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Comparative analysis of locus of control among combat and team sports athletes

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Abstract
This study investigates the differences in Locus of Control subdomains between college-level athletes engaged in combat sports such as boxing, wrestling, judo and team sports included football, basketball, hockey) A total of 50 male athletes, aged 18 to 25, were randomly selected 25 from each sport category. Using a standardized, sport-adapted Locus of Control Questionnaire, five psychological subdomains were assessed: Personal Control, Coach Control, Team Control, Luck or Chance, and Environmental Control. Descriptive statistics and independent sample t-tests revealed significant differences across all subdomains (p<0.001). Combat sport athletes demonstrated higher scores in Personal Control, indicating a more internal orientation, while team sport athletes scored higher in Coach Control, Team Control, Luck or Chance, and Environmental Control suggesting a stronger external orientation. These findings highlight sport-type as a key factor influencing control beliefs and have implications for psychological training and coaching interventions tailored to specific sport contexts.

Keywords: Locus of control, combat sports, team sports, internal orientation, external orientation, personal control, coach control, sport psychology, athlete behavior, performance beliefs

Introduction
In contemporary sports science, psychological attributes have become increasingly central to understanding and enhancing athletic performance, resilience, and long-term development. Among these, Locus of Control emerges as a key construct for explaining how athletes perceive, interpret, and react to success, failure, and effort. First conceptualized by Julian Rotter (1966) [19], locus of control refers to the extent to which individuals believe that the outcomes of events in their lives are contingent on their own behaviors with internal control) or on external forces such as luck, fate, or other people with external control.

In athletic contexts, Locus of Control significantly influences how individuals respond to setbacks and challenges. Athletes with an internal locus of control tend to accept responsibility for their performance and are more likely to engage in corrective efforts, such as intensifying training following a failure. In contrast, those with an external locus of control are more inclined to attribute failure to uncontrollable factors like officiating errors, environmental conditions, or teammate performance, which may diminish personal motivation and accountability (Lefcourt, 1976; Gould & Weinberg, 2011) [16, 9].

This psychological construct has been widely studied within sports, primarily for its impact on performance, self-motivation, persistence, and coping mechanisms under pressure (Anshel, 1995; Singer, Hausenblas, & Janelle, 2001) [2, 22]. The nature of the sport whether individual or team-based plays a substantial role in shaping an athlete's control orientation. Combat sports, which emphasize individual discipline, accountability, and direct performance outcomes, often nurture a more internal control orientation (Arslan, 2012; Sharma & Bhat, 2020) [3, 20]. Conversely, team sports, which necessitate coordination with others and reliance on coaches' strategies, are more likely to cultivate an external locus of control (Balaguer, Castillo, & Duda, 2008; Kim & Cruz, 2016) [4, 12].

The present study builds on previous findings by exploring five specific subdomains of Locus of Control Personal Control, Coach Control, Team Control, Luck or Chance, and Environmental Control. These dimensions provide a more granular understanding of how athletes from combat and team sports perceive their role in influencing performance

outcomes. According to Weinberg and Gould (2011) [9], internal control is positively correlated with consistency and achievement motivation, while external orientations can hinder performance if they reduce perceived agency.
\Supporting evidence from Jones, Hanton, and Connaughton (2002) [11] and Mahoney and Avener (1977) [17] further suggests that sport-specific environments contribute to the development of control beliefs. For example, combat athletes are often trained under controlled conditions and evaluated individually, reinforcing internal attributions. In contrast, team athletes must operate within dynamic systems where external factors like teammate performance, environmental conditions, and coaching strategies play a larger role in outcomes. This study thus aims to compare combat and team sport athletes across the five subdomains of locus of control, offering valuable insight for sport psychologists and coaches seeking to optimize mental training interventions based on the psychological profiles shaped by the type of sport.

Methodology: This study adopted a quantitative comparative design to investigate differences in Locus of Control subdomains between athletes involved in combat and team sports. Fifty male college-level athletes (aged 18-25) from various colleges in Kerala were randomly selected and equally divided into two groups: one representing combat sports such as boxing, judo, wrestling) and the other representing team sports such as football, basketball, hockey. Standardized tools were used to assess five subdomains of Locus of Control. Data collection involved questionnaire administration in a controlled environment, followed by statistical analysis using independent sample t-tests to determine group differences.

Selection of Subjects: The study involved fifty male college-level athletes, aged between 18 and 25 years, who were randomly selected from various colleges across Kerala, India. The sample was equally divided into two groups to represent different types of sports participation: the first group consisted of 25 athletes engaged in combat sports such as boxing, judo, and wrestling, while the second group included 25 athletes involved in team sports like football, basketball, and hockey. Random sampling ensured the minimization of selection bias and enhanced the generalizability of the findings.

Selection of Variables
To assess the psychological construct of Locus of Control within the context of athletic participation, five essential subdomains were selected as dependent variables. These subdomains are: Personal Control, which reflects an athlete's internal sense of autonomy; Coach Control, which signifies the perceived reliance on a coach's guidance and decisions; Team Control, which represents the belief in the influence of teammates on one's performance; Luck or Chance, which relates to the belief that unpredictable external factors affect outcomes; and Environmental Control, which involves the perception of how external conditions such as weather or facilities impact performance. Together, these dimensions provided a comprehensive framework for evaluating the balance between internal and external control orientations among athletes.

Data Collection Tool
Data were collected using a standardized Locus of Control Questionnaire that was adapted specifically for use with athletes. The instrument was designed to measure perceptions across the five selected subdomains. It consisted of multiple items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). This scaling method allowed for nuanced responses and increased sensitivity to individual differences in perception.

Test Administration
Prior to the administration of the questionnaire, all participants were clearly briefed on the objective of the research and assured that their responses would be kept confidential and used only for academic purposes. The administration of the test was conducted in a controlled classroom setting, ensuring consistency and minimizing distractions. The principal investigator was present throughout the session to clarify any doubts and ensure that participants followed instructions accurately.

Analysis of Results
The collected data were first subjected to descriptive statistical analysis, including the calculation of means and standard deviations for each of the five subdomains across the two groups. To identify statistically significant differences between combat and team sport athletes, independent sample t-tests were performed for each subdomain. These t-tests assessed whether the mean scores for each group differed significantly, thus revealing potential variations in locus of control orientation related to the type of sport played. The findings are presented in tabular form along with t-values, p-values, and interpretations.

Table 1: Comparison of Personal Control between Combat and Team Sports Athletes

Group	Mean (M)	SD	t-value	p-value
Combat Sports	4.40	0.17	19.986	0.0000
Team Sports	3.52	0.13		

Table 1 indicates the combat sports players demonstrated significantly higher personal control than team sports players, indicating a stronger internal belief in their ability to influence outcomes. The difference is statistically significant ($t = 19.986$, $p<0.001$).

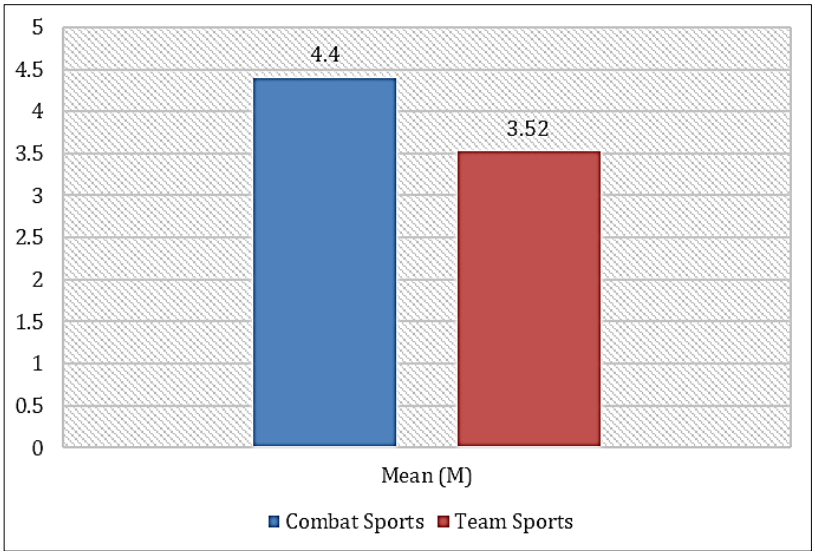

Fig 1: Personal Control between Combat and Team Sports Athletes

Table 2: Comparison of Coach Control between Combat and Team Sports Athletes

Group	Mean (M)	SD	t-value	p-value
Combat Sports	2.35	0.21	-20.800	0.0000
Team Sports	3.37	0.15		

Table 2 indicates Team sports players scored significantly higher on coach control, suggesting a greater dependence on coach decisions and instructions. The result is statistically significant (t = -20.800, p<0.001).

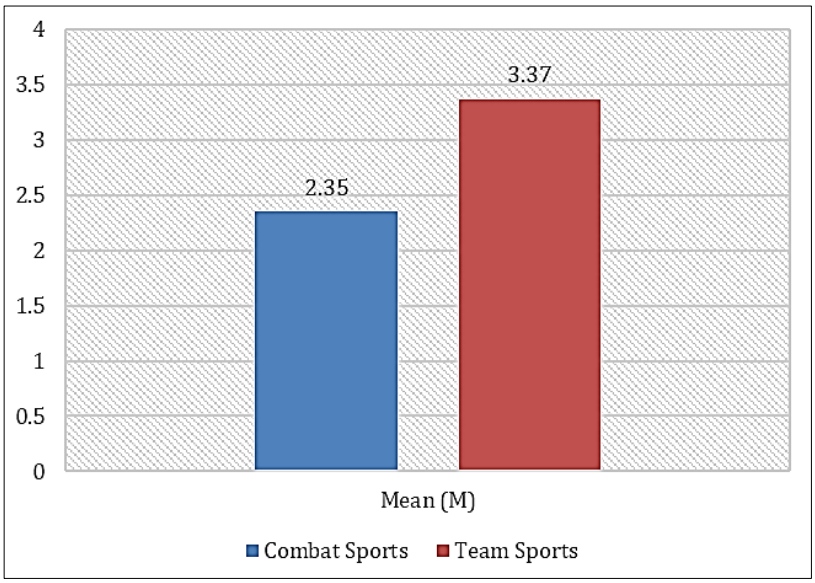

Fig 2: Coach Control between Combat and Team Sports Athletes

Table 3: Comparison of Team Control between Combat and Team Sports Athletes

Group	Mean (M)	SD	t-value	p-value
Combat Sports	2.88	0.18	-26.833	0.0000
Team Sports	4.07	0.14		

Table 3 shows the team players have a significantly higher team control score, indicating a strong belief in collective/team influence on performance. This aligns with the collaborative nature of team sports (t = -26.833, p<0.001).

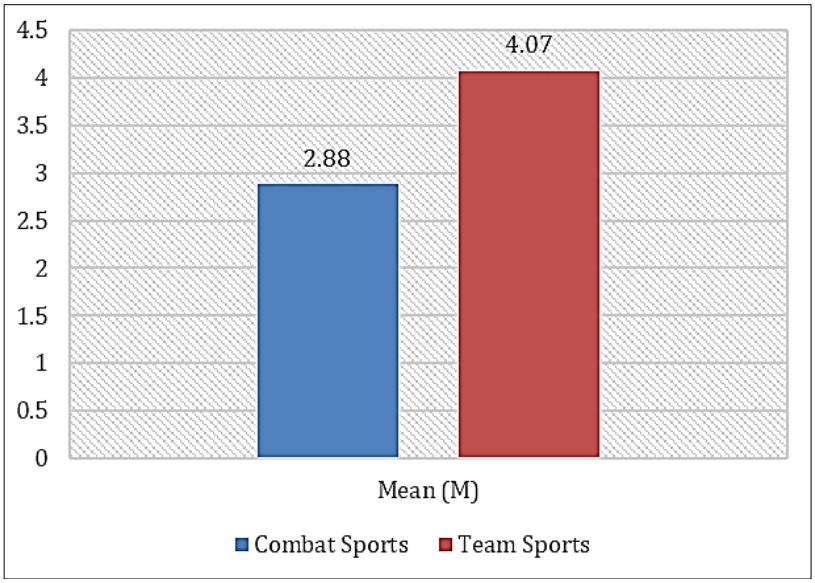

Fig 3: Team Control between Combat and Team Sports Athletes

Table 4: Comparison of Luck/Chance Control between Combat and Team Sports Athletes

Group	Mean (M)	SD	t-value	p-value
Combat Sports	2.53	0.23	-12.961	0.0000
Team Sports	3.24	0.14		

Table 4 indicates the team athletes showed a stronger belief in luck/chance affecting outcomes than combat players. This external orientation may stem from the variability and unpredictability in team dynamics (t = -12.961, p<0.001).

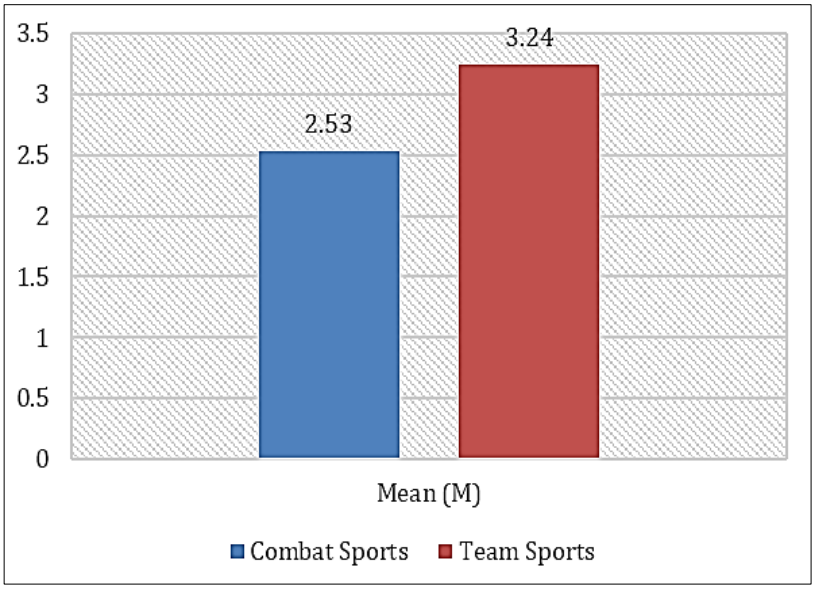

Fig 4: Luck or chance Control between Combat and Team Sports Athletes

Table 5: Comparison of Environmental Control between Combat and Team Sports Athletes

Group	Mean (M)	SD	t-value	p-value
Combat Sports	2.26	0.17	-24.021	0.0000
Team Sports	3.22	0.12		

Table 5 shows the environmental control is significantly higher among team players, suggesting they are more likely to perceive external conditions (weather, facilities, etc.) as impacting performance (t = -24.021, p<0.001)

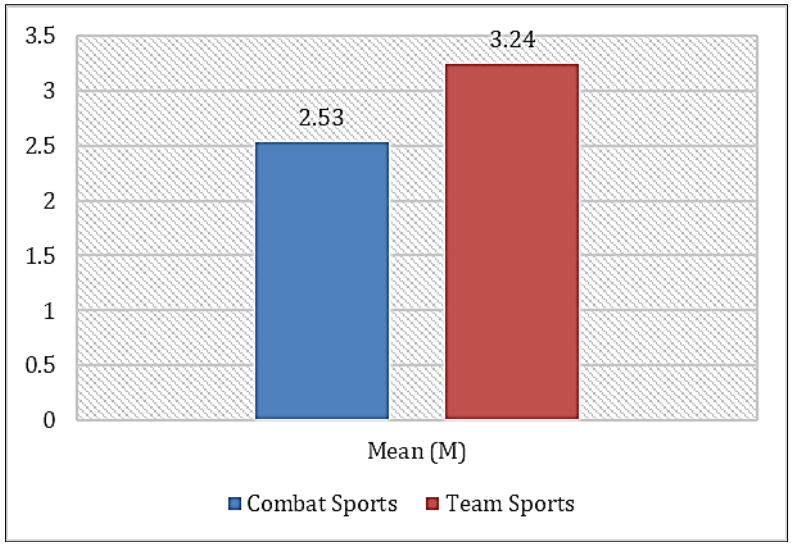

Fig 5: Environmental Control between Combat and Team Sports Athletes

Discussion on Findings

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into how the nature of sport whether combat or team shapes athletes' Locus of Control orientations across five psychological dimensions: Personal Control, Coach Control, Team Control, Luck or Chance, and Environmental Control. The consistent and statistically significant differences across these subdomains highlight the underlying psychological frameworks shaped by the demands and structures of different sports.

Athletes involved in combat sports demonstrated significantly higher levels of Personal Control, reflecting a stronger internal Locus of Control. These athletes are more likely to believe that their performance outcomes are directly influenced by their own decisions, actions, and efforts. This aligns with the individualistic structure of combat sports, which emphasize personal responsibility, autonomy, and strategic self-regulation. Such findings are consistent with Rotter's theory of internal control development in environments that prioritize individual accountability (Rotter, 1966) [19].

In contrast, team sport athletes showed significantly higher scores in Coach Control, indicating a stronger reliance on external figures such as coaches for performance guidance. Within team settings, athletes frequently depend on coaches for strategic direction, substitutions, and tactical decisions, naturally fostering an external orientation. This finding is supported by Lefcourt (1976) [16], who argued that situational and social structures particularly those involving authoritative figures can influence one's control orientation.

The largest difference between groups was observed in the Team Control subdomain. Team sport participants strongly believed that their performance is influenced by teammates' actions and collaboration. This reinforces the idea that team sports cultivate a sense of interdependence, where performance outcomes are shared experiences. Vealey (2005) [24] emphasized that such perceptions are foundational to team cohesion, communication, and mutual trust key components for successful group dynamics in sports.

Team athletes scored significantly higher in the Luck or Chance subdomain, revealing a greater tendency to attribute outcomes to unpredictable or uncontrollable events. This could be attributed to the dynamic and often volatile nature of team sports, where performance can be affected by various external actors and circumstances. While such beliefs can serve as coping strategies in high-pressure scenarios, they may also reduce an athlete's sense of personal efficacy. These findings align with Kim and Cruz (2016) [12], who reported that elite team sport athletes often demonstrate heightened beliefs in external factors like luck or referee decisions influencing their performance.

Environmental Control, where team athletes reported a stronger perception that environmental elements such as weather, surface conditions, facilities, or audience impact their performance. In contrast, combat athletes typically train and compete in highly standardized environments, reducing their perceived influence of external physical conditions. This distinction supports earlier findings by Mahoney and Avener (1977) [17], who noted that the controlled nature of individual sport settings contributes to lower external control beliefs among participants.

Collectively, these results reinforce the perspective that sport type plays a significant role in shaping psychological characteristics, particularly in how athletes assign responsibility for success or failure. Combat sports promote internality, independence, and personal agency, while team sports tend to foster external attribution patterns shaped by shared responsibilities and situational variability. The observed differences, validated by highly significant t-values and p-values are both statistically and practically relevant for applied sport psychology.

These findings carry substantial implications for sport-specific coaching strategies and psychological training. For instance, developing a greater sense of personal control in team sport athletes could improve resilience and performance consistency. Conversely, encouraging combat sport athletes to acknowledge and leverage social and environmental support may foster adaptability and mental flexibility. Future research could expand on these results by examining variations across gender, skill levels, and cultural backgrounds, or by evaluating the impact of psychological interventions aimed at modifying control orientations to optimize performance.

Conclusions

This study aimed to explore and compare the subdomains of Locus of Control among college-level combat and team

sports athletes. The findings revealed statistically significant differences across all five subdomains Personal Control, Coach Control, Team Control, Luck/Chance, and Environmental Control indicating that the type of sport significantly influences how athletes perceive control over their performance and outcomes.

Combat sport athletes demonstrated a stronger internal locus of control, as evidenced by higher scores in Personal Control and lower scores in external control subdomains. This suggests they are more self-reliant and attribute success or failure primarily to their own actions. In contrast, team sport athletes showed higher scores in Coach Control, Team Control, Luck/Chance, and Environmental Control, reflecting a more external orientation. These athletes tend to recognize and depend more on external agents, such as teammates, coaches, and situational factors which is consistent with the collaborative and dynamic nature of team sports.

The results emphasize the psychological distinction between individual and team sports, and underline the need for sport-specific psychological training and interventions. Coaches, trainers, and sport psychologists can use these insights to tailor their strategies to suit the mental orientation of athletes based on their sport type. Strengthening internal control in team athletes and enhancing situational adaptability in combat athletes may lead to improved self-regulation and overall performance.

In conclusion, locus of control is not only a personal trait but also contextually influenced by the structure and demands of the sport, highlighting the importance of psychological profiling in athletic development. Future studies could expand this line of inquiry by including different age groups, female athletes, or by examining longitudinal changes across competitive levels.

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