

ADRENALINE

A JR SUN DEVILS HOCKEY UPDATE



**JR SUN DEVILS HOCKEY ATHLETES
ENJOY KEY ADVANTAGE OF
MENTAL PERFORMANCE COACH**



Long recognized in professional and college-level athletics, Mental Performance Coaches are now becoming a secret weapon for progressive sports clubs like Jr. Sun Devils Hockey. That's why the Jr. Sun Devils Hockey organization is thrilled to announce the addition of James Nellis to the team as the programs first ever Mental Performance Coach.

Coach Nellis — who holds a Master's Degree in the Science of Professional Counselling, is completing his Certified Mental Performance Coach Designation, and has also played the game of hockey at the highest levels in his native country of Canada — will be focused on the mental health of Jr. Sun Devils Hockey players on and off the ice.

For Hockey Director and Coach-in-Chief Brad McCaughey, bringing on a Mental Performance Coach was a no-brainer. "I believe Coach Nellis' programming will improve our players use and understanding of mental preparation, effective goal setting, teamwork and a performance mindset. With his expertise, Jr Sun Devils Athletics will be able to provide a more complete student-athlete support program and education to our kids." commented McCaughey.

"I think it's a good, positive message", said Jr. Sun Devils Assistant Hockey Director Nick Naumenko "I've experienced firsthand the benefits of having a Mental Performance Coach involved with top level hockey programs. A Performance Coach can assist in many of the crucial areas above and beyond the X's and O's of the game. Most youth level coaches are not trained to recognize and support mental health issues facing young athletes today. I think the timing of this is perfect as we are all going through a trying season adapting to the additional challenges of COVID-19."

JR SUN DEVILS HOCKEY LEADS THE WAY

"Our partnership with Coach Nellis and his work with our student-athletes will allow them to maximize their abilities and reach the next level in and out of hockey."

- Coach McCaughey

SPORTS IN A TIME OF COVID

Whether you're an athlete or not, we've all been dealing with many of the same feelings during this worldwide pandemic: Sadness. Frustration. Boredom. Fatigue.

"With all the bad the pandemic has brought with it, it's given our organization a chance to reevaluate how we can best support our athletes, and we feel strongly the timing is right to take the next step as an elite organization and add a Mental Performance Coach to our staff," said Coach McCaughey.

"As we experience COVID-19, I think probably the most universal theme is that everyone, almost every day, goes through some sort of low-grade grief, and the reason is just that the emotion of sadness is always a response to loss," Nellis explained.

"Athletes, obviously they feel — and this is normal — that sport is the most important thing in their lives," says Coach Naumenko. "But under these circumstances, everyone realizes that it's maybe not the most important thing at the moment, and that is a bit of a shift from their normal mindset."

"The first part is just to respect the fact that those emotions we are all feeling, are not you coming apart. You're having what is a really natural response to a global pandemic," Coach Nellis said.

"That's a big deal, so of course there's going to be an emotional reaction to it. And once you give yourself permission to feel it, it loses its power over you."



MENTAL PERFORMANCE COACHING

Players struggle with mental health issues in and out of the games. Mental Performance coaching aims to help the parents, players and coaches identify these issues and provide solutions.

Coach Nellis might not physically be on the bench as the teams hit the ice this season, but that doesn't mean he won't be a key factor in how the teams are playing.

"My role is multi-faceted, I'm a support person for our hockey players, their parents, and our talented group of coaches. The role will start out modestly and grow with time as we determine where the needs are and how best to deliver support services" Nellis said.

"Without question mental health support for athletes is the future of sport. Our players can benefit from learning how to communicate more effectively, how to build resiliency, and how to cope with stress. Student athletes today deal with higher than expected levels of anxiety and depression which is a hurdle in healthy cognitive development, age and stage maturation, and of course their performance on the ice."



COACH NELLIS

Coach Nellis has a history of improving athlete performance as a game day coach.

As a member of the GCU Men's ACHA coaching staff, Coach Nellis helped launch the program, and in its second season helped the coaching staff win coach of the year in the Western region.

On the heels of that success Coach Nellis made the move to ASU. Coach Tait Green, Jr. Sun Devils 18U Coach and current ASU ACHA D1 head coach and hockey director recruited Coach Nellis to assist him in rebuilding the ASU club program. In their two seasons together ASU found themselves back in the National tournament before they were shut down due to COVID-19.

When it comes to building mental skills, Nellis has already been recognized and recruited by one of the nation's most elite treatment centers. He is currently on staff as a Primary Therapist at the Meadows Intensive Outpatient Center in North Scottsdale, the nation's premier treatment program for treating trauma, addiction, anxiety disorders, depression, eating disorders, and resilience training. He also launched New Thinking Institute in 2020 where his partner and their staff deliver on line life skills coaching classes to kids ages 11-18.

When you combine his high level student athlete and student coaching experience with his access to world class treatment techniques and experts, the result is a powerful benefit to the Jr. Sun Devils organization.

"I am very excited for the opportunity to work with the Jr. Sun Devils," Nellis said. "I think that they are at the forefront of providing their student athletes with a truly holistic support system and I could not be more proud to be a member of the Jr Sun Devils family."



MENTAL HEALTH

Beyond the mental endurance needed to be a top athlete, there is also the mental stress we all go through. At some point in their lives, 1 in 5 adults will face a mental health condition such as anxiety, depression, addiction.

Playing sports does not make athletes immune to mental health challenges. 33% of all students experience significant symptoms of depression, anxiety or other mental health conditions. Among that group, only 30% seek help. But of athletes with mental health conditions, only 10% do. Among professional athletes, data shows that up to 35% of elite athletes suffer from a mental health crisis which may manifest as stress, eating disorders, addiction, burnout, or depression and anxiety.

With pressures to perform in the game, as well as in the rest of their public lives, being an athlete can be incredibly challenging for a person's mental health. Student athletes have additional pressures to maintain, finding out who they are amongst ever changing teen social dynamics, as well as their classwork and grades on top of practice and games. When athletes get hurt, they receive time to heal, but what about when those injuries are invisible?

Often the reluctance to admit you need help is the biggest barrier to progress. Having a trusted Coach around who the students are comfortable with, who has the skills to identify when a student is in need of support, and who can help them work through the pressures of being a high level athlete, can make all the difference.

MENTAL PERFORMANCE COACHING

Mental Performance Coaches provide support in the following areas:


- Team dynamics
 - Among teammates
 - Relationships between players and coaches
 - Ability to work together
- Athletic and physical performance
- Behavior
- Academic performance

Benefits of Mental performance coaching:

- Improves overall student wellness.
- Reduces substance abuse and high-risk behaviors.
- Increases graduation rates and reduces negative impacts on grades due to mental health.
- Students who use counseling services often are retained longer, have higher GPAs, and graduate at higher rates.
- If intervention is received early, students are less likely to have significant drops in performance (academic and athletic).
- Proper assessment may assist getting proper academic accommodations if needed.
- Takes pressure off of administrators, coaches, and Sport Medicine staff to address issues they are not trained in and may be uncomfortable with.

Mental Performance Coaching Strengthens Athletic programs by:

- Improving performance
- Lowering risk of injury or sickness
- Reducing behavioral concerns that may impact team dynamics
- Helping prevent or moderate significant drops in performance
- Serving as an additional support for students in need



DID YOU KNOW?

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