

AMPLIFYING STUDENT ATHLETES' VOICE

by:

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Being a student-athlete requires immense dedication, but it also comes with significant challenges. Balancing academics with athletic commitments is one of the most common struggles student-athletes face. The demands of practice, travel, and competitions often interfere with their academic schedules, leading to stress and sometimes academic underperformance (Johnson, 2021). Many student-athletes find it difficult to maintain focus on their studies due to physical exhaustion and time constraints.

Mental health issues are also prevalent among student-athletes. The pressure to excel in both academics and sports can lead to anxiety, depression, and burnout (Lee, 2022). This is particularly true for athletes who aspire to compete at higher levels, such as national or international competitions, where the stakes are even higher. These mental health challenges are often exacerbated by a lack of support from coaches or educational institutions.

Moreover, the pressure to excel in both arenas can take a significant toll on mental health. Student-athletes often face the dual stress of performing well academically while maintaining peak physical performance in their sport. This pressure is particularly intense for those who aspire to compete at elite levels, whether in national competitions or professional leagues. Lee (2022) argues that the mental health struggles among student-athletes are widespread, with many experiencing anxiety, depression, and chronic stress due to the high expectations placed on them. The anxiety to perform and fear of failure often leaves student-athletes feeling isolated and overwhelmed.

Student-athletes are also at risk of social isolation, a lesser-discussed aspect of their struggles. The time demands of their training schedules leave little room for personal social activities or maintaining relationships outside of their teams. Many student-athletes find it difficult to connect with their peers who do not share the same commitment to sports. As Clark (2023) points out, this isolation can lead to feelings of loneliness and disconnectedness, contributing to an overall sense of being overwhelmed. The lack of time for friendships or leisure activities often leads to emotional exhaustion, as student-athletes lack the opportunity to relax and engage in other aspects of life.

The physical toll of being a student-athlete is another significant concern. Intense training regimens, combined with the risks of injury during competitions, can take a lasting physical toll on the body. While physical activity is essential for health, the repetitive strain and high-impact nature of many sports can lead to injuries that affect not only athletic performance but also day-to-day life. Injuries often require rest, rehabilitation, and sometimes even surgery, which can disrupt both athletic careers and academic progress. Recovery times vary, and this can lead to even more stress for student-athletes, who may feel they are falling behind in their training or studies due to forced time off (Johnson, 2021).

Social and emotional support is vital to helping student-athletes navigate these challenges. Coaches, parents, and school staff can play a crucial role in providing the encouragement and guidance needed to maintain balance. Supportive relationships with mentors or peers who understand the demands of being a student-athlete can make all the difference. For example, having coaches who acknowledge the academic pressures of student-athletes and work with them to accommodate study schedules can help ease some of the burden. Additionally, providing mental health resources, including counseling and stress-management programs, is essential in addressing the emotional well-being of student-athletes.

In response to these struggles, some schools and universities have begun to implement specialized programs and support systems for student-athletes. These programs focus on helping students manage their time more effectively, offering academic tutoring specifically designed for athletes, and providing mental health resources. These interventions can be life-changing for many student-athletes, ensuring they can thrive both academically and athletically. Lee (2022) stresses the importance of a well-rounded support system that addresses the mental, physical, and academic needs of student-athletes to prevent burnout and ensure long-term success.

Despite these challenges, student-athletes develop valuable life skills such as discipline, time management, and resilience. However, it is crucial for schools and coaches to provide the necessary support systems to ensure their well-being and success in both arenas.

References:

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