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## Lacrosse Coach Lindsey Kellar is Helping to Lead a New Mental Health Initiative

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WGLT Interview with Lindsey Kellar, September 29, 2020

Charlie Schlenker: Illinois Wesleyan University wants to remove the stigma that can come with mental health issues in athletics. Women's lacrosse coach Lindsey Kellar is leading a new mental wellness initiative in IWU athletics she tells Eric Stock she sees the struggles many student athletes face.

Lindsey Kellar: psychology and people along with athletics has always been really important to me um and just like experience with student athletes in the past too and my um interactions with student athletes and the struggles that they go through knowing that it's something that's very common regardless of what team you are on. There's a lot of that that goes into being a student athlete.

Eric Stock: If we could expand on that a little bit as a psychology teacher and a coach it's an interesting intersection. The mindset that exists in sports is that you have to show mental toughness you have to fight through adversity that's what separates champions from everyone else. So how do you, with your background, approach that mindset and does that contribute to where were at today.

Kellar: Oh absolutely. I think, you know, I think about when I played years and years ago mental health wasn't a conversation. Um a lot of times there was that stigma where like well if your struggling then it must not mean that you're not mentally tough enough and um there is that there still a good amount of bias but knowing the difference between mental health and mental toughness someone who struggles with mental health can still be mentally tough and still learn mental toughness strategies on the field. Um and I think that's where there's probably an unclear line for people of knowing what that difference is. Um people with mental health can still be pushed they can still overcome things um they just might have this extra obstacle that they've also gotta work on to overcome those things. So it's very interesting to try you know were in a position right now trying to reduce that stigma of knowing that you know mental health does not mean that your weak, mental health doesn't mean that you aren't able to do something. Um mental health means maybe you're more mentally tough because you do have the ability to overcome something else on top of the adversity you may hit in a game.

Stock: and do you sense that student athletes want to seek this kind of help but wonder if they will get labeled if you know even if it's not their coach but someone else they tell. It's a small athletic department people talk they're afraid that you know this may become an excuse to play someone else instead. So how do you overcome that stigma and to get them willing to come forward.

Kellar: Yeah I think there's to parts to that question. The first one is you asked you know is this something athletes want and need and the overwhelming majority is yes student athletes want this. Our student advisor committee has brought it up as something they really want to focus on for student athletes as well. We're going to be putting out a survey to see just how important to um you know what percentage of students are really looking for these resources and activities what are they looking for. Then that second part that stigma pc talked about also very important. What kind of designs to help with that piece is if a student athlete does not feel comfortable approaching their coach specifically for whatever reason like the ones you stated you know they're afraid they aren't going to play or their

coach may think that they aren't mentally tough for any of those reasons we've actually started what's called a care team here in the athletics department. And there's a variety you know a diverse amount of coaches and administrators, athletic trainers that make up care team. Student athletes or even teammates who are concerned about one of their teammates mental health they can go to any other these particular coaches or like I said administrators or trainers and they can approach those people and say hey I'm looking for some advice or I'm looking for some resources and that's a completely confidential team.

Stock: And this all was in the works pre-pandemic but how has Covid and the fact that the student athletes don't have that outlet impact your approach.

Kellar: There was a large number of student athletes that were struggling with mental health pre pandemic um now I can safely say probably 100% of the student athletes are struggling with that including coaching, including anyone on campus, anyone in the community right?

Schlenker: That is Illinois Wesleyan's women's Lacrosse coach Lindsey Kellar with Eric stock. The athletic department plans to offer resources for student athletes including guest speakers and webinars on mental wellness.