Simone Biles Becomes an Advocate for Mental Health

The leader of Team USA's women gymnasts stresses how important it is to prioritize mental health.

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Simone Biles, who has the most world records and gold medals in gymnastics competition, is considered the greatest gymnast of all time. But Biles has also experienced psychological pressure trying to live up to the enormous expectations sports fans place on her and other athletes to win big at the Olympics, nbcnews.com reports.

This mental health challenge prompted Biles to pull out of a slew of events at the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. "Physically, I feel good," Biles told Hoda Kotb on the network's Today show after withdrawing from four key events. "Emotionally, that kind of varies on the time and moment. Coming here to the Olympics and being the head star of the Olympics isn't an easy feat. So we're just trying to take it one day at a time, and we'll see."

When Biles spoke to The Associated Press, she stressed that athletes are also human beings who must protect their minds and bodies rather than compete at all costs because that's what the world expects them to do.

The gymnast echoes sentiments expressed by a growing number of Olympic athletes, including Michael Phelps, who experienced depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts during his career as an Olympic swimmer. (He eventually sought professional help to overcome his mental health struggles.)

The four-time Olympian, a supporter of therapy for depression, told USA Today he could relate to Biles. "We carry a lot of things and a lot of weight on our shoulders. It's challenging, especially when we have the lights on us and all the expectations that are being thrown on top of us," Phelps said.

"We're human beings, nobody is perfect. It's OK to not be OK. It's OK to go through ups and downs and emotional roller coasters…" he continued. "I felt like I was carrying, as Simone [Biles] said, the weight of the world on my shoulders. It's a tough situation."

At press time, Biles was scheduled to compete in one event, the balance beam final, according to

nbcolympics.com.

To learn more about other world-class athletes' mental health journeys, read "Olympian Raven Saunders Discloses Her Battle With Depression" and "Tennis Star Naomi Osaka Prompts Talk About Racism and Mental Health."

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