



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Athletes are NOT 'CUE'

Sports Social Workers focus on the humanity and vulnerability of athletes.

Summary Bullet Point One: Athletes are not robots. When too much life comes at them too fast, they are perfect candidates for anxiety, depression, and loss of confidence.

Summary Bullet Point Two: Per John Hopkins Medicine, *'the brain is a complex organ that controls thought, memory, emotion, touch, motor skills, vision, breathing, temperature, hunger and every process that regulates our body.'*¹

Summary Bullet Point Three: *"This Olympic season is different from past seasons, with the impact of COVID-19 on training, Olympic games delay, no spectators, coupled with race-based violence and how it may have affected some athletes. It is important to acknowledge the courage of young Black women at the top of their game to prioritize their mental and emotional well-being equally with their physical health,"* said Valon Alford, licensed clinical social worker and co-chair of the ASWIS pro sports committee.

Monday, July 26, 2021, CUE, the human-size Japanese basketball robot created by Toyota Motor Corporation made several free throws in a row. Even from half-court, CUE hit those free throws. 100% precision. All nets! I was in awe of CUE as were others who watched. I am confident CUE felt no pressure about hitting or missing those free throws.

“Simone Biles is a treasure, but if we want to show her the support she needs and deserves, it’s time to recognize that she is a human being and start treating her like one.” Jeremy Llorence, Columbus, Ohio, Letter to the Editor, The New York Times, July 28, 2021. ²

Everyone is weighing in about gymnast Simone Biles’ decision to step back from the 2020 Olympics. She is the next champion to admit participation in sport has positive yet sometimes overwhelmingly challenging consequences.

“Athletes are not robots. Or machines. Or inanimate objects. They are human beings. When too much life comes at them too fast, they are perfect candidates for anxiety, depression, and loss of confidence,” said Anita Daniels, licensed clinical social worker, addictions specialist, and president of the Alliance of Social Workers in Sports. The pressures athletes face is different from the pressures of non-athletes because they are always in the public eye. Who among us has ever felt obligated to post when they failed to meet expectations on their performance evaluation? As ASWIS professional and licensed clinical social workers, we spend almost as much time educating the public and advocating for the unique needs of athletes as we spend serving them.

While we admire athletes’ willingness to be open about their mental health challenges, we also advocate for their privacy. Christine Moeser, licensed independent clinical social worker and co-chair of the ASWIS clinicians committee added, *“Mental health is just as important as physical health. When an athlete has a physical injury, it is accepted if*

they need to take time off from their sport to heal. Why not allow the same grace when an athlete is struggling with a mental health issue?"

Per John Hopkins Medicine, ‘the brain is a complex organ that controls thought, memory, emotion, touch, motor skills, vision, breathing, temperature, hunger and every process that regulates our body.’ Once an athlete makes a statement, is every person who ever had contact with them at liberty to share what they know or think they know? To render their opinion. Are athletes required to share their private struggles because they are in the public eye? One of the Team USA gymnasts says it best every time she is asked about her teammates: *“It’s her story to tell.”* Sports social workers wholeheartedly echo that sentiment.

We admire and respect the athletes who have stepped forward to share their physical, emotional, and yes, mental health crises. Alford adds, *“They are practicing what we have been preaching, and we (society) can show support by not demanding intricate details of their story but extending grace and providing empathy and compassion at the very least.”*

Let them tell their story. If they initiate the dialogue, pursue it, and be courteous. Get their permission and acknowledge permission to share what they shared with you. No speculation, second or third opinions. Give them the space and dignity we all need to recover when we do not feel well. In his book, *The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom*, author Don Miguel Ruiz’s fourth agreement is, *“Always do your best. Your best is going to change from moment to moment; it will be different when you are healthy as opposed to sick. Under any circumstance, simply do your best, and you will avoid self-judgment, self-abuse and regret.”*³ This is an agreement we can apply to our own life and keep in the forefront of our minds for the athletes who attempt to give us their best on any given day.

About the Alliance of Social Workers in Sports

The Alliance of Social Workers in Sports is a 501 (c)(3) organization that focuses on the needs of athletes and their families at all levels, e.g., youth, high school, collegiate, Olympians, Paralympians, and professional athletes. We are also committed to advocating for and supporting athletes during and after they retire from sport.

References

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/anatomy-of-the-brain>

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Ruiz, D.M., and Mills, J. (1997). The Four Agreements: A practical guide to personal freedom. Amber-Allen publishing, San Rafael, CA.