

# When athletes struggle with food

## The pressures of sport can trigger eating disorders

BY GRETA GESICK  
Staff Writer

"I saw others in my sport who were thinner than me and I wondered why I didn't look like them," said Emma, a student athlete. (Emma is not her actual name but she would like to remain anonymous.) "I decided to go on a healthy diet to lose some weight but it spiraled out of control. I tried everything to lose weight and it ruined my life."

Studies have shown that athletes are three times more likely to develop an eating disorder or engage with disordered eating behaviors than the average population. There are several components that make athletes more prone to eating disorders. Some of these include emphasis on physical appearance, sports focused on the individual over the team, endurance sports, and athletes with perfectionist tendencies.

Young athletes in particular are more sensitive to developing an eating disorder and understanding the risks and origins of this disease is key to supporting them and helping them overcome their struggles.

The pressure put on athletes to succeed combined with emphasis put on body weight and shape can create a toxic outcome. Athletic competition can contribute to psychological and physical stress and if you add the aspect of aspiring for a "perfect body," the risk skyrockets for athletes to develop an eating disorder.

Hannah Weaver, a registered dietitian working at Park Nicollet Melrose Center for Eating Disorders, comments on how she has seen eating disorders in athletes in her everyday job.

"I would say that there are multiple reasons why eating disorders are more prevalent in athletes," said Weaver. "One is the pressure that athletes feel to perform at a certain level. A lot of times, eating disorders give a sense of control and when you're engaging in behaviors they give you a sense of control over your performance. But most of the time, these behaviors get taken too far and it starts to actually negatively affect your performance."

It can be difficult to realize if an athlete is struggling with an eating disorder or disordered eating be-

cause they mask their unhealthy habits with the misperception that they are just being 'healthy.' Their habits, such as dieting, weight loss, and excessive exercise, may be recognized as disordered or they may be praised for their actions.

"I barely ate anything," said Emma. "I started feeling weaker, more tired, more depressed. People weren't even worried about me losing weight, they just congratulated me. I felt more loved when I was thinner which reinforced my behaviors even more."

Coaches and teammates play a crucial role in recognizing signs of eating disorders to help struggling athletes get the help they need. Some common behaviors to look out for are compulsive and obsessive exercise, decline of food intake, cutting out certain foods and obsessive calorie counting.

The media athletes consume can also be a factor for developing an eating disorder. Seeing posts about weight and weight loss, diets to try, the perfect model's body, etc, can all negatively affect your mental health.

Weaver comments on why athletes are never satisfied with their

### National Eating Disorder Hotline: Call or Text (800) 931-2237

#### STATISTICS

1. About 30 million people in the United States deal with an eating disorder
2. They have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness
3. Nearly 3% of teenagers are diagnosed with an eating disorder
4. Only 1 in 10 people dealing with an eating disorder ever receive treatment

bodies.

"We live in a society that's very weight-biased and in certain sports such as gymnastics, swimming, running, dance, we often don't see very diverse body sizes," Weaver said. "And I think it is because there is a perpetuated image or stereotype that you need to have a smaller body to perform well. But trying to lose weight when you're training and competing will lead to poor performance and other medical side effects."

Once you get the help you need, it can change your life in a happier and healthier way. Recovering from an eating disorder is very difficult; it's a long process, but the price of living after being free from your mental illness is worth it.

"I was hesitant about recovering at first," said Emma. "It was definitely hard but it paid off. I just feel happier and better than before. So, yeah, I would for sure say that recovery is worth it."

## The season never ends

### Minnehaha girls use club volleyball to fuel future success

BY AMANDA LINDSKOOG  
Staff Writer

The school volleyball season has ended, but for most girls club volleyball is just beginning. First year student Danielle Hobbie, a middle hitter on the Minnehaha Academy girls varsity volleyball team, is just starting the club season for Kokoro.

"I really like the community and the spirit of school volleyball," said Hobbie. "A lot of people aren't as dedicated as others. I really like club because everyone wants to put in extra work and wants to be there. That's why you do club, it is to work to get better in the off-season."

Although Danielle loves club volleyball, she will be missing school volleyball, because she



PHOTO BY ADDI MACK

loved being able to go after school for practices and games.

"It gave me something to look forward to and work hard throughout the day," said Hobbie.

Danielle has started tryouts and soon will be practicing three to four times a week.

"A lot of clubs actually come with working out," said Hobbie. "You have to do two sessions a week that are an hour long because it helps you to jump higher and get stronger."

Danielle will soon be traveling every month or so for tournaments with her team.

"We usually travel every month but definitely no less than that," added Hobbie. "I can't wait to travel with my team and have a stronger bond with them."

Many players enjoy doing club to get stronger and improve in the

offseason including first year JV player Greta Christiansen.

"I love school volleyball but the environment is a little more competitive for club," said Christiansen. "Everyone that is there is there to get better. I also love meeting new people and club gives you that opportunity to have new people on your team each year."

A lot of fun memories are created with school volleyball and club volleyball. Club volleyball offers many players to travel and create strong friendships and bonds with their teammates.

"My favorite moments from school volleyball was when a few of my teammates and I would get food before our games," said Christiansen. "It was always something I could look forward to. My club that I play for, Northern Heat, is taking one trip to Roches-

ter for a tournament and I am really looking forward to it."

Most people think that it may be hard to manage school and sports, but Christiansen is learning to manage it all pretty well.

"My volleyball practices start at 7:30 and it goes till 9:30," said Christiansen. "I go to nordic practice right after school and get my homework done either in school or before practice. I am learning more about time management, and I'm glad that my practice is

later in the day so I can get school work done before it."

Many players are improving as much as they can for the next school season by working hard now.

"I have about two practices a week and my first game is in January," Christiansen added. "I am working hard on my hitting to try and jump higher and hit harder."

Below: Sophomore Beatrice Sahlstrom gets ready to serve the ball in the Redhawks' section game against MPA.

PHOTO BY ADDI MACK



PHOTO BY ADELIN DODD

Junior Maddy Benka (above) goes up for a block against Providence. Benka has played club volleyball for MI. First-year Vivien Affeldt (above right) was an instant contributor and also plays club volleyball.

