



HAPPY JULY 4TH!

SUMMER NEWS

UPCOMING TALKS:

By Invitation only
July 12, 2017

I will be talking at a luncheon organized by **Menninger Clinic** at Westport, CT

“Helping Our Bodies Manage Stress Responses”

Sport Psychology for Squash Players:

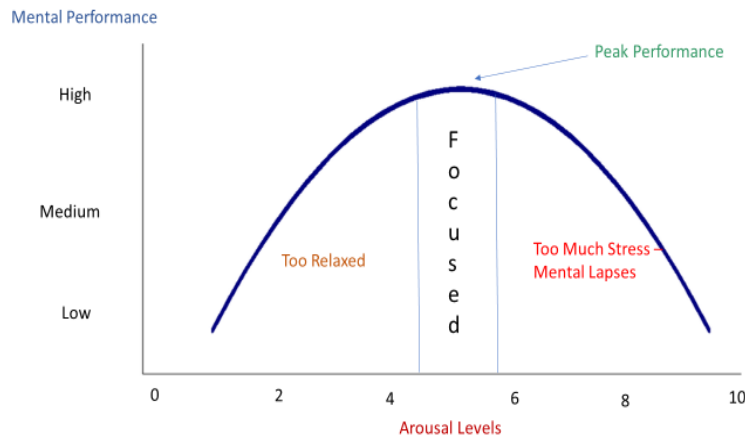
Apawamis Club:
August 21 and 28.

(For squash program attendees only)

HOW TO REACH YOUR PEAK PERFORMANCE

Do you remember a time when you had to sink a 3-foot putt to win a championship, meet a deadline to present a project to your boss, or study for next day final exam? The simple perception or expectation we placed in ourselves to execute a task entails an arousal in our nervous system. The challenge we all face is how much of an arousal is optimum to achieve top performance? The Yerkes-Dodson Law, also known as the Inverted “U” Model,

Inverted “U” Shape Performance



has attempted to help us identify our ideal level of arousal to achieve peak performance.

The Model indicates that feeling high level of tension or feeling too relaxed will not be ideal to achieve our best. Some level of tension is needed to stay focused and attain our peak performance. Identifying what level of arousal is ideal for you, it will depend on three factors: Trait Anxiety; Expectations vs. Acceptance; Focus Ability.

Trait Anxiety

Trait anxiety refers to the general level of anxiety that is experienced throughout all aspect of the individual’s life. State anxiety refers to the specific situation that is tension provoking. A person who has high levels of trait anxiety will be



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more likely to negatively respond to a particular stressful situation than a person with low trait anxiety. These individuals will more likely see the negative aspects of the upcoming performance and focus on the obstacles. Their mindset will be aligned toward pessimism or putting blame on others. They will be more easily distracted by outside factors, such as: referee's calls, opponent's good shots, weather, and opponent's ranking.

Also, individuals who practice group sports or teamwork are less likely to feel state anxiety. One of the challenges for these individuals is not elevating enough their level of arousal while in practice only to feel not mentally prepared when the competitive arousal increases during competition or project is due. One useful technique is to simulate the real performance to elevate your arousal enough. The more you practice, the better your ability to manage stress.

Expectation vs. Acceptance

When an individual has doubts about his or her abilities to achieve the desired outcome, and such an outcome is important, the level of state anxiety increases. The perceived lack of control increases the level of state anxiety, particularly for those individuals who experience high levels of trait anxiety. For individuals who show low trait anxiety, they will most likely see the positive side of the situation. They will be more optimistic and/or focus on accepting what they can manage instead of being mentally derailed by non-controllable factors, such as zeroing in on meeting self or other's expectations.



Placing focus on expectations may lead to an elevated increase in arousal. Given that there is no such a thing as a guarantee result, individuals who pursue expectations embark into a zero-sum game whereas winning, and only winning, matters. One of the key attributes successful individuals share is that of learning from defeats. Individuals who learn from unsuccessful experiences have consistently shown to have made persistent improvement in the pursuit of their goals. They focus on process and acceptance rather than expecting that an outcome must happen.

Focus Ability

Before a performance, individuals are either goal or behavior directed. Those individuals who are goal oriented will more likely give a negative interpretation to their arousal by labeling it as anxiety. Those individuals who are behavior oriented will interpret the same arousing situation as excitement. Highly achieving individuals know that focus is a short-lived experience. They understand that increasing focus rests on enhancing the awareness of the moment when loss of focus takes place. It is precisely then when they shift their attention back to the present moment. Unless they know they lost focus, they have no way of regaining it. Meditation has been shown to enhance one's ability to shift attention to the present moment. Those who consistently practice it have been better able to regain their focus to what it is in front of them rather than being mentally derailed by non-controllable factors.





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