

# Managing the Dynamics of Pre-Competitive Anxiety for Enhanced Sports Performance through Socio-Psychological Intervention

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**Abstract-** *Over decades of sports studies and sport psychology in particular, a very strong psychological construct that has serious connection to sports performance is anxiety. The performance of sports participants especially athletes could negatively be affected by anxiety before and during sports competitions if not well managed. This paper is a documentary review and evidence of the dynamics of precompetitive anxiety with emphasis on how to manage it through sociological and psychological interventions in order to enhance sports performance. The paper addresses the concept of anxiety and pre-competitive anxiety, signs and symptoms of pre-competitive anxiety, such as; fear, loss of confidence, poor concentration, indecision, sense of confusion, among others. The paper equally x-rays the sociological forces (i.e. environment, weather, size of the venue, etc.) and psychological forces (fear, low self-esteem, etc.) necessitating pre-competitive anxiety. Some of the interventions that could be made to manage pre-competitive anxiety include; building mental strength, mental imagery rehearsal, among others.*

**Indexed Terms-** *Dynamics, pre-competitive anxiety, sports performance, socio-psychological, interventions.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Sports have become a way of life. Today, a significant percentage of the world's population is involved in sports either through direct participation or by way of support. Sports all over the world have played a vital role in the integration of people from different places. However, events and statistics in recent time have shown that sport is one activity that captures man's interest. The number of spectators at out stadia today

exceeds any other event which also gives rise to anxiety in the participants.

Along with the development of sports, the psychologists, coaches and athletes have become increasingly aware of the detrimental role that anxiety plays in athletes' performance in competition. Pre-competitive anxiety has been an issue in the world of sport today. This issue has transcended to every level of competition. Athletes, coaches and trainers have tried different ways to manage pre-competitive anxiety. One of the most important problems in modern sports psychology today is pre-competitive anxiety as an athlete starts to think and worry whether he/she will perform well or not, this thought put them under high psychological pressures to deal with negative result and experience fear before the competition (Kumar, 2016).

## II. CONCEPT OF ANXIETY

According to Weinberg and Gould (2011), anxiety is a negative emotional state in which feelings of nervousness, worry and apprehension are associated with activation. Anxiety can also be defined as "an unpleasant psychological reaction to perceived stress concerning the performance of a task under pressure. Hence, anxiety can be described as the response to a future or possible threat. It is closely related to fear, which is the response to a real or perceived immediate threat. It is a common emotional state experienced by athletes at all levels of performance. Anxiety is made up of state and trait.

State anxiety is short term anxiety. It is the state of emotional arousal following perceived threat. State anxiety could either be cognitive or somatic. Cognitive state anxiety concerns the degree to which one worries

or has negative thoughts, whereas somatic state anxiety concerns the moment-to-moment changes in perceived psychological activation. Somatic state anxiety is not necessarily a change in one's physical activation but rather one's perception of such a change.

Unlike state anxiety, trait anxiety is part of the personality, an acquired behavioural tendency or disposition that influences behaviour. Highly trait anxious people usually have more state anxiety in high-competitive and evaluative situations than those people with lower trait anxiety.

Hence, state anxiety is an immediate emotional response that can change situations while trait anxiety is inbuilt in a person's personality and the individual with this problem has a tendency to view the world as a threatening place (Kumar, 2017).

### III. CONCEPT OF PRE-COMPETITIVE ANXIETY

Pre-competitive anxiety is how the athlete feels about the competition, prior to the event (Weinberg & Gould, 2011). Everyone gets a little anxious before a big game or athletic event. However, for those who experience the severe symptoms associated with social anxiety disorder (SAD), the quality of their athletic performance will often suffer. The relationship between anxiety and performance is so strong that a whole field of psychology (sports psychology) has been devoted to helping athletes deal with anxiety.

Elbe (2002), using the achievement motives scale-sports (AMS-sport) postulated that the fear of failure makes the athletes to avoid setting realistic goals and respond to athletic challenges anxiously, which in turn affect his/her performance negatively. It is noted that some athletes are more prone to anxiety than others, because of their personality. However, unsolved pre-competitive anxiety may hinder athletes or a team to function optimally. In modern competitive sports, psychological preparation of an athlete or a team is as much important as athlete skills and team working. If the athlete does not cope properly with pre-competitive anxiety, it can lead to poor performance, failure and even injuries.

A number of theories exist concerning the effect of anxiety on performance, and why there seems to be an interaction effect between the amounts of anxiety necessary to maximally perform certain specific task, a study by Nassib, Mkaouer, Riahi and Wali (2017), demonstrated that there was a negative relationship between pre-competitive level of anxiety and performance of athletes. Ferrand, Tetrad, and Fontayne (2006) on elite climbers, indicated that pre-competition anxiety has a detrimental effect on successful performance and concluded that a high level of anxiety affected performance positively (Szabo, Szucs, Gaspar & Sulek, 2014). All theories seem to agree that maximum performance is reduced by too much anxiety.

Pineda Espejel and Lopez (2012), were able to prove that ego orientation predicts somatic and cognitive anxiety and that task orientation predicts self-confidence positively as well as both anxieties in a negative manner. Ruiz and Zaraus (2013), supported them that ego orientation predicts cognitive anxiety in a negative manner. Cognitive anxiety refers to the mental component caused by a fear to social evaluation, failure and loss of self-confidence, while somatic anxiety include those physiological responses, such as; muscle tension and self-confidence that refer to the perception of personal abilities and the believe to show an adequate performance (Cox, 2009).

### IV. SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF PRE-COMPETITIVE ANXIETY

According to Karageorghis (2007), the signs and symptoms of pre-competitive anxiety vary from person to person. Some include; fear, loss of confidence, poor concentration, indecision, sense of confusion, inability to take instruction, forgetfulness, negative thoughts, images of failure, feeling rushed, feeling weak and sweaty palms.

### V. CONCEPT OF SPORTS PERFORMANCE

Sport performance is the manner in which sports participation is measured. It is a complex mixture of biomechanical function, emotional factors and training techniques. Performance in an athletic context has a popular connotation of representing the pursuit of excellence where an athlete measures his or her

performance as a progression toward excellence or achievement.

Sport performance, at both the elite and participatory levels, requires the coordinated efforts of athletes, coaches, psychologists, scientists and other professionals. Athletes and coaches constantly try to balance the intensity and frequency of their training to obtain the greatest enhancement in performance. If the intensity and frequency is too low the maximum potential performance gains will not be achieved. If the training is too stressful the athlete can become ill and under perform.

#### VI. SOCIOLOGICAL FORCES OF PRE-COMPETITIVE ANXIETY

Sport has been acclaimed to be one of the strongest factors that bring people of different races, colour and creed together with high expectation and capable of generating anxiety among participants, especially athletes. This anxiety is connected to some sociological forces, such as; the environment, the weather, the size of the venue, the audience (size of the audience, knowledge of the audience), the composition of spectators, distance of the crowd, experience of players (Kumar, 2016). He identified the following as pre-competitive anxiety;

- 1) Environment: a slopping environment can cause an athlete to be apprehensive knowing that, he/she has not been trained in such an environment.
- 2) Weather: climatic change can enhance or inhibit performance.
- 3) Size of the venue: some teams are used to training in secret or secluded venues rather than in open venues while some and when taken to an open venue to play will experience pre-competitive anxiety.
- 4) Audience (size and knowledge of the audience): With some athletes, the presence of a few people does not bother them but as the number increases they become apprehensive, also performing before a knowledgeable and evaluative audience makes them anxious.
- 5) Composition of spectators: performances are usually affected positively or adversely depending on who the players are, their experiences and number of such spectators, the relationship of the

spectators in terms of parents, siblings or friends, peers, etc.

- 6) Distance of the crowd: The distance of the crowd to performing athletes vary from one place to the other and from one stadium to the other. This is a great factor that can enhance or inhibit good performance.
- 7) Experience of players: The present of spectators, whether near or far, does not seem to affect experienced and elite athletes at least as much as it does affect the inexperienced athletes.

#### VII. PSYCHOLOGICAL FORCES OF PRE-COMPETITIVE ANXIETY

According to Endler (1975), there are five specific antecedents or factors that tend to an increase anxiety, in anticipation of an achievement situation. They are:

- 1) Fear; These factors such as; performance failure, negative social evaluation or physical harm. Fear and anxiety often occur together but these terms are not interchangeable. Even though their symptoms typically overlap, a person's experience with these emotions differs based on their context. Fear relates to a known or understood threat, whereas anxiety follows from an unknown or poorly defined threat.
  - 2) Situation ambiguity: Not knowing if he or she is going to start a match, this is sometime stressful to an athlete.
  - 3) Disruption of well-learned routine
  - 4) Low self esteem
  - 5) Wining at all cost mandate
- Intervention; the following are some of the intervention strategies of anxiety.
    - 1) Build mental strength (toughness): mental strength or toughness is having the natural or developed psychological edge that enables you to generally cope better with many demands that sport places on a performer. Like being more focused, confident, consistent and in control when under pressure.
    - 2) Mental Imagery Rehearsal (MIR): MIR is simply a mental technique that programs the mind and body to respond optimally. By using MIR, athletes have the capacity to see and believe, which gives them the confidence and focus to perform successfully.

- 3) The positive perception strategy: Here the athlete should perceive anxiety as a positive feedback which will enhance performance rather than an emotional reaction that will inhibit competition.
- 4) Self-talk: The athlete should rationally assess and re-adjust to the nature of the impending competition, e.g. “this competition is like one of those that I have performed very well”. There is no need blowing it’s importance out of proportion.
- 5) Goal setting: The athlete should set goals that are “SMART”. Goal setting will help the athlete to stay focus and persist on that direction of achieving the goal.
- 6) Sports and Exercise Psychologist (SEP): In all the interventions stated above, the presence of a SEP is very important because some athletes may not know how to apply these interventions in order to enhance their performance, but with help of a SEP they will understand and know how to apply them better.

#### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there are many impacts of pre-competitive anxiety on sports performance of players, such as; fear, failure to concentrate, feeling weak, loss of confidence, etc. Players should know about the effects of pre-competitive anxiety on sport performance and the techniques of how to deal with pre-competitive anxiety. This can be done by teaching the athletes on how to apply the interventions in order to enhance their performance optimally.

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