

Athletic Burnout

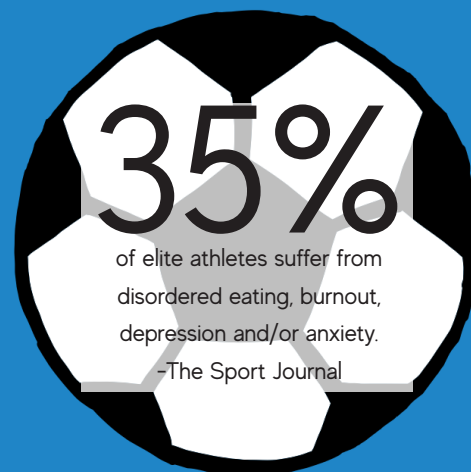
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Athletics are a huge part of how students stay healthy and build community during their high school years, but as seasons get longer and breaks get shorter, many athletes are experiencing burnout.

Athletic burnout has a lot of parts that can either be contributing or resulting factors. These include but are not limited to off-time, sleep, injury, mental health, diet, academics, and coach support. All of these influence athletes differently, and Athletic Director Josh Tobey says, "Having that situational awareness regarding what's best for an individual student is important."

Tobey says, "We need to do everything we can to try to prevent burnout." He encourages students who feel the need to take a break from their sport to do so and find a different activity, hobby, or job to keep them occupied until they are ready to get back into the initial activity. However, he is wary of offering too

many activities for students to participate in. Tobey believes that they will take advantage of many of the opportunities offered which will inevitably lead to burnout. No one can do it all.



Jacob Janni '24 has struggled to balance all of the sports he participates in. He made the difficult decision to quit baseball and basketball to focus more of his energy on football, track, and recreational volleyball. Janni says, "Ask yourself, 'is it a burden or is it something I enjoy being at everyday?'" Finding joy in something you commit so much of your time and energy to is paramount.

Janni attributes the baseball program's success to the year-long work they put in. He respects the commitment but also recognizes that it wasn't practical considering his involvement in other sports. He says, "It was very stressful. I wasn't getting much sleep at all."

Unfortunately, Janni's struggle to get enough sleep is very common. Between athletics, academics, work, and friends, many student-athletes do not get the sleep they need to let their muscles recover and be fully prepared for practices and competitions. Jayce Blanchard '23 is a multi-sport athlete. She says, "Whenever I get the chance I just take naps." She believes that sleep is key to staying on top of your game and preventing burnout.

However, if athletes lose sleep or aren't getting enough fuel, their bodies will be unable to recover. In this case, injuries are bound to follow. Olivia Verde '24 was fourth in the state cross country meet. Despite the results of her gutsy performance, Verde wasn't feeling her best. The week leading up to state she began battling with a knee injury that took mental toughness to overcome.

Reflecting back on the season, Verde says she wasn't fueling enough and believes that is why she faced the injury that she did. She says, "I ate enough for what I thought, but I

didn't realize how much I should be eating with doing so much, like, running everyday."

Verde thinks that she noticed her injury towards the end of the season because of how long cross country season is. Runners start training after track season at the beginning of June and don't get a break until after the Nike Heartland Regionals in the middle of November. Verde says that towards the beginning of the season, "We're focused on our fueling and, like, drinking enough water." Whereas, after six months of training, all of the preventative measures become too tedious to keep up with.

In a society where diet culture is commonplace, many athletes struggle to take in as much energy as their bodies expend on a daily basis. While trying to compete and train for a handful of sports, Janni unintentionally lost thirty pounds and acknowledges that, "that just wasn't healthy."

Alise Grady '24 was a competitive gymnast for twelve years and experienced the changes that adolescence brings while she was under the strict instruction of her coaches. Her body naturally grew out of old leotards as she experienced these developmental changes, but she was angry with herself nonetheless. During the time when her body needed energy the most, her coaches put her on a diet. Grady says, "We weren't allowed to eat, like, treats or, like, sweets." Her lack of energy led to multiple recurring injuries, but she was unable to tell her coaches. She says, "You get scared to tell your coaches that you're hurt because then they would get mad at you or yell at you." While not exactly common, this lack of coach awareness and support is not rare either.

Boys soccer Coach Jimmy Frizzel, however, is doing everything he can to prevent his players from experiencing burnout. Boys soccer has an extremely short and rigorous season. They pack 22 games into a 5 week window, leaving little time for recovery and lots of room for injury. Frizzel admires his

athletes' dedication, but sometimes has to step in to prevent his athletes from overworking themselves. He says, "They just kind of have that invincible, 'I can play this thing eight hours a day, everyday, and be just fine.'" However well intentioned their attitudes may be, they, just like other athletes, can't do it all.

Frizzel is in a unique position because he has to compete with club soccer for his athletes' time and attention. He says, "Club soccer will ultimately try and milk the cow as long as they can up until the start of high school soccer." Frizzel sometimes has to make the difficult decision to deny his players an

open gym or additional practice because he knows that rest is imperative and something they don't get enough of because they are practicing both school and club soccer simultaneously.

Wilmont Manneh '22 is the leading scorer on the soccer team. Manneh says that he frequently tries to balance his time between school soccer and club soccer. It's not just those two parties that beg for his time though. He also plays football and, like other athletes at our school, is a student with homework to complete and tests to study for. Manneh says, "I try to not do so much just so I can have time to do my homework."

Aleah Tenpas '22 is a track and cross country runner. She says, "I try and focus on, like, being a student first." Tenpas believes that it is important to be well rounded. In addition to being a student-athlete, try finding other hobbies and ways to build community with people. Finding your identity solely in your sport is a quick path to burnout and injury.

Ultimately, athletic burnout is bound to impact every athlete at some point. Taking breaks, properly fueling, and getting enough sleep are some of the things you can do to try to minimize the effects of burnout. In the words of Manneh, "Take a break, get some rest, and just get ready for your next matchup."

