



Be an
Olympian

in Your Mental Health Journey:

Lessons from the 2021 Olympics

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For this year's 28th summer Olympic Games, held in Tokyo, Japan, 11,656 athletes ventured from 206 nations with one common lifelong goal: to be the best in the world. During the games, 113 gold, silver, and bronze medals were distributed from events across 33 sports. A total of 15.5 million people worldwide tuned in to watch the record-breaking and gravity-defying Olympic performances. What made this year's Olympics stand out from previous events is that the heroic performances of Olympic athletes extended beyond their performances on the playing field.

On July 27th, four-time Olympic Gold Medal Gymnast Simon Biles changed the conversation about athletes and mental health by withdrawing from an all-around competition to focus on her mental health. In a sport that depends so heavily on having your mind and body in sync, Biles made a decision that is certainly gold medal-worthy. "I didn't have a bad performance and quit. I've had plenty of bad performances throughout my career and finished the competition," said Biles. "I simply got so lost my safety was at risk as well as a team medal."

Biles sparked a pivotal conversation. Following her decision, many other Olympians supported Biles, some following in her footsteps as they shared their mental health struggles. United States weightlifter Kate Nye said, "As someone with bipolar disorder and ADHD, I could definitely relate to the overwhelming nature of the sport. I'm of the opinion that you have to put yourself first. She should have done what was best for her, and she did."

Along with the IOC's launch of The Mentally Fit Helpline, the 2021 Tokyo Olympic games saw an increased effort by the IOC to provide mental health resources for all its athletes, which included mental health professionals present at the Olympics to meet with athletes.

To say that Biles created change is an understatement. As the conversation around athletes and mental health continued to get louder, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) launched The Mentally Fit Helpline, a free and confidential mental health and well-being support service available to all Olympians and Paralympians. Along with the IOC's launch of The Mentally Fit Helpline, the 2021 Tokyo Olympic games saw an increased effort by the IOC to provide mental health resources for all its athletes, which included mental health professionals present at the Olympics to meet with athletes.

The 2021 Tokyo Olympic Games will have a lasting memory of not only what happened on the field of competition but also how the games demonstrated that:

- People can achieve fantastic things despite difficulties with mental health.
- Taking a gigantic leap of faith and sharing one's struggles can inspire others in various ways.

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written by Nick Romano