Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model suggests that appraisals are based on the constantly changing relationship between person and environment. They propose that stressors in any environment share common characteristics (underlying properties) that underpin any meaningful situation perceived as stressful. These are: novelty, predictability, event uncertainty, imminence, duration, temporal uncertainty ambiguity and timing in relation to the life cycle. Previous research (Thatcher and Day, in press) has demonstrated the relevance of these properties in a competitive sporting context and highlighted two further properties (self and other comparison and inadequate preparation) that may be specific to this context. The present examined appraisals of these properties and resultant emotions in a sporting context.

Participants were eight trampolinists, 4 men and 4 women aged between 16 and 26. All competed at the highest level of national competition at the time of the study. With institutional ethics approval data were collected via purposely designed diaries used to record underlying properties, appraisals and emotions. All participants recorded entries one and two weeks prior to competition, one day prior to competition and one day after. Participants completed the diaries for their whole three month competitive season. After completion of the diaries all data were transcribed and follow up interviews were conducted to expand and clarify information. All salient statements were categorised into negative, positive or benign appraisals. Negative appraisals were examined for evidence of any underlying property of stress in line with Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) definitions. Appraisals of each situation were categorised into harm/loss, threat and challenge and emotions were identified. This analysis allowed for a comparison of underlying properties, appraisals and emotions between and within individuals over the three month period.

Results showed an individual propensity to appraise some underlying properties as consistently harmful, threatening or challenging. Participants tended to associate particular emotions with specific underlying properties. Across participants the frequency of occurrence of each underlying property varied. Temporal uncertainty did not underpin any stressors whereas comparability and preparation occurred most frequently. Results indicate that individuals showed a propensity towards finding some underlying properties particularly harmful or threatening and associating particular emotions with these properties. Applied suggestions are that practitioners may focus on changing appraisals of underlying properties that are appraised as specifically harmful or threatening or associated with negative emotions.
