

# SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY

**Sports psychology** the study of a people's behaviour in sport. It is also a specialization within the brain psychology and kinesiology that seeks to understand psychological/mental factors that affect performance in sports, physical activity and exercise and apply these to enhance individual and team performance. It deals with increasing performance by managing emotions and minimizing the psychological effects of injury and poor performance. Some of the most important skills taught are goal setting, relaxation, visualization, self-talk, awareness and control, concentration.

## Stress Reduction Techniques

The techniques that you select to reduce stress depend on the **cause** of the stress and the **situation** in which the stress occurs.

In choosing methods to combat stress, it is worth asking yourself **where the stress comes from**: if outside factors, then a positive thinking or imagery based technique may be effective. If the stress is based on the feeling of adrenaline in the body, then it may be effective purely to relax the body **.I.**

### ENVIRONMENTAL TECHNIQUES

#### 1. Reduce the importance of the event

A number of factors can make an event take on a high level of significance and cause stress as a result:

- the importance and size of an event
- the presence of family, friends or judges

#### 2. Reduce uncertainties

Uncertainty can cause high levels of stress.

- not knowing what the coach thinks of your abilities
- receiving vague or inconsistent instructions

## II. PHYSICAL TECHNIQUES

#### 1. Progressive Muscular Relaxation

Progressive Muscular Relaxation (PMR) is a purely physical technique for relaxing your body when muscles are tense.

The idea behind PMR is that you tense up a group of muscles so that they are as tight and contracted as possible, and hold them in a state of extreme tension for a few seconds. Then relax the muscles to their previous state. Finally you consciously relax them again as much as you can.

#### 2. Biofeedback

Biofeedback systems use electronic sensors to measure stress, and then feed the results of this measurement back to the athlete.

This feedback allows you to experiment with stress management techniques, and actually see or hear them taking effect on your body. It allows you to practise different ways of using the techniques and compare the results. Biofeedback methods convert vague feelings into hard, observable information, and help an athlete to fine-tune the use of stress management techniques.

### **III. MENTAL TECHNIQUES**

#### **1. Imagery in Relaxation**

One common use of imagery in relaxation is to imagine a scene, place or event that you remember as peaceful, restful, beautiful and happy. You can bring all your senses into the image, with sounds of running water and birds, the smell of cut grass, the taste of cool white wine, the warmth of sun, etc. Use the imagined place as a retreat from places of stress and pressure.

Other uses of imagery in relaxation involve mental pictures of stress flowing out of the body; or of stress, distractions and everyday concerns being folded away.

#### **2. Thought Awareness**

You are thinking negatively when you fear the future, put yourself down, criticize yourself for errors, doubt your abilities or expect failure. Negative thinking can damage confidence, harm performance and paralyse mental skills.

Thought awareness is the process by which you observe your thoughts and become aware of what is going through your head.