

DeMar DeRozan, Kevin Love: Here's What They Revealed About Mental Health

He has been a college star at UCLA, an All-Star, an NBA Champion with the Cleveland Cavaliers, and an Olympic Gold Medalist. And for Pete's sake, his last name is "Love." (Didn't the Beatles sing "All You Need is Love"?) So why would NBA power forward Kevin Love have a panic attack in an early regular season game against the Atlanta Hawks, who last won the NBA Championship before the Beatles even appeared?

Similarly, DeMar DeRozan has been a four-time All Star, won a Gold Medal with Team USA at the 2016 Rio Olympics, and plays guard for the Toronto Raptors, which finished with the best regular season record in the Eastern Conference. Plus, his play has inspired someone to say on Reddit "The More DeMar Shoots, The More Toronto Wins." He's a star and famous and his name can be a pun. Why, then, could he suffer from anxiety and depression?

The answer is both Love and DeRozan are humans, not robots. And even though they are exceptionally tall and athletic humans, they are susceptible to the same feelings and challenges that affect many, many humans.



DeMar DeRozan #10 of the Toronto Raptors tries to get a shot off over Ty Lawson #4 of the Washington Wizards in Game Two of the Eastern Conference First Round in the 2018 NBA Play-offs. (Photo by Claus Andersen/Getty Images)

[Last month, in the *Players Tribune*](#), Love described his panic attack during the second half of a game against the Atlanta Hawks on November 5, 2017. The 29-year old Love had been stressed about family issues and not sleeping well leading up to the 10th game of the season. The Cavaliers also weren't off to the best start to the season with 4 wins and 5 losses. He said that he felt off and easily winded during the first half of the game, making just one basket and two free throws (which, by the way, would be considered amazing for most people in the world not in the NBA.)

Kevin Love discusses his decision to seek help after suffering from a panic attack. (0:54)

Then in the third quarter of the game, he became unusually out of breath, feeling like his mouth was chalky, his heart was racing faster than usual, and his brain was trying to climb out of his head. When he couldn't physically re-enter the game after a time-out, he ran back into the locker room, became disoriented, and eventually checked into the Cleveland Clinic.

In his essay, Love further described how he was reluctant to reveal that he had had a panic attack or see a therapist. But once he began seeing the therapist, he was pleasantly surprised.

Meanwhile, in February, the 28-year old DeRozan first revealed his mental health challenges in a statement that was a bit shorter than Love's essay. It was a Tweet:

This depression get the best of me...

– DeMar DeRozan (@DeMar_DeRozan) [February 17, 2018](#)

After receiving plenty of sympathetic responses from other players and fans (see, people can be nice on Twitter), he then elaborated [during an interview with Doug Smith for the Toronto Star](#), saying:

I always have various nights. I've always been like that since I was young, but I think that's where my demeanour comes from. I'm so quiet, if you don't know me. I stay standoffish in a sense, in my own personal space, to be able to cope with whatever it is you've got to cope with.

He continued by saying:

My mom always told me: Never make fun of anybody because you never know what that person is going through. Ever since I was a kid, I never did. I never did. I don't care what shape, form, ethnicity, nothing. I treat everybody the same. You never know.

Unfortunately, Love, DeRozan, and many, many other people have an unnecessary and frankly very stupid opponent: stigma. Stigma and the fear of being stigmatized are what prevent numerous people from openly discussing mental health issues and getting help when needed. These two NBA stars could probably (if they wanted to do so) kick the butts of many people who do the stigmatizing. Thus, having Love and DeRozan speak openly about their struggles could really help others defeat this silly opponent.

To help raise awareness and fight stigma, Love and DeRozan have filmed the following public service announcement for Mental Health Awareness Month, which begins tomorrow (May 1):

This PSA will run on TNT, ABC, ESPN and NBA TV throughout the NBA Playoffs and Finals.

Stigma also means that many cases of anxiety and depression are not reported so that any available statistics probably underestimate the number of people who struggle with these challenges. [According to the National Institute of Mental Health](#), in the U.S. in 2016, an estimated 16.2 million adults (or 6.7% of all adults) in the United States had at least one

major depressive episode. [The Anxiety and Depression Association of America](#) indicates that anxiety disorders affect approximately 40 million adults (or 18.1% of adults) in the United States. Thus, people facing these challenges are far from alone, even though they may sometimes feel that way.

Why does stigma exist? One reason is insecurity. People like to make fun of others to make themselves feel better, which is a bit like throwing pies at other people when you are covered in baked goods. A second reason is ignorance. Many people fear and repel what they don't understand. A third reason is politics and how mental health has been misused in political battles. Some political sharks make mental health claims about their competitors in attempts to discredit them, which only furthers the negative connotations of mental health issues.

To offer players opportunities to discuss and address their mental health challenges, [the NBA will soon name a Director of Mental Health and Wellness](#), who will run an independent mental wellness program for players. Through a NBA new partnership with Headspace, the NBA is also providing free mindfulness training for all league and team employees and new mental wellness programming for youth through the Jr. NBA and NBA FIT programs. Additionally, the NBA will be [launching a web site](#) that will include a variety of mental wellness resources for the general public.

The most courageous people are the ones who can be real about themselves and their struggles. Often, the people you worry most about are the ones who tell you that everything in their lives are perfect or the best, because that is not reality. That is just carefully manicured images. Maintaining such images can be like taping a lid on to a boiling pot or keeping the shields up constantly on the U.S.S. Enterprise (for you

fellow science fiction geeks out there). At some point, you either run out of energy or explode.

Therefore, what Love and DeRozan revealed about their mental health actually in fact revealed their mental strength. It showed that they had the self-awareness and confidence to openly discuss and address their struggles. And they are trying to show “Love” towards others who may be suffering silently. Because the more DeMar talks about these issues, the more people win over stigma.

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