Lessons from Student-Affairs on Mental Health Wellness

Preparing Coaches and Athletic Staff to Support Student-Athletes of Concern
Presenters

• Eric Hartung – Associate Director of Research, NCAA (Moderator)
• Carrie Smith – Assistant Dean of Students, University of Georgia
• Jody Russell – Faculty Athletics Representative, Lock Haven University
• Dawn Stewart – Director of Athletics, Otterbein University
Preparing Coaches and Athletic Staff to Support Student–Athletes of Concern

Carrie Smith, Assistant Dean of Students, University of Georgia
Context on campuses

• Increased concern and fear
• Awareness of mental health
  • 1 in 5 college students will report a struggle with mental illness (Jed Foundation, 2015)
  • Anxiety diagnosis is surpassing depression diagnosis (National Alliance on Mental Health, 2015)
• Increased parental involvement
• Self-medication and access to prescription and over the counter drugs
• Social media continues to evolve
Student–Athlete Systems

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Brown, 2014)

- **Macrosystem**: Overall contextual beliefs e.g. democracy, meritocracy
- **Exosystem**: Interactions between microsystems e.g. concept of student-athlete, culture of athletics on campus
- **Mesosystem**: Influence the individual e.g. NCAA policy, private vs. public school, financial aid, curriculum
- **Microsystem**: Face to face interactions e.g. teammates, faculty, family, coaches, trainers

**PERSON**
A network of referral agents

- Only 20% of students say they would seek help at their counseling center (Jed Foundation, 2015)
- Prevent the silo of information
- Knowledge of resources and contact information for those who can assist
- Tapping into unexpected information sources
- Partnership, relationship, continued collaboration
What is student affairs?

“What student learning doesn’t just happen in a classroom. Opportunities for teaching and development exist everywhere and at all times on campus, and it’s our job to seize these moments... Encouraging an understanding and respect for diversity, a belief in the worth of individuals, and supporting our students in their needs are just some of the core concepts of the profession.”

– NASPA, 2016
Common Student Affairs Structures

• There is no one size fits all structure for student affairs
  • Institutional context is key
• Offices of Student Care, Concern, Support
  • Often located with Dean of Students Office
  • Clinical and non-clinical case managers
• Students of Concern Teams
• Threat Management Teams
• Counseling services
Direct support of students
• Providing resources
• Identifying a team of support
• Confidential Support Resources

Sharing information with campus partners
• Documenting student interactions across campus

Providing immediate interventions
• Approving and Processing Hardship Withdrawals
• Absence notifications

Targeted outreach and preventative measures
• Using data to identify students for proactive outreach
UGA Student Care & Outreach: Continuum of Care

- Providing interventions and ongoing support throughout a student’s enrollment

General Concern

Immediate Threat of Harm to Self/Others
Potential Opportunities

• Orientation and first year experience
• Transition out of athletics
  • Exhaust their eligibility
  • Graduate school or additional degrees
• Educating campus partners about your services and activities
  • Reciprocal training
QUESTIONS???
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Preparing Coaches and Athletic Staff to Support Student-Athletes of Concern: The FAR and Athletic Trainer Perspective

Jody Russell, PhD, LAT, ATC
Lock Haven University
The alarming FACTS

- Mental Health/Wellness recognized as the top health and safety concern for student-athletes

- ACHA/NCHA 2014 survey
  - 32.6% of students “felt so depressed it was difficult to function.”
  - 86.4% “feeling overwhelmed by all they had to do.”
  - “Athletes experience as much or more psychological stress as non-athletes, but use professional services less.”
What are the additional stressors?

- Demands of sport
- Demands of coaches
- Juggling athletic and academic demands – managing time
- Playing time/Starter role
- Body Image/Nutritional Concerns
- Home Issues
- Relationship/Self-identity development
Specific Mental Wellness Issues

- Depression
- Suicide
- Eating Disorders
Depression

- **Signs and Symptoms**
  - Sad moods
  - Irritability or anger
  - Feeling hopeless or worthless
  - Eating and sleeping changes
  - Decrease in energy
  - Decrease in motivation
  - Social withdrawal
  - Negative thinking
  - Thoughts of suicide

- **Risk Factors in Sport**
  - Response to injury
  - Response to end of career
  - Overtraining
  - Overwhelmed with sport participation
Reflective Questions

- Do you feel comfortable knowing when someone should/needs to be evaluated by a mental health profession?

- Do you have open communication lines with stakeholders about prevention, detection, and treatment?

- Do you know whom you would refer a student-athlete in need to?
They look so happy...always greeted me with smiles
“Suicide in young adults, and in student-athletes in particular, is ever present.”

Warning signs:
- Withdrawal
- Change in performance
- Giving away personal items
- Suicide threats
- A sudden lift in spirits after depressions
What to do?

- Do not attempt to determine the seriousness of the situation
- Immediate referral to a mental health professional
- A quick response shows the athlete someone cares
- Do not leave her/him alone
Reflective Questions

- Do you have open communication lines with stakeholders about prevention, detection, and treatment?

- Do you know how to make referrals for student-athletes?

- Do you have names and phone numbers of referral sources readily available?
Eating Disorders
What to look for

- Signs and Symptoms
  - Amenorrhea
  - Dehydration
  - GI problems
  - Cold intolerance
  - Stress fractures
  - Significant weight loss
  - Muscle cramps/
    weakness
  - Anxiety/Depression
  - Excessive Exercise
  - Difficulty concentrating

- Risk Factors in Sport
  - Body type stereotypes
  - Losing weight will increase performance
  - Health related to performance
  - Pressure from coaches
  - Revealing uniforms
  - Mimic eating/exercise behaviors of others
What to do?

- De-emphasize weight
- Keep an open dialogue about the importance of nutrition and staying injury-free
- Screen student-athletes before the start of the season for risk factors
- Develop a plan to identify and treat
Reflective questions

- Is there anything you can be doing in your Athletics Department to better support student-athletes who are struggling with these issues?

- Do you emphasize the importance of optimal nutrition?
Setting Our Stage

- Determining the Key Players
  - Student–Athletes/Teammates
  - SAAC
  - Athletics Department
  - Medical staff
  - Counseling staff
  - Faculty
  - Office of Disability Services
  - Conference Office
Needs Assessment

- SAAC
- Senior exit interviews
- Freshmen student-athlete interviews
- Monitoring social media
LHU Results

- Academic Major Mentoring for Freshmen
- Educational Sessions
- Psychoeducational Sessions
Psychoeducational Sessions

- **Key Players**
  - Counseling Department
  - Clinical & Mental Health Department
  - Athletics Department
  - Medical Staff
  - FAR
  - SAAC
  - Student–Athletes

- **5 sessions**
  - Eating Disorders
  - Dealing with Injury
  - Life After Sport
  - Stress Management
  - Performance Anxiety
Action Plan

- Developing a Mental Health Emergency Action Plan
  - Within each institution
  - Conference–wide plan

- Provide professional development to all constituents

- Disseminate information to athletes and teams

- Empower SAAC to openly discuss with teammates

- Early Alert System
Be proactive so you don’t have to be reactive.

Contact information:

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References/Resources:

- NCAA. Managing Student–Athletes’ Mental Health Issues.
- NCAA. Mind, Body and Sport: Understanding and Supporting Student–Athlete Mental Wellness.
Otterbein University Athletics
Preparing Coaches and Athletic Staff to Support Student-Athletes of Concern
Within Athletics . . .

• Generally speaking, coaches are expected to . . .
  – Focus on the competitiveness of your sport program
  – Support the academic success of student-athletes
  – Recruit viable student-athletes to the institution.
  – Provide administrative oversight to the sport program.
  – Manage alumni and development activities for your sport program.
  – Encourage the integration of student-athletes into campus and social settings
  – Provide oversight to the overall wellbeing of student-athletes – including emotional and mental wellbeing.
Managing to Student-Athletes of Concern

• As the number of student-athletes diagnosed with different concerns continues to increase, Coaches are wondering how to effectively communicate and manage to these concerns.
Questions from Coaching Staff

• How do I manage to student-athletes of concern when they need disciplined or corrected? Will this discipline or direction have a negative impact?

• What do I do when . . . I know a student-athlete is struggling, or I’m aware that medication has been adjusted, or I know that a life event has significantly impacted them?
Simple Strategies to Manage to Student-Athletes of Concern

• Have a conversation with the student-athlete
• Be a listener
• Thank the student when they share challenges with you. (Consider that this may not be easy for the student to do.)
• Be honest, and ask what you can do to help
• Pay attention to the non-verbal behaviors, i.e. body language, actions toward responsibility, response to adversity and/or moments of celebration. These may trigger the need for a conversation
• Know that you do not need to have all of the answers. Your partnerships with counseling services and student services can and should provide assistance. In addition, team physicians or medical providers can also provide support
Recommendations for Coaches to Manage to Student-Athletes of Concern

- Coaches should connect with...
  - Their athletics administration
  - Team physicians/medical services
  - Members of counseling services
  - Members of student affairs/services & campus conduct
  - Members of campus police departments

*Form a relationship . . . Don’t just go with a need!*

- These relationships can provide incredible guidance for your work with student-athletes of concern.
Otterbein’s Approach

• Otterbein has a unified approach to managing to the well being of students.
  – It is an expectation for Faculty, Staff, and Administration to work together for the well being of each student.
  – Electronic system in place (Cardinal Concerns) to report a concern for a student. The “concern” is sent directly to our Center for Student Success then passed along to any group on campus that the student is connected to, including Athletics. Communication occurs between these groups as to who has been in contact with the student and what the action has been.

• Student Affairs is the hub for support (non-academic) for students. Counseling services are offered through the Student Affairs Division. At Otterbein we house:
  – 3 counselors, 4 administrators – who see students
    • Walk-in appointments are permitted
    • Students receive 5 free sessions (paid via student activity fee)
Recommendations for Athletics Administration to Support Student-Athletes of Concern

• It is important for Athletics to stay connected to any/all of the services that campus offers to your student-athletes, especially for emotional and mental health wellness.

• Meet regularly with individuals in Student Affairs/Services including (but not limited to): Counseling Services, Center for Student Success, Health Services, Housing, Campus Police Department.
Focus on Counseling Services

• Meet with the Director of Counseling Services to discuss
  – Drug and alcohol usage on your campuses.
  – The common emotional and mental health issues they are presented with.
  – The ongoing opportunities to familiarize your staff and student-athletes with their services.
  – Ways in which you can support their efforts.
Conversation with Counseling Services

• Ask, what are the drug and alcohol trends with student-athletes on your campus and nationally or among our aspiration group.
• Ask, what are the common mental health issues that student-athletes are facing on your campus and nationally.
• Talk about the basic skills that your staff can demonstrate in order to confidently manage a conversation with one of their student-athletes who might be of concern.
• Offer to provide the counseling with basic resources in order to show gratitude for the work they are doing with students, especially your athletes!
In Conclusion . . .

• Your coaches and athletic administrators do not need to be the experts in managing to all the challenges that your student-athletes are facing.
• Know how to access the resources that can assist you.
• Build relationships and value the relationships with campus services, specifically counseling services.
• Have a regular dialogue with campus services.
• Ask about trends and educate yourself!
Feel free to contact me with questions . . .

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