

Mental Health and Sports-and How You Can Help

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Objectives

- Why do I have an interest in this topic?
- What is mental health/mental illness?
- Why student athletes? Why all the buzz now?
- Signs and BLF (Baseline Level of Functioning)
- Know your athletes
- Awareness and Collaboration
- Promoting Emotional Health and Wellness



Personal interest

- Early coaching career experiences
- A desire to give skills...we tell students they need to be mentally tough or to focus better but do we give them the tools?
- I still like to WIN and I know winning comes in many forms.

Give your students ownership and responsibility otherwise.....



What is mental health?

- Mental Health- “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.” (World Health Organization)

What is mental illness?

- Mental Illness- “collectively all diagnosable mental disorders” or “health conditions that are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood, or behavior (or some combination thereof) associated with distress and/or impaired functioning.” (US Dept. of Health and Human Services)

Indicators of mental health

- Three domains:
 - Emotional well-being: life satisfaction, peacefulness, joy
 - Psychological well-being: purpose in life, personal growth, spirituality, positive relationships
 - Social well-being: sense of community, social relationships



Why student athletes?

- Often overlooked by many as people who 'have it all' or are defined by society as a 'hero.'
- Pressure to succeed in the classroom and on the field .
- Paid to play: looking for a scholarship (HS), keeping or getting a scholarship (NCAA), your job (Professional)
- We treat their physical health seriously why not their mental health as well?

Why now?

- Recent deaths of athletes and more media attention regarding mental health have triggered a desire to better understand the mental health of athletes.
 - Professional athletes speaking out about their personal experience regarding mental health-Kevin Love, Royce White, Brandon Marshall, Serena Williams, Missy Franklin, Kelly Holmes,
 - NCAA has awarded grant money the past 6 years for research regarding S-A mental health.
 - Starting to move to the HS level with mandatory Mental Health First Aid in some states

Where does it start?

- Youth leagues
 - Pressure to perform from parents
 - Pressure to not let a parent or coach down
 - Words from other teammates
 - Once you win consistently, you start down the road of being in the limelight



Where does it start?

- High School
 - Appearance of media starts.
 - Hype of the big Friday night game.
 - Crowds attend and you are in the spotlight.
 - Talk of scholarships and 'Who will you sign with?'
 - Pressure and constant spotlight can become too much with feelings that there is no place to turn to be honest or talk.



Let's not forget

- Real life
 - Grandparent passed away
 - Divorce of parents
 - Sister hospitalized
 - Relational problems boyfriend/girlfriend/roommate
 - Friend committed suicide
 - Parent found out they have cancer
 - Sports Injury (out a season or career ending)
 - And many more real life experiences that can create a spiraling out of control feeling with the addition of not knowing, understanding, or asking for help.



Vulnerability

- Is it safe in the locker room?
- Can I be who I am?
- Can I have emotions relevant to what is going on in my life?
- Who can I trust?
- Am I good enough?
- What's my purpose?
- Am I the only one who feels this way?
- Are people going to make fun of me when I tell them how I feel?

What you should know: Baseline Level of Functioning

- BLF-the ability for an individual to complete and engage in daily activities (athletics, social events, school) while being minimally impacted from the various stressors in their surrounding environment.



Signs

- What might distress in social, emotional, or psychological functioning look like for an athlete:
 - Out a balance
 - Behind in normal everyday tasks
 - Constant repetition until one gets it perfect
 - Sleep disturbances
 - Expresses stress/pressure
 - Can't shut off their mind
 - Too much/too little eating
 - Negative thinking
 - Poor decision making habits
 - Distracted
 - Lack of concentration



Do you know your athlete?

- What is their BLF?
 - How do they normally react to stress?
 - Are they someone who needs their own time after a good/poor performance?
 - Pay attention to the small things.
 - Listen to their teammates and have an open door policy.
 - Be prepared to actively listen, empathize, and not judge.

Why is this important?

Why should I be involved?

- Coaches and athletic staff are in an ideal position to notice changes on a daily basis.
- You spend quality time with these individuals.
- You have built a relationship with them maybe even before they played on a team for you.
- You are not a peer and not a parent.
- They trust you and you are very influential.

Now what? What should I do?

- The most serious mistake you can make as a coach or athletic personal is to view mental health as a weakness or trivial.
- You can point them in the right direction to get help.
- There are times you should NOT leave a student-athlete alone (suicidal tendencies) and seek help immediately.

When a student approaches you:

- Take time for them. Stop, look at them (engage in eye contact) and most importantly listen to what they have to say.
- Ask for clarification without judging.
- Ask if there is anything you can do.
- Thank the student for telling you and provide empathy.
- Refer the student, and FOLLOW-UP with the student and/or parent.

How to approach a student:

- Privacy is critical
- Start off by saying you are concerned about them as an individual, regardless of their contribution to the team's success. (You MUST live this day in and day out BEFORE they have an issue).
- Ask about life (home, school, practice).
- Express your concern and provide resources.



Collaboration

- Get EVERYONE on board for the benefit of the student athlete!
- Know your limits as a coach and also know the services available.
- Your responsibility is to recognize and refer.
- Also remember YOUR self-care...it is critical to your ability to coach effectively.

Other ways you can help:

- Promote Emotional Health and Wellness
 - Cognitive Reframing
 - Mindful Self-Compassion
 - Pro/Con list
 - Visualizing an Outcome
 - Deep Breathing

Cognitive Reframing

- Used in therapy to help individuals notice negative and intrusive thoughts and actively work to challenge/change those thoughts.

Video-those thoughts



Inner voices

- There are three inner voices that we tend to experience
 - Inner Critic
 - Inner Defender
 - Inner Guide
- The language you use to respond to these voices matters: Victim vs. Victor language

Mindful Self-Compassion

- Accepting you for who you are!
 - Accepting the good and bad
 - Accepting the success and failure
 - Very important for a high achieving athlete
 - Learning to understand your identity....running/jumping/throwing is not who you are it is something you do!

The secret to Victory



Let your athletes fail....make them fail?

- Teach your athletes how to FAIL WELL!
 - Failure provides valuable feedback
 - It can keep you present and allow you to continue to strive for your goals and not ruminate about the failure.

How?

- Have your captains and coaches talk about times they have failed regularly!
- Give them opportunities to fail!
- Admit to them when YOU as a coach have failed them. (didn't give them enough recovery, too many reps, etc..)

Final thoughts....

- It is becoming increasingly clear that there is a strong link between mental health and performance, whether at work, in the classroom, or on the field/court.
- As coaches we have an up close view of the lives of our student athletes. We play a role in helping to identify, provide resources, and support when an athlete is struggling both mentally and physically.

Final Thoughts....

- Our next generation of students will not only be distracted themselves with social media, etc....they will also be a generation who had distracted parents.
- What will we need to know....emotion regulation....how to deal with and express emotion.

Additional Resources

My Blog:

www.beyondtheoutcome.com

Resources:

www.athletesconnected.umich.edu

www.balanceposition.com

What Made Maddy Run by Kate Fagan

Running is My Therapy by Scott Douglas

Raising Young Athletes by Jim Taylor

Mental EDGE camp

- Mental EDGE camp

The End

Questions?

Comments?

Thoughts?

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