

Lesson One – Introduction to Mental Health in Sports

“ Everyone is going through something that we can't see. The thing is, because we can't see it, we don't know who's going through what, we don't know when and we don't always know why. Mental health is an invisible thing, but it touches all of us at some point or another. It's part of life.

– Kevin Love



CREATIVE ACTIVITY – POST-IT BOARD

Lesson Intention:

The Kevin Love Fund Student-Athlete Mental Health Program provides guidance and tools to navigate the varying challenges that athletes face mentally and emotionally. This curriculum offers a platform for coaches, trainers, athletic staff and educators to facilitate discussions with their athletes and create a safe space for emotions to be expressed.

Learning Goals:

- Student-athletes will gain an awareness that they have support from their coaches, athletic staff and educators when they face mental health challenges.
- Students-athletes will notice how they are feeling and express it through writing.

Materials for Lesson:

- [Post-it Notes](#)
- [Writing Utensils](#)
- [Featured Videos](#)
- [Lesson PowerPoint](#)
- [Downloadable Lesson Plan \(PDF\)](#)

Prior to Teaching the Lesson:

1. Watch the *ESPY Award* video where Kevin Love shares his story of navigating anxiety and depression.
2. Watch the excerpt of KLF's *Virtual Student-Athlete Summit* (24 mins) featuring NBA player Kevin Love, professional soccer player Naomi Girma, NFL player Solomon Thomas, and former D1-athlete Victoria Garrick Browne. If you would like to play the panel in its entirety (45 mins), [here is the link to the full conversation](#).
3. Make sure to have a Post-it note and a writing utensil for each participant, and a board or wall where students can stick their Post-it notes.
4. Have a list of campus mental health resources and support that you can share with students afterward.

Videos:

[Kevin Love shares his story](#) of navigating anxiety and depression and recounts when he had a panic attack during a televised NBA game while playing for the Cleveland Cavaliers.

[NBA player Kevin Love, professional soccer player Naomi Girma, NFL player Solomon Thomas, and former D1 athlete Victoria Garrick Browne discuss](#) several topics that impact athletes including: mental health, vulnerability, injury, identity, body image, grief and more.

If you would like to play the panel in its entirety (45 mins), [here is the link to the full conversation](#).

Lesson Plan:

Display the 'welcome slide' from the Lesson 1 PowerPoint as you begin.

**Slide 1*

- As discussed in the coach/educator training, remember to make the suggested language below authentic to yourself and meaningful for your students.

Launching the Lesson:

**Slide 2*

- Explain that mental health is as important as physical health and needs to be included in a student-athlete's plan for self-care.
- Introduce Kevin Love's story and the importance of sharing our experiences to take away the stigma that still surrounds mental health.

Example of What You Could Say:

"Today, we are going to talk about how taking care of our mental health is just as important as taking care of our physical health. As you may have noticed, over the last few years, the culture in athletics has shifted, and discussing emotions is more accepted. Professional athletes have begun to speak out about mental health and set the tone for the student-athletes who follow in their footsteps. You might think of athletes who have been leaders in this space such as Kevin Love, DeMar Derozan, Simone Biles, Naomi Girma, Michael Phelps, Victoria Garrick Browne, and many more."

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Introducing the Featured Videos:

**Slide 3*

- Play two short videos for students that introduce the importance of discussing mental health among the student-athlete community. In the first video, Kevin Love shares his story of navigating anxiety and depression and recounts when he had a panic attack during a televised NBA game. The second video is an excerpt from a panel discussion at the The Kevin Love Fund Student-Athlete Summit.
- Before you play the videos, remember to give students a description of the video content, so that they are prepared for what is being discussed.

Example of What You Could Say:

“Now we are going to watch two videos – in the first, NBA player Kevin Love shares his story of navigating anxiety and depression and recounts when he had a panic attack during a televised NBA game. The second video features a conversation between NBA player Kevin Love, professional soccer player Naomi Girma, NFL player Solomon Thomas, and former D1 athlete Victoria Garrick Browne speaking on several topics including: mental health, vulnerability, injury, identity, body image, grief and more.”

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Play Featured Videos:

1. Kevin's ESPY Video
2. KLF Athlete Summit Panel Video

Reflecting on the Featured Videos:

- Reiterate the primary message from the videos – that it is important to acknowledge our emotions and to discuss mental health as a community of athletes.
- Reflect on your own personal experience. Is there anything you heard in the panel discussion that reminded you of something you have experienced as an athlete?
- Invite students to share anything new they heard or learned in Kevin's video or in the panel discussion.

Example of What You Could Say:

"These two videos help to illustrate that athletes at all levels face mental health challenges, but by being vulnerable and opening up, athletes can find the support they need and realize they're not alone in what they're going through. I had an experience once where I....*(Share something from your own life that connects with one of the videos.)*

- Did anyone connect with Kevin's story in the first video we watched? If so, what resonated? *(See if any students would like to share.)*
- Was there anything in the panel conversation that really stuck out to you? Was there anything they shared that you felt like you related to? *(Invite a few students to share if they would like.)*

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Introducing the Creative Activity:

*Slide 4

Example of What You Could Say:

“Now, we are going to do a short activity together that will help you notice your emotions, which is an important first step in caring for your mental health. So often, we ask people, “How are you?” Most of us don’t answer the question honestly because we are used to responding with, “I’m okay” or “I’m fine”, even if that isn’t the way we really feel. Of course, sometimes we don’t want to share our emotions with everyone who asks, but today, we are going to try something new. I want you to check in with yourself and see how you are really feeling. I checked in with myself and noticed I was feeling...*(Share an emotion you are feeling today or that you recently experienced.)*

I am going to pass out a Post-it note to each of you, and everyone is going to write down the answer to this question: How are you really feeling? Put your name on the back of the Post-it note, so we can keep our responses anonymous to the group. And on the front, write how you are feeling. Then, I will come around and collect them, and stick them up on the board.”

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Creative Activity: “How are you really feeling?” Post-it Board

- As an introduction to the KLF Student-Athlete Mental Health Program, this lesson serves as a warm-up activity for coaches and athletes to begin recognizing their emotions and sharing them with their peers.
- The coach or educator leading the session will first share their own response to the question in order to model the activity.
- The coach or educator will hand out a Post-it note to each student and staff member participating. Invite participants to respond to the prompt, “How are you really feeling?” Encourage participants to write an unfiltered response and then collect the Post-it notes and stick them up on the board once everyone is finished. **Give the group about 3 minutes to write.**

Lesson Closure:

- If you feel the group would respond with respect, you may decide to read a few of the responses aloud to the group.
- Introduce the idea that you have now created a space where all emotions are welcome as you begin to complete other lessons in the curriculum.
- You may facilitate a short discussion on any reflections the participants had while writing their own note or listening to the responses others had written.

Example of What You Could Say:

"I want to read a few examples because it seems that a lot of us have some similar feelings and emotions, but we might think we are the only one feeling this way. (*If you would like, you can read a few examples to the group.*) Thank you for participating in this activity and opening up. If anybody would like to share:

- What did you realize while writing your note or listening to how others responded?
- What do you hope to learn from these lessons?"

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Share Resources:

**Slide 5*

- Display the Kevin Love Fund Resource Page on PowerPoint.
- Share local/campus resources.
- Encourage students to reach out for help if needed.

Example of What You Could Say:

“Remember that the purpose of this lesson is to recognize that it is okay to reach out for help when you need it. If you or someone you know is in crisis or in need of immediate support, remember that you can call 988 or text HOME to 741741.

Here are the Kevin Love Fund resources, which you can access directly on their website at kevinlovetfund.org.

And here are some additional resources from our campus that you can utilize as well. (*Share relevant information to campus counselors/sports psychologists.*)

As a team, and as individuals, I think these lessons will help us to be healthier and stronger, not just physically but also mentally. Remember you’re not alone, and we’re all in this together.”

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Supplemental Information:

If you or your students would like to learn more about the ideas in this lesson, additional resources and third party links are included below.

1. In 2018, Kevin wrote a letter for the Players' Tribune called ["Everyone is Going Through Something."](#) In this letter, Kevin shares his own experience with anxiety in an open and vulnerable way and reading the letter will help students feel less alone if they are going through something similar. In September of 2020, Kevin Love wrote a second letter for The Players Tribune. In this letter, he shares more details about his experience with depression. He also connects his experience with the many people who are grappling with the impact of the pandemic and the other unprecedented challenges of 2020. This second letter for The Players Tribune can be accessed here: ["To Anybody Going Through It."](#)
2. [Morgan's Message® Education Program](#) supports motivated student volunteers to become active leaders and advocates of student-athlete mental health on their campus and in their communities.
3. Team USA psychologist, Dr. Kweku Ramel Smith, speaks about the importance of mental wellness checkups and how you don't have to be in crisis to seek mental health care. You can read the article [here](#).
4. Solomon Thomas's nonprofit, [The Defensive Line](#), whose mission is to end the epidemic of youth suicide, especially for young people of color, by transforming the way we communicate and connect about mental health.
5. Victoria Garrick Browne's nonprofit, [The Hidden Opponent](#), is an organization that raises awareness for student-athlete mental health and addresses the stigma within sports culture.
6. [The Mental Matchup®](#) is a podcast and blog series that features stories about the mental health journeys of fellow athletes.
7. [The Athletes OnBalance](#) podcast features conversations with athletes, coaches and experts about mental health and sports – a stigma-free zone for inner thoughts and outer conversations.
8. ["THE ATHMINDSET® WORKBOOK: Training Your Mind for Optimal Mental Health in Sport and in Life"](#) by Dr. Tiana S. Woolridge, MD, MPH and Lisa Bonta Sumii, LCSW. A guide that equips athletes at every level with essential tools to elevate their mental well-being on and off their field of play.
9. The Minnesota Vikings (NFL) get real about mental health through the ["Getting Open"](#) content series. This series includes full-length audio interviews with athletes sharing personal experiences, professional insight, and an intimate perspective on the often overlooked topic of mental health in professional sports.