

GSM International Coaching Education Articles for Developing Your Players

PLAYERS REBOUNGING FROM THEIR INJURIES CAN BE A HUGE STRUGGLE

THE MENTAL SIDE OF FOOTBALL INJURIES

“A Coach’s and Player’s Guide to Psychologically Rebounding or Recovering from Injuries”

Players have been involved in their sport, soccer, for longer than you can remember. As players have grown, they have strength, endurance, and technique. They’ve busted your butt to become as good in your sport as possible and a force to be reckoned with in competitions. Good players known for their work ethic, consistency, and ability to come through in the clutch, they’ve been the one your team has always been able to depend on in crunch time.

They live to practice and perform. They have a passion for competing. They flat out love the sport of soccer. It’s the players who work hard, develops their performance level, and it’s how they define themselves. Players have dreams to compete at club soccer, maybe get a college scholarship, sign a pro contract.

Then the unthinkable happens! It seems to have slowly snuck up on them. It’s not like there was any major injury or anything. They didn’t feel anything pull, pop or break. Perhaps it might have been a lot easier and more straightforward to deal with if they had experienced that. No, this was quite a bit more insidious. After a significant competition, the player notices some pain and tenderness in their knee. “No problem they say, “All this has happened before. You’ve dealt with this stuff before.” The player quickly dismisses it as nothing.

The next day in practice they notice that their knee still feels tight and sore. No big deal! They try to ignore it and push through the pain. When practice ends the knee is throbbing, and you start realizing that perhaps the player was a bit foolish to have forced them to work through the pain. That night, when they can't even lift their leg, they start to get worried for the first time.

THE PLAYER THINKS:

You keep telling yourself there's nothing wrong, but the pain just won't quit. As much as you hate it, the next day you have to go to the coach and tell him you’re a little hurt. He tells you to take a few days off. You’re forced to rest, and you hate it. However, even after you take two days off, the first few movements that you go through in the next practice still kill. In fact, that knee feels just as tight and sore as before.

But how bad can it be? Maybe you just need to take a little more time off. However, when the throbbing in your shoulder keeps you up several nights in a row and then out of two more competitions you finally get the message! Something's very wrong here, and it's time to drag your butt to the doctor!

Seeing a sports medicine specialist confirms your worst fears. Your knee is terrible, and he says that you have to be out of action for at least two to three months! He claims that you have some form of tear or maybe some potential ACL problems, but that’s all Greek to you. He doesn't know how long this is going to take, but what he says next, really gets your attention.

Unless you take care of that knee and give it enough rest, you may risk doing some permanent damage. What does that mean you ask? He tells you that if you continue to play through the pain, that you may be jeopardizing your playing career! Is he crazy!! Is he telling me that I may never play again!! How could that possibly be! Is this guy a quack or what? How could I even survive without my daily dose of this sport?

If you're a serious athlete and have ever had an experience with an injury, then you know that the physical hurt you feel is only one tiny part of the overall pain that you have to go through in the rehab process. The psychological pain caused by your injury and the temporary or permanent loss of your sport can be far more devastating than the strained or torn ligaments, pulled muscles, ripped cartilage or broken bones.

Unless this psychological pain is directly addressed and treated, your overall recovery will be slow and incomplete. Coaches and parents who are sensitive to the issues of the injured athlete help speed up the rehab process and significantly lessen the mental anguish that the player must struggle. Coaches who are insensitive to these very critical issues, cause further trauma to the player and may compromise the healing process.

To better understand what happens psychologically when the player is kept out of action because of an injury, it's important to briefly examine the three primary functions that sport plays in the player's life.