

## EDITORIAL

### HEALTHY BODY, HEALTHY MIND: FROM PLAYGROUND TO PODIUM AND BEYOND

The deeper impact of sports is beyond the narrow definition of success i.e. winning. Sports is about physical fitness, mental development, emotional regulation and spirit of sportsmanship.



Sports contribute to health at every phase of life - from free play in childhood to sports-based rehabilitation for the elderly. Introducing sports at an early age helps improve focus, memory,

hand-eye coordination, muscle flexibility, communication and teamwork. Children learn to collaborate, help each other and accept defeat as a part of the game. Sports have a huge recreational value where children have fun and enjoyment. They look forward to going to the playground and playing.

**Research shows that student-athletes perform better academically.**

The 'Zero Hour PE' (link given below) program is an ideal example.

**Choosing sports as a career is a different ball game altogether** -for it does not follow a clear and straight path like other professions such as engineering, law, medical. It's an ambiguous and unknown path, full of risks, obstacles and uncertainties. So many athletes pursue parallel education to secure their future. Well-affording parents have the resources to support the aspirant and allow risks. Not all can afford it.

**Sports psychology plays a vital role in an athlete's journey.** Sport psychologists cultivate a champion mindset by strengthening self belief, developing the winning attitudes. They guide the athletes to visualise success and reach the podium. They also help you with focus, concentration, and regulate emotions. Sports psychologists also take care of your mental distress and disorders if any.

Sports by itself have value. Whether you are an elite athlete or not, everyone should continue with sports. I believe sports is for all. If we want to promote a culture of sports, we must generate awareness amongst all the stake-holders to invest in sports and create a supportive ecosystem.

<https://phecanada.ca/professional-learning/journal/school-study-sparking-major-change>



-Dr. Aabha Pimprikar  
Co-Editor

*Sport shapes your mindset,  
drives positive lifestyle choices,  
and inspires us to push harder,  
aim higher, and reach further.*

## SPORTS AND

### MENTAL DEVELOPMENT

The importance of introducing sport as a lifestyle activity right from early developmental years has been highlighted, in developed countries, such as Australia, USA, UK etc. The governing bodies, schools, sport academies and even parents take deep interest and initiative in participation of their children as young as toddlers in team sports - such as water sport. There is excellent infrastructure for all types of sports for kids and above. **This not only promotes the child's overall growth but also creates a fertile ground for evolving career opportunities in sports and stronger resilient coming generations.**

The physiological response to playing a sport involves release of endorphins (aka happy hormones), serotonin (natural antidepressant), and substance P (increases pain threshold) in our minds. **Physical activity causes a rush of adrenaline in the body, which is known to increase achievement drive and improve distress tolerance.** It is seen to improve social outcomes such as self-control, interpersonal communication, prosocial behaviour, working in collaboration, and to increase resilience and emotional regulation during adversity. **Sports also sharpens our cognitive skills like reaction time, focus, creativity, problem solving, critical thinking, and judgement.** These benefits are directly proportional to the degree of individual participation in the sport, and are centred upon development of an overall positive/ winning attitude in the lifetime of a sportsperson, who learns how to take defeat well and not get bitter about it.

**Years of research has established that sports benefit our mental health by reducing stress hormone cortisol (thus combating psychological distress, anxiety/ depression, body image issues), enhancing self-esteem and life satisfaction, and fostering a sense of belonging (protects against breakdowns).**

Sports remains one of the most go-to remedies for poor mental health, especially in teens and adolescents. Encouraging them to take up a sport prepares teens to navigate adolescence more effectively, build on emerging self-worth, and prevent health adversities through healthy lifestyle measures. **In fact, studies consider exercise (or sport) to be as effective as medication in improving happiness quotients.** Team sports help adolescents to build interpersonal resources like responsibility and empathy. Exercise stimulates reward pathways of their brains, thereby protecting their vulnerable minds from resorting to substance use for quick recreation or stress relief. By spending more time in physical sport, teenagers are exposed to nature and its benefits, while also indirectly cutting down on their screen time and use of social media – welcome outcomes for mental wellness in the long run. Physical exertion also exhausts them adequately to facilitate timely onset, adequate duration, and good quality of sleep – in turn safeguarding their mental health in the background.

Given our **Prime Minister's vision of Khelo India** - aiming to host the Olympics of 2036, we can only imagine the wonders India could do (from bagging medals to breaking records across all sport categories), if the common man in our country saw the potential treasures unfolding in his child's life with the simple practice of taking up a sport early on and investing time and effort in pursuing it. Family and coaching support plays a crucial determinant in optimising outcomes as witnessed recently in the ground-breaking success of Vaibhav Suryavanshi of Samastipur - the 14 year old next master blaster who scored a century in IPL cricket in combat with world class bowlers!

-Dr Bhakti Murkey

Associate Professor, Geetanjali Hospital, Udaipur  
Courtesy: Dr Mahendra Warhade, Senior Psychiatrist,  
Udaipur

(De-addiction specialist, Member of Anti-doping  
Agency under Sports Authority of India)

## THE ATHLETE WITHIN: HOW PERSONALITY SHAPES SPORTS

*"Pressure is a privilege," Billie Jean King, an American tennis player once said. But not every athlete sees it that way.*

Picture two athletes, both equally trained, physically fit, and technically skilled. When the spotlight hits and the pressure builds up, one delivers a flawless performance while the other crumbles under pressure. What contributes to this difference?

**Sometimes even with sharp mental skills preparation, athletes respond very differently to pressure. That's where deeper psychological factors – personality traits come into play.** Personality traits are long term patterns of behaviour, emotion and thought that influence how an individual approaches various situations. For athletes, personality traits don't just influence their performance but also affect how consistently they train, handle setbacks and failures, deal with injury and communicate with others.

While mental skills can be learned and practiced over time, personality traits are relatively more stable and deeply rooted. Core personality traits don't radically change in adulthood, small, meaningful shifts can be brought about with self-awareness and effort. The most commonly used framework by sports psychologists to describe personality is through five broad traits known as the **Big Five**:

**Conscientiousness** (discipline, persistence, organisation); **Extraversion** (confidence, energy, sociability); **Agreeableness** (cooperative, empathetic); **Neuroticism** (anxious, emotionally reactive, moody); **Openness** (curious, flexible, imaginative)

Research into elite athletes reveals some common patterns. **High conscientiousness** is frequently linked to better performance as it helps athletes to adhere to their training routines, recover from setbacks, and stay focused on long-term goals. **Low neuroticism** helps athletes remain calm and composed in high-pressure situations, allowing them to make clear decisions. Athletes with **high extraversion**, especially in team sports often take on leadership roles, communicate effectively and boost morale. Athletes **high in openness to experience** are typically more adaptive and flexible, which is especially useful in sports that require quick thinking and strategic or innovative play.

**Certain personality traits can give athletes a natural edge when matched with the right sport or role.** For example, someone with impulsiveness and aggression may excel in fast-paced sports like boxing or rugby, where quick reactions are paramount. Similarly, an extraverted athlete might thrive in team environments that require communication and energy. On the other hand, traits that may hinder performance — like high anxiety, low confidence, or emotional reactivity — can be effectively managed through therapy, mental skills training, and support from sports psychologists. Sports psychologists can help athletes gain insight into personality traits, emotional patterns, and mental habits to optimize performance. They can help athletes to build self-awareness, identify psychological barriers, and develop strategies that align with their individual makeup.

Hence, **personality isn't destiny, but it's a powerful part of the performance puzzle.** By becoming more self-aware, athletes can turn natural tendencies into strengths and build strategies to manage hurdles.

**-Dr. Devika Patil**  
Psychiatrist, Nashik

## GAME ON: TRAINING THE MIND BEHIND THE MUSCLE

When you hear the term 'sports psychologist', do you picture a 'problem athlete', someone in crisis, battling depression or buckling under pressure? If so, it's time to change this long-standing myth. In truth, the role of a psychologist in an athlete's life extends far beyond fixing problems. **It's about enhancing performance, strengthening focus, maintaining mental well-being, and supporting personal growth.** Far from being a sign of weakness, working with a psychologist is a sign of an athlete's commitment to reaching their full potential.

Counselling typically falls into three key areas: distress, disorder, and development. **Developmental counselling aims to build and enhance mental capacities, allowing individuals to function more effectively and reach their potential.** Athletes often work with psychologists to strengthen their mindset, sharpen focus, manage emotions, and elevate their on-field performance. *"Your body won't go where your mind doesn't believe it can."*

Coaches, athletes and parents all know that physical skills need to be regularly practiced and refined through a number of repetitions. Similar to physical skills, psychological skills such as maintaining and focusing concentration, regulating arousal levels, enhancing confidence, and maintaining motivation also need to be systematically practiced. There are a number of skills required for an athlete to optimize their game. Along with the skills mentioned above, some higher mental skills are also required; grit, resilience, patience, self-belief, mental toughness, consistency.

**Psychological Skills Training (PST)** refers to systematic and consistent practice of mental or psychological skills for the purpose of enhancing performance. PST also boosts motivation by supporting effective goal-setting and maintaining drive, even through setbacks. One of its key functions is managing performance anxiety and stress through techniques such as **deep breathing, relaxation, and mindfulness.** By promoting positive self-talk and mental imagery, PST strengthens confidence and self-belief, which are essential for consistent performance. It also develops mental toughness, enabling athletes to push through fatigue, pressure, and adversity.

**Emotional regulation** is another crucial benefit, helping athletes control feelings of anger, frustration, or disappointment in competitive environments. **Visualization techniques** used in PST allow athletes to mentally rehearse strategies and outcomes, improving execution and readiness. Moreover, it fosters consistency by establishing routines that support optimal performance. PST is also highly beneficial during injury recovery, helping athletes cope with setbacks and maintain motivation throughout rehabilitation. Lastly, it enhances communication and teamwork, building stronger interpersonal skills and cohesion, especially in team-based sports.

In today's competitive sports environment, **training the mind is just as important as training the body. It's not about fixing what's broken, it's about unlocking what's possible.**

**-Radhika Dharap**  
Gymnast, Sports Psychologist  
Thane



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## THE SCIENCE OF SPORTS: WHERE CHAMPIONS ARE MADE

Behind every record-breaking sprint, winning serve, and high-pressure goal lies more than just physical skill or daily practice. There's a much more powerful, often invisible force at work—sports science. This rapidly evolving field is transforming how athletes train, perform, and recover. **It blends physiology, psychology, neuroscience, nutrition, and biomechanics to push human limits like never before.**

In India, the value of sports science is finally gaining recognition. Traditionally, training focused on physical drills, strategy, and endurance. With sports science, athletes can gain a precise understanding of how their body and mind perform under stress, how much they can endure, and how to recover faster while performing better.

**Leading this movement is Sumona, under the guidance of Dr. Sanjeev P. Sahni, a renowned sports psychologist.** At Sumona, science meets sport through advanced assessment tools that measure the physiological and psychological responses of athletes. Tools such as Galvanic Skin Response (GSR) monitor emotional arousal, SpO2 trackers measure stamina and recovery, and EEG assesses mental focus and brainwave activity. These insights are essential for understanding how an athlete copes under pressure and how their training can be customized for better outcomes.

Moreover, assessments like electromyography (EMG) help perfect muscle activation and prevent injuries. Hand steadiness tests and flicker fusion thresholds evaluate neuromuscular coordination and visual focus—critical skills in precision sports like shooting, cricket, and tennis. **By combining this data, we create a personalized performance blueprint that replaces guesswork with real-time, actionable insights.**

**Importantly, our assessments at Sumona can also predict an athlete's future readiness.** By analyzing psychological resilience, emotional regulation, focus levels, and physical markers, we can identify whether a child will be able to continue performing at a high level over time—or if early interventions are needed to prevent burnout, injuries, or mental fatigue. **Early identification is crucial for long-term success.**

Mental training is not optional anymore—it is essential. **At least one-sixth of an athlete's total training time should be dedicated to mental conditioning.** Fear of failure, performance anxiety, self-doubt, and pressure management are realities that athletes must be equipped to handle. Through sports psychology interventions, mental toughness, focus, emotional control, and confidence can be systematically built. **Training the mind is no longer a luxury; it is a necessity for those who aim for sustainable excellence.**

U.S.A, U.K., Australia, and Germany dominate because they integrate sports science and mental training from the grassroots level. India is now stepping into this era. **The future of Indian sports will not just depend on natural talent but on how intelligently and scientifically that talent is nurtured.**

**-Reva Kalra**

**Team Lead & Psychologist,  
Sumona Institute of Performance Excellence  
([www.sumona.org](http://www.sumona.org))**

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## UNLOCKING HUMAN POTENTIAL WITH AI: HOW ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS TRANSFORMING SPORTS

From Olympic arenas to local playgrounds, the spirit of sports is being amplified by a new force - **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**. AI is no longer just a tool for technology giants; it is a game-changer in the world of sports, revolutionizing how athletes **train, compete & optimize athlete performance**. Wearable sensors powered by AI algorithms collect real-time biometric and movement data, offering insights far beyond the human eye. Coaches in Kenya are using AI-powered video analysis to refine sprinters' techniques. In the U.S., NFL teams employ AI to predict player fatigue and prevent injuries. In India, cricket teams utilize machine learning to analyze opponent strategies and customize practice sessions accordingly.

AI does not just benefit elite athletes. Grassroots sports, where dreams begin, are also seeing a transformation. **AI democratizes access to training**, enabling children in rural areas to learn skills through mobile-based applications powered by computer vision. Virtual coaching platforms are guiding aspiring footballers in Brazil, hockey players in Canada, and archers in Bhutan bridging gaps in geography, resources, and opportunity.

AI is also a powerful tool for **mental health and wellness**, an often-overlooked aspect of athletic performance. Through pattern recognition, **AI can detect early signs of stress, anxiety, or burnout in players by analyzing speech, sleep patterns, and social media behaviour**. This is especially critical, because mental health support is often underfunded. AI is driving **inclusivity in adaptive sports**. Smart prosthetics, real-time feedback systems, and voice-controlled coaching are empowering differently-abled athletes to compete with greater confidence. **Paralympians are harnessing AI** not only for training but also for navigating stadiums, coordinating schedules, and engaging with fans.

From a commercial standpoint, AI is enhancing the **fan experience globally**. Personalized content, real-time statistics, virtual reality stadium tours, and AI-generated commentary are reshaping how billions of people engage with sports from Tokyo to Lagos, London to Lima. AI is making sports more immersive, accessible, and exciting. As we embrace this new era, ethical considerations are paramount. Fairness in AI-driven decisions, data privacy of athletes, and preventing algorithmic bias must be addressed with collective global responsibility.

Supporting AI in sports aligns with Rotary's pillars **youth empowerment, health, education, and inclusion**. Whether it's funding smart training kits for underprivileged athletes or partnering on mental wellness platforms, Rotary can help ensure that AI in sports is a force for equity, not exclusion.

**-Randeep Kumar**

**Founder, Jamitson Healthcare**



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## FITTING INTO THE PANTS: UNINTENTIONAL DISORDERED EATING PATTERNS OF ATHLETE

Young Abdusalam approached me, anxious to correct his calcium levels. He was devastated to see his DEXA scan report showing low bone mineral density, which might end his sports career. The already existing unresolved gastric issue was another challenge. On psychological inquiry, he denied body image issues and prided himself on disciplined eating habits, weight-consciousness and discipline. His parents agreed that he ate well and took good care of himself. But all the assessments showed otherwise. A condition called '**Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport (RED-S)**', caused by chronic energy imbalance, was evident and the blood investigations showed anemia and low testosterone levels.

Eventually, Abdusalam agreed to his poor eating habits. Food scared him. He believed true strength came from suffering. His self-worth was tied to weight control. In college, he often skipped breakfast, surviving on black coffee, a couple of eggs, and half a chapati. Before weigh-ins, he used extreme measures like salt restriction, steam baths, and spitting into bottles, tips learnt from his seniors. He would even sleep in a hoodie to sweat off some stubborn fat.

**In the world of sports, the pressure to maintain a certain physique can quietly evolve into disordered eating behaviours—ranging from food restriction to bingeing, purging, or obsessive “clean” eating. Studies show that up to 62% of female athletes and 33% of male athletes engage in such patterns, particularly in sports with weight classes or aesthetic judgments. The drivers include performance myths (believing lighter means faster), appearance expectations, and harmful comments from coaches—42% of athletes say weight-related criticism triggered these behaviors.**

But the impact of disordered eating goes beyond performance. **RED-S can disrupt hormones, weaken bones, and affect heart health.** Psychologically, it often brings anxiety, depression, and burnout. Stress fractures and electrolyte imbalances can abruptly end athletic careers.

Worryingly, athletes often mask symptoms well, leading to delayed diagnosis. A 2023 study found that many athletes with severe eating issues report minimal body dissatisfaction, complicating detection. Warning signs include performance dips, obsessive food habits, or frequent injuries.

Abdusalam's six-year journey toward recovery—through medical, nutritional, and psychological care—emphasises the need for holistic, team-based interventions. Today, he is not just healed; he is a coach, helping others avoid the same trap.

It is time for the sports world to face a hard truth: glorifying “fitting into the pants” over health - fuels a dangerous cycle. True athletic success should be redefined—not by the scale, but by strength, balance, and well-being.

**- Dr Sripriya Shaji**  
**Counselling Psychologist & Nutritionist,**  
**Kozhikode**

## TRAINING AN ELITE ATHLETE: A TRUE STORY

The present case study documents the glimpses of an **individual-based intervention** towards enhancing an elite athlete's performance. I have implemented an individual-based approach in training the young athlete for optimum performance in tennis.

**Manognya** (real name with consent), a 15-year-old female athlete, was referred to me. We worked together on several solutions. We initially listed Manognya's challenges while performing in competitions and regular practice sessions. Manognya had several questions in her mind —about herself, her parents, her coach, her fellow players, and many more. The initial interaction sessions, followed by essential assessments, helped me explore the psychological distress, lack of motivation, interpersonal conflict, and low confidence.

To promote her best performance, we developed an individual-based intervention session that lasted for **6 weeks with a duration of 60-90 minutes**. The structured sessions are integrated with counselling and relaxation techniques, such as guided imagery and visualisation, positive affirmations, and Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy, followed by homework activities. Identifying her positive emotions and strengths helped her become more self-aware during sessions. Manognya acknowledged the benefits of the sessions that facilitated her performances in competitions. Soon her confidence led her to win the **Women's Singles title in the All India Tennis Association women's 1 Lakh All India Ranking Tennis Tournament (Under 16) in Odisha**. She also continued to hold the title in **Bengaluru (Under 18)**.

She practices tennis regularly. Maintains good physical and mental well-being as part of her routine and attends open school. I sincerely appreciate the relentless efforts of her parents, whose support has been consistent throughout her sports journey. Her mother's role has been incredible. She accompanies Manognya to practice sessions, tournaments, and the fitness centre, and takes special care of her diet. Both parents have complete trust in Manognya's performance. Manognya has a limited friend circle owing to her rigorous practice schedules. However, she maintains good rapport with her fellow athletes during practice sessions. Their input significantly boosted our sessions. Since then, as a result of our success, I have been her mentor from time to time.

**-Dr. NDS Naga Seema**  
**Associate Professor,**  
**Centre for Psychology,**  
**School of Medical Sciences,**  
**University of Hyderabad.**



PC: Google

## THE SILENT STRUGGLE OF MENTAL ILLNESS

When **Simone Biles** withdrew from several events during the 2021 Tokyo Olympics, it sent shockwaves across the globe. Behind her glittering accolades was a woman grappling with anxiety, burnout, and the crushing pressure to perform flawlessly. Her decision, though criticized by some, symbolized a turning point for others, validating their own silent struggles.

**Michael Phelps**, the most decorated Olympian with 28 medals, has spoken openly about his battle with severe depression and suicidal thoughts after the 2012 Olympics. Likewise, Indian cricketer **Robin Uthappa**, despite career highs and public success, lived for years behind a mask, fighting clinical depression while fearing judgment and stigma.

Studies show that mental health challenges **are surprisingly prevalent among elite athletes**. Around 15–20% experience clinical depression (Reardon et al., 2019), while anxiety disorders affect approximately 14–21% (Rice et al., 2016). Eating disorders are notably common—affecting 13–45% of female athletes and 3–19% of males, especially in sports where body weight is emphasized (Currie & Morse, 2005). Sleep issues, too, affect nearly 50–75% during high-stakes competition (Halson, 2019).

**-Dr. Devika Patil**  
**Psychiatrist, Nashik**



## BUILDING CHAMPIONS: THE POWER OF MENTAL PREPARATION IN WOMEN'S CRICKET

When I joined a professional women's cricket team as their sports psychologist, I was excited by the challenge of applying psychological insights in a high-pressure, performance-driven setting – where mental toughness was just as essential as physical fitness.

### Breaking the Ice: From Skepticism to Trust

Many players came from different social and cultural backgrounds and were unaware of the mental health aspects. Some were sceptical, some showed resistance to even sit for the sessions and others were unsure of what to expect. Building trust would be the key. Over time, the walls fell, and discussions became more profound; from game pressure to inner fears and personal struggles, they shared it all.

### Overcoming Adversity

The sports person is commonly subjected to obstacles and setbacks in the form of injuries and tough competition. I supported them to withstand such adversity with the help of coping mechanisms and resilience through EFT tapping, visualisation, mindfulness, meditation breathing exercises, brain exercises, psychotherapy, CBT, SFBT. This helped them to enhance focus and concentration and think positively.

### Turning Points: When the Mind Wins the Match

One of the most rewarding experiences was during a tournament match. When some players who had previously struggled with anxiety stepped onto the field with confidence and gave a match-winning performance. It wasn't her technique that had changed—it was her confidence in herself. Seeing her transformation was a reminder why mental strength is often the quiet force behind breakthrough moments in sport.

### The Ego Factor

One of the greatest challenges that I observed for many athletes is their own ego. A strong ego can be both a blessing and a curse. On the positive side, it can motivate athletes to strive to be their best. On the negative side, it can also breed arrogance and a lack of self-awareness, even after having tremendous talent and hard work. Though we all know about it, during that moment, assisting athletes in creating a healthy ego is the immediate need that enables them to perform optimally without turning into self-centered individuals.

### Beyond Cricket: Supporting the Whole Person

Many players juggled outside of the pitch as students, caregivers, daughters, and wives—coping with demands from every quarter. Our sessions were not only about sport but about life. We practised emotional resilience, time management, loving, and respecting oneself—skills that benefited them in being present and attentive during the games. From days to months, the rollercoaster of emotion in the team was seen, but the improvement in handling those emotions with maturity was also observed during the season.

### Where Psychology Meets Passion

I witnessed the quiet but powerful role that mental health plays in sport especially in women's athletics. Where resilience is expected but rarely nurtured, the need for psychological support is immense. With proper mental preparation, athletes can unlock their full potential and achieve success.

- Meenakshi Ghosh

Child & Sports Psychologist,  
Sai Vikash Institute & ACA, Guwahati, Assam

## WHEN THE WHISTLE STOPS: PLAYING THROUGH THE SILENCE

*"It's OK not to be OK."*

*To show weakness, we're told in sports, is to deserve shame. But showing weakness, addressing your mental health is strength."*

- Mardy Fish

Sports differ significantly from structured career paths like engineering or law. While the latter offer predefined routes, sports demands not only performance but also constant reinvention. I was once a professional athlete, now a postgraduate in Clinical Psychology—and **this is my story of transition, identity, and mental health.**

My journey began in school when I was encouraged to take up a sport for fitness. Despite not having what many would call an "athletic build," I found deep resonance with basketball. What started as a choice slowly turned into passion. Against doubts and expectations, I trained hard, balanced academics with sport, and eventually **represented Delhi in national basketball championships—for six consecutive years.**

**Basketball gave me more than just medals.** It offered scholarships, academic fee waivers, recognition, and most importantly, a strong sense of self. My athletic identity was a source of immense pride. But **an unexpected injury brought that momentum to a halt.** I lost not just the game, but a piece of myself.

The rehab period after my injury was filled with emotional breakdowns and repeated setbacks every time I stepped back on the court. I was desperate to return to the player I once was, but each attempt reminded me of everything I had lost. That phase demanded more patience and resilience than I ever imagined.

Thus, though physically recovered, I withdrew from the court entirely. I started believing I was no longer "good enough"—**a classic case of imposter syndrome.** The very sport that once uplifted me became a space of self-doubt and emotional distance. For years, I avoided playing, as if punishing myself for not meeting my old standards.

When the cheers stop, the court seems unfamiliar, the self-doubt sets in. I'm still 'playing', just not the way others think. There's always this quiet guilt, like I'm chasing a version of myself I can't live up to anymore. Studying psychology has helped me put words to feelings I couldn't explain back then. I've started to understand how deeply tied my self-worth was to performance, and how hard it is to rebuild confidence once that rhythm breaks. It's still a work in progress—but I'm learning that it's okay to show up differently now.

To anyone who has ever felt lost after a high point in life: your worth is not limited to what you once achieved. **Growth can look like stillness, and identity can evolve without erasing the past. You are not alone in your confusion, nor are you less for changing paths.**

-Muskan Jain  
(Trainee Psychologist)

PC: Google



## MENTAL CHALLENGES OF WORKING WITH MEN & WOMEN ATHLETES: SAME OR DIFFERENT?

Over the past 20 years working with thousands of athletes and multiple teams, my special moments are connected to success of my women athletes. the excitement after the win, the tears of joy after their first 100 and the celebrations after a team win – they are all special.

At one level, working with men and women athletes remain the same – both are training themselves for success in their sport. But, that's where the commonality ends. I have closely observed how women and men play sports – and there are some stark differences.

**When it comes to women, I've seen a far greater desire to succeed.** That doesn't mean, men are less, but, although it can't be quantified, there is a different 'junoon' ( fire) to succeed. The reason is- many of them are fighting battles beyond the sport. They want to prove something—not just to the world or themselves, but closer home- to the naysayers in their family and neighbourhood. I have seen two kinds of families - those who back them to choose a career in sports and those who don't.

**In India, let's be honest—it's still not seen as a "career" for most women.** There's always this looming pressure to settle down, get married, and put sport aside. So there's a sense of urgency and a bit of desperation sometimes, which can lead to greater anxiety. Because they know their window is short. Men have no such issues. They have the luxury of focusing on their game for as long as they want, which of course doesn't take away the pressure, challenges and stress that they too also face in their fledgling careers.

**Women athletes in India also face safety and security concerns** that most men don't even have to think about. Their travel, training environments, staying arrangements—these things carry a different weight for a female athlete as well as for their family. Add to that the very real physical toll of hormonal changes, period pains, mood swings—it's not easy. And still, they show up, day in and day out. That spirit... it's special.

**Women are fighting for self-respect. For something bigger.** And that hunger shows. They're open to learning, especially on the mental aspect, more than men. They are also quick to absorb feedback, apply it, and then give you feedback on your feedback! To put it candidly, there is surely so much more joy and satisfaction to see them succeed because you know what they've had to overcome.

**From a team perspective, women tend to be a little less cohesive.** It takes more effort to build team unity compared to men's teams, where the bonding comes faster and more naturally. But that doesn't take away from how powerful women can be—when they *do* come together as a unit, they can be unstoppable. Men, on the other hand, usually don't carry the same emotional or societal baggage. The anxiety levels are generally lower. And while they're also competitive and hard-working, the pressure of *proving themselves* is not absent but different.

**When a woman athlete decides she wants to succeed, she will find a way. It's not just about performance—it's about identity, purpose, and self-worth.**

**-Dr. Swaroop Savanur**

**Mental Conditioning and Peak Performance Coach**



## THE INVISIBLE COACH: HOW PARENTS SHAPE A YOUNG ATHLETE'S MINDSET

**What if a sideline reaction could shape your child's confidence?**

A young athlete is guided by two powerful forces: coaches and parents. While coaches are responsible for developing physical skills and tactical knowledge, parents are responsible for giving emotional support to the athlete. Their reactions to wins, losses, and mistakes can raise their motivation or lower their self-worth. **The way parents respond to efforts or setbacks shapes a child's mindset in the future.** When parents and coaches work together, the outcome is a nurturing environment where athletes thrive mentally and physically. This is where sports counselling becomes important, equalling all voices around the athlete's well-being.

**The Power of Parents: What does your child see when they look at the stands?**

Imagine a young football player who just failed to score a goal. He looks toward the stands—his eyes search for compassion—but instead sees his parents showing disapproval. In that instant, his developing self-esteem gets affected. Small moments like these matter a lot to athletes. They can build mental resilience or develop self-doubt. **When parents focus on effort rather than outcomes, they promote a positive attitude that views setbacks as opportunities to grow.** Coaches, too, are essential in this journey. A coach who recognizes that an athlete might be carrying emotional pressure can act as a rooting influence in encouraging the athlete and mediating the connection between them and their parents.

**Are You Supporting or Pressuring Your Young Athlete?**

Parents always want "the best" for their children. The following can create unnecessary pressure, in spite of good intentions:

- Comparing your child to other players.
- Focusing only on winning the matches.
- Expressing noticeable disappointment after mistakes

These behaviours turn a happy sport into a stressful moment. Instead, parents should honour progress, not just results. Let your child lead the way because when they own their experience, they gain confidence & commitment. Coaches who focus on personal development over perfection reinforce this positive attitude, allowing athletes to accept challenges and enjoy acquiring knowledge of sport and psychology.

**Why Sports Counselling is the Missing Link:**

Sports counselling ensures strategic coordination between the athlete, parent, and coach. Sports Counselling helps parents encourage their athletes without pressure, trains coaches to tune into emotional signs & symptoms, and empowers athletes with tools like self-talk, mental imagery, mindfulness, and stress management. It also discloses effective communication strategies that reduce misunderstandings and promote emotional safety.

**The Real Victory Is in the Mindset**

Parents and coaches are co-creators of an athlete's experience. When they concentrate on support over pressure, young athletes flourish—not just in the field, but also in life. Sports counselling is the link, ensuring every young athlete gets way more than training—they get confidence, mental resilience, and a love for their game. Because **long after the trophies are forgotten, the mindset they carry into life will be the true victory.**

**-Akansha Hirraani**

**Founder & Head Psychologist,  
Calmfit Counselling**

(<https://calmfitcounselling.com/>)

