Providing Support For Student-Athletes, Coaches, and Staff Around Mental Health Needs
GNAC seminar cites mental health among athlete concerns

By Greg Johnson
NCAA.org

BOSTON – Participants at a Great Northeast Athletic Conference seminar last week learned that mental health is just as important as physical health for student-athletes, and that mental-health problems often are harder to diagnose.

The GNAC’s fourth annual Professional Development Seminar – this year focusing on the mental health of student-athletes – was funded by an NCAA Division III Strategic Initiatives Grant and attracted more than 100 student-athletes, athletics administrators, coaches and athletic trainers from around the conference.

While the idea of student-athlete mental health doesn’t always receive the attention that physical injuries generate, people within college athletics know that stress inside and outside of sports participation can lead to eating disorders, substance abuse, depression and anxiety. When these issues arise, it is imperative that a coach, athletic trainer or administrator recognize them quickly. What could be interpreted as a slump or just a bad stretch could be a sign that a student-athlete is having a problem.

“A topic like this shines a light on it for all of us,” said Alexis Mastronardi, the associate athletics director and sports information director at Emmanuel. “The timing is good because we’re going into the fall sports seasons in a few weeks.”

That is the type of response GNAC Commissioner Joe Walsh received from his membership after each of the four seminars. The previous versions focused on student-athlete well being, sportsmanship and gender equity.


DIVISION III
#WHYD3
“One of the greatest gifts a coach can give is loving and understanding.”

- Coach Wilbur T. Braithwaite
“Everyone wants to win, but more importantly, a coach can be the most influential person in that young person’s life. For the most part, it’s the student’s first time away from their parents, and they are developing as people.”

– Joe Walsh
Goals of the Panel

• Minimizing the stigma associated with mental health issues.
• Providing additional understanding and resources for coaches and administrators.
• Moving a mental health injury to the same level as a physical injury.
  • *It does not have to end a student-athlete’s playing or academic participation.*
Lisa Yenush
Associate Athletic Director/Senior Woman Administrator

Division III Student-Athlete
  Soccer, Basketball, and Softball
  NEW 8 Player of the Year
  Academic All-American

Division III Head Coach
  Women’s Soccer and Softball

Athletic Administrator
  Assistant and Associate Athletic Director
  Senior Woman Administrator
  NCAA Committee Service

Division III Women’s Basketball Committee
  Northeast Region Chair

DIVISION III
#WHYD3
Madison Burns

Division III Student-Athlete
Background

- DIII National Student-Athlete Advisory Committee.
- DIII Management Council.
- Randolph-Macon College (Ashland, VA).
  - Major: Business
  - Minor: Communications Studies
  - Women’s Soccer
Mental Illnesses

• Anorexia Nervosa.
• Anxiety.
• Depression.
Road To Recovery

Fall semester freshman year

Biweekly check in with Athletic Trainer

College Counseling Service

Adolescent Psychologist

Sports Nutritionist & separate Psychologist

VCU’s Athletic Nutritionist & Psychologist

Continual Recovery
Personal Advice

Coaches:

• Understand your role.
• Be on the lookout for signs.
• Have resources prior to the start of the season.
• Do not ignore.
• Do not automatically remove SA from athletics participation.
Personal Advice

Teammates:

• Don’t turn your head.
• Don’t hide information.
• Can’t be afraid your peer will be mad at you.
• If you’re uncomfortable with your head coach, go to captains, trainers, counselors or assistant coaches.
• Your peer NEEDS your support on and off the field.
• BE PROACTIVE!
PERSONAL ADVICE

Someone battling mental illness:

• YOU’RE NOT ALONE!
National SAAC Initiative

- Upcoming video.
- Resources guide.
- QR code card.
- Awareness day in DIII Week.
- Scheduled counseling hour for SA.
Emily Klueh, LLMSW
Performance Psychology Athletic Counseling Counselor and Program Coordinator for Athlete’s Connected: University of Michigan
Scott Hamilton, MS, LMHC

DePauw University (D-III), Greencastle, IN.

• Clinical Counselor.
• Outreach Coordinator.
• Supervisor of Wellness Advocates (peer educators).
• Active Minds Chapter advisor.
• Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT).
• Mindfulness Trainer.
## Average Sum of Hours Spent Per Week In-Season on Academic Activities and Athletic Activities in 2010 (SA Self Report)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Division I</th>
<th>Division II</th>
<th>Division III</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>Men's Basketball</td>
<td>Football (FBS/FCS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average Sum of Hours</td>
<td>73.7</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>81.3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>74.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Sum of Hours</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>71.0</td>
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Almost 85% of ATCs indicated that anxiety disorders are currently an issue with student-athletes on their campus.

83% indicated that eating disorders and disordered eating are an issue.

Mood disorders (77.0%), substance-related disorders (68.9%) and management and treatment issues (46.6%) also were listed as current issues on campus.

Note. Information was extracted from 2010 NCAA Managing Student-Athlete’s Mental Health Issues Follow-up Questionnaire
Student Athlete’s

- 1 in 4 student-athletes reported that fairly often in the past month they felt like difficulties were piling up so high that they could not overcome them. (NCAA report)

- 63% of student-athletes reported that emotional or mental health issues affected their athletics performance in the last 4 weeks. (Athletes Connected research)
Mental Health and Student Athletes

“There has always been a stigma of ‘You’re supposed to be mentally tough, not emotional’ in athletics, and it’s gotten in the way of a serious look at the problem.”

–Ron Chamberlain, a sports psychologist at Washington
Full Spectrum of Care
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What We See</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Depression</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Eating Disorders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Adjustment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bipolar</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Alcohol and other drug dependencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Stress Management</td>
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<td>• Academic Stress</td>
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<td>• Performance Anxiety</td>
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<td>• Performance Enhancement</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Interpersonal Relationship Issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Suicidal Ideation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Psychosis</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Trauma</td>
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## Signs and Symptoms

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<th>Anxiety</th>
<th>Eating Disorders/Disordered Eating</th>
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<td>• Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness</td>
<td>• Restlessness or feeling wound-up or on edge</td>
<td>• Chronic dieting despite being underweight</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Loss of interest in daily activities</td>
<td>• Being easily fatigued</td>
<td>• Obsession with calories and fat contents of food</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Appetite or weight changes</td>
<td>• Difficulty concentrating or having their minds go blank</td>
<td>• Engaging in ritualistic eating patterns, such as cutting food into</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sleep Changes</td>
<td>• Irritability</td>
<td>tiny pieces, eating alone, and/or hiding food</td>
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<td>• Anger or irritability</td>
<td>• Muscle tension</td>
<td>• Continued fixation with food</td>
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<td>• Loss of energy</td>
<td>• Difficulty controlling the worry</td>
<td>• Depression or lethargic stage</td>
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<td>• Reckless behavior</td>
<td>• Sleep problems (difficulty falling or staying asleep or restless,</td>
<td>• Avoidance of social functions, family &amp; friends.</td>
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<td>• Concentration problems</td>
<td>unsatisfying sleep)</td>
<td>• Switching between periods of overeating and fasting</td>
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<td>• Unexplained aches and pains</td>
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Privacy and Confidentiality

- HIPAA.
- ROI’s.
- Professional relationships and appropriate boundaries.
  - How it affects the student-athlete who is the client.
  - How coaches can be effective/ineffective in the process.
  - In many cases, team physicians can play a vital role with mental health treatment.
  - What about psychiatry?
Resilience and Athlete Mental Health

• How well can the athlete manage stress?
• Learning and implementing coping skills.
• Recovery from psychological conditions and the capacity to perform.
  o Evaluating the student-athlete’s ability to function.
Destigmatization

• The “ubiquity of suffering”.
  o Over 1 in 3 (15-24 year-olds) meet criteria within a year period.
• Seeking help as sign of strength.
• Sending the message that none of us are immune from mental health issues.
• Less focus on categorization (i.e., diagnostic labeling), more emphasis on strengths and resiliency across multiple life domains.
• Using sport as a positive metaphor for mental health.
Resources/Referring

URGENT / EMERGENCY SERVICES

- Call 911
- National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-8255
- Crisis Text Line: Text “Start” to 741-741

Other National Resources

- ULifeline: An online resource center for college student mental health and emotional well-being, aimed at students and campus professionals
- ActiveMinds: The nation’s only peer-to-peer organization dedicated to the mental health of college students
- Athletes Connected: Aimed to increase awareness of mental health issues, reduce the stigma of help-seeking, and promote positive coping skills among student athletes
Programs

Trainings:

• QPR: [www.qprinstitute.com/](http://www.qprinstitute.com/)
  o to reduce suicidal behaviors and save lives by providing innovative, practical and proven suicide prevention.

• Screening for Mental Health:
  o Education and screening programs that empower college students to take charge of their mental health. [http://screening.mentalhealthscreening.org/locator/depression_college](http://screening.mentalhealthscreening.org/locator/depression_college)

• Step-Up: [www.stepupprogram.org/](http://www.stepupprogram.org/)
  o is a prosocial behavior and bystander intervention program that educates students to be proactive in helping other.

• Therapist Assisted Online (TAO) [thepath.taoconnect.org/](http://thepath.taoconnect.org/)
  o interactive, web-based program that provides assistance to help overcome anxiety, depression, relationships/communication, and substance use concerns.

• Mental Health First Aid: [www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/](http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/)
  o Mental Health First Aid teaches you how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders in your community.
Professional Organizations

• Association for Applied Sports Psychology.  
  http://www.appliedsportpsych.org/

• American College Counseling Association.  
  http://collegecounseling.org/

• Society for Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology (APA).  
  http://www.apa.org/about/division/div47.aspx

• National Alliance of Social Workers in Sports.  
  https://www.naswis.org/
Athlete Mental Health Initiatives on College Campuses

- Athletes Connected: University of Michigan
- Restorative Yoga: University of Penn
- Mental Health Awareness: Stanford University
- Pow6rful Minds: American Athletic Conference
- Many universities hiring in-house counselors for Student Athletes
- Mindfulness, Acceptance, Commitment (MAC) Training: DePauw University
What Next? What can you do?

“Some people don’t think of athletes as human; they just see them for what they do and their success on the field. The more athletes define themselves by what they do, the more susceptible they are.”

- Will Heininger, former Michigan football player
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