



## Managing activation levels for officials

by Dr Michael Lloyd, Performance Psychologist

Officials who aim to produce their optimal performance at all times need to consider their activation levels. **Activation** refers to the energy levels you experience in your body and mind prior to your performance. Your level of activation can vary from low (deep sleep) to high (extreme excitement). It involves both a physiological response (for example, increased heart rate) and cognitive/psychological processes (for example, appraisal of a situation).

Activation levels fall into one of three categories: over activated, optimal activation, and under activated. The following information below outlines the signs and symptoms associated with each level of activation.

**Over activated:** Cold, clammy hands; need to urinate regularly; sweating; negative self-talk; increased muscle tension; butterflies in stomach; nausea; dry mouth; fidgeting; difficulty sleeping; inability to concentrate; consistently under-performing in your officiating.

**Optimal activation:** Total immersion in the activity; feeling in complete control; inner calm; energized; heightened awareness; in the moment; confident.

**Under activated:** Lack of anticipation or enthusiasm; moving slowly; mind wandering (that is, easily distracted); lack of concern about performance; heavy/lethargic feeling.

Activation levels can have both positive and negative effects on your performance as an official if they are not managed effectively. Some activation is essential for good performance. Too much activation is generally bad for performance, creating muscle tension and coordination difficulties, changes in attention and concentration levels, and recovery difficulties. All officials have an activation continuum ranging from under-activated to over-activated, including a zone of optimal activation that is unique to them. The secret is knowing what your optimal zone is, and being able to achieve it on a regular basis.

Many successful officials regularly reflect on their performances and identify different aspects of their preparation (physical and mental) that contribute their successful performances. By identifying how you like to feel (that is, optimal level of activation) prior to your performance you can then incorporate strategies into a pre-performance routine (which will be discussed in the next article) to regulate and control your level of activation rather than just leaving this part of your preparation to chance.

The ability to effectively regulate your activation is one of the cornerstones in an official's mental skills strategy. The two broad skill sets that successful officials use to regulate their activation are *relaxation* techniques and *energising* techniques. Some useful relaxation and energising techniques are outlined below.

Relaxation techniques:

- controlled breathing
- progressive muscle relaxation (PMR)
- listening to music
- watching a movie
- reading a book
- meditation

- massage and/or stretching
- light exercise (for example, walking)

Energising techniques:

- increased breathing rate
- physical activity
- sparring with someone
- mood/cue words
- positive statements and self-talk
- listening to music, and
- using energising imagery.

By carefully monitoring and managing both your physical and mental preparation for a performance and by employing some of the techniques outlined above you will increase the likelihood of achieving your optimal level of activation on a more regular basis.