Preparing To Take the Field: A Temporal Exploration of Stress, Emotion, and Coping in Elite Cricket

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the stress, emotion, and coping (SEC) experiences of elite cricketers leading up to and on the day of the first competitive fixture of the season. Four elite male cricketers (M = 21.25, SD = 1.5) completed Stress and Emotion Diaries (SEDs) for a 7-day period leading up to and on the day of the first competitive fixture of the season. We then interviewed the cricketers to explore the content of the SEDs in more detail. We used semi-structured interviews to glean insight into the cricketers' stressors, cognitions (appraisals), emotions, coping strategies, and behaviors. Inductive and deductive content data analysis provided a holistic and temporal exploration of SEC underpinned by the cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotions (Lazarus, 1999). The results highlighted the ongoing and continuous nature of the SEC process whilst illustrating the coping strategies (e.g., pre-performance routines, social support, self-talk, and humor) the cricketers used leading up to and on the day of competition.

Keywords: Stress, Appraisal, Emotion, Coping, Self-Talk, Social Support

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Contemporary research focusing on competition stress and emotion has been informed by Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional perspective of stress and the cognitive-motivational-relational (CMR) theory of emotions (Lazarus, 1991, 1999, 2000). Essentially, Lazarus considered stress an ongoing transaction between the environmental demands and a person's resources, with the process of cognitive appraisal central to how the individual responds to transactions. This process involves both primary and secondary appraisals. Within primary appraisal, life events are constantly evaluated with respect to an individual's personal values, situational intentions, goal commitments, and well-being. Secondary appraisal refers to a cognitive-evaluative process that focuses on minimizing harm or maximizing gains in line with an individual's coping potential (Lazarus, 1991). Lazarus (1999, 2000) expanded this approach through the CMR theory of emotions and proposed that following the appraisal process, emotional and behavioral responses (mediated by actual coping strategies) will have an influence on actual [sport] performance (Hanton, Neil, & Mellalieu, 2008; Neil, Fletcher, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2007). For example, if an individual does not believe they have the resources to deal with the demands encountered in the competition environment, then he or she will perceive the situation as threatening or harmful and experience negative emotions such as anxiety and anger. This affective response may then be associated with negative behaviour (e.g., physical tension) and performance (e.g., skill breakdown).

Lazarus further advocated that stress and emotion should be considered as one, co-existing, and interdependent process in the CMR theory of emotions. Based on his proposition, various types of stress appraisal (i.e., harm, benefit, challenge, or threat)

were suggested to evoke different emotions. For example, an individual may experience anxiety when a stressor is appraised as an uncertain threat, while anger may be experienced as a result of perceived personal harm. Thus an inability to cope with such emotions can distract athletes from the task at hand during sporting competition (Lazarus, 2000). Based on this notion, sport psychology researchers have explored the different coping strategies used by athletes (e.g., Nicholls & Polman, 2007). In a systematic review on coping in sport, Nicholls and Polman reported five primary coping dimensions used by athletes: problem-focused coping (e.g., seeking information); emotion-focused coping (e.g. seeking emotional support); avoidance coping (e.g., removing oneself from the situation); approach coping (e.g., increasing effort); and appraisal coping (e.g., re-evaluation of the situation).

Sport psychology researchers have explored the various coping strategies used by athletes in relation to numerous stressors (e.g., Devonport, Lane, & Biscombe, 2013; Thelwell, Weston, & Greenless, 2007; Weston, Thelwell, Bond, & Hutchings, 2009). For example, Weston and colleagues (2009) examined the stressors and the coping strategies used by five elite single-handed sailors. They highlighted a variety of competitive, organizational, and personal stressors that were regulated through a number of coping responses (e.g., problem-, emotion-, appraisal-, and approach-focused coping). Similarly, Thelwell et al. (2007) explored the stressors experienced and coping strategies used by elite cricketers. Cricket, by its very nature, exposes players to a diversity of stressful situations that occur frequently over a period of hours and, sometimes, days. Given the duration at which cricket matches play-out, Thelwell and colleagues reported many stressors including personal issues, match specific issues, and external factors that were attended to by a variety of coping strategies including social support, reflection, and self-talk. In sum, the

aforementioned literature has illustrated provisional links between stressors and the implemented coping strategies, however future researchers need to explore: 1) the entire SEC process through an approach that encapsulates each component as an interdependent transaction; and, 2) the coping strategies used to manipulate the stress and emotion experience to enable the prevalence of helpful behaviors (e.g., Thelwell et al., 2007; Weston et al., 2009).

Building on the research that isolated the individual components of the SEC process, several scholars have taken a holistic approach and examined more of the SEC process (e.g., Neil, Bayston, Hanton, & Wilson, 2013a; Neil, Hanton, Mellalieu, & Fletcher, 2011; Nicholls, Polman, & Levy, 2012). To illustrate, Nicholls and associates used path analysis and highlighted a sequential account of SEC experiences. Their data supported the notion that stressors, appraisals, emotions, and coping are highly related constructs. Using a qualitative approach, Neil and colleagues (2011) provided insight into the transaction of both male and female athletes across multiple sporting environments through interviews and single-case procedures. The data revealed the relationship between initial appraisals, emotions, further appraisals, and subsequent behavior, emphasizing the different influence of athletes' appraisals on their emotional response(s). Further, athletes who viewed their emotional response as positive increased their effort and concentration, and enhanced performance. In contrast, athletes who viewed emotions as detrimental described performing poorly. Similarly, Neil and colleagues (2013a) examined the influence of stress and emotions on referee decision-making through identifying the stressors encountered, the consequent appraisals, emotions, and adopted coping strategies. Data highlighted the use of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies to deal with the negative appraisals and associated emotions, a process that enabled better decision-

making.

Qualitative designs such as the one adopted by Neil and colleagues (2011; 2013a) have been advocated to explore the "theoretical heart" of the SEC process (Lazarus, 1991, p. 61). Despite this emerging body of work providing a more holistic insight into the SEC process and the impact on performance behavior, studies have typically adopted a snapshot approach through retrospective methods. That is, they have considered one transaction at one moment in time, failing to consider the ongoing intricacies of a person's stress experience(s). To highlight the reciprocal nature of the SEC process, future researchers may adopt temporal methods to further understand athletes' experiences (Hanton et al., 2012). Such approaches would highlight the sport-specific experiences of athletes and give insight into the stressors, appraisals, emotions, coping strategies, and behavioral responses associated with sports performance over time.

Adhering to the aforementioned recommendations the present study adds to the extant literature by providing a more representative account of Lazarus' conceptualization of SEC through adopting a temporal and holistic examination of cricketers' SEC experiences. Specifically, we aimed to highlight the SEC process in its entirety with a view to extending the provisional links demonstrated in the stress and coping research (e.g., Devonport et al., 2013; Thelwell et al., 2007; Weston et al., 2009). Therefore, in this study we explored the stressors, cognitions (appraisals), emotions, coping strategies, and behaviors that elite cricketers experienced throughout a 7-day period leading up to and on the day of the first competitive fixture of the season.

Method

Participants

In line with the recent SEC literature (e.g., Hanton, Wagstaff, & Fletcher, 2012; Neil et al., 2011), we used a purposive sampling approach to obtain the sample for this study. Having approached the Cricket Team's management to gain preliminary access to their players, the lead author gave a formal presentation to explain the study. Specifically, the presentation included an outline of the our interest in understanding the SEC experiences of elite cricketers, and how these experiences influenced elite cricketers' behaviors in the 7-day period leading up to and on the day of the first competitive fixture of the season. After verbally agreeing to participate in the study, four elite male cricketers with ages ranging from 20 to 23 (M = 21.25, SD = 1.5) provided written informed consent to participate in this study.

Data Collection

Stress and emotion diaries. We collected data from the cricketers through diaries completed for a 7-day pre-competition period and on the day of the Cricket Team's first competitive fixture of the season. Using diaries has been described as essential in capturing the temporal and dynamic nature of the SEC process (Lazarus, 2000). More specifically, we required an intensive monitoring process to illustrate the plethora of demands an individual may encounter each day, the meaning they ascribe to these encounters, and their attempts to cope (Dewe & Trenberth, 2004). Consistent with previous research (e.g., Hanton et al., 2012; Neil, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2013b), we developed a standardized log for this study. The Stress and Emotion Diaries (SEDs) included a page for each day that prompted the players to record stressors that had affected their emotional state during each day. To reduce issues relating to retrospective recall the cricketers completed the SEDs at the end of each day (i.e., prior to getting ready for sleep; Campbell & Jones, 2002). When recording the stressors, we prompted the participants to report their thoughts concerning the stressor

(e.g., specifically, what were you thinking in relation to the stressor?) and the resultant emotions (e.g., how did this stressor make you feel?). Prior to issuing the SEDs, the lead author explained the requirements of the data collection process and provided the participants with an information sheet containing example diary entries. During data collection, the lead researcher attended the Cricket Team's training session each day to answer any questions and help ensure adherence (e.g., Hanton et al., 2012; Nicholls et al., 2005).

Collection of video footage. To promote accurate recall and reflection during competition, video footage of each participant during competition was collected to use alongside post-competition interviews. This approach has previously been successful in providing a stimulus to encourage more vivid recollections (e.g., Miles & Neil, 2013; Smith & Harwood, 2002). With the Cricket Club's approval, the lead author recorded footage of the competition on location using a 50Hz camera situated directly behind the wicket from the media end of the ground (Miles & Neil, 2013).

Video editing. To explore the participants' SEC experiences, we used Sportscode to edit the video into 15-second clips representing each competitive stressor identified within the SEDs. For all the participants, footage was also provided of the warm up, taking the field, and bowling or batting performances.

Interview process. We interviewed the cricketers the day after competition to reduce issues with retrospective recall. For the purpose of this study, we deemed an open-ended, semi-structured interview technique as most appropriate to enable us to explore newly emerging themes whilst gaining greater clarification and understanding of participants' experiences (Patton, 2002). We tailored the interview guides for each participant in-line with the data collected from the SEDs and divided the interview guide into two sections. Section one contained a logical and progressive sequence of

questioning encouraging the participants to elaborate on the stressors (e.g., "you mentioned the meeting was pointless, what made you record this?"), cognitions (e.g., "what specifically were you thinking when he told you this?"), emotions (e.g., "how would you describe the way you were feeling at this point?"), coping strategies (e.g., "what did you do to help cope with these thoughts and feelings?"), and behaviors (e.g., "how would you describe your behavior at this point?") emerging throughout the pre-competition period. In sum, within the first section of the interview we explored the participants' SEC experiences throughout the 7-day period leading up to competition. In section two we focused on the participants' SEC experiences on the day of and during actual competition. To minimize issues surrounding retrospective recall that has limited previous studies within cricket (e.g., Thelwell et al., 2007), the questions regarding competitive experiences were accompanied by video footage of each participant during their performance.

Pilot studies. We piloted the SEDs with two recreational cricketers throughout a 3-day period leading up to competition. Following the pilot we made only cosmetic changes to the layout of the SEDs. The data collected over the 3-day period created a template for a pilot interview guide. Based on this template, the lead author then interviewed the same two recreational cricketers following competition. This process enabled the interviewer to become familiar with the type of responses the open-ended questions would provoke and ways to stimulate detailed descriptions (Flick, Kardorff, & Steinke, 2004). We made minor amendments to the interview guide following the pilot to promote better clarification (e.g., ''I'm not entirely sure what you mean, could you please go over that again?'') and elaboration (e.g., "could you please explain that in more detail?").

Data Analysis

Following all the interviews being transcribed verbatim, the lead author sent copies of the transcripts to the participants. This process enabled the participants to reflect on the interview and ensure the transcripts represented a valid description of events. Following confirmation from the participants that the transcriptions were accurate, we read and re-read the transcripts to improve our understanding of each of the participants' unique experiences (Kvale, 2009). In-line with previous research (e.g., Hanton et al., 2012), we identified and coded words, phrases, and quotes associated with the stressors each participant encountered and the associated cognitions, emotions, coping strategies, and behavioral responses. We then conducted inductive and deductive content analyses (Côté, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993), with key components categorized into a Microsoft® Excel® document (Meyer & Avery, 2009). To elaborate, the stressors and the associated cognitions, emotions, coping strategies, and behavioral responses were inductively analyzed into manageable *meaning units* (Côté et al., 1993) before being classified through deductive means in line with previous literature – consequently adopting a post-positivistic approach. For example, we categorized the stressors into competitive, organizational, and personal sub-categories in line with existing stress literature (see Fletcher, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2006). We organized the cognitions and emotions using Lazarus's (2000) existing categories; whilst the coping strategies were also classified using Lazarus's (1999) model of coping that has been widely adopted within the sport literature (Nicholls & Polman, 2007). Finally, the emanating behaviors remained inductively organized and were recorded as quotes from each participant. We then sent the raw data in the Microsoft® Excel® document and the first draft of the results section of this paper to the participants for member-checking procedures which verified our interpretations of the data.

Results

The data we collected highlights the types of stressors and subsequent cognitive, emotional, coping, and behavioral responses that elite cricketers experienced throughout the 7-day pre-competition period and on the day of the first competitive fixture of the season. To clearly represent the large amount of data gathered during this study, we display the data through temporal representations using Microsoft® Visio® (see Figures 1-4). The representations give details of: the stressors; the associated cognitions (appraisals); the subsequent emotions; the coping strategies; and the behavioral outcomes. To facilitate a contextual understanding and provide an empathetic view of the collective experiences of the players, we accompany these representations with a selection of narrative and descriptive quotes (Smith & Sparkes, 2005).

Pre-Competition Period

From the 68 stressors recorded throughout the pre-competition period (see Figures 1-4), 55 of the preceding SEC transactions concerned performance stressors. In line with the stressors, all the players identified cognitions (appraisals) associated with a variety of competitive stressors that resulted in either positive or negative emotions, attempts to cope, and behavioral responses. To guide the reader through our findings, we describe the players' experiences in four stages of the week leading up to, and including, competition: 1) early in the week (Day 1-3); 2) throughout the middle of the week (Day 4-6); 3) the day before competition (Day 7); and 4) the day of competition. In each stage we illustrate the most frequently encountered stressors and the subsequent components of the SEC process.

Day 1-3

Early in the week, the most frequently cited competitive stressor by each

player was team practice (including a practice fixture). When given the opportunity to elaborate on his experiences, player C (Figure 3, Day 1) highlighted practice to be a commonly reported stressor and his attempts to cope:

> I know it is important to perform well in practice to show the coaches that I have improved throughout the winter [*stressor*]. I often think about the importance of hitting the ball well leading up to the first class match as it increases your chances of selection [*threat appraisal*]. This leaves me feeling slightly anxious [*emotion*]. When you are feeling like this it is important to try and relax and watch the ball. This is something I will say to myself, 'relax and watch ball' during batting practice as it helps me focus [*problem-focused coping*] and, on this occasion during practice, I played well [*performance behavior*].

The above quotation highlights the importance of displaying competence at each practice to help the players achieve their overall goal of being selected for the competition. The potential of performing poorly in practice was appraised as threatening in relation to the chances of selection. In line with this appraisal and the associated anxiety response, all of the players reported the value of coping. Pre-competition routine was the most commonly used coping strategy to regulate anxiety and redirect focus to the task. For example, player B reported that he would focus on "the routine that [he] would use in the match" prior to going into bat (Figure 2, Day 1). He continued, "…when you are feeling under pressure and anxious, it is important that you have one constant routine that enables you to feel relaxed and focused". Although the components of each players pre-competition routines were different, emphasis was placed on a systematic and "consistent routine" to cope with these demands.

Although practice was the most commonly cited stressor throughout the week, demands from outside of cricket were noted to affect the players' cognitions, emotions, and behaviors at the start of the pre-competition period. On Day 2, player A reported that he had recently broken up with his girlfriend and noticed himself becoming particularly aware of his demands:

> The break up made me realize I am at a big crossroad in my life [*stressor*]. I don't know what will come after university… Will I play cricket? Will I get a job? Will I get back with my girlfriend? Will I be living away from home? It seems like I have a lot on my plate and I'm not sure how I'm going to handle it, let alone focus on the match at the weekend [*threat appraisal*].

Feeling increasingly anxious [*emotion*], player A returned home to use his social support networks. By confiding in his family, he was able to gain some perspective on his situation [*emotional coping*] and appeared much more sociable and attentive [*behavior*] (Figure 1, Day 2). When we asked player A how he was feeling the next morning, he responded positively:

> In the morning, all the worrying thoughts had gone and I was looking forward to our practice fixture [*stressor*]. I was thinking 'cricket is the most important thing in my life right now' [*benefit appraisal*] and I was really happy and looking forward to the day ahead [*emotion*]. I returned to my normal self [*behavior*].

Despite the temporary diversion of player A's attention, he later stated that "those thoughts are still there, but being around the boys and striving for selection enabled me to cope with it". The above quotation illustrates the value of social support as an emotion-focused coping strategy and also highlights that cognitions can be diverted towards other important goals (e.g., the goal of being selected for competition).

Day 4-6

Although the players recorded personal issues and demands associated with displaying competence in practice, organizational stressors related to the coach's view on selection became more frequent as the week progressed. All of the players continually appraised their chances of selection as a consequence of coach perception. Indeed, the demand of selection was most often timed at night following the days practice. Half way through the week, three of the four players reported cognitions associated with their chances of selection. Player C provided insight into the general thoughts of the group on Day 4:

> What the coach thinks of you [*stressor*] and where he sees your role in the team is particularly concerning [*threat appraisal*]. You often end up feeling anxious and frustrated [*emotion*] no matter how much reassurance you get from your teammates throughout the week [*emotion-focused coping*]. Most evenings I would find myself sitting in my room rather than socializing with my housemates [*behavior*].

The above quotation shows player C's view on selection in relation to coach perception(s) and the rationale for many of the cognitions that the players had throughout the week. Regardless of how the players viewed their practice throughout the week, organizational stressors concerning the uncertainty of the coach's opinion was appraised as a threat given the importance of their selection for competition.

Towards the end of the week there were several occasions when the players highlighted stressors that were perceived to enhance or diminish team values prior to competition. To elaborate, player D illustrated an occasion on Day 5 where several players jeopardized team values by wearing the wrong kit, which threatened the prospects of a good practice session (Figure 4):

> Three or four of the boys weren't wearing the right clothing and as soon as they walked into the meeting you could see that the coach wasn't impressed [*stressor*]. This was reflected by a poor start to our warm ups and could have led on to a bad net session [*harm appraisal*]. Given how close we were to competition, this made me angry [*emotion*]. I knew getting angry wouldn't help so I started to joke with one of the lads that was wearing the wrong kit [*emotion-focused coping*]. This helped my body language in the session [*behavior*] and, slowly, the atmosphere improved.

The use of humor was highlighted on several occasions to enable coping with team-related organizational stressors. To elaborate, player A explained why he used humor to cope with one of his teammates making him late for practice on Day 6 (Fig.1):

> We jokingly, yet seriously, let him know that we were annoyed. For example, we were swearing and saying he's always late. Although I was annoyed, having a joke made it a little easier. I think it gets the message across without causing too many issues. I hope that he takes it well but learns his lesson from it. If I didn't make a joke of it, it would have festered and I may have taken it out on him later.

Both of these explanations highlight how the players used humor within the team environment to maintain a positive team ethos whilst ensuring that their teammates were aware of their misdemeanors.

The Day Before Competition (Day 7)

At the end of the week, three of the four players (A, B, and D) were selected for the competition. Although player C missed out on selection for the competition, he was named as 12th man. Given that the role of 12th man required player C to be present at the competition, his experiences were recorded (Figure 3, Competition).

Upon receiving news of selection, all three of the selected players reflected upon their week's preparation. Depending on the perception of their performances throughout the week, the resultant cognitions represented a benefit or threat appraisal and subsequently positive (i.e., happiness) or negative (i.e., anxiety) emotions. To elaborate, player D provided insight into the experience he had on the night prior to competition (Figure 4, Day 7):

> I knew that I had been training well [*stressor*] all week and that gives you such a confidence boost [*benefit appraisal*]. Reflecting on this made me feel really happy [*emotion*] and confident going into the game. Despite these thoughts, you sometimes find yourself thinking about letting yourself and your team down [*threat appraisal*]. To counter this, I would tell to myself, 'you know you are up to pace' and that helped me a lot as the game was so close [*problem-focused coping*]. Despite the bursts of anxiety, I was very happy [*emotions*] about my chances the next day and as a result I was buzzing and full of energy whilst sat with my housemates [*behavior*].

The above quotation highlights the continual and fluctuating nature of the SEC process. In addition, it highlights the use of positive reminders, through the use of self-talk, as a form of coping to negate any feelings of anxiety. In particular, the players would appear to find positives in stressors that were initially deemed to be threatening (e.g., past performances in practice).

Day of Competition

Upon waking up on the morning of the competition, the players recorded their thoughts surrounding the approaching competition [*stressor*]. Having spent the majority of the week with concerns over selection, all the players initially appraised the competition as a great occasion [*benefit appraisal*] that they could enjoy.

Typically, all of the players reported feelings of happiness [*emotion*] at the start of the day. Specifically, the players drew upon their week's preparation as a source of confidence to explain their feelings. To illustrate, player A stated:

> Despite all the ups and downs you have in the week with thoughts concerning your performance in practice, you actually become stronger and more confident as a result. Being able to draw on this will be important as the day goes on; it will particularly help when you are put on the spot to perform [when batting or bowling].

The sentiments provided above were consistent with the three players who had made the team for competition. However, as the morning progressed, it was apparent that the players' goals had changed from gaining selection to performing well in the competition. For example, player A gave more insight into this change:

> For players on this scheme there are no bigger games than this. I think most of the players would agree that this is the most important match of the season [*stressor*]… Your focus changes quickly from getting in the team to wanting to play well… It becomes important that you play well to make a name for yourself [*threat appraisal*].

To cope with the reported anxiety [*emotion*] associated with their approaching performance, all three of the cricketers who were selected for competition focused on their pre-competition preparation and routines [*problem-focused coping*]. Player B advocated the use of a pre-competition routine as it helped "stop any negative thoughts creeping in and focused [him] on the task at hand". As a result he was "very focused" in the morning's warm-ups and executed his pre-competition preparation "really well" [*behavior*].

Specific to competition, the three selected players (A, B, and D) reported

different stressors associated to their individual roles. To elaborate, player A gave insight into being asked to bowl by the captain (Figure 1, Competition):

> I had been waiting for about 45 minutes when the captain asked me to bowl [*stressor*]. Although you want to be excited, you can't help but feel anxious [*emotion*] about the occasion given that you don't want to fail [*threat appraisal*]. By concentrating on my pre-competition routine it helped me focus on my skills rather than all the other thoughts you get [*problem-focused coping*]. With my first ball, I fully committed to my routine and I got a wicket [*competition behavior*].

Player A was not alone in his use of pre-competition routines to help him cope with the demands of competition. All three participants reported pre-competition routines as a valuable coping strategy during competition, as it enabled them to focus on their skills as well as relax during times of increased anxiety. In addition, during periods of self-doubt, the players used self-talk as a reminder of their preparation throughout the week and their readiness to compete.

Discussion

This study adds to the extant literature by becoming the first to provide a holistic and temporal exploration of SEC underpinned by the CMR theory of emotions (Lazarus, 1999). By addressing the call for more temporal designs to explore the SEC process (Hanton et al., 2012), we have demonstrated some of the SEC experiences of elite cricketers throughout a 7-day pre-competition period and on the day of the first competitive fixture of the season. These data provide insight into the transactions that cricketers have with their environment through: the stressors, cognitions (appraisals), emotions, coping strategies, and eventual behavioral outcomes in the lead up to an important competition. Consequently, data support existing literature that illustrated

athletes face a diversity of demands, appraise each demand in relation to their existing goals, experience a myriad of emotions, and attempt to cope through a number of different strategies, all of which ultimately affect performance behaviors (Neil et al., 2011; 2013b).

Whilst the narratives provide specific insight into the SEC transactions that arise during the lead up to, and during, competition, the temporal representations (see Figures 1-4) also illustrate the ongoing and continuous nature of the SEC process over a prolonged period of time. Specifically, the players in this study reported a number of stressors across the week, some of which reoccurred in line with their existing performance goals. Despite the emphasis on performance stressors, the players continued to experience stressors that emanated from outside the performance environment (Hanton, Fletcher, & Coulglan, 2005; Woodman & Hardy, 2001). That is, organizational (e.g., team issues) and personal (e.g., relationships) stressors that evoked a number of cognitions, emotions, coping responses, and behavioral outcomes. Indeed, our data illustrate the need for athletes to continuously cope with numerous demands from a variety of contexts to avoid conflict with their most salient goals (e.g., Fletcher et al., 2006; Mellalieu, Neil, Hanton, & Fletcher, 2009).

To cope with the stressors and the resulting cognitive and emotional responses, the players reported using several coping strategies. Consistent with the CMR theory of emotions, the coping strategies were implemented during threat and harm appraisals (including negative emotional responses; Lazarus, 2000). In particular, the players expressed the use of pre-competition routines, social support, self-talk, and humor (e.g., Cotterill, 2011; Gaudreau, Blondin, & Lapierre, 2002; Miles & Neil, 2013; Thewell et al., 2007). Although the type of coping strategy used was specific and unique to each player's appraisal, analysis of the data revealed several common

strategies. For example, pre-competition routines were regularly used to help cope with many of the competitive stressors appraised as threatening (i.e., the need to display competence) and evoked emotions perceived as detrimental to competition (i.e., anxiety). Previous research on stress and coping in cricket has revealed the importance of pre-match preparatory strategies to help overcome stress from self-induced pressure and match-specific issues (Thelwell et al., 2007), a result that is congruent with data in our study. Although existing research has indicated the effectiveness of pre-performance routines on skill execution (e.g., Cotterill, 2011), future researchers should continue to adopt more experimental methodologies to explain why pre-performance routines assist performers in regulating the affects of the SEC process on skill execution.

Regarding organizational or personal stressors that were appraised as threatening or harmful to goal attainment, the players highlighted the value of social support networks and the use of humor as useful coping strategies. Indeed, athletes have been reported to seek support agencies comprising of teammates and coaches for instrumental and emotional purposes (Bianco, 2001). Although our study provides examples of using teammates as social support for concerns surrounding selection, the data also offer evidence for the use of support networks external to the sports organization (e.g., friends and family). The data indicate providers of social support (from outside of cricket) were used more frequently as an emotion-focused coping strategy since consulting with teammates or coaches was seen to have potential implications for future selection (Bianco, 2001). These data align with previous research exploring the efficacy of Personal-Disclosure Mutual-Sharing (PDMS) intervention strategies on team functioning variables (e.g., Barker, Evans, Coffee, Slater, & McCarthy, 2014). Through the use of PDMS, practitioners may aim to

enhance the quality of relationships and rapport among teammates and coaching staff to further enhance the provision of emotional support. Similarly, the data from our study also highlight humor as a potential coping strategy for team-related issues. Comparable to the data of our study, the use of humor has recently been described as a specific interpersonal emotion regulation strategy used in competitive situations (Tamminen & Crocker, 2013). Therefore our preliminary data may provide a valuable avenue for future researchers interested in understanding coping strategies to maintain social relationships in the sport environment (Niven, Totterdell, & Holman, 2009).

The strength of this present study is based upon the combination of qualitative techniques to more effectively understand the experiences of elite cricketers in the period leading up to, and during, competition. Advancing on retrospective enquiry, we gave the participants opportunity to reflect upon, and record, their SEC experiences through the use of diaries (e.g., Hanton et al., 2012). Additionally, we used innovative methods to delineate the players' SEC experiences over a prolonged and significant period of time prior to competition. By adopting this approach, we have demonstrated the ongoing and continuous nature of SEC (Lazarus, 1999; 2000), and have highlighted the idiosyncratic nature of each SEC response is underpinned by unique athlete goals. Whilst data have reinforced the credentials of the CMR theory of emotions (Lazarus, 2000), we acknowledge that this study only provides provisional insight into the athletes' goals and their SEC response in relation to performance behaviours. Future researchers should consider investigating the specific goals of athletes, their cognitive and emotional responses, and the effectiveness of specific coping strategies (e.g., self-talk) on athletic performance.

In conclusion, this study is the first to provide a holistic and temporal exploration of SEC underpinned by the CMR theory of emotions (Lazarus, 1999).

Through exploring the SEC experiences of elite cricketers, data indicate a variety of stressors and subsequent cognitive, emotional, coping, and behavioral responses. In particular, our data support the ongoing and continuous nature of the SEC process and highlight the central role of appraisals (Lazarus, 1999). By using an approach that illuminated the SEC process in its entirety, we have shown the types of coping strategies that cricketers use to regulate their SEC responses and performance behavior(s). Researchers are encouraged to adopt experimental approaches to examine the effectiveness of coping strategies utilized by athletes to regulate their experiences of stress and emotions during performance.

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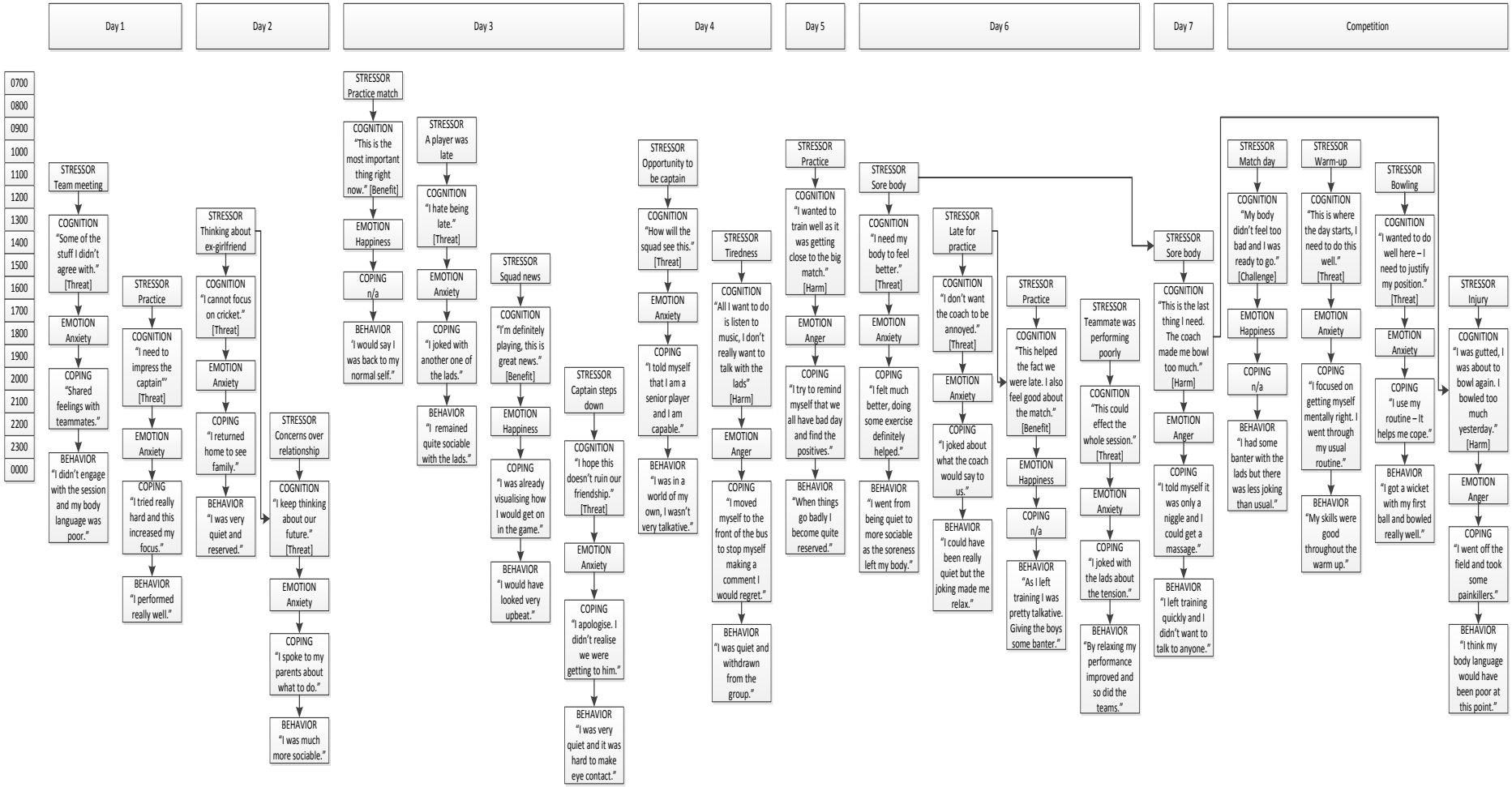
Figure Captions

Figure 1. Temporal representation of the stress and emotion process of the 8-day period leading up to, and including, competition for player A.

Figure 2. Temporal representation of the stress and emotion process of the 8-day period leading up to, and including, competition for player B.

Figure 3. Temporal representation of the stress and emotion process of the 8-day period leading up to, and including, competition for player C.

Figure 4. Temporal representation of the stress and emotion process of the 8-day period leading up to, and including, competition for player D.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STRESSOR Team meeting
COGNITION "Some of the stuff I didn't agree with." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "Shared feelings with teammates."
BEHAVIOR "I didn't engage with the session and my body language was poor."
STRESSOR Practice
COGNITION "I need to impress the captain"' [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I tried really hard and this increased my focus."
BEHAVIOR "I performed really well."
STRESSOR Thinking about ex-girlfriend
COGNITION "I cannot focus on cricket." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I returned home to see family."
BEHAVIOR "I was very quiet and reserved."
STRESSOR Concerns over relationship
COGNITION "I keep thinking about our future." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I spoke to my parents about what to do."
BEHAVIOR "I was much more sociable."
STRESSOR Practice match
COGNITION "This is the most important thing right now." [Benefit]
EMOTION Happiness
COPING n/a
BEHAVIOR 'I would say I was back to my normal self."
STRESSOR A player was late
COGNITION "I hate being late." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I joked with another one of the lads."
BEHAVIOR "I remained quite sociable with the lads."
STRESSOR Squad news
COGNITION "I'm definitely playing, this is great news." [Benefit]
EMOTION Happiness
COPING "I was already visualising how I would get on in the game."
BEHAVIOR "I would have looked very upbeat."
STRESSOR Captain steps down
COGNITION "I hope this doesn't ruin our friendship." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I apologise. I didn't realise we were getting to him."
BEHAVIOR "I was very quiet and it was hard to make eye contact."
STRESSOR Opportunity to be captain
COGNITION "How will the squad see this." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I told myself that I am a senior player and I am capable."
BEHAVIOR "I was in a world of my own, I wasn't very talkative."
STRESSOR Tiredness
COGNITION "All I want to do is listen to music, I don't really want to talk with the lads" [Harm]
EMOTION Anger
COPING "I moved myself to the front of the bus to stop myself making a comment I would regret."
BEHAVIOR "I was quiet and withdrawn from the group."
STRESSOR Practice
COGNITION "I wanted to train well as it was getting close to the big match." [Harm]
EMOTION Anger
COPING "I try to remind myself that we all have bad day and find the positives."
BEHAVIOR "When things go badly I become quite reserved."
STRESSOR Sore body
COGNITION "I need my body to feel better." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I felt much better, doing some exercise definitely helped."
BEHAVIOR "I went from being quiet to more sociable as the soreness left my body."
STRESSOR Late for practice
COGNITION "I don't want the coach to be annoyed." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I joked about what the coach would say to us."
BEHAVIOR "I could have been really quiet but the joking made me relax."
STRESSOR Practice
COGNITION "This helped the fact we were late. I also feel good about the match." [Benefit]
EMOTION Happiness
COPING n/a
BEHAVIOR "As I left training I was pretty talkative. Giving the boys some banter."
STRESSOR Teammate was performing poorly
COGNITION "This could effect the whole session." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I joked with the lads about the tension."
BEHAVIOR "By relaxing my performance improved and so did the teams."
STRESSOR Sore body
COGNITION "This is the last thing I need. The coach made me bowl too much." [Harm]
EMOTION Anger
COPING "I told myself it was only a niggle and I could get a massage."
BEHAVIOR "I left training quickly and I didn't want to talk to anyone."
STRESSOR Match day
COGNITION "My body didn't feel too bad and I was ready to go." [Challenge]
EMOTION Happiness
COPING n/a
BEHAVIOR "I had some banter with the lads but there was less joking than usual."
STRESSOR Warm-up
COGNITION "This is where the day starts, I need to do this well." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I focused on getting myself mentally right. I went through my usual routine."
BEHAVIOR "My skills were good throughout the warm up."
STRESSOR Bowling
COGNITION "I wanted to do well here – I need to justify my position." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I use my routine – It helps me cope."
BEHAVIOR "I got a wicket with my first ball and bowled really well."
STRESSOR Injury
COGNITION "I was gutted, I was about to bowl again. I bowled too much yesterday." [Harm]
EMOTION Anger
COPING "I went off the field and took some painkillers."
BEHAVIOR "I think my body language would have been poor at this point."

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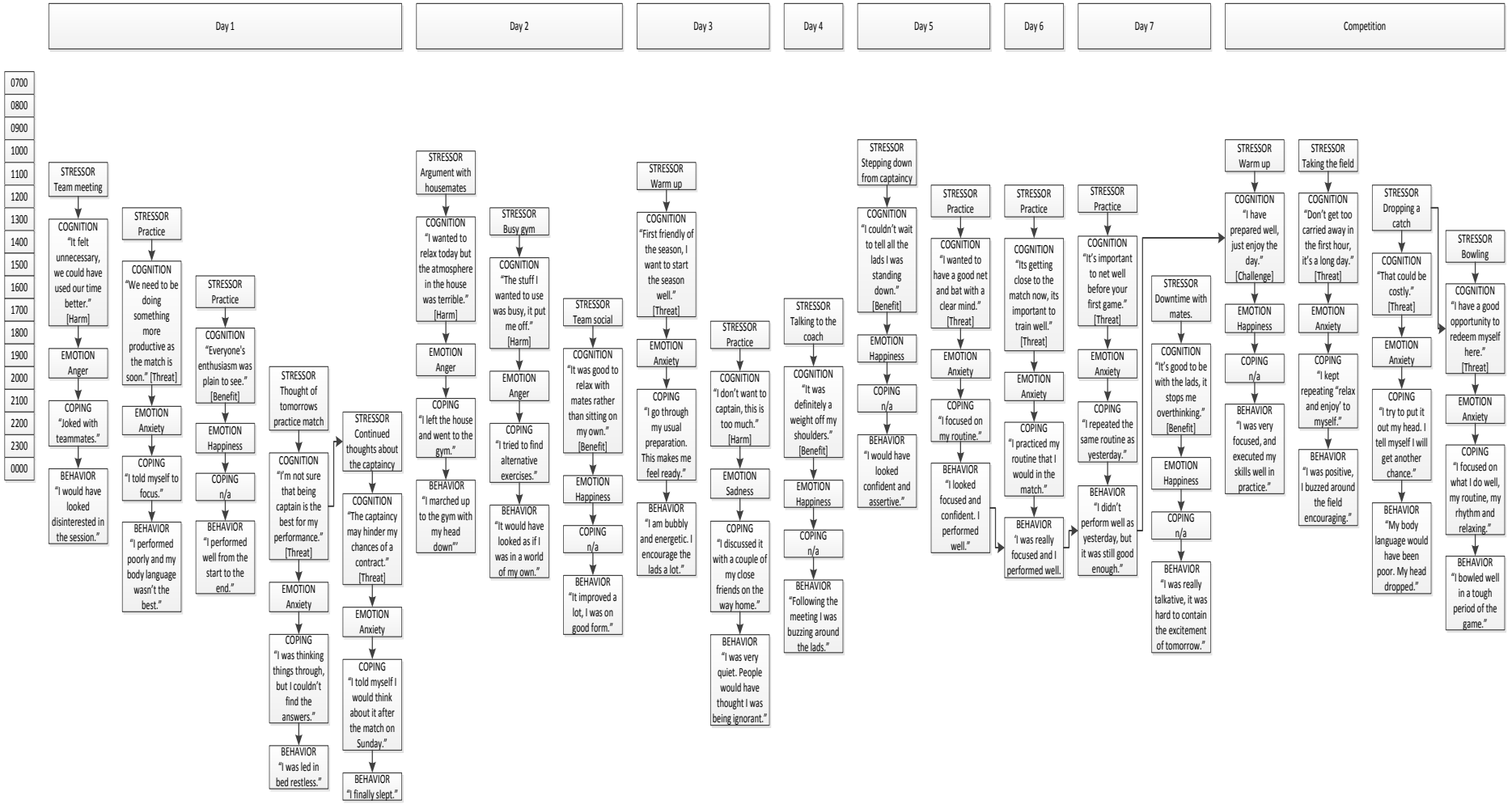
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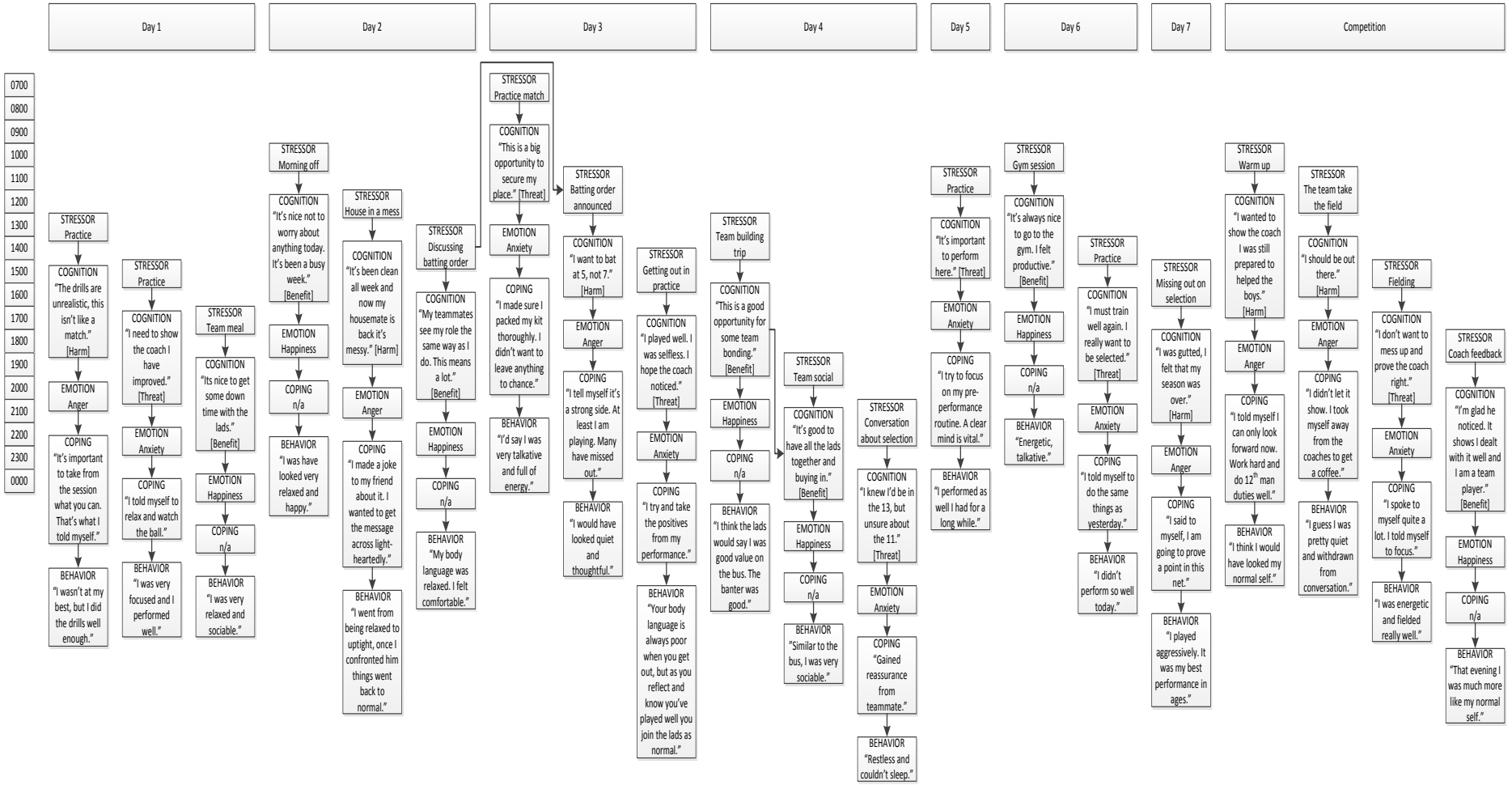
STRESSOR Team meeting
COGNITION "It felt unnecessary, we could have used our time better." [Harm]
EMOTION Anger
COPING "Joked with teammates."
BEHAVIOR "I would have looked disinterested in the session."
STRESSOR Practice
COGNITION "We need to be doing something more productive as the match is soon." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I told myself to focus."
BEHAVIOR "I performed poorly and my body language wasn't the best."
STRESSOR Practice
COGNITION "Everyone's enthusiasm was plain to see." [Benefit]
EMOTION Happiness
COPING n/a
BEHAVIOR "I performed well from the start to the end."
STRESSOR Thought of tomorrows practice match
COGNITION "I'm not sure that being captain is the best for my performance." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I was thinking things through, but I couldn't find the answers."
BEHAVIOR "I was led in bed restless."
STRESSOR Continued thoughts about the captaincy
COGNITION "The captaincy may hinder my chances of a contract." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I told myself I would think about it after the match on Sunday."
BEHAVIOR "I finally slept."
STRESSOR Argument with housemates
COGNITION "I wanted to relax today but the atmosphere in the house was terrible." [Harm]
EMOTION Anger
COPING "I left the house and went to the gym."
BEHAVIOR "I marched up to the gym with my head down"
STRESSOR Busy gym
COGNITION "The stuff I wanted to use was busy, it put me off." [Harm]
EMOTION Anger
COPING "I tried to find alternative exercises."
BEHAVIOR "It would have looked as if I was in a world of my own."
STRESSOR Team social
COGNITION "It was good to relax with mates rather than sitting on my own." [Benefit]
EMOTION Happiness
COPING n/a
BEHAVIOR "It improved a lot, I was on good form."
STRESSOR Warm up
COGNITION "First friendly of the season, I want to start the season well." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I go through my usual preparation. This makes me feel ready."
BEHAVIOR "I am bubbly and energetic. I encourage the lads a lot."
STRESSOR Practice
COGNITION "I don't want to captain, this is too much." [Harm]
EMOTION Sadness
COPING "I discussed it with a couple of my close friends on the way home."
BEHAVIOR "I was very quiet. People would have thought I was being ignorant."
STRESSOR Talking to the coach
COGNITION "It was definitely a weight off my shoulders." [Benefit]
EMOTION Happiness
COPING n/a
BEHAVIOR "Following the meeting I was buzzing around the lads."
STRESSOR Stepping down from captaincy
COGNITION "I couldn't wait to tell all the lads I was standing down." [Benefit]
EMOTION Happiness
COPING n/a
BEHAVIOR "I would have looked confident and assertive."
STRESSOR Practice
COGNITION "I wanted to have a good net and bat with a clear mind." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I focused on my routine."
BEHAVIOR "I looked focused and confident. I performed well."
STRESSOR Practice
COGNITION "Its getting close to the match now, its important to train well." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I practiced my routine that I would in the match."
BEHAVIOR "I was really focused and I performed well."
STRESSOR Practice
COGNITION "It's important to net well before your first game." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I repeated the same routine as yesterday."
BEHAVIOR "I didn't perform well as yesterday, but it was still good enough."
STRESSOR Downtime with mates.
COGNITION "It's good to be with the lads, it stops me overthinking." [Benefit]
EMOTION Happiness
COPING n/a
BEHAVIOR "I was really talkative, it was hard to contain the excitement of tomorrow."
STRESSOR Warm up
COGNITION "I have prepared well, just enjoy the day." [Challenge]
EMOTION Happiness
COPING n/a
BEHAVIOR "I was very focused, and executed my skills well in practice."
STRESSOR Taking the field
COGNITION "Don't get too carried away in the first hour, it's a long day." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I kept repeating "relax and enjoy' to myself."
BEHAVIOR "I was positive, I buzzed around the field encouraging."
STRESSOR Dropping a catch
COGNITION "That could be costly." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I try to put it out my head. I tell myself I will get another chance."
BEHAVIOR "My body language would have been poor. My head dropped."
STRESSOR Bowling
COGNITION "I have a good opportunity to redeem myself here." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I focused on what I do well, my routine, my rhythm and relaxing."
BEHAVIOR "I bowled well in a tough period of the game."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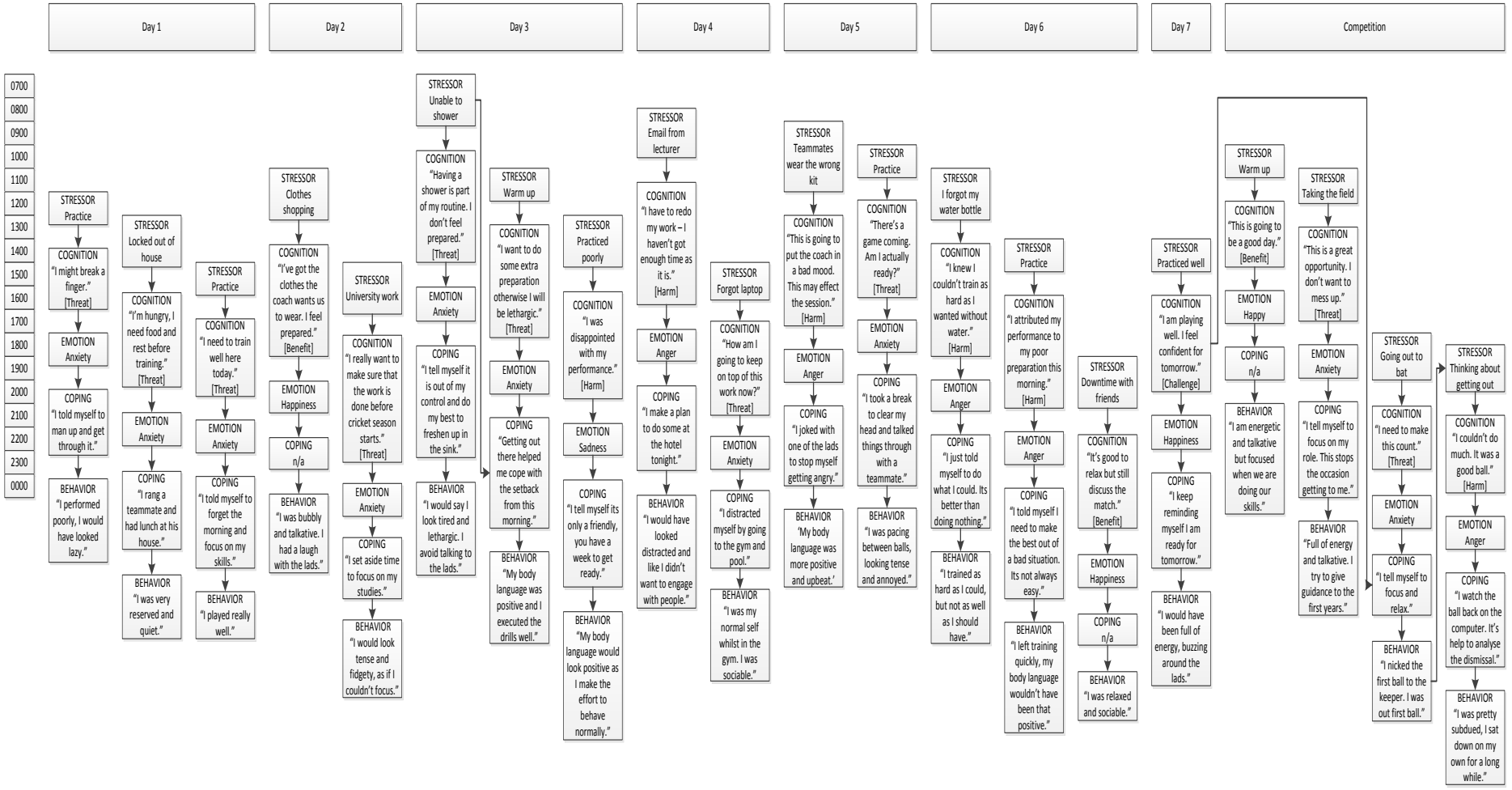
STRESSOR Practice
COGNITION "The drills are unrealistic, this isn't like a match." [Harm]
EMOTION Anger
COPING "It's important to take from the session what you can. That's what I told myself."
BEHAVIOR "I wasn't at my best, but I did the drills well enough."
STRESSOR Practice
COGNITION "I need to show the coach I have improved." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I told myself to relax and watch the ball."
BEHAVIOR "I was very focused and I performed well."
STRESSOR Team meal
COGNITION "Its nice to get some down time with the lads." [Benefit]
EMOTION Happiness
COPING n/a
BEHAVIOR "I was very relaxed and sociable."
STRESSOR Morning off
COGNITION "It's nice not to worry about anything today. It's been a busy week." [Benefit]
EMOTION Happiness
COPING n/a
BEHAVIOR "I was have looked very relaxed and happy."
STRESSOR House in a mess
COGNITION "It's been clean all week and now my housemate is back it's messy." [Harm]
EMOTION Anger
COPING "I made a joke to my friend about it. I wanted to get the message across light-heartedly."
BEHAVIOR "I went from being relaxed to uptight, once I confronted him things went back to normal."
STRESSOR Discussing batting order
COGNITION "My teammates see my role the same way as I do. This means a lot." [Benefit]
EMOTION Happiness
COPING n/a
BEHAVIOR "My body language was relaxed. I felt comfortable."
STRESSOR Practice match
COGNITION "This is a big opportunity to secure my place." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I made sure I packed my kit thoroughly. I didn't want to leave anything to chance."
BEHAVIOR "I'd say I was very talkative and full of energy."
STRESSOR Batting order announced
COGNITION "I want to bat at 5, not 7." [Harm]
EMOTION Anger
COPING "I tell myself it's a strong side. At least I am playing. Many have missed out."
BEHAVIOR "I would have looked quiet and thoughtful."
STRESSOR Getting out in practice
COGNITION "I played well. I was selfless. I hope the coach noticed." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I try and take the positives from my performance."
BEHAVIOR "Your body language is always poor when you get out, but as you reflect and know you've played well you join the lads as normal."
STRESSOR Team building trip
COGNITION "This is a good opportunity for some team bonding." [Benefit]
EMOTION Happiness
COPING n/a
BEHAVIOR "I think the lads would say I was good value on the bus. The banter was good."
STRESSOR Team social
COGNITION "It's good to have all the lads together and buying in." [Benefit]
EMOTION Happiness
COPING n/a
BEHAVIOR "Similar to the bus, I was very sociable."
STRESSOR Conversation about selection
COGNITION "I knew I'd be in the 13, but unsure about the 11." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "Gained reassurance from teammate."
BEHAVIOR "Restless and couldn't sleep."
STRESSOR Practice
COGNITION "It's important to perform here." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I try to focus on my pre-performance routine. A clear mind is vital."
BEHAVIOR "I performed as well I had for a long while."
STRESSOR Gym session
COGNITION "It's always nice to go to the gym. I felt productive." [Benefit]
EMOTION Happiness
COPING n/a
BEHAVIOR "Energetic, talkative."
STRESSOR Practice
COGNITION "I must train well again. I really want to be selected." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I told myself to do the same things as yesterday."
BEHAVIOR "I didn't perform so well today."
STRESSOR Missing out on selection
COGNITION "I was gutted, I felt that my season was over." [Harm]
EMOTION Anger
COPING "I said to myself, I am going to prove a point in this net."
BEHAVIOR "I played aggressively. It was my best performance in ages."
STRESSOR Warm up
COGNITION "I wanted to show the coach I was still prepared to helped the boys." [Harm]
EMOTION Anger
COPING "I told myself I can only look forward now. Work hard and do 12th man duties well."
BEHAVIOR "I think I would have looked my normal self."
STRESSOR The team take the field
COGNITION "I should be out there." [Harm]
EMOTION Anger
COPING "I didn't let it show. I took myself away from the coaches to get a coffee."
BEHAVIOR "I guess I was pretty quiet and withdrawn from conversation."
STRESSOR Fielding
COGNITION "I don't want to mess up and prove the coach right." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I spoke to myself quite a lot. I told myself to focus."
BEHAVIOR "I was energetic and fielded really well."
STRESSOR Coach feedback
COGNITION "I'm glad he noticed. It shows I dealt with it well and I am a team player." [Benefit]
EMOTION Happiness
COPING n/a
BEHAVIOR "That evening I was much more like my normal self."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STRESSOR Practice
COGNITION "I might break a finger." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I told myself to man up and get through it."
BEHAVIOR "I performed poorly, I would have looked lazy."
STRESSOR Locked out of house
COGNITION "I'm hungry, I need food and rest before training." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I rang a teammate and had lunch at his house."
BEHAVIOR "I was very reserved and quiet."
STRESSOR Practice
COGNITION "I need to train well here today." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I told myself to forget the morning and focus on my skills."
BEHAVIOR "I played really well."
STRESSOR Clothes shopping
COGNITION "I've got the clothes the coach wants us to wear. I feel prepared." [Benefit]
EMOTION Happiness
COPING n/a
BEHAVIOR "I was bubbly and talkative. I had a laugh with the lads."
STRESSOR University work
COGNITION "I really want to make sure that the work is done before cricket season starts." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I set aside time to focus on my studies."
BEHAVIOR "I would look tense and fidgety, as if I couldn't focus."
STRESSOR Unable to shower
COGNITION "Having a shower is part of my routine. I don't feel prepared." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I tell myself it is out of my control and do my best to freshen up in the sink."
BEHAVIOR "I would say I look tired and lethargic. I avoid talking to the lads."
STRESSOR Warm up
COGNITION "I want to do some extra preparation otherwise I will be lethargic." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "Getting out there helped me cope with the setback from this morning."
BEHAVIOR "My body language was positive and I executed the drills well."
STRESSOR Practiced poorly
COGNITION "I was disappointed with my performance." [Harm]
EMOTION Sadness
COPING "I tell myself its only a friendly, you have a week to get ready."
BEHAVIOR "My body language would look positive as I make the effort to behave normally."
STRESSOR Email from lecturer
COGNITION "I have to redo my work – I haven't got enough time as it is." [Harm]
EMOTION Anger
COPING "I make a plan to do some at the hotel tonight."
BEHAVIOR "I would have looked distracted and like I didn't want to engage with people."
STRESSOR Forgot laptop
COGNITION "How am I going to keep on top of this work now?" [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I distracted myself by going to the gym and pool."
BEHAVIOR "I was my normal self whilst in the gym. I was sociable."
STRESSOR Teammates wear the wrong kit
COGNITION "This is going to put the coach in a bad mood. This may effect the session." [Harm]
EMOTION Anger
COPING "I joked with one of the lads to stop myself getting angry."
BEHAVIOR 'My body language was more positive and upbeat.'
STRESSOR Practice
COGNITION "There's a game coming. Am I actually ready?" [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I took a break to clear my head and talked things through with a teammate."
BEHAVIOR "I was pacing between balls, looking tense and annoyed."
STRESSOR I forgot my water bottle
COGNITION "I knew I couldn't train as hard as I wanted without water." [Harm]
EMOTION Anger
COPING "I just told myself to do what I could. Its better than doing nothing."
BEHAVIOR "I trained as hard as I could, but not as well as I should have."
STRESSOR Practice
COGNITION "I attributed my performance to my poor preparation this morning." [Harm]
EMOTION Anger
COPING "I told myself I need to make the best out of a bad situation. Its not always easy."
BEHAVIOR "I left training quickly, my body language wouldn't have been that positive."
STRESSOR Downtime with friends
COGNITION "It's good to relax but still discuss the match." [Benefit]
EMOTION Happiness
COPING n/a
BEHAVIOR "I was relaxed and sociable."
STRESSOR Practiced well
COGNITION "I am playing well. I feel confident for tomorrow." [Challenge]
EMOTION Happiness
COPING "I keep reminding myself I am ready for tomorrow."
BEHAVIOR "I would have been full of energy, buzzing around the lads."
STRESSOR Warm up
COGNITION "This is going to be a good day." [Benefit]
EMOTION Happy
COPING n/a
BEHAVIOR "I am energetic and talkative but focused when we are doing our skills."
STRESSOR Taking the field
COGNITION "This is a great opportunity. I don't want to mess up." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I tell myself to focus on my role. This stops the occasion getting to me."
BEHAVIOR "Full of energy and talkative. I try to give guidance to the first years."
STRESSOR Going out to bat
COGNITION "I need to make this count." [Threat]
EMOTION Anxiety
COPING "I tell myself to focus and relax."
BEHAVIOR "I nicked the first ball to the keeper. I was out first ball."
STRESSOR Thinking about getting out
COGNITION "I couldn't do much. It was a good ball." [Harm]
EMOTION Anger
COPING "I watch the ball back on the computer. It's help to analyse the dismissal."
BEHAVIOR "I was pretty subdued, I sat down on my own for a long while."

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