

## Breaking the Silence Athletes' Mental Health Matters

The conversation about athlete mental health reached a global stage when Simone Biles, the most decorated American gymnast, withdrew from competition during the Tokyo Olympics. Citing mental health concerns and experiencing what gymnasts call "the twisties", Biles ignited a pivotal discussion regarding athletes' mental well-being. This spotlight confirmed existing research that indicates that up to 35% of elite athletes face significant mental health challenges<sup>1</sup>. Biles' personal moment catalyzed a broader, groundbreaking shift in athlete mental health awareness.

Beyond the spotlight, a silent struggle unfolds in young athletes. Research indicates that elite youth competitors encounter performance anxiety and identity crises, particularly when sidelined by injuries<sup>2</sup>. These pressures can exacerbate mental health issues, with female athletes often experiencing higher stress-related injury rates compared to their male counterparts<sup>3</sup>.



The sports community in return has been responding to these findings. According to the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine, major sports organizations have published nine mental health position statements since 2018, signaling a growing recognition of the issue's importance. Athletes like Biles and beyond have transformed the dialogue, demonstrating that mental health is as critical as physical performance.

As we look to the future, the integration of mental health support in sports is not just beneficial—it's essential. Athletes, coaches, and support staff should prioritize mental wellness alongside physical training. This holistic approach not only enhances performance but also ensures the long-term well-being of athletes beyond their competitive careers.

By embracing these insights and implementing supportive practices, we can foster a sports culture that values mental health as much as athletic performance, ultimately leading to healthier, happier, and more resilient athletes.

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### Mental Health Resources:

- National Alliance on Mental Illness Hotline: 1-800-950-NAMI
- 24/7 Crisis Text Line: Text 741741
- [NCAA Mental Health Resources for Student Athletes](#) (Click Link)
- [Athletes for Hope Resource Hub](#) (Click Link)

References:<sup>1</sup> (2019) Mental health in elite athletes: International Olympic Committee consensus statement. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*.<sup>2</sup> (2023) Current Findings on Student-Athlete Mental Health. NCAA Research.<sup>3</sup> (2024) Olympics Spotlight Gender-Informed Injury Prevention. Think Global Health.