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# IMPROVE YOUR... - AROUSAL CONTROL

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This material is written by  
Mrs Dubravka Martinović and managed  
by the FIBA Referee Operations.

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**FIBA - International Basketball Federation**

5 Route Suisse, PO Box 29  
1295 Mies Switzerland fiba.com  
Tel: +41 22 545 00 00  
Fax: +41 22 545 00 99

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FIBA Referee Operations.

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Operations at [refereeing@fiba.basketball](mailto:refereeing@fiba.basketball)

# IMPROVE YOUR... AROUSAL CONTROL

It is alright to have “butterflies in the stomach” as long as they are “flying in formation”. Finding the balance between feeling over-excited and feeling over-relaxed – your optimal arousal level – it is essential for your peak performance.

Arousal level refers to a person’s general psychological and physiological activation of the body that ranges and varies on a continuum from on the one hand deep sleep and on the other hand to panic or intense excitement.

As arousal increases from low to moderate (PSYCH-UP ZONE), performance improves, eventually reaching a zone where performance is at its best (OPTIMAL AROUSAL ZONE). But when arousal is too high and increases beyond the optimal zone (PSYCH-OUT ZONE) it will reduce performance quality (Figure 3).

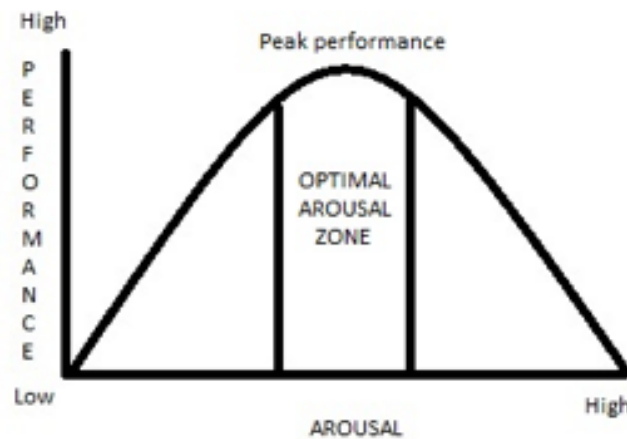


Figure 3. Inverted - U model of arousal performance-relationship and optimal zone of functioning (Burton and Raedeke, 2008; Landers, 2001; Weinberg and Richardson, 1990).

Individuals function differently, and each person has a unique arousal curve (Figure 4). It is important that you do not compare yourself with other officials and that you understand that some of them need to psych-down or relax before the game to achieve their optimal level of arousal, while other need to psych-up or activate.

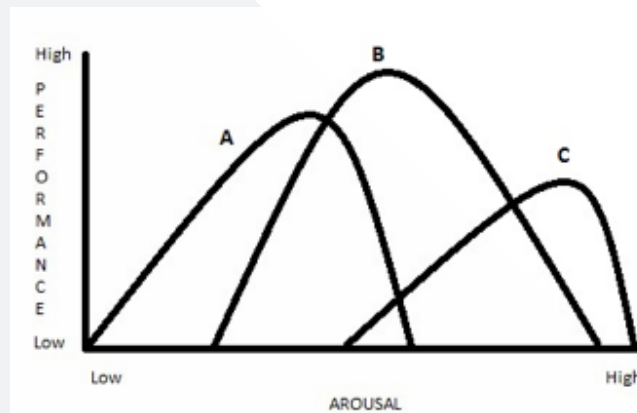


Figure 4. Individuals difference in optimal arousal (energy) zones. Person A, B and C (Burton and Raedeke 2008; Hanin, 2000).

While preparing for the game and actually officiating, it is important that you find your optimal level of arousal and learn how to keep it under control.

**Table 3. Arousal control techniques**

<b>AROUSAL CONTROL TECHNIQUES</b>		
	<b>RELAXATION TECHNIQUES</b>	<b>ACTIVATION TECHNIQUES</b>
<b>technique</b>	Psych-down relaxation breathing Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) Self-talk and key words Imagery and visualization Music Stretching	Psych-up activation breathing Self-talk and triggers Imagery and visualization Music Physical activity
<b>outcome</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ helps you control your arousal level by decreasing it</li> <li>▪ decrease unwanted muscular tension, guides your concentration and increases enjoyment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ helps you control your arousal level by increasing it,</li> <li>▪ enhance your concentration and focus, and elevate your mood state and confidence.</li> </ul>

## **AROUSAL CONTROL EXERCISES**

### **EXERCISE 1: PROLONGED RELAXATION BREATHING**

Relaxation breathing rhythm means that exhalation interval is longer for at least two intervals / seconds than inhalation interval. I.e. if your inhalation interval is 4 seconds, than your exhalation interval should be 6 – 8 seconds. Usual relaxation rhythms are: 3:5, 3:6, 4:7, 4:8, etc.

- Sit comfortable and close your eyes. Turn your attention to your breathing and concentrate on sensations in your body while taking each breath. Further, and in conjunction with your breathing, you should focus on the muscle groups of your body where you feel tense.
- Inhale through your nose into your abdomen, so that your stomach muscles and abdominal membrane spreads (like a balloon), and then let the air fill and expand the central upper chest. You may stop inhaling when you no longer feel comfortable taking air.
- As you exhale, tighten your stomach muscles and the air should be pushed out through your stomach and mouth. Imagine that you are emptying the air from the balloon. Associate each exhale with your key word for relaxation (i.e. relax, calm, smooth, easy, float). Exhale until you cannot comfortably continue to breathe out.
- Breathe smoothly and comfortably repeating your key relaxing word. With each breath you will feel more relaxed and comfortable with your body. Pay attention to the sensation in your body while you inhale and exhale. Try to only concentrate on your breathing rhythm and body sensations. Remind yourself that you will feel as relaxed and alert as you want to be for the next task.
- Continue this exercise for about 5 to 10 minutes.

You will find out that as you breathe in this way, you will quite naturally come to be comfortable, relaxed and calm.

### **EXERCISE 2: SHORT RELAXATION BREATHING – THREE BREATHS TECHNIQUE**

In a situation where you do not have much time for prolonged relaxation techniques, this short breathing exercise can help you to relax quickly and effectively.

- Breathe in and count to three. Then allow your neck and shoulders to relax as you breathe out while counting up to six. Use your key relaxation word (i.e. calm).
- Breathe in and count up to three. Then allow your abdomen and back muscles to relax as you breathe out while counting up to six. Use your key relaxation word (i.e. relax).
- Breathe in and count up to three. Then allow your whole body to relax as you breathe out while counting up to six. Use your key relaxation word (i.e. calm).

For example, you may feel some tension in your shoulders and arms areas. While breathing use the relaxation rhythm breathing with a prolonged exhaling breath. As you breathe out allow your shoulders and arms to relax by saying one of your cue relaxing words.

### **EXERCISE 3: PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION (PMR)**

The purpose of PMR is to help individuals to develop an awareness of the difference between tension and relaxation, and how to let go of this tension.

- Tense all the muscles in the neck area (while you breathe in) and hold it for a few seconds.
- Then gradually start releasing the tension (while you breathe out). Repeat this twice.
- Pay attention to the contrast between tensed and relaxed muscles and be aware of the feeling when your muscle area is relaxed.
- Then repeat this with other muscle groups in your body.

### **EXERCISE 4: RELAXATIONAL AND ACTIVATIONAL SELF-TALK**

You can create or change your arousal level by controlling your thoughts through self-talk. To use self-talk to create or change your mood and arousal level you need to find an appropriate phrase or key (cue) word as a trigger. Triggers in conjunction with breathing and/or imagery can be very effective to control arousal levels.

- To calm down and relax you can try to use this trigger words: calm, relax, loose, chill, breathe deeply, or any word or phrase that you can associate with the relaxed feeling.
- To psych you up and activate you can try using this trigger words: action, focus, ready, go, move, search, or any word or phrase that you associate with a high energy feeling.

### **EXERCISE 5: "PEACEFUL PLACE" IMAGERY SCRIPT**

In imagery relaxation you imagine taking a mini vacation to a place where you feel relaxed and comfortable – "peaceful place" script. The more you can transport yourself into that special place, the more relaxed you will be.

- Sit comfortable, close your eyes and start with the abdominal breathing. Find your relaxation rhythm and concentrate on every breath.
- Allow your eyes and face muscles to relax. Concentrate on your relaxation breathing and be aware of your relaxation through your entire body.
- Now, imagine your favourite peaceful place, when you feel relaxed and calm (i.e. riverside, white sand beach, mountain, forest, etc.).
- Recall the feeling of relaxation when you are at that place. Allow yourself to drift back to that place and immerse yourself in it once more.

#### **EXERCISE 6: ACTIVATION IMAGERY SCRIPT**

- Sit comfortable, close your eyes and start with the abdominal breathing. Find your optimal activation rhythm and concentrate on every breath.
- Then think back to a situation where your arousal state was optimal and produced a great performance.
- Recall precise states that led you to that arousal level (i.e. focused, under control, full of self-belief, prepared and ready).
- Recall a specific situation during the game when your performance was at the peak.
- Capture that sensation with the key word, image or feeling and use it every time when you feel that you need to increase your arousal level.

#### **EXERCISE 7: ACTIVATIONAL BREATHING**

Activation breathing rhythm means that your exhalation interval is the same (or one interval longer) than inhalation interval. I.e. if your inhalation interval is 3 seconds, then your exhalation interval is 3-4 seconds. Usual activation breathing rhythms are: 2:2, 3:3, 3:4, 4:4, and 4:5.

- Inhale through your nose into your abdomen, so that your stomach muscles and abdominal membrane spread (like a balloon), and then let the air fill and expand the central upper chest. You may stop inhaling when you can no longer take in air comfortably.
- As you exhale, tighten your stomach muscles and the air should be pushed out through your stomach and mouth. Imagine that you are emptying the air from the balloon. Exhale until you can no longer continue to breathe out comfortably.
- Continue this exercise for about 1 minute.

Short activation breathing (2 – 3 breaths) can help you feel strong, focused, and ready for the action.

# STANDARD QUALITY GLOBAL CONNECTION



5, route Suisse - P.O. Box 29  
1295 Mies  
Switzerland  
Tel.: +41 22 545 00 00  
Fax: +41 22 545 00 99