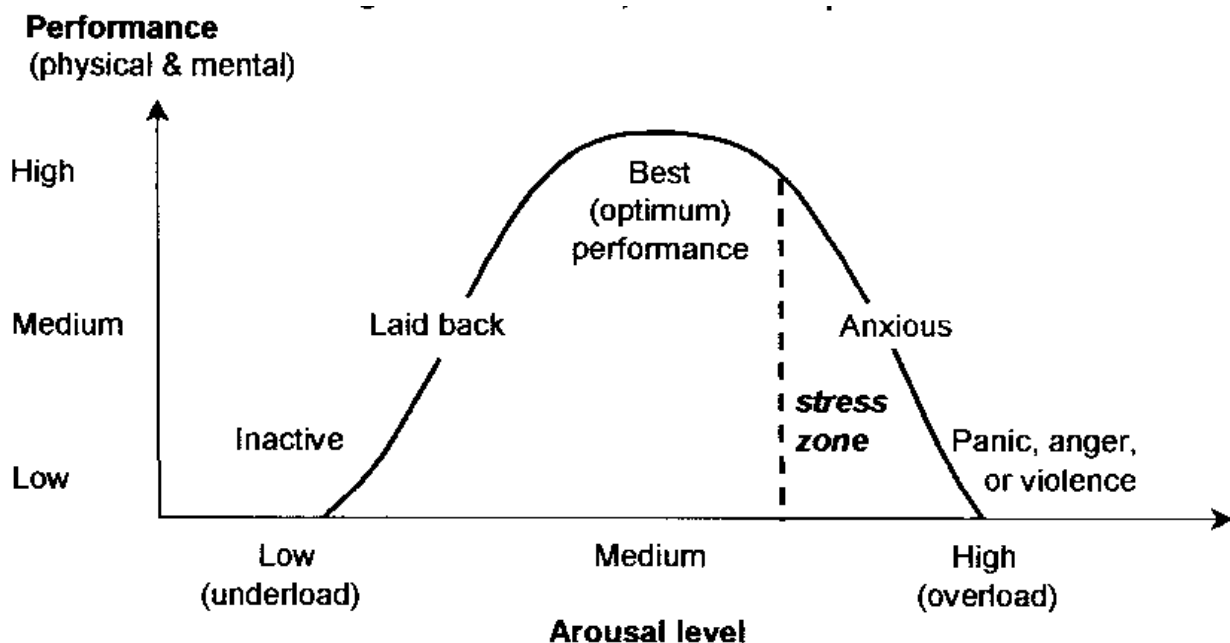


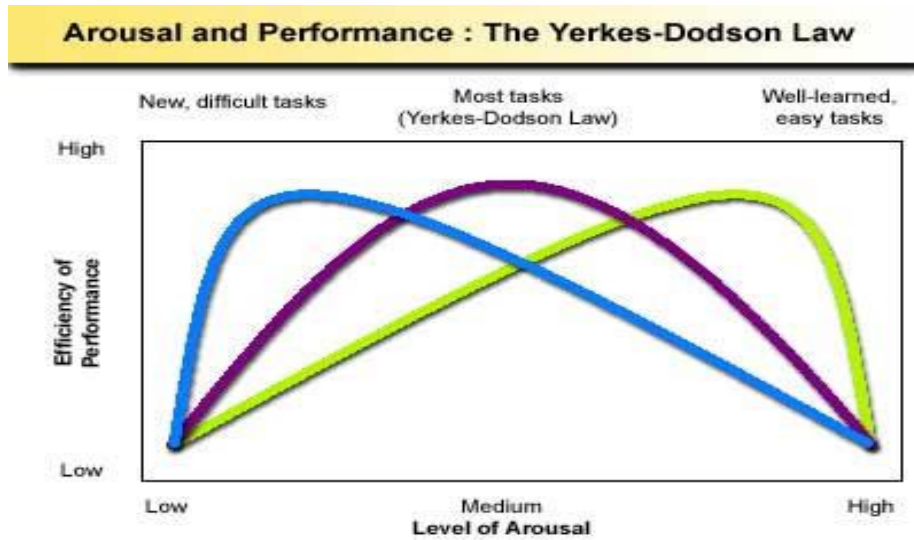
OAL: Summary of Presentation

1. The term "Arousal Level" refers to your physical, emotional and mental state during a match. Simply put, your arousal level describes how calm you are, how aggressive you are, how spooled up or spooled down you are at a particular moment. It includes both psychological (aggression, confidence, anger, fear, apprehension, etc.) and physiological (heart rate, breathing, etc.) components.
2. Each of us has an Optimum Arousal Level. (OAL). By definition, our OAL is the perfect blend of calmness & aggression which we need to perform at our best. We are falling short of our potential when we are under-aroused or over-aroused.

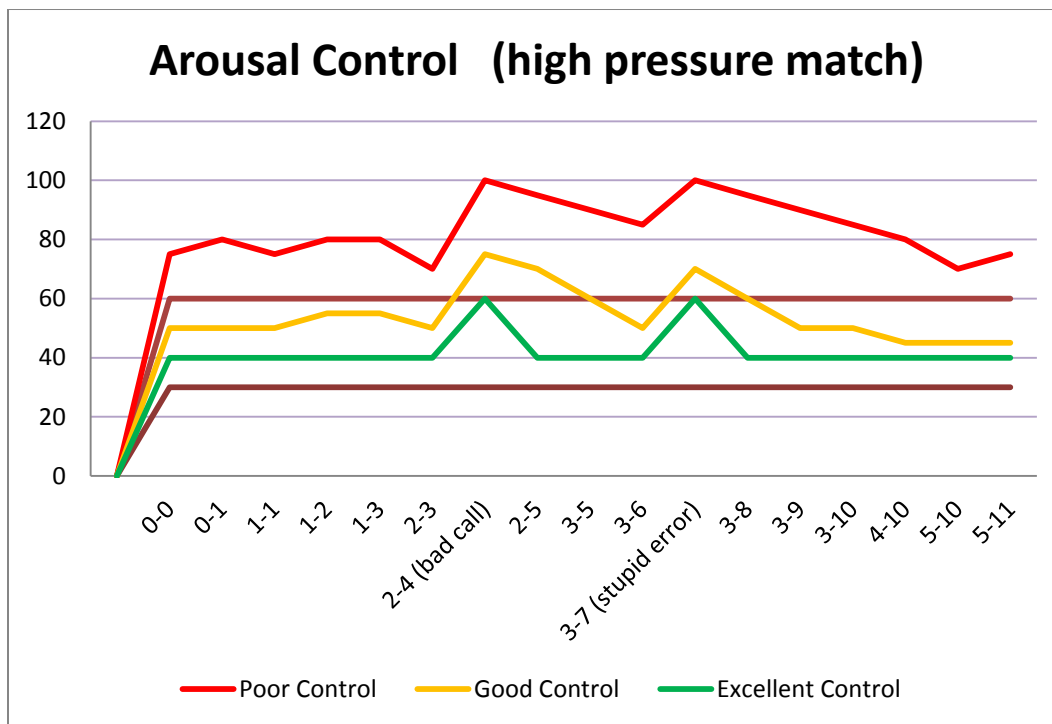


3. Rules pertinent to Squash which surround this theory:
  - i) When learning (acquiring) a task we cope better in a low pressure situation, when all of our attention can be focused on the task in hand.
  - ii) Every person's arousal curve is different as personality plays the most significant role. As a (small) generalization, extroverts tend to perform better in high-pressure, high arousal situations, but under perform when the situation is not perceived as important. Introverts naturally perform better in low pressure situations (they practice well), but struggle to perform well in situations that they find stressful.
  - iii) There is such high pressure in US Junior Squash (for many reasons, but the #1 being College) that even the most extravert individual is often pushed beyond a pressure level that they can perform successfully at. For the introverts the pressure is almost debilitating.

4. The Yerkes-Dodson Law



5. World class athletes can manipulate their own minds to find and maintain their OAL, using motivational techniques when under-aroused and relaxation techniques when over-aroused. Just like a backhand drop, or a forehand boast, these techniques are learned (and therefore can be coached). A high level of performance consistency is the result.



6. We learn OAL control through exposure (i.e. experience). Typically USA junior squash players are over coached and under experienced. They play tournaments under greater pressure than any other squash playing nation in the world, and yet typically practice all week long in the lowest pressure environment (i.e. on court with a coach). This huge disparity between the conditions of practice compared to the conditions of performance is usually the reason why integration does not occur.
7. If the right environment in practice is created then “real experience (and pressure)” can be achieved and the learning of OAL control can be significantly speeded up. Pressure can and should be created in the practice environment when learning shifts to the integration stage.
8. As a coach or parent of a junior athlete we have a significant role to play in helping our child find and maintain OAL until they are more capable of doing it for themselves. We can help the young athlete with their emotions – but that also means we can hinder them too.
9. Any coach working with your child (in competition) should get to know them as an individual. The stronger the relationship between coach and pupil gets, the more effective the coach becomes in assisting competitive performance. A coach that does not properly understand your child’s personality is potentially doing more harm than good in highly competitive situations. The parent can help the coach to understand the child better and I encourage communication from you to your child’s coach in this area.
10. Signs of under arousal include a lack of concentration, yawning, lackluster movement, not following routines, etc. In general the player will just look and sound flat.
11. Motivational techniques when under aroused include (but are not limited to); Goal Setting, Tangible & Intangible Rewards, Punishments, Shouting, Keeping Score (writing the score down), Quick Fire Movement Drills, Music, Inspirational Video Clips, etc.
12. Signs of over arousal include (but are not limited to); heart palpitations, muscle tension, fatigue, clammy skin, confusion, irritation, poor concentration, self-doubt, worry, a lack of rhythm and flow to usual movements and techniques.
13. Relaxation techniques when over aroused include; Routines, Visualization, Meditation, StressEraser, Music, Breath Control, Personal Mantra’s, etc. Once an athlete is trained in tension reduction they can transfer this to the sporting environment to lower general muscle tension when in a highly stressful situation. Tools should be developed for pre-game and in-game relaxation.
14. It’s important to know your athlete because the symptoms for over-arousal and under-arousal at first glance often look the same. Furthermore, the best method to push or pull someone back into their OAL is player specific.
15. In high pressure competition there are 3 things that I encourage the coach and parent to do:
  - i) Be aware that your own behavior can push arousal even higher – be careful of what you say and do around the athlete – always understand the impact you are having.

- ii) Not veer away from the usual routine because it's a big occasion. Maintaining familiarity and routine is one of the best ways to lower anxiety levels.
- iii) Encourage the use of pre-match relaxation techniques (for athletes and parents/coaches).

16. A one on one coaching lesson is not the most effective way to create the practice environment to help with AOL control, or any of the other mental aspects of the game of squash.

17. There are 3 stages of learning ; (A) Acquisition (P) Perfection and (I) Integration.

- i) **Acquisition** (Cognitive Stage). The fundamental requirement here is that the athlete gains an understanding of the task required. This will necessitate knowing what to do and an insight about how to do it.

Demonstrations, videos and information highlighting the important points can help guide the learner through the skill. However, coaches must be careful to avoid 'information overload', which would confuse the learner.

It is expected that the learner will encounter problems, the number and magnitude of which will depend on the difficulty of the skill. The learner may experience error, awkwardness and some disorientation. Thus, learners must receive continuous feedback or information on their progress. If they experience much difficulty, the skill could possibly be broken into smaller movements for practice.

During this stage, the learner should experience some success. All positive learning should be reinforced and encouraged. Many coaches will give drills at this point to improve the learner's coordination and feel for the desired movement.

Rates of progress through the cognitive stage vary from one individual to another.

- ii) **Perfection** (Associative Stage). This is identified by an emphasis of practice. The learner, having acquired an idea of what the skill is, needs to repeat the movement to enhance the synchronization of their mind and muscles.

Errors still occur, but are smaller and less frequent than in the cognitive stage. Feedback is again essential to improve the skill, which the learner repeats frequently in practice. A sense of fluency or smoothness will develop as the learner's kinesthesia improves.

Practice will improve the way the skill is performed. The learner eventually experiences some success. These successes are felt more frequently with additional practice and feedback. Gradually, the learner feels more at ease as their confidence increases.

Learners can remain at this stage for a long period, even years. Some may never progress to the next stage. However, given sufficient practice, most will reach the level at which the skill execution is reasonable automatic. But this does not imply perfection, because performances at the autonomous level vary in their quality.

- iii) **Integration** (Autonomous stage). This is characterized by the ability to automatically execute the skill. Execution of the movement is now properly sequenced and performed instinctively.

The performer has consolidated the many discrete skills (commonly called subroutines) that comprise the action. Their movement has a characteristic fluency as the sub-routines sequence and blend in esthetically pleasing motions.

This is referred to as 'temporal patterning'. The movement looks good because it is efficient, with the muscle groups working in order and producing only the necessary movements at the required time.

The most important feature of performers in the autonomous stage is that they are able to attend to other cues while giving little thought to how to perform the skill.

Practice is still important during the autonomous stage, but mostly involves simulating the competition situation. Unless specifically practiced to improve technique, training sessions for an athlete at this stage should incorporate pressure drills. This helps the athlete adapt their skills to the real performance.

18. Coaching method most suitable for each stage of learning (more stars = more appropriate)

<b>Coaching Method</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>I</b>
Oral Communication	**	*	*
Demonstrating	***	**	**
Video	***	***	***
Ball Machine	***	**	*
Knowledge of Results	*	**	***
Coach as Coach (static)	***	**	*
Coach as Player (moving)	*	**	**
Player as Player	*	**	***
Individual Coaching	***	**	*
Paired Coaching	**	***	***
Clinic Work	*	***	***

19. Once a technique is acquired Knowledge of Results (KOR) is the most effective way of reinforcing what works and what does not to a player at their level. A lot of my coaching is centered around the repetition of practices that are designed to give strong, immediate and frequently repeated feedback to the player on a particular isolated aspect of their performance.

20. What works at one level is very often different to what works at another. This is why practicing, playing regularly, and sharing lessons, with someone of a similar standard is so important. No matter how good the coach is he cannot artificially create situations that are as effective as the real thing.