

The experience of competition stress and emotions in cricket

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### Abstract

The purpose of the study was to conduct an in-depth examination of the stress and emotion process experienced by three sub-elite level male cricketers over a series of five competitive performances. Using reflective diaries and follow up semi-structured interviews, the findings highlighted the impact of appraisal, coping, and emotion on performance, with perceptions of control and self-confidence emerging as variables that can influence the emotive and behavioral outcomes of a stressful transaction. Post-performance, guided athlete reflection was advanced as a valuable tool in the production and application of idiographic coping behaviors that could enhance perceptions of control and self-confidence and influence stress and emotion processes.

Keywords: stressor, appraisal, coping, emotion, performance

1                   The experience of competition stress and emotions in cricket

2   Given the potentially deleterious effects of experiencing stress within competition, a large  
3   body of research has attempted to further understanding by investigating the causes and  
4   consequences of stress, and how performers attempt to cope during stressful situations  
5   (Fletcher, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2006). A recent focus has been informed by Lazarus'  
6   transactional perspective of stress and cognitive-motivational-relational (CMR) theory of  
7   emotions (Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). **Within these theories**, Lazarus  
8   proposed stress **to be** an ongoing, dynamic process that reflects a relationship between an  
9   individual and the environment that gives rise to set of cognitive-emotional responses.  
10   Central to this proposition is the notion of relational meaning (Lazarus, 1991), where  
11   stressors are appraised with regard to the implications they have for personal goals, values  
12   and beliefs. **When stressors are considered to negatively influence these personal goals, then**  
13   **the individual makes one of four primary appraisals: harm, benefit, threat, or challenge**  
14   **appraisals. The individual may also experience secondary appraisals that focus on the options**  
15   **for coping, the level of control over own actions, and the potential outcomes of engaging in**  
16   **the situation.** The way in which an individual appraises the environment can influence the  
17   emotional and behavioral response to it – thus having implications for sporting performance  
18   (Jones, Meijen, McCarthy, & Sheffield, 2009; Neil, Fletcher, Mellalieu, & Hanton, 2007).

19           Guided by **Lazarus's** perspective, an insight has been provided into the different  
20   stressors encountered by sport performers (e.g., **Arnold, Fletcher, & Daniels, 2013**; Fletcher,  
21   Hanton, Mellalieu, & Neil, 2012), the range of appraisals made when faced with such  
22   demands (e.g., **Didymus & Fletcher, 2012**; **Hanton, Wagstaff, & Fletcher, 2012**; Thatcher &  
23   Day, 2008), the emotional responses to appraisals (e.g., Uphill & Jones, 2007), and how  
24   athletes cope within stressful situations (e.g., Holt, 2003; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Nicholls, Holt,  
25   Polman, & Bloomfield, 2006; Nicholls & Polman, 2008). Consequently, the nature of a

1 performer's experience of stress and emotions has been partially demonstrated. The main  
2 limitation of this research is the focus on segments of Lazarus' conceptualization, thus failing  
3 to illustrate a performer's *continuous* journey through the process of encountering and  
4 appraising stressors, responding emotionally, coping with these demands and/or emotions,  
5 and the impact on performance. Indeed, Lazarus (1999) proposed that the individual parts of  
6 an adaptational encounter belong together as a single, conjoined conceptual unit, only being  
7 separated for the purpose of discussion. This process has been illuminated more  
8 comprehensively through interviewing performers about experiences of stress and emotions  
9 during competition. For example, Neil, Mellalieu, Hanton, and Fletcher (2011) showed that  
10 performers encounter many stressors, have different appraisals in relation to these stressors,  
11 and experience subsequent emotions that can influence sporting performance positively or  
12 negatively, depending on whether these emotions were viewed as beneficial or detrimental to  
13 performance. Similarly, Neil, Bayston, Wilson, and Hanton (2013a) illustrated the impact of  
14 negative appraisals of stressors on emotions and football referee decision-making. That is,  
15 threat and harm appraisals of different stressors caused negative emotions such as anxiety and  
16 anger. The inability to cope with these emotions caused amateur referees to give  
17 discriminating or incorrect decisions, while the use of problem-focused and positive emotion-  
18 focused coping strategies helped professional referees manage their emotions and led to  
19 perceptions of improved decision accuracy.

20 Yet in spite of adding some richness to the understanding of the stress and emotion  
21 process, Neil and associates have only provided snapshots of performers' experiences and  
22 have not considered how these experiences change during performance. Indeed, Lazarus  
23 (1991) noted that the study of emotion is primarily a study of change and flow over time and  
24 across occasions. Consequently, longitudinal designs and narratives are now desirable to  
25 represent accurately Lazarus' theory and offer advice for practitioners. The aim of the present

1 study, therefore, was to provide an in-depth examination of the stress and emotion process,  
2 focusing specifically on the *process* of a transaction during performance and over a series of  
3 performances. In order to achieve this, the **objectives** of the study were as follows: a) to  
4 illustrate sequentially the stages of the stress and emotion process from onset (recognition of  
5 performance stressors) to outcome (performance); and b) illuminate an athlete's experiences  
6 of stress and emotion across a sequence of performances.

## 7 **Method**

### 8 **Research design**

9 As the experience of stress and emotion is ongoing and ever changing **and that the**  
10 **experience is unique to the individual** (Lazarus, 1999), **a prolonged** qualitative design was  
11 deemed the most appropriate approach (Neil, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2009). Specifically,  
12 participants used reflective journals after five competitive matches to catalogue their  
13 experiences and to inform interviews aimed at gaining more in-depth information about  
14 competition stress and emotion.

### 15 **Participants**

16 Three male competitive county level (**semi-professional**) cricketers aged between 17  
17 and 22 years of age ( $M = 20.5$ ,  $SD = 2.38$ ) were recruited to take part in the study. **All three**  
18 **participants were known by the researchers and were asked to partake in the study. This**  
19 **purposive sampling technique was used to provide 'information-rich' cases (Patton, 2002),**  
20 **with** cricket chosen as it is an interactive, open skilled sport where stressful situations occur  
21 frequently (Holt, 2003; Thelwell, Weston, & Greenlees, 2007).

### 22 **Measures**

23 **Reflective journal.** A reflective journal was created according to the stages of a  
24 stressful transaction posited by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Specifically, the participants  
25 were instructed to respond to the following four open ended questions after each match: 'Tell

1 *me about your performance*, ‘*What demands (stressors) did you face during your*  
 2 *performance?*’ ‘*What did you think (appraisal) and feel (cognitive-emotional responses) when*  
 3 *you experienced these demands?*’ and ‘*What impact (behavioral) did these thoughts and*  
 4 *feelings have on your performance?*’ Similar to Nicholls et al. (2006), an appendix was  
 5 included in the diaries that provided thought provoking examples in response to the four  
 6 questions. This appendix formed part of a structured education approach, and made clear its  
 7 purpose as a prompt for the process of reflection rather than a model answer.

8         **Interview guide.** The information disclosed in the reflective journals informed a  
 9 tailored interview guide that sought elaboration and explanation for the description in the  
 10 diary (Holt & Dunn, 2004). For example, one diary extract read: ‘*One of the biggest demands*  
 11 *was probably the quality of the bowling*’. The participant was subsequently probed: ‘*Why did*  
 12 *you view the quality of the opposition’s bowling as a demand?*’ The interview guide  
 13 followed the participants’ season chronologically, and the stages of the stress-emotion  
 14 process sequentially, but remained sufficiently open to allow the participants to express  
 15 themselves in relation to their own experiences (Patton, 2002).

## 16 **Procedure**

17         Following ethical approval granted by the University’s Ethics Committee through  
 18 devolved responsibility to departmental level, the participants were contacted via email after  
 19 permission had been received from their respective cricket clubs to contact them. Following a  
 20 verbal discussion about the purpose and specific details of the study – where the participants  
 21 had the opportunity to ask questions relating to the research topic and data collection  
 22 procedures – each participant provided informed consent and was allocated the reflective  
 23 journal and appendices in time for the start of the cricket season in 2011. The participants  
 24 **were asked to submit one diary entry per calendar month, but** were given the freedom to  
 25 reflect upon any match they wished. However, they were instructed to engage with their

1 journals within 24 hours after a specific performance to minimize the effects of memory  
2 decay and to enhance the accuracy of their reflections. All participants reported that they  
3 adhered to this timeline.

4 The participants reflected on five separate performances across the course of one  
5 cricket season. This corresponded to one diary entry per calendar month of a cricket season  
6 that ran from April to August. The spacing (i.e., one diary entry per calendar month) was  
7 aimed at encouraging participants to reflect on changing contextual influences (e.g., form) on  
8 their experiences of competition stress across time, and was agreed by the participants to be  
9 less intrusive than a bi-weekly schedule that was originally proposed. On average diary  
10 entries were submitted within 26 days of each other. These diary entries were then used to  
11 inform bespoke one-to-one interviews at the end of the season. A week prior, the participants  
12 were presented with their tailored interview preparation guide and a summary of their  
13 individual diary entries. The purpose of this was to give the participants adequate time to  
14 familiarize themselves with the questions and to provide them with ample opportunity to  
15 recall the experiences they reported over the course of the season (Thatcher & Day, 2008).  
16 The interviews were divided into two sessions (lasting in excess of two hours per session)  
17 and were audio recorded and undertaken in agreed venues away from the competitive  
18 environment, to minimize interference with the interview process and participant responses  
19 (Mellalieu, Neil, Hanton, & Fletcher, 2009). The interviews resulted in a total of 584 pages of  
20 text (103,042 words).

## 21 **Data Analysis**

22 Data were analyzed via analytic induction, whereby the researcher applies theory-  
23 derived concepts and theoretical frameworks alongside inductive procedures that strive for  
24 ‘undiscovered patterns and emergent understandings’ (Patton, 2002, p.454). Throughout the  
25 season, the participants’ diaries were collated into individual player profiles via the extraction

1 of relevant quotations under six sequentially ordered themes - demands, appraisals, emotions,  
2 coping, behaviors and performance – that comprised the core components of the stress and  
3 emotion process. This was followed by a written interpretation that summarized each  
4 performance, helping the research team to get close to the data and begin to understand each  
5 participant’s competitive experiences (Patton, 2002). General themes, gaps in the data, and  
6 areas requiring further clarification were noted and used in the development of tailored  
7 interview guides. The interview data were subjected to a continual analytical process in that:  
8 a) all data were transcribed verbatim; b) repeated line-by-line analysis took place to identify  
9 key aspects of the stress and emotion process; and, c) responses were placed on a theoretical  
10 ‘time-line’ to establish the sequence of events for the purpose of retelling each stressful  
11 transaction. Collectively, this analytical process reflects what Smith and Sparkes (2009) refer  
12 to as a ‘story analysis’ (p.282) whereby data are extrapolated and formally analyzed  
13 alongside theoretical propositions, before the ‘story’ is (re)represented in the form of a realist  
14 tale.

15       **Verification and trustworthiness.** In order to achieve trustworthy findings, Kvale  
16 (2007) argued that a continual process of checking, questioning, and theoretical interpretation  
17 should permeate throughout the investigation. This relates to the notion of reflexivity that  
18 denotes an ongoing examination of ‘what I know’ and ‘how I know it’ (Patton, 2002). To aid  
19 ‘trustworthiness’, the authors reflected repeatedly in an unstructured, reflective log on salient  
20 aspects of the research process that contributed to conceptual understanding and data  
21 interpretation. This included personal experiences of stress and emotions, reflections on the  
22 interview process, and conceptual and theoretical uncertainties during the analysis of data.

23       The authors’ interpretations of diary extracts and the interview transcript were  
24 verified through member checking, an essential procedure that allows ‘the objects to object’  
25 (Kvale, 2007, p.121). The participants were content that each narrative represented their

1 experiences accurately and only sought reassurance that their anonymity would be protected  
 2 – hence the use of pseudonyms and the removal of all identifying descriptors throughout.  
 3 Furthermore, the data were subject to independent analysis by two active researchers,  
 4 experienced in qualitative research, and knowledgeable in the subject matter, to clarify  
 5 interpretation and reduce misrepresentation (Patton, 2002). Finally, in reference to the data  
 6 collection procedures, the dual staged approach minimized issues relating to retrospective  
 7 research designs, with the diaries capturing specific moments in time with the purpose of  
 8 providing a stimulant for accurate recall during interview.

### 9 **Results**

10 We present the data as a series of narratives. To guide the reader through experiences of  
 11 stress and emotion, each stage of the process is italicized (e.g., *appraisal*, *emotion*).

#### 12 **Aaron the ‘all-rounder’**

13 Aaron opened the bowling and batted in the middle order, the following narratives relate to  
 14 his experiences playing for his club side over the course of the competitive season.

15 **Performance one (batting): ‘In two minds.’** During this performance Aaron was  
 16 confronted with two *stressors* – his opponents’ ability and the playing conditions:

17 The biggest demand was the quality of the bowlers. Warming up they looked useful,  
 18 the quickest bowlers I have faced. The strip was also fairly green, which meant the  
 19 ball was nipping around off the seam which made batting very difficult.

20 He *appraised* both demands as threatening to the outcomes of his performance:

21 I was thinking, ‘he’s got quite a good chance of getting me out... the batting above me  
 22 is of a higher standard than I am, and they got out to it, so if they got out to it, then I  
 23 can get out to it easily as well.’ There was also that thought that the pitch is going to  
 24 do something you don’t expect. So the bowler had both the positives in his favor.

1 Consequently, he responded anxiously [*emotion*] to this situation describing how he became  
2 'cautious' as a result of the demands that had planted doubt in his mind:

3 [My] focus went away from what I was doing to what he [the bowler] was doing...  
4 rather than acting on instinct and dealing with the ball when it comes down, I was  
5 thinking, 'oh, what is he going to bowl me? Is he going to bowl a short one? Is he  
6 going to bowl a Yorker? Is the ball going to nip in? Should I come forward? Should I  
7 go back?' I was putting loads and loads of doubt in my mind.

8 Aaron's anxiety left him feeling 'vulnerable' and unsure about what to expect, a state that he  
9 suggested was debilitating to his performance:

10 ... it [anxiety] was negative because I was threatened, I felt vulnerable. I think the  
11 vulnerability came because I was threatened... you're [then] playing the shot but  
12 you're not committed to the shot, because there's that element of doubt in your head.  
13 You need to be either committed to a shot or leaving it. That half way house is not a  
14 good place to be... it has a negative impact [on performance]!

15 Aaron's performance decrement led to a new appraisal that the bowler was doing better than  
16 he was, he described *appraising* the situation as threatening as he had little control over it:

17 I had nothing to show the bowler that I could cope with what he was bowling, he had  
18 all guns blazing and I was the rabbit in the headlights... When you're in a vulnerable  
19 state you doubt yourself... you've no confidence in what you're doing.

20 He continued by describing how his perceptions of his poor batting performance during this  
21 time made him worry about how he was presenting himself in front of his teammates, 'when  
22 something is out of my control I get worked up and then I feel like everyone is looking on  
23 and expecting me to do well, so the stress I was experiencing definitely increased because of  
24 the situation.' Aaron attempted to *cope* by 'doing something about the situation' through

1 trying to score runs, 'the only way I could cope was try to attack'. His coping efforts briefly  
2 made him feel at ease, but attempts to cope and score runs failed:

3 I actually tried to score a run which put my mind a little bit at ease because I was  
4 trying to [score]... but I wasn't scoring... the bowling was good, the pitch wasn't  
5 great, I hadn't scored a run, I tried to score a run, I can't cope!

6 The consequences of this stressful cycle was a reduction in Aaron's capacity to attend to  
7 relevant stimuli to the extent that he lost focus and got bowled out:

8 It took my focus away from my batting performance. There were so many external  
9 factors that actually I didn't concentrate on what the best asset was and that was me!  
10 This made me very indecisive in my shot selection, which consequently contributed to  
11 me getting out. The ball was just back of a length and I was in two minds whether to  
12 go forward or back, I did neither resulting in me being bowled out through the gate.

13 **Performance two (batting): 'I was in control'**. In this game, Aaron's team was in a  
14 bad position and he viewed it as his responsibility [*stressor*] to get them out of that situation:

15 Our batting line up was thin and the team needed me to put a good performance in  
16 and score some runs... at 50 for 4, my team being bowled out cheaply looked quite  
17 likely and it was my responsibility to ensure that didn't happen.

18 He *appraised* his responsibility as a challenge, a 'chance to shine', placing a positive slant on  
19 the situation, and evaluating his chances of success as high:

20 I saw that I could win us the game. I wanted to show [opposition] and team mates that  
21 I was as good as when I played them and got 87 at the start of the season. That  
22 contributed to seeing responsibility positively, as a challenge. I was eager to bat.

23 Despite this appraisal, the initial stages of his innings proved difficult and he described how  
24 he found it hard to score runs. He explained that the bowler became an additional *stressor*  
25 causing him to doubt his own ability, *appraising* the situation as threatening:

1 They brought a left arm over [bowler] on just as I went out to bat - I hate left arm  
2 overs. So that affected my confidence and I found it difficult to score. The first 20  
3 balls, I'd scored 5 runs. I felt lots of pressure, I was reluctant to get on strike, I was  
4 worried I'd get out. I need to be scoring as many runs as I have faced balls and I  
5 wasn't anywhere near that.

6 The strain of the situation then brought frustration [*emotion*] that resulted in a loss of focus.  
7 He stated, '[I had] a lapse in concentration, I went to drive the ball over extra cover's head and  
8 I was nearly caught.' This was as a critical moment in his performance. Rather than dwelling  
9 on his actions, he *coped* with the situation by viewing it as an opportunity to refocus:

10 I realized that I'd \*\*\*\*\* up, and that brought me back down to ground and made me  
11 refocus. A little light bulb went off in my head, 'right you can't do that again, that's  
12 your chance, go and take advantage of the fact that you've made a mistake and you're  
13 still batting.' So it spurred me on that 'I've done something stupid but I'm still here.'

14 During this stage of his innings, Aaron also described *coping* with the situation by initially  
15 evading the strike, 'when you get to the non-striker's end it gives you time to think, look at  
16 fielding positions and reflect on what you're doing'. This respite afforded him the opportunity  
17 to re-evaluate the situation. Specifically, he described using positive self-talk to maintain  
18 control over his emotions and actions. He also thought about his game plan, focusing on a  
19 strategy to deal with his circumstances. Combined, these strategies helped him deal with and  
20 eventually overcome the stressors he faced during this phase of his innings:

21 We were in a bad situation and it's a positive to get off strike because I know I can't  
22 get out and I'm still here for the next over. This kept me in control. I was telling  
23 myself that runs didn't matter, that we needed to bat the overs. [I was] thinking about  
24 the game plan of how I'm going to get through the situation.

1 His coping efforts resulted in a perception of control. He described how his *performance*  
2 improved to a point where he felt ‘indestructible - I was in complete control - the bowlers had  
3 nothing on me [*benefit appraisal*]. [I felt] very happy [*emotion*].’ He elaborated further:

4       The responsibility was always there, but when I was batting better that demand  
5       became easier because I was doing well. I'd conquered the first challenge of getting  
6       the team out of a sticky situation. From that point I thought whatever we got is a  
7       bonus. I wasn't thinking about the situation. I saw the ball, I hit it and it went for runs.  
8       I was doing really well. I was in total control. As I became more confident and  
9       scoring runs, I wasn't thinking about batting... [I was] going on instinct... showing  
10      my potential. I was timing the ball really well and playing more aggressively.  
11      Anything the bowler bowled at me I was dealing with.

12      **Performance five (bowling): ‘Why do I bother?’** Aaron perceived the importance  
13      of this game as a *stressor*. He viewed his team as better than the opposition and felt ‘quite  
14      positive about the situation,’ and this helped his *appraisal of* the match as a ‘challenge’:

15      ... because we'd beaten them previously, I saw it as a challenge. We were the better  
16      team. We had better players and I was confident that we would do well... they were  
17      bottom of the league, so the expectation was there that we would go out and win.

18      The match was *appraised* as ‘a must win’, because of the threat of ‘looking bad’ if they lost.  
19      Consequently, Aaron confessed that the situation made him feel ‘a little bit nervous’,  
20      [*emotion*] and he sought ways of *coping*, ‘I made a conscious effort to warm up and  
21      concentrate on what lines I needed to bowl, so that it didn't take me five or ten balls to get  
22      into my stride.’ This coping method had a positive impact on the way he was feeling, it  
23      ‘eased the nerves’, ‘eased the pressure’ and had a positive effect on his ‘thought processes’:

1 [Following my warm up] I was feeling pretty high... and I was pleased that I'd had a  
2 good warm up session, so that put me in a good state of mind. I was happy with my  
3 preparation so I was feeling quite confident and ready to go out and play.

4 The use of this coping strategy meant that Aaron felt that his 'nerves' were under 'control'.  
5 However, a teammate then dropped a catch off his bowling, which became a *stressor* for him:

6 I'd put so much into bowling well... that's what I was hoping for and I'd done  
7 everything within my control it was just the fact that the catch went down. Trying to  
8 keep that frustration under control was quite difficult.

9 The *stressor* of the dropped catch coupled with the importance of the fixture resulted in an  
10 instant reaction, 'as soon as the catch went down I hit the roof, I became so frustrated! It sent  
11 everything plummeting in my mindset... my head dropped and I became really angry.' He  
12 described how he perceived that he had done everything he could to create a wicket taking  
13 opportunity, *appraising* the situation as harmful as 'somebody had let me down':

14 It's annoying [*emotion*], you're bowling really, really well, and something that is out  
15 of your control has affected you... the fact that there was no outcome from it, there  
16 was no success, it's sort of like, 'why do I bother?'

17 Aaron considered that his only *coping options* to reduce his frustration were to 'bowl better,  
18 get the wicket, try harder'. However, this strategy only managed to make him evaluate that he  
19 couldn't cope, 'I wasn't succeeding... I had gone so far down the downward spiral of  
20 frustration that I couldn't cope... so the frustration and feeling of being irate just continued.'  
21 He then described getting increasingly 'stressed' as he battled to control his growing  
22 frustration and anger between each delivery:

23 ... my mind was going off at different tangents, the dropped catch [*stressor*], I'm  
24 bowling well, I'm not bowling well [*appraisal*], I'm frustrated [*emotion*], I'm bowling  
25 wide after wide [*behavior*], the batsman is getting on top [*appraisal*], the situation of

1 the game [*stressor*], the intensity of my thoughts and feelings... I wasn't actually  
2 thinking about bowling, where I was going to land the ball. The batsman was really  
3 good off his front foot, but I was still bowling really full [*behavior*]. I was running up  
4 and getting to my mark feeling negative. Then I got hit for 4 [*stressor*], and then I  
5 bowled a wide [*behavior*]. I never took a step out to calm myself down or think about  
6 the situation and talk to myself about what I needed to do or talk to somebody else,  
7 get their thoughts on the situation... I just failed to cope.

8 **Aaron's season overview.** Throughout the season Aaron attributed 'form' as the key  
9 contributing factor to how he appraised his ability to cope with stressors:

10 The responsibility and demand of winning and overcoming my emotions was always  
11 there. When I was performing well I thought about it less, but when I wasn't  
12 performing [as well] that's what I was concentrating on. At the start of the season I  
13 was dealing with the demands because I was performing well, but during the middle  
14 and end of the season I wasn't performing well as I wasn't coping with the demands.

15 Aaron suggested that the 'anxiety' experienced increased because he was not in 'control' of  
16 his emotions due to him no longer 'performing well' and being unable to cope with the  
17 demands he faced. He also described how the 'frustration' he experienced whilst performing  
18 increased in line with a progressive decrease in his 'enjoyment' and 'motivation':

19 ... the enjoyment was there at the start, but as soon as I didn't perform well I enjoyed it  
20 less. I became disappointed and when I'm not enjoying it, it's a chore to go out and  
21 bat. I'd gone through a stage where I got three or four ducks in a row and I thought  
22 'why am I bothering? I'm not coping, I can't bat, I may as well give up!'

23 Importantly, through a process of experiential learning Aaron was able to recognize his needs  
24 during this period and implemented an appropriate and effective method of coping:

1 ... the frustration got to a point where I needed to do something about it. That's when I  
 2 thought, 'I can bat but I might need to work on it' ... I made a conscious effort to try  
 3 and warm up, try to practice in the nets more often and even played games on a  
 4 Sunday that were of an easier standard to get back into the rhythm. So the way of  
 5 coping was trying to improve my game and try to deal with the main demand of lack  
 6 of form and technique... the practice did have a positive impact as my form increased  
 7 and I started to enjoy my cricket. I was becoming confident again.

#### 8 **Brendan the bowler**

9 Brendan is the youngest and least experienced of the three cricketers. He is a 'leg break'  
 10 (spin) bowler and the following narratives portray his experiences bowling for his club side's  
 11 1<sup>st</sup> XI in league fixtures over the course of the competitive season.

12 **Performance one: 'It got a bit overwhelming'.** During this game Brendan perceived  
 13 his opponent as being the main *stressor*, 'My biggest challenge was their number 4 batsman  
 14 that kept coming down the track and hitting me over the top... he was a good batsman and I  
 15 wasn't bowling well'. Consequently, he had low expectations of success, 'I knew I couldn't  
 16 get him out.' In addition, he felt he 'had to back up the person who was bowling at the other  
 17 end' and 'had not been bowling well all season' [*stressors*]. These demands contributed to a  
 18 threat *appraisal* that he was incapable of dealing with the qualities of the batsman, which  
 19 caused him to feel 'anxious' [*emotion*] and overwhelmed by the situation:

20 ... it got a bit overwhelming... as soon as it's not going [well] for me I have a tendency  
 21 just to – not to give up but just to pass the buck... If I'm not going to do it then  
 22 someone else can because I just wasn't good enough at the time.

23 Brendan described how he then began to question his bowling action and strategy, which  
 24 proved detrimental to his performance:

1 Usually when I bowl I don't think about what I'm doing, I just do it. When I think  
2 about what I'm doing, it impacts how I'm doing it. Bowling bad balls make me doubt  
3 myself and look at what I'm doing wrong and as I do that my concentration goes.  
4 He conceded that he 'couldn't get the wickets' that he was 'there for'. He therefore asked his  
5 captain to end his bowling spell. This *avoidance coping behavior* provided immediate 'relief'  
6 from the stressful situation. However, avoiding the situation failed to help restore confidence,  
7 so he resigned himself to likely failure in his second bowling spell, 'having no confidence  
8 after my first spell impacted my second spell. I knew that if I couldn't do it in my first spell  
9 then why would I do it in my second?' In addition to the prospect of bowling again and the  
10 *stressors* related to the opposition's batsman, he perceived people were now 'expecting' him  
11 to perform, increasing his anxiety [*emotion*]:

12 I was more anxious because I knew people were expecting me to perform. I was tense  
13 in my shoulders and my wrist. I was nervous. My feet weren't going where they were  
14 supposed to, which meant doubts about what I was going to do with that delivery.

15 When I get tense in my arms and wrists I can't put the ball where I want. That makes  
16 me doubt myself more. It made the batsman more of a threat because he knew he was  
17 on top of me. I thought, 'I can't put the ball where I want, how am I going to get him  
18 out?' This anxiety made the demand even more of a threat to my performance.

19 During his second spell, Brendan alluded to how he could only remember the bad balls and  
20 how this was having a negative impact on his performance, '... if I'm thinking about what I'm  
21 doing then it impacts on my performance. So thoughts of the bad deliveries were still there  
22 even when I was bowling so that made me bowl an even worse ball.' He attempted to *cope* by  
23 'kidding' himself that he could perform better, 'I kept telling myself that I had the ability to  
24 put it (the ball) where I wanted and to back myself.' This strategy proved ineffective, as he  
25 was still 'thinking about the bad balls' and did not believe he could perform well:

1 I knew deep down that I was bowling so badly that whatever I told myself wasn't  
 2 going to impact on what I was doing. I doubted myself too much. I knew that it was  
 3 all going to go wrong, because it's happened before in other games. I've egged myself  
 4 up, but it hasn't worked, so what was going to make this game any different?

5 As a result of the anxiety experienced and the lack of confidence, his bowling *performances*  
 6 continued to be perceived as poor:

7 Every time I came up to bowl I had no confidence in my action so the end result was  
 8 either a full toss or a long hop. Then I lost confidence altogether, and I started to  
 9 question my action and where I'm meant to be bowling. It's a vicious circle, if I bowl  
 10 a bad ball I lose confidence and think about what I'm doing, and when I think about  
 11 what I'm doing I bowl another bad ball. If I know that someone is on top of me and  
 12 I'm anxious, then I'm thinking about what I'm doing and it all just goes to pot.

13 Critical to Brendan's performance outcomes were the levels of his self-confidence. When he  
 14 is confident his appraisals and emotions differ and help benefit his performance. In addition,  
 15 he referred to the importance of previous bowling performances that help him 'relate' to the  
 16 situation and provide him with confidence that he lacked during this game:

17 [A past good performance] would have given me more confidence because I could  
 18 relate to it and say, 'it's the same sort of batsman I got out before, so this is what I'm  
 19 going to do again.' But because I couldn't relate it to anything I couldn't find a way of  
 20 getting him out. If I'm confident it shows in my performance, I'd bowl more  
 21 variations like a wrong'un, or a top spinner, or a slider. I don't get stressed, I get  
 22 reared up. If the batsman takes me on, I get reared up and say to myself, 'ok I'm going  
 23 to get him out.' It's more of a challenge, not a threat like in this particular game!

24 **Performance two: 'It was all in my head'.** During this performance Brendan was  
 25 confronted with numerous *stressors* that stemmed from the competitive environment and his

1 experiences in his last performance (i.e., performance one). Consequently, he perceived the  
2 task of bowling as a demand describing it as something he just ‘didn’t want to do’. Added to  
3 this was a perception that he was physically tired from his performance earlier in the day with  
4 the bat and the conditions the match was being played in. In his diary, he *appraised* the  
5 prospect of bowling as a ‘chore’ and a ‘threat’, which resulted in a lack of ‘enthusiasm’, the  
6 feeling of anxiety [*emotion*], and an unwillingness to confront the task at hand [*behavior*]:

7         ... it was really hot that day, I was batting and I got really hot, so that was another  
8         factor why I didn't want to bowl because I was physically fatigued, but also mentally  
9         fatigued from knowledge of my previous performance. So I didn't want to go over  
10        everything – I didn't want to go through the emotions of being let down by myself that  
11        I went through in previous games and the stress of letting the team down again.

12 At the same time, Brendan had the *stressor* of preserving his identity as a good player. He  
13 described not wanting to ‘embarrass’ himself ‘again’ in front of his teammates and ‘look like  
14 a fool’ by not ‘living up to the standards that people came to expect’ from him. He became  
15 preoccupied with people’s ‘perceptions’ of him, which channeled his focus away from trying  
16 to do well. He concluded that, ‘if I didn't bowl at all then maybe people would still have good  
17 perceptions of me as a bowler’. Consequently, he confessed in his diary that that he  
18 *appraised* ‘no threat from the batsman’, suggesting that ‘it was all in my head’, explaining ‘a  
19 knowledge of how poorly I’d performed in the games before affected how I felt at that  
20 moment in time’ – a continuation of the stressful transaction that preceded this performance.  
21 Waiting to bowl he described himself as someone who was ‘defeated’:

22         My mind was telling me if you do this [bowl] you're going to do as worse as you did  
23         in other games. So I was telling myself, ‘ok, you've been told you're bowling and you  
24         can't!’ I stood there waiting to bowl, thinking, ‘What am I doing?’ ‘This is going to go  
25         bad!’ ‘Why put myself through it again?’ ‘Why is my captain making me do it?’

1 This whole experience resulted in the demand of bowling being *appraised* as an excessive  
 2 demand that overpowered his resources to cope:

3       The demand was too overwhelming for me when I was bowling so I felt that I didn't  
 4 want to bowl. This was more than a demand, it was something that I couldn't do, an  
 5 impossible demand... knowing that I can't compete, I can't do what I'm supposed to, I  
 6 felt that there's no point in me doing anything. I'm not going to have any impact on  
 7 the game. I'd be letting the team down and that is the worse feeling.

8 Consequently, he responded angrily describing feeling 'pissed off' and 'annoyed' as a result  
 9 of his *harm appraisal* that everything was 'going against him,' he 'couldn't do any better'  
 10 and perform as well as he 'should'. His *emotions* built up as his performance continued, 'I  
 11 had another over which made me even more angry'. He described that he felt 'at no time  
 12 comfortable' with his bowling, 'I wasn't trusting my action or where my feet were landing'.  
 13 This was detrimental to his *performance*, 'I remember getting hit out of the park'. He felt  
 14 impelled to remove himself [*avoidance coping*] from the situation:

15       The emotion, everything got to me and I just got to a point where I said 'I can't do it  
 16 anymore. It's not working for me. It's not going to impact the game for us so why  
 17 should I be bowling?' So the pressure of bowling, the anger, and all the questions of  
 18 why I should be bowling just built up to a point where I just said, 'I can't do it.'

19       **Performance three: 'I just bowled'**. Similar to previous performances, Brendan  
 20 described that 'the biggest demand was the quality of the batsman' who he *appraised* as  
 21 threatening due to them having the ability to 'hit me around the park'. This appraisal was  
 22 influenced by low confidence – a result of previous poor bowling performances that season:

23       ... he was a good batsman... I felt I'd have to work really hard to get him out and I felt  
 24 that maybe I wasn't even good enough to get him out given my past performances. So

1 he was a threat to my way of bowling in that I couldn't beat him, I couldn't be better  
2 than him... I knew that he would probably affect me before I affected him.

3 Concurrent with this appraisal was his evaluation of the playing conditions and the match  
4 situation. He described that the conditions for bowling were 'nigh on perfect... the wicket  
5 was turning and the weather was good', which he remarked as suiting his type of bowling.  
6 Further, and perhaps most importantly, he *appraised* very little pressure from the competitive  
7 situation, which acted to reduce his perception of what was at stake:

8 I knew we weren't going to win if we were honest with ourselves, so there was no  
9 pressure on me really to take wickets... I'm bowling because I'm there in the team...  
10 it's what I do... I knew it wouldn't change the impact on the game.

11 Despite the fact Brendan perceived his opponent as a 'threat' throughout his performance, the  
12 value placed on the situation, and therefore the requirement for Brendan to perform well,  
13 appears to have overpowered and compensated for the relational meaning construed to the  
14 environmental stressor. The demand of the opponent became irrelevant in as much as it was  
15 never perceived by Brendan to stretch his resources to cope, and therefore have the potential  
16 to evoke negative cognitive-emotional reactions. When asked to explain why he didn't feel  
17 the need to cope, Brendan replied, 'there was no pressure on me... I didn't feel the need to  
18 have a coping strategy'. Consequently, a positive relaxed feeling state was described:

19 [The conditions and match situation] made me relax in what I was doing. I didn't have  
20 to think about what I was going to do, how I was going to get him out... I just  
21 bowled... I was relaxed in my mind in that I wasn't thinking about anything, but I  
22 didn't have any pressure in my body either - no tension... I was in a frame of mind  
23 that I knew that whatever I did I couldn't affect the outcome of the game so that made  
24 me relaxed in that I didn't have to perform, and because I didn't have to perform I

1           didn't have to think about what I was doing. And because I didn't have to think about  
2           what I was doing, I just bowled better.

3 He explained how he 'felt really good coming in [to bowl]' due to 'not being bothered about  
4 the outcome.' He described how he was free of all 'worry' in relation to how his actions were  
5 going to impact on peoples 'opinion' and 'perceptions' of him. As a result, he described, '[I  
6 had] no problems with how I was feeling... so it had no [effect] on what I was doing'. This  
7 process led Brendan to have some control over his performance during this time, 'when I  
8 bowl well I don't think about it and I can just feel it coming out nicely', thus facilitating his  
9 performance. He stated in his diary, 'I had a pretty good rhythm. I did well just landing the  
10 ball on a good length making sure the batsman played, and I eventually got this batsman out.'

11           **Brendan's season overview.** Prior to each game, appraisals related to opposition and  
12 previous performances influenced Brendan's emotions throughout the season:

13           ... it [appraisal] was varied... if playing [opposition] I'd automatically think, '\*\*\*\*,  
14           they're a good team so I have to raise my performance even more.' So the stress I'd  
15           get depended on what team we were playing and what happened the week before.

16 He also experienced the reoccurring emotion of anger that was coherent with a steady  
17 decrease in his 'enthusiasm to bowl', 'confidence with the ball', and 'faith in ability'.

18 Underscoring this anger was his struggle to identify the root of his fluctuating performances:

19           In one game I took 7 wickets. The following week I did poorly and I don't know why.  
20           I have control on where I put that ball, so how is it one week I can do it well and the  
21           next I can't? I got angry about not having control over that throughout the season.

22 Linked to Brendan's inability to identify the cause of his fluctuating performances was his  
23 lack of variety in coping during competition. He described how his method of coping  
24 remained the same throughout the season:

1 I've always had that coping strategy of telling myself that I was better than everyone.  
 2 That's always been there throughout the season. I either told myself I was better than  
 3 them or I found a way of getting out of the situation, which was telling myself to give  
 4 up. I wouldn't say I didn't know any other way... it just comes down to the fact that I  
 5 don't know why I bowl well in some games and don't bowl well in the next game. If I  
 6 knew why then I would be able to devise a coping strategy to help.

7 Being unable to pinpoint the reason why he 'performed well one game and poorly the next'  
 8 led to a suggested 'rolling process' of demanding circumstances, failures to cope, negative  
 9 emotions, variable performances, and a perception that he 'no longer wanted to bowl'.

#### 10 **Carl the captain**

11 Carl competes in minor county (U25's) representative cricket. He is a top order batsman who  
 12 was also captain of the 1<sup>st</sup> XI. The following portray his experiences as batsman and captain  
 13 in league and cup competitions over the course of a competitive season.

14 **Performance one: 'I wasn't ready'**. During this game, Carl experienced a number of  
 15 *stressors* leading up to his batting performance. First, he described the fixture as a 'bottom of  
 16 the table clash against a team we backed ourselves against' that placed an expectation that he  
 17 and his team had to perform well. This match was also his first game back as captain and he  
 18 had 'lost the toss and faced the demand of changing my idealized game plan':

19 They won the toss and put us in to bat. I didn't feel confident as we hadn't been  
 20 batting well all season. We weren't prepared for it. I felt I needed to force a good  
 21 score to get us a decent total. This affected my mindset when I went out to bat.

22 An additional *stressor* was his change in batting position, which he described as 'much  
 23 harder' and 'completely different' to his usual position at the top of the batting order, and a  
 24 role he hadn't yet 'adapted' to. Consequently, he *appraised* these stressors as threatening

1 towards the outcomes of his performance. Accompanying this appraisal was a negative  
2 *emotional response* that he experienced immediately prior to the start of his innings:

3 We'd lost a wicket straight away. We wanted a solid grounding, so I was disappointed  
4 in the way the opening batsman got out. I thought, 'why did you do that?' It's  
5 annoying! I was really nervous and apprehensive. I couldn't act how I wanted to act  
6 and I wasn't thinking clearly. I felt uncomfortable and timid when I went out to bat.

7 Consequently, Carl described how he became 'anxious', which affected his performance:

8 Anxiety when I'm performing is normally detrimental, affecting my thought  
9 processes and ability to perform at my normal level. It's debilitating as I lose control  
10 of my ability to do things I know I can do. I don't think straight, in a logical way.

11 He then recounted how this experience of anxiety caused him to 'scuff' his first delivery, an  
12 easy half volley that could have got him nicely off the mark:

13 I didn't feel myself out there. I didn't feel relaxed enough to just stroke the ball. When  
14 I'm anxious I try and hit the ball too hard and too early, I don't let my natural timing  
15 come through. You've really got to wait for the ball. But I was anxious and wanted to  
16 hit the ball early, and then I missed it and thought, 'God I can't believe I missed out  
17 on that' and it just got worse and worse.

18 He reported in his diary how a few balls later he got struck on the leg pad, a 'painful blow on  
19 the knee' from another delivery he perceived he 'should' have hit [*stressor*]. However,  
20 instead of backing away and composing himself for the next ball, he depicted how a clouded  
21 mind led to an error of 'judgment' resulting in his innings coming to a premature end:

22 I got out the next ball after I got hit on the knee. When facing up to the next ball I had  
23 it in my head that I wasn't ready. I was anxious, not thinking properly to say, 'right  
24 just back away here.' Everything we discussed reduced my confidence in my actions,  
25 I wasn't confident in my footwork, I wasn't confident enough to say, 'I'm not ready to

1 face this ball.' I wasn't in the right frame of mind to just step back and take my time  
 2 and recover. I was letting the opposition control me. It comes back to feeling nervous  
 3 before the game, as physically I didn't feel on top of my game. I felt restricted and  
 4 didn't move my feet, didn't watch the ball properly, didn't time anything... I ended up  
 5 not making a decision, letting the ball go and then I was bowled... and that was it!

6 He then portrayed how his cognitive-emotional reactions affected his capacity to 'think  
 7 straight', identify with his needs, and subsequently cope with the stressful situation:

8 I didn't know what I was trying to cope with. I knew I wasn't quite myself but I didn't  
 9 try and rectify that. I didn't try and take a bit of time out to just sort myself out. It  
 10 never occurred to me to try and change or cope with what I was feeling. I was stressed  
 11 and not in the frame of mind to say 'all right, let's get out of it.'

12 **Performance two: 'Getting bogged down'.** Carl went out to bat faced with the  
 13 *stressor* of having to 'continue the good work' of the opening batsmen by maintaining the  
 14 high scoring rate they had set at the start of the innings. He *appraised* the situation as a threat  
 15 as he did not want to not 'waste' the good start his team had made in the game. To cope he  
 16 described how he spoke to himself about his game plan, repeating to himself that he must be  
 17 'patient', allow his 'timing to come', and not be 'reckless' with his actions. He expanded:

18 I didn't want to go out there and try and smash it. I didn't want to give my wicket  
 19 away to a big shot or put it up in the air or anything like that. So even though I was  
 20 anxious [*emotion*], that was what was in my mind – patience... because it was a good  
 21 enough pitch where I thought if I stayed in I could have got runs.

22 As a result, Carl described entering the playing area in a 'relaxed' state, not worrying about  
 23 maintaining the good start. However, as wickets fell and 'more overs went by', the pressure  
 24 and responsibility developed as he became more 'desperate' to start scoring 'freely':

1 Frustration [*emotion*] was building up, especially when I actually got one out of the  
 2 middle of the bat and it just hits the fielder... I was getting frustrated because the  
 3 team's run rate was going down and we'd lost another wicket at the other end [*harm*  
 4 *appraisal*]. The new batsman that then came in doesn't like running, doesn't score  
 5 quickly, so that put extra pressure on me to make the scoreboard tick over... It just  
 6 felt like I was always on strike but not really rotating the strike or scoring freely.  
 7 The more he got 'bogged down' the more preoccupied he became with his 'frustration' -  
 8 'frustration was the main overriding sensation' that he was 'consciously feeling' during that  
 9 period of time. Consequently, Carl depicted how his *emotional response* started to translate  
 10 into his 'batting technique' [*behavior*] as he began to think that he 'needed to change  
 11 something' [*coping*]. He suggested his emotions led him to miss out on balls he'd 'always'  
 12 hit for four, he tried to hit the ball 'too hard' and played in a manner that was not 'natural' to  
 13 him. The frustration led him to lose sight of his game plan and the calming 'be patient self-  
 14 talk' coping strategy he used earlier in the innings:

15 I was weak and decided to change my game plan, trying to hit balls I wouldn't  
 16 normally try and hit for four. My patience ran out after a certain amount of time.

17 When you're scoring slowly, if you're not scoring when you want to be scoring or at  
 18 least perceive you should be scoring then it [my plan] goes out of the window.

19 Entwined in his growing frustration were feelings of 'anxiety' that were attached to his  
 20 threatening *appraisal* that he would not be living up to the 'level' of performance that he and  
 21 others 'expect'. He began to question his ability, technique, and why he could no longer score  
 22 as 'freely as I used to', suggesting his anxiety had a detrimental effect on performance:

23 ... it [anxiety] is like any kind of mental negative issue you have in your head when  
 24 you're playing cricket. It comes out and it affects the way you play. It's not letting you  
 25 be as free, it's not letting you play your natural game, it affects your physical actions.

1 Once again, Carl's cognitive-emotional responses inhibited his capacity to identify his needs  
 2 and cope with the situation effectively. He allowed the situation to 'build up', rather than  
 3 being proactive in his attempts to manage the situation. Carl's growing frustration and  
 4 anxiety led him to believe that he must 'score quickly' and 'find' form, and by doing so,  
 5 'hopefully' cope. He attributed this *maladaptive coping style* as the reason for his dismissal:

6 I didn't actually think how I was going to find my form; I was just hoping it was going  
 7 to come back. I just thought my luck would turn. You know the old saying, where you  
 8 get a bad ball and you'll hit it for four and everything will change. That's what I was  
 9 hoping would happen. That's why I got out! I wasn't concentrating on the ball!

10 **Performance five: 'Everything was coming naturally'.** During this game, Carl  
 11 faced an opposition's bowler who he described was bowling with 'good pace and swing' and  
 12 whose 'tail was really up' [*stressor*]. He *appraised* this bowler as a 'challenge' and one he  
 13 'liked to face' early on in his innings due to the confidence he drew from successes against  
 14 bowlers of a similar 'caliber'. Carl wrote, 'I felt confident when reaching the crease as this  
 15 was the type of bowler I was scoring lots of runs against during the season. I get excited  
 16 [*emotion*] facing good bowlers and I normally have reasonable success.' He then described  
 17 how the 'challenge' of facing a talented bowler helped him focus to better his performance:

18 I was used to facing bowlers like this so I knew I could keep him out and I knew it  
 19 was a pretty good way to start my innings... I was more at home; I immediately  
 20 recognized what he was going to bowl [away swing], and the pace he was bowling. In  
 21 those challenges I want to come out on top. So that helped focus the mind.

22 Carl described how he felt in his 'comfort zone,' which was reinforced by the 'good start' he  
 23 made to his innings. He wrote how the first ball he faced was 'the best ball of the day, a huge  
 24 away swinging Yorker that I managed to dig out'. Commenting on the significance of this  
 25 moment in context to the rest of his performance, Carl described how surviving this delivery

1 instantly elevated his levels of confidence, reinforcing that he was capable of performing  
2 successfully. Further, his actions led to the *appraisal* that he was in control of his  
3 performance, which contributed to a 'relaxed' feeling state beneficial for his batting:

4       ... just keeping that ball out, I knew something was going to go right today. On most  
5       days you'd get bowled by that ball... If I keep out the good ball early on I know my  
6       eye is in, I know that even if they bowl the best ball at me it's not going to get me out,  
7       I know I'm going to score runs... It relaxed me quite a lot; I was confident and didn't  
8       need to force anything. That opening encounter got me in a frame of mind that helped  
9       me focus in on what I needed to do. I also thought, 'if that can't get me out then  
10       there's something right today, it's going to be a good day.' It definitely helped my  
11       batting. That whole feeling of being relaxed is when I play my best cricket.

12 Despite overcoming this initial demand, Carl still faced the *stressor* of achieving his main  
13 goal of constructing an innings that would contribute significantly to his team's position in  
14 the game. He described in his diary how he perceived himself to be in the 'correct mindset'  
15 for a 'big innings' generated by the process of appraisal described above and through the  
16 application of a 'game plan' [*coping*] that assisted him in retaining his focus on 'achievable  
17 goals'. Abiding by his 'game plan' that helped him keep 'everything in control', he felt no  
18 'stress or strain,' which he suggested gave him the 'opportunity to score freely' and 'find' his  
19 'natural form' [*performance*]. In addition, he alluded to being free of all debilitating thoughts  
20 about 'the weight of captaincy' and 'the weight of underperformance by myself, or by my  
21 team or by the situation'. He also stated, 'I didn't feel like anyone was going to get me out'.  
22 Consequently, he remained in a 'relaxed' state throughout his performance:

23       My game plan helped me keep in control, helped me realize what the end goal was.

24       My performance is driven from my thoughts and emotions. If I'm too emotional then

1           you see it in my shots. You see it if I'm stressed, because I'm not playing my natural  
 2           game. So keeping that kind of emotion at bay is why I performed well in this game.  
 3    Carl implied that, combined, his appraisals, coping, and emotions (regulated by perceptions  
 4    of confidence and control), produced a perceived good performance. He wrote, 'I did not give  
 5    the opposition a chance throughout my innings. I scored at a brisk rate. I hit the ball as well  
 6    as I have all season – finally, it felt like everything was coming naturally again.'

7           **Carl's season overview.** At the start of the year the novelty of captaincy and the  
 8    stressors that accompanied such responsibilities proved to be the strongest antecedents to  
 9    Carl's stressful experiences prior to and during competition. These contributed to the  
 10   'pressure' and 'threat' he appraised he was under whilst performing. Furthermore, his team's  
 11   position in the league following a 'bad start' to the season was a 'stressful situation to come  
 12   into' and take over the captaincy of the side. Consequently, thoughts about his team's 'league  
 13   position' and the importance of winning games disrupted his concentration and performance:  
 14           ... we were at the bottom of the league and I had only captained for one game... that  
 15           was a really stressful position to come into. Before I went in to bat, the stress I was  
 16           feeling wasn't just because of batting it was also the stress of the situation. Any  
 17           demand on me early in the season, because of all the other stresses, had a great effect  
 18           on me mentally. My performance was affected much more at the start of the season.  
 19   As the season progressed Carl described how his 'experience of captaining more games and  
 20   getting used to everything' reduced his focus on organizational stressors. He became more  
 21   aware of the competition demands he encountered, developing and implementing strategies  
 22   that helped him *cope*. Through experiential learning he created and applied effective 'game  
 23   plans' that helped improve his emotional response and performances:

24           It [coping] came in half way through the year. My confidence was at the lowest point  
 25           ever so I thought, 'how am I going to go forwards?' So, I set up a simple game plan

1 and it worked! I was only thinking about my batting, I wasn't thinking about the  
2 captaincy or anything. I created something that helped clear my mind and start  
3 performing again. Once I'd implemented this, the stress before and during the game  
4 was much less... I then started to enjoy performing again. I became a lot more  
5 relaxed... I was feeling like I was contributing significantly to the team doing well.

## 6 **Discussion**

7 The purpose of this study was to provide an in-depth examination of the stress and  
8 emotion process of competitive cricketers at specific moments in time and across  
9 performances. Informed by Lazarus' (1991; 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) transactional  
10 perspective of stress and CMR theory of emotions, diaries and in-depth interviews facilitated  
11 findings that support the notion that athletes progress through an adaptational process where  
12 appraisals of encountered stressors elicit emotional responses that, if not managed effectively,  
13 can be detrimental to performance. Consistent with Lazarus' perspective, appraisals were  
14 shown to be at the 'heart' of the stress and emotion process (Lazarus, 1999, p.61) and  
15 fundamental to understanding the manner in which athletes respond to competitive demands  
16 (Holt & Dunn, 2004; Thatcher & Day, 2008). In addition, the findings illustrated that  
17 individuals' progress through a continuous cycle of appraisal that is closely attached to their  
18 personal values, beliefs, and commitment to achieving personal goals (Lazarus, 1999; Uphill  
19 & Jones, 2007). Indeed, the data revealed that these cricketers' appraisals were linked to their  
20 perception of goal attainment that, if seen as endangered, led to a situation being appraised as  
21 threatening (Holt, 2003; Holt & Dunn 2004), and resulting in emotional and behavioral  
22 responses capable of disrupting performance.

23 Key to the goal attainment appraisals reported by these cricketers was their  
24 knowledge of past performances. The confidence gained, or lost, from previous performances  
25 was shown to influence their goal attainment appraisals and the subsequent emotional and

1 behavioral responses. Self-confidence has been demonstrated to protect athletes from the  
2 detrimental effects of anxiety symptoms (see Hanton, Mellalieu, & Hall, 2004). **Focusing on**  
3 **Lazarus's notion of relational meaning**, it is therefore possible that self-confidence also aids  
4 performers earlier in the stress-emotion process, through inducing greater perceptions of goal  
5 attainment and positively influencing **primary** appraisals. **Consequently, improving the**  
6 **performers belief that they can achieve their goals and helping them focus on the positive**  
7 **challenges or/and benefits from reaching their personal targets.**

8         The findings also indicated that the amount of control an athlete is capable of exerting  
9 over their emotions might influence the relationship between the experienced emotions and  
10 performance (Jones, 2003). By definition, emotions are associated with cognitive, biological  
11 reactions and impulses to act (Lazarus, 1991, 2000). Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that  
12 it was the amount of control the cricketers possessed over their action tendencies associated  
13 with experienced emotions that proved most pivotal in respect to their performance. For  
14 example, Carl gave a clear indication of how frustration during performance changed the way  
15 he 'naturally' played by urging him to 'snatch' at scoring opportunities, which affected his  
16 timing and debilitated his performance. This supports the sentiments made by Lazarus (1991,  
17 2000) who highlighted that the motivational properties of emotion compel individuals to act  
18 in certain ways during an adaptation encounter, which in this case was acting erratically when  
19 feeling frustrated. In contrast, **Aaron** highlighted the use of self-talk and a game plan to keep  
20 self-control when feeling frustrated, strategies that were perceived to benefit performance and  
21 that have previously been demonstrated as effective in facilitating cricket-batting  
22 performance (i.e., Miles & Neil, 2013). Coping strategies such as positive self talk  
23 (emotional-focused) and the development and application of a predetermined game plan  
24 (problem-focused) also helped the cricketers when experiencing other emotions, such as  
25 anxiety. **The use of such coping strategies supports findings from previous research (e.g.,**

1 Thelwell et al., 2007), and further demonstrates their potential performance benefits when  
2 individuals are experiencing stress. Again, the terms ‘confident’ and ‘controlled’ were  
3 associated with the effective use of such strategies when negative emotions were felt.

4 The identified coping strategies were not always evident from the start of the season,  
5 however, but developed through reflection during the season. Specifically, the cricketers  
6 managed to identify with their down turn in ‘form’, and formulated and implemented  
7 methods of coping that helped them re-establish their confidence, maintain their focus, and  
8 facilitate performance. It is, therefore, plausible to infer from these cricketers’ narratives the  
9 potential benefits of self-reflection on regulating emotions and enhancing performance – a  
10 strategy well documented to have such effects within the sporting literature (see e.g., Hanton,  
11 Cropley, & Lee, 2009; Jones, 2003; Neil, Cropley, Wilson, & Faull, 2013b).

12 From an applied perspective, the findings point to a number of strategies to help  
13 cricketers cope during performance. For example, during stressful situations such strategies  
14 as self-talk, game plan development, and distraction techniques seemed to help the  
15 performers maintain self-control, and improve perceptions of control over the situation.  
16 Consequently, the development of such cognitive-behavioral strategies are advocated for  
17 performers who may be struggling to manage their cognitive-emotional responses to stressors  
18 within the competitive environment (Neil, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2013c; Wagstaff, Hanton, &  
19 Fletcher, 2013). In addition, these strategies were suggested to be formed through a process  
20 of reflective learning. Reflective practice has been forwarded as a way of establishing  
21 constructive self-awareness and the development of a varied coping repertoire (Fletcher et al.,  
22 2006). Therefore, post-match reflection and experiential learning could help cricketers  
23 become more proficient at acknowledging what they’re thinking and feeling during  
24 performance and, accordingly, why they are thinking and feeling in that way. In turn, this  
25 may help them to identify what actions to take to improve or maintain performance during a

1 stressful event (Neil et al., 2013b; Wagstaff et al., 2013). For example, through guided  
2 reflection sport psychologists could help athletes become more understanding of their stress  
3 experiences, the stressors they encounter, their negative appraisals, the accompanying  
4 emotions and the consequences this process had on their performance (Jones, 2003). Once  
5 achieved, practitioners can then work with the performer to construct more process  
6 orientated, context specific methods of coping that set about a facilitative course of change.

7         Despite providing a novel contribution to the extant stress and emotion literature, it is  
8 important to identify this study's limitations for future research to address. Although this  
9 study did demonstrate changes in demands, appraisals, emotions, and behaviors within and  
10 across performances, the current method may have lacked the sensitivity to pick up on many  
11 important factors contributing to the Cricketers' stressful experiences in competition.  
12 Consequently, more innovative methods of recording and discussing performances could  
13 provide more detail into the experiences of sport performers. One possible approach is  
14 through recording performance and, aided by this medium, conducting self-confrontational  
15 interviews outside of the competition environment. Self-confrontational interviewing has  
16 been used successfully in previous research (see Miles & Neil, 2013; Seve, Ria, Poizat,  
17 Saury, & Durand, 2007), and could be used to provide a more detailed insight into the  
18 experience of competition stress and emotion within performance.

19         In conclusion, this study has provided detail of the experiences of competition stress  
20 and emotion of cricket performers. Expanding on previous research, the study adopted a  
21 holistic approach that focused on the unfolding of these experiences through time. In doing so,  
22 the research has illustrated the dynamic relationship between performers and the competitive  
23 environment that influences performance through the cognitive-emotional responses such  
24 relationships generate.

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