

Investigation of Superstitious Behavior Tendencies of Professional Football Players and Coaches*

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Abstract

This study aims to elucidate the superstitious behavior tendencies of professional football players and club coaches. The research group consists of 22 football players and 9 football coaches selected through the "Criterion Sampling" method. The research is considered as basic qualitative research. These are qualitative research studies in which data are collected through documents, interviews, or observation analyses. The research design employed in this study is phenomenology (phenomenological research design) which is a qualitative research design. In this research, "Superstitious Belief" has been selected as the phenomenon and the meanings attributed to this phenomenon by football players and coaches are attempted to be revealed. Semi-structured interview forms have been prepared to identify the superstitious behavior tendencies of players and coaches. In this context, open-ended questions are asked to the participants to determine their superstitious behavior tendencies. The data obtained have been analyzed using the content analysis method. According to the findings, the Superstitious Behavior Tendency comprises a theme, a sub-theme, and six categories. Under the sub-theme of superstitious behavior tendencies among professional football players and coaches are the categories of Clothing-Appearance, Lucky Objects, Pre-match Ritual, In-match Behavior, Team Ritual, Faith and Prayer. The opinions of players and coaches regarding the questions prepared for this theme are presented. Word clouds have been created illustrating prominent codes under the identified categories based on data obtained from interviews with participants. In conclusion, beyond effective preparation and training phases for performance enhancement, it is discerned that some superstitious behavior tendencies exist among players, contributing to elevating their motivation and self-confidence to higher levels.

Keywords: Athlete, Coach, Football, Superstition

Profesyonel Futbolcu ve Antrenörlerin Batıl Davranış Eğilimlerinin İncelenmesi

Öz

Araştırmada profesyonel olarak futbol oynayan sporcuların ve profesyonel futbol kulübü antrenörlerinin batıl davranış eğilimlerini ortaya koymak amaçlanmıştır. Araştırma grubunu "Ölçüt (kriter) Örnekleme" yöntemiyle seçilen 22 futbolcu ve 9 futbol antrenörü oluşturmaktadır. Araştırma temel nitel araştırma olarak ele alınmıştır. Bu araştırmalar doküman, görüşme ya da gözlem incelemesi ile verilerin toplandığı nitel araştırma şeklidir. Desen olarak ise nitel araştırma desenlerinden fenomenoloji (olgu bilim) kullanılmıştır. Bu çalışmada olgu olarak "Batıl İnanç" seçilmiş, futbolcu ve antrenörlerin bu olguya yönelik yüklediği anlamları ortaya çıkarmaya çalışılmıştır. Araştırmada futbolcu ve antrenörlerin batıl davranış eğilimlerini saptamaya yönelik yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formları hazırlanmıştır. Bu kapsamda katılımcılara batıl davranış eğilimlerini belirlemeye yönelik açık uçlu sorular sorulmuştur. Elde edilen veriler içerik analizi yöntemiyle çözümlenmiştir. Bulgulara göre Batıl Davranış Eğilimi bir temadan, bir alt temadan ve altı kategoriden oluşmuştur; profesyonel futbolcuların ve antrenörlerin batıl davranış eğilimleri alt teması altında Giyim-görünüş, Uğurlu nesne, Müsabaka öncesi ritüel, Müsabaka esnası davranış, Takımca ritüel, İnanç ve dua kategorilerden oluşmaktadır. Bu tema için hazırlanmış sorular hakkında futbolcu ve antrenörlerin görüşleri yer almaktadır. Katılımcılardan yapılan görüşmelerden elde edilen verilere göre belirlenen kategoriler altında öne çıkan kodları gösteren kelime bulutları hazırlanmıştır. Sonuç olarak performans artırma noktasında iyi bir hazırlığın ve çalışma evresinin ötesinde sporcuların kendi motivasyonlarını ve özgüvenlerini daha üst noktalara taşıyacak bazı batıl davranış eğiliminde olduğu anlaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Antrenör, Batıl inanç, Futbol, Sporcu

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, people have built their lives on their beliefs. Sometimes people have come up with these beliefs themselves. The most common of these beliefs among people is superstition (Mutlu et al., 2016). Superstitious beliefs and behaviors are a psycho-social phenomenon that has occurred in all parts of the world throughout history, be it the most primitive tribe or the most modern society (Günay, 2002). The word superstitious is defined in the Turkish dictionary as follows: it is described as untrue and unjustified, rotten, baseless and unfounded. And in the dictionary of psychology, it is defined as “the belief that the flow of natural events can be changed by supernatural or magical powers such as prayer, magic, black magic, carrying objects believed to bring good luck, having amulets written, and summoning spirits” (Budak, 2005).

Superstition is based on a supernatural power. It represents an unseen belief that influences. That people perform certain behaviors at certain times causes them to usually continue to perform these behaviors because when they do not perform them, they provide negative motivation by leaving question marks in the human brain (Burger and Lynn, 2005). It undeniably affects the emotions of individuals with strong superstitions (Liu et al., 2023). People are superstitious for many reasons (Khaenamkhaew, 2023). While these reasons, which differ from person to person, significantly affect people’s lives (Çam and Çelik, 2023), it is stated that they will lead to positive results in their emotional states and mental actions (Vyse, 2022.) For example, the “Labarum” symbol, one of the symbols of Christianity, is believed to have helped Emperor Constantine win the Battle of Milvian Bridge (Dönmez and Sivaz, 2024). Superstitious behaviors, which associate patterns between different situations without any rationale, take place in the lives of individuals through phenomena such as clothes, substances, etc. that are part of daily life (Jirásek, 2024). One of the areas where these superstitious behavioral tendencies are frequently encountered is the field of sports, which plays an important role in our lives (Wilson et al., 2013). Sports and its inherent uncertainty provide fertile ground for superstitious behavior (Galily et al., 2023).

In Womack's (1992) definition of superstition in sports, he explains: It is the situation in which the actions of the athletes are repetitive, formal, sequential, and different from technical performance in situations where they feel strong in control of luck and other external factors. The role of superstition in sports is not new, it dates back to the beginning of this century (Kaushik et al., 2023). Athletes have generally focused on superstitious tendencies in areas that they think relieve anxiety and help them achieve success (Kanbir, 2022). Athletes, especially in situations with high stress levels, resort to superstitious behaviors to ensure the control and stability of the result and situation (Barut et al., 2016). In addition, athletes exhibit these behaviors to improve their performance levels and increase their achievement (Cohn, 1990). It can be said that the motivation to win, fear of losing, worry, or anxiety lies at the basis of superstitions used in sports environments (Kavi and Karagün, 2020).

They exhibit behaviors that they believe bring them luck, such as using the same equipment before, during, or after the matches, and tying their shoelaces in the same way (Swedo, 2006). Some superstitions are also learned through conditioning (Skinner, 1948). They believe that

they will maintain their success if they repeat their in-match behaviors in which they have been successful (Womack, 1992). These behaviors are widely observed in football, which is one of the most interesting sports today. Gheorghe Hagi states that he cut the bottom of his socks before matches and that if he played a match without cutting it, the match would be bad (Galeano, 1997). Gary Lineker does not take any shots on goal during the warm-up so that his goals are not wasted while warming up for a match, and if he does not score in the first half in the matches he plays, he does not play with the same jersey in the second half (Sabah, 2010). Another example is that when Coach Ümit Kayıhan was training Göztepe, he did not take off his yellow-red scarf for the whole season and did not have it washed. Additionally, there are research results showing that some dates are auspicious (Denovan et al., 2024). In light of this information, the aim of the research is to reveal the superstitious behavior tendencies of professional football players and coaches in the football branch. After all, it has been observed that athletes often resort to superstitious behavior. In the research conducted by Kelley and Woolley (2017), they emphasized that there are results that support this situation, including the result that especially adults frequently use superstitious behaviors. When the literature on this subject is examined, there are many studies investigating the superstitious behavior tendencies of athletes (Vyse, 2022). However, there is limited research that includes coaches in superstitious behavior tendencies. When the literature is examined, it is seen that the number of studies on coaches in terms of superstitious behaviors is limited. In essence, Neil (1982) observes that not only athletes have their own superstitious behaviors, but also coaches, managers, and even spectators often exhibit superstitious behaviors related to sports. It is thought that the research, especially the coach aspect, will contribute to the literature and serve as an example for future research.

METHOD

Research Model

This research, which has been conducted to examine the superstitious tendencies of professional football players and coaches, is projected as basic qualitative research. These studies are qualitative research in which data are collected through documents, interviews, or observation analysis. In this design, what will be observed, which documents will be considered relevant, or which questions will be asked are related to the theoretical framework of the study (Merriam, 2013). Phenomenology, one of the qualitative research designs, was used as the design. The aim of phenomenology is to reveal people's experiences and perceptions of a phenomenon and the meanings they attribute to them (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018). In this study, "Superstition" is chosen as the phenomenon, and it is attempted to reveal the meanings attributed to this phenomenon by athletes and coaches. In the study, semi-structured interview forms have been prepared to identify the superstitious behavior tendencies of football players and coaches. In this context, open-ended questions have been asked to the participants to identify their superstitious behavior tendencies. Football players and coaches have been given code names and their opinions are conveyed directly. In order to create the code names, the football players are assigned the letter "F" accompanied with a number 1,2,3,4..., hence the

code names F-1, F-2, F-3 are formed. Similarly, coaches are assigned the letter “C” and a number 1, 2, 3, ..., resulting in the code names C-1, C-2, C-3 for the coaches.

Research groups

The sample of the study consists of the players and coaches of the professional football club Anagold24 Erzincanspor, which competes in the Turkish Football Federation 2nd League during the 2023-2024 football season in Erzincan province. These participants were selected using the "Criterion Sampling" method. Criterion sampling is the formation of the sample from people, events, objects or situations with the qualifications identified about the problem (Büyüköztürk et al., 2021). The criterion is determined for football players in Erzincan province to have a professional football player license and for coaches to have a UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) coaching license in order to coach a professional team. When determining the sample, the most appropriate strategy is considered to be convenience sampling. Easily accessible or convenient sampling is based entirely on items that are available, quick and easy to reach. It is the most commonly used strategy in qualitative research (Patton, 2005). It is known that in most cases, researchers conducting qualitative research predict that the sample size they will use will not allow them to generalize, and they prefer situations that are easy to reach and not expensive to work with, without paying attention to how they are selected (Vogt et al., 2012).

Data Collection Tools

In the research, qualitative data have been obtained through interview questions. The data have been analyzed using by content analysis method. The objective of content analysis is to explain the collected data (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018).

Semi-Structured Interview Form

In this study, interviews were conducted with football players and coaches to examine their superstitious behavior tendencies. Interview questions were prepared to be used in the aforementioned interviews, paying attention to the fact that they are in the form of open-ended questions that can be easily understood by the participants, and that are focused on the aims of the study. While preparing the questions, care was taken not to give any guidance to the individual being interviewed, and also to ensure that the questions asked during the interview did not cover more questions at once (Patton, 2005). In addition to this, probing questions were prepared to be used in case the questions to be asked in the interview were not understood or perceived by the participants. A Semi-Structured Interview Form has been prepared to be used in interviews with professional football players and coaches by following the procedure below.

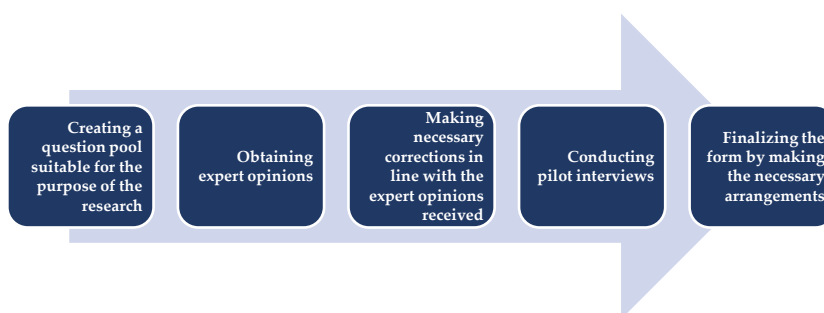


Figure 1. Interview form preparation steps

Ethical Approval

Before starting the research, approval of the Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University Human Research, Health, and Sports Sciences Ethics Committee dated January 31, 2023, and numbered 01/18 was obtained.

Collection of Data

The accuracy of qualitative findings and interpretations is very important in the research. Many qualitative studies use strategies such as data triangulation, participant confirmation, and expert review when determining the credibility or accuracy of findings (Creswell and Miller, 2000; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In order to reveal the validity and reliability of the data in the study, the answers given to the interview questions by the football players and coaches participating in the study were documented in Word and the file was shared with the participants. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in the meeting room of Erzincanspor facilities and a voice recorder was used with the permission of the participants. The data obtained from football players and coaches are given as direct quotations in the findings section. In addition, the statements have been read separately by the researchers and the expert, and internal reliability has been tried to be obtained by creating codes, themes, and categories. Moreover, a voice recorder is used while asking the interview questions of the research, thus preventing data loss.

Analysis of Data

Content analysis of qualitative research data analyzed in four stages includes code naming the data, creating themes and categories, organizing themes and codes, describing and interpreting the findings (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018). Based on the data obtained from the interviews with football players and coaches, word clouds were created using the Wordart program for the prominent codes within the question categories asked.

FINDINGS

Under this heading, interviews were conducted by asking 6 open-ended questions to determine the superstitious behavior tendencies of the football players and coaches participating in the research. In the table given below, categories consisting of semi-structured questions, as well as themes and sub-themes obtained from these categories, have been created.

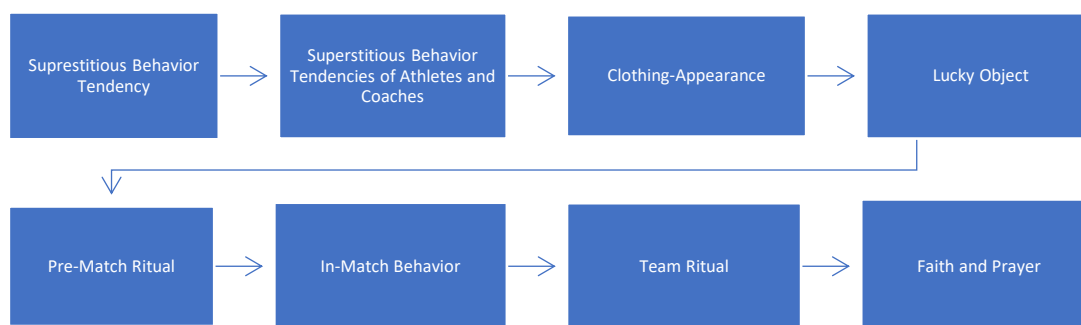


Figure 2. Superstitious behavior tendencies theme and categories

Superstitious Behavior Tendency

Superstitious Behavior Tendency consists of 1 theme, 1 sub-theme, and 6 categories, under the sub-theme of superstitious behavior tendencies of professional football players and coaches are the categories Clothing-appearance, Lucky object, Pre-match ritual, In-Match Behavior, Team ritual, Faith and prayer. The opinions of football players and coaches about the questions prepared for this theme are included.

Superstitious Behavior Tendencies of Football Players

Under this theme, six questions are asked to the football players. These are:

1. How do you relate clothing-appearance, and match performance?
2. Is there an object that you particularly carry with you in matches? Why?
3. Is there anything in particular you do when you take the field for the match that you believe will bring you luck? Why?
4. Do you have any special in-match behavior? Why?
5. Do you have any special behaviors that you perform as a team? Why?
6. What are your views on the impact of beliefs on performance?

Some of the football players who participated in the research review the relationship between clothing-appearance and match performance, one of the superstitious behavior tendencies, as follows.

F-1 *“Clothing and appearance are definitely important for performance, for example, if I don't wear white cleats, my performance will decrease”*

F-2 *“Clothing and appearance cannot reduce my performance. I don't believe that clothing such as shoes, jerseys, etc., has an impact on performance”*

F-3 *“I don't think that clothing and appearance can bring luck, but I think that putting the jersey inside the shorts, etc. can affect in-match performance as it is more comfortable and ergonomic.”*

F-6 *“I partially have that thought. Having my hair neatly shaved and done improves my performance.”*

F-7 *“Although I do not think that appearance has an effect on performance, it is a fact that appearance gives people self-confidence, so football players with high self-confidence can give better performance. As a result, let's say it is partially effective”*

F-8 *“Clothing and appearance have an impact on performance. First of all, psychologically it makes me feel confident and good, my jersey number is always the same, any other number will decrease my performance”*

F-12 *“In terms of clothing and appearance, I have my uniform adjusted according to my size, I make sure that it looks very elaborate on me, the neater I look, the more motivated I am, so this has a positive effect on my performance.”*

Some of the football players who participated in the research commented on the question “Do you have any special in-match behavior?” as follows:

F-5 “*I take 3 steps back, especially in free throws with high potential to be goals, such as penalties and free kicks. I feel more comfortable that way, I think there is a higher chance of scoring a goal*”

F-7 “*I say the basmala before I kick the ball. Maybe that’s how I get motivated, it increases my percentage of hits or goals*”

F-8 “*There is a backward step on set pieces, I do the same on all set pieces, this increases the chances of scoring a goal*”

F-11 “*During matches, I move like the footballers I look up to, I take steps like them, I try to do their kicking technique, this way I think I am doing the right kick or movement, I act more focused.*”

F-17 “*When I take a penalty kick, I always stand as if I’m going to kick with the other foot and take my steps accordingly.*”

Based on these views, it can be deduced that football players resort to some rituals about set pieces during a match and think that these behaviors are a source of motivation for them and affect the result positively.



Figure 6. Word cloud showing the prominent codes under the category of in-match behavior based on the data obtained from the interviews with football players

Some of the football players who participated in the research commented on the question “Do you have a special behavior as a team?” as follows:

F-2 “*We try to be the side that chooses the goal in home games. I would call it the behavior we do as a team*”

F-3 “*There are jerseys that the majority want and think that we win with them, and we usually prefer those jerseys as a team.*”

F-6 “*Before we take the field as a team, everyone clenches together by linking arms and makes a promise, and this brings us good luck.*”

C-1 “I don’t think there is anything that we specifically prefer doing when we go out to a match that will bring us luck, we perform normal routine behaviors, we make our match talk, we try to raise the ambition and motivation of the players and we go out to the match in this way”

C-2 “There is nothing that I believe will bring luck to our team when we take the field for a match. We are going with the normal flow that is in the nature of football, so let me say they are the necessary procedures to play the match, not for luck”

C-4 “Before matches I pray and recite Surah al-Fatih. Actually, it’s like we’ve worked hard and left the rest to God.”

C-7 “I can say that what I specifically do when I go out for a match is as follows: I am the last one to leave the locker room and go to the field. In fact, I do this not to be lucky, we beat the previous match like this, so we can win again, but I wait until the end to make the final checks and see that everything is working correctly.”

According to these opinions, it is understood that the coaches do not go beyond the normal routine match preparation when going out to matches. It can be thought that some of them are motivated to compete by engaging in various acts of worship.

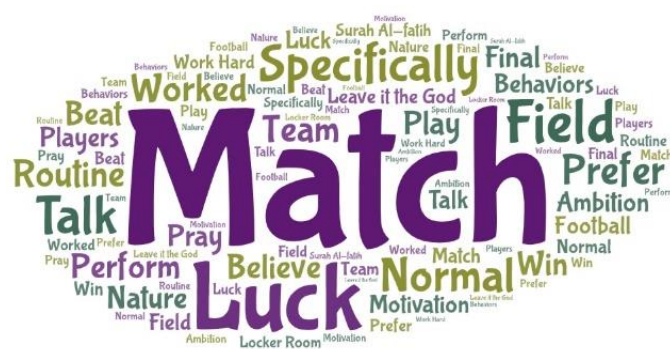


Figure 11. Word cloud showing the prominent codes under the pre-match ritual category based on the data obtained from the interviews with coaches

Some of the coaches who participated in the research commented on the question “Do you have any special in-match behavior?” as follows:

C-3 “I don’t have any particular in-match behavior myself. I just try to make my players believe in the game, that’s what I want during a match”

C-6 “I don’t have any special in-match behavior either, I try to seize the game and to be completely focused on the match”

C-7 “I have some behaviors here, yes, for example, let me put it this way, if there is a situation such as a free kick or penalty, if we are using it, I open my hands and arms, if the rival is using it, I cross my arms, this is my totem”

According to these perspectives, we can see that coaches generally do not prefer a special in-match behavior, but prefer to seize the game. Some coaches, on the other hand, are thought to prefer some physical movements that they believe will bring luck in kicks that may affect the result, such as penalties that may occur during a match.



Figure 12. Word cloud showing the prominent codes under the category of in-match behavior based on the data obtained from the interviews with the coaches

Some of the coaches who participated in the research commented on the question “Do you have any special behaviors that you perform as a team? Why?” as follows:

C-3 *“As a team, there is no behavior carried out by the team that will include the coaches, but there are some behaviors that I observe among the players themselves”*

C-5 *“As a team, we do not have anything related to luck or any lucky actions that we prefer either”*

C-6 *“There is nothing that we as a team believe will bring us luck. As a team, our only right thing will be to work hard”*

C-7 *“There is a behavior that we do as a team. Actually, there may be some people on the team who don’t know this, but I call it a team behavior because we do it together. That is: if we stayed in a hotel and we won that match, I prefer to stay in that hotel again in the next match, if it’s an away match, I take the team to the same hotel in the next season.”*

Based on these views, it can be assumed that while some coaches do not prefer certain rituals as a team, others attach special meaning to matches that are won and try to imitate that match in the next games.



Figure 13. Word cloud showing the prominent codes under the team ritual category based on the data obtained from the interviews with coaches

Some of the coaches who participated in the research commented on the question “What are your views on the impact of beliefs on performance?” as follows:

C-1 *“The only factor that affects performance is effort and sacrifice. Taking shelter behind superstitions, thinking that you will get high efficiency by doing them seems like a bit of an escape to me, at best it would have a placebo effect”*

C-2 *“Beliefs have an absolute impact on performance. People do not hesitate to fight for what they believe in, to fight until the last drop of sweat, I can say that it is a kind of source of motivation”*

C-4 *“Believing is half the success. Belief has a positive effect on focus and performance. It is a source of additional motivation for all performance athletes. As a result, it positively affects performance with mediators such as belief, motivation, focus, and feeling strong”*

C-9 *“Beliefs can have an impact on performance in the form of prayer, make a person spiritually strong, provide a source of motivation”*

According to these views, coaches think that beliefs have an impact on performance. Accordingly, it is understood that they generally evaluate beliefs as a source of motivation and a mediating force to feel good.



Figure 14. Word cloud showing the prominent codes under the category of belief and prayer based on the data obtained from the interviews with coaches

DISCUSSION AND RESULT

Based on the opinions of professional football players and coaches, this study attempts to evaluate the superstitious tendencies of individuals who play and coach football at the professional level. When the findings obtained from the interviews within the scope of the research are evaluated, it is observed that football players frequently show superstitious tendencies, football players pay attention to their clothing and appearance in matches and associate it with performance, and they believe that some objects bring good luck by keeping these objects with them while going out for a match, that they exhibit some behaviors while going out for a match and believe that these behaviors increase performance as a way of preparing for a match, they show some in-match superstitious tendencies, these behaviors are generally associated with the performance such as the stepping before hitting the ball; as a team, some behaviors are preferred such as clenching and firing up the team, and they emphasize that beliefs are an effective tool on performance. The key findings are discussed in detail in this part and recommendations are made to improve performance.

First, when it comes to clothing-appearance in matches, the opinions of football players are generally that looking physically good increases performance through motivation and self-

confidence. For example, F-12 states his opinion as follows: “In terms of clothing and appearance, I have my uniform adjusted according to my size, I make sure that it looks very elaborate on me, the neater I look, the more motivated I am, so this has a positive effect on my performance”. Indeed, when the literature is examined, it is seen that clothing and appearance in football are related to superstitious behaviors (Ofori et al., 2013). In addition, it has been observed that Super League football players tend to show superstitious behaviors related to clothing-appearance and believe that these behaviors will bring them good luck and success (Kavi and Karagün, 2020).

In another research result, according to the opinions of the football players about an object to keep with them in a match, it is understood that the football players keep some objects with them in matches and assume that these objects bring them good luck. Accordingly, it is stated that some objects are attributed special meanings and that these objects strengthen them, and it is found that religious figures are the most preferred objects. F-11, for example, says, “I wear an amulet on my arm and it is with me every match, which helps me feel better and when I feel good, my performance is at its highest level.” When the literature is examined, there are studies showing that athletes often use some objects in terms of objects that are considered auspicious. It has been revealed that objects considered auspicious for athletes are the most effective superstitions in increasing self-confidence, and prayer, pre-match rituals, and auspicious objects are the most commonly used superstitions among athletes (Ptacek, 2016).

When considered in terms of the behaviors that are specially done while taking the field for a match and believed to bring luck, the opinions of the football players participating in the research are mostly that some behaviors are preferred. Accordingly, it was concluded that the most preferred behaviors are those that increase concentration such as going on the field with the right foot and hopping, praying before the match, and listening to music. For example, F-1 expresses his opinion as follows: “When I go out on the field for a match, I step on the grass with my right foot and hop twice. I believe it brings me good luck.” When the literature is examined, it is seen that athletes generally prefer certain behaviors before games and matches. As a matter of fact, Çakmak (2019) observes that professional football players in the 1st and 2nd League show a tendency towards superstitious behavior before matches and training. In another study, Eluère and Héas (2017) find in their study that volleyball players exhibit more superstitious behaviors before the game.

According to another research result, when considered in terms of specific in-match behavior, the opinions of the football players participating in the research are generally that certain behaviors are preferred. From this point of view, the most frequently preferred behaviors are related to the kicks made during a match, such as F-5 states “I take 3 steps back, especially in free throws with high potential to be goals, such as penalties and free kicks. I feel more comfortable that way, I think there is a higher chance of scoring a goal”. It is thought that the preferred behaviors motivate the players to kick and increase the goal/hit percentage. As a matter of fact, F-8 expresses his opinion as follows: “There is a backward step on set pieces, I do the same on all set pieces, this increases the chances of scoring a goal”. When the literature is examined, there are studies that athletes exhibit some behaviors that can be considered auspicious during a game/match. Çakmak (2019) finds in her research that professional football

players in the TFF 1st and 2nd League tend to be superstitious during matches and training. Additionally, Witkowska (2023) stated in her study that athletes who hold superstitious beliefs have more rituals compared to those who do not.

According to another result of the research, when considered in terms of a special behavior as a team, the opinions of the football players participating in the research are generally that there are some preferences as a team. Accordingly, the choice of jersey is also a reason for preference for the next match, especially if success has been achieved in the previous match. For example, F-3 states “There are jerseys that the majority want and think that we win with them, and we usually prefer those jerseys as a team”. In addition to this, behaviors aimed at firing up the emotions of the moment by linking arms as a team before the match are also preferred. For example, F-6 states “Before we take the field as a team, everyone clenches together by linking arms and makes a promise, and this brings us good luck”. When the literature is examined, there are studies showing that teams engage in some behaviors as a team, that is, in the aspect of team behaviors. Barut et al., (2016) find that superstitious behavior tendencies in basketball are mostly related to team behaviors.

According to the results of another research, when considered in terms of the belief-performance relationship, the opinions of the football players participating in the research are mostly that belief is effective on performance. Accordingly, it is understood that football players feel themselves stronger in general spiritual values and praying in particular and frequently resort to these behaviors. For instance, F-11 expresses his opinion as follows: “Faith is very influential on performance. In my own case, the more I pray, the safer and stronger I feel, and this feeling is reflected in my performance”. When the literature is examined, it is found that praying has a positive effect on performance. Accordingly, Ofori et al., (2013) found in their research that the most effective superstition of football teams in Ghana is prayer. In another study, it is observed that the items in the category of praying are frequently marked in all sports branches (Barut, 2008). In addition, Kavi and Karagün (2020) find in their study that football players playing in the lower leagues tend to pray more than those playing in the upper leagues. In addition, Dömötör et al., (2016) state that prayer has a positive effect on performance and is a way that individuals often use to control their emotional state. Similarly, Karakullukçu (2023) revealed in her study that especially athletes have the habit of praying.

When the tendency towards superstitious behavior from the coach's point of view is examined, it is stated that clothing-appearance does not have an effect on performance, but it contains some elements that could put the opponent under pressure. For example, C-1 expresses his opinion as follows: “There is nothing I pay particular attention to when it comes to clothing and appearance. On those days, just like an ordinary day, I open the closet in the morning and decide what to wear. I don't think it has any effect on the match, or to put it more accurately, on our own performance. However, in terms of influencing and putting pressure on the opponent, both my clothing-appearance and the team's clothing-appearance can affect the opponent and create psychological pressure”. In addition, they state that faith and prayer are sources of motivation and help them feel good. For example, C-2 comments “Beliefs have an absolute impact on performance. People do not hesitate to fight for what they believe in, to fight until the last drop of sweat, I can say that it is a kind of source of motivation”. And in the

lucky object category, it is understood that the coaches generally do not show any superstitious tendencies; although, for example, C-6 states “I don’t carry an object or anything else with me in matches for good luck, as I said before, I regard these things negatively” and C-2 adds “I don’t use an object specific to matches, I keep objects that I routinely use in my private life, such as a watch, for example, I don’t use special jewellery or objects for a match other than that”, it has been observed that a small number of coaches, such as C-5 saying “I keep a hat with me. This is my totem”, prefer lucky objects. In terms of the pre-match ritual category, it is found that coaches generally do not show a tendency towards superstition. For instance, C-1 expresses his views as follows: “I don’t think there is anything that we specifically prefer doing when we go out to the match that will bring us luck, we perform normal routine behaviors, we make our match talk, we try to raise the ambition and motivation of the players and we go out to the match in this way”. In the category of in-match behavior, while some coaches do not show any superstitious tendency, such as C-6 “I don’t have any special in-match behavior either, I try to seize the game and to be completely focused on the match”, some coaches are observed to engage in certain behaviors during matches. For example, C-7 states his opinion as the following: “I have some behaviors here, yes, for example, let me put it this way, if there is a situation such as a free kick or penalty, if we are using it, I open my hands and arms, if the rival is using it, I cross my arms, this is my totem”. In the team ritual aspects, it is found that the coaches do not show a tendency towards superstitious behavior. Accordingly, the coaches emphasize the importance of hard work. For example, C-6 says “There is nothing that we as a team believe will bring us luck. As a team, our only right thing will be to work hard”.

According to the available data, it is obvious that psychological skills contribute positively to sportive performance. Athletes and coaches will gain added value if they use these skills in the most accurate way for their own benefit and approach them more consciously. However, in the literature, it is noticeable that mental training is insufficient in training planning. Woolley et al., (2024) state that individuals are aware of the effects of superstitions on human behavior and that the underlying reason for this situation may arise from psychological factors. Indeed, Sulu (2022) states that although coaches approve psychological skills in sports performance, they do not do any work for the development of these skills.

Superstitious behavior is characterized by ritualized and repetitive actions, often associated with uncontrollable factors such as luck, which can influence performance. In contrast, competition preparation should be seen as a concept distinct from superstitions or ritual behaviors, as it involves consciously planned and effort-driven pre-competition strategies that athletes employ to prepare for competition (Bae et al., 2024).

As a result, it is clear that beyond a good preparation and training phase with respect to performance enhancement, athletes prefer some behaviors that will increase their motivation and self-confidence. In order to achieve performance from them by increasing the performance of the group of athletes to a higher level and to reduce their anxiety levels, they can be helped to gain some behaviors that can be considered auspicious. In addition, it is important to conduct experimental and mixed methods research in order to better understand the value of

superstitious behavior. In this way, it is envisaged that the issue will be examined in depth and more concrete results will be revealed.

One of the limitations of this study is that it focuses only on athlete and coach behaviors within the football branch. In order to make generalizations about sports, interviews with athletes and coaches in different sports branches, and even other stakeholders of sports, such as referees, managers and fans, can reveal the effect of superstitious behavioral tendencies on sports performance.

Conflicts of Interest: There is no financial or personal conflict of interest within the scope of the research.

Authors' Contribution: Research Design-HBE, Data Collection- HBE; AYM, statistical analysis- HBE; ES Preparation of the article, HBE; AYM; ES.

Ethical Approval

Ethics Committee: Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University Health and Sports Sciences Ethics Committee

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