

From Adversity to Achievement: Challenges, Coping Strategies, and Performance Outcomes of University Faculty and Staff in Sports Activities

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ABSTRACT

Faculty and staff participation in university sports may contribute to well-being, motivation, and sustained workplace engagement, yet their lived experiences in competitive institutional sports remain underexamined. This study explored how faculty and staff made sense of their participation in university sports activities, focusing on the challenges they encountered, the coping strategies they developed, and the factors they believed shaped their competitive performance. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 purposely selected participants from a government public university in Mindanao. The analysis indicated that performance was shaped by fitness culture, prior sports progression, institutional adversities, as well as adaptive preparation strategies, self-fulfillment, and faculty and staff-management partnership. Despite institutional scarcity, participants described achieving strong performance through disciplined preparation, resilience, intrinsic motivation, and organizational support. The findings suggest that higher education institutions should strengthen equitable and sustainable sports programs for faculty and staff and recognize sports participation as part of employee development and institutional well-being.

Keywords: Employee well-being, faculty and staff, higher education, institutional support, sports participation

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INTRODUCTION

Regular physical activity and sports participation are important to the physical and psychological well-being of university employees. Research has shown that engagement in physical activity contributes to the prevention of chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and respiratory illness (Choi et al., 2024). However, many faculty and staff members in higher education remain physically inactive, often because their work involves prolonged sitting, computer-based tasks, meetings, and other sedentary routines (Safi et al., 2022). Recent interdisciplinary studies emphasize that modern educational environments increasingly demand institutional wellness frameworks to combat this escalating physical inactivity among academic staff (Oza et al., 2026; Wood et al., 2026). This pattern of inactivity has implications not only for individual health but also for employee well-being, workplace productivity, and institutional vitality.

Beyond health benefits, participation in sports may also foster psychosocial and professional gains. Studies suggest that regular involvement in physical activity can reduce stress and support improved work performance (Hanaysha, 2016). Sports participation may also promote teamwork, self-discipline, confidence, persistence, and social connectedness, all of which are valuable in higher education communities. In this sense, universities are not only centers of teaching and learning but also environments that can support healthy and active lifestyles among faculty and staff (Cardinal & Kim, 2017). Furthermore, as researchers argue in the context of interdisciplinary educational studies, integrating health and wellness initiatives directly into university administrative policies significantly enhances faculty morale, cross-departmental collaboration, and holistic well-being (Clark, 2026; Nulud, 2026).

Sport has been broadly defined as all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being, social relationships, and competitive success (Martín-Rodríguez et al., 2024). Although researchers extensively study student-athlete programs, they have limited focus on the sports participation of university faculty and staff. There is a need for a deeper understanding of how faculty and staff in resource-constrained university settings prepare for competition, respond to adversity, and achieve strong performance

outcomes. More specifically, there is insufficient research on the coping strategies, motivational factors, and support systems that enable university personnel to remain engaged in sports despite challenges related to facilities, time, equipment, and funding. This gap highlights a critical intersection between sports science and educational management, where sustainable policy reforms are urgently needed to support staff welfare equitably (Bailey et al., 2026). This concern is particularly relevant at a government public university in Mindanao, Lanao del Sur, where faculty and staff participated in organized sports activities during the 2022–2023 academic year while continuing to fulfill their academic and professional responsibilities. Their participation provides an important context for examining how university personnel manage the competing demands of work and sports involvement and how institutional and personal factors shape their ability to perform successfully.

Therefore, this study investigates the challenges, coping strategies, and performance outcomes of faculty and staff in university sports activities at Mindanao State University. Specifically, it examines the constraints they encounter, the strategies they use to manage these challenges, and the factors that support sustained participation and competitive success. The study seeks to contribute to higher education research by providing evidence that may guide universities in designing more equitable, responsive, and sustainable sports programs for faculty and staff.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Robinson & Williams, 2024). IPA is appropriate for studies that seek to explore how individuals make sense of their lived experiences and the meanings they attach to those experiences within a particular context (Smith & Nizza, 2022). In the present study, IPA was used to examine how faculty and staff made sense of their participation in university sports activities, particularly the challenges they encountered, the coping strategies they developed, and the factors they perceived to influence their performance outcomes.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at a government public university in Mindanao, where faculty and staff participated in organized sports activities while continuing to perform their academic and professional responsibilities. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in university sports activities and their relevance to the phenomenon under study. A total of 12 participants were interviewed from the 13 identified individuals who met the inclusion criteria. These participants were considered information-rich

cases because of their firsthand experience of sports participation within the university setting.

The participants included faculty and staff members who emerged as champions in various sports events, including basketball three-point shoot, table tennis singles, dart singles, and lawn tennis singles, and included both male and female university employees. In IPA, sample size is typically small because the method emphasizes depth of analysis and detailed engagement with participants' lived experiences rather than broad representativeness (Alase, 2017). Accordingly, the sample was considered appropriate for generating rich, experience-based accounts of the phenomenon.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, which are commonly used in IPA studies to elicit detailed personal accounts. The interview guide focused on participants' experiences of sports participation, the challenges they encountered, the coping strategies they used to manage these challenges, and the factors they believed contributed to their performance outcomes (Guo et al., 2025). This format allowed participants to describe their experiences, preparation, motivations, and perceptions of institutional support in their own words while allowing the researcher to probe significant meanings as they emerged during the interviews.

Before data collection, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the university authorities and the institutional research ethics committee. Following approval, potential participants who met the inclusion criteria were identified and invited to participate in the study. They were informed about the objectives of the study, the ethical considerations involved, and the voluntary nature of participation. Written informed consent was then obtained. Face-to-face, one-on-one interviews were conducted at times convenient to the participants and were audio-recorded with their permission. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and anonymized prior to analysis.

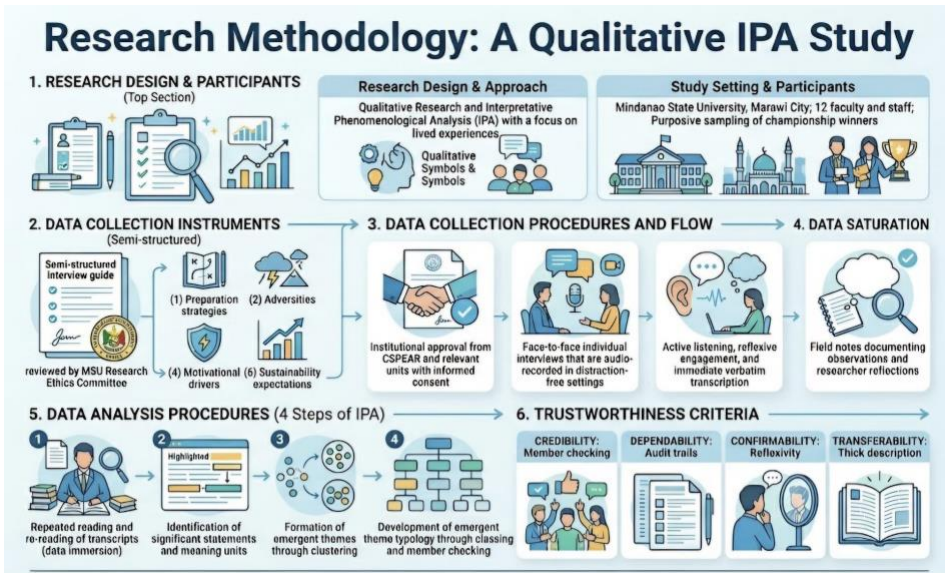
Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the procedures of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as outlined by Eatough and Smith (2017) and supported by Robinson and Williams (2024). The analysis followed several iterative stages. First, each transcript was read and reread to allow immersion in the participant's account. Second, initial notes were made, focusing on descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual aspects of the text. Third, emergent themes were developed from these notes within each individual case. Fourth, related themes were clustered to form subordinate and superordinate themes. Finally, patterns were examined across cases while preserving the idiographic commitment of IPA.

Through this analytic process, the study generated an interpretative account of participants' lived experiences in relation to preparation strategies, adversities, coping mechanisms, motivational factors, and performance outcomes. The analysis produced seven superordinate themes: fitness culture, sports progression, adversities, formation strategies, sound body and mind, self-fulfillment, and faculty-management partnership (see Figure 1).

NVivo was used as a data management tool to organize transcripts, notes, and coded segments. Any digital tools used during the analysis served only to support data organization and retrieval. The interpretation of meaning and development of themes remained the responsibility of the researcher, consistent with the principles of IPA.

Figure 1: *Thematic Analysis flow of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)*



Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher maintained close engagement with the interview transcripts throughout the analytic process and grounded all interpretations in the participants' accounts. Alignment was maintained among the study purpose, interview questions, data collection procedures, and IPA-based analysis. The coded data and thematic structure were reviewed carefully to ensure that the findings remained faithful to the participants' lived experiences.

Prior to data collection, the interview guide was reviewed by the University Research Ethics Committee to ensure ethical appropriateness and clarity. The guide served as an aide-mémoire and was used consistently across

interviews while still allowing flexibility for in-depth exploration of participants' individual experiences (Denham et al., 2017). In addition, member checking was conducted to enhance the credibility of the findings and to confirm that the interpretations were reasonably consistent with the meanings intended by the participants (Vella, 2024).

Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed of the purpose of the study prior to data collection. Their participation was voluntary, and they were assured that their responses would be treated confidentially and used solely for research purposes. Informed consent was obtained before the conduct of the interviews, and all identifying information was removed from the transcripts to protect participant anonymity.

RESULTS

Analysis of the interview data generated seven interrelated themes that explain how faculty and staff at Mindanao State University prepared for, sustained, and interpreted competitive performance in university-organized sports activities despite institutional and personal constraints. These themes were fitness culture as foundational preparation, progression in sports activities, adversities in sports participation, formation strategies, sound body and mind, self-fulfillment, and faculty-staff-management partnership. Taken together, the findings show that championship performance was shaped not only by individual skill, but also by sustained preparation, adaptive coping, personal sacrifice, and the ability to remain competitive within conditions of limited institutional support.

Fitness culture as foundational preparation

Participants described fitness culture as the foundation of their sports preparation and competitive performance. They emphasized that success in university sports activities depended on regular practice, physical conditioning, and sustained engagement in their chosen sport. Preparation was not viewed as something done only immediately before competition, but as a continuing process of building readiness over time.

When asked how they prepared for sports activities, several participants identified practice as their primary form of preparation. FS1 shared, "*I have started practicing.*" Similarly, FS3 and FS5 *emphasized the importance of practice and training. Other participants described specific activities that supported their readiness, such as jogging, walking, endurance training, and actual game play.* FS2, FS6, and FS10 noted that *they prepared through endurance-building activities and repeated sport practice.* FS7 and FS10 also reported *preparing themselves both mentally and physically for competition.*

These responses suggest that participants viewed fitness not merely as a health habit, but as the groundwork of competitive readiness. Regular preparation enabled them to build endurance, strengthen sport-specific skills, and improve confidence before actual competition.

Progression in sports activities

Participants described progression in sports activities as an important part of both preparation and performance. They viewed improvement as a gradual process developed through continuous practice, repeated participation, and accumulated experience. For many of them, preparation was valuable not only because it improved physical readiness, but also because it built confidence and familiarity with the demands of competition.

When asked whether preparation helped their performance during sports activities, most participants responded positively and emphasized that their efforts contributed to improvement. Several participants stated that preparation enabled them to perform better during actual competition. In contrast, FS4 offered a different view, stating that “*performance was based more on prior playing experience.*” This suggests that while most participants linked progress to active preparation, some also relied on previous sport exposure and established skill.

Overall, this theme indicates that progression was understood as a continuing process rather than an immediate outcome. Participants developed competitive capacity over time through repetition, practice, and sustained involvement in sports.

Adversities in sports participation

Participants identified adversities in sports participation as a major theme affecting their preparation and performance in university-organized sports activities. These adversities referred to the barriers they encountered while trying to train, prepare, and compete despite strong interest and commitment. Across participant accounts, the most common challenges involved limited venues, lack of time, weather conditions, lack of kits and equipment, and insufficient funds. These barriers constrained both the quality of preparation and the extent of participation in sports activities.

Limited venue

A common challenge reported by participants was the lack of adequate space or appropriate facilities for training and practice. Several participants explained that limited venue availability restricted their ability to prepare effectively for competition. FS2, FS5, FS6, FS7, and FS8 expressed similar concerns, *noting that there was not enough space or venue to play the game.*

These responses suggest that access to suitable sports facilities was an important condition for effective preparation. Without adequate training space,

participants found it difficult to practice consistently and refine their skills before competition.

Lack of time

Time constraints also emerged as a major adversity. Participants explained that their academic and professional responsibilities limited the time available for practice and training. FS3, FS4, FS5, FS6, FS8, FS9, and FS11 reported that *they did not have enough time to practice and schedule training. However, FS1 offered a contrasting perspective, stating, "I don't see time as a problem, but create time for the activities."*

This contrast suggests that although lack of time was widely experienced, some participants actively treated time as something that could be negotiated through commitment and prioritization.

Weather conditions

Weather conditions were also identified as a challenge, particularly for sports that depended on outdoor practice or competition. FS3, FS5, and FS6 described *weather as a recurring problem, especially because of frequent rain.* One participant noted that *weather was another challenge because it was always raining.*

These responses show that environmental conditions disrupted training schedules and affected readiness for competition, particularly when covered or indoor facilities were unavailable.

Lack of kits and equipment

Another difficulty raised by participants was the lack of sports kits and equipment needed for training and competition. FS4 shared that *there was no equipment available for practice and that actual play only happened on game day.* FS6 noted that *the needed kits and equipment were difficult to obtain, although some support was provided by the university.* FS11 also explained that *arrangements had to be made to borrow equipment for training.*

These responses indicate that limited access to sports materials reduced the quality of preparation and created additional burdens for participants.

Insufficient funds

Participants also described insufficient funds as a significant barrier to sports participation. Financial limitations affected transportation, training needs, and the purchase of sports materials. FS2 explained that *transportation to playing areas outside the university was difficult because personal allowance was not enough.* FS4 referred to *the cost of returning home after staying for training,* while FS6 and FS7 described *budget limitations in obtaining kits and other sport-related needs.*

These accounts suggest that financial constraints extended beyond institutional resources and often required personal sacrifice from participants.

Overall, this theme shows that participation in sports was shaped by multiple structural and personal barriers. Preparation and performance were influenced not only by effort, but by the availability of time, space, equipment, financial support, and favorable training conditions.

Formation strategies

Participants described formation strategies as the ways they responded to the barriers they encountered in sports participation. Rather than allowing challenges to end their involvement, they developed practical coping mechanisms that helped them continue training and competing. These strategies included adaptability, time management, allocation of resources, and fundraising.

Adaptability

Adaptability emerged as an important strategy for managing changing conditions and limited resources. Participants explained that they adjusted their schedules and training locations in response to barriers such as weather conditions and lack of venue. FS2, FS7, and FS11 shared that *they looked for alternative venues as a way of coping with weather-related disruptions*. Similarly, FS3 stated that *training and play were moved to the morning because rain was less likely at that time*. FS6 and FS9 also described *waking up as early as 5:00 a.m. to train and prepare*.

These responses suggest that participants remained engaged in sports by adjusting to unfavorable conditions and finding workable alternatives.

Time management

Time management was another strategy frequently mentioned by participants. Because faculty and staff had to balance sports participation with teaching, administrative duties, and personal responsibilities, they emphasized the need to deliberately create time for training. FS6 explained that *personal sacrifice was necessary, stating that training required waking up early to prepare*. FS9 similarly described *maintaining an early morning exercise routine*, while FS11 reported *sacrificing evening time in order to seek support and train with others*.

These responses indicate that time management was not simply about scheduling, but about prioritizing sports participation despite competing demands.

Allocation of resources

Participants also described the allocation of resources as a coping strategy, particularly when institutional support was limited. Some participants reported using their own money to support training and participation. FS2 stated that *personal funds were used to cover transportation and food when traveling to other*

venues for practice and play. FS7 also shared that *personal allowance for meals had to be sacrificed in order to continue participating.*

These accounts suggest that participants compensated for institutional resource gaps by reallocating their own limited resources.

Fundraising

Fundraising also emerged as a practical response to financial and material constraints. Participants explained that they sought assistance from family members, friends, and other personal networks to obtain sports kits, equipment, and training support. FS7 stated that *support was requested from a husband and friends to buy shuttlecocks*, while FS8 similarly reported *asking for help in purchasing sports materials*. FS11 also described *relying on family and friends for support related to training*.

These responses show that participants extended their coping efforts beyond the university and mobilized personal relationships to sustain sports participation. Overall, this theme indicates that faculty and staff addressed sport-related adversities through adaptability, deliberate time use, personal sacrifice, and support-seeking behavior. Their experiences show that participation was sustained not only through motivation, but also through strategic action under constrained conditions.

Sound body and mind

Participants described a sound body and mind as an important factor in sustaining their involvement in sports activities. This theme reflected the physical, emotional, and social resources that motivated them to continue participating despite work demands and preparation challenges. Three subthemes emerged under this theme: passion and enthusiasm, health and wellness, and socialization.

Passion and enthusiasm

Participants frequently referred to their passion and enthusiasm for sports as a major reason for continued participation. FS1 shared, *"I always love to play,"* while FS2 explained that *a love of sports since adolescence continued to shape present involvement*. FS3 similarly stated *a desire to play whenever opportunities arose*, and FS9 emphasized *love of the game and the desire both to play and compete*. FS10 and FS11 also *expressed strong attachment to sports*.

These responses suggest that passion and enthusiasm served as internal drivers that strengthened commitment and sustained involvement.

Health and wellness

Health and wellness also emerged as important reasons for continued participation. Participants associated sports with physical fitness, exercise, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. FS1 and FS3 emphasized *a personal commitment*

to exercise, while FS7 explained that *health reasons motivated continued involvement in sports*. FS8 similarly stated *a desire to remain healthy, physically fit, and well-presented*.

These accounts suggest that participants viewed sports participation as a way to preserve physical well-being while managing professional responsibilities.

Socialization

Socialization was another important element of this theme. Participants described sports as an avenue for social connection, encouragement, and interaction with others in the university community. FS5 stated that *sports created opportunities for integration and meeting new people*, while FS6 emphasized *the motivational value of receiving support from others during competition*. FS11 also highlighted *the encouragement received from friends who expressed interest in the participant's performance*.

These responses indicate that relationships, recognition, and a sense of belonging reinforced sports participation. Overall, this theme demonstrates that a combination of personal passion, health motivation, and social connection sustained sports participation among faculty and staff.

Self-fulfillment

Participants described self-fulfillment as an important outcome of their preparation, sacrifice, and participation in sports activities. This theme reflected the sense of achievement, satisfaction, and personal reward they experienced when their efforts resulted in successful performance. For many participants, fulfillment came not only from winning, but from seeing that their training, discipline, and perseverance had produced meaningful results. FS1 explained that *preparation was helpful because it made performance easier during the actual event*. FS2 stated that *training helped bring out personal qualities in play*, while FS3 shared that *the skills learned during training were applied during the competition*. FS5 described *winning as a source of great joy and connected this outcome to training and sacrifice*. Similarly, FS6 stated that *the time and energy invested in training had paid off*, and FS7 emphasized that *hard work and sacrifice resulted in victory for the college*. These responses suggest that self-fulfillment was closely tied to participants' recognition of their own growth, effort, and accomplishment.

Faculty, Staff, and Management partnership

Participants identified faculty-staff-management partnership as an important factor in sustaining sports participation and improving performance outcomes. This theme reflected the role of university support, administrative encouragement, and coordinated institutional action in enabling faculty and staff to continue engaging in sports activities. Participants emphasized that while

personal commitment was necessary, long-term participation depended on stronger support in terms of time, facilities, organization, and motivation.

When asked what school management could do to ensure the sustainability of yearly sports activities, several participants suggested increasing the frequency of sports events and providing more consistent institutional support. FS1, FS2, FS3, FS6, FS9, and FS10 recommended more regular sports activities, including holding events twice a year and organizing friendship games or local tournaments among colleges. Participants also highlighted the importance of motivation, incentives, and improved facilities. FS6, FS10, and FS11 emphasized that monetary incentives could encourage greater participation, while FS7 and FS8 pointed to the need for more indoor gyms, covered courts, and playing fields.

Overall, this theme shows that successful and sustained sports involvement depended not only on personal motivation, but also on meaningful partnership between faculty, staff, and university management.

Figure 2: The path to Championship Performance: A dynamic Model for Faculty and Staff



DISCUSSION

This study examined the challenges, coping strategies, and performance outcomes of faculty and staff participating in university sports activities at a government public university in Mindanao. The findings indicate that competitive performance was shaped by the interaction of fitness culture, sports progression, adversities in

sports participation, formation strategies, sound body and mind, self-fulfillment, and faculty-management partnership. Taken together, these themes suggest that success in university sports was not determined by athletic ability alone but by sustained preparation, adaptive responses to constraints, personal motivation, and institutional support.

The themes of fitness culture as foundational preparation and progression in sports activities underscore the importance of preparation as the foundation of competitive performance. Participants consistently described regular practice, physical conditioning, and continued involvement in sports as essential to readiness and success. These accounts support the view that sports performance develops gradually through repeated engagement, disciplined preparation, and progressive improvement rather than through isolated effort alone (Kaygusuz, 2024; Button et al., 2021; Chow et al., 2019; Pagdato et al., 2021). In the present study, fitness culture was not simply a personal habit but a practical condition that enabled faculty and staff to remain competitive despite the demands of university work. This suggests that prior engagement in sport and sustained preparation serve as an important base for performance, especially among employees who must balance training with professional responsibilities.

At the same time, the findings show that faculty and staff sports participation took place under significant institutional and personal constraints. The theme of adversities in sports participation revealed that limited venues, lack of time, weather conditions, inadequate kits and equipment, and insufficient funding affected both preparation and performance. These barriers reflect broader structural challenges associated with sports participation in educational settings, particularly where facilities, funding, and program support are limited (Bhatia et al., 2013). Time constraints emerged as a particularly important issue, as participants had to manage sports involvement alongside teaching, administrative work, and personal responsibilities. This finding supports prior work suggesting that professional obligations and competing demands can reduce opportunities for physical activity and sports engagement among university employees (Safi et al., 2024; Guo et al., 2025; Safi et al., 2022). Furthermore, these temporal challenges echo the findings of O'Mahony and Jeske (2019) which highlighted that managing temporal boundaries is a significant hurdle in the higher education environment, where individuals must constantly negotiate the work-life-study balance to maintain well-being.

Despite these challenges, participants did not withdraw from sports participation. Instead, they developed what this study identified as formation strategies, including adaptability, time management, resource allocation, and fundraising. These strategies indicate that coping in this context was both practical and relational. Participants adjusted their training schedules, identified alternative venues, used personal resources, and mobilized support from family and friends in order to sustain participation. These findings are consistent with studies showing

that resilience and adaptability are important for continued athletic engagement under difficult conditions (Cai et al., 2025; Gupta & McCarthy, 2022), and that time management is essential when individuals must negotiate multiple responsibilities (Jones & Kessler, 2020; Scarlatis, 2017). Moreover, the development of these soft skills through extracurricular engagement mirrors the observations of Llenares and Deocarís (2019), who noted in a Philippine-based study that participation in non-academic activities within the university setting is a primary driver for developing professional competence and interpersonal adaptability.

The theme of sound body and mind further indicates that passion, health-related motivation, and social connection sustained sports participation. Participants described sports as something they valued not only for competition, but also for physical well-being, emotional balance, and enjoyment. These accounts support literature indicating that sports participation can promote health, reduce stress, and enhance overall well-being (Choi et al., 2024; Hanaysha, 2016). They also align with studies suggesting that passion for an activity sustains long-term involvement, particularly when the activity is personally meaningful (Chen et al., 2020). In addition, the socialization subtheme indicates that sports functioned as a relational space where faculty and staff experienced encouragement, belonging, and interpersonal connection. Thus, sports participation in this study was not merely a physical activity but also a source of social and emotional support within the university community.

The theme of self-fulfillment reveals that sports participation carried meaning beyond competition itself. Participants associated their preparation and performance with satisfaction, accomplishment, and pride, particularly when effort and sacrifice led to visible success. This finding is consistent with literature suggesting that sports participation can strengthen self-esteem, confidence, and personal fulfillment (Okechukwu, 2021). It also supports the view that sports can contribute to positive self-development by allowing individuals to test their abilities, experience achievement, and recognize personal growth (Song, 2024). In the present study, self-fulfillment emerged not only from winning but also from the recognition that discipline, perseverance, and commitment had produced meaningful outcomes. This suggests that sports participation may serve as an important source of motivation and identity reinforcement for faculty and staff within the workplace context.

The final theme, faculty, staff, and management partnership, highlights the importance of institutional support in sustaining sports participation among university personnel. Participants consistently emphasized the need for time, facilities, equipment, incentives, and stronger administrative backing. These findings suggest that while individual motivation is necessary, continued participation depends largely on whether the institution creates enabling conditions for involvement. This supports prior discussions of partnership and collaboration

as important elements of organizational support and professional engagement (Tamang et al., 2024; Bradbeer, 2020). It likewise reflects broader policy directions in the Philippine context that recognize the value of sports development and institutional support for physical activity programs in educational settings (Ramos & De Bosscher, 2026).

Overall, the findings suggest that competitive performance among faculty and staff emerges from the interaction of preparation, progression, adversity, coping, motivation, wellness, and institutional support. The proposed model, "The Path to Championship Performance: A dynamic model for faculty and staff excellence," shows that sports success in higher education is not a simple product of talent but a dynamic process shaped by both personal effort and structural conditions. This is an important contribution because much of the literature on sports in higher education has focused primarily on students rather than faculty and staff (Choi et al., 2024). By centering the experiences of university personnel, the study broadens understanding of sports participation in higher education and shows how employee well-being, organizational support, and competitive performance intersect.

CONCLUSIONS

This study explored how faculty and staff at a government public university in Mindanao prepared for and sustained competitive performance in university-organized sports despite institutional and personal constraints. The findings showed that championship performance was shaped by the interaction of fitness culture, sports progression, adversities in sports participation, formation strategies, sound body and mind, self-fulfillment, and faculty, staff and management partnership. Taken together, these themes indicate that success in faculty and staff sports was not determined by athletic ability alone, but by disciplined preparation, adaptive coping, personal sacrifice, and sustained commitment under constrained conditions.

The study further revealed that participants were able to remain competitive not because institutional support was consistently strong, but because they developed practical and relational ways of responding to limited time, facilities, equipment, and financial resources. In this sense, championship performance may be understood as an outcome of resilience under institutional scarcity. At the same time, the findings make clear that individual grit, while important, is not sufficient on its own. Sustained participation and performance are more likely when institutions provide enabling conditions that support preparation, well-being, and continued engagement in sports.

Overall, the study contributes to higher education and sport research by foregrounding faculty and staff as an important but often overlooked group in university sports participation. It also suggests that faculty and staff sports should not be treated as a peripheral activity, but as a meaningful site of wellness, collegiality, and competitive development. Strengthening institutional support through improved facilities, time allowance, equipment provision, and program continuity may help transform individual sacrifice into a more sustainable and inclusive culture of sports participation in higher education.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings suggest that higher education institutions should not treat faculty and staff sports participation as peripheral or merely recreational. If such programs are to be sustainable, universities must reduce the extent to which success depends on personal sacrifice alone. This requires improving access to safe and adequate facilities, providing basic equipment and material support, protecting time for training and participation, strengthening scheduling and communication systems, and offering more consistent recognition and incentives. Framing faculty and staff sports as part of institutional wellness, collegiality, and community-building may also help shift support from symbolic approval to concrete program investment. In practical terms, stronger institutional support does not replace personal commitment; rather, it enables that commitment to produce more equitable and sustainable performance outcomes.

LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations. First, it was conducted in a single university context, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other higher education institutions with different organizational cultures, facilities, and administrative systems. Second, the data were based on participants' self-reported accounts, which are appropriate for examining lived experience but do not include the perspectives of administrators, coaches, or policy actors who may also influence sports participation. Third, although recent Philippine studies were used to support the discussion, literature specifically addressing faculty and staff championship performance in Philippine higher education institutions remains limited. As a result, some of the supporting studies were drawn from related areas such

as employee wellness, intramural participation, and educator exercise adherence. Future research may address these limitations by comparing multiple universities, incorporating management and administrative perspectives, and examining how institutional support shapes not only participation but also long-term competitive performance among faculty and staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Higher education institutions should develop more inclusive, sustained, and better-supported sports programs for faculty and staff. Greater institutional support in terms of facilities, scheduling, equipment, and incentives is recommended in order to reduce participation barriers and promote continued engagement. Universities may also consider integrating faculty and staff sports more explicitly into wellness and employee development initiatives. Future research may examine similar experiences across other higher education institutions and explore the relationship between sports participation, well-being, and work performance in different institutional contexts.

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