

## PROTECTING YOUR POSSIBILITIES PODCAST WITH LUKE FEDLAM

### Episode 30: Removing the Stigma: The Importance of Mental Health | March 4, 2021

*The following is a transcription of the audio podcast recording. It is largely accurate but in some cases it is incomplete or inaccurate due to inaudible passages or transcription errors.*

**Luke:** I'm sports attorney Luke Fedlam, and welcome to the Protecting Your Possibilities podcast. Each conversation we focus on sharing information and having conversations around how athletes can best educate and protect themselves or their life outside of their sports.

Thank you so much for tuning in to the protecting your possibilities podcast. I'm your host, Luke Fedlam. I'm always excited. As , I think I kick off every podcast and I'm so excited. I'm so excited to host this person or talk about this topic. But let me tell you right now, I am very excited to have with me a guest who's just one of my guys. My dude, Dr. Victor Kidd. Vic, what's up, man?

**Dr. Kidd:** What's going on, man? Thanks for having me on, man. It's always good to see you,

**Luke:** Absolutely, man. So glad that you could join us in the Protecting Possibilities Podcast. This podcast is is always about how we protect athletes. And I'll tell you, what Dr. Kidd is doing is really working to protect athletes. So let me just start by giving y'all some background on my guy, Dr. Kidd. Man, I love it. I just love to say that man, congratulations on that for sure. So he's a sports mental health consultant, a sports psychotherapist, he does work with the NBA on some of their initiatives. But I also got to say he also has launched and is the owner of Kidd Wellness Solutions and Consulting, I want to make sure I say that again. So everybody gets it. So you could check him out as Kidd Wellness Solutions and Consulting where he has a virtual therapy practice. As we all know, in these COVID times virtual makes things so much easier to be in that safe space of your own home or wherever it is that you find solace and peace. And he's also a sport mental health consultant. So that's a mouthful, that's a lot big man. Tell, tell us more like what is it that you actually do?

**Dr. Kidd:** Oh, man, it is it is a lot, it's one of those deals where you just get opportunities and life just kind of craps out these really niche areas for you. And you just kind of it's a combination of all those things. But at the basis of it, I'm a psychotherapist, and I've been a clinical psychotherapist for about seven years now, after graduating from the University. And so I started out working in substance abuse, and clinical diagnosis, something that's called a cold current diagnosis. And so since then, I've been focusing on trauma as a therapist and things like that. And I went back to school for a PhD in sport and entertainment management. So that's where the sport integration comes where I was focusing on transition and some of the traumatic transitions that athletes face as they transition out of sport, and also some athletic identity things and stuff like that. But at the end of it, when you get a PhD in sport and entertainment management, the real big thing is, how does your work impact sport managers and sport organizations. And so I've been able to leverage those opportunities, where I still am a psychotherapist working with athletes and private practice and doing some offshoot of consultant with different member institutions of the NCAA. But I also am able to use my skill set

now, in regards to me being a therapist, and also my doctoral training to impact spaces in sport organizations, such as the NBA, other organizations that I've worked with. So it was really, really cool. I didn't imagine, when you get a Master's of clinical social work, it's kind of like this fine line, like you got to be a direct practice person, or more like a macro level practitioner. And I never thought that both worlds will merge in my career the way that they have so quickly. So it's just been really good man. So that the online virtual practice popped off in December, which I'm really proud of it.

**Luke:** Congratulations.

**Dr. Kidd:** And it is so important when we think about, I think this is Social Work month, and I think is Women's History Month as well. I've been able to recruit, not recruit, I sound like a coach, but I've been able to start to work with in my private I have about 16 clients now. And I've been working with black men and black women, which is really important in my private practice. And I have a few athletes that I work with, as well, former one, the basketball players, pro basketball players are trying to transition out of sport, and a few amateur athletes that are trying to get to the next level man. So it's all come together. And it's been really beautiful management.

**Luke:** No, that's great. That's great. Well, congratulations on your successes, I want to dive into it a little bit because, you said the term, psycho therapist. Sometimes that can be a scary term, right? Like, what do I need that for? Like what's going on? So it's not you make what you do, especially in the sports space, right? Because when we think about it, we're dealing with athletes that are performing at the highest level, right? And so whether that's at the college level, whether that's it NBA or professional sports, how do you bring that, what could be a scary, kind of technical space, where we already know that there's this kind of, it's a scary thing to say I need help or something's just not right mentally, like how do you make that real to athletes and help them understand like, sometimes , you need that for your overall well-being your overall health. But what how do you make that real?

**Dr. Kidd:** I think the biggest thing that really helped me is I am a former Division Two linebacker, played at Virginia State. And I am a former high school defensive coordinator. So I have the coach element as well. I think the big thing is just really making it safe. So obviously, I'm not going in the session saying, Yeah, I'm a psychotherapist. And we're going to talk about, all these coping strategies and things like that, and depression and anxiety, I put it in a way that it encourages a safe space for discussion and how I base it is because we're working with athletes, all of us as athletes, we want to do something that's going to make us more efficient, right? Even when you want coders as a football player, you're trying to get from point A to point B in the most efficient way, right. And so what I try to leverage with my, with my athletes to just let them know that this is just another part of you becoming more efficient, right, and how becoming more efficient from an emotional mental standpoint, actually leads to better output on the court or field of play. And so it's really important, when I situated that way, is not you remove that stigma, right? It's not as overbearing, right. And I like to talk to them about just having a conversation, I spent first six weeks really just building rapport, some people may say, oh, wow, he's built a rapport for six weeks. But when you think about a population that is so skeptical, because everybody gets a lot more premier athletes, everybody wants something from right. And so when you have a population that is really skeptical, it's really important that you create that safe space, use terminology that they will understand. And use this term that I learned early on, in my master's level training, meet the client where they're at. And so meeting the client, where they're at is really important. And a lot of times what we see is that there's some inconsistency between the messenger and being a practitioner and the client. And when you

have that incongruency it's going to be some barriers of communication. I can't tell you how many times I've had people say, Oh, well, I had another therapist, but we just didn't communicate well. Right. And, and that speaks to kind of the dialectical process of therapy. But at the crux of it, you don't have to have anything wrong with you, per se, right? I think it's this association is something wrong or something. So therefore I need to be here a lot of times is really to get better, right? When we look at ourselves as businesses, right? I got a brand and things like that you want your brand if you want, see how your books can be different, right? You're gonna go hire an accountant, if you're gonna see how you can get more notoriety, you're going to hire public, right? Publicist, right. And so what you want to get better in regards to process and different things emotionally. And from a mental standpoint, a therapist is that professional and so yeah, so that's how I really break it down to them. The big key is safe space, creating a safe space. I tell my clients, if you want to come in here and custom first one session, you could do that if you want to come here and cry, one session, you can do that. If you want it whatever you want. It has to be client driven. Right. And so that's really important.

**Luke:** No, that's, that's great. I think I really relate to what you're saying, because it's the same thing on the legal side. Right, I could talk about all the technical terms that are in this agreement or contract that's being put in front of you and speak about indemnification and all these different terms and things that that the client knows nothing about. But what good is that? Do you have to like, as you mentioned, you've got to meet the client, the individual where they are. So if you really want to affect change right now may think that is the crux of it. So I got to ask you, over the past 12 months, obviously, the world has been dealing with COVID we all have found ourselves being forced into changing our life routines and athletes are no different, right? Whether it's performing in a bubble, whether it's going through testing and every single day, all the things that go into it and , college athletes in particular it's basketball season now and you've got, some basketball players who haven't seen their parents write their support system in person for months as a performance. What are some of the things that you've seen and how, what are some things that you're doing to kind of help folks help athletes kind of cope through uncertain and challenging times?

**Dr. Kidd:** You know, the last day was really I was talking to Arizona state's global sport Institute and Kenneth Shropshire about this back in January. COVID for a lot of athletes has just exacerbated pre-existing situations, right? And so the big challenge with COVID is that, it's not necessarily what I'm saying. It's not necessarily playing. Right, but it's more so the backdrop around what's going on in their lives. Right. So I have a client, he's a big time high school basketball player and his whole family got COVID. Right. So really impacted, he had to be quarantined from his family, they had to really try to find different ways for him to get to his practices and things like that, because I think the school is it playing kind of like an alpha league, I don't think the league is actually playing, but they plan like just to keep the kids in good shape. And so those are things that you have, where his father was significantly impacted health wise, right. So when we think about, just like taking it out into space or sport, right, those things can be really triggering to take away your focus on the court. Or if you plan, football or soccer webcast would be your field of play. To wake up and think, wow, my father was in good health. On Monday, Friday, he was diagnosed with COVID. And then the following Monday, he's on an air tank. Those different things really impact. It's also, one thing that I talked about how this COVID has kind of changed. The backdrop is that, for COVID, student athletes with particularly on the collegiate level, were doing certain things that they had to do, but they also had outlet. Now, the hyper vigilance around having interaction with people outside of that bubble, has been so heightened that you could potentially see anxiety symptoms, right on the decision making, like if I need to, if I want to do this, or if I want to do that, they really can't do it.

And then early on, I know, some college campuses are starting to have students trickle back in, but before that, it was just athletes. And so I'm not really having that social stimulation. And that's impacted us all as a society, right? We're not having that social stimulation has impacted us from an emotional mental health standpoint, something I've been having my athletes do is just really meet the coping strategies that they select things that they typically do, right. So diving a little bit more into the video games, diving a little bit more into some music, diving into a little bit more of things that are right at their disposal. A lot of times I think when we think about coping strategies and coping mechanisms, I think as therapists, we try to get a little too impractical with what we place on to the client. So if the client doesn't read, right, we may say, Well, why don't you read, 30 books, right, if the client isn't necessarily into journaling, we said, well, quick coping mechanisms have a daily journal, right.

But these days, one, particularly not the culturally responsive, this might not be something that they've done in their lives, right. Or it could be a group of what their interests are. And so when we talk about developing coping mechanisms, and self-care, game plans and things of that nature, these things have to be, they have to have some familiarity. And that's what I've been trying to work with my athletes on, is just making sure that when we talk about coping mechanisms, and how to get through certain situations, that these things are easily accessible, and they fit who you are, from a personality standpoint, some of the things that I've been trying to try to work with him on is taking this time to breathe, right? I think when the pandemic first hit, it was a lot of a lot of what I call productivity shaming, oh, if you're not grinding hard enough, during the pandemic, then I don't know what's going on. I don't know how you when you're going to get it, all that type of messaging. And we grow up in the digital age where everyone's scrolling down and reads their feeds. And that can be very triggering, in regards to depression and anxiety, and they're having us operate very sporadically, believe it or not, a lot of people judge and gauge who they are based on the social media, and so you can easily get into a trap with that, and impacting your emotional mental well-being. So take some time to breathe, take some time to understand that we are still in a pandemic. And I think as a society, what we did was we just switched over to and just assume like everyone to go virtual, without really considering the new monsters and how it can impact us and look and be honest with you. With these other backup really start opening back up, we're gonna go through a different difficult challenge thing, just to be clear, assume that the kids have been home for two years. They just want to be able to integrate back into a school system or school structure just like that. And even for the American workplace, just as soon as somebody is going to transition back into their cubicle from working at home for two years. It's just going to be a tall order.

**Luke:** Yeah, absolutely. I think some significant challenges, I think, lie ahead. I'm always ever the optimist. And I try to look at it to say, Well, I hope that we can be effective in thinking about some of the things that were successful that we successfully navigated to like these virtual conversations and things like that. We find ways to make sure that we don't just try to flip the switch back to our old normal, but realize and recognize that there's a new normal, and that with that new normal will come, as you mentioned, some of those new challenges as well. So I want to ask a little bit kind of broader question. You touched on it before, I want to try to really put a hammer on a nail around performance. And that, having kind of just that, that mental wellness, having discussions with someone like yourself, that it really goes back to efficiency and getting better. Like, if you had to kind of articulate it, why is it so important for athletes to recognize to move beyond the stigma and to just recognize the importance of mental health and well-being the importance of being able to talk with someone like, when we think about protecting athletes, why do they need to understand and why do we all whether we're athletes or people around athletes, why do we play a role? Or why is it so important that we play a role in helping to remove that stigma for athletes?

Dr. Kidd: Some of my colleagues when I was telling them, I was interested in working with athletes, they will say, well, why are they so different? I started making comments that athletes were vulnerable population, which is a term for most health professionals, and most people in public health, when they identify a population that may have some unique challenges or underserved population. So what we put all the superstar athletes up since 9-10, it's a young kid that lives in my neighborhood, he's out here, in his helmet, throwing a rock, it looked like he gonna project the run a four-three, when he was 14 years old. And even myself, I go out and say, yeah, man, you get ready for the season, he like really excited, yeah I'm getting ready, I'm gonna kill these boys this year.

Socially, we kind of all play a role in facilitating this silly athletic identity, or this celebrity, right? Whether we consciously engage in it, or it's kind of subconsciously engaged in it. And what we pump these individuals up like this, and when we lift them up and put them on this pedestal, we have a due diligence to also support them while they're on that pedestal. Right. And so why understanding the importance of having individuals pour into them from an emotional and mental standpoint, is even more important because of that, right, because of the role that they play in our society. I mean, you see just over the last few years, Colin Kaepernick to now, athletics has been one of the most polarizing things and so we usually think that sport is a microcosm, but it's actually a reflection of our society. So it's really, really important.

These are challenges that they're still going to have right that they still need to be supported from an emotional and mental standpoint. Just being an athlete just is like a cherry on top. But they're still gonna have instances of depression, instances of anxiety, challenges, we're trying to figure out, like discovery, I have a few clients that are between 21 and 28. And they're just on this seesaw of I want to do this, I want to do that. I feel lost. I feel disoriented. And these are just individuals that are just regular people in our society, regular young people. So when you think about athletes, putting that on top, because they have to have to pour so much into what they do. Right? It makes it even more difficult. So when we think about performance, I never went to my coach and said, I need help trying to get ready for camp, I need help trying to increase my deadlift. I knew that was something on my squad. I knew that was something that I had to do, to start, to play to keep my scholarship. And it was something that I was really well versed with. Now, the other stuff, as far as misogyny, right. As far as other different things that I was going to dealing with as a football player, those different things, I really could have used some support because the locker room doesn't necessarily foster a healthy emotional environment.

**Luke:** Right.

**Dr. Kidd:** So when we think about being more efficient, right, I'll give you an example. I've worked with a basketball player, he had real bad performance anxiety come to find out his parents were really having some infidelity. It was a very unsafe space in the household. and once I started doing some family work with the basketball player with my client, forgiving his parents for their behavior for them to communicate, improving their communication, and improving love and improving all these other different things that were going to make the household safe space again, that next year, performance anxiety went away. He was killing it was going to tournaments, he was going to open gyms he was telling me "man, I'm playing free," started averaging 20 and 11. And it was kind of a weird switch for him. And what I had to teach him was he thought he necessarily needed to help with performance, I need to get better with performing. But it's your outside world that it really needs to be addressed. Because this is the difference. This is the difference. When I was coming up, I'm 31 years old, just 31 years old.

So I'm maybe 16 years old or 17 years older than this particular client. When I was coming up, social media was just coming up. But sport was literally an outlet. I put the phone in my locker, I'm going out, I'm at practice, I'm at the gamble of case might be on that film, or whatever the case may be. Today's athletes, particularly our amateur athletes, they go to the gym, go back and get a phone. And then they see somebody tweeting about oh, so-and-so didn't perform well like this open gym. So-and-so is lower this week, because it has class because he has to perform. These things can be really, really, really, really, really triggering, really have a very significant impact.

So I say that to say that sport is no longer a buffer or protective factor, like we think it is the outside noise that has really, that said that there's been a real change. We talked about somebody that we know where they made a decision. And then it's like, instantaneously, it's all over the news, right? It's all over the news, even just small things from a transfer to play a time. These things even impact our amateur athletes at the high school level. And so playing us a sport to get away from the noise is that necessarily as pure as we as it once was,

**Luke:** I hear you, I hear you. Listen, man, you are dropping gems out here for everybody. Thank you so much. I got one last question that I got to get you out. So let me just ask you this. And give me your response as succinctly as you can man, Virginia State University for undergrad, Howard University for your masters. Now, you got a PhD in South Carolina, but to HBCUs. Tell me and tell our listeners the importance of our historically black colleges and universities in society today.

**Dr. Kidd:** Oh, man, it's so important. I'm so grateful to Virginia State University because Virginia State allowed me to kind of kind of flounder and find my way and give me that that positive reinforcement sometimes give me a little kicking my butt to where I needed to be. So I'm so forever grateful to my professors there because they gave me tough love. But they did. They gave me love that I was familiar with. My professors reminded me of the matriarchs in my family, and also the men there was really important for someone who necessarily didn't have his biological father like really, really involved. Howard University, I was so grateful to them, they saw the potential I had as a student, and really held me accountable as a young black man and a young black man practitioner. If you want culturally enriching experiences, for someone that looks like myself and look like you, Luke, the HBCU experience is the way to go. And it is the key to cultivating our future, believe it or not, as a former professor of at Benedict College of Columbia, South Carolina, so many times that I've seen people say, Oh, man, I wish I went to HBCU for my students that were in South Carolina, because it gives us a space to learn and to figure things out without having to consider any social any loss socially, right that we will be at a disadvantage socially. So HBCUs is love, shout out to all HBCUs across the spectrum, even the smaller HBCUs they don't necessarily get enough notoriety shout out to Claflin University down here in South Carolina. They are doing some really good work South Carolina State. And even Johnson C. Smith, they do some good things. They got the e-sport thing going shout out to all those institutions, but they are the future they are a future. Believe it or not.

**Luke:** Yeah, absolutely. Well, listen, thank you so much, ladies and gentlemen. Dr. Victor Kidd, sports mental health consultant, sports psychotherapist, all around great dude, Vic. Man, thank you so much for joining us today.

**Dr. Kidd:** For sure for sure, Luke. Thanks, man. I appreciate it.

Unknown Speaker 24:19

**Luke:** Absolutely. Thank you again for tuning in to the protecting your possibilities podcast. If you found value in today's episode in our past episodes, please do rank it. Share with your colleagues with your friends with your teammates. Subscribe. So did you get our content every single week protecting your possibilities? Thanks so much for tuning in. And we'll talk again real soon.

Disclaimer: Porter Wright Morris & Arthur LLP offers this content for informational purposes only, as a service for our clients and friends. The content of this publication is not intended as legal advice for any purpose, and you should not consider it as such. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the firm as to any particular matter, or those of its clients, please consult an attorney for specific advice regarding your particular situation.