

The Effects of Stress on Student-Athletes

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Abstract

This paper is about what can happen when student-athletes are overloaded with too much stress, training, and expectations.

In the book *The Boys In The Boat* by Daniel James Brown, a collegiate rowing team overcame many obstacles in each rower's personal life. The team works through their issues and

with hard work and determination they go on to get gold at the Berlin Olympics. The main character, Joe, feels very overwhelmed at times with his lack of money, terrible family, and competing for a spot on the rowing team. This led to him having symptoms of depression and other mental illnesses. **The growing pressure on student-athletes is causing numerous stress related issues such as athlete burnout, decreased mental wellbeing, and depression.**

As athlete burnouts are getting more common; it is necessary for student-athletes to have more breaks and be on the lookout for signs. In Dr. Kaufman's article, "Understanding Student-Athlete Burnout" he states, "Burnout can be conceptualized as a training stress syndrome where too much stress can produce staleness, then overtraining, and eventually burnout." (Kaufman, 2022). In addition to this, the article later explains the reason this issue is not resolved, when it mentions that most athletes will recognize that they should stop but are pressured to continue from many sources such as coaches, scholarships, starting roles, etc. which in turn only furthers stress (Kaufman, 2022). Finally, to quote Kaufman's final thoughts, "Athletes can sometimes end up feeling controlled by the very rewards they are pursuing which may undermine their raw desire to participate in their sport and create a sense of being trapped, potentially fueling burnout" (Kaufman, 2022). Based on the evidence collected in this article, student-athletes feel compelled to work through bad symptoms of being overworked/overtrained without seeking help. The over-stress can lead to spark devaluation and eventually athlete burnout which can last 4-12 weeks.

In the same way of overstress on student-athletes causing burnout, it also decreases mental wellbeing. Overloading collegiate and highschool athletes is causing decreased mental stability compared to their non-athlete counterparts. As mentioned in the article, "Stress in Academic and Athletic Performance Review of Collegiate Athletes," poor coaching and

over-stress can result in mental inhibition, distraction, insecurity, and team division (Lopes, 2020). In fact, in McQuade's 2021 "College-Student Athlete Health and Well-Being" article she continues this statement by saying, "Data also confirms that student-athletes are at a greater risk of substance abuse, social anxiety, and eating disorders than other students" (McQuade, 2021). She later adds through data charts that athletes are at a higher chance to develop mental illnesses than their non-athlete counterparts and are 2% more likely for severe mental illness (McQuade, 2021). The cause of this, as stated in Lopes's article is, "collegiate athletes reported dedicating up to 34 hours per week to athletics" (Lopes, 2020). In the end, the expectations and commitment put on athletes is leading to injuries and illnesses. Based on the evidence and author's conclusions from the two inforatory articles, the amount of time, physical, and mental effort student-athletes are forced to generate has effects on their mental wellbeing and is shown through data in comparison to non-athletes students.

Finally, as a decreased mental-wellbeing causes a broad spectrum of problems for a student-athlete, depression is becoming increasingly common among them. Depression among student-athletes is growing and becoming a leading issue teams and schools are facing. Laura Morris's article, "Student-Athletic: An Exploration Of Subjective Wellbeing" she states, "Student-athletes are not immune to depression and may have some factors that are unique to the population-injury performance expectations, career termination, and overtraining" (Morris, 2020). In the data table later shown in the article, it can be concluded that 23.7% of athletes displayed symptoms of depression (Morris, 2020). In addition to this, "suicide was the fourth leading cause of death among college athletes" (Morris, 2020). Based on the research gathered, it is critical to monitor student-athlete mental health as depression and overall well being are tending to worsen.

With the growing numbers of student-athletes having declining mental wellbeing (such as Simone Biles withdrawing in the 2020 Beijing Olympics), it is imperative to recognize signs early so the recovery can be faster. To prevent negative effects from occurring, athletes need to inform coaches and trainers instead of keeping the information to themselves. On the other hand, coaches also need to accept and understand that an athlete may need time to rest and allow them days off without pressuring them to train more. If Joe had learned it was acceptable to take a break during those hard years of training in Washington, maybe he would have had a chance to think and get some of his problems together.

References

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