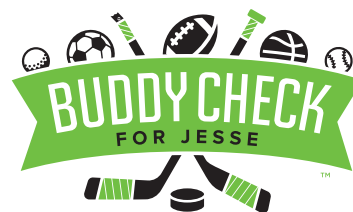


ATHLETE INSPIRATION

2026/27 COACH RESOURCE



Sometimes the easiest way to start a mental health conversation is to remind athletes that the people they admire have hard days too. The athletes below have spoken publicly about pressure, anxiety, depression, burnout, therapy, asking for help, and the importance of support.

Use these stories as conversation starters. You do not need to read every example. Choose one that fits your sport, your age group, and the message you want to share with your athletes.

NEW VOICES AND STORIES FOR 2026/27

Hallie Clarke | Skeleton | Canada

After becoming the youngest-ever women's skeleton world champion in 2024, Clarke described feeling intense pressure to keep proving herself. She stepped away during the following season, worked with mental health professionals, and later spoke openly about how difficult it had been to ask for help.

"It sounds dramatic, but it saved my life." — Hallie Clarke

Buddy Check takeaway: Success does not protect someone from struggling. Asking for professional help can be life-changing.

Source: Team Canada, January 27, 2026

Broderick Thompson | Alpine Skiing | Canada

After a devastating training crash and a long physical and cognitive recovery, Thompson said one of his biggest lessons was learning to talk about how he was actually doing rather than simply trying to battle through it.

"I think being strong enough to say you need help is important." — Broderick Thompson

Buddy Check takeaway: Toughness is not pretending everything is fine. Strength can look like telling someone you need support.

Source: Team Canada, January 22, 2025

Courtney Sarault | Short Track Speed Skating | Canada

Sarault went through a period of overtraining when pushing harder actually made her physical and mental health worse. Her recovery required rest, patience, and learning that more effort is not always the answer.

"I got sick physically, and it made me sick mentally." — Courtney Sarault

Buddy Check takeaway: Rest and recovery are part of being an athlete. Struggling is not a cue to simply push harder.

Source: Team Canada, August 20, 2025

Sam Poulin | Hockey | Canada

Poulin stepped away from professional hockey to take care of his mental health and seek support. In 2025, he continued speaking publicly about that experience so other people who are struggling would know they are not alone.

Buddy Check takeaway: Stepping away to take care of yourself is not giving up. Sometimes it is the step that lets you move forward.

Source: Pittsburgh Penguins / NHL, January 13, 2025

Victor Hedman | Hockey | Sweden

After a physically and mentally draining 2025/26 season, Hedman spoke openly about taking a mental health break and working with a therapist who focused on him as a person, not simply as a hockey player.

“Just don’t sit around with your thoughts by yourself. Just reach out and get the help you need.”
— Victor Hedman

Buddy Check takeaway: Athletes are people first. You do not have to manage difficult thoughts on your own.

Source: Tampa Bay Lightning / NHL, 2026

Naomi Osaka | Tennis | Japan

Osaka has continued to talk openly about mental health and how her relationship with sport changed when she stopped tying her entire self-worth to winning. In a 2025 interview, she spoke directly to younger athletes about emotions and vulnerability.

“I wish younger athletes felt more comfortable talking about their emotions.” — Naomi Osaka

Buddy Check takeaway: Your value is bigger than a result, a roster spot, or a scoreboard.

Source: ELLE Canada, November 14, 2025

STILL WORTH SHARING

Some athlete messages remain powerful year after year.
These are useful when you want a short quote rather than a longer story.

Carey Price | Hockey | Canada

***“Asking for help when you need it is what we encourage our kids to do.
And it was what I needed to do.”***

— Carey Price

Source: Montréal Canadiens / NHL, November 9, 2021

Kia Nurse | Basketball | Canada

“I found focusing on small things you can control made a big difference.” — Kia Nurse

Source: Team Canada, January 28, 2021

Shelina Zadorsky | Soccer | Canada

“Everyone has their own battles. Being a listener is a huge thing.” — Shelina Zadorsky

Source: The Guardian, March 2, 2024

Clara Hughes | Cycling & Speed Skating | Canada

“I couldn’t ask for help because I didn’t know I needed help.” — Clara Hughes

Hughes has spent years using her experience with depression to help break down stigma around mental illness in Canada.

Source: Buddy Check for Jesse athlete resource

A SIMPLE QUESTION FOR YOUR TEAM

After sharing one of these stories, ask: What do you think this athlete needed from the people around them? Then bring it back to your team: What can we do here so people know they can speak up, ask for help, or have a hard day and still belong?