The role of the resilience in coping with stress in sports

Roxana Bejan*, Florentina Tonita

*National University of Physical Education and Sport, Constantin Noica, No. 140, 060057, Bucharest, Romania

Abstract

It is known that some sportsmen manage stress better than others, coping with loss and pressure during competitions and afterwards. After losing a game or a competition, some sportsmen manage to bounce back, rapidly, to a previous state of normal functioning; others delay too much in getting over their loss. We focused on the analyses of the post-competition period of time and the development of the sportsmen in their training and state of mind. For those who cope poorly with loss and defeat in competitions, we consider counseling having a main role in their training as the resilience is consider a process not an individual trait.

© 2013 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under CC BY-NC-ND license. Selection and peer-review under responsibility of ICPESK 2013.

Keywords: resilience; counseling; training; competition.

1. Introduction

The word resilience has its origin in science and refers to the material resistance. In psychology, resilience is associated with other words like coherence, adapting to stressful situations, self-reliance, etc. People tend to respond in a different way to the same stressful event, even the members of the same family. Studying the works of Siebert (2009), we could identify four types of responses:

- Some individuals are overwhelmed by the effort they are supposed to make in their attempt of facing the challenges. In stressful situations these individuals cannot develop, adapt, learn, create or try their best solutions because they are emotionally drained.
- Other individuals become aggressive. In their effort of getting the right response to a stressful situation, they feel in danger of losing, they a frightened and their response is extreme, loaded of emotions.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +00 0000000
E-mail address: roxana_bejan@yahoo.com
• Loss and failure can lead to other responses. The individuals consider the event as unfair, unjust so these people see themselves as victims of an unfortunate context of life.

• Other individuals are resilient and their responses to stressful events are constantly adapted, and overcome fast and efficient loss and failure, rejection or abandonment. Being resilient won’t ensure success in all the situations but will preserve vital energy for everyday challenges and obstacles, as well as a constant self-development attitude towards difficult events, stressful events or unsuccessful ones.

Resilient people face all the events that face a non-resilient person, their way to respond to these events is different. For sportsmen the situations are rather similar. All sportsmen face the same challenges. Being resilient in the sport career does not ensure success and winning game and competitions. Failure is an important part of the resilient sportsman career but even failing the resilient sportsman will continue to be focused, reaching for his goals and his mistakes will not disorganized the activity.

Ripley (2008) emphasis few ideas regarding the resilience. She consider that resilient people believe that they can influence the course of events, they look for a positive meaning of their life events and they believe that they can learn both from positive and negative events. This believes protect them from the impact of traumatic experience and make them feel that they are in control. Once we understand how to respond to challenges in life with resilience, downturns are not so overwhelming, defeating, or destructive. Resilient people respond to life’s challenges with courage and emotional stamina, even when they are afraid. Downturns become challenges to face head-on and overcome. Even though we have no control over many events in our life—accidents, natural disasters, crime, illness, the economy, etc. — we can control how we respond to these events, and we can choose to do so with resilience. Resilience is a process that is sustained by five essential characteristics (Wagnild, 2010):

• Meaningful life (purpose)
• Perseverance
• Self-reliance
• Equanimity
• Coming home to yourself (existential aloneness)
• Meaningful Life (Purpose)

“Life without purpose is futile and aimless. Purpose provides the driving force in life” (Wagnild, 2010). The meaning of life or actions can be considered as the foundation of everyday life, as well as the whole development process in life span: personal development, professional development or a sports career. This is the main characteristic of the process of resilience, on which relies the rest of the characteristics: perseverance, equanimity, self-reliance, existential aloneness.

• Perseverance

Perseverance is the characteristic that allows the human being to keep on going despite the failure, mistakes, rejection, abandon, accidents, illness, divorce, traumatic events, etc. Repeated disappointment and failure are important downturns. But resilient individuals overcome all these roadblocks and reach to their goals in the life span development as well as in their professional projects. Sportsmen, teen or adults, overcome health problems, accidents, or failure in their activities; they reach for their goals no matter what and continue fighting against the odds. Resilience is considered to be a process, that is why we consider perseverance as the main motive of the development of the reliance at sportsmen alongside with the role model.

• Equanimity

Equanimity refers to balance and harmony. Some people face regrets and disappointments after mistakes, failure and loss while resilient people avoid extreme responses, look for solutions or start all over again. Because of that resilient people are described as optimistic. Resilient sportsmen look for different possibilities, solutions,
recovery and reset their goals. Saving energy from extreme responses they invested in solutions, recovery or repeating the process – activity, game, competition.

- Self-Reliance

Self-reliance is a result of a spiritual development with a clear understanding of their own skills, knowledge. Self-reliant sportsmen confide in their own experience and ability to achieve their goals, confide in their role that they have in the process of winning and problem-solving. Each problem and each challenge become an opportunity of personal, professional development for strengthening and adapting.

- Coming Home to Yourself (Existential Aloneness)

“While we all live in the world with other people, resilient individuals learn to live with themselves. They become their own best friends,” says Wagnild, 2010. Resilient people are tolerant and understanding with their own mistakes and failure, and they accept that their actions not lead always to success. Resilient sportsmen can accept loss and adapt easy to an unfortunate situation without noticing effects on the long term in their training or career. “Resilient people will also realize that they are in a class of their own and do not feel a pressure to conform” (Wagnild, 2010), which we consider to be a premise of the creative act.

Seligman (1991) and Rettew and Reivich (1995) (quoted by Schinke, Peterson & Couture, 2004) found that under adversity, optimistic athletes are more likely to maintain or improve upon their previous tournament efforts than are pessimists. Taken further, Schinke (2004) found that athletes can improve or diminish their optimism regardless of which end of the continuum they typically reside. Thus, it seems reasonable that resilience skills can be borrowed from optimistic elite athletes in their resilient moments, and reinforced with both groups of athletes with the intention that only positive mental skills will be developed.

2. Methodology

Our main question is related to the difference between sportsmen that do not give up trying to win, no matter how many challenges are facing: accidents, unfair arbitration, meteorological changes, etc.; and sportsmen that give up the challenge before even start it. In our research another question is related to the coming back after facing loss and why this recurrence does not define all the sportsmen.

We looked for answers trying to identify the factors that determine different responses to the same situations. Identifying our factors we can include in the counseling process of the sportsmen. We know for a fact that our answers are related to the resilience.

All the athletes felt that in order to remain successful and cope effectively with the additional demands of winning, there are a number of key factors that need to be in place (Kreiner-Phillips and Orlick, 2005). These include enjoying what you are doing, remembering where you came from, and keeping it all in perspective. Some specific suggestions included the following: know why you win, why you lose, and work hard towards your goals; believe in yourself, think positively, and stay on a track that has worked; be well rested physically and mentally; avoid accepting the pressure of other people’s expectations; create new challenges and let the politics of sport pass by; work on the feeling aspect of your sport, be mentally prepared, and keep the desire sharp; know what is important and what isn’t; and perhaps most importantly, create a system for dealing effectively with the demands.

3. Development of the research

We analyzed the answers of 4 teen tennis players, ages between fourteen and sixteen, which train in a private sports club in Bucharest. Focused on investigating the resilience factors we worked with two girls (D.C.M. and D.C.) and two boys (D.N.T. and C.A.).
We used "The Resilience Scale" (table 1) questionnaire by Gail M. Wagnild and Heather M. Young, translated and adapted. The questionnaire has 25 items that describe the resilience, organized by the five categories: Meaningful Life (Purpose), Perseverance, Equanimity, Self-Reliance, and Coming Home to Yourself (Existential Aloneness).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Resilience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-100</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101-115</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>116-130</td>
<td>Mod. Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131-145</td>
<td>Mod. High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>146-160</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>161-175</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Results and discussions. Table 2 shows the results of the subjects on the Resilience Scale, each subject and the final score got on the scale. The final score represents the global level of resilience but for a better understanding we analyze each category of the questionnaire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nr. crt.</th>
<th>Name of Subjects</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>D.C.M.</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>Mod. Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>D.N.T.</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>Mod. High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>C.A.</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>D.C.</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The score obtained by sportsmen allows us to unveil the resilience level for each one of them. We focused on establishing the right share for each factor that describes the resilience. Each share for each individual shows us the main focus for counseling and its goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Share</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ML</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHY</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.C.M.</td>
<td>D.N.T.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend: ML – Meaningful Life; P – Perseverance; E – Equanimity; SR – Self Reliance; CHY – Coming Home to Yourself.

In D.C.M. case the counseling process will focus on Perseverance, Self-Reliance, and Equanimity; in D.N.T. case, we will focus on Self Reliance and Existential Aloneness. In C.A. case we consider that Perseverance,
Equanimity and Existential Aloneness should be strengthened, while in D.C. case counseling will try to increase the share for Equanimity.

![Graph showing profiles for teen sportsmen](image)

**Fig.1. Profiles for teen sportsmen**

5. Conclusions

Resilience is considered to be an important process in our life. So, strengthening each factor will allow us to increase the number of positive learning experience in the context of realistic expectations.

In our work with sportsmen teen or adults, we take into consideration not only their will of achievement and their goals or their results in games and competition but also their share in the describing factors of resilience. Guiding by the significant share of these factors, we intervene enforcing the fraiest ones.

The shares get different significance in the context of significant events – loss, traumatic events, health problems, stressful events. We take into account not only the roadblock itself but the period that follows such an event and the sportsmen evolution. Coping with stress is a different process for each person, for each sportsman, and it relies on the dominant factors of resilience, on a shorter period of overcoming the roadblocks and on the process of empowering the frail factors and pursuing their goals.

References
