

SUPPORT KEY TO RECOVERY FROM INJURY

Open communication, mental strength also crucial in helping athletes overcome trauma

Melvyn Teoh

Injuries may be part and parcel of an athlete's life, but they can take a huge mental and emotional toll.

Having a strong support group and team to get through these tough times is key, said national foil fencer Amita Berthier, who recently competed at the Paris Olympics and is recovering from a knee injury.

The 23-year-old was speaking on the sidelines of the Singapore Sport and Performance X Sing-Health Duke-NUS Sport and Exercise Medicine Conference, which is being held at the Singapore Sports Hub from Nov 6 to 8. Among the

topics discussed at the event are managing sports injuries and the role of people in creating high-performance environments.

Two-time Olympian Berthier, who was part of a panel discussion on Nov 6, said: "Coming back from injury is definitely very mentally taxing. I think being able to be vulnerable with the people around your support group, sport psychologists, and not being shy about getting help is really crucial in the athlete's development, especially at a high level."

Joining Berthier on the panel were Mick Massey, coach of Singapore's seven-gold Paralympic swimmer Yip Pin Xiu, Singapore badminton doubles coach Paulus

Firman, and Dr Harry Lim, senior sport psychologist from the Singapore Sport Institute.

Noting that Yip had a wrist fracture in October 2023 which put her out of action for six to eight weeks, Massey stressed the importance of mental strength and openness between the athlete and her support team.

He said: "Pin Xiu is a world-class athlete with a world-class programme and communication is one of the cornerstones of that programme."

"It was obviously playing on her mind, she's an S2 athlete, the level of disability is high. And when you're out of the pool for a considerable amount of time and you're not training, it isn't like a normal athlete where they can get back in and then get back to where they were. But she's very experienced, knows what she wants and is not



Singapore's two-time Olympic foil fencer Amita Berthier says "coming back from injury is definitely very mentally taxing". ST PHOTO: AZMI ATHNI

afraid to say, 'this isn't right'.

"And I think that the psychological side of that rehabilitation was improved and triggered by the fact that she had confidence in the people around her."

Dr Sophia Papamichalopoulos, a former Olympic alpine skier who was a keynote speaker at the conference, also believes that mental health training is important for athletes who are recovering from injuries.

The Cypriot doctor, who is a member of the World Sailing Medical Commission, said: "We're seeing mental health and well-being as a great focus across all sports, especially in the recovery process."

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MIND OVER MATTER

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DR SOPHIA PAPAMICHALOPOULOS, a former Olympic alpine skier who is a member of the World Sailing Medical Commission.

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Berthier added: "There is always a fear (of getting injured) and I am more cautious, but that's why I try to work on areas surrounding my injured area to strengthen the muscles around it. Practising good habits and constant rehab is crucial to making sure the injuries don't resurface in the future."

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