

Emotion Regulation in Sport

- Emotions play a central role in sport performance.
- Sport is an emotional experience for many athletes.



What is emotion?

Advanced Learner's English Dictionary:

- A feeling (as opposed to thoughts), such as happiness, love, fear, anger, which can be caused by the situation that you are in or the people you are with.

Deci (1980):

.... a reaction to a stimulus event (either actual or imagined). It involves changes in the viscera and musculature of the person, is experienced subjectively in characteristic ways, is expressed through such means as facial changes and action tendencies, and may mediate and energize subsequent behaviors.

What are arousal and anxiety?

- At times, these 2 are used interchangeably. However, they are 2 separate, but related things.
- Arousal – more often defined physiologically as the intensity of behaviors on a continuum from sleep to extensive excitement. Is a prerequisite for optimal sport performance.



Low
(coma)



High
(frenzy)

The arousal continuum.

- Has an emotional component, caused by (1) positive feelings of excitement & confidence, or (2) negative feelings of fear, anxiety, or sadness.

Physiologically, arousal is indicated by an increase in the body's level of activation.

- *Anxiety* – an emotion related to over-worry about a real/perceived threat. For example, anxiety reflects the athlete's feeling that something may go wrong, outcome may not be successful & performance failure may be experienced.

Two types:

1. State-A (transitory & fluctuate over time)
2. Trait-A (relatively stable & acquired behavior disposition)

Origin of emotions in sport performance

Emotion as a response:

Some examples:

- I feel happy because I score a point.
- I feel disappointed when I miss/lose a point.
- I feel despair when I lose a match.
- I feel scared because my opponent is powerful.

Role of cognition in emotion:

- Central role
- Lazarus (1991, 2000) – emotion is a part of a changing person-environment relationship, and motivation & appraisal are central to this process.

- Event → Primary appraisal (related to a person's well-being & goal achievement) → secondary appraisal (concerns coping) → emotional response (include physiological changes) → behaviors or performance

Characteristics of the emotional response

3 elements:

- Physiological changes -- e.g., ↑heart rate, blood pressure, & skin response, muscle tension, etc. In sport, an ↑in arousal may accompany some emotions like anxiety & excitement, and a ↓in arousal may accompany other emotions like sadness & disappointment.

- Subjective experience – Vallerand & Blanchard (2000) – refers to what a person consciously experiences during the emotional episode; e.g., feeling angry, happy, scared, etc.

- Action tendencies – e.g., fear →run away; sadness →become motionless; leading →conservative & ↓performance.

How do emotions affect sport performance?

On motivation:

- Hanin (2000) – optimal emotions can initiate and maintain the required amount of effort for a task.

- Pensgaard & Duda (2003) – Relationship between emotions, coping and performance of athletes at the 2000 Olympic Games. They found that optimizing emotions were related to coping effectiveness (objective & subjective) and is a positive predictor of objective competitive results.

- Enthusiastic (P+)
- Ready (P+)
- Optimistic (P+)
- Safe (P+)
- Determined (P+)
- Happy (P+)
- Relaxed (P+)
- Anxious (N+)
- Tired (N+)
- Angry (N+)
- Scared (N+)
- Pessimistic (N+)

Can anger be beneficial to sport performance?

On physical functioning:

- High arousal may result in an ↑ of anaerobic power (Hardy, Jones, & Gould, 1996).
- But accuracy may be reduced.

On cognitive functioning:

- High arousal + some emotions
→ impair working memory (Parfitt et al., 1990); & narrowing of attentional focus & reduces cognitive resources available for the task (Moran, 1996).

Ways to regulate emotion

Cognitive methods:

- Stress-management training (Smith, 1980)
- Imagery (Martin, Moritz & Hall, 1999)
- Cognitive reframing / positive self-talk

- Problem-solving skills
- Vicarious learning /modeling
- Self analysis – e.g., training log or competition journal

Arousal control methods

- Relaxation (breathing, muscle relaxation, biofeedback, etc.)
- ↑arousal – upbeat music, physical activity, arousal training