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Techniques to Avoid Competition Anxiety

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Introduction

Sports psychology is part of the larger field of sport science and studies human behaviour in the sport environment and the benefits of mental training on enhancing sports performance. The goal of sports psychology is to help athletes and teams perform their best by improving the necessary mental skills to excel in a sporting endeavour. Sports Psychology is not about working with problem athletes or abnormal behaviour.

To reach an optimum psychological state, you need to understand your own natural responses to stress and be sensitive to your body signals. Learning to handle the demands of competition involves learning to read your thought patterns and physical responses, and to develop the skills necessary to find your ideal arousal level. Stress management requires excellent self-awareness because, if you know yourself well, you will better understand the roots of your anxiety.

1. Establishing your 'winning feeling'

Think carefully about the last time you were performing at the top of you. Game then list every detail you might associate with your 'winning feeling'. Pick out the eight most important aspects of this positive feeling and write them down. You can use your winning feeling to help create an optimum competition mind set through consciously reproducing the desired elements.

2. Centering

- The second technique is known as 'Centering' because it involves focusing attention on the centre of your body, the area just behind your navel. This is technique that is particularly effective during sports that have breaks in the action, such as in between sets in tennis, or prior to a penalty in soccer. Centering has a calming and controlling effect, providing a simple but effective way to counteract the negative effects of anxiety:
- Stand with your feet flat on the ground, shoulder width apart, arms hanging loosely either side of your body.
- Close your eyes and breathe evenly. Notice that when you breathe in, the tension in your upper body increases, but as you breathe out, there is a calmer, sinking feeling.
- Inhale deeply from your abdomen and, as you do, be aware of the tension in your face, and your neck, and your shoulders, and your chest. As you exhale, let the tension fall away and focus on the feeling of heaviness in your stomach.
- Continue to breathe evenly, focusing all your attention internally on the area immediately behind your navel.

- Maintain your attention on that spot and breathe normally, feeling very controlled and heavy and calm.
- On each out-breath use a word that encapsulates the physical feelings and mental focus that you want eg 'loose', 'calm', 'focused', 'sharp', 'strong' etc.

3. The five breathing technique

This anxiety control exercise can be performed while you are standing up, lying down or sitting upright. It is ideally used before competition, or whenever you feel particularly tense. You should inhale slowly, deeply and evenly through your nose, and exhale gently through your mouth as though flickering, but not extinguishing, the flame of a candle.

- Take a deep breath. Allow your face and neck to relax as you breathe out.
- Take a second-deep breath. Allow your shoulders and arms to relax as you breathe out.
- Take a third deep breath. Allow your chest, stomach and back to relax as you breathe out.
- Take a fourth deep breath. Allow your legs and feet to relax as you breathe out.
- Take a fifth deep breath. Allow your whole body to relax as you breathe out.
- Continue to breathe deeply for as long as you need and each time you breathe out say the word 'relax' in your mind.

4. Think positive

When you experience a negative or unwanted thought (cognitive anxiety) such as 'I just don't want to be here today' or 'She beat me by five meters last time out', picture a large red stop sign in your mind's eye. Hold this image for a few seconds then allow it to fade away along with the thought. If you wish, you can follow this with a positive self-statement such as 'I am going to hit it hard right from the off!' Thought-stopping can be used to block an unwanted thought before it escalates or disrupts performance. The technique can help to create a sharp refocus of attention keeping you engrossed in the task at hand.

5. Relaxation

You will need to lie down somewhere comfortable where you are unlikely to be disturbed. If you wish, you can also use this exercise to aid a restful night's sleep. Allow your eyes to close and let your attention wander slowly over each part of your body -starting from the tips of your toes and working up to the top of your head. As you focus, on each part of the body, tense the associated muscles for a count of five and then 'let go'/ relax. If this does not relieve the tension in a particular body part, repeat the process as many times as you need to. Once you have covered each body part, tense the entire body, hold for five and then 'let go'/ relax. You will feel tranquil and deeply relaxed.

Conclusion

Indulging in sports be it team sports or individual sports, leads to a major boost in self-confidence. The ability to go on the field and perform instils a sense of self-confidence, which is very important for the development of a person's character. Every victory achieved on the field, helps to boost a person's self-confidence. Moreover, the ability to accept defeat on field and yet believe in your own capabilities brings a sense of positive attitude as well. Thus participation in sports, martial arts or even dance and aerobics, is always a positive influence on a student's overall personality and character and works wonders for his/her self-confidence.

The major problem in competition is letting your mind work against you rather than for you. You must accept anxiety symptoms as part and parcel of the competition experience, only then will anxiety begin to facilitate your performance. The techniques I have presented herein are but a small selection from the pantheon of stress management interventions. You should adapt these techniques to suit your needs or those of your athletes. Remember that pressure is your ally and will invariably bring out the best in you, just as coal under pressure can produce a diamond!

Anxiety and sport if you want to get rid of anxiety go out and run for 10 hours. Do some, endurance athletes use the sports as a drug. It can be very effective medication, so if you're an ultra-endurance athlete and the 'man on the street' wants to know why you're willing to punish your body for 10 hours or more in an 'ironman' competition just tell him that the effort is a lot cheaper than Prozac, and a lot better for the cardiovascular system. Sport places a wide variety of stressors upon participants, it can be physically exhausting, it pitches you against superior opponents, hostile fans might verbally abuse you, the elements may need to be overcome and your emotional frailties are constantly laid bare for all to see. Despite this sports participants an opportunity for growth a chance to push back personal boundaries and a means by which to liberate the body and the mind. Ostensibly, there is nothing damaging about the stress associated with a sporting contest, and in fact stress can be a very positive influence that leads us to tackle the challenges that make life far more rewarding.

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