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Anxiety in Sports Performance

By [Gobinder Gill](#)

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Anxiety is a concept that is widely discussed by performers and coaches. Practitioners involved in sports performance need to be aware of anxiety related symptoms. Once awareness is built it would be prudent to deal with anxiety related issues.

There are two distinct aspects of anxiety. One aspect emanates towards trait anxiety. Trait anxiety relates to innate characteristics that humans are born with. For example, having a tendency to throw up before important competition. A second form of anxiety is related to the state, which is situational specific. For example, a performer may feel anxious when free-throwing in basketball. Related to these aspects there are also two mechanisms that are identified as somatic (physical feelings) and cognitive (mental) anxiety. Performers can suffer with both types of mechanisms or predominately from one over the other.

Common symptoms of somatic anxiety include, experiencing butterflies, sweating, heavy breathing or a elevated heart rate. Common symptoms of cognitive anxiety include negative thoughts, feelings of apprehension or nervousness. Dealing with anxiety related symptoms could be difficult because what works for one performer may not work with another. Therefore, practitioners need to be flexible in their approach and utilise a range of different strategies.

To help performers overcome, or at least limit (somatic symptoms) a range of strategies can be put forward. Through experience performers could develop their own individual strategies. However, novice performers should be guided and supported.

1) Relaxation training

Relaxation training involves teaching performers a range of routines to help support the body to relax. The purpose of relaxation training is to enable performers to feel relaxed in both mind (thinking) and body (muscles). Feeling relaxed can help performers focus effectively on performance aspects. There are two forms of relaxation that performers could conduct. One form relates to practices beyond the training pitch and competition settings. This form of relaxation can relate to listening to music or participating in Yoga classes. The other form of relaxation can

ABOUT GOBINDER GILL

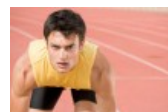


I currently work as a Lecturer in Sport and specialise in Sport Psychology. My particular interest is in mental preparation for sport and how emotions can be regulated to enhance performance levels. To this extent, I currently employ mental preparation strategies with Coventry City Ladies Football Club and work closely with the College Academy Teams. I am very passionate about Sport Psychology and fully believe that mental preparation is essential for meeting performance objectives.

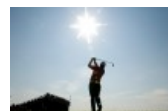
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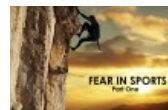
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be within the changing room environment prior to competition. Within this environment, performers can use positive intent statements, use calming breathing techniques or listening to music.

2) Deep breathing

Deep breathing is a strategy that needs to be practised over time for it to become effective. Therefore, performers need to start focusing on their own breathing and also focus on different parts of the body. A simple, but effective routine, deep breathing simply involves inhaling (through the nose) and exhaling (out the mouth). Performers are encouraged that through deep breathing they get in tune with different parts of their body and in particular where they can feel tension.

To enable performers to overcome or at least reduce (cognitive symptoms) a range of strategies can also be put forward.

1) Goal setting

Goal setting is a simple but useful technique. Goal setting allows performers to attain purposeful direction and focus on tasks in hand. Practitioners must set process related goals and not wholly outcome goals. Goal setting must be a mechanism through which performers develop a process in order to achieve set targets.

2) Positive self-talk

Performers should practise positive self-talk on a regular basis. Positive self-talk supports the cognition within our own minds. A positive mind will be more balanced and provides a better chance of success. Thus, positive self-talk is about channelling your brain and directing that thinking to support performance.

3) Emotional control

An excellent practitioner should instruct performers to understand their own performance levels. Performers need to identify feelings during good performance and compare these to feelings following poor performance. This will enable performers to understand how they react and the way they feel during contrasting emotional states.

The key to anxiety is that practitioners need to work on ways to combat symptoms. Through combatting symptoms performers will have greater opportunities for performance improvement.

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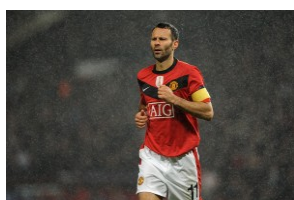
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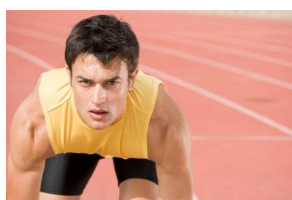
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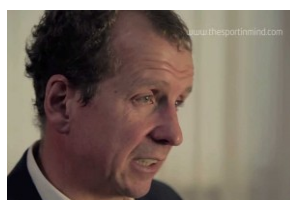
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