Amani Free

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Professor Bogardus

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“More Than an Athlete: Student-Athletes & Mental Health”

Introduction:

 Welcome, you’re listening to Lady Kobe Speaks. I’m Amani Free and today’s podcast is “More Than an Athlete: Student-Athletes & Mental Health”. In this episode, we’re going to dive deep into the importance of student-athletes and mental health and how awareness needs increase on this.

**Part 1:**

 Student-athletes endure a lot of mental challenges throughout their careers, whether that be in the classroom, on the field, or court, or even in everyday life. These constant mental battles can drain a student-athlete to a very low point in which it begins to affect their everyday lives. This is something that is always lightly touched in certain places, or not talked about at all, but no matter where you are it still can affect anyone.

Sophomore Forward, Tiera White for Quinnipiac Women’s Basketball team says student-athlete mental health to her is “being comfortable in your own mental state even when external forces challenge it. I think it should be discussed because many are told that they need to have mental health but not given the tools to build or maintain their mental health. It should also be discussed because student-athletes are arguably more subjected to suffer from mental health challenges”.

 Student-athlete’s mental health can be affected in various ways such as abusive situation within an institution, mentally overworking themselves, or personal situations affecting their mentality or even a pandemic. Instants in which situations like abusive situations within an institution can be seen with the former Texas Southern investigation. Former Texas Southern coach, Cynthia Cooper-Dyke is currently under investigation by the school’s Office of Title IX for alleged violations by players who charge that she demeaned and abused them, according to published reports. ( <https://hbcusports.com/2022/05/05/former-texas-southern-coach-cynthia-cooper-dyke-accused-by-players-of-abusive-behavior/> )

Quinnipiac’s Associate Athletic Director and Director of Athletic Performance, Brijesh Patel said that “An individuals’ mental fitness is of utmost importance as the mind ultimately controls the body. How a person thinks directly impacts the way they feel. Any sort of negative stress impacts tone within the body and has a direct impact upon movement. Being successful in athletics depends on being able to move efficiently to perform specific sporting skills. If those skills cannot be performed efficiently due to a poor mental state, then the athletes’ performance will suffer. Mindset is everything”.

With us still in the mist of the Covid-19 Pandemic, student-athlete’s mental health continues to be a precedent issue to be discussed and brought aware of. According to Nicholas Grubic’s editorial “Competing Against COVID-19: Have We Forgotten About Student-Athlete’s Mental Health”, it states that “in addition to the direct impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic places on student-athletes, their mental, social and physical health may also be affected indirectly through the reduction of many positive influencers that accompany access to team sport ( <https://bjsm-bmj-com.libraryproxy.quinnipiac.edu/content/55/17/950> )

Mr. Patel says that “one’s mental state directly plays apart on the nervous system and our nervous system directly impacts out muscular system. An athletes’ muscular system is what allows them to produce and reduce force and ultimately move three dimensionally through the environment. If an athletes’ mental state is poor (negative, angry, complaining, stressed), then the nervous system will have to respond in a way that can decrease one’s peripheral vision and increase muscular tone to the point range of motion may be limited. If range of motion is limited and one’s periphery narrows, it will become more challenging to make technical and tactical plays”.

Three minority groups of student-athletes, African-Americans, Latin Americans, and Asian Americans, seem to have a higher rate of mental health need according to Jorge Ballesteros’ article, “Under the Face Mask: Racial-Ethnic Minority Student-Athletes and Mental Health Use” ( <https://www-tandfonline-com.libraryproxy.quinnipiac.edu/doi/full/10.1080/07448481.2018.1536663> )

Quinnipiac senior midfield soccer athlete, Lauren Wendland believes that “Mental health affects student-athletes way more than people could even think. I actually think 75% or about that amount of student-athletes go through depression throughout their collegiate careers. Mental health affects anyone but as an athlete we experience heightened level of stressors. Our schedules alone can cause anxiety as time is never really in our favor especially in academically driven programs. On top of that a lot of people can’t adjust properly to the demands of the sport they come to play at college, it’s a higher level, new atmosphere and with that comes higher expectations from others and yourself. Our sports are our greatest love and most often our escape so when we are being challenged to higher levels than ever before or you get injured and need to catch back up to get a spot, it’s no wonder student athletes struggle immensely with mental health. But there are always resources and people to talk to, so I urge anyone who is struggling even if they think talking to someone could never fix an issue, I ask people try because that’s all we can do and as an athlete most of our life is about trying. Now it’s about trying through a different lens”.

Five NCAA student-athletes died by suicide between March and April 2022. The tragedies have led to calls for increased mental health support for athletes. ( <https://abc6onyourside.com/news/local/five-college-athletes-die-by-suicide-since-march-columbus-experts-address-mental-health> )

Senior Quinnipiac Track and Field Runner Symone Foster says that “Student-athlete mental health awareness is very important. We need to make it a norm for athletes to speak about their mental state. I think a lot of people are aware of this, but it’s not very normal to have a regular conversation about it. In order for us to perform at the best of our abilities, we must be able to perform mentally as well”.

Up next, I had the opportunity to speak with former Co-Director of Mindset Development at Mamba Sports Academy and current Quinnipiac Clinical Sports Psychologist, Devin Markle on student-athletes and mental health.

Conclusion:

Very grateful to have had to opportunity to talk with Ms. Markle. I hope that in listening to this episode you learned the importance of spreading awareness and reaching out to student-athletes who may be struggling with mental health. Athletes if you are listening as well, I encourage you to reach out and get help if need be or even if you feel like you might not need to. The stress one classes, athletics, image, likeness, sponsor opportunities can all be a lot to handle. It’s okay to speak to someone and decompress all that has piled up. I hope I have inspired you make towards a change for better. This is Amani Free, and you’ve just listened to Lady Kobe Speaks.