

How positive and negative psychological affects on performance

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Throughout sport there are a number of physiological and psychological factors which occur that effect performance in either a positive or negative way. The most common factors which effect performance are motivation, anxiety, arousal

Motivation is crucial to success in every sporting event whether it is team sports such as football or hockey, or individual sporting events such as the 100 meter sprint. When a player is not motivated he or she is liable to make a lot more mistakes and not perform to their best ability. A motivated player will overcome a de-motivated player almost every time. Motivation can be triggered by a number of different things such as receiving encouragement, or even being insulted or put down. If an elite performer receives bad press over a particularly bad game he or she may feel motivated to try and prove to the media and everybody else including themselves that they are capable of performing well.

Motivation is one of the most common psychological factors affecting sporting performance. There are many different types of motivation and different levels that have different affects on how we perform. Motivational factors can be intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation comes from inside the performer and can also be stated as self- motivation. Intrinsic motivation depends on the athletes own attitudes and perceptions therefore this leads to the athletes understanding of their own circumstances. A definition of intrinsic motivation can be, " those which a person engages in to feel competent and self- determining" (Deci 1975, Intrinsic motivation, New York Plenum Press).

An example of intrinsic motivation in a sporting situation can be a 40 year old who takes up on marathon running and trains three night a week and at the end of the week he/she is likely to be motivated by intrinsic rewards such as feeling fitter or the satisfaction of a faster finishing time rather than receiving a extrinsic reward such as a winners medal.

Intrinsic motivation is very important in enhancing a sports performance because without self drive and an ongoing desire to win an athlete will find it hard to succeed.

Intrinsic motivation is different from extrinsic motivation because it is very spontaneous and it does not have to be provided by anyone apart the performer. Therefore intrinsic motivation is never fully satisfied so the individual will continue to seek out opportunities to satisfy these needs. This shows intrinsic motivation can be very persistent therefore would be a very good way for a coach to encourage the development of intrinsic motivation.

Extrinsic motivation is very different from intrinsic motivators as they motivators from outside the performer. These can include things such as money, trophies or medals, recognition or even prestige or praise which are also known as social reinforcements. Extrinsic motivational factors are important in enhancing performance at first as it is useful to identify and encourage the performance of correct skills, moves and behaviour and shows the performer that they are doing the task correctly.

Positive comments from others provide extrinsic motivation to the performer as well as information about his or her performance. These help evaluate

performance and therefore increase the individual's sense of competence, which leads to intrinsic motivation. However too much emphasis on rewards can damage motivation and participation as performers may be too reliant on receiving rewards and therefore only participate if they are getting rewarded.

Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can help to increase a performer's motivation. Therefore it is expected that if a extrinsic reward such as a trophy or a medal is given to someone who is already intrinsically motivated to improve their performance then even higher levels of motivation would be produced.

Another type of motivation is achievement motivation. This is when the individual's motivation is to strive for success, which enables the individual to persist even when he or she meets obstacles and perhaps even quality. This is a very useful quality in a sportsperson. A psychologist called Atkinson (1964) saw two aspects in Achievement motivation. He proposed a theory of achievement motivation which took account the individual personality and the situation specified and the two were related.

The first aspect Atkinson proposed was the motive to achieve success. This included people with a high motive to achieve success show characteristics such as they look for challenges, people who are concerned about standards of excellence and how high levels of performance: -

1) Persist for longer

2) value feedback from others

3) enjoy situations where they can be evaluated

4) are not afraid of failure

5) attribute their performance to internal factors such as effort, and failure due to poor concentration.

The second aspect which Atkinson proposed was the motive to avoid failure.

This was people who avoid failure. The factors of this aspect are:-

1) be preoccupied about failure

2) avoid challenging tasks e. g. playing against very easy opposition so that they are guaranteed success

3) dislike situations in which there is a 50- 50 chance of success as this situation may bring shame.

4) Perform worse when they can be evaluated by others

5) attribute their performance to external factors such as luck, or failure due to tough opposition.

Another psychological factor that may affect performance in a sporting situation is arousal. Arousal is a blend of physiological and psychological activation varying in intensity along a continuum.

Intensity aspects of motivation are known as arousal. Our level of arousal is our level of psychological readiness. These levels can vary depending on our mood and our personality, some people can be under aroused or over

aroused, both these can affect our performance in a negative way. Most of our performances come when we are at optimum arousal levels.

Over arousal is very detrimental to performance, it influences our abilities to think clearly which causes decisions to become erratic and generally poor. Over arousal is caused mostly by stress or high pressure, either from life or from competition itself, for example being in the final causes great stress and puts a high amount of pressure on athletes. An example of over arousal in a sporting situation is John McEnroe who is a highly skilled tennis player but high levels of arousal caused him to have outbursts, which affected his concentration therefore affecting his overall performance.

Under arousal can affect arousal massively in a number of negative ways. When an athlete is under aroused it means you have very low morale and are very low in motivation which creates a lack of effort being put into the task which is required. Performers which are under aroused make poor decisions because they are far too concerned about what the outcome will be.

One of the earliest ways arousal and performance was related was that as an individual's arousal increases their performance would improve.

Drive theory is a concept developed by a psychologist called Hull (1951) describing the relationships between arousal and performance as a linear one because it is represented by a straight line. Hull believed that as arousal is increased so would performance, this continued as arousal reaches its highest levels therefore the performance would also be at the highest levels.

This theory is true to a point however it is said to be criticized that what is said to be a well learned task is hard to define. The drive theory is even harder to test in a real life situation as many tasks maintain both well learned and novel elements. There is also evidence from many situations suggested beyond a certain level of arousal, the individuals performance often deteriorates, even on well learned tasks. An example of this can be a 100meter sprinter that is a student athlete who froze on the starting blocks due to being so over aroused that they " foiled" under pressure.

The inverted U theory was developed by two psychologists called Yerkes and Dodson. According to their history, as arousal levels increase so does the performance levels, but only to a certain point. When arousal reaches this optimum point performance levels will reach their highest that they possibly can. After this optimum point if arousal begins to increase the individuals performance will begin to decrease due to the individual becoming over aroused. A psychologist called Oxendine (1970) discovered the inverted U theory is found in a number of sports, but it is noted that the amount of arousal necessary for optimal performance is depended on the nature of the skill.

An example of this can be when putting in golf requires a low level of arousal, however a tackle in football requires a high level of arousal.

Oxendine proposed that more complex skills such as putting in golf require less arousal for optimal performance this is because high arousal interferes with fine muscle movement, co-ordination and cognitive activities such as

concentration.(Oxendine J. B. 1970, Emotional Arousal and Motor Performance, The University of Illinois Press)

On the other hand high arousal is useful in less complex skills requiring strength, endurance and speed, which are evident in skills such as tackling in football.

A psychological factor which affects performance is anxiety. This can be defined as a vague form of fear or apprehension that is created by awareness of this arousal. It is said to be a negative emotional state which is caused because a situation is seen as threatening.

The two main components of anxiety are trait anxiety and state anxiety.

A definition of trait anxiety " is a behavioural disposition which predisposes a person to perceive an objectivity in non- dangerous circumstances as threatening and respond to these with state anxiety levels disproportionate to the level of threat" (Weinberg and Gould 1995, Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology)

Trait anxiety depends on the personality of the person as if the person has a high train anxiety then that person may become afraid very easily in any unfamiliar circumstances which they are not used to. The symptoms will appear to be very clear that the person would become nervous with obvious physical symptoms such as sweating or trembling. A psychologist called Spielberger (1966) predicts that individuals with high trait anxiety will perceive more situations as threatening and respond to challenges with

more state anxiety than those who are low trait anxious individuals.

(Spielberger, C. D. 1966- Anxiety and behaviour, New York Academic press)

State anxiety is an emotional response to particular situations. The main signs of state anxiety would be nervousness and apprehension. State anxiety can often be temporary which therefore exists in relation to particular situations. An example of this can be in table tennis on their own but are relaxed in a team game such as football. The state anxiety is shown playing table tennis on their own. State anxiety has two components. These are cognitive state anxiety which consists of feelings of nervousness, apprehension and worry. The other component of state anxiety is somatic state anxiety which is the awareness of arousal around the body. Some people may show high somatic state anxiety but at the same time be calm and mentally collected, conveying low state anxiety.

People with high anxiety usually have higher state anxiety in a competitive or evaluate situations than those with low trait anxiety. Anxiety can be a big problem in sport as it affects many players' performances. The individual can deal with low anxiety with not too much decrease in performance. The main problem is when the player creates excessive amounts of anxiety and the player witnesses a rapid decrease in performances and performs well under their acceptability.

Excessive anxiety is often being associated loss of perception of in ability to meet the demands of the situations such as fear of injury. If the player realises the effect of anxiety that itself can increase anxiety. With all these high levels of anxiety an increase in arousal and that excessive arousal is

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associated with decreased performance for example the "inverted U theory". the cognitive anxiety takes up processing capacity and diverts it from the tasks, if all these effects are not controlled can lead to a complete in breakdown in performance.