

Staring at the people on the screen, she could not help but feel dissatisfied with her own. The techniques executed on the screen were crisp and clean, their kicks higher than the sky, and it looked as if confidence was theirs. As soon as the round had ended, their coach turned off the television. Blinking back to reality, the rest of the team grumbled as they retreated to their positions, ready to practice again. After another hour of training, she sat on the worn-out mats, mentally preparing herself to hear her coach's speech, once again telling the team about how bad their poomsae was. That their kicks were not high enough, that he couldn't hear their uniform snap with each movement. Sammie's kicks were not high, and there was no snap with each movement because confidence was not hers. An hour ago, the people on the television had stolen her confidence.

With athletes, the usage of social media results in providing a sense of belonging for them, positively benefiting the athletes' mental health; however, if athletes begin to overexert their freedom of social media use, it can result in detrimental low levels of self esteem.

A positive outlook on social media is that athletes are able to connect through similar interests, giving a sense of belonging within the sports community. As an athlete, one of the easier ways to bond with others for me would be over sports. Social media gives me that chance to bond with others who share similar interests by letting me express myself to friends. I, as an introvert, find it harder to make new friends where I don't know anything about the person. However, in the sports community, we already have something in common that a conversation can spark from. "Belonging is more than just being part of a group—it's about finding places where you feel comfortable expressing yourself and being accepted, understood, and appreciated for all your identities" ([Source](#)). Everybody wants to have a place in the world. Finding a community where you can be yourself and wholly yourself is essential to the human being. As an athlete in Taekwondo, my social media feed usually includes content about my sport. This opens the door to more experiences I can connect to, and creates a sense of belonging because I am accepted for who I am in a community that shares the same interests. Social media gives athletes such as me the opportunity to connect with others in the sports community, providing us a sense of belonging that benefits our mental health.

On the other hand, social media within sports also has negative impacts to it, especially highlighting the importance of lowered self esteem within athletes. From my experience as a Taekwondo athlete, becoming better at your sport doesn't require just practicing the same exercises and techniques over and over again. I grew and improved by observing and learning from others. And this is when social media comes into play. Taekwondo is a sport that "operate[s] in

performance-oriented environments, [meaning it] may be more susceptible to the influence of social comparison and public scrutiny online” ([Source](#)). Growing athletes like me face more social comparison than we might already be experiencing due to social media. This lowers our self esteem and confidence. Generally, negative social interactions tend to result in heightened rates of anxiety and stress within an individual. As a Taekwondo athlete, I scroll past hundreds of posts on content related to my sport. Usually the content includes individuals who are better than me, and as an athlete with a competitive spirit, I cannot help but compare myself. Being only human, we cannot help but feel discouraged by the idea that there is someone who is better than us when we want to be the best. Social media ultimately leads athletes to develop a lower self esteem as they cannot help but compare themselves to others online.

To prevent these consequences, sports communities can implement healthy social media habits on their athletes. After going to enough competitions, I’ve realized that there are almost no athletes who are by themselves. Most usually warm up with the people from their own schools. I, as well, have gone to every tournament in my three years of competing with my team. An effective strategy that Taekwondo athletes can adopt is taking a video about how they feel before and after the competition and then sharing it with their teammates to reflect and support each other. Even after competing at nationals and world competitions, I’ve still felt nervous at local tournaments. I believed that I should bear this weight alone because I thought that no one else on my team would understand. I would be on social media before and after the competitions to distract myself from nervousness, or about how bad I performed during the competition. Thoughts have flooded into my head about how bad I was compared to the people online. However, I’ve noticed that many people on my team have fallen into similar habits. While we had come as a team, we were all individually reflecting on our performance. That’s when I realized that maybe it wasn’t only me who had negative thoughts about my performance. After talking with one of my teammates after a competition, I learned that not only was I, but she was also reflecting on her bad performance. After a bit of talking, we’d come to understand each other a little better. The only problem now was that the rest of the team wasn’t able to experience this because they did not share their thoughts. By taking these videos and sharing it with your teammates, this helps us better understand each other but also face our problems with a positive mindset rather than pushing it down.

In this era where we cannot live without social media, it becomes more difficult to realize that it contributes to unhealthy comparisons and negative self-reflection. My experiences through Taekwondo have proven that many athletes struggle with these feelings, and that I am not alone. With this small act of encouraging athletes to share their thoughts and emotions with their team, we can create a healthier

environment for all athletes, prioritizing their mental wellbeing. These simple steps can help athletes like me feel seen and heard without having to suffer from low self esteem that social media creates. Ultimately, we are able to grow stronger not only as an athlete but as an individual.