



Strong Minds. Stronger Athletes

The Science and Strength of Building Intentional, Healthy Sport Systems

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Why mental wellness in sport systems?

Impacts millions of athletes

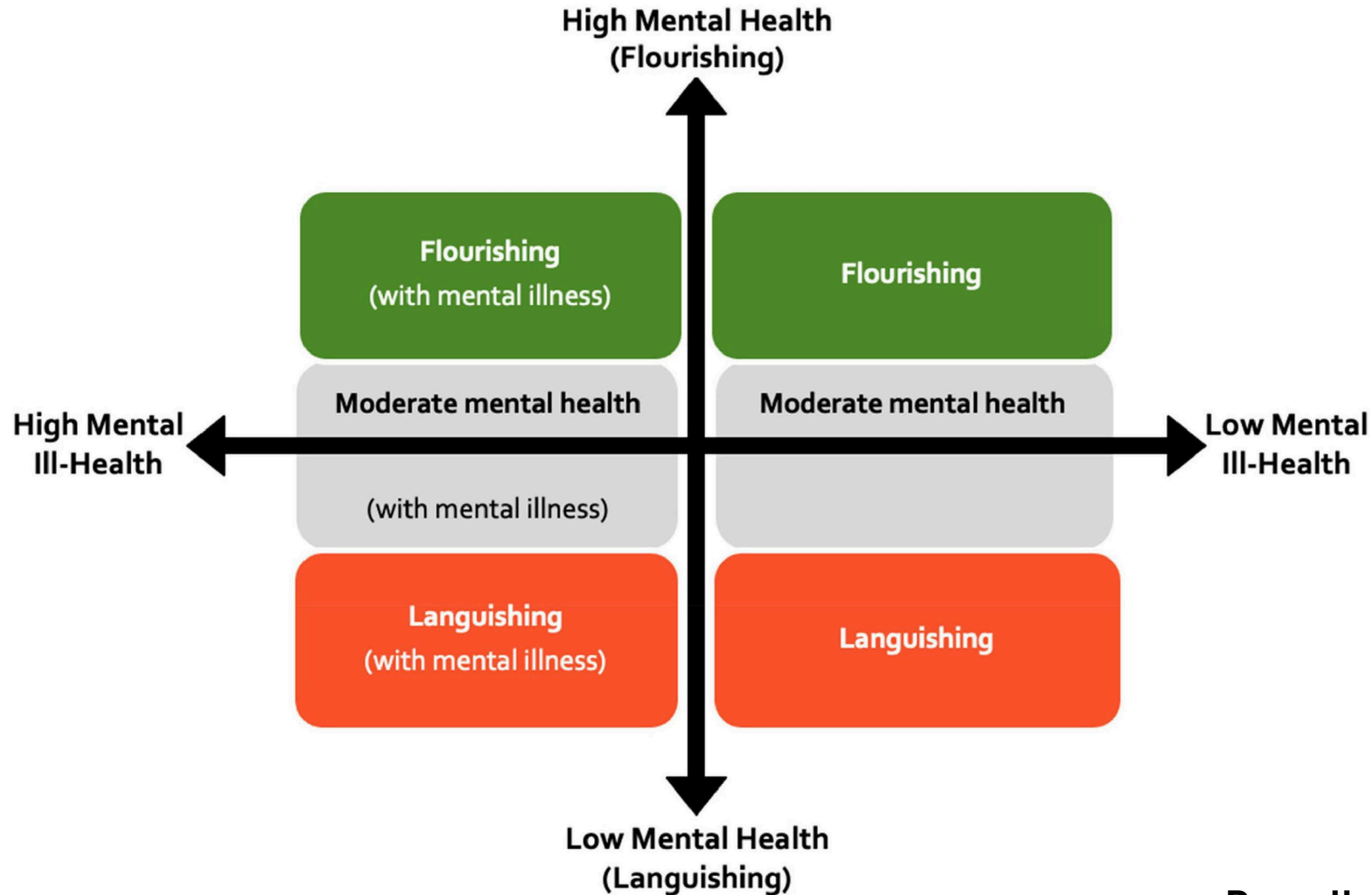
- Millions of kids in youth sport
- Also, less kids are playing team sports
- Those that are playing are specializing more often

Mental wellness at risk

- Adolescents and young adults are at a high risk for developing mental health conditions
- Sport puts unique mental and emotional pressure on athletes
- Athletes are far less likely than their peers to seek mental health support due to stigma in sport and what it “means to be a good athlete”

Mental Wellness and Sport Systems

Prioritizing Athlete Mental Health





The Mental Health Continuum in Sport



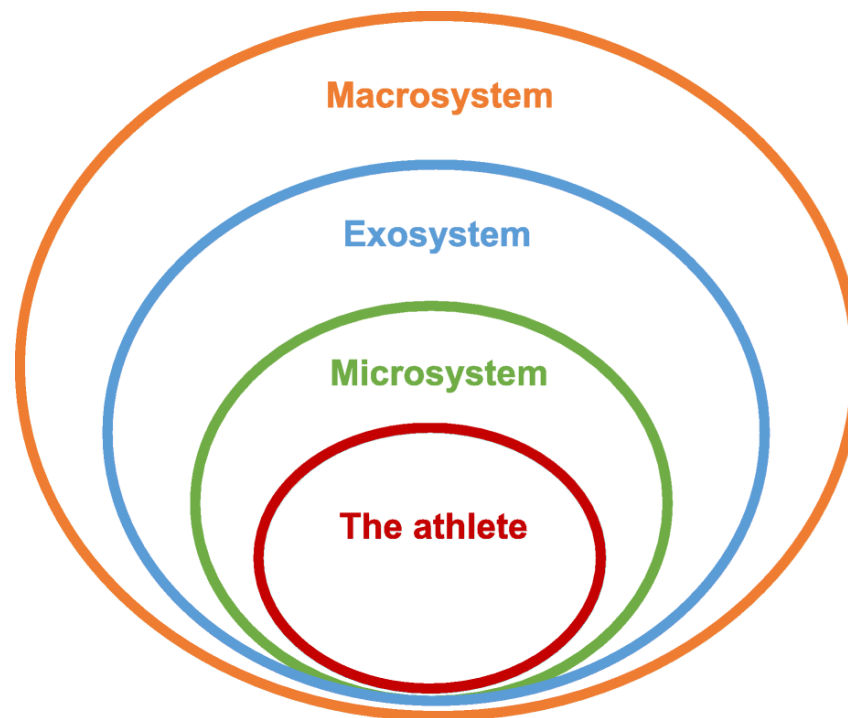
What is the sport eco-system?

At each level we need:

Education and tools to strengthen mental wellness and develop coping skills and resilience

Ability to recognize and respond to ill-being and crisis

Policies and funding that prioritize these and provide accountability



- Macrosystem**
(Inter)National sporting environment, public and social media
- Exosystem**
Individual sport
- Microsystem**
Coaches, parents/relatives, friends, high performance and sports medicine staff
- The athlete**
Coping skills, attitudes



Research “Glimmers” for Healthy Sport Systems



Mindset and Mental Training

- **Attitude of Gratitude**

- Improved ability to learn from mistakes, make decisions, regulate emotions, practice empathy (pre-frontal cortex)
- Reduced anxiety and fear of failure (amygdala)
- Reduced inflammation, stress, depression
- Improved cardiovascular health and stronger immune system
- Joy, peace, and gratitude - *increase parasympathetic response*
- Reduced burnout

- **Mindfulness**

- Improved performance, focus, & concentration
- Reduces stress, anxiety & performance anxiety – *reduced stress reactivity*
- Improved mental health & psychological well-being
- Improved sleep, recovery, cardiovascular and digestive health



Training Environment and Culture

Psychological Safety “*perception that one is protected from, or unlikely to be at risk of, psychological harm in sport*”

- Athletes, coaches, and leaders feel safe to take risks, knowing they will make mistakes and experience failure, but be supported in the process.
 - Effort + intensity = growth + performance
 - Care, trust & respect
- Psychological safety is determined by policies, norms, culture, and parent, coach, leader, and athlete behavior.
- Psychological safety in sport determines achievement potential, performance, longevity in sport, and mental health outcomes.

(Vella et al., 2024)



Training Environment and Culture

Psychological Safety

“If I coach with hostility, my players learn to be hostile. If I coach with ridicule, my players learn to disengage. If I coach with shame, my players learn to be ashamed. If I coach with sarcasm, my players learn to hide. If I coach with love, my players learn to be loved. If I coach with tolerance, my players learn to be patient. If I coach with encouragement, my players learn to be encouraged. If I coach with empathy, my players learn to understand others’ feelings. If I coach with compassion, my players learn to care for others. If I coach with praise, my players learn to value themselves. If I coach with fairness, my players learn justice. If I coach with affirmation, my players develop and discover their full potential. If I coach with acceptance and friendship, my players learn how to find and give love in their relationships.”

(Van Tuyl et al., 2024)



Tools you can use today

Creating a Healthy Sport System

- Student-Athlete
- Coaches
- Family
- Sports Medicine
- Administrators and Leaders
- Organizations
- Community



Sport is not the business of winning. **Sport is the extraordinary endeavor of human development.**

What are we capable of achieving together for a moment in time?

Mental wellness determines our capacity to answer that question and realize our true potential.