

Men's Mental Health In Sports

By Peyton Hartford



The stigma of “be strong” and “figure it out” around male athletes is toxic. The idea that you have to be strong and brush things off is unjust and isn't realistic. Many things fans and critics don't understand is the impact their words and actions have on athletes all across sports.

In a recent article by Christina Vogt, she interviewed several NFL players who shared their unseen struggles with their mental health throughout their careers.

She found that as young athletes grow and train in football they are too often told to “push through” and to “suck it up” when they feel emotional or physical discomfort. They are never taught to express how they are feeling and it can lead to serious mental health issues.

This culture of suppressing emotions and enduring pain without acknowledgment can have lasting consequences, as seen in Antonio Brown's career. His struggles highlight the dangers of untreated mental and physical strain, showing how they can derail even the most promising athletes. NFL star named Antonio Brown's journey from a top NFL wide receiver to a troubled athlete that no team wanted can be traced to a mix of personal and professional challenges. Once celebrated for his unparalleled skill and work ethic, his career took a downward turn after off-field controversies, legal issues, and reported behavioral concerns. Many speculate a specific helmet-to-helmet hit during a 2016 playoff game may have impacted his decision-making and behavior. It's a cautionary tale of how personal struggles can derail even the most illustrious careers. A plethora of experts presume he has undiagnosed CTE. This likely caused him to behave irrationally and ultimately led to the downfall of his NFL career. CTE is highly dangerous and even the thought of it causes mental strain on athletes.

Mental health struggles in athletes aren't exclusive to contact, they come in many different forms; Cincinnati Bengals tight end Hayden Hurst opened up about his struggles with mental health and performance anxiety.

Whilst trying to make a debut in the MLB with the Pittsburgh Pirates he developed depression and anxiety which led to him being cut. He tried to suppress his feelings with drugs and alcohol. He eventually came to football for help, he joined the University of South Carolina's football team to help ease the pain, it gave him purpose. Hurst eventually made it to the NFL and is doing much better. However, it didn't come without trials and tribulations though. Hurst admitted he attempted suicide in 2016.

Today Hurst and his family are the proud founders of the Hayden Hurst Family Foundation. The organization is nonprofit geared toward health, wellness, and mental health education for those in need. Hurst hopes to be an example that there is hope: “Because as dark as it gets, I promise you there's somebody out there in your life that loves you and that will support you and that'll help you get out of that situation.”

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Hayden Hurst

Brain Injury

CTE

Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy

Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy is a progressive degenerative disease affecting people who have suffered repeated concussions and traumatic brain injuries. One theory for the cause of CTE is the repeated injuries to the brain cause a buildup of an abnormal form of the tau protein which may interfere with the function of the brain neurons. This tends to lead athletes to do destructive things in their lives and possibly suicide. There is no research that states who or exactly how CTE will form and it seemingly happens at random. Athletes are very fearful of this disease. (Indiana University School of Medicine)