

## Stages of Injury Recovery

*“My body could stand the crutches, but my mind could not stand the sidelines.” Michael Jordan*

### THE INJURY

- Immediately after the injury, the range of reactions typically include, shock, denial, anger, sadness, confusion, flat (numb).
- Common thoughts:
  - *This is nothing.*
  - *How bad is this?*
  - *What is going on right now?*

### THE REALIZATION

- The athlete receives the diagnosis and severity of the injury. An initial time frame of the rehab process is provided. For a prognosis that is better than expected, athletes tend to experience relief and optimism. For a prognosis that is worse than expected, athletes tend to experience heightened distress that can take many different forms, such as symptoms of anxiety, depression, or panic.
- Common thoughts when information is worse than expected:
  - *All that offseason work done for nothing.*
  - *How am I going to get through this?*
  - *What will my teammates & coach think?*
  - *How will I support my teammates when I cannot compete?*

### THE INITIAL REHAB PHASE

- Athletes that notice gains and improvements early on experience periodic bursts of motivation and excitement.
- Athletes with injuries that notice no or minimal progress early on experience fleeting or lasting feelings of dread, intense distress, anger, become easily frustrated, and tend to isolate themselves more. It is common for athletes to display uncharacteristic behaviors and moods.
- Common thoughts when no or minimal progress is observed:
  - *What is the point?*
  - *These exercises are tedious and pointless.*
  - *What is wrong with me, why am I not making any progress*
  - *I feel alone. I do not feel like myself.*

### THE MIDDLE REHAB PHASE

- At this point, athletes know what to expect coming to rehab. Some athletes experience acceptance of the situation, have adjusted their lifestyle, and have learned their current limitations and are OK with it. Yet depending on how far out they are from returning to competition, some athletes can feel a sense of boredom, burned out, discouraged, and/or frustrated.

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- Common thoughts for athletes feeling far out from return to competition:
  - *I feel like I stopped making progress, yet working harder than ever.*
  - *Taking it slow and easy feels like the easy way out.*
  - *I just want to get back on the field.*
  - *I am getting closer, let's speed this up.*

### **THE LATE REHAB PHASE**

- Athletes begin to see the light at the end of the tunnel and experience a range of emotions including, excitement, new energy, and nerves and doubts about returning to competition.
- Rehab exercises begin to emulate game play movements and may notice being overly cautious about using the injured area.
- Common thoughts:
  - *Will my knee hold up?*
  - *Does this soreness/pain mean I re-injured it?*
  - *Alright I am back, let me start playing with my team.*

### **GIVEN THE CLEARANCE**

- Your AT and medical doctors have given you the clearance to return to practice. For some there is tremendous joy, excitement, and relief; determined to show the team the progress they have made. For others, the return to practice can be anxiety provoking and filled with self-doubt worried about re-injury and/or ability.
- Physical clearance to return may not always correlate with psychological readiness. Many athletes share this stage is the most difficult due to fear of injury and performance expectations. **At this stage, it is important to discuss 360 degree expectations from athlete, coaches, and AT and create new goals/timeline.**
- Common thoughts of self-doubt:
  - *Will my knee still hold up?*
  - *What if I lost a step?*
  - *I am never going to catch up to my teammates?*
  - *I hope coach does not think I am done.*

### **THE FULL GO!**

- After hours, days, weeks, months of sacrifice, pain, and determination, the athlete is back competing with their teammates. Though in many cases, internal reactions of anxiety linger. Often once athletes trust their injured area and repeatedly use it successfully, they are able to feel confident and competent.

