

Helping Athletes Cope with the Challenges of COVID-19

For many of us, our lives as we knew them changed abruptly and significantly over the last 2 weeks. As competitive athletes, we have had to come to terms with the end of the season, the missing of a championship, or even the end of our high school athletics career. All of us may be wondering what lies ahead and feeling many uncomfortable emotions. Feelings ranging from sadness, loss, anger, uncertainty, stress and anxiety are common and normal. Change is an inevitable part of life. As athletes, we have many skills to respond to changing conditions, opponents, and game plans. Now is the time to apply those skills. We have the power to decide our mindset and to focus on what is within our control.

7 Tips for Thriving During this Adversity

1. **VIEW THIS TIME AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO PRACTICE FACING ADVERSITY:** You will face many challenges during your lifetime. So, deliberately use your athletic mindset, drive, and perseverance to deal with these life changes head-on, just like you would when facing an opponent in competition. Change and loss can also bring opportunity. Look for doors that may open and be ready to step through them.
2. **INSTITUTE A DAILY ROUTINE:** Having structure in our daily lives is comforting because we know what is coming next. A routine is an excellent way to manage the uncertainty we are all facing with this major life disruption. Take it one day at a time and balance playing Xbox with exercise, chores, academics, and family time.
3. **STAY CONNECTED TO FRIENDS AND FAMILY:** Social distancing does not mean social isolation. Prioritize talking to your friends via FaceTime or Zoom to keep some normalcy in your life. Spend quality time with your family talking about social issues, playing games, or watching movies. Social support is crucial for our mental fitness during adversity.
4. **GIVE YOURSELF SPACE TO FEEL:** We are all feeling a variety of emotions in response to this crisis. It is totally normal. You are not alone. The whole world is dealing with this problem. Fighting or ignoring negative feelings only leads to greater problems. Negative feelings are temporary. Let your unpleasant emotions come and go, then refocus on the present moment. Make sure to tune into all of your positive emotions as well.
5. **STAY ACTIVE:** As an athlete, vigorous training, deep focus, and striving for improvement are all part of your identity. While you can't practice with your team, continue to be an athlete by looking for ways to stay vigorously active and focused on small improvements. Be creative in the way you train.
6. **STAY IN THE PRESENT:** Wherever our mind goes, our body follows. Thinking about the future usually leads to fear and physical tension. We imagine many frightening or uncomfortable scenarios, but we have no idea if they will happen. Recognize when you are drifting into the future and return to the present moment by focusing on what is around you, tuning into your senses, or taking a moment to focus on the simplicity of each deep breath you take.
7. **FOLLOW YOUR VALUES:** Our values tell us how we should treat other people (e.g. with compassion, generosity, thoughtfulness, loyalty, etc.) and how we should approach the tasks of life (e.g. with diligence, dedication, perseverance, curiosity, vigor, conscientiousness, etc.). Your values are your core sense of self, so continue being the person you are proud of. Doing so will ground and center you during this time of uncertainty. Continue to be a thoughtful teammate and a dedicated athlete.