



International Journal of Current Research and Academic Review

ISSN: 2347-3215 Volume 3 Number 6 (June-2015) pp. 298-304

www.ijcrar.com



The strategies for sports coach in managing stressful situations in sports competitions

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KEYWORDS

Sports coach

A B S T R A C T

This paper attempts to look at the strategies for sports coaches in managing stressful situations in sports competitions. This paper therefore, writes in the introduction, the concepts of stress, competition based stress, management, stress management in sports, stress in sports psychology. The paper a/so examines the sources of stress. It looks critically at the levels of stress in competitive sports. The paper also highlights some specific stress management strategies which sports coaches have to employ to aid excellent performance in sports competition.. It also identifies the educational implications of stress management in sports competitions. The paper concludes with summary and recommendations.

Introduction

A number of spoil related programmes were developed from behavioural psychology, these programmes emphasized stress management and visualization method for skill management.

Stressor abounds in our everyday life as world economic conditions and unsatisfactory living continue to be a problem. Stress ds a fact, threatens the health of the body and has an adverse effect on its functioning, has become a major in most Nigerian cities (Preh, 2007) stress according to Nwajei (2004) is often thought to be the dominant psychological problem of today. Increase in mental disorder, crime,

psychosomatic illness, heart attack and the breakdown of marriages have aII at some time been attributed to increasing pace of development, competitiveness, and uncertainty in modern life.

Ogbe and Ebon (2004) state that stress is an action in situation, that places special physical and psychological demand upon a person, anything that can cause imbalance in individual equilibrium as well as anything which man experiences when he is under pressure and fell unable to cope.

Martens (1975) defined competitive stress as the negative emotional reaction an athlete

feels when his/her self-esteem is threatened. This personal threat occurs when the young athlete perceives an imbalance between the performance demands of the competition and his/her own ability to successfully meet those demands, under conditions where the consequences of perceived failure are thought to be important.

Stress' management in sports competition may be seen as the way or ways of handling of stress of the athletes during sports participation. According to Assa (2006) stress management in sports simply means how one Copes, controls and reduces the occurrence of the negative conflict of stress. It is clear that stress is part and parcel of all sports competitions, therefore different approaches should be sought in coping with this effect. It must be realized that coping with the stress of sports competition is more of cognitive functions, that is mental and body control. This therefore needs constant practice and assessment to ensure that athletes are practicing the correct techniques that suit them best in coping with the stress of competition, which has been one of the major problems confronting our athletes in this country (Eze, 2002).

The inability to control stress has been responsible for the noticed fluctuations in performances of athletes. Meanwhile stress as an intense pressure or tension forced on a body expressed per unit of area is seen as the way human beings respond to conditions that scare, threaten, angry or excite them. If such conditions persist there is a tendency for an occurrence of fatigue break down in the human perceptual mechanism or even a damage to the system of the body which will result in mental failure.

In sports psychology, stress is seen as a form of arousal which is specifically -linked with specification task expectation of the demand

which a situation places on individual performing in competitive sports. Stress is viewed from different perceptiveness. Some psychologists or teachers or even the coaches consider stress management to be an 'essential ingredient *for excellent performance.*

Other believe that stress has devastating effects on performance psychological point of view, stress could be good or bad. This depends on its level and the calibre of the person affected.

Sources of stress

Scanlan (1978) reported that the two potential sources of stress were the intrapersonal factor of competitive trait anxiety and the situational variable of win-loss. The competitive trait anxiety (CTA) is a stable personality disposition that reflects the tendency, to perceive competitive situations as threatening to self-esteem. This competitive trait anxiety was a significant source of Pre-competition stress and that of win-loss was the major cause of post-competition stress. Fun as one of the intrapersonal factors of competitive situations were found to be associated with post-competition stress. It is said that fun and stress are inversely related, and that this relationship holds true for losing as well as winning players.

Martens (1975) finds out that competition can be a stressful experience to some athletes and under some conditions. He further states that stress occurs if the athlete perceives that he/she is not capable of successful meeting the demands of the competitions and yet feels that it is important to do so. The negative consequences of this perceived demand/capability imbalance can include feelings of failure and/or the threat of

incurring negative evaluation from significant people.

The situational source of post-competition stress is defeat, with state anxiety levels even fluctuating with the degree of success or failure attained. In other words, the sources of competitive stress among others include the hopes of someone (athlete), what he or she hopes to get or achieve or win in the competition.

The fear of failure, anger, frustration, dissatisfaction, anticipation of success, increase in task, behaviour, crowd demand, muscular tension, over confidence, over motivation, injury, discomfort, inability to cope with sensory information, temperature intolerance, that is inability to tolerate heat, cold, attitude and humility are sources of stress. Others could be lack of sleep, poor nutrition, uncertainty, lack of realization, inability to estimate the actual performance response, break down of personal play or performance form.

Levels of stress

In all human endeavour and all activities, there must be certain degree of stress which stimulates an individual to action or actions. The level of stress in competitive sports include

- i. Low
- ii. moderate and
- iii. high-excessive levels of stress

when a low level of reaction is experienced in any activity, tendency is lack of excitement, alertness and the consequence is poor performance. On the other hand, an excessive level of Stress tends to result in overloading of cortex part of the brain which makes the central nervous system malfunction in which information could be misinterpreted due to inability to co-ordinate

all the necessary in put. It is believed that people/athletes perform best at optimal stress levels.

Duffy (1962) in Nwajei (2004) discussed the levels of stress thus: in optimal performance, if the activation is too low as in drowsiness, it might be expected that the individual might lack alertness and attention so that his response would be inadequate, but if activation is too high, the cortex may become bombarded by a stream of impulses with which it is unable to cope. The stage of moderate and optimal performance level will be different with each individual athlete. Therefore, it is not advisable to generalize on the treatment for stressful conditions for all categories of athletes.

Duffy (1962) in Martens and Landers (1970) state that the optimal level of performance in a given task will clearly depend on a number of factors such as the nature of the previous training and habitation .and the individual's tonic arousal level. However, the relationship between stress and performance seems to be best expressed by inverted U-shaped curve in which performance improves with arousal or activation from a low level up to an optimum after which performance deteriorates with increase in stress (Figure 1)

Figure 1 above is the inverted U-shaped relationship between arousal and performance. Arousal levels up to X_2 are positively linked with performance but thereafter negatively. X_2 Y_2 represent the optimal relationship between arousal and performance. However, arousal levels X_1 Y_2 give rise to .the same performance level and X_2 give rise to the same performance level Y_3 . From the inverted U association, it is confirmed that moderate levels of stress are associated with optimum performance. In general, there are the research evidence that

indicates motor performance such as ball tossing, speed of tapping, manual pursuit and mirror drawing deteriorate when activation level is high. Meanwhile high levels of anxiety and stress eg. Danger, annoyance and incentives have been shown to have some kind of disorganizing effect on performance.

Specific stress management techniques

As earlier explained, stress management in sports competition may be seen as the way or ways of handling stress among the athletes during sports participation. Stress management which involve coping with stress in sports competition is more important than proposing for an elimination of stress.

Rushall (1.985) in Eze (2002) listed some specific stress management methods or techniques which had aided excellent performance in sports competition as follows:

- (i) Positive thinking towards ones expected achievement.
- (ii) Mental practice of the skill .or pattern of play as a perception of self as a spectator and as a perception self as active participant
- (iii) Mental rehearsal the skill is mentally rehearsed over and before the actual physical performance.
- (iv) Imagery practice this involves going through the process of imagining its perfect form. There and blocking out any stress provoking thought.
- (v) Development self confidence before and during the competition and engaging in positive self statement.
- (vi) Eliminating inhibitory messages and statements
- (vii) Developing the awareness of muscles this may be the kinaesthetic

sense through practically going over a skill without actual performance.

- (viii) The coach or teacher should adhere to the use of cueing words for example- hit, jump, volley, kick harder, drive in anticipation for an action and calming down words like relax, cool it down and concentrate.
- (ix) Believing in oneself and one's ability is very effective in managing stress.
- (x) Mediation -this requires mental and body discipline and mental concentration.
- (xi) Relaxation -this assists the conservation of energy.
- (xii) Bio-feedback - this enhances self regulation. It is claimed that optimal self regulation is the key to successful sports performance as the individual is not struggling with his movement, no muscular tension; perfection is experienced through graceful movement which minimizes outlay of movement. The under lining process is to move the athlete form an external locus of control to an internal one.

Educational Implications of Stress Management in Sports Competitions

The teacher or coach should set the standard achievement to be moderate, or a little bit high. This will arouse the participants with low level of stress. First of all, the teacher will make use of short frequent drills for teaching them. He should provide opportunities so that they can taste success, make a win for them for sometimes before setting the standard high. Activities should be appropriate to the children capabilities and needs. The stress management techniques should be developed generally on corrective remedial programme.

According to Cornwall (1983) the trembling

of the body, particularly prior to an important competition have been noticed that moderate of stress does help the athletes to perform better. There should be good coaching or teaching to develop the participant's self discipline and sense of direction. In the teaching approach, allow a greater freedom and greater responsibility for the athletes. Every direction is put down for the athletes to see that they perform well or otherwise and this will help the athletes to develop responsibility and self confidence.

For mental and emotional stress, the implication for physical educator or coach is that apart from the intellectual curiosity, we teach understanding and concepts connected with the stress and the competitive sports. The coach tries to increase the control of emotion in individual athletes and group situations. At this stage, the athletes try to control emotion or stress as it arises. Here the coach requires a careful selection of activities and also provides situation for fellowship and leadership, (Nwimo,2004).

Teacher or coach should try to group the participants together for the purpose of reduction of excessive level of stress before the competition. They should be allowed to play simple games together like pyramid building and some warm up exercises.

Special attention should be given to the athletes with low level of stress because they easily show signs of fatigue. For concentration and blocking out stress provoking thought, the implication for coach or physical educator is to provide activities that should be interesting to them, he allows the athletes to choose games that they like to engage in before the actual competition.

The teacher coach should also note, that probability of stress is determined on the basis of the content and the availability of

information , as perceived by the competition about their ability, and the actual performance outcome.

Summary

Stress management in sports competition means how some one copes, controls and reduces the occurrence of the negative conflict of stress. The main sources of stress are the hopes of the athlete; what he hopes to achieve or win in the competition; the fear of failure, anger, frustration, injury, discomfort which he would like to avoid. Other stressful situation include crows demand, muscular tension, over motivation and inability to cope with sensory information.

The impact each of the above mentioned variable have on each athlete determines the individual's level of motivation namely:

1. Low level
2. Moderate level and
3. High-excessive level of stress.

Having determined the level, one can then devise means to handle such stressful problems through stress management techniques namely:

- i. Mental practice of the skill as a perception of self active participant. Positive thinking towards ones expected achievement.

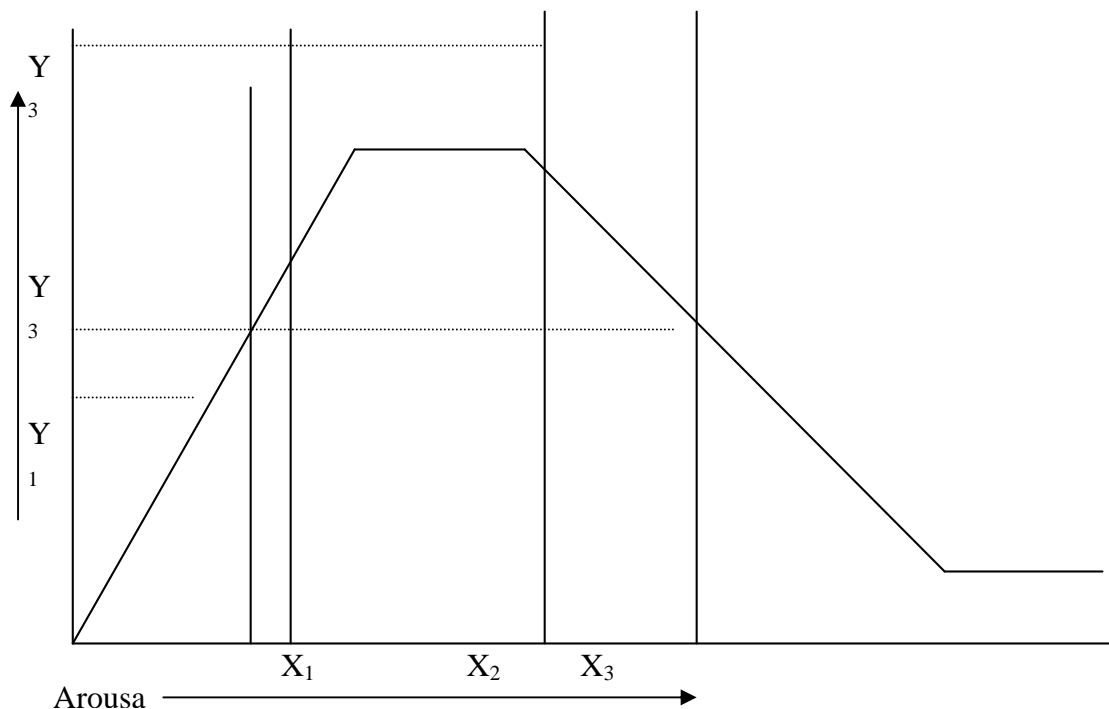
The use of cueing words like, hit. volley, kick harder, jump in anticipation for an action, and Developing of self confidence before and during competition etc.

There is no doubt whatsoever that one's ability to control one's emotion in competition situation enhances an athlete's performance even under adverse situation.

Recommendations

- i. The teacher/coach should increase the control of emotion in individual athlete and group situations.
- ii. The Coach/Teacher should adhere to the use of cueing words,
- iii. Participants should be grouped together for the purpose of reducing excessive level of stress and should concentrate and block out stress provoking thought.
- iv. Special attention should be given to the athletes with low level of stress, imagery practice should be adhered to.
- v. Mental rehearsal should be observed by the athletes before the actual physical performance.
- vi. Activities should be appropriate to the children's/athletes capabilities and needs.

Fig.1 An inverted U-shaped curve (relationship between stress and performance Source: motor performance under stress, invented hypothesis in journal of personality and social psychology



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