

SIDELINED USA LAUNCHES COVID WELLNESS INITIATIVE

NON-PROFIT INTRODUCES MENTAL WELLNESS SUPPORT RESOURCES FOR ATHLETIC PROGRAMS IN RESPONSE TO NATIONWIDE PANDEMIC DISRUPTIONS

CHICAGO, IL., October 13, 2020 - Today, Sidelined USA, a national 501(c)3 non-profit advocating for sidelined student-athletes, has announced the COVID Wellness Initiative (CWI). The program provides free specialized resources offered nationwide to high school, club, and collegiate athletic programs to support the mental wellness of student-athletes whose sports have been disrupted due to the impact of COVID-19.

Thirty seven states currently have either modified or cancelled high school Fall sports seasons, 105 of the NCAA's 143 conferences have altered Fall sports schedules, and 79 NCAA colleges have dropped, suspended or cancelled certain sports or entire sports programs. Student-athletes forced to the sidelines due to the pandemic are confronting a potential psychological manifestation of loss in depression, anxiety, isolation, stress, identity loss and living with uncertainty. According to a May 2020 NCAA student athlete COVID-19 well-being survey rates of mental health concerns were up 150-250 percent. Of the 37,000+ participants surveyed, 85 percent desired access to mental health resources. A University of Wisconsin Madison survey of high school student-athletes suggests that the cancellation of youth sports since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a significant toll on the mental health and well-being of adolescents. 68 percent reported feelings of anxiety and depression at levels that would typically require medical intervention - up 37 percent from past research studies.

"Sidelined's COVID Wellness Initiative is designed to help sidelined student-athletes cope with the extreme loss, chronic stress and isolation they are currently experiencing," said Christine Pinalto, Executive Director of Sidelined USA.



photo: Sidelined USA Covid Wellness Initiative programming image

"Our work with medically disqualified athletes has uniquely prepared us to provide insights into proven strategies and tools to support pandemic-sidelined athletes."

The CWI will equip partner athletic programs and organizations with resources to help the COVID-impacted student-athletes manage negative and self-defeating thoughts, cope with loss and uncertainty, build mental vigilance, and harness the athletic mindset to conquer adversity outside of athletic performance. The program also offers unique resources which aim to empower athletes struggling more deeply with mental health concerns to advocate for themselves and seek the professional help they need.

"During this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are challenges to both physical and mental health," stated Timothy Neal, chair of the National Athletic Trainers' Association inter-association

task force, which set the national standards for recognition and treatment of mental health in both high school and college sports. “While protocols are in place to address physical health, there is much to be done in addressing the mental health and wellness of athletes during this pandemic and that’s where Sidelined USA comes in.”

Sidelined USA’s network of sports psychologists and content experts will share specific tools and discuss strategies to help athletes cope and thrive during this challenging season. Sidelined’s network of mentor athletes, who previously experienced a medically-forced exit from sport, will provide unique insights into the internal dialogues of athletes forced to the sidelines and share their own mental health journeys as well. By modeling athlete vulnerability in discussions on depression, anxiety, feelings of isolation, and suicidal ideation, Sidelined USA hopes to open doors for pandemic-sidelined student-athletes struggling with mental health to build the courage to verbalize their need for additional help.

“We are living in a time unlike any other. Athlete mental health should be a priority with everything going on in the world. Having resources that can support your mental health impacts your livelihood and those around you as well,” said former Northwestern University football player, sidelined athlete, and Sidelined USA athlete mentor Matthew Harris. “It is important to provide student-athletes with a toolkit of resources they can tap into even beyond the days of being an athlete.”

Any organization, team, club, or program that works directly with high school or collegiate student-athletes is invited to become a Participating Partner and pledge with Sidelined USA to prioritize mental health in athletics, break the stigma, and forge a meaningful way forward - together.

To become a Participating Partner with Sidelined USA, or for more information about the organization please visit www.sidelinedusa.org.

About Sidelined USA

Sidelined USA is a 501c3 nonprofit organization which exists to reunite permanently sidelined student-athletes with their passions and equip them to find a meaningful way forward through resources, connection, and new pursuits. Sidelined USA inspires permanently sidelined athletes to face the obstacle imposed on them, adapt, and overcome. The Sidelined USA team engages in original research, education, and advocacy initiatives to raise awareness for improved after-care of medically disqualified athletes.

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