



Intensity Regulation

Hi Wildcats,

In this edition of the “Mental Training” email series, we will discuss intensity management. Intensity is defined as “energizing yourself to activate and regulate your body’s resources for intense and/or rigorous activity.” In other words, intensity is when your mind tells your body “It is time to go to work!” Intensity levels range from extremes of being too high (mass panic) to extremes of being too low (totally lethargic). When an athlete’s intensity is poor, he or she is unable to perform their natural coordinated action or skill.

Intensity regulation depends on many task characteristics and individual preferences. In regard to tasks, ideal levels of intensity may differ between different sports (i.e., golf vs. weightlifting), different positions in the same sport (i.e., goalie vs. forward in soccer), and different executable actions for the same position (i.e., blocking vs. catching a pass for a tight end in football). Similarly, intensity regulation can occur before, during, and after a specific task. In reference to individual preferences, athletes performing the same event in the same sport at the same position may execute better under two very distinct and different levels of intensity. For example, Jonathon Papelbon, the Boston Red Sox pitcher known for his flamethrower attitude, may desire higher levels of emotional intensity than what the recently retired Greg Maddox, a pitcher known for his more cerebral approach, used.

Identifying an ideal level of performance intensity is the first step toward optimal performance. As previously stated, individuals perform better

under different levels of intensity for different sports and different plays within each sport. Thus, an athlete’s desire to attain the appropriate intensity level begins with a little research. First, create a system to help label the continuum of intensity.

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For example, using a scale from 0 (no intensity) to 100 (maximum intensity) may be useful. Another system used may emphasize a qualitative shift (anxiety to concern) rather than a quantitative shift. Instead of scoring 0 to 100, ask, “What am I feeling? Is this feeling helping or hurting me? In what ways is it helping? In what ways is it hurting?”



Second, start labeling different intensity experiences using your system. Recall past performances and label intensity levels from them. For example, remember some of your “best” performances and the intensity felt during those moments before, during, and after. Then, remember some of your “worst” performances and the intensity felt during those moments before, during, and after. Additionally, create situations at practice or at home where you can control the environment. Then, observe and record your intensity level and performance. For example, shoot wads of paper in a trash basket for fun. Slowly, add stressors such as “1 miss means I do 20 push-ups.” At practice, imagine different dramatic scenarios that will

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gradually increase pressure. For example, start by imagining, “the game is tied in the 2nd period and I must make this shot to put our team ahead” and then increase it to “the game is in double overtime and if I make this shot we win and become champions of the league.” Finally, keep an “intensity diary” or checklist that allows you to monitor and assess for patterns of desired performances. For example, a basketball player may notice that an intensity level of 60 helps him score 90% of his free

throws and an intensity level of 90 lowers his accuracy to 65%. Before each event, record your intensity level. If possible, record your intensity level between plays or at halftime. After the match, record your intensity level and attempt to recall any intensity deregulation throughout the contest. Establishing the current ineffective intensity level and the more desired intensity level is the beginning to transitioning from the ineffective to the desired level of intensity. And, ultimately, improving your performance.

Identifying the Optimal Zone of Intensity

Instructions

Example

Step 1

Create a system that labels your emotional intensity level

a) Scale

a) 0 (none)—20—40—60—80—100(max)

b) Qualitative Shift Assessment

b) 1. What am I feeling? (Anxiety or concern)

2. Is this feeling helping or hurting me?

3. In what ways is it helping? In what ways is it hurting?

Step 2

Practice labeling your emotional intensity

a) Recall from past performances

a) BestPerformance/Worst Performance

b) Home

b) Shoot wads of paper in your trash basket with increasing level of challenge and pressure (i.e., “1 miss = 20 push-ups)

c) Practice

c) Putting with increasing levels of pressure (i.e., “for the tie, for the win, for the championship”)

Step 3

Keep an Intensity Diary/Checklist

a) Monitor and assess for patterns

a) After each strikeout, record your intensity score.

To help, I have created a worksheet that makes monitoring your performance and intensity level easy. Please stop by my office and I will be happy to give you a copy. Also, If you would like assistance in controlling your intensity level; if you would like to feel more confident; if you would like to meet and discuss other benefits of sport and clinical psychology; or if you are feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, stressed out,

frustrated, worried, sad, or lacking confidence, please contact Angie at 621-8805 or ask your athletic trainer to schedule an appointment. I look forward to working with you.

Best Wishes,
Scott Goldman, Ph.D.

*Sport and Clinical Psychologist
for Student-Athletes*

To schedule an appointment, call **621-8805, 621-3334**, or ask your athletic trainer for assistance.