

In-game stress reduction

Refereeing is a stressful job and stress levels rise under various circumstances such as:

- Making a call that you wish you had not made or making a good call at a call at a key time
- Having the fans yell; having the coaches yell
- Being mentored

This article aims to discuss what we can do about stress while we are in the middle of a game. Stress is an important topic for referees because, aside from *decreasing our job satisfaction*, it also *increases the risk of making more errors*. Here are two techniques¹ that can be done in less than 5 seconds and may help you decrease stress:

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

PMR has two steps and can be applied to any muscle group of one's body.

1. Tense muscles
 - a. Select a group of muscles (i.e. one of your arms/hand)
 - b. Take a deep breath, tense/flex that muscle group as hard as you can
 - c. Count to 5 (or the length of one part of the line change procedure)
2. Relax the muscles
 - a. After 5 seconds let your breath out
 - b. Let the muscles relax.

Mindful Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) 5-second breath-awareness

Stress is often associated with worrying about the future or regretting the past. Therefore, a second method of stress reduction is being in the present and MBSR, in its simplest form, is a breathing-focus technique. Here are three steps to a 5 second present-focus exercise:

- 1) Focus on your breath, feel your chest expand and contract, feel the air move down into your lungs and then out again, let your thoughts drift to the back of your mind and just be with your breath.
- 2) Open your awareness to your senses (seeing, tasting, hearing, touching, smelling). What is the first thing that you are aware of? Do not analyze or identify whatever you are sensing, do not think about it, just accept and appreciate it.
- 3) Bring yourself back to the present moment with a clear mind ready to referee.

¹ According to medical and psychological research, these two techniques have been shown to decrease stress and increase performance of students and employees as well as increase survival rates of patients with various illnesses. In general, people who take part in Mindful Exercises report lower stress than a control group of people who do not and, in another study, an MBSR group of seniors experienced less flu symptoms than a group of seniors who did not participate in the MBSR group.