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There are many reasons as to why I chose to write my paper about mental health in the student athlete community. First and foremost, I am genuinely interested in mental health and the stigma surrounding it. It can be truly fascinating how people's minds work, especially when it comes to athletes. As an athlete, there are many beliefs burned into our minds about how we need to be tough and never show weakness, how no matter what happens, we need to be able to keep going and never stop. This mentality can be found in some non athletes as well, but quite often, it reaches an unmatched level in serious athletes. The second, and main reason, I chose to write my paper on athlete mental health, however, is because of my own experiences with mental illness as an athlete.

I have participated in a large variety of sports pretty much year round from the time I was only two years old. To list a few: I have been a gymnast, dancer, and all star competitive cheerleader, played T-ball, soccer, basketball, volleyball, field hockey, and competed in track and field. I have always taken my sports extremely seriously, to the point that my mom will bring up the many times that I was so sick I could barely get out of bed, but would fight her to go to practice. This was only the start of my determined, cannot stop mentality when it comes to athletics. In having this mentality, I have been able to continue my field hockey career after being heavily recruited by coaches at a number of different colleges; however, I have also suffered many physical and mental injuries along the way.¹

Over the past six years, I have been in physical therapy almost non stop for a number of different injuries ranging from my ankles, to my knees, hips, elbow, thumb, and most recently my back. The majority of these injuries could have been prevented, or at least minimized, had I been able to stop and take the break that my body was telling me I needed. This especially goes

for my back injury from last semester that had me pulled from the majority of my season, as I had a stress fracture and shift of my vertebrae and my L4-L5 disc was herniated and pressing on my main nerve. If I had taken that much needed break when it had first started bothering me, I may have been able to participate in my freshman year field hockey season. However, as I have the common and stereotypical athlete mentality, I still have not learned to take it easy with this injury and pushed through physical therapy, telling my physical therapist, the athletic trainers, nurses at the orthopedic, and ultimately the surgeon that it was much better, when in reality it was getting worse, simply so I could be cleared.

Although it was my mentality of never “quitting” that has led to many overuse injuries over the years, there was also much more behind the story that I have not shared with most people. Last semester, I had a lot going on with my roommate accusing me of crimes, my injury, and my life back at home that being without my sport, my escape, was extremely difficult and caused my mental health symptoms to drastically increase. My coaches and teammates became extremely concerned for me and persuaded me to go to the health and counseling center, where I was quickly set up with a mandatory nutritionist and counselor, as I was diagnosed with an eating disorder. The mentality when you have an eating disorder mixed with my extreme athlete mentality was a recipe for disaster as my health declined and my grades dropped.²

I am still in recovery, but I have come a long way since I finally started to listen to the people who truly cared about me and learn ways to combat the things that my mind tells me. I am no longer hyper focused on staying below an extremely dangerous calorie count and was forced to take a break from exercise, until I could recently return to it safely. Considering everything I have been through in the past year alone, when we were able to pick our own research topics, it was an easy decision.