



The Mind Game

Today's athletes face intense pressure—on the field, in the classroom, and online. Mental health is essential to long-term success and resilience. By recognizing challenges early and promoting healthy habits, we can support athletes in reaching their full potential—both in competition and in life.

Without balance, this can lead to:

- **Burnout** (mental, physical, emotional)
- **Sleep deprivation**
- Feeling the need to be “everything to everyone”
- To stay mentally healthy, encourage attention to the **6 Pillars of Well-Being**:
 - Nutrition
 - Physical activity
 - Sleep
 - Stress management
 - Social connection
 - Avoidance of risky substances

Understanding Performance Anxiety

What it is:

The fear of underperforming or facing a challenge that feels overwhelming—common in competitive sports.

What it looks like:

- **Physical:** Racing heart, dry mouth, GI distress, sweaty hands
- **Mental:** Self-doubt, catastrophic thinking
- **Behavioral:** Avoidance, restlessness, seeking reassurance

How it affects performance:

- **Slump:** Long-term drop in performance
- **Choke:** Short-term performance breakdown
- **Yips/Twisties:** Loss of control in movement or focus

Supporting Athletes Through Anxiety

- Check in when something seems “off”
- Normalize nerves: “Feeling anxious is normal.”
- Practice breathing techniques and routines
- Reinforce positivity: “Let’s focus on what’s going well.”
- Help athletes stick to a plan under pressure

Building Mental Resilience

Setbacks and injuries can affect confidence and identity. Common fears include:

- “Will I get my spot back?”
- “What if I never perform the same?”
- “I’m bored, frustrated, or losing motivation”

How to support recovery:

- Be patient and encouraging
- Promote support networks (coaches, peers, family)
- Reframe setbacks as part of the journey

Tools for resilience:

- Positive routines (morning, midday, evening)
- Visualization & journaling
- A balance between sport and other life activities

Stress Management Tools

Help athletes shift from stress to calm using:

- **4-7-8 breathing**
- **Guided imagery**
- **Body scanning or progressive muscle relaxation**
- **Yoga and mindfulness**

Stress is normal. Chronic stress needs care

The Power of Non-Sport Hobbies

Non-sport hobbies help athletes:

- Recharge and prevent burnout
- Discover identity beyond athletics
- Reduce anxiety and increase joy

Examples: Art, cooking, reading, time outdoors, gaming, volunteering

Athletic performance and mental wellness go hand in hand. By recognizing pressure, normalizing anxiety, and promoting healthy habits, we can help young athletes thrive—not just on game day, but every day.