

Background

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Mental toughness and coping skills have a big role in the success of student-athletes. The demand that college athletics have on student-athletes not only is physical, but also mental. The constant performing under pressure, enhanced focus, challenges, and stress all affects the mental side of things. Today, mental health is one of the focusses for student-athletes. In order to do that, it is important to know how athletes deal with the highs and lows of playing a college sport. How student-athletes respond to these highs and lows has become increasingly important in understanding how to better prepare and practice.

Methods

We distributed a survey to assess sport psychology skills of student athletes at Liberty University.

Results

Results of the survey showed that student-athletes at Liberty University use sports to block out distractions. They like pressure and most of them answered that they perform better under pressure. Many athletes responded admitting that focusing and planning play a big part in their mental success. Also, athletes feel like they are supported and cared about when their coaches call them out to help them improve.

Conclusions

Our results suggest that student-athletes put a ton of pressure on themselves to be the best versions of themselves that they can be. A big part of being mentally prepared is planning and visualizing the results that you want to see.

Introduction and Research Question

Introduction

This study examines the mental toughness and coping skills in college athletes using the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 (ACSI-28) scale. This topic is important due to the focus on mental health in today's society. The purpose of this research is to inventory the athletic coping skills of Liberty University student-athletes to better understand how they prepare for and practice their "mental game." Through responses from student-athletes, this research will provide information that can help understand student-athletes and their mental well-being.

Research Question

How do athletes at Liberty University respond to several mental challenges?

The results of this survey help answer this question by showing athletes scores in seven sub-scales.

Methods

Methods

The ACSI-28 is designed to gauge mental toughness and coping skills in athletes in seven crucial areas. These areas can impact performance, for example, handling setbacks, thriving under pressure, and staying focused. The survey was distributed to all 500+ of the Liberty University NCAA student-athletes and 600+ Club sports athletes through email. This tool is simply a psychological assessment, meaning that it can help observe the crucial "mind game" side of sports. It is helpful because it can show not only the strengths of each athlete but also the weaknesses and areas where improvement is needed. In total, there were 402 responses (36% response rate) consisting of 18 NCAA sports teams and 25 club sports teams.

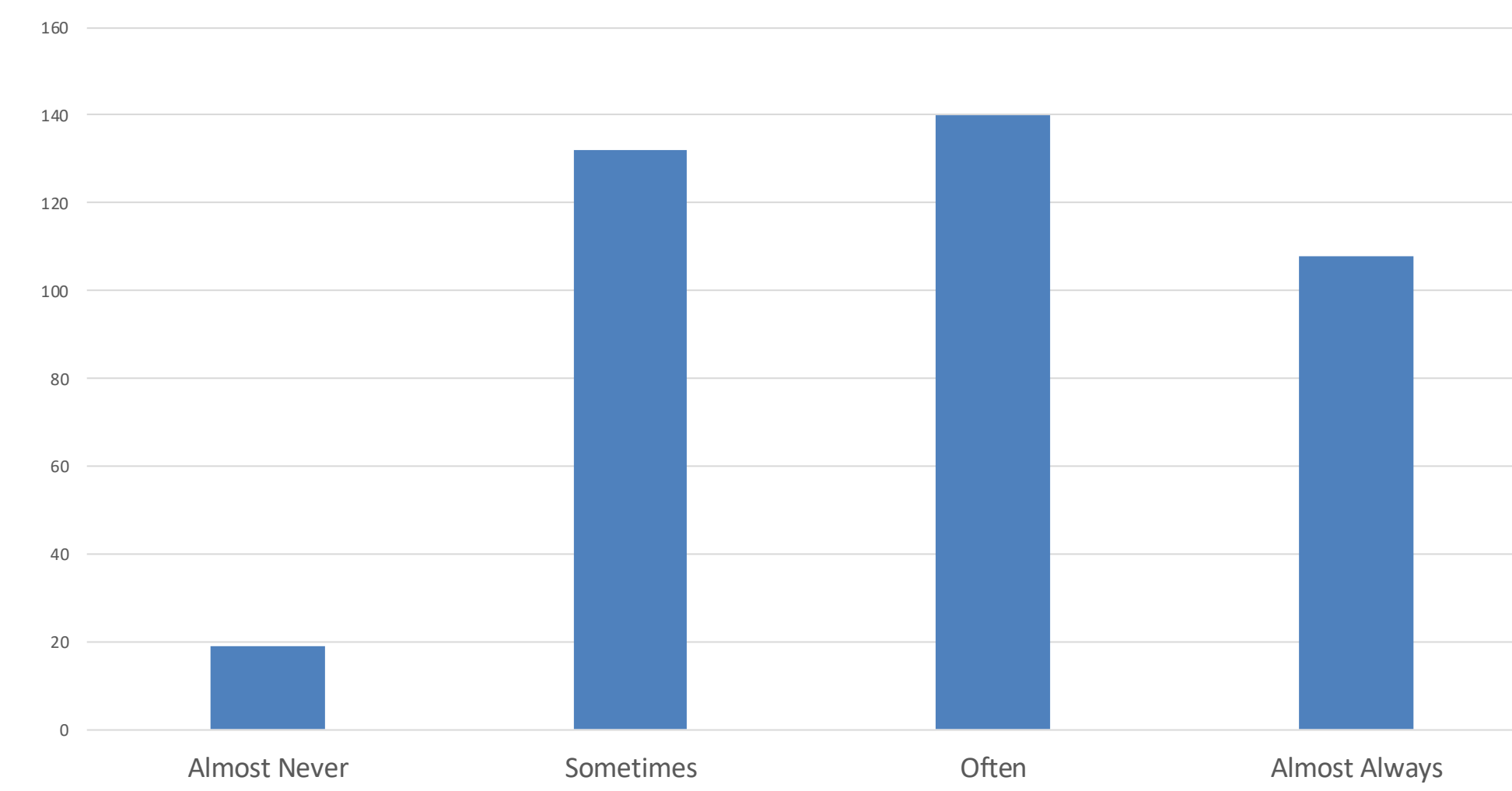


Figure 1. When a coach or manager tells me how to correct a mistake I've made, I tend to take it personally and feel upset

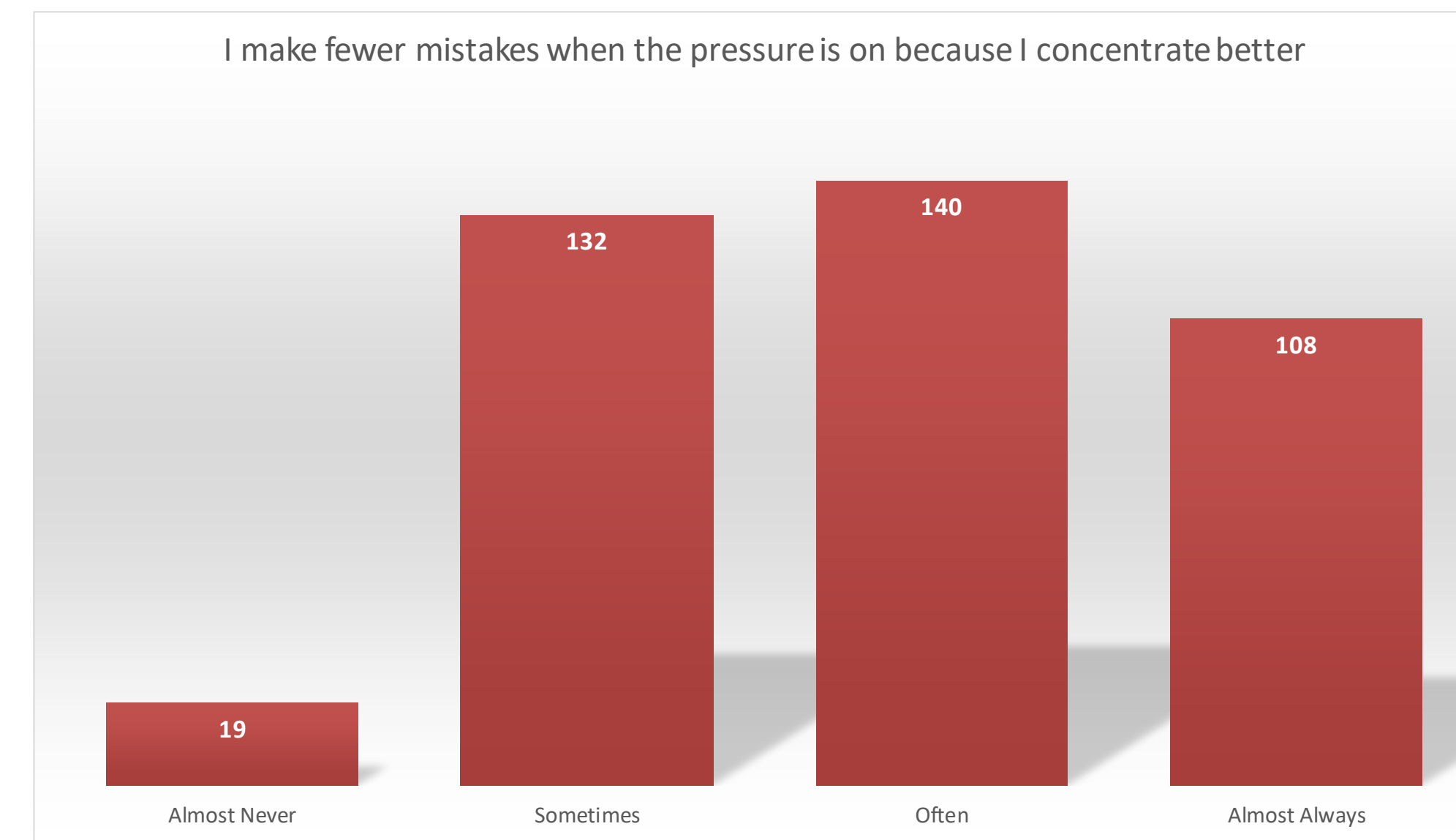


Figure 2. I make fewer mistakes when the pressure is on because I concentrate better

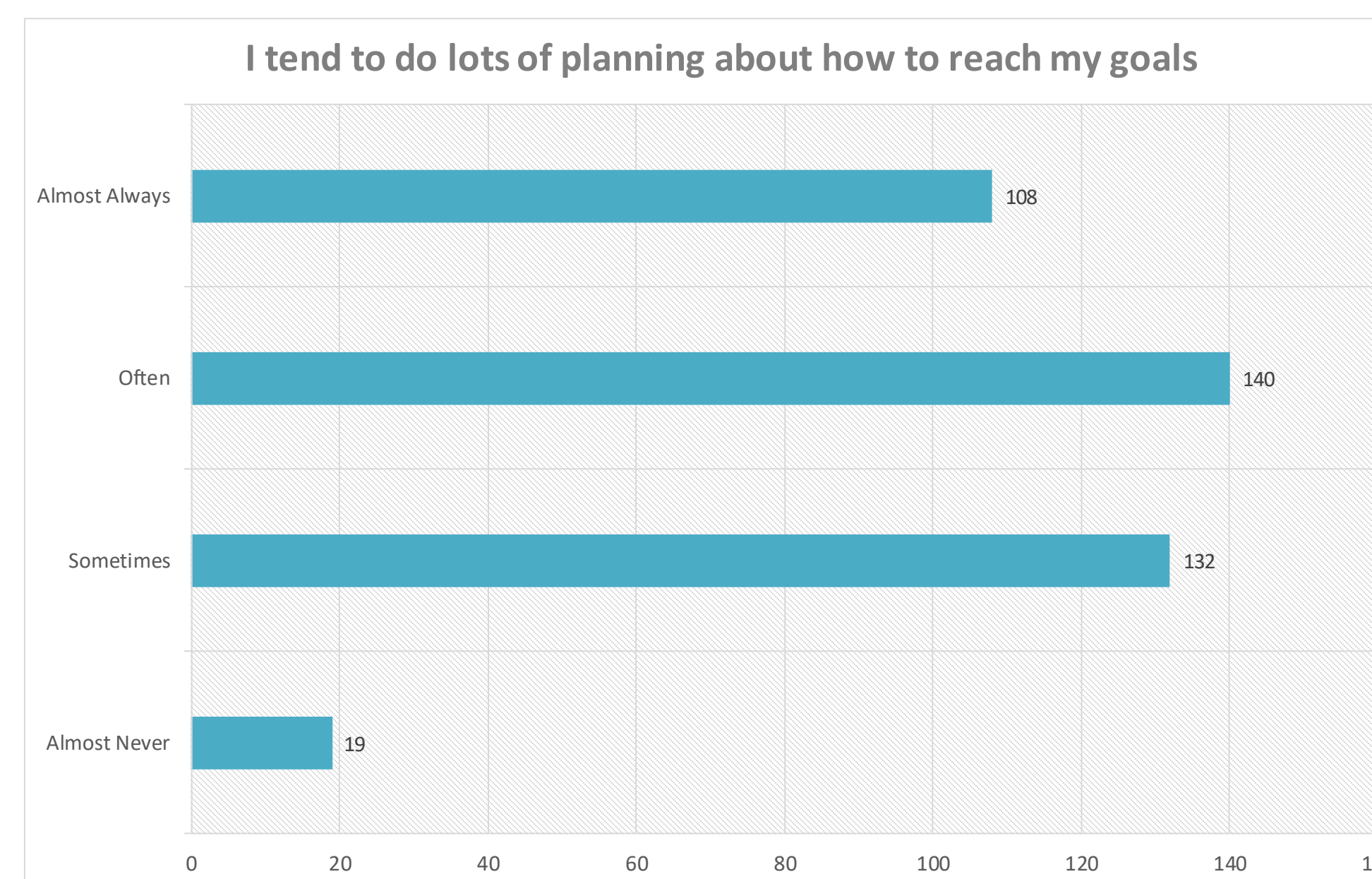


Figure 4. I tend to do lots of planning about how to reach my goals

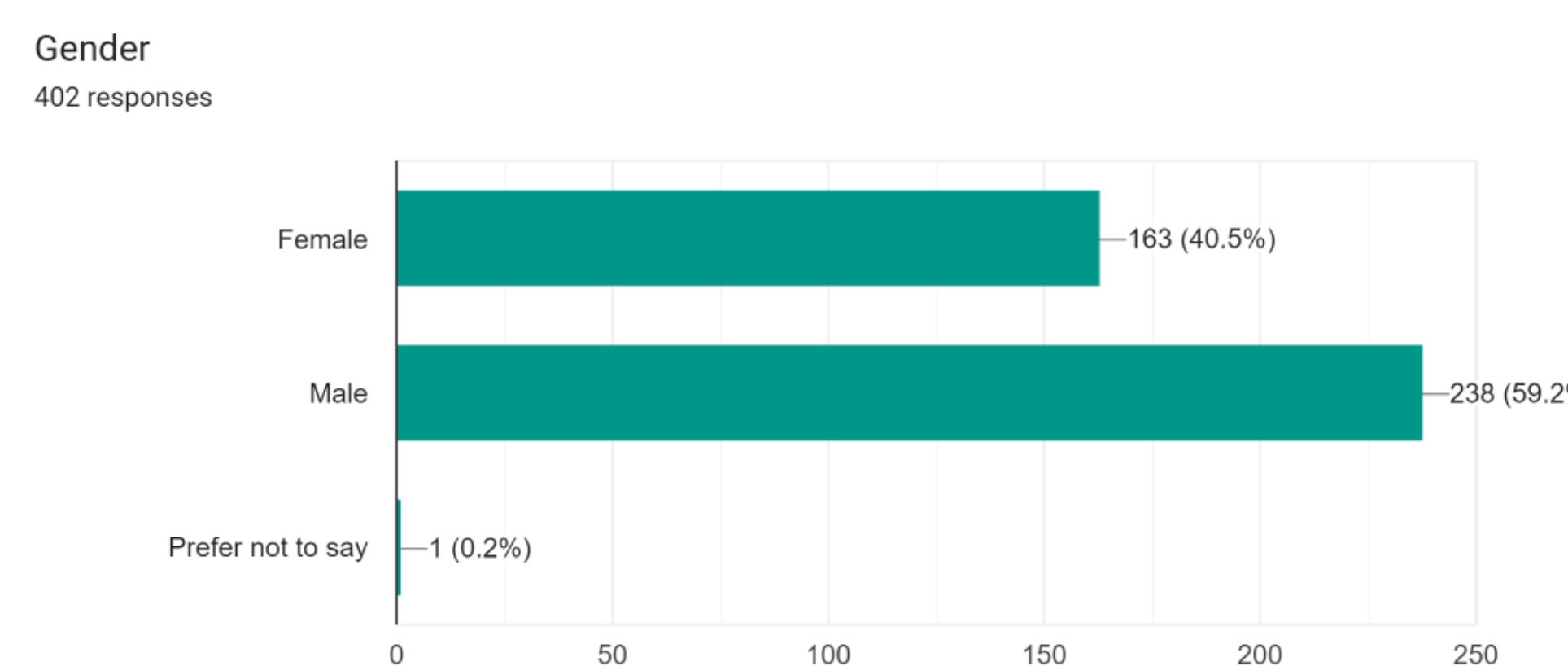


Figure 6. Demographic Information

Table 1. Shows the sports that participated in the ASCS survey. There were 18 NCAA D1 sports and 25 Club sports.

NCAA Sports					Club Sports				
Football	Baseball	Basketball (W)	Basketball (M)	Cross Country (W)	Action	Archery	Beach Volleyball	Cycling	Dance
Cross Country (M)	Golf	Soccer (W)	Soccer (M)	Tennis (W)	Disc Golf	Equestrian	Figure Skating	Gymnastics	D1-D3 Hockey (M)
Tennis (M)	Track & Field (W)	Track & Field (M)	Field Hockey	Lacrosse (W)	D1-D2 Hockey (W)	Lacrosse (M)	Racquetball	Rock Climbing	Rowing
Softball	Swim & Dive (W)	Volleyball (W)			Rifle	Shotgun	Ski & Snowboard	Synch. Skating	Swimming (M)
					Taekwondo	Triathlon	Ultimate	Volleyball (M)	Wrestling

On a daily or weekly basis, I set very specific goals for myself that guide what I do

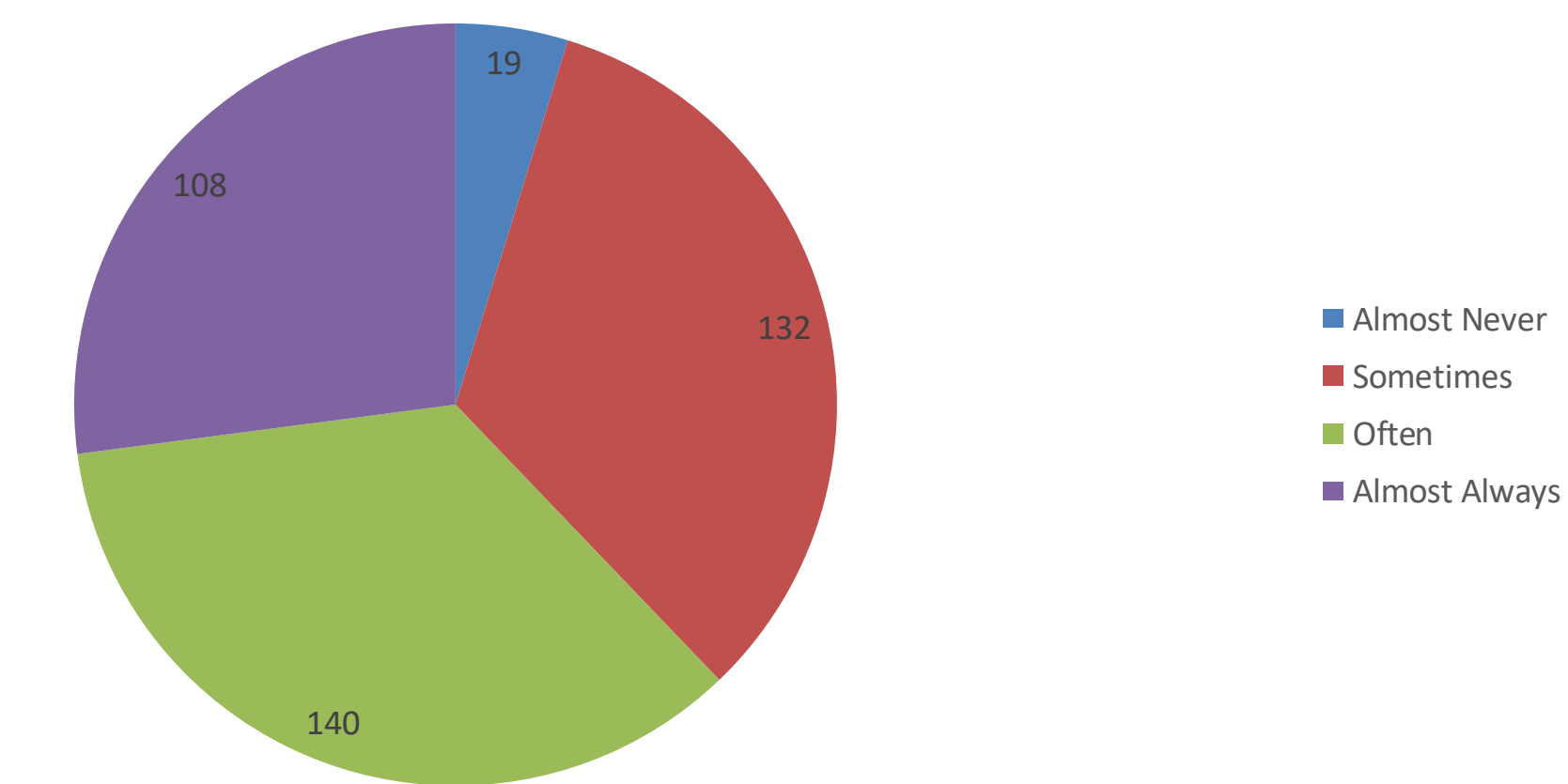


Figure 3. On a daily or weekly basis, I set very specific goals for myself that guide what I do

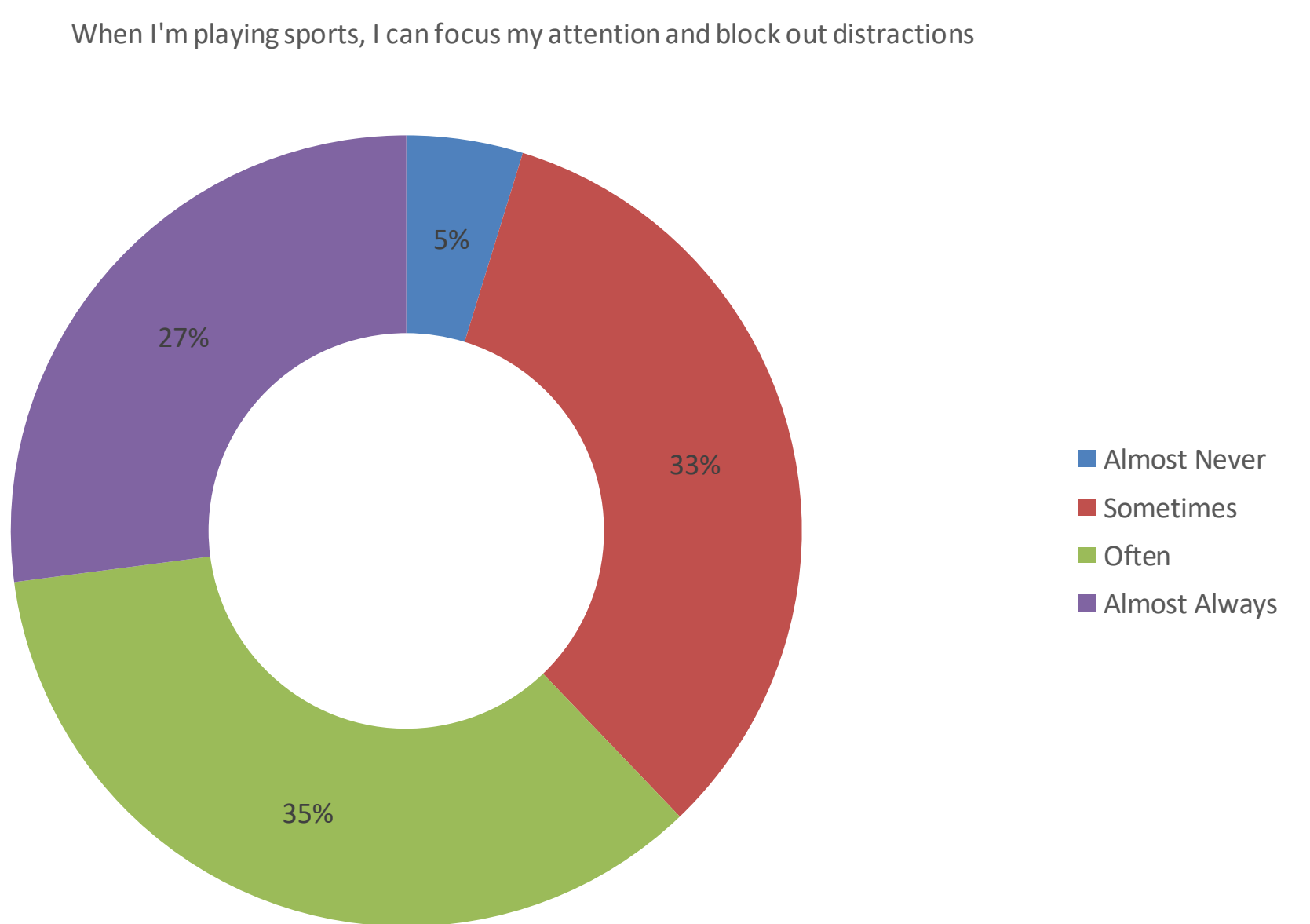


Figure 5. When I'm playing sports, I can focus my attention and block out distractions

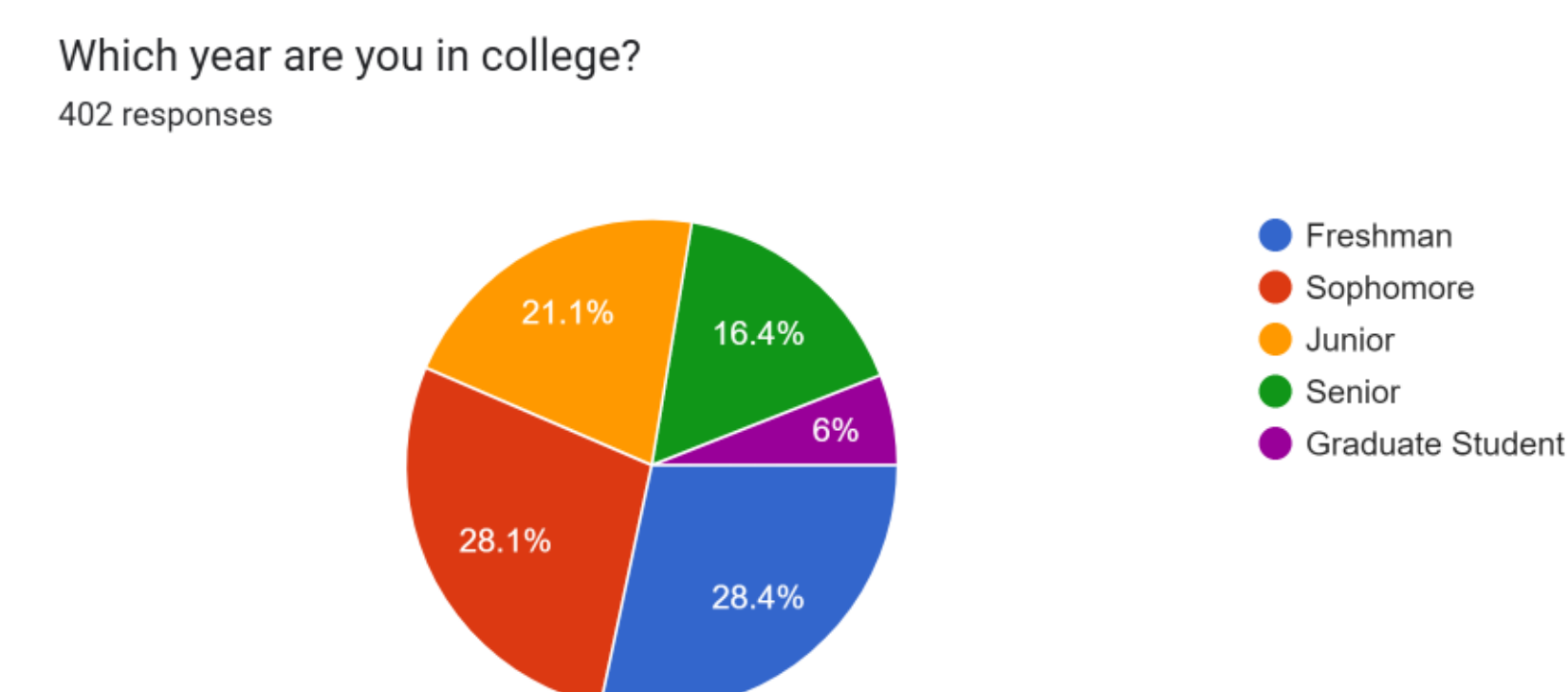


Figure 7. Demographic Information

Results and Conclusion

Results

For athletes blocking out distractions while competing can be very important. Competing to the best of their ability will not happen if they are focused on distractions. Being able to compete with a clear head is the best way to compete. Figure 5 shows that over 60% of athletes find they are able to block out distractions when playing sports. Another 30% of athletes are sometimes able to block out distractions.

Goal setting is important due to the need to have greater purposes to strive for. Figures 3 and 4 show that planning and goal setting play a huge role in the lives of student-athletes.

Failure is a frequently discussed topic and can have mixed motivations associated with it. Some athletes that fear failure will channel their fear into hard work. Conversely, pressure of failure can also paralyze some athletes in vital moments. Being prepared to handle pressure in a big moment is vital for athletes. Figure 2 indicates that a majority of athletes feel like they perform better under pressure.

Conclusion

To be a successful college athlete, you must have mental toughness and handle a multitude of circumstances. Coaches play a big part in the mental well-being of student-athletes. Holding athletes accountable as well as teaching important skills helps them feel prepared both physically and mentally. From an athlete's perspective, planning for each practice and performance as well as setting goals are important aspects of athletics.

Future Work

1. Determine how different teams at Liberty University prepare their athletes differently.
2. Understand and predict how ACSI 28 scores can change throughout college career.
3. Determine whether high ACSI 28 scores indicate success on the playing surface.

References

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