

HOW ATHLETES CAN EXCEL AFTER INJURY: THE ADVANTAGE OF SPORT PSYCHOLOGY DURING REHABILITATION

CHAGRIN FALLS, Ohio – June 2015 – Injuries can be emotionally disruptive for anyone, but when an athlete depends on a sport as a part of their career or identity, they may face greater challenges during rehabilitation. Hard hits to an athlete’s self-esteem and a fear of re-injury can emerge after an incident. While serious injuries may end the careers of some athletes, others, fortunately, are able to make a remarkable recovery with the proper set of psychological skills.

What is remarkable recovery?

“The best example of remarkable recovery is when a person returns from an injury to a higher level of play,” explains Sport Psychology Consultant Dr. John Heil. Remarkable recovery can also describe those who recover from an injury that did not initially seem recoverable. An example of remarkable recovery could be a professional basketball player recovering from a torn ACL to lead his or her team in a championship game when it was not known whether they would compete again.

Four specific factors drive remarkable recovery in athletes:

1. **Heightened body awareness:** Athletes gain a broader and deeper understanding of underlying training principles as they are exposed to sport medicine and conditioning professionals during rehabilitation.
2. **Enhanced pain management:** Rehabilitation pushes the boundaries of pain tolerance and assists athletes in uncoupling the paired experience of pain and fear.
3. **Emotional momentum:** Athletes who confront the emotional challenges of rehabilitation with determination, intensity and resourcefulness can establish positive momentum that can carry them to a higher level of performance after they have healed.
4. **New perspective on sport:** When athletes are deprived of their prized activity, they may develop a clearer sense of the meaning and value of sport in their lives and seek to recommit themselves to their sport.

"Athletes who return to sport after injury at a high level of play typically view the injury experience as a competitive challenge, one that they can successfully overcome," says Dr. Leslie Podlog, assistant professor of sport and exercise psychology at the University of Utah. "Adopting a competitive approach to injury rehabilitation allows athletes to focus on factors under their control and to apply optimal effort in their recovery."

The advantage of sport psychology

“An injured person is susceptible to many pitfalls: recovery setbacks, feelings of loss, isolation from teammates...” says Heil. “Most deal well with the changes that come with an injury, however on some occasions a person may feel stuck. Psychological training helps an injured athlete overcome these feelings more quickly.”

The road to remarkable recovery begins with the sharpening of psychological skills. With the help of a sport psychology consultant, athletes work through various steps such as managing emotions, visualizing recovery, working through pain and building mental toughness to overcome performance injuries faster than those who choose to rehab without acquiring these psychological skills.

(Continued...)

Finding a qualified sport psychology consultant

When seeking the help of a sport psychology consultant, athletes should look for someone who possesses the proper amount of training. One should research the type of degree a consultant holds and look at their past experience. It is also important that athletes check to see if their sport psychology consultant is a Certified Consultant of AASP (CC-AASP) or is registered with the United States Olympic Committee. The [AASP Certified Consultant finder](#) can help those seeking psychological training and support find a qualified practitioner to work with.

The Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) promotes ethical practice, science, and advocacy in the field of sport and exercise psychology. Since 1986, AASP has been an international, multidisciplinary, professional organization that offers certification to qualified professionals in the field of sport and exercise psychology. With more than 2,300 members in 57 countries, AASP is a worldwide leader, sharing research and resources with the public via its website, www.appliedsportpsych.org.

###