

10 Things the Athlete Would Like You to Know But May Never Tell You

<p><i>"If I don't play well or get to play at all, I'll let everyone down. People-pleasing and meeting others (and my own) expectations drives my life."</i></p>	<p>Pressure to please: Must please coaches, teammates, family, friends, professors, high school friends/teachers, media, and themselves. Belonging to the team demands being accepted by the team; being accepted by the team, in the average athletes mind, demands being one of the best performers on the team.</p>
<p><i>"How I feel about myself and my place in the world is directly tied to my performance. All of life is a stage and I am constantly on it."</i></p>	<p>Pressure to perform: Athletes constantly grapple with performing under pressure—mental, physical, emotional, spiritual, social. Their value and worth are tied to position, playing time, statistics, W/L record, 40-times, skills related to other players. They tend to carry this pressure into every area of life, including the spiritual area.</p>
<p><i>"Sports are my life, and if they are taken away, I'm not sure what I'd do. Behind the appearance of invincibility, I'm constantly dealing with a low-grade sense of fear."</i></p>	<p>Fear Factor: They exude confidence but mask a strong fear of failure; risk of injury; lack of approval from others; loss of position; loss of finances/scholarship; not measuring up; not considered the best by media/fans. They have a strong fear of failure and yet an uncanny belief in their own abilities. The fear comes from the reality that at any time they could be "finished": An injury, the whim of a coach, a teammate or the next "up and coming star" could replace them. But they have reached a high level because they believe in their own ability or they are out to prove that they have ability. Competitive life is a risk and played out in an arena beyond their control. They know it will one day end and that prospect scares them to death, especially as they near the end of their eligibility.</p>
<p><i>"Most people don't understand me and what really drives me, nor do they care about me apart from my sport."</i></p>	<p>Socially isolated/suspicious: Relationships limited to the "right" people. As is often the case with sub-cultures, they don't mix easily with others outside the athletic bubble. They look for relationships with people they can trust who understand the stress but also understand the glory of training and competition. Add the "celebrity" factor to the equation, and it becomes difficult to find someone who not only understands but also genuinely cares for them apart from their sport.</p>

<p><i>"I have exactly 22 minutes of unscheduled time each day."</i></p>	<p>Limited free time: Especially true at scholarship schools but increasingly true at every level of competition down to 12-year-old AAU leagues, the demands of participation controls their lives and how they spend their limited free time.</p>
<p><i>"I am important as an athlete, at least that's what everyone has always told me."</i></p>	<p>False pride: Because of the attention paid to athletes by surrounding culture, they probably think more highly of themselves than they ought. The world starts to revolve around them. Can border in some cases on narcissism.</p>
<p><i>"What else is there to life than practice and games and sports in general?"</i></p>	<p>Imbalanced life: Athletes can become so consumed with their sport that they neglect other important aspects of their lives, with little time to build a well-rounded life. The "dumb jock" stereotype is certainly not true across the board, but most athletes spend an inordinate amount of time playing, thinking, talking sports.</p>
<p><i>"I wish I had a friend who can talk about matters that go beneath the surface."</i></p>	<p>Soul Cravings: All the while surrounded with people, their friendships tend toward superficiality and fail to satisfy at the core. Who can understand the pressure? Who will care for them in spite of performance? Who can answer life's deeper questions? The default answer seems to be "no one". Athletes are craving someone to be interested in their life holistically. People have interest in them because of who they are or what they have achieved, but rarely can give spiritual, emotional direction.</p>
<p><i>"People are always giving me breaks and I've been able to avoid taking responsibility for many areas of my life."</i></p>	<p>Privileged and spoiled: Often enjoy special privileges; used to being catered to and coddled, pampered by those off the field/court. Players may no longer be thankful to have earned their position, but often arrive expecting their "rights".</p>
<p><i>"I need something to live for besides conference championships."</i></p>	<p>Challenge-oriented: They want something big enough to which they can give their all. Athletes are motivated by challenges. Though this motivation probably starts out as an unhealthy desire to perform/please, it nevertheless is an important part of their psychological make-up—give me something that gets me out of bed in the morning and demands my best.</p>