

Monitor**SPORTS****Psychologists Study
'Choking Under Pressure'**

We've seen it happen hundreds of times—the ice skater blowing a jump she's nailed dozens of times in practice, the slugger striking out on an easy pitch with bases loaded.

Choking under pressure. Some experts believe people get distracted by the crowd, others blame performance anxiety. Now experiments conducted by two Michigan State University psychologists have yielded new insights.

A group of 54 novice golfers was split into three groups. One group putted under normal conditions, the second putted while distracted by another task, and the third putted in front of a video camera. This group was told to pay close attention to performance because golf pros would review the tapes.

Later on, when given an easy task, all three groups performed about the same. But when they were tested under pressure, where they were told their performance could result in monetary rewards, only the third group improved.

This suggests that initially facing pressure inoculates people from performance anxiety because they are accustomed to the stress. Researchers also concluded that choking was caused by paying too much attention to executing a well-learned skill.

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