

Effects of Trash-Talk on Motivation and Confidence in High School Athletes



Abstract

When considering sports psychology, or the study of how mental factors influence sports performance, the concept of interpersonal interaction, such as trash-talk, becomes relevant. Trash-talk is any form of insult-talk aimed at competitors or peers during competitions, often serving as a means to taunt, intimidate, or get inside the head of the recipients. This research focuses on the relationship between trash-talking, motivation, and confidence for both the user and recipient to evaluate the overall purpose of trash-talking and determine whether the phenomenon has any beneficial or detrimental implications. Both motivation and confidence have been previously shown to impact athletes' performance during competitions. The data indicates that trash-talking is beneficial for the users in terms of boosting motivation and confidence levels internally, ultimately creating an indirect, positive relationship between trash-talking and performance. However, it appears as if the motivation and confidence of the recipients are minimally affected by trash-talking and if anything, the athletes respond positively. As a result, the pre-conceived intended external effects of trash-talking fail to match up with what occurs, mandating a change in association with why athletes should or should not trash-talk.

Introduction

Within the context of sports at all levels, most athletes and coaches previously felt success was determined solely by which team or athlete was physically superior or more skilled. While this is a primary factor, the development of sports psychology over the past century has led to the indication that the mental aspects of sports are comparably important to physical preparation and ability. Whether it be motivation, confidence, internal pressures, or external influences, the cerebral factors that go into athletic performance are now recognized as critical by collegiate and professional sports teams and athletes alike, as determined by previous research conducted by many researchers.

When considering how external influences affect motivation and confidence, which are critical determinants of how athletes perform during competitions, trash-talking becomes prominent. Some famous instances of trash-talking include the contentions of renowned athletes such as Muhammad Ali, Michael Jordan, and Larry Bird. In many competitions, this verbal intimidation exists in some facet, with varying implications depending upon the situation. The majority of previous studies have focused on this topic among collegiate or professional athletes, but rarely among high school athletes. Nonetheless, high school athletes are a compelling group to consider because the findings apply to the greatest number of participants since high school sports are significantly more widespread.

Methods

A total of 132 student-athletes of different sports and skill levels engaged in this study by taking a four-part survey. The first part of the survey identified general information such as gender, sport choice, the team the respondents play on, and their year of high school. From there, as previously discussed, the next two sections included Likert scale questions adapted from the SMS and the TSCI to provide standard motivation and confidence levels that helped determine what types of athletes use trash-talk and how it affects them in terms of these psychological factors. Lastly, the participants responded to nine Likert scale questions with options ranging from 1 (almost never) to 7 (almost always), five multiple choice questions, and one open-ended question in direct relation to their use of and experience with trash-talking.

For data analysis, a variety of different calculations were necessary. Simple percentages helped to identify the portions of the data pool that fell into specific categories and enabled the researcher to make the primary conclusions of the study. With both the SMS and the TSCI, average calculations determined central tendencies while standard deviation illustrated the spread in the given groups of respondents. As for the Likert scale questions related to trash-talk usage and exposure, the median helped analyze central tendencies while the Interquartile Range (IQR) determined the spread of the data. These methods of analysis were adapted since the Likert scales provided ordinal data.

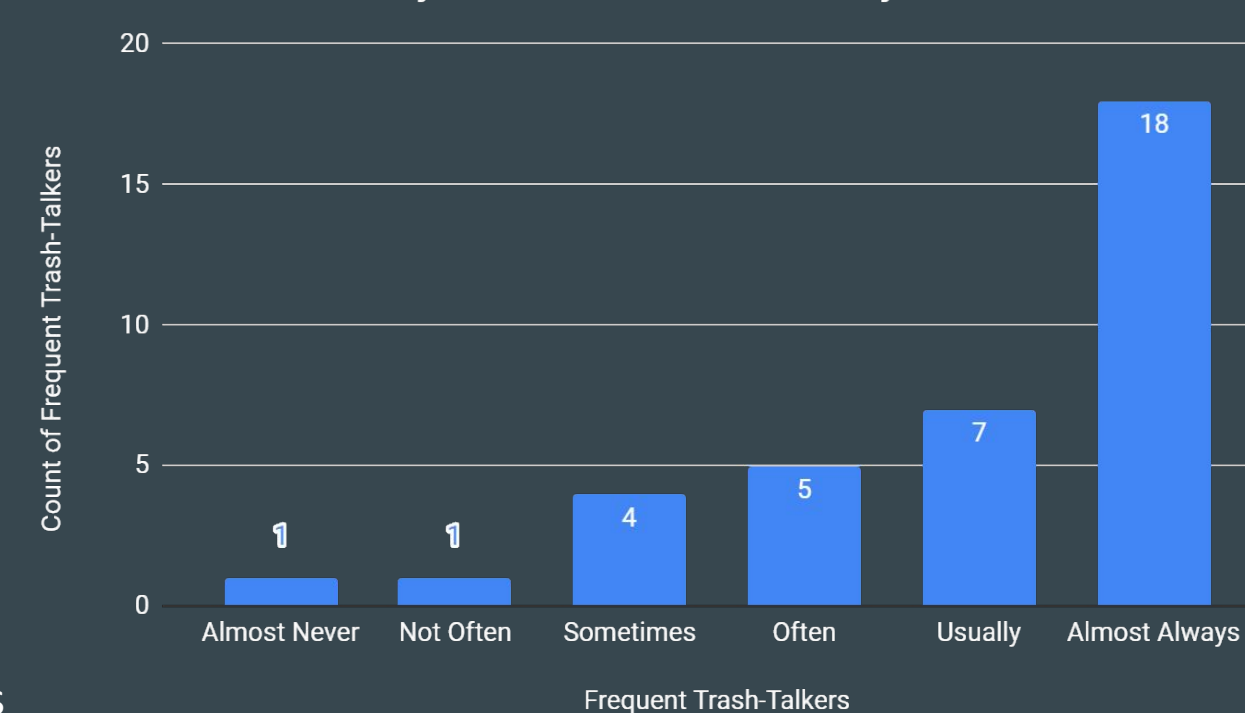
Braden Padberg

Research Question

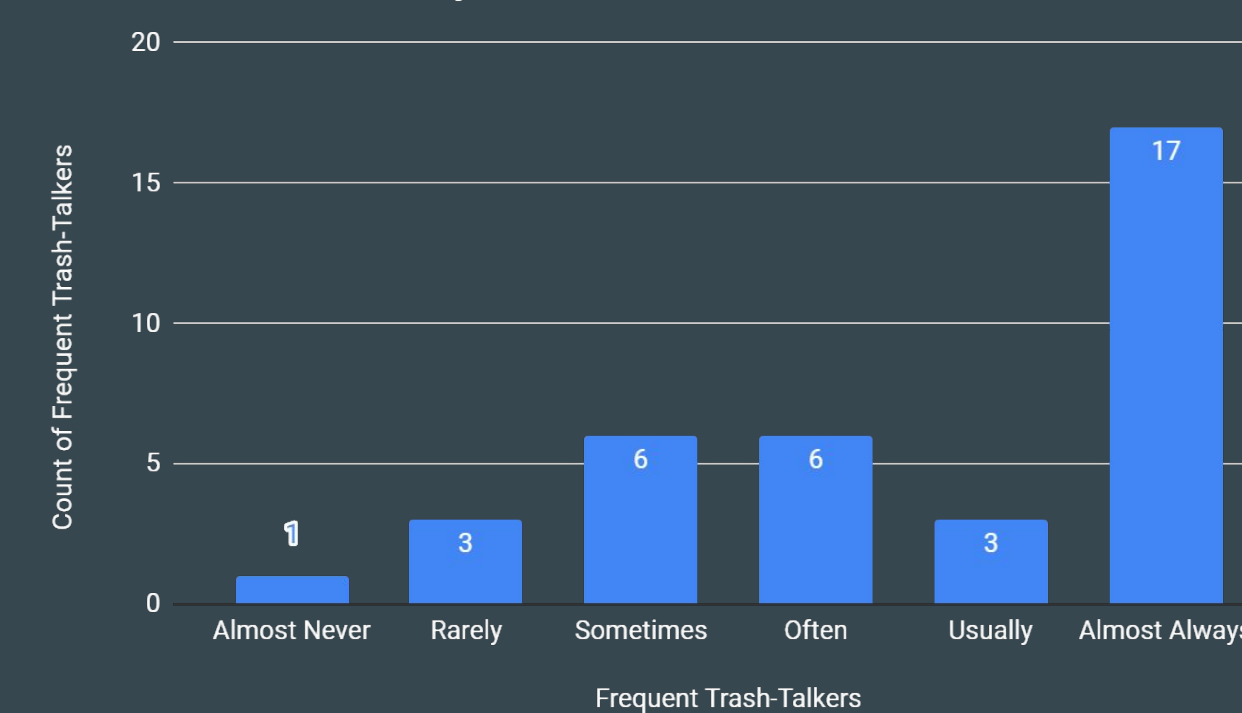
How do the effects of trash-talking in high school athletes influence motivation and confidence levels and do these influences tend to be beneficial or detrimental to performance?

Results

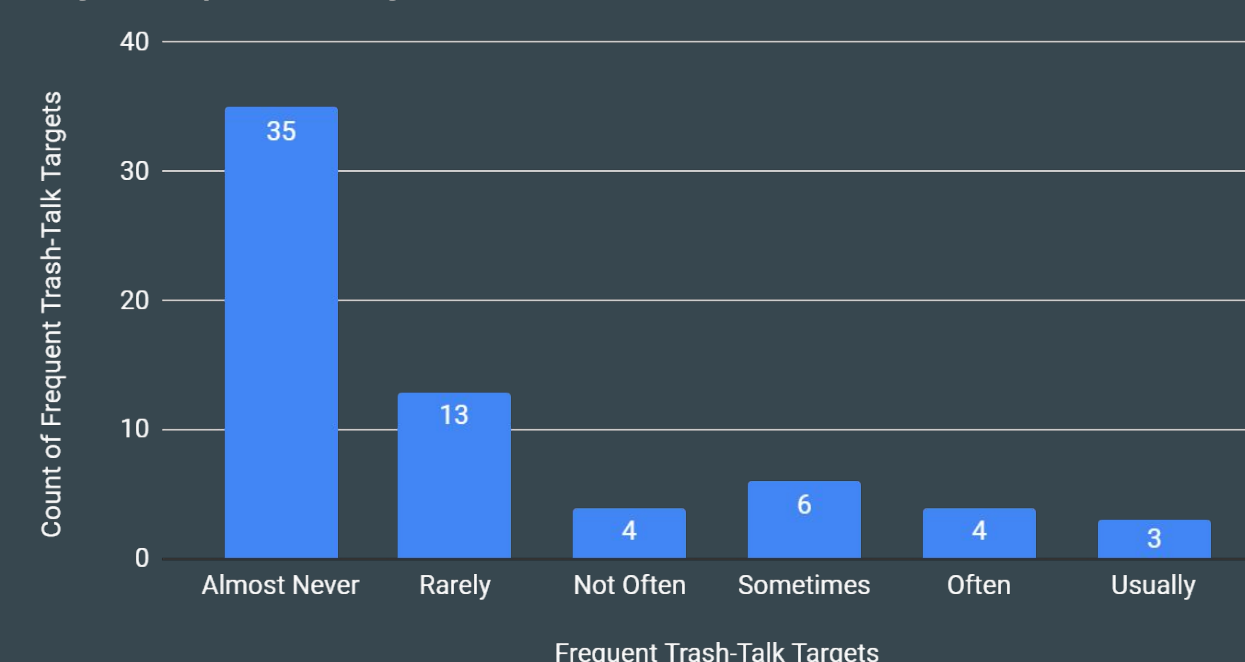
I Trash-Talk in a Way That is Beneficial to my Motivation Levels



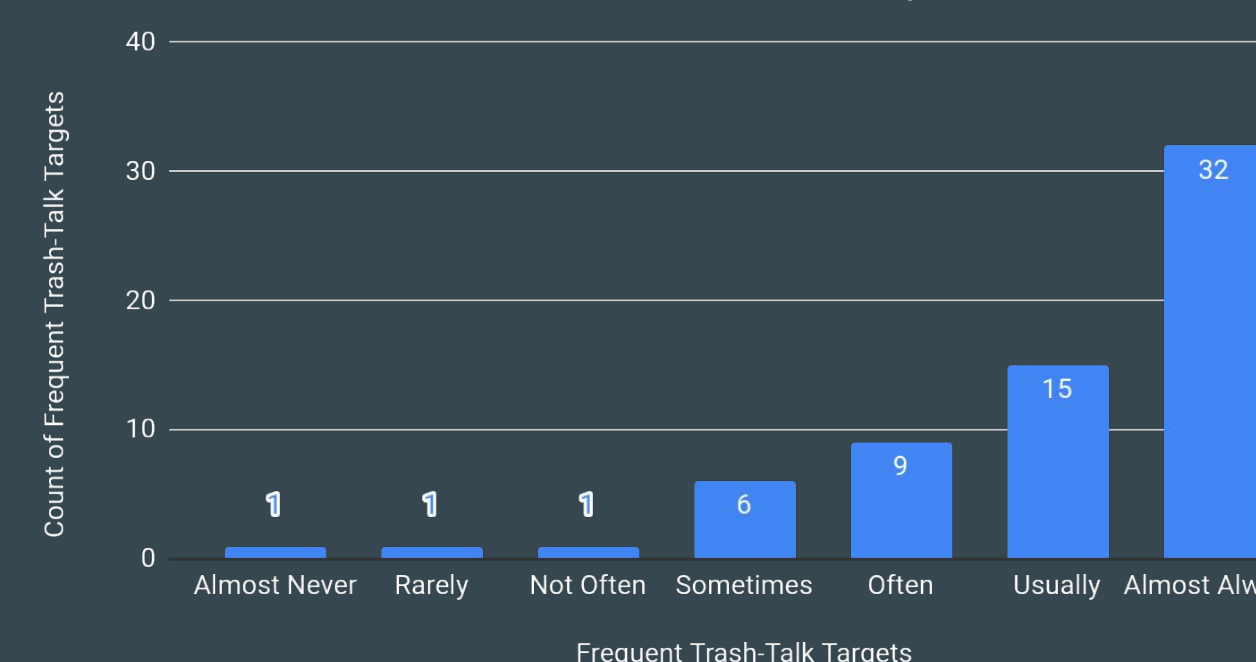
When I Trash-Talk, my Confidence Increases



When I Receive Trash-Talk, I am Emotionally Affected by What my Competitor Says



When Someone Uses Trash-Talk Against me, it Boosts my Motivation Levels and I Become More Competitive



Discussion

Use of Trash-Talk:

Among frequent trash-talkers, the results indicated that trash-talk increases motivation and confidence levels, providing internal applications that can be indirectly beneficial to performance.

- 83.3% of frequent trash-talkers claim the use of trash-talk boosts motivation levels
- 72.2% of frequent trash-talkers claim the use of trash-talk boosts confidence levels
- Previous studies illustrate that higher motivation and confidence levels directly lead to improved performance
 - Trash-talk can be indirectly beneficial to performance as a result

Responses to Trash-Talk:

Among frequent trash-talk targets, the results indicated that trash-talk has minimal psychological effects upon the recipient, refuting previous notions of why trash-talk should be used.

- 86.2% of frequent trash-talkers claim that when they receive trash-talk, they would be more likely to become motivated than intimidated
- 80.0% of frequent trash-talkers claim that receiving trash-talk does not affect them emotionally

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine whether trash-talk, as a whole, has positive implications during competitions in terms of motivation, confidence, and impacts upon the competitor. Ultimately, the data indicated that, in most cases, trash-talk is beneficial to the users as it increases their motivation and confidence, which have been previously shown to improve the performance of athletes. At the same time, the responses of the student-athletes who participated in the study demonstrated that the recipients of trash-talking are affected at an infrequent rate and sometimes the response to trash-talk comes in direct contradiction with the intended effect on the competitor, proving there are minimal external consequences of trash-talking that are beneficial to the user. Therefore, trash-talking is practical and favorable for internal purposes but often fails to negatively impact the competitor, causing a shift in what the real reason athletes trash-talk should be.