Body Composition and Mental Health Concerns in Athletes

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Body composition assessment is widely used in sport as a tool to optimize performance, monitor training adaptations, and guide nutritional strategies. However, growing evidence suggests that body composition practices may also contribute to unintended psychological consequences, particularly in environments where weight, leanness, and appearance are highly valued. This session will explore the complex relationship between body composition assessment, athlete health, and performance through three complementary perspectives: research evidence, applied practice, and lived experience.

Potential Mental Health Implications of Assessing Body Composition in Athletes

The session opens with an overview of how body-focused cultures develop within sport and how athletes experience pressures related to weight, body shape, and appearance. Drawing on contemporary research in eating disorders, Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport (REDs), and athlete mental health, Professor Jorunn Sundgot-Borgen will examine how well-intended performance practices may influence body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, anxiety, and overall well-being. Particular attention will be given to the ways in which performance environments can either increase vulnerability or promote resilience and long-term athlete health.

Assessment of Body Composition in Athletes: Best Practices and Pitfalls

Professor Therese Fostervold Mathisen will then address the practical role of body composition assessment in elite sport. She will review the scientific evidence linking body composition to performance across different sporting disciplines, discuss commonly used assessment methods and their limitations, and consider the potential risks associated with measurement and reporting practices. Emphasis will be placed on evidence-based recommendations and interdisciplinary approaches that support athlete health while maintaining performance goals.