

Mental Health and Athletics

Lesson 1- Introduction and Michael Phelps

OPRF Student Services: <https://www.oprfhs.org/student-services>

Entrance Question: Would you rather be stuck in Jumanji or Jurassic Park?

[Professional athletes](#) are said to be seeking mental health help in record numbers. More than ever before athletes have been speaking out on their struggles to cope with the pressure that comes with competing at an elite level. Even more and more, athletes are coming out to the public about their mental health struggles, in hope to help one person that also may be silently struggling.

Approximately 46.6 million people are living with mental illness in the US. That's 1 in 5 adults who will be living with a mental health condition at some point in their lives. Many manage symptoms with therapy, medication, eating a healthy diet or exercise. Research has shown that the benefits of exercise can boost moods and improve overall mental health. By moving our bodies we can increase our endorphins and enkephalins, two of the bodies naturally producing hormones that make us feel better. It also allows us time to concentrate on ourselves instead of our busy lives, a much needed break for many of us.

However, playing sports does not make athletes immune to mental health challenges. With pressures to perform in the game, as well as in the rest of their public lives, being an athlete can be incredibly challenging for a person's mental health. Student-athletes have additional pressures to maintain their classwork and grades on top of practice and games. When athletes get hurt, they receive time to heal, but what about when those injuries are invisible?

With young adults, especially college athletes, the statistics are startling: 33% of all college students experience significant symptoms of depression, anxiety or other mental health conditions. Among that group, 30% seek help. But of college athletes with mental health conditions, only 10% do. Among professional athletes, data shows that up to 35% of elite athletes suffer from a mental health crisis which may manifest as stress, eating disorders, burnout, or depression and anxiety. We're inspired by athletes such as Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps, USC Volleyball player Victoria Garrick, NBA player Kevin Love and those who are telling their stories and inspiring others to seek help to support the cause.

[Michael Phelps](#) is an Olympic Medalist 28 times over again. Now that he is retired from competitive swimming, he is coming out and talking about his struggles with depression and mental health. [Here is his story.](#)

Exit Question: What are some ways that you have coped during the pandemic to ensure that your mental health is in a good place?