

Vol 2, Issue 7: Signs for Depression in Athletes

Signs for Depression in Athletes

Athletes are the paragon of health...right? This perception is easy to understand. Athletes are physically healthy, often attractive, and represent, in many ways, the societal "ideal." In addition, we generally associate other positive characteristics with attractive, healthy people. We view them as honest, better workers, happier...etc. So, athletes, whether accurate or not, are seen as healthy and having it all together.

Athletes also have nothing to worry about or be sad about...right? This perception occurs because athletes sometimes get preferential treatment and, at the professional level, may earn very large sums of money. But does all that translate into an easy life?

The reality is that, while athletes generally are healthy as a result of their high levels of physical activity and are "taken care of" by others, they are human and can suffer from depression and other psychological disorders, such as anxiety, just like everyone else. Unfortunately, these societal perceptions, combined with athletes' general wanting to take care of things themselves (not show weakness), may make identifying and treating psychological disorders among athletes more of a challenge.

Depression can be the result of many issues on and off the field including athletic injury, relationship problems, identity issues, constant failure or perceived failure, pressure to succeed, burnout, etc. But depression and other mental health disorders do not always show up easily. Athletes may hide their conditions, keeping everyone out of the loop as they maintain their training and high level of performance. In such instances, performances may be constant, but other areas of their lives may be suffering greatly.

So here are some signs and symptoms to watch for in the athletes with whom you work. Remember, too, that performance problems may be the last area in which the problems will surface:

- Lack of concentration or motivation or confidence
- Excessive irritability or easily becoming upset
- Changes in appetite or eating patterns and/or sleep patterns
- Low energy, chronic fatigue
- Loss of interest or pleasure in fun activities and/or depressed mood
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Problems with motor skills

If you have an athlete who may be suffering from depression or experiencing other psychological concerns, he/she may benefit from talking with a licensed psychologist, particularly one who understands the sport culture and the pressures that today's athletes' experience. At the Center for Sport Psychology and Performance Excellence at the University of North Texas we have a staff of consultants who are trained to work with athletes and/or

coaches experiencing mental health issues including depression. For more information about our services and how we can work with you and/or your team, contact us at (940) 369-SPORT (7767). Or you can visit our website and send us an email at www.sportpsych.unt.edu. In closing, we leave you with the sport quote of the week:

“To find the unlimited scope of human possibility, look within your self.” Jim Valvano, NCAA Champion Basketball Coach