



**Baylor Doffing**

**Issues In International Sport (HHPS 566)**

**Issues Media Analysis Report**

**Mental Health In Sport**

## **Introduction**

This paper explores how major media and major sporting organizations have framed the concept of mental health in sport. It analyses high profile cases, such as Naomi Osaka's 2021 withdrawal from the French Open. The media platforms examined include ESPN, BBC Sport, The Athletic, the official websites of the WTA and French Open, YouTube interviews, and Instagram/Twitter posts by not only Osaka, but by the tournament organizers too. These outlets reach global audiences and frame the general perception of the psychological health and well being of the athletes.

Primary results of this analysis are that the media framing of athlete mental health is variable, with some outlets promoting empathy, systemic and behavioral changes and others reinforcing traditional performance first stories. Sport organization media itself are largely focused on performance, branding and commercial success as opposed to athlete well being. This paper analyses these representations using demographic profiling, critical analysis of the media, relationship to broader theme that we have been learning about in global sport media and media-based comparison.

The remainder of the paper provides:

- (1) a demographic profile of the target audience;
- (2) a critical media analysis of cultural and international themes;
- (3) connections to course material involving media influence on sport;
- (4) a review of organizational websites and outside media outlets; and
- (5) concluding insights.

## **Analysis**

### **Demographic**

Mental health coverage in sport targets a broad demographic because elite athletes attract diverse international audiences. Media outlets such as ESPN and BBC Sport cater primarily to global English speaking consumers ages 18–49, while social media posts from athletes target a younger demographic, often ages 15–30, who are highly active on Instagram and TikTok.

Race and national identity also shape audience reception. Naomi Osaka's multicultural identity (Japanese, Haitian, American) attracted global attention and created transnational dialogue. The French Open and WTA websites primarily target tennis consumers in Europe, Japan, and North America.

Media directed at youth athletes, such as injury related mental health coverage described by Xu et al. (2025) *Pediatric sports: The mental health and psychological impact of sport and injury*. *Journal of Clinical Medicine* serves adolescent athletes, parents, and coaches, all of whom directly influence understanding of mental health at developmental levels.

### **Critical Media Analysis**

Coverage of mental health in sport reflects competing cultural ideals: *athletic toughness*, *commercial obligations*, *individual advocacy*, and *global mental health awareness*.

International outlets used Osaka's case to highlight how modern sport places athletes at the intersection of financial pressure, public scrutiny, and cultural expectations, mirroring factors

identified by Reardon (2023) *The mental health crisis in sports: The perfect storm of contemporary factors*. *Journal of Athletic Training*.

For example:

- **ESPN** emphasized Osaka's right to protect her well-being, framing mental health as a legitimate medical issue.
- **French Open officials**, in their website statements, reinforced obligations to press conferences, suggesting a priority on tradition and commercial commitments.
- **BBC Sport** provided balanced coverage that questioned whether current media expectations are outdated in an era of rising mental health awareness.

Athlete-driven media (Osaka's Instagram and Twitter) provided a counter narrative focused on exposing vulnerability, emotional transparency, and systemic flaws in professional tennis. Her posts subverted stereotypes embedded in global sport culture and the traditional norms that elite athletes must suppress emotion to maintain marketability.

These results are consistent with Chang et al. (2020) *Mental health issues and psychological factors in athletes: Detection, management, effect on performance and prevention.*, who highlight the need for interdisciplinary support and cultural changes within sport institutions. Media framing, though, typically lags behind these recommendations.

### **Connections to Course Themes**

Week 10 course themes emphasize that media shapes global understanding of international sport, reinforces cultural power structures, and influences public expectations of athletes. This case demonstrates all three.

### 1. **Media as a global influence:**

Osaka's withdrawal was instantly international news, demonstrating the transnational nature of modern sport marketing and journalism.

### 2. **Media as cultural gatekeeper:**

Traditional press conferences were portrayed as “mandatory” components of athlete professionalism. By refusing them, Osaka challenged institutional power structures.

### 3. **Digital platforms redefining athlete narratives:**

As highlighted in course readings, athletes increasingly control their own storytelling. Osaka's personal statement circulated faster and more widely than official tournament messaging, showing how digital media shifts narrative authority away from institutions.

### 4. **Commercialization and global branding:**

Reardon's (2023) “perfect storm” of media, financial pressure, and globalization is clearly evident in the ways sponsors and governing bodies positioned their statements during the incident.

Collectively, these connections reflect the broader role of media in shaping global sport identity, legitimacy, and mental health discourse.

## **Types of Media Outlets / Global Nature of Coverage / Review of Organization's Platforms**

### **Types of Media Outlets Used:**

- **Sport organizations:**

*French Open website, WTA website, ITF news releases.*

These emphasized performance, rules, and commercial considerations. Mental health references were limited and often reactive.

- **Mainstream global sports media:**

*ESPN, BBC Sport, The Athletic.*

These outlets provided deeper context and highlighted mental health as a systemic issue.

- **Athlete-driven platforms:**

*Instagram, Twitter/X.*

These portrayed raw emotion, transparency, and advocacy, challenging traditional media narratives.

### **Global Nature of Coverage:**

Coverage appeared in North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia within hours. Japanese media framed Osaka as a cultural symbol, while U.S. outlets focused on mental health activism.

European outlets emphasized tradition and professionalism, reflecting cultural differences in sport expectations.

### **Event/Organization Media Platform Review:**

The French Open website focused on event logistics, competition highlights, and sponsorships. Mental health messaging was minimal, reflecting the institutional tendency described by Mental health messaging was minimal, reflecting the institutional tendency described by McCorry et al. (2025) that organizations often remain reactive rather than proactive.

The WTA website, by contrast, included athlete focused features with positive language about well-being, though still framed within performance enhancement.

This comparison highlights the difference between organizational branding and athlete centered advocacy, a central tension in media portrayals of mental health in sport.

## **Conclusion**

Coverage of mental health in sport reveals significant discrepancies between athlete centered narratives and institutional or commercial messaging. While global media outlets increasingly acknowledge mental health as a legitimate and systemic issue, organizational websites and governing bodies often prioritize tradition, commercial interests, and public expectations.

High-profile cases such as Naomi Osaka's expose persistent stigma and structural gaps within international sport, supporting the findings of Chang et al. (2020), Reardon (2023), and McCorry et al. (2025) from the provided Mental health messaging was minimal, reflecting the institutional tendency described by McCorry et al. (2025)

Athlete driven media continues to reshape public understanding by providing authentic insight into psychological struggles, signaling a shift toward greater transparency and advocacy.

However, sustainable improvement requires genuine organizational reform, global media responsibility, and integration of mental health principles into sport culture, not reactive or symbolic gestures.

## References

Chang, C., Putukian, M., Aerni, G., Diamond, A., Hong, G., Ingram, Y., Reardon, C. L., & Wolanin, A. (2020). *Mental health issues and psychological factors in athletes: Detection, management, effect on performance and prevention*. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 54(4), 216–220.

Martín-Rodríguez, A., et al. (2024). *Sporting mind: The interplay of physical activity and psychological health*. *Sports*, 12(1), 37.

McCorry, U., et al. (2025). *Mental health and wellness*. In *Psychology in Sport*. Conncoll Pressbooks.

Reardon, C. L. (2023). *The mental health crisis in sports: The perfect storm of contemporary factors*. *Journal of Athletic Training*, 58(9), 819–823.

Xu, E., Greif, D., Castle, P., & Lander, S. (2025). *Pediatric sports: The mental health and psychological impact of sport and injury*. *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 14(12), 4321.

Schinke, R., Stambulova, N., Si, G., & Moore, Z. (2018). *International society of sport psychology position stand: Athletes' mental health, performance, and development*. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 16(6), 622–639.

Markovits, A. S., & Rensmann, L. (2010). *Gaming the world: How sports are reshaping global politics and culture*. Princeton University Press.