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BURNOUT IN SPORTS

Hello, everyone and welcome to session 4. In this session, we will be discussing about sports burnout or burnout in athletes or one of the pressing problems that is there in sports today. So, let us look at quickly what we will be covering in this session. We will be looking at the introduction, definition and about overtraining, the models of burnout and the types of burnout, factors leading to burnout, the symptoms of burnout, overcoming burnout, some exercise and also a quick recap. Burnout is a multidimensional concept and it is caused due to several factors. To understand this phenomenon, let us look at a case study here or a particular scenario.

This is a case of a 21 year old cricket player at the Ranji level. His training includes tough practice and matches throughout the year. Being an all rounder, the demands are more having to excel both with the bat and the ball, score runs, get wickets. Despite all his efforts and his practice, he is unable to get selected at the higher level. Slowly he starts feeling exhausted, rejected and even dreads practice, his performance is of no worry to him, he slowly wants to avoid going to the pitch. He wonders what is happening to him. This athlete or this cricket player is experiencing something called a sports burnout. Sometimes we feel that more is better, right? So, in sports more is not always better because it has its repercussions and it also has its negative effects.

What is burnout? Since I already expressed this to you, it is a most pressing issue in active sports. It hampers sports participation and it can either be temporary or even a permanent issue. So, what exactly is burnout? It is a phenomenon or it is a situation that is very prevalent in sport. Athletes go through a lot of stressors in their journey from being an amateur to being a sub elite

or even an elite athlete. The tremendous stress that is placed on them in terms of competition, in terms of training and this continued training and competition sometimes can lead to overtraining. The desire to excel, the desire to get better or bettering yourself. So, overtraining beyond a level that is ideal from the maximum. So, you do not benefit when you overtrain yourself, you are only kind of depleting your resources, you are getting yourself mentally and physically tired because after a certain point of time, more is not always good.

In addition to overtraining, there is also an important concept that is one of the causes or the leading to stress and burnout that is called staleness. So, in staleness, the performance level is at a plateau, you do not seem to improve at all. So, you are improving periodically and progressively to a certain point, after that point your performance stagnates over a period of time. Here we have a case of a weightlifter, he cannot do more than 5 repetitions carrying a 250 pounds in a half squat. So, trying to overtrain to do more than 5 reps is only going to have a tremendous effect on his body and maybe lead to injury etcetera. So, most sports persons usually go over the slump where their performance is at a plateau and they do not see any quantum improvement, but slowly over a period of time they can get over this and come into a level where they will be able to practice and also see performance improving slowly. So, how is burnout defined? Raedeke said that burnout is a psychological syndrome involving 3 concepts, emotional and physical exhaustion, reduced sense of accomplishment and sports devaluation.

If you look at the case of that 21 year old Ranji player, he was emotionally and physically exhausted because he was putting in so much effort and putting in so much practice. He had a reduced sense of accomplishment because he was dissatisfied, he was dejected that he could not move on to the next level. So, he did not care about his accomplishments, about his performance after a certain period of time. Also sports devaluation because he does not want to go to the practice. So, the sport or the cricket that he is doing is not in any way of prime importance to him. So, let us look at what each of these characteristics or dimensions of burnout are actually.

First one, we have the emotional and physical exhaustion that is caused due to intense training and competition and a player or a sports person dreads doing an activity that they loved before. They are so emotionally exhausted that they do not want even want to go to the training ground.

Then you have the reduced sense of accomplishment, this refers to the skills and abilities. You do not have that sense of accomplishment, you do not want to work or you do not see that you want to benefit from your performance or you want to benefit from your practice or benefit from your tournaments. You feel that your efforts are being wasted, it is worthless and overall a general feeling of frustration and this leads to lack of consistent performance and you start feeling very low that you are not achieving anything. So, the effort also reduces quantumly.

Finally, the third dimension is a sports devaluation. Loss of interest and resentment to the sport. So, you lack enthusiasm, you do not care about your sport, you do not care about your team members, you do not care about the sport at all. So, you totally want to detach yourself from the sport and it is not at all important to you. So, these three dimensions characterize how burnout can be understood.

Now that we know how burnout is defined, let us try to understand how the phenomenon of burnout has been explained. We have four models or four theories. We have the training-stress model, you have the cognitive-affective model, you have the uni-dimensional model and we have the investment or the entrapment model. The first two models focus on how the stress manifests into burnout. The third one that is uni-dimensional is more from a sociological point of view. And the fourth investment or entrapment model talks about how the athlete is trapped into the sport due to the amount of time and effort that is invested.

Let us look at what are the models and how they explain how an athlete or a player goes through burnout. So, you have the negative-stress training model given by Silva. He explains that burnout is more related to physical training. When you train hard, it affects you both physically and psychologically, but the training has both positive as well as negative effects. If you are an athlete, where you are able to adapt and have a positive outlook towards your training, then you gain from your training. You hone your skills, you improve yourself and you are gradually progressing. But if you view the training to be negative or if you think that it is, you are not able to deal with it, then there is something called a negative adaptation. Slowly over a period of time, the demand is more than what you can give and it can lead to staleness, where

you have a stagnation in performance. Slowly if you are not able to recover from the staleness period, it can eventually lead to athlete burnout.

The cognitive-affective model given by Smith, uses four key components and this is very interesting the way they explain about how burnout can happen. In the first phase, you have the situation. You have an athlete or a player faced with a situation where he or she needs to train more, because there is a pressure to win and that leads to excessive training and having to spend more number of hours on the court or in the grounds. Once this happens, the player appraises the situation like can they deal with it. So, in situations where a player cannot deal with it, it is kind of a threat to them. They feel that they are overloaded, they have a lack of control over the training and this in turn affects them physiologically or bodily.

Once they sense that the situation is harmful or threatening, they start having anxiety, they have tension, they have insomnia, they cannot sleep, some depressive factors and also a deep sense of fatigue. This in turn, when you experience anxiety, tension, depression, fatigue, etcetera, you can imagine what the behavior would be towards that particular demand. Your coach calls you for more practice and you are going through all this and finally, it leads to two important things. One is it leads to decrease in performance because you have no time to recover, there is no recouping that is happening and finally, withdrawal from the activity which is the end result that happens. So, the cognitive model given by Smith talks about how the situation is appraised, if it is threatful, it has its own symptoms and finally, leading to the withdrawal from the activity.

Now, we move on to a sociological viewpoint given by Coakley. Coakley, the researcher had a different view or perspective to how burnout results in athletes. He says that as a child starts to play from a very young age, right up to adulthood or right up to an elite level, they are always in the field of sport, they are surrounded by people with sport and the significant others are also involved in sport. So, being in the sport for such a long period of time, hinders them from developing a normal identity. So, they are forced to develop an athlete identity and the normal identity is kind of found wanting.

Because there is no separate identity that is formed, they have adaptation issues when they leave the sport. When they experience an injury, they are not able to go to the practice grounds, maybe they are in rehab or maybe they have to take rest. So, they do not see the court, they do not see the match grounds, they do not see the practice sessions. Then what happens, the sports identity or the competitive environment is not their real environment anymore, the environment is something else, but because they have not developed a normal identity like having other social aspects, social friends etcetera, they start experiencing symptoms of stress and they do not have success because they are not participating in the sport, they have to wait till they come back into the after the recovery period. And finally, this will culminate in what he calls as burnout.

The identity itself leads to burnout because they are not able to cope with the injury and sometimes the injury can also make you withdraw from the sport. So, that is something unacceptable for a sportsman because their life is all about the sports.

Then you have the investment or the entrapment theory. This is a very interesting theory given by Raedeke in 1997. He says that athletes join the sport for 2 reasons. One thing is either they enjoy the sport or they are so involved in the sport that they want to continue it. And he says that if the sport is to be enjoyable, then the sports participation is good for the athlete. But if they are not enjoying the sport, then they are involved in something or they are entrapped into the sport. So, when the entrapment happens that is when they do not enjoy the sport, but they continue the sport. So, why do athletes continue the sport and play the sport is because it gives them self-identity.

They are identified as players or sports persons. Because they lack other alternate identities and finally, they have invested too much time and energy. So, if you are a player who started at the age of 12 and you are continuing till the age of 26 or 27 and the demands of the sport cause you to feel stressed out, cause you to feel burnt out. You still continue in the sport because you are trapped in it because you have invested time and energy, the costs are great and you have also gotten some rewards; maybe you got a scholarship, maybe you got sponsorship, maybe you got a job because of your sport. So, you are entrapped into it, whether you like it or not you continue to play the sport and still experiencing burnout syndrome. So, this is his entrapment model.

Even though you lose motivation, even though you lose interest you still continue the sport. and this is seen very evidently in athletes and sports persons throughout the year because nowadays you do not have anything like an off season, you are training 365 days in a year. Where is the time to recoup? So burnout is like a part of our system.

His entrapment theory is a very interesting theory and can be really applied to situations that happen today like you have back to back tournaments, you cannot say “no”, you will be playing for a club which you cannot say “no”, you will be playing for a university which you cannot say “no”, you will be playing for your state because it needs you and maybe you will also be selected as for the national, as a national probable and you cannot say “no”. So, whatever it is, you are entrapped into the sport.

What are the factors that are related to burnout? So, the models are there which have their explanation, but what are the factors that could be singled out? So, here on the screen we have high demands of the sport; as sports today is not what it was before, it is getting more dynamic, more demanding, more stressful, more competition, the formats are different and there is a lot of effort that the athlete needs to put. Feeling powerless; because you cannot control what is happening to you, you need to be a part of the system. High expectations; you have your own self expectation, you have expectations from your coach, from your family, maybe your club, your organization wherever you are attached to. Low social support; again sportsman life can be sometimes very lonely, you cannot reach out to other people for social support for various reasons. That is a big hindrance because one of the things is if you have the support system with you, you can tide over many things and many of the issues that we face in sport, we are not able to talk it out. Excessive demands of time; you have no time for anything else except the sport and only the sport. It is either practice or it is you are going for conditioning or if you are a student you are attending to your academic requirements. So, there is a lot of demand on how you use your time.

The next aspect is parental involvement. In today's sporting environment and the sporting ecosystem parents play a huge role and it has its advantages and disadvantages, but here it is a contributor to burnout. Coach involvement; at some point of time the player has to be left to

make their own decisions, this happens sometimes in individual sports like badminton, tennis, table tennis, etcetera, even swimming like what are the tournaments you play, what you would like to play. So, sometimes you need to calculate, you need to take off. The involvement of the coach and the parent can have a big pressure factor for you. Injuries; is of course something that we cannot avoid, but that is a real direct cause relating to burnout. training loads and competitions; sometimes you are training, you are playing 3 weeks, back-to-back for tournaments, then you come back, train for 4 weeks, then again you are back to playing tournaments. So, it is like you are playing this cluster of tournaments like at least 4 to 5 months in a year. You know what is going to happen to you bodily, you know physically, mentally, emotionally and all ways.

The burnout can be in two types, we have the active burnout. Active burnout is similar to what we studied in the entrapment model, where the athlete experiences the burnout, but is still active in the sport. So, maybe take a day off, maybe take a week or two off and then come back to the sport or being involved in something else, helps to deal with the active burnout, but the player is constantly in the sport he is not out of it at all. So, you will be hearing in the course of this session about a young basketball player who gives her narration about how it is to play back-to-back tournaments and how you still continue with it.

The second aspect directly leading is the withdrawal from the sport, where you stop the sport you do not want to continue and you are totally out of it, it is out of your system. So, these are the two types of burnout that you know tend to be exhibited in sport.

What are the psychological symptoms of burnout? The psychological symptoms of burnout can be seen here on the screen. Firstly, you have the low self-esteem. Self-esteem is basically how you view yourself, what you think about yourself, how you hold yourself in your own standards. If you are feeling burnt out then your esteem is going to drop and then you feel exhausted physically, mentally and emotionally.

You have mood disturbances; you are happy, you are not happy, you go through all that irritation and different types of mood swings that happen. You have an impersonal feeling. So,

the sport that you loved, the team members whom you loved now are impersonal to you like it is the thing, it is a “thing” to you. So, it is no more like it is “mine”, it is “my sport.” So, you start feeling impersonal. You are unable to handle any kind of stress, even the smallest of stress kind of triggers you. and the final aspect is the withdrawal; where you tend to withdraw from the sport.

Let us look at the physiological symptoms. There are a whole host of them, on the screen are a few of them. Firstly, your heart rate increases; because of the stress that you feel every time you think about the sport and you are not able to go back and the different reasons which led to the situation in which you are. You have muscle soreness and muscle fatigue, you have loss of sleep or also what is called insomnia, you have increased respiratory infections, then you have an issue with your body weight because it decreases and also your appetite also decreases.

The physiological symptoms have an effect on the psychological and the psychological can also have an effect on the physiological symptoms. So, both work in tandem to create feelings of wanting to leave the sport and stay away from the sport. So, this comes to the question of how do we deal with burnout? We all know that it is a prevailing issue, it is a phenomenon, it is transitory in nature for most part. People are able to come out of it, take a break for about a week or two or even a month, do something exciting, and stay away from the sport.

Remember that when you are dealing with burnout, that activity or the sport that you once loved is no more loved by you. So, how do you deal with it? The first concept is very very important, is self-awareness. Important for a player or athlete to understand or be aware that something is happening to him or her. They recognize that there is something that is not normal, something that is happening which is making them move away from the sporting activity.

Then you have the communication part. You have to communicate with coaches, with parents, even with peers or good friends of yours, you communicate to them. So that you are able to voice out what is happening. You are getting it out of your system and maybe the inputs that are given by them may make you overcome these feelings at the very first cut rather than it getting

more profound at the very basic level or the low level of burnout you may be able to overcome. After doing this you can also look at taking time off.

Please remember, in sports, too much is not the mantra. How optimal you train is the mantra. So, take time off from your practice, rest and relax. Being a sports person myself and having children who play the sport, I totally resonate with that you were always thinking about practice. If the child or the player tells you “I want to take a day off”, you are like “no you will miss your practice session” or “we have paid for your practice.” So, feel free to take off from the practice session and rest and then you could use a lot of relaxation strategies.

Nowadays yoga is inbuilt into the sporting ecosystem. Any academy that you train has yoga trainers and there you have a yoga coach to help you out. So, yoga could be exercised, you could do meditation, you could have your own hobbies. During the COVID time, most of the sports persons came up with unique hobbies that they were really going into and practicing. So, you could discover new hobbies because this is a time for sports persons ; the other life away from the sports is something where you can look at besides studies etcetera, could be developing your hobbies. So, it will come useful for you at your time of need.

In this table on the screen are what coaches and players can do to deal with burnout. If you are a coach and you identify a player or players who are dealing with this emotional and physical exhaustion or dealing with sports devaluation or loss of personal accomplishment, or you see some kind of a change in the player. It is a trigger that the coach has to start doing things. So, instead of waiting for the last minute to work on athletes, it is better to implement a prevention strategy before you can actually work on these people who are having burnout symptoms.

You can make participation and training fun, incorporate fun activities, you can do a lot of cross training. I think most coaches do that these days, make them do a lot of cross training, encourage and support and avoid pressure. Everybody wants to win. You are a coach, you want to field the best team, you want your team to win. If you are a coach with the individual player, you have worked with the player, you want the player to win.

Winning is a habit but it does not happen to everybody and that should not be the criteria for which we work on. We have already learnt in the goal setting process, the outcome goal of winning is not the end product, we need to work on other things. So, encourage and support your players.

Involve the athletes in decision making. So, this is very important, we have already discussed this in the goal setting process where in teams the players, the individual players should be involved in the decision making. If you are even working with an individual athlete in an individual sport, you can involve them in making decisions about what tournaments they play, what is the practice, if you need to do more of loading, if you need to reduce the loading, you could discuss with the player.

Help them to deal with post competitive stress . If you have done well then you are very happy with your performance but there are times when you do not do well, when you lose or you lost the match which you should have won or you are leading and something happened and you lost. Help them to deal with the post competitive stress, be supportive and helpful to the emotions that they show, being supportive is very very important especially when they go through ups and downs in their emotions.

As a coach, provide realistic assessment for the athlete. Do not hype up the athlete and express to them that you know something could be achieved beyond their capability. So, whatever is the athlete, when you assess them and know what their capability is, that information should be provided to the player.

As usual, go out for team meetings and team outings because that is where you bond and that is the way you get to know one another and also the players can see the other side of the coach and the coach can also see the other side of the player because players have a lot of hidden talents.

If you are a player and you want to deal with burnout, one thing is, setting short term goals and working on them, so that you are able to achieve them in your quest for higher performance.

Take periodic breaks, have a positive outlook towards your sport because today whether you like it or not every sport comes with its requirements. There is no sport where you can say - I am just going to have light training and go participate. You need to get it into the system that you need to train hard. So, have a positive outlook towards your training. Learn self-regulation skills. During the course of this program we have already taught you two self-regulation skills: one is goal setting and the other one is imagery. So, using them when you need to use them, understanding when this particular skill could be applied and having realistic expectations from yourself.

Not putting yourself too high on a pedestal so you do not see yourself going there, be realistic and know what you can expect, real time expectation about where you can see yourself going.

We will hear a video from Niharika. She is a basketball player.

“Hello all, my name is Niharika. I am a basketball player and I represent Karnataka at the national and international level as well.

I experienced burnout when I play back-to-back tournaments. Sports persons have a very busy competition schedule; they play back-to-back tournaments and do not get much of a break. I was mentally and physically exhausted while playing back-to-back tournaments as I did not have much of a break in between the tournaments. I started feeling weak and I was not able to recover properly. However I was able to find a few ways to cope with it.

I would often listen to music and bake which is very relaxing. I would also talk to my parents about what I am going through and they would help me by talking it out with me and advising me on what I should do. During this time there will be ups and downs in a sports person's performance and this may affect their passion for the game. However, they should remember their love for the game and work towards where they think they are going wrong. They should

also try and excel in their respective fields. I often like to listen to my favourite music playlist which ensures that I am calm and relaxed. I also like to initiate positive self-talk. Another thing that I like to do is, visualise what I am going to be doing during the game. I hope this helps. Thank you.”

So, that was Niharika Reddy and giving her inputs about how she deals with the pressures of competition and tournaments.

Now we have a small exercise to break the monotony of the session. Name the three dimensions of burnout is your first question. The second question is that the (dash) model says that sports prevents players from developing other identities. The third question, the two types of burnout are (dash) and (dash).

So you have your answers here on the screen. So the first question is the dimensions; emotional and physical exhaustion, reduced sense of accomplishment and sports devaluation. The unidimensional theory tells us that either sport prevents us from developing other sports identities and the two types of burnout are active and the total withdrawal.

On your screen, we have an interesting research study that was done on a group of tennis players and based upon that the following recommendations have been given to players, parents and coaches. What can be done to avoid burnout? So at the player level, we need to balance sports and other things, relax and take time off occasionally. As a coach, we need to understand players' feelings and the perspective, personal involvement with the player, knowing the person well enough or knowing the player well enough.

I have had situations and cases where the coach does not even know anything about the players, parents. He does not know the birthday of the player. So you have to have some kind of a personal involvement, two way communication with the player. Not resort to a carrot and stick, but be more communicative. Listen to what the player has to say because today's players are very intelligent and very smart and they have access to a lot of information. So they can offer a lot of useful information when you discuss with them regarding their sport.

And as a parent, this is very interesting, reduce importance on winning, and reduce the amount of pushing. Stop pushing your child to their limits. Don't coach if not the coach. So reading from the internet or trying to learn certain things and trying to be a coach for your child will not help because it will conflict with what the coach is trying to teach your child. And then lessen your involvement in your child's sport. be supportive, but, stay away and stay away from and not be too involved. So these are very interesting recommendations given by the researchers to players, coaches and parents.

Finally, we come to the end of this session and before we end, we have the customary recap. So what did we do here in this session on burnout? We understood what burnout is. We looked at the definition of burnout involving three dimensions. We studied the models of burnout. We understood from where or how burnout develops or how burnout is the ultimate factor.

We also looked at how we can deal with burnout, different ways that we can deal with burnout. These are the recommended ways, but athletes and players can have their own ways of dealing with burnout and the more you work with it, the more you will be able to come out of this situation. And also another aspect which I want to highlight is we are discussing burnout and about a phenomenon that it is manifested, in the mannerisms and the way athletes and players think. But burnout can also be measured.

It can be measured using the athlete burnout questionnaire developed by Raedeke. It's a 15-item questionnaire and when you answer the questionnaire, it tells you how you rate yourself among all these three dimensions and you can understand which area you are found to be feeling being more prone to the burnout concept.

With this we will be ending the session on burnout and we will be meeting again in the next session where we will be looking at coach burnout and also talking to a coach. Thank you so much. .