38	0.494	4.748	0.000	Acceptable
	Lower	29	1.83	0.384			
2	Upper	29	2.31	0.471	9.495	0.000	Acceptable
	Lower	29	1.21	0.412			
3	Upper	29	2.34	0.484	10.875	0.000	Acceptable
	Lower	29	1.14	0.351			
4	Upper	29	2.38	0.494	11.785	0.000	Acceptable
	Lower	29	1.10	0.310			
5	Upper	29	2.59	0.501	9.237	0.000	Acceptable
	Lower	29	1.38	0.494			
6	Upper	29	2.28	0.455	7.942	0.000	Acceptable
	Lower	29	1.31	0.471			
7	Upper	29	2.48	0.509	9.985	0.000	Acceptable
	Lower	29	1.24	0.435			
8	Upper	29	2.62	0.494	9.237	0.000	Acceptable
	Lower	29	1.41	0.501			
9	Upper	29	2.72	0.455	10.097	0.000	Acceptable
	Lower	29	1.45	0.506			
10	Upper	29	2.59	0.501	15.633	0.000	Acceptable
	Lower	29	1.03	0.186			
11	Upper	29	2.24	0.435	9.910	0.000	Acceptable
	Lower	29	1.17	0.384			
12	Upper	29	2.69	0.471	9.378	0.000	Acceptable
	Lower	29	1.48	0.509			
13	Upper	29	2.72	0.455	10.425	0.000	Acceptable
	Lower	29	1.41	0.501			
14	Upper	29	2.76	0.435	9.985	0.000	Acceptable
	Lower	29	1.52	0.509			
15	Upper	29	2.21	0.412	3.240	0.000	Acceptable
	Lower	29	1.90	0.310			
16	Upper	29	2.69	0.471	13.442	0.000	Acceptable
	Lower	29	1.17	0.384			
17	Upper	29	2.76	0.435	9.734	0.000	Acceptable
	Lower	29	1.55	0.506			
18	Upper	29	2.52	0.509	11.360	0.000	Acceptable
	Lower	29	1.17	0.384			
19	Upper	29	2.45	0.506	6.517	0.000	Acceptable
	Lower	29	1.59	0.501			

20	Upper	29	2.38	0.494	7.711	0.000	Acceptable
	Lower	29	1.38	0.494			

All items were statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ with 56 degrees of freedom, indicating acceptable discriminatory power.

Internal Consistency

To verify internal consistency, Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated between each item score and the total scale score for the construction sample (n = 109), as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Internal Consistency: Correlation between Item Scores and Total Scale Score

Item	Correlation	Sig.	Item	Correlation	Sig.
1	0.535*	0.000	11	0.695*	0.000
2	0.607*	0.000	12	0.646*	0.000
3	0.564*	0.000	13	0.735*	0.000
4	0.621*	0.000	14	0.668*	0.000
5	0.652*	0.000	15	0.521*	0.000
6	0.772*	0.000	16	0.854*	0.000
7	0.624*	0.000	17	0.655*	0.000
8	0.608*	0.000	18	0.688*	0.000
9	0.664*	0.000	19	0.521*	0.000
10	0.608*	0.000	20	0.562*	0.000

*Items are internally consistent at $p < 0.05$ with 107 degrees of freedom.

Reliability and Normality

The internal consistency of the scale was verified by determining Cronbach's alpha coefficient which was 0.859, showing a high degree of internal consistency. This previously was explored beyond measuring the normal distribution of score, which is demonstrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Final Statistical Indicators and Normal Distribution Values of the Scale

Scale Name	Construction Sample	Items	Total Score	Mean	SD	Skewness
Behavioral Opportunism during Athletic Professionalization	109	20	60	52.86	3.794	−0.012

The distribution is considered approximately normal when the skewness value lies within ±1.

Through these statistical process and analyses, the researcher has concluded construction of the scale in sport psychology. The last version of the scale was composed of 20 to 60 points, and a theoretical scale mean was set at 40.

Main Field Study

The proceedings followed in the survey applied to the men athletes being of which, 96 composed its main application sample and it was elaborated from a direct observation and individual approach of each subject that comprises the sample. The data were collected between Friday, the 20th of May 2025 and Saturday, the 7th of June 2025. The data were then coded and entered into preformed forms in preparation for statistical analysis.

Statistical analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to compute the following measures:

- Percentages
- Arithmetic mean
- Standard deviation
- Skewness coefficient
- Pearson's simple correlation coefficient
- Cronbach's alpha coefficient
- Independent samples t-test
- Paired samples t-test
- Weighted mean
- Relative importance

These statistical procedures were employed to ensure accurate analysis and interpretation of the results related to behavioral opportunism during the athletic professionalization season.

Results

To assess the global incentive profile for athletes, we calculated the mean of all scores in the scale and compared it to a hypothetical mean.

Table 5. Results of Comparing the Arithmetic Mean with the Hypothetical Mean of the Scale

Scale	No. of item	Total Score	Hypothetical Mean	Arithmetic Mean	SD	Mean Difference	*T value*	P value
Behavioral Opportunism	20	60	40	51.63	4.58	11.625	24.858	0.000

Note. The unit of measurement is the score. The difference is statistically significant when Sig. < 0.05 at degrees of freedom (n − 1) = 95 and a significance level of 0.05.

As illustrated in Table 5, the arithmetic mean (51.63) was significantly different from the hypothetical mean (40); $t = 24.858$, $p < 0.05$. However, it shows a high degree of behavioral opportunism in the professional sports season by the athletes in their Sports Talent Care Center as aforementioned.

Table 6. Qualitative Criteria for Judging Responses to the Scale Items

Response Range	Evaluative Judgment for Interpreting Results
From 1.00 to less than 1.667	Low
From 1.667 to less than 2.334	Moderate
From 2.334 to less than 3.00	High

Table 7. Results of the Careerism Dimension Items Compared with the Evaluative Judgment Criteria

Item No.	Always (Freq.)	Always (%)	Sometimes (Freq.)	Sometimes (%)	Never (Freq.)	Never (%)	Weighted Mean	Relative Importance (%)	Evaluative Judgment
1	55	57.292	35	36.458	6	6.250	2.51	83.681	High
2	50	52.083	35	36.458	11	11.458	2.406	80.208	High
3	24	25.000	20	20.833	52	54.167	1.708	56.944	Moderate
4	33	34.375	37	38.542	26	27.083	2.073	69.097	Moderate
5	7	7.292	41	42.708	48	50.000	1.573	52.431	Low

Note. *N* = 96. Percentage values are rounded.

As seen in table 7, careerism behaviors differed ranging from low to high levels, but many items illustrate that athletes were very likely to prioritize their personal advancement during the professionalization stage.

Table 8. Results of the Self-Centeredness Dimension Items Compared with the Evaluative Judgment Criteria

Item No.	Always (Freq.)	Always (%)	Sometimes (Freq.)	Sometimes (%)	Never (Freq.)	Never (%)	Weight Mean	Relative Importance (%)	Evaluative Judgment
1	25	26.042	26	27.083	45	46.87	1.792	59.722	Moderate
2	31	32.292	41	42.708	24	25.00	2.073	69.097	Moderate
3	52	54.167	40	41.667	4	4.167	2.500	83.333	High
4	38	39.583	23	23.958	35	36.45	2.031	67.708	Moderate
5	8	8.333	21	21.875	67	69.79	1.385	46.181	Low

Note. N = 96. Percentage values are rounded.

As shown in Table 8, moderate to high self-centered tendencies were observed among the trainers that revealed some of the athletes had their eyes more on personal success than in creating a collective work environment.

Table 9. Results of the Goal Justification Dimension Items Compared with the Evaluative Judgment Criteria

Item No.	Always (Freq.)	Always (%)	Sometimes (Freq.)	Sometimes (%)	Never (Freq.)	Never (%)	Weighted Mean	Relative Importance (%)	Evaluative Judgment
1	61	63.542	24	25.000	11	11.458	2.521	84.028	High
2	29	30.208	27	28.125	40	41.667	1.885	62.847	Moderate
3	31	32.292	30	31.250	35	36.458	1.958	65.278	Moderate
4	25	26.042	40	41.667	31	32.292	1.938	64.583	Moderate

5	20	20.833	10	10.417	66	68.750	1.521	50.694	Low

Note. N = 96. Percentage values are rounded.

Results in Table 9 (demonstrated varying degrees of justification-based behaviors), as some athletes were justified on their way to professional success salvation.

Table 10. Results of the Task Hoarding Dimension Items Compared with the Evaluative Judgment Criteria

Item No.	Always (Freq.)	Always (%)	Sometimes (Freq.)	Sometimes (%)	Never (Freq.)	Never (%)	Weighted Mean	Relative Importance (%)	Evaluative Judgment
1	42	43.750	21	21.875	33	34.375	2.094	69.792	Moderate
2	26	27.083	32	33.333	38	39.583	1.875	62.500	Moderate
3	62	64.583	5	5.208	29	30.208	2.344	78.125	High
4	19	19.792	42	43.750	35	36.458	1.833	61.111	Moderate
5	6	6.250	24	25.000	66	68.750	1.375	45.833	Low

Note. N = 96. Percentage values are rounded.

Moderate to high levels of task and knowledge hoarding as see in Table 10 inheritably suggests that some athletes are unwilling to share information or strategies that could benefit others.

The results in Tables 7–10 display variation with respect to athletes' responses across the four dimensions of behavioral opportunism. Certain items that were recorded had high levels, indicating a greater proclivity towards opportunistic behaviors compared to other items, which exhibited moderate or low levels indicating increased encase prevalence of opportunistic behaviors amongst athletes during the professional sports seasons.

Discussion

the results of this study suggest that behavioral opportunism is a prominent psychological and ethical trait in athletes throughout the professional sports season (as demonstrated by high overall scale scores) that varies over the course of four dimensions. This trend indicates that the professionalization milieu might foster particular conditions leading to a climate of self-oriented behavioral tendencies based on athletes' perception of few promotion and increased competition pressure.

From the perspective of sport psychology, such findings are in line with research showing that competitive climates and performance-oriented contexts can heighten self-serving behaviors among athletes, particularly at transition periods associated with professionalization and career development (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007; Kavussanu et al., 2017). Many training environments focus on individual achievement, notoriety and selection; as such are perhaps indirectly conducive to opportunist conduct.

On the careerism dimension, findings were indicative of a preference for own promotion and validation during transitions in professional life. This reading of the situation is consistent with more contemporary research that applied within high-stakes environments suggest athletes developing instrumental habits that serve to maximise individual career opportunities despite localised tensions presented when behaviours conflict with collective ethos or moral codes (Mohd Yusoff et al., 2022; Doron & Martinent, 2021).

Another dimension that emerged from the present work is a self-centeredness orientation towards individual success characteristic of competitive sport climates. Studies have demonstrated that an ego-oriented motivational climate results in decreased cooperation and a greater focus on personal success (Stanger et al., 2018; Zhong & Wang, 2025), especially for young athletes who are exposed to the professional selection system. These conditions can

create behavioral tendencies that place team impacts after the team, leading to every player focusing on their individual outcomes instead of striving for a common responsibility.

In terms of goal rationalization, the results confirm that certain forms of cognitive strategy are used by some athletes to legitimize behavior viewed as unethical in pursuit of success. To argue the point, Bandura (2016) went on to develop the theory of moral disengagement in sport, which provides a powerful explanation for behaviors emphasizing cognitive restructuring that aligns harmful or unethical action with highly desired end goals like victory or professional achievement (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007; Hassoun & Anoun, 2025). Many studies have shown that athletes tend to rationalize behaviors that were deemed as unacceptable when exposed to performance pressure (Kavussanu et al., 2017; Ghyaidh, 2025).

The task hoarding dimension represents another aspect of opportunism, where there is a reluctance of athletes to share knowledge, strategies, and experiences related to their performance. These proclivities have both been recorded in sport and organizational psychology as functional behavioral responses to competitive ecosystems constructed from under-resourced and talent-rich settings (Nguyen et al., 2022; Garg et al., 2022). In talent development contexts, this behavior may manifest as athletes seek to uphold an assumed performance advantage.

Collectively, these results illustrate the intricate relationship between psychological, social, and environmental factors in influencing opportunistic behavior by athletes. In particular, achievement, selection, and performance outcomes are hallmarks of a professionalization context that may unintentionally produce norms conducive to self-serving behaviors while diminishing the social applicability of ethical standards. Similar patterns have emerged from research on youth elite sport systems, in which pressure to perform and identity formation intermingle (Berilova et al., 2025).

The results highlight the need to include psychological preparation programs targeting ethical thinking, collaboration, and moral responsibility as part of training in talent development centers from an applied perspective. Psychological interventions in sports focusing on motivational atmosphere, team building, and value-based education have been able to decrease negative behavior patterns alongside increasing positive sport development (Stanger et al., 2018; Kavussanu et al., 2017).

Conclusions

The conclusion of this research is that athletes at the Sports Talent Care Center for Track and Field exhibited a very high level of behavioral opportunism during the professional sports season, manifested in undesirable and unethical behaviors in the training environment. The outcomes revealed that the majority of athletes were prone to distort facts and take advantage of others' vulnerabilities in order to push their own career agenda, further worsening the situation of opportunistic careerism. Athletic overidentification, also characterized by self-centering tendencies, prioritized individual success and competitive advantage above group values and ethics. The results also suggested that some of the athletes embraced an "ends justify the means" mentality, and this mindset contributed to the normalization of outcome-justifying behaviors in their pursuits for career success. Moreover, a tendency to hoard tasks and knowledge, based on the belief that you do not share information or strategies because being better than someone else justifies it, was evidenced by athletes; this is the main example of opportunistic behavior within professionalized individuals.

Recommendations

During the professional sports season when competitive pressures peak during competitions, structured strategies should be put into place to restrict ramping up behavioral opportunism among athletes at the Sports Talent Care Center for Track and Field. More

psychological preparation programs that supplement the professionalization process with an emphasis on ethical decision-making, personal integrity, and value-based goal achievement. Moreover, sport psychology specialists should be effectively involved in this emergent phenomenon, but for that, communication and collaboration between the Ministry of Youth and Sports and colleges of Physical Education and Sport Sciences must be strengthened. Additionally, there is a need for greater focus on developing coaches' psychometric measurement competency and also assisting their acceptance of its purpose as a mechanism to track, diagnose, and manage behavioral opportunism in talent development settings.

Conflict of interest

the authors declares no conflicts of interest.

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