

Getting Back in the Game: Psychosocial factors of return to play

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Wellness Model to treating the injured athlete

- Physical
- Intellectual/Cognitive
- Emotional
- Social
- Occupational/Financial
- Spiritual/Purpose



Build the relationships...

- Get to know your athletes before the injury (when possible)
- Trust takes time – Colleagues, Supervisors, Coaches, and Athletes
- Observe body language
- Watch dynamics – individual, team, coach, etc.

The waiting game...

- Severity & prognosis of injury
- Timing/Career (pre-season, early/mid, end of season/post season)
- History (physical & mental health)
- Daily Functioning (sleep, pain, eating, classes, etc.)
- Dynamics
 - Self (internal dialogue-negative self-talk)
 - Teammates
 - Coaches

"When I step onto the court, I don't have to think about anything. If I have a problem off the court, I find that after I play, my mind is clearer and I can come up with a better solution. It's like therapy. It relaxes me and allows me to solve problems." ~ Michael Jordan

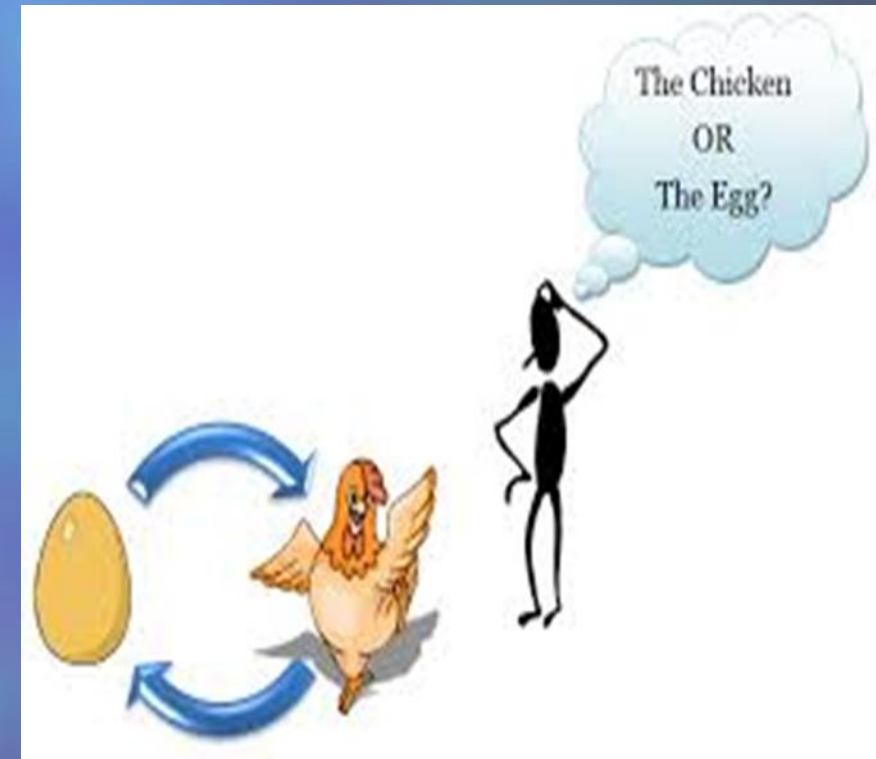
Common Reaction to loss:

- Shock
 - Realization
 - Mourning
 - Acknowledgement
 - Coping/Reformulation
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- Three-cluster approach:
 - Early reactions of shock, anxiety and denial
 - Intermediate reactions of depression, internalized anger, and externalized hostility
 - Later reactions of acknowledgement and adjustment

“Although many of the causal factors in sport injuries are undoubtedly physical and biomechanical in nature, psychosocial factors may also contribute to injury vulnerability. Among the factors that may be involved are stressful life events; personality variables such as anxiety, self-esteem, and sensation-seeking; and deficits in psychosocial assets such as psychological coping skills and social support.”

(Smith, Smoll, Ptacek, 1990)

- Coping skills
- Resiliency
- Social support
- Brain Development (PCS)



Depression

- Feelings of sadness, hopelessness, tearfulness
- “Short fuse”, irritability, angry, moodiness
- Changes in sleep (too much or not enough)
- Lack of energy
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities, friends, and family
- Changes in appetite (and/or weight)
- Trouble thinking, concentrating, making decisions, and remembering things
- Feelings of worthlessness, guilt, fixation on past failures
- Physical pain (headache, back pain, etc.)
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide

Anxiety

- Feeling nervous, restless, tense
- Having a sense of panic or impending danger
- Increased heart rate and/or respiration
- Trembling, feeling weak, or tired
- Difficulty concentrating on something other than present worry
- Struggle with hyper focus on controlling the worry
- Difficulty falling asleep/staying asleep
- GI symptoms
- Avoiding things that trigger anxiety or panic attacks

Post Concussion Syndrome

- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Insomnia
- Sensitivity to light and sound
- Difficulty with concentration and memory
- Possible behavioral and emotional changes

“Patients returning from an injury may experience fear of reinjury and have difficulty returning to full play. Even athletes who seem otherwise healthy may be at risk for disordered eating, substance abuse, anxiety, or bullying” (Valovich Mcleod 2015)

- Learning to trust their body
 - Practice and full competition
 - Adjusting to bracing / new routine
 - Re-learning movements (“bad habits”)
 - Pain vs. fatigue – a new “normal”
- Fear of re-injury
 - How did initial injury occur?
 - The “what if...”
 - Second guessing/hesitating

The ripple effect of returning...

- Rushing the recovery process – “I should be _____...”
- Internal/External pressure to return
 - Identity
 - Family
 - Team & Coaches
- Adjustment to a different role (possibly)
 - Loss of starting position
 - Kicking someone out
 - Not knowing where the fit/belong anymore

Action steps:

- Provide education and explain
- Pay attention to what they aren't saying
- Avoid comparison – athletes and injuries
- Ask open ended questions – get them talking
- “Big Picture” & Perspective
- Pro-Active vs. Reactive

Challenges to seeking help...

- Time (never enough)
- Fear/Stigma
- May not recognize the need
- Asking for help = weakness
- “I don’t want anyone feeling sorry for me”
- Facing the unknown vs. “I’m fine”
- “I don’t want to lose my spot/covering re-injury”

Be Proactive

- Build relationships (before you need them, or they need you)
- Keep your eyes & ears open
- Communication is key (especially listening)!
- Know your resources – immediate and extended
- Consult – early and often

Questions