



### 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

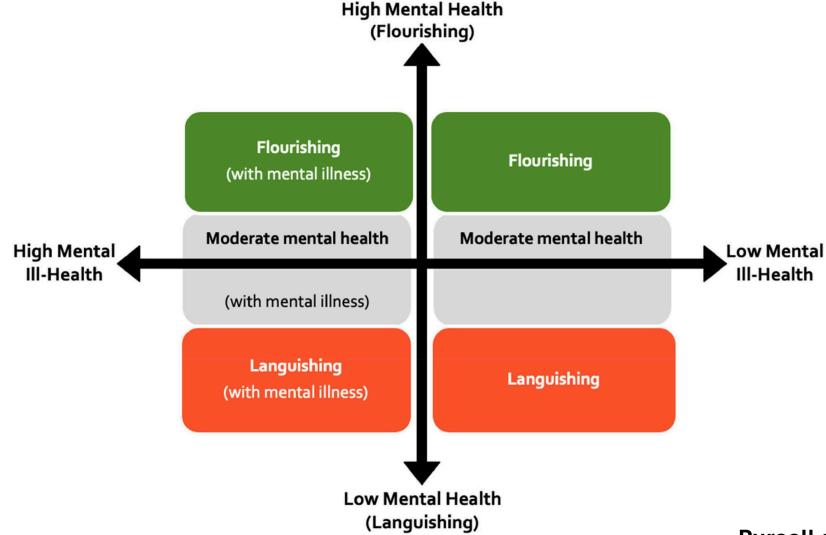
- Millions of kids in youth sport
- Also, less kids are playing team sports
- Those that are playing are specializing more often

#### 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"













#### WHAT WE SEE

Mood swings Defensive to feedback Highly critical of self/others Self-isolating Persistent illness/injury Misses pratices/games Not able to perform

#### **BEHIND THE SCENES**

Not sleeping
Low to no appetite
Can't seem to recover
Overwhelming sense of failure
Tries to force every outcome
Demands perfection of self
No self-worth
Substance use/abuse



Fatigued
Distracted
Disinterested
Low mood and energy
Does the minimum
Minimal social interactions
Not performing well

Lack of enjoyment
Lack of purpose
On autopilot
Low self-worth
Lack of confidence
Dreads going to practice
Doesn't feel sense of belonging



Surviving I'm "fine"

Shows up on time Open to feedback Completes workouts Attends class & practice Turns in assignments Puts on a good "face" Inconsistent performance Rushes to and from Minimal sleep Skips meals Pushes through Uncertain/anxious Stressed but manages Frustrated Fear of not being enough



Flourishing Being well Positive mood
Good effort
Good energy
Coachable
Interacts well w/team
Consistent performance

Eating & hydrating well
Consistent sleep
Decent emotional regulation
Basic self-awareness
Healthy relationships
Lacks mental training routine



Thriving Pursuit of excellence

Confident
Challenge seeking
Growth mindset
Resilient
Great leader
Seeks feedback
Competes every day
Exceeds peformance goals

Quality sleep & recovery
Eats to fuel training
Clear values and purpose
Emotional intelligence
Prioritizes rest and balance
Not afraid to take risks or fail
Quality support system
Daily mental training

# The Mental Health Continuum in Sport





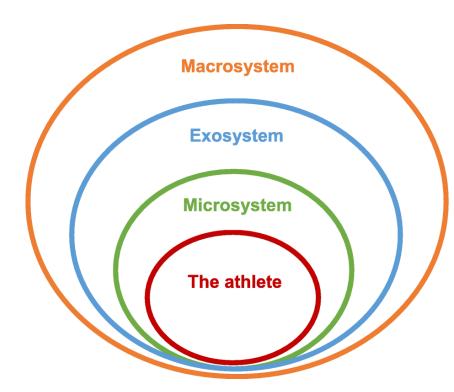
#### What is the sport eco-system?

#### 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.





### **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.