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Mamidi Sharath
Physical Director, Dr. B. R.
Ambedkar Jr. College Bagh
Lingampally, Hyderabad,
Telangana, India

Corresponding Author:
Mamidi Sharath
Physical Director, Dr. B. R.
Ambedkar Jr. College Bagh
Lingampally, Hyderabad,
Telangana, India

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How media publishing sports and an analysis on performance

Mamidi Sharath

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to initiate an examination of the influence of the media as a distraction and its impact on athletic performance. For the purposes of this paper, it is important to have a common definition and understanding of media, arousal, stress, anxiety, and mood. Media will be defined as individuals who publicly report or make public statements relative to an athlete's performance. In this context, media can be newspaper reporters, paparazzi, television newscasters, or fans and critics who publicize their critiques of athletic performance through the use of public for unsaid blogs. In order to differentiate between arousal, anxiety, and stress in this text, specific definitions will be used. Arousal will refer to a state of alertness as the body prepares itself for action. It is associated with increases in physiological and psychological activity, such as heart rate and attention (Landers, 1980). Stress is defined as a state that results from the demands that are placed on the individual which require that person to engage in some coping.

Keywords: Newspaper, reporters, television, news casters, blogs, arousal, anxiety, stress, champion, competition, drugs

Introduction

In the field of Sport Psychology, many models have been created to explore arousal and anxiety levels as they relate to athletic performance. Following criticisms of lack of support, popular one-dimensional models such as the Inverted U-Theory and the Catastrophe Theory are being replaced with multidimensional-type models (Weinberg, 1990). The Multidimensional Anxiety Theory by Martens *et al.* (1990), for instance, focuses on the anxiety response that accompanies high levels of stress. It takes into consideration two different elements: cognitive anxiety and somatic anxiety. Cognitive anxiety signifies distractions which involve inability to concentrate, disruptions in attention, and negative performance expectations (Martens *et al.*, 1990).

Arousal and Stress

In sport competition, athletes must often think fast and make sharp decisions regarding the task at hand. For example, when a basketball player is receiving a pass from a teammate, he or she must complete necessary cognitive functions quickly in order to catch the pass. According to a model created by A.F. Sanders, one entity that may affect one's cognitive functions is arousal level. If the basketball player exhibits a low level of arousal, his or her perception declines. However, the player's perception is sped up with a high level of arousal. When the arousal level is too high, though, perception becomes less efficient. Additionally, Sanders proposes that stress commonly results from one's failed efforts in correcting a level of arousal that is too high or too low. Moreover, high levels of stress accompany increased anxiety (Sanders, 1983).

Media's Influence on Athletic Performance

Many athletes are targets of media prey. Win or lose, their performance and life is publicly dissected by the media. Winning brings forth media glorification and expectation, and/or jealousy and criticism. Losing brings forth negative judgment and more criticism. Howard Ferguson (1990) in his book, *The Edge*, said, "Criticism can be easily avoided by saying nothing, doing nothing, and being nothing. Mediocre people play it safe and avoid criticism at all costs. Champions risk criticism every time they perform."

One such athlete who risked media criticism was Miki Ando. Miki Ando was a two-time Japanese national figure skating champion and 2004 Junior World champion. She also became the first female skater to successfully complete a quadruple jump in competition. Ando is very popular in Japan and receives a lot of attention from gossip magazines and other Japanese media. Ando's athletic performance struggled in 2005 and 2006, and media coverage turned negative. When the Japanese Skating Federation (JSF) selected her to be on its 2006 Olympic woman's figure skating team, the press said she did not deserve to go to Torino. They also frowned on her for wearing miniskirts. The JSF was so concerned media coverage would negatively affect as she prepared for the Olympics, they sent formal written requests to several magazine publishers asking them to cut back on their coverage (NBC, 2006). The JSF was not the only organization concerned with media impact on their 2006 Olympic athletes. The Canadian Olympic Committee (2006) recognized the potential of the media as a distraction to their athletes as well. In an effort to divert any negative media influence, the Committee publicly announced the following communications objective in their victory management plan: A media training section emphasizing the notion to support athletic performance by removing media as a distraction (Canadian Olympic Committee, 2006). Were these concerns founded? Some in the Republic of China believe so. After China won the first gold medal in the 2004 Olympic Games and had some major unexpected wins during the first few days of Olympic competition, Chinese newspaper and television stations touted predictions of gold medals their athletes would claim. The predictions, however, did not come to fruition. Athletes the media advertised would take first, such as the Chinese male gymnasts, did not even make it to the award stand. Badminton player Lin Dan was beaten in the first round of competition and Ma Lin, China's top table tennis player, was defeated by 20th-ranked Swede Jan-Ove Waldner (China Daily, 2004).

Kenny Rogers

Baseball player Kenny Rogers has had a volatile relationship with media. During the 2005 season, Rogers refused to talk to media after they published a report saying he would retire if the Rangers did not give him a contract extension. Then on June 29, 2005, while walking onto the field for a pre-game warm-up, he had an altercation with two cameramen. Rogers first shoved Fox Sports Net Southwest photographer David Mammeli, yelling at him to get the cameras out of his face. Next, Rogers's charged cameraman Larry Rodriguez, wrestled the camera from him, threw it to the ground, and kicked it. As a result of the tirade, Rodgers was suspended and fined. Before all of his run-ins with the media, Rogers was having a career best season. However, following the suspension, in his August 11, 2005 return to the mound, Rogers allowed five runs and seven hits in five innings, on the way to a 16 to 5 loss. He also gave up a two-run homer in the all-star game where he was booed by the crowd. This indicates a possible causal relationship between stress and the media influence on Rogers. His adversarial relationship with the press caused him to publicly lose his temper and become violent, which cost him playing time, salary, and the respect of the fans. Moreover, it affected his performance and his season's statistics declined (ESPN, 2006).

Ricky Williams: David Swerdlick's editorial Ricky Williams – Just Let Him Be, discusses how the constant pressure of the

media drove collegiate and professional football standout, Ricky Williams, to quit the sport he loved. According to Swerdlick (2005), Ricky Williams suffered with a debilitating social anxiety disorder and extreme shyness. The aggressive media attention was uncomfortable and frightening for him. In his early pro years, he dreaded doing interviews so much he wore his helmet and an eyeshade inside his face mask. The article claims that in order to cope with all the unwanted media attention Williams smoked marijuana. As a result, he failed three NFL drug tests and experienced further embarrassing press. Superstar Neffler, Ricky Williams, loved the sport, but couldn't handle the media attention that comes with greatness. Swerdlick asserts that the media negatively impacted this athlete. Ricky Williams walked out on the Miami Dolphins; lost millions of dollars; lost the respect of his teammates and fans; and still finds himself as media fodder (Swerdlick, 2005). Many disagree with this conclusion, however, as is indicated on numerous blogs. One such blog critic instead credits William's early departure with his overriding desire to smoke marijuana (Sportscolumn.com, 2004).

Mike Tyson

Iron Mike Tyson's quick rise to the top of professional boxing made him one of the most publicized and admired boxers of all times. His personal turmoil, however, such as being convicted of raping Miss Black America and his volatile escapades such as biting off the ear of opponent, Evander Holyfield, made him one of the most media criticized boxers of all times. Up until the early 1990s, Tyson, too many boxing enthusiasts, seemed unbeatable. He earned numerous championship titles such as: World Boxing Council (WBC) Heavyweight Title, World Boxing Association (WBA) Heavyweight Title, and International Boxing Federation (IBF) Heavyweight Title. However, as his personal life became mired in legal difficulties, the media had an increased negative focus when reporting about him, and concurrently, Tyson lost all of his previously earned professional boxing titles. His sudden decline in performance may be tied to negative and excessive media attention, effecting his training and mental state. Days prior to a comeback fight, in an interview by writer John Raygoza, Tyson was asked if it bothers him when the media writes negative things about him. He responded, "It's my job to beat people and win fights... and it's their job to sell papers. Everything that could've been said about Mike Tyson has already been said. I don't take it personally like I use to." Here, Tyson admits that the media criticism did impact him but he is beyond that. One has to wonder, though, as Tyson was knocked out in the fourth round of that fight, and his boxing career ended on that night (Raygoza, 2004).

Only the Mentally Strong Survive

The above were examples of athletes whose performance was negatively impacted by media. Tony Dorsett, legendary NFL halfback, said: "You can turn the negative around and use it as a motivating force in your life. One of my biggest desires has always been to prove certain people wrong-to prove to them I can do it despite what they think or say" (Ferguson, 1990). Like Dorsett, some athletes are able to strive under intense media scrutiny by using it as motivation to achieve success. The following are several reports of athletes who have been able to survive and thrive in spite of the media.

Venus and Serena: In the world of tennis, two standout

sisters have received more than their share of negative press. Venus and Serena Williams are not your typical small, cutesy, white, female tennis players. They are black, muscular, and solid. They win with their hard hitting, hard return, and power-games. Not only does the medium write and talk about them due to them not fitting the stereotypical construct of the usual tennis player, Venus and Serena are also known and criticized for the exotic, colourful, and tight-fitting attire they wear on the court. The two girls grew up in a poor, Los Angeles neighbourhood.

Colin Montgomerie

Colin Montgomerie, one of Europe's top golf pros, has had his share of ups and downs. Among his many accomplishments are victories at the European Tour Order of Merit every year from 1993 to 1999. During this era, he was consistently ranked in the top 10 in the Official World Golf Rankings, reaching the number two ranking at his peak. Then in 2003 and 2004, he began having personal and performance problems, and his ranking slumped to the eighties. To make matters worse, he became the victim of media and fan abuse. Media publicly questioned his ability, and fans called him names, such as Mrs. Doubtfire, because of his noticeable weight gain.

Clinton Portis

Washington Redskins running back, Clinton Portis, during the 2005-2006 seasons, was known for wearing outrageous costumes and playing odd characters during media interviews. In one such costume, he dressed up as a made-up character named "Sheriff Gonna Getcha". He wore a long, black wig, glasses with oversized eyes, a Led Zeppelin T-shirt, a star-shaped badge, and an unusual necklace. In another interview, he showed up in a black cape, black Lone Ranger mask, clown-style oversized yellow sunglasses, a shaggy black wig, and fake gold teeth. He also created outrageous names for his costumes such as: Dr. I Don't Know, Dolla Bill, Rev Gonna Change, Kid Bro Sweets, and Coach Janky Spanky (Solomon, 2006). The stand-out athlete started this charade of characters after being traded by the Denver Broncos to the Washington Redskins in 2004. He was uncomfortable on this new team and had trouble scoring touchdowns.

Conclusion

While media has potential to negatively impact athletic performance, this medium can also be used to cultivate or bring out the best in an athlete. In an excerpt from the book, *Coaching Wrestling Successfully*, Dan Gable, a gold medallist in freestyle wrestling in the 1972 Olympics and former head wrestling coach for the University of Iowa, discuss various ways to motivate wrestlers. Of specific note is his view on using the media as a tool to positively motivate wrestlers. He believes athletes get pumped up from positive media, and media forums should be used extensively as a tool to motivate athletic performance. One specific media outlet he references is the collegiate team's annual poster. He suggests that if athletes know they will get their picture on the poster if they become an All American, they are motivated to excel and attain some deserved recognition. He also discussed the advantages of having a media day before the first competition each year. He says this not only serves as a good motivator, but also assists to enhance the athlete's communication skills in responding to the media. Most importantly, Gable stresses the importance of a coach's statements to the media and how they can serve as motivators. He believes athletes are inspired when they hear their coach's positive comments about them

(Gable, 1999). The examples and cases above support the premise that media does impact athletic performance. The cases also reveal or recognize that athlete's have two choices:

1. They can succumb to the challenges of media distractions.
2. They can meet the challenges of media. American poet Arthur Guiterman wrote, "The stones that critics hurl with harsh intent - a man may use to build a monument". As evidenced above, we suggest that a champion can use those stones as momentum to win.

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