

# Foreword:

## In Their Own Words, Sport Social Work Journal Special Issue

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Sport has the power to inspire, challenge, and bring people together, but behind the headlines and statistics are real athletes with experiences that are often overlooked or misunderstood. “In Their Own Words” gives these athletes a platform to share their stories directly with coaches, administrators, social workers, trainers, and others who influence the world of sport.

This special issue focuses on the voices of current and former athletes, inviting them to share personal letters and narratives that highlight their realities. Through these stories, we explore how factors like race, gender, class, sexuality, and other intersecting identities shape their experiences in sport. Athletes often face pressures and challenges that are invisible to those outside the field, and these contributions bring those experiences to light in their own words.

Our goal is to amplify these voices so that members of the sport community, especially those who live and work alongside athletes, can better understand the human side of sport beyond performance and results. By listening to athletes directly, coaches, administrators, social workers, families, and advocates can help create more supportive, inclusive, and ethical environments. We hope this issue sparks reflection, dialogue, and action, encouraging all who engage with sport to consider the social, emotional, and cultural realities that shape athletes’ everyday lives.

Ultimately, “In Their Own Words” reminds us that sport is more than just competition. It is a community made up of real individuals shaped by their challenges, their successes, their identities, and their resilience. By centering athlete voices, we can challenge assumptions, rethink policies and practices, and ensure that mental health, well-being, and inclusion are prioritized alongside performance. We hope these stories inspire both empathy and action, encouraging readers not only to hear athletes’ experiences, but to use that insight to help make sport safer, fairer, and more empowering for everyone involved.