

Psychological Skills Training for Severely Injured Athletes to Enhance Recovery and Return to Sport

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Abstract : This IRB-approved study explored athletes' emotional recovery experiences following a severe sports injury keeping them out of their sport for six months or longer. A realistic thematic analytical approach was used to interpret the findings of 44 semi-structured interviews of athletes who competed at high school, college, and professional levels of competition. Thematic analysis validated by a self-rating scale demonstrated athletes cross a series of emotional thresholds during their injury rehabilitation process. Results showed athletes crossed two to six emotional thresholds before positive emotion and coping were consistently experienced following their injury. Athletes reported being unequipped to cope with negative emotional intensity, the longevity of recovery, and enduring depression during long-term rehabilitation. Positive emotional recovery was expected no sooner than nine months and up to 2.5 years following a sports injury. In addition, 100% of athletes received no psychological skills training (PST) for coping and recovery, and 93% of athletes indicated passive psychological coping strategies in the first month following injury, which extended their time to recover. Athletes recommended immediate, realistic, and evidence-based strategies benefitting the emotional recovery of severely injured athletes emotional recovery to improve athletes' emotional well-being during long-term rehabilitation and enhance their return to sport. Future experimental research might compare the post-PST program that emerged from this study to determine its efficacy in improving the recovery of severely injured athletes.

Keywords : sports, injury, rehabilitation, psychological skills training, coping

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