

# AN EXPLORATION OF THE SPORT-RELATED DRINKING MOTIVES OF AUSTRALASIAN PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES USING THE ATHLETE DRINKING SCALE

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## Keywords

Motives, Drinking, Professional Athletes

## Background

As two of the most popular Australasian spectator sports, professional rugby union and rugby league generate revenue sufficient to support full-time athletes. With such a profile comes an increased level of attention on the off-field behaviour of those athletes. In recent years, focus has been on players' alcohol consumption, which at times has been perceived as excessive. For example, in March 2013, a high circulation newspaper, the *New Zealand Herald*, published a series of articles on the incidence of alcohol consumption among professional rugby union players, with a particular focus on the All Blacks – the national rugby union team of New Zealand. Recent attention like this underscores the importance of this issue to sport managers who must manage selection decisions, off-field discipline, support and publicity associated with athlete drinking behaviours. The factors that affect the alcohol consumption of professional athletes are therefore of considerable interest to managers, coaches, fans, the media and scholars alike. Although the intersection of sport and alcohol has received attention from scholars in the past (e.g., the Sport Alcohol Nexus; Palmer, 2011), the sport-related drinking motives of professional athletes have yet to be the focus of inquiry. In the current project, this emerging issue is explored through the administration of a questionnaire to a sample of National Rugby League (NRL) and Super Rugby players.

## Aim

The aim of the project is to measure the sport-related drinking motives (SRDM) of Australasian professional football players. A secondary aim of the project is to compare SRDM across a variety of independent variables. Both aims have been conceived to generate data that will inform sport managerial practice.

## Research design

The 19 item Athlete Drinking Scale (ADS) utilizes a 6 pt, strongly agree – strongly disagree scale and was developed to measure an athlete's SRDM (Martens, Watson, Royland & Beck, 2005). The instrument is structured on the belief that there are three dimensions to the SRDM construct: Positive Reinforcement (PR), Team/Group (T/G) and Sport Related Coping (SRC). To date the instrument has only been utilised amongst collegiate athletes in the United States. The instrument must be rigorously tested in alternate settings to explore the dimensionality of the construct, and to reliably measure SRDM in future. This project represents the first usage of the ADS in both a professional sport setting as well as Australasia. A comparison of SRDM across rugby codes (i.e., union and league) is also possible within this research design.

In addition to items representing the three SRDM dimensions, the questionnaire used in this project included items related to education history, current educational activity, current employment activity, year of birth and debut year in the respective competitions. Alongside scale development, exploring links between these independent variables and SRDM was a priority. Rare access to NRL and Super Rugby athletes was granted through the respective player associations and a sample ( $n = 193$ ) was generated during the 2012 season. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to examine the structure, reliability and validity of the ADS in this context, whilst a selection of additional statistical techniques was used to explore the other research questions.

## Results & discussion

The three hypothesized factors that underlie SRDM held up in a streamlined, well-fitting 9 item model ( $\chi^2 = 29.95$   $df = 24$ ,  $p = 0.19$ ). Other indices including RMSEA (.05), SRMR (.05), CFI (.98) and TLI (.97) were within acceptable ranges. Construct reliability scores ranged from .70 to .83 for the three factors. These results lend support to both the dimensionality of the construct as well as the authenticity of using the ADS outside of the collegiate athlete context.

Overall, players rated the PR motives higher than T/G and SRC which is perhaps surprising considering the widespread belief that athletes drink excessively to cope with losses or as a mechanism to build camaraderie. Compared to rugby league players, rugby union players reported higher levels of both positive reinforcement and team/group motives. This result could be explored further in sport-specific research.

From a scholarly perspective, this project has taken place at the intersection of the sport management and sport psychology disciplines. While a psychological construct (i.e., motivation) is the focal point, the managerial implications are significant. For example, facilitating opportunities for athletes to experience positive reinforcement and team building might be one way in which sport managers can limit athlete drinking behaviour and thereby reduce negative consequences.

## References

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