

What To Do When Your Sport Quits You

All athletes come to terms with the end of their athletic careers at some point, but this is typically something you prepare for and it is on your terms. Retiring from collegiate athletics is a difficult enough transition when you know you are playing your last season; it is much harder when your career is abruptly ended by a serious injury, pandemic, or other circumstance out of your control.

It is common for athletes to go through a grieving process when they retire. Denial, sadness, anger, loss of sense of self, and withdrawal are all common experiences; these experiences can be even more intense when an athlete is *forced* to quit. Athletes are used to performing well and can get frustrated with themselves for grieving, further compounding the problem. In general, the more success an athlete has had, the more likely they will struggle with the end of their career.

Suggestions for surviving

- Be compassionate with yourself: Allow yourself to be angry, sad, frustrated, and confused. Talk to your coaches and your teammates; you are not the only one who feels this way.
- Find ways to get closure as a team: In the future, if there is a way to schedule a final activity as a team (even if it cannot be your sport), this can help you get some closure. When social distancing has concluded, think about organizing a last scrimmage, a (fun) final practice, or even a social outing as a team. This not only helps bring closure, but makes your last memory of the season much more enjoyable than the announcement that your season is over.
- Focus on your success as an athlete: After you have spent some time grieving, start focusing on your success as an athlete throughout your career rather than how it ended.
- Think about getting involved with other activities. While it will first feel very strange to have so much unstructured time on your hands, eventually, you will likely appreciate it. Are there hobbies or events you typically are unable to enjoy due to your regular schedule? Maybe grab a teammate and try something new together.
- Discover your identity outside of sports: Who are you when you are not an athlete? The more time and effort an athlete spends on their sport, the greater impact it has on their identity- get to know yourself outside of your sport. What are your values? Career interests? What do you like about your personality? What kind of relationships do you want in your life?
- Practice healthy habits: Eat well, practice good sleep hygiene, and manage your stress. Keep a workout routine. Avoid withdrawing from friends and family.
- Ask for help when you need it: Lean on the people who support you in your life. The Counseling Center is also available for support: www.mnsu.edu/counseling