



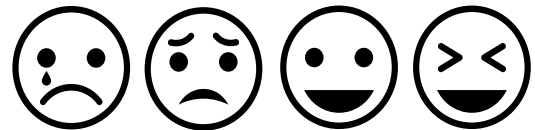
*Dear participants,*

We are e-mailing you to provide a summary of the results from a study that you participated in during 2020-2021. As researchers, we realize that we could not conduct this research without the time and interest of those who participated, so we work to ensure that we pass on the information that may be valuable.

As a brief reminder, the purpose of this study was to examine **coaches' perspectives regarding athletes' emotions, and coaches' regulation of athletes' emotions.**

### **Background:**

It is well known that athletes experience a variety of pleasant and unpleasant emotions during sport participation (e.g., happiness, excitement, anxiety, anger), and that those athletes who are able to regulate/control their emotions more effectively tend to be mentally healthier and perform better.



It is also well known that coaches have significant influence on athletes' emotional experiences. However, research to date has not explored coaches' beliefs about athletes' emotions, or coaches' *direct* efforts of influencing athletes' emotions. Thus, we asked coaches about the **usefulness of pleasant or unpleasant emotions for athletes, and the degree to which coaches try to improve or worsen athletes' emotions, and why/how they try to do this.**

### **Data collection:**



- 208 coaches completed our online survey



- 10 coaches participated in an interview with us

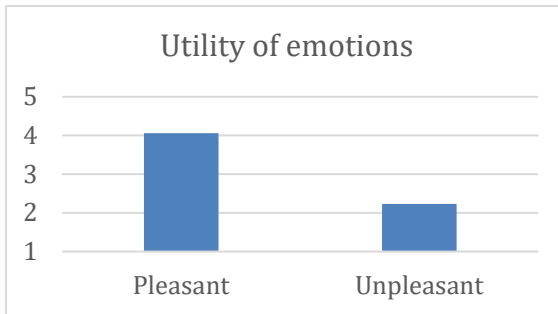
### **Participating coaches' demographics:**

- 44 years old on average (although the age range was roughly from 20 to 70!)
- Coaching a variety of different sports (nearly 20 different sports)
- 48 identified as female, 159 identified as male, and 1 did not disclose their gender.
- 106 coached women's sports, 81 coached men's sports, and 21 coached co-ed sports.
- Coaches' years of coaching experience ranged from 1 to 8+ years.



## Main Takeaways:

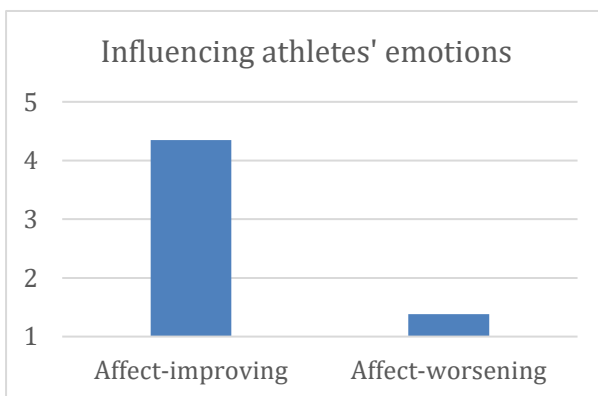
1. Coaches reported that, *generally speaking*, pleasant emotions lead to positive outcomes for athletes (e.g., better performance) and unpleasant emotions lead to negative outcomes (e.g., worse performance, dropout). However, it is also not helpful for athletes to *always* feel pleasant or *too* pleasant.



As seen in this figure, coaches scored around 4 on the “usefulness of pleasant emotions”, but this was *not* as high as 5 (maximum). The score was around 2 for the “usefulness of unpleasant emotions”, but this was *not* as low as 1 (minimum). This demonstrates the coaches’ beliefs that for both pleasant and unpleasant emotions, extreme levels might not be optimal.

Example quote from a coach: “*‘There’s no parades and no funerals’, you know, ... enjoy the times that you’re successful, but don’t over-enjoy them. And when you’re not successful, don’t overindulge in negative thoughts and just have balance*”

2. Coaches frequently tried to improve athletes’ emotions, but rarely tried to worsen athletes’ emotions. Most coaches were strongly against worsening athletes’ emotions on purpose.



As seen in the figure, coaches frequently tried to improve athletes’ emotions, but rarely tried to worsen athletes’ emotions.

Example quote from a coach: “*I truly believe that’s why a lot of guys quit, because some of these coaches – that’s exactly what they do [worsen athletes’ emotions on purpose]. And the kids go, ‘Well screw you, I don’t need this anymore.’*”

3. However, there were situations where worsening athletes’ emotions happened.

a. When athletes are being too positive:

- i. Example quote: “*I have been on teams where it’s almost too positive, where guys will make the same mistake over and over [again] and guys on the bench [are] saying, “aw no worries, don’t worry about it!”*, and then as a coach, at some point I am just like, “*wake up and stop thinking everything is going to be fine, we [are] either not working hard or we aren’t focused, snap out of it.*”



- b. When critical feedback worsens athletes' emotions, although the coach's goal was not to make them feel worse. Thus, coaches tried to focus on reflection and growth:
  - i. Example quote: *"You expect them to know what they're doing ... then when they come out and don't, you just get so frustrated. But, I really try to find at least one good in what they had done, ... and just focus on that, and find ways to change what's not working, and kind of word it as, "Okay, so that happened. How do we stop that from happening again?", as opposed to, "What the heck are you doing? What's wrong with you?"*

#### 4. Each athlete is different in terms of what kinds of emotional states "work" for them.

- a. Example quote: *"I'm a fairly serious coach and I like my players to be focused ... but I have a particular player that is a goofball. The beginning of last year he was making me crazy ... But I got to a point where I said, "If that's what you need to do to perform, then do it." ... And he was instrumental in helping us in our quarter final match. ... it's just who he is ... it was a big knock in the head for me like, 'Stop fighting it, just let him go.'"*
- b. Example quote: *"We have one player that was a great player ... she would make the most phenomenal play on the court, and her reaction would be just to kind of turn to her teammates and just have this little smirk on her face. That was her, we knew she was really fired up. [Laughs] But, expect her to scream, jump up and down, whatever, that wasn't going to work for her, that's not who she was. So, we really try to celebrate individuality."*

#### Main Implications/Summary

- Emotions as nuanced: Coaches felt that pleasant emotions are generally good and unpleasant emotions are generally bad among athletes, but there should be a relative balance between the two types of emotions.
- Coaches often try to improve athletes' emotions, and rarely try to worsen athletes' emotions.
- Sometimes coaches' actions do worsen athletes' emotions, for example when sharing critical feedback. It may be most helpful to focus on reflection and growth after identifying areas for improvement.
- Every athlete is different. Athletes and coaches could benefit from reflecting on and communicating about "what works" for each athlete.

Thank you for your time. If you are interested in this and other work, try visiting our lab website at: <https://kpe.utoronto.ca/laboratory/sport-performance-psychology-laboratory>. We encourage you to contact us about this study and/or future studies, or to discuss this topic more generally. Once again, we would like to thank you for the time that you spent to help us!

**All the best,**  
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