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Preperformance Routines in Sport: Theoretical Support and Practical Applications

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The purpose of this review is to discuss the theoretical and empirical support for the use of cognitive behavioral preperformance routines in sport and also to provide suggestions for the practitioner in developing and structuring cognitive and behavioral preparatory routines given the nature of the task and personal preferences. The first section discusses the underlying theoretical assumptions supporting the use of preperformance routines. The second section elaborates on empirical research that has been conducted on cognitive behavioral interventions and preperformance routines in sport. The final section details the practical implications of routines based upon theories and research in the area and provides recommendations for developing and teaching preperformance routines to athletes.

Preperformance routines are prevalent in a variety of sports. Physical and mental preparation strategies used prior to motor skill execution have reportedly been employed by athletes in closed skill sports as well as open skill sports. Preperformance routines, involving an intricate combination of cognitive strategies coupled with behavioral responses, are most frequently used to prepare for the execution of self-paced motor skills such as a serve in tennis. The cognitive portion of preperformance routines includes a number of strategies such as relaxation, visualization, cognitive restructuring, self-talk, and decision-making processes. Behavioral components may include responses such as physically practicing the movement, aligning to a target, and bouncing a ball. For example, the preparatory routine for a tennis serve may include cognitive strategies such as imaging the ball flying to the target and clearing the mind of unnecessary thoughts, coupled with behavioral responses such as bouncing a ball and rocking back and forth.

The purpose of this paper is to (a) review the theoretical positions supporting the implementation of preperformance routines; (b) review the applied research on the effects of cognitive behavioral preperformance strategies on sport performance; and (c) offer practical suggestions for developing and teaching preperformance routines to athletes of all skill levels.

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