

Hockey and Mental Health: How the Game can Impact Mental Well-being

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Hockey is mainly played by the middle classes in South Africa, but it can be spread to townships where only two main sports dominate, basically divided according to sex. The sports with big currency are football, mostly played by males, and netball, usually played by females. Hockey could be an interesting sport and can help individuals improve their mental health. Here is an overview of the sport.

As you may know, hockey is a physically demanding sport which requires a high level of skills, strength and determination. However, the mental demands of the game can be just as challenging. As a hockey player, you need to perform, the risk of injuries, and the pressure from your coaches and fans can all take a toll on a player's mental health.

While hockey can be mentally demanding, it can also have a positive impact on mental health, such as a confidence boost: scoring goals, making saves, and contributing to the team's success can all boost a player's confidence and self-esteem.

Despite the potential benefits, hockey can also have a negative impact on mental health, there are ways in which hockey can harm mental well-being.

Mentally, hockey demands focus, concentration and strategic thinking to overcome opponents and make smart decisions.

Reabetswe Nelly Ntsamai (20), a member of the Knights Hockey Club said, "According to my knowledge, [and] most importantly, hockey requires discipline and without discipline, there's no consistency. And with no consistency, there are no results."

Players have to be mentally strong, however. As we all know, there are many ways to deal with criticism or negative feedback as a player of the sport. A young lady also from the Knights Hockey Club, Dintle Lichakane (17), says that, "I would go to the person [who criticises me] and ask them to elaborate into detail so that I can pinpoint everything that I need to improve on. And I would also ask for advice on how to improve, set myself a goal that aligns with it, then invest time into it."

Hockey and mental health are linked in complex ways. While the game can provide many benefits for mental well-being, it can also pose significant risks against which clubs should plan and provide support. By promoting awareness, reducing stigma, and giving support, the hockey community can help players to prioritise their mental and well-being.

Like other sports, hockey is also beneficial physically. Playing the sport works players' fitness levels and improves their cardiovascular and respiratory health. But mentally, hockey is also good for keeping the brain engaged due to the pace it is played at. The sport should be attractive for township residents and could provide a unique opportunity to play professional sports.

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