

TENSION: POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE?

by Lilly Rossetti

Handling tension is a very important aspect of the mental game which has different meanings in sports.

Let us start with a simple introduction to the key-words of our topic:

- TENSION: commonly known as every form of emotional or physical alteration of the normal living and performing conditions
- POSITIVE TENSION: meaning the positive excitement preceding competition
- NEGATIVE TENSION: instead, the negative, excessive amount of tension leading to stiffness

All athletes at all levels have had something to do with these different forms of tension.

What, in turn, good competitors have is a form of psychological tutoring which allows them to recognize these three steps and to handle with them correctly.

What we can try to do here is to improve our awareness of the importance of this distinction and to understand how we can exploit these different forms of tension in the best way.

Without tension there is no competition, for sure.

Mind and body must get active in such a way that they can give full effort if they want to reach a set goal.

This means that the athlete needs much more concentration and physical activity, which will enable him to compete against another athlete or himself and his own limits.

Tension is neither positive nor negative for the athlete.

As usual everything depends on how you use it and for what purposes.

The goal of good athletes and good competitors is to reach a state of POSITIVE TENSION creating for them the best situation to reach and overcome their limits. After all that training, repetitions, automatization of motions, after all the teaching and coaching, all tips and advice, the athlete needs a personal interiorization of his goal which he can achieve through visualization, concentration and sometimes meditation too.

In a state of POSITIVE TENSION the athlete feels on one side tension before the game but most of all he feels like facing his opponents and challenging them; he has a real desire to step into the field and play the best game ever.

Only this kind of approach will enable the player to focus on his strengths and goals instead of feeling undecided, doubts or even fear.

Too often tension becomes NEGATIVE. Quite the opposite as in the case of the positive tension the athlete feels his task as pressure, as a must, a difficult situation, an obstacle he would like to pass as quickly as possible.

Symptoms of negative tension are stiffness, slow movements and thoughts, oversweating, cold hands, difficult breathing, a sense of tiredness, hesitation, doubts, negative self-talk, fear for mistakes and bad performance, lack of concentration, perception of the outer world during warm-up and games.

What shall/can we do then?

First of all: recognize the case, know symptoms and detecting them, making a self-evaluation

Second: find antidotes against negative tension. Mostly positive key-words and thoughts

Third: MOST IMPORTANT: practice positive tension in your TRAINING sessions.

That means setting up pressure situations in practice and learn how to develop a positive approach to all possible tasks and situations day by day.

Game situations won't be felt as new and unusual, that is embarrassing and scaring and your players won't lose the fun in the game.

