In the Mood: Mood Profiling Applications and Mood Regulation Strategies

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Introduction

Getting in the right mood is seen by many as an important part of mental preparation for athletic competition and the success or failure to do so is often presented by athletes as an attribution to explain performance outcomes. The purpose of this presentation is to move on from the conceptual and measurement issues addressed by my colleagues to look at the implications of mood assessments for practitioners. First, the potential uses of mood profiling are reviewed, primarily from an applied perspective although new research directions are suggested. The focus then switches to mood management, where the current state of knowledge on the subject is discussed and new data is presented on the popularity and perceived effectiveness of mood regulation strategies utilised by athletes.

The problems associated with defining and measuring the mood construct might at first glance appear to detract from the applied usefulness of mood scores. For example, given the problems of differentiating mood from emotion, as outlined in the previous presentation, can we be sure that the POMS actually assesses mood or that the PANAS assesses affect and not mood? In both cases, the answer must be no because in neither scale is the measured construct operationalised clearly enough to really judge with any certainty. Also, given the number of performance-relevant emotions reported by Hanin and his colleagues (see Hanin, 2000), do forced-choice measures such as the POMS capture the whole spectrum of feelings that contribute to moods? Once again, logically, the answer is no. Does this mean that the information gleaned from such measures is invalid? This is a more complex question to answer. Empiricists would argue that a test is invalid if it does not, in fact, measure what it purports to measure. Pragmatists would argue that the numbers generated from such tests have been shown to be predictive of important outcomes such as sport performance and therefore they are very useful, even if they might possibly be mislabelled. In this presentation, it will be argued that there are many ways in which mood profiles can be put to good use in an applied setting.

Mood Profiling Applications

Pre-competition mood scores have been shown, when certain conditions are met, to be significantly predictive of subsequent performance (see Beedie, Terry, & Lane, 2000), although the links between mood responses and performance appear to be highly individualised (e.g., Lane & Chappell, 2002; Diment & Terry, 2003). For some individuals, performance is very mood-dependent whereas for others it appears to be quite independent of mood. Hence, prediction of performance may rely on individualised assessment of idiosyncratic mood-performance relationships.

Regular assessment of moods may also facilitate systematic evaluation of adaptations to training demands, potential risk of staleness and burnout (see Morgan, Brown, Raglin, O’Connor, & Ellickson, 1987), recovery from overtraining syndrome, effectiveness of the pre-competition taper period (see Hall & Terry, 1995), and adaptations to travel fatigue and jetlag. Mood profiling may also have a role to play in screening for pathogenic behaviours. For example, mood scores have been shown (Terry, Lane, & Warren, 1999) to be predictive of eating disorder risk (as assessed by other measures) and recently were shown to be 91% effective at
screening out athletes that were not at risk (Terry & Galambos, 2004). In the area of sports injuries, mood profiles can be used to monitor psychological recovery from injury or as an index of the effectiveness of a particular rehabilitation program. More generally, mood profiles have been reported to be effective as a mechanism for early problem identification and resolution, or simply as a catalyst for discussion, and may come into their own most in an elite sport environment (see Terry, 1995, 2004).

Many of these proposed applied uses raise thorny methodological and procedural issues, such as how often to monitor mood, by whom, when, under what conditions, using what scales, and using what response timeframe; and interpretational issues, such as how much can be read into a single profile, what tables of norms represent the best point of reference, which mood dimensions provide the most important information, and so on – all issues that will be addressed during the presentation.

**Mood Regulation Strategies**

Although the promotion of mood regulation strategies among athletes is not new (see Bond, 1990) evidence about the efficacy of such strategies in sport is scarce. In the general psychology literature, there is relative consensus that people tend to monitor and evaluate their moods, and also that they develop and implement personal self-regulation strategies (see Wegner & Pennebaker, 1993). Therefore, the role of the applied practitioner may be to monitor and help direct this naturally occurring process. The list of strategies used by different individuals is long and varied with at least 162 mentioned in the literature (see Parkinson & Totterdell, 1999). A study by Thayer, Newman, and McClain (1994), which investigated the incidence and efficacy of different categories of mood-regulating behaviours among the general population, found the most common behaviours to reduce nervousness, tension, or anxiety in the short term to be, in descending order of popularity, affiliative-communicative (e.g., call, talk to, or be with, someone), exercise, relaxation techniques, rest, music, and food. To enhance the energy component of mood, Thayer et al. found that the most effective strategies were to control thoughts through self-talk, listen to music, take a shower, exercise, take a nap, do something to keep busy, eat something, or drink a caffeinated beverage. Age and gender were found to moderate choice of strategy.

In one of very few studies among athletes, Stevens and Lane (2000) found that athletes reported exercise, listening to music, talking to or being with someone, and thought control as the most common mood-regulating strategies, although their relative effectiveness was not established. A recent, as yet unpublished, study among 195 athletes, which focused on the popularity and perceived effectiveness of strategies to regulate various aspects of mood at the pre-competition stage (Terry, Dinsdale, Karageorghis, & Lane, in preparation) showed (a) that strategies varied considerably depending on the target mood dimension, (b) that the most popular strategies were not always the most effective, and (c) that type of sport moderated choice of strategy but age and level of competition did not. Given the paucity of completed research in this area, it is clear that further investigations are required to better understand the effective use of mood regulation strategies in sport.

**References**


