

YouthFirst

Coaches Learning About Youth Sports

The Sports Education and Leadership Program at UNLV

Grade 1-2 Arousal

"Success should not be measured by the outcome of the game...
but by preparation, attitude, and effort."
- Morris Jenkins

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Optimal Arousal

Children play sports to have fun. When they are bored their arousal level is low. When they are having fun their arousal level is at a desirable high level. Children who are in a situation that they perceive fearful or are too anxious are in an arousal level that is harmful to athletic performance. Levels differ from athlete to athlete. Some thrive on a great deal of stimulation while other are content with only a little.

Arousal that is beneficial in sports is termed flow experience.

Keeping Athletes Optimally Aroused

By agreeing to coach, it is your responsibility to keep your athletes aroused and not anxious. Here are some suggestions to achieve optimal arousal levels.

1. Provide challenging instruction- Tasks must be sufficiently difficult to be challenging, but not so difficult that succeeding is no longer achievable. If an athletes has high abilities, but the challenge is low, that athlete will be bored. If ath-

This occurs when the athlete is totally immersed in an activity. The athlete losses sense of time, are unable to feel pain or fatigue, and are neither bored nor anxious during the flow experience.

Coaches need to foster a flow experience for every athletes. Athletes who experience the flow usually become hooked to the activity and do not drop out. An example would be a runner who experiences a "runners high" other wise known as the flow, tend to stay with the sport longer with aspirations of advancement.

letes ability is low and the challenge is high, they will experience anxiety. But if the challenge is close to ability, the athletes will experience flow and have fun.

2. Change up practice and let the athletes have impute in activities.
3. Limit standing around- Arousal levels drop when athletes are not involved in the activity. This includes practices and games.
4. Limit instruction and yelling- This limits the flow experience, and causes athletes to zone out of the game.
5. Don't constantly evaluate your athletes- Whether evaluations are positive or negative they may limit their flow experience. There is a time and a place for evaluating.

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How To Psych Down Overly Aroused Athletes

During the pre game warm up or game you notice one of your athletes are overly aroused. This athlete could be expressing negative emotions like fear, anger, anxiety, jealousy, embarrassment, disgust, boredom, or rage, or expressing negative feelings like scared, worried, sad, upset, or nervousness. As a coach you need to be able to handle these situations. Try to include high energy activities during warm up to keep the athlete moving, this will decrease thought induced stress and may calm the athletes mental jitters. Try not to tell the athlete to relax. This may facilitate arousal and anxiety as it may be contradictory to the players preferred mental state. If you need to pull an athlete from a game, have them get a drink sit down for a while and relax. After a few minutes talk to the athlete about why they were pulled and have them draw about what they were feeling during the game. Get them thinking about something new and positive. Set a new goal for them when they return to the game. An example for basketball would be to tell the athlete to concentrate on dribbling down the court without losing control or getting the ball stolen.

Arousal Levels and Sports

Some sports benefit from a higher level of arousal. These include:

1. Football- Athletes need to be excited to tackle and block the opponent forcefully.
2. Weightlifting- Arousal levels that are high will help one to push their body to the limit. (Age appropriate if you are having your younger athletes lift).
3. Running events- A high arousal will let the athlete compete in the flow. The flow is explained on the previous page.
4. Wrestling- Athletes need to be aroused and excited to find the energy and technique to pin their opponent on the mat.

-A high arousal level in most contact sports will facilitate their performance. Remember that this also depends on the athletes disposition; the athletes confidence, self-esteem, optimism, and cop-

ing style.

Some sports benefit from a lower level of arousal. These include:

1. Baseball- Most pitchers and batters need a low level of arousal because they need to concentrate on the skill and not be too excited.
2. Bowling- This also requires a lower arousal level because it is more individualized and requires a high level of concentration and less excitement.
3. Golfing- Athletes need to be more relaxed to achieve a desirable shot.
4. Tennis- Athletes who assume a lower level of arousal tend to be more focused and are more attentive to fine-motor skills.

- A lower level of arousal in most individual sports will facilitate their performance. These sports should not be mistaken for boring but pleasant and relaxing.