ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Lived Experiences of Well-being of the University Athletic Association of the Philippines Season 84 Student-Athletes in Bubble Training during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

Background and Objective. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the sports industry, resulting in the postponement of events worldwide. This posed a significant burden in the mental and emotional well-being of athletes due to uncertainties and diminished training levels. As an adaptation, bubble camps emerged as a new approach to resuming training and tournaments under stringent regulations of the COVID-19 protocols. In the national context, the University Athletic Association of the Philippines (UAAP) has adapted the bubble set-up by implementing antigen testing, RT-PCR, and other health protocols as a prerequisite to bubble training. However, uncertainties in the future of sports continue to present as a psychological toll to the well-being of student-athletes despite the sense of normalcy instilled by bubble training. Existing literature on bubble training is grounded heavily on the quantitative assessments of an athlete's well-being in a bubble set-up and its effectiveness in mitigating COVID-19 transmission, thereby lacking insights that may be obtained from qualitative data. This study explored the experiences of UAAP Season 84 student-athletes in a bubble set-up by examining personal and contextual factors that impacted their well-being.

Methods. The study employed a qualitative descriptive phenomenological approach based on Seligman's Well-Being Theory. A purposeful sampling technique was used to recruit UAAP student-athletes through online dissemination of Google Forms for recruitment. Only three student-athletes from UAAP fit the eligibility criteria. Data were collected through on-site and online interviews using a semi-structured interview guide to reveal a narrative of the student-athletes' bubble training experiences, common themes, and patterns. The NVivo software program was used for data analysis, utilizing a deductive thematic approach.

Results. The lived experiences of three UAAP student-athletes were classified into six major themes: (1) Availability and Accessibility of Services; (2) Restrictions; (3) Mental Health; (4) Fostering Relationships; (5) Support Systems; and (6) Individual Growth. Accounts of both positive and negative training perceptions and outcomes regarding the bubble set-up were noted from all student-athletes. The set-up provided student-athletes with easy access to training facilities and services, eventual development of mental fortitude and

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perseverance, improved interpersonal relationships, and opportunities for individual growth. However, the restrictions, isolation, internal and external pressures, and routinary nature of the set-up contributed to the elevated levels of stress and anxiety, eventually leading to fatigue and burnout.

Conclusion. The study elucidates on the multi-faceted experiences of UAAP student-athletes in bubble training, underpinning the essence of the adequacy of training services and facilities, enhanced support systems, and prompt policy development that caters to improving the holistic well-being of student-athletes amidst adverse changes in the trajectory of sports.

Keywords: qualitative research, well-being, universities, college athletes

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the trajectory of sports globally, causing widespread postponement of sports events. This shift caused numerous consequences on the athletes' mental and emotional health, where stress, anxiety, depression, and uncertainties about their careers and training level were identified among the personal factors affecting their well-being.[1-3] In response to rekindling the morale of sports and athletes in transitioning to the new normal, sports leagues have gradually returned to the competition scene under strict regulations. Hence, as an adaptation to the stringent COVID-19 protocols, bubble camps emerged as a novel concept in the sports industry.

Bubble camps employ strategic isolation of people from the general population to resume regular activities for a definite time frame.[4] In the sports setting, athletic leagues utilize bubble camps to conduct training and tournaments while isolating athletes and coaching staff from the public.[5] Adherence to the bubble safety protocols is expected during training, games, and off-hours.[6]

Despite the set-up's implications of a safe training environment, questions on its advantages and disadvantages arose. Lowered COVID-19 transmissions[6,7] were detected in bubble camps with strict compliance to risk mitigation protocols and testing cadences.[8,9] Bubble camps provided access to training facilities and medical and coaching services, enhancing the athletes' quality of training.[5] This offered easy monitoring of the coaching staff that instilled a sense of normalcy among athletes, resulting in decreased stress, improved training routines, sleep, nutrition, and dietary habits, and maximization of competitive play.[4,5,10-12] Conversely, limitations in communication inside and outside the bubble caused emotional and psychological strain on athletes and coaches.[5,13-15] Fatigue occurred among student-athletes due to the additional pressures of fulfilling their academic and athletic roles.[5] Due to the said limitations in bubble training, the coaching staff and the medical team personnel such as physical therapists present as direct consultants for both physical and psychological conditioning among athletes, which highlights their essence to be positive social contacts among the athletes.[12] As such, understanding of well-being of students is necessary to be more effective social contacts and deliver quality and needs-based services. Concurrently, Philippine collegiate leagues have initiated efforts to conduct bubble training with its share of successes and failures.

The University Athletic Association of the Philippines (UAAP) is one of the most notable collegiate leagues in the Philippines. This athletic association was met with two consecutive cancellations of in-season competition and training until the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) permitted the resumption of training under general community quarantine (GCQ) or modified GCQ areas last September 2020.[16] Consequently, recommencement plans resurfaced and were targeted during the first quarter of 2022.[17] The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) inspected the competency and readiness of different colleges in preparation for safe bubble training conduct.[18] Last December 2021, CHED allowed the association to facilitate training provided students are fully vaccinated[18] and compliant with COVID-19 health protocols.

For UAAP Season 84 held between 2021-2022 to commence safely, strict compliance with the implemented safety and health protocols was mandatory. This entailed clustering teams in a bubble for the entire tournament. Person-to-person contact was minimized, and traveling was only permitted to dormitories and game venues. Moreover, the UAAP mandated antigen testing before each game and RT-PCR testing every two weeks.[19]

In a pandemic, the future of sports competitions and training remains to impose uncertainties and setbacks on student-athletes' holistic well-being. Hence, the findings of the study may provide meaningful insights that may guide the implementation of bubble training protocols in the context of Philippine universities.

The Well-Being Theory by Seligman serves as the foundation for the selected factors and the basis for data analysis.[20] This framework identifies the indicators relevant to the status of a student-athlete's well-being, including positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement. Positive emotion refers to expressions of happiness, hope, and joy.[20] Engagement describes the level of participation, interest, and focus on training and activities.[20] Relationships pertain to the meaningful social interactions, valued ties, and close connections of a student-athlete.[20] Meaning is associated with a greater sense of purpose of oneself.[20] Achievement relates to the motivation to attain a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment.[20] The indicators mentioned above may have influenced the overall well-being of student-athletes due to the abrupt shift of training methods, cancellation of competitions, and limitations brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard,

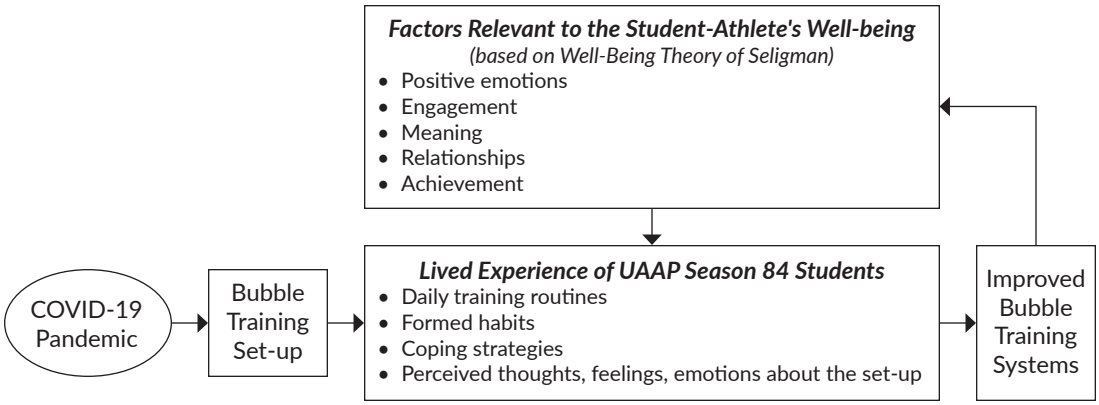

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

the components of the Well-Being Theory were utilized to identify and derive essential information on the lived experiences of UAAP student-athletes to be able to guide insights for improved bubble training systems in Philippine universities. This framework also became the basis for the development of the semi-structured guide questions.

Figure 1 shows that the COVID-19 pandemic led to the bubble training setup approach. The factors that affect the well-being of student-athletes based on Well-Being theory of Seligman were considered to further explore the lived experiences of the participants. The themes that were developed could potentially help improve future bubble training systems. A good system in place, in return, can have a positive impact on a student's well-being.

The conceptual framework was adopted to present the influence of the bubble training set-up under the COVID-19 pandemic to a student-athlete's well-being, based on the indicators from Seligman's Well-Being Theory. This was the basis of generating the lived experiences of student-athletes as translated to their responses regarding their formed routines, habits, coping strategies, and emotional states during bubble training. The researchers retrieved the lived experiences of student-athletes to foster a common understanding and cater to improved bubble training systems by providing insights to the implementation of policies and delivery of services.

There is a dearth of qualitative information regarding the lived experiences of well-being of Filipino student-athletes in bubble training. Existing literature on bubble training focuses on quantitative assessments of an athlete's well-being in a bubble set-up and its effectiveness in mitigating COVID-19 transmission.[4,11,21] Studies primarily investigated COVID-19 incidence rates, symptoms, and general bubble protocols, and presented with insufficient local studies and data gathering limited to online surveys, small sample sizes, and sport-specific contexts,[4,8,15,21] hence the need for further qualitative assessments of experiences of well-being.

Thus, the study explored the experiences of UAAP Season 84 student-athletes in a bubble set-up by examining personal and contextual factors that impacted their well-being, including positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement. Specifically, it focused on daily training routines, formed habits, coping strategies, and perceived emotions, thoughts, and feelings about the bubble set-up, aiming to assist sports and governmental institutions in improving bubble training protocols that promote student-athletes' well-being in case of another global emergency, or should sporting teams wish to adapt a bubble set-up as deemed necessary. Moreover, the findings may contribute to the scientific pool of knowledge and a broader understanding of physical therapists of student-athletes' experiences which may help improve their competencies to provide improved services while keeping the student-athletes' well-being in mind.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design

The study employed a descriptive phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of Filipino collegiate student-athletes under a bubble set-up. This design furthered the discussions on bubble training by allowing participants to describe novel experiences from their perspectives freely.[22] Thus, it provided a better understanding of the essence of the student-athletes' experiences, enabling researchers to discover recurring patterns and themes.[23,24] Both protocol and manuscript writing were guided by using the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) Checklist.

Participants/Study Selection

The target population consisted of student-athletes from across member universities of the UAAP Season 84 who trained in bubble camps from 2021-2022. The study intended to recruit participants for interviews until data saturation was achieved and themes appear redundant during the interviews.[25] Fifteen student-athletes were recruited, but only three were eligible to participate in the study[24] despite the constant follow-ups and active assistance in accomplishing

Table 1. Eligibility Criteria

Type of Criteria	Qualifications
Inclusion Criteria	**Age:** The student-athlete must be at least 18 years old during the bubble training. **Student-Athlete Classification** • Student-athletes included in the UAAP Season 84 roster regardless if they had scheduled competitions or not, as long as they actively participated during the bubble training period. • Student-athletes who have trained under the same team prior to UAAP Season 84. **Bubble Training Requirements** • Bubble training must have been conducted last 2021-2022 in preparation for the recommencement of UAAP. • The student-athlete must have undergone at least six weeks of bubble training to ensure that participants have incurred substantial training experiences. • A student-athlete who continued bubble training upon recovery after acquiring COVID-19 or did not acquire COVID-19 at any point during bubble training.
Exclusion Criteria	**COVID-19 History:** Student-athletes who acquired COVID-19 during bubble training and were not permitted to continue training. **Transferees:** Student-athletes from a different school who joined another team in the same or different league between UAAP Season 84 (i.e., UST student-athlete transferred to ADMU). **Withdrawal History**: Student-athletes who suspended all athlete-related activities and discontinued participation in bubble training. **Changing of Sports:** Student-athletes who switched sports between UAAP Season 84 (i.e., basketball student-athlete switching to volleyball).

the requirements for interview. The researchers also sought referrals from the interviewed student-athletes for potentially eligible student-athletes to gather more participants. Non-participation and exclusion of the 12 recruited participants were attributed to either non-eligibility to the criteria or non-submission of the recruitment forms. The study recruited participants who met the criteria presented in Table 1.

A homogeneous purposeful sampling technique was utilized for selecting participants as it is widely used in qualitative studies to investigate a certain phenomenon, in this case on bubble training, and analyze similarities among the student-athletes' experiences. Such sampling approach ensured that the required characteristics were satisfied by potential participants.[26]

Setting

The study was done from August 2022 to December 2023. The researchers conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews (SSIs) in the Philippines, either online or on-site, to explore the training experiences of purposely selected student-athletes in bubble training camps. On-site SSIs were held in the San Martin de Porres Building at the University of Santo Tomas - Manila. Meanwhile, online SSIs utilized Zoom Video Communications or Google Meet to mitigate health risks associated with virus transmission from person-to-person contact and allow athletes from distant locations to participate in the study.[27]

Tools

Google Forms and recruitment posters were utilized to gather potential study participants. The Google Forms included the informed consent form, read, obtained, and signed by the participant, and an orientation video explaining the process and the study's objectives. The recruitment poster stated all pertinent information, such as the study's target participants, on-site or online interviews as the primary data gathering method, and the scheduled dates. An SSI guide (see Appendix A) was self-formulated and adopted based on studies with similar research objectives.[3] It was validated by an independent qualitative expert with substantial experience in research methodology and published qualitative studies using a self-made validation tool that assesses the content, relevance, and alignment of the interview questions to the research objectives.[28]

Interviews were recorded using a phone camera for on-site interviews and Zoom or Google Meet for online interviews to allow backtracking of responses and transcribed simultaneously using Google Docs. All transcriptions, audio, and video recordings were saved in a restricted Google Drive folder and may only be accessed through the researchers' Google accounts which are password-protected and further secured by Google Authenticator to ensure data privacy. Moreover, the NVivo software program was used to produce themes corresponding to the gathered data.

Data Gathering

The recruitment materials were disseminated on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to obtain interested participants' demographic information. Interested participants may view information regarding the study through the published invitational posters and participate in the study by accessing the Google Forms link and the QR code provided in the post. The researchers also emailed the universities under the athletic associations and the UST CRS Physical Therapy Society to assist in dissemination.

Interested participants accomplished the Google Forms to be identified as potentially qualified research participants, and the informed consent form attached to the forms. The researchers verified whether all interested participants can be recruited based on the study's selection criteria . Following this, the researchers emailed the selected respondents 1-2 days after accomplishing the Google Forms to confirm their participation in the study and their selected interview schedule, to which they must respond within two weeks.

Procedures

A dry run was conducted to ensure that the interview would not exceed 60 minutes and to determine the need to refine the interview guide. This ensured the clarity, coherence, and non-redundancy of the interview questions.[29] The dry

run and the study was led by three male faculty researchers who are licensed Physical Therapists and Master's Degree holders with substantial experience and knowledge in conducting qualitative studies. All ten researchers, seven males and three females, underwent Principles of Health Research Ethics and Good Research Practice training initiated by the University of Santo Tomas. The researcher conducting the semi-structured interviews underwent a refresher training from an externally affiliated expert. Roles during the interview included the following:

1. An **Interviewer,** a faculty researcher who either underwent training from a qualitative expert or is experienced in facilitating one-on-one semi-structured interviews, adept in sports rehabilitation, and qualified to facilitate the smooth delivery of one-on-one SSIs, shall lead the discussion, and extract data from participants.[30]
2. A **Technical Assistant** who recorded the interview and assisted in cases of technical difficulties for online and on-site SSIs.
3. **Transcribers** consisted of two notetakers who transcribed the participants' responses verbatim and a field notetaker who took note of the participants' body language, emotions, tones, and reactions.
4. Two **cross-checkers** worked closely with the transcribers to ensure data accuracy.
5. A **Timekeeper** monitored the duration of the interview to ensure efficiency.

Aside from the participant, only four persons were inside the room during each interview to ensure participant's comfort. This included one interviewer, one person acting as both the technical assistant and timekeeper, and two transcribers. For online interviews, the cross-checkers were in a separate conferencing room that also includes the technical assistant who broadcasted and shared the ongoing interview with permission from the participant. For both online and onsite interviews, the cross-checkers also reviewed the recorded interviews as consented by the participants to ensure the accuracy of the transcribed data.

The identity and relationship between the researchers and the participants are influential in the conduct of the interviews and the potential results of the study. From the spectrum of UAAP student-athletes, some researchers may have established a prior rapport from providing training or rehabilitation services. To address this bias, the participants were not assigned to the faculty member with whom they have interacted significantly from previous encounters. Moreover, the interviewer used a set of guide questions during the semi-structured interviews to ensure consistency and avoid any inquiries that may potentially elicit biases.

Data Collection

A single semi-structured interview of 60 minutes maximum was employed as a method of inquiring open-ended and follow-up questions to reduce interviewer and participant fatigue.[30] Interview questions were focused on exploring the training experiences of student-athletes during the bubble set-up and neither intended to compare different bubble training set-ups nor consider alternative training methods during the pandemic. Before the interview, participants were assigned a number as their code name (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.) for identification, privacy, and confidentiality, which were utilized for data collection (during the interviews) and data analysis.

Password-protected Zoom/Google Meet links or the interview venue were emailed to online and on-site participants, respectively, three days before the interview schedule. Online interviewees renamed themselves with their assigned code names, exhibited proper online etiquette, and kept their cameras on throughout the interview. On-site interviewees were provided with a name tag corresponding to their assigned code name, which was worn throughout the interview. They abided by the UST COVID-19 health protocols at all times. Before entering UST, interviewees answered health declaration forms via the StaySafe application for non-UST student-athletes or the Thomasian Online Medical Services and Support (ThOMedSS) for UST student-athletes. They also wore face masks and observed social distancing throughout the interview.

The SSI commenced with the interviewer introducing and explaining the study's objectives, followed by retrieving the participant's consent to record the session, and reiterating guidelines in the informed consent. After asking the predetermined questions, the interviewer summarized the discussion and asked the participant for any additional bubble training experiences they wanted to share. The session ended by thanking the participant and providing reminders on the study's next steps.

The researchers transcribed the participants' responses, emotions, tones, and reactions in verbatim. Transcribed responses in Filipino were translated into English. Transcriptions were cross-checked to adequately perform member-checking and ensure data accuracy, then forwarded to the participants for validation.

Data Analysis

The researchers underwent intensive training sessions focusing on the data encoding process led by a faculty researcher with experience in utilizing the NViVo software. As guided by the framework of the study, the researchers selected participant responses that are appropriate and corresponding to each component of well-being then encoded them using NVivo to aid in the organization, analysis, and discovery of insights of the gathered data.[31] Codes generated through NVivo were utilized to create a coding tree based on the codes-to-theory model, which categorized codes and produced themes for UAAP student-athletes.[32] Appendix B shows the summary of the generated codes and themes using NVivo. The data were analyzed through a deductive thematic approach.[33] After conscientious deliberation among

all authors, themes derived from the data were finalized for interpretation through a semantic approach to formulate the significance of the extracted themes and patterns at a descriptive and explicit level, then underwent the six phases of thematic analysis.[33]

In thematic analysis, the researchers extensively familiarized themselves with conducting its step-by-step process and the retrieved data to ensure a smooth and proper coding of the necessary information. Salient data features were extracted and identified individually from participant responses and were provided with codes, then were sorted accordingly to establish themes and similarities. These were modified to derive more meaningful representations and relationships between various codes, and major and minor themes that were presented through a structural map. Thorough reviews of the codes were conducted to ensure coherence and accuracy.[33]

The researchers evaluated the final themes by creating explanations and informative names for each that best summarize their contents and essence. Once the themes were finalized, the researchers began writing the thematic analysis. They discussed each theme's frequency and significance, which examples from the data supported, then summarized the main findings, including an in-depth description of the athlete's experiences, feelings, and thoughts on training under a bubble set up to demonstrate how the research question was addressed.[33] Finally, a complete report of the data analysis was emailed to the participants for validation and adequate feedback for potential improvements of the interpreted results.[34]

Scientific Rigor

Rigor was established by employing credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Credibility was attained by implementing a member-checking approach and assessment of data from multiple perspectives through methodological triangulation of SSI, non-participant observation, and Google Forms.[34,35] The researchers were divided into two groups: three transcribed data, and four verified the transcribed data.[34] Transcripts were returned to all participants for validation prior to data analysis.[34,35] All researchers coded data, and the final set of codes were based on a common decision among the researchers. Any disagreement was resolved through consensus. If discrepancies cannot be resolved, a third-party coding expert intervened.[36] To attain dependability, all SSIs had a consistent interview guide, interviewer, and duration, although the sequencing of probing varied. Moreover, the researchers created an audit trail to outline the research process, including all choices and decisions made during data collection, analysis, and interpretation.[35] The researchers provided a thorough explanation of the methodology to ensure transferability.[35] Lastly, for confirmability, only one researcher assigned code names to the participants to reduce bias and strengthen confidentiality, and only information about their bubble training experiences were asked to respect their privacy. Reflexivity using a reflective journal was employed to prevent potential influences or biases of the researchers' experiences and to provide context on the research's processes.[35] All researchers were in line with the physical therapy practice with experience in handling patients including student-athletes. However, this context was only directed towards exploring the lived experiences of the student-athletes' experiences in bubble training. The researchers have carefully reflected and managed prior assumptions to mitigate biases and any direct influence in the data acquisition and analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The study abided by the ethical principles based on Belmont Report (1979), National Ethical Guidelines for Health and Health-Related Research (2017), and the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Moreover, it received approval from the University of Santo Tomas-College of Rehabilitation Sciences (UST-CRS) Technical Review Committee and Ethical Review Committee with the protocol number SI-2022-041, and registered on the Philippine Health Research Registry (Registry ID: PHRR230216-005441).

RESULTS

After analyzing the interview transcripts, the following six major themes emerged: (1) Availability and Accessibility of Services; (2) Restrictions; (3) Mental Health; (4) Fostering Relationships; (5) Support Systems; and (6) Individual Growth.

The current study shows that among Filipino student-athletes, bubble training is a multifaceted experience that encompasses both successes and failures from predicted and unforeseen complications, respectively which affected the trajectory of their well-being. In presenting the data, an English translation was provided to Filipino responses as necessary. The participant selection and characteristics of the eligible participants were reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Participant Demographics

Participant Selection	Category	# of Participants (N = 15)
Participation and Non-participation	Eligible	3
	Non-eligible	6
	Non-submission	6
Respondent's Characteristics	**Category**	**# of Participants (n = 3)**
Age (years)	20	1
	22	1
	26	1
Sex	Male	2
	Female	1
Sport	Basketball	1
	Volleyball	1
	Cheerdance	1
Competed during UAAP Season 84	Yes	3
	No	0

Fifteen student-athletes were recruited, but only three UAAP student-athletes were eligible to participate in the study. The participants consist of student-athletes from two member universities of the UAAP. Reasons for non-participation include non-eligibility or non-submission of the recruitment forms. Participants consisted of one female volleyball student-athlete (Participant 1), one male cheerdance student-athlete (Participant 2), and one male basketball student-athlete (Participant 3), ranging from 20-26 years old. All participants competed during the UAAP Season 84.

Availability and Accessibility of Services

Each of the participants expressed timely and ease of access to services including strength and conditioning facilities, medical management, coaching, and physical therapy. The access to these facilities and services may be availed by student-athletes especially in cases of a warranted immediate medical attention. Following were the responses of Participant 2 which describes their available services and facilities in bubble training:

Participant 2: "*...Sa services, andyan naman yung hospital everyday. Kung meron mang ma-injured samin, didiretso siya agad…"*

Participant 2: "*...sa Mental Health Day namin… pwede kami pumunta sa pool.*"

(**Participant 2:** Regarding the services, the hospital is there every day. If anyone gets injured, they will be taken care of immediately.

Participant 2: During our Mental Health Day… we can go to the pool.)

Similar sentiments arose from Participant 3, highlighting their positive regard towards the acquisition of vital training amenities and resources that are readily provided to them by the university:

Participant 3: "*...Sa strength and conditioning namin, pati yung sa physical therapy, kasama po sa bubble… yung coaches. So, anytime pwede ka naman magpa-PT."*

(**Participant 3:** In our strength and conditioning, as well as in physical therapy, the coaches are with us in the bubble. So, you can avail yourself of physical therapy at any time.)

Moreover, Participant 1 affirms the adequacy of the services received by the student-athletes, owing it to the assistance of the university, as prompted as:

Interviewer: *"...in terms of the services provided, were they adequate?*

Participant 1: "*Ah yes… We were able to train two times a day with no problems."*

Restrictions

A common ground of the responses highlighted the expressed feelings of being limited in terms of mobilization due to quarantine. This is also evidently caused by the standardized schedules and the difficulties that the bubble set-up imposes on them, demonstrative in Participants 1 and 3 as:

Participant 1: "*...you could only go at a certain place at a certain time."*

Participant 3: "*…Yung schedules po namin sa training medyo mas mahirap lang kasi nga 'di kami pwede lumabas."*

(**Participant 3:** First, our training schedules are a bit more challenging because we can't go out.)

The bubble restrictions were further expounded by Participant 2 as depriving student-athletes of their sense of freedom, greatly accounted for by the limits in spaces and activities that they can do:

Participant 2: "*...parang you're trapped in a place where in, dun ka lang.*"

Participant 2: "*...limited yung freedom mo na gumala sa specific location… Bawal kami pumunta sa ibang places. 'Di ka makagala or kung ano man gusto mong gawin sa buhay."*

(**Participant 2:** You're trapped in a place where you're just confined to that area.

Participant 2: Your freedom to roam is limited to a specific location. We're not allowed to go to other places. You can't go out and wander around or do whatever it is you want to do in life.)

With the strict imposition of rules and regulations in the bubble set-up, hints of homesickness were discerned from the accounts of the student-athletes as influenced by new protocols and restrictions:

Participant 1:"*It was… 6 weeks before we got out, so… the anxiety of like, or when can we go home again. I wasn't used to being away from the house again."*

Participant 3: *"Pinaka-ano talaga is … hindi mo makikita yung ibang kaibigan mo… Tapos dati kasi bumibisita yung ibang kaibigan ko, mga pamilya ko. Yun … hindi nangyari, 'di namin magawa. Yun yung mabigat na part."*

(**Participant 3:** The hardest part is that you can't see your other friends. And before, some of my friends and family used to visit. That didn't happen, we couldn't do it. That was the heavy part.)

Participants 2 and 3 even laid out recommendations of widening their free spaces and potentially allowing their loved ones in the bubble to improve their experience in the

bubble set-up, while still adhering to the health protocols, as expressed:

Participant 2: "...*Sana bigyan ng freedom pa rin na gumala. Kasi... parang naka-cage ka talaga dun sa isang place eh.*"

Participant 3: "*…i-allow sana yung visitors na family lang…tapos i-swab. Kung negative, pwede papasukin... Makakadagdag din ng motivation sa bata, sa mga athlete yun eh.*"

(**Participant 2:** I hope there's still freedom to roam around. Because it's like you're in a cage in that one place.

Participant 3: Maybe visitors like family should be allowed and they should be swabbed. Then if they test negative, they can be allowed to enter. It can also add motivation for the student, for the athletes.)

Despite some negative perceptions on the bubble set-up, the student-athletes have demonstrated their resiliency in response to change. Most of which concerned Participants 1 and 3 with their adjustment period to the set-up, to their self, and to their peers which brought a personal sense of ease:

Participant 1: *"It was not something that I was used to, 'cause there were a lot of protocols. That was very different from what I was used to but going into that, like [a] few weeks in, I think it got easier for everyone."*

Participant 1: *"I think the adjustment of separating the new team from the new set-up, the new set-up was fine. It was hard to cope the first… couple days, couple weeks."*

Participant 3: "*Yung pinaka-nagcontribute talaga is… yung paano ka lumaban. Lalabanan mo yung katamaran… lahat na ng ano ng katawan mo sinasabi na, 'gumawa ka ng rason para 'di magpraktis'... Mas titibay ka as an athlete."*

(**Participant 3:** The biggest contributor [to the overall well-being] really is how you fight. You fight laziness, every part of your body that's telling you, 'find a reason not to practice'. You'll become stronger as an athlete.)

Mental Health

The impact of the **routinary** nature of bubble training led to the experiences of **burnout and fatigue** among student-athletes which significantly compromised their well-being:

Participant 1: "*If you train that much for 5 days a week and then, we would only have a day and a half day of rest… [It] can really get into you mentally."*

Participant 2: *"...internally, nakaka-drain siya. Ayoko kasi nung parang routinary yung gagawin. Parang nakakasawa siya in a way."*

(**Participant 2:** Internally, it's draining [bubble training]. I don't like it when things become a routine. It gets tiring in a way.)

This sentiment was reiterated multiple times in the interviews by multiple participants, and the repetitive nature of the experience was further emphasized:

Participant 2: *"It's either training, aral. Tapos routinary."*

Participant 3: *"Pero nung tumagal, parang mapapagod din yung utak mo."*

(**Participant 2:** It's either training, studying. And it's routinary.

Participant 3: But as it [bubble training] went on, it seems like your mind might also get tired.)

Participant 3 highlighted the emotions they underwent during bubble training, which stemmed from the monotonous tone of their days, eventually affecting their passion towards the sport:

Participant 3: "*Parang mawawalan ka ng social life. Yun na lang lagi mong ginagawa, mapapagod ka rin pala."*

(Participant 3: It's like you're losing your social life. That's the only thing you always do [routine in bubble training], [and] you'll get tired eventually, too.)

During the interviews, the athletes also expressed their **uncertainties** due to the unpredictable nature of the set-up and the pandemic, and their futures both outside and as a player on the team. Their current situations gave them an indefinite timeline of when their lives would get back on track, leading to plenty of questions:

Participant 1: *"...being away from home and also the uncertainty of "when can I go". It's like "taking too long", "Why is it taking too long?"*

Participant 3: "*Yung una, excited talaga. At the same time… parang naiisip mo din- napag-uusapan din ng teammates namin, 'pag tumagal nga anong mangyayari samin."*

(**Participant 3:** At first, [I was] really excited. At the same time, you also think about it – my teammates would discuss what would happen to us if it [bubble training] lasted long.)

Aside from the uncertainty of the situation, the student-athletes also felt frustrations that originated from different situations. Participant 2 experienced it while managing multiple responsibilities at once as a student and as an athlete inside the bubble while also meeting the intense expectations of the coaches:

Participant 2: *"Frustrating siya for me, kasi kailangan mong pagsabay-sabayin siya. Wala kang pwedeng pag-kwentuhan."*

Participant 2: *"Parang kailangan mong ma-hit yung specific skills na kailangan. Yung dine-demand nung coach sa amin. … Tas, physically demanding na din… yun yung nagiging bridge nila para ma-frustrate."*

(**Participant 2:** It's [bubble training] frustrating for me, because you have to juggle everything [tasks]. You can't have casual conversations.

Participant 2: You need to hit the specific skills that the coach demands from us. And it's physically demanding, [and] that becomes the bridge for them to get frustrated.)

Similarly, Participant 3 felt frustrated due to the routinary schedules and being confined in one place:

Participant 3: "*May point kasi… na dadating na parang mapapagod ka din. Paulit-ulit nalang yung gagawin niyo… walang nagbabago, 'di kayo nakakalabas, walang ibang mukhang nakikita."*

Participant 3: *"... parang kang nakakulong, tapos ganon na yung ginagawa mo palagi… parang napupuno ka din."*

(**Participant 3:** There's a point where you get tired [of bubble training]. You do the same routine over and over again, nothing changes, you can't go out, and you don't get to see any other faces.

Participant 3: It's like you're locked up, and you keep doing the same thing, you'll feel like you're being suffocated.)

Throughout the set-up, coping strategies and efforts such as a weekly buffer day and initiatives for team bonding were implemented to deal with the mishaps of bubble training and support mental health. The experience of Participant 2 details an explicit and systematic manner of taking care of the student-athletes' mental health:

Participant 2: *"Meron kaming parang Mental Health Day… hindi siya gagawa ng training or anything else. Basta lilibot lang kami dun sa bubble training set-up."*

Participant 2: *"Dun ko parang nilalabas lahat which is pwede kami pumunta sa pool. Parang dun mo mafi-free lahat ng frustration… emotions na negative effect… May ginawa kami nung bubble training namin, which is parang kailangan namin… kausapin lahat ng ka-teammate namin. 'Anong problem?'"*

(**Participant 2:** We have what we call a Mental Health Day. There's no training or anything else. We just move around in the bubble training set-up.

Participant 2: That's when I release everything [negative emotions], and we can go to the pool. There, you can free yourself from all the frustration, emotions that have a negative effect. Also, we had an activity during our bubble training, where we needed to talk to all our teammates, asking them, 'What's the problem?'.)

Conversely, Participant 3's experience was more of an intrinsic effort by the student-athletes and the coaching staff to take care of each other's mental health:

Participant 3: *"Yung coaches namin that time, gumagawa naman sila ng paraan na parang may bonding din kami… Ginagawa namin dun naglalaro din kami ng … parang mga bata din."*

(**Participant 3:** Our coaches during that time, they found ways for us to have some bonding as well. So, we played like kids, too.)

Fostering Relationships

In the bubble, the student-athletes were able to develop positive relationships with their teammates and coaches through enhanced communication with one another. Their experiences revealed that the bubble was an avenue for team development as it also influenced their ability to uphold themselves as team players. All three participants expressed the same emotions about their coaches and teammates as evidenced through their responses:

Participant 1: *"I was able to see all of them, even the coaching staff everyday for a very long time, and I think that really helped make us closer because also, there are a lot of new players on the team. I think that because of that, we were able to adjust early."*

Participant 2: "*Mas gumanda yung relationship namin. So, kaya na namin silang masabihan kung bakit hindi siya nagwo-work, ganun. So, na-aaply naman din nila yun sa paggawa ng routine namin. Kaya, mas okay siya."*

Participant 3: "*...yung coaches namin that time, gumagawa naman sila ng paraan na parang may bonding din kami."*

(Participant 2: Our relationship improved. So, we can now tell them why it's [routine] not working. So, they can also apply that in creating our routine. So, it's better.

Participant 3: Our coaches during that time, they found ways for us to have some bonding as well.)

Examining participants' behaviors in their bubble training, it becomes evident that being a good team player holds significance. This implies that effective collaboration with others significantly shapes the outcomes of the training for them, as emphasized by the following responses:

Participant 2: "*So nung bubble training, yun yung naging stepping stone na parang na-realize ko na nasa team ako. So, kailangan kong ma-build pa rin yung relationship dun sa teammates ko.*"

Participant 3: *"...sa'min team sport, basketball, hindi naman ikaw lang yan eh. So, kailangan mong matuto makisama sa bawat isa. Mag-adjust ka din, maging selfless ka."*

(**Participant 2:** So, during the bubble training, that became a stepping stone for me to realize that I am part of a team. So, I still need to build relationships with my teammates.

Participant 3: In our team sport, basketball, it's not just you, right? So, you need to learn to get along with everyone. You need to adjust and be selfless.)

Moreover, improved communication was also conveyed through all the three participants' responses:

Participant 1: *"I think the set-up influenced socializing greatly because I think you might go crazy if you are just in the bubble by yourself all the time rather than socializing with other people."*

Participant 2: *"Sa mga coaches naman, parang mas napi-pinpoint namin kung ano pa yung pwede namin gawin sa team. Parang, mas nasasabi na namin sa kanila yung mga factors kung bakit hindi siya nagwo-work."*

Participant 3: "*Nakakapag-usap kami nang medyo malalim na mga conversations ng teammates ko… kaya naging okay din kasi kasi pare-parehas kami ng pinagdadaanan eh."*

(**Participant 2:** And then, with the coaches, it seems like we can pinpoint more what else we can do for the team. It's like we can convey to them the factors why it's [routine] not working.

Participant 3: "We were able to have deep conversations, and it became okay because we were all going through the same thing. So, we were able to open up to each other.)

Team relationships were also found to be a key element during the bubble training, as observed from the participants' responses:

Participant 1: "*...in the bubble, we were able to talk with them [teammates]... we were able to spend more time with them, which made us a lot closer than we were in the online set-up."*

Participant 2: *"Madi-distinguish mo yung personality ng ka-teammate mo."*

Participant 3: "*...minsan lumalabas din yung tunay na ugali, makikilala mo lalo tsaka dun na kayo mag-aadjust. So, mas… na-strengthen yung relationship ng bawat isa."*

(**Participant 2:** You can distinguish the personality of your teammates.

Participant 3: Sometimes, their true character would come out, and you would get to know them better and adjust to each other. So, the relationship between everyone became stronger.)

In examining participant responses within the context of bubble training, the findings indicate that team development constitutes a substantive factor exerting discernible influence, thereby significantly shaping the observed outcomes within the purview of this research study.

Participant 2: "...*siguro yung advantage nun is… mas na-fofocus mo yung sarili mo para ma-build yung team… Mas nagiging buo kayo compared sa aalis kayo sa university ganun. Mas mabubuo niyo yung team in terms of character."*

Participant 3: "*Sa team naman, mas tumibay talaga kasi dahil dun sa chemistry na nabuo sa loob ng bubble na yun."*

(**Participant 2**: Maybe the advantage of that [bubble set-up] is you focus more on building the team. You become more cohesive compared to, let's say, if you were outside the university. You can build the team in terms of character.

Participant 3: As for the team, we became stronger because of the chemistry that was built inside the bubble.)

Empathy with one another was also greatly highlighted during the bubble especially since the student-athletes were experiencing relatively the same things during their journey. These are supported through these responses:

Participant 1: *"People also feel somewhat the same of what you feel."*

Participant 2: *"Yung ano lang… nagbago is… siguro… mas malawak na yung pagkaka-intindi ko sa mga teammates ko."*

(**Participant 2:** The only thing that changed is, perhaps, I've had a broader understanding of my teammates.)

However, being with the same people for weeks, it became inevitable for the student-athletes to engage in conflicts with one another due to the rise of negative feelings such as frustrations and the differences in culture and family upbringing as contributing factors:

Participant 2: "*It's a team effort siya eh, so pag 'di mo siya nagawa, parang masisisi mo rin minsan yung ka-teammate mo. Minsan, may nag-away nga dun… kasi nafu-frustrate na din sila na parang ... ayun nga 'di nila magawa."*

Participant 3: "*Magkaka-conflict talaga kasi … kanya-kanyang kulturang kinalakihan sa bahay, iba-ibang pamilya, iba-iba yung kinalakihan niyo, anong ginagawa niyo sa bahay."*

(**Participant 2**: It's a team effort, so if you can't do it, sometimes you'll blame your teammate. Sometimes, there were disagreements because they were getting frustrated since they couldn't do it [routine].

Participant 3: There were really conflicts because of different cultures that we grew up with at home, different families, different upbringing, and what you do at home.)

These findings emphasize the significance of fostering relationships in the researched context, contributing to a deeper understanding of the experiences of student-athletes in bubble training.

Support Systems

Immediate support systems in bubble training provided practical and emotional support to ease the anxiety of student-athletes. Student-athletes were provided with academic leniency by their professors, as mentioned as:

Participant 1: *"...it was easier 'cause they [university] were able to give us a whole day of… purely studying and then you can attend your classes freely with the online set-up...".*

Participant 3: "*…parang mas madali siya para sakin kasi una, online lang. Tapos yung mga professors that time alam nila naka-bubble kami. Mas naging lenient sila, mas naging understanding sila sa schedule namin."*

(**Participant 3:** It was easier for me because it [class] was online only. Also, the professors at that time knew we were in a bubble. They became more lenient and understanding of our schedule.)

Moreover, external support from their families and the university was also integral for the athletes as this served as their motivation during the bubble training. This was specified by:

Participant 3: "*...lagi naman kami nag-uusap ng pamilya ko araw-araw. Araw-araw nila akong tinatawagan."*

Participant 3: "*...motivated kami na ipaglaban yung school kasi nga na-feel namin paano kami alagaan. Parang alagang-alaga kami sa bubble eh. Yun yung parang motivation namin na magcompete."*

(**Participant 3**: My family and I talk every day. They call me every day.

Participant 3: We were motivated to fight for the school because we felt how they took care of us. It feels like we're very well taken care of in the bubble. That was our motivation to compete.)

Individual Growth

Each participant expressed their viewpoints on how the bubble training affected their motivation, determination, thinking, and skills that developed them as an individual both mentally and physically.

As the bubble training continued for weeks to months, student-athletes expressed how they were able to cope amidst the pandemic. At the same time, bubble training provided opportunities for the participant to show what they have worked on and reignite their motivation:

Participant 1: *"it was really motivating to show what you worked for, for the past 2 years."*

Participant 2: *"…Parang intrinsic motivation yun eh. Kasi lagi ko lang iniisip is yung family ko… For me na din na para magka-scholarship, ganun. Aside from that… napili kami ng coach so... bakit… hahayaan ko pa na… mawala yun? So, I'd take the opportunity na pinili na din ako ng coach."*

Participant 3: *"Pero babalik naman, bumabalik talaga siya, kumbaga nagigising din ulit yung drive mo para sa future."*

Participant 3: *"Yun yung kumbaga parang trabaho mo eh … nagbibigay ng scholarship sa'yo eh."*

Participant 3: *"Iba kasi pag UAAP eh, yung spirit na gusto mo ipaglaban yung school mo, yung pride… Motivated kami na ipaglaban yung school kasi nga na-feel namin paano kami alagaan."*

(**Participant 2:** Most likely, that's intrinsic motivation. Because I always think about my family. And then, for me as well, to get a scholarship. Aside from that, we were chosen by the coach. So, why would I let that opportunity slip away, right? So, I'd take the opportunity that the coach chose me.

Participant 3: But it will come back [motivation], it really comes back, like your drive for the future is reawakened.

Participant 3: It's like your job. It [sports] gives you a scholarship.

Participant 3: It's different when it comes to UAAP, the spirit of wanting to fight for your school, your pride. We were motivated to fight for the school because we felt how they took care of us.)

In terms of determination, student-athletes also mentioned that they were eager to improve themselves as an athlete and to be stronger not only physically but also mentally:

Participant 1: "*I felt more eager to train also, to wake up every day, and to be in the competition that we were preparing for."*

Participant 3: *"...dahil sa bubble tsaka bantay-sarado ka rin ng coaches mo, mas naging matibay ka na hindi ka basta-basta sumusuko."*

(**Participant 3:** Because of the bubble and your coaches are watching you closely, you become stronger and don't give up easily.)

Student-athletes also began to ponder and reflect as they realized their undiscovered potentials in bubble training, that assuming a more significant role in the team may benefit oneself and those around them:

Participant 1: *"I think the set-up made me realize [that] I am capable of a lot more things than I think that I can do."*

Participant 2: *"Sinabihan ako na…, after nito, isa ka sa nakikita ko na maglead ng team. Na-realize ko na, 'Ba't niya nasabi yun? 'Di ko naman nakikita yun sa sarili ko'. Yun yung parang naging isang way, na parang 'Ay, ba't di ko subukan na maging… isang leader na den sa team para maka-help na din na mag-grow yung team?' Yung yung realization ko na, 'Bakit hindi ko i-try?'".*

(Participant 2: I was told that after this [one-on-one session with teammate], I was one of those seen as leading the team. So, I realized, 'Why did they say that? I don't see that in myself'. That became a way for me to think, 'Why not try to be a leader in the team to help the team grow?' That was my realization, 'Why not give it a try?'.)

Student-athletes also stated that their physical condition during the bubble training increased dramatically, and another participant also said that they found improvement in their overall skills:

Participant 1: *"Being in the training set-up, it really helped a lot with the development of not just basic skills, but overall my skills as a whole."*

Participant 3: *"So, physically maco-condition ka talaga. Wala ka na ibang iisipin eh, puro training."*

(**Participant 3:** You will be physically conditioned. You won't have to think about anything else, just constant training.)

DISCUSSION

The exploration of the lived experiences of UAAP student-athletes in bubble training prompted complex perceptions and emotions towards the imposed protocols of the set-up. The present study underscores the nature of bubble training and the underlying influence of the new set-up towards the overall well-being of UAAP student-athletes amidst the pandemic. On one hand, the set-up contributed positive impacts on aspects such as team chemistry, performance, and the self-perception of student-athletes. On the other, it also caused a series of struggles and inconveniences to their mental state.

The findings of the study also reflected the nature of Seligman's Well-Being Theory of improving a student-athletes' well-being by the individual pursuit of each component of well-being. A common denominator of the responses also revealed a combination of both external and internal factors (e.g., COVID-19, bubble set-up, etc.) that influenced the pursuit of well-being, which cascaded into a series of events in the experiences of student-athletes that may have positively or negatively affected their well-being while subjected under these conditions.

Availability and Accessibility of Services

Across all participants, it was evident that the bubble set-up laid out the availability and completeness of facilities and services essential to the student-athletes' performance and well-being. The increased satisfaction of the student-athletes on the available services during bubble training contributed significantly to maximizing their preparation to physically condition themselves for competitions. This is similar to a recent cross-sectional study by Washif et al. that reveals the greater utilization of performance support services (i.e., physiotherapy, sports massage) in athletes during quarantine camps. Access to these resources were attributed to enhancing outcomes of recovery after sports-specific training.[11] In addition, miscellaneous facilities like pools had an impact on the well-being of athletes in the bubble as it provided them an opportunity to explore a different scenery besides the usual training gym or court. This is in contrast to the results of a correlational study conducted by Bullard on student-athletes during the pandemic who were not in a bubble set-up which concluded that a contributory factor associated with their heightened feelings of stress is due to the lack of resources since their training facilities were closed and there were no available rehabilitation services for chronic injuries from pre-pandemic training.[37]

Restrictions

A requisite of bubble training among the student-athletes was to abide by the strict protocols and restrictions enforced during the bubble set-up. The implicated deprivation of freedom imposed on student-athletes substantially contributed to both their difficulties and adaptability,

ultimately leading to a varied plethora of feelings and emotions towards the bubble set-up. Contrary to existing literature, the quarantine restrictions assumed a vital role in restoring the daily routines of student-athletes while having security from support systems (i.e., athletes, coaching staff) and from virus transmission.[11] These offer a perspective from the other end of the spectrum, presenting the possibility of varying experiences and perspectives of student-athletes.

Moreover, this confinement was further influenced by thoughts of longing for family and a social life, adding challenges to a student-athlete's motivation. A striking semblance with a different study revealed increased levels of stress and anxiety in student-athletes attributed to the curtailment of social life in student-athletes, posing an additional burden to relieving stress as aggravated by imposed demands.[38] The present study underscores the psychological toll of restrictions and its cascading effects to the thoughts and feelings of student-athletes.

Perseverance and adaptability towards the imposed norms fostered settlement in the student-athletes' own pursuit of life inside the bubble. The participants demonstrated resilience from their shared experiences, which is noteworthy in a study that demonstrates an athlete's resilient thinking as a means to cope with the stressors of the pandemic.[38] With the unique and inherent burden carried by student-athletes, a high regard should be given to a student-athlete's resiliency to encourage adaptability.

Mental Health

The mental well-being of student-athletes emerges as a significant challenge during bubble training, primarily due to the stagnant and repetitive nature of their schedules. The routine, which usually rotates between training sessions, meal breaks, and study periods, presents both a positive and negative influence on the mental and emotional well-being of athletes. The demand for high-performance results, accompanied by a feeling of confinement to specific areas assigned for the completion of their daily tasks within the bubble also placed significant stress and frustration on athletes.[15] Eventually, it manifests as a pronounced psychological strain, or even negative physical response resulting in a cascade effect that progresses towards feelings of burnout and fatigue.[5] It was also taken into account that the uncertainty for their future, athletic career, competitions, and seasons added more burden to the student-athlete.[3] The lack of clarity in these aspects heightened the overall stress and anxiety experienced by these individuals, influencing not only their present well-being but also the trajectory of their future endeavors within the realm of sports. Thus, it is critical to provide vacant periods in the athletes' schedules that allow them to meet their psychological demands for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as fulfillments of these demands are said to increase sport-related intrinsic drive.[3] It is also necessary for student-athletes to possess essential coping skills within the confines of the bubble, aiming to mitigate adverse effects on their well-being, performance, and personal and athletic objectives.[5] Furthermore, due to the coaches and supporting staff being in constant close proximity with the players, there was ease in active monitoring and regulating of the athletes' conditions, ensuring they are equipped with effective strategies to handle undesired thoughts, emotions, and stress-induced behaviors, thus playing a vital role in maintaining optimal performance.[12]

Fostering Relationships

The bubble training has sparked conflicts among student-athletes, as their mental well-being was compromised by separation from their families. However, despite these challenges, athletes and coaches equally gave efforts to maintain a positive team environment.[15] Some participants highlighted the importance of bonding time, illustrating the team's commitment to fostering camaraderie. Athlete participants expressed that the bubble environment played a significant role in uniting the team. Spending every day together for months provided an opportunity to understand and appreciate each other despite individual differences. Consequently, these responses suggest that bubble training, despite its inherent stresses, ultimately contributed to a positive and unifying experience for our athlete participants.[11]

Support Systems

The presence of various forms of support systems played a vital role in the athletes' holistic well-being as this has inspired them during the bubble training, providing them the motivation to persist. External social support through remote communication such as phone calls from their loved ones kindled additional drive for the athletes regardless of the psychological impact the set-up has had on them.[3] Similarly, support from the university in the form of academic leniency was also of great assistance to the athletes especially that simultaneously balancing academics, sports, and their other roles and responsibilities apart from being a student-athlete is difficult enough. Their professors' empathy regarding their situation stimulated further support on the side of the athletes. Consequently, these support systems yielded positive outcomes as it motivated them to perform better in the bubble.

Individual Growth

The isolation of the student-athletes in the bubble set-up derived opportunities for them to build positive relationships with their teammates and coaches. Consequently, this sense of relatedness amongst the members of the team served as their motivation to train at the same level even during the pandemic.[3] Close supervision of the coaches meant that the athletes could maintain and even improve their overall mentality, which allowed them to develop a drive to continue to prepare for competitions as they were determined to show all their hard work despite any unfavorable conditions. Individual growth was also seen as there was an improvement

in the athletes' performance as they were able to focus on sport-specific training with other athletes and their respective coaches.[3]

Implications for Research

Future studies should focus on formulating strategies to improve the schedules set during bubble training as experiences of burnout and fatigue root from how routinary their schedules were. For instance, implementing a bubble training with alternating programs (e.g., skills training, health break, cross training, light exercise, etc.) may help in retaining the drive of student-athletes to train while in a bubble. Moreover, there is a need for additional qualitative studies on the effect of bubble training on Filipino student-athletes and professional athletes to gain deeper insights into their emotions, challenges, and experiences from what is already known and to serve as a comparative measurement. It is through delving deeper into these psychological aspects of the athletes that concrete and effective ways of mitigating the negative mental and psychosocial effects of such a set-up could be created.

Implications for Practice

The recognition of the student-athlete's mental struggles in bubble training, subsumed by the restrictions and standard practices set by the pandemic, has clear implications for athletic associations, universities, and the coaching staff of a student-athlete that requires intervention. The routinary nature of bubble training that often discourages student-athletes in their pursuit of fulfilling their roles due to uncertainties and fatigue should lead to more initiatives to uplift the spirits and self-esteem of student-athletes. This may stem from the collaborative efforts of school counselors and coaching staff to cause a favorable impact in boosting the morale of student-athletes. Efforts to teach student-athletes on the effective management of their self-doubts and fatigue must be intensified to sustain their motivations.

Structured routines have also implied symptoms of burnout, as evidently seen in the assessment of student-athletes in their bubble set-up. This is further underscored by the frustrations of student-athletes towards isolation, causing a sense of deprived freedom. In this light, a reformat of schedules may be prompted to particularly ease the mental exhaustion of student-athletes and find the right balance between time for training and rest. This is ideally performed collectively with the opinions of the student-athletes, coaches, and other relevant parties involved to ensure productivity and progress in a student-athlete without compromising both their potential and mental needs. Specific and more frequent mental health initiatives may also be conducted in an attempt to boost the morale and motivation of everyone inside of the bubble set-up. Activities to change the pace of the athletes' daily lives, counseling efforts, and team-building activities can be conducted as part of their schedules.

Implications for Policy

Endeavors to policymakers must also be initiated in efforts to sustain the well-being of student-athletes under a restricted set-up. The findings suggest that allowing visitors such as families in bubble training can potentially motivate the student-athlete, thus improving their mental states. This policy should include adequate monitoring of the people entering the bubble, thus addressing the homesickness of student-athletes while keeping safety measures intact. Guidelines with regard to the athletes exploring the venues at which their training sessions are being held may also be made to be more lenient to give room for exploration outside of their rooms or training facilities. Alternatives must also be explored further in developing and expanding programs that ensure the holistic welfare of student-athletes by considering their inherent qualities and understanding that a solid support system empowers student-athletes in their pursuit of roles as both student and athlete.

Limitations

There were limitations in the study that could be noteworthy for future researchers. Only three participants were recruited due to the lack of eligible participants that meet the study's criteria[24] such as having prior experience of training under the same team. Recruiting and interviewing athletes from more UAAP schools and the National Collegiate and Athletic Association (NCAA) would have allowed greater depth and diversity of data for an improved understanding of the lived experiences of collegiate athletes from various universities. Moreover, the nature of semi-structured interviews conducted online prompted unpredicted connectivity issues from the participants which prevented them from turning on their cameras. This disregarded the underlying meaning from non-verbal responses, limiting the collected data to verbal responses. Recall bias is also a limiting factor to the volume and completeness of data given an approximate of two years of recall necessitated among participants. Similar to other qualitative studies, the potential bias in the data due to the influence of the interviewer's verbal and non-verbal nuances remains as a limitation despite employing alternative solutions to mitigate these biases.

CONCLUSIONS

The bubble set-up yielded varied experiences and perspectives among the student-athletes. During the interviews, it was found that the bubble set-up had its strong points, providing the athletes with easy access to sport-specific facilities and services, eventual development of the virtues of mental fortitude and perseverance, improvement of interpersonal relationships, and opportunities to grow as individuals. Conversely, the heavy restrictions, isolation, various internal and external pressures, and routinary nature of their daily routines were causes for increased levels of stress and anxiety eventually leading to fatigue and burnout.

In the current qualitative study, the participants have shared a wide range of responses regarding the positive and negative effects of bubble training. Despite several differences with each of their unique experiences during the set-up, similarities were found among their responses. Positive effects that were substantial for the student-athletes encompass the streamlined access to comprehensive services including strength and conditioning facilities, medical management, coaching, and physical therapy which optimized both training and proactive health measures, enhancing their physical condition. They likewise expressed that the implementation of buffer day and team bonding activities has developed their resilience and adaptability to change with the help of their peers, thus forging stronger relationships with teammates and coaches which fosters a supportive network crucial for success. This has significantly improved their overall well-being despite the bubble set-up and has increased the athletes' determination or drive to perform better during games.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Semi-structured Interview Guide

Lived Experiences of University Athletic Association of the Philippines Season 84 Student-Athletes in Bubble Training during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study

Instructions:
As this is a semi-structured interview, it is not required to ask every specific question below in order. The Interviewer must ask open-ended questions to seek further detail and description of the participant's responses.

Begin the interview by properly introducing yourself and explaining the purpose of the interview. The Interviewer may begin the interview with the following question: "How did you find your experience training in bubble set-up under a pandemic?"

The Interviewer may ask follow-up questions as listed in bullet points below in each main question when appropriate regarding the responses of the participants, and must ensure that all topics will be covered.

Introduction:
Good morning / afternoon!

I am (state your name) and on behalf of our research team, we thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. As you know, we are interested in your experiences as a student-athlete who trained under a bubble set-up during the COVID-19 pandemic last 2021-2022. Our goal during this interview is to understand how you feel you've been impacted by training under these conditions— particularly as it relates to athletics—and how you have responded to it.

Before we begin, I would like to remind you that I will record the session once we begin the interview. The recordings and transcripts of the conversation are confidential, as described in the consent form. Please avoid stating your name and all identifying information including your university. I also want to remind you that everything you say during this interview is voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. You can choose not to answer any question or to end the discussion at any point. Do you have any questions before we begin?

[BEGIN RECORDING]

Once again, can you please confirm that you have consented to participate in this study?

PRIMARY QUESTIONS

Introductory Question

1. What were your general experiences when you were training under a bubble set-up such as your **training schedule, location or area, and services provided** like strength and conditioning or physical therapy?
   - [PROBE] What was an experience that you think stood out the most to you?
   - [PROBE] How would you think this experience was relevant to you as a student and as an athlete?
   - [PROBE] What were your initial impressions of the overall bubble training set-up?

Question/s for Positive Emotion

2. What were the **emotions and thoughts** that you felt while training in a new set-up with certain limitations?
   - [PROBE] What specific reasons do you think contributed to those emotions and thoughts?

Question/s for Engagement

3. What was your **daily training routine** under a bubble set-up? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this set-up?
   - [PROBE] What were the challenges or difficulties that you encountered to maintain this established routine?
   - [PROBE] How did you cope with the challenges and difficulties that you experienced in training under a bubble set-up?

4. As the bubble training continued for weeks and months, how would you **describe your interest and motivation** to train and/or compete while under a bubble set-up?
   - [PROBE] How different was your motivation under a bubble set-up as compared to your motivation during pre-pandemic training?

Question/s for Relationships

5. How did the set-up affect your **relationship with your teammates and coaching staff**?
   - [PROBE] What were the key differences between your relationship with them during the bubble training and during your training before?
   - [PROBE] How did the set-up influence you when it comes to socializing with your teammates and coaching staff?

Question/s for Meaning

6. How did the **set-up affect you in terms of the direction you wish to take in the future** as an athlete?
   - [PROBE] How did the set-up influence your perception about yourself as an athlete?
   - [PROBE] How did the set-up influence your purpose as an athlete?

Question/s for Achievement

7. If you would assess yourself, what are the **changes to your level of performance** and/or team's performance/dynamics **after the experience** of training under a bubble set-up?
   - [PROBE] What do you think might have affected the outcome of your performance?

Concluding Question/s

8. Based on your experience, what **improvements can you recommend** for future bubble training camps?

The Interviewer will then provide a **summary** of the sharing of the athletes and ask the following question: "Is this an adequate summary?"

Following this, the interview shall close with the following question: "Are there any **additional experiences** in training under a bubble set-up that **you think have contributed** to your overall well-being as a student and an athlete?"

Concluding Remarks

Thank you so much for participating in this interview. On behalf of the researchers, we really appreciate your time and effort. We will send you a GrabFood gift certificate as a token of appreciation and a copy of the transcript through email so you have the opportunity to validate all the information and make any comments or changes as necessary. Please feel free to contact the researchers if you have any questions about this interview or the study.

Appendix B. Themes and Coding Summary

Table 1. Generated Themes from NVivo

Themes	Categories / Codes	Files	Frequency
Availability and Accessibility of Services		3	3
Fostering Relationships	Conflicts	2	3
	Empathy	2	2
	Improved Coach Relationships	3	3
	Improved Communication	3	5
	Improved Team Relationships	3	11
	Team Development	2	4
	Team Player	2	2
Individual Growth	Intrinsic Motivation	2	5
	Perseverance	3	3
	Reflective Thinking	3	4
	Skill Development	2	3
Mental Health	Burnout	3	5
	Fatigue	2	4
	Frustrations	3	5
	Mental Health Initiatives	2	5
	Optimism	2	3
	Pressure	1	2
	Routinary	3	9
	Uncertainty	2	5
Restrictions	Adapting to Change	1	4
	Homesick	2	3
	Quarantine	3	7
Support Systems	Academic Leniency	2	3
	External Support	1	2