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## To go the Distance: Mental Health and Addiction in Sports: The Stigma that Haunts

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This work seeks to highlight the challenges that elite athletes and aspiring athletes in colleges may face during their intensive career that may last a glimpse or up to three decades. Among the myriad of challenges, mental health and addiction are the most stigmatizing and hence least talked about. A delay in recognizing the affliction and its causes, and timely intervention, may cause the loss of the athlete’s career. While the athlete is the epitome of success, and an inspirer to the masses to follow their dreams, there is a price to be paid. Injuries, and the pain associated with recovery, defeats and the required recuperation, anxiety about performance, and attention deficit disorder are among the reasons athletes may resort to drugs, if their need, and unacknowledged vulnerability are not recognized and addressed.

Intensive training becomes the center of the life of the athlete: the rise to fame and glory, the pressure to compete, the losses and defeats, the accolades, and finally the requirement to step down even at the height of glory only to meet the social/sports culture standards.

Athletes find themselves forced to keep up performance for the dreaded fear of being shamed, either from their clubs, or themselves. Losing and retirement are among several of the mental health challenges that threaten athletes and the stigma of having a mental illness does not spare them. It is, thus, no wonder that they may start to abuse substances, either to enhance performance or to quieten the suffering experienced as a result of loss, or to artificially relieve pain sustained from injuries.

Special reference to adverse events of psychiatric medication and thus the required selection of medication to prescribe as well as emergencies of mental health presentations including but not confined to suicide is alluded to.

### Biography

Samir Aboalmagd is a Professor of Psychiatry at Kasr Al Ainy Faculty of Medicine and past head of the Addiction Unit. His interests are predominantly addiction and sports psychiatry but nevertheless works with patients and trainees with an all encompassing approach. His approach is infused by the focus, depth and fortitude that characterize sportsmanship. For 16 years he was a handball player in the National Handball League of Egypt. His career in psychiatry spans four decades and he has supervised numerous thesis. He is cofounder of one of the very few private hospitals that retain a wholistic approach to treatment, addressing the national and regional need for personalized interventions. His experience in treating addiction disorders acknowledges the relapsing nature of the disorder and he is aware of cultural limitations and stigma of the disease.