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Sports Values and Their Role in the Athletic Excellence of Premier League Football Players

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Keywords

Sports Values
Athletic Excellence
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ABSTRACT

This study aims to highlight the role of sports values in achieving athletic excellence among players of Premier League football clubs. It emphasizes the importance of values such as fairness, integrity, cooperation, respect for opponents, and self-discipline as complementary elements to physical and technical skills. These values contribute to shaping the ideal athlete's character and enhancing team performance. The research problem lies in the presence of behavioral disorders among some players despite their high technical skills, which calls for investigating the impact of moral dimensions on athletic performance. The researcher adopted the descriptive-analytical method to examine the relationship between sports values and athletic excellence. The research sample included 460 players from Iraqi Premier League clubs for the 2024–2025 season, selected intentionally. Data was collected using two scientifically designed questionnaires one measuring sports values and the other athletic excellence. The questionnaires covered multiple areas and were validated through internal consistency and Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients. The results revealed a statistically significant correlation between sports values and the level of athletic excellence, indicating that behavioral values contribute to enhancing players' efficiency on the field, while also positively influencing their psychological stability and behavioral discipline. The study recommends integrating value-based education into official training programs and empowering coaches and administrators to promote ethical practices among players, with the aim of fostering a competitive, healthy, and balanced environment that combines high performance with upright conduct.



1. INTRODUCTION

Athletic excellence in professional sports is increasingly understood as a multidimensional construct that extends beyond physical and technical competencies to include the moral and ethical values that shape athletes' identities [23]. Values, defined as enduring beliefs central to the self-concept and guiding the desirability of goals, actions, and personal standards, play a pivotal role in this process [19].

Sporting values such as discipline, commitment, respect for rules, cooperation, integrity, and sportsmanship form the cornerstone of an integrated athletic personality. These values not only regulate players' behavior on the field but also influence their conduct off the field, fostering mutual respect, teamwork, and fair play, all of which are essential for developing cohesive teams and sustaining long-term athletic success.

Football, in particular, demands high levels of coordination, strategic thinking, and collective discipline, making values education indispensable for optimal team functioning. Recent research indicates that embedding values education into training programs enhances athletes' mental and behavioral performance, which in turn positively influences their physical and technical execution [15]. This integration is especially critical in elite environments such as Premier League football clubs, where players face intense competition, significant media attention, and high public expectations. Under such conditions, a solid foundation of sporting values equips players to handle challenges ethically, make sound decisions under pressure, and maintain strong team spirit [21].

Despite substantial advancements in physical conditioning and training technics,

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behavioral and disciplinary problems remain evident in some Premier League football teams. These challenges often manifest as unsportsmanlike conduct, frequent disputes with referees, and negative competitive behaviors all of which undermine team performance despite the players' high technical capabilities. This suggests a critical gap in values education within elite football training systems. It raises essential questions about players' awareness of sporting values and the degree to which these values actually shape their behavior and performance on the field.

Several studies have indicated the importance of moral development in sporting contexts. For example, [15] study showed that young athletes with high moral values exhibited greater adherence to rules and fairer behavior in competitive situations, suggesting a correlation between moral values and performance quality in team sports. Shields and Bredemeier [21] depicted "authentic competition" as having a high correlation with ethical behavior, arguing that sustainable athletic excellence requires an environment rooted in respect, cooperation, and sportsmanship. Similarly, [14] found that values emphasizing fairness and cooperation enhance intrinsic motivation, leading to more stable and effective athletic performance.

However, despite this growing evidence, there remains a dearth of experimental research directly examining the relationship between sporting values and athletic excellence in professional football. Understanding this relationship is important for developing comprehensive training approaches that go beyond physical and tactical skills to include ethical and psychological dimensions, achieving true professionalism.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining the role of sports values in achieving athletic excellence among elite soccer players. The current study aims to assess the level of sports values and their athletic excellence among players, and to study the impact of sports values on their overall performance. By highlighting these relationships, the research will provide evidence-based recommendations for coaches, administrators, and policymakers to design integrated training programs focused on developing technically, ethically, and psychologically qualified athletes capable of meeting the complex demands of professional sports and achieving advanced positions.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Research Methodology

This study adopts the descriptive-analytical approach, which is deemed the most appropriate for examining the relationship between sports values and athletic excellence, as well as for analyzing players' behavior in a realistic competitive environment.

2.2. Research Sample

The research sample comprised 460 players from the Premier League's advanced category, officially registered with the Iraqi Football Association and actively participating in the 2024–2025 sports season.

2.3 Data Collection Tools

To complete the research, tools are required, namely the questionnaire. A questionnaire is a data collection tool that includes a set of written and structured questions posed to sample members to measure their opinions, behavior, or characteristics. It is one of the most widely used research tools in psychological, educational, and social research, especially when the goal is to measure subjective variables such as attitudes and values [18]. "A questionnaire is a research tool consisting of a number of structured questions presented to respondents to measure their attitudes, characteristics, or values according to a specific quantitative scale" [8]. Therefore, the researcher was required to prepare two questionnaires (sports values - sports excellence).

2.4. Development and Psychometric Evaluation of the Sports Values Questionnaire

To measure the construct of sports values among Premier League football players participating in the 2024–2025 season, the researcher developed a specialized questionnaire, following a systematic and scientifically grounded process. This section outlines the key stages of the tool's construction and psychometric evaluation, including item formulation, domain selection, scaling method, content validation, internal consistency validity, and reliability testing.

2.4.1. Purpose and Use of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was used for collecting data, as a scale was designed to measure the level of sports values in order to identify their relationship with the sports excellence of football players.

2.4.2. Domains and Item Construction

After reviewing the relevant literature and theoretical frameworks, five theoretical

dimensions of the sport values were identified, and each dimension was expressed in five paragraphs, the total will be 25 paragraphs, including the following:

- Justice
- Integrity
- Respect for the Opponent
- Cooperation
- Ambition and Self-Discipline

A committee of specialists in psychology and physical education reviewed the initial set of paragraphs. The committee reached 100% on the appropriateness of the items and their relevance to their dimensions, confirming their content validity.

2.4.3. Scaling Method

The Likert-type scaling method was used for item responses, given its proven effectiveness in measuring attitudes, beliefs, and psychological constructs in social and educational research. A five-point Likert scale was adopted, with response options coded in a positive ascending order:

- (1) Strongly Disagree
- (2) Disagree
- (3) Neutral
- (4) Agree
- (5) Strongly Agree

Each item was assigned a numerical weight based on the respondent's level of agreement. The total score of the scale was computed by summing the scores of individual items, yielding a quantitative indicator of the respondent's level of sports values or athletic excellence.

Table 1. Displays the correlation coefficients obtained for each item.

Dimensions	T	Paragraphs	R	P- value
justice	1	I treat my teammates the same way without discrimination between them .	0.732 **	<0.001
	2	I am committed to fair play even in situations that are in my team's favor .	0.601 **	<0.001
	3	I respect the rights of all players to participate regardless of their technical level .	0.768 **	<0.001
	4	I refuse to cheat or circumvent the rules to win .	0.745 **	<0.001
	5	I believe that real victory is achieved through fair play .	0.602 **	<0.001
Integrity	6	I make sure to tell the truth when asked about the performance of the team or the referees .	0.584 **	<0.001
	7	I do not participate in actions that harm the reputation of the club or my colleagues .	0.741 **	<0.001
	8	I am committed to honesty in training and matches, even without supervision .	0.604 **	<0.001
	9	I take responsibility for my mistakes in playing without blaming others .	0.747 **	<0.001
	10	I refuse to accept undue rewards or benefits.	0.774 **	<0.001
Respect the competitor	11	Make sure to shake hands with your opponent before and after the match, regardless of the result .	0.732 **	<0.001
	12	Refrain from mocking or ridiculing the opposing team's performance .	0.739 **	<0.001
	13	I treat my opponent as a partner in developing my level, not an enemy .	0.602 **	<0.001
	14	I do not exploit the opponent's weaknesses in a way that offends the spirit of sportsmanship .	0.575 **	<0.001
	15	I appreciate the opposing team's efforts even when they beat us.	0.753 **	<0.001
cooperation	16	I make sure to help my teammates on and off the field .	0.805 **	<0.001
	17	I participate in collective team decisions with a positive spirit .	0.698 **	<0.001
	18	I put the team's interests before my own while playing .	0.567 **	<0.001
	19	I encourage my colleagues and lift their spirits during difficult times .	0.734 **	<0.001
	20	I adhere to the coach's instructions and cooperate with the technical staff without objection .	0.711 **	<0.001
Ambition and self-discipline	21	I set clear fitness goals for myself and strive to achieve them .	0.566 **	<0.001
	22	I commit to attending all training sessions and matches on time	0.559 **	<0.001
	23	I continue to train and improve my level even outside of official times .	0.707 **	<0.001
	24	I control my emotions when I get angry or provoked on the field	0.575 **	<0.001
	25	I refrain from behaviors that affect my fitness or mental focus.	0.713 **	<0.001

2.4.4. Internal Consistency Validity

To assess the internal consistency of the scale, the researcher calculated Pearson's correlation coefficient between the score of each item of the scale and total score [5,10]. The sample used in this procedure was (200) soccer players from the elite league. The emergence of strong positive correlations expresses the internal consistency of the scale.

2.4.5. Reliability Analysis

To calculate the reliability of the Sport values questionnaire, the researcher relied on Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which is one of the most common methods for measuring the internal consistency coefficient of scales. This coefficient reflects the degree of homogeneity of the items in measuring the same concept, as it provides a good estimate of the scale's reliability. The reliability coefficient in this study reached (0.899), a high indicator indicating that the scale enjoys a high degree of internal consistency, which enhances the reliability of its results.

2.5. Development and Psychometric Evaluation of the Sports Excellence Questionnaire

To assess the athletic excellence of elite soccer players participating in the 2024-2025 season, the researcher developed a questionnaire measuring athletic excellence. The development process followed precise scientific procedures, including defining domains, formulating scale items, verifying internal consistency, and determining scale reliability.

2.5.1. Purpose and Application

The questionnaire was used as the primary data collection tool for this study. It was designed to measure the levels of psychological and behavioral traits contributing to athletic excellence among elite soccer players.

2.5.2. Domains and Item Construction

After reviewing the relevant literature and theoretical frameworks, three main dimensions

were identified as essential components of sports excellence. Each dimension was expressed in five paragraphs, bringing the total to 15 paragraphs, including the following:

1. Physical and Skill Performance
2. Behavioral Discipline During Training and Matches
3. Commitment to Team Spirit and Positive Interaction with Teammates and Coaches

A committee of specialists in psychology and physical education reviewed the initial set of paragraphs. The committee reached 100% on the appropriateness of the items and their relevance to their dimensions, confirming their content validity.

2.5.3. Scaling Method

The Likert-type scaling method was used for item responses, given its proven effectiveness in measuring attitudes, beliefs, and psychological constructs in social and educational research. A five-point Likert scale was adopted, with response options coded in a positive ascending order:

- (1) Strongly Disagree
- (2) Disagree
- (3) Neutral
- (4) Agree
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Each item was assigned a numerical weight based on the respondent's level of agreement. The total score of the scale was computed by summing the scores of individual items, yielding a quantitative indicator of the respondent's level of sports values or athletic excellence.

2.5.4. Internal Consistency Validity

To assess the internal consistency of the scale, the researcher calculated Pearson's correlation coefficient between the score of each item of the scale and total score [5,10]. The sample used in this procedure was (200) soccer players from the elite league. The emergence of strong positive correlations expresses the internal consistency of the scale.

Table 2. Presents the results of the correlation analysis.

Dimensions	T	Paragraphs	r	P- value
Physical and skill performance	1	I demonstrate high physical fitness that enables me to perform the tasks required during the match efficiently	0.698	<0.001
	2	Master basic football skills such as passing, shooting, and ball control .	0.567	<0.001
	3	I maintain my technical performance throughout the match without any noticeable decline .	0.734	<0.001
	4	I can accurately execute the tactical instructions requested by the coach during the game .	0.711	<0.001
	5	I have the speed and the right reaction in crucial situations on the field.	0.568	<0.001
Behavioral	6	I commit to regular attendance at all training sessions without delay .	0.566	<0.001

discipline during training and matches	7	I stay calm and control my nerves while playing even in difficult circumstances .	0.559	<0.001
	8	I don't argue with referees or misbehave during matches .	0.707	<0.001
	9	Make sure to implement the training instructions without evasion or negligence .	0.575	<0.001
	10	I refrain from unsportsmanlike behavior that harms me or the team .	0.719	<0.001
Commitment to team spirit and positive interaction with colleagues and coaches	11	I encourage my colleagues to perform positively even when they make mistakes .	0.713	<0.001
	12	I actively participate in group plans without trying to stand out just for myself .	0.748	<0.001
	13	I maintain a respectful and cooperative relationship with all team members .	0.686	<0.001
	14	I show receptivity to feedback given to me by my coach or teammates .	0.705	<0.001
	15	Contribute to boosting team morale on and off the field.	0.541	<0.001

2.5.5 Reliability Analysis

The reliability of the Sports Excellence Questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which measures the internal consistency of scale items. After statistical analysis, the overall reliability coefficient was found to be 0.887, indicating a high degree of reliability and confirming that the instrument consistently measures the intended construct.

3.6. Final Administration of the Research Instruments

The final version of the two research instruments was administered to a hypothetical application sample consisting of 220 Premier League players. The data collection period extended from February 1, 2025, to April 1, 2025.

Upon reviewing the collected data, 190 questionnaires were deemed valid for statistical analysis, as they were fully completed and met the inclusion criteria. These responses were subsequently subjected to statistical processing in order to examine the psychometric properties of the tools and fulfill the study objectives. The findings derived from this analysis will be presented and discussed in the following chapter.

3.7. Statistical Methods

To analyze the data and address the research objectives, the researcher employed appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical methods using SPSS software, version 26.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Determining the Level of Sports Values Among Premier League Football Players

Following the administration of the finalized Sports Values Questionnaire to the primary sample of 190 Premier League players, the statistical analysis revealed a mean score of 98.23 with a standard deviation of 9.13. A one-sample t-test was conducted to compare this value with the

hypothetical average of 75. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: One-Sample t-Test for the Sports Values Level

<i>N</i>	<i>mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Hypothetical Mean</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>sig</i>
190	98,225	9.125	75	19,224	<0.001

* Significant at $p < 0.05$

The results indicate that the calculated t-value (19.224) is statistically significant at $p < 0.001$, confirming that the observed mean significantly exceeds the theoretical mean. This result supports the conclusion that the players exhibit a high level of sports values.

These findings highlight the positive impact of structured sports education and the ethical climate fostered by professional competitive environments. Core sports values—such as justice, respect, integrity, cooperation, and discipline form the ethical and behavioral foundation of athletic identity [20].

These results are consistent with recent findings by [16], who emphasized that engaging in competitive physical and sports activities significantly contributes to the development and internalization of positive values among athletes. Such values are not only essential in the sporting context but also translate into everyday social interactions, influencing players' behavior within broader community settings.

Similarly, the findings align with those of [12], who reported that individuals actively involved in physical sports activities exhibited high levels of sports-related values, reinforcing the idea that consistent participation in structured physical activity plays a critical role in shaping moral and ethical dispositions.

Prior studies have shown that athletes with high levels of sports values are more likely to demonstrate better on field behavior, reduced aggressive tendencies, and greater commitment to

fair play [14]. Moreover, recent research emphasizes the importance of value-based coaching approaches, suggesting that ethical and psychosocial development in athletes is highly influenced by coaches' modeling, team norms, and institutional culture [13].

In light of these findings, the high level of sports values observed in the current sample may be attributed to several contributing factors, including:

- The influence of long-term structured training environments that prioritize ethical behavior.
- The active role of coaches and administrators in shaping values through consistent feedback and modeling.
- Participation in elite-level competitions where values such as respect for opponents and adherence to rules are institutionally reinforced [22].

This suggests that sports values are not merely internal psychological constructs, but socially nurtured traits that evolve through sustained exposure to structured training, ethical leadership, and performance-based accountability.

3.2. Assessing the Level of Athletic Excellence Among Premier League Football Players

To assess the general level of athletic excellence among Premier League football players, the finalized Athletic Excellence Questionnaire was administered to a primary sample of 190 players. The statistical analysis yielded a mean score of 62.22 with a standard deviation of 6.13. A one-sample t-test comparing this mean with the hypothetical mean of 45 revealed a statistically significant difference, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: One-Sample t-Test for Athletic Excellence Level

<i>N</i>	<i>mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Hypothetical Mean</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>sig</i>
190	62,218	6.128	45	28,125	<0.001

* Significant at $p < 0.05$

The significant t-value (28.125) and $p < 0.001$ confirm that the observed mean is significantly higher than the theoretical average, indicating that the sample possesses a high level of athletic excellence.

This result suggests that Premier League players demonstrate advanced competencies not only in technical and physical domains but also in psychological, behavioral, and social dimensions that define excellence in elite sport contexts. Athletic excellence is widely recognized as a multidimensional construct, encompassing discipline, ambition, emotional regulation, and teamwork [2].

Research has shown that athletes exhibiting these traits tend to demonstrate greater adaptability, performance stability, and effective stress management under competitive pressure [3,11]. Recent evidence further supports this view: elite athletes who consistently perform at high levels possess strong self-regulation, resilience, and mental toughness—all critical in maintaining peak performance [6,7].

Furthermore, as noted by Mohammed & Mohammed [17], sustained excellence is linked to intrinsic motivation, goal-directed behavior, and adherence to long-term training. This highlights the importance of not only individual traits, but also external support structures.

The club environment and professional coaching systems are vital contributors to the development of excellence. Clubs that provide structured training programs and expose athletes to high-stakes competitive settings tend to foster a culture of continuous development and behavioral discipline [24].

Based on these findings, the high level of excellence observed in this study may be attributed to:

- The structured, competitive nature of Premier League clubs.
- Coaches' consistent focus on psychological and behavioral standards.
- Athletes' long-term commitment to training and self-improvement.

3.3. The Impact of Sports Values on Athletic Excellence Among Premier League Football Players

To test the third hypothesis and examine the predictive relationship between sports values and athletic excellence, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. Sports values were treated as the independent variable, while athletic excellence served as the dependent variable. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Simple Regression Analysis Sports Values Predicting Athletic Excellence

Variable	\bar{X}	$SD \pm$	B	R	R^2	F	T	Impact ratio
Sports Values	98,225	9.125	0.862	0.536	0.288	61,748	7,858	28.8%
Athletic Excellence	62,218	6.128	0.110					

* Significant at $p < 0.05$

The results indicate a moderate positive correlation ($R = 0.536$) between sports values and athletic excellence. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.288$) suggests that sports values account for approximately 28.8% of the variance in athletic excellence, while the remaining variance is likely due to other psychological, environmental, or physiological factors. The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 61.748$, $p < 0.001$), and the standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.862$) confirms that sports values are a strong predictor of athletic excellence.

These findings affirm that sports values play a foundational role in shaping the behaviors, attitudes, and performance outcomes of elite athletes. Athletes who demonstrate high levels of integrity, discipline, respect, and teamwork are more likely to translate these values into competitive advantage, resilience under pressure, and sustained excellence [3].

Recent studies have reinforced this link, demonstrating that athletes who internalize positive moral values perform more consistently under competitive pressure and are more likely to emerge as team leaders. Furthermore, research has identified self-discipline and ethical accountability as two of the most critical psychological traits predicting elite-level achievement in football players.

In a recent cross-contextual analysis, Ring et al. [19] confirmed a strong overlap between sport and personal values, highlighting connections between status and self-enhancement values, competence and openness to change, and moral and self-transcendence values.

These characteristics, often cultivated through early sports socialization, contribute to what has been conceptualized as “psychosocial excellence”—a holistic integration of moral character and athletic competence that enables athletes to excel both on and off the field.

Furthermore, the interplay between sports values and athletic excellence highlights the importance of integrative training models that combine skill development with ethical and behavioral conditioning. As noted by [9], coaching practices that foster accountability, emotional intelligence, and respect for others are more effective in developing high-performing athletes.

Accordingly, the strong predictive value of sports values observed in this study suggests that such traits can be used as reliable indicators in talent identification, development programs, and performance planning. Sports values are not only reflective of an athlete's current status but also predictive of future success, adaptability, and

leadership potential in high-pressure sporting contexts.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Premier League players demonstrated a high level of athletic values. Players also recorded a high level of athletic excellence. The results revealed a statistically significant effect between athletic values and athletic excellence.

Recommendations

- Strengthen athletic values programs in clubs.
- Incorporate athletic values into technical and psychological training plans.
- Adopting sports values as indicators in athletic selection processes.
- Directing psychological counseling programs to strengthen the relationship between values and excellence.
- Encouraging future studies in younger age groups.

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest is declared by the authors. In addition, no financial support was received.

Ethics Committee

The study protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of the College of Basic Education, University of Mosul (Ethics Committee Approval: 155/2025).

Author Contributions

The author solely designed the study, collected the data, performed the statistical analysis, interpreted the results, prepared the manuscript, and conducted the literature search. The author has reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

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