



Assessing Players' Thoughts and Emotions during Competition



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INTRODUCTION

- Performance enhancement programs have been of great interest to athletes, coaches, and researchers for all levels of sport, with the methods and strategies used to increase the performance and enjoyment of players receiving great attention.
- Unfortunately, we have yet to find a reliable way to measure players' thoughts and emotions during competition, which is an important aspect of any successful intervention program.
- Interpersonal Process Recall is a method, more commonly used to train communication skills in new counselors, by which the recall of thoughts and emotions in a particular situation is aided by viewing video recordings of the situation in question. Recall is further reinforced by an interviewer who actively listens and asks non-judgmental questions about the events viewed on the tapes.
- The purpose of this project was to investigate if IPR could be used to help athletes better remember their thoughts and feelings experienced during match play so that performance enhancement interventions could be better informed.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to determine the usefulness of Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) as a tool to gauge players' thoughts and emotions during competitive tennis match play.

SAMPLE

Participants for this study were six adult female players participating in the Houston Tennis Association Women's Singles League. All players were members of the same club and had performance rankings of 3.0 or 4.0

YEAR PERFORMED 1990

METHOD

- To investigate the effectiveness of IPR at various levels of tennis play, three freshmen members of the University of Houston Women's Tennis Team also participated in the study.
- These players had performance ratings of 5.0 or higher. Each athlete completed 3 taping and observation sessions in which they viewed a video of a match they had just completed and were encouraged to give in-depth explanations of their thoughts and feelings during the competition.
- To increase players' recall, an interviewer asked questions such as "what were you thinking at that time," "what would you have liked to have done," or "what were you physically feeling" while the tapes were being viewed.



RESULTS

When recalling feelings and thoughts experienced before their matches:

- Recreational players with rankings of 3.0 reported feeling calm, relaxed, and confident
- College players with rankings of 5.0 reported experiencing anxiety, fear and frustration (which may have been due to the fact that they competed against opponents with higher NCAA rankings during both observed matches)
- Players with ratings of 4.0 showed varied negative and positive responses to competition.

When recalling feelings and thoughts experienced during competition:

- Winning 3.0 players continued to show positive emotional patterns;
- Winning 5.0 players continued to report negative emotions similar to their warm-up report
- Winning and losing 4.0 players' responses were more similar to the 5.0 players than to the 3.0 players.

When recalling feelings and thoughts experienced after competition:

- The 5.0 players continued to show stronger negative emotions, even when winning, than the other two levels of players.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) method was judged to be a valuable experience by the players who completed the three recall sessions.
- While the players reported knowing their thoughts and emotions while on the court, they also believed IPR helped made them even more aware.
 - This heightened awareness is often an important first step in performance enhancement interventions.
- Several players, however, did mention a common problem with the IPR process.
 - Athletes reported the 30 to 45 minutes needed for the recall sessions was too long. This is not surprising considering several of these players had worked all day and started their tennis matches at 6:30pm.
 - Other responsibilities at home or with school were viewed as more important and in need of more immediate attention than taking part in the project.
- For athletes to buy into an intervention, they must first believe it is worth their while. Therefore, it is important that the process be as convenient and engaging as possible.
- Issues such as maladaptive thinking patterns or a lack of emotional control during tennis competition is often invisible to observers and difficult for players to remember after the fact.

CONCLUSION

- In summary, IPR would be a valuable clinical tool to help players become more aware of the thoughts and feelings experienced during competitive play.
- By showing players video of competitions and providing assistance through a supportive and non-judgmental listener, sport psychology consultants and coaches can gather information about these illusive experiences that can be useful in developing appropriate performance enhancement interventions.