

PROMISE25: Protecting Mental Health in Sport + Exercise Conference 2025

Speaker Bio and Abstract – Dr Emma Kavanagh

Bio

Dr Emma Kavanagh is an Associate Professor in Sport Psychology and Safe Sport and an HCPC-registered Sport Psychologist from Bournemouth University, UK. Emma's research focusses on interpersonal violence in sport, safe sport and athlete welfare. Most recently her work has introduced the topic of online abuse in sport, advancing understanding of the specific threats online spaces pose to athletes and wider sporting communities and exploring how to safeguard online spaces which increasingly play a pivotal role in (elite) sporting experiences. Emma was a member of the recent IOC Expert Consensus group on interpersonal violence and safeguarding in sport.

Emma sits on the Chartered Association of Sport and Exercise Scientists (CASES) Integrity Advisory Group and was recently awarded a CASES Fellowship for services to the sport and exercise sciences. As a sport psychologist and a chartered sport and exercise scientist, Emma has supported athletes and teams at major sporting events including the Commonwealth, Olympic, and Paralympic Games, and brings extensive experience of working within elite performance environments.

Abstract:

Behind the Screen: Social Media and Athlete Mental Health

Online environments are now a fundamental component of modern sporting experiences. While early geographic scholarship viewed online spaces as separate from physical ones (Kinsley, 2014), this perspective has shifted. Increasingly, online and physical worlds are recognised as deeply intertwined (Kavanagh et al., 2019; Leszczynski & Elwood, 2015). For athletes, coaches, and fans alike, online platforms offer significant value - but with increased connectivity comes heightened potential for misuse and abuse (Kavanagh & Mountjoy, 2024). Now more than ever, the online realm must be considered central to discussions about athlete well-being and lived experience. This presentation explores the evolution of online technologies and their complex and shifting impact on (high-performance) sport. It will outline emerging risks and forms of abuse that manifest in and through online platforms. Drawing on recent research, it will highlight the urgent need to educate athletes and their entourage on strategies for online safeguarding, and to equip health and performance professionals with the skills to identify and respond to online abuse. This presentation will examine the role of applied practitioners in recognising online risk, supporting those affected, and responding effectively. It concludes by underscoring the importance of embedding online safeguarding into sport systems and suggests directions for future research in this critical and ever evolving area.

Kavanagh, E., Litchfield, C., & Osborne, J. (2019). Sporting women and social media: Sexualization, misogyny, and gender-based violence in online spaces. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 12(4), 552-572. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ijsc.2019-0079>

Kavanagh, E., & Mountjoy, M. (2024). CyberAbuse in sport: Beware and be aware! *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 58, 1313-1315. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2023-107885>

Kinsley, S. (2014). The matter of 'virtual' geographies. *Progress in Human Geography*, 38(3), 364-384. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132513506270>

Leszczynski, A., & Elwood, S. (2015). Feminist geographies of new spatial media. *Canadian Geographies / Géographies canadiennes*, 59(1), 12-28.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/cag.12093>