The gestual language perception as way to interpret emotional status of athletes submitted to high performance training

ABSTRACT: The body’s language is one of the aspects of the human relationship that shows the emotional status of the human being. Because of that, it can be reference that shows the state of mind of high performance athletes and, consequently, gives us the possibility of guiding them to a better performance. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to present ideas about this language method, indicating also some corporal expressions that can be used to identify state of mind of high performance athletes. That reflection will make possible the modification of a theoretical or practical posture against the athlete’s experiences with high-level performance, as well as one of the ways to identify their body’s reactions, in order to contribute for the evolution of high performance’s training.

Keywords: body’s language, emotional status, emotions, high performance training.
INTRODUCTION

In 1961, Raoul Mollet announced the following concept for sport training:

It is a philosophy of appreciation of the sport activity in function of all its components that, through a rational programming, it tries to develop the techniques, the tactics and the physical qualities, supporting it in the appropriate feeding, in a favourable psychological attitude, in the rulings of the healthy life habits, in the appropriate social adaptation and in the planning of the leisure times. (DANTAS, 1998, P.24).

According to Dantas (op. cit., p.24), for the first time the athlete, although it is undeniable and indispensable the support of effort physiology laboratories, biomechanics and, even, the development of sport materials," [...] it is no more seen as a beam of muscles, bones and nerves, but as an intelligent social being, interacting with their fellow creatures."

Like this, to reach the maximum performance through training, must be added to the genotype contributions of the affective, cognitive and psychomotor domains (phenotype), offering to the individual the most complete possible training, with subsidies of different areas (same).

The activities of the psychomotor domain, recognized as integral part of the high-level sport training, turned to be contemplated by a psychological preparation.

In that preparation type, the capacity of the trainer to know how interpret the messages transmitted through the nonverbal language or corporal expression can represent a great contribution, because the effective communication is frequently the difference between success and failure for teachers, technicians and instructors. (WEINBERG, GOULD, 2001). The nonverbal messages link to the motivational system and, therefore, to the morals or happiness state of the individual. To interpret the moral of athletes submitted to a training of high performance level is significant, because that psychoemotional state influences in the sport action and, in consequence, in the results presented in trainings or competitions.

It is important to remind that moral, in this case is relative to the individual’s psychoemotional domain and reflecting his motivation state, it should not be confused with another kind of moral. This are relative to a set of rules of conduct considered as valid, right or fair, for a determined partnership or culture (BERESFORD, 1994).

It can be considered that the point of view of the Human Being, referred by Dantas (1998) finds a theoretical reasoning not only in the psychology, but, also, in the contemporaneous philosophy. Through the thought of Gabriel Marcel, Friedrich Nietzsche and, especially, Merleau-Ponty, is signaled for the Man’s understanding as an indivisible and transcendent Being; a complex being multidimensional, in which the union between the soul and the body is not stamped by an arbitrary decree between two external terms, an object, and other subject. Takes place at each instant in the movement of the existence” (MERLEAU-PONTY, 1999, p. 131).

The body is not limited, therefore, to a set of organs and interlinked systems for biophysical laws (mechanics, physiologics, biochemistries, etc.). A system integrates so much biophysical aspects, as biopsychic or emotional and biosocial or historical, which coexist in an influential way. These aspects interact simultaneously, no-minating, to each modification in one of them, a corresponding change in the other (WEIL and TOMPAKOW, 2002), not holding, therefore, a hierarchy among them.
All of the possibilities of demonstration of the mind, spirit or conscience and of the body are expressed through the motor act. The human action is a complex process in which the thought and the expression are simultaneously constituted; initially, the gesture and the movement summarize the action for, later, mediate and allow the appearance of the expression. Since the first moments of life, the human being denounces his needs and future intents through spontaneous movements, natural and instinctive, that involve the perception of the senses (visual, tactile, auditory, gustatory and olfactive) and perceptive organization of the motive structures of basis (manipulation, locomotion and postural tone). “... The movement and the thought are integrated into the global labour of the body, acting as mean of relationship and communication through gestures and movements in the individual’s total integration with the environment” (Barros, 1998, p. 37).

The communication forms assume, in general, two functions: the verbal function and the nonverbal function, that interac and interrelate, conducted by the thought. According to Rector and Triña (1999, p. 21), “it is possible saying that we spoke for the voluntary activity of our vocal tract; however, when participating in a social interaction, we make it with all our body.”

The verbal and nonverbal languages represent an own code of each culture or social environment. The verbal language is represented by the words and the nonverbal language by the gestures, poses, glances, gestures, facial expressions, inter-individual distances, clothes and accessories etc. (same). Such corporal signs are spontaneous and of difficult control, revealing intents that, many times, was not wanted to express (Davis, 1979).

It is evident, like this, that the nonverbal signs are a significant way of human communication and that several corporal expressions manifested by athletes of high performance can be constituted in an alternative to interpret the moral or the animus state of those individuals.

However, at what point, when analyzed the conquests, the defeats or the desires, is the athlete’s true intent revealed? How the body, through its nonverbal language, express its necessities, needs or state of fullness? How to understand the messages that it transmits?

More and more the partnership demands creative professionals, even if was not always realized that the sensibility is essential requirement for such creativity. The sensibility, in this case, understands the rescue of the athlete’s understanding as a human being, turning possible the approach between the praxis and the necessities of the same ones.

Being like this, it is evidenced that the essence of the problem that created this study was the need of promoting a reflection concerning the importance and the meanings of the corporal language, in the sense of interpreting the moral or animus state of the athletes of high performance. With the concern in contributing somehow with this situation-problem, to present such reflection was constituted in the objective of this research.

When evidencing the nonverbal language as a way of identifying the demonstrations of the body of athletes of high performance, the communication among the parts involved in the training becomes more effective, making possible theoretical/practical posture changes of the technicians, coaches or instructors, before those sportsmen’s experiences, in way to contribute for the development of their performances.

**The body and the nonverbal language**

The body has the communication power, with the speech or the expression. “It is for my body that I understand the other, as well as it is for my body that I notice ‘things’” (Merleau-Ponty, 1999, p.253). It is through the gestures and of the speech, that the body becomes the thought or the intent than it means.

According to Feyreisen and Of Lannooy (1996), is considered natural that the physical look, the movements of the body and other corporal attitudes play an important part in our communication and in our social relationship, by expressing a part of us and could be noticed by other people. For Birdwhistel (apud Silva et al, 2000, p. 52), “[...] only 35% of the social meaning of any interaction corresponds to the pronounced words, because the man is a multisensorial being that, once in a while, verbalizes.”

Those actions or processes of the body that has meaning for the people, except the verbal expression, constitute the nonverbal communication. This communication form is present in our day-by-day, but, many times, it is not easy to be aware of its occurrence nor how it happens.

Such corporal signs are replete of meanings and exercise an effect on other people, for its relationship with the motivational system, this related to the Man’s needs. (Feyreisen and De Lannooy, 1996).

In agreement with Davis (1979), the corporal language is the expression of feelings and emotions through the movements of the body. It is a way of nonverbal communication that occurs in simultaneous levels, consciously and unconsciously, being used, for this, great part of the senses: the view, the ear, the touch and the sense of smell. The perception and the decoding of the corporal signs that serve as icons to this communication type occur by the intuition.

Silva (1987) relates that there is a great diversity of channels or modalities of signs involved in the corporal language. These signs can be transmitted through the glance, of the size of the pupil, of the colour, of the touch and of the facial expressions.

**The emotions, the moral or animus state and the sporting performance**

According to Nitsch (1986, p. 241 apud Samulski, 2002, p.28) the human action represents “an execution system of instructions and control, which is defined what a person should do, in what moment and under what conditions.”

It can be defined as “[...] a conscious, intentional, dynamic, motivated process, driven to a goal, addressed and psychically regulated and accomplished through different ways of behaviour inside of a social context” (Samulski, op. Cit.).

The sporting action represents that same integration process and influence between several variables. This action is accomplished through movements and technical-tactical and social behaviours, inside of a sporting context and it can be defined as an interrelation of personal factors (reasons, personality, attitudes, interests, capacities etc.) and situational (environment or external conditions...
of training and difficulty grade and task complexity), factors that modify along the time and that nominate the motivation (same).

The motivation presents an energetic determinant and a determinant of behaviour direction, could be understood as the intensity and the direction of the effort that it is applied in the accomplishing of a task (same). “The best way to understand motivation is to consider as much the person as the situation and the method as they interact” (WEINBERG and GOULD, 2001, p. 74).

According to Feijó (1998), the motivation has a dynamic function that channels the information in the direction of a behaviour, could be characterized as an active process, intentional and driven to an objective, that springs from the needs that could be physical, psychological or social, being, therefore, directly related to the intentional and functional movements of the personality.

Those authors’ thought evidences the interactional point of view between personal and situational factors to explain what motivates the people to act. One of the personal aspects being considered for such is the emotional reactions.

The relationship between emotion and sport performance should be analyzed considering: what emotion; in what situation; and what effect (positive or negative) produces in the performance. That analysis allows understanding the functions of the emotions inside in the sport of a situational context (NITSCH, 1985 apud SALMUSKI, 2002).

The emotion is a complex system of interrelations between the biopsychic system, the biophysiological system and the biosocial system that indicates “[...] a state that involves a certain excess, a state that can unchain determined action and to interfere in other.” It is considered although, that an emotion is not just an isolated experience, but is also identified by its motivational forces and for the function of these in the unchaining of a action (BLACKBURN, 1977, p. 114).

Daniel Goleman (apud RICETTE, 1998) affirms that all of the emotions are, in essence, impulses to act, instantaneous plans to work with the life. The own root of the word, that is, “mover” meaning “to move” and the prefix “e” denoting the stand back, indicate that tendency to act in all of the emotions. Relates although, starting from basic emotions, elapse waves of endless mutations, being produced different emotional states. Among these are the “states of mind” that, in technical terms, are more contained and last much more than a basic emotion. Those “states of mind” or “states animus” contemplate, therefore, in the same way that an emotion, the disposition for a action.

In agreement with Samulski (op. cit), there are positive emotions and negative emotions. Emotions as tension, fear, rage, physical damages and affective or material losses can produce vegetative, motive and emotional reactions that reduce the motivation, negatively affecting the sport performance. This means that, if the influential variables don not hold the capacity to reach an end, the power to arrive to this will be minimized.

Ricette (1988, p.76) relates that studies elaborated with athletes and “[...] related to physical damages and failures reveal the existence of an accentuated tension level [...]”, what would characterize a negative influence of the emotions on the motor acting.

The positive emotions, to the opposite, reflect the maximization of the result of the motor system. In other words, feelings of happiness, happiness, prosperity, peacefulness, can increase the motivation and positively influence in the athletes of high performance level (SAMULSKI, 2002).

According to Fleming (1966), in agreement with the clause presented by the individual, the animus state or “the moral” can, in the same way that the emotions, to present in positive or negative way.

The corporal language and the understanding of the moral or state of animus

Starting from the understanding of the corporal language as the expression of feelings and emotions through the movements of the body, we will relate some behavioural demonstrations or negative emotional reactions and the respective corporal expressions that, in general, can appear in the sport relationships, in the intention that can serve to the moral identification of the athletes of high performance. Remember, however, that this list of corporal expressions is not complete, because the human beings possess an immense repertory of emotions to interpret.

Frustration

The frustration, also referred in the literature related to the sport as deception, is an easily experienced emotion for sportsmen of high level, most of the time due to results that are below to the expected and / or injustices that have suffered, and that can negatively influence in their performance. This frustration situation due to injustices, by technical mistake or improper moral behaviour can be evident “When a referee emits a mistaken opinion in a competition” (IZARD, 1981 apud SAMULSKI, op. Cit.)

The frustration comes in two versions: confrontation and surrender. If somebody believes that can alter what is frustrating him, he can show signs of confrontational frustration, attacking directly the problem. Many of the frustration signs resemble the signs of rage. But as soon as a person thinks that the situation became a lost cause, he will display signs of surrender frustration, an irritated passivity, not signs of rage (DIMITRIUS and MAZZARELLA, 2000, p. 73).

In the same way, it is important not to confuse signs of frustration surrender with boredom signs, because it is easy to confuse.

The signs of confrontational frustration can include, according those authors (op. cit.):

• direct and frequent visual contact;
• repetition of sentences;
• approach of the other person invading his personal space;
• to gesticulate with the hand and to point and to raise the shoulders.

In the other hand, the surrender frustration can begin with:

• sighs;
• fast expiration;
• grimace;
• hands in the hip;
• hands in the head in exasperation;
• melodramatic or exaggerating movements (same).
When reaching the point of total surrender these start to be:

- turn or close the eyes;
- swing the head;
- throw the hands to the air;
- raise of shoulders;
- turn and exit (same).

**Grief / sadness**

The grief or sadness “[...] appears with the loss experience, which should be intarnally worked” (IZARD, 1977 apud SAMULSKI, 2002, p. 148).

The loss that takes to the grief can dominate their minds, deleting most of the other emotions, turning to even appear some depression signs.

According to Dimitrius and Mazzarella (2000), that feeling can take to two kinds of opposite behaviours. The most frequent is that sorry people lose their positive energy, reflecting this in their corporal language.

However, in the first stages of the grief the person can try denial, rage and need for search. He can, like this, to become hyperactive, speaking quickly or changing many times the subject, for not thinking in the sadness. Observing him well, it can be noticed certain moments in that he stops speaking and his grief can be observed. It is “when he allows his grief to traverse the defences that he raised. The face will be sad, his glance will be far away, and later, and he will quickly separate again from the feeling of mourning” (same, p. 76).

The signs of mourning or sadness are:

- tears;
- indifference;
- incapacity of accomplishing the daily tasks;
- isolation;
- apathy;
- low eyes;
- depression and confusion signs;
- relaxed facial muscles;
- released body;
- immobility or slow and deliberate movements (same).

**Nervousness**

In the pre-competitive phase the athlete is under intense psychic load or psychic stress (SAMULSKI, 2002, p. 137), that can be denominated nervousness. “That state is characterized, under the psychological point of view, for the anticipation of the competition, and consequently of the anticipation of the opportunities, risks and consequences.”

That emotional state produces discomfort, and makes the person to execute movements to distract or to disguise. “Somebody that is nervous needs an escape valve for the nervous energy” (DIMITRIUS and MAZZARELLA, 2000, p. 78) to obtain physical relief and to avoid that other circumstantial evidences of his nervousness appear.

The nervousness symptoms include:

- eyes going side to side;
- tension and contraction of the body;
- pass the weight of the body side to side;
- to rock in the chair, when he is seating;
- to cross and to uncross arms and legs; to drum with the hands, fingers and feet;
- to arrange or to play with objects and / or nails, hair, hands etc;
- to twist the hands;
- to cough repeatedly;
- to smile repeated and quickly;
- to bite the lips;
- to look down;
- to sweat;
- to chatter quickly;
- to gnaw the nails or to bite the cuticles;
- to put the hands in the pocket;
- to turn the superior part of the body side to side;
- to be silent (same).

There are several nervousness symptoms and many can indicate other mental states. This way we should not base on isolated tracks, what can take to mistakes in the interpretation of the message.

**Anger / hostility**

The feeling of rage is a lot of times manifested in the sport environment in case the athlete’s goal has not been reached, performing, therefore, a failure (SAMULSKI, 2002).

According to Dimitrius and Mazzarella (op. cit.), usually this emotion is displayed under three ways: aggression, defenceness and withdrawal. The aggressive rage is easily noticed, however, in the defence or withdrawal way demands a larger care in its perception.

The most common signs that appear in the rage are:

- redness in the face;
- crossed arms or legs;
- hands in the hips;
- short or fast breathing;
- frequent repetition of certain sentences;
- to point with the fingers;
- speaks speaking;
- fast corporal movements;
- closed jaw;
- tight lips;
- rigid posture;
- tremor;
- closed fists;
- sarcastic laughter (same).

A very intense rage can also be demonstrated through an intense glance, in a fixed and intentional way and/or with the forward projection of the face.

A furious person, but which is in the defensive position, probably will show fast movements of the body, redness in the face and changes in his breathing standard, as well as the quoted aggressiveness sign. Instead of this he will present rigidity, the arms will be closer to the body, the contracted face and the glance will stray to avoid the visual contact.
In a retracted way, the rage will be shown through signs as: turning the body and the eyes for another side, avoiding the visual contact. The person will be quiet, with the contracted face, could even stand back.

**Resentment**

Usually the resentment is a consequence of the rage or of the jealousy “Could be with any source the resentment, it is demonstrated through a set of gestures with the objective of establishing distance between a person and whose he is resented of” (DIMITRIUS and MAZZARELLA, 2000, P. 315).

The signs are:
- to cross the arms;  
- to stiffen the body;  
- to be surly;  
- to avoid the other;  
- to look for the other side;  
- signs of rage (same).

**Concerning**

When somebody is concerned, usually, he is also nervous and / or with fear, therefore the sporting situations in which that psychic state can show are the same ones related to the nervousness.

The concern can, as almost all of the emotions, to present in several ways, being necessary, therefore, to analyze the signs together, not separated. These include, according to Dimitrius and Mazzarella (2003):
- repetitive action as stomping the foot in the ground;  
- to bite the nails;  
- to scrub the face;  
- to shake;  
- concern;  
- to twist the hands;  
- to cross the arms;  
- to avoid the other;  
- to be surly;  
- to stiffen the body;  
- to look for the other side;  
- to pass the hands in the hair;  
- lack of concentration.

**CONCLUSION**

It was evidenced in this research the important role carried out by the corporal language in the understanding of the animus state or of the moral of athlete human beings submitted to training of high performance, because that communication way resembles to the psychological state of motivation of the Man, aspect to be considered in the sport performance.

We were quoted as indicators of that psychological state the negative emotions, as frustration, sadness, nervousness, rage and resentment, but it fits to explain that others, as the fear, happiness, arrogance, confidence etc., although have not been quoted in this study, can also be interpreted through the corporal expression and related to the animus state or moral of athletes of high performance, so much in a negative way as in a positive way.

It also must call the attention so that the perception of the corporal language, evidenced as of relevant role in the sport performance of athletes of high performance level, or also considered in any other sphere of the human life. This, because the communication is present in all of the aspects that involve the Man, in their jobs, in their home, among friends and, even, in the most formal relationships involving unknown people.

However, the relevance here attributed to the nonverbal language, when related to the animus state or moral of athletes of high level, is because the effective communication acts, a lot of times, the difference between the success and the failure. Ignore that language is, therefore, to commit the athlete’s motor performance and, consequently, his professional performance, with losses of unrecoverable opportunities.

We remember that, although we have referred to the need of establishing a theoretical referential to facilitate the interpretation of the corporal messages in what says respect to the moral of athletes of high performance, in general, all have a certain capacity of perception of these signs. Such referential, however, establishes a more appropriate interpretation, representing one more instrument for the optimization of the training and of the results obtained by athletes of high performance when they are considered as human beings and, therefore, involved by problems regarding the Man’s existential life.

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