

PROMISE Conference

Speaker: Dr. Carla Edwards

Session: Mental Health Considerations for Removal from and Return to Sport

Abstract

Athletes can experience changes in their physical and mental health and still participate in training and competition most of the time. Decisions to interrupt sport participation due to physical illnesses and injuries can be straightforward and many conditions have clear protocols to guide rehabilitation and return to sport. Conversely, mental health symptoms and disorders experienced by athletes present a complexity that requires the approach of a framework to identify when interruption in sport participation is necessary. Mental health is experienced on a continuum, and when symptoms or disorders are experienced on a more intensive level there may be occasions when it is in the best interest of the athlete to be removed from the sport environment for treatment and recovery. Having a diagnosis alone does not preclude sport participation; however, symptoms and disorders that compromise safety, stability, and function may result in the athlete either having to modify sport participation under medical (including psychiatric) monitoring or being removed from sport participation until such a time that they are deemed suitable to return. Guiding an athlete back to the sport environment during or following impairing mental health challenges does not always follow a linear path. Specific considerations that must be addressed in this process should include diagnostic assessment, risk appraisal, treatment according to a biopsychosocial framework, and management plans that include individual and sport-specific factors. This presentation will describe the comprehensive framework to guide sport participation related to mental health challenges, and provide practical guidance to clinicians to incorporate into their practice.

References:

- Edwards C. Mental health considerations for athlete removal from play and return to play planning. Sports Psychiatry. 2023;1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1024/2674-0052/a000058>