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Which Goals Matter? Examining the influence of task and ego orientation on the sports performance of Physical Education students

¿Qué metas importan? Un análisis de la influencia de la orientación hacia la tarea y el ego en el rendimiento deportivo de los estudiantes de Educación Física

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Abstract
The influence of goal orientation on athletic performance is well-documented in competitive sports; however, its impact on students in physical education (PE) settings remains underexplored. This study examines the influence of task and ego goal orientations on the sports performance of physical education students in a classroom context. A total of 283 PE students (119 males and 164 females) aged 18 to 21 years (M = 19.24, SD = .978) from General Santos City, Philippines, participated in the study. A descriptive-correlational research design was used, and participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Data were analyzed using bivariate correlation and multiple regression analysis to examine the relationship and predictive strength of goal orientations on sports performance. Results showed that task orientation accounted for 37% of the variance in sports performance, while ego orientation explained 7.3%. Together, both orientations explained 32.8% of the overall variance in students' sports performance. The findings indicated that both task and ego orientation substantially affect students' sports performance in programs for physical education. This suggests that cultivating a balanced motivational environment that promotes both individual development and constructive competition can increase overall athletic performance in physical education contexts. This study presents substantial evidence on the impact of task and ego goal orientation on the athletic performance of physical education students. These findings suggest that physical education programs should emphasize mastery-based learning environments while appropriately incorporating competitive features to address varied student motivations. By implementing this approach, educators can improve performance, motivation, and emotional well-being in sports instruction.
Keywords: sports performance; physical education; ego orientation; task orientation; goal orientation

Resumen
La influencia de la orientación hacia las metas en el rendimiento deportivo está bien documentada en deportes competitivos; sin embargo, su impacto en los estudiantes en contextos de educación física (EF) sigue siendo poco explorado. Este estudio examina la influencia de las orientaciones hacia la tarea y hacia el ego en el rendimiento deportivo de los estudiantes de EF en un contexto de aula. Participaron un total de 283 estudiantes de EF (119 hombres y 164 mujeres), con edades entre 18 y 21 años (M = 19.24, DE = 0.978), todos provenientes de la ciudad de General Santos, Filipinas. Se utilizó un diseño de investigación descriptivo-correlacional, y los participantes fueron seleccionados mediante técnicas de muestreo intencional y bola de nieve. Los datos fueron analizados mediante correlación bivariada y análisis de regresión múltiple para examinar la relación y la fuerza predictiva de las orientaciones hacia las metas sobre el rendimiento deportivo. Los resultados mostraron que la orientación hacia la tarea explicó el 37% de la varianza en el rendimiento deportivo, mientras que la orientación hacia el ego explicó el 7.3%. En conjunto, ambas orientaciones explicaron el 32.8% de la varianza total en el rendimiento deportivo de los estudiantes. Los hallazgos indicaron que tanto la orientación hacia la tarea como hacia el ego afectan de manera significativa el rendimiento deportivo de los estudiantes en los programas de educación física. Esto sugiere que fomentar un entorno motivacional equilibrado, que promueva tanto el

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desarrollo individual como la competencia constructiva, puede mejorar el rendimiento deportivo general en contextos de educación física. Este estudio ofrece evidencia sustancial sobre el impacto de la orientación hacia la tarea y el ego en el rendimiento atlético de los estudiantes de EF. Los resultados sugieren que los programas de educación física deberían enfatizar entornos de aprendizaje basados en el dominio, incorporando adecuadamente elementos competitivos para abordar las diversas motivaciones del alumnado. Al implementar este enfoque, los docentes pueden mejorar el rendimiento, la motivación y el bienestar emocional en la enseñanza deportiva.
Palabras clave: rendimiento deportivo; educación física; orientación al ego; orientación a la tarea; orientación a la meta

Introduction

Despite the growing emphasis on physical education (PE) as a way to develop athletic skills and encourage lifelong participation in sports, student-athletes continue to show differences in their sports performance. Numerous studies have demonstrated that sports performance in physical education classes is affected by several aspects, including motivation (Lochbaum et al., 2022; Mandan et al., 2024; Longakit et al., 2025; Li et al., 2024), teaching methods (Reina et al., 2020; Camacho-Sánchez et al., 2023), competency skills (Longakit et al., 2024) and individual psychological traits (Zulkifli et al., 2025; Cho et al., 2022). However, the role of goal orientation remains inadequately explored in this context. Task-oriented students, who value mastery and self-improvement, may put up more effort and persistence (Rivera-Pérez et al., 2021; Greve et al., 2020), whereas ego-oriented students, motivated by competition and social comparison, may succeed in performance settings but struggle with setbacks (Jørgensen Olsen & Mehus, 2022; Reigal et al., 2024). Studies indicate that individuals with a task-oriented approach are more inclined to utilize adaptive learning strategies, maintain consistent effort, and exhibit resilience when confronted with challenges (Greve et al., 2020; Jørgensen Olsen & Mehus, 2022: Ghayebzadeh et al., 2023). Ego-oriented individuals generally excel in settings that allow them to showcase their superiority; however, they may encounter anxiety and diminished motivation when confronted with failure or challenges to their competence (Reigal et al., 2024; García-González et al., 2019; Morales-Sánchez et al., 2024). The findings underscore the significant influence of goal orientation on students' engagement and performance in physical education contexts. Goal orientation theory offers a significant framework for analyzing student

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motivation and performance within physical education (PE) contexts. Goal orientation theory explains how individuals develop and demonstrate motivation in achievement settings, including sports and academics (Bandhu et al., 2024; Cid et al., 2020; Nicholls, 2021). According to Nicholls (1984), goal orientation consists of two primary dimensions: task orientation and ego orientation. Task-oriented individuals focus on personal growth, effort, and mastery of skills, while ego-oriented individuals measure success based on outperforming others. In sports, goal orientation influences how athletes approach competition and training, impacting their overall performance (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Studies suggest that task-oriented athletes are more likely to persist in challenging situations, develop higher self-efficacy, and show resilience in the face of failure (Harwood et al., 2015; Jr et al., 2024). In contrast, ego-oriented athletes may experience anxiety and stress, particularly when they perceive their skills as inferior to those of their peers (Roberts et al., 2020; Jakobsen, 2021).

Research also indicates that students in physical education classes who adopt a task-oriented approach are more likely to enjoy participation and demonstrate greater effort, leading to improved sports performance (Cumming et al., 2021). These findings highlight the importance of fostering a mastery-oriented environment in sports education to enhance student engagement and performance. The relationship between goal orientation and performance extends beyond sports, influencing academic success as well. Task orientation has been linked to intrinsic motivation, sustained effort, and deep learning strategies in both athletic and academic contexts (Elliot & Hulleman, 2017; Pestano & Ibarra, 2022). Students who adopt a task-oriented approach tend to focus on skill development, which translates into consistent academic and sports achievements (Schmidt et al., 2022). Conversely, ego-oriented students may rely on external validation and competition, which can sometimes hinder performance if they encounter failure or setbacks (Senko et al., 2019). Studies in sports psychology suggest that combining task and ego orientations can lead to balanced motivation, where students maintain a competitive spirit while prioritizing personal growth (Wang et al., 2023). This perspective supports the idea that educators and coaches should promote a mix of both orientations to enhance student performance in physical education classes and academics.

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Some students excel and consistently improve, while others struggle with motivation and performance, which can limit their overall progress. One important factor that affects athletic success is goal orientation, which influences motivation, effort, and perseverance in sports (Urdan & Kaplan, 2020). Sports performance is affected by several factors, including psychological, physical, and environmental influences. Psychological factors, in particular, play a key role in an athlete's ability to handle pressure, overcome challenges, and stay committed to their sport (Anderson et al., 2014). Research shows that goal orientation affects an athlete's drive to succeed and their willingness to improve. It has two main types: task orientation, which focuses on personal growth and skill development, and ego orientation, which is centered on outperforming others (Urdan & Kaplan, 2020). Studies have found that motivation, team support, and personality traits like conscientiousness and emotional stability can improve an athlete's focus and performance (Tomczak et al., 2024). On the other hand, high levels of sport anxiety can weaken confidence and concentration, leading to poor performance (Van Mierlo & Van Hooft, 2020).

Despite these theoretical distinctions, empirical evidence on how these orientations shape actual sports performance in PE classes is limited. Most existing research has focused on competitive athletes rather than regular students engaged in structured PE activities, creating a gap in understanding how goal orientation affects skill acquisition, participation, and overall achievement in educational sports settings. Addressing this gap is essential for developing instructional strategies that foster both motivation and performance in PE classes. In light of these insights, this study aimed to explore the influence of task and ego goal orientation on sports performance of physical education students.

Methods

Participants and Sampling Technique

The study utilized a quantitative approach with a correlational research design, incorporating a descriptive-correlational method to explore relationships among key variables. This framework enabled an in-depth analysis of how the task and ego orientation influences sports performance of physical education students. The

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participants who took part in this study were chosen using purposive random sampling. The purposive sampling methodology is a non-probability sampling method in which participants are chosen based on the researcher's subjective assessment of who will offer the most pertinent data, rather than depending on statistical likelihood (Andrade, 2020). The study included a total of 283 physical education students as participants, comprising 119 male athletes (42.05%) and 164 female athletes (57.95%). Their ages ranged from 18 to 21 years, with a mean age of 19.24 (SD = 0.987). All participants were based in General Santos City, Philippines, and represented various year levels within their PE programs. A detailed socio-demographic profile of the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Sociodemographic of participants

Variables		N (%)	M ± SD
Sex			
	Male	119 (42.05%)	
	Female	164 (57.95%)	
Age			19.24 ± .978
Year Level			
	1st Year	77 (27.20%)	
	2nd Year	88 (31.10%)	
	3rd Year	88 (31.10%)	
	4th Year	30 (10.60%)	

Instruments

The socio-demographic profile questionnaire, often referred to as a demographic survey, serves as a vital instrument in this study to capture essential information about the participants. It encompasses a range of demographic variables, including name, age, sex, and year level. The Goal Orientation (Task and Ego) Orientation in Sport Questionnaire (TEOSQ) was used to assess the task and ego orientation in sport of students (Duda, 1989; Duda & Nicholls, 1992). The scale consists of 13 items including 7 items for task orientation (e.g., I work really hard) and 6 items for ego orientation (e.g., I can do better than my friends) with a response rated using 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). The TEOSQ demonstrated

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acceptable levels of internal consistency and validity to other studies (Morales-Sánchez et al., 2022; Dagsdóttir et al., 2023). The reliability of two subscales is α=.94 (task orientation) and α=.81 (ego orientation). The overall internal consistency of the TEOSQ is .88. The athlete's sports performance was measured using Sport Performance Perceptions Scale (SPPS). This scale consists of a 16-item tool that was developed to measure the level of perceived sports performance and has five components: athlete development (e.g., I recognize that I have a primary sport), mastery and development (e.g., I take my training seriously"), strategy and preparedness (e.g., I feel confident in my level of fitness when competing in my sport), recovery and injury prevention (e.g., I get at least 7 hours of sleep every night), psychological skills (e.g., I feel like I can manage my emotions in my training). On a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Almost never) to 7 (Almost always) with high scores indicating greater level of sports performance. This scale shows high internal consistency and validity to other studies (Lourenço et al., 2022). The internal consistency coefficients for the current study displayed high levels of reliability for all subscales ranging from .91 to .938. SPPS obtained Cronbach Alpha of .983.

Procedure

Prior to the conduct of the study, authorization was obtained from the institutional authorities and test administration was conducted after the letter of approval. Consent forms were collected from the respondents. The questionnaires clearly outlined the study's aims and guaranteed the confidentiality of participants' responses. Participants completed the packet of questionnaires under the researchers' instruction. The researchers verified that the individuals are physical education students currently enrolled at MSU- General Santos. The data collected from this survey were quantified based on the items chosen by participants. Enumerated additional risks associated with participation in the online survey include potential threats to data privacy arising from the digital collecting of responses. In response, strict data protection protocols were established to protect participant information. Participants were notified of the potential for minor psychological discomfort from certain inquiries,

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as well as their entitlement to withdraw from the study or request a debriefing at any moment.

Statistical Analysis

The findings demonstrate that the skewness and kurtosis values conform to the designated threshold of [2, -2]. Therefore, it can be inferred that the data set adheres to a normal distribution. The subsequent table displays the outcomes of the reliability test performed on each scale utilized in the study. The findings suggested that all scales exhibited a high degree of reliability, as evidenced by Cronbach's alpha values between .81 and .94. Finally, the table presents the bivariate correlations for each scale, indicating a robust link among all scales ($p < .0001$). Furthermore, linear regression was employed to examine the relationship between aspects of goal orientation (task and ego orientation) and perceived sports performance. This examination sought to determine the relationship between these factors, regardless of their underlying structures. The researchers employed multiple regression analysis to ascertain the direct impact of task and ego orientation on students' reported sports performance in physical education meetings. This modeling approach utilizes many predictors to forecast a single objective variable (Kang and Zhao, 2020). This study analyzes the correlation between task and ego orientation and students' perceived sports performance in physical education classes.

Ethical Statement

The study upheld strict ethical standards throughout its duration. Data collection was conducted via an online survey administered through Google Forms, which clearly explained the research objectives, eligibility requirements, and the variables under investigation. Participants were made fully aware that their involvement was voluntary, and they had the option to withdraw at any point without consequence. Any potential risks, such as discomfort from answering personal or sensitive questions, were transparently communicated. No financial incentives were offered for participation. All data were securely stored in a password-protected Excel file, accessible only to the research team, and saved on a USB drive for a period of three months before being permanently deleted. Participants were assured that their responses would remain

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anonymous and confidential, and that their information would not be used for future studies. The study strictly followed the guidelines set forth by the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173), ensuring the privacy and protection of all participant data during collection, analysis, and reporting phases.

Results

The mean, standard deviations, reliability, skewness, kurtosis, and correlation among variables are displayed in Table 2. The results demonstrated that task and ego goal orientation were positively correlated with athlete development (r = .284 to .596), mastery and development (r = .267 to .632), strategy and preparedness (r = .26 to .55), recovery and injury prevention (r = .22 to .565), and psychological skills (r = .261 to .537). Moreover, the skewness and kurtosis values are relatively close to zero, indicating that the data are approximately normal and suitable for parametric statistical analyses.

Table 2
Normality estimates, reliability and bivariate correlation

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Task	(.94)						
2. Ego	.288***	(.81)					
3. AD	.596***	.284***	(.91)				
4. MD	.632***	.267***	.934***	(.94)			
5. SP	.555***	.260***	.896***	.891***	(.938)		
6. RP	.565***	.220***	.864***	.886***	.861***	(.935)	
7. PS	.537***	.261***	.851***	.870***	.851***	.825***	(.923)
M	28.96	15.73	30.45	36.78	34.93	41.46	20.19
SD	5.96	4.62	7.79	9.39	9.27	10.44	5.54
Skewness	-1.80	0.25	-0.92	-1.09	-0.85	-1.07	-0.70
Kurtosis	3.77	0.02	0.57	0.80	0.39	0.86	-0.02

Note: AD- athlete development; MD- mastery and development; SP- strategy and preparedness; RP- recovery and injury prevention; PS- psychological skills. Significant at level *** $p < .001$

In Table 3, the findings indicate that task and ego goal orientation significantly predict sport performance. The results revealed that task ($\beta = 0.261$, $t = 2.836$, $p = <.005$), and ego orientation ($\beta = 0.501$, $t = 4.696$, $p = <.001$) significantly predict sports

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performance with R-squared of 37% and 7.3% of the variance explained, respectively. Thus, $\boldsymbol{H_{1a}}$ and $\boldsymbol{H_{1b}}$ are accepted. Moreover, the findings revealed that there is a clear and direct positive influence of total goal orientation of students on sports performance in physical education classes F (1, 282) = 137.206, p <.001. The R-squared value is reported at .328 indicating that 32.8% in the variability of sports performance can be explained by the influence of the predictors explored in this study. The remaining 67.2% is attributed to the unexpected variance, or other factors not included in this study. Thus, $\boldsymbol{H_1}$ is accepted.

Table 3

Multiple Regression results and Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Regression weights	Beta	R^2	F	t-value	p-value	Decision
H_{1a}	Task → SP	.611	.37	--	12.923	<.001	Accepted
H_{1b}	Ego → SP	.501	.073	--	4.696	<.001	Accepted
H_1	GOSQ → SP	.573	.328	137.206	--	<.001	Accepted

Discussion

This study examined the influence of task and ego goal orientation on the sports performance of physical education students, providing valuable insights into how these psychological factors shape athletic development. The findings reveal that both task and ego orientations significantly predict sports performance, with task orientation showing a stronger influence compared to ego orientation. Task-oriented individuals are generally motivated by intrinsic standards, perseverance, and a quest for self-enhancement, resulting in more reliable and enduring athletic performance (Dagsdóttir et al., 2023; Bessa et al., 2021). Moreover, task-oriented individuals prioritize effort, learning, and perseverance over social comparison, resulting in enhanced interest in training and competition (Williamson et al., 2022; Albert et al., 2019). This approach fosters internal determination, persistence in adversity, and sustained dedication to sport, all of which are crucial for consistent performance and athletic development. The ramifications of these findings are particularly significant for physical education environments and athletic training programs. Educators and coaches ought to cultivate a task-involving motivational environment that promotes effort, acknowledges individual

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advancement, and rewards mastery of tasks. This setting fosters student confidence, encourages self-improvement, and sustains motivation irrespective of external results. By prioritizing personal development over mere competitiveness, students can cultivate better perspectives on success and failure, thereby alleviating performance anxiety and fatigue. This study corroborates previous research affirming that task orientation is a crucial determinant in enhancing both performance and favorable psychological and behavioral outcomes in young athletes (Urdan & Kaplan, 2020). Consequently, incorporating task-oriented methodologies into physical education curricula and training programs may substantially improve the proficiency and welfare of student-athletes. Consequently, ego orientation, which involves comparing oneself to others, also contributes to performance but to a lesser extent, suggesting that while competition can drive improvement, it may not be as sustainable or beneficial as a focus on self-improvement (Reigal et al., 2024; Morales-Sánchez et al., 2024). Ego-driven individuals define success by surpassing others and exhibiting greater competence relative to their contemporaries. According to Bandhu et al. (2024) motivation is mostly influenced by external validation, acknowledgment, and competitive achievement. This orientation can enhance performance in competitive environments, particularly for those with high perceived competence; however, it may also render individuals susceptible to motivational fluctuations, especially when encountering setbacks or perceiving themselves as less capable than others (Li et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2021). The findings indicate that while ego orientation may be advantageous in specific contexts, it should be treated with caution in educational and developmental sports environments. Coaches and instructors must offer structured opportunities for healthy competition for students with a pronounced ego orientation, while simultaneously assisting them in cultivating coping strategies for failure and performance-related stress. If unaddressed, an inflated ego orientation may result in detrimental consequences, including performance anxiety, fear of failure, avoidance behavior, and less enjoyment in sports (Noskeau et al., 2021; Peng & Zhang, 2021). Consequently, although competitive ambition and acknowledgment can be strategically employed to enhance motivation and performance, it is crucial to equilibrate ego-driven objectives with task-focused approaches (García-González et al., 2019; Morales-Sánchez et al., 2024; Álvarez-Sánchez et al., 2024).

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Promoting the importance of personal development in conjunction with competitive success can enhance motivation and psychological health among athletes (O'Brien & Kilrea, 2020). Ultimately, incorporating a balanced goal orientation strategy can improve overall athletic achievement and resilience in physical education settings.

Additionally, the results of this study substantiate Goal Orientation Theory by illustrating that both task and ego orientations considerably impact sports performance, with task orientation exerting a more pronounced influence. The stronger predictive value of task orientation found in this study reinforces previous research indicating that intrinsic, mastery-focused goals promote sustained engagement and better psychological outcomes in sports (Williamson et al., 2022; Albert et al., 2019). This indicates that students who concentrate on learning, effort, and self-referential objectives generally exhibit more consistent and adaptive performance (Borghouts et al., 2021; Rivera-Pérez et al., 2021). Similarly, the positive but comparatively weaker effect of ego orientation echoes conclusions from prior studies suggesting that while competition can enhance performance for some individuals, its impact is often less stable and context-dependent (Reigal et al., 2024; Morales-Sánchez et al., 2024). Moreover, these findings are particularly meaningful within the Filipino cultural context, where collectivism and strong community values often shape individuals' behavior and motivation (Ganotice et al., 2020; Cruz, 2021) In many Philippine educational and sports settings, students are encouraged to excel not only for personal achievement but also to bring pride to their families and schools. This may amplify both task and ego orientations, as students strive for self-improvement while also responding to social expectations of success. The integration of cultural values—such as *bayanihan* (community spirit) and a shared drive for recognition—can therefore influence how students approach physical education and competition.

The findings illustrate the dual nature of ego orientation; it can enhance performance in competitive contexts but may also diminish motivation and resilience when success is lacking. The present study, in conjunction with existing literature, highlights the significance of fostering a balanced motivational climate in physical education and sports environments, one that predominantly promotes task-oriented objectives while effectively incorporating competitive aspects to cater to ego-related

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motivations. This balanced approach enhances performance while promoting psychological well-being, motivation, and long-term engagement in sports.

This study has several limitations. First, it relied on self-reported data, which may be affected by social desirability or recall bias. Participants may have overestimated their sports performance or motivational tendencies to align with perceived expectations, potentially inflating the strength of observed associations. Second, the cross-sectional design prevents causal conclusions about the relationship between goal orientation and sports performance. Third, the sample was limited to PE students from one geographic area, which may restrict generalizability. Finally, other potentially influential factors, such as prior athletic experience or socioeconomic background, were not controlled for. Future studies should use longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches with more diverse samples to enhance validity and insight. The implications of these findings are particularly pertinent for the development of effective physical education and sports programs. Comprehending goal orientation enables educators and coaches to customize motivational tactics to meet the requirements of their students or athletes. Promoting a task-oriented environment can enhance resilience, intrinsic motivation, and sustained engagement, while acknowledging ego orientation can assist in managing competitive dynamics and mitigating performance-related stress. Educators should prioritize fostering a balanced perspective, motivating athletes to pursue personal development while effectively managing competitiveness. In doing so, they cultivate an environment that fosters both exceptional performance and positive psychological growth, ultimately resulting in more motivated, self-assured, and well-rounded student-athletes.

Conclusion

This study provides compelling evidence for the influence of task and ego goal orientation on the sports performance of physical education students. The findings highlight the stronger predictive power of task orientation, emphasizing the importance of fostering a growth mindset and intrinsic motivation among student-athletes. The results also underscore the need for culturally relevant interventions that consider the

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unique context of Filipino student-athletes. By integrating psychological training into physical education programs, educators and coaches can support the holistic development of student-athletes, ultimately enhancing their performance and well-being. In practical terms, PE teachers can implement these findings by designing lesson plans that emphasize skill mastery, individual progress, and self-reflection. Additionally, promoting peer encouragement and collaborative activities may help foster a positive, task-involving climate that boosts motivation and emotional resilience. Future research should continue to explore the long-term effects of goal orientation and investigate the role of cultural factors in shaping athletic development. These efforts will contribute to the design of more effective and individualized training programs, ultimately improving outcomes for student-athletes in diverse contexts.

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