



Role of Stress Management in Sports

Anurag

Assistant Prof. of Physical Edu.
DAV College, Sadhaura
Distt. Yamunanagar (Haryana)

Abstract: *The fact is that a lot of importance is being given to the sports and it has led to huge competition in sports due to which athletes are under pressure to perform well. Expectations of coaches, teammates or family members can lead to anxiety, depression and other forms of stress. It has become important to discuss stress management techniques for an athlete. Athletics coaches are constantly experimenting on their athletes, whether consciously or not, by seeing how much training they can take. Up to a certain level the athlete improves in performance, to a measurable extent, but there eventually comes a point when the training is too much. The athlete becomes more and more tired and eventually breaks down. This breakdown leads to listlessness, loss of appetite or improper sleep. Whereas the athlete who gets the right training load seems full of energy and is hardly ever ill.*

This paper brings out the crucial issue of stress in the life of a sportsperson and how can it be tackled.

Keywords: Athletes, Stress, Management Techniques, Depression, Anxiety.

Introduction: When the body is placed under any kind of stress it leads to hormonal imbalance. Not only adrenaline, but other substances like testosterone, hormone responsible for human growth, the glucocorticoids and mineralocorticoids show an increased output, while there is decrease in production of others. Stress can be due any reason like – it may be due to problems in moving house, examination stress, playing too many matches of football, or it could simply be worrying about something. Stress can be beneficial up to a certain extent as it will help us to perform with greater energy and increased awareness. But if the stress increases still further, the output of anti-stress hormones



will eventually start to fall. This has adversely affects the entire metabolism, including the grow rate of our cells and also the rate at which they are repaired. Also the production of the cells in the immune system will be affected. Therefore it is very important to discuss about stress management in a sportsperson's life.

Research Methodology: The present research paper is based on the secondary sources of data collection. Most of the study material has been taken from the reference books and official websites. The research is exploratory in nature. To pace the study, the researcher has also used some observational facts.

Research Objectives: This paper aims at the following objectives:

- To highlight the concept of stress management in sports.
- To find out the various types of stress in sports.
- To point out some major techniques to tackle the problem of stress in sports.

The Concept of Stress Management:

Stress management refers to the environmental, physiological, cognitive, and behavioral techniques needed to manage the factors and components that underlie the stress process or experience of stress. The primary goal of stress management in sports is to help the athlete to effectively manage competition related demands as well as to enhance psychological well-being (PWB). There a lot many stress management techniques that can be classified into various categories. Many of them have been covered in this paper.

Types of Stress:

The concept we have to bear in mind is the Total Stress Load. For the sportsperson the formula is: Lifestyle Stress + Emotional Stress + Training Stress + Competition Stress = Total Stress Load. It is believed that the fit athlete should be able to withstand stress better than the ordinary person as he or she is trained to perform well under pressure. But, if the athlete is training too hard or competing too much, a slight increase in the total stress can lead to

their breakdown. Here are some kinds of stresses that a sportsman can undergo.

□ **Lifestyle Stress:** For a sportsman to live a stress free life he needs an economically stable base. Mounting debts increases the stress level. It can be eliminated if government provides economic support to the athletes or he gets a part time job that gives him economic stability. Other factors such as where he lives and how much travelling he has to do must also be considered.

□ **Emotional Stress:** This is something we can rarely control, but we can manage other aspects of our lives so as to reduce the total stress load. During times of great stress, one should use training as a form of therapy. One should avoid serious competition when under great stress, though non-serious competition is fine.

□ **Training Stress:** Training is an integral part of a sportsman's life and thus it should be progressive. It should not add extra load to his life

suddenly, it leads to stress. The increase in volume and the introduction of new training methods must all be done such that with one phase merging into the next. A sportsman should get enough rest to rejuvenate.

□ **Competition Stress:** Since competition is at the heart of sport and it may lead to stress one should be trained to cope with competition stress. There can be times when one does not get the expected results but it should not get heavy on the athlete and should not make him stressed. One must be conscious of the fact that going on higher level carries with it the strong possibility of failure. Here it's important to teach the athlete to cope with failure and work harder.

□ **Everyday Stress:** We all lead a busy and at times stressful life and life of a sportsman is no exception. A sportsman can reduce his daily life stress by few simple ways. When lifestyle stress or emotional stress

increases, competition stress should be avoided, and training should take the form of therapy. He may consult an expert as well if needed.

Techniques to Manage Stress: It is very obvious to say that managing stress can reduce injury and illness. A study published in 2003 “Annals of Behavioral Medicine” explored that college rowers who received cognitive behavioral stress management training reduced the number of days they were sick or injured. They also cut their visits to health services in half. The CBSM included seven group sessions with a licensed psychologist and a clinical psychology intern, where athletes learned progressive muscle relaxation, diaphragmatic breathing techniques, emotive imagery and cognitive restructuring.

Furthermore, it may be stated that stress management techniques in sports typically target somatic, behavioral, and/or cognitive affective symptoms of stress. Behavioral responses are the direct actions taken because of the stress, including engag

ement or disengagement in certain strategies or activities, as well as distraction. Finally, cognitive affective responses may include the thoughts associated with the stress, including worries, beliefs, apprehensions, and negative expectations about performance as well as action plans to manage stress. Therefore, an effective stress management is urgently needed to recognize the temporal aspect of the stress process because any stressful transaction in sports often involves anticipation, confrontation (engagement), and post-engagement stages and can result in a sportsperson feeling overwhelmed. Stress management techniques can target specific stages as under:

- **Cognitive Restructuring:** It enables a sportsperson to think through a situation, turning negativity into a balanced response while helping him to plan for future situations. Mind Tools provides the following cognitive restructuring technique: to write down the situation and

identify the deep feelings already experienced; to identify the thoughts that went through the head and mark the ones that were most stressful; look at both sides of the situation and create a balanced answer, such as "I performed well, but in the future I would like to improve in this area."

- **Visualization:** To achieve any goal is an important part of building the self-confidence which will need to obtain it. If a sportsperson is a runner, picture himself running the race, going through each part of the course and getting the medal at the finish line. This gives a sportsperson something to remember when he is running the course and can provide the push he needs to get through the difficult moments. Visualization can be as easy as closing the eyes and picturing each step that will get him to the finish line.
- **Guided Relaxation:** If a sportsperson is guided properly, it may physically reduce stress. The CBSM study found that relaxation recordings

reduced the hormone cortisol, which is released in response to stress. Most of the concluding results of various studies have found that soothing music and calming voices help a sportsperson to gently contract and release muscles or focus on breathing.

- **Anxiety Management Training:** It involves a sportsperson's learning to employ relaxation strategies under stressful situations, including those producing emotions such as anger and anxiety. During anxiety management training, the sportsperson visualizes the stressful situation and allows the accompanying physiological arousal to be generated within himself or herself. Relaxation techniques, such as applied relaxation, progressive muscle relaxation, breath control or deep breathing, or meditation are used by the sportsperson to reduce the symptoms of stress.
- **Autogenic Training:** It was first introduced in psychiatry by

Johannes Heinrich Schultz. It involves a series of exercises designed to produce sensations such as warmth or heaviness, to help promote relaxation. The program is based on six stages, each stage has a separate goal and the sportsperson gets more relaxed at every next stage.

□ **Breath Control and Deep Breathing:**

It is a relaxation technique which uses the physical strategy of breathing.

It is an effective and relatively easy stress management technique to apply. It is commonly used before a competition or during a natural break during the competition because it is most practically applied during non-active times.

□ **Meditation:**

Meditation is another method to help a sportsperson to manage stress. Through meditation, a sportsperson can become more attuned to physical sensations and can build an understanding of the connection between physiological functions

(e.g., increased HR, nausea) and psychological state (e.g., anxiety, confidence). This

knowledge can help the sportsperson to get relaxation.

□ **Performance and Competition**

Planning: Performance and competition plans can help the sportsperson to manage the stress that is inherent in competition. Such plans allow the sportsperson to take a proactive stance on stress, identifying ahead of time triggers of stress, and formulating a plan to counteract those issues. Planning allows many sportspersons to feel more in control of the situation and the self, thereby often decreasing further experiences of stress. It also provides a structure for them to incorporate other stress management and psychological skills into their pre-performance and performance routines.

Likewise, there are some other psychological skills, such as imagery, identifying strengths, and goal setting,



that can be incorporated into stress management programs. Calming imagery, such as visualizing oneself in a safe, relaxing place, can be used to help reduce cognitive anxiety and arousal and to bring on physical relaxation. Identifying strengths can also help to refocus on thought process towards what a sportsperson can do rather than what he/she cannot do and assist in developing competition plans that maximize assets. Goal setting can help the athlete stay focused on the task at hand and keep attention on relevant issues in sports.

Conclusion: To conclude, we can say that stress management techniques include any intervention that can modify one or more components of the stress process. Therefore, all the stress management techniques need to be directed at individual needs and the issue at hand, as well as take into account the coping resources the sportsperson has available. Furthermore, as with the acquisition of any skill, application of stress management techniques requires training, time, and practice. We know the

fact that knowledge is not sufficient, as it does not guarantee a sportsperson of the necessary skills or program to his or her specific issues while performing in any event. That is why; a positive and planned effort is urgently required on the part of the sportsperson to make the event stress free.

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