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STRESS MANAGEMENT IN SPORTS

Hello everyone, we finally arrived at the final segment of this course and my topic, which is going to be this, is the last segment in the team section. And my aim is to try and put together all the aspects so that it falls in one cognitive map for you in one umbrella. So today we are going to look at stress and performance. Of course the other faculties have also discussed this. I am also going to try and look into the intricacies of this. And you can see this beautiful image right, in front of your screen.

And I think a lot of us would probably recognize this. This is Arjuna being led by Krishna on the battlefield. Why did I choose this image? I really want you to just hold this image which is on your screen and see what calls out to you right? Because the metaphor of a chariot and a charioteer is a very apt metaphor for the mind and psychology, especially when we talk of sports psychology.

So I want you to notice what is in front of your screen here. I also want you to notice how the horses are, right. How is the person guiding the horses or leading the horses? And then you have the person in the chariot right? And also the reason I am going to, just for a brief second also put you; this is Arjuna. He is known right, for those of us who know the legend of Mahabharata. He is known for his sharp vision.

He is known for his focus right? But the same person, the same individual, one of our leaders, he is known as someone with great leadership skill, also faced immense stress on the battlefield before the battle started right. And what was the triggering factor was when he happened to see

the Kauravas or his openings who are no one none other than his own cousins but also his teachers, his guides and his grandfather right? And he goes oh my god, do I really need to fight this battle right, is this necessary? And he actually puts down his bow and arrow and that is what the Gita is about which really is about the right action.

But what I really want to stress here is and look at the pun on stress is because he showed classic symptoms of stress when he perceived those who were close to him and he had to wage a war against them. And that is where he gets the knowledge that this is the righteous war right. Only after he settles, he is able to go and perform right. So why did I bring this here and of course the charioteer image is also about if you now look at just Krishna and even if you just want to think about it as any other person, how that person holds the reins and how he or she is also will influence the horses right. The horses are nothing but our senses.

So why is this so important for us? Because in sport how pressure can build, how stress can build and what have I been feeding? Have I been feeding the right ingredients to my senses or am I getting over stimulated or under stimulated? So that really will depend on me because then my horses are going to perform in that way. That is going to influence how focused I can be and how I am going to perform. And that is why they always say, have an inner coach, inner figure, inner guide, inner Krishna in you right? So I thought this is a really beautiful image to start with and I think this shows it all when you see this person right, Arjuna just the way he is you know it is, they say even the way you hold the arrow right, it is the right tension, if it is too tight you are not going to be hitting your target.

Too low you are going to go off track right? I remember I was working with one of the shooters and he would be so over focused on his pre shot ritual that he was taking too much time right, and I said it is beading the purpose. The whole purpose is to just help you to come into your center and then which helps you with what you need to do right. So this is how we go. How is my body? Remember in the emotion section I was telling you our body is giving us very important cues, for example I am still recouping from surgery. I know that if I do not move my leg right, I am going to be very tight and at certain points I am going to feel the tightness so I have to keep moving right?

You see athletes sometimes the tension is here, sometimes it is here, sometimes they are cramping in their legs. So you are getting cues or your heart beat is too high, some people are throwing up, so what is actually happening? How stressed am I right and what do I need to do about it is essential right?

So this is you know, I wanted to bring this in just so that we know that; see stress is something we all face every individual but then stress related illness is something which, it could be a depression, it could be your anxiety which goes into the clinical, it really needs to be taken note of. And that is why I have said in the quote there, that you know, just as a physical injury we go to a doctor, we really should be going to a psychologist or a psychiatrist when stress goes beyond a certain limit right? Or as a psychologist we also need to know that, okay you know this is something which needs to be referred probably to a psychiatrist so please take note of that.

Okay now when we talk of stress right, I hear this from athletes or everyone- I am so stressed right? So we all have stress right and I think it is also very essential to understand that there are two types of stress.

Eustress and distress right, so what is eustress? Eustress is actually nothing but the positive stress, so I know I have to come in here today, I know I need to get up at a certain time, do certain preparations and I come and deliver what is expected of me right? So you need a little bit of it right?

And also can I take something as a challenge? I know I have to deliver something in a particular way. I take it as a challenge and I know that huh I can do this I am going to really try this right?

Distress is when it goes beyond a limit, when it starts eating you, when a person does not feel they have the required skills to actually live up to it. Or Deci said you know, emotion. This is not something that I am ready for or dwelling on what could possibly be wrong and the problem is this much or the challenge is this much and it gets magnified into a mountain. So that is also

very very essential to know the difference between eustress and distress so can I actually use stress to help me.

I hear a lot of players, a lot of cricketers especially going, you know, I like challenges. I do not like it if it is an easy match. You know, the world cup is happening now. Even though we want to see a good fight, we do not want to just see a one sided fight like a one sided way right?

So what could be some of the factors which can help us in maybe living up to the challenge or taking stress and making it into positive stress? Using it as positive stress?

So one of it could be controlling the controllables right, there is only so much which is in your hand. You do that without focusing on all the other things but you focus on what in me can stay steady? My emotions, how am I prepared and also not externalizing the problem when I have not delivered right? So it is like I do not blame just the window, the audience or xyz. Go yes, all these factors were there but also most importantly it impacted me right?

And the second which I am sure every faculty has been insisting about and emphasizing is performance goals, not just on the outcome. So your process is what is going to give you the outcome and especially as we come closer to competition, I was recently telling someone this and they said oh so should not I push myself, should not I say go for gold?

I said no you need to say all that, you need to prepare for all that when you are preparing but as you are going in, do not put the additional pressure if you have not done it that I am going to go for gold because then it just becomes unnecessary stress right?

So performance is at its peak when anxiety levels are at what we say the middle or at the optimum state. So and that we have discussed in the eyes of life we have discussed in the flow state, it is different for each person but it cannot be shooting up or shooting down right? So that is something we need to really be aware of. A little bit of angst, a little bit of stress is essential but also knowing what is going to get me to my peak.

So I am going to read the quote that I had given okay?

“Performance is at its best when anxiety levels are in the middle or at the optimum level. The tremendous pressure we place on our team to win obviously shoots up their anxiety level or of the team”.

So this is something to be very mindful of even when we work upon ourselves. So let us say you are a little anxious individual so make sure you come on time, you have the time. You center yourself, you probably have a nice cup of chamomile tea, it is supposed to be very cooling. Get a sense of the environment than just coming in and rushing then that is going to shoot up the anxiety right?

Someone who is an insistent thinker, what we tell them is having one trigger or one anchor to hold on, okay I am going to beat my best right and all my thinking after the tournament. So it becomes very important because if an athlete has not done it before it becomes very difficult to really perform and handle it at that point of time.

So that is really what I am trying to say and this impacts the zone. Your zone is very much dependent on how well are you centered and how are you holding yourself and giving yourself the best chance to perform right?

So I come to one of my favorite sections which will also be having a discussion upon later is on connections and as you all know I am also training to be an analyst, as jungian analyst and something that we really say is that field, it's that space and what Porges says here, it's one of my favorite quotes is that: safety is so much more than the absence of threat. Safety is the presence of connection.

What does he mean here? So basically we are not really facing the threat that our ancestors probably faced, right? You're not really fighting a wild animal every second day unless you stay in the periphery of a forest and you venture in, right?

But am I feeling safe with my team? Am I feeling connected to my team? That's going to determine and what he says is that helps us regulate ourselves which in turn will help with our

performance right? So if you look at the diagram, it's about connection helps us to reflect and restore right?

Let's just think about it, you had a really tough day you know, you probably had a difficult day. You come home and you either have a pet or your friend or your family you're able to process it. Or could be an extremely introverted person and sit with a nice cup of tea with nature and just come into yourself, it really helps in restoration right? So your stress hormone is coming down which is nothing but cortisol and then of course what we see next is survival.

There are times when we either have to get into a stress fight or flight right? And then finally what he says is conservation is when a person plays dead right? We've all heard of the story right? The person who plays dead to save himself against a wild animal and that's the freeze response so what Porges actually says is that, what really impacts a human being, what keeps him happy and connected and alive and able to perform, of course the performance is what we've connected I have connected but to be in their element is what a human needs.

And I think what every other being also needs is really connections right, without that right, then a person is constantly going to be in fight or flight right? Which is a lot of strain on the nervous system and versus when it literally comes to the free state.

So now I want to connect this. So what we understood with the previous slide was stress and performance. Nervous system regulation right with connections and bonding right?

Now what we can look at is from a very little bit of analytical psychology, depth psychology perspective is, play instinct. How do we connect? One of the best ways is through play right, building bonds right.

So I want you all to ponder on this quote by dr. Carl Jung. He asks "What did you do as a child that made the hours pass like minutes? Herein lies the key to your earthly pursuits".

I'm gonna give you a couple of seconds to think about it. And just go back, what did we all do, what did we all like doing as children? Of course play and it's right on the screen but what does play instinct do?

Think of small children, think of small kids or children and pets, the curiosity, their imagination & creativity right and even Einstein said he got inside suddenly and just think about a time you're really mulling on something. It could be a personal challenge or it could be something that you're trying to solve at work and we think think think, we're going on so much here in the cerebral and maybe nothing's come.

And then you just sparked it and then suddenly you have an ah right and I think that really is what is play instinct and there's this really beautiful quote on play instinct by Jung himself so he says, "The creation of something new is not accompanied by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the object it loves".

Think about it and look at you know this is, this was of course, I was having an improv session with some of the young athletes and they're very young right, so you can't sit and just say okay let's just meditate, let's just get into the center. So you have to play, you have to get that energy moving and then there's ideas coming out, there's creativity and then you made space and just put in what you need to and they're really open at that time.

And I think this is something I have learned immensely with elephants and animals is, play is a way of life and play instinct is something every being, human being and animals are born with. Are we really utilizing it?

So as important as our brain and intellect is, it's also very important to make space for that play instinct, to make space to like he says I love that last line. It's like you know the creative mind plays with the object it loves like even just preparing this lecture like let's say this this section, it's I'm playing with what do I want to bring in here? What's different here and that's how I am. Another individual may want to do it differently, so that's what it is right, how do you bring in creativity in everything you do. And why is this important because sport right like Bindra said

I've quoted it earlier as well is like it's about being prepared for the unexpected. How am I going to adapt myself? So if I'm always in a very tightly structured space, how are you going to be open to challenges? What are you going to do? So that's what, that's something we need to prepare them as well.

So in my sessions I never give out direct answers. A lot of the times they at least tell me ma'am you're playing, oh you're trying to get this out of me but I kind of like work on the periphery, you know?

It doesn't even look like we're touching on the problem but then you come and you tease it in, you come in so slowly that finally the reflection and aha moment comes from them. That moment aha when it comes from an athlete right, it's going to stay and I think that's one of the roles that we as psychologists do.

And I'm sure like different individuals and especially let's say the supporting staff do because when I see coaches right like the very creative coaches they bring in the same exercise but in different different ways. They're giving them different challenges and remember flow, one of the essential ways to build flow was with play and creativity.

So please remember this and why is this so important with this aspect because when I'm playing, when I'm playful right I'm connected to myself. I'm connected to the other and what is the message my brain takes? We're fine, we're not in a state of stress, we do not have to prepare for war right?

So cortisol is low, it brings us to our optimal state to perform. So one of the questions I like to ask is, what is your what if? You know, is your what if because you're thinking, okay what if I really get it, deep down unconscious but am I'm not prepared to handle it. Which happens at different points of time right and I really want you to ask yourself, what do you want out of life and why do you want it? What have you told yourself about taking the risk necessary to create? What you want and I think these are very very important reflections that one must dwell into.

Because this is going to determine how I view life, how I view my goals, how much stress I'm holding and am I able to play with it?

Take it as a challenge, convert it into eustress and use it for my performance right? Or I make a mountain out of it and that becomes distress right? So to really recognize what is it that I tell myself, how am I beginning my day?

I know I've told you all this before, what's the story, the narrative which keeps running? Is this helping me and do I want to change? This is very very essential right because this is a model I work with and I thought I'll just put it out for you all because I really feel it's the triangle if you look at the quadrant the first one is self.

Which is your reflection, your inner work. Second is really about how I am with the other, bonds and connection. And then the third is, embodied deep action, which is our performance right?

So and of course I feel it's also the soul because I really feel you can do one; just very superficially. The other when you've done it from the soul you really know how you did it right?

So I call it the field of potential and now we finally have an audio from an elite athlete who really talks about the need for connections, the essence and why it's important to have these connections which really helps us to tie up the entire course together.

“Hi guys, I've been in competitive sports for the last 13 years. I started very young at the age of 10 and since then I think in the last 13 years after many Nationals, after a lot of international competitions and one Olympics later I think I've seen a lot of highs and lows that the sport had to offer and I'm still continuing to feel and learn so many new experiences and so many new things. But yeah I just wanted to talk a bit about how the journey has been because ultimately everybody looks at the result and everybody talks at the result. did you win the race, did you lose the race but nobody really speaks about the journey and what happens in all these years. The race only lasts a couple of seconds but the amount of hard work and the amount of sacrifice that goes into getting those couple of seconds right is massive and nobody really speaks about that.

As a child I love, I mean even till today, there is nothing else that brings me more joy and pleasure than my sport and then the training and then the routine but just wanted to speak a bit about how it is and what happens behind the scenes. You know, everybody keeps saying everybody tells us that, if you're an athlete and if you're aiming at bigger competitions you have to follow a strict routine, you have to be focused all the time, you have to be motivated and determined to be better every single day.

I believe all of that is true to a certain extent. Yes, there is a level of dedication required, there is a level of focus required to be the best from the rest but everybody gets lost in their training. Everybody is so engrossed in their training and that strict routine that you become so mechanical you know, every day you're just getting up and running and trying to chase your goals. Even as athletes nobody really focuses on the human side of an athlete. The end of the day you're still a human being and you're allowed to feel emotions whatever they may be, whatever kind of emotions they are.

I remember as a child I was always juggling between my swimming and my studies and after I'm done racing I'd get back to my books and I'd be writing exams and I love that. I'd love the monotony and I'd really really enjoy it but when I was growing up I never really you know I was so lost in the monotony I never really nurtured the human side. 13 years later, after I got back from the Olympics I was so happy because that's what I wanted all my life and that was the biggest achievement of my career till date and I was wondering okay now what? Who do I share this happiness with?

Of course I have friends and family but I don't really have that many close friends or um you know my social life was dead because of my sport but I believe that every athlete needs to find the human side, need to let the human side grow, you know?

Have an anchor outside of sport at the end of every week you know? See on a Saturday or a Sunday you can maybe just go and hang out with your friends keep in touch with them and that feels good you know? That is an anchor to your human side. For me right now I'm starting to discover some things that I like. Some things that I like that are of course outside the sport like I

love learning new languages so I'm learning a new language and that makes me feel good you know.

I come back from my training and I look forward to learning a new language. I look forward to taking classes and I feel like I'm nurturing and developing the girl in me and that also makes me happy that I'm doing something else apart from my sport and it also boosts my confidence as a girl that I am. As a growing girl that I am and that definitely definitely helps me with my everyday training and it really makes me happy”.

Right so we come to the final reflections segment. I like to end with this, by really asking you all how connected are you feeling right? To yourself, to others. Are you active, are you taking care of your physical needs, fitness wise. Are you taking notice that there is awe in your life you know? Are you connected to nature?

Begin a new skill passion. It really helps keep us going and reduces stress right? And it challenges our brain, right? One of the keys that the founder of positive psychology Seligman says is that how are you giving to life, you know? In whatever we write and of course there's this beautiful thing called Johari window.

Which really helps us to connect to bonds by you know, I asked athletes to give two positive things that they like about each player okay? One is as a person and one is as a player and the chits come to everyone and then they open it and see and just that joy you see.

The like oh my god this is what this person thinks and of course Johari window also looks at what is it that I know, along with the other what is it that I don't know but the other knows, what is it I know but the other doesn't know and the final quadrant is the unknown so just wanted to touch on that.

So to really look at connections and of course that's my favorite little girl and I was just sitting there and she coming and reaching out her trunk and I'd like to leave you all with this really to

start dwelling on how connected are you feeling because that's really going to help with your performance by reducing unwanted negative stress.

So we'll have another small section in this unit, for the discussion and thank you so much and hope this has been helpful to you, thank you.

Welcome to our final segment. You see we have something special for y'all and that I've been inspired by Priyanka. Hi Priyanka, welcome. Thank you so much.

So today we're going to be looking at connections especially in response to stress and we're going to connect it a little bit to Stephen Porges. We want to look at his theory as such but just how he focuses on connection and how that can impact a player at the personal which impacts performance is what we're going to look into.

So I'm really excited Priyanka, so we're going to do a little demo where you can see we have these figurines here in front of you and then we'll build on this and this is actually your real case scenario okay? So you can see these beautiful figurines here, so Priyanka I'll explain the case to you which we can build upon.

So what you see in this end is a group of people who are sitting and chilling. It's a canteen situation and the coach is in his own place and this is our athlete okay, she's had a good session and she's just come and she sees that okay people are in their own space so she doesn't mind in the beginning. And then she's reading a book she's chilling out and then what starts happening there are more people who come in but they ignore her and then they're all getting closer and closer here, beginning to ignore our athlete okay? You have one more here and then what do you think happens?

So this athlete is beginning to shrink, right? So her, what we call the inner child, is triggered and she's shrinking because the group here is ignoring her. The coach of course is minding his own work right, minding his own business. So this is the first part and then what happens, it becomes

unbearable for her. She moves out of the situation right and what happens in the interim okay, so now I'm just going to shift this and just focus on our main character here.

She's very hurt with her inner figure. Thankfully what she does is she connects to a supportive figure who happens to be the psychologist in this case right. Then what do you think happens to her, but we are not ignoring this little figure here which is her inner child right? Then this figure, our athlete who had shrunk starts getting more powerful okay and after she has worked on this right, the next there's a major event happening okay?

What happens is she then starts integrating with people so she's no longer alone or in a figure here right? So I wanted to bring this case study right to explain what happens to an individual. So to summarize, this figure shrunk when she was hurt and moved away but then we don't ignore this little one here and after the supportive figure comes in who's helped her work on herself. What then happens is she comes into her main power and is integrated and connected to people right?

So this is the demo we wanted to bring and we can now build on this right Priyanka? Sure ma'am. What did you feel? It was very interesting, was so powerful because I was able to feel her sadness. Yeah yeah. I felt how lonely and sad she actually felt especially you know, I was able to feel that she's shrunk in her size and she became so small and she felt probably that unloved. Maybe she felt that nobody wants me, everybody is ignoring me. I was able to relate to her thought process yeah and this is sadly, this is actually a real case scenario but I guess we're all involved in such spaces so yeah.

So I kind of think what we're doing here is also, we can say we shrunk but when you actually see the shrinking here and how Priyanka is saying right, you could really touch and tap into it so basically I probably did a decent job with explaining. So and I think that's mirroring right and that's the connection that you're feeling right, because it's and that's what I did as the psychologist with her right? So that's where the connection comes in right, what Porges you know Stephen Porges really says, I know I quoted this even in my chunk on stress and I want to bring it up again he says safety is not just the absence of threat but the presence of connection.

And I think what we're trying to bring out through this was she feels so alone, our athlete felt so alone amidst a group of people and this can happen a lot of times in sport and in life to us. To everyone and she went away. But I think the good thing was she connected to the psychologist.

I think sometimes nobody there; what stood out for me was none of them actually told her anything. They didn't say that you're not good enough, we don't want to connect with you but she was feeling she felt that way.

Somewhere we really have to help her remember that she is also loved, she's worthy of being respected and she is worthy of making connections. Yes exactly.

And the group here could have also thought that she wants a space. Absolutely right. But what was growing in her head was I'm being ignored or for whatever reason this is happening and it was really tough for her.

But the point was I think this connection here and I mean in the session Priyanka, actually also held this little one here because it's very essential to realize all of us have some inner trauma and inner work that needs to be done. And embedding this one cannot be ignored and once she came into herself right like to tell and convince your little one inside you to go; we're fine, we're in a good state.

And only then did she come into her power and then it was beautiful because then she made that decision to go and take the initiative to mingle with others. Rather than ignoring that day of course. She was not in the right space but the point was it was a major tournament after that and then once we worked she said, yes I'm gonna go have a good time and it was. She had a good time and it was so heartening. Yeah absolutely.

What I see you have done with her is the fact that helped her feel safe within, so that she can really go out there and connect with other people. Yeah yeah safe and then also something is to start using an anchor.

I was like you could use music, you could probably go connect to nature, we always say and once we could do that work, you know having that connection again and rebuilding her integrity into the team.

I think that's just so important you know? Priyanka, I did speak about Porges in this section but I kind of felt like just getting into an example would be really nice.

What do you feel about Porges? I know you like him as well very much. Yeah definitely, I think when we're talking about performance we're not just thinking about high performance without safety. I think what he speaks about connection, co-regulation and self belonging which comes in everything is so important for the performance to take place. An athlete really has to feel connected and safe within self and also for them to go out there and connect with other people. The environment has to create a safe space for this person, for the high performance to happen the safety is so important.

And I think that is one thing that we've mentioned throughout the course. Be it with injury, be it retirement, be it with communication or team building. Every single thing has the same theme, that is connection, belonging and regulation.

And here that is what I saw happen, there was co-regulation which happened between the psychologist and the athlete. Which Porges actually speaks about. And somewhere I think for sports that connection and safety is important for the performance to actually take place.

I think you really touched on such a vital aspect and then for everyone taking the course and listening. Sport and performance people think and especially with psychology they think of okay what do you do? Sometimes I'm like how do you really answer this question in the best way possible?

Because as much as it is about sport and performance what we're really looking at is building a team and building that environment like Priyanka was saying. Which can groom and bring out the best in athletes. And that is why our team building exercises, our vulnerability or be it your

how do you even strengthen your resilience, how do you bring up? Everything's going to depend on can we all come together?

And especially when we're looking at a team but even when you look at a group like an individual game as well, there's still a whole team. You cannot just keep coming in but we're not connected.

It's like the difference between a home and a house. Yeah absolutely, yeah. I remember when I was traveling with one of the teams for the very first time, I didn't feel any sense of disconnect at all. They took care of me so well, they made sure that I feel safe and that helps in doing our job better. Yes, oh definitely.

And I'm sure you felt the same. I was remembering especially since I worked with a lot of men's teams, I think one of my challenges is not when you're taking the sessions but I think the social situation. Yeah, it's just like this entire bunch of very well disciplined but still men.

But the thing was they would make me feel included like they would sometimes make me like the judge of an event just so that I belong. And that makes a lot of difference you know? It's like I also think to add, I normally state that I'm introverted. I take some time and that was held so well, I felt safe to tell whoever, it was my head of ops and they took care of that. It was not mocked, it was not like oh my god you're the psychologist.

But I kind of feel like that inclusivity which we're talking of makes a world of difference because then instead of this person shrinking, when someone notices okay they actually help and empower so that's where core regulation, the mirroring happens.

And I think that's what we really wanted to touch on and mirror that you know how, let's say if like I struggled a little or when one of these fell down Priyanka came in and put it up right?

So I don't have to worry about it like oh my god like am I making a mistake? Which is very honestly what it is. But knowing that she's also someone I know or someone I trust and we've

built that trust. You know this is something I am venturing for the first time, very much inspired by her and to know that someone's got your back right, I think makes a world of difference in whatever you're doing.

So what he really wanted to bring out was how connections are so important like for me I knew that you want to do it so I was like I held the space yes but then I was like okay this is also falling so you know and I think that's the thing the subtleness with which you held it is also very important no?

Not going okay fine if there's a mistake it's okay but it's like oh okay let me just be a little supportive and I think that really really helps. So I think there was a play within the play here in itself.

So thank you for that, that was really nice and I think what he also says is connections which I feel is to bring in a play attitude you know? Playful instinct and I think that's what it is. It's like a little bit of structure but also a little bit of play and creativity. I think realness is the most important thing. The realness with which things can actually flow and happen rather than staging everything.

I mean of course you need to know what you're doing but the point is also sometimes to also trust no? What's in the field and what's opening in this space? Just like sport and life. In fact this was really nice, I think we demonstrated what Porges is and what I mean Porges recommends and insists. And I think it's such a beautiful theory which seems so easy but I think even as we went through this I was feeling her tension and stuff, but like I think as it's settled and then as we started the discussion, I'm feeling very held and connected as well. So this was lovely, thank you. Thank you so much, is there anything you'd like to add? And I'd really like to thank Priyanka.