**The Players’ Tribune Statement for 2018 MHA Media Award**

[The Players’ Tribune](http://www.playerstribune.com/) (TPT) is reimagining the world of sports and entertainment through the players’ point of view. Founded in 2014 by Derek Jeter, TPT has become the trusted destination for athletes to share news, personal stories and issues important to them. By giving athletes the tools to create personal content, TPT continues to publish content not found anywhere else, providing unique insight into the daily sports conversation. We have become a distinct and disruptive player in the overcrowded sports media landscape.

Whether it’s breaking news on retirement and free agency decisions or thought-provoking commentary, TPT provides athletes with a platform where they feel safe to express themselves on topics and ideas that transcend sport and culture. As a result, our audience is guaranteed authentic, fresh and original content that provides a glimpse into the minds of their favorite athletes.

Our global athlete community has grown to more than 1,800 contributors. New athletes that joined our roster in 2017 include NBA stars Stephen Curry, Gordon Hayward and Karl-Anthony Towns; international football stars Gerard Pique, Cristiano Ronaldo, Neymar, Dani Alves and Marta; and NFL stars Alex Smith, Eric Berry and JuJu Smith-Schuster. Trust in TPT is why members of the athlete community have been willing to share their most personal and difficult stories, from [Breanna Stewart’s](https://www.theplayerstribune.com/en-us/articles/breanna-stewart-me-too) #MeToo essay to [Aly Raisman’s](https://www.theplayerstribune.com/en-us/articles/aly-raisman-gymnast-olympian) story of survival from sexual abuse to [Patrick O’Sullivan’s](https://www.theplayerstribune.com/en-us/articles/patrick-osullivan-nhl-abuse) account of being abused as a child.

Equally important, an increasing number of influential athletes have collaborated with TPT to speak about mental health and courageously share their personal experiences and daily struggles. Topics have included various forms of mental illness, such as anxiety, depression, borderline personality disorder, paranoia and OCD, as well as battles with drug addiction, alcohol abuse and suicidal thoughts.

The best athletes in the world are perceived to be mentally tough and highly competitive, and most of all, are expected to not show any emotions or signs of weakness. Thus, when the public reads about or hears from athletes describing in their own words their struggles, fears and breaking points, it is extremely powerful and moving. Athletes become more human and relatable to fans and fans experiencing similar feelings and situations are comforted knowing they are not alone and help is out there.

The athlete stories on mental health published by TPT to date have not only helped break down stereotypes and stigma surrounding mental illness but have also raised general awareness and shaped public opinion. Below are notable quotes and story links from a few of our athlete contributors:

“To show weakness, we’re told, in so many words, is to deserve shame. But I am here to show weakness. And I am not ashamed.” -[Mardy Fish](http://www.theplayerstribune.com/mardy-fish-us-open/), ATP (September 2015)

“My family member will continue to live with this illness (schizophrenia) for the rest of their life. Nothing can make it go away. But we can change how we treat, talk about, relate to and understand people like them, or others with mental illness. All they want is some version of normal. Maybe the normal everyone thought us to be.” -[Jayne Appel](https://www.theplayerstribune.com/jayne-appel-schizophrenia-mental-health/), WNBA (September 2016)

“We need to accept that mental illness is a disease, and that like any other disease, the research is key to fighting it. We need more robust education in schools. But most of all, we need to break the stigma. When my NFL career is over, I will have left a legacy on the field — one that hopefully includes a Super Bowl ring. But my most enduring legacy will be my contributions to the mental health community. And we have a lot of work to do.” -[Brandon Marshall](https://www.theplayerstribune.com/brandon-marshall-nfl-mental-health-awareness/) (May 2017)

In February 2017, retired NHL player Corey Hirsch [wrote](https://www.theplayerstribune.com/corey-hirsch-dark-dark-dark/) about trying to kill himself and his daily struggle with dark thoughts that would not go away. Due to the overwhelming reaction to his story, he wrote a follow up story a year later:

“So before I published my story, I honestly was prepared for the worst. But I shared it with my family and with my kids, and they gave me their blessing and support. I was tired of holding everything inside. I wanted people to know the real me and why I was like that when I was younger. After the story went out into the world, well … my fears couldn’t have been further from reality. I was absolutely blown away by how many people reached out to me through text and email and Twitter to say that they’d struggled with similar thoughts and feelings for years — sometimes decades — and either they didn’t know *what* was wrong with them, or they were afraid to talk to someone about it.

Well, I’m not alone. We’re not alone. Mental health awareness is an enormous, unspoken problem — not just in hockey in Canada and the United States, and not just in sports in general, but also across all other spectrums of society.” -[Corey Hirsch](https://www.theplayerstribune.com/corey-hirsch-you-are-not-alone/) (January 2018)

TPT also works with athletes to share their mental health stories in video format, allowing them to connect emotionally with viewers and heighten awareness:

* Larry Sanders (February 2015): [Why I Walked Away from the NBA](https://www.theplayerstribune.com/larry-sanders-exclusive-interview/)
* Daniel Carcillo (April 2015): [Gone](https://www.theplayerstribune.com/nhl-daniel-carcillo-steve-montador-video/) (about Steve Montador)
* Lamar Odom (July 2017): [Done in the Dark](https://www.theplayerstribune.com/lamar-odom-done-in-the-dark/)
* Brandon Marshall (November 2017): [First Step](https://www.theplayerstribune.com/first-step-brandon-marshall-project-375/)

In March 2018, three athletes shared first person accounts about their daily struggles with anxiety and depression – one is an NBA champion ([Kevin Love](https://www.theplayerstribune.com/en-us/articles/kevin-love-everyone-is-going-through-something)), one walked away from his NBA career three days before his first game ([Jalen Moore](https://www.theplayerstribune.com/en-us/articles/jalen-moore-mental-health)) and one is a retired NHL goalie who dodged death twice ([Clint Malarchuk](https://www.theplayerstribune.com/en-us/articles/clint-malarchuk-bleeding-out)). Collectively, their stories have generated over two million page and video views to date.

To understand the magnitude of TPT’s impact on reducing the stigma surrounding mental health and encouraging open conversations, one needs to look no further than the comments and social engagement generated by the athletes’ stories. Examples below:

* Kevin Love (NBA): <https://twitter.com/PlayersTribune/status/971007859839393793>
* Clint Malarchuk (NHL): <https://twitter.com/PlayersTribune/status/976835902025674753>
* Vickie Morgan (fan):<https://twitter.com/mpowerbooks/status/978972781822992384>
* Daniel Burka (fan): <https://twitter.com/dburka/status/978711724479188992>
* Charles Muhammad (fan): <https://twitter.com/chazmuhammad/status/971011509705936901>

Within 24 hours, Kevin’s story generated 1.25 million social actions (action is defined as a RT, like, reaction, comment, URL click, etc.) and was picked up by 237 digital and TV media outlets, including AP, Reuters, ESPN, The Today Show, ABC, and CBS. The article has been widely shared on social media by key influencers across all sectors such as [LeBron James](https://twitter.com/kingjames/status/971053228950544384?lang=en), [Jeremy Lin](https://twitter.com/JLin7/status/971133067883560960), [Mardy Fish](https://twitter.com/MardyFish/status/971017764554014720), [Isaiah Thomas](https://twitter.com/isaiahthomas/status/971154014304784384), [Gerard Piqué](https://twitter.com/3gerardpique/status/971356196853747712), [Arianna Huffington](https://twitter.com/ariannahuff/status/971421500900364288), [Laurene Powell](https://twitter.com/laurenepowell/status/971130058806124544?s=21), [Alyssa Milano](https://twitter.com/alyssa_milano/status/971172642538405888), [Julianne Moore](https://twitter.com/kingjames/status/971053228950544384?lang=en), [Andie McDowell](https://twitter.com/andiemacdowell3/status/971145423648833536?s=21), [Talinda Bennington](https://twitter.com/TalindaB/status/971288118426062853), [Ben Stiller](https://twitter.com/RedHourBen/status/971014848720011264) and [Senator Chris Murphy](https://twitter.com/ChrisMurphyCT/status/971089559487475712). Kevin’s article truly transcended sports and resonated with a global audience.

Inspired by the tremendous reaction to and outpouring of support for his story, Kevin sat down with former teammate Channing Frye, who has also battled depression and loneliness after losing both of his parents just months apart and a career-threatening medical diagnosis, to elevate the public discourse about mental health. In the [video](https://www.theplayerstribune.com/en-us/articles/kevin-love-channing-frye-mental-health), both reveal their mission of sharing their stories is to make it easier for younger people to open up about their emotions. Both Kevin and Channing stress that finding a professional to help talk through mental health issues is key.

Athletes have the power to not only help every day fans find the courage to speak out and seek help, but they can also inspire other athletes to share their stories. In fact, Kevin’s decision to write about his panic attacks and visits with a therapist was sparked by Toronto Raptors’ DeMar DeRozan, who had publicly announced his own struggles with depression and loneliness a few weeks earlier.

The attention athletes are generating about mental health and the risks of their professions is forcing professional sports leagues to acknowledge they must address these issues and provide resources for their players. Days after Kevin Love’s story was published, the [NBA and NBPA announced](http://www.nba.com/article/2018/03/12/morning-tip-nba-nbpa-addressing-mental-wellness-issues) they are creating an independent mental wellness program for players. Although the plan has been in the works for months, no doubt the outpouring of support for the story caused them to announce the program early before a Director of Mental Health and Wellness was hired.

TPT is extremely proud of the impact we have made, but there is still more work to be done. As we continue to grow, we remain committed to highlighting mental health and other social issues important to our athlete contributors. Athletes are powerful influencers and our goal is to help them use their platform to create meaningful, impactful change for social good.