

# The Mental Toughness and Coping Strategies of Thailand's Competitive Sailors

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**Abstract** This study explores the mental toughness and coping strategies of members of the Thai national sailing team. The samples were 19 sailors from the Thailand national team who were preparing for competition in the 28th Southeast Asian (SEA) Games in Singapore. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview schedule, designed to draw out the participants' experience or explanation of mental toughness and coping strategies. The results indicated that "mental toughness" means the ability of the mind to show confidence, never give up, and be persistent and determined to overcome all obstacles and achieve victory. Mental toughness has five characteristics: (1) willpower, (2) mindfulness, (3) confidence, (4) commitment, and (5) fighting spirit. Moreover, eight specific "coping strategies" were applied for use in preparing for competitions, including these 6 coping strategies: (1) strictly keeping to daily routines, (2) setting aside leisure time, (3), staying focused on the task at hand, (4) releasing stress, (5) relying on social support, (6) reflecting on past training, but 2 technique was unique as (7) performing superstitious rituals in which closed to Thailand believe in guardian spirit to make mental energy and (8) mindfulness and meditation that relate to the Buddhist way that was used to reset the mind and increase focus, awareness, and concentration on the breath. In conclusion, the techniques for coping with stress did not follow just one method, but sailors' ways were diverse depending on the situation.

**Keywords** Mental toughness, Coping strategies, Sailors

## 1. Introduction

In every sporting success, there must be an ever-changing challenge. Many Thai athletes overcome their fear and reach success such as Khaosai Galaxy (a world champion super flyweight boxer widely honored as the best boxing champion of all time); James Wattana (a male professional snooker player who competes in ranking tournaments with an invitational tour card); Paradorn Srichaphan (the tennis men's singles player in the top 10 of the ATP rankings in 2003); Ratchanok Intanon (a women's badminton singles player who award no.1 of world ranked in 2016); Thongchai Jaidee (a male professional golfer who win in the Asian tour several time and join in the European tour); and Ariya Jutanugarn (a women's professional golfer who are the number one in the world golf rankings in 2017). These athletes display ultimate physical conditioning; outstanding sport skills, and a significant mind. The psychological variable is important for help athletes reach their potential and fully develop their performance. The ability to maintain desired high challenge levels during significant competition

which full pressured that increased the levels of anxiety for example golfer putt golf ball in a sudden death playoff for champion) [1]. Within competitive conditions, athletes' responses and overcome the barrier are largely dependent on athletes' psychological [2], specifically attribution that seem to be mental toughness (MT). According to Cowden [3] mention that MT has often been asserted or implied to correspond with higher competitive standards, achievement levels, and performance outcomes which MT represents one of the most important psychological attributes that influences athletic success. However, in real situation of many athletes, we found with good training and good preparation for the competition but when having to go down on the pitch for a match. Their performance is drop down, as this may be caused by fear, anxiety, or stress. Nicholls and Levy [4] explain the athlete experience that experience sports playing that has very stressful with a wide range of performance-related, coach-related, and expectations from others. Some athlete become a child's play (or cool hand) when faced with adversity in competition, they make mistakes and fail because they are unable to control their energies or focus, and power of mental toughness decrease and finally, they lose. When athlete facing the adversity, mental toughness can help support ability that meets your potential, cope effectively and maintain focus and control emotion.

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Received: Jan. 31, 2022; Accepted: Mar. 4, 2022; Published: Mar. 15, 2022

Published online at <http://journal.sapub.org/sports>

Key mental skills associated a mental toughness and coping. Analyzing the combination of these two constructs and associated behaviors will enable a greater understanding of how athletes use these skills to consistently perform at competition. Kaiseler, Polman and Nicholls [5] In support of a priori predictions, mental toughness was associated with stress intensity and control appraisal, but not the type of stressor experienced by athletes. Total mental toughness and its six components predicted coping and coping effectiveness in relation to the self-selected stressor. In particular, higher levels of mental toughness were associated with more problem-focused coping, but less emotion-focused and avoidance coping. Coping effectiveness was influenced by the coping strategy employed by the athletes. Coping has been defined as “a constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” [6]. In recently, Roness [7] explain that coping strategies refers to the athlete’s attempts to cope with stressful demands and to decrease perceived stress intensity by using one or more cognitive or behavioral strategies. Coping responses have been categorized into problem-focused coping describes strategies used to minimize distress by reducing or eliminating the stressor. Emotion-focused coping involves strategies used to regulate emotional arousal and distress. Finally, avoidance coping includes both behavioral and psychological efforts to disengage from a stressful situation [5].

In literature review was finding many different methods for classifications of coping in elite athletes. As such mastery by controlling the situation and eliminating the stressor, internal regulation with managing internal stress responses, or goal withdrawal which ceasing efforts toward goal attainment [8]. A coping strategies used research of Thailand athlete was study by Darasak [9] who use qualitative approach study the coping strategies used in youth tennis players that included rigid, massage and stretching, hobby activity, vigorous training, meditation, breathing control and imagery, superstition, humor, planning and management, social support, task focus strategies, rhythm and plan changing, venting, tactic with opponent, ignoring the stressor, and standard play. Yeimpop [10] studied the coping strategies in nine athletics jumping events of the Thai national team for the 26th SEA Games in Indonesia in 2011. The results showed that the athletics jumpers used seven techniques to cope with stress as massage, meditation, self-stimulation, social support, consulting with others, imagery, and relaxation by participating in recreational activities. Jongsombatjarean, Oilkam, Dongmanee, Pompech and Singnoy [11] who study with muay Thai that claim a coping techniques use strict routines, such as massage and stretching of muscles, pursuing a hobby, self-motivation by thinking about difficulties in practice, meditation, breath control, imagery, superstitious rituals, humor, good planning and management, social support, focusing on the present, changing tactics to contend with competitors, ignoring others, and playing according to their

own standards. But past research has inadequate information to confirm the coping technique of athletes when facing the barrier.

The study of mental toughness and coping strategies used requires more information with a specific context in order to understand both the theory and the application in various setting such as in Thailand. Almost research come from the western countries which different cultural, then, we need applied those knowledge and used in our region. It is may be lead to misconception. Sometime research's result needed more implicit data from our cultural. It required answering questions about the incidence, distribution and diversity and the problems that complex across cultures around the world. The mental toughness study will have different meanings than some of the literature because most studies come from Western countries that have cultural differences, which may cause differences in theory. Despite recently significant attempts to defined and conceptualized the concept of mental toughness and coping strategies is remains inadequately. Then, our study needs to explain more information about the mental toughness and coping strategies technique of Thailand athletes.

Sailing is major sport in international competitions as the SEA Games, the Asian Games, the Sailing World Championships, and the Summer Olympics. This study interest a specific sailing context because this sport has a specific competitive style that requires expertise in sailing by control a boat against the wind and sea wave, moreover, mental tolerate with the heat weather and solved problem that cannot be predicted and controlled. The most important psychological requirements are: concentration with many external factors, such as wind, waves, other boats, route, etc.; motivation on training and competitions at various sites around the world; stress management for against a nervousness, controlled and keep clam and making a good decisions; and the resilience for face with occasional adverse meteorological conditions, and requires a lot of effort. Sailor must have an activation mind for the moment of the regatta begins [12]. It is show a part of mental strongly to survive in competitions and succeed.

Their past accomplishments have usually seen Thailand’s sailors successful in securing one of the top three gold medals in all competitions in a part of the Southeast Asian region competition. Sailing skill is not only a part of success way but also have the mental factor of athlete use. So, the aim of this study was to explore the mental toughness definition and coping strategies used by interview process for identified and clarify constructs relevantly and to use for the psychological training plan utilized for the athletic preparation.

## 2. Methodology

The sample consisted of 19 sailors (mean age = 17.53, SD = 4.23) from the Thai national sailing team who participated in the 28th Southeast Asian Games in Singapore in 2015.

The sample was purposive sampling because they are elite athletes who have been representing the Thai national sailing team and have been involved in continuous and serious training. All of them had successfully experienced a past competition at least once, such as an international competition, the World Championships, an Asian sailing championship, or an Asian Games competition. They had also experienced an international amateur racing tournament such as the Optimist World Championship, the Hua Hin Regatta in Thailand, or the Royal Langkawi International Regatta in Malaysia.

### 3. Participants

The sample group was training in preparation for the SEA Games. During February–June 2015, the researcher was granted permission to observe team training sessions for research purposes throughout the team preparation period at the Sports Ocean Center at Dong Tarn Gulf, Sattahip Naval Base, Chonburi Province. The researcher coding name of player as table 1 below:

**Table 1.** Coding name of player

No	Name of coding	Gender	Type of competition
1	Nathorn	male	470
2	Niwai	female	470
3	Nata	female	470
4	Sunich	male	420
5	Noppacherd	male	420
6	Supat	female	420
7	Kanbon	female	420
8	Nutsri	male	470
9	Tossachain	male	470
10	Arit	male	470
11	Chula	male	Laser
12	Wadee	female	Laser
13	Kanya	female	Laser
14	Sapat	male	Optimist
15	Papat	female	Optimist
16	Jnan	male	Optimist
17	Ibul	female	Optimist
18	Napat	female	420
19	Paporn	female	470

The training period lasted from February to June 2015. The schedule for training covered six days per week, Monday to Friday. The morning training session ran for two hours, with exercises such as stretching, running, physical exercise, and bodyweight training with an intensity target of around 75% of maximum heart rate. After the exercise session, they took an hour's break for breakfast. At 10 o'clock, they had a briefing regarding the training plan. After that, they prepared their boat for 30–45 minutes and trained to improve their sailing skills in the sea for 3–4 hours. On Saturday, training would emphasize tactics. They exercised

for one hour (intensity target around 65% of maximum heart rate), took a break for breakfast for an hour, and went to sea for sailing practice. As they spent such a long time practicing during the sea session, they would also have lunch on the boat. Eventually, their training would stop and they would return to shore at around 4:00 p.m. and take the boat back to the boat maintenance plant. In the evening, the sailors would break up for dinner as the camp did not prepare dinner for them. They would go out for dinner and come back to the camp before 20:00 p.m.

### 4. Research Protocol

The ethical position of this study was approved by the ethics committee of the board of Burapha University. Data were collected by using non-participant observation methods in the setting of a semi-structured interview. The interviews were recorded by a voice recorder. Data from observations were recorded. The qualification of the interviewers has undergone interview training and has interview experience. The interview data were collected by the research team. The research team conducted interviews and recorded audio that was transcribed verbatim to create an interview script report for data analysis.

### 5. Interview Procedure

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview schedule, designed to draw out the participants' experience or explanation of mental toughness and coping strategies. Before each interview commenced, the participants were briefed on the study's aims and methods before giving signed consent to participate. An information paper describing the details of the study methods was provided for every participant. Participants were informed that they could terminate the interview at any time or skip any question, and that independent counseling was available if needed. The duration of the interview was 30 to 45 minutes. There were two main questions, namely "What does mental toughness mean and what are the characteristics of mental toughness?" and "How do you deal with stress that occurs to you?"

### 6. Data Analysis

Observation data the researcher takes notes of the observations and records the observations by writing explanatory notes so that they are ready for analysis. Information obtained from the interview the researcher had the research team to be an interviewer. The research team conducted interviews with audio recordings. The audio has been transcribed verbatim to prepare interview scripts for data analysis. Information obtained from the technique of describing the event. The researcher had a sample of paper writing techniques and methods for managing stress. Data analysis was used to compare data stability. Summarize a

topic related to the research question. The data consistency was consisted 3 steps: reading the data to find the subject or golden phrase, arrange subject heading by grouping, and bringing the data into groups properly.

### Trustworthiness of Information

In this study was involves analysis data by specialist team for analysis qualitative data to a set of categories. The statistic teams are analyses the transcripts and produce codes, concepts, golden phrase and categories by separately in order to establish trustworthiness of data analysis process.

## 7. Results

### 1. Meaning and characteristics of mental toughness

Different perceptions and meanings of mental toughness were supplied by our sample members as this theme is illustrated by the following quotes:

It seems like an ability to solve problems and to overcome obstacles with a strong mind. It helps us to endure difficult situations and get through them as well (Natorn).

Do not give up on the obstacles. This must be a conscious effort and it helps to control the body, mind, and emotions. Sometimes when we are afraid this will help us to be brave and shut down the tough situation (Wadee).

It is like the kind of mental energy that comes from our thoughts in order to control thought as we think and do as we are thinking (Paporn).

Therefore, it can be concluded that mental toughness is the ability of the mind to overcome obstacles until achieving victory in a competition.

The characteristics of mental toughness. The sailors described mental toughness as having these five characteristics:

#### Willpower

Willpower is like a mental energy and is important to me. Many times when I lose power, I look for the mental power to strengthen me, to make me keep my head, to make me stand up against the worst, especially in competitions. Sometimes it's not what you expect. We will begin to get tired and many times begin to be discouraged. We will slump down. However, if our mind is good, then anything can be accomplished... (Nata).

#### Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a mental state which involves focusing one's awareness on the present and moment, and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations. This is the technique I use to control my anxious feelings. When I am over thinking, everything is a blur and out of control. I will locate myself in mindfulness and stay with the here and now (Kanbon).

#### Confidence

Confidence is mental power, the power of belief in one's own ability. I would not be able to sail away without enough confidence. I believe that people can be successful with

confidence. Many senior sailors have taught me and told me to always have confidence in myself (Kanbon).

#### Commitment

Commitment is a sense of the goal we have. It's difficult to explain what it is. But what I know is that it helps me a lot. My determination is to win medals in the competitions. It may be similar to having a goal and staying with that goal. If we have a goal, then we will follow it relentlessly. We will not allow any obstacles to get in our way. We can overcome them and reach success (Tchein).

#### Fighting spirit

A great fighter must have a brave heart. Competition doesn't just involve the mind, but we must also have a brave heart. Like the cartoon heroes we have watched, such as Iron Man, Spiderman, or Superman, we must have a brave spirit. This spiritual determination produces a brave power, not fear, and never gives up so that we may become a winner if we are lucky enough (Supat).

Knowing how to be mentally tough come from, that is help player move forward in the right way. Now know what it make to be mentally tough with the 5 characteristics as (1) willpower, (2) mindfulness, (3) confidence, (4) commitment, and (5) fighting spirit that will allow through the hard times and become a wiser and stronger sailor.

### 2. Coping strategies

From the result, by analyzing it with the golden paragraph and making it into frequency, it is found that the athletes use the following techniques as

**Table 2.** Show a number of coping strategies can be used

Coping strategies technique	Important order
Strict on daily activity	1
Superstitious rituals	
Do leisure	2
Staying focused on the task at hand	3
Mindfulness and meditation	4
Use social support	
Release stress	5
Thinking about past training hard	6

A number of coping strategies can be used to deal with the incoming pressure of competition. However, the process of facing certain problems does not use only one technique for solving the problems in every situation. Some effective management methods for reducing anxiety or negative emotions which the competitors use were classified into eight techniques as follows.

1. Strictly keeping to daily routines. In general, sailors will try to stay with their daily activities such as wake up early in the morning and pray, lightly warm up, have breakfast, and prepare the boat. Especially on a racing day, they are especially strict in their daily activities. If there is any activity that is missing, it will make the sailor feel guilty. This theme is illustrated by the following quotes:

There will be a start in the early morning, make merit and worshiping to earn the blessing to win. Focusing on eating food on time and preparing the equipment to be ready. I will consider doing these things strictly on competition days (Sunit).

The race day is very important. I have to do certain things on time. If something goes wrong and does not happen as usual on every day, it may be a bad omen for today (Kanya).

2. Performing superstitious rituals. Players will have their own personal beliefs by believing that what they do will help them have a good luck and achieve a goal. The beliefs that are often seen are based on their personal beliefs or their family. The athlete will usually make merit, worshiping the monk or superstition, as the texts below explain:

Before competition comes, I will make merit. After making merit, then I will be graciously spreading compassion to the spiritual benefit of family members who have passed away. The consequences of these acts are that they will make me calm down, help me to cheer up, and help me feel good and powerful (Noppacherd).

Usually around two or three days before a race my parents will go to pay their respects to Long Phor Eh (legendary holy monk of Sattahip city) or to the Krom Luang Chumphon monument (to honor the father of the Thai navy). They will make a wish for me to have good luck and win the competition. When I was a child, they took me to the temple and I won. I believe and pay great respect to the Buddhist way and wear Buddha amulets. Not only that, but I will go to the city pillar shrine or a holy place which is respected by the local people also in case I will be going to a competition in another country (Nathorn).

Yes, I have. I will make a wish to the shrine of Krom Luang Chumphon to make me brave and give me the willpower to fight in the competition. Every time I go out to compete, I have to do it. Mostly, whenever I win, I will come back to do something that I had promised before going to competition. For example, if I have won, I will come back and run 10 laps or bring red water to the shrine for a thank you (Natsri).

3. Setting aside leisure time. Many situations the participants are just anxiousness on a competition. The interview information confirms that leisure activities not only help them free from what they are doing, but give a chance to enjoy life, such as watching movies or funny videos also. More activity such as playing with friends, listening to music, writing notes, reading comic books, and exercising has shown this research. Sometimes, they need time to be alone and given a chance to review their life and find the answer to questions like what am I competing for? or what are we trying to accomplish? This theme is illustrated by the following quotes:

Watching a movie or a funny video clip. It helps me recover my feelings because sometimes I come out of the meeting room and have a hot head. When I sit and watch movies or funny clips, it is possible to release the stress out of my head (Arith).

I frequently get serious and a little anxious in my head during practice, but nobody knows what I feel because I am smiling. But what I do to relax my mind is play football with some friends or sometimes goes on a long bicycle ride. That will usually make me feel better. I can get out of what I have to do that it can help me have a free time, empty my head, and feel free from playing with the boat. I have time for reviewing my thoughts. I will be free and calm (Natthas).

When I face the pain, I like to be left alone to find a quiet place to sit and write my own story. The stressful period was before the race. I will write my feelings down in my notebook. And then sometimes I'll go to read comic books, watch a movie or listen to music in a quiet corner. I need the time to stay with myself (Noppadet).

4. Staying focused on the task at hand. Performances up to their standards are whatever the sailors want to happen in the competition. The standard is a measure of the ability of the sailor. Therefore, they try to maintain their standards. Athletes use this method of thinking to maintain a momentum to match the task on hand as these statements explain:

Actually, there are many things to do. When our competitors are leading on the scoreboard and get more of an advantage, it will make us more concerned. Many plans were reviewed for defending against being overtaken by the others and we still have to create opportunities for us go into the lead. Sometimes it makes us confused with your own ideas and with our boat. Lastly, we think about the present, think of the current work and try to concentrate on our strategies. But it is not going to be their game; it is going to be our game. At least if we maintain our standards, we will give ourselves a chance to have a good outcome (Paporn).

In fact, we can't control everything. We can just control what we control. Anything that is uncontrollable, we just end up thinking, let it go and go back to focus on our performance is enough (Nathat).

5. Mindfulness and meditation. Mindfulness helps athletes to be aware and conscious of their personal thoughts, feelings and emotion that includes the other internal stimulus that encourages them to focus on personal processes of skills - here and now. Which started with the breathing, accept, understand and focusing on their performance and game strategies. Several time, player claim that they use sitting meditation training-like a Buddhist way teaching for increase self-awareness by pray "in" and "out" when inhale and exhale. This theme is illustrated by the following quotes:

During one competition, we encountered very strong winds around 14–15 knots. I was afraid of the strong winds and afraid the boat would capsize. My thoughts were confused until they blurred. Then, I started to inhale and exhale with deep and long breaths about five times to control my consciousness and pull myself back. I noticed then that it was better. I performed better. My mind was not swinging, but the deep breathing helped keep the conscious in the present. It helps control emotions to be neutral. Controlled by consciousness, then I can slowly think and

plan with more deep breathing until the mood cools down (Paporn).

Sit meditating around 5–10 minutes before going to bed, with a prayer between meditations. The script has to be a Buddhist prayer that helps calm the mind (Nata).

Mostly I will sit and meditate after the race in a single room to review the mistakes that occurred and rethink the race for the next day, before going to sleep because if many things are running in my head, it is not so easy to sleep (Sunij).

6. Relying on social support. Athletes will talk with significant others such as family members, friends or girl-boyfriends to request their mental support. A great power of this source, usually, receives from family support that is an important encouragement they got whenever they are going to compete and face stress. This theme is illustrated by the following quotes:

There is a lot of encouragement from my parents, I feel free and not under pressure. Sometimes being pressured by a coach or an association administrator, I don't understand why they come to expect so much from us and put a lot of pressure on us. Sometimes I feel it is a very stressful time. So I call my parents and both of them will give me their encouragement. Then it makes me feel a release of stress (Kanya).

With my friends who went together. It was criticized in the same situation, and easy to understand. Sometimes we go to find some place to eat and talk about other things. When having a bad time, I do not want to be alone, I need to have my friends, perhaps helping each other (Niwai).

Perhaps I'm bored and driven a bit crazy by the practice. I was very determined, but my crew didn't respond and didn't try hard enough. We performed using the wrong technique. We got so far behind that that we couldn't do it. After the race finished, I came home and talked to my girlfriend. She started encouraging me. She took me out from that black hole (Arith).

7. Releasing stress. Releasing stress is a tactic to drain the athlete from tension. It can take the form of awkwardness, such as shouting, jumping into the sea, complaining to them, smashing the boat and crying to drain the bad emotions. This theme is illustrated by the following quotes:

In a very stressful moment, I shouted out loud and I felt a little relieved (Chula).

In practicing, many things create a hot head moment. Maybe the weather is hot, many things are boring, or training is not reaching the required level. I hate this moment. When I jump into the sea that makes me cool and calms me down (Tossachian).

I will complain to myself, saying, for example, why can't you just do this? At least, I know how to manage my thinking. It is not easy when I have to control my emotions and feelings in tough situations (Natsri).

When the tough moment comes, sometimes I cannot adjust my performance to the highest level. Maybe I didn't know what to do. I tried, but it still didn't improve. I will smash the boat with my hand (Nathorn).

I don't know what to do; I cried for a few minutes and the bad feeling will stop. It's better. I will feel released (Patat).

8. Reflecting on past training. Athletes will bring to mind their past experience of training to remind them to put in a lot of effort because the past training was serious. If they don't want it to be wasted, they must give 100% to the effort. Therefore, going back to think about the difficult and tiring exercises in the past training is what the sailors use to empower them to bravery in the competition. This theme is illustrated by the following quotes:

It is tiring and we are discouraged during a serious competition such as the gold medal round. We are talking about all the hard practice and training we have gone through that has helped us a lot when we thought of the past difficulties and this reinforced our courage in the competition. Our own decision is to beat the competition, but there are many times that I think of the exhaustion that we have had when we practiced. And I told myself that we must perform 100% for our investment not to be wasted (Ibul).

## 8. Discussion

Almost 30 years, a sport psychology research was establishing knowledge from Western culture. Some data may not saturate when transferred a specification concept from the West to Eastern culture. That is knowledge gap. Many research use cross cultural studies to compare "how the different cultural had affect to other consequence", we needed study that concept with Thai culture to help us more understand the concept and meaning. Then we needed collect more data and try to explain the construct of mental toughness from the perspective of the Thai athlete. And merge knowledge of mental toughness from both of 2 cultures as the same concept. However, the research result show Thai sailors had a concept of mental toughness as same as past literature. They revealed that it is the ability of the mind to show confidence, not to give up easily, to be persistent, not to be shaken in competition, and to overcome every obstacle until it led to victory in the competition. This result is similar to with Thelwell et al. [13] and Jones, Hanton, and Connaughton [14] that also asked athletes for a specific definition of mental toughness. The respondents claimed that mental toughness enabled competitors to always cope better than the opponents. The concept is to compete, be resilient, be able to cope under pressure, be able to handle anxiety, remain fully focused, and be able to control their mind. The mental toughness and resilience has the same direction of profile but some context has different. In generally, the persevere and overcome impediments ability is an important component in helping athletes to achieve their goals. Furthermore, according in past study Belem, Caruzzo, Nascimento, Vieira and Vieira [15] found that elite athlete using of coping strategies to overcome problems settings gals, motivation and staying concentrated during competition that show resilience profile of the elite athlete. According to Wagstaff, Sarkar, Davidson, and Fletcher [16], resilience is the ability to recover quickly from difficulties".

This describes an ability to recover from an adverse and difficult situation partially or total. This does not lead to positive feeling about coping successfully with the difficult situation. Patsiaouras and Stirbu, [17] use the variables like “perception”, “getting a grip of one’s life”, “forming relationships” “acceptance and optimistic thinking”, and “orientation on solution and aims” for explain the resilient in athlete. In general, elite athletes are mentally tough individuals and are resilient but actually not all resilient athletes are mentally toughness. Then, resilience and mental toughness are connected together. But mental toughness are driven by characteristic qualities, attitudes and behaviors and can be viewed as a personality trait which determines in large part how individual in general deal with stress, pressure and challenge irrespective of circumstances. The present study has identified five characteristics of mental toughness derived through qualitative research. These factors are willpower, mindfulness, confidence, commitment, and fighting spirit. Moreover, This result found that these characteristics were similar with other past studies such as Vongjaturapat, Prachakul, Pattanamontri, Singnoy and Montri [18] finding that the female sepak takraw players expose the characteristics of mental toughness in which divided in 6 character that to show 1) patience 2) ability to confront an obstacle 3) self-confidence 4) commitment and concentration 5) ability to control negative energy, and 6) ability to create positive energy. And Gould *et al.* [2] determined that the athletes he studied were successful due to their general mental toughness and resiliency, their ability to cope with and control anxiety, their possession of confidence and optimism, and their ability to focus and block out distractions.

#### **The coping strategies techniques that directly parallel previous research findings**

The distraction and stress made a limitation on athletes' performance. Controlling the amount of arousal and stress will allow for it to be released stress effectively. There are many ways to relieve stress, with the selection of each method depending on its suitability and the needs of the athlete. Researcher found that Thai sailors use these coping strategies techniques to harness on their performance that the past research as Crust, Nesti, and Bond [19] suggest that successful participants were stubborn / bloody-minded (tenacious), totally committed to their goals, objective, had a sense of humor, thrived on challenges, were able to maintain perspective in adversity and possessed humility. There are 6 techniques similar with the past such as strictly keeping to daily routines: athlete use a strict daily activity before the competition that is most important to them. The wrestlers follow the mental preparation plan and make a confident and appropriate focus on their own performance. [10,20]. Setting aside leisure time: recreational activities can relieve physical or mental stress, depending on the perception of each athlete include watching funny movies or video clips, playing with friends, listening to music, writing notes, reading cartoons, exercising or getting physical relaxation through massage. Staying focused on

the task at hand: athletes who feel free to perform will have a clear mind and not be worried or confused. Jones *et al.* [21] state that mansions completely focused on the task at hand in the face of competition distractions and switching a spot of distractions focus as on and off. Additionally, staying focused on the task at hand helps athletes to devote their full attention to their skill and helps them make decisions faster. Mentally tough athletes are smart to focus on the implementation of the task while blocking out distractions. Relying on social support: social support is attention paid to the emotions and feelings of an athlete by a significant person, family, friends, coaches, and people who are important to athletes. In consistent with Rees and Freeman [22] that found that social support will help athletes very much because it will motivate their ability to chase and desire success. Releasing stress: releasing stress can raise the athlete's mood, their feeling uncomfortable with a setback, or their showing off certain behaviors. When athlete release of emotions in competitions such as yelling or jumping into the sea for release of stress. Whenever an athlete can release their stress, they will feel good and it will help them get back into the game like Darasak's study [10] was found the Thailand national tennis team would give a loud shout when they hit the ball into the net or would throw their racquet down. Reflecting on past training; the sailors relied on their past hard training to boost their confidence and reduce anxiety before a competition. The study of Jongsombatjareon *et al.* [12] found that Thai boxers use the method of thinking of hard training in the past as a warning not to give up easily and to help them feel confidence in their ability and physical strength.

In general, we found almost the result was similar to the past research but only 2 techniques were show close related to Thailand's culture as performing superstitious rituals and with mindfulness.

Performing superstitious rituals. Many Thai athletes believe the holy soul resides in the statue when they pay their respects and that doing so will give one of mental energy and they will feel the holy thing stay with them always. The psychological benefits of superstitious rituals have trend to use in sport setting that follow by Schippers and Van Lange [23] study. They examined the elite athlete are most likely to be committed to action rituals behavior prior to a game which they called this action that “ritual benefit” and it has a great use in dealing with the uncertainty situation and the important competition. Damisch, Stoberock, and Mussweiler [24] explain deeply detail about the major purpose of relationship between the situational, person and determinants of the superstitious ritual activity among elite athlete. This research found that activating good luck-related superstitions through a common saying or action to improve the sports performance. Damisch *et al.*, [24] also suggest that these superstitious ritual activity, it's help to produce a perceived self-efficiency, which a superstitious boost in a sports person's confidence in successful and improves their performance. In Thailand, we have a strong belief in

superstitious rituals because it came from ancient people who believe in master preserver spiritual. The past research of Jongsombatjarean et al. [12] found the Muay Thai, usually, use the recite spells for superstitious rituals activity before compete. And meditation and mindfulness, the athlete was used to train sitting meditation by coach and when a child was their parents train this technique to athletes as well. The purpose of this technique was mentioned as a prime method of helping them relax. Meditation can be used in all stressful situations and is a fundamental technique for relaxation [25]. The evidence shows a relationship between mindfulness and flow state which can be utilized to manage negative emotions in sport [26,27]. Along the same line, Darasak [10] found that athletes will use a meditative style by breathing in and out before a competition, while competing, and then post-match. Breathing exercises are used both intentionally and in an unconscious style, especially in the important competitions in which athletes are often unaware of stress. In Thai culture, we usually teach about believing in the dharma and recognizing concentration, mindfulness, and wisdom. Almost every sailor practiced meditation in childhood. The parents or coach makes them do a meditation session before sleep. The consequence is they know how to perform mindfulness meditation as well. Samples mentioned on mindfulness meditation technique are useful for relaxation that has been practiced. This technique was applied from the Buddhist way which was used to reset the mind and increase focus, awareness, and concentration on the breath.

## 9. Conclusions

The results found that the coping techniques were explained in traditional actions and followed their beliefs. This research provides a definition and conceptualization in the area of mental toughness that is similar to evidence discovered in the past. The qualitative method in this study ensures a clear view of the mental toughness context as well. The "mental toughness" means the ability of the mind to show confidence, not to give up, and be persistent and determined to overcome all obstacles and achieve victory. An understanding of mental toughness firmly shows the sailors defining five dominant characteristics: (1) willpower, (2) mindfulness, (3) confidence, (4) commitment, and (5) fighting spirit. Moreover, the study revealed that the sailors use these 6 coping strategies: (1) strictly keeping to daily routines, (2) setting aside leisure time, (3), staying focused on the task at hand, (4) releasing stress, (5) relying on social support, (6) reflecting on past training, but 2 technique was unique as (7) performing superstitious rituals in which closed to Thailand believe in guardian spirit to make mental energy and (8) mindfulness and meditation that relate to the Buddhist way that was used to reset the mind and increase focus, awareness, and concentration on the breath. Techniques for dealing with stress did not use only one method for efficient benefits. Instead, the sailors needed diverse techniques depending on the situation, their

familiarity with the experience, and their personal beliefs and preferences. Moreover, the coping strategies are not specific in one form but depend on the technique being used and the degree of their satisfaction with it, particularly if they won or were successful as a result. In this case, they are likely to use that technique again.

Future research would benefit from investigating the interaction between personal characteristics with 5 characteristics of mental toughness factors and the consequence of using 8 coping strategies. Moreover, collect more data in diversity sport for understand the phenomenal mental toughness and coping strategies of Thai athlete.

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