

## The Use of Intuition, Pressure, and Anticipation in Badminton: A Qualitative Study

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### ABSTRACT

The current study included a qualitative method to examine badminton players' actual views on concepts that are often considered essential for their play skills: intuition, pressure, and anticipation. Interviews of experts and novice badminton players found that the groups have different understandings of intuition, pressure and anticipation and will define the concepts by discussing experience, memory, knowledge, state of mind, thinking ahead, and the opponent's body language.

**Keywords:** Qualitative research; Focus group; Badminton; Intuition; Pressure; Anticipation

### INTRODUCTION

Intuition is problem-solving based on the feeling that one option is the preferred one<sup>[1]</sup>. Athletes have been found to make these judgments from instinct, previous experiences and fast and unconscious processing<sup>[2,3,4,5]</sup>. Experts might then further use intuition to make faster and more efficient decisions<sup>[6,7,8]</sup>. This is vital for badminton players who must make correct decisions quickly without compromising effectiveness for speed<sup>[9]</sup>. Athletes are prone to mistakes and more risk-taking behaviours when under pressure<sup>[10]</sup>. Badminton players are no exception. For example, badminton players have been found to serve better when under less pressure<sup>[11]</sup>. Therefore, pressure may negatively influence badminton performance. Although, expertise might allow players to assign attention appropriately for effective anticipation<sup>[12,13,14]</sup>. Badminton players may, therefore, call upon attentional processes to make intuition more effective and reliable. They focus on relevant cues and then use visual information to detect and identify objects and predict movement<sup>[15]</sup>. Therefore, anticipation is the prediction of future events<sup>[16,17]</sup>.

Knowing the relevance of intuition, anticipation, and pressure in badminton, the following study investigated badminton players' understanding of the concepts using qualitative methods. Ethics approval was sought for the study to comply with Kingston University regulations on testing human participants, and the Faculty Research Ethics Committee of Kingston University has issued a favourable opinion. The aim was to answer the following research questions: Are there any differences and similarities between novices and experts in understanding

intuition, pressure, and anticipation in badminton? Thinking about these concepts in badminton, can experts and novices use their knowledge to predict the action plans of other badminton players?

## **METHODS**

### **Participants**

The participants were chosen based on expertise criteria and were all recruited from London badminton clubs. All badminton players were right-handed and reported no disabilities that could have influenced the data collection. The novices (N=5, age range= 23-30, M= 27.20 age, SD= 2.40) had yet to gain experience with structured badminton training or competitions. The experts (N=5, age range= 22-56, M= 29.80 age, SD= 13.14) had experience competing at the county and national levels for at least three years. They had watched at least one national or international, live badminton competition live within the last year. No participants were excluded from the study, and no answers were excluded from the transcripts.

## **MATERIALS AND PROCEDURES**

Due to COVID-19 regulations, the interviews occurred over the video-calling platform Messenger, which was deemed not to provide lesser video quality than other online screen platforms. The participants were instructed to turn their phones off and use a minimum screen size of 15' in a quiet and excluded place during the interview.

During the interviews, the experts were encouraged to provide examples and the novices were encouraged to imagine times when a badminton player might use intuition, pressure or anticipation. The first interview questions included open-ended questions about intuition, pressure and anticipation in badminton, and these concepts were then further examined through viewing a recording of the Yonex All England Badminton Championship 2020. The video clip was edited (using iMovie version 10.1.8) to contain 24 seconds of the men's double-final match from 2020 <sup>[18]</sup>. The clip was stopped as the opponent hit the shuttle towards the player, and the interview questions asked participants to anticipate his action. The video clip contextualised intuition, anticipation, and pressure in badminton and created holistic discussions. The complete interviews took approximately 60 minutes per participant, including instructions at the beginning of the study and a debrief at the end. Following the interviews, the data was transcribed, and three novel definitions were created for using intuition, pressure and anticipation in badminton. No participant asked for their transcript to be edited.

## **RESULTS**

### **Expert and novice understanding of the use of intuition in badminton**

The experts defined intuition as learning from previous events and knowing when to stick with a plan or when to change it. Intuition is an innate feeling for events and the process of acting unconsciously, automatically and with confidence that you know what is happening and how you should or should not respond to an event. This innate feeling included the skill to outsmart the opponent by predicting their moves from their body language and exploiting their weaknesses.

The novices defined intuition as an action formed from experience, memory, what feels right, and badminton knowledge and understanding. They considered intuition to lead to the formation of strategies and countermoves.

### **Expert and novice understanding of the use of pressure in badminton**

The experts defined pressure as a state of mind during matches that occurs when you are ahead in a game (worrying about losing your current lead) or chasing points in a match (worrying that you might lose). Pressure can be applied to yourself (concerned that you may not win) or to your opponent (pressuring them until they make mistakes and lose), and was also considered a positive component of badminton (acting as motivation to encourage players to fight for points) or a negative component of badminton (players feeling stressed and making errors), most often discussed in the latter form.

The novices defined pressure in badminton as a negative and stressful experience often self-induced through feelings of wanting to succeed and making, for example, an audience feel proud. The novices also considered pressure to be triggered by adrenaline. Adrenaline was believed to force players to react quickly to events and work harder to end the game quickly.

### **Expert and novice understanding of the use of anticipation in badminton**

The experts defined anticipation as thinking ahead in the game, predicting the shots created by the opponent from their body language, and preventing the opponent from predicting your shots from your body movements. Predictions were considered to allow badminton players more time to explore options and strategies for creating responses during play. It was thereby thought to aid efficiency and allow players to reach the shuttle early, thus positioning themselves correctly on the court to return shots from the opponent. The experts did not believe that anticipation can be taught; anticipation is something players are born with.

The novices defined anticipation as the skill to predict by thinking several steps ahead, quickly moving to the correct locations on the badminton court, and the badminton players' predictions are made using gut feeling about the game's outcome, the shuttle flight directions and speed, and the actions from the opponent.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of the analysis, in relation to the research questions, are discussed below. Despite overcoming geographical and financial restrictions by using video methods, the study acknowledges the limitations of using live video rather than face-to-face interviews.

Experts defined intuition as subject-based knowledge. The novices also explained that intuition is based on knowledge, memory, experience, understanding, and knowing right and wrong. Both groups linked intuition with strategy. However, the novices stated that intuition aims to produce counter moves to the opponent. The experts, in comparison, stressed the importance of knowing when to stick with a plan and when to adapt the

action plan. Hence, although the novices expressed that understanding is essential for intuition, the experts explained how understanding might occur, that is, knowing when to adjust actions and plans.

The experts and novices agreed that pressure is a state of mind during badminton matches that forces the opponent to make mistakes. According to the participants, it is the feeling of being stressed either because you have applied pressure to yourself through negative thinking or because the opponent has applied physical pressure to you during the game. Both groups also agreed that pressure is an essential strategy, which may lead to the opponent making significant errors that may lead to the player winning. Both groups considered a small amount of pressure beneficial for badminton players, as it may motivate them to perform well. Throughout the interviews, the novices mentioned external factors that may cause pressure. They stated, for example, that pressure can develop from the existence of an audience or from wanting to win trophies or tournaments. The experts did not consider this. Instead, the experts discussed pressure as a general concept during all matches. This led to the assumption that pressure is such a common idea to them that they struggled to explain what pressure means, or they did not feel the need to explain in detail how pressure takes place because they assumed it was common knowledge.

By freezing the video during the point of interception for the opponent, participants are left with minimal cues as to what shot will be played. They, therefore, must rely on other information to make their decisions. Since the badminton players could discuss what types of shots the opponent could play and why, despite the lack of information, they are assumed to have an awareness of anticipation, action plans and event sequencing.

The answers from the interviews showed that three of the five experts had the skills to predict the opponent's shot from the video, and none of the novices anticipated the shot. The novices expressed in detail where the shuttlecock was expected to land on the court and focused their answers on the shuttle's movements. In comparison, the experts focused their answers on the opponent's movements. They discussed, in detail and with badminton terminology, how the opponent in the video was positioned before hitting the shuttlecock. They stated that the player's body allowed them to predict where the shuttlecock was expected to land. The experts further discussed how they would position their bodies to respond to the shot. From these answers, it was concluded that body movements might successfully enable badminton players to anticipate the final landing location of a shuttlecock. This supports the findings from previous studies <sup>[19]</sup>. Furthermore, the experts, through their answers to the questions 'Would you play a different shot than the player did?' and 'What would you do with this information?', had skills to explain why the player should play a smash and what the opponents should be doing when responding to the smash. These answers showed, for the first time in the literature, that badminton players can anticipate the action plans of other badminton players through analysis of their body language, and they may, therefore, understand the development and aim of action plans.

## **CONCLUSION**

On several occasions throughout the interviews, regardless of whether intuition, pressure, or anticipation was discussed, it demonstrated that the experts could not discuss any concept without mentioning another. Therefore,

it is assumed that these concepts work together and being an expert means having the skill to process the concepts simultaneously.

This analysis showed how advantageous it can be to seek opinions from novices and experts to produce an overall theory. The experts often leapt straight into mid-match play and discussed behaviour in detail, whilst novice observations included an outside perspective. Combining these two perspectives produced definitions that cover all aspects of the sport. It is concluded that badminton players can predict action plans created by other badminton players. Intuition in badminton is based on experiences, memory, and knowing when to persist with a plan or change it. Pressure in badminton is a self-inflicted state of mind during matches. Lastly, anticipation in badminton refers to thinking ahead in a game and predicting the shots from the opponent's body language.

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