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2021-12-01

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Strauss, Mickey, "The Negative Side of a Student-Athlete" (2021). *Student Works*. 325.
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The Negative Side of a Student-Athlete

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Abstract

College athletes have different levels of success and failures throughout their college careers. These successes and failures can easily determine if an athlete is happy, can build up or break down self-esteem and confidence. In addition to student-athlete having many positive benefits like developing healthy lifestyle habits, increase happiness, increase self-esteem and self worth. The challenges that a college athlete faces are the benefits and hazards of physical activity, factors that lead to happiness or depression.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has reported an increase in suicide in student-athletes, causing it to be the fourth leading cause of death of college athletes, this has enhanced a focus on all student-athlete's mental health. Wolanin and Hong stated "6.3% of student-athletes met the criteria for clinically significant depression and 24% had low moods considered "clinically relevant". Student-athletes originally thought that they weren't vulnerable to mental health problems because they have access to support systems, academic assistance, nutritious foods, proper sleep and daily exercise. However, there are many student-athletes who suffer from anxiety and depression and are not immune to mental health problems. One way of surveying an athlete's mental health is to assess their levels of subjective well-being. "Subjective well being (SWB) is the scientific term for happiness and life satisfaction" (Morris et al, 2020). This paper will review current research on the negative impacts of student-athletes. The focus of this paper will discuss how students often suffer from the negative side of athletics which can include stress in academics and performance as well as during in-season versus out of season, gender within team versus individual sport, and depression.

Results

After reviewing many articles, only a few were selected for this paper. The articles that were chosen focused on the negative side of student-athletes. These articles were divided into separate sections that included academic and performance stress, as well as stress during pre-season, in-season and postseason. Athletes that were included were male and female and multiple sports were included in these articles.

Research done on 180 athletes who participate in different sports and both male and female over a 4-year period. Results suggest athletes had less stress and high levels of energy at the beginning of off-season. However, energy decreased rapidly as the seasons went from pre-season to during the in-season, and very low energy was reported in the postseason.

Academic and Performance Stress

Academic stress has a huge impact on student-athletes, these athletes must balance their commitment to the university as a student and as an athlete. An athlete must have good academic standings in order to participate in their sport. Academic performance is a significant source of stress on student-athletes. Studies concluded that during the academic year, which is also in-season and postseason for an athlete, academic stress was at its highest. Students had trouble managing their requirements for academic demands as well as their sport demands. These stressors cause a decrease in energy level and sleep which had an impact on the athlete's well-being resulting in illness and/or injury.

There are two types of college students, the student-athlete and the student. College is full of changes for all students, academics, social changes, being away from home, finances, etc. However, student-athletes are required to spend a large amount of time participating in their

sport and other areas associated with their sport (meetings, travel, competitions, weight training, nutrition, etc) These extra requirements on top of being just a student increases a student-athlete's risk of experiencing both physical and mental issues that may affect their overall health and wellness. College athletes are coping with many stressors throughout their college career. "Stress can be described as a state of physical and psychological activation in response to external demands that exceed one's ability to cope and requires a person to adapt or change behavior" (Santos, 2020) The more stressful an athlete becomes, the harder it is for his body to return back to a normal state of relaxation. Certain events in a person's life that causes them stress and anxiety are known as stressors. "Stressors can be acute or chronic based on the duration of activation. Acute stressors may be defined as a stressful situation that occurs suddenly and results in physiological arousal (e.g., increase in hormonal levels, blood flow, cardiac output, blood sugar levels, pupil and airway dilation, etc.)" (Selye, 1976). Because the body is not back to a normal physiological state, when stress occurs again the body's physiological arousal increases to the next level. When acute stressors continue to happen, an athlete could develop depression, anxiety, and other disorders. Stress is described as two types of stress, eustress and distress. Eustress is positive stress whereas distress is negative stress. "Even though they both cause physiological arousal, eustress also generates positive mental energy whereas distress generates anxiety" (Statler and DuBois, 2016) College athletes need to understand which type of stress they are having and how to cope with it, because stress can not only impact their performance but also have an effect on them academically. "Stress can be detrimental to the student's mental and physical health as well as to sport performance." (Ivarsson et al., 2017; Li et al., 2017).

Many athletes have reported that they suffer from performance stress because of the demands of their sport. In addition to practice, many athletes participate in other activities to help their sport such as weight lifting, nutrition class, psychology sessions, etc. When an athlete is injured, they have a tendency to experience more stress than healthy athletes. The results showed that an injured athlete has to find balance in getting healthy in addition to the requirements of a healthy athlete. An injured athlete has shown more stress due to returning back to their sport, maintaining their position in the line-up, as well keeping up with the demands of a healthy athlete.

A college athlete has two major roles when they commit to a university, being a college student and an athlete. Athletes must be successful in the classroom in order to be successful in their sport. In comparison, a non-athlete college student only needs to be concerned about their academic performance. “Academic performance is a significant source of stress for most college students” (Aquilina, 2013; López de Subijana et al., 2015; de Brandt et al., 2018; Davis et al., 2019). The highest levels of academic stress for athletes is usually prepping for final exams and taking those exams. During this time athletes have trouble with managing practices and studying, which causes a decrease in energy levels and makes athletes susceptible to illness and injury. “Time spent training, competition schedules, dealing with injuries, sport-specific social support and playing status are just a few of the additional challenges collegiate athletes must confront relative to their dual role of being a student and an athlete” (Santos, 2020). Most student athletes find that these types of stressors cause eustress.

The self confidence the athlete receives from their sport outweighs their academic stress, causing them to feel overall success. However, when the demands of their sport become beyond the athlete’s capacity to deal with, it can result in a negative impact on the athlete’s mental health

and physical health and it can also affect their performance in their sport. “Once the collegiate-athlete has been able to identify the need to balance their stress levels, the athlete may then need to seek out options for managing their stress.” (Santos, 2020). Coaches become one of the biggest key players when helping their athletes with stress management. They can help by giving the athletes information on stress and resources for these students if needed. “Coaches can introduce their athletes to basic lifestyle concepts, such as practicing deep breathing techniques, positive self-talk, and developing healthy sleep habits” (Santos, 2020). Specific techniques such as goal setting, self-talk, mental imagery, time management skills, etc are perfected can help an athlete’s self-confidence which in results helps them be more successful in academics and sport performance. College athletes are coping with many stressors throughout their college career. It is extremely important for coaches to be aware of the needs of their athletes when it comes to stress. These coaches can help support their athletes with stress management techniques to help them become successful in academics as well as athletics.

Stress during pre-season, season, and postseason

Student-athletes have reported feeling less stress and having a stronger mental health status at the beginning of their off season. However, as the seasons went from pre-season to during to postseason their energy decreased rapidly and ended at the lowest point in postseason. Athletes' levels of perceived mood, increased academic stress and a decrease in sleep throughout all seasons showed signs of stress. Postseason indicated the highest levels of academic stress, which increased the chances for illness and injury. However, during the pre-season, an increase in stress due to higher training demands resulted in illness and injury. Student-athletes are vulnerable to increased levels of stress during certain periods of the year, mostly pre-season and

postseason. Other studies of athletes in-season as well as athletes that are out-of-season.

“Participants of in-season sports reported a higher level of subjective happiness than participants of out-of-season sports at the time of data collection” (Morris et al, 2020). Even though more studies need to be done on this area of mental health, it shows that those athletes that are in-season are more happy. It was thought that out-of-season athletes would have a higher level of happiness and mental health because they do not have the additional stress of competition, time constraints, travel, and playing status. But in reality, the in-season athletes had higher levels of happiness because they like the structure of competition season and it offsets the stress of just competition. Postseason athletes have a higher risk of injury because of the increased stress that comes from academics, due to exam week being in the postseason for most athletes. Overall, athletes face the risk of injury everyday but when other stress factors are in place, the risk of injury increases. Student-athletes do much better in all seasons with their mental and physical health when they have a set schedule of academics, nutrition, practice and competitions.

Individual Sports vs. Team Sports

How does physical activity affect one’s self-esteem and happiness? It is quite interesting to see the comparison of self-esteem in those who participate in sports versus those who did not. In order to increase an athletes’ self-esteem, the athlete must feel successful at their sport. However, athletes that participated in team sports have been known to have a higher self-esteem than those that participated in individual sports.

Depending on the sport, student-athletes participate as an individual or with a team. It has been controversial if playing as a team brings more happiness to an athlete than participating as an individual. “Participants of team sports reported a higher level of subjective happiness than

those of individual sports” (Morris et al. 2020). Research has shown that athletes participating in individual sports are more susceptible to being depressed than those in team sports. Frank Nixdorf found the internalization of success and failure related to individual sport athletes may play a role in depressive symptoms. (Nixdorf et al. 2016, p. 893). In team sports, an athlete has teammates that they can rely on in a time of failure and depression. “Research has shown that having a social network and team support are two factors that protect college athletes from developing depression” (Armstrong & Oomen, 2009 p. 521-526)

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has been able to help with the renewed focus on mental health in student-athletes. Even though many thought that student-athletes were immune to mental health problems because of their access to support systems, academic assistance, nutritious foods, proper sleep and daily exercise. It has been proven that student-athletes suffer from mental health problems just like non-athletes. These studies were to determine the athlete’s well-being, which is their happiness and satisfaction. Athletes that participate in team sports are more likely to avoid depression, mainly due to the social interaction of the team sport. “The social component of team sports may play a part in this outcome, as team engagement presents more opportunities for fun than the solo training that many individual sports require. While team sports involve a community and network of players, individual sports focus more directly on one player’s singular track to success” (Pluhar 2019)

The levels of happiness and mental health were thought to be equal between male and female athletes. But after studies, it was proven that females are more likely to be depressed than males. “Our findings support existing literature, with males reporting a slightly higher level of subjective happiness than females ” (Morris et al, 2020) Wolanin also had similar findings that female athletes have much higher levels of depression symptoms than male athletes. Out of

these female student-athletes, the sport that had the most depression symptoms was track and field (Wolanin et al, 2015 p. 56-60). Even after college sports, female elite athletes had higher levels of psychological problems than male athletes.

Depression of a Student-Athlete

It has been determined that lack of exercise can cause depression in people which can be associated with stress and have a negative affect on mental health. Those who participate in physical activities are developing lifelong healthy behavior habits. The benefits of participating in physical activity, will have a positive impact on themselves as adults in their physical and mental health. In comparison, those who do not engage in physical activity throughout their life, are at an increased risk of physical and mental illness at any age. Booker focused on sedentary adults and came to the conclusion that they are less happy and having emotional issues due to lack of exercise (Booker, 2015). There was a study done on the effect of sport participation on happiness by Downward and Rasciute. Their results showed that sports have a significant effect on happiness, and social interaction gained through sports is also known to increase one's happiness (Downward, P., & Rasciute, S. 2011). Physical activity through sport participation has been proven to have a positive impact on health and overall happiness. Anxiety, depression, stress and low self-esteem are the most reported mental problems. Studies have shown that those who were involved in sports, had a better body image, and a high self-concept of mental and physical health. Those who were active in sports, went on to live a happy successful life. Doctors would tell people that suffered from anxiety, depression or stress to play a sport, because those who are physically active have a more healthy outlook on life. Sports throughout one's lifetime can help increase-self esteem, feelings of fulfillment and helps reduce the risk of anxiety

and stress. Sports and physical exercise has shown to affect people's mental and physical health. Self-esteem is higher in those that participated in sports and physical activity than those who did not participate. The results therefore show a positive correlation with exercise suggesting that kids should be encouraged to participate in sports at a young age to play a sport and continue to be physically active throughout their lives, it will only increase their self-esteem and self-concept.

Conclusion

Throughout an athlete's college career there are many levels of success and failures. An athlete's happiness usually depends on how they are performing in their sport which affects their entire college experience. A successful athlete is happy, confident and full of high self-esteem, which will give the athlete many positive benefits throughout their college career and even into the rest of their life. However, the negative effects of a college athlete can be very harmful. If an athlete is not feeling success, then they have a tendency to stress over their performance which can be carried over into academics. The more an athlete stresses about their sport, the more damaging they do to their mental health. They have a harder time focusing on their academics and worry about keeping their grades up. Stress during exam week also makes athletes more likely to become injured or ill. Such negative effects can cause an athlete to have anxiety and/or depression. Student-athletes often suffer from the negative side of athletics which can include stress in academics and performance as well as during in-season versus out of season, gender within team versus individual sport, and depression.

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1. ½ page describing the changes you made because of your visit to the writing lab

I tried to get into the writing lab but again it was full, I even submitted a hard copy of my paper last Monday and was told they would contact me. However, I was never contacted and told I couldn't walk in because it was by appointments only. I am very frustrated that I can't get time in the writing lab and I am losing points for it. What do you suggest I do?

I also turned in my "Introduction to thesis" Student Athlete tutors for the first lab, and I am still waiting for them to get back to me.

I am just not sure what to do, since I have tried to get into these labs on time and yet unable to do so. I did email you a screenshot of the sign ups, with no spots available. However, is there anything else I can do so I won't lose points since this is out of my control?

2. ½ page describing the changes you suggested for your classmates peer review

Only 2 people from my group emailed me their paper. I reached out to my entire group to read their paper and have them read mine. However, I was only able to get 2 peer reviews and give 2 peer reviews.

Trever did well on his paper, he did have a few extra spaces that I suggested he delete. He also had a few typos such as spelling errors and misuse of capitalized letters. He did have the same sentence in two different spots. I also suggested fixing a few fragmented sentences, and suggested some rewording ideas. He also talked about a test that was given for MS, and I

suggested that he expanded on a description of the test. I also suggested that he restate his thesis at the end of his paper.

Alan had some great ideas, however his paper was still in the rough draft stage. He had lots of thoughts and outlines that I reminded him to edit and take out. Alan also had misspelled words and typos that I suggested he fix. There were some missing words or too many words in a sentence that I suggested he fix. Throughout his paper he had parentheses and I suggested he delete or add citations. He also had some run on thoughts that I suggested he explain and/or give examples. Since his paper was a little chopped up and full of outlines and reminders to himself it was a little hard to help edit.