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## **MENTAL CONDITION OF ATHLETES DURING CONTEST SEASON**

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**Abstract.** *The article describes the causes of stress in terms of competition. Given the recognized foreign scholars stress theory in sport. The possibility of using Copping strategies for coping in the competitive period.*

**Keywords:** *stress, sports, competition period.*

Insufficient clarity in terms of the role of intellectual sphere in coping behavior defines relevance of study of mental stylistic features in connection with coping strategies.

Recent decades have shown increasing attention of researchers to the problem of coping behavior in stressful situations within all spheres of human life and activity. This problem is particularly true for athletes whose activity is often associated with stress (extreme) conditions.

In the presence of an increasing number of studies dedicated to the coping problem in stressful situations, experimental data on cognitive mechanisms of coping behavior are very limited. Analysis of domestic works on coping behavior psychology shows that the major part of study is aimed at examination of such coping resources as control locus, social intelligence, self-esteem and self-concept. There are only few works which are devoted to study of the role of mental capacity in coping behavior. We have not found any studies which would investigate relationships of mental stylistic features as cognitive style indicators with aspects of coping behavior in sporting activities.

The objective of psychological support in preparation of athletes is creation of psychological requisites for athletes to acquire optimal prestart state.

**Tasks:** 1) identification of long-term goals objectively achievable by an athlete on the basis of correlation of goals with his/her capabilities;

2) determination of strengths and weaknesses;

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- 3) identification of short-term and long-term goals;
  - 4) making athletes understand whether his/her behavior and activity bring him/her to the goal.

**Stress coping resources of athletes.** Fairly recently, researchers dealing with problems of coping strategies (essence of the term “coping” lies in effective adaptation of a person to situation requirements) when considering coping have started following the so-called “resource-based approach”. The resource-based approach focuses on the fact that there is a process of “resource allocation” which explains why some people manage to preserve health and adapt despite different life circumstances.

A number of reliable researchers whose works have not been connected with coping behavior study are referred to the resource-based approach. The resource-based approach considers a wide variety of different resources, both environmental (availability of instrumental, moral and emotional support from the social environment) and personal (individual skills and capabilities) ones. According to the Hobhole theory, there are two resource classes: material and social, or those associated with values.

By developing ideas of various authors on multiplicity and allocation of resources which participate in activity control, V. A. Bodrov presented several postulates in the human resource concept.

- the “human system” at any moment of time has a certain number of capabilities for conversion of energy and information which are called resources;
- activity is characterized by the quantity of applied resources and efficiency of their application;
- the task at the given point of time is defined for a certain person by a variety of informational (quality and quantity of incentives, coding, placement etc.) and personal (capability, difficulties, significance etc.) parameters, correlation of which defines availability of resources in the present activity;

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- the activity function is characterized by relationship of operative information quality (as a result of correlation of task performance conditions and individual capability) and resource amount.

The problem of psychological stress from the point of the resource-based approach is reflected in its resource-based model, in accordance with which stress appears as a result of real or imaginary loss of a part of resources which include behavioral performance, physical, mental and professional capabilities, personal attributes, autonomic and metabolic processes. G. V. Lozhkin presents the same idea of interrelation of stress and resources and states that stress reflects the character of relation between requirements of sporting activity and amount of resources for their satisfaction.

In the stress resource-based model, the possibility to evaluate stress through the category of resource loss and consumption seems attractive. However, it is still unclear, to what extent differences in stressful situations reflect on composition and amount of required resources, how this process is influenced by initial significance of a resource, whether resource reallocation effects exist in real and what they involve.

Issues of essence of resource consumption processes, specificity of resources, individual differences in intensity of consumption in the similar situation, change of resource consumption in different situations etc. appear when analyzing positions of the stress resource-based theory.

Efficient stress coping is ensured by creative, rational use of available resources and estimated in terms of the following indicators: efficiency of energy and resource consumption, efficiency in achievement of the desired goal to resist stress and recover functional balance of organism and mind, personal development as increase of capability, self-respect and well-being. Thus, successful stress coping helps to obtain short-term and long-term benefits and advantages.

All resources in accordance with their role in control of stress coping processes may be divided into several types:

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Personal resources include traits and attitudes which are useful for control of behavior in different stressful situations. The most significant ones involve self-control, self-esteem, self-regard etc.

Psychological resources are determined by psychomotor, emotional, volitional and other capabilities of a person to solve the problem or control emotions.

Professional resources are the required level of knowledge, skills, competencies and experience for solution of tasks in a difficult situation.

Social resources of stress coping reflect the level of social and material support, life values, self-regard, confidence control and interpersonal relations etc.

Physical resources reflect the state of physical and mental health, functional reserves of the organism.

Material resources are determined by the level of financial, residential and other support.

The set of personal, psychological, professional and physical resources comprises the uniform individual resource of a person.

Personal resources of coping are the complex set of personal and relational factors which provide a part of psychological context of coping. Personal resources are relatively stable characteristics which have impact on selection of estimation and coping processes, and in their turn may be influenced by the most important results of these processes in action.

Self-worth, optimism and sense of connection with the world. People who prize their self-worth in critical situations show performance and quietness. Those who are unconfident, who underestimate their personal qualities, tend to avoid such situations.

Optimism as common expectation of a positive result. Optimism is associated with success in physiological and psychological adaptation to stressful situations, possibly because optimists are prone to focus on the problem, see into it and thus search for real ways of coping, rather than avoid problem situations using different defense mechanisms, such as negation or emotional expression. An optimist hopes for the best outcome of the situation for him.

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Such a personality trait as self-respect is associated with self-efficacy to some extent. It has been found that people successfully resisting stress have more implicit self-regard.

The risk factor which is considered both as the aspect of a difficult situation and personality trait plays a significant role in development of stress and nature of coping with it, especially in dangerous, harmful types of activity which require responsibility. It is shown in studies of E. N. Kiryanova that capability to act in risk conditions depends on personal appetite and readiness for risk. Manifestation of these personal qualities depends on the level of intensity - extremeness, anxiety and other qualities which characterize personal resource of an acting party.

Therefore, it may be said the personal resources, degree of their performance depend on impact aspects of internal and external life and activity factors.

**Sports as a stressful activity type.** In the modern sports, requirements to sporting activity, sportsmanship level, an athlete as such are very high. During workouts and especially contests, athletes have to show great and ultimate strain of their force and capabilities. Besides, the more the level and scale of contests, the more the degree of psychological strain.

As a matter of fact, study of psychological strain (stress) in sporting activity was started in 40-50-s of the 20th century, when different forms of athlete prestart state were found and described, and their impact on athlete behavior and activity under conditions of contests was revealed.

For a long time many stress researchers considered physiological strain as the main and only stressor in sports. In fact, mental factors in sports were the strongest stressors. That is why stress degree should be estimated on the basis of complex and simultaneous study of psychic and physiological components.

Stress in sporting activity is caused by both physiological and psychological stressors. The human organism when responding to stress impact does not delimit stressors. Sport situations cause both psychic and physiological stress.

In opinion of some researchers, a sports contest situation is stressful mainly because there is significant discrepancy between which tasks are set for an athlete in

these contests and which capabilities for their realization he has currently. Tasks exceeding athlete's capabilities are the main reason for stress during contests. Moreover, not simply objective difficulty of a solved task, but rather probabilistic assessment of possibility of its execution by an athlete is the main reason for strain.

Among other factors which give rise to psychic stress in a sports contest situation, one emphasizes objective difficulty of an activity, overstrain of physical and physiological functions, appearance of negative emotional experience. There are social and psychological reasons for stress under conditions of sports contests of different levels:

- 1) inadequate interpersonal relations in collective activity, e.g., in collective play activity;
- 2) disturbance of functional relations within the sports team;
- 3) hard management by the trainer;
- 4) microsocial environmental situational effects.

There is no uniform stress theory either in general or sport psychology.

American experts in the field of sport and exercise psychology R. S. Weinberg and D. Gould consider several stress theories in sports: drive; inverted U; zones of optimal functioning; catastrophes and reversal theories.

Drive theory. According to the drive theory, with increase of anxiety or agitation state of a person, his/her physical activity level increases as well: the more agitated an athlete becomes, the better he/she performs.

In accordance with the social facilitation theory – a form of the drive theory, presence of other people facilitates execution of simple or well learnt tasks and has negative impact on execution of complicated or poorly learnt ones.

Inverted U hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, in case of low agitation levels, indicators of physical activity will be lower. With increase of the agitation level, the physical activity level will increase as well – up to a certain optimal extent which is characterized by the highest results. Further agitation increase leads to reduction of the physical activity level. So, this hypothesis is represented by the

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inverted U which reflects the high physical activity level at the optimal agitation level and reduced physical activity level at lower or very high agitation degree.

It should be noted that as in case with general psychology, terms “stress” and “psychic strain” in sport psychology are typically considered as synonyms.

The most important methodological principle for explanation of psychic phenomena is analysis through activity. Characterizing sporting activity and marking its specifics, A. Ts. Puni points out its extreme nature in the first place. “Extremeness of activity conditions is a characteristic feature of modern sports, culmination wherein lies the contest rich with intense struggle for achievement of victory over a contestant”.

So, the key feature of sporting activity is regular high-degree mental strain. This strain is conditioned by participation in sports contests which are usually rich with struggle of equal contestants and always require maximum strain of all spiritual and physical strengths of an athlete.

All scientists working in the field of psychology, physical education and sports point at extreme nature of sporting activity, especially in its key link – contest.

What are key features of modern sports which determine its stressful nature and have essential impact on athlete’s mind?

The following aspects are characteristic for contest activity:

- publicity with all resulting consequences (estimation by viewers, mass media etc.);
- its significance for an athlete, because he/she strives either for victory, record or accomplishment of a category or a qualifying standard;
- limitation of a number of qualification trials, that is why there is often no possibility to correct faulty actions or performance;
- limitation of time during which an athlete may estimate a possible contest situation and make an independent decision;
- strangeness of conditions of its performance when changing contest sites: climatic, time, weather differences, new sports equipment, gyms and athletic grounds.

All this leads to appearance of mental tension state of an athlete which does not usually happen during workouts.

Thus, modern sports are activity, mainly under conditions of strongly marked stress, especially if it is executed on the level of large-scale contests.

Numerous studies show that negative forms of prestart states not only cause clearly experienced mental discomfort, but also have an adverse impact on readiness for sport struggle and contest result. For instance, A. Ts. Puni points out negative impact of these mental states on memory, attention and thinking processes. O.A. Chernikova states that they affect athlete's behavior, appropriateness of his/her actions, reduce performance, deteriorate speed and precision in movement, reduce activity and are destructive for shape. Yu. Ya. Kiselev draws attention to negative effect of emotional states, information receipt and organization processes.

In conclusion, sports contests on all its levels (from junior and youth to top-class sports) this is mainly stressful activity with high responsibility.

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*Вишня Е.В., Пройдаков С.О., Карлашов С.В.*

**Психологическое состояние спортсменов в соревновательный период**

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**Резюме.** В статье показаны причины возникновения стресса в условиях соревнований. Приведены признанные зарубежными учеными теории стресса в спорте. Показаны возможности использования коппинг-стратегий для преодоления стресса в соревновательном периоде.

**Ключевые слова:** стресс, спорт, соревновательный период.

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**Психологічний стан спортсменів у змагальному періоді**

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**Резюме.** У статті наведено причини виникнення стресу в умовах змагань. Приведено теорії стресу у спорті, які визнано закордонними вченими. Показано можливість використання коппінг-стратегій для подолання стресу у змагальному періоді.

**Ключові слова:** стрес, спорт, змагальний період.

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