

Identification, Management, And Prevention

The key to identification, management, and prevention of mental health issues is education. There has been identification of multiple stressors that are linked with performance in elite sport. Some of the stressors in rugby included;

- Criticism from coaches.
- Physical errors.
- Mental errors.
- Injury.

These are associated with heightened levels of anxiety and depression in athletes of an elite level. Nevertheless, there are early identification and coping mechanisms that can help control and stop these mental wellbeing disorders.

Identifying earlier can allow for an athlete to receive treatment needed to help cope. Management and prevention of mental welfare conditions can be targeted by through the use of multiple different coping mechanisms, such as relaxation and meditation. These mechanisms strongly target the stressors identified above which are linked to mental wellbeing.

Identification, management and prevention are all vital factors when trying to raise awareness for mental welfare disorders in rugby. Mental wellbeing should be just as important as physical wellbeing to ensure athletes, coaches, and others involved in elite level sports have a positive outlook.

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Stigma Of Mental Wellbeing

Mental health has been stigmatised by people in and out of sports, especially for athletes competing at an elite level. This is due to various factors that can affect an athlete such as external pressures from family, friends or coaches, the media, and sporting history.

Athletes competing in a male dominated sport such as rugby are presumed to be physically and mentally fit. Mental wellbeing and mental toughness are seen to be contrasting terms when talking about sports performed at an elite level. Research suggests athletes seeking help to cope with their mental wellbeing may feel like they are putting their future career on the line. This can result in these athletes being less likely to discuss their mental health and ask for help as they feel they may appear weak mentally.

Changing Your View On Mental Welfare

The need to raise awareness of mental wellbeing in sports at an elite level is an increasing issue. No athlete should be afraid to discuss and get help to improve their mental wellbeing.

Mind is a charity that works to raise awareness of mental health and elite sports by encouraging governing bodies, sports clubs, players, and coaches to recognise the significance of mental health along with physical wellbeing.

Further information can be found at their webpage: <https://www.mind.org.uk/>.

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Mental Health Awareness For Elite Rugby Players



Esra Sarac

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Mental Health – What Is It?

Mental health can be defined as a state of being that includes factors of a biological, psychological, or social nature which can contribute to a person's mental state and capacity to work within the environment.

Measurements of mental health can include your capacity to cope with normal stresses of life, work effectively, and being able to give back to the community. The means to learn from others and to develop emotionally and psychologically can be a measure of good mental wellbeing.

How Can Mental Health Effect You?

Mental health conditions can affect athletes at any point of their career. Athletes at an elite level have to cope with numerous challenges to do with their mental wellbeing, such as injury, pressure to perform, and internal and external stressors.

Evidence suggests physical activity has a positive effect on mental health by decreasing certain symptoms and can be used as a potential treatment. Nevertheless, even though elite level athletes participate in high levels of physical activity, it is a possibility for them to suffer from mental health conditions due to varying factors.

Raising Awareness About Mental Health

The Duty of Care Review published in 2017 identified mental welfare as one of the key issues.

With mental wellbeing becoming increasingly talked about, the effort to raise more mental health awareness in sport has risen.

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What Is Depression?

A person suffering from depression may experience heightened emotions such as, anxiety and helplessness which can be with them every day. Depression can decrease confidence and concentration, as well as keeping away from certain situations.

Depression is one of multiple mental health conditions linked with performing at an elite level and can be a result of ageing, injury, prolonged failure, and retirement from sports. As of recently, research would suggest that athletes performing at an elite level may be more susceptible to develop a mental health condition, such as depression, due to the amount of stress their body goes through.

Signs And Symptoms

The list below includes some of the most common, but not all, symptoms of clinical depression.

- Changes in sleep and appetite.
- Decreased confidence and concentration.
- Lack of interest in activities.
- Constant low mood.
- Suicidal thoughts.

If any of these symptoms or signs are experienced, it is best to seek help at the earliest opportunity and receive treatment as this will benefit your mental wellbeing.

“Around 1 in 6 (17%) adults aged 16 years and over in Great Britain experienced some form of depression in summer 2021.”

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State Of Mind

Rugby is one of the sports that has introduced mental health strategies to assist their athletes. The State of Mind programme was created in 2011 with the aim of improving mental welfare, wellbeing, and work life of rugby players and communities. This is one of multiple projects set up across sports to identify, manage, and prevent mental health conditions in sports at an elite level. The State of Mind programme aims to educate on mental health conditions and how it can affect the people in sport. This has been done through the use of educational workshops and introduced to coach education.

Further information can be found at their webpage: <https://stateofmindsport.org/>.

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