



**Parker
Ford**

The Prowl

Part of the Game

"It's just a part of the game," is a line used in regard to the overwhelming pressure placed on athletes. It's important to note though, that this pressure has become a destructive variable within several athletes' lives.

While several of us tend to treat these athletes as gods, it is important to understand that they are still human beings just like the rest of us. This has led to a crucial need for us to understand how this pressure can be destructive, who is causing this pressure, and what steps we can take to work towards a solution for this growing issue.

Before I go any further, I want to mention a survey that I conducted amongst 15 student-athletes within my senior class. I asked them two questions, the first question asked, "Do you feel pressured to perform to a certain standard?" All 15 of the students interviewed answered, "yes." I then asked, "How does this pressure affect you?" Only one of the students responded that it affected them negatively, three claimed it had a positive effect on them, and the other eleven students said that it affected them both ways. Now while some of you may say, "Oh well, this means that this pressure had a positive impact on the students." Yes, it did, but only to a certain extent. It's important to note that this also means that these athletes are facing negative results from this pressure as well.

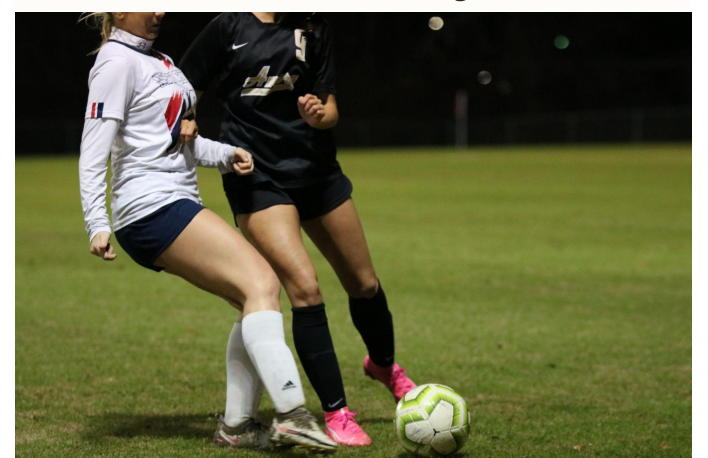
There are several different ways in which this pressure placed on athletes can be destructive towards an individual. For starters, this pressure placed on athletes can lead to destructive behaviors such as playing through an injury.

According to the article, "Playing through the Pain: A University-Based Study of Sports Injury," Genevieve Jessiman-Perreault discusses the five variables that lead an athlete to play injured, one of which is, "negative external pressure." Samantha O'Connell also plays into this idea in her article, "Playing through the pain: Psychiatric risks among athletes," where she discusses that more than one-half of athletes feel forced to play while injured. This pressure has also led to other destructive behaviors such as substance abuse and a decline in mental health. O'Connell also mentions in her article that a common result of athletes being pressured to play injured is suffering from depression. Also in accordance to the article, "Drug abuse in athletes-PMC," Claudia Reardon states, "Athletic life may lead to drug abuse for a number of reasons, including for performance enhancement, to self-treat otherwise untreated mental illness, and to deal with stressors, such as pressure to perform, injuries, physical pain, and retirement from sport." This statement alone is able to dictate that this pressure is a leading factor in substance abuse among athletes. Now, let's discuss the factors that contribute to these destructive behaviors.

There are several variables that cause this pressure on athletes. One of the main factors is the media. According to a survey done in Sophia Bassi's article, "The world is watching: Media pressure on athletes," around 75% of the 200 athletes that were questioned felt that the media were the ones who created the stressful pressure that they face. Bassi also discusses that due to the media's attitude towards them, caused gymnast, Simone Biles, to leave the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and tennis player, Naomi Osaka, to remove herself from the 2021 French Open. Another factor in this pressure is the fans and coaches. Steve Dittmore first presents this through his article, "How You Can Help Your Student-Athletes Cope With Negative Social Media," by discussing the negative fan responses made towards collegiate football players Matt Coghlin, Cade Foster, and Dorian Gerald.

One of the responses made towards Coghlin consisted of, "Coghlin sucks. Blew the game. Make a freaking kick." Another fan made a response to a Twitter post made by Dorian Gerald; it read, "Go watch film and get off social media. Your performance yesterday was putrid." Throughout these various articles that have been presented, it has been discovered that the coaches are one of the external influences towards the pressure placed on athletes by pressuring athletes to participate in destructive behaviors, such as playing injured. Now that the causes of this pressure have been discussed, it is important to discuss potential solutions to this uprising issue.

Over the years, there have been several solutions to this problem proposed. Sophia Bassi first presents a solution to the pressure that stems from the media. Bassi states, "Sports journalists need to change their mindsets...Some may argue that this is part of the journalist's job, but the approach contains no empathy for the athletes. Instead, sports journalists should ask less sensitive questions, including asking about different tactics the athletes used throughout the game." It is important for journalists to understand that the athletes being interviewed are still humans, and can thus, be affected by the tone and wording of questions asked. The second solution presented is a support system for the athletes. While several of us may think this to be a trivial thing that is already put in place, Dittmore first states, "Few athletic departments, however, have focused on the potential mental health consequences when athletes encounter negative media coverage, whether from the mainstream media or from misguided fandom."



Dittmore also presents, "the social support system stood out as a primary way to assist athletes with media stress." He furthers this statement by suggesting that the coaches are the ones who need to understand the importance of this support towards athletes. This social support system can also be presented by providing a psychological department at the campus or facility for the athletes to turn to in times of stress.

As mentioned before, this pressure placed on athletes has become a detrimental problem within this industry and has led to destructive results. So I ask that before you begin to criticize an athlete, whether in person or over the phone through social media, remember that they are humans just like you and me and words can hurt them just the same.

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