

Struggles of Being a Student-Athlete

By Ava Goeller

Being a full-time athlete and student can be extremely rewarding and can teach many lessons like having good time management skills, functioning in different environments, knowing what's good for your body, and much more. But, the thing that I believe is most overlooked is the struggles and challenges that come with it. Being a student-athlete requires a lot of time, energy, and dedication that almost no one can fully give every day. It can be extremely damaging to your physical and mental health if you are prioritizing your academics and athletics over your health. Even though exercise is very important, many struggles come with it if you don't allow yourself to take breaks.

Sometimes people who play sports and take school very seriously have extremely high expectations for themselves that are almost impossible to achieve. While it is important to work towards difficult goals, it can sometimes destroy a person's self-worth trying to reach their goals. Student-athletes are expected to complete all their homework, perform well at every sporting event, always give their best effort, and be happy no matter what. It is ironic because it's almost impossible to be doing all of those things right all of the time. But, what people forget to say enough is that it's okay to not always be giving 100% effort or to always be happy because people's best effort looks different every day. It doesn't matter how good of an athlete you are or how smart you are, every single person has off days. Obviously, this would seem like it goes without saying but most kids who can function in these situations are constantly invalidating their feelings by telling themselves that they can do it or they have to get through something. These feelings are driven by the need for athletic or academic validation which is a large part of the drive to always give 100% all of the time.

Having a demanding schedule is nothing new to a student-athlete. Sometimes it feels like there is no time to catch your breath. Most nights are spent up late doing homework or making up work that you missed because of athletics. Most weekends are spent away at a hotel or driving to and from games. Even though this schedule can be beneficial in ways like prioritizing your time wisely, getting rest when you can, or doing work early, it can also be overwhelming. It feels like there is no time to take breaks and most of the time, the relieved feeling of taking a break is taken over by the extreme feeling of guilt or disappointment in yourself. Something that is forgotten a lot is that a break shouldn't be looked at as a sign of weakness but rather something that is encouraged. Usually, most student-athletes are running off of a small amount of sleep and are still expected to do well on assignments and play well in every game. This is a damaging mindset that most people have because it's impossible yet everyone still expects themselves to do it anyway.

Overall, being a student-athlete can be very difficult and stressful. Even though it's rewarding, these struggles make it a lot easier to fall into bad habits and feel sad. It is hard on your physical and mental health to expect your happiness to come from things you can't always perform perfectly. It doesn't matter if you are first starting at a sport, getting A's in every class, or playing at the highest level of a sport, everyone struggles in their own ways. The hardest part to accept is that it's okay to not be the best every single second of the day.