



SIDELINE STRONG

FREE TOOL 07 / 10

AFTER THE LAST GAME

What to do when an injury ends the career early — the send-off, the grief and the question “Who am I now?”

FOR PARENTS, COACHES + ADS



WHEN THE CAREER ENDS EARLY

THE SPORT ENDED. THE ATHLETE DIDN'T.

Medical retirement is a loss with no ceremony and usually no plan. Grief is the right response. Your job is to make sure they don't go through it alone.

COACHES + ADS

CLOSE IT WITH HONOR

- Hold a real send-off, like senior night
- Keep their name on the roster or alumni wall
- Offer a role: student coach, manager, broadcast, mentor
- Tell the team yourself, with the athlete's OK

PARENTS

LET IT BE GRIEF

- Name it: "You're allowed to grieve this."
- Don't rush them into the next thing
- Protect the friendships sport gave them
- Keep watching for months, not weeks

EVERYONE

WORDS THAT LAND

- "You'll always be part of this team."
- "This is a real loss. I'm sorry."
- "Who you are is still here."

SKIP

~~"At least you have more free time now."~~
~~"Everything happens for a reason."~~
~~"You'll find something else."~~

THE HARD DATES

Grief often returns at the first practice of the season, senior night, playoff time and the anniversary of the injury. Put those dates on the calendar and check in on them.



WHO AM I NOW?

THE IDENTITY MAP

Sport gave them more than a position. Sit down together and find where each piece can live next. Fill in the last column with them, not for them.

SPORT GAVE THEM	WHERE IT CAN LIVE NOW	THEIR IDEA
STRUCTURE	A training plan for school, a job, a class schedule they build	_____
TEAM	Club, band, theater, coaching a youth team	_____
COMPETITION	A new sport, debate, esports, a personal record in anything	_____
PURPOSE	Mentoring younger athletes who are injured now	_____
CONFIDENCE	The skills they already have: discipline, grit, leadership	_____

THE REFRAME

YOUR WORTH WAS NEVER THE STAT LINE.

Everything that made them a great athlete is still in them. It's looking for a new place to go.

CHECK IN AT

- 1** **Month 1** — how they're sleeping, eating, connecting
- 3** **Month 3** — when the support usually fades
- 6** **Month 6** — is the new identity taking hold?

CONNECT ONE

THE FOUR DOORS

You don't have to fix it. You have to walk them to a door.

DOOR 01

Student Services

School counselor, social worker or psychologist

DOOR 02

A Trusted Adult

A coach or staff member they already talk to

DOOR 03

The Athletic Trainer

The adult who sees them most during rehab

DOOR 04

988 Lifeline

Free, confidential, 24/7 — call or text 988

988

Call or text 988 · Chat at 988lifeline.org

Worried right now? Don't wait and don't leave them alone. If someone is in immediate danger, call 911.

READY FOR THE FULL PLAYBOOK?

THE MEDICAL RETIREMENT PROTOCOL

A school-wide plan for when the career ends early: send-off, identity work + follow-up. Included in the School License. → HuddleForAthletes.com

HUMAN FIRST.

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