

### ***Mind Body and Sport: Gambling Among Student Athletes***

*An excerpt from the Sport Science Institute's guide to understanding and supporting student-athlete mental wellness.*

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Generally, the social and problem gambling experiences of college student-athletes are similar to those of other youth gamblers....

One notable difference between student-athletes and their peers is that student-athletes tend to be drawn to sports wagering at higher rates. This is not surprising, given their background and interest in sports. However, for student-athletes, wagering on sports can have negative consequences even if the behavior is not classified as excessive or pathological.

To protect the integrity of college athletics contests, NCAA regulations prohibit student-athletes from betting money on any sporting event (college, professional or otherwise) in which the NCAA conducts collegiate championships. Violations of this regulation can result in a student-athlete losing his or her athletics eligibility, which has clear negative repercussions for the individual and his or her team.

Despite NCAA regulations prohibiting sports wagering for money, 26 percent of male student-athletes report doing just that, with 8 percent gambling on sports at least monthly. Of particular concern is the culture surrounding golf, where on-course wagering is considered a normative aspect of the experience. Males who participate in NCAA golf are approximately three times more likely to wager on sports (or engage in other gambling behaviors) than other student-athletes.

While most student-athlete sports wagering occurs solely among friends and teammates, many are now placing bets with online sites or using bookmakers they can access easily via their smartphone. Technology is also allowing outside gamblers seeking "inside" betting information easier access to college student-athletes (for example, through social media). Nearly 1 in 20 Division I men's basketball student-athletes in the 2012 study reported having been contacted for such inside information.

**Unlike other more publicized addictive behaviors (for example, alcohol, drug abuse, tobacco consumption), gambling problems often go undetected.** It is important that student-athletes and athletics personnel understand that a gambling problem parallels other addictive behaviors. Helping student-athletes with a gambling disorder requires education, early assessment, an acknowledgment of a potential problem and effective referrals into the mental health care system.

The ability to identify the college-age problem gambler may be more difficult today because more of it is occurring online. But two-thirds of student-athletes believe that teammates are aware when a member of the team is gambling. They also report that the coach has a strong influence on tolerance for gambling behaviors and for empowering members of the team to intervene when a teammate needs help. Athletics departmental personnel, including athletic trainers and coaches, are in a unique position to observe and interact with student-athletes on a daily basis and help refer student-athletes for the appropriate assistance should such a need arise.