

SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

Coaches often refer to 'mental strength' and 'mental toughness' when attempting to describe that elusive quality which distinguishes the great players from the good ones in any sport. This quality is underpinned by specific mental skills and, as a coach, you have an important role in helping your player or team to develop and perfect these skills.

Sport psychology focuses on teaching practical mental skills to players, so that they can develop their psychological abilities to the same high level as their physical abilities. The key difference between winning and losing, or a good performance and a poor performance, may be at the mental skill level rather than the physical skill level. As with physical skills, these mental skills need to be taught correctly, fine-tuned by the coach and player, and then practised until they are mastered.

Two of the areas that are seen by coaches as being most important for players to develop and master: motivation and arousal control. It is important to recognise that this focus on mental skill development is appropriate for players of all ages and grades, from juniors and novices through to national representatives.

This paper will help you to:

EXPLAIN THE ROLE OF GOAL SETTING IN MOTIVATION

EXPLAIN THE ROLE OF PERFORMANCE PROFILING IN GOAL SETTING, AND COMPLETE PERFORMANCE PROFILES WITH YOUR PLAYERS

EXPLAIN WHY GOAL SETTING IS USEFUL, THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF GOALS THAT CAN BE SET, AND HOW TO SET GOALS

EXPLAIN THE IMPORTANCE OF PRE-COMPETITION MENTAL PREPARATION

EXPLAIN HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR PLAYERS CONTROL THEIR AROUSAL LEVELS PRIOR TO COMPETITION

EXPLAIN THE ROLE OF GOAL SETTING IN MOTIVATION

Before you begin, think about the following points:

- **What motivates the players you coach?**
- **How can you, as a coach, best meet the needs of your players at training and competition, and consequently keep them involved in sport?**

INTRODUCTION

Coaches are always interested in learning ways to help their players motivate themselves. Players are concerned with maintaining their motivation once they have acquired the drive and desire to succeed in petanque. Motivation is a complex concept involving the combination of direction and intensity of effort in a particular situation. For example: direction – playing for a team or club, attending a coaching clinic or seeking physiotherapy treatment for an injury; intensity – the amount of effort with which a player pursues their chosen direction (*ad. Weinberg & Gould, 1995*).

PARTICIPATION IN PETANQUE

Players participate in petanque for three main reasons:

- fun – enjoyment, challenge and excitement,
- socialisation – to be with others, belonging to a group, and
- self-esteem – achievement.

Understanding why players participate is an important key to motivating them. It may be useful for you to ask your players to complete a simple exercise at the start of each season or period of coaching, rating themselves 1 to 10 on each of the aspects above. If the participation needs of your players are not being met, these become goals you can help your players work towards achieving.

It is important that your goals and those of your players are compatible. If you want to win the regional championship, and your players just want to play for fun and socialisation and are not prepared to put in the effort required to achieve your goal, conflict will inevitably result.

GOAL SETTING

Goal setting has been shown to influence the performance motivation of players of varied ages and ability levels, and has also been linked to positive changes in important psychological states such as anxiety, confidence, and self-concept. It is a basic technique that coaches, players, sport psychologists and allied sport professionals should regularly employ.

Goal setting is primarily a mental skills technique used to generate, enhance, and maintain motivation.

Goal setting achieves this by:

- organising the existing needs, desires and objectives of your players, i.e. their goals,
- creating a focus of attention and action, and
- identifying what the players and coach are trying to do or accomplish. This provides a purpose for the players' efforts.



Once you have identified common goals with your players, you need to work together to decide upon a plan of action to achieve or accomplish those goals. This allows you to make the most efficient use of training time in order to maximise performance and enjoyment.

Goals can be viewed as the regulators of motivation. Therefore, the importance of establishing a goal setting programme cannot be overstated. However, like other mental skills, goal setting is not a magic formula that guarantees success. Goal setting is a very effective tool that, when combined with hard work, can help players reap the fruits of personal growth and peak sporting performance.

QUESTIONS & EXERCISES

Explain factors that can cause a player's motivation for pétanque to increase or decrease over time.

EXPLAIN THE ROLE OF PERFORMANCE PROFILING IN GOAL SETTING, AND COMPLETE PERFORMANCE PROFILES WITH YOUR PLAYERS

PERFORMANCE PROFILES

Performance profiles are a means for you to assess where your players are now, and the standard of performance they are trying to achieve. From this the improvements required to achieve their target performances can be determined. Performance profiles:

- identify the needs and key requirements of pétanque,
- identify the qualities and skills your players need to work on,
- allow you and the players to set goals, and plan training to improve performance and achieve targets,
- allow players to build up a picture of themselves, which helps build confidence and self-esteem,
- help create a greater understanding between you and your players, and
- help develop team work and team spirit.

USING PERFORMANCE PROFILES

There are four steps to completing a performance profile.

1. Identify the important qualities required for pétanque. You could do this with individual players, or in a group through discussion. These qualities generally fall into four main areas.

These are:

- psychological – mental skills,
- tactical – strategies and tactics used in pétanque,
- technical – specific boule skills required in pétanque, and
- physical – fitness requirements of pétanque (concentration, focus, endurance, flexibility).

The weighting placed on these qualities varies in different sports and with different individuals.

2. Rate each player on the qualities that you identified. Rate where the players are at now, and their target performances, i.e. the standard they are trying to achieve.
3. Rate the qualities that need improvement and the extent of the improvement required by each of your players to achieve their target performances (1 = huge improvement required, 10 = no improvement possible).
4. Develop goal setting programmes with the players to make the improvements required to achieve their target performances. Quantify the goals using the ratings from their performance profiles, e.g. increase performance of a particular skill from 6 to 8.

Repeated profiling enables you to measure players' progress, which can be particularly important when players are peaking for an important event.

An example of a performance profile is included on the following page. Use this as a guide only and do not feel restricted to the size of the page. Write down a full list of the essential requirements to play pétanque, prioritise these, and include the top three or four on the performance profile.

QUESTIONS & EXERCISES

Explain the concept of performance profiling and how it forms the basis of goal setting.

Write down your own long-term coaching goals.

Assess your own abilities as a coach, using the Performance Profile Sheet provided as a guide. You need to identify your strengths and weaknesses, and the areas you need to focus on over the next 12 months.

(Considering the same questions you will be asking of your players will help you gain a good understanding of how challenging the issue of long-term goals can be. You should then go through the performance profiling process yourself, to get a feel for it.)

Choose one player who you currently coach, and profile that person's performance level, using the Performance Profile Sheet provided as a guide. You need to consider the areas of the player's performance that would most benefit from a specific goal setting programme. Complete the Performance Profile Sheet in consultation with your player.

PERFORMANCE PROFILE

Complete this form.

Quantify factors where you are able to do so. Use a 1 to 10 scale (1 poor, 10 excellent) for factors which are unable to be quantified. State your current position, target performance, and the improvement required to achieve your target performance.

From these results work with your coach to develop and implement a goal setting programme designed to achieve your target performance.

Name

Date

Factors	Current Performance	Target Performance	Improvement
Psychological <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentration • Focus • Positive self talk 	Loose focus and don't watch boule count which leads to poor decision making	Sustained focus throughout a game Create a habit to zone in on boule count	No poor tactics due to mistaking boule count
Tactical <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • 			
Technical <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hand motion • Arm swing 			
Physical <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance • Flexibility 			

EXPLAIN WHY GOAL SETTING IS USEFUL, THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF GOALS THAT CAN BE SET, AND HOW TO SET GOALS

WHY SET GOALS?

Goals:

- help maintain motivation by reflecting improvement,
- help determine what is important to players – they give direction, and force players to prioritise their needs,
- help improve performance – show players their strengths, and those areas requiring development,
- help focus attention and effort, and
- provide feedback on performance.

WHAT TYPE OF GOALS SHOULD WE SET? – ‘CONTROLLING THE CONTROLLABLES’

In all sports, there are elements that are controllable and others that are uncontrollable.

For example, Freda is a millieur who has set herself a goal of making the top eight in national tournaments (This is an example of an outcome goal over which Freda does not have full control.)

Uncontrollable Elements

- Team performance
- Draw
- Weather.
- Terrains •
- Captain (decides when and if Freda plays).

Controllable Elements

- Where she puts the ball.
- What the ball is doing.
- Her own commitment and effort.
- Her concentration.
- Tactics.

For every outcome goal a player sets, they should set several performance goals to be achieved on the way to attaining the outcome goal. These should relate to elements over which the player has control.

If Freda perseveres and achieves her performance goals, she will give herself the best possible chance to achieve her outcome goal. This is not to say that players should not set outcome goals, but they must understand that there are many uncontrollables. Focusing on outcome goals creates anxiety, which is detrimental to performance. It is far healthier psychologically to set performance goals which focus on the controllable elements. Some tournaments, Freda may achieve her performance goals and not win a single game, but mostly, if she achieves her performance goals, she will also start to win. At all times, she should focus on ‘controlling the controllables’, e.g. swinging or spinning the ball and landing spot, weight etc. and putting 11 out of 12 balls where she wants to.

GUIDELINES FOR SETTING GOALS

Set Performance Goals and Outcome Goals

- Winning and losing are important, especially for high performance players, but winning and losing are not always good measures of improvement or personal ability and skill, and are not the only or best measures of success. Players normally have more control over their own performance than they do over outcomes.

Set Long-Term as Well as Medium and Short-Term, and Daily Goals

- **Long-term goals** provide direction over a long timeframe as you progress towards the ultimate objective or target.
- **Medium and short-term goals** allow for periodic review of improvement, add reward for ongoing effort, and help to maintain motivation at key points during the season.
- **Daily goals** allow players to break larger medium and short-term goals down to fit the resources (time, money, etc.) they have available to work towards their goals at any given time.

The timeframes used to determine what is long, medium and short term will depend on the sport and the level at which the player is participating, i.e. club, regional, national, international.



Set Specific Measurable Goals

- **Numerical goals** are easier to measure and evaluate success in reaching a goal.
- **Specific goals** are very specific, detailed goals which are easy to measure and observe.

For example:

Poor goal: I want to be the best pointer

Good goal: As millieur I want to be 70% effective in pointing

Poor goal: I want to be a better shooter.

Good goal: I want to be able to keep my line towards the target 70% of the time

Areas in Which to Set Goals

- Fitness – aerobic (endurance), anaerobic (speed).
- Physical skills.
- Mental skills – motivation, preparation, concentration, arousal control, etc.
- Fun – plan for satisfaction and enjoyment. It is hard to be specific and numerical, but fun is worth aiming for.
- 'Life' goals, linking these to sporting goals.

Goals Must be Difficult to Reach but Realistic

- Players need to know their own limitations and abilities.
- Goals should be difficult enough so their achievement has value, but still close enough so they can be achieved with honest effort, in the timeframe the player specifies.

Goals Must be Prioritised

- At any one time, players may be working on more than one goal. Therefore, they need to know which one is most deserving of their efforts if they cannot attend to all of them.
- In this case, reference to their performance profiles will allow them to target what their priorities should be. Each goal can be broken down into smaller goals (short-term or daily) to show progress. Each larger goal can have its own 'staircase' of smaller goals. An example is illustrated, see Figure 1.

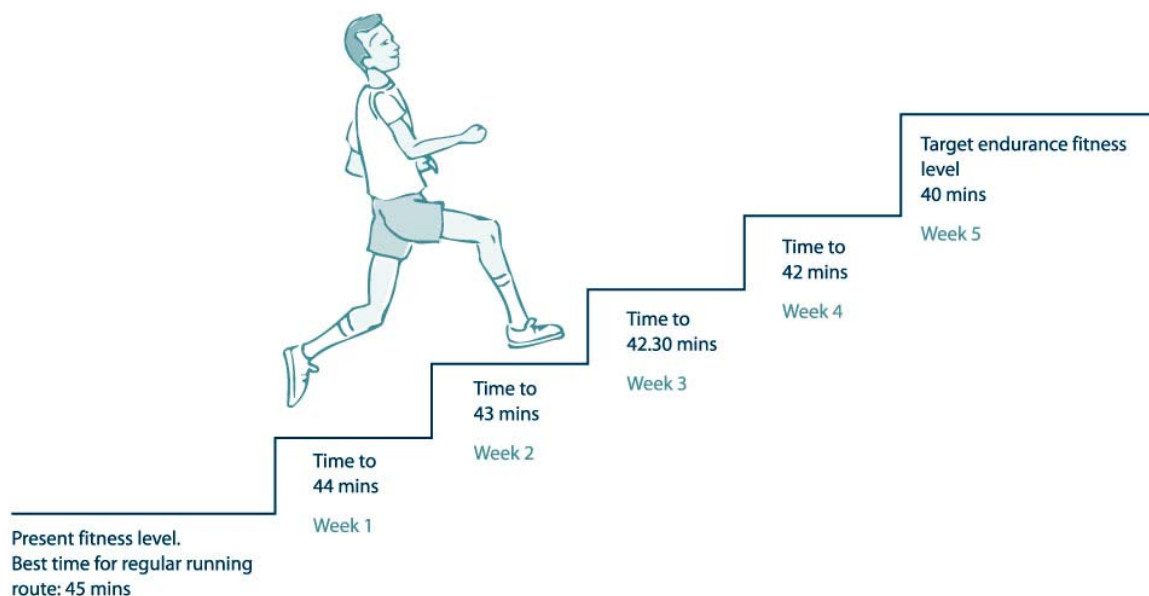


Fig.1 Example: Aerobic fitness goal staircase.

Goals Must be Flexible

- Flexibility is not 'copping out'. Players may need to change either, (i) their goals, or (ii) their timelines, for any one or more of a number of unforeseen circumstances, e.g. illness or injury.
- Players may need to change the time schedule for goal attainment, if the goals set are either too easy or too difficult to achieve.

HOW TO SET GOALS

Players need to talk to their coach and answer these key questions.

- Where am I now?
- Where do I want to be in one week, next month, six months, two years?
- What are my strengths?
- What areas need development?

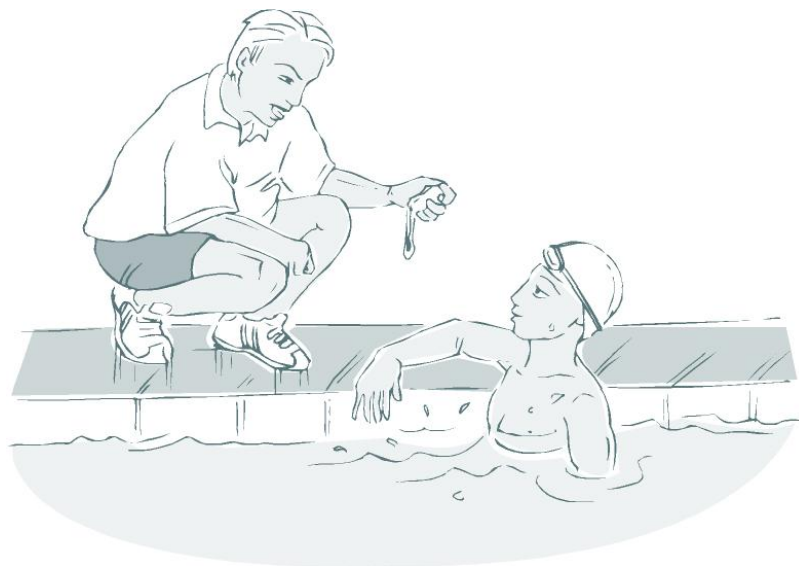
Players Need to Prioritise their Needs and Select Two or Three Goals

These goals should:

- include long-term and short-term goals,
- be hard but realistic, and
- have a date set for achievement.

Players Need to Outline a Strategy to Achieve their Goals

The strategy needs to be specific; e.g. I will throw 50 boules three nights per week into a tyre. I will find a training partner to maintain my effort and motivation. I will do 30 minutes pointing exercises three times a week



Players Need to Make a Firm Commitment to Achieve their Goals

They need to:

- ask themselves if they have the desire to pursue their goal achievement strategies,
- be honest with themselves, and
- write a contract with themselves.

MONITOR GOAL SETTING

Pursuing the set goal is the players' task. Monitoring progress towards the goals set may also be the players' task, or may be done in consultation with the coach.

Players Need to Write Down their Goals

They should record:

- both long-term and short-term goals,
- their strategies for achieving their goals with targeted dates, and
- goal evaluation procedures.

Players Need to Remind themselves of their Goals

They could:

- maintain a training diary or log, or
- make a wall poster of their goals.

Players Need to Ask themselves Periodically:

- what did I do today to become a better player?

EVALUATE THE GOALS

Players Need to Evaluate their Goals Periodically

They need to:

- check goal attainment progress,
- check target dates, and
- check goal strategies.

QUESTIONS & EXERCISES

Explain why we set goals and the different types of goals that we can set, using your own sport as an example.

Following the guidelines presented in this module, set some specific, measurable goals for the player for whom you completed the performance profile. Rank these goals and put them into a timeframe. You will need to complete this in consultation with your player to ensure the goals are shared.

PETANQUE Ltd

Goal Achievement Programme

Player's name

Date

Strengths

Weaknesses

Long-term petanque goals 1

2

3

This season's goals 1

2

3

Skill Area Needing Improvement	Specific Goal	Goal Achievement Strategy(s)	Target Date Evaluation
Goal kicking accuracy.	I want to be able to consistently make 8 out of 10 kicks from all angles within 35 metres.	1) Before practise, I will spend 30 mins practising my kicking, taking at least 30 shots at goal. (Tues & Thurs) 2) I will take extra instruction once a week (Sundays) from a kicking expert (45-60 mins).	Fourth weekend of the season. Then reset goal to 10 out of 10 by the middle of the season.

Fig.2 Goal setting worksheet example

EXPLAIN THE IMPORTANCE OF PRE-COMPETITION MENTAL PREPARATION

High performance requires peak levels of physical and psychological readiness. Players must plan to include mental skills in their training and practise programme. This means helping players develop strategies which allow them to enter competition with the proper mindset, and to perform consistently at their highest level.

If players are interested in getting the most out of their sport, they can no longer treat their performance as a combination of isolated factors, which come together in some mysterious and unified way on the day of competition.

‘PSYCHING UP’

There is an ‘ideal performance state’ (thoughts, feelings, bodily responses) typically associated with peak performance. The ultimate goal of mental skills’ training is for each player to consistently achieve the ‘ideal performance state’ at competition time. This will rarely occur if pre-competition preparation (the ‘psych up’), and the competition focus are left to chance, or if these are left in the control of others (e.g. coach, captain, parents). More often than not, individuals do not have a consistent pattern in readying themselves for competition (the ‘psych up’ procedures). Performance is likely to be improved if an individual’s preparation becomes more systematic. We seldom identify and systematically practise mental preparation skills. Yet, after the competition the greatest percentage of excuses are attributed to the mental and emotional aspects of the event!

MENTAL WARM-UP

The mental preparation of the ‘countdown-to-competition’ ritual should consist of getting players physically and mentally ready for competition. Players need to develop a ‘mental warm-up’ to go with their ‘physical warm-up’. This means monitoring and controlling emotions and thoughts so that the energy and excitement for competition build up slowly, without the individual becoming aroused (psyched up) too soon, or becoming so over aroused (psyched out) that feelings of anxiety and worry, rather than excitement and challenge occur.

ACHIEVING CONSISTENCY IN PERFORMANCE

Any player who participates competitively faces stressful situations and anxious moments hundreds of times during the course of their competitive career. For many, regardless of how many times they have been in that situation, they will still react in a negative way. Somehow, experience is not always the best teacher in this case!

Individuals who are able to continue performing with some degree of consistency, despite their feelings of anxiety, have learned to cope with this anxiety. Many players with superior physical capabilities have been systematically eliminated from competitive sports because they could not perform with any consistency. They might perform beautifully in practise, but ‘choke’ in competition. Consistent mental preparation is thus essential for peak performance. Once a player has learned to identify which mental, emotional and bodily states and feelings accompany superior performance, they can learn to ‘programme’ these responses voluntarily in order to set the stage for another superior performance.

Being psyched up, energised, wired, activated, aroused, or ‘ready’ is an integration of mind-body feelings and thoughts which provides the player with feelings of confidence, mastery, and control. Players can learn to reach this state consistently by learning how to regulate their arousal level before and during competition.



PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILL TRAINING: PRE-COMPETITION MENTAL PREPARATION

The following guidelines are recommended for use in teaching pre-competition mental preparation techniques to your players.

Psych Up or Psych Out? – Understanding Competitive Stress

Common sayings about mental preparation are:

- psych up,
- fire up,
- get psyched,
- get motivated and,
- psyched out,
- head case,
- over motivated,
- choke.

Psych up or psych out: what is the answer?

The Fine Line Between Getting Up and Getting Uptight: The Relationship Between Emotional Arousal and Performance

The Emotional Arousal-Performance 'Inverted "U" Theory', see Figure 3.

At low arousal levels, the performance of players will be less than optimum, i.e. they are not psyched up.

As their arousal levels increase, their performance improves to a point where they perform at their best. If the players' arousal levels continue to increase beyond this point, their performances begin to deteriorate.

Key Points

- Poor performance results if the player is under or over aroused.
- Best performance results from optimal emotional and arousal states.
- Optimal levels of arousal are sport and task specific (e.g. Pointing vs. Shooting).
- Each of us has a different optimal level of emotional arousal that will produce the best performance. You and your players need to recognise when they are optimally aroused, over aroused and under aroused.
- Motivational team talks must be planned carefully and used sparingly, as individual needs within a team vary considerably.

What Happens When a Player Becomes Over-aroused?

When players choke, their attention-concentration shifts. They experience 'tunnel vision', and worry about worrying. There is an increase in muscle tension or tightness leading to decreased timing and coordination, and 'paralysis by analysis'.

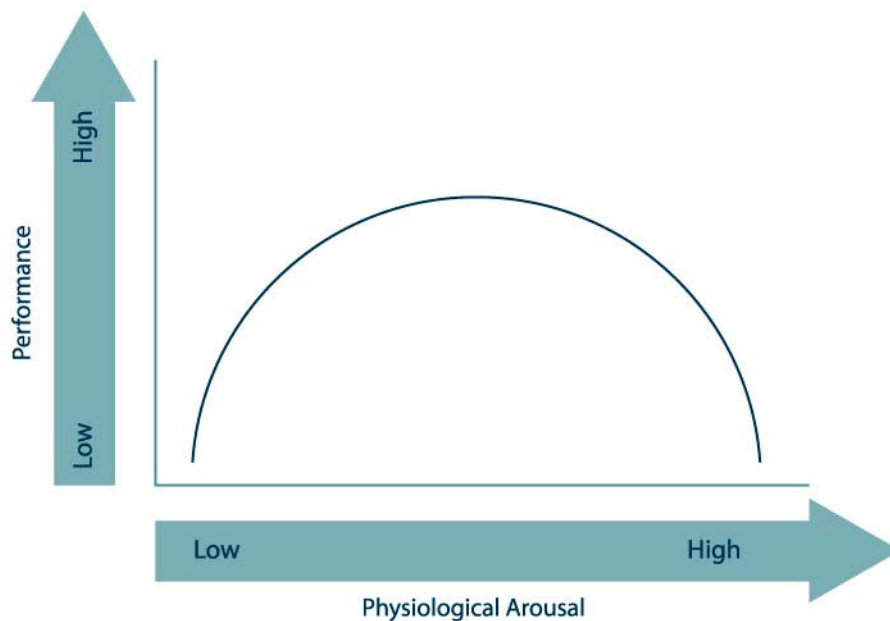


Fig.3 The inverted-U arousal performance relationship.

(Source: Wienberg & Gould, 1995)

QUESTIONS & EXERCISES

Explain why pre-competition mental preparation is important in sport. Why not just go with the flow?

Explain the difference between being 'psyched up' and 'psyched out'.

EXPLAIN HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR PLAYERS CONTROL THEIR AROUSAL LEVELS PRIOR TO COMPETITION

CONTROLLING PLAYER AROUSAL LEVELS

Once players have identified their optimal level of arousal for maximising performance, they can use appropriate energising or relaxation techniques to increase or reduce arousal levels. All players need a certain amount of arousal or motivation to perform well. However, this amount of arousal is specific to the individual, to the sport and even to specific skills within a sport. Some players require a higher arousal level than others to perform to the same level.

While being under aroused will lead to boredom and poor performance, too much arousal can be detrimental. Some individuals will respond positively to a highly charged emotional speech by the coach or captain, whereas others may become over aroused and psyched out. Most coaches and players have tended to emphasise the psyching up aspect of preparation for performance, while sport psychologists tend to focus on controlling, and often lowering arousal.

During pre-competition mental preparation, and during competition itself, it is not uncommon for players to experience feelings of worry, stress, and anxiety. Stress

may be positive or negative, e.g. excitement causes stress. When an player's concentration is adversely affected, the stress is negative. Feelings of stress and anxiety may be a result of pressure to perform from the coach, captain, spectators, or from the players themselves.

Some stress is obviously useful in helping to energise a player to their desired level of arousal. However, too much stress, and an inability to regulate the over arousal it creates, will interfere with peak performance.

In sport, we often call this 'choking' or being 'uptight'. Mental errors, as well as tactical and skill execution errors occur. Each player has to learn their own signs of over arousal resulting from anxiety, so that they can use relaxation skills to regulate their level of arousal. Our bodies provide us with a great number of warning signs that we are becoming over aroused.

Signs of Over Arousal

Some of the signs of over arousal are listed in the table below. Obviously, if a player had all of these symptoms at once, complete dysfunction would occur! Most players have a personal combination of these signs when they are anxious and over aroused. Individuals differ in how much their performance is affected by over arousal. Therefore, it is essential for players to identify the signs they associate with over arousal, and determine how these signs influence their performance.



Immediate Physical or Somatic Signs	Cognitive or Behavioural Signs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Palpitations of the heart. • Muscle tension. • Sense of fatigue. • Dry mouth. • Clammy hands. • Butterflies in the stomach. • A desire to urinate. • Trembling and twitching in the muscles. • Flushed face, voice distortion. • Nausea and vomiting. • Yawning. • Hyperventilation. • Increased heart rate. • Increased respiratory rate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sense of confusion. • Irritability. • Forgetting details. • Inability to concentrate. • Inability to make decisions. • Self-doubts. • Fear. • Worry.

Table 1. Signs of over arousal in players.

Signs of Under Arousal

When players are under aroused motivation is reduced. Their focus of attention is likely to be inappropriately broad and external, and they will be easily distracted. They may look and sound 'flat'. Players who are under aroused will have trouble sticking to their pre-competition and competition routines because they cannot be 'bothered'. Their intensity or effort will be below that required for optimal performance.

While a degree of relaxation is essential for successful performance, players who are under aroused clearly need a boost to their levels of motivation. Arousal levels may be increased by reminding players of the goals they want to achieve. Short bursts of high intensity activity, upbeat, motivating music (e.g. from a walkman, probably loud) and the use of exciting, powerful imagery are all techniques that are effective in raising an player's arousal level.

QUESTIONS & EXERCISES

You need to recognise the signs that indicate an player's mental preparedness for competition is on track. Using examples from your own experience, explain:

- *how you can tell if an player is too aroused or over anxious to achieve optimal performance, and*
- *how you can tell if an player is under aroused or too relaxed to achieve optimal performance.*

CONTROLLING AROUSAL – THOUGHT CONTROL

Thought control involves getting rid of ‘stinking thinking’ and replacing it with ‘helpful thinking’. Players need to address their perceptions of and thoughts about a situation. ‘Stinking thinking’ focuses the player’s attention on negative aspects of their performances, e.g. “Don’t panic!”, “Don’t worry about your injury”, or “Forget that she beat you last time”. Coaches often put these types of thoughts into their players’ heads. They are almost guaranteed to cause worry and anxiety, resulting in a poor performance. Such thoughts start a ‘negative thought cycle’.



Thought control involves interrupting this cycle by recognising negative thoughts and replacing them with positive thoughts and expectations. It helps the players think or focus on the present, on things they can control. The quicker this is done, the better. It is common for players to allow negative thoughts to continue for some time, because either they do not understand the detrimental influence they can have on performance, or they do not know how to manage them.



EXAMPLE: TENNIS

Stinking Thinking

“Fred can shoot better than me....
“He’ll beat me for sure”

Helpful Thinking

“I’ve shot well in this game
- “I’m in good form”

For some players, if they are able to control their thinking, they can calm their body down. For others it works the other way; if they are able to calm their body down first, they can then control their thoughts. Hence, body relaxation is an important skill for all players to develop.

Thought control is a mental skill which requires practise. With help from their coach, or a sport psychologist, players who want to work at making changes need to:

- understand that how they think affects how they feel,
- write down the most common negative thoughts they have,
- learn to recognise those negative thoughts in training and competition,
- develop ways to stop those negative thoughts in their tracks,

- write down some positive thoughts that they can use in different situations, and
- practise converting their negative thoughts into positive thoughts.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILL TRAINING – THOUGHT CONTROL

The following guidelines are recommended for use in teaching thought control skills to your players.

The Sensory Approach

To help your players develop the skills they need to do this, you should begin with a simple exercise.

This technique requires players to use their senses to reduce the effect of a negative thought. They can concentrate on different features of the negative image in the following ways:

- **brightness:** dim the negative image, and when the desired level is reached, replace it with a positive image, increasing the brightness until it is strong and dominant,
- **clarity:** gradually blur the negative image and replace it with a progressively clearer and sharply focused positive image,
- **distance:** slowly move the negative image further away and replace it with a positive image which comes closer and closer until it dominates,
- **size:** progressively shrink the negative image, and then replace it with a positive image, enlarging this until it dominates,
- **colour:** reduce the colour of the negative image until it is black and white, then replace it with a colourful positive image, and
- **sound:** turn down the volume on the negative image and replace it with a positive image which increases in volume.

The Swish Technique

This technique requires players to:

- identify the thoughts and images that occur in their minds just before they begin an action or behaviour that they would like to change,
- see themselves as if they were watching themselves on a video performing the negative action or behaviour, and
- create a big, bright positive image that they 'swish' across the negative image on the video screen, as if they were using a big paint brush.

With practise this may only take one or two seconds. Players should repeat the process four or five times and the positive images will begin to stick in their minds.

QUESTIONS & EXERCISES

Identify a common negative thought a player that you coach has and explain how you would help the player to change it.

CONTROLLING AROUSAL – STRESS MANAGEMENT

What we think determines how we feel emotionally and how we subsequently behave. Stress occurs when there is an imbalance between the physical and psychological demands placed on a player, and the player's ability to respond to those demands, when they know failure to do so results in important consequences.

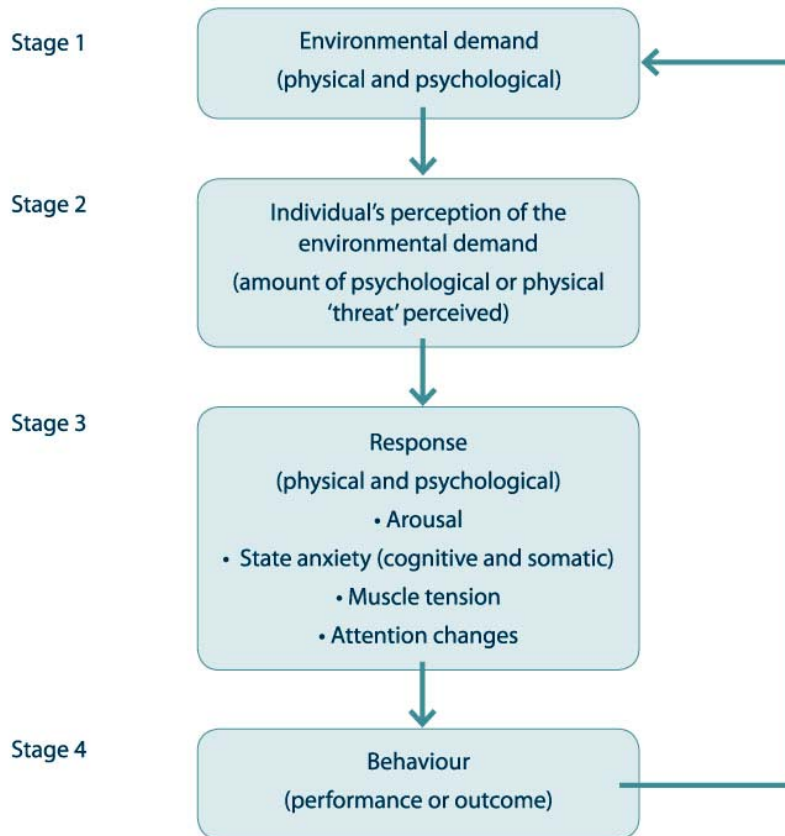


Fig.4 The stress process.

(Source: Weinberg & Gould, 1995)

- In the first stage, a physical and/or psychological demand is placed on the player.
- Individuals perceive demands differently. One player will have little difficulty responding to the demand and will not see it as a threat. Another player may see an imbalance between the demand and their ability to meet it, and therefore perceive the demand as threatening.
- Where there is a perceived imbalance, there will be an increase in the player's arousal level. This will result in increased worries (cognitive state anxiety) and/or heightened physiological activation (somatic state anxiety), and other reactions such as changes in concentration and increased muscle tension.
- The increased arousal may improve the player's performance, but it may also cause their performance to deteriorate. The behaviour exhibited by other players as a result of the stress response may add to the initial environmental demand. The stress process then becomes a continuing cycle.

Example:

A coach is teaching a young team how to shoot on the full and asks the players to take two shots each while the rest of the team line up around the edge of the terrain.

Some players may enjoy being the centre of attention for this short period of time, particularly if they feel confident of their ability to make their shots. Others may feel less confident, and perceive the situation as threatening. The increased arousal and subsequent reactions may improve the player's performance, or it may make them so tense that they miss the shot completely.

If the rest of the team then laughs at this effort, this adverse reaction may place an additional demand on the player, making it even more stressful for her next time her turn comes around.

QUESTIONS & EXERCISES

Identify and describe a common sporting situation that two players might perceive differently, and explain why.

CONTROLLING AROUSAL – RELAXATION

Most players find that over arousal is detrimental to peak performance and try to manage or regulate arousal to their own optimal level. Learning to relax is essential to regulating these responses, to avoiding any detrimental effects on performance. When a muscle tenses up, as it does with worry and anxiety, it contracts or shortens. Proper form in any movement involves using a precise amount of tension in a muscle (or muscle group) – too much tension interferes with the execution of the skill. Players can learn to control their arousal levels and muscle tension with the use of relaxation skills. Players need to be taught how to relax so they learn to avoid too much tension. Total relaxation means letting go and doing absolutely nothing with the muscles.

You may wonder why any player would want to be completely relaxed. Players need muscular tension and arousal to perform; some need maximal tension to execute the skills of their sport. However, in learning to train the muscles to relax totally, players develop a much greater sensitivity to their own bodily feelings and responses. Once players become aware of these bodily responses, and learn to associate them with peak levels of performance, they can learn to regulate their arousal levels and muscle tension using relaxation skills.

Once trained in relaxation, players can use this skill to lower general muscular tension under any condition. Relaxation can assist in removing localised tension, such as that surrounding an injury. It can aid in the onset of sleep, and can reduce insomnia problems that often afflict high performance players. Relaxation can be used to regulate over arousal before competition (mental preparation), and during competition (momentary relaxation). Finally, relaxation is an essential skill in teaching players the advanced mental skill of imagery.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILL TRAINING: STRESS MANAGEMENT/RELAXATION

The following guidelines are recommended for you to use in teaching stress management/relaxation skills to your players.

What is Relaxation?

Relaxation is a state where one is physically and mentally free from uncontrolled tension, anxiety and readiness.

Purpose of Relaxation Training

- Physiological calming of the body (decreased muscle tension, decreased heart rate).
- Attention shift from anxiety-provoking thoughts to an increased state of relaxation.
- Aids in achieving an optimal level of emotional arousal (refer to Mental Preparation notes).

Why Learn Relaxation Training?

- To help players achieve proper mental preparation (i.e. help achieve an optimal level of emotional readiness), before or during a competition.
- To help players sleep the night before a major competition.
- As a mechanism for helping players develop concentration and imaging skills.



Breathing Exercises for Immediate Relaxation – One Breath Relaxation

This is the most practical technique an player can learn. It is a quick technique which allows an player to take a momentary mind-body time-out or rest before refocusing. There are three steps to one breath relaxation:

1. Breathe in from the stomach and diaphragm.
As they breathe in, they should imagine that all the muscles from the top of the chest, shoulders and jaw are loosening.
2. Breathe out. As they breathe out, they should imagine that all excess tension is draining out through their feet, that their hamstrings have become loose, and that their feet are really light.
3. Immediately refocus on the correct attentional cue, i.e. having completed the one breath relaxation, players must direct their attention straight back to the task at hand.

It is very important to practise this technique until it is perfected. Once perfected, it will become like an old friend that will not let the players down in situations of high

competitive demand. For example, a shooter is unsettled by a boule thrown on the adjacent terrain. He takes a one breath relaxation (two or three if time allows), and immediately refocuses back on an external cue, in this case, the ball being released from his hand. His internal cue might be 'watch the ball'.

QUESTIONS & EXERCISES

Identify and explain a simple relaxation technique and a situation in your own sport where it could be applied.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SPARC acknowledges the source of Figures 3 and 4:

Weinberg, R. & Gould, D. (1995) Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology. Champaign, IL. Human Kinetics.