

What is Mental Health?

Mental health is defined as a person's emotional and psychological state as well as their social well-being.

Mental health can be measured by your ability to cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and be able to make a contribution to the community. The ability to learn from others and to develop psychologically and emotionally can also measure good mental health.

How can it effect you?

Mental health conditions can affect any athlete at any stage of their career. Elite athletes have to cope with a number of challenges to their mental health such as pressure to perform, injury and internal and external stressors.

Physical activity has been found to have a positive affect on mental health by reducing certain symptoms and can be used as treatment. However, even though elite athletes participate in high levels of physical activity they are still very likely to suffer from mental health conditions due to other factors.

Raising Awareness

Mental health was identified as one of the key issues in the Duty of Care Review published in 2007.

With mental health becoming more openly talked about over the past few years the effort to raise the awareness of mental health in sport has increased.

Depression

Someone suffering from depression will experience intense emotions such as, anxiety and helplessness which will stay with them day to day. Depression can cause loss of confidence, concentration and avoiding certain situations

Depression is one of the most common mental health conditions related with elite level performance and can be a result of injury, ageing, continued failure and retirement from sport. Research has found that elite level athletes may be more likely to develop mental health conditions, like depression, due to the amount of stress their body undergoes.

Signs and Symptoms

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

- Continuous low mood
- Low self-esteem and self confidence.
- Lack of motivation.
- Lack of energy.
- Avoiding social activities.

If any of these signs or symptoms are experienced it is best to seek help early and receive treatment which will benefit your mental health.

"1 in 6 adults experience mental health issues such as depression and anxiety"

RAISING AWARENESS OF MENTAL HEALTH



FOR ELITE RUGBY PLAYERS

Katie Stopper



State of Mind

Rugby is one sport that has started to introduce mental health strategies to assist their athletes. The State of Mind programme was established in 2013 with the aim of improving the mental health, well-being and working life of rugby players and communities. This is one of the many projects across sport set up to identify, manage and prevent mental health conditions in elite level sport. The State of Mind programme also aim to provide education on mental health conditions and how it can effect individuals in sport. This will be done through educational workshops and introduced to coach education.

More information can be found at their website <http://stateofmindsport.org/>

Identification, Management and Prevention

Education is the key to the identification, management and prevention of mental health issues. It has been found that there are a number of stressors associated with elite level performance. The stressors related to rugby were;

- Physical errors
- Mental errors
- Injury
- Coach criticism

These stressors are linked to increased levels of depression and anxiety in elite athletes. However, there are early identification and coping methods that will help manage and prevent these mental health conditions.

Early identification will allow for the athlete to receive the treatment needed to help cope. Management and prevention of mental health conditions can be targeted by the use of different coping methods, such as meditation and relaxation. These coping methods effectively target the stressors related to mental health.

Identification, management and prevention are all key factors when raising awareness of mental health conditions in rugby. Mental health should be treated with the same importance as physical health to ensure a positive outlook by all athletes, coaches and other involved in elite level sport.

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The Stigma of Mental Health

There is a specific stigma attached to mental health and those who participate in elite sport. This is because of many different factors that can influence an athlete such as sporting history, external pressure from coaches or family and also the media. Athletes who participate in male dominated sports, like rugby, are expected to be physically and mentally tough. Mental toughness and mental health are seen as contradictory terms when discussing elite sport. Many athletes feel seeking help to cope with their mental health many jeopardise their further career. This can result in individuals being less likely to ask for help to cope with their mental health conditions as they fear they may appear mentally weak.

Changing the View of Mental Health

There is a need to raise the awareness of mental health in elite level sport as it is a growing issue. No athletes should be ashamed of speaking out and seeking help to improve their mental health. The charity Mind works to raise awareness of mental health and elite sport by encouraging sporting clubs, governing bodies and players to recognise the importance of mental health along with physical health.

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