



Keywords

Word	Definition
Stress	A negative response of the body to a threat causing anxiety
Eustress	A positive response of the body to a threat
Stressor	The cause of stress
Attentional narrowing	Limiting the amount of information being processed; missing some important cues
Cue utilisation	The ability to process information is directly linked to the level of arousal
Attentional wastage	Limiting the amount of information being processed; the result of attentional narrowing
Attentional control	Using four different attentional styles; broad, narrow, internal, external

Key skills

- Discuss the methods coaches can use to reduce stress in the performer, including somatic and cognitive techniques.

Eustress, stress and stressors

Stress is the response of the individual to a threat and one of the most common emotions in sport.

Stress is not always negative – at the end of an important game, when the score is in your favour with only a few seconds left of play, you realise you're going to win, a feeling of euphoria. This positive aspect of stress is called **eustress** and in some extreme sports, performers will seek out this feeling by pushing themselves into more difficult challenges. Eustress can happen when a response to a threat of a difficult challenge is overcome and the feeling of success gives future confidence and motivation.

Stress can also be negative and create a negative response of anxiety and cognitive and somatic effects. The cause of stress in sport is called a **stressor**, examples include;

- Injury
- Playing an important match
- Playing against really good opponents
- Playing to get an important reward such as prize money
- Fear of failure caused by pressure from being watched by significant others, pressure from coach, or own expectations

Cognitive stress is psychological and brings negative thoughts and feelings, including irrational thinking of the inability to cope with the demands of the situation.

Somatic stress is physiological and involves the physical response of the body which might include increased heart rate and an increase in sweating.



Cognitive stress management techniques

Thought stopping – When negative and irrational thoughts occur, the performer uses a learned action or trigger to remove them.

Positive self-talk – When a performer replaces negative thoughts with positive ones.

Imagery – Recreate a successful image of the action from a past performance when the skill is performed successfully and the player can recall the feel of the actual movements in the mind.

Visualisation – also uses a mental image of the skill, an image perfected while performing the skill successfully in training. This image is then 'locked in' and re-lived when the skill is performed for real.

Mental rehearsal – This is the process of going over the movements of a task in the mind before the action takes place.

Attentional control and cue utilisation – As stress and arousal increase, the ability to take in information reduces (attentional narrowing, Easterbrook 1959). The ability to process information is directly linked to the level of arousal, known as cue utilisation. At high levels of arousal and stress, only limited information can be processed causing important information to be missed (attentional wastage). To avoid this the performer could choose an attention style that suits the situation; broad, narrow, external, internal.

Psychological skills training – The performer can train and practice using any of the methods explained as cognitive stress management techniques.

Somatic stress management techniques

Biofeedback – this technique uses a measuring device to help the athlete recognise the physical changes that happen under stress, e.g. the galvanic skin response that measures increases in electrical activity when sweating.

Progressive muscle relaxation – This is a physical technique, conducted with the use of recorded instructions, the performer alternates between a state of tension in a group of muscles to a state of relaxation in those same muscles.

Centering – a form of breathing control when, at opportune times, the performer can learn to relax the shoulders and chest while concentrating on the slow movement of the abdominal muscles when taking deep controlled breaths.

Pathway

Previous knowledge: Personality, attitude, achievement motivation, confidence and self-efficacy, attribution, social facilitation and inhibition, arousal, anxiety.

Future links: Aggression, leadership, group dynamics, goal setting.

Careers: from curriculum narratives

Cross curricular links