

# Mental Health of Sportsperson during Lockdown

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## Abstract

Lockdown has tested many people around the globe with more inclination towards family bonding and community safety and total mass isolation from outward activities. For a sportsperson, every tested field out there in sports is not bigger than the lockdown battlefield. As a sportsperson, it is a journey about cumulative daily actions, team bonding, and daily checks by their mentors and health specialist to keep them in shape and always ready whenever the game is on. The challenge during the lockdown period for most of the sportsperson is the restriction of the various vital actions needed to get in shape and eventually to get in the game. The absence of this vital action due to lockdown has created confusion, shock, irritability, fear, and frustration among athletes and the cut-off input parameters like Daily Quotient Management (DQM), metabolism activity, and nutrition absorption at the molecular level are leading to mental issues. This has been well established in the past researches that Elite athletes suffer from depression at a rate similar to the general population (rates range from 4 percent to 68 percent) and even suicidal ideation.

The current review contributes to the importance of immediate goal needs and shift of mind set from competitiveness towards being mentally healthy. The gap created by lockdown in terms vital input factors of a sportsperson like team bonding, daily health and nutrition checks, and mentor guidance can be filled up by connecting virtually to sports, health, mental, and team members community and sharing their daily and weekly targets.

**Keywords:** mental health, lockdown, virtual team bonding.

## INTRODUCTION

For a sportsperson, sports games are won or lost more in the mind than on the field and COVID-19 has been the biggest ever battlefield, especially for the sportsperson not in terms of their physical health but for their mental health. The challenge during the lockdown period for most of the sportsperson is the restriction of the various actions needed to get in shape and eventually to get in the game in whatever sports arena they are training for.

### **Absence of Action**

According to many experts, the perspective of a sportsperson viewed the lockdown as the unused pressure build-up of the energy in the mind due to restriction imposed on the physical actions. A sportsperson is always aware of this fact that they need to release this unused build-up energy in some physical activities like running, cycling, swimming, heavy lifting, etc. The absence of action in the form of training and other outdoor activities due to lockdown and the news of *The Tokyo Olympics, scheduled to be held in July-August in 2020 was postponed by a year* has created confusion, shock, irritability, fear, and frustration among athletes. Lockdown has forced every sportsperson to rethink their immediate sports goals and search for a new purpose to stay as a healthy sportsperson and not a competitive sportsperson. The doubts and negativity arising among the sportsperson regarding their lack of training needs and other inputs is a fact to be considered for long term goals and the immediate need to stay just healthy by the mind is considered as an immediate task on hand for every sportsperson.

### **Rethinking new goals**

This has also allowed re-living the forgotten spirit of sports of olden times where the sports were considered only for experiencing the gift of the mind-body connection. Sports are all about a means to connect something deep within us which has something to do with curiosity and adventure and somewhere this purpose of the sport was forgotten and is now all about winning trophies. Many sportspeople around the globe have started experiencing this truth which lockdown is offering silently. Many of them shifted their goals from self-training to virtual teaching of their dedicated sports to all age audiences on the social media platform. Similarly, young players are less affected by the crisis of the lockdown. They shifted their target beyond

2021 and 2022 where major meets such as the Commonwealth Games and the Asian Games are scheduled.

### **Theory of “No input, No output”**

As per the report stated on Indiatimes by Mumbai based expert Dr. Shilpa Desai (Health psychologist, scientist & fitness expert) who has been actively engaged with a few national-level sportspeople stated that lockdown has drastically cut-off the need of the valuable inputs which could eventually reduce the output of a sportsman physical efficiency and mental stability. The cut-off input parameters like Daily Quotient Management (DQM), metabolism activity, and nutrition absorption at the molecular level will lead to mental issues or simply put signals from body to brain will disrupt. According to her, the sportsperson is not like the normal person, as sportsperson their entire journey is all about cumulative daily training inputs i.e Daily Quotient Management (DQM).

Similarly, many researchers have stated that Elite athletes suffer from depression at a rate similar to the general population (rates range from 4 percent to 68 percent). A recent study revealed about one out of six international track and field athletes reported having experienced suicidal ideation.

### **Role of team**

For many athletes, the team environment is critical. Research shows that team training not only boosts performance but lessens the pain athletes feel. A sudden shift to solo exercise can be frustrating, painful, and lonely, placing significant mental strain on even the most resilient athletes.

### **Tips for reducing the distress among sportsperson:**

Athletes are no strangers to adversity. The following points are here to be considered by a sportsperson for staying physically and mentally healthy.

- Be aware of your health and your needs.
- Maintain a timetable with daily targets.
- Design a daily nutrition intake chart with the help of a consultant.
- Keep track of daily activities
- Virtually connect and share to sports and mental health community
- Remember the fact that they are not alone.

The most important thing is to keep moving forward so that when the lockdowns are lifted, the arenas and playing fields reopen, we will be ready. Getting back to training is important but

getting back in shape mentally is equally important. Psychologists must be made available for athletes in times of distress, or for all athletes who are getting back to training after a period of stress and strain.

*Reardon C 2019* and its research members presented research on mental health support in elite athletes in British Journal of Sports Medicine (BJSM). They stated the integral importance of mental health checkups along with physical injury checkup. Mental health cannot be separated from physical health, as evidenced by mental health symptoms and disorders increasing the risk of physical injury and delaying subsequent recovery. The research group emphasizes the change in management strategies which should consider all contributing factors to mental health symptoms and consider bio psychosocial factors relevant to athletes to maximize benefit and minimize harm. Management must involve both treatments of affected individual athletes and optimizing environments in which all elite athletes train and compete.

*Timpka T 2019* examines associations between suicidal ideation and sexual and physical abuse among active and recently retired elite athletics (track and field) athletes and published their research in the British Journal of Sports Medicine (BJSM). The study population consisted of all athletes (n=402) selected for a Swedish Athletics team between 2011 and 2017. Data on suicidal ideation, suicidal events (estimated through the 1 year non-sports injury prevalence), lifetime abuse experiences, sociodemographics, sense of coherence, and coping strategies were collected using a cross-sectional survey. The data were analyzed using binary logistic regression with suicidal ideation and non-sports injury as outcomes. The research concluded with the statement of about one out of six international athletics athletes reported having experienced suicidal ideation. World Athletics and National Olympic Committees need to include suicide prevention in their athlete protection programs.

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