



Managing Anxiety/Stress on the Competitive Stage

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What I will talk about!

- Brief look at anxiety/ stress
- Your role, as a coach
- Skills that help effectively manage the stress
- Five stories of athletes who had fears, who ‘shouldn’t’ have had fears, who were too analytical/intense, who had no Olympic experience, who made the most of his second ‘chance’ after a disastrous first Olympic event

Competitive sport demands an athlete to excel at *optimal levels*, under **extremely stressful conditions**, *at a particular moment in time*

Bad and good news!

Bad news – competitive sport is stressful – this is not going to change

So question is, how will you help your athlete(s) manage this stressful environment?

Good news – we have, or can develop, the skills to effectively manage such stress – physiologically and psychologically

Anxiety and Stress

Anxiety: a *negative* emotional state with thoughts and feelings of worry, nervousness and apprehension associated with activation of the body(somatic) and mind(cognitive)
-state and trait

Anxiety and Stress

Stress can be positive (eustress), or negative (distress)

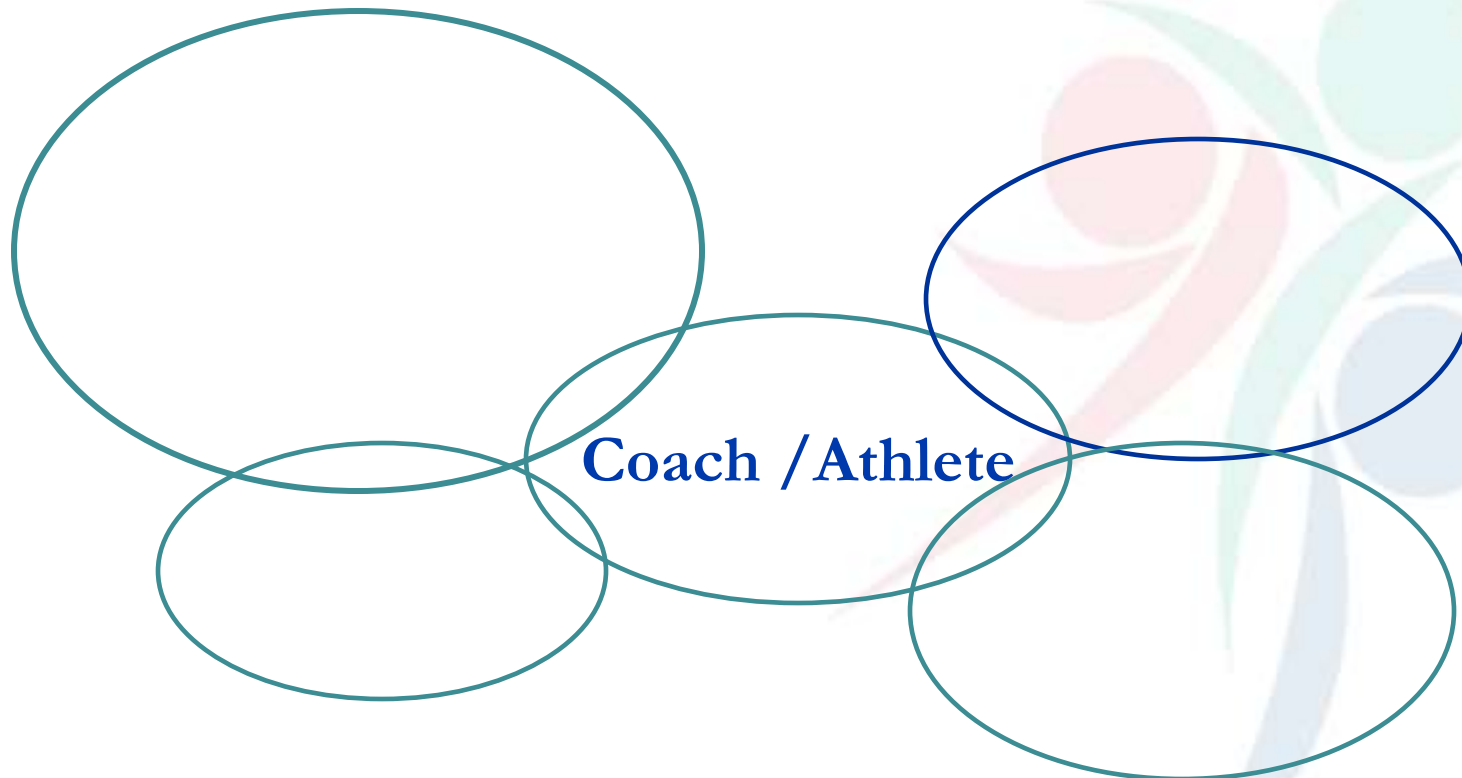
‘Distress’ occurs when there is a substantial *imbalance* between the physical and psychological demands placed on the athlete and her or his response capability – *and* under conditions where failure to meet the demand has important consequences.

You, the coach are –

‘*Creating the environment for effectively managing the stress*’

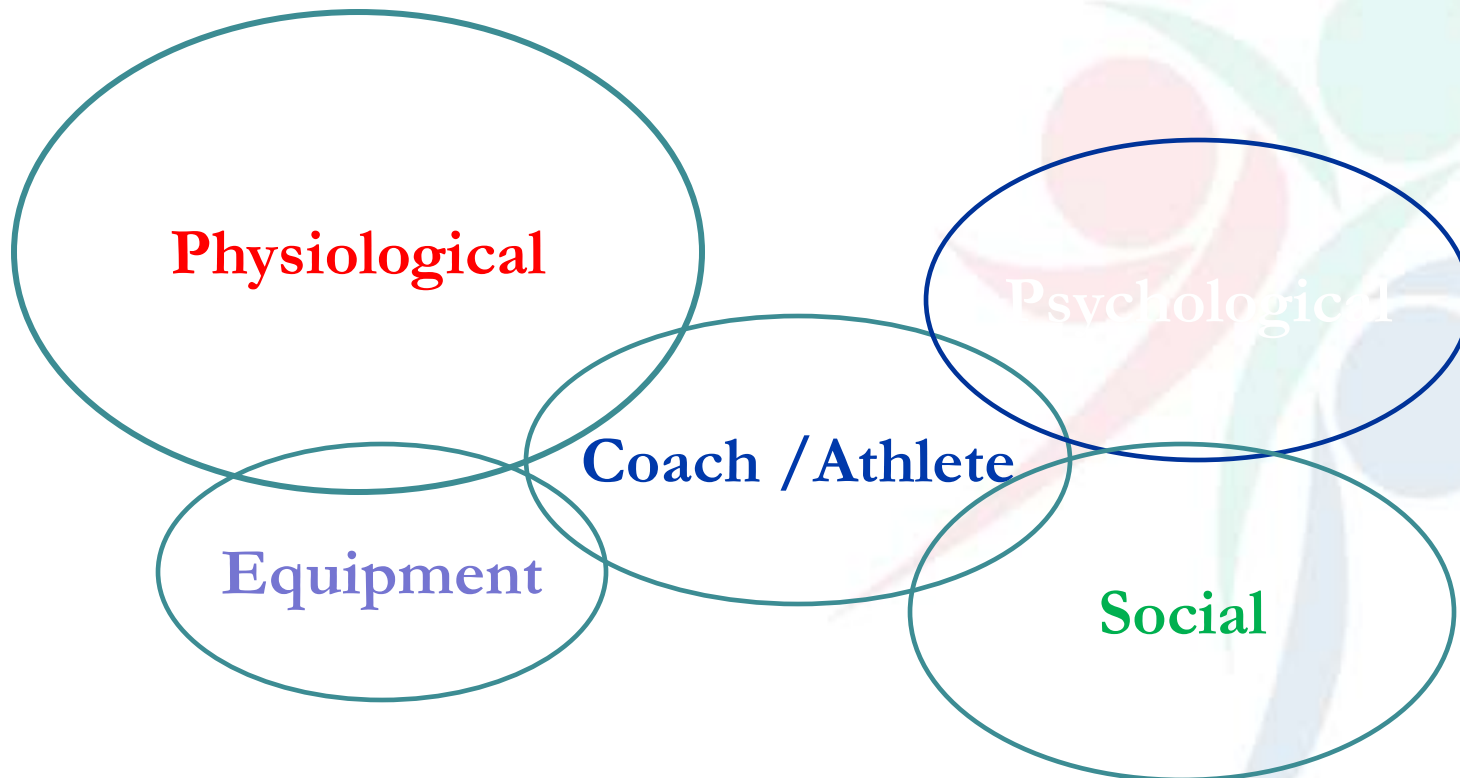
- Athletes – are human beings, who are *thinking* all the time, and feeling/have emotions - you want to be helping the athlete *discover* what causes stress, you want to be individualizing this process, you want to be creating *independence*
- Psychology plays a role in:
 - how you think/reflect/analyse what is going on and why
 - how you plan training
 - how you change/adapt/flex(ibility)
 - how you communicate - talk and *listen* to each other
 - how you deal with issues, as they arise (because they will!!)

Success at the Olympics/World Championships/Commonwealth Games 'pieces of the puzzle'



Success at the Olympics/World Championships/Commonwealth Games

‘pieces of the puzzle’



Question to ask – to each of your athletes...

In competition, *how* do you want to be?

- *What do you want to be thinking?*
- *How do you want to be feeling?*

What are the *5 key psychological skills?* – to ensure your athletes effectively manage the stress, and perform well?

- Knowing what critical factors to *attend to (what to focus on/ think about??!!)*
- *Knowing* how to manage one's emotions (stress, anxiety, fear, confidence)
- *Knowing* how to **consistently find** the *right level of intensity (sport/ event specific, individually specific)*
- Assessment/ On-going reflection/ **Debrief**
- Recovery (brief, and deep)

The Process of Learning these Psychological Skills:

self-discovery, personal performance excellence

**Solid, Consistent Performances,
& Confident Athletes!!**

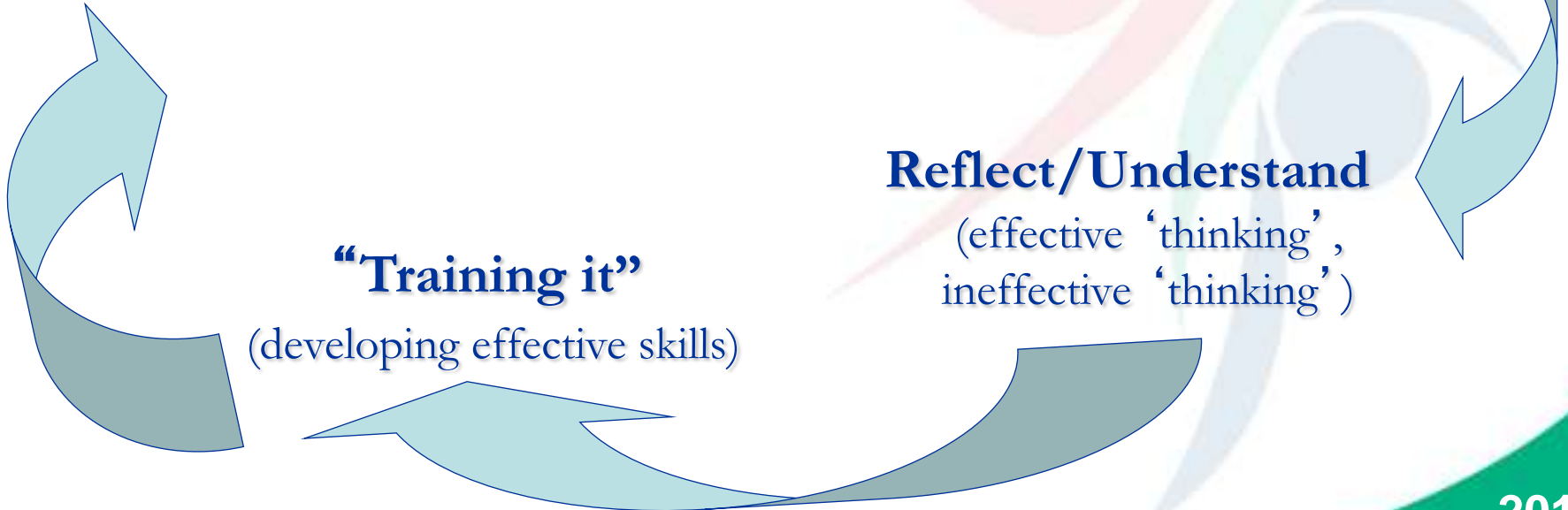
Self-awareness

Reflect/Understand

(effective 'thinking',
ineffective 'thinking')

"Training it"

(developing effective skills)



Focus, emotions, recovery

Beijing 2008

(It's hard to win an Olympic medal!!!!!!)

- skilled coach; committed, talented athlete
- What needed work – *focus and managing emotions and environment* (5th in Sydney, 4th in Athens)
- *focus on five good dives*
- managing issues/10 days in the village before competing



Women's diving – silver medal in 10m

Emilie Heymans Beijing Olympics



Focus, managing fears

Beijing 2008

*Chantal Petitclerc – 10 Paralympic
gold medals*

- athlete willing to work on the skills; skilled coach
- **What needed work** – focus, managing her fears (about race strategies), sometimes poor communication between coach and athlete



DX7





Managing the environment – emotions, recovery

Vancouver 2010

(It's hard to win an Olympic medal!!!!)

- **What needed work:** team, coach had not been to an Olympics; managing the two weeks of playing; keeping other 'expert information' to a minimum
- daily team meetings – debrief and plan



Women's curling team – silver medal

Managing 'expectations'

Vancouver 2010


It's hard to win an **Olympic medal!!!!**

- Skilled coach, talented athletes
- **What needed work:** emotional coach; parents; sponsors; own expectations, country's expectations
- *'Earned'* those expectations
- athletes trained with bioneurofeedback (muscle tension, anxiety)



*Men's and women's freestyle
ski moguls – gold and silver
medals!!*



1 BILODEAU Alexandre 

CAN
POST



Managing 'expectations'; recovering from disaster

Beijing 2008

Olympics is *not a 'normal environment'*

- gold and bronze medals in Athens, 2004!
- Recovering from devastation of 8th place – created a clear plan, *worked through emotions over 24hr period*



Adam Van Koeeverden - Kayak

K1 1000M Beijing



K1 1000M MEN	
1	SWE 🇸🇪 Markus OSCARSSON
2	CRO 🇨🇷 Stjepan JANIC
3	AUS 🇦🇺 Ken WALLACE
4	GER 🇩🇪 Adam van KOEVERDEN
5	GBR 🇬🇧 Tim BRABANTS
6	NOR 🇳🇴 Erik Verås LARSEN
7	GER 🇩🇪 Max HOFF
8	KOR 🇰🇷 Ben FOUHY
9	HUN 🇭🇺 Zoltan BENKO

K1 500M Beijing



Attention/Focus - *solving the mystery*

- Knowing *what* to focus on (the critical factors), and when – *what is the task??*
- Knowing *when* to focus - turning it on/up, turning it off/down (macro level – Olympic year; micro level – two weeks of games, day of competition, morning of, last 5 minutes)
- *well-trained* plan for competing

Understanding, and regulating emotions - *anxiety/pressure/doubts/fears*

There will be emotions

- Accept that anxiety/stress is inevitable – and learn how to effectively ‘manage’ it!!
- Learning how to ‘thrive’ in the competitive environment

Do:

- Train how to be calm and yet alert
- Train how to breathe at 4-6 breaths/minute – for recovery

Bioneurofeedback training tool

Purpose:

For athletes to physiologically and cognitively learn how to (i) manage their stress and levels of anxiety and (ii) focus effectively

Stress

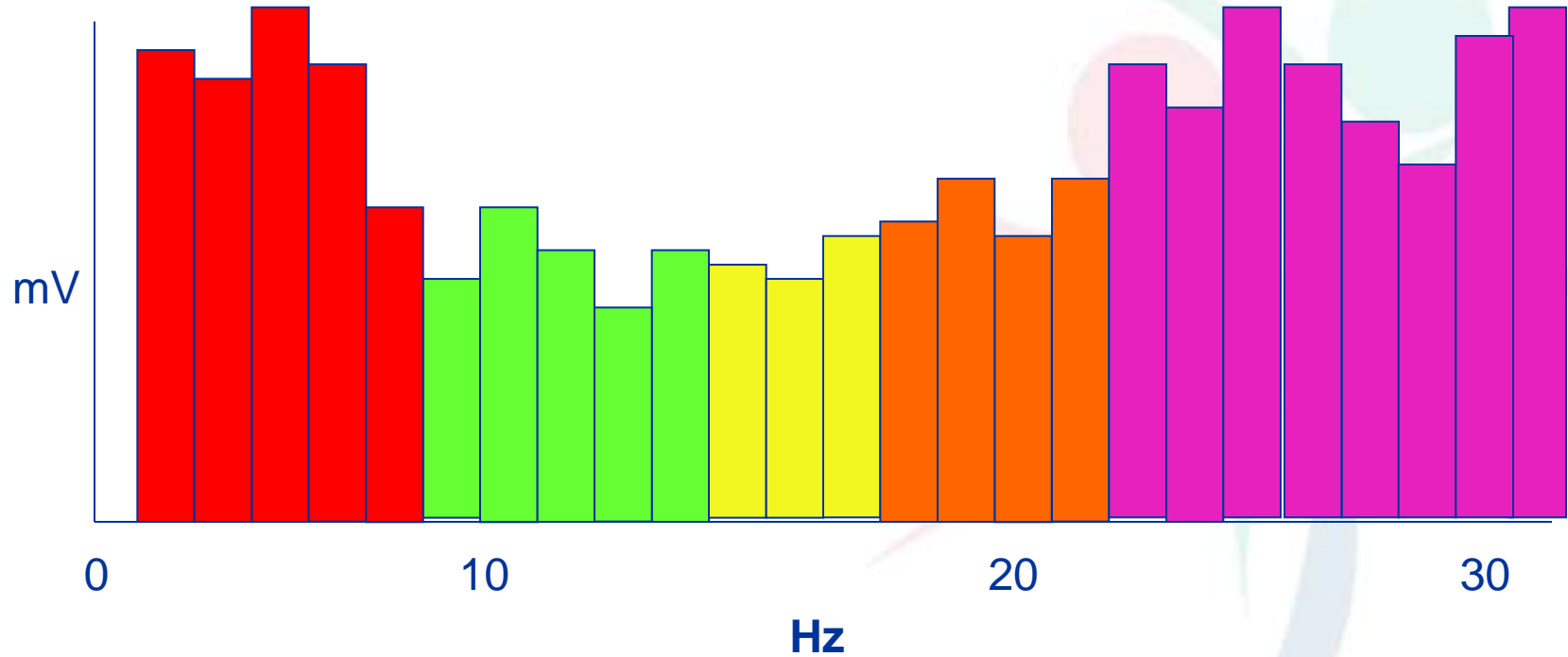
When **stress response** is activated, physiologically:

- *Respiration rate (up)*
- *Heart rate (up)*
- *Muscle tension (up)*
- *Skin conductance (sweating response) (up)*
- *Peripheral body temperature (down)*

Neurologically:

- *Our brainwaves **either** speed up, or slow down (not in the optimal range for a performance)*

2D EEG Spectrum



A neurofeedback screen



Debriefing - Analysis / Assessment

- *Why* are we doing this?
 - To be better next week, next month, next season
- *When* should we do this? – same day, next day, following week,
- *Who* should do it? Athlete needs to reflect, coach needs to reflect, other coaches, support staff

Debriefing – asking key questions

- ✓ *What happened out there? How was the race/event?*
- ✓ *How did I compete? Fact, feeling*
- ✓ *How was my race/game strategy? (What did opponent(s) do?)*
- ✓ *What do I/we need to do differently/work on?*
- ✓ *What is plan for next race/event? – make a decision/test it out*

Athletes speak first, coach can then ‘fix’, correct, ask more specific questions “what about semi?”

Debriefing – asking key questions

Analysis / Assessment

Possible difficulties:

- ✓ *Too judgmental, too harsh – blame vs analysis*
- ✓ *Lack of knowledge, lack of facts*
- ✓ *Lack of honesty, denial*
- ✓ *Perfectionism*

Two key ‘take homes’:

#1

- *Focus and recovery* – knowing when to be focused – ‘dialed in’, and when to be ‘dialing it down’
- *Emotions – anxiety, fears, stress* – inevitable, accept and learn how to ‘manage’

#2

- As a coach, creating that environment where athlete(s) are thinking, learning, becoming independent!