Episode 4

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**A'Milliana:** Hello everyone. Welcome back to the Be Well Mu podcast with your co-host, A'Milliana and Yessenia. And today we have a special, special guest. Not only is she my lovely mentor, but she's also my boss, April. She could tell y'all more about herself.

**Aprile:** Hi everyone. Like Millie said, my name is April Preller. I'm the community health director here at Marymount. I'm also a Title IX deputy and part of why I'm on the call today is because I'm also an assistant women's basketball coach here at Marymount. This is my fourth season with the Saints. We've had a lot of success. I've really enjoyed it. Won a championship, hosted NCAA's, been a part of coaching staff of the year, player of the year

Tons of And prior to here I was a college athlete myself at Salisbury University for four years. So I have a lot of experience in different areas, but definitely in the basketball and college athletics world. [00:01:00]

**A'Milliana:** Yeah, so she knows she has the good juicy details and the ins and outs of the athletic community, and that's why we are here today to talk about the mental health within the athletic community.

Before we start, we do have a suggestion. So. At our events, we have a suggestion box for the BeWellMU podcast where students and faculty can write down topics or questions that they wanna hear on the platform. So today we have a question, and I'll actually direct this to Yessenia. So the suggestion box question is, how do you navigate finding the right therapist?

**Yessenia:** I think that's a great question to ask. It's one of the things that I really try to emphasize to anyone who comes through our office here is making sure that you're paying attention to how comfortable you feel with the counselor you're working with. Cause it's actually a big part of how well it can go for you.

You obviously want to feel like you trust the person across from you and that their personalities somewhat matches [00:02:00] yours. And that at the end of the day, like as counselors, we cannot change that. Like we are just who we are and some personalities mesh with us and some don't. And it's important to kind of respect that for yourself.

So that's one layer of it. Another layer of it is just kind of for yourself, thinking through what you're comfortable with and maybe what. You might not be comfortable with. So sometimes there are people who are like very clear on the fact that it just, I will not feel comfortable working with, let's say, like a male counselor.

And so if that's something that you think is important to you and that's something that you wanna be mindful of, then that's one way to kind of limit your search as you're looking for a therapist. I've also, Know that sometimes people wanna work with someone who shares some levels of identities with them.

So in particularly within the queer community, sometimes people feel more comfortable working with other. Queer individuals are part of the community. So they have that sense of like, you kind of [00:03:00] understand and know, and I don't have to explain things to you. And similarly we might wanna work with someone who's of our same like racial background, right?

So for example, being Latina, maybe I would want to work with another Latino therapist. Again, similar idea, like, so I don't have to explain things about my culture to them. There's already that baseline understanding. It's not necessarily always the case that you will work with another therapist who's not, does not share the same identity as you, and they won't be able to really relate to you at all or understand it's not gonna happen necessarily.

But sometimes we just want to kind of have that baseline. Feeling that, okay, this person, not just me in this way. So I kind of don't have to explain things. And for other people that doesn't matter, right? So I think it's just important to kind of take time and think through maybe if any of these things kind of resonate with you to keep them in mind as you're looking for a therapist.

And they're definitely like helpful platforms that kind of cater to some of these [00:04:00] things. So, Sites like inclusive therapists.com, or I know for Latinos there's Latinx therapy. So those are all like directories that specifically help you find providers of those shared identities. And so that's just another thing to kind of help you through that search.

But ultimately, after you set up that first appointment, get a feel for them. See if their personality's feeling comfortable to you. If you feel like at ease talking to them. Normally, I would say like give it like 1, 2, 3 appointments to kind of get a sense of the person. The first one always feels awkward, so that's gonna be there.

But if you are still kind of feeling that awkwardness or discomfort three sessions in, then it may be important for you to consider looking for someone else.

**A'Milliana:** And I think it was, it's a very important question to be answered via the fact that we're our students trying to navigate this world. And I love the fact that this is a topic that students and faculty want to talk about [00:05:00] and want to learn more about.

It shows that we do care about our mental wellbeing. and segueing into the conversation is really important for athletes to care about their mental wellbeing as well.

So the first question would be, has there been a mental health stigma within the athletic community in the past? And how does that compare or contrast to how topics surrounding mental health is in 2022?

**Aprile:** Yeah, great question Millie. You know, I think that's, obviously it's anecdotal from my experience, but I think just thinking of the big picture, I do think there were some stigmas, especially in the past over the, you know, decades ago. Definitely. So I think there was always this kind of rub, some dirt on it, toughness.

Resilient attitude and mentality that you thought came along with athletics and especially college athletics and even more so if you attach a scholarship to it for some division one athletes. But I do think more and more over the last, you know, five to 10 years, there's really been a big surge. Some [00:06:00] really influential and highly regarded athletes in both the professional realm and then also in college athletics have kind of come forward to shed light on it. And I really think has kind of stepped. The game in terms of coaches, community, parents, players, et cetera, really understanding how important it is and breaking away from some of that stigma. For example, the Hidden Opponent is a great organization that was started by a USC volleyball player who experienced this and you can see some of her TED Talks and cool stuff like that.

And now Marymount even has their own chapter of it here. So I think it's really kind of trickled its way through, through everywhere. I don't think the work's done, but it's a good start..

**A'Milliana:** Yeah, you actually, put up a great point. The organization that you just mentioned, I actually was gonna mention it, but it's a very, very nice organization.

I, I applaud them for even starting this organization because it was a very prevalent issue within the community. Leading into my next question, do you think athletic departments push, unrealistic expectations on [00:07:00] to student athletes and faculty, or do outside entities pressure students and faculty to live and be a certain type of way in order to be deemed successful?

**Aprile:** Yeah, I think, you know, I think a lot of it comes from like pop culture media and what you see in movies or TVs or, you know, anything like that. I'm sure Yessenia could add to what she thinks some of that has come from. I personally think you see this movie where there's, they're doing all these sprints and there's this heroic ending and that, you know, and it makes the team win or this, that, or the other.

I think it's honestly more of that, at least in my personal experience, I've worked for some great head coaches who really, really care about mental health. And I think a lot of coaches do care about that. I think a lot of athletic departments do care about it, but I think because of the pressure that, Social media, movies, film, et cetera, and society is placing on athletics that now student athletes don't come forward and they don't really wanna vocalize those [00:08:00] struggles to their coaches or to the athletic department. So because of these outside negative perceptions that the world has put on it, even if the athletic department is super supporting of it, they can only help if they know in some cases.

**Yessenia:** I mean, I think thinking about athletics I know that there's like that pressure to just do super well. And that comes like externally and internally. I think a lot of the times athletes have these Really high goals for themselves anyways, like these really big expectations. And so I wouldn't even say like it's necessarily just the external pressures that the coaches are placing on them or the team, or even the school, it's, it's sometimes internal as well.

And so that's a huge barrier, like when you have this idea of like, I want to accomplish this, and then you don't need it. And then feeling disappointed in yourself. And, or like just having a hard time like voicing when you're struggling because of those expectations you're setting on yourself.

So that can be a piece of it. But when you think [00:09:00] about it, like there's always that idea of like pushing through the pain, like you were saying earlier, April, like. Physically when you're injured and still kind of continuing to perform has been like this huge image that's been placed on just like in movies, but in, in real like athletic events, like in the Olympics that I think is always kind of operating in the back of our minds, right?

And so if you're not really giving. Attention and time to how your body is limited. Yeah. How are we gonna extend that to our own mental health? Right. Which is an extension of our health in general. So it is really hard, I think, just as a society in general for us to like recognize when we're having a hard time to request and seek out help. And even more so when you're working under all the pressures that we're kind of talking about right now.

**A'Milliana:** And I definitely agree with that and I totally agree with April that I think pop culture and the media really pushed this type of false narrative of having everything and working so hard to be successful.

And that's the only [00:10:00] avenue in being successful within that realm. I know for me at least when it came to the ncaa, they really tried to push the mental health stigma out of the community. And they perform studies and surveys and they found that 30% of athletes are extremely overwhelmed and 25% are mentally exhausted from all the responsibilities they think they need to have in order to be successful. So that leads me into my next question. What are some methods in ways that athletes and faculty members can alleviate the stress within those type of settings. Like be it the fact they are a hundred percent a student and a hundred percent athlete, and like they're also a hundred percent a coach, but also a hundred percent within their own type of career field. How can they maneuver through that?

**Yessenia:** Yeah. That's a really tough question, I mean, I think the one thing that comes to mind is [00:11:00] balance. . And because both of those aspects are really important to students, right? Like both being a student and an athlete, both are obviously priorities and demanding along their attention and time and energy, right?

And so finding that way of like balancing both of those things, but also kind. Also balancing other things as well is that it's always such. Big struggle for people to find that balance that works. Cause it's not like I can hand you a formula and say like, this is the amount of hours you should do for everything.

Everyone's so unique. But actually like paying attention to that idea of like, where is my balance at? Like, am I giving too much time to this one thing or am I not giving enough time to this other thing? Like actually starting to give yourself the chance to ask yourself that question. I think that does often happen. As college students it can be easy to kind of get pulled into the what's happening right now in front of you. So the idea of like balance seems like irrelevant, but it's actually incredibly relevant. Even in the [00:12:00] midst of vitals. Yeah. So that's something I always like, try to push forward.

**Aprile:** Yeah, I'd agree. I think, you know, going back to my like college student athlete days that was really hard. You talk about like even just the transition into college as a freshman. So you know, standard freshman comes to college and they're not an athlete that's a big transition in itself and then adding kind of the athlete piece.

And it really can be a lot because you have lift and you gotta do this with your team and you gotta go to, you know, practice and, and all those different things. And how are you gonna prepare your meals if you have practice at this time and, and all those things. And so, I do remember like definitely feeling overwhelmed, struggling to find that balance.

And because of that pop culture that we've talked about, that false narrative, I would think, you know, well I just have to work harder. I'm supposed to do all these things, so I just need to like work harder. I need to be the best at everything that I do, and I just need to do it. I need to suck it up.

And I think that was really hard to recognize, like what's working [00:13:00] hard and, and being a little resilient. And then what's too much like, Teetering over that edge and the balance was way outta whack. I think as a college athlete, it's really hard to figure out what that is because you wanna seem tough.

You wanna seem, you know, and be great and be elite and all those things. And so, you know, there's definitely a little bit of like, okay, you can work hard and grind it out. And college is meant to be difficult for everyone. But I think it's definitely hard when you're an athlete to recognize. Oh, this is too much. Like this is getting too hard and now I need help. But we don't recognize that as college athletes, so you don't often ask for help. So I think definitely doing a better job, recognizing the balance and being more conscious about what's a healthy. Balance and challenge and what's like, not a healthy challenge at all.

Think I struggled with that as a student athlete and even now as a coach, you know, I do, I have a few jobs here at Marymount and I find myself getting busy and things like that. And, you know, even now I, I'm better at it, but it's something I still have to like, [00:14:00] consciously think about. Like I can't do it all, all the time.

**A'Milliana:** You touched on something that I, I'm really deeply interested in. Cause I really haven. I don't, I know like a lot of people really don't think about the faculty aspect of this, and I wanted to see like what type of methods do you do now for as like a basketball coach, do you do in balancing your life and making sure that you're okay in every aspect.

**Aprile:** Yeah, well, I do plan a lot, so I'm a big planner Google calendars for this. I'm sure everybody uses that. But really before, like on Sundays, I'm looking at my calendar and I'm planning in like the hours that I'm spending to scout opponents that we're playing, the hours that I'm spending to do individual sessions with kids, the hours that I'm planning and I'm gonna be at practice.

So I can see how that's all gonna line up. And I really try to make use. My, my daytime hours, I'm really big on sleep. So one thing that's important to me is sleep. I really try to keep that at least six [00:15:00] hours a night. Like when I'm outta season, I keep it pretty good. But you know, in season, that's one area where I'll give a little, but I know when it's too much.

Like I'm not gonna give to where I'm like down to four hours of sleep because I know that I'm not gonna be functional the next day. I'm not gonna be at my best, and then my mental health will start deteriorating. So I think I know where I can give a little and. I have that cutoff point where like, I can't go past that.

And then I think just also I'm pretty confident and comfortable with our head coach, Maragrat White. I think it's really about the relationships that you build and being able to vocalize to them, you know, this is where I'm at, this is what I got done, and, and kind of working as a team. That's been really helpful.

And I think being able to vocalize what you can realistically do and, and manage within your time is a skill for me as a coach, but also as players, you know, what can you realistically give? Yeah. So I think being open to those conversations and asking for help when you need it. .

**A'Milliana:** What are some resources that specifically student athletes can take in trying to manage both being a student and being an athlete, but also [00:16:00] prioritizing their mental health within the crazy role that they're already in. So I wanted to get both of y'all's input on the resources.

**Yessenia:** Yeah. Well, I think I really wanna highlight some of the things that April just named for herself because like I think there's some ideas there that athletes can use for sure. And there's like two really important parts of it I wanna highlight. One is like having a plan. Like, I guess one way of naming them is like preventative, like supportive things that you can always make sure are happening for you.

So for a lot of people that's like sleep and eating and making sure those things are happening and occurring in the way that they need to happen for yourself. And for other people it's like making sure, like you get your workout in or you get your time with your family or pets or you know, like having an idea of like, what are those things that you need to sustain consistently to make sure you're functioning well.

And then there's the responsive side of things. So when things start to get a little chaotic or overwhelming, What can you turn to or [00:17:00] do that helps you? Right. So like this is where, well, US counselors like to call coping strategies, right? . So the things that help us cope when things get stressful or difficult.

So like for April, what you said was like cutting back, like when you realize you're getting to that point of feeling overwhelmed. For some people I might be like, okay, I'm realizing I'm really tired, so I need to make sure that I'm resting some way or another. For some people I might be like, okay, like I'm getting so stressed right now. I need to make sure I spend some time with my friends. So like I'm decompressing in some way. So knowing what those things are for yourself too, which look different for everyone. For some people the coping side might be like working out or taking walks or doing things like that. And not necessarily be like the more preventative things that are always in your schedule, but you kind of have to ask yourself what those things are and have them in mind so you can pull 'em out what you need, right?

Or. So you're making sure they're happening all the time for you, and everyone's a little different. So again, there's no like straight up formula I can give you, but you would kind of have to have that conversation with yourself about what those things are, [00:18:00] which is the other really important thing to kind of keep in mind in terms of like resources.

It's just knowing. Where to turn to for support. Right. And the answer isn't always counseling. And I know I say this all the time cause it isn't. But it can be very helpful for some people. And if it's not, Necessarily what you're looking for. Even kind of like identifying who are the people that you feel comfortable talking to and turning to when you're even just overwhelmed.

And so the, there are people that you might turn to just to vent, to let out all the frustration you're feeling. And there are people that you're gonna turn to for advice. And so even knowing and asking yourself like, what are you looking for again? And then identifying who those people are. Like some people know that they can turn to their parents to vent.

And then to their friends to kind of look for advice. Right? Or vice versa. Cuz there are some people who are really good at giving advice, but maybe you're not looking for advice in a certain moment. Right. So kind of knowing who your supports are and who you can turn to [00:19:00] for different types of help.

**Aprile:** I like a lot of what you said. I'm a big fan of walks. That's really my go-to. Milli knows she sees me trying to turn everything into a walking meeting, . But really, you know, that's a nice way where I can get a change of scenery. I can get some fresh air. I'm really big into exercise, obviously, you know, my background, but it really just helps me.

So if it's a meeting that I have with my colleague Brianna, for example, if I think there's nothing that we need to physically like have in front of us, like a computer or something. I'll suggest like, why don't we go for a walking meeting because now we can still accomplish what we need to. We can talk through what we need to talk about, but we can be moving.

It's really helpful for me and, and I think a lot of people enjoy that, so I always recommend that because it's. It's easy and you can kind of multitask a little so you can still feel productive yet also kind of doing what you need in that moment. So that's been really, really helpful for me. And once I figured that worked, I I try to do that a lot. And then the other thing is I wanted to highlight some of the, the great resources here at So student counseling offers mindful moments [00:20:00] where they come out to sports teams practices for five or 10 minutes to kind of check in and, and do some fun coping skills which is really great.

And I. Speaking for my team. They really enjoyed those sessions. So I think that was helpful. And it's a way to show how colleges are evolving all the way, you know, all different divisions, different countries or states, you know, really. I think it's kind of come a long way and people are trying to figure out how to help. So yeah, I'm really happy with that and what we've done here in

**Yessenia:** Marymount. Yeah, mindfulness is very, very useful and very accessible. As a concept. It's very tricky. But , there are a lot of lovely apps and I'm sure YouTube videos that will start kind of walking you through it, but it's, it's a really helpful thing to kind of try to adopt into your life.

It kind of hits at that idea that I was kind of mentioning earlier, which is , having those conversations with yourself. And what I mean by that is like just generally checking in. Yeah. In terms of like how you're doing. And that can be like on an emotional level, that can be on like an energy level, that can be on like a [00:21:00] physical level.

So if you're like, The minimum, like experiencing tension or pain somewhere in your body, being mindful and noticing that and then asking yourself, okay, what can I do to tend to this? Right? And similarly on all the other layers I just talked about, energy or emotions. So mindfulness kind of hits at that cuz it is this practice like just trying to slow down momentarily, not for like an hour or anything like that.

Just like for a few seconds to be more attentive to your surroundings and to yourself. So just kind of like hone in on the present moment. And in doing so, we can kind of like recenter ourselves and feel more like grounded and kind of continue with whatever we need to do. But really just taking that idea of like, let me just check in and see how I'm doing right now and how I can tend to whatever might be showing up that feels uncomfortable in this moment.

**Aprile:** Yeah, I love that. I actually. Just reflecting on what you're saying, when I was a college athlete, I remember I used to get quite stressed or get a little [00:22:00] anxiety, especially heading into a game and, and wanting to perform that pressure that I innately put on myself, but also like all the other things we talked about, but.

You know, I remember talking to my strength coach about it, and something he told me to do to just give it a try was when I was feeling really stressed out or about to check into a game or, you know, whatever it was about to get on the floor to find something that, you know, worked for me to like calm.

So one of the things I did is we were the Salisbury seagulls, and so across our jersey said Salisbury across the scoreboard, I think said Seagul. You know, those sorts of things. And I would intentionally like, And like spell it out loud in my head and just like, take a moment, breathe and read it. And then I really felt like I started performing better and it had nothing to do with like my scale. I was the same player I was 30 seconds prior. But I do think when I started to do that, or when I felt stressed in a game, I would like slow down and, and just find it, read it, remind myself like my team, you know, and, and they're here for me. And, and this is our team.

It's not just, you [00:23:00] know, me. Out there I think that really helped a lot and in a way, I guess was kind of being mindful. I was just taking a moment and, and that worked for me. So I didn't know it at the time, but I think I was doing it.

**Yessenia:** A basic grounding skill you were using?

**A'Milliana:** I definitely think like those little moments and those little things really help a person. They're really bigger than what it actually is, and I find it very important. I even do grounding techniques all the time when I'm getting anxious for anything, be it a student or be extracurriculars.

But I thank April so much for coming in and you know, Giving everything about the athletic community, both in the student perspective and the faculty perspective. I'll always thank Yessenia for co-hosting and for guiding me and the conversation with all her expertise.

The next game, they will be playing at April's Al Mater on Saturday, Saturday, December 10th at 12:00 PM They will be having live stats online and, [00:24:00] you know, I think. Everybody should come out. You know, it's the girls' basketball team, so we always have to support. So that is it for now. Thank you again for listening and you can see the full transcript on Marymount . edu.

Bye.