

Lesson Two – More Than My Sport

“ I thought the only value that I brought to the world and to my life was to have success in basketball. I was haunted by so many things I didn't say or let out. I didn't have the presence of mind or language to speak. I didn't have an emotional outlet outside of basketball. That's why I was all tied up.

– Kevin Love



CREATIVE ACTIVITY – WRITING ACTIVITY

Lesson Intention:

As athletes, our sport is often our world. We eat, sleep, breathe our sport. Our social life revolves around it – you know, the typical, “Sorry, I can't. I have practice.” Our academic life revolves around it – the classic studying on the bus, coming back from an away game. Our emotional state revolves around it – how often does a bad game turn into a bad day? For most of us, our sport is at the center of our lives, and for many of us, it has been that way for as long as we can remember. However, we are more than our sport.

One day we will no longer compete at the same level. It may be due to injury, burnout, academic probation, transferring, retirement, etc. – and whether we want it to or not, that chapter will come to a close at some point. We are more than an athlete, but what does that mean? As athletes, we often don't have that conversation with ourselves until we have to face it head on. The message of this lesson is that although being an athlete is a major part of us, it does not define us.

Learning Goals:

- Recognize the central role identity development plays for student-athletes.
- Cultivate a sense of self outside of the student's role as an athlete.

Materials for Lesson:

- Paper (or printed activity handout)
- Writing Utensils
- Featured Videos (choose one)
 - Dr. Kweku Smith, Psy.D.; Dr. Brook Choulet, M.D.; Dr. Tiana Wooldridge; Dr. Lauren Lowe, Psy.D
- Additional Videos
- Lesson PowerPoint
- Downloadable Lesson Plan (PDF)
- “More Than My Sport” Activity Handout
- Creative Activity Examples

Prior to Teaching the Lesson:

1. Choose the expert video (descriptions below) that you feel will resonate the most with your athletes.
2. Choose the guest artist video(s) that you feel will resonate the most with your athletes.
3. Write your own response to the creative writing prompt that you will share with your athletes.
4. Have paper and pens or personal electronic devices (i.e. laptops, tablets, and Chromebooks) available for writing time.
5. Have a list of campus mental health resources and support that you can share with students afterward.

Featured Videos – Choose one:

1. [Dr. Kweku Smith, Psy.D.](#) challenges athletes to reflect on their identity outside of their sports and explore other interests and skills they have in addition to being an athlete.
2. [Dr. Brook Choulet, M.D.](#) explains why having a singular identity tied to your sport can lead to an identity crisis and mental health struggles. She describes a few ways to prevent and combat this challenge.
3. [Dr. Tiana Wooldridge, M.D.](#) discusses the interplay of mental health and injury and the importance of mental rehabilitation in addition to physical rehabilitation.
4. For a younger audience, [Dr. Lauren Lowe Psy.D.](#) has a warm and deliberate style as she describes how an athlete can face threats to their identity. She teaches athletes how to think of themselves outside of athletics and shares her own experience.

Additional Videos:

1. [Kevin Love and Solomon Thomas](#) (NBA & NFL) share about how they have struggled to create their identity outside of their sport and how they're learning to find balance by investing in other interests and passions.
2. [Naomi Girma](#) (NWSL) shares about the challenging journey of navigating injury, specifically a torn ACL, during her collegiate career and how it threatened her identity as an athlete.
3. [Victoria](#) (former collegiate cross country and track runner) speaks about the difficult transition after retiring from her sport and navigating her identity in this new chapter.
4. [Anya](#) (high school squash) shares about her struggles with her identity as a student-athlete and the link to her struggles with self-esteem.
5. [Colin](#) (former collegiate and professional football) speaks about how getting cut from the Buffalo Bills after just four days made him face the reality that his athletic career wasn't who he was but just something that he did.
6. [Maddie](#) (professional track & field) talks about her struggle with creating a whole brand and persona, both online and in-person, based off of her identity being a runner. This led to an intense battle with her identity when facing an injury during college.
7. [Elizabeth](#) (high school dance) reads her "I am..." poem as an example for students.
8. [Quade](#) (high school water polo) talks about his identity as a neurodivergent student-athlete and being so much more than that. He reflects on his service in the community being a major part of who he is outside of his sport.
9. [Ryan](#) (former collegiate baseball) shares about his challenging journey of getting recruited to play in college, transferring and leaving his sport.

Lesson Plan:

Display the 'welcome slide' from the Lesson 2 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*

- The coach/educator connects today's lesson with the importance of taking care of the student-athlete as a whole. Student-athletes are often taught to take responsibility for their grades, training, extra reps, sleep and nutrition, etc. However, the conversation rarely includes how to attend to their mental and emotional health. The coach/educator emphasizes that today's focus will be on exploring who they are as 'more than their sport'. The hope in this lesson is to avoid a crisis when student-athletes are faced with having to leave their sport. It is also important to expand their sense of self beyond their identity while they are still playing, as this supports their mental health.

Example of What You Could Say:

“As you know, as athletes, you are often expected to keep up your grades, make sure you sleep enough, eat right, and get extra reps in if you want to make the starting lineup. But, how often do you think about your world outside of being an athlete? Today, we’re going to explore who you are outside of your sport. It’s important for us to reflect on our identities and embrace all aspects of ourselves. Research shows that the majority of athletes find it difficult to transition into life after sport, especially when your career is unexpectedly cut short. However, when this moment comes, it will be easier to handle if you have aspects of your identity that you are familiar with that exist outside of your sport – such as your role as a daughter or son or friend, your personality traits like humor and creativity, or things you love to do like reading or traveling, etc.”

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Introduce & Play Featured Video:

**Slide 3*

- Introduce the expert video you have chosen to share with your athletes. Explain that this expert will describe the importance of identity development outside of being an athlete.

Example of What You Could Say:

“We are going to watch a video from a sports psychologist who shares information about identity development and connects these ideas to today’s creative activity.”

Reflecting on Featured Video/Introducing the Guest Artist Video:

- Reiterate the main idea from the expert video- that it's important for athletes to explore aspects of themselves outside of their sport, and to recognize the other roles they play, and what other skills they possess. Connect the expert video to the guest artist video by noting that the guest artist provides an example of an athlete navigating identity development.

Example of What You Could Say:

"As you can see from the expert video we just watched, it's important for athletes to understand themselves outside of their sport and recognize the other roles they play and the other skills they possess. Now, we are going to watch another video from an athlete who gives an example from their life and shares the way they have learned to navigate their identity outside of their sport."

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Play Guest Artist Video:

- Before you play the guest artist video, remember to give students a description of the video content, so that they can decide if they would like to view the video. The video descriptions are listed above each video.

Introducing the Creative Activity:

**Slide 4*

- Introduce the writing activity by explaining that the athletes will use a writing prompt to help them think about their identity outside of their sport.

Example of What You Could Say:

"Today, we are going to do a writing activity together that will help us think about our identities in a new way. I did the activity earlier, and when I was responding to the prompt, I thought of a few areas of my life that help represent my identity. I want to read what I wrote.

Coach/educator shares their writing aloud with the group.

Now, you are going to have a chance to write. Begin your writing with the sentence: "I am more than my sport. I am...." If you get stuck, you can return to the phrase: "I am..." and continue writing. The goal isn't to write something that sounds good- it's more about the process of using writing as a way to think about who you are and who you want to be.

As you write, try to think of various attributes that make you who YOU are. This could be your ethnicity, culture, hobbies, passions, friendships, family dynamics, personal values, religion, etc. Try to get creative and think of as many parts of your identity as you can. This activity should feel really individualized for who you are. If you woke up tomorrow as a retired athlete, how would you spend your time and how would you describe yourself? Are there activities you've always wanted to try? Interests you've always wanted to explore? You might also think of qualities that describe you, like kind or funny or generous."

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Creative Activity: "More Than My Sport" Writing Activity

- Students spend approximately 10 minutes responding to the prompt: "I am more than my sport. I am...."

Lesson Closure:

- Invite students to share their writing and reflections.

Example of What You Could Say:

"Thank you all for participating in this activity. I know it can feel a little different than what we're used to doing. I want to invite you to share what you wrote (*Select a question or two from the list below and lead students in a discussion.*)

- Would anyone like to read what they wrote?
- How did this activity help you view your identity?
- How did it feel to do this writing activity?

Thank you for sharing with the group. As we come to the end of this activity, I really want to thank each of you for being willing to try something new and using this time to learn something that will support your mental health.”

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 kevinlovefund.org.

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

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. [“When Your Career Ends, What to Do with Your Athletic Identity”](#) by Dr. Jeff Porter, former two-time Olympian.
2. [“6 ways athletes can prioritize mental health”](#) featuring Naomi Girma.
3. Athletes Soul interviews many athletes from different sports about their [athletic retirement and transition from sports](#). These former athletes share about their experience, their challenges, how they overcame them and their recommendations to current athletes who are contemplating their next phase of life.
4. In this [Wondermind interview](#), Solomon Thomas shares about his mental health journey, how he keeps his sister’s memory alive, and his strategy for getting more guys to talk about their feelings in the locker room.
5. In this [Washington Post interview](#), Kevin Love reflects on his public mental health journey and the way prioritizing his mental health has made him more comfortable in his own skin.