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Controlling pressure by the athlete

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Abstract

Pressure can help you to reach your potential, or it can suck the life out of your sports activity. Drawing on the five core mental skills, the mentally fit sports person manages pressure effectively and uses it as fuel for optimal performance. Learning to handle pressure and even to use it can make the difference between achieving your goals and falling short. And learning to handle pressure starts with learning how it works on you and in you.

Keywords: Pressure, athlete, mental skills

Introduction

The Athletes are under tremendous pressure with relation to their performance. But the main question to be pondered over is how to negotiate and control pressure for achieving excellence. Controlling pressure is advanced skill of the mentally fit sportsmen or women. Where's the pressure in your activity? Is it in your training? Your races? Your first century? The sprint for the City Limits sign? Your teammates' expectations of you? Your conversations with your spouse before you walk out to begin your activity? Or perhaps it's in your thoughts. The way you talk to yourself, the way you talk about yourself – is it there? When you think about your goals, your performance, your skills, your challenges – is it there? You feel it from others, and you feel it from within. Either way, pressure can help you to reach your potential, or it can suck the life out of your sports activity. Drawing on the five core mental skills, the mentally fit sports person manages pressure effectively and uses it as fuel for optimal performance. It's certainly not unusual to feel pressure in any aspect of life, and sports are no exception. Performing, having fun, and succeeding under pressure come easy to some, but for most of us, pressure can sometimes detract from our performance. Learning to handle pressure and even to use it can make the difference between achieving your goals and falling short. And learning to handle pressure starts with learning how it works on you and in you.

Sources of Pressure

Let's look first at some of the sources of pressure in your sport. How about the people in your life with whom you have important relationships? Your spouse, significant other, kids, parents, friends, coach, boss, teammates, competitors, sponsors – you might feel pressure from any or all of them. Pressure to... What? Win, improve, cooperate, give up, give in, rest, spend time with them, reduce/increase/justify your commitment to sport? Before one can have a first meeting with an athlete, ask the athlete to complete a brief self-evaluation. One of the questions asked the athlete was to identify and assess people from whom the athlete feels pressure. The answer is: Many athletes, say that being too hard on themselves detracts them from their performance. The relationship we have with ourselves often mirrors, for better and for worse. Our self-talk is a prominent sign of the kind of relationship we have with you. When we think about our sport or activity, we are overly critical, judgmental, pushy, or negative at times? if so, we "sound" like them who are strong, influential voices tend to stay with us. The legacy of our contact with toxic people is not the only source of the pressure we put on ourselves. Let's not forget our old nemesis anxiety, and of course it's Siblings: stress, tension, nervousness, worry, and fear. It's kind of like the Stress. We have a natural, instinctive, and sometimes impulsive reaction to anxiety: control. If we're able to see or at least assume what's triggering our anxiety, we frequently try to exert some control over the

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trigger, in the hope of feeling less anxious. If we don't (or can't) see what's triggering our anxiety, we sometimes aim our control at something else. For better and for worse, this often provides some relief. Pressuring yourself is exerting a certain kind of force, a certain kind of power, a certain kind of control. If you're doing too much of it, your self-pressuring may be fueled by anxiety. In that case, you'd be better off finding a different way to get some relief from your anxiety, whether the anxiety comes from sport or elsewhere. That would likely take the 'edge' off of not only your pressure, but your pressuring as well. Let us take things a bit further: When pressure has an extra 'edge' to it that is fueled by anxiety, where does the anxiety come from?, what might be triggering your anxiety?, how you might feel when if you don't reach your goal?, having too much riding on the future when you don't have full control over it?, how you might feel if the person who's pressuring you doesn't get what they want?. The power these things have over you may have something to do with how you feel about yourself. Perfection is miss a common consequence of not feeling OK as we are. When applied to ourselves, perfectionism is pressuring ourselves to do more, to be more; having too much of our hoped-for well-being attached to the 'carrot' we are chasing. Perfectionism has a bad reputation, and for good reason: although it can be a great asset when properly managed, it can drive us (and others) into the ground. It may be fruitful for you to evaluate how much of the pressure you feel, and particularly the pressure you feel from yourself, comes from trying to fill or transform something within yourself. There's certainly nothing wrong in trying to grow, evolve, and change. The questions are: how much urgency is there to that journey for you, and is there too much? and are you aiming your energy in the right direction?

Conclusions

1. Increase your self-awareness, if necessary

Particularly if you're a person for whom pressure has been a long-term way of life, you may not always be aware that it's operating in you. How do you know when you're feeling it?, where do you feel it in your body?, how does it affect your mood?, your behavior?, your relationships?, how, both positively and negatively, does it affect your sport?, your self-talk, how hard you train, your focus?, Do you seem to react more to pressure from others, from reality, from yourself, or all of the above?, If you have a tendency to be too hard on yourself, ask yourself how that is serving you and how it's not; ask yourself what's driving it. You may have the opportunity to replace the tendency with another, calmer way of relating to yourself, without sacrificing any of the satisfaction, fulfillment, and results you'd like to achieve.

2. Reassess your goals

Are your objectives specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound (SMART)? If not, they may be activating unnecessary pressure. And if not, why not? Are you trying to get your activity to deliver too much of your identity, self-worth, and fulfillment.

3. Communicate

When you're feeling pressure, talking about it can be useful, at least as a way to make yourself more aware of what's actually happening, if not also to get some valuable understanding and input from a trusted person: a family member, a friend, a coach, a teammate, a training partner.

4. Improve your ability to maintain, regain, and shift focus

Particularly with pressure that's "just reality," concentration skills can be key to performing under pressure.

5. Notice, stop, and correct any negative self-talk

When you're under pressure, coach yourself as you would like to see any athlete be coached when he is under pressure. Be forthright yet supportive, encouraging, and positive. There's no (good) reason for you to treat yourself more harshly.

6. Manage your emotions effectively, particularly your anxiety

Pressure creates anxiety, and anxiety creates pressure. Investigate whether anxiety - and sometimes, the resulting perfectionism and pressure - is a sign of avoiding something deeper in you that, if you were to confront it, might bring you some relief

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