

## **Challenge: Athletes mental health and public perception**

### **S:**

- Increased awareness and conversation around mental health in sports.
- Existing NFL mental health programs (e.g., team psychologists, Player Care Foundation).
- High-profile athletes advocating for mental health awareness (e.g., Calvin Ridley, Dak Prescott).

### **W:**

- Stigma surrounding mental health in professional sports.
- Lack of standardized mental health resources across teams.
- Limited transparency in how the NFL supports players' mental well-being.

### **O:**

- Potential to partner with mental health organizations to improve resources and communication.
- Use social media and athlete anecdotes to normalize mental health discussions.
- Expand mental health support beyond players to coaching staff and executives.

### **T:**

- Negative media coverage if mental health concerns aren't adequately addressed, bad reputation in the court of public opinion
- Resistance from traditionalists who view mental health struggles as "weakness."
- Potential legal and PR issues if the NFL is seen as neglecting mental health support.

## **Research:**

The NFL has made positive efforts in addressing mental health, but stigma and inconsistency in support programs continue to cause problems. Understanding player concerns and public perception is vital to enhancing mental health initiatives.

## **Key Questions:**

- How do NFL athletes perceive the availability of mental health resources?
- What factors contribute to the negative connotations around mental health in football?
- How does the public react to mental health discussions in the NFL?

## **Planning:**

**Goals:**

- Improve the NFL's mental health programs based on player feedback.
- Enhance public messaging to reduce stigma and increase awareness.

**Strategy:**

- Use data-driven insights to shape mental health initiatives.
- Amplify athlete voices to create a more open conversation.

**Objectives: (SMART Format)**

- Conduct research with at least 50 current or former NFL players
- Analyze at least 500 social media posts and media articles on NFL mental health discussions.
- Compare the NFL's mental health approach with other major sports leagues, like the NBA, MLB, and NHL.

**Implement:****Informal Research:**

- Key Interviews
  - Speak to players, coaches, and psychologists about mental health challenges.
- Focus Groups
  - Gather feedback from retired NFL players on mental health support effectiveness.

**Formal Research:**

- Content Analysis
  - Review media coverage, public discussions, and social media trends around mental health in the NFL.
- Surveys
  - Collect anonymous data from current and retired NFL players about their experiences with mental health resources.
- Secondary Analysis
  - Examine past studies on athlete mental health in professional sports.

**Evaluate:****Quantitative:**

- Percentage of players who feel supported by the NFL's mental health initiatives
- Engagement metrics from social media campaigns promoting mental health awareness

#### **Qualitative:**

- Testimonials from players who have benefited from mental health programs
- Media analysis to gauge shifts in public perception

#### **Sources:**

- **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).** (2014, March 9). *Stigma of Mental Health in Sports Remains an Opponent*. NAMI. Retrieved from <https://www.nami.org/nami-news/stigma-of-mental-health-in-sports-remains-an-opponent/>
- **National Football League (NFL).** *Mental Health*. NFL.com. Retrieved from <https://www.nfl.com/playerhealthandsafety/health-and-wellness/mental-health/>
- **Choulet, B.** (2024, May 15). *How The NFL Players Association Helps Athletes Deal With Mental Health*. Forbes. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brookchoulet/2024/05/15/how-the-nfl-players-association-is-tackling-mental-health/>