

Courting success: Why the 'head' outsmarts the body in basketball

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Two decades after his retirement, US basketballer Michael Jordan still holds the record for the highest paid athlete of all time, netting a cool \$2 billion, demonstrating his global status in sport.

But what was it about the star player that put him head and shoulders above his peers?

A new study led by University of South Australia Ph.D. student Michael Rogers reveals why coaches believe "game intelligence," work ethic and competitiveness—traits that Jordan possesses in spades—are far more important than [physical fitness](#) in determining success on the basketball court.

Rogers surveyed 90 basketball coaches from 23 countries to find out what factors—other than peak fitness—are used to recruit players for the big league.

"We found 35 performance indicators that coaches considered important and at the top of the list were psychological attributes," Rogers says.

"Coaches look for players who are competitive, have a strong work ethic, are excellent communicators, good teammates and can 'read' the game. Being super fit is a given. It is the other traits that make a difference to the scoreboard.

"Game statistics are commonly used to recruit [basketball players](#) but by watching players on the court, and how they behave outside of it, coaches can pick up a lot of non-physical factors that indicate whether a player is likely to make the grade."

Of the 35 performance indicators used by basketball coaches, 14 are psychological and four of these—attitude, coachability, competitiveness and work ethic—are considered more important than anything.

"Basketball players who are optimistic, easily taught and trained, and determined to be more successful and to work harder than others are favored by coaches," Rogers says.

Coaches indicated that players who put themselves ahead of their team were not good picks.

Mental toughness is also critical, because the ability to focus on every play, especially when tired, reflects on the scoreboard.

"Resilience, motivation, and good communication on the court are crucial in separating the 'best from the rest' once players reach elite level, according to the coaches we surveyed.

"Interestingly, the least important indicators were physical fitness and movement skills."

The study is the first to examine key indicators for recruitment in basketball using a large international panel of elite countries from FIBA-ranked countries.

"Player profiling and monitoring in [basketball](#): A Delphi study of the most important non-game performance indicators from the perspective of elite athlete coaches" is published in *Sports Medicine*.

More information: Michael Rogers et al, Player Profiling and Monitoring in Basketball: A Delphi Study of the Most Important Non-Game Performance Indicators from the Perspective of Elite Athlete Coaches, *Sports Medicine* (2021). [DOI: 10.1007/s40279-021-01584-w](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40279-021-01584-w)

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