



Putting Mental Health First: A Lesson from Simone Biles

Written by Alexa Tavares

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<https://www.nbcnews.com/know-your-value/feature/simone-biles-showing-us-what-exemplary-feminist-leadership-really-looks-ncna1275351>

SIMONE BILES has been all over the news lately for leaving the women's GYMNASTICS final at the TOKYO Olympic Games. She claimed that she was not in the right place mentally to be competing on a stage like that or performing the high-level skills she was expected to do. The world is DIVIDED about her actions, some are APPLAUDING her for putting herself first while others are ENRAGED because they believe that she gave up and disappointed the world. So, let's talk about all that this 24-year old woman has endured before making this decision on the world's stage.

Who are we talking about? SIMONE BILES

She is all over the news lately for what? LEAVING THE WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS FINAL

In what city are the Olympic Games being held? TOKYO

The world is _____ about her actions. DIVIDED

Some are _____ her for putting herself first. APPLAUDING

Other people are _____ because they believe she gave up. ENRAGED

What is a sport, besides gymnastics, that will be competing in the Olympic Games?

Question Type Key

KNOWN – SEMI-OPEN – PRIOR KNOWLEDGE – MATH – OPEN – VAKT



Since the 2016 RIO Olympic Games, a lot of CONTROVERSY has been brought to light in the world of gymnastics. DR. NASSAR, the physician of the United States Women's National Gymnastics Team, was ACCUSED and CONVICTED of abusing hundreds of girls and young women on the team. Some of those women were competing at the Olympics at the time, such as ALY RAISMAN, MCKAYLA MARONEY, and GABBY DOUGLAS. This conviction brought a lot of attention to the sport of gymnastics, and it seemed to bring back years of TRAUMA in those affected. Simone Biles has recently admitted to being one of the victims of his abuse. She also stated, as the only surviving victim still competing in the Olympics, that her position on the Olympic team is holding USA Gymnastics accountable for the abuse.

In what city were the 2016 Olympic Games held? RIO

A lot of what has been brought to light in the world of gymnastics? CONTROVERSY

Who was the physician of the United States Women's National Gymnastics Team?

DR NASSAR

Name one of the women mentioned above that were competing during the time that the accusations came about. ALY RAISMAN, MCKAYLA MARONEY, GABBY DOUGLAS

As the only surviving victim competing, Simone says that her position on the Olympic team is what? HOLDING USA GYMNASTICS ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE ABUSE

What do you think about Simone's decision to compete in the Olympics despite her trauma with the team's physician?

Simone competed in the 2016 Olympics and won gold in the ALL-AROUND (when you add up the scores from all 4 events), team, vault, and floor. She earned the title G.O.A.T. which stands for GREATEST OF ALL TIME. At only 22 years old, she was already under an immense amount of pressure to maintain her LEGENDARY status. Between the 2016 and 2020 Olympics, she continued to practice, compete, and solidify her GOAT title. She states, "I'm not the next USAIN BOLT or Michael Phelps- I'm the first Simone Biles", as she was continuously compared to male Olympic athletes.

Name one event in which Simone won gold in the 2016 Olympics. ALL-AROUND, TEAM, VAULT, FLOOR

What is it called when you add up the scores from all 4 events? ALL-AROUND

Question Type Key

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What does the acronym G.O.A.T. stand for? GREATEST OF ALL TIME

OR- What is the acronym for Greatest of All Time? GOAT

Simone is under immense pressure to maintain her _____ status. LEGENDARY

Name one of the male athletes mentioned above that Simone has been compared to. USAIN BOLT; MICHAEL PHELPS

What sport did USAIN BOLT compete in? TRACK AND FIELD

What do you think about Simone's quote in this section?



<https://www.npr.org/sections/tokyo-olympics-live-updates/2021/07/27/1021182711/simone-biles-tokyo-olympics-gymnastics-pressure>

In 2020, the global pandemic of COVID brought the world to a screeching halt. The Tokyo Olympic Games were cancelled and POSTPONED to the following summer. Athletes all over the world had to adjust their SCHEDULES which can be stressful as they had spent the last couple of years preparing for competition. Fast-forward one year to the summer of 2021 when the Olympic games are finally occurring. The United States Women's Gymnastics Team is composed of Simone Biles, SUNISA LEE, JORDAN CHILES, GRACE MCCALLUM, and alternates JADE CAREY and MYKAYLA SKINNER.

The Tokyo Olympic games were cancelled and _____ to the following summer. POSTPONED

What is something in your life that was postponed due to COVID?

Athletes all over the world had to adjust their what? SCHEDULES

Question Type Key

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Name one gymnast mentioned above that is on the current US Women's Gymnastics Olympic Team. SIMONE BILES, SUNISA LEE, JORDAN CHILES, GRACE MCCALLUM, JADE CAREY, MYKAYLA SKINNER

In what year were the Tokyo Olympic games finally held? 2021

The amount of pressure Simone was under is INDESCRIBABLE. At 24 years old, the athlete was expected to win gold, fulfill OBLIGATIONS as a global celebrity, and secure the United States' position as the best Women's Gymnastics team in the world. But Simone was feeling far from perfect; she was fighting DEMONS and couldn't hold them back. Her breaking point was when she was performing a skill on the VAULT, one that she was known for, and lost herself in the air. Her PROPRIOCEPTION (the body's ability to sense itself in space) failed and she twisted fewer times than she had planned. The result could have been detrimental, and this was her wake up call. The loss of proprioception in the gymnastics world is called "the TWISTIES", which is similar to a brain-body disconnect. Your mind cannot grasp where your body is in the middle of the air and you become lost.

The amount of pressure Simone was under is _____. INDESCRIBABLE

Simone was fighting ____ and couldn't hold them back. DEMONS

When she was performing a skill on the _____, she lost herself in space. VAULT

What is the body's ability to sense itself in space? PROPRIOCEPTION

Name one of the things mentioned above that Simone was expected to do. WIN GOLD, FULFILL OBLIGATIONS AS A GLOBAL CELEBRITY, SECURE THE US' POSITION AS THE BEST

What does it mean when you have the Twisties? LOSS OF PROPRIOCEPTION

Have you ever felt a feeling similar to the Twisties? If so, what happened?

Simone walked off the mat and left the competition. She told her TEAMMATES and coaches that she was not mentally prepared to continue. The team physicians urged her to get back out there, as she was cleared of any INJURIES, but Simone fought back stating that it was her mental health that was failing, not her physical health. Simone stated that she "felt like I was still doing it for other people.... So that just, like, hurts my HEART, because doing what I love has been kind of taken away from me to please other people."



Name one group of people mentioned above that Simone talked to about not being mentally prepared enough to continue on. TEAMMATES; COACHES

The team physicians cleared Simone of any _____. INJURIES

Simone stated that it was not her physical health but her _____ that was failing her. MENTAL HEALTH

What do you think of the quote from Simone?

A few years ago it would have been UNIMAGINABLE for an Olympic athlete to admit to mental health concerns, let alone walk out of a competition. But Simone is not alone; many other Olympic athletes as well as NATIONAL athletes are speaking out about putting their mental health first and the EXPECTATIONS of others second (if at all). In the past, Simone would have suffered through the mental fog and competed, but now she is older, smarter, and realizes that there is more to life than gymnastics.

A few years ago it would have been _____ for an athlete to admit to mental health concerns. UNIMAGINABLE

Name one of the two different types of athletes mentioned above that are speaking out about putting their mental health first. OLYMPIC ATHLETES, NATIONAL ATHLETES

These athletes are putting the _____ of others second (if at all). EXPECTATIONS

Simone is now older, smarter, and realizes what? THAT THERE IS MORE TO LIFE THAN GYMNASTICS



<https://www.newsweek.com/naomi-osaka-boyfriend-parents-lifestyle-japanese-olympic-tennis-player-1611294>

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2021 has been the year for female athletes to ADVOCATE for their mental health. Unfortunately, this has been met with pushback from some of the public as they feel that athletes are PERFORMERS and OWE them a performance. At the end of the day, athletes are HUMAN BEINGS too. They struggle with mental health issues, succumb to stress, and need a break just as you and I do.

What year has been the year for female athletes to advocate for mental health?
2021

What is something that you want to advocate for this year?

Some people feel that athletes are _____ and owe them a performance.

PERFORMERS

At the end of the day, athletes are what? HUMAN BEINGS

Name one of the things mentioned above that athletes do just as you and I do.

STRUGGLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES, SUCCUMB TO STRESS, NEED A BREAK

NAOMI OSAKA, a 23-year-old professional tennis player, stood up for herself at the FRENCH OPEN when she stated that she would miss the PRESS CONFERENCES in order to take care of herself mentally. She was then forced to DISCLOSE (tell/discuss) her symptoms, as the press and the tournament did not believe she really needed a break. Imagine that, having complete strangers, people not in the medical field, SCRUTINIZE you for your medical history!

Who is the 23-year-old professional tennis player we are talking about here?

NAOMI OSAKA

What country does she compete for in the most recent Olympic games? JAPAN

At what event did she stand up for herself? FRENCH OPEN

What did she state that she would miss? PRESS CONFERENCE

What is one of the synonyms I used above for “disclose”? TELL; DISCUSS

I asked you to imagine having complete strangers do what? SCRUTINIZE YOU FOR YOUR MEDICAL HISTORY

MICHAEL PHELPS, an Olympic swimmer for the United States, has been open about his struggles with DEPRESSION and shares his MANTRA of “it’s ok to not be ok”. His admittance to mental health struggles was met with support and positive vibes from the public, while Simone Biles and Naomi Osaka were SHUNNED for



taking a break to protect themselves. Nobody is saying that Michael did not deserve the support he received, but people feel that these female and minority athletes also deserved support in their time of VULNERABILITY. Michael Phelps applauded Osaka when she took her break, and even told her that she might have saved her own life by speaking up. And to Osaka, that was more than worth it.

Who is the Olympic swimmer we are talking about here? MICHAEL PHELPS
Name one of the years in which he competed in the Olympics. 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016

He has been open about his struggles with what? DEPRESSION

What is his mantra? ITS OK TO NOT BE OK

Female and minority athletes deserve support in their time of _____.
VULNERABILITY

What did I say Michael told Osaka after she refused to attend the press conference? THAT SHE MIGHT HAVE SAVED HER OWN LIFE BY SPEAKING UP

What would you say to Simone, Michael, or Naomi if they were with you right now?

Creative Writing:

Tell me about a time that you had to put your mental health first. What led you to making that decision? How was this received by those in your life?

Or

Write a letter to yourself that you can read when you need a reminder to put your mental health first.



Alexa Tavares is the newest addition to the GKTC team. She is a practitioner-in-training and an ex-gymnast. She decided to write this lesson on Simone Biles' brave decision to step down from competing in the Olympic Games and putting her mental health first.





(This was the introduction to his poem Joel wrote for Neurolyrical Café) “I was inspired to write this poem after I read about gymnast Simone Biles and her twisties. It sounds like she has what I so often feel. Proprioception can be a tricky thing. I hope you will enjoy this poem and keep going for gold. Thank you Brian for coaching me. Thank you for listening. This is our Olympics.”

INTERDEPENDENCE IS GOLD

By Joel Nyland

7/29/21

Sources:

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<https://michaelphelpsfoundation.org/>

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