How Has The Disappearance Of Fans Due To Covid Affected Athletes

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March 13, 2022

Everybody has a favorite sport, or at least 7.5 billion out of 7.9 billion people do (Statista, 2020). As a fan, we love cheering on our favorite teams and enjoy seeing cool things like an NBA player dunking, or a NFL player juking players and breaking tackles and getting the touchdown too. We as fans love to watch athletes play, it brings us excitement, entertainment. But what does it bring to the athletes when we the fans are absent, how has the disappearance of fans affected athletes especially during covid.

Many things can have a positive or negative effect on athletes in sports, but what are some of those things? How do they affect the athletes? Social media plays a big role in today's society. Especially in sports, any level of sports. From Friday Night Lights to the NFL, all of these athletes are being watched on tv and are being judged by every single person watching them. Not everything is what it seems on social media. When you look on instagram you mainly see things like all the positive comments, what we don't see are the negative comments, the ones that are meant to hurt an athlete. "Social media has been associated with harmful experiences, such as bullying, checking out opponents that can lead to a negative comparison of skills, or pressuring athletes to showcase only their best and conceal what's going on 'behind the scenes'. In advocating for amateur athletes and helping them create their identity outside of the sport, it is essential to look at athlete stressors and barriers to seeking support such as counseling." (Osborne, 2021, p6). Social media can help build an athlete's confidence and identity when playing, but it can also break them down, it can decline their confidence and affect their mental health.

Fans are important to athletes for many reasons. They help the teams make money to pay the players, they bring energy to the games, excitement and loud roaring cheers to hype up the players. "They give the players confidence, and whoever their favorite team

is."(Jackson-Edwards, 2009) But what happens when there aren't any fans? Covid-19 made that a reality. Covid sent society into a world wide quarantine.

This quarantine is where social media became important, to keep fans connected to athletics and the world. "Social media has also been instrumental in how individuals have remained connected during COVID-19"(Osborne, 2021, p11). Covid was a big contributor to the online use for athletics. Fans were unable to attend games because of Covid and it changed athletics, teams were left with finding ways to connect the fans and athletes like they've never left. "Internet users are currently growing at an annual rate of 4.0 percent, equating to an average of more than half a million new users each day"(DATAREPORTAL). In 2019 the number of global users was 4.39 Billion people, today in 2022 that number is now 4.62 Billion people (DATAREPORTAL). That is an increase of 5.24% since 2019. These numbers indicate that society depended on social media to stay connected to the world.

Due to this increase of social media use, players were being constantly "watched" by fans, brands, sponsors, their team and league. "Trying to excel in one's sport while attempting to find stability in personal life, mental health, and expanding one's brand can become challenging when social media adds an element to be monitored" (Osbourne, 2021, p10). Just like a regular job, whatever you post your position is at risk based off of whatever you comment or post. Those posts can have a positive or negative affect on your play time or if you're a draftee, your draft position. "it can be assumed that social media has a "double-edged sword" effect. The conceptual metaphor illuminates the idea that social media can have both favorable and unfavorable outcomes." (Osbourne, 2021, p11). Favorable things like, gaining fans, or getting an athlete sponsors or brands to make a deal with them. Unfavorable things like brands or sponsors not making deals because of opinions they don't agree with or things posted that may be racist or sexist or even them seeing things like bad sportsmanship between the player and other players within the league. These negative things can affect an athlete mentaly, they could

think "its because im not good enough", "I need to work harder" and end up pushing too hard and hurting themselves. It could also affect their position in their league or team. They could lose play time or not make a deal for a new contract with a team. The positive things could hype up a player, help them drive to be greater, they can get bigger contracts with teams, make brand deals, and sponsor deals. It can also lead to bigger play time.

Athletes are under pressure to perform for their fans and as a possible future career. As fans we should want to try to keep a positive energy towards athletes. We never know what they are going through and how our actions through social media or even in person can affect their future in an instant. For some athletes playing in the big leagues is a big dream or goal of theirs and being negative to those athletes can affect that goal. Social media for athletes should be used to promote the athletes, be role models to younger athletes, and get them recognized for their participation in their sport and how they contributed to the team. The goal of the SMSA Athletics Instagram page that I manage for my Capstone project is to always spread positivity towards all sports and athletes even when they lose, find some way to make it positive and tell the team they tried their best and that their community is proud of them for working hard at a sport they love.

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