
The Reason Of Anxiety For Sportsmen

It was hypothesised, based on previous research, anxiety levels would be higher in elite athletes (Gould et al., 1983; Highlen and Bennett 1979). However, results of this study suggested otherwise. Elite and competitive athletes had reduced anxiety compared to non-elite and recreational athletes. This was replicated in a study where international athletes had lower anxiety than regional and recreational ones (Campbell and Jones, 1994). A further study stated that prior to competition; better athletes are more anxious. Yet during crucial actual performance, this reverses (Mahoney and Avenier, 1977).

One possible reason is anxiety interpretation, rather than differences in actual intensity. Jones et al., (1993) found elite gymnasts reported anxiety to be more facilitative than less elite gymnasts. Other studies reported similar findings (Perry and Williams 1998). Consequently, interpreting anxiety as facilitative may mean 'positive anxiety' symptoms are not acknowledged as anxiety at all, but instead as facilitative moods like excitement, arousal, and motivation, all deemed good traits. The way anxiety is perceived is critical because it diminishes negative consequences of anxiety (Mahoney and Avenier 1977), perhaps explaining unexpected lower anxiety in elite athletes. Future studies should consider changes in anxiety interpretations as this may be more informative than absolute levels (Jones, in press). Psychologists and coaches need to recognise different anxiety responses occur between elite and non-elite performers. Specifically, non-elite may benefit more from relaxation strategies allowing them to interpret anxiety feelings as facilitative rather than detrimental (Jones and Swain, 1995).

Similarly, better athletes report greater use of distraction and blocking strategies than less successful athletes (Highlen and Bennet, 1979). Supporting this, elite athletes more effectively use anxiety control (Mahoney et al., 1987), training and competition mental strategies (Williams and Krane 1993) and had higher coping management of anxiety (Meyers et al., 1999). More effective coping responses could give reason to the present results and elite athletes typically have more competition experience, which could account for mastery of these coping skills.

Another potential explanation relates to success. Mahoney and Avenier (1977) showed successful gymnasts had lower anxiety. Less successful athletes may feel immense pressure to prove themselves and make the team. This could lead to a downward spiral, where the need to perform well creates higher anxiety subsequently diminishing performance, and pressure becomes even greater. This may explain why sub-elite athletes in this study had the highest anxiety levels. They have yet to gain elite status and battling to advance, comes with immense pressure and anxiety, which perhaps is lessened once 'elite status' is obtained (Collins and MacNamara, 2012). Additionally, elite athletes are typically full-time sportspeople, so focus solely on ensuring successful performance whereas non-elite athletes divide efforts between sport and a traditional job, perhaps reducing capacities to excel in sport so increasing anxiety (Crook and Robertson, 1991).

However, this study lacks explanation for the bidirectional nature of anxiety and sport participation level (Allen et al., 2015). Orlick and Botterill (1975) suggest avoidance of competition is likely if anxiety is high initially, since many want to compete but fear inferiority. Increased anxiety may therefore be unrelated to competition. Consequently, in future, a

competition specific anxiety measure should be implemented. Also, as this dissertation did not examine differences between sport types, sport-specific comparisons are needed, especially since Simon and Martens (1979) state anxiety changes between individual and team sports.

edubirdie.com