

U14-U15s Psychology Workshop: Performing under pressure



May 2020

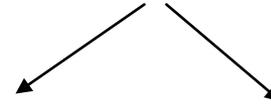
Pressure

- Pressure is a perception of a situation – not a situation itself. It is a self-imposed experience which we create in our own minds
- Normally we feel ‘pressure’ when we perceive that there is an expectation on us e.g.:
 - *“I need to play really well today to impress my coach”*
 - *“I must score runs and win or I will be dropped”*
 - *“I must perform well because my Dad expects me to be a winner”*
 - *“I can’t make any mistakes today”*
- These expectations often focus on what others think – coach, teammates, parents, spectators. They centre on avoiding playing badly, avoiding letting people down, and avoiding losing

Performance under pressure

*Stage 1: Situation/
Demand*

E.g. 100 runs to win off 7 overs



*Stage 2: Perception of
Demand by athlete*

Positive Perception
CHALLENGE

Negative Perception
THREAT



*Stage 3: Cognitive and
Physiological changes*

Increased energy and
motivation, remain calm,
normal breathing,
focused mind, positive
thoughts, effective
decision making

Increased worry, tense
muscles, heart rate
increases, shallow
breathing, drop in focus,
negative thoughts,
poor decision making



Stage 4: Outcome

Enhanced performance

Disrupted performance

What happens to us under pressure

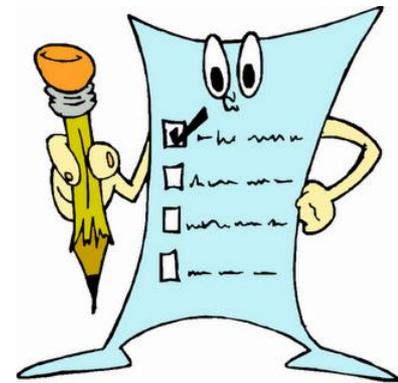
- A negative perception of a demanding situation leads to a threat response. This causes individuals to feel an increased amount of pressure
- In a threat state, you feel less confident and in control, you over-think your performance and experience unwanted thoughts such as avoiding failure
- Thinking clearly becomes difficult and this can impact your ability to make good decisions. Performance is more likely to be disrupted under this pressure

Sources of pressure

- Pressure can come from both internal and external sources
- Internal sources are self-inflicted and include
 - Doubts
 - Expectations
 - Worries
 - Injury
 - Form
 - Mistakes etc.
- External sources include family, coaches, other players, spectators and the media etc.

Task 1: Identifying your sources of pressure

- It is important to identify your sources of pressure so that you can learn how to deal with them
- Find 'Task 1' in your workbook
- Write down your internal and external sources of pressure



“When trying to cope with pressure the first thing to do is to try and blank everything else out and just play. If you can concentrate on your own game and think about what you need to do, you won’t be thinking about the game as much. Sometimes it’s difficult to put everything else out of your mind and if it’s a massive game, but that is the best way to do it. You have to think, ‘if I play the way I can, we will win’. Lastly, hard work pays off. If you put the work in you should get results. Thinking like this also takes the pressure off you too.”

Wayne Rooney

How can I deal with pressure?

- By changing the way you think about and approach situations, it is possible to reduce and control the amount of pressure you put on yourself
- The key to performing well under pressure is to control the controllables:
 - Your physiology (your breathing)
 - Your self-talk (what you say to yourself)
 - Your training (your technical and psychological practice)
 - Your focus (what you decide to pay attention to)
- We will now explore some of these strategies

Physiological changes

- When you're feeling stressed or under pressure, your heart rate and breathing rate increase, and you might feel butterflies in your stomach
- Recognising these symptoms is important as it allows you to better control them
- You can recognise these symptoms by checking in with yourself and implementing a body scan:
 - It can be as simple as “Ok, I can feel my heart rate going up and I have butterflies in my stomach. I know I am feeling a bit more pressure here”

Deep Breathing



- Deep breathing can be useful to control these physical responses and reduce unhelpful emotions
- Breathing from your diaphragm allows deeper, slower, fuller breaths
- Concentrating on and slowing down your breathing can help you to feel calm, relaxed and composed
- Deep breaths slow your thought patterns down and help clear the mind to aid decision making

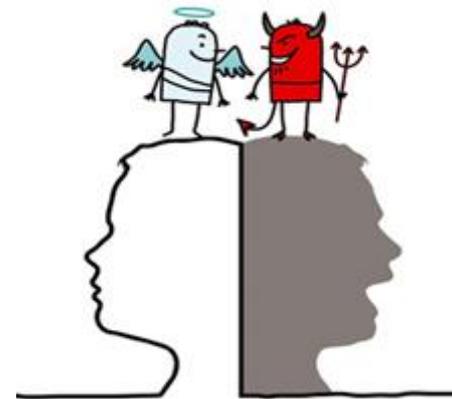
Task 2: Deep Breathing



- As with any skill, focused breathing requires practice before it can have a beneficial effect on your emotions and cricket performance
- Using the steps outlined in your workbook, spend some time practising the deep breathing exercise
- Initial practice of the deep breathing exercise should be on a daily basis for at least 10 minutes

Self-talk

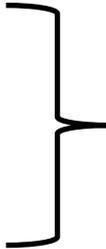
- Self-talk is your internal dialogue
- It is what you are thinking about
- The conversation you have with yourself
- Self-talk can be positive, negative, instructional and neutral



Why is it important?

- Increases motivation
- Helps to cope with anxiety and when under pressure
- Strengthens confidence
- Focuses attention
- Helps to feel relaxed
- Facilitates learning
- Enhances performance

Negative self-talk

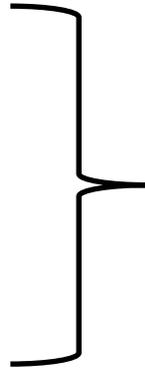
- Negative self-talk is critical and self-demeaning. It is:
 - Counterproductive
 - Creates anxiety
 - Fosters self-doubt

**Lowers self-confidence
and increases pressure**
- Examples:
 - “I must not fail today”
 - “Last time I was in this situation I played badly”
 - “You are rubbish”

Positive self-talk

- Positive self-talk typically focuses on:

- Increasing energy
- Increasing effort
- Encouragement
- Positive attitude



**Builds self-confidence
and feeling of control**

- Examples:

- “I can do this”
- “Keep going”
- “I’ve worked hard and I’m ready”

Instructional self-talk

- Used to get you to respond in a certain way
- Gives you a specific focus and helps to direct your attention
- Examples:
 - “Watch the ball”
 - “Front foot forward”
 - “Keep your arm straight”

Task 3: Positive Affirmations

- You are always in control of what you say to yourself
- Positive self-talk and positive affirmations help to interrupt and block out negative thoughts that accompany anxiety
- In your workbook, create some positive affirmations for yourself and write them down
- They need to be relevant to you, should reaffirm your confidence and remind you that you are capable
- Look at them daily to make them more powerful when talking yourself through high pressure situations

Visualisation

- Creating or recreating an experience in your mind, in as much detail as possible – using all of your senses
- It can be used to recall a positive past performance or to help mentally rehearse demanding situations you could face
- Images of successful performance can help to build confidence and improve future responses to pressure



Task 4: Best Performance Imagery

- Recall the last time you performed well and felt confident in a demanding situation
- Close your eyes and relive the experience using the steps outlined in your workbook
- Continue to repeat and try to add more detail each time
- The more vivid and realistic you can make the image, the greater the effect on your mindset and performance
- Develop a 'best imagery script' and write this down in your workbook

Task 5: Mental Rehearsal of Pressure Situations

- Think of a demanding match situation you may face
- Using the steps outlined in your workbook, create a perception of pressure by very realistically visualising being in the difficult situation
- See yourself perform well, with control and composure
- If you visualise coping in your realistically imagined pressure situation, it is like rehearsing your desired response
- Develop a 'mental rehearsal imagery script' and write this down in your workbook

Mental rehearsal is just as effective as physical rehearsal as the brain does not know the difference between what is real and imagined!

Example

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmhNr6PDx7U>