

# Sports Performance and mental health of Athletes

Gomati Devi<sup>1</sup>, Satish Kumar<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** The combination of an athlete's physical, mental, technical, tactical, psychological, and social attributes determines how well they perform in sports. Each separate facet of sports performance includes multiple subcategories, some of which are based on physical certainty and others of which tend to be very changeable. The most complete and representative of those parts of the performance that require the most concentration and preparation time, mental health is one of the factors that affect sports performance. Sports performance and mental wellness are closely related. With the decisions of Naomi Osaka, Simone Biles, and Ben Stokes to withdraw from their respective competitions to put their mental health first, worries about the mental health of athletes have recently gained attention. In this review article, we investigated and analyzed recent data about the mental health of sports persons. To gather as much as possible scientific data we used Google Scholar and Google search engine. As selection criteria for scientific articles, we collected keywords such as mental health, stress, anxiety, depression, yoga, and performance. This review article shows that the athlete's capacity to perform at their best can be significantly enhanced by having strong mental health.

**Key Words:** Performance, mental health, stress, anxiety, depression, yoga

## INTRODUCTION

Sports performance is essential for athletes who want to progress in their chosen sport. Athletic prowess is used to measure sports participation. Strong technical and tactical standards can compensate for fitness shortcomings in other sports, such as ball games, even though physical fitness is an important role in other sports disciplines, such as sprint running, marathons, and rowing. However, athletes in most sports need to be in top physical shape to withstand the physical rigours of competition and utilise their tactical and technical skills while doing so. The most common interpretation of performance in a sporting context is that it symbolises the pursuit of excellence, with an athlete evaluating their performance concerning their advancement towards excellence or achievement. How well an athlete performs in sports is determined by a mix of their physical, mental, technical, tactical, psychological, and social characteristics.

## RESEARCH METHOD

We employed a search engine as our research tool. It is an open-source platform that allows anyone to quickly and easily contribute data from online scientific databases. Due to this, we chose to employ this process to compile as much scientific data as we could that was pertinent to the review's objective. The following keywords were used to find literature on Google Scholar and the Google search engine: mental health, stress, anxiety, depression, yoga, and performance. Only 13 publications were chosen since they directly addressed the purpose of our study.

## RESULT

Mental health and sports performance are strongly interconnected. There are numerous subcategories for each

distinct aspect of sports performance, some of which are founded on physical certainties and others of which tend to be quite variable. Mental health is one of the elements that affect sports performance because it is the most comprehensive and indicative of those components of the performance that demand the most focus and preparation time. Concerns about athletes' mental health have lately acquired attention as a result of Naomi Osaka, Simone Biles, and Ben Stokes' decisions to withdraw from their respective competitions in order to prioritise their mental health. Mental health and athletic performance are intimately related. Vinesh Phogat, a wrestler, claimed in an interview with *The Indian Express* that she struggled to fall asleep and frequently remained up for days at a time while being diagnosed with depression for three months in 2019.

According to research, having good mental health can considerably increase an athlete's ability to give their best performance. Yet too much time has passed since any attention was paid to the mental health of athletes. The public enthusiastically cheers for them when they win on the field, but little attention is paid to the demands and concerns they face off the field. From dealing with disappointments, injuries, and criticism to avoiding loved ones, athletes encounter a wide spectrum of mental issues that have mostly gone undiagnosed. Those who are mentally ill could feel overburdened and unable to achieve their goals because they have less desire and energy. This can be observed in sports, where achieving elite performance requires a significant commitment of time, attention, and effort. It could be challenging to perform at one's best or even to engage in physical activities if one's mental health declines. If an athlete has significant levels of anxiety or depression, it may be difficult for them to stay motivated and practice frequently. Also, they may

have difficulty sleeping, which is crucial for a complete recovery from exercises and for maintaining physical health.

The mental parts of sports are frequently the most difficult to learn because success frequently necessitates a high level of athletic ability and maturity. Any athlete can evaluate their weaknesses in any sport objectively with the aid of logic and analytical skills. Success as an athlete depends on their ability to motivate themselves, both during training and competition. Ingenuity is another quality that separates successful athletes from those who are merely skilled. In team games, creativity is demonstrated through clever or well-planned strategies. The innovativeness of these players in various sports is frequently demonstrated by the ways in which they approach their training routines. An athlete's degree of alertness and mental clarity during competition depends on a number of interconnected factors, such as physical tiredness or challenges unrelated to sport, such as limitations imposed by their family, their educational obligations, or their profession.

### *Mental health*

Stress management and learning coping mechanisms are essential to maintaining mental wellness. According to the WHO, mental health is "a condition of well-being in which each individual fulfills his or her potential, can cope with everyday stressors, is able to work creatively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to her or his community." {10} The definition of mental health regarding athletics provided by Wylleman et al. (2015) is "a state of successful performance or mental function, resulting in productive activities, rewarding relationships with other people, and the ability to adapt to change and manage with adversity." {1}

### *Sports performance and mental health problems*

According to studies, having a healthy mind is essential for athletic achievement. {2} Yet it's important to become aware of how mental health issues may impair sports performance to start focusing on wellness promotion and preventing adverse effects. These mental health disorders are any modifications in behaviour, attitudes, or feelings that have a negative impact on a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Student-athletes experience a unique set of pressures that are connected to mental health concerns, despite the fact that physical activity and athletics have many beneficial consequences on mental health, including elevating self-esteem, creating connections with others, and offering social support. Several things can happen, such as increasing academic pressure, longer playing seasons, coach pressure to win, commercialization of sports, injuries, identity defined by athletic accomplishment, and body-weight expectations. There are several ways that mental health affects sports performance, depending on the person and the specific mental health problem. Stress, anxiety, depression, food disorders, substance misuse, and strained relationships can affect athletic performance.

### *Stress*

One of the top three mental health problems that student-athletes expressed, along with anxiety and depression, was stress, a massive study found. {3} Although exercise has numerous positive health effects, researchers have found that excessive activity is associated with increased stress, burnout, and other adverse effects. {4} Stress can affect general well-being, harm academic and athletic performance, and increase the likelihood of athletic injury in athletes. {4} This increased risk of injury is due to attentional alterations brought on by stress, distractions, and greater self-consciousness that may affect performance. Moreover, stress alters coordination and raises muscle tension, all of which can affect sports performance and increase the risk of injury. According to studies, when their stress levels are reduced, athletes are significantly less likely to get sick or wounded. {4} It's also crucial to realise that, should one occur, a sports injury constitutes a considerable stressor in and of itself. Athletes may experience loneliness among their teammates, feelings of disappointment or depression, and anxiety about regaining their pre-injury level of performance. {2}

### *Anxiety*

Anxiety affects a sports player's performance in physiological, cognitive, and behavioural ways. One of the top three mental health problems among athletes, along with stress and hopelessness, was anxiety. {3} In a meta-analysis, which synthesises the results of numerous scientific studies, researchers discovered an inverse relationship between trait anxiety and athletic performance, with one study measuring race times in distance runners and another looking at performance errors after a competitive motor task. This implies that anxiety may have an impact on performance regardless of the type of athletic exertion or the sport. Attentional system changes brought on by anxiety impair executive function, sensory processing, and the capacity to choose pertinent information. These skills are necessary for both elite academic achievement and athletic success. {5}

### *Depression*

In a study, 28% of female and 21% of male student-athletes reported "feeling depressed" in the previous year. {2} Student-athletes listed depression as one of their top three mental health concerns, along with stress and anxiety. {3} It's noteworthy to note that studies have found that top athletes tend to experience sadness at higher rates than athletes with less talent. {4} There are various ways that depressive symptoms affect function. One consequence of sadness is that leaving the house and performing daily tasks may seem nearly impossible. This is particularly challenging for student-athletes, who usually have both major and daily commitments. {2} Depression can manifest as changes in appetite and weight. {6}

Athletic performance depends heavily on weight and nutrition, and poor nutrition brought on by depression can seriously harm performance. The loss of interest in once-enjoyed pastimes is another indication of depression. Athletes that are not passionate about their sport do not perform well because they are not engaged

in practice, healthy habits, or competition. People with depression may walk or speak slowly in addition to feeling exhausted, lacking energy, and having abnormal sleep patterns. commitments, this is quite challenging. {2} Depression can manifest as changes in appetite and weight. {6}

### *Eating Disorders*

Eating disorders are serious mental health diseases that can lead to severe physical and mental problems. {7} The prevention of eating disorders is a constant concern for athletic trainers, coaches, and other people involved in athletic care. The specific number of athletes who struggle with eating disorders is extremely difficult to ascertain, and data may not be reliable. {2,7} This phenomenon could have a number of causes. Athletes are frequently hailed as exemplifying strong work ethics and progressing athletically when they emphasise living a healthy lifestyle over their customary training. It becomes challenging for academics and other people involved in athlete care to recognise problematic eating patterns and eating disorders as a result. {2} Furthermore, many who frequently experience disordered eating do not even report their behaviour or ask for assistance. {7} Nonetheless, research shows that college-aged people and athletes have a higher risk of developing eating disorders. {2}

### *Dealing with stress*

Understanding your sources of stress is the first step to later coping with it. Being aware of your mental triggers is an excellent place to start. P.E.R.F.E.C.T. stands for actions that assist athletes in managing excessive stress and restoring enjoyment to both sports and life, according to Dr. Graef. P – Positive Self-Talk; E – Embrace Adversity; R – Reverse Engineer; F – Focus on the Now; E – Evolve; C – Chill Out and T – Talk It Out {11}

### *Dealing with Anxiety*

Using specific techniques that enable them to unwind and feel at ease in the circumstance that is making them worried are healthy ways for athletes to deal with anxiety. Indulging in enjoyable hobbies, taking care of one's physique, maintaining a good outlook, laughing, practicing relaxation techniques, conversing with people, and reframing are just a few examples.

### *Dealing with Depression*

To develop a healthy culture for a sportsperson to express emotions better, they need to feel safe expressing them in the first place. Concentrate on what you need to do, Establish reasonable expectations, keep in mind why you got started, and consult with experts.

### *Steps to be taken to improve mental health*

Humans have the capacity for wisdom due to our unique cognitive abilities. We can take in vast amounts of information, analyze it, and make decisions based on that data. This allows us to recognize patterns, anticipate consequences, and draw conclusions about the world around us. We also have social intelligence which enables us to understand ourselves and others better, as well as think abstractly about concepts such as morality and justice.

Sports are about winning and losing, but accepting failure may be difficult. Gagan Narang, a shooter who won a bronze medal at the 2012 London Olympics in shooting, acknowledged that it might be difficult to get past setbacks, but that it is the only way an athlete can advance. {13}

Deep Dasgupta, a former cricketer, said it was difficult to accept defeat. Sports help one to be emotionally stable whether coping with wins or defeats. Every sportsperson has a distinct manner of dealing with losses. {14} Deepa Malik, a silver medalist at the 2016 Summer Paralympics, claimed that people frequently believed that athletes were their property and could be subjected to any amount of pressure, criticism, or discussion. She noted that social media increased the strain, therefore she abstained from using it while she was exercising. {14} Making small changes can have a big impact on your mental health. Taking the time to nourish yourself with healthy foods, and prioritize meaningful activities can help create a more balanced lifestyle for improved mental well-being.

Additionally, setting aside time to connect with friends and family as well as participating in activities that make you feel relaxed or fulfilled can also help promote positive mental health. Many strategies can help to improve mental health. One of the most important things for improving mental health is establishing and maintaining good self-care practices, such as getting enough sleep, eating healthy foods, engaging in meaningful activities, and spending time with people who make you feel supported and valued. By creating and implementing strategies such as these into our daily lives, we can make small but significant changes that can contribute to our overall mental health. Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar clarified, uplifted, motivated, and inspired young, tough athletes all across the world by addressing the numerous mental challenges that athletes experience. {12} "To be able to exercise in the gym, all of your muscles must be relaxed; otherwise, muscle growth will not occur and your nerves will get stiff. Although the mind wants to unwind, the body needs to exercise. Workouts and downtime are necessary for both the body and the psyche. 12 Although failure is a tremendous teacher, athletes should learn to deal with it.

"Sports are about success and failure. We occasionally run ahead and occasionally fall behind. Just keep your cool in either case. Always keep in mind that losing means someone else wins. And nobody enjoys losing. These are the struggles of life. Life is never the same twice. There are often ups and downs. We must go on after accepting losses as a necessary part of life. Remain unwavering. Don't let yourself down. {12}

"Stop worrying. Have a bigger perspective. Extend your difficulties & goals. Believe in the Divine. {12}

All of your internal systems gain from yoga, which also supports mental stability. Focus and mental fortitude are prerequisites for all sports. Yoga and meditation should be combined to develop focus. Do meditation and the Sudarshan Kriya before your practice.

**Conflict of Interest:** No conflict of interest among authors.

## REFERENCES

Wylleman P, Rosier N, De Knop P. Transitional challenges and elite athletes' mental health. In Baker J, Safari P, Frasset Thomas J (Eds) *Health and Elite Sport: Is high-performance sport a health pursuit*. London: Routledge. 2015 (p 99 - 116)

Egan, K. (2019). Supporting mental health and well-being among student-athletes. *Clinical Sports Medicine*, 38, 537-544. doi: 10.1016/j.csm.2019.05.003

Hilliard, R. C., Watson, J. C., 2nd, & Zizzi, S. J. (2020). Stigma, attitudes, and intentions to seek mental health services in college student-athletes. *Journal of American College Health*, 1–10. doi: 10.1080/07448481.2020.1806851

Putukian, M. (2016). The psychological response to injury in student-athletes: a narrative review with a focus on mental health. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 50(3), 145–148. doi: 10.1136/bjsports-2015-095586

Rice, S. M., Gwyther, K., Santesteban-Echarri, O., Baron, D., Gorczynski, P., Gouttebauge, V., Reardon, C., Hitchcock, M., Brian Hainline, & Purcell, R. (2019). Determinants of anxiety

in elite athletes: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 53(11), 722. doi: 10.1136/bjsports-2019-100620

National Institute of Mental Health (2018). Depression. Retrieved from:

[https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression/index.shtml#part\\_145397](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression/index.shtml#part_145397)

McLester, C. N., Hardin, R., & Hoppe, S. (2014). Susceptibility to eating disorders among collegiate female student-athletes. *Journal of athletic training*, 49(3), 406–410. doi: 10.4085/1062-6050-49.2.16

National Collegiate Athletic Association. (n.d.). Substance Use. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncaa.org/themes-topics/substance-use#:~:text=Those%20student%20athletes%20with%20the,season%2D%20or%20career%2Dending.&text=Heavy%20drinking%20can%20result%20in,performance%20by%2011.4%20percent4.>

Sønderlund, A.L., O'Brien K., Kermer, P., Rowland, B., De Groot, F., Staiger, P., Zinkiewicz, L., Millera, P. (2013). The association between sports participation, alcohol use, and aggression and violence: A systematic review. *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, 17(1), 2–7. doi: 10.1016/j.jsams.2013.03.011

World Health Organisation. (2023) <http://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>. (last accessed 16 February 2023)

## Author Information

<sup>1</sup>**Gomati Devi**; Research Scholar, Department of Physical Education and Sports, Chaudhary Devilal University, Sirsa, Haryana

<sup>2</sup>**Satish Malik**; Assistant Professor, Govt. College Jind, Haryana; Email: [vanshmalik77@gmail.com](mailto:vanshmalik77@gmail.com)

**Corresponding Author:** Gomati Devi, Email: [vanshmalik77@gmail.com](mailto:vanshmalik77@gmail.com)

## Citation

Devi, G, & Malik, S. (2023). Sports Performance and Mental Health of Athletes. *Sports Science & Health Advances* 1(1), 46 – 49. <https://doi.org/10.60081/SSHA.1.1.2023.46-49>

Copyright: © 2023 by the authors. Licensee Sports Science & Health Advances. This article is licensed under CC BY 4.0

Received: 05.03.2023

Accepted: 25.05.2023; Published: 30.06.2023