



How Parental Support Influences University Football Players' Intention to Continue Sport: The Mediating Role of Intrinsic Motivation

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Abstract

This study examined the mediating role of intrinsic motivation in the relationship between perceived parental support and intention to continue sport among Korean university football players. Using a sample of male university football players registered with the Korea Football Association, we employed structural equation modeling to test a mediation model based on self-determination theory. Participants completed measures assessing parental support, intrinsic motivation, and intention to continue sport on 7-point Likert scales. The results revealed that parental support had no significant direct effect on sport continuation intention and a significant positive effect on intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation, in turn, strongly predicted sport continuation intention. The mediation analysis demonstrated that intrinsic motivation fully mediated the relationship between parental support and sport continuation intention, with parental support influencing athletes' commitment exclusively through the enhancement of intrinsic motivation. The model demonstrated strong predictive validity and explained a substantial portion of the variance in sport continuation intention. These findings suggest that parental support influences athletes' commitment to sport entirely through enhancing their intrinsic motivation rather than through any direct influence. The study contributes to sport psychology literature by providing empirical evidence for the complex psychological mechanisms underlying athletic commitment in university settings and offers practical implications for developing interventions that promote sustained sport engagement among collegiate athletes.

Key words: parental support, intrinsic motivation, intention to continue sport, self-determination theory, university athletes

Introduction

University student-athletes are consistently exposed to multiple stressors as they strive to balance intensive training with academic responsibilities. When compounded by restrictions on autonomy, this cumulative

stress may trigger internal conflict regarding their continued involvement in sport (O'Neil et al., 2021). Positioned at a developmental crossroads between adolescence and adulthood, their decisions about sustaining athletic engagement are not merely preferential but are intricately tied to future career trajectories, identity formation, and overall life satisfaction. Brown et al. (2015) highlight that this transitional phase is marked by the dual demands of academics and athletics, and that the university

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environment plays a pivotal role in supporting the maintenance of athletic careers. Similarly, Korean research has demonstrated that university athletes encounter complex and multifaceted stressors stemming from training, competition, academic workload, and career-related anxiety, all of which can undermine psychological well-being and diminish intentions to continue sport involvement (Park & Kim, 2007). Given this context, identifying the determinants of sport continuation intention among university athletes is both timely and necessary. Korean university athletes may experience unique pressures as they navigate between fulfilling high parental expectations and pursuing athletic excellence, making the examination of parent-athlete relationships particularly relevant in this cultural context.

Recent research has further illuminated this issue. According to Zhang et al. (2024), collegiate athletes experience anxiety throughout their sport engagement, which can significantly diminish their subjective well-being. When core psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness are not adequately met, this anxiety tends to intensify, thereby weakening their motivation to continue participating in sport. In this context, parental support is increasingly recognized as a key external factor and vital social resource that fosters athletes' motivation and promotes sustained engagement. This type of support, which includes emotional, material, and informational components, has a lasting influence from adolescence through the university years (Knight et al., 2016). Emotional support from parents enhances career decision-making self-efficacy, enabling athletes to make more confident and informed choices. In addition, parental career modeling contributes to greater independence and preparedness for future career paths (Li, Pan, & Nie, 2023). Harwood & Knight (2015) also found that parental support improves athletes' self-management behaviors, such as mental resilience, training discipline, and lifestyle regulation. These behaviors strengthen athletic performance and self-confidence, ultimately supporting long-term engagement. Similarly, Balaguer et al. (2018) reported that autonomy support from coaches significantly enhances

athletes' life satisfaction and their intention to remain involved in sport. Collectively, these findings underscore the multifaceted benefits of parental support in promoting athletes' psychological well-being, performance enhancement, and sustained sport engagement.

On the other hand, the relationship between parental support and sport continuation intention may not be direct or straightforward. While parental support provides essential resources and encouragement, research in sport psychology suggests that parental support often influences athletic outcomes through complex psychological pathways rather than simple direct effects (Knight et al., 2016; Teques et al., 2018). The mechanisms by which parental support translates into sustained sport engagement likely involve intermediate psychological processes that facilitate or hinder athletes' long-term commitment (Harwood & Knight, 2015). Therefore, examining potential psychological mediators is crucial for understanding how parental support ultimately influences athletes' intention to continue sport. Such an approach would provide a more nuanced understanding of the parent-athlete relationship and offer insights into the psychological processes underlying sport commitment.

One such mediator that has received considerable empirical support is intrinsic motivation. According to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), intrinsic motivation is enhanced when basic psychological needs are satisfied, factors closely tied to commitment in goal-directed behaviors. Within this framework, parental behaviors such as emotional support, verbal encouragement, instrumental assistance, and career modeling have been found to positively influence psychological stability and career maturity among young athletes (Knight et al., 2016). Gao et al. (2024) provided empirical evidence that autonomy supportive parenting facilitates the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, which in turn boosts intrinsic motivation and ultimately promotes long-term sport involvement. The family support system, therefore, serves as a psychosocial resource that goes beyond emotional consolation or financial assistance to meaningfully impact athletes' motivational structures. Choi and Choi (2019) found that among rhythmic

gymnasts, autonomy support from parents and coaches enhanced intrinsic motivation via fulfillment of basic needs, which subsequently influenced involvement behavior. Similarly, Kim and Kim (2018) observed that among junior golfers, parental social support significantly boosted intrinsic motivation, contributing to reduced stress and improved psychological stability. Ullrich-French and Smith (2009) also reported that among youth sport participants, parental support fulfilled relatedness needs by strengthening friendships and team belonging, thereby increasing intrinsic motivation. These findings consistently demonstrate that supportive parental behaviors serve as key antecedents to athletes' intrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation, in turn, has been consistently identified as a critical psychological predictor of sport commitment and continuation intention. Numerous studies have demonstrated that athletes with higher levels of intrinsic motivation are more likely to sustain long-term engagement in sport. Atkins et al. (2015) emphasized that enjoyment, personal preference, and self-efficacy significantly influence athletes' intention to continue participating in sport, with intrinsically motivated athletes showing greater commitment to sustained involvement. Cho (2017) pointed out that when university athletes are controlled by external rewards such as scholarships, their autonomy diminishes and amotivation increases. In contrast, intrinsic motivation derived from genuine interest, enjoyment, and a sense of achievement provides a more stable psychological basis for continued involvement. Athletes driven by intrinsic motivation demonstrate greater resilience in facing challenges, maintain higher levels of satisfaction, and show stronger intentions to continue their sport engagement over time (Ullrich-French & Smith, 2009). This relationship becomes particularly crucial during university years when athletes face mounting academic pressures and career uncertainties. Intrinsic motivation, stemming from genuine interest and enjoyment rather than external pressures, is widely regarded as the most sustainable and self-determined form of motivation for continued engagement (Hayre, 2024).

Previous research has established the significant role

of parental support in fostering athletes' motivation and well-being. While the relationship between parental support and sport engagement is well-established, the specific psychological mechanisms underlying this relationship require further investigation. Although studies have demonstrated positive relationships between parental support and various psychological outcomes, most research has focused on youth athletes or specific populations, with limited attention to university-level athletes who face unique developmental challenges. Moreover, few studies have systematically examined the mediating pathways that explain how parental support influences sport continuation intentions, particularly within the demanding context of collegiate athletics. This gap is especially pronounced for university football players, who as team sport athletes face intensive training demands while balancing academic responsibilities during a critical developmental period.

To address these gaps, the present study empirically examines a mediating model in which intrinsic motivation explains the relationship between perceived parental support and sport continuation intention among Korean university football players. Drawing on self-determination theory, we hypothesize that parental support enhances athletes' intrinsic motivation, which in turn strengthens their intention to continue sport. By exploring this psychological pathway, the study aims to contribute to theoretical advancement in sport psychology and provide evidence-based insights for designing interventions that promote sustained athletic engagement in university settings. Based on the reviewed literature, we propose the following hypotheses:

- H1: Parental support will positively predict intrinsic motivation among university football players.
- H2: Intrinsic motivation will positively predict intention to continue sport among university football players.
- H3: Intrinsic motivation will mediate the relationship between parental support and intention to continue sport among university football players.

Methods

Participants

The participants in this study were male university football players in South Korea, officially registered with the Korea Football Association. A total of 422 participants were recruited using a non-probability sampling method, specifically convenience sampling. Data collection was conducted in February 2025 through both online and offline surveys. All procedures were conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. No personally identifiable information was collected, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement, with participants informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. After removing incomplete and unreliable responses, a final sample of 383 participants was retained for analysis. The participants' average age was 20.99 years ($SD = .999$). Regarding academic year, 167 participants (43.6%) were first-year students, 111 (29.0%) were second-year, 76 (19.8%) were third-year, and 29 (7.6%) were fourth-year students.

Measures

The following scales were used to measure parental support, intrinsic motivation, and intention to continue sports among university football players:

Parental support was assessed through four items derived from the Student Social Support Scale (SSSS; Noltén, 1994). An example item is "My parents provide me with material support (e.g., equipment, training fees) necessary for sports". Another item, "My parents cheer for me during competitions and training", captures the emotional dimension of parental support. The internal consistency for this scale was established with a Cronbach's α of .799.

Intrinsic motivation was measured using four items adapted from the Sport Motivation Scale (SMS; Pelletier et al., 1995). For instance, "When I exercise, I become completely absorbed and lose track of time" highlights the immersion aspect of intrinsic motivation, while "I exercise because I feel like I am growing"

captures the personal development motivation. The internal consistency for this scale was high, with a Cronbach's α of .887.

Intention to continue sport was assessed through four items adapted from the Sport Commitment Model (Scanlan et al., 1993). Items such as "I intend to continue this sport for a long time" and "I will continue to train despite the difficulties that come with sports" measure athletes' determination to persist in football. The reliability of this measure was very good, with a Cronbach's α of .874.

All items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Statistics

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 23.0 and AMOS 22.0. First, descriptive statistics were calculated to examine the characteristics of the data, including means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis values for all measured variables. Bivariate correlations were then computed to assess the relationships among parental support, intrinsic motivation, and intention to continue sport.

To test the mediation hypothesis, a two-step approach was employed. The measurement model was first evaluated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in AMOS 22.0 to verify the factor structure and establish the validity of the measurement instruments. The assessment of model fit was based on several indices: the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR).

Following confirmation of an adequate measurement model, the structural mediation model was tested to examine the direct and indirect effects of parental support on intention to continue sport through intrinsic motivation. Maximum likelihood (ML) estimation was employed, and the significance of the indirect effect was assessed using bootstrapping procedures with 5,000 resamples to generate bias-corrected confidence intervals (MacKinnon et al., 2004; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). This approach is preferred over traditional mediation

analysis methods as it does not assume a normal sampling distribution of the indirect effect (Hayes, 2009). The statistical significance level was set at $\alpha = .05$ for all analyses.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

The descriptive statistics and correlation results are presented in Table 1. The results revealed that all study variables had mean scores above the scale midpoint (4.0). Parental support showed the highest mean score ($M = 6.18$, $SD = 0.91$), followed by intrinsic motivation ($M = 5.52$, $SD = 1.11$) and intention to continue sport ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.25$). These results indicate that university football players generally perceived high levels of parental support and reported high levels of intrinsic motivation and intention to continue their sport involvement.

Normality assumptions were assessed through skewness and kurtosis values. All variables met the criteria for normal distribution, with absolute skewness values below 3.0 and absolute kurtosis values below 10.0 (Kline, 2023). Specifically, parental support showed skewness of -1.22 and kurtosis of 0.81, intrinsic motivation had skewness of -0.73 and kurtosis of 0.46, and intention to continue sport displayed skewness of -0.78 and kurtosis of 0.05.

Correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships among all study variables. Parental support was moderately correlated with intrinsic motivation ($r = .402$, $p < .01$) and intention to continue sport ($r = .368$, $p < .01$). A strong positive correlation was found between intrinsic motivation and intention

to continue sport ($r = .713$, $p < .01$), suggesting that athletes with higher intrinsic motivation were more likely to express stronger intentions to continue their sport engagement.

Measurement Model Analysis

The measurement model demonstrated acceptable fit to the data. The chi-square test was significant ($\chi^2 = 202.398$, $df = 51$, $p < .001$), but this is common in large samples and should not be solely relied upon for model evaluation (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). The normed chi-square ratio ($CMIN/DF = 3.969$) was close to the preferred threshold of 3.0, indicating reasonable model fit.

The Comparative Fit Index ($CFI = .944$) and Tucker-Lewis Index ($TLI = .928$) both exceeded the recommended cutoff of .90, indicating good incremental fit. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual ($SRMR = .049$) was well below the recommended cutoff of .08, indicating excellent fit. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation ($RMSEA = .088$) was slightly above the conventional cutoff of .08 but remained within the acceptable range of .10 (Browne & Cudeck, 1992; MacCallum et al., 1996). According to MacCallum et al. (1996), $RMSEA$ values between .08 and .10 indicate mediocre fit, while values above .10 suggest poor fit. The 90% confidence interval for $RMSEA$ (.076 - .101) includes values below .10, further supporting the acceptability of the model fit.

Convergent validity was established as all construct reliability (CR) values exceeded .70 (minimum CR = .820) and all average variance extracted (AVE) values surpassed .50 (minimum AVE = .535), meeting the criteria suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). All standardized factor loadings were above .60 and

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Analysis

Variables	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3
1. Parental Support	6.18	.91	-1.22	.81	1		
2. Intrinsic Motivation	5.52	1.11	-.73	.46	.402**	1	
3. Intention to Continue Sport	5.5	1.25	-.78	.05	.368**	.713**	1

* Significant differences for $p \leq .05$, **Significant differences for $p \leq .01$

Table 2. Reliability and Validity of Measurement Model

Variables	CR	AVE	1	2	3
1. Parental Support	.82	.535	.732		
2. Intrinsic Motivation	.875	.637	.402	.798	
3. Intention to Continue Sport	.899	.692	.368	.713	.832

statistically significant ($p < .001$), providing additional evidence of convergent validity. Discriminant validity was confirmed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), discriminant validity is established when each construct's AVE exceeds the squared correlations between that construct and other latent constructs. The analysis revealed that all constructs met this criterion, with each construct's AVE being greater than the squared correlations with other constructs, thus confirming discriminant validity. Thus, convergent and discriminant validity were both confirmed, as shown in Table 2.

Structural Model Analysis

The structural model exhibited identical fit indices to the measurement model, indicating adequate model

fit for hypothesis testing. The analysis focused on examining the hypothesized mediation relationships among parental support, intrinsic motivation, and intention to continue sport.

The structural equation model analysis revealed significant relationships among all study variables. The conceptual model and standardized path coefficients are presented in Figure 1, with detailed effect decomposition provided in Table 3. As hypothesized, parental support had a significant positive effect on intrinsic motivation ($B = .642, p < .001$). Intrinsic motivation, in turn, demonstrated a strong positive effect on intention to continue ($B = .869, p < .001$). The direct effect of parental support on intention to continue was marginally significant ($B = .147, p = .050$).

The mediation analysis provided strong support for the hypothesized mediation model (Table 3). The

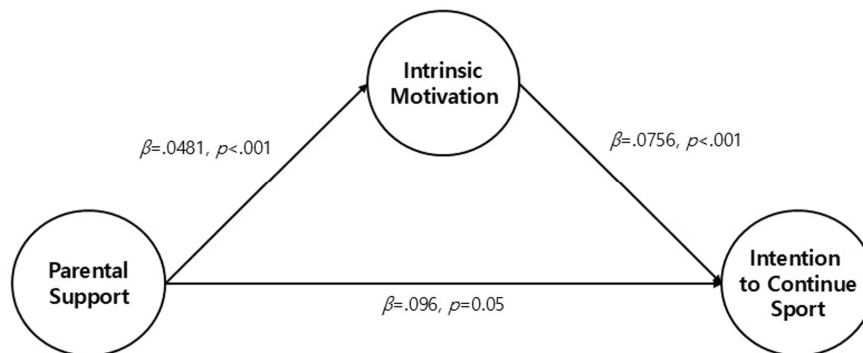


Figure 1. Structural mediation model showing the relationship between parental support and intention to continue sport mediated by intrinsic motivation.

Table 3. Effects of Parental Support on Intention to Continue Sport via Intrinsic Motivation

Path	Estimate (B)	SE	95% CI	<i>p</i>
Direct effect	.558	.077	[.423, .734]	<.001
Indirect effect	.147	.075	[-.014, .299]	.050
Total effect	.705	.080	[.546, .861]	<.001

indirect effect of parental support on intention to continue through intrinsic motivation was significant ($B = .558, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.423, .734]$), confirming that intrinsic motivation serves as a significant mediator in this relationship. The direct effect showed borderline significance based on the p -value ($B = .147, p = .050$) but was not statistically significant given that the 95% confidence interval included zero ($95\% \text{ CI } [-.014, .299]$). The total effect was significant ($B = .705, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.546, .861]$). Given that the indirect effect was significant while the direct effect was not statistically significant, the results indicate full mediation. The substantial indirect effect compared to the non-significant direct effect highlights that parental support influences athletes' intention to continue sport primarily through the mediating mechanism of intrinsic motivation rather than through direct pathways.

The structural model demonstrated substantial explanatory power, explaining 23.1% of the variance in intrinsic motivation and 65.0% of the variance in intention to continue sport. The high R^2 value for intention to continue indicates that parental support and intrinsic motivation together account for a substantial portion of the variance in athletes' intention to continue their sport.

Discussion

This study investigated how perceived parental support influences university football players' intention to continue sport, with a particular emphasis on the mediating role of intrinsic motivation. The findings showed that parental support had no significant direct effect on intention to continue sport but had a significant positive effect on intrinsic motivation. Moreover, intrinsic motivation served as a significant full mediator in the relationship between parental support and sport continuation intention, with the indirect effect being larger than the direct effect. The comprehensive model explained 65% of the variance in intention to continue sport, indicating strong predictive validity.

The non-significant direct effect of parental support on student-athletes' sport continuation intention underscores the complex and psychologically mediated

nature of parental influence in shaping long-term engagement in sport. This finding suggests that parental support does not directly influence athletes' commitment decisions but rather operates through internal psychological mechanisms. This result supports previous research suggesting that emotional support and parental career modeling foster athletes' confidence, independence, and readiness for future athletic and career pursuits through enhanced psychological processes rather than direct behavioral influence (Knight et al., 2016; Li et al., 2023). Building on this foundation, Harwood and Knight (2015) emphasized that parental support strengthens self-management behaviors, which enhance performance and increase the likelihood of sustained sport involvement through improved psychological well-being. These results reaffirm the importance of a supportive family environment in facilitating internal motivational processes rather than directly influencing sport decisions. The absence of a significant direct effect may reflect the developmental characteristics of university athletes, who are transitioning toward greater independence and are less susceptible to direct parental influence on their sport decisions. Unlike younger athletes who may be more directly influenced by parental involvement, university athletes appear to benefit from parental support exclusively when it enhances their internal psychological processes. This finding suggests that during the university years, the relationship between parental support and athletic commitment operates entirely through psychological mediation, highlighting the critical importance of understanding the underlying mechanisms through which family support operates in collegiate sport settings.

More prominently, the finding that parental support significantly enhances intrinsic motivation aligns strongly with the assumptions of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This substantial effect suggests that parental behaviors satisfying athletes' basic psychological needs including autonomy, competence, and relatedness foster greater enjoyment and commitment to sport. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that emotional and

instrumental support from parents can strengthen intrinsic motivation through enhanced psychological well-being (Gao et al., 2024). Studies with rhythmic gymnasts and junior golfers have similarly demonstrated that parental support plays a critical role in enhancing athletes' internal drive and personal satisfaction (Choi & Choi, 2019; Kim & Kim, 2018). The substantial effect observed in this study may be particularly explained by the developmental characteristics of university athletes. During this transitional period, athletes are developing independence while still relying on family support (Brown et al., 2015). Parental support may fulfill athletes' relatedness needs and provide a secure base that allows them to explore and develop genuine interest in their sport, ultimately fostering intrinsic motivation that is self-determined rather than externally driven (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Subsequently, intrinsic motivation emerged as a strong predictor of sport continuation intention, reinforcing the idea that athletes who participate in sport due to enjoyment, self-efficacy, and personal value are more likely to maintain long-term engagement (Atkins et al., 2015; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2009). This finding provides empirical support for Cho's (2017) assertion that reliance on external rewards, such as scholarships, may undermine autonomy and lead to amotivation. In contrast, athletes driven by intrinsic motivation appear more resilient and psychologically stable when facing challenges inherent in university sport engagement. The exceptionally strong predictive power observed in this study may reflect the demanding nature of university athletics. When athletes face intense training schedules and academic pressures, internal sources of motivation become crucial for sustaining commitment (O'Neil et al., 2021). Athletes who derive genuine enjoyment and personal satisfaction from their sport are more likely to persevere through challenges, as their motivation is self-sustaining rather than dependent on external validation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The full mediation effect represents perhaps the most significant finding of this study, highlighting the exclusive role of intrinsic motivation in linking parental support to sport continuation. The absence of a

significant direct effect while maintaining a strong indirect effect indicates that parental support contributes to athletes' commitment entirely through enhanced intrinsic motivation rather than through any direct influence. This complete dependence on the indirect pathway suggests that parental support operates exclusively through psychological mechanisms and has no direct influence on sport decisions. The finding indicates that university athletes, being developmentally autonomous, are not directly influenced by parental expectations but benefit significantly when parental support enhances their internal motivational processes (Brown et al., 2015; Knight et al., 2016). This mediating mechanism echoes the findings of Gao et al. (2024), who demonstrated a structural pathway from autonomy-supportive parenting to basic need satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and continued sport behavior. Similarly, Choi and Choi (2019) identified the mediating role of intrinsic motivation in the effect of parental support on participation among rhythmic gymnasts, though they observed significant indirect effects without direct effects.

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends the application of Self-Determination Theory by empirically verifying the complex relationships among parental support, intrinsic motivation, and sport continuation intention within the specific context of university football. The findings underscore that parental support exerts influence exclusively through the mediating role of intrinsic motivation, with no independent direct pathway. This indirect pathway contributes to a deeper understanding of how motivational processes function in athletic retention and offers a conceptual framework for future research in youth and collegiate sport psychology.

The practical implications of these findings are equally compelling. The results offer clear guidance for developing intervention strategies aimed at preventing dropout among university athletes. Educational programs should be designed for parents to promote autonomy-supportive behaviors and emotional encouragement while discouraging excessive performance-oriented pressure. Given that intrinsic motivation emerged as the pathway through which

parental support influences sport continuation, emphasizing intrinsic enjoyment and personal growth over outcomes may foster more sustainable motivation. At the institutional level, coaching staff and athletic departments should create environments that nurture intrinsic motivation through athlete-led decision-making, personalized feedback, and opportunities for competence-building and meaningful social connections. Furthermore, because sport continuation intention is closely tied to identity development and holistic growth, universities should integrate psychological support services to help athletes manage stress, explore career paths, and maintain mental well-being throughout their athletic journey.

These recommendations are particularly relevant within the Korean cultural context, where parental involvement in children's education and activities is traditionally high and intensive. Korean parents often demonstrate strong commitment to their children's success, which can be both beneficial and potentially overwhelming for young athletes. The findings of this study suggest that in Korean culture, the quality of parental support—rather than its quantity or intensity—is important for sustaining athletic engagement. Specifically, Korean parents may benefit from understanding that their natural tendency toward high involvement can be most effective when channeled into autonomy-supportive behaviors that foster intrinsic motivation rather than external pressure for achievement. This cultural insight implies that intervention programs for Korean families should focus on redirecting existing parental dedication toward supporting athletes' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby maximizing the positive impact of Korea's culturally characteristic high parental involvement while minimizing potential negative consequences.

In conclusion, the current study contributes to the growing body of literature that emphasizes the significance of intrinsic motivation in athlete retention. The strong explanatory power of the model and the robust mediating pathway through intrinsic motivation provide evidence-based support for designing interventions that incorporate parental education and

psychological support to enhance long-term athletic engagement in the university context. These findings suggest that strengthening intrinsic motivation should be a priority in strategies aimed at promoting sustained sport engagement among university athletes.

Conclusion

This study successfully established intrinsic motivation as a key psychological mechanism linking parental support to sport continuation intention among Korean university football players. The research makes several important contributions to the field of sport psychology and athlete development.

First, it provides empirical validation of self-determination theory within the context of university athletics, demonstrating that the relationship between parental support and athletic commitment is more complex than previously understood. Rather than operating through direct influence, parental support functions by fostering athletes' intrinsic motivation.

Second, the findings reveal that intrinsic motivation serves as the significant pathway through which family support systems impact long-term athletic engagement. This insight shifts focus from external motivational factors to internal psychological processes, emphasizing the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in sustaining sport involvement.

Third, the study addresses a gap in research on university-level athletics by examining the unique developmental context of collegiate football players. The results highlight that during this critical transitional period, athletes' decisions about sport continuation are fundamentally tied to their intrinsic motivation rather than external pressures or rewards.

These findings have important implications for understanding athlete retention and developing evidence-based interventions to support sustained sport engagement in university settings. The research ultimately demonstrates that fostering intrinsic motivation should be a central focus in efforts to promote long-term athletic engagement among university athletes.

Limitations and Future Directions

First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw definitive causal inferences between parental support, intrinsic motivation, and sport continuation intention. Future studies employing longitudinal designs are recommended to clarify the temporal ordering and causal mechanisms among these variables.

Second, the sample was limited to football players from a single university, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Future research should include participants across various sports disciplines (e.g., individual sports, other team sports), different university settings, and diverse demographic groups including both genders, to enhance the external validity of the model.

Third, this study conceptualized parental support as a unidimensional construct. Future investigations should consider disaggregating parental support into autonomy-supportive versus controlling forms to explore their differential effects on intrinsic motivation and sport continuation. Given that parental support showed no significant direct effect in this study, exploring whether different types of parental support might have varying direct or indirect effects will be critical.

Fourth, this study focused on intrinsic motivation as the sole mediating variable. Future research could explore other potential psychological mediators, such as athletes' perceived competence or sense of autonomy, to gain a more complete understanding of how parental support influences sport continuation intention.

Finally, the exclusive reliance on quantitative survey methods may limit contextual depth. Incorporating qualitative approaches such as in-depth interviews with athletes and their parents would offer richer insights into the lived experiences, interpretations, and dynamics underlying parental support, motivation, and athletic commitment. Such mixed-method designs can strengthen ecological validity and enrich theory development.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: S. K.

Data curation: I. K.

Formal analysis: I. K.

Investigation: S. K.

Project administration: S. K.

Writing-original draft preparation: S. K., I. K.

Writing-review and editing: I. K.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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