

“I don’t think your human if you don’t get nervous” - Sid Crosby

To start, what is Anxiety?

(Very Scientific- From Doctoral Paper on Anxiety in Sports Performance in Youth)

Anxiety is a common emotional state experienced by athletes at all levels of performance. In general, anxiety is made up of cognitive (e.g., worrying thoughts and apprehensions) and somatic (e.g., degree of physical activation) components.

Anxiety is often characterized by a range of physiological (e.g., sweating, increased heart rate), behavioral (e.g., biting fingernails, fidgeting), and/or cognitive (e.g., negative thoughts, inattention) signs and symptoms (Weinberg and Gould). A recent review revealed that the terms competitive state anxiety, competitive trait anxiety, somatic anxiety, cognitive anxiety, behavioral anxiety, performance anxiety, facilitative anxiety, debilitating anxiety, competition anxiety, and pre-and post-competition anxiety have also been used to describe sport-related anxiety.

Given the significance of anxiety in sports performance, it is important to ensure it is addressed early and by appropriately trained mental health professionals. Anxiety, even though it is a normal emotion experienced by many, if left unaddressed, can lead to more serious psychological disorders.

Sports Performance and Nerves/Anxiety how do we prepare?

There are many signs and symptoms of performance anxiety and no one athlete will experience the same exact things. Signs of performance anxiety include feelings of weakness, “butterflies” in the stomach, elevated heart rate, fast breathing, muscle tension, frustration, paralyzing terror, cold sweat, clammy hands, and negative self-talk.

There are several coping techniques used to help athletes manage their game-day anxiety and get their nerves under control.

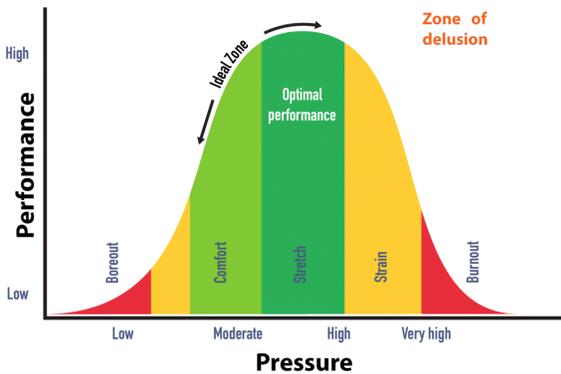
Here are four go-to Prep Steps:

- 1. Visualization**
- 2. Meditation and Breathing**
- 3. Smile and Laugh**

Visualization- During visualization, focusing on breathing and staying calm is a helpful technique; thinking of game-like situations that cause them the most stress and seeing themselves being successful at that moment.

Meditation/Breathing- Meditation is a mindfulness practice that can increase self-awareness, enhance attention and emotional regulation. Controlled Breathing is a form of Meditation.

Smile/Laugh- Break the negative thought chain by forcing a smile. Smiling alone can help improve mood. This is not a long-term answer, but it can help with acute stressors or in the moment of pressure. It’s okay for athletes to recognize and process their thoughts of apprehension and tension. When they are aware of these feelings, they can utilize the above tools to help process them.



PRESSURE VERSUS PERFORMANCE CURVE

Psychologists Robert Yerkes and John Dodson developed the first version of the pressure performance curve back in 1908.

It shows how as we add Pressure to situations our performance can be enhanced however over stimulation to pressure and making a moment “too big” can bring us down at the moment and perform less than optimal.

Low Side Signs of “Bore-Out”

- demotivation
- disengagement
- cynicism
- lethargy
- insomnia
- anxiety
- Depression

High Side Signs of “Burn-Out”- we experience exhaustion from chronic stress. Our body perpetually draws on its survival mechanisms as it believes it is in physical danger and the ‘fight or flight’ response takes over.

What are the optimal zones? Green!

Yellow in the latter of the curves is called “Stretch.” Stretch is extremely important.

1. You find new Peak Performance in “Stretch”
2. You can not grow as an athlete if you do not “Stretch” (Coach Alex Joke, You need this kind of Stretch plus our GAIN Program!)

At the point of stretch, your body’s stress response releases the hormones adrenaline and cortisol, which help us perform at our best. We think more clearly, our vision is sharper, our hearing more acute. The fight-or-flight response raises our game to deal with short-term stress.

We don’t want people stretched all the time, though. That would be exhausting. No one can perform at their peak all day long. That’s why chunking tasks and interspersing breaks is a smart work strategy. An ideal zone for work is one that cycles between comfort and stretch



How do I prepare for “uncontrolled” Nerves and Anxieties for Meets or Practices?

1. **Prepare**
2. **Embrace Rituals** (Same Breakfast, Lucky Towel, Bag Tags, etc.)
3. **Get Perspective** (Open your eyes on deck, smile, talk to another swimmer)
4. **ReFrame** (Re-shape your thoughts, no negativity)
5. **Talk to Yourself** (NOT OUT LOUD, positive words of affirmation and continued belief that you can do it)
6. **Breath** (Social Media- Triangle Breathing)



Where do our Nerves Possibly Come From?

1. **Having an audience-** (particularly one that is loving and supportive): Athletes can become overly self-aware of every decision and play they make when they're on the athletic stage.
2. **Fear of disappointing others-** Even when a parent or coach is supportive, athletes may be anxious about disappointing them.
3. **High expectations-** Every athlete wants to do their best, but internal self-talk might create stress when they set expectations that anything less than a perfect play is a failure.
4. **Post-game analysis-** Whether it is from a coach, parent, teammate, or themselves, the post-game analysis weighs on an athlete's mindset.
5. **Recovering from an injury-** After an athlete gets hurt, it can take a long time to restore their confidence.

It's important to recognize that your nerves are normal and coming from a normal place. So find ways to “normal” knockout those doubts and nerves!!

