# Advanced Psychological Strategies and Anxiety Responses in Sport

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This study examined the use of four advanced psychological strategies (i.e., simulation training, cognitive restructuring, preperformance routines, and overlearning of skills) and subsequent competitive anxiety responses. Semistructured interviews were employed with eight highly elite athletes from a number of team and individual sports. Participants reported using each strategy to enable them to interpret their anxiety-response as facilitative to performance. Only cognitive restructuring and overlearning of skills were perceived by the participants to exert an influence over the intensity of cognitive symptoms experienced. The perceived causal mechanisms responsible for these effects included heightened attentional focus, increased effort and motivation, and perceived control over anxiety-related symptoms. These findings have implications for the practice of sport psychology with athletes debilitated by competitive anxiety in stressful situations.

The area of competitive anxiety continues to attract a considerable amount of research attention in the discipline of sport psychology (Hanton, Neil, & Mellalieu, 2008; Mellalieu, Hanton, & Fletcher, 2006). Traditionally, researchers studied the intensity (i.e., the amount or level) of competitive anxiety and its associated cognitive and somatic symptoms to predict and/or explain variance in performance (e.g., Martens, Burton, Vealey, Bump, & Smith, 1990). However, the development and expansion of anxiety research has generated other dimensions that warrant attention. One dimension that has become the focal point of a substantial body of research is the notion of direction, which refers to the extent with which the intensity of symptoms associated with competitive anxiety are interpreted as having either positive or negative effects upon performance on a facilitative-debilitative continuum (Jones, 1995). Alongside researchers observing that anxiety-related symptoms can be further appraised, interpreted and ultimately labeled as facilitative to performance (e.g., Hanton & Connaughton, 2002; Perry

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**Tobias Bleicker** 



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