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Stress and Coping in Athletes of Different Age

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Abstract

Every athletes' sport life begins with early childhood. Sporting activities will proceed more effectively if sports schools from an early age children will be accompanied by psychological support. This paper is devoted to consideration of boxers' human functional state (HFS), their coping strategies, and on the basis of obtained data we try to show how young athletes should overcome the negative HFS without reaching the critical points when they can move into chronic consequences. Therefore, in order to reduce the risk of psychological breakdowns athletes have to be prepared to the high sport loads from the early age.

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Sport psychology in Russia is recovering and developing quicker and quicker. Psychologists have actively worked in sports teams and conduct scientific researches. Sports activities take place in extreme conditions such as outrageous physical and mental stress, risk and lack of time. Such conditions create enormous difficulties for the person which cannot be effectively overcome without willpower without the conscious mobilization of all forces, without the necessary regulation of actions and states. Human functional states problem is one of the research areas. Researches interest in diagnostics, correction and forecasts. Human functional state is important component in each professional activity. During professional activities, especially in sport, various negative factors influence in people. As a result might be a decrease in job performance, loss of health, high risk of negative HFS development in the acute and chronic form. And so there is a problem of stress prevention and optimization of HFS. Special attention is paid to the analysis of the causes of athlete's life. In the presented article, this problem will be considered and discussed on the example of athletes in amateur boxing.

1. Basic principles of HFS and its management

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One of the central concepts in Russian applied psychology initially developed in the field of work and engineering psychology and recently in organizational psychology is human functional state (HFS) [1]. This concept describes relations between the achieved level of work efficiency and individual resources of a worker with which he fulfilled the tasks. According to the activity regulation approach developed in Russian psychology, HFS is defined as an integral characteristics complex of features and qualities of the person who directly or indirectly determines the type of activity. The HFS research theoretical framework is based on the data of job analysis in order to distinguish the sets of objective work factors that lead to changes in HFS. Consequently, any type of HFS could be represented as a structural system of actualized physiological and mental functions which are took part in the process of work execution [2, 3].

Also, sports psychology is one of the application areas where often problem of functional states appears. The functional state reflects the degree of efficiency of work in terms of optimality or non-optimality of athlete internal resources. Thus, one of the promising ways to organize an efficient psychological support in sport conditions is to elaborate and implement special programs targeted to optimize HFS at work and to teach people how to manage their states during the process of work execution. Furthermore, such work can help young athletes to avoid some extreme HFS.

For HFS prevention and correction there are methods and techniques that can be divided into two groups (categories), every of them corresponds to a specific purpose. In the first group in all cases subjects have a passive position. In one case their aim consists in reduction of influence of objectively demanding job conditions and intensive workloads (i.e., ergonomic redesign of workplaces and technical devices, normalization of work/rest schedules, etc.). Another category of methods relates to different ways of external stimulation of a person – by using light psychopharmacological means, location in a more comfortable environment (functional music, multimedia compositions) or suggestion. And the second group, it is the category of methods is based on active learning of new habits and skills that can help subjects to overcome the difficulties by themselves – for instance, by training professional and communicative competencies, resolving conflict situations and applying other useful coping strategies [4, 1].

The second group methods can help people to become the most promising group with respect: 1) to the subject's active conscious participation in managing his/her own states, 2) to development of the so-called internal psychological HFS regulation skills, 3) to high usability of actualization of these skills when necessary - is a person which can use them at any time and in any place when and where it becomes necessary [5, 1]. Particularly important to be able to regulate states under stress and lack of time contains that often occurs with athletes in their professional activity. These techniques include various tools of relaxation and successive mobilization of internal resources, which should be reached according to the near future activity aims. The more well-known techniques that are applicable for purposes of psychological HFS self-regulation there are: progressive relaxation, autogenic training, ideomotor training and visualization [1].

That's well known that psychological self-regulation skills are widely present in the psychological structure of any human being's activity. In particular, the sports activity is such an area of activity where self-regulation skills are paramount. Athlete state is always characterized by a higher degree of cost of internal resources. Sometimes physical and mental health is subjected to heavy loads and a person cannot cope with them. And one of the ways to cope with negative states is to use techniques to regulate them. [6]

2. Diagnostics and analysis of the athletes-boxers HFS and coping behaviour

It is important to consider and take into account changes in the level of stress experience and functional state of the athlete. Attention should be paid to the changes in the mental state athlete, especially at the negative decrease of HFS. If necessary, psychologist should help the athlete to find the most effective ways to cope with difficult situations in his life to overcome emerging challenges. In the conducted research athletes' diagnostics was held a week before the competition. Structured interview took place a few days later after filling out the questionnaire. In our study 53 athletes took part: all highly qualified boxers, 14 men (main Russian boxing team) and 39 women (main Russian boxing team). Age: 16 - 33 years, mean – 21, 5.

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