



ATHLETES INSPIRATION

Coaches, this section is here to give you tools. The athlete quotes below can be shared directly with your team, or woven into one of your Buddy Check chats. Sometimes, hearing that a world-class athlete has faced mental health challenges is enough to spark a powerful conversation—with you, your coaching staff, or even among the players themselves.

As coaches, our role is bigger than teaching skills and strategy. We also help our athletes understand that mental health is just as important as physical health—and that challenges can affect anyone, no matter how talented or accomplished they are.

The athletes featured here remind us that behind the medals, trophies, and headlines, they are human too. Many of them have said they wish they'd spoken up sooner and that support from teammates or friends could have helped earlier. Their stories help normalize the conversation and break down stigma.

That's why we talk about Buddy Checking—checking in with each other, offering support, and showing compassion. You never know what someone is going through, and sometimes one caring word or gesture can make all the difference.

Clara Hughes (Cycling & Speed Skating): “I couldn’t ask for help because I didn’t know I needed help... With athletes, it’s never fully understood the level to which we push ourselves.”

Kia Nurse (Basketball): “Focusing on small things you can control made a big difference.”

Travis Gerrits (Freestyle Skiing): Open about his diagnosis, he said that his career results: “came in spurts and peaks” due to managing bipolar disorder.

Shelina Zadorsky (Soccer): “Everyone has their own battles. Being a listener is a huge thing.”

Evan Dunfee (Race Walk): “After grappling with depression tied to the retirement of his event, he shared how he struggled with identity—but overcame challenges to set a world record in 2025.”

Carey Price (Hockey): “Asking for help when you need it is something we encourage our kids to do, and it’s what I needed to do.”

Kevin Love (Basketball): “Everyone is carrying unseen things... not talking about our inner lives robs us of the chance to reach out to others.”

Simone Biles (Gymnastics): “Put mental health first—you won’t enjoy your sport otherwise.”

Michael Phelps (Swimming): “Mental health isn’t a timeout. Seeking help is strength.”

Robin Lehner (Hockey): “I’m on meds and talk to a psychiatrist—I’ve fought through hell to be here.”

Angel Reese (WNBA): “Check on your people.”

DeMar DeRozan (Basketball): “It’s one of them things that no matter how indestructible we look like we are, we’re all human at the end of the day...we all got feelings...all of that. Sometimes...it gets the best of you, where times everything in the whole world’s on top of you.”

Naomi Osaka (Tennis): “I do hope that people can relate and understand it’s OK to not be OK, and it’s OK to talk about it. There are people who can help, and there is usually a light at the end of any tunnel.”

Stephanie Labbe’ (Soccer): “You always think you’re alone. You sense nobody can possibly understand what you’re going through. But I’ve seen the reaction to opening up because other people are suffering in their own ways. Sometimes just one word in your story sparks a connection.”

Sebastian Coe (President of World Athletics): “The advice I would give is to reach out, to colleagues and friends...don’t be afraid to show vulnerability, it’s a badge of honour in a way to want that help.”

Corey Hirsch (Hockey): “There is nothing wrong with you morally or spiritually if something is misfiring in your brain. You just need to tell someone. The term “mental illness” complicates matters because of the associated stigma. We’ve separated the mind and the body, but your brain is a physical piece of the body, like the heart or the liver. We expect everyone’s brains to function perfectly, when it’s the most complicated thing we have in our body.”

Venus Williams (Tennis): “Mental health and self care are so important. And I am glad there’s a bigger conversation happening right now.”

Paul Pierce (Basketball): “In retrospect, I wish I had listened to the Celtics and talked with a mental health expert. My decision to deal with my post-traumatic stress on my own heightened my depression and isolated me from friends, family and teammates. I should have opened up earlier than I did. It was eating me alive. Once I finally started talking to a family member, it helped me. I realized I should have done this sooner. I would tell everyone to get the help they need. My depression was bad—really bad. I never want to feel that way again.”

Kelly Hrudef (hockey): “Whatever we’re all going through, don’t discount it; it’s real. Your feelings, your stress, your anxiety, your angst, it’s all real and we’ll get through it, but please talk to somebody about it. ‘This affects all of us.’”

Amanda Beard (Swimming): “I was really, really awful at communicating, at opening up and sharing my feelings. Whenever I heard anything negative about myself, it hit me so hard, but I never allowed anybody to know what I was thinking or dealing with. Once you open your mouth and start to talk to people, you really start to go on the right path of getting healthier.”

Abby Wambach (Soccer): “As soon as I started talking about it, I immediately felt like this is what I’ve been needing to do. The number one thing anyone should ever say to somebody is that they’re not alone.”

Allison Schmitt (Swimming): “I have been diagnosed with depression and here I am, I’m happy, you would never be able to tell from the outside that I have depression. The misconception that people have is, ‘If you’re feeling this way, why don’t you do this, this and this to not feel this way? Help is available.’”

Harry Miller (Football): “I had no intention of this happening the way it did. People have called me brave, but to me it just felt like not dying and it felt like being honest. Maybe bravery is just being honest when it would be easier not to. And if that’s bravery then so be it. But I’ve just been really grateful to, one, receive the help I have. And then, two, to have learned some things that I can share with others. The dilemma is that nobody has to say something, but that is precisely why somebody has to say something.”