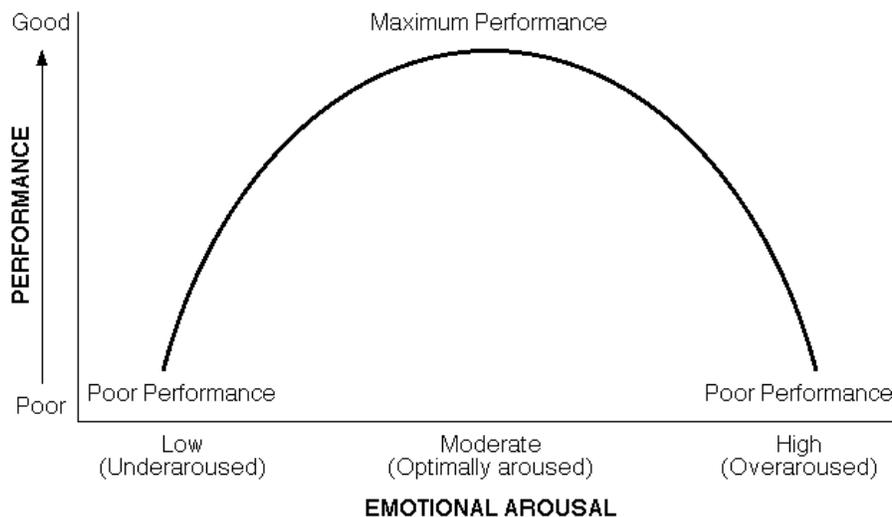


Regulating Emotions & Performance Anxiety

One of the most common reasons that young athletes seek our help is to manage performance anxiety. They perform well in practices, but when competition rolls around, they become a bundle of nerves and perform poorly. Many people become upset when their nerves surface because they interpret this to mean that they aren't going to perform well. This fear doesn't have to be one that keeps us from achieving our goals. The first mental adjustment you need to make is your perception of anxiety's role in your performance. **Feeling nervous doesn't have to have a detrimental effect on you.** In fact, if regulated properly, nervous feelings can sometimes help you perform better. The challenge with anxiety is to **optimize it, not eliminate it.** Think of it as this: *We're not trying to get rid of the butterflies, we're trying to get them to fly in formation.* The graph below does a great job of illustrating this concept. As you can see, anxiety (or arousal) only produces negative effects when it is very low (e.g., don't care enough) or very high (e.g., care too much). When anxious feelings are of moderate intensity, performance is usually improved.



Think back to some of your best performances and recall how you felt. Were you overly anxious (aroused)? Were your thoughts racing? Did you think your heart was going to beat out of your chest? Probably not. The odds are, you felt composed and reasonably in control of yourself. Conversely, you probably can't think of a great performance that occurred when you were very low on anxiety (arousal). When we aren't experiencing some level of investment or engagement in a performance or task, it's highly unlikely we will execute well. In other words, the presence of anxiety tells us we care. To learn how to optimize your performance and control your performance anxiety, contact us at 864.239.4110.