

Put Mental Health First

As far as people could see, Katie Meyer was living the dream life. Playing soccer at highly ranked Division I school, becoming captain of the team, and leading them to the 2019 national championships. She made amazing saves that lifted her team up and saved them from defeat. She was considered the hero, someone who should have felt like they were floating, overwhelmed with waves of joy and excitement rushing through them. Katie was smart too, making the dean's list at Stanford University . She had everything to live for and nothing to lose. Though, it was what people could not see that counted. Eventually, the pressure built up too high and she could not handle it anymore. This student-athlete had a lot on her plate and ended up taking her own life. The agony she was putting her mind through was not noticed, because to be good at something you tell yourself, *just push a little harder*. An athlete's mental health can not only affect their life in drastic ways, it could end it.

Most athletes start playing their sport at a young age. At first, it is something to do for fun. Then you start to get involved with it until it becomes a part of who you are. As you get older, coaches, parents, and teammates start to expect more from you. One mistake, one slip up, one wrong movement. That's all it takes. If they make one error, their mind automatically starts telling them that they aren't good enough. That they need to do better. It's exhausting. It sucks all the joy. The athletic validation does equate a person's value.

The sports environment creates the illusion that no matter how you are feeling, you can always push harder. They try to portray that to be the best, you can never stop working. There is no

reason to stop unless you faint, right? Although you may be feeling nauseous, if you don't finish

these last sprints, you will never be good enough. You need to keep going. With a terrible mental state, an athlete will not be able to tell the difference between working hard, and crossing the line. Pushing through the hardships is to please others. Feeling like you are not good enough if you don't take that extra lap, run that extra mile.. Saying you are depressed or anxious is a sign of weakness in the athletic world. Athletes are not weak. They push and they push and they push until they break. This is a chain of disaster. We need to stop this chain. We need to educate others. We need to speak up when we hurt- either physically or mentally. Playing a competitive sport comes with a lot of pressure. When athletes are in the state of mind that they need to be the best, they submerge themselves into the cycle of hard work. When an elite athlete sets a goal for themselves, they put their heart and soul into reaching it. There is nothing wrong with having goals..... until the goal becomes too much and the pressure builds.. Pressure can also come from coaches and parents. Striving to be at the next level is not the problem, it is when the person working feels like they now only have to reach these high standards in fear of disappointing someone else or themselves.

Simone Biles has a combination of 32 Olympic and World Championship medals. She is known to be one of the most talented gymnasts in the world. That is a lot of pressure and hard work to keep showing up and winning. A million things must be going through her mind. What if she doesn't win? Will she not be considered the best anymore? The pressure is too high, and in the recent olympics, she showed the world what good choices for mental health looks like. Simone had told her coaches and team doctor that she was not in the right "head space" to perform in her

big important events and dropped out of the competition. Simone showed everyone that no matter how important you think that what you are doing matters more than

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anything, it doesn't. She proved to everyone that mental health and her well being comes first

and has become a role model and helped so many people because of it. In the end, she may not have won like expected, but she did the right thing for herself.

Although it might be hard, putting your mental health first is crucial for an athlete. It is one of the most dangerous and overlooked kinds of pain because unlike physical injuries, you can't put a bandage or brace over it and get better. Mental injuries need band aids, too. They need time to process. They need time to heal. Putting your happiness above everything is the key to having a successful career in your sport and an overall better life.