

# Taking Risks in Sports: College Student-Athlete Experiences and Attitudes

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This study of college athletes was designed to address these research questions:

- What attitudes do college student-athletes have regarding taking risks and chances, versus playing it safe, in competitions?
- Who or what do college student-athletes report as the strongest influences on their views toward taking risks as an athlete?

The sample was 101 Mizzou student-athletes, recruited in spring 2020. Participants completed a 26-item paper survey that asked about their views on taking chances and risks in sports. Approval for the study was obtained from Campus IRB and Mizzou Athletics.

Participants were asked about, a) an incident where they had to decide whether or not to take a risk, b) whether/when they thought playing it safe was a good thing, and c) influences on their beliefs about when to take a risk or play it safe as an athlete.

Steps of content analysis conducted were, a) review survey responses to familiarize themselves with the data, b) open coding of responses to identify potential themes, c) establishing a set of exclusive/exhaustive thematic categories and definitions, d) randomly selecting 20% of cases and coding each response into the appropriate category by a primary coder, e) coding of those cases by a second coder to test reliability, and refining of categories and repeating if needed to reach satisfactory agreement, f) final coding and counting of all cases, g) interpretation of results.

Among results, influences on risk attitudes were found to be coaches (cited by 69.3% of athletes), parents (35.6%), and teammates (21.8%), own experiences, (9.9%), other family members (5%), and friends (5%). Specific motivations included taking risks as an offensive or defensive strategy, to qualify for something, to avoid regrets, and for personal growth or teammate recognition.