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Sports Psychiatry Digest

Covering the latest in sports and lifestyle psychiatry: research, insights, and practice
June 2025 - Volume 1, Issue 1

Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the *Sports Psychiatry Digest*. I'm excited to launch this monthly publication at a time when both sports psychiatry and lifestyle-driven mental health care are gaining momentum across the field.

What began as a passion for athlete mental health has evolved into a broader mission: to explore how performance, lifestyle, and psychiatric science intersect, not just for elite competitors, but for anyone seeking better mental health through movement, sleep, nutrition, recovery, and purpose.

The goal is to provide a centralized, digestible resource connecting clinical research, practical tools, and real-world application. Whether you're a psychiatrist, a primary care physician, a coach, or a health professional interested in lifestyle-based interventions, I hope you'll find value in these pages.

I welcome your feedback and suggestions; this newsletter is meant to grow in conversation with its readers.

Andrew Del Colle, MD, MS
Editor, *Sports Psychiatry Digest*

In This Issue

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Highlights from the APA Annual Meeting, MLB's youth mental health partnership, Temple's TUWell program, and Canadian soccer's expanded mental health coverage.

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New findings on perfectionism and injury risk, para-athlete distress, RED-S care models, and psychiatrists' updated treatment preferences for athletes.

Events & Education

Recap of May's top conferences and upcoming global events including ISSP's PROMISE Conference and the World Congress of Psychiatry.

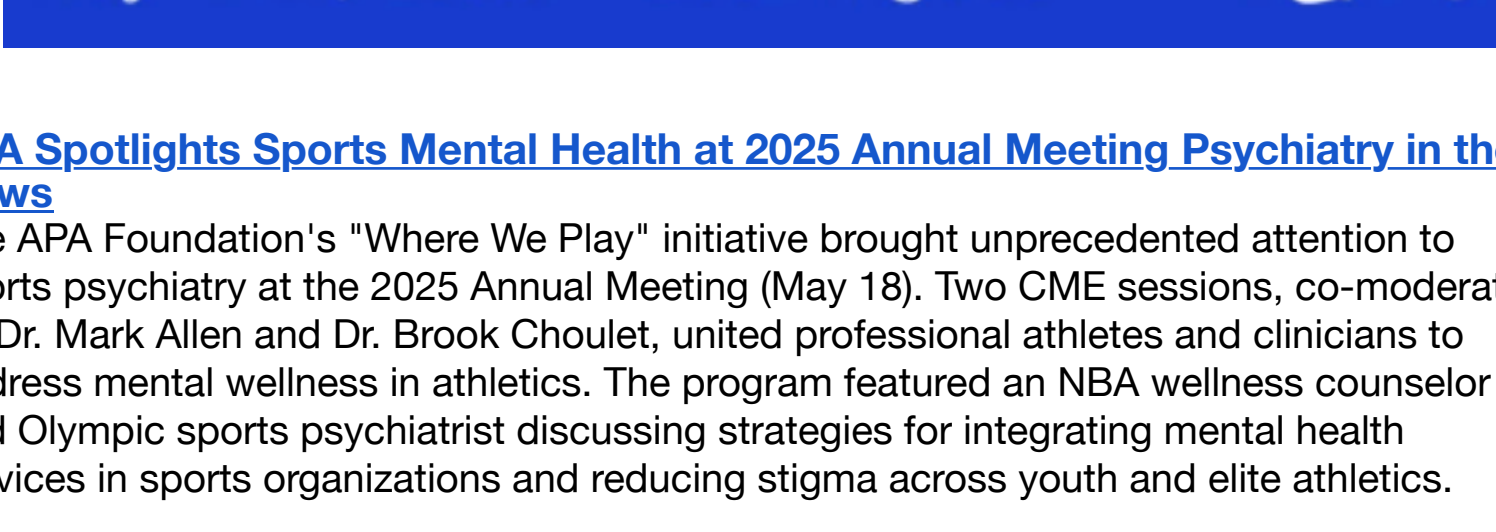
Monthly Feature: Lifestyle Psychiatry in Sports

A deep dive into integrating the Six Pillars: exercise, nutrition, sleep, stress, substance use, and social connection into athlete mental health care.

Resources & Opportunities

Toolkits, mentorship programs, open access journals, and submission invites for future issues.

Sports Psychiatry in the News



APA Spotlights Sports Mental Health at 2025 Annual Meeting Psychiatry in the News

The APA Foundation's "Where We Play" initiative brought unprecedented attention to sports psychiatry at the 2025 Annual Meeting (May 18). Two CME sessions, co-moderated by Dr. Mark Allen and Dr. Brock Choulet, united professional athletes and clinicians to address mental wellness in athletics. The program featured an NBA wellness counselor and Olympic sports psychiatrist discussing strategies for integrating mental health services in sports organizations and reducing stigma across youth and elite athletes.

Practice Impact: This high-profile platform signals growing institutional support for sports psychiatry as a legitimate subspecialty within organized psychiatry.

MLB's Crisis Text Line Partnership Shows Strong Youth Engagement

In a May 2025 interview marking Mental Health Awareness Month, MLB and Crisis Text Line leaders provided an update on their 2023 partnership. Dr. Shairi Turner, psychiatrist and Chief Health Officer of Crisis Text Line, reported that the free 24/7 text counseling service has seen significant uptake among young baseball players and families. The interview revealed that MLB's ongoing involvement continues to normalize mental health discussions, with youth athletes now seeking help for mental health concerns as readily as they would for physical injuries.

Clinical Update: Two years of data demonstrate sustained engagement and reduced stigma when sports organizations maintain long-term mental health partnerships.

Temple's TUWell Program Shares Best Practices After Successful Launch

In a May 2025 study, Dr. Stephen Cuddy detailed lessons learned from Temple University's "TUWell" mental wellness program for student-athletes, sharing implementation strategies and outcomes data. The article outlines specific best practices that emerged from the program's operation, including effective stigma reduction through education, streamlined referral processes, and metrics showing improved access to psychiatric care among athletes.

Implementation Insights: Temple's experience provides tested strategies for institutions currently developing or refining their athlete mental health programs.

Canadian Professional Soccer Expands Mental Health Coverage

The Professional Footballers Association of Canada announced an expansion of mental health services through a new partnership with Onvive (May 12, 2025). Building on growing recognition of athlete mental health needs, this initiative provides all professional soccer players in Canada with free, confidential access to counseling and psychiatric services. The athlete-led program represents the latest in a global trend of players' associations taking active roles in mental health provision.

Global Trend: Players' associations worldwide are increasingly taking leadership in establishing comprehensive mental health services for their members.

Emerging Research



Mental Health and Injury Risk in Elite Para Athletes

Citation: Bertzen M, et al. (2025). "Mental distress is associated with injury and illness in elite Para athletes: a 44-week prospective study." *BMJ Open Sport & Exercise Medicine*, 11(1): e002267.

Methodology: 44-week prospective study tracking 59 elite Para athletes' mental health symptoms, injuries, and illnesses.

Results:

- Weekly prevalence: 15% for anxiety, 21% for depression symptoms
- Cumulative prevalence over study: 58% anxiety, 42% depression
- Mental distress significantly associated with concurrent injuries/illnesses
- Shorter sleep duration correlated with increased symptoms
-

Practice Implication: Routine mental health monitoring should be integrated into Para athlete care, with particular attention during injury/illness periods when vulnerability increases.

Perfectionism and Injury Vulnerability in Triathletes

Citation: Gil-Caselles L, et al. (2025). "Perfectionism, mental health and vulnerability to injury in triathletes." *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16:1561432.

Study Population: 172 triathletes across youth, amateur, and elite levels.

Key Discoveries:

- Maladaptive perfectionism linked to greater injury risk
- Depression and stress associated with longer recovery times
- Athletes with higher "vigor" experienced fewer injuries
- Psychological distress both contributes to and prolongs injury

Clinical Relevance: Screening for perfectionism and mental health issues should be integrated into injury prevention and rehabilitation protocols, requiring collaboration between sports psychiatrists and medical staff.

Mental Health Interventions For Elite Athlete Well-Being

Citation: Wang W, et al. (2025). "Psychological interventions to improve elite athlete mental well-being: a systematic review and meta-analysis." *Sports Medicine*, 55(4): 877-897.

Review Scope: 27 studies examining interventions for promoting mental well-being (not just treating illness) in elite athletes.

Intervention Categories and Effects:

- Psychological skills training: moderate improvements (SMD -0.8)
- Third-wave interventions (Mindfulness, ACT): improved resilience and mood
- Positive psychology approaches: enhanced overall well-being
- All categories showed significant beneficial effects

Implementation Guidance: Sport organizations should facilitate proactive mental health programs focusing on skill-building rather than waiting for crisis intervention. Prevention-focused approaches can help athletes flourish while potentially guarding against future mental illness.

Treatment Preferences Among Sports Psychiatrists: 2024 Update

Citation: Heardon CL, et al. (2025). "Psychiatric treatment preferences of sports psychiatrists for athlete-patients across competitive levels: a 2024 update." *The Physician and Sportsmedicine*, published online April 29, 2025.

Study Design: International survey of 75 sports psychiatrists examining medication preferences and clinical practices when treating athletes.

Key Findings:

- Bupropion was the top choice for depression without anxiety
- Escitalopram preferred for depression with anxiety and anxiety disorders
- Extended-release methylphenidate (OROS) favored for ADHD
- Heightened concern about sedation, weight gain, and performance impacts
- Most psychiatrists order more comprehensive medical workups for athletes

Clinical Application: This study provides evidence-based guidance for medication selection in athletes, emphasizing the need to minimize performance-impairing side effects while effectively treating psychiatric conditions.

RED-S Management: A Multidisciplinary Care Pathway

Citation: Edwards CD, et al. (2025). "Responding to Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport (RED-S): a multidisciplinary care pathway for safe return to sport." *Sports Psychiatry*, 4(2).

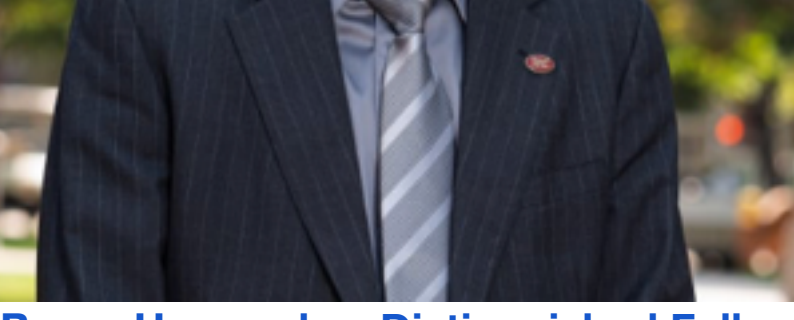
Framework Components:

- Medical evaluation (bone density, menstrual function)
- Nutritional rehabilitation protocols
- Psychological support integration
- Clear return-to-play criteria

Clinical Significance: This pathway exemplifies the essential collaboration between psychiatry, sports nutrition, and sports medicine in treating complex conditions like RED-S. The integrated approach ensures both physical safety and mental well-being during recovery, providing a model for multidisciplinary athlete care.

Events & Education

Recent Highlights (May-June 2025)



APA 2025 - Dr. David Baron Honored as Distinguished Fellow

May 2025, Los Angeles, CA - At APA's 2025 Annual Meeting, Dr. David Baron was recognized as a Distinguished Life Fellow of the APA. This honor, the APA's highest membership distinction, highlights Dr. Baron's contributions to sports psychiatry and underscores the field's growing prominence within general psychiatry.

International Society for Sports Psychiatry (ISSP) Annual Conference

May 2025, Held Virtually - The International Society for Sports Psychiatry held its annual meeting virtually. Sports psychiatrists worldwide convened online to share new research findings and clinical pearls in athlete mental health, maintaining global collaboration in the field.

Sports Psychiatry Track at APA Annual Meeting

May 2025, Los Angeles, CA - The APA meeting featured a dedicated sports psychiatry "highlight track," including sessions like *"Expanding the Field: An Introduction to Sports Psychiatry and Interdisciplinary Mental Health Care in Athletics"* and *"From the Arena to Everyday Life: A Comprehensive Exploration of Mental Health in Elite Sports"*. These sessions brought athlete mental health to the forefront, giving psychiatrists and trainees insight into emerging best practices for caring for athletes and teams.

Upcoming Events in 2025



ISSP "PROMISE" Conference 2025

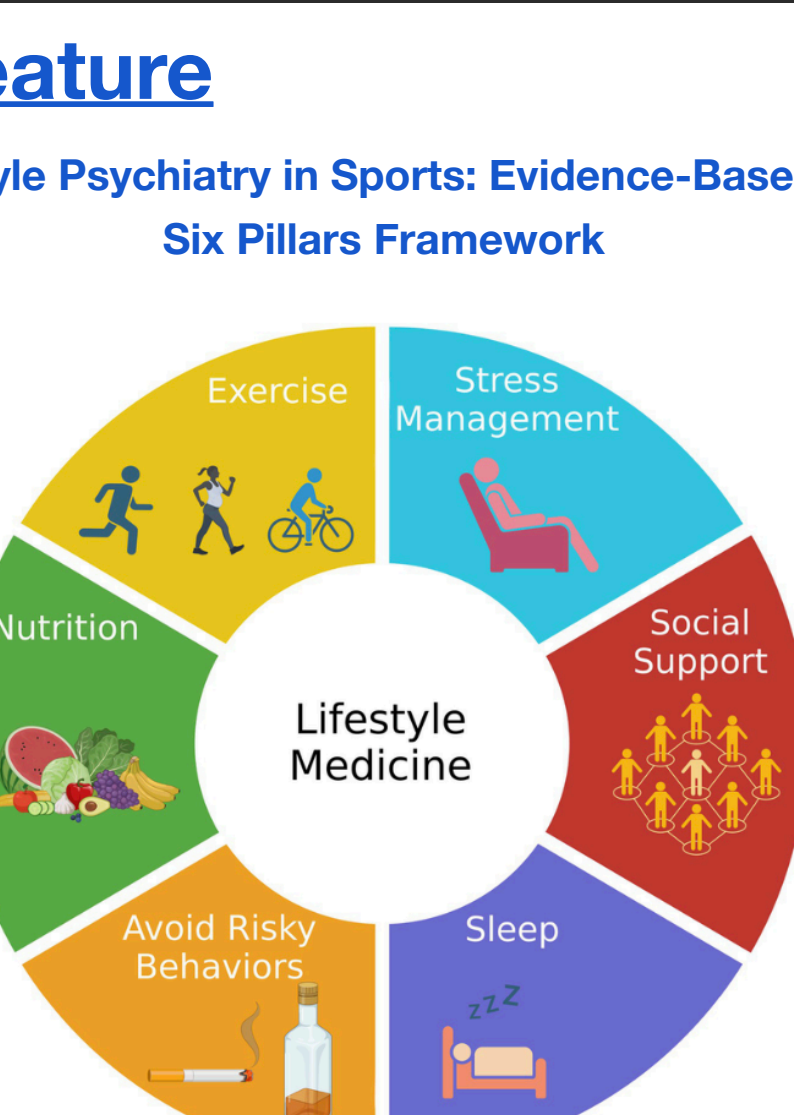
September 20-21 2025, Edinburgh, Scotland - The International Society for Sports Psychiatry's in-person conference - *Protecting Mental Health in Sport - Exercise (PROMISE)* will bring together global leaders to focus exclusively on athlete mental health. Key members of the IOC Mental Health Working Group are curating a superstar lineup of speakers, with cutting-edge research and practical strategies for supporting athletes' well-being on the agenda. Abstract submissions are open until Aug 13, 2025 for those wishing to present.

World Congress of Psychiatry 2025

October 5-8, 2025, Prague, Czech Republic - The WPA's flagship meeting will feature an *"Exercise & Sports Psychiatry"* track as part of its theme of psychiatry's evolving roles. This global conference offers sports psychiatrists and trainees a chance to learn the latest research on athletic mental health and share insights with an international audience.

Monthly Feature

Implementing Lifestyle Psychiatry in Sports: Evidence-Based Integration of the Six Pillars Framework



Lifestyle psychiatry represents a paradigm shift in mental health care, especially for athletes. This approach integrates the six pillars of lifestyle medicine: physical activity, nutrition, sleep, stress management, substance avoidance, and social connection into sports psychiatric practice, moving beyond symptom management to optimize well-being and performance. Here, we review the evidence base, practical applications, and implementation strategies, with explicit references to recent guidelines and research.

Introduction

The field of lifestyle psychiatry has gained momentum, highlighted by the 2023 international clinical guidelines from the World Federation of Societies for Biological Psychiatry (WFSBP) and Australasian Society of Lifestyle Medicine. For sports psychiatrists, this framework offers unique opportunities and challenges; athletes may excel in some lifestyle domains but neglect others critical for mental health.

The Six Pillars Framework: Evidence and Application

1. Physical Activity: Beyond Training

While athletes engage in high physical activity, the mental health benefits depend on how activity is structured. Meta-analyses show that structured exercise interventions reduce depressive symptoms with effect sizes comparable to antidepressants (standardized mean difference SMD 0.43-0.68)^{1,2}. For athletes, the challenge involves optimizing existing activity for mental health benefits rather than prescribing additional exercise.

Clinical Application: Integrate periodized mental health goals into training cycles, including mindful movement during recovery phases.

2. Nutritional Psychiatry in Athletes

Randomized controlled trials, including the SMILES trial, demonstrate that dietary interventions can achieve remission in 32% of moderate-to-severe depression cases³. Mediterranean-style diets are consistently associated with lower depression risk (relative risk 0.67-0.91)⁴.

Contrast with Standard Practice: Traditional sports nutrition emphasizes performance (macronutrient timing), whereas lifestyle psychiatry prioritizes anti-inflammatory foods, omega-3 fatty acids, and micronutrient density for mood regulation⁵.

3. Sleep as Primary Intervention

Sleep disturbances affect 80-90% of those with major depressive disorder⁶. In athletes, even minor sleep deficits (<7 hours) increase injury risk 2.3-fold and delay recovery⁷. The bidirectional relationship between sleep and mental health makes this pillar particularly critical.

Evidence-Based Protocols:

Sleep extension protocols (≥ 9 hours) show 12% improvement in athletic performance metrics. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for insomnia (CBT-I) demonstrates superiority to sleep medications in athletes⁸.

4. Stress Management: Performance vs. Pathology

Athletes face unique stressors, including public scrutiny and career uncertainty. Mindfulness and acceptance-based interventions show moderate-to-large effects (Cohen's d 0.55-0.82) for reducing anxiety and improving well-being⁹.

Implementation Strategy: Embed stress management within existing mental skills training, not as a separate intervention⁹.

5. Substance Use: Beyond Anti-Doping

Lifestyle psychiatry addresses the full spectrum of substance use, including self-medication. Athletes have higher rates of alcohol use disorders (14-19%) than the general population¹⁰.

Clinical Consideration: Screen for compensatory substance use during injury recovery and career transitions¹⁰.

6. Social Connections: Team vs. Authentic Relationships

Despite team settings, athletes report loneliness risk by 33-45%, especially in individual sports. Social isolation doubles depression risk (odds ratio 2.03)¹¹.

Intervention Focus: Foster relationships beyond sport-specific roles to support identity and ease retirement transitions^{11,12}.

Contrasts with Standard Psychiatric Practice

Traditional Approach	Lifestyle Psychiatry Approach
Symptom reduction focus	Well-being optimization
Medication as first-line	Lifestyle interventions as primary
Individual pathology model	Systems-based health model
Crisis intervention	Prevention and early intervention
Separate from performance	Integrated with performance goals

Example: At Stanford, comprehensive assessments include validated lifestyle tools (e.g., SNAPO for activity, PSQI for sleep)¹³. Care is collaborative, involving performance staff and stepped care:

- Level 1: Lifestyle optimization for all athletes
- Level 2: Targeted interventions for at-risk individuals
- Level 3: Integrated lifestyle + traditional treatment for diagnosed conditions'

Outcomes Evidence

- Effectiveness: Mendelian randomization studies show each one-point increase in lifestyle score reduces depression risk by 35% (odds ratio 0.65)¹⁴.
- Implementation data: Early programs report up to 40% reduction in new mental health diagnoses when lifestyle screening is routine¹⁵.
- Athlete Preferences: 65% of athletes prefer lifestyle interventions as first-line treatment¹⁶.
- Cost-effectiveness: Multidisciplinary lifestyle interventions can be cost-neutral or cost-saving, with a ratio of up to 3:1 compared to traditional treatment alone¹⁷.

Future Directions and Gaps

- Research Gaps: More high-quality trials are needed on emerging domains (e.g., green space, social support interventions), and on long-term outcomes in athlete populations¹⁸.
- Implementation: Success depends on multidisciplinary collaboration and ongoing education for clinicians and coaches¹⁹.

Conclusion

Lifestyle psychiatry in sports is an evidence-based evolution that addresses root causes and aligns with athletes' performance mindsets. By integrating the six pillars into routine care, sports psychiatrists can promote sustainable mental health and resilience, complementing traditional treatments and supporting peak performance.

References

Resources & Quick Links

Professional Organizations

- International Society for Sports Psychiatry (ISSP)
- American Board of Sports & Performance Psychiatry (ABSPSP)

Journal Access

- Sports Psychiatry (Open Access)
 - Call for abstracts open through June 15, 2025

Educational Opportunities

- ISSP Mentorship Program: Applications open through June 30, 2025
 - Contact: mentorship@isspsportspsychiatry.org

Clinical Tools

- Athlete Mental Health Screening Toolkit (ISSP members)
- WADA TUE Guidelines 2025: For prescribing in competitive athletes

Contribute to Future Issues

Interested in Contributing?

We're currently welcoming submission including to:

- Case Studies
- Interviews
- Research summaries
- Clinical insights
- Conference reports
- Book reviews
- Letters to the editor

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